

***CLASSICS OF WORLD  
LITERATURE***

**VI SEMESTER**

**CORE COURSE: ENG6 B12**

**B.A. ENGLISH**

**(2019 Admission onwards)**

**CBCSS**



**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**  
*School of Distance Education,  
Calicut University P.O.,  
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# **UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

## **School of Distance Education**

### **Study Material**

### **VI Semester**

### **Core Course (ENG6 B12)**

### **B.A. ENGLISH**

### **CLASSICS OF WORLD LITERATURE**

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#### **DISCLAIMER**

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### **COURSE OUTCOME:**

After the completion of the course students should be able to:-

Identify the classic literature and thereby composite cultures of the world

Develop cross cultural perspectives

Classify literary texts in English or English translation in terms of their main stylistic and thematic features.

Describe the literary, historical, social and cultural backgrounds of these texts.

Identify some of the main theoretical and methodological issues involved in reading World Literature

## **Module I.**

### **Introduction to the ancient world**

#### **Introduction**

Human beings have been social animal and literature, though orally to a period, has been a part of his/ her life since its beginning. It has shaped, moulded, and influenced the people so much. Later, as man figured out language in its written form, literature transformed into something materialistic. Everything started getting recorded. The ancient oral literature started getting written. These were obviously tainted by different interpretations by the people who were writing them. Gradually ,the oral epics paved the way for written ones. The poets and dramatists were later better equipped with better vocabulary and styles. This resulted in the making of better literature. Later, different genres appeared apart from mere epics and tragedies. In this paper, we will come across almost all these genres.

Almost every dictionary in English defines epic as a long poem, typically from oral traditions, often dealing with the exploits of a hero or the past history of a nation. Many ancient civilisations have created epics of their own and most of them survive even today. The Greek/Roman epics may be treated as the most popular among the epics available today. As discussed in the beginning, these have been oral literature initially. For example, Homer literally sang the epics of Iliad and Odyssey through the

streets of Greece like a nomad. While analysing the ways which the epics became popular, one arrives at many conclusions. One of them being, the people who started living as a group really wanted to have stories in fact. These acted as a supplement to their music and dance. Their modes of entertainment were limited. The epics didn't appear overnight. The people sang them. The ones who heard them passed them onto the next generation and the cycle continued. As the generations changed, it is sure that the original oral content would have undergone major changes but it no longer matters since these are all a written manifestation of oral literature. Often, anonymity is the characteristic of epics, except for a very few ones. When we analyse, there are similarities among the epics because the life seemed to be pretty similar in most of the societies though the rituals and customs changed.

Let us now briefly analyse some important epics of the ancient times and why they are still being read and studied.

### **Iliad.**

Iliad is thought to have been written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This is also treated as one of the earliest works in the Western literature. To put it simply, Iliad narrates the story of the Trojan war, especially its last days. Iliad revolves around the adventures of Odysseus, Menelaus, Achilles, and the lives of Helen and Paris. Paris, younger son of Priam of Troy falls in love with Helen, wife of Menelaus. He abducts her to Troy. Menelaus was the king of Sparta, one of the many small countries in Greece whereas Troy was a very powerful country.

In order to bring Helen back, Menelaus seeks the help of Odysseus, king of Ithaca and Achilles, a great warrior. The trojan war lasts for around 10 years. At last, the war comes to an

end when the remaining warriors hide themselves in horses made by the remnants of their ships and annihilate everyone they see in Troy at night. Helen is brought back to Sparta.

Iliad contains 24 books and more than 15000 lies altogether.

### **Answer the following.**

1. What are the qualities that make Iliad an epic.?
2. Summarise the plot of Iliad in 250 words.

### **Odyssey.**

Odyssey is the epic that narrates the further exploits of Odysseus. Once they won the trojan war, the remaining warriors try to return home but the journey takes them not months but years. Later, the very word became suggestive of a long journey. This work, just like Iliad also contains 24 books. It is in Odyssey that we meet the Cyclops and Polyphemus.

Odysseus wanders for almost ten years. While he was away, a lot of things happened. His wife Penelope was mentally harassed by the suitors who wanted to have her. Ithaca gradually ruined. The governance was in shambles. In order to find out the truth behind the disappearance of his father, Telemachus goes in search of Odysseus. He meets Nestor and Menelaus, who fought with Odysseus and understands that he was still alive.

Meanwhile, Odysseus was wandering from one adventure to another. He meets Circe, Scylla, Polyphemus, Calypso and saves his skin from everyone. When he lands in

Ithaca at last, there were more troubles. It was only his faithful dog and a servant who recognised him at first. He reveals himself to Telemachus and they devise a plan to overthrow the mayhem in Ithaca. Both the father and the son drive away the suitors.

### **Answer the following.**

1. Discuss the characterisation as presented in both Iliad and Odyessey.

### **Aeneid.**

Aeneid is a Latin poem written by Virgil. This was written between 30 to 19 BCE. The story centres around the adventures of Aeneas. In 12 books, Virgil talks about the foundation of Lavinium (parent town of Rome).

Aeneid meets Dido while he was on his errands. Dido, the queen of Carthage falls in love with Aeneas but he is bound to sea again. Dido prepares to kill herself because of her loss of love. Aeneas travels to the underworld and there he meets the ghosts of Dido and Anchises, his father. Towards the conclusion of the poem, we see Trojans being welcomed by Latinus, the king of the region nearby Tiber River. A proposal of marriage between Lavinia, daughter of Latinus and Aeneas takes place. Unfortunately, this decision was resented by Latinus' wife and Turnus, a tribal leader who wanted to marry Lavinia. A war follows in which the Trojans defeat them and Lavinia and Aeneas unite.

Homer was one of the influences of Virgil and enough instances can be seen to prove this. His journey is shaped after the model of *odyssey*. Virgil has often imitated and translated some passages from *Odyssey*.

Answer the following.

1. How did Virgil get inspired by the Greek epics?

### **The epic of Gilgamesh.**

The epic of Gilgamesh is about Gilgamesh, as the title suggests. Gilgamesh was a king of Uruk , a Mesopotamian country. Akkadian is the language used in order to narrate the poem. The text of the poem is available from 12 tablets which are incomplete. The tablets were found from the library of the Assyrian king named Ashurbanipal who ruled from 668 to 628 BC.

The tablets found in Nineveh narrates the epic of Gilgamesh, a warrior and builder. We meet many Assyrian/Mesopotamian Gods in the epic. Gilgamesh is said to be a severe ruler and the God Anu sends Enkidu in order to control his ruling. According to different tablets, the narrative also changes. As both Enkidu and Gilgamesh find out Gilgamesh is stronger, they become friends. Enkidu is a friend in some texts whereas he is a servant of Gilgamesh in Sumerian texts/tablets.

As the tablets are incomplete, we don't get to know what exactly happens in a linear manner. Both of them start off an expedition to meet Huwawa , an appointed guardian of a forest. But the continuation of this journey isn't recorded at all. Later,

Gilgamesh rejects Ishtar , the goddess of love. Angered, she sends a divine bull to kill him. Enkidu helps him kill the bull. Enkidu is asked to pay for this with his life. After this, Gilgamesh goes in search of Utnapishtim, the lone survivor of the flood. Gilgamesh wanted to know how to stay immortal. He is given the information of a plant that would help him gain immortality. Unfortunately, a serpent eats the plant and Gilgamesh returns to Uruk as a mortal.

### **Answer the following.**

1. Epic of Gilgamesh as a precursor of Asian epics.

### **The Mahabharata.**

Mahabharata is an epic believed to have been written between 400 BCE- 200 BCE. The Hindus in India treat this as both a text on morals and partly historical. The basic theme of this grand epic is sovereignty and the fights for that in various ways. The fights happen between two groups: the progenies of Dhritarashtra and Pandu , two princes. The descendants are respectively called Kauravas and Pandavas.

There are almost 100,000 couplets in the poem. It talks about intrigues, fights, etc. Moreover, dharma is one of the prime features presented in the epic. The epic is divided into 18 parvas/kandas. It may not be true that a single person had written the epic, it is still solely ascribed to Sage Vyasa. Vyasa appears in the epic as a character as well.

As prince Dhritarashtra was blind, Pandu was given the chance to rule the kingdom. Since Pandu wasn't able to beget children in his wife Kunthi, they seek the help of gods. Hence,

Pandu gets five boys for sons and Dhritarashtra, 100 sons and a daughter. Gradually, feud grows between these two groups. When Pandu dies, the five brothers along with their mom are made to leave the palace. Since Yudhishtira, the elder lost the gambling match to Duryodhana, the brothers go into an exile of 12 years and one year of invisible exile. If someone recognises them in the last year, another 12 year-exile would follow. The brothers after the period of exile come back and ask for a meagre area of land so that they could live there. But Krishna, the messenger was disrespected by Kauravas and this results in the gory war named Kurukshetra war. Everybody in the Kauravas died and only the five Pandava brothers and Krishna survive. At the end of the poem, we see the five brothers ascending to heaven.

### **Answer the following.**

1. Contemporary significance of Mahabharata – Discuss.
2. What caused the rivalry between Kauravas and Pandavas ?

### **The Ramayana.**

Between the two significant epics of ancient India , the Ramayana is the shorter one. Written in Sanskrit like Mahabharata , the Ramayana was written by Valmiki. Ramayana includes some 24000 lines in seven books.

Just like seen in the Mahabharata, Ramayana also narrates the story of princes and royal life, exile and so on. The epic narrates the life and struggles of lord Ram, worshipped as Sri Ram in India. Rama was born in the palace of Ayodhya and grows up to be a popular prince. He meets Sita and bends, or

literally breaks the bow, which was a test to win the bride. They get married but the happiness doesn't stay much longer. In a typical intrigue as seen in all the narratives about power structure, Ram is banished to forest and loses the chance to rule the kingdom. Rama faces a lot of adversities before he returns to Ayodhya. Similar to The Mahabharata, there also is the case of exile for 14 years in Ramayana. While Rama was in exile along with Sita and Lakshmana, Ravana, the demon king of Lanka sees Sita and he falls in love with her. Ravana then abducts Sita to Lanka and Rama finds it difficult to trace her. With the help of monkeys led by Hanuman and Sugriva, Rama travels to Lanka. In a fierce battle, Ravana is overpowered and Sita is brought back. Sita jumps into fire to prove her chastity but when they reach Ayodhya, the people again doubt her for the same. Later, she is banished to forest by Rama. Sita lives there with the sage Valmiki and two kids are born to her later. Though Rama later comes to the forest to meet her, she lets herself be swallowed by the earth, her mother.

### **Answer the following.**

1. How is Ramayana different from Mahabharata in treating the myths ?

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## **Greek Theatre.**

The Greek theatre takes its roots from the religious festivals. Especially, there used to be the festival that celebrated Bacchus / Dionysus, the god of wine. The people used to gather there, get intoxicated, and would perform little crude plays. The comedy plays emerged out of these.

Later, the plays became standardised through the works of Sophocles, Aristophanes, and Euripides. One of the important aspects of Greek theatre that continues to inspire the modern theatre is the very architecture. Obviously, the drinking rituals associated with the festivals would have influenced the tragedy plays to form.

Tragedy became the accepted norm gradually. The themes were taken from Greek epics. There would be the open theatre where it was an almost all-men presence. The entrance to the theatre would be usually free. The themes were often the fight between good and evil. Often, the death of the characters were communicated orally.

The tragedies were full of divine characters too. Initially, these plays had only one actor who would use a mask to impersonate all the characters he was about to play on stage. There would be a big chorus comprising many people. Later, the number of actors on stage gradually increased to three instead of one.

Aristotle later defined the grammar for Greek tragedies. The strict adherence to the three unities, necessity of catharsis etc. were part of these changes.

In the festival of Dionysus, there would be a Tragedy competition in which plays by playwrights would be assessed and the best one would be given prizes. Each participating poet would submit for plays, three tragedies and a Satyr play, a parody. Among them, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, and Sophocles became famous and set standards for the upcoming plays.

To find out the traces of Greek comedy would be a tough task. But one could see that since time immemorial, man loved mocking and mimicking others and their mannerisms. Crude songs were sung in the festivals of Dionysus which reflect comedy. Comedies followed a conventional structure. The players entering the stage imitated Knights to bees on stage. This was the first part of the play and by the second part of the play consisted of a verbal debate among the actors. Aristophanes and Menander were the most important comedy playwrights.

## Indian Theatre.

Indian ancient theatre is suggestive of the Sanskrit theatre that dates back as old as 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.

Bharata, the sage is the one who changed the way in which acting was perceived in India. He suggested a grammar for many performing arts. Out of the 10 types of Drama Bharata defines, two are very important. *Nataka*, which includes the themes related with gods and kings. They are often taken from history or mythologies. *Shakuntala* by Kalidasa is an example for this. *Prakarana* is the other mode of performance defined by

Bharata. In *Prakarana*, the dramatist uses the life of common people. *Mrichchhatika* by Shudraka falls into this category. Often the Sanskrit plays during these times ranged from 1 to 10 acts. Apart from them, there were one-act plays too. *Bhana* is one such one act play. In *Bhana*, a single character involves in a dialogue with an invisible character. There is also *Prahasana*, which has an inferior and superior version. *Bhagavad Ajjukiya* and *Mattavilasa* by Mahendravikramavarman are examples of Prahasana.

Talking about the physical theatre, unlike the Greek proscenium, the Indian theatre were three types : oblong, square, and triangular. Though the Greeks followed the three unities rigorously (of action, place, and time), the Indians were unaware of these at all. Technically, the idea of catharsis was entirely different from Bharata's rasa theory. For the Greeks, catharsis was more important than the aesthetic aspect the Indian upheld.

The Indian theatre was categorised into two: lokadharmi, or the natural presentation of human behaviour and Natyadharmi, the exaggerated stylistic presentation of drama. In traditional Sanskrit plays, we have *Nandhi*, or a benediction of 8-12 lines that praises the gods and goddesses. Then a common factor in almost all the Sanskrit plays is the presence of a kind of clown named *Vidhushaka*, who reminds us of the fool in Shakespearean plays.

The most famous Sanskrit playwrights were Kalidas and Bhasa. And there are others like Harsha, Mahendravikramavarman, Bhavabhuti, and Vishakadatta. King Sudraka's plays are very much theatrical in nature. Once the traditional Sanskrit theatre declined, folk theatre emerged in different regions of the country.

## **Module II**

### **POETRY.**

#### **1. The Divine Comedy: Canto IV.**

Dante Alighieri was an Italian poet, (1265-1321) literary theorist, and prose writer. The poem The Divine Comedy was written as *La commedia*, and later named as *La Divina commedia*. The poem can be read as a personal one too as Dante was exiled from Florence. This is also an allegory, narrating the journey passing through hell, purgatory, and paradise.

The Divine Comedy was written between 1308-1321. The poem is categorised into three sections: Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso. Dante makes use of another Italian poet in his work too. This is none other than Virgil. Categorised into three sections, there are 100 cantos in Divine Comedy.

The Canto IV of The Divine Comedy talks about the preparation to visit hell/inferno. Along with Dante, Virgil is there too. The very manner in which hell is described here is to evoke fear. The targeted reader would definitely be from the fourteenth century. The content of Divine Comedy, especially from Inferno was enough to scare the reader of those times.

As Dante and his guide move along, they see many souls who didn't seen but were trapped there since they were ahead of the time of Christianity. When they walk further, they meet another group of people. Dante was unable to understand who they were and his companion comes to his help at this juncture.

He introduces each one in the following order : Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan. Dante was perplexed as he saw all these masters. Then the four masters ask Dante to join them and he feels privileged to be one among those six. They pass a brook there to reach a lawn. Later, they chanced upon some people who were sitting there. They all seemed very much serious. He then spots many Greek/ Roman heroes there. There was Hector, along with Electra, Caesar , Aeneas , and many more. Beside them, he also saw many Greek philosophers too. They included Socrates, Plato, Diogenes , Tales , Anaxagoras , Zeno , and so on. The poet feels that he will not be able to talk enough of those literary men, philosophers, and martial heroes, and princes and princesses. Slowly, leaving the four masters behind, they both walk on.

### **Answer the following.**

1.Discuss the way in which Dante met his masters like Homer.

### **2.      Violet : Goethe.**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was a German poet, playwright, and novelist. He may be seen as the greatest German literary figure of the modern era. Goethe also is a face of German romanticism. His notable works are *Alexis und Dora*, *Clavigo*, *Egmont*, *Faust*, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, etc.

Violet is a poem that reminds one of the English romanticism. Goethe starts the poem with a statement:

“Upon the mead a violet stood,

Retiring, and of modest mood”.

All of a sudden, the reader is brought to the poem. The poem becomes lively when another character is presented here. A youthful shepherdess passes by the meadow and spots the flower. The moment the flower spots the girl, it is enthralled. It wishes to be held close to the bosom of the girl.

The desire of the flower is so strong that it wishes for the actualisation for just a moment. That single moment will make the flower the happiest. Unfortunately, that was the fatal moment in which the flower was crushed. The poem ends on an unsaid cry from the flower.

### **Answer the following.**

1.     Violet as a nature poem- discuss.
  
3.     **A Flower shrivelled bare of fragrance: Alexander Pushkin.**

Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) was a Russian poet, novelist, and dramatist. He is often considered as the greatest poet Russia produced. Pushkin is credited with the shaping of modern Russian literature. His notable works are *Boris Godunov*, *Egyptian Nights*, *Eugene Onegin*, *The Gypsies*, *The Queen of Spades etc.*

A Flower...is a poem that is rich in visuals. A shrivelled flower is placed in between the pages of a book. The poet awakens seeing this, though the word in the poem is *soul*. In other words, the poet isn't a word that is free from soul. As if in

a reverie, the poet goes in search of the whereabouts of the flower now. The book is compared to a tomb here. As to the flower, there might have been a lot of interpretations regarding who would have plucked it. It might have someone the poet/narrator knew, or someone foreign. Someone would have plucked it for a meeting with someone else, or meeting someone for the last time. An unknown love affair might have been present there, in which the reader is in dark as to who they were. The poet wonders who they might be, where they might be now. At last, they might have faded like the flower in the page.

Though the poem seems to be so simple in nature, it presents the idea of evanescence and transience. As if times slowly fades everything, people and lovers also fade. At the same time, a token of such emotion also stays and brings back memories. Here, the flower is at the same time a memento mori as well as a token of love that would have existed at some point of time.

### **Answer the following.**

1. How does Pushkin recreate the life of a shrivelled flower in his poem ?

### **4. Adam : Rilke.**

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) is one of the most widely read Austrian poets in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the lyrical German language poets , Rilke stands a class apart. He has written lyrical poems as well as prose. He was an avid traveller and travelling throughout Europe has influenced his poems to an extent.

Though he has extensively written in German, more than 400 poems were written in French. His most important works include *Duino Elegies*, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, *Letters to a Young Poet etc.*

Adam is a very short poem in four stanzas. The poem travels from a famous visual to mythology/scripture with enough ease. There stands the statue of Adam and the poet stands in awe of it. Adam is compared to a ploughman here. When he was in Eden, he didn't know what he was supposed to do. But the same person rose to find out a new path. In the first stanza , the reader comes across a glorified , gigantic statue that looks from a cliff. While moving on to the last two stanzas, one sees god as a tyrant who wasn't convinced in man. There was a threat from his side. Instead of granting the wish of man, the man is threatened with death here. Yet the man stands firm since he has a companion too. Though she is not present in the poem , *she* in the last line of the poem refers to Eve , who would bear him a child later. There is a stark contrast here that suggests, though one is punished with death eventually, life will sprout as the years pass by. The poem ends on a positive note as it talks about the perseverance as well as fortitude in order to create a new path.

### **Answer the following .**

1. Adam as a poem that connects myth and the present-Discuss.

## **5. Rubaiyat : Omar Khayyam. (68-72)**

Omar Khayyam (1048-1131) was a Persian polymath , mathematician, astronomer , historian ,and poet. Though his other roles are gradually forgotten, Rubaiyat will make sure that his stature as a poet stays forever. It was through the translation of Edward Fitzgerald that Rubaiyat comes to be known in the western world. The work was translated from Persian in 1859. The Rubaiyat often talks about *carpe diem*.

The 68<sup>th</sup> rubai in Rubaiyat talks about transience. The buried ashes, being fragrant might fling into air as that won't stay forever. In a way , the poem altogether talks about the need to live in the present. Another interpretation might suggest that he was talking about wine instead of perfumes. In other words, another drinker might pass by his dead body some day and get intoxicated.

The next quatrain deals with the loss of faith as well idols. The so-called idols do not seem to be the same anymore for the narrator. The shallow cup here might refer to wine and with intoxication, everything else changes forever. The honour is pawned along with the very cup one used to get drunk.

The next stanza suggests that the speaker really wanted to change in his life , but he isn't sure whether he took such a decision when he was sober. Rose in his hands suggests the way in which it withered as the days passed by. In other words, his repentance never worked out at all.

The next stanza is an extension of the 68<sup>th</sup> one. The narrator talks about wine sellers (vintners) and wonders what they would be buying as they are selling something amazing. On

the other hand, he accuses the wine to be the reason for losing everything.

In the 72th quatrain, the rose and spring are used here again. We are back to the idea of transience. As the rose fades , which suggests youth , spring also fades away. The nightingale used here also suggests youth. At last the speaker comes to wonder where did both the nightingale and spring go. In other words, he has no clue as to where did his youth go.

Answer the following.

1. Liquor / wine as used by Omar Khayyam as a metaphor in Rubaiyat.

**6. Let go of your worries, Look at Love, I died from Minerality : Rumi.**

Jalal ad-Din Mohammed Rumi (1207-1273) was a Sufi monk and Persian poet. Rumi's poetry overflows with spirituality in every sense. Most often his works are written in Persian but sometimes his verses can be found in Greek, Turkish , and Arabic. His poems often praise the god in a Sufi way.

1. Let Go of Your Worries.

The entire poem makes use of two similes: heart and mirror and the ways in which they differ. Rumi speaks about clarity. One should be like a mirror without preconceived notions and images. The truth, according to the poet, is shameless. It is bitter too. The mirror is polished out of a metal and similarly, the heart requires polishing too. The poet concludes the poem stating one

core difference between heart and mirror : the heart conceals secrets and the mirror doesn't do that. Maybe, the reader could extend the reading saying that the mirror is shameless and the heart is shameful.

## 2. Look At Love.

The poem is an exhortation as it begins. All of a sudden, it asks the reader to look at love. Instead of looking at binaries, the speaker in the poem asks everyone to see how things blended. According to the poet, the unknown and the known merge into a composite.

Though the poet talks about binaries here and there, he concludes every stanza saying how these binaries form a composite image or idea, which makes it complete. As he concludes the poem, there is an advice to the reader that since everything mingles in nature, man must also mingle. In other words, man needs others in order to survive.

## 3. I Died from Minerality.

Rumi talks about spiritual transformation in this poem. He at first dies as a mineral, and is reborn as a plant. Later, dies as a plant but becomes an animal later. No matter, according to the poet, every death leads to something better. But the change of tone in the poem is striking as it moves from being a man to something beyond: an angel. The poet suggests that all except God perishes. Rumi suggests that in order to become what nobody has perceived, one must leave the angel-soul behind. While concluding the poem, the poet argues for non-existence as he declares that the very non-existence will lead to godliness.

Rumi invokes the scripture here saying that to God does everyone return.

**Answer the following.**

1. How does Rumi deal with mysticism in his poems?

**7. In the Twilight Rain: Matsuo Basho.**

Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) was the most famous poet in the Edo period in Japan. Basho can be treated as the master of haiku poetry in Japanese. His poems are crisp and often they clinically talk about the rustic charm. Basho used to write in pen names like Tosei.

In the Twilight...is a haiku that is a mix of visuals. There is a twilight, a sunset, rain, and hibiscus. There is the rain. In that rain, the earth makes the hibiscus to be a brilliantly hued one. Basho makes sure that everything, every element in the poem works as a complement. The sunset complements hibiscus and vice versa. Altogether, it is a composite. There is a fullness even though all the elements in the poem stand as single entities.

**Answer the following.**

1. Compare Haiku with other poetic forms.

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## **Module III**

### **DRAMA AND FILM.**

#### **Oedipus Rex : Sophocles.**

Sophocles was one of the most ancient Greek playwrights. He is thought to have lived between 497 BCE and 406 BC. Out of the 120 plus works he had written, only seven of them survive today. His most important plays would be the Theban trilogy dealing with the life of king Oedipus. Oedipus Rex still holds relevance in present day because of the brutal portrayal of a character who is victim to fate.

Oedipus Rex begins from middle. A disastrous plague is eating up Thebes and everyone is so alarmed. Nobody understands what the issue is. When Creon, Oedipus's wife's brother went to know the oracle, he was rather shocked to see what the issue was. The previous king named Laius was murdered and the murderer was there in the country. According to the Oracle, because of the murderer's presence, the gods were angry and they sent a plague. When Creon doesn't reveal much, Oedipus questions Tiresias, the prophet and the seer. There breaks out a debate between Oedipus and Tiresias and Oedipus. Tiresias accuses Oedipus of the murder and he is enraged. Suddenly, Tiresias talks about Oedipus' parents and it makes him wonder how come he knows about them at all. As a reply, Tiresias tells him that it would be the day he would be undone. Tiresias tells him that that day will show his birth as well as

destroy him. Before leaving, Tiresias says that Oedipus will soon find out the binary relations he has with his daughters as well as his wife. Oedipus accuses Creon too, saying that he was an accomplice with Tiresias in branding Oedipus as the murderer. When Creon enters the stage, he says that he has been wrongly accused.

When Oedipus spots Creon, there emerges a debate between them and Oedipus starts chiding him straight away. While they were quarrelling thus , Jocasta comes there and demands both of them enter the house rather than quarrelling in the open where everyone in the streets hear about it. Jocasta asks Oedipus what the issue was, and Oedipus says that Creon wrongly accused him for which he should be killed. Oedipus talks about Tiresias as a false prophet.

When Jocasta hears about this, she says that there was also another prophecy about the dead king, Laius, the former husband of Jocasta. Oedipus came to Thebes when he answered the riddle of the monster Sphinx and he married the queen and started ruling the country as the king.

Jocasta says that the prophecy was that the King (Laius) would be killed someday by his own son. So fearing the prophecy to become true , the king pierced his son's ankles and cast him away at a hillside. Jocasta says that since the son was already sent away , Apollo's prophecy failed. Hence, Laius was never killed at the hands of his son. But when he listens to this , Oedipus starts losing his mind. Oedipus questions as to the whereabouts of Laius, how did he look and all. Jocasta provides the information as she heard them from others. Oedipus now is terrified at how things are revealed to him. As each question is answered, he is more terrified since it becomes clearer that he was the one who killed his father and the king unknowingly.

Oedipus comes to know that it was a servant who escaped that told Jocasta all of these.

Oedipus tells Jocasta about his whereabouts. He was born to the king and queen of Corinth. Once in a feast, he was accused to be a bastard by a drunkard. When he comes to know that he would be the reason for his father's death and would marry his mother, Oedipus fled the country. While he was fleeing the country, he meets a group of people who misbehaves with him. A brawl follows there and Oedipus kills them all. Oedipus wants to see the old servant who escaped. Meanwhile, Jocasta decides to go to the oracle to know the truth of everything. While she was going to hear the oracle, a messenger arrives saying that the people of Corinth will choose Oedipus to be their king. To Jocasta, he says that his father died. Jocasta becomes so happy hearing this and sends a messenger to reveal this to the king. When Oedipus comes to know this, he tells her that he was glad as he didn't do anything to kill his father.

When the messenger says that the king and queen of Corinth were not the legitimate parents that Oedipus had, he again is frightened. The messenger tells him that he was brought as a kid from Thebes to Corinth and the childless king and queen adopted him as their son. Then Oedipus, who was happy all these while demand that the shepherd who gave the kid be brought before him. Jocasta tells him not to do so. As if Jocasta has already understood everything, she runs away calling Oedipus unhappy Oedipus.

Then the old man in the palace of king Oedipus is brought here. He was also a shepherd. Both of them had transferred the kid from one king to another. The servant says that it was the queen of the old king who sent the kid away. As everything comes to the open, Oedipus weeps and the singers in

the stage start weeping for Oedipus. Without being able to see Oedipus again, Jocasta kills herself. Oedipus plucks out his eyes.

The stage witnesses the dialogues between Oedipus and chorus. Creon comes to meet Oedipus and Oedipus demands him that he be driven away from the land since he is the reason for the plague. Oedipus talks in tearful tones to his daughters.

Though the play is an ancient one, it never amazes even a modern reader. The very ideas of fate and destiny play a vital part in the play. Oedipus and the people who knew him tried a lot in order to avert the imminent danger, but the circle is complete as the play ends. The play is an epitome of Greek tragedy and its nuances. Oedipus becomes blind, but he is no longer proud about anything. The hamartia/tragic flaw of Oedipus may be treated as the pride he often felt being a strong king as well as the protector of the kingdom.

### **Answer the following.**

1. How is Oedipus Rex a perfect example of Greek Tragedy ?
2. Fate is inevitable – discuss while comparing the character of Oedipus.

### **2. Urubhangam : Bhasa.**

Before Kalidasa, Bhasa (200-300 AD) was the most celebrated Sanskrit playwright. His plays have been thought to be lost before they were recovered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Just like

many writers who used to write in those times, Bhasa also used myths to be his source texts.

Urubhanga is a play that deals with Duryodhana from the epic Mahabharata. As the gory Kurukshetra war was coming to an end, there happened a duel between Bhima and Duryodhana. Duryodhana was the disciple of Balarama and he was fond of his student. While the duel was ongoing, Krishna finds out that Bhima was losing and Duryodhana had more strategy than the mere brutal strength of Bhima. Since he knew that if it continued this way, Bhima would fail. Krishna starts tapping on his thighs as a gesture to send Bhima a message. Bhima , forgetting all the rules of the duel, smashes the thigh of Duryodhana with his mace. This is where the title of the play comes from. In Sanskrit, *Uru* refers to thigh and *Bhang* suggests broken, shattering etc. Duryodhana falls down to the ground and can't even get up. Balarama was furious since his student was cheated. Krishna, and the rest of the Pandavas return victoriously. Balarama was going to take an oath that he would destroy everyone responsible for this.

Later, Ashwattama decides that he would kill everyone in the Pandava clan. The most moving part of the play is when the wife and son of Duryodhana come to meet him. His son used to sit on Duryodhana's thighs but now, he can't even stay upright on his feet. Contrary to the portrayals of Duryodhana as we have seen already, here the characterisation is pretty different. He seems to be someone who has foreseen it all. He doesn't even believe that he was cheated in the duel. Duryodhana feels rather peaceful that it has come to end this way.

Apart from the characterisation, the play doesn't seem wonderful considering the modern standards. The audience do not see the action on stage, rather the Vidushaka informs the audience what happened.

### **Answer the following.**

1. How is the portrayal of Duryodhana in Urubhangha different from that of the epics ?

### **Les Miserables : dir. Bille August.**

Billie August (1948-) was a graduate of the Danish film institute. He started his career in television and later worked as cinematographer. His first film as a cinematographer was *Hemat i Natten / Homeward in the Night*(1977).

Les Miserables is the most famous work the French social realist novelist Victor Hugo wrote. This is a voluminous work spanning hundreds of pages. This work, dealing with the character Jean Valjean and his pathetic life has been adapted into films many a time.

The movie directed by Bille August makes use of the talent of Liam Neeson for the character of Jean. One of the early scenes in the film shows Jean approaching a Bishop and telling him he has been a convict. The bishop takes him in and feeds him. Jean steals a silver from the bishop and the police arrests him. Fortunately, the Bishop tells the police that he had given him the silver himself. The bishop tells him that he was ransomed from fear and hatred.

He sells the silver and gets a job in a factory nearby. As the years pass, he has changed and is a mayor of the locality. He was trying to become a better version of himself when the inspector Javert, played by Geoffrey Rush enters the scene. He was someone who knew Jean as a convict.

Uma Thurman plays Fantine, who was dismissed from the factory and forced to live as a prostitute. Later, Jean takes care of her. Uma Thurman has showcased a stupendous performance in the film. He protects both her and the kid Fantine had out of a wedlock. Later, Jean flees the place to Paris. When Cosette comes of age, she meets a guy called Marius and falls in love with him. But he was also being searched by the police and this puts Javert behind Valjean once more.

The sets and locations have been handled well.

### **Answer the following.**

1. Compare the differences between the novel and the film of Les Misérables.

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## **Module IV.**

### **FICTION.**

#### **1. Mother Sauvage: Guy de Maupassant.**

Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) was a French master craftsman of short stories. Quite often, the stories of Maupassant centred around the lives of people stuck in disillusioned terms.

The story begins in the form of a nostalgia or flashback. The narrator visits a place called Virelogne after fifteen years. With his friend, he was there to shoot. They spot a house there and the narrator suddenly remembers the woman who was there. She had given him wine to drink years ago, but now the house is in shambles. When he asked Serval, his friend, what had become of the woman, the friend replies that her son was enlisted in the army and the people didn't bother since she had enough money. As the days passed by, the snow arrived. Mother Sauvage went on with her morose life. Later, the Prussian army arrived there and four of their military men were asked to live with Aunt Sauvage. These four men proved to be pretty gentle and considerate towards the old woman. Though her life was okay there, she would always worry about her son who was also a soldier somewhere there. When she asked if they knew where her son would be , they always had the same answer. Maupassant here remarks that the peasantry usually doesn't have any hatred towards anyone and it's always the middle class who have it.

All of a sudden on a day, the postman appears there with a letter and it contained the information that her son Victor was killed by a shell in war. It was difficult for her to digest at first. Slowly, she found the tears within her. When the Prussians came back, there was a rabbit with them. When she saw the animal, she couldn't kill it but one of the soldiers did it with his mere hands. It shocked her too. When she saw the dead animal in front of her, it reminded her of her son. Though she sat with them, she couldn't eat anything at all.

It was almost a month since they had been together but she didn't know their names and vice versa. They wrote down their names and passed to her. Since it was cold, she made them a chamber with straws so that they wouldn't be frozen. Once she knew that they were fast asleep, she locked the door and came outside. Once she was safely out of the room, she set fire to a bundle of straw and threw it onto the chamber. When she knew that her mission was successful, she sat down calmly outside her cottage. Then a group of German soldiers ran to the place and she told them it was she who set the fire but they didn't believe her. When many people gathered there, she detailed everything from the beginning. When she handed down them the paper on which the addresses of the dead soldiers were written, she was pushed to the cottage by 12 German soldiers. She knew she was going to be shot down. She was killed by the firing squad.

The narrator ends the story thinking about all the mothers who lost sons to the wars and a particular mom who was brave enough to avenge it.

## **Answer the following.**

1. Discuss the portrayal of the character of the mother in the story Mother Sauvage.

## **2. The Three Questions : Tolstoy.**

Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, fondly called Leo Tolstoy (1862-1910) may be considered one of the greatest writers of all time. He is often treated as one of the most significant realist fiction writers. Tolstoy is famous for two voluminous works named Anna Karenina (1878) and War and Peace (1869).

The Three Questions written by Tolstoy is a very simple yet philosophical story. He straightaway starts the story, talking about a king. The king thought if he knew the right thing to do always, everything would be perfect in his life. He asked his people if they knew someone who could say which was the right time to do anything. There were answers like, one must always think in an advanced manner. Then there were others who said it wasn't possible but avoiding pitfalls will be the only option to the necessary things in life. There were other opinions that one man alone wouldn't be able to do anything of that sort.

Regarding the people who the king needed, there were various opinions like he needed wise men, priests, doctors etc.

When the king heard of a hermit who lived alone in the forest, he went to him asking three questions. When the king met him, the frail hermit was digging the soil. The king asked him how would he learn to do the right thing at the right time, the people he needed the most, and the most important things that needed his attention. The hermit didn't say anything but went on

digging. The king, seeing how tired the hermit was, offered to help him. When it was so late, the king asked if the hermit didn't have any answer to any of the questions, he would rather leave. When the hermit heard this, he said there was someone running to them. The man who came running was wounded and both the king and the hermit attended to the person. When he became better, he asked something to drink. When it was dark, both the man as well as the king were tired and they went to sleep in the hut. When the king woke up , he saw the man standing near him and he apologised to the king. When the king told him he didn't wrong him to be forgiven, the man told him that he was in fact his enemy who came to avenge his brother. But he was caught by the bodyguard of the king when the king went alone to meet the hermit. The wounded man then offered his services to the king if he would forgive him.

When the king decided to go out with the wounded man, he asked the hermit once again the questions. The hermit told him that he was already answered. He detailed that, if he hadn't helped him, the man would have come to kill the king. The hermit told that, the most important time was then, and the most important man would be one who he is with, and the most important thing to do is to do good.

Answer the following.

1. The philosophy as explained by Tolstoy in the short story Three Questions.

### **3. Shahnamah : The story of Sohrab and Rustum : Firdausi.**

Firdausi ( 940-1019-25) was a Persian poet who is famous for writing Shahnamah , the longest epic poems written by a single poet. Sohrab and Rustum is one of the many poems Firdausi wrote in Shahnamah.

Rostam and Sohrab talk about the story of a father and his son. Rustum was an Iranian warrior. One day he went in search of his lost horse and reached the kingdom of Samangan. He meets princess Tahmina. She becomes enraptured by seeing him. While Rustum was staying in the kingdom, the princess enters his bedroom at night and offers that she would bring the horse but in return, he should give her a child. Before he left the kingdom after impregnating her, he told her that if it was going to be a boy , she should take the seal and bind it on his arm and in case it is a girl, she has to take the jewel and make a plait of her hair. She bears a son and does as Rostam suggested. She names him Sohrab. The father and son never meet at all. A war breaks out between Iran and Turan then. Sohrab was already a great fighter in Turan army. But Rustum was a veteran who knew better than what Sohrab knew. Sohrab goes to fight Rustum. Sohrab just knew his father by name and he didn't know that he was fighting the same. They fight for a long time and at last Rustum stabs Sohrab. While he was dying, Sohrab tells him that his father will avenge him. Then both of them realise their identities and it breaks their hearts. Sohrab produces the armband Tahmina tied to him. Rustum is unable to save his son. Tahmina comes to know about this and burns Rustum's house and gives away his wealth. Later, her spirit joins her son Sohrab.

## **Answer the following.**

1. Sohrab and Rustum as an epic – discuss.

4. **In a Grove : Ryunosuke Akutagawa.**

Akutagawa (1892-1927) was a prominent Japanese writer in the Taisho period. Often regarded as the father of Japanese short story , Akutagawa was phenomenal as a writer. Akutagawa died at a young age before leaving a legacy of short stories. In a Grove was later turned into the film Rashomon by Akira Kurosawa.

In a grove is a story that uses multiple narratives and perspectives in the same story. The first narrative is by a wood cutter who testifies that it was he who saw the dead body first in the grove. According to the wood cutter, the body was clad in a kimono. The chest of the body carried a wound and it had almost dried up. There was a rope as well as a comb nearby.

The second narrative was given by a travelling Buddhist to the investigating commissioner. He had seen a man and a woman, supposedly his wife. They were on a horse.

The third testimony was by a policeman. He talks about a man he arrested. His name was Tajomaru. He suspects it would have been Tajomaru who murdered man but wasn't sure what would he have done with the wife of the man.

Another testimony came from an old woman who claimed that the dead body belonged to the one who married his daughter. She told the commissioner that the man was not from Kyoto. He

was a samurai named Kanazawa Takehiko. Her daughter was named Masago.

The fifth narrative comes from a woman who was seen near Shimizu temple in the form of a confession. She saw her husband was tied by a rope there. After a few moments, everything went blank as she became unconscious. When she looked around, the man in blue silk had gone away and only her husband was there. Before he left, the man had his way with the woman forcibly. The husband kept on looking at these loathingly. She suggested that both of them die since after the shameful incident, they wouldn't be able to live together. She killed him with her small sword. Later, she tried to stab herself and threw herself to a pond. Though in whatever ways she tried to kill herself, she didn't die.

The next narrative is by the murdered man himself, through a medium. In his words, he tried a lot in order to dissuade his wife from listening to the robber. But he thought that she was slowly yielding to him. The robber at last told her that she would be useless in case she was tainted by the robber. Then the murdered man thought that she was telling him that let the robber take her away wherever he went. According to the man, the woman asked the robber to kill him since living with the robber wouldn't be possible while he was alive. Then the robber knocked down the woman and asked if she be killed. According to the man, he was forgiven that moment. Then the robber untied the man and went his way and the woman was nowhere to be seen. Then the man spotted a small sword nearby and stabbed himself. The man was in a hallucination and he thought someone must have crept near him and drew out the sword from his chest.

The last confession is by Tajomaru. He says that he had killed the man but not the woman. He accuses people who kill others with power and money. He says that everyone does the same and he alone cannot be branded as a murderer then. He had already made up his mind to capture the woman the moment he spotted the couple. Then, he accompanied them as if he was a friend and lured them into the grove in the mountains saying that he had kept some precious swords and mirrors there. Once they were inside, the robber seized the man from behind and tied him to a cedar. When then woman was brought to the grove, she was furious and started slashing at the man with a small sword she had. But she was overpowered soon and later, he raped her. But when he was about to leave, she clung to his arm that she cannot live with her husband anymore and she be taken with him. She wanted to be with whoever survived between the two. He decided at that moment that he needed her as his wife. When they went to the man, he untied him and asked to fight him. There was a furious battle that followed. According to Tajomaru, nobody had ever gone past 20 strokes with him in a fight. He struck him with the 23<sup>rd</sup> strike. But once he fell down, she had gone too.

The story is an open ended one. We can only make assumptions as to who might be telling the complete truth. Instead of following a linear, connected narrative, the author has used unconnected yet connected fragments of narratives. Later, once Kurosawa made the film titled Rashomon, this kind of narrative came to be known as Rashomon effect in cinematic terms.

### **Answer the following.**

1. Significance of multiple narrative in the story In a Grove ?

## 5. The Painted Wall: PU Songling.

Born in 1640, PU Songling was a Chinese author who became famous for his anthology titled *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*. He was recognised only very late in his life as a literary man. The anthology consists of around 500 “marvel” stories depicting fantastic life.

The story begins by talking about two friends named Meng Longtan and Zhu. One day they decide to visit a monastery nearby. When they entered the monastery which was quite simple enough, Zhu started noticing the paintings on the wall. Out of all the paintings there, one specific painting of a beautiful maiden caught the attention of Zhu. He was slowly transfixed at the painting and even felt as if someone was tugging at his sleeve. The maiden was beckoning him while slowly moving away from him. They were alone in a pavilion and made love there. This continued for two more days as she used to visit him in his room. The companions of the maiden started teasing her. Zhu started making love with her and they were interrupted by the sounds coming from outside. Then they overheard the sounds and it revealed to them that their room would be searched over pretty soon. The maiden then asked Zhu to hide under the bed.

Then , suddenly Meng Longtan found out that Zhu was no longer by his side. When he asked a monk nearby where his friend was, he was replied that the guy was listening to a sermon. Then, all of sudden Zhu was materialised on the wall. When Meng saw Zhu, Zhu was so tired and he couldn't even stand on his feet. Zhu said he was hiding but when he heard the noise, he came out to see what the commotion was all about. When Zhu asked the monk what this was all about, he said

chuckling that the illusion stays in the man himself. Trying to comprehend what it was all about, the two friends walk away.

### **Answer the following.**

1. How did the author create a sense of magical realism in the story The Painted Wall ?

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