

SYLLABUS (English)
For
BA/BSc/BHSc/B.COM/BBA/BCA/BMMMC/FAZILA/OC&MIL
(GENERAL/HONOURS) 2nd SEMESTER

(FOR BATCHES ADMITTED IN 2019 & ONWARDS)
ABILITY ENHANCEMENT COMPULSORY COURSE
(For all streams)
ECS219A: ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS-II

Credits: 2

Poetry

1. Ecology : A K Ramanujan
2. Mending Wall: Robert Frost
3. The Unknown Citizen: W H Auden

Science Fiction (Extracts):

1. The Last Question: Isaac Asimov
2. There Will Come Soft Rains: Ray Bradbury

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Unit 1 (Poetry):

1) ECOLOGY (POEM)

BY A.K. RAMANUJAN

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF A. K. RAMANUJAN:

A.K. (Attpate Krishnaswami) Ramanujan was born in Mysore, India in 1929 and he died in 1993. He was an Indian poet and Scholar of Indian Literature who wrote in both English and Kannada. His poems are remembered as enigmatic works of startling originality, sophistication and moving artistry. He was educated at Marimallappa's High School, Mysore and at the Maharaja College of Mysore. His father who thought him 'not mathematically minded' persuaded him to opt for English rather than Science. Later, Ramanujan became a fellow of Deccan College, Pune in 1958-59 and a Fullbright Scholar at Indian University in 1959-62. He earned his PhD in linguistics from Indiana University. He migrated to America and taught in Chicago University from 1962 to 1993.

He writes about Indian Culture and tradition. He has written *The Interior Landscape: Love poems from a classical Tamil Anthology*(1967) and *Folktales from India: A selection of oral tales from Twenty Two languages* (1991). His most important works are *The Striders* (1966) and *Relations* (1971). The theme of these volumes is his relationship with his Indian past and his attempt to reach out to his roots. The present poem *Ecology* is from Ramanujan's third volume of poetry called *Second Sight*(1986) He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award posthumously in 1999 for his collection of poems, "*The Collected Poems*".

A.K. Ramanujan died in Chicago, on 13th July 1993 because of adverse reaction to anaesthesia during preparation for surgery.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM *ECOLOGY*:

The title ecology means the branch of biology that deals with the relationship between organisms and their physical surroundings. The title of the poem suggests that the content will be about environment or the issues related to the environment. The poem is from Ramanujan's third volume of poems, *Second Sight* (1986). The poem could be read as one single sentence. However,

each stanza has one particular idea. There is a casual connection between the ideas and one stanza leads to another.

The speaker seems the poet himself or some imaginary person who is loyally devoted to his mother. The mother in the poem shows her devotion for the three Red Champak Trees. The tree is an angiosperm or a flowering plant which belongs to the family *Magnoliaceae* which is known for its fragrant flowers. Hindu people use its flowers for offering to their gods as a kind of respect and reverence. Also, Hindu girls use its flowers to decorate their hair. The poet presents both positive and negative aspects of these trees

The poem presents the conflict of ideology between the mother and her son. Mother suffers from the severe migraine pain because of the allergy of pollen grains of Red Champak trees. In summers these trees release pollen grains in the air which spread everywhere like clouds. Hence, people find it very difficult to breathe in fresh air. Her son gets very angry because his mother had caught the migraine again. Migraine is a kind of headache of varying intensity often accompanied by nausea and sensitivity to light and sound. The condition of the mother gets worse with the suffocating fragrance of the flowers of red Champak Trees. In spite of her headache she has the great respect for the trees in her yard. These champak trees have been there from the time she could remember.

The poet personifies his house. He says that it is porous like a human body. Just like humans have to cover their mouth nose and eyes (pores) to prevent the entry of pollen grains, in the same manner the poet's house is also porous for it could not stop the smell of flowers. Also, the house suffers from the bombardment of these pollen grains and no door can stop the entry of the pollen grains. The walls of the house are able to absorb almost everything-the sounds, sights, the human voices, the harsh sounds produced when new shoes are worn. But they cannot stop the fog of pollen dust from the Champak Trees. Therefore, the poet resolves to cut them down because they had become a reason for the recurring disease of his mother, but mother stops him from doing that because her religious and emotional sentiments for the trees. She says that the tree had been fertilized by the droppings of a passing bird by chance which is considered to be a very good omen Mother wants to save the trees at any cost even if it means putting her life at risk. According to mother, these trees give flowers which help other people in worshipping their gods. The poet wants to save her

mother at any cost. So the poem also depicts the poet's strong interest in family and relations.

The poem also contains the theme of generation gap- the difference in ideology of old generation and new generation. Old people have emotional attachment towards the environment and the things related to it whereas the younger generation have different attitude and tastes. There is also a reference to the Hindu heritage of the poet as he mentions the gods and the ancient beliefs in the poem.

2)MENDING WALL

BY ROBERT FROST

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ROBERT FROST:

Robert Frost was an American poet and playwright born on January 29, 1896. He was named after confederate General Robert E. Lee. He is known for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech. He is famous for winning four Pulitzer prizes in poetry (1924, 1931, 1937 and 1943). Frost wrote about the rural landscape of New England to explore complex social and philosophical themes. He was a college dropout because he attended Dartmouth College for just two months, later explaining, 'I wasn't suited for that place'. He got his second chance in 1897 at Harvard, but only made it two years before dropping out to support his wife and child. He made \$15 from the sale of his first poem called "My Butterfly: An Elegy" which was published in the *New York Independent* in 1894. Ezra Pound exposed Frost to a much larger audience by writing a review of his first poetry collection, *A Boy's Will*. He wrote the poem "The Road Not Taken" for his friend Edward Thomas but later he was surprised to know that his readers began taking the poem as a metaphor for self-determination. The then U.S president John F. Kennedy invited Frost to do a reading at his 1961 inauguration wherein he recited "*The Gift Outright*". George R. R. Martin was inspired by Robert Frost when he wrote "*A Song of Ice and Fire*"

After the first two volumes *A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914) which were issued in England, eight more volumes of his poetry were brought out in America-*Mountain Interval* (1916), *New Hampshire* (1923), *Come In, and Other Poems* (1943), *A Masque of Reason* (1945) and *A Masque of Mercy* (1947)

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM *MENDING WALL*:

The poem was included in 'North of Boston' published in 1914. It is a dramatic monologue. The speaker or the poet expresses his views through the poem. The other character is the poet's neighbour-an old farmer who doesn't speak a single word but we come to know about his conservatism and orthodoxy. Frost begins by saying that there is some force which does not love a wall. This force, he says, makes the ground underneath the wall swell up, causing the topmost stones to fall. The gaps in the wall are so large in places that two people could walk through, side by side. Hunters also cause damage when they go through the land with their dogs, but Frost says that this is "another thing" and not the same as the mysterious force that tumbles sections of the wall when nobody is there. The poet and his neighbour get together every spring to repair the stone wall between their respective properties. The neighbour, an old New England¹ farmer values walls and fences and according to the speaker reiterates his father's saying: "Good fences make good neighbours". Nobody sees or hears the wall fall, but each spring, when it is time to walk the boundaries of his land and check for damage, Frost finds these gaps. He lets his neighbour know, and they meet one day and fix the wall together. This may seem neighbourly and friendly, but Frost's description of the work suggests otherwise. They both stay on their own side of the wall and each person picks up and replaces the stones that have fallen on his side. The stones are different sizes and shapes, and Frost says that the spherical ones are so difficult to balance. They have to use a spell and ask the stones to stay in place until they have left. This light-hearted approach contrasts with the stolid, unimaginative attitude of the neighbour, who refuses to be drawn a little later in the poem when Frost asks him if there is really any need to repair the wall.

Frost regards the mending of the wall as "just another kind of outdoor game" and seems to see little point in it when there are only trees on both sides. As he points out to his neighbour, "My apple trees will never get across / And eat the cones under his pines". The neighbour is unmoved by this argument. There is no practical reason to rebuild the wall, but the neighbour "will not go behind his father's saying" and clings to the old tradition. It seems that Frost delights in teasing this unimaginative farmer and revels in the fact that he, Frost, understands the man's motivation more than he does himself.

The neighbour regards the act of rebuilding the wall as necessary work, and rejects Frost's more whimsical notions, yet the neighbour is moving "in darkens". This may be the darkness of ignorance or the darkness associated with deep magic and with pagan rituals. Frost, a classical scholar, would certainly have known that the ritual of rebuilding walls each year was a tradition

¹ The North Eastern region of the United States comprising the states of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

predating the Romans, who nevertheless honoured Terminus, the god of boundaries, each year in a pagan feast involving sacrifices and feasting.

The poet sympathises with some elemental spirit in Nature which denies all boundaries. Which one is right, the speaker or his Yankee neighbour? Frost here portrays a problem and explores many different and paradoxical issues. The real strength of the poem is the clash of opposites. The wall symbolizes man made barriers; the divisions between nations, races etc. The poem presents the two opposite attitudes towards life-one is surrender to the natural forces, drawing humans closer, the other, the conservatism which persists in keeping up the divisions separating them.

2) UNKNOWN CITIZEN

By W.H. Auden

Biographical Sketch of W. H. Auden (1907-1973):

Wystan Hugh Auden was born in York, England in 1907. His father was a medical officer who, soon after Auden's birth, shifted the family to Birmingham. Auden received his early education at Gresham's School, Holt, where he took a keen interest in mining and geology and aspired to become an engineer. But a friend suggested to him that he should write poetry, and so Auden started writing poetry. When he went to Christ Church College Oxford, his interest in poetry increased tremendously. He became editor of the "Oxford Poetry" which he edited with Charles Plumb in 1926 and with Cecil Day Lewis in 1927. Here he also made friends with Stephen Spender and potential writers who later became known as the "Auden Group". After Auden came out of Oxford in 1928, he went to Germany and stayed in Berlin for some time, but then returned home and became a school master- a job which he really enjoyed and in which he was eminently successful.

About the Poem:

The poem was written by W. H Auden in 1939. The poem was first published on January 6, 1940 in *The New Yorker* and first appeared in book form in Auden's collection *Another Time*. The poem is the epitaph of a man identified only by a combination of letters and numbers somewhat like an American Social Security number (JS/07/M/378) who is described entirely in

external terms: from the point of view of government organizations such as the fictional “Beureau of Statistics”. The speaker concludes that the man had lived an entirely average, therefore exemplary life. The poem is a satire of standardization at the expense of individualism. The poem implicitly refers to the future government organizations which have limited the life of an individual

Analysis of the Poem:

The Unknown Citizen by W.H. Auden is a satiric poem. It describes an average citizen in a government-controlled state. In many big cities, there is a monument to the Unknown Soldier that stands for the thousands of unknown soldiers who die for their country. The title of Auden’s poem parodies this. The citizen to whom the monument has been built has been found to be without any fault. He was a saint not because he searched for God but because he served the government perfectly. He did not get dismissed from his job. He was a member of the Union and paid all his dues to the union. A report on the Union shows that it was a balance union and did not take extreme views on anything. The social psychology workers found that he was popular among his fellow workers and had a drink with them every now and then. He also bought a newspaper every day. He reacted to the advertisements normally. He had good health and although he went to hospital once, he came out quite cured. The citizen was sensible about buying things on an instalment basis. He had everything a modern man needed at home. Moreover, this ideal citizen was found to be sensible in his view. When there was peace, he supported it. But when there was war, he was ready to fight. He didn’t hold his personal views on anything. He had the right number of children and he did not interfere with the education they got. The poet now asks the important questions. Was this man free? Was he happy? No government statistics can ever answer these kinds of questions. ‘The Unknown Citizen’ is a typical Auden’s poem in that it shows the poet’s profound concern for the modern world and its problems.

Theme of the Poem:

Auden was a person who realized that the totalitarian socialist state would be no Utopia and that man there would be reduced to the position of a cog in the wheel. A citizen will have no scope to develop his initiative or to assert his individuality. He will be made to conform to the State in all things. It is the picture of such a citizen, in a way similar to Eliot’s Hollow Man, which is ironically presented in the poem. Auden dramatizes his theme by showing the glaring disparity between the complete statistical information about the citizen compiled by the State and the sad inadequacy of the judgments made about him. The poet seems to say, statistics cannot sum up an individual and physical facts

are inadequate to evaluate human happiness- for man does not live by bread alone. In the phrase 'The Unknown' the word 'unknown' means ordinary, obscure. So the whole phrase means 'those ordinary, obscure soldiers as citizens of the state who laid down their lives for defending their motherland wanted name and fame, but remained unknown.'

Conclusion:

The poem is the epitaph of a man, identified only by a combination of letters and numbers somewhat like an American Social Security Number who is described entirely in external terms: from the point of view of government organizations such as the fictional "Bureau of Statistics." The speaker of the poem concludes that the man had lived an entirely average, therefore exemplary, life. The poem is a satire of standardization at the expense of individualism. The poem is implicitly the work of a government agency at some point in the future, when modern bureaucratizing trends have reached the point where citizens are known by arbitrary numbers and letters, not personal names. By describing the "average citizen" through the eyes of various government organizations, the poem criticizes standardization and the modern state's relationship with its citizens. The last lines of the poem dismiss the questions of whether he was "free" or "happy", implicitly because the statistical methods used by the state to be his life have no means of understanding such questions. The epigraph to "Unknown Citizen" is a parody of the symbolic Tomb of the unknown soldier commemorating unidentified soldiers; tombs of unknown soldiers were first created following the first World War