UNIT 2 MOTILAL JOTWANI: VERY LONELY, SHE
TRANSLATION: DR. NANDLAL JOTWANI

Structure

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The second Unit in this Block has a two-fold objective: one, to give you a sample of a Sindhi short story and to enable you to read it with enjoyment and understanding; two, through the story, to open up a window on the world of Sindhi short stories and Sindhi literature in translation.

The story chosen for your reading is Very Lonely, She by Motilal Jotwani.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Unit begins with a brief note on Sindhi language and then goes on to introduce you to the author Motilal Jotwani and his works and their major themes and concerns. It then critically examines the text of the short story, Very Lonely, She, particularly its narrative technique and characters and its ending and suggests how this story dealing with of an old woman living a lonely life could be compared with the other stories dealing with old women and their struggle to survive.

2.2 SINDHI LANGUAGE

Sindhi is one of the recognized languages on the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution. In undivided India Sindhi was the language of Sind but after partition that province became a part of Pakistan. Now Sindhi is spoken by a large number of people who have migrated to India and have settled in
Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, U.P. and Delhi. Among the major Indian languages it is the only one that isn’t the state language of any one particular state.

Motilal Jotwani is among those writers who are deeply concerned about the uncertain future of the Sindhi language and literature. He feels particularly unhappy because he finds the Sindhi-speaking people themselves seem to be losing interest in Sindhi as a subject of serious academic study. He dedicated his Dictionary of Sindhi Literature to his students ‘who have offered Sindhi as one of his subjects of study during the acculturative decades for them in Independent India.’

Sindhi is written both in both the Perso-Arabic script and the Devanagari script.

2.3 MOTILAL JOTWANI: LIFE AND WORKS

Born in 1936 in Sukkar, Sindh (now in Pakistan), he started life as a primary school teacher in Delhi and worked his way up to be a Reader in Sindhi in Deshbandhu College, New Delhi. He has written in a variety of genres—short stories, novels, poetry, essays and criticism, besides an autobiography—55 works in all. He has written principally in Sindhi but has also written in Hindi and English. He likes to describe himself as an Indianist in his thought and writings.

Works:

Sindhi: PeeleeBattee-a Te (novel, 1974); Ihe Rishtaa Nataa (novel, 1982); Sanbadhani Je Sarakami Te (poems, 1982); Koth (novel, 1985; Sunjaanap jo


2.3.1 Background to Sindhi Short Story

Indian narrative tradition goes back to ancient times. Though western education introduced us to the genre of short story, as we know it today, we would have come by it anyway. The first embryonic stirrings in this genre were recorded in the mid-nineteenth century in “Kudhatooro aín Sudhatoooro” (1855), a didactic story based on a Hindi original version by Pt. Bansidhar Chiranjal, adapted in Sindhi by Miran Muhammad Shah. Out of the two men — Kudhatooro and Sudhatooro — one grew into a gentleman because of his good qualities and other landed in a prison for he knew vices only. The Sindhi short story in the second half of the nineteenth century portrayed people in almost flat contrasts.

Childlike at an early stage, the Sindhi short story described the lawbreakers of the Makhi Lake in “Hur Makhee-a Jaa” (1914) by Lalchand Amardinomal (1855-1954). Based on a historical fact, it is the first Sindhi short story, and tells us about the Muslim Hurs (Hurs, an Arabic word meaning “independents”), who took to looting of the rich landlords, traders and businessmen and helped the lowly and the lost in society. These law-breakers boldly confronted the alien British Government. It is a dark and passionate story, a blend of virtue and vice, in which the good guys and the bad guys are difficult to tell apart.

The Sindhi short story, however, was still not on its own and relied much on the ideas and intentions of the writer. Adolescence indulged in the all-too-apparent situations of life and hardly tried to bring out the raison d'etre of human actions, or if it did, it chattered a lot about it, leaving almost nothing to imagination. The stories of Jethmal Parsram (1886-1948), Mirza Nadir Beg (1891-1940) and others were replete with the ideals the authors exhorted frail humans to abide by. The writers idealistically portrayed the Hindu and Muslim heroes and heroines in love — love, which was not meant to be corrupted by the narrow considerations of caste, colour and creed. They delineated the zamindars who were liberal in their attitude — unexpectedly so, in their real life situations — towards the tenants on their lands, and depicted them in their notorious attempts to bring the nationalists among them into hardship. This they did in so many words, not missing the sharp and clear note. For instance, the main character in ‘Ado Abdul Rahman’ (Brother Abdul Rahman) by Amaral Hingoran's (1907-56) did not speak a word which was not dictated by his inner monitor, “the ever-present conscience residing in each person”. The artistic objectivity in the Sindhi short story suffered a great deal at the hands of content which very often embodied fictional facts for the ideas of Marx, Freud and Gandhi. In sum, the kathaa-lekhis (essays in the story form) masqueraded as the kathaa (stories). Even Asanand Mamtora's (1903-
It was after Partition that the Sindhi short story was shocked into adulthood. Unprecedented as the mass migration was in human history, the entire community — about 1.2 million of Sindhi Hindus — migrated to India. The whole of Sindh, known for its syncretic Sufi though, was lost to Pakistan. All this shook many out of their complacency and created many a problem of rehabilitation for them. Since the problems of "ato, lato and ajho" (food, clothing and shelter) became acute for them in the wake of Partition, the progressive writing had a new lease of life, and it held the floor for about a decade. Soon, however, some of the progressive writers realized that they could not possibly raise the talk of class-conflict, etc., in their short stories in view of the basically classless character of the Sindhi society and they should, instead, present life as it was and the story would speak for itself. While Uttam (B. 1923) and Gobind Panjabi (B. 1918) confined themselves to the delineation of unconcealed social purpose, writers like Kirat Babani (B. 1922) and Gobind Malhi (1921-2001) joined the humanist writers.

By 1960, there appeared on the scene a new wave of contemporary writers, namely, Mohan Kalpana (1930-92), Lal Pushp (B. 1935) and Guno Santanay (1934-97), who could be called human interest storytellers. Mohan Kalpana struggled hard to get the Sindhi short story out of the slogan-mongering progressivism that had set in. But he is essentially a romantic storyteller in both mind and art. In one of the stories his protagonist is hard-pressed to find enough money to treat his beloved to a respectable cup of ice cream — a humble desire in the urban situation indeed! With Lal Pushp a “true” realism shows itself in the psychoanalytical studies of characters — a husband and wife, a brother and sister, a son and mother, and so on, etc. He probes deep in the dark recesses of the human psyche and brings out the purposes that account for, or justify, their actions. Lately, he has been able to shed off the trappings of psychoanalysis which had reduced some of his stories to case studies. For instance, his ‘Kahaani-a Jee G’olha’ (The Pursuit) arrives at a psychological truth that “if a man does what a woman should ordinarily do, she cannot love him”. But it does so in an atmosphere of gaiety and light-heartedness. Guno Santanay is a neo-classicist in the field of short story writing in Sindhi. His short story ‘Abhimam’ presents a world sans discotheques, frustrations and the sick hurry of modern times. He draws a sensuous world in which man strives to know himself vis-à-vis woman, and vice versa. Kamal in the title story ‘Aparajita’ commits suicide because she fails to translate her “knowing” into “doing”.

By the mid sixties, the second new wave of short story writers appeared in Vishnu Bhatia (B. 1941), Ishwar Chander (B. 1937-92) and Shyam Jaisinghni (B. 1937). According to them the forces of industrialization and urbanization (in one word, of “modernization”) have been moving so fast in the world of today that the organizational changes have not been able to keep pace with them. As a result, man is disorganized and he should be described in the way he experiences the real life around him. These writers have for their materials the life of the common people in their day-to-day workings. For instance, in Vishnu Bhatia’s ‘Kaaniru’ (A Coward) we see Ramaprasad going to Bombay in search of a job. There he meets Kalicharan, and both of them drive carts with bhelpuri, monkey-nuts and parched grams piled on them to
sell in the streets. Since the organizational changes are not commensurate with the fast-changing life, the dehumanizing effect of the metropolis shows itself on them. Kalicharan who has already “adapted” himself to the city life shatters Ramaprasad’s legitimate hopes of a good, happy married life. At the end the reader is left wondering whether Ramaprasad, who used to regularly read the *Hunumaan Chaaleesa* before coming to Bombay would also take to Kalicharan’s ways and visit the houses of ill-fame. Ishwar Chander’s stories are authentic commentaries on contemporary life; they sensitively etch out men and matters around us. Vasudha in Ishwar Chander’s short story “Panhinje Ee Ghar Mein” (In Her Own House) goes to visit her parents in another city on receiving a not-so-warm invitation from them for the first time in the five years of her married life. She finds that her poor, helpless father whose to-day is bleak and the morrow still bleaker looks forward to her going back; her stay alongwith her little child in the house calls for extra expenses which the poor father cannot bear. Shyam Jaisinghani’s short story “Hiku B’iyo D'eenhun” (Another Day) portrays a working couple in a mechanical dehumanizing situation. Yet another day passes like a cog turning onward and onward in time-machine, leaving its scratch and screech on the mind of the young husband and wife: they begin the day (in fact, they don’t want the day to begin, to rise; it rises in spite of them, their curses) with a usual supply of milk at the door-step of their flat and end it on the weary loveless bed with shrieks and shouts from the nearby slums within their hearing.

It is true that in the changed conditions after Partition, the Sindhis have come to live in the cities, big or small, with their life at once marked by despair and hope, cynicism and faith. In the ferment and flurry in and around their homes, Ashu in Prem Prakash’s (B. 1946) story ‘Villain’ wonders if the idea of “sweet home” or “happy family” is a myth, for she has never experienced the home or the family in such a sweet, happy way. She remembers when she was a school-going child, she read a lesson in the Primer: “This is my family. He is my father. She is my mother. They are sitting together on the sofa. My younger brother is standing beside me. My younger sister is sitting on the floor. Both of us go together to the school everyday. I love my brother and sister very much”. She also remembers the illustrations given alongside the text in the book, in which members of the family are all smiling in happiness. Now, Ashu thinks either the school or the family is a big lie. But then great literature, as John Gardner says, “has a clear moral base and ultimately affirms humane values”.

Other writers, who have remained in the “and/or” of the subsequent waves and helped the contemporary Sindhi short story to develop further are — Sundari Uttamchandani (B. 1924), Krishan Rahi (B. 1932), Krishan Katwani (B. 1927), Tara Mirchandani (B. 1930), Popti Hiranandani (B. 1924), Hari Himthani (B 1933), Harikant (1935-94), Harish Vaswani (B. 1940), Hiro Shewakani (B. 1935), Ishwar Bharati (B. 1942), Lakhmi Khilani (1935), Jayant Relwani (B. 1936), Namdev (B. 1946), Param Abhichandani (B. 1926) and, of course, the present author (B. 1936).

Here is a list of short stories, novels and poems available in English translation that you might like to sample at your leisure.

**Sindhi Short Stories**

1. This City by Sundri Uttamchandani (translator: Param Abhichandani)
2. Ado Abdur Rahman by Amarjul Hingorani (translator: Hashu Kewalramani)
3. The Desire of a Boy by Sundri Uttamchandani (translator: Hashu Kewalramani)
4. Khanwahan by Kala Prakash (translator: Hashu Kewalramani)
5. Struggle by A.J. Uttam (translator: Shree Israney)
6. The Ruins by Guano Samtaney (translator: Param Abhichandani)
7. Search for Blood by Gope Kamal (translator: Param Abhichandani)
8. The Portrait of a Father by Hiro Shewkani (Param Abhichandani)
9. Continuity by Harish Vaswani (Translator: Param Abhichandani)
10. Time of Eunui by Lal Pushp (Translator: Param Abhichandani)
11. The Tail by Brij Mohan (Translator: Param Abhichandani)
12. Sometimes by Ishwar Chander (Translator: Param Abhichandani)
13. The Cell by Harikant Jethwani (Translator: Param Abhichandani)

2.3.2 Jotwani: A Writer of Unified Sensibility

During a meeting with Mrs Indira Gandhi, Moti Lal Jotwani characteristically introduced himself as an Indian writer in Sindi, Hindi and English. At this the Prime Minister remarked: ‘People of your tribe introduce themselves as writers in Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Kashmiri, etc. But you have put it rightly.’ Jotwani likes to describe himself as an Indianist in his thought and writings. One of his books is entitled Of Grass and Roots: An Indianist’s Writings (1987). He has in fact emphasized the essential unity of the literature produced on the subcontinent.

Jotwani has written in a variety of literary genres — short stories, novels, poetry, essays, and criticism besides an autobiography — 55 works in all. He has written in three languages but he has written more in Sindi than in either Hindi or English. And his works have earned praise from knowledgeable critics. Among other things, he has published four collections of poetry, four collections of short stories, and also four short novels. Full details of the publications have been given earlier. His books on Shah Abdul Karim (1970) and Shah Abdul Latif (1975) and Sufis of Sindh (1986) have won critical acclaim.

About his poetry, only a few Sindhi poets have ‘the rich variety of subjects and themes as Jotwani possesses.’ (Hari Dilgir about his fourth anthology). Talking about his short stories, another reviewer says that Jotwani ‘modifies tradition through his individual talent and brings in modernity in his works.’ His Koth, a collection of one short novel and several short stories, says yet another reviewer, is ‘highly readable’ and his language ‘ripe, mature and genuine.’ The short novelette Koth (1985) deals with ‘East-West encounter and looks at the problem of women’s lib from the women’s point of view. Jotwani recreates the ardhanaishvar myth in the modern context. (Param Abhichandani: Indian Literature: 29/6 1986) Jotwani’s short story ‘Aakaash Disana Jee Chaahmaa’ (A Desire to See the Sky) included in his third collection is rated to be among his best Sindi short stories. It portrays the pathetic condition of the miners and passionate love of Kalu for his wife. When Kalu comes to know that his wife has returned to him, safe and sound, he is anxious to talk to her from his coal mine and a desire is born in him to see her, to see the sky above.
Jotwani is deeply concerned about the future of Sindhi language and literature in post-independence India. About his book *Sindhi Literature and Society* (1979), said M.V. Kamath said:

"...I can understand Motilal Jotwani’s agony. Which is why I have read with particular interest his book. He questions his fellow Sindhis’ penchant ‘increasingly to hide their separate entity by changing names and surnames’. The characters in Sindhi fiction today, he says, ‘are generally representative of those who live in a cultural void, roam about in Connaught Place of New Delhi or the Fort area of Bombay and cry in desperation that they are broke’. If I were a Sindhi, I would never forget Sindh...’ His *Dictionary of Sindhi Literature* (1996) over which he worked for several years is dedicated to those students of his who ‘offered Sindhi as one of the subjects of study during the acculturative decades for them in Independent India.’

As a writer Motilal Jotwani has made a name for himself. But to those unsympathetic to him, he is a Sindhi writer to the Hindi people, a Hindi writer to the Sindhi-reading public and an English-knowing scholar to both of them. He remains somewhat dissatisfied with his achievements for he likes to conclude by saying that ‘he could have been a much greater writer, but didn’t permit himself to be one.’

### 2.3.3 Themes and Concerns

The central theme of Jotwani’s works, including the fictional ones, is the one single reality that legitimately lies at the basis of the universe, which sages express by various names, in various forms (Skt. *Ekam Sat, vipraa bahuDhaa vadanti*). While this theme runs like a silken thread in them, it manifests itself in a variety of sub-themes and concerns like one family on the earth, (Skt. *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*), love, co-existence, toleration, acceptance, responsibility, faith, discipline, etc. The comprehensive sense of one single reality would include love for nature, in the first place; then of man for woman and vice versa, for philosophic truth, for God, for the country — and it would also not exclude the traditional love and the modern love (tradition and modernity) — in their permutations and combinations.

Jotwani relates a significant incident from his early life to which he owes existence of this broad spectrum of reality as the presiding metaphor, in his works. It was 6 January 1948, and he was barely 12 at that time. The Jotwani family lived in a building belonging to a devout Muslim in Karachi (now in Pakistan). Things were never bad in Sindh before the Partition, for the people, bred and brought up as they were on the Sindhi Sufi soil, lived in peace and harmony. But on the fateful day of January 6, 1948, it looked like the world would come to an abrupt end for them. The rioters were at the gate and demanded of the house-owner to quietly hand over all the *kafirs* in his premises. Huddled along with other members of the family in a small storeroom of the house, they all waited with bated breath for destruction and death. But their house-owner Allahdino lied to them, saying, “The people you are looking for, sailed to India yesterday....The poor creatures couldn’t take along with them their possessions.....Do you want their belongings?”

Allahdino? He is so dear to our heart that we in our family never use any honorific before his name. God’s good man, he is God himself — God without any honorific, Allahdino? He is a commoner in the Indian
subcontinent, with a name having roots in the Indian composite culture: he is Allahdino with a Sindhi-Sanskrit suffix *dino* (*dutt*, meaning ‘given by, or gifted by’; Allahdino meaning gifted by Allah, or God) in his Muslim name, as there are many Hindu names like “Gurubaksh” with a Semitic suffix *baksh* (again meaning ‘given by, or gifted by’: Gurubaksh meaning gifted by the Guru, or Preceptor).

As the night descended on that gloomy day, his father and Allahdino sang together the *padas*, or songs, of the great saint/Sufi poet Kabir (1399-1518).

Secularity to him means not the state or the quality of being non-religious as it is believed in the West but that of being variously religious (Skt. *sarva dharma sama bhaava*). This was the view presented by sages and seers like Valmiki, Vyasa, Buddha, Mahavira, Muhammad, Kabir, Nanak and Mahatma Gandhi. Deep spirituality that attends this kind of secularity makes one rise above the narrow confines of one’s own religion and respect all religions of the world. And this kind of secularity, evolved as it is by the Indian mind over the centuries, suits the Indian-multi religious society the most.

Conjugal love is also one of his major themes. It was depicted in his short novel *Koth* (1985). Familial love is depicted in the present short story *Very Lonely, She*.

In fact, Jotwani celebrates the forces of affirmation — they may relate to the union of soul and Super Soul or to the togetherness of Siva and Sakti, as in the icon of *Ardhanarishvara*. His themes and concerns are, as it were, a ‘condensed India’.

### 2.4 INTRODUCING THE STORY

The short story *Very Lonely, She* was originally published in Sindhi with the caption of “Akeli Akeli hoo-a” in the quarterly journal *Sipoon*, (Mumbai: July-September, 1999). It was translated into English and published in *KATHA: Prize Stories Vol 10* (New Delhi, 2000) and was subsequently available in its Hindi translation, as “Akeli Akeli Waha” in *Samkaleen Bharatiya Sahitya*, a Sahitya Akademi bi-monthly (New Delhi; January-February 2001). This short story is not yet formally included in any of Jotwani’s four collections of short stories in Sindhi.

In the “Contributors’ Note” published in *KATHA: Prize Stories, Vol. 10* (New Delhi, 2000), the writer said that this short story is based on an autobiographical incident. Pooran Mausi and Manohar are taken from life. ‘I wanted to focus on the sense of utter loneliness experienced in old age, and the fine line of distinction between loneliness and aloneness.’ But the readers will have to figure out from the story which epithet — ‘lonely’ or ‘alone’ — suits whom.

The story has been translated by the writer’s own brother Dr. Nandlal Jotwani who is a writer in his own right.
As you read the story keep the following questions in mind. If something strikes you as you read, do make a note of it. This will help you formulate your ideas later on.

1. Who is the narrator in the story?
2. Are the focalizer and the narrator the same person or are they different?
3. Who is the main character in the story, Pooran Mausi or Manohar? Or do they both occupy center-stage?
4. What is the prime interest in the story?
5. Is there irony in the story? In what way?

2.5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The first question to ask yourself is: ‘What is my reaction to the story?’ Put it down on paper before you read any further. It doesn’t matter if you find your reaction a little deficient or even mistaken. The important thing is to think for yourself before you reach out to the views expressed by the teacher.

Well, as you see, very little happens in the story — very little that is external. A nephew on way back to Delhi pays a visit to her mausi who is living alone in a different town. She recalls a painful remark made by a close young relative. The nephew discovers that they also have been guilty of neglecting her. There are guilt feelings and regrets. The story ends with the nephew reflecting on the web of human relationships and the difference between loneliness and being alone. Clearly, most of the action in the story is psychological.

2.5.1 Narrative Technique

The story is told by a third person narrator, Manohar. He is also the focalizer. That is, he sees and we see what he sees.

The narrative is simple enough. Manohar breaks journey at Agra to see his Mausi. Which means, he is a decent person who is not entirely neglectful of relationships. But like everyone else he has got busy with his life in Delhi and he and his family haven’t kept much contact with her. The revelation about their neglect of Mausi comes in the course of the conversation between the nephew and the aunt. An event in the family, like death, is generally an occasion for relatives to come together but when his younger sister, Vimla’s husband in Delhi died, they didn’t let her know of the tragedy. Obviously they didn’t consider her to be important enough to be informed. Manohar is reminded of the serious omission on their part when Mausi enquires about Vimla’s daughters.

When the truth dawns on him, Manohar feels guilty and he doesn’t have the courage to face her. But that is not all. This revelation leads him to reflect on life. Read in this way, the story is the story of growth in the awareness of Manohar and of the human need to keep in touch with one’s own people.

If you need an identical example, think of Tagore’s story ‘Kabuliwala’. I hope you have read it at some stage. There also we find something similar happening. In Kabuliwala, as in Very Lonely, She, the story is narrated by a
character whose consciousness expands at the end. If in our story it is Manohar who realizes the truth about Mauji’s feelings, it is Mini’s father in the other story who comes to understand why the Kabulaivala used to come and bring dry fruits for Mini. Both Manohar and Mini’s father begin to see what they had not seen earlier.

2.5.2 Main Characters

Pooran Mausi

We can now take a close look at the principal characters in the story.

Who are the principal characters in the story?

As is evident from the heading of the short story, Very Lonely. She, it is Pooran Mausi who is the main character. But she shares the importance with Manohar. Abandoned by her husband as Pooran Mausi, she lived with her parents in Agra. But when her parents died, she was left alone to fend for herself (a characteristic which helped her, especially in her old age). She had been running a domestic school for women where she had been giving lessons in tailoring and embroidery and etiquette. Latterly however because of old age she sold away the sewing machines and now lives on the income that comes from rent of a portion of the parental house.

She can’t afford to have modern conveniences like a telephone or a television or even a newspaper. But she has reconciled herself to her lot, thinks positively and lives a fairly contented life.

She gets up rising early in the morning, sweeps and swabs the rooms and does puja in front of the framed photograph of the Anandpur Sahib Guruji. In spite of her indigent circumstances she has self-respect. That is why after having been asked by her brother-in-law’s son that ‘Chachi, for God’s sake, leave us alone’, Pooran Mausi hasn’t stepped into her in-laws’ house.

Pooran Mausi leads a lonely life. When Manohar remarks that she must be feeling very lonely, she responds simply: ‘Life becomes the way you mould it.’ This suggests that she has come to accept loneliness as a part of her existence and she has made peace with it. But while her loneliness has not made her bitter, she has not been able to forget her hurt. So when Manohar comes she welcomes him lovingly, with the tears of joy in her eyes and serves him the best fare she can. She also remembers his preferences — that he doesn’t take sugar and that he likes tea in a mug — but the visit also revives painful memories in her, particularly when her nephew reminds her of her loneliness. The one hurtful memory that sticks out in her mind like a sore thumb and that made her weep recalling it was the remark that her brother-in-law’s son had made when she went to visit them. She had merely asked the young man to visit her and drop a line once in a while. But the response was heartless. ‘For God’s sake, Chachi, leave us alone’.

However, life has not soured Pooran Mausi and like an affectionate and concerned aunt she asks Manohar about the well-being of other members of the family, particularly about the daughters of his younger sister Vimla. It is this enquiry that takes Manohar aback and brings forth the honest confession from him that Vimla had lost her husband a few months before and that they
had omitted to inform her about the tragedy. Forgetting to inform Pooran Mausi about this, her sister’s son Manohar had behaved in the manner her brother-in-law’s son had behaved earlier. It was as if the former too had said to Pooran Mausi, “Mausi, for God’s sake, leave us alone”.

Mausi is of course shocked and she sees the brother-in-law’s son reflected in Manohar. Here was a fresh proof of the indifference of the relatives in Delhi towards Pooran Mausi. This makes Manohar feel guilty and full of remorse.

Pooran Mausi comes through as an old widow who barely manages to survive with self-respect and is condemned to lead a lonely life by her relatives.

**Manohar**

Manohar is both the narrator and the focalizer. We get to see what he sees and narrates. It is through him that we get to experience the plight of an old woman who is his Mausi. Manohar should be a man well past his middle age.

Manohar’s impulses are fairly sound. Just as he notices in his train journey from Bhopal that he has reached Agra Cantt, he immediately decides to drop and see Pooran Mausi. But he is also one among numerous persons who are so wrapped up in their own affairs that they have no time for those beyond their immediate family.

As a result it didn’t occur to him (nor for that matter to any one else in the family), when Vimla’s husband died, that they should inform her of the tragedy. This was a glaring omission and Manohar the honest man that he is has no excuse to offer for it. There is an irony in this because earlier when his aunt had said that Delhi people had no time for their kin, he had asked if she got this feeling while staying with them also. Now he is as guilty as Mausi’s brother-in-law’s son was. He only asks his aunt to forget and forgive.

The revelation leads Manohar to reflection. Lying on the cot, he worries over “the distinction between loneliness and aloneness, between that which was imposed on an individual by society and what the individual sought voluntarily”. In the same breath, Manohar further says, “it is different matter that aloneness becomes loneliness in time”. Manohar seems to be reduced to the state of loneliness where he does not have the courage to face Mausi’s grief any more. Lonely and grief-stricken, he lies down on the cot, a pillow beneath his bed, and closes his eyes at the end of the short story.

Pooran Mausi’s story is not hers alone. It is quite a suggestive story that goes beyond those who are its immediate subjects. The story tells us how the ambit of the family is shrinking and how people in a big metropolis like Delhi cut themselves away from all but their immediate family. It is particularly the story of innumerable old people, particularly old women whom their intimate relatives have practically disowned and who barely manage to survive on their own with self-respect. Pooran Mausi’s line — Delhi folks have no time for their kin — can be generalized to read: *Humans all over the world have no time for others.*

**Exercise**

Now here is one exercise that you could do with profit. Try and link this story up with those that have woman characters who try to live by themselves and
see how the comparison holds. Can you draw some conclusions about poor and/or old women in our society?

2.5.3 Objectivity

T. S. Eliot wrote that ‘the only way of expressing emotion in art is by finding an “objective correlative”, in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.’ (Source to be quoted.) Since the details in the story are autobiographical, the question of achieving objectivity through the right selection of events is very important.

The writer has made the right selection of events which help him to evoke the right response. Jotwani’s objectivity in the short story lies in his permitting his narrative to unfold itself and allowing people to speak for themselves.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

The short story, Very Lonely, She, though autobiographical in origin, is bifocal in effect. It makes us realize the weakening of familial bonds taking place in cities and at the same time shows us the consequences of this weakening in the life an old widow like Pooran Mausi who is trying to survive with courage and self-respect.

2.7 GLOSSARY

The writer’s younger brother Dr. Nandlal Jotwani, who is also a writer in his own right, translated the short story from Sindhi into English for KATHA: Prize Stories. Vol 10 (New Delhi, 2000) and wrote for its “Contributors’ Notes”, “... I chose to retain the original expressions for a few terms, especially the kinship terms, as I found the English equivalents somewhat superficial and deficient”.

How are the English equivalents of kinship terms ‘superficial and deficient’? One sample may suffice: “aunt” means 1. (father’s sister) bhoor; 2. (father’s brother’s wife) chachi, kaki; 3. (mother’s sister) mausi; 4. (mother’s brother’s wife) mami.

The original expressions in the short story are explained in their English equivalents:

**aloo parantha**: a kind of fried cake made in several layers, stuffed with potatoes

**chachi**: father’s brother’s wife

**chapati**: a thin cake or bread

**dahi**: yogurt, curd

**guruji**: preceptor; ‘ji’ is suffixed out of reverence

**haan bhai**: yes, dear

**halwai**: confectioner
Mausi: mother's sister  
Nana: maternal grandfather  
Nani: maternal grandmother  
nari-shala: domestic tailoring school for women  
puja: worship  
uffo: an expression of regret, Ah  
vaishnava: devotee of Vishnu, one of the three principal divinities of the Hindu mythology

2.8 QUESTIONS

1. Examine the theme of familial love in *Very Lonely, She* and the techniques the writer employs to deal with this theme.
2. Compare and contrast the two characters of Pooran 'Mausi and Manohar, discussing the epithets of 'lonely' or 'alone' for them.
3. Write a note on the appeal of the story.

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS


K.M. George (General Editor), *Masterpieces of Indian Literature* (New Delhi, 1997).


Geeta Dharmarajan and Nandita Aggarwal (Editors) *KATHA: Prize Stories, Vol. 10* (New Delhi, 2000).