

# **MAR GREGORIOS COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCE**

Block No.8, College Road, Mogappair West, Chennai – 37

Affiliated to the University of Madras  
Approved by the Government of Tamil Nadu  
An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Institution



## **DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**SUBJECT NAME: WOMEN'S WRITING**

**SUBJECT CODE: BRA5C**

**SEMESTER: V**

**PREPARED BY: PROF. G.PRADHA**

## Unit I - INTRODUCTION

### **ÉCRITURE FÉMINISME**

*Écriture féminine* is a [French](#) term which means "women's writing"—The theory, reveals the relationship between the cultural and psychological inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text.

**FEMALE** refers to a biological status of an organism. A female produces non-mobile ova. The word "female" is used to refer to all organisms displaying the aforementioned trait, including humans.

**FEMININE.** "femininity" is chiefly a set of socially-defined attributes. Hourglass figure, long hair, dresses, skirts, florals, shyness, sea of emotions, sensitiveness, unending affection, calm, motherliness, kindness, readiness to sacrifice and a fuck load of other things are related with femininity and some centuries ago blue would be for girls & pink for boys while with time pink has come to be synonymous with femininity so much so that men cringe at a tinge of pink in any of their possessions. It is not necessary to belong to the female sex to possess these attributes.

**FEMINISM** is an ideology which advocates women's rights on the ground of equality between the sexes. It is aimed at abolishing patriarchy which puts men's status above women, and fights for giving equal rights to women. One does not have to be a "female" to be a feminist. Anyone who believes in equality between the sexes & is willing to fight for it is a feminist.

In her book "A Literature of Their Own" Elaine Showalter has divided the period of evolution into three stages. They are:

1. the Feminine,
  2. the Feminist, and,
  3. the Female stages.
- 1) The first phase, the feminine phase dates from about 1840-1880. During that period women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture. It became a national characteristic of English women writers. During this phase the feminist content of feminine art is typically oblique, because of the inferiority complex experienced by female writers.
  - 2) The feminist phase lasted about 38 years; from 1882 to 1920. The New Women movement gained strength—women won the right to vote. Women writers began to use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wrong womanhood.
  - 3) The latest phase or the third phase is called the female phase ongoing since 1920. Here we find women rejecting both imitation and protest. Showalter considers that both are signs of dependency. Women show more independent attitudes. They realize the place of female experience in the process

of art and literature. She considers that there is what she calls autonomous art that can come from women because their experiences are typical and individualistic. Women began to concentrate on the forms and techniques of art and literature. The representatives of the female phase such as Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf even began to think of male and female sentences. They wrote about masculine journalism and feminine fiction. They redefined and sexualized external and internal experience.

The Language of Gender: Female, femininity, and feminism.

## Post-feminism

- **Post –feminism** developed after 60s feminism and came to the fore as a new form in the 80s.
- As an ideology it had moved on from feminism, they believed that **women had gained relative equality with men but wanted more.**
- It further believes that women could **'USE THEIR SEXUALITY FOR EMPOWERMENT'** and assume traditional female roles (motherhood) whilst **simultaneously being in control of their lives, 'juggling' a family and a career.**
- This is sometimes referred to as the **TRIPLE BURDEN-** wife, mother, career women.

### Liberal Feminism

- Principal object is to gain equal rights for men and women.
  - Modern societies should be reformed rather than transformed by revolutionary means.
    - Only limited social change is necessary to achieve feminist goals.
  - Women should enter all male dominated occupations.
    - Women should engage in athletic and other cultural activities previously reserved for men
    - Gender integration is vital to the achievement of feminist goals.
- Legal change is a principal avenue for the emancipation of women.
- The structure of the state need not change.

• Betty Friedan (1921- )

• National Organization of Women (NOW) **Liberal feminism** is an **individualistic** form of feminist theory, which focuses on women's ability to maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. Its emphasis is on making the legal and political rights of women equal to men.

**Radical feminism** is a perspective within **feminism** that calls for a radical reordering of society in which **male supremacy** is eliminated in all social and economic contexts.<sup>[1]</sup>

Radical feminists view society as fundamentally a **patriarchy** in which **men** dominate and oppress **women**. Radical feminists seek to abolish the patriarchy in order to liberate everyone from an unjust society by challenging existing social norms and institutions.

TENETS OF FEMINISM

**Feminist theory** is the extension of [feminism](#) into theoretical, fictional, or [philosophical](#) discourse. It aims to understand the nature of [gender inequality](#). It examines women's and men's [social roles](#), experiences, interests, chores, and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as [anthropology](#) and [sociology](#), [communication](#), [mediastudies](#), [psychoanalysis](#), [home economics](#), [literature](#), [education](#), and [philosophy](#).

Feminist theory focuses on analyzing [gender inequality](#). Themes explored in feminism include [discrimination](#), [objectification](#) (especially [sexual objectification](#)) [oppression](#), [patriarchy](#), [stereotyping](#), [art history](#) and [contemporary art](#), and [aesthetics](#).

**Socialist feminism** rose in the 1960s and 1970s as an offshoot of the [feminist movement](#) and [New Left](#) that focuses upon the interconnectivity of the patriarchy and capitalism.<sup>[1]</sup> Socialist feminists argue that [liberation](#) can only be achieved by working to end both the [economic](#) and [cultural](#) sources of women's [oppression](#).<sup>[2]</sup> Socialist feminism is a two-pronged theory that broadens [Marxist feminism's](#) argument for the role of [capitalism](#) in the oppression of women and [radical feminism's](#) theory of the role of [gender](#) and the [patriarchy](#).

**Cyberfeminism** is a genre of contemporary [feminism](#) which foregrounds the relationship between [cyberspace](#), the Internet and technology. It can be used to refer to a philosophy, methodology or community.<sup>[1]</sup> The term was coined in the early 1990s to describe the work of feminists interested in theorizing, critiquing, exploring and re-making the Internet, cyberspace and new-media technologies in general. The foundational catalyst for the formation of cyberfeminist thought is attributed to [Donna Haraway's The Cyborg Manifesto](#), third wave feminism and post-structuralist feminism,.

**Womanism** is a social theory based on the discovery of the limitations of the [second-wave feminism](#) movement in regards to the [history](#) and experiences of [black](#) women, and other women of marginalized groups. Writer, poet, and activist [Alice Walker](#) coined the term, and often opposes interpretations of conceptions such as feminism, men, and blackness.

### **Gender and sex**

Sex: a biological condition, i.e. defined as a set of physical characteristics

Gender: a social construct (within the fields of cultural and gender studies, and the social sciences "Today a return to separate single-sex schools may hasten the revival of separate gender roles" according to Wendy Kaminer

## **LANGUAGE AND GENDER**



There is a close connection between the structures, vocabularies and the ways of using language and the social roles of men and women who speak the language. Certainly, women's speech differs from men's speech; and women and men use language differently due to the styles, registers, and the way of using language, interaction, thought, culture, and linguistic attitudes gender, politeness and stereotypes. In fact, there is a number of close relationship between Gender and language. Another word, men's way of using language and women's way of using language is different. It is because of structure of the language, norm of the society or people of the society who use the language. Moreover, gender (male-female) is socially constructed.

**Gender** differences in **language** use appear early; girls are more likely to use **language** in the context of emotional relationships with others, while boys are more likely to use **language** to describe objects and events.

Intersections and tensions between language and gender is diverse. It crosses disciplinary boundaries, and encompasses work notionally housed within [applied linguistics](#), [linguistic anthropology](#), conversation analysis, cultural studies, feminist media studies, feminist psychology, gender studies, interactional sociolinguistics, linguistics, [mediated stylistics](#), [sociolinguistics](#) and media studies.

It can be divided into three main areas of study:

First, there is a broad and sustained interest in the varieties of speech associated with a particular [gender](#);

Second, there is a related interest in the social norms and conventions that (re)produce gendered language use (a [variety of speech](#) (or [sociolect](#)) associated with a particular gender called **genderlect**.

Third, there are studies that focus on the contextually specific and locally situated ways in which gender is constructed and operationalized.

The study of gender and language in sociolinguistics and [gender studies](#) began with [Robin Lakoff's](#) 1975 book, *Language and Woman's Place*.

### **Culture/gender/language**

When we look at the linguistic behavior of men and women across languages, cultures and circumstances, we will find many specific differences.

In some Native American languages, grammatical forms of verbs are inflected differently according to the sex of the speaker. Muskogean language is a family of languages indigenous to the Southeast America. In Koasati, a Muskogean language, men and women's speech have different phonological and morphological features. English is different. Examples from the

Muskogean language Koasati are given below:

| Women's form | Men's form  | English gloss    |
|--------------|-------------|------------------|
| Lakaw        | lakaws      | he is lifting it |
| Lakawwitak   | lakawwitaks | let me lift it   |
| Mol          | mols        | he is peeling it |

it is clear that in many circumstances, women and men tend to use language differently.

Within the domain of culture, two broad classes of explanations for such gender effects have been offered: ***difference theories*** and ***dominance theories***.

According to ***difference*** theories (sometimes called ***two-culture theories***), men and women inhabit different cultural (and therefore linguistic) worlds. To quote from the preface to Deborah Tannen's 1990 popularization *You just don't understand*, "boys and girls grow up in what are essentially different cultures, so talk between women and men is cross-cultural communication."

According to ***dominance*** theories, men and women inhabit the same cultural and linguistic world, in which power and status are distributed unequally, and are expressed by linguistic as well as other cultural markers. In principle, women and men have access to the same set of linguistic and conversational devices, and use them for the same purposes. Apparent differences in usage reflect differences in status and in goals.

**Androgyny** is the combination of [masculine](#) and [feminine](#) characteristics. Usually used to describe characters or people who have no specific gender, gender ambiguity may also be found in [fashion](#), [gender identity](#), [sexual identity](#), or [sexual lifestyle](#).

In the case of gender identity, terms such as [genderqueer](#), or [gender neutral](#) are more commonly used.

## UNIT -I Important terms

Ecriture feminine-Helene Cixous

Laugh of medusa - Helene Cixous

Feminism – Martha Lear

Elizabeth Cady Stanton -Seneca Falls Convention

Amelia Jones -Post feminist texts

Feminist theorist– Elaine Showalter

Womanism, Womanist – Alice Walker

Language and Gender

**Genderlect**– a variety of speech associated with a particular gender

**Double marginalisation**-African-American Women have been physically, sexually and economically exploited and abused by the oppressive white society as well as by the men of their own society. This is known as double marginalisation.

Black women had to suffer from triple oppression as poor, black and female while their counterparts suffered double oppression as poor and black.

**Aphasia**- Men patients suffering damage to the left hemisphere of the brain (48.5%) Women (30%)

**Androgyny**-The combination of masculine and feminine characteristics. This gender ambiguity may be found in fashion, gender identity, sexual identity, or sexual lifestyle. Ander(male)+Gyne (female)partly male and partly female.

**Patriarchy**-Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary **power** and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property. **It is** a system of oppression of women. Firestone believes that **patriarchy** is caused by the biological inequalities between women and men, e.g. that women bear children, while men do not. **feminists** use the term '**patriarchy**' to describe the power. relationship between men and women as well as to find out the root. cause of women's subordination.

**Stereotyping**-Stereotypes which society promotes are fatal for empowering women. If we want equality we need to stop Stereotyping. It is curbing individual freedom but we are reaffirming every single second that women has to follow the path which pleases the society and its men. A working mother is not a good mother, A housewife is dumb, a woman who is aggressive is manly, a woman who is beautiful only if she is physically attractive...not suited for a corporate job, who smokes is bold.The list is endless.

**Male gaze-** It is the act of depicting women and the world in the visual arts and literature from a masculine that presents women as sensual/sexual objects for the pleasure of male viewers.

Some important concepts:

Feminism, Waves of feminism, Post feminism, Tenets of feminism -Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Socialist feminism and Cyber feminism

## Unit II– PROSE

### 1. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* – Mary Wollstonecraft



#### About the author:

**Mary Wollstonecraft** (April 1759 – 10 September 1797) was an English writer, philosopher, and advocate of [women's rights](#). She is regarded as one of the founding [feminist philosophers](#), and feminists often cite both her life and her works as important influences.

She wrote novels, treatises, a [travel narrative](#), a history of the [French Revolution](#), a [conduct book](#), and a children's book. Wollstonecraft is best known for [A Vindication of the Rights of Woman](#) (1792), in which she argues that women are not naturally inferior to men, but appear to be only because they lack education. She suggests that both men and women should be treated as rational beings and imagines a [social order](#) founded on reason.



□ Chapter 13-Some Instances Of The Folly Which The Ignorance Of Women Generates; With Concluding Reflections On The Moral Improvement That A Revolution In Female Manners Might Naturally Be Expected To Produce

Section 1

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

Section 2

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

Section 3

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

Section 4

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

Section 5

- Wollstonecraft addresses "the rearing of children," which is considered a wholly female domain. She acknowledges the logical reasons for women's involvement but says women are so ignorant they are unintentionally harming their own children. She contrasts a man's knowledge of breeding horses with a woman's lack of knowledge about caring for her own

children. She continues the comparison, likening a wild, unmanageable child to a "spirited filly" that can suffer crippling injuries if trained incorrectly.

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

#### Section 6

- Wollstonecraft makes her concluding argument. She says "the sagacious reader" no doubt already understands her point, but she wishes "to add some explanatory remarks to bring the subject home ... to that sluggish reason, which supinely takes opinions on trust."
- "To render women truly useful members of society," she says, they need more knowledge and training in rational, critical thinking. This knowledge will make them more virtuous as well. Wollstonecraft claims it is "not to be disputed" that women of her time "are by ignorance rendered foolish or vicious." She reiterates some of her key points about the effects of oppression on the human spirit. She concludes by claiming that if women obtain civil rights and other liberties of citizenship but do not "change their character and correct their vices and follies," women will have proven themselves lesser than men and men can rightfully rule over them. Until that time, she warns men to "allow her the privileges of ignorance, to whom ye deny the rights of reason."
- **Wollstonecraft** sums up her argument that women must acquire more rational understandings and affections in order to be more useful to society. A "revolution" in female manners is needed. While Wollstonecraft has not tried to downplay female faults, she has sought to demonstrate that they are "the natural consequence of their education and station in society," which means they will change when women are afforded their due freedoms. If this does not prove to be the case, then men should "not mark more severely what women do amiss" than mere animals do; "allow her the privileges of ignorance, to whom ye deny the rights of reason, or ye will be worse than Egyptian task-masters, expecting virtue where nature has not given understanding!"

## Analysis

Wollstonecraft reviews women's key faults: women are gullible and easily fooled by con men; they are overly sentimental and too obsessed with clothes and "ornamentation"; they are selfish and ungenerous; they are bad mothers. Scholars believe Wollstonecraft may have been specifically thinking of her employer when she was a governess. She was a vain, society woman who did not like Wollstonecraft any more than Wollstonecraft liked her. These faults of women, Wollstonecraft argues, are rooted in the mistreatment of women. She calls on society to better educate women and provide more social opportunities and says that if women fail to improve in such situations, they will have proved themselves less worthy than men.

## Overview

Wollstonecraft decides that she wants to close *Vindication* with a discussion of some of the faults that are most common to women. As you can imagine, she attributes most of these faults to a lack of education.

Here, Wollstonecraft directly accuses her women readers of being the cause of their own oppression, because so many of them try to gain an advantage in life by acting as "ladylike" as possible. But these women don't realize that their actions reflect on their entire gender and have an impact outside their personal lives.

She especially goes after women who like to visit quack doctors who use magnets and crazy things to cure diseases. Wollstonecraft thinks these quacks should all be arrested, and she blames gullible, uneducated women for making quackery such a thriving industry in England.

Another common fault that Wollstonecraft sees with women is that their ideas about life are way too influenced by the romance novels they read. Women grow up thinking that Prince Charming will ride up on his horse and sweep them away. To be fair, Wollstonecraft thinks that some reading (even of romance novels) is better than no reading at all. But she thinks there are better things women could be putting their minds to.

The best way for people to deal with novels is to point out (for their daughters) all of the things in a novel that are silly or nonsensical. This might seem kind of harsh, but Wollstonecraft is more interested in producing good citizens than women who think that life is one big romance.

One of the things that Wollstonecraft dislikes most about women is how judgmental they are toward other women, especially when it comes to appearances.

Society tends to make a big deal out of how compassionate women are compared to men. But this compassion usually stems from ignorance, and women are often compassionate toward people who don't deserve it. They're just as likely to feel compassion for a murderer as for a poor person because they haven't got the education to know any better.

On top of all the other faults, women are often too harsh with their servants, especially in front of their own children. What kind of message does it teach your child when you're mean to those who are worse off than you?

In closing, Wollstonecraft says that she has no interest in excusing the faults of women. She simply thinks that these faults wouldn't be so bad if women were given a better education and a more equal place in society.

## 2. Ain't I A Woman? -Sojourner Truth



Isabella Baumfree was born into slavery in 1797 and later changed her name to Sojourner Truth. She was one of the most powerful advocates for human rights in the nineteenth century. Like other slaves, she experienced the miseries of being sold and was cruelly beaten and mistreated. Around 1815 she fell in love with a fellow slave named Robert, but they were forced apart by Robert's master. Isabella was instead forced to marry a slave named Thomas, and had five children.

**Sojourner Truth (1797-1883): Ain't I A Woman?  
Delivered 1851**

### Ain't I a Woman? (Speech)

The speech begins with [Sojourner Truth](#) politely asking permission to say a few words. She opens with the conclusion, "I am a woman's rights," and begins laying out her evidence. She



asserts that she is as strong as any man and is capable of doing the work of a man such as plowing and reaping crops in the field. She then subtly addresses the specific issue of gender equality by answering any lingering doubt that she can cut and carry as much as a man. Regarding the issue of intellectual inequality, she makes a sudden and effective shift in rhetoric by asserting that if a man has a quart and a woman only has a pint, she should be allowed to keep that full pint.

She then admits she cannot read, but she can certainly hear, and many of the things she has heard are stories from the Bible. In particular, she references the story that [Eve](#) is the cause of all the sin of mankind. Rather than trying to argue against that point, she suggests that if one woman can cause all that trouble for the world, she should be given the chance to put things right. Next, she moves to [Jesus](#) and the New Testament, reminding her audience that the Lord seemed willing to give women a second chance. When [Mary and Martha](#) came to Jesus in grief over their death of their brother, for example, Jesus did not spurn them, but rather raised [Lazarus](#) from the grave. And finally, Truth asserts that it was a woman that brought Jesus into this world through the intervention of God. Man himself, she says, is missing from the story.

The speech ends with yet another rhetorical shift from allusion to metaphor. After asking where man's part is in this plan of God, she admits that man is, indeed, in a difficult position. With the slave already on him, and the woman fast approaching, Truth ends on a note of sympathy for the white man, who is perhaps caught "between a hawk and a buzzard."

## Unit III - Poetry

### 1. Persephone, Falling - Rita Dove

One narcissus among the ordinary beautiful  
flowers, one unlike all the others! She pulled,  
stooped to pull harder—  
when, sprung out of the earth  
on his glittering terrible  
carriage, he claimed his due.  
It is finished. No one heard her.  
No one! She had strayed from the herd.

(Remember: go straight to school.  
This is important, stop fooling around!  
Don't answer to strangers. Stick  
with your playmates. Keep your eyes down.)  
This is how easily the pit  
opens. This is how one foot sinks into the ground.

### In A Nutshell

Rita Dove's poem "**Persephone, Falling**" was published in 1996 as part of her collection *Mother Love*, which is about the often messy, rarely simple relationships between mothers and daughters. She published this poem as Poet Laureate of the United States.

In "Persephone, Falling," Dove draws on the Greek goddesses Demeter and Persephone, a rather famous mother-daughter pair, to channel her thoughts and feelings on the sticky subject. She uses the story of this mother-daughter duo to examine every child's longing to be free, and every parent's fear of the dangers that freedom could lead to.

Rita Dove knows a lot about high honors; her poetry has earned her a **Pulitzer Prize**, among a ton of other awards. Like **Nikki Giovanni** and **Maya Angelou**, she's been one of the most important African-American female voices of the late twentieth century.

The poem requires a basic understanding of a few characters from Greek mythology, all about **Persephone, Demeter and Hades**. Persephone gets kidnapped by creepy Uncle Hades and Momma Demeter gets so mad she refuses to make any plants grow.

The speaker focuses our attention on the precise moment that Hades kidnaps Persephone. The poem begins with a girl (Persephone) off on her own picking flowers. She tugs and tugs at one particularly beautiful blossom and up pops Hades, who snatches her down to the underworld with him, which no one notices, because Persephone had "strayed." Uh oh.

Then the speaker addresses us, or at least reminds us of what the girl had always been told by Demeter: to be careful, to watch out for danger. The chilling last two lines explain why her mother had always been so overprotective—the world is a scary place and bad things can happen in the blink of an eye.

We immediately know the setting. It's the part of the story when Persephone falls. It's a present moment. It's not after she fell or even right before. The whole poem is capturing one present-tense moment. It's what happened *right then*.

It has two meanings. Persephone fell into the pit, sure, but she is also falling metaphorically. Falling from grace, falling from innocence, falling away from her mother's protection.

## 2. Journey to the Interior – Margaret Atwood




---

## Journey to the Interior

There are similarities  
 I notice: that the hills  
 which the eyes make flat as a wall, welded  
 together, open as I move  
 to let me through; become  
 endless as prairies; that the trees  
 grow spindly, have their roots  
 often in swamps; that this is a poor country;  
 that a cliff is not known  
 as rough except by hand, and is  
 therefore inaccessible. Mostly  
 that travel is not the easy going  
 from point to point, a dotted  
 line on a map, location  
 plotted on a square surface  
 but that I move surrounded by a tangle  
 of branches, a net of air and alternate  
 light and dark, at all times;  
 that there are no destinations  
 apart from this.

There are differences  
 of course: the lack of reliable charts;  
 more important, the distraction of small details:

your shoe among the brambles under the chair  
 where it shouldn't be; lucent  
 white mushrooms and a paring knife  
 on the kitchen table; a sentence  
 crossing my path, sodden as a fallen log  
 I'm sure I passed yesterday

(have I been  
 walking in circles again?)

but mostly the danger:  
 many have been here, but only  
 some have returned safely.

A compass is useless; also  
 trying to take directions  
 from the movements of the sun,  
 which are erratic;  
 and words here are as pointless  
 as calling in a vacant wilderness.

Whatever I do I must  
 keep my head. I know  
 it is easier for me to lose my way  
 forever here, than in other landscapes

Margaret Atwood is better known as a Canadian author of books rather than a poet. She is a prolific writer and very creative so it is interesting to look at this poem.

**S1** ... This is obviously an internal journey within contrasted with travelling in the external environment. The first line states that there are '*similarities*'. The eyes define the scene as a wall to be broken ... perhaps a '*flat wall*' as the scene only comes 'known' when entered at a personal level. But what is found in S1 is that the environment is endless as '*prairies*' and that it is '*poor country*' and not easy going.

Well, to get to know yourself – who you really are – is perhaps a difficult and endless task. But this is the start of the journey so, hopefully, the country will improve with travel. It is interesting that the *cliffs* cannot be seen for what they are except at a very base level.

**S2** ... Destination is unknown except to be vague as a dotted line between points on a map. The endless *light and dark* could relate to both day and night as well as emotional highs and lows. I guess when we start any internal search we have little idea of what might be revealed ... and again it is a difficult journey to untangle.



**S3** ... It is the small details in life that have internal effect. Small details can absorb much of our thinking if they have sufficient deep association. *'A shoe among the brambles under a chair/ where it shouldn't be'* – this implies an unfortunate meeting with another person – the 'shoe' indicating crossing another's journey. *White mushrooms* are immature mushrooms and a *paring knife* is used to peel fruit to make it edible. What significance these hold for the poet is not known. You could of course liken the personal journey to that of fruit being made acceptable.

A *'sentence crossing'* my path has double meaning – life as a sentence, and the written sentence of the poet that is now *'sodden as a fallen log'* whereas yesterday it was more acceptable – *'I'm sure I passed yesterday'*.

**S4 and S5** – this search for self is circulating into deep depression to the extent of self-danger. The poet knows within of this danger – ironic self knowledge given the circumstances.

**S6** – There is no solution not from any words, not from the poet's writing or from the Sun (whether or not indicating religious connotation). There is a cry for help.

**S7** – The solution is internal – to stay focused and rational – *'keep my head'* ... a double meaning in a very real sense.

### 3. Request to a year -[Judith Wright](#)



*Introduction to the poet:*

**Judith Arundell Wright (31 May 1915 – 25 June 2000) was an Australian poet, environmentalist and campaigner for Aboriginal land rights. She was a recipient of the Christopher Brennan Award. She was a recipient of the Australian National Living `Treasure Award in 1998.**

In 1945 Wright's [poetry](#) began to appear in magazines. The first of her several books of poetry, *The Moving Image* (1946), was followed by *Woman to Man* (1949), *The Gateway* (1953), *The Two Fires* (1955), *The Other Half* (1966), and *Alive* (1973). Much of her poetry was marked by restrained and lyric verse that decried materialism and outside influences on native [cultures](#). A collection of short stories, *The Nature of Love*, was published in 1966, and her *Collected Poems 1942–1970* in 1971. She also wrote several children's books as well as biographical essays on the Australian poet [Charles Harpur](#) and the Australian short-story writer [Henry Lawson](#). A further volume of poetry, *Phantom Dwelling*, was published in 1985

### Request to a year

If the year is meditating a suitable gift,  
I should like it to be the attitude  
of my great- great- grandmother,  
legendary devotee of the arts,

who having eight children  
and little opportunity for painting pictures,  
sat one day on a high rock  
beside a river in Switzerland

and from a difficult distance viewed  
her second son, balanced on a small ice flow, drift down the current toward a waterfall  
that struck rock bottom eighty feet below,

while her second daughter, impeded,  
no doubt, by the petticoats of the day,  
stretched out a last-hope alpenstock  
(which luckily later caught him on his way).

Nothing, it was evident, could be done;  
And with the artist's isolating eye  
My great-great-grandmother hastily sketched the scene.  
The sketch survives to prove the story by.

Year, if you have no Mother's day present planned,  
Reach back and bring me the firmness of her hand.

#### Summary:

The poem begins by the narrator asking the character "Year" for a particular gift - that gift being the attitude of her great-great-grandmother. The narrator tells that this remarkable woman was a "legendary devotee of the arts", and continues to describe how that is true later in the poem.

This great-great-grandmother has eight children, therefore` little time to devote to the arts. However, she one day sits on a precipice, and watches her children playing. One of them is stuck on a piece of ice that broke off from a larger chunk, and is now flowing towards a waterfall. She sits peacefully, knowing that there is nothing she can do, and later learns that her daughter saved her son from dying in the accident.

The narrator again asks Year for a present, and, even if Year can't bring her great-great grandmother's attitude - considering she painted the scene in which her son was falling off of a waterfall - she would like to hold her firm hand, which represents her ability to maintain composure even in times of stress.

### **Analysis**

The annals of history are filled with poetry, man's attempts to express the beauties and tragedies of life in the form of language equal to their significance. Though poems have been used to serve many different functions, there is one common function among them all, eternization. The issue of man's mortality has been addressed by many different poets. There is a natural human desire to live forever, to see one's beloved live forever, or even to see a moment last forever. However, all humans are obviously mortal and will taste death. Here lies a barrier between the will power of man and his ability to accomplish what he desires. Many advocate poetry as the answer to this predicament, but is it? Can poetry truly respond to the problems that arise due to the finite nature of man? The answer to that question depends entirely upon man's understanding of the purpose of poetry. Judith Wright, in her work, "Request to a Year," demonstrates the power of poetry and its ability to eternize something of lasting value. In her work, Wright addresses the year throughout the poem as her audience. She asks the year for the gift of her great-great-grandmother's attitude as well as her "firmness of hand." The firmness that Wright desires is most clearly demonstrated by her great-great-grandmother as she, having just watched her son floating down a river and nearly over a waterfall, chooses to sketch the scene rather than run down to her child. To most, this decision would sound like the exact opposite response that a mother should have. Yet, this is the very decision for which Wright commends her great-great-grandmother.

## **4.MEDUSA**

- Sylvia Plath



## Sylvia Plath

Off that landspit of stony mouth-plugs,  
 Eyes rolled by white sticks,  
 Ears cupping the sea's incoherences,  
 You house your unnerving head — God-ball,  
 Lens of mercies,  
 Your stooges  
 Plying their wild cells in my keel's shadow,  
 Pushing by like hearts,  
 Red stigmata at the very center,  
 Riding the rip tide to the nearest point of  
 departure,

Dragging their Jesus hair.  
 Did I escape, I wonder?  
 My mind winds to you  
 Old barnacled umbilicus, Atlantic cable,  
 Keeping itself, it seems, in a state of miraculous  
 repair.

In any case, you are always there,  
 Tremulous breath at the end of my line,  
 Curve of water upleaping  
 To my water rod, dazzling and grateful,  
 Touching and sucking.  
 I didn't call you.  
 I didn't call you at all.  
 Nevertheless, nevertheless  
 You steamed to me over the sea,  
 Fat and red, a placenta

Paralyzing the kicking lovers.  
 Cobra light  
 Squeezing the breath from the blood bells  
 Of the fuchsia. I could draw no breath,  
 Dead and moneyless,

Overexposed, like an X-ray.  
 Who do you think you are?  
 A Communion wafer? Blubbery Mary?  
 I shall take no bite of your body,  
 Bottle in which I live,

Ghastly Vatican.  
 I am sick to death of hot salt.



Green as eunuchs, your wishes  
Hiss at my sins. Off, off, eely tentacle

There is nothing between us.

**About the Poet:**

Sylvia Plath is one of the few American women of the mid-twentieth century, who was an exceptional poet, a novelist and a writer who never forgot to give her short stories a periphrastic touch, which in turn attracted her readers to delve into the inner recesses into the her mind and conscience. Boston born Plath had a fascinating academic career even before she established herself as a poet and writer; she studied at Smith College and Newnham College at the University of Cambridge. She is responsible for the advancing popularity of the genre called confessional poetry; her most celebrated works are in the form of collections called *The Colossus and Other Poems* and *Ariel*. Her semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* is greatly admired, and was published shortly before her death. In 1932, she was born in Boston to Otto Plath, an entomologist and a professor of botany at the Boston University. Plath went through depression for most of her adulthood; after not being able to meet Dylan Thomas, who she claimed as her boyfriend, she slashed her legs to see if she can commit suicide. Such incidents have inspired her novel *The Bell Jar*. She had to undergo electroconvulsive therapy for depression; her first documented suicide attempt was in the August of 1953. Later she got married to poet Ted Hughes on 16 June, 1956. Controversies surrounds her death, in 1963; some believe she had shoved her head into the oven an turned on the gas, while looking at the site evidences, some find it hard to believe that she was willing to commit suicide.

Summary of Medusa

“Medusa” imparts a similar essence like the poem “Daddy” written by her; Medusa is concerned with Plath’s mother. The poem is like a long list of complaints, that the poet rant against her mother. Written four years after the phenomenal “Daddy”, according to Plath this was one of her best. The “you” in the poem undoubtedly refers to her mother Aurelia. Lines like “Overexposed, like an X-ray. / Who do you think you are?” emits the anger and offense that she felt. The poem starts with the description of her mother’s situation where she houses her “unnerving head- God-ball, / Lens of mercies, / [her] stooges”. To an extent, Plath has accused her mother of punishing her, as she says in the third stanza that her mother had “steamed” her “over the sea, / Fat and Red, a Placenta”. The reference is here to her birth, may be Plath’s depressed life made her believe that giving life to her was her mother’s fault, and doing that was just a punishment to her. She had to squeeze “the breath from the blood bells” to survive each day. She could “draw no breath/ Dead and moneyless”. Her mother, after keeping Plath in her womb, suddenly had “overexposed” her to the harsh reality of the world, “like an X-ray”. The poem ends with the same tone of disappointment and withdrawal with which it had started; the poet finally makes it crystal clear that “there is nothing between us” as if she cuts off all motherly ties with her mother.

## Critical Analysis of Medusa

The poem comprises of 7 stanzas if the last line is considered as a stanza. Contradictory to the feeling of admiration and the strong desire that she felt to achieve a freedom is nowhere better evident more than in this poem. The poet has created two separate sets of imagery, both of which are etymologically related to the Greek mythical figure of Medusa- the natural (the Medusa jellyfish) and the mythological (the Gorgon Medusa from Greek mythology). Through these imageries, she explores some vital aspects of her personality that according to her has been influenced by her mother, including the physical, emotional and also the artistic. The poetic genius of the poem lies in the fact that the title of the poem can be directly related to her mother Aurelia as the genus name of the moon jellyfish is *Aurelia aulita*. From her various journals, it can be gathered that Plath was affected by her mother's constant gaze, once again reminding us of the mythical figure of Medusa, who could turn men into stone with a gaze. Primarily, intense physical attributes have been used to describe Medusa: her mouth, eyes, ears, head, umbilicus, and placenta. Plath in the poem has identified her mother as a monstrous figure, "paralyzing" and "Squeezing the breath from" her until she "could draw no breath". Plath as a daughter rejects every kind of physical ties; the most convincing evidence of this is expressed through the image of the "umbilicus" (the physical contact between the mother and the child).

The particular cable "seems in a state of miraculous repair", seemingly unable to be severed despite the daughter's attempt to "escape". In spite of all her efforts the mother is "always there, / Tremulous breath at the end of [her] life". Plath in the poem has rejected her mother in every aspect; she refuses to accept nourishment from her mother, which is an interesting way of expressing disgust; just as Kristeva points out, "food-loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection". It is a struggle to separate from the maternal influences. In the poem the mother's body is identified with food which the daughter detests, even if it is offered by Virgin Mary ("Blueberry Mar") or presented to her as a "communion wafer". By the end of the poem the mother is stripped off of all humanity; the mother is reduced to an inhuman creature that cannot communicate through anything beyond a "hiss". There is a sense of suffocation that is exerted upon Plath by her mother, as she attacks her with eely tentacle, a maternal umbilicus/ cable which becomes a weapon to squeeze the life out of Plath. "Eely" is an adjective which enhances the clinginess of the mother. By the end of the poem, the daughter has reached a decision that there is nothing between them, and her end is inevitable.

### **Tone of Medusa**

The tone of the poem never changes throughout the seven stanzas. It bears the same tone of complain and detachment throughout. Scholars have read deep into the poem and have discovered a connection between the two, "a spiritual connection that Plath brought to the forefront of the poem through her use of specific Christian imagery in much the same manner that she used Jewish imagery to explore the relationship between the father and daughter in poems like "daddy"".

**Conclusion:**

- The poem stands out as an exceptional evidence of the depression and suffocation that Plath was subjected to. Every line of the poem cries for freedom and her strife against the suffocation; this too in some way is a confessional poem, which talks about her depression, her pain that she had to live with most of her life.

**Poetic Devices in Medusa****Imagery:**

Medusa is a mythical figure which has been used as an image to exemplify the character of the poet's mother.

Line 34: "Blueberry Mary" is an image for Virgin Mary.

**Symbolism:**

Line 14 and Line 25: "umbilicus", "placenta" is symbols of the suffocation that the poet was subjected to.

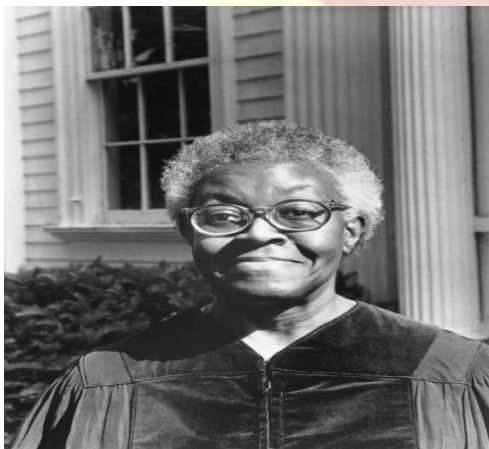
**Metaphor:**

Line: 31: "x-ray" is a metaphor for the exposed condition of the poet.

*There are many Christian imagery in the poem, such as "Blueberry Mary", "Communion wafer", etc.*

**5.A SUNSET OF THE CITY**

- GWENDOLYN BROOKS



**Already I am no longer looked at with lechery or love.  
My daughters and sons have put me away with marbles and dolls,**

Are gone from the house.  
 My husband and lovers are pleasant or somewhat polite  
 And night is night.

It is a real chill out,  
 The genuine thing.  
 I am not deceived, I do not think it is still summer  
 Because sun stays and birds continue to sing.

It is summer-gone that I see, it is summer-gone.  
 The sweet flowers indrying and dying down,  
 The grasses forgetting their blaze and consenting to brown.

It is a real chill out. The fall crisp comes  
 I am aware there is winter to heed.  
 There is no warm house  
 That is fitted with my need.

I am cold in this cold house this house  
 Whose washed echoes are tremulous down lost halls.  
 I am a woman, and dusty, standing among new affairs.  
 I am a woman who hurries through her prayers.

Tin intimations of a quiet core to be my  
 Desert and my dear relief  
 Come: there shall be such islanding from grief,  
 And small communion with the master shore.  
 Twang they. And I incline this ear to tin,  
 Consult a dual dilemma. Whether to dry  
 In humming pallor or to leap and die.

Somebody muffed it?? Somebody wanted to joke.

#### About the poet:

Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks was an American poet, author, and teacher. Her work often dealt with the personal celebrations and struggles of ordinary people in her community. She won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry on May 1, 1950, for *Annie Allen*, making her the first African American

to receive a Pulitzer Prize.(1950)American poet whose works deal with the everyday life of urban blacks. In 1968 she was named the poet laureate of [Illinois](#).

Summary:

“A Sunset of the City” is no exception, as our speaker tells us she is a woman “no longer looked at with lechery or love.” This is a striking juxtaposition to open the poem with, and it leaves us wondering, which is it that our speaker misses most? The next line adds another layer of complexity to our speaker, as it evokes not simply a tender ache for the woman herself – seemingly left behind by those she cares for – but her own ache as a mother of grown children, a mother who has perhaps kept the “marbles and dolls” somewhere in the attic, where they serve as little souvenirs of youth.

This is a woman, then, whose awareness of the passage of time is matched by an awareness of all that she has experienced throughout the years of her own life. At times her voice seems to expand beyond her own body to serve as the voice of the very city in which she lives. This is more than a simple identification of the woman with the city. It is as if, through the woman, the city speaks of the ways it has been changed by the passage of time. Here, then, the sons and the daughters who have put away their childish things are now no longer simply the sons and daughters of a singular woman, but instead have become all the young men and women who have ever left a city for a better life, a better job or a better opportunity elsewhere. In this sense, it is the city itself that mourns the changes that have come through the years, and it is the woman who is sensitive enough to pick up on this sense of loss in the air.

If it seems that the passage of time has made her a creature of habit, a woman “who hurries through her prayers,” she isn’t in that much of a hurry to get to the end just yet. Our woman faces the sunset of her life with a sense of observation, of contemplation; she has a decision to make yet. It is the last two lines of the poem that leave me perplexed, perhaps owing to the use of the verb “muff,” which can mean “to do something badly” or, more intricately speaking, “to spoil a chance to do something well or achieve something.” Is she talking about life, or about death here? I’m very interested to hear your thoughts on Monday. Until then, get out into the city, and enjoy a sunset or two.

The theme is continued throughout the poem in the symbols of browning grass, the chill in the air, the sunset itself.

There is a small theme of loss as well in her knowing that there is nothing in the cold, empty house and the empty halls that are echoing with past sounds of life.

It would be easy to say this is about death, but it is more of transition from an active full life to one of emptiness where time is moving forward and there is not much to look forward to

“Somebody muffed it? Somebody wanted to joke.” Did someone get it wrong? Is this a joke? Is this all I have left of life?

### ***Transcript of Sunset of the City***

The Poets use of imagery helps the reader see the theme better. Seeing (mental image of course) this lady being left alone to not "be lechered on or loved on" helps us see her being left behind. Also in a non literal term feeling the "cold house she is left in", we see that she is "dust" and she hurries through her prayers which in a way helps the reader with a mental image of everything going on in this poem and helps put the theme in your mind. Imagery Gwendolyn Brooks theme in "A Sunset of the City" would be a combination of loneliness, and being forgotten. The thing that mostly enforces this is when the poet writes "My daughters and sons have put me away with marbles and dolls" we see how this woman is forgotten and is left.

“A Sunset of the City”-Theme and figures of speech:

Gwendolyn Brooks, “A Sunset of the City” presents a depressing and mournful viewpoint of growing old. The poem begins as the narrator describes her appearance, as she is no longer viewed as beautiful or lovable. She goes on to describe that she is not in denial of her old age, though she is unhappy about it.

The theme is continued throughout the poem in the symbols of browning grass, the chill in the air, the sunset itself.

There is a small theme of loss as well in her knowing that there is nothing in the cold, empty house and the empty halls that are echoing with past sounds of life.

It would be easy to say this is about death, but it is more of transition from an active full life to one of emptiness where time is moving forward and there is not much to look forward to

“Somebody muffed it? Somebody wanted to joke.” Did someone get it wrong? Is this a joke? Is this all I have left of life?

Toward the end of the poem, the narrator discusses that she no longer feels needed, and contemplates whether to fade away slowly and miserably or to die. Old age is perceived negatively because people believe their lives will lose meaning -- they will be less loved, become undesirable, and lose their importance. Brooks use of imagery, metaphors and rhyming emphasize the narrator’s sadness and sorrow, as her old age haunts her. This allows us to think



about how bad the world is around us and the effect of the "bad world". She wants us to not submit to the effect, but be yourself.

## 6. The Old Playhouse - [Kamala Das](#)



You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her  
 In the long summer of your love so that she would forget  
 Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but  
 Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless  
 Pathways of the sky. It was not to gather knowledge  
 Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn  
 What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every  
 Lesson you gave was about yourself. You were pleased  
 With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow  
 Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured  
 Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed  
 My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices. You called me wife,

I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and  
 To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering  
 Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and  
 Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your  
 Questions I mumbled incoherent replies. The summer  
 Begins to pall. I remember the rudder breezes  
 Of the fall and the smoke from the burning leaves. Your room is  
 Always lit by artificial lights, your windows always  
 Shut. Even the air-conditioner helps so little,  
 All pervasive is the male scent of your breath. The cut flowers  
 In the vases have begun to smell of human sweat. There is  
 No more singing, no more dance, my mind is an old  
 Playhouse with all its lights put out. The strong man's technique is  
 Always the same, he serves his love in lethal doses,  
 For, love is Narcissus at the water's edge, haunted  
 By its own lonely face, and yet it must seek at last  
 An end, a pure, total freedom, it must will the mirrors  
 To shatter and the kind night to erase the water.

### **Summary and Analysis**

The Old Playhouse, published in 1973 in *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*, is a poem of protest against patriarchy in which Kamala Das voices against the domination of the male and the consequent dwarfing of the female. The poetess expresses the common expectations of the male dominated Indian society. In the male dominated society a woman is expected to play certain conventional roles, and her own wishes and aspirations are not taken into account.

The poem is written in the first person point of view. The persona in this poem is a woman, who gives an account of her unsatisfactory and disappointing conjugal life with her husband. She compares herself to a swallow and her husband a captor who wanted to tame her and keep her fully under his control by the power of his love-making.

The husband wanted to make her forget all those comforts which she might have enjoyed in her home before being married; but, in addition to that, he wanted also make her forget her very nature and her innate love of freedom by keeping her in a state of subjection to him. The speaker says that she had come to her husband with a view to developing her own personality. But all she has had from her husband are lesson about him. Her husband, who is a self-centered person, makes love with her and he feels pleased by her bodily response to his love-making. He approves her state of mind and her mood when he makes love to her and he feels pleased by the tremors of her body during the sexual union.

He, however, fails to understand that her response to his love-making is purely physical and, therefore, superficial because she never experiences any feeling of oneness with him.

According to the speaker, the notions of love and affection mean nothing to her husband. To him she is nothing but a plaything, a sexual partner and a housewife. In the course of the sexual union, he kisses her very hard, pressing his lips against hers and letting his saliva flow into her mouth. He presses his whole body against hers with great vehemence, gratifying his sexual desire in this process.

In this physical union, her husband is successful as he is able to penetrate every part of her body and make his bodily fluids mingle with hers. But he never realizes that she is still emotionally unsatisfied and hungry. In the emotional and spiritual sense, he completely fails.

The title of the poem, *The Old Playhouse*, constitutes its central image, and the speaker finally discovers that love-making has made her mind an Old Playhouse with all its lights put out'. It is like a deserted old playhouse having no life of its own. It has almost become non-functional and inert due to the disastrous physical-cum-mental strains. She has lost all her value as a woman in this life of confinement and suffocation.

### **Imagery used in *The Old Playhouse***

Kamala Das has used very suggestive imagery to show the disastrous effects of the mismatched marital relationships in *The Old Playhouse*. The word 'sparrow' stands for the poetess who is captured by her cruel and heartless captor (husband) who denies her any identity or freedom. The images of 'summer' and 'autumn' show the bright and dark phases of her life. The comparison between the poet's mind and the 'old playhouse with lights put of' is equally very appropriate and suggestive.

Both are in a state of neglect and have lost their functional value. The poet's mind is in a state of inertial and filled with impenetrable darkness like the darkness prevailing in the deserted old

playhouse. The image of Narcissus shows that Kamala Das's love for her husband is all shattered by her egotistical husband and she is haunted by her own face which is reflective of her loneliness and desolation.

The image of mirror is very relevant because it faithfully mirrors the loneliness and anxieties of her face. The images of the 'kind night' and 'to erase the water' suggest that only death can help her in overpowering her mood of depression and loneliness.

### **Critical Analysis**

In the poem, *The Old Playhouse*, the poet shows her total disenchantment with her married life and its disastrous consequences on her life. It is an open protest against her egotistical husband who does not think beyond the gratification of his sensual desires. The female persona accuses her husband for domesticating her like a swallow after marriage in a well-planned manner.

She also blames him for depriving her of the thrills of romantic love and the desired woman's freedom. He has intentionally done it so that she cannot only forget the fury of the winter and autumn seasons but also snap all her ties with the life before marriage. He has spared no efforts to make her forget her colourful past in which she enjoyed perfect freedom and distinct identity. He wants to make her forget her true nature as well as the very desire to move about freely in the infinite spaces of the sky.

This first section of the poem points to the disastrous fate of the mismatched marriage. Marriage is not an institution limited to the gratification of the sensual desires only. It is not a unilateral but a bilateral relationship based on mutual-trust and mutual understanding. There is no place for the exploitation and dehumanization of any partner in love.

It was not to gather knowledge (...)

To offer at the right moment the vitamins.

In this second section, the woman is critical of her feeling less husband for shattering her romantic dreams of the married life. She has realized that she is merely an object of physical entertainment meant for satisfying the lustful desires of her husband only. She has lost all her identity as a woman and is systematically alienated from her happy and contented past life.

The woman, in the poem, then explains the reason of marrying the man and the intention behind forming this relationship. She had come to him not to be enlightened about him but to learn about her true self. She thought that the marriage would give her an opportunity for self-growth and self-discovery. But all her hopes were belied because of the egotistical nature of her husband. She found highly selfish and self-centred who could not think beyond himself.

Cowering (...)



In the vases have begun to smell of human sweat.

In this third section of the poem, the woman had a very horrifying experience of the marital life. It marked the sudden end of the life of romantic aspirations and dreams. She was almost overpowered by the monstrous ego of her husband. She lost the very will to live in this hostile environment. She had also lost the chance of self-growth and self-discovery. She was treated like an object of sexual-gratification only.

Kamala Das always felt terrified by the dreadful ego of her husband. She was meant to please her self-conceited husband against her wishes to preserve this relationship. It is in this process of unnatural appeasement she had lost her individuality and self-respect. She was almost reduced to a dwarf and lost all her will to think and act in an independent manner. Being mentally disturbed, her responses and reactions were always illogical and inconsistent. She had lost all her identity as a dignified woman and felt totally dehumanized in this caged existence.

Kamala Das's marital life is all disturbed due to the overpowering and egotistical nature of her husband. She is all alienated and frustrated in life because of the indifferent attitude of her husband. She is denied all the needs of a woman for self-growth and self-discovery. She is neglected by her husband who treats her as an object for the satisfaction of his lust only.

There is (...)

To shatter and the kind night to erase the water.

In this fourth section, the female persona has suffered both physically and mentally at the hands of her self-centred and selfish husband. She has lost all her freedom, self-respect and identity as a woman and is reduced to the level of a dwarf. She has to work like a caretaker to satisfy his daily needs. She is almost crushed under his unchallenged monstrous ego.

It was a period of winter in her life. For Kamala Das, life has come to a stand-still. All her romantic dreams of the marital life are shattered and she faces a complete vacuum in her life. There is no space for singing or dancing in her colourless and meaningless life. Her life is like an old playhouse filled with impenetrable darkness. She is all fed up with the stereotyped and mechanical technique of love-making of her husband. He offers love in fatal doses which will ultimately kill his wife.

## **Unit IV– DRAMA**

### **TRIFLES –SUSAN GLASPELL**



## Trifles Summary

### Susan Glaspell

#### At a Glance

Sheriff Henry Peters, local attorney George Henderson, and neighbor Lewis Hale enter the Wrights' farmhouse to investigate the murder of its previous owner, John. John's wife, Minnie, is suspected of the murder.

- Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters come along to collect some of Minnie's personal effects to bring to her in jail. The men search the house for evidence against Minnie, leaving the two women alone.
- Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters begin their own search in the kitchen, which the men overlooked. During their search, they find a broken birdcage and a dead canary wrapped in silk. It's suggested that John killed the bird and that this was what caused Minnie to snap.
- Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters sympathize with Minnie, realizing that her husband was abusive. They decide to hide the evidence from the men, who think of these things as mere "trifles."

#### Analysis

- The play opens on the scene of **John** and **Minnie Wright**'s abandoned farmhouse. The kitchen is in disarray with unwashed dishes, a loaf of uncooked bread, and a **dirty towel** on the table. The county attorney **George Henderson** arrives at the house accompanied by the local sheriff **Henry Peters** and the neighboring farmer **Lewis Hale**. The wives of two of the men, **Mrs. Peters** and **Mrs. Hale**, both of whom appear disturbed and fearful, follow the men inside.
- The play establishes its themes in its opening moments. The play examines the relationships between husbands and wives, particularly a marriage that ended in murder. The setting, a messy kitchen, reflects this. The women stand together, highlighting both the way they have been pushed together by their male-dominated society but also, possibly, their loyalty to each other over their husbands, a topic explored in the play.



- The sheriff asks [Lewis Hale](#) to describe the scene he discovered at the farmhouse the previous day. Before Mr. Hale begins, Mr. Peters reassures the attorney that nothing has been moved in the house since he saw it last, despite having sent one of his men ahead to prepare a fire. He explains that he couldn't have kept one of his men there the previous day to monitor the house because they were too busy. Mr. Peters knew George Henderson would arrive the next day for them to go over the house for evidence.
- Lewis Hale's account establishes the dynamic between men and women in the world of the play. The men are concerned with the business of finding evidence, and George Henderson is established as the man in charge in the investigation. Mr. Hale's account shows the value placed on the word of a man. His testimony will not be questioned.
- [Mr. Hale](#) tells the story of arriving at the [Wrights'](#) home the previous day. He had been hoping to convince [John Wright](#) to invest in a party line telephone with him, and thought maybe it would help to ask him in front of his wife, though he acknowledges that John paid little attention to what his wife wanted. Mr. Hale arrived at the house and found [Minnie Wright](#) sitting there in her rocking chair. He describes her as looking out of sorts. Mr. Hale asked to see John and Minnie told him that he couldn't because John was dead. When Mr. Hale asked what he died of, Minnie said that he died of a rope around his neck.
- The irony of the request that brought Mr. Hale to the Wrights' house is revealed later in the play. Minnie Wright was starved for company, for the voice of any other living thing. Mr. Hale hoped to install a telephone, an object that could keep her in touch with others and combat loneliness. But he was too late, an example of situational irony. The way that John was murdered—strangled by a rope—becomes critical later in the play as the characters search for a motive for murder.

[Mr. Hale](#) describes calling one of his men, going upstairs and finding [John Wright's](#) body. His first instinct, he says, was to remove the rope, but his companion cautioned him to not touch anything and to preserve any evidence. Before leaving, he questioned [Minnie Wright](#) about who killed her husband. She said that despite having been sleeping in the bed with him where he was killed, she didn't wake up when it happened. The county attorney asks what Minnie did when Mr. Hale sent for the coroner to question her and Mr. Hale says she stayed quiet. But when he mentioned that he'd originally come to ask about putting in a telephone, Minnie laughed and then looked fearful.

- Mr. Hale's account of Minnie's response to her husband's death casts her as suspicious. Her statement that she didn't wake up when her husband was killed seems nearly impossible. Her laughter and her fearful look are also treated as suspicious behavior. The men make various assumptions about women throughout this play. One assumption is that Minnie is guilty and they try to prove this, rather than try to understand her situation and her emotions. The men are looking for facts, not context.

- The play kicks off with stage directions that give us the lowdown on John Wright's farmhouse.
- (This place probably wouldn't be anybody's first pick on [House Hunters](#).)
- All we can see onstage is the "gloomy kitchen," which is full of signs of "incompleted work," like unwashed dishes, a random loaf of bread sitting outside of the breadbox, and a dishtowel sitting out on the counter (1).
- (Hmm, this place kind of sounds like the house you'd rent with friends during your sophomore year of college.)
- Okay: time for some characters.
- First to enter is the Sheriff, who's followed by the County Attorney and Hale.
- We're told that the Sheriff and the Hale are middle aged, but the County Attorney is a young buck.
- All three men are bundled up against the cold and go immediately to the kitchen stove to warm up.
- Next to enter is the Sheriff's wife, Mrs. Peters, who's described as wiry and nervous.
- Last to make her appearance is Mrs. Hale, who it's probably safe to assume is the wife of Hale.
- We're told that Mrs. Hale is larger than Mrs. Peters and that normally people would describe her as "more comfortable looking" than the other woman, but for some reason Mrs. Hale looks kind of freaked out right now (1).
- (We're guessing it's more than that moldy bread.)
- The County Attorney invites the ladies to join the men by the fire.
- Mrs. Peters takes a step towards the stove, but then decides she's not cold.
- (Make up your mind, already.)
- The County Attorney asks Hale to confirm whether anything has been moved in the house.
- Hale says he just had some dude named Frank come over and make a fire that morning since it dropped below freezing last night.
- The County Attorney chides the Sheriff, saying that somebody should've been left at the house yesterday.
- The Sheriff makes an excuse about some guy going crazy and being really busy.
- The County Attorney asks Hale to tell him everything he saw when he entered the house the morning before.
- So Hale starts filling us in on the deets.
- He dropped by to see if John Wright wanted to go in with him on a party telephone.
- (This is telephone that people shared back in the day, not that people had parties with telephones.)
- Hale mentions that he'd tried to get Wright to do this before.
- Wright had blown him off, though, saying that people talked too much and all he wanted was peace and quiet.
- (Seems like Wright was really not the guy to go in with on a party telephone.)
- Hale starts to say that he hoped Wright might budge on getting the phone if Hale brought up the subject in front of Mrs. Wright, but then he admits that Wright never really paid attention to what his wife said anyway.

- The County Attorney cuts off Hale, telling him they'll talk about the wife stuff later.
- So Hale keeps dishing out the exposition.
- He tells us that everything was quiet when he knocked on the door, and when he came in he found Mrs. Wright rocking in the rocking chair.
- Everybody looks at the rocking chair he's talking about.
- According to Hale, Mrs. Wright was just kind of weirdly rocking back and forth in her chair and pleating her apron.
- The County Attorney asks Hale how Mrs. Wright seemed to feel about Hale being there.
- Apparently, she was didn't seem to really care.
- Hale tried to point out that it was cold, but Mrs. Wright didn't seem to have noticed.
- When Hale asked if he could see John, Mrs. Wright kind of laughed and said no.
- Confused, Hale asked if John was home, and Mrs. Wright says yes.
- Even more confused, Hale asks why he can't see John then.
- To which Mrs. Wright calmly replies that John was upstairs dead.
- (Whoa.)
- After some more questioning, the unconcerned widow tells Hale that her husband died of a rope around the neck.
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3HhCR\\_utU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3HhCR_utU) about the play
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5FsUJDDrUs> summary author, theme and questions
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5vU\\_1bOEoE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5vU_1bOEoE) -video in short
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrMNa2-emuk> introductory video
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=304nvr25LoI> play video

## Unit V- SHORT STORIES

### About the author:

Ambai is the pseudonym of Dr.C.S. Lakshmi, a historian and a creative writer in Tamil. Being born in a conservative Tamil household as an accidental second girl child, our author, C. S. Lakshmi did not receive deep love and care from his father. However, her mother and grandmother nurtured the child with support and guidance. That sowed the seeds of working as a feminist writer and independent researcher in women's studies.



## 1.FOREST - AMBAI

The most wonderful thing about this collection of stories, that it celebrates differences and being unconventional, something that is often admired in men but is very difficult for a woman. There are so many women here, who question the norm and turn rules on their heads. There is Chenthiru in “A Forest”, who is refused a partnership in her husband’s firm in spite of the long hours she has spent working there, and decides to do something so radical that she has her family worried. She travels alone to stay in a forest for a few days, an experience that very few of us have. This leads her on her own voyage of self discovery, and she turns to writing, imagining Sita rewriting the Ramayana from her own perspective.

Chenthiru’s mind was filled with forests, from the poems of Ahananuru. She wanted to go away to a forest. Forest, a place without noise, traffic and electrical gadgets. Her father was a chief accountant in a coffee estate. She and her younger brother stayed in Bangalore with their mother. As she was born under a tree, her brother used to mock at her that she will go off in search of a Bodhi tree.

Chenthiru studied MSc Textiles. She married Tirumalai who was doing his father’s business selling Vibhuti and Kumkumam. She thought that the time has come to re-write the epic. She stayed at the Government guest house in the forest. When she showed the permission letter to her husband, he complained that she made all the decisions and inform him only at the end.

She took a notebook and stationaries and started her journey to the forest.

Sita was alone. She met Valmiki. She told him that she wanted to write Sitayana, in a different language, as there will be many Ramas and Sitas in the ages to come. Valmiki created history but Sita experienced it. She absorbed into herself all manner of experiences. Rama was suspicious of everything when Sita came from Lanka. He cross-questioned witnesses, thw Sun, the Moon and at last the Fire, as the final test of purity. Rama’s mind was entirely warped as he suspected Sita.



Sita was born from Lotus flower which was plucked by Ravana. His wife Mandodari placed the baby in a bamboo box and put it out to sea. The baby was handed over to Janaka who gave the name Sita.

When Rama was born a feast was arranged. Venison(meat of deer) was served. The hunter killed the buck (the male deer). The female deer ran to Kosalai, Rama's mother and requested her to give atleast the skin of her partner deer. She refused to give it as she wanted to make a Kanjira with that skin to give it to the baby(Rama) to play. The deer wailed in grief that one day Kosalai will suffer this pain of loss. It happened when Rama was sent to forest for 14 years.

Chenthiru walked further along the densely spreading trees. She watched a dancing peacock. She began to weep thinking about the obstacles that stand in her way. She wanted to vanish all her burden.

She met a group of Marathi women who brought thick roti and red thuvayal. They shared the dish with Chenthiru. One woman named Minabai was consuming tobacco. Chenthiru remarked that it will spoil their health.

Rama broke the bow and married Sita. When Sita was taken away by Ravana , she was in Lanka. When she came back to Ayodhya she was forced to undergo the test of purity. After doing this she didn't live with him. When Lava and Kusa were born to Sita, they told her about chasing a deer. They were surprised by the beauty of the deer. She told them not to chase it and let it run.

Lava, Kusa didn't know their father's name. Sita told them it was Rama, the King of Ayodhya. When he was standing there, they both leapt towards their father. If they were girl children they might have looked upon a father who abandoned their mother in the forest with suspicious eyes. She met Sufi Baba in an Ashramam. She heard BilavalRaagam from Dhruvad, his mother's favourite ragam. Both of them have two choices. One is to renounce, the other is not to renounce.

Sita looked around the cottage. It would be a total renunciation. She decided to take a lone, long and deep journey. The more she walked, crossed the river, waterfall, saw the deer drinking water, tigers, baby elephants, owls, monkeys, she walked on.

Someone was playing Vinai, he called himself Ravana. He didn't die in the war. He was waiting to meet her. He told her that he had never refused to give his friendship to anyone. He told her that the body is a prison, it's a means of freedom. He showed her Rudravina. It's an extension of Devi's body. She wanted to learn it. She started thinking it as her life had a quest to learn it. She kept it over her lap.

---

## 2.THE YELLOW WALLPAPER - Charlotte Perkins Gilman

In the short story **The Yellow Wallpaper** we will consider the ways in which Charlotte Perkins Gilman uses the story to communicate about her own difficult experiences post-birth. We will also discuss her use of fiction as a vehicle to reveal what she felt was the less-than-equal existence of women during the 19th century.

### A Woman's Voice in the 19th Century

'**The Yellow Wallpaper**', a short story written by **Charlotte Perkins Gilman** and published in 1892, is both a haunting psychological story and a feminist masterpiece. Gilman, a women's rights activist, writer, wife and mother, lived during a time when she felt women were kept in a position that prevented them from existing beyond the sphere of their home - effectively hindering any kind of intellectual or creative growth. Marriage, as a result, was a sticky situation. Family life, Gilman felt, could never really satisfy everyone in the family, and things needed to change. Women needed to have the opportunity to work, to grow and to make connections outside of the home.



### *Gilman used her own difficult postpartum experience in writing The Yellow Wallpaper*

While Gilman wrote many essays concerning concepts of social reform and progressive change, along with other poems, short stories and even an autobiography, her most famous work has been 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' which was inspired by her own experience. While in her twenties, Gilman married and one year later, gave birth to a daughter. It was after the birth of her daughter that she suffered from what we know now was probably a severe case of postpartum depression. The suggested cure for this was...well...nothing. She was, as prescribed by her doctor, to do absolutely nothing. A 'rest cure' as they called it back then was a length of time during which the patient did minimal physical activity and had very limited mental stimulation because, as some doctors believed, the condition was brought on by too much going on in the patient's mind (or a kind of hysteria or nervousness). It was a miserable time for Gilman, who was reduced to a mental breakdown.



It was only after she stopped listening to the doctor and her husband that she started to improve. Gilman eventually left her husband and began her writing life soon thereafter but contended that the postpartum experience, the traumatic course of action and the lack of insight into her emotional state left scars that she felt for the rest of her life. It was from this emotion that Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'

#### 'The Yellow Wallpaper': Synopsis

Our story, it is important to remember, is written in the first person in the form of a journal. Our female [narrator](#), who remains nameless in the story, and her husband, John, have come to vacation in a large house for the summer after the birth of their daughter. It seems as though John believes this would be good for our narrator as she has been suffering from hysterical behaviors postpartum, which led to her rest cure treatment until she improves. John feels that the best room for her during this time is an upstairs room believed to be a former nursery - one with bars on the windows, scratches on the floors and busy yellow wallpaper.

Our narrator reveals that she does not agree with John, who also happens to be a doctor. He has told her that she should not write anything (which she loves to do) and that improvement will come by sticking to a strict regimen of doing almost nothing. She disagrees and feels that distraction would be best for her, so she continues to write, hiding her journal. Her entries consist of descriptions of the house, imaginings of things going on nearby, revelations of the narrator's true feelings for her husband's ideas (which feel oppressive). She does come back to descriptions of her room and specifically the wallpaper, more often. She finds it ugly and then a bit scary. She imagines designs in it, tries to figure out its pattern. She believes she sees a small pattern behind a large one - a woman stooping in front of bars. At this point, our narrator is fixated.

Our narrator's descent into madness is clear. Her obsession with the woman in the paper plagues her. She envisions the woman stooping around during the day (when she is let out) and shaking the bars of her prison at night (when she is locked up). Our narrator spends time trying to peel off all the wallpaper to free the woman. She begins a habit of crawling around the room on all fours. She is convinced that she herself is a trapped woman who was once in the wallpaper as well.

In a scene of total madness with the narrator creeping along the walls of the room, John comes in to check on her. When he sees the extent of the situation, he faints with horror. But she continues her course, stooping around and around the room, stepping over her husband as she passes.

#### 'The Yellow Wallpaper': Analysis

Before we address any story analysis, it's important to think about the context of this particular story. First of all, the historical context in which it was written has quite a bit to do with how it exists as a social and political commentary. In other words, it was written during a time when women did not have the rights and freedoms that they do now. The author wrote this story as a response to her experience in this situation. The story's a critique of the way things worked among genders and the ways in which the lives of women were controlled and limited.

What, then, can we gather about 'The Yellow Wallpaper?' Well, it seems to be about a woman who is dealing with some postpartum depression of some sort. She follows the advice of her husband, which is to rest. They are not in their own surroundings but rather they are in a rented house where the narrator has been given a room with metal bars and yellow wallpaper

in which to spend her hours. Remember - there was no TV at the time. She's not supposed to write (but she does) or have much mental stimulation at all.

In a nutshell

The 19th-century treatment for postpartum depression, then called “nervous depression,” was a “rest-cure” that called for isolating a woman from her societal duties and forcing her into inactivity. Throughout the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper,” author Charlotte Perkins Gilman explores her own experience with postpartum depression and the “rest-cure” treatment. Written as a woman’s secret diary while locked away in a room, “The Yellow Wallpaper” explores the negative attitude towards women and the stigma surrounding mental health. While the narrator writes in order to relieve her mind, her husband John forbids it. He denies her wishes to stay in a small, cozy room downstairs in their summer home and instead confines her to an airy room coated with an ugly, yellow wallpaper. While at first she resents the room, the narrator soon becomes obsessed with the yellow wallpaper, believing that there is a woman trapped behind it whom she must set free. Early readers generally overlooked the story’s social commentary about the treatment of women and instead read the story as a straightforward, gothic ghost story. However, Gilman’s depiction of a woman’s rapid descent into madness stands as an early example of an empowered female voice that gives testimony to the horrors of the female condition.

### 3. Draupadi by Mahasweta Devi



**About the author:** MAHASWETA DEVI 1926 - 2016 Mahasweta Devi was an Indian Bengali writer and social activist. Her works, written in Bengali have been translated to English, Hindi, Marathi and several other languages. Mahasweta was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 14th January 1926 but later after the partition of India, their family moved to West Bengal. Mahasweta was born in a literate family. Both her parents were well-known writers. Mahasweta also received good education. She acquired a Bachelors and Masters degree in English. Basically interested in writing, Mahasweta Devi wrote more than 100

novels and over 20 collections of short stories. The Indian government honoured Mahasweta with various literary awards such as the SahityaAkademi Award, Jnanpith Award, Ramon Magsaysay Award and also the civilian awards Padma Shri and Padma Vibhushan. The legendary and glorious mother of Bengal passed away on Jul 28, 2016 due to multiple organ failure.

Draupadi is probably one of Mahasweta Devi's most famous stories, and has been reprinted and translated in several collections. Apart from receiving praise for her literary works, she was recognised as a voice for the helpless, actively fighting against the discrimination of tribal people in India. She has spent over thirty years working with and for the tribal people of West Bengal and the southeast of Bihar as a political anthropologist, investigative journalist and editor of a "People's Magazine". Born in 1926 to an urban, middle-class, professional writer. Mahasweta becomes more and more involved with the lives and struggles of the unprivileged tribal women and the atrocities inflicted on them.

GayatriChakravortySpivak translated this Bengali short story into English as much for the sake of its villain, Senanayak, as for its title character, Draupadi (or Dopdi). Because in Senanayak she finds the closest approximation to the First- World scholar in search of the Third World. On the level of the plot, first she speaks about Senanayak, the army officer who captures and degrades Draupadi. She will not go so far as to suggest that, in practice, the instruments of First-World life and investigation are complicit with such captures and such a degradation.<sup>1</sup> The approximation she notices relates to the author's careful presentation of Senanayak as a pluralist aesthete. In theory, Senanayak can identify with the enemy. But pluralist aesthetes of the First World are, willy-nilly, participants in the production of an exploitative society. Hence in practice, Senanayak must destroy the enemy, the menacing other. He follows the necessities and contingencies of what he sees as his historical moment. There is a convenient colloquial name for that as well: pragmatism. Thus his emotions at Dopdi's capture are mixed: sorrow (theory) and joy (practice). Correspondingly, we grieve for our Third-World sisters; we grieve and rejoice that they must lose themselves and become as much like us as possible in order to be "free"; we congratulate ourselves on our specialists' knowledge of them. Indeed, like ours, Senanayak's project is interpretive.

Mahashweta Devi's "Draupadi" as a narrative of India- explains how politics work in a society and that provides a profound insight into the forces that makes an attitudinal shift. Mahashweta Devi's short story "Draupadi" captures the experiences of a tribal woman. She is involved in a social movement- the Naxalite movement in India. She is living in the Jharkhani forest with a group of Naxalite rebels. The story reveals several significant facts about the Santal tribe through the reminiscences of Draupadi. Firstly women are shown clearly "protected" by the men of the tribe as the phrase "stood guard over their women's blood" implies. Secondly, as a group that expected and received such patriarchal

“protection,” the women seem not to have engaged in warfare for Dopdi does not mention foremothers in this regard. Thus the proud reference to the “black armour” of the forefathers is also significant, as this seems to indicate that the Santal men were perhaps (good) warriors. Alas! The same could be the state of tribal people today! The same could be the location of a woman today! It is indeed a matter of lamentation Mahashweta shows how a woman suffers in psychologically, emotionally and physically in society. She swings with oppression between the two versions of her name. GayatriChakravortySpivak in her 'foreword' to Draupadi observes: "Draupadi is the name of the central character. She is introduced to the reader between two uniforms and between two versions of her name. Dopdi and Draupadi. It is either that as a tribal she cannot pronounce her own Sanskrit name Draupadi, or the tribalized form, Dopdi, is the proper name of the ancient Draupadi". It is also noticeable in the 'foreword' that " the tribes have no right to heroic names as Draupadi is perhaps the most celebrated heroine of the Indian epic Mahabharata.

Draupadi is about the Santhal tribe girl, who is vulnerable to injustice but resist the burnt of social oppression and violence with indomitable will and courage and even try to deconstruct the age old structures of racial and gender discrimination. Draupadi is translated by GayatriChakravortySpivak. The most interesting part of the story is that DopdiMejhen is portrayed as an illiterate, uneducated tribal woman. Yet she leads the politicized life amongst all because she is engaged in an armed struggle for the rights and freedom of the tribal people. This essay is about the modern breaks with tradition and the development of new forms of discourse and harmonious with the women's cause for the problems that in rejecting the binary structures of patriarchal discourses which are sight of the political, social and ideological forces of racism in our society. In her later works, Mahasweta becomes more and more involved with the lives and struggles of the unprivileged tribal women and the atrocities inflicted on

Mahasweta Devi's prime concern is with the underprivileged castes and tribes of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. The KheriaSabars, Santhals, Ganjus and Mundas, the low castes people living in the above regions are the most marginalized. Despite the Indian Constitution's claims of India as a democratic and egalitarian state, social inequalities are a grim reality today. Even after sixty-six years of independence, Indian society is faced with structural inequality. Mahasweta Devi –Draupadi.

The story of Draupadi is set among the tribal's in Bengal. Draupadi or Dopdi as her name appears in dialect, is a Santhals tribe girl, who is vulnerable to injustice but resist the burnt of social oppression and violence with strong will and courage and even try to deconstruct the age old structures of racial and gender discrimination. The most interesting part of the story is that DopdiMejhen is portrayed as an illiterate, uneducated tribal woman. Yet she leads the politicized life amongst all because she is engaged in an armed struggle for the rights and freedom of the tribal people. Draupadi, or Dopdi as her name appears in dialect, is a rebel, hunted down by the government in their attempt to overcome these groups. Name DopdiMejhen, age twenty-seven, husband DulnaMajhi (deceased), domicile Cherakhan, Bankrajharh, information whether dead or alive and/or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees..." The government uses all forces available to them, including kidnapping, murder, and rape, and any tribal deaths in custody are invariably 'accidents'.

Draupadi and her husband Dulna are on the 'most wanted' list in West Bengal. They murder wealthy landlords to claim wells and tube-wells which are their main sources of water in the village. They fight



for their right to basic means of nourishment. Dulna is eventually gunned down by policemen; however Draupadi manages to escape and begins to operate helping fugitives who have murdered corrupt property-owners and landlords, escape. She tactfully misleads the cops who are on her trail, so that the fugitives' campsite remains a secret. However, she is finally caught and kept in police custody. This is where the story actually begins. Over the course of a few days, Draupadi is repeatedly raped, deprived of food and water and tortured by multiple officers who state that their orders to Mahasweta Devi – Draupadi. “make her” have come from their Bade Sahib, officer Senanayak, in charge of her case. The Senanayak, an officer appointed by the Government to capture Draupadi and stop her activities. The Senanayak the military official, is a senseless, cruel officer for whom murders, assaults, counter- assaults and sadistic tortures on the tribal activists reaches a point where if anyone is captured, their eyeballs, intestines, stomachs, hearts, genitals and so on become the food of fox, vulture, hyena, wild cat, ant and worm. After days, the policemen take her back to the tent and tell her to clothe herself, because it is time for her to meet Senanayak. As the guard pushes a bucket of water forward, for her to wash herself, she laughs, throws the water down and tears the piece of cloth on her body. She proceeds to walk out of her tent, towards Senanayak, naked and with her head held high. Senanayak is taken aback and quickly turn away his eyes from her body. She walks right up to him, hands on her hips and says “the object of your search, DopdiMehjen. You asked them to make me. Don't you want to see how they made me?” When Senanayak asks where her clothes are, she replies angrily, that clothes were useless because once she was stripped, she could not be clothed again. She spits on Senanayak with disgust and says “How can you clothe me? Are you a man? There isn't a man here, that I should be ashamed.’ She pushes Senanayak with her exposed breasts and for the first time, he is afraid to counter an unarmed woman. In that moment, though Draupadi has no weapons, she uses her body as her greatest weapon. The body which was abused, tortured and seen as the cause of her downfall becomes the very weapon with which she stands up for herself. Mahasweta Devi –Draupadi. Page 4 She refuses to let them take advantage of her emotions, even though she has been physically assaulted. Draupadi realizes that raping women does not make the male species ‘masculine’. In fact, it neutralizes the very purpose. Here Mahasweta Devi presents Draupadi as a strong female character, transgressing sexual orientation and social standards. The story ends with a magnificent final scene in which she faces her abusers, naked and bloody, but fiercely strong andfor the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed *target*, terribly afraid.

---