



Indira Gandhi National
Open University
School of Humanities

THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEL
MEG-19

Block

4

War Novels

Block Introduction	03
<hr/>	
UNIT 11	
Australian Novels of War	04
<hr/>	
UNIT 12	
Thomas Keneally as a Novelist	13
<hr/>	
UNIT 13	
<i>Schindler's Ark: The Triumph of Humanity</i>	22
<hr/>	
UNIT 14	
<i>Schindler's Ark: Major Themes</i>	31
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BLOCK INTRODUCTION:

Block 4 “War Novels” analyses the writings of Australian war novelists and their contribution to the canon of war literature. The block begins by looking at the ways in which writers engage with the traumatic experience of war. **Unit 11 “Australian Novels of War”** points out that Australians are proud of their military past and love reading about it, celebrating its victories, and remembering their loved ones lost in war. Australians have therefore extensively used the theme of war in their imaginative writings. The Unit discusses Australian novels of the First World War, the inter-war years and of the Second World War and their various concerns and themes.

Unit 12 “Thomas Keneally as a Novelist” introduces the brilliant fictional writing of Thomas Keneally. Keneally’s early and later novels, and the incredible range of themes in his novels, such as racism, violence, the horrors of war and the clash of cultures are interrogated in this unit.

Unit 13 “*Schindler’s Ark: the Triumph of Humanity*” introduces Keneally’s Booker Prize winning novel *Schindler’s Ark* and discusses how the author, presents the enigmatic Oskar Schindler and the various obstacles and sacrifices encountered by Oskar Schindler in his mission of rescuing Jews from the Nazi Germans. The unit also focuses on the historical background of the holocaust and the heroic efforts of Schindler to save the Jewish workers in his factory from death in the concentration camps.

Unit 14 “*Schindler’s Ark: Major Themes*” discusses the novel’s presentation of the intriguing character of Oskar Schindler, the theme of the complex nature of virtue and righteousness, the symbols and images employed, and the significance of ‘lists’ in the novel.

UNIT 11: AUSTRALIAN NOVELS OF WAR

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Wars between settlers and indigenous Australians
- 11.3 Early Writers of the First World War
- 11.4 Novels of the inter war period
- 11.5 Recent novels of the First World War:
- 11.6 Second World War novels
- 11.7 Hundred years later
- 11.8 Let us sum up
- 11.9 Glossary
- 11.10 Unit end Question

11.0 OBJECTIVES:

Writers have many reasons to write about war. An analysis of the entire canon of war literature shows that many of the writers are war veterans themselves. Their writings offer the readers glimpses into the range of experiences they have gone through during their combats. As most civilians are not aware of what happens actually in the battle field, their writings bridge the gulf between the military and the civilians. These war writings also serve as a catharsis, by helping to dispel their horrific memories of horrendous violence in the battlefield, grief over the loss of their friends etc. The writings may also help them to deal with Post traumatic stress syndrome. They make the readers feel what it is like to be soldiers, their pain, suffering, frustration, and anguish. Another group of writers who are war veterans project through their writings the society's perspectives on war - whether it is needed or not, the sufferings of the civilian society due to war and the humanitarian side of society. But the hidden message behind all war literature is that it instructs society to think twice before sending troops to the war front as it is essentially horrific and meaninglessly destructive. The objective of this chapter is to analyse the writings of Australian war novelists and their contribution to the canon of war literature.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Australian history after settlement has been dominated by many battles, the first one being the attack on Botany Bay in 1788. This encounter was led by the British Captain Arthur Phillip with his First Fleet, which was followed by numerous horrific encounters within Australia. In the twentieth century, ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) troop's attempt at Gallipoli triggered a patriotic zeal which bound Australia as a nation. ANZAC tradition was created and that day - 25th April 1915 - has been celebrated as Australia's National Day. Following Gallipoli the ANZAC troops fought many wars in the great wars of Europe which was followed by Second World War and other wars. The First World War has left a deep scar on the Australian landscape

and many memorials are scattered everywhere across Australia, in towns, squares, churches and other places.

Australians are proud of their military past and they love reading about it, celebrating its victories, remembering and grieving for the loss of loved ones. Though the government has strictly restricted and regulated the use of the word ANZAC from being commercialised and misused, Australians have extensively used the theme of war in their imaginative writings ranging from depicting the experiences of soldiers in trenches to battling in distant war fields.

The war years created interest in the minds of Australians to know more about what is actually happening in the war field. War has been utilised by Australian's print industry and they were quick in publishing articles news, poems, fiction to entertain the public and war literature became a point of discussion in Australian writings. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the canon of Australian war literature was not as popular as its British counterparts. Even Australian commemorative liturgy drew its inspiration from British prose and verse rather than from its own literary production. Australian writers encountered another problem in choosing the right mode to express feelings and emotions of warriors in trenches and war field. Initially poetry was considered the right medium as it consoled and countered, pacified and protested, conveyed the environment in its immediacy without the necessity of any big framework. Combat's emotions and experiences found their way into the civilian world through poems. Novelists later found fiction a suitable medium to narrate the events in an order with a frame work whereas poetry could not chronicle the events in an order with meaning. Publication of war time novels during war years was considered as a patriotic and profitable business.

11.2 WARS BETWEEN SETTLERS AND INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

In early Australian historical novels, the frontier wars between the European settlers and Aboriginal peoples were critical events in their settlement history, and have been retold in various versions and mythologised in all forms of settler writings memoirs, stories and fiction as examples of the risks and sacrifices made by settlers. The defining event has been immortalised in Simpson Newland's popular fiction *Paving the Way: A Romance of the Australian Bush* (1893). In later fiction this frontier zone was shown as a dangerous war zone where settlers lost their lives and shed their blood in the battle against Aboriginal peoples to establish pastoral lands and mining industries. Grasby and Hill's *Six Australian Battlefields* (1988) and David Lowe's *Forgotten Rebels: Black Australians who Fought Back*(1994) describe such wars and explode the myth associated with Australia's claim of its peaceful settlement.

11.3 EARLY WRITERS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

John Butler Cooper (1862-1951), Mabel Balcombe Brookes (1890-1975) Arthur Wright (1870-1932) and Ambrose Pratt (1874- 1944) are some of the early seasoned writers of World War I. The writings of these early novelists seem to validate the entire society's involvement in war and its consequences in their lives. Arthur Wright who is generally known for his sports novels focuses on World War I in *The Hate of a Hun*. The novel deals with two young men, one, the son of a wealthy Australian and the other a well-to-do German both falling in love with the same girl. The

Australian finally wins the girl's love which infuriates the German who threatens to take revenge on the Australian. After two years he comes back and picks up the old fight and quarrels with the Australian. In one such fight the Australian man's wife gets killed after which the German disappears. After twenty years he comes back to Australia as a trader of German troops during the war. Even after twenty years his hate towards his Australian enemy has not subsided and so he vows to destroy his native district Goulder as much as possible. Attempts are made to wreck troop trains, damage crops and to destroy warehouses. Although the novel was written prior to World War-I the incendiary moves made by Germans in this novel can find parallels in World War-I. The novel culminates when the Australian protagonists save Australian troops from the attacks of German spies in Sydney.

Mabel Balcombe Brookes, was a gifted writer and community worker who is known for her services to hospitals and charity during World War –II. She published her memoirs in 1947. In her novel *On the Knees of the Gods*, her heroine is portrayed as treating the people who were wounded in war in London.

By 1914 Mary Grant Bruce and Ethel Turner the most popular women writers for girls were contributing war trilogies to the Australian book shelf. The female characters in their novels did not play any conventional roles as nurses, teachers or caring wives and mothers - rather they were the main characters assisting the army in their war efforts in Europe. These two authors were much sought after by the girls of that time as their books romanticised war and their books competed with each other in attracting the readers. Bruce's novels sold 20000 copies per book and David Walker quotes Ethel Turner's publisher as saying "frankly let me tell you. Mrs Bruce's newer books are selling better than your own". Bruce's war trilogy forms a part of her already famous Billabong series which helped in increased sales. Both the authors were engaged in doing voluntary service during war time by organising nursing courses, arranging for ambulances, serving the soldiers etc. They extended their commitment to serve the society in their books also. They used their books as platforms to appeal to the girls to serve the soldiers in the barracks. They reminded the girls and women of their moral obligation to the British Empire and their women protagonists were always eager to help the army. The style of the language used by these two authors is similar to the language of newspaper articles written for children. Their works give direction to girls regarding how to conduct oneself during the war period.

Turner's war trilogy series deals with two families: one an English family and the other an Australian family. The first book *The Cub* was published in the year 1915. Brigid, the youngest daughter of the British family is the lead character of the series who rescues an orphan from death at the hands of German soldiers in Belgium. In contrast Cub the son from the Australian family, is a pacifist. As the novel proceeds Brigid and Cub become friends and Cub discusses social issues and inequality with Brigid and makes her more compassionate towards the poor. In turn Brigid convinces Cub to enlist in the army which is the seminal point of the story. The relationship between the English Brigid and the Australian Cub illustrates the kind of relationship that prevails between the two countries and the kind of support the two countries extended towards each other during the First World War. *Captain Cub* her second Cub book portrays Brigid as a service minded woman who looks after the deprived men in society. Earlier she mourned the fact that women had a lesser role to play during war time. In the last novel in the trilogy series *Brigid and the Cub* her longing is fulfilled. She stays very close to the front and serves the refugee children in Paris. As

Britain had won the war, her publishers too encouraged the author to end the series on a good note to capitalise on the good feeling that prevailed in the society at that time. Her book was recommended to school girls because of its patriotic nature.

Unlike Turner, Mary Grant Bruce neither focused on romance nor social issues, but only on war. The fourth, fifth and sixth books of her Billabong series form her war trilogy. The entire series is set in Billabong railway station which revolves around the Linton family which consists of sister Nora, brother Jim and their father. All the three novels - the first one *A Little Bush Maid*, the second one *From Billabong to London* and the last one *Jim and Wally* traces the growth of Jim as a perfect tomboy in the first book to a warrior in the final book and Norah as a thorough bush maiden to a responsible woman who nurtures the wounded soldiers. Bruce and Turner expected all the men to enlist in the war as Jim and Cub and motivated girls to assist the war efforts as Norah and Brigid.

Check your progress 1

1. What were the general concerns of early novels about the First World War?

11.4 NOVELS OF THE INTER WAR PERIOD

During the years between the two World Wars, writings of the soldiers who returned home from the war front gained momentum. The publishing houses started collecting soldier's letters, diaries and other memoirs to fictionalise them. Fictional mode of narration helps the author to narrate the events in a more detailed manner rather than registering merely what happened and also to give more emphasis on character and also to render different dimensions and invite various perceptions into it. The literary field saw the publications of five prominent works between 1928 and 1932 by English and Australian writers. The English writers Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden shared their war experiences in the form of memoirs. The first person narration lends authenticity to the events and hints at how the events have moulded the author's view point.

By contrast the Australian writers Fredric Manning and Leonard Mann wrote documentary novels about their battlefield experiences in Belgium and Northern France. In the documentary form the narrator is placed outside the events. So the events are unfolded through the eyes of the narrator as he / she observes it and he / she does not discover the pattern of events through experience. The narration of the events from the point of view of ordinary infantry soldiers rather than the officers lends it an authentic Australian flavour.

In Australian war novels, the soldier is isolated from civil society and also from superiors which enables the narrator to offer the view point of both the sides. The narrative structure shows how the protagonist passes through various stages: at first he is a peaceful civilian, and then in the second stage he is absorbed into the drills of war which makes him lose his individuality. In the third stage he realises that machines alone are not sufficient to win the war, rather it demands from the soldier his individuality as each and every situation is unique to win the war. Thus the central character evolves as a soldier and then as a war veteran who comes back to civilian life with a changed personality. For the English writers, their central characters do not evolve. Since they have been born as English gentlemen, they directly join as officers in the British army. As the

stories are narrated in first person, the experience of war becomes a highly individual and personal ordeal.

Fredric Manning was born in Australia, grew up in England from the age of fifteen and served the British army as a soldier. In his novel *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, the narrator Bourne like the author is an educated Australian who serves as an ordinary soldier in the British army. The author conducts an in-depth analysis of the military world through the eyes and viewpoints of his lead character. Bourne's experiences in the army teach him the values and ethics of life. Through various incidents the author conveys the message that the battlefield is the place where our humanity is put to test and where it finds its expressions. To Manning's British counterparts war is a highly uncivilized activity and a civilized society must not opt for war. But to Manning, though war brings a lot of misery, it also provides an opportunity for the warriors to discover one's self and learn what life is all about. Usually Manning's narrators in the war novels are educated men who have already faced a lot of struggles in the pre-war life and who after joining the army undergo a new lot of struggles which teach them lessons for life. War makes the war heroes realise the importance and necessity of various relationships in life. Bourne appreciates the value of friendship in one's life and understands that men are dependent on each other at times of critical situations. As the novel progresses, the reader cannot ignore the looming presence of death that follows the soldier: either he experiences it or witnesses it. Bourne narrates the tragic power of death as experienced by the soldier:

he has seen one man shot clearly in his tracks and left face downwards, dead and he has seen another torn into bloody tatters as by some invisible beast and these experiences had nothing illusory about them: they were actual facts. Death of course like chastity, admits of no degree, a man is dead or not dead and a man is just as dead by one means as by another; but it is infinitely more and eviscerated, than to see him shot. (Manning, *Fortune* PP 10-11)

The success of Manning's character Bourne is not the victory in war or victory over rivals, rather it is the victory over the self that the character gains, the understanding he gains of the greatness of human beings, and his discovery of the humaneness within people.

Leonard Mann's *Flesh in Armour* (1932) like Manning's novel, describes the life of Australian soldiers who are displaced from home, distanced from the commanders, from their pre-war life and from other civilians at home. To the Australian soldiers, England seems as strange as France. The novel traces the development of Australian warriors' from their isolation in the beginning to their absorption into a single platoon and finally shows how they prove their mettle under the Single Australian Army Corps. Forging of this national fighting force is the major theme of the novel. The novel also deals with the final Australian Campaign as the correction of "British" errors and looks at Australian society as a refined, idealistic society without any errors.

Neither Manning nor Mann condemns war or questions the necessity of war. Such questions were raised after the Second World War by Australian writers, which exposed the claim that peace prevailed everywhere after the First World War. Frank Dalby Davison in his book - *The Wells of Beersheba* talks about the exploitation of men and horses in the Australian light horse regiment during the war at Palestine. He demonstrates that war was won as a result of the combined effort

of man, animal and nature. In his other novels, *Forever Morning* (1931) *Man- Shy* (1931) and *Dusty* (1946) he shows that alliance among man, nature, and animal brought victory to the Australian forces. All his works condemn the human beings who were responsible for war

Martyn Boyd, contemporary of Davison, in his works mourned the fact that war had become an integral part of society which in turn had lost its sense of ethics and human values. His four part novel *Lucinda Brayford* (1946) and his Langton tetralogy (1952-62) trace histories of the families whose lives are torn between England and Australia, between the traditional order of the English and the materialistic lives of the new class. The tension between these two orders triggers the collapse of civilized values that culminate in the devastation of the First World War. He is of the opinion that the leaders of the warring nations, who claim that they are fighting for securing justice for the people, are actually destroying society and harming the people. In *When Blackbirds Sing*, the fourth of the Langton novels (1963), Boyd deals with the First World War experiences of Dominic Langdon in France. Dominic hates the role he had played in the war and so he dumps all his war associated materials into the dam. Thus the attention of the reader is shifted to moral questionings about society from the experiences of war.

11.5 RECENT NOVELS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Roger McDonald's novel *1915* which was published in the year 1979 documents not just life in the trenches but also the harsh realities of war which have severely affected life everywhere. The novel recreates the war-torn life in 1915 in a serene country town near the shores of Sydney and amid the trenches in Gallipoli. In this novel, McDonald treats war as one of the external forces similar to flood which human beings have to cope with. David Malouf's novel *Fly away Peter* which was published in the year 1981 portrays through a series of images how the war threatens the values of human life. Jim the central character looks at machines as an intrusion on the natural world. Ashley, the land owner on his return to Australia after his studies in Cambridge, finds that nature is very open in Australia and not fenced in with hedgerows as in England. He looks at it as a place where human beings can enter freely, not as intruders or as the ones who try to exert their domination over nature. To him war has reduced human beings to machines which threatens not only the soldiers but entire human civilisation. Malouf and McDonald try to showcase how the First World War had helped Australians to discover themselves. The novels written by Australians about First World War find Europe guilty for the War and position their country as an innocent nation.

Check your progress 2

1. Write a short note assessing Australian fiction on war written during the inter-war years.
2. Do the more recent writers of novels about the First World War bring new perspectives on the War?

11.6 SECOND WORLD WAR NOVELS

All wars are barbaric but each war is brutal in its own way. The mass destruction of the First World War is replaced in the Second World War, by a war of attrition. Novelists also look at Second

World War novels in terms of Australians fighting against each other: such internal conflicts came to the fore in Eric Lambert's two war novels: *Twenty Thousand Thieves* and *The Veterans*. In the First World War novels the themes revolve around the problems in society that have produced wars. Lambert's novels see wars as the consequence of class-conscious civil society and the fight against imperialism. The novel *The Twenty Thousand Thieves* concentrates on the polarity between the soldiers and the officers who try to impose brutalising authority on them. The central character discovers that the solidarity of men in the platoon and the strength they derive from each other can be either destructive or constructive. The theme of the novel deals with building the camaraderie amongst the troop members against fascist forces. For Lambert the enemy is the embodiment of fascism against whom the soldiers fight.

In *The Veterans* Lambert attacks the war profiteers and racketeers who make fortunes out of war sufferings. The novel deals with jungle warfare during the war in New Guinea. To the Australians the island and jungle symbolise death. In T. A. Hungerford and David Forrest, New Guinea occupies the centre stage where the individual soldiers struggle against the environment. In Hungerford's *The Ridge and the River* this environment is the inland mountain where the battalion struggles in the last days of the war. In David Forrest's *The Last Blue Sea* (1959) the 83rd battalion has to encounter obstacles in the form of successive mountain ranges. The author gives more attention to the struggles of individual soldiers than to the outcome of war. The novel describes how the Australian soldiers face the enemy from the mountain and cleared the way to the sea. The characters discover the significance of humanity in the face of ultimate destruction.

In the novels of the First World War the narratives exposed the ugly face of the old world which induced the war. In the Second World War the Australian war novelists shifted their focus towards the dark New Guinea jungles. The Australian authors not only fictionalised the heroic deeds of the infantry, but have also given accounts of war at sea and on the shore. Ronald Mckie's *Proud Echo* (1953) talks about the sinking of HMAS Perth at the Battle of Sunda Strait in World War Two and the ordeal of her crew who are isolated in the ship. Don Charlwood's *No Moon Tonight* (1956) and John Beede's *They Hosed them out* (1965) talk about the life of the soldiers at the base and their war life during the mission. In these novels history is narrated through the experiences of the individual soldiers. Jack Mckinney's (1891-1966) novel *Crucible* (1935) of the First World War portrays the experience of the young soldier on the western front. This novel which is based on the author's own battlefield experience recount the brutal experiences in trenches, friendship and tension among the Australian soldiers who lived and died together. Arthur Crocker's *Australia Hops in* (1935) catches the mood of the time when Australia entered the war and to expose the brutality and filth in the field.

Post 1945, the Second World War novels dominated the world of fiction more than during the First World War. Katherine Susannah Prichard's *Golden Miles* (1948) and Judah Waten's *The Unbending* (1954) – two works by two well-known Australian Communist authors attempt to portray society along the lines of class and not the nation as a whole. Martin Boyd's *When Blackbird's sing* (1962) the last novel by a returned soldier recounts the author's experiences on the Western Front and in England. But all three books did not receive much patronage from the readers. Waten's novel written with funding from the Australian Government hails the industrial workers as the real heroes of the Second World War. Malouf's *Fly Away Peter* shows his central character Jim who discovers himself during the traumatic experiences in the trenches and returning

from war as a changed person. George Johnston's *My Brother Jack* (1964) which won the Miles Franklin award deals with the life of two Australian brothers Davy and Jack Meredith who grew up during the inter-war years near a Melbourne suburb. This novel was well received as it chronicles what it meant to grow up during the tumultuous times of World War II and with the legacies of ANZAC. *Schindler's Ark* –a Booker prize winning novel was published by Thomas Keneally in the year 1982. The following Units in this Block discuss this novel in detail. In David Brook's *The Umbrella Club* (2009) the traumatic experiences in the battlefield and home coming are two liberating forces for the character. Most of the Australian war novels use fiction as a medium to air their concerns regarding social issues other than war.

11.7 HUNDRED YEARS LATER

Australia spent more money to celebrate the centenary of the First World War than any other nation. Thomas Keneally, one of Australia's famous novelists opines that "no one says Australia was born at Gallipoli there needs to be a certain amount of de-mythologizing". After the centenary celebration the Australian book world saw a sudden surge in the publication of war novels. New novels along with reprints and reissues made Australians remember and revisit the First World War experiences. Martin Boyd's *When Blackbirds Sing*, Leonard Mann's *Flesh in Armour* and Jack Mckinney's *Crucible* are some of the novels which were reissued and published at a time when Australian troops were taking part in Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Thomas Keneally's *The Daughter of Mars* - his 28th novel revisits the First World War through the struggles of two nurses who experience the war as they tend to the wounded soldiers. Joanne Van Os's *Ronan's Echo* (2014) and Pamela Hart's *The Soldier's Life* (2015) narrate how war can completely devastate Australian homes across time and place. Bruce Scater in *On Dangerous Ground: A Gallipoli story* (2012) and Chinese- Australian writer Ouyang Yu in *Billy Sing* (2017) question the necessity of commemorating the war and remembering it. Recent novels written by Australian women novelists give fresh voice to the experiences of fighters which have been written about extensively over the years. *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* by Heather Morris deals with the true story of Lale and Gita who fell in love in one of the concentration camps and survived against all odds. After the war Lale Sokolov left Europe and settled in Australia. Only at the age of eighty, he decided to share his life story with the author Heather who took three years to record the story. *The Paris Seamstress* by Natasha Lester portrays the struggle of the female lead Estella Bisette who flees to New York from occupied Paris with her sewing machine and who tastes success in the New York fashion industry.

11.8 LET US SUM UP

In these novels and fictional responses to war themes, these novelists convey how war has shaped the Australian experience. Though hundred years have passed after the First World War, still the term war literature is vibrant in Australian culture. This unit attempted to illustrate how the Australians love their military past and also analyses Australia's conversation about the wars by giving you a sense of the variety of approaches, themes and perspectives in Australian war literature.

11.9 GLOSSARY

Catharsis : the process of releasing repressed emotions

Liturgy: observance, ritual

Incendiary: excite or inflame; start a fire

11.10 UNIT END QUESTION

1. Compare and contrast the First World War novels and Second World War novels.



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UNIT 12 THOMAS KENEALLY AS A NOVELIST

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Early life
- 12.3 Career
- 12.4 Early novels
- 12.5 Later novels
- 12.6 Themes in his novels
 - 12.6.1 Clash of cultures
 - 12.6.2 History
 - 12.6.3 Plight of Australian Aboriginal peoples
- 12.7 Historical war novels
- 12.8 Let us sum up
- 12.9 Glossary
- 12.10 Unit end Question

12.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit, we discussed Australia's rich and varied creative response to the theme of war. Together with discussion on selected novels, the unit also engaged with Australian novelists who were preoccupied with penning the horrors of the battlefield, nationalistic pride of the soldiers, their personal ordeals, and their role in the formation of an empathetic community around them. The objective of this chapter is to introduce Thomas Keneally, one of the prominent Australian war novelists, whose novels portray the pain of the individuals and rewrites the experiences of war and its savagery in order to present the harsh reality of the society around him.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Thomas Keneally one of the most highly regarded Australian writers, is a prolific novelist, playwright, non-fiction writer and essayist. His literary oeuvre deals with varied subjects ranging from the holocaust, the civil war, contemporary politics, history, colonialism, and the Antarctica expedition to the portrait of Joan of Arc. He has evolved from being one of Australia's most successful writers to the status of an internationally acclaimed novelist with the publication of his best known work, the holocaust novel - *Schindler's Ark* which was later adapted into an Academy award winning motion picture *Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg. Due to the diversity of themes, it is difficult to characterise his work and certain themes like clash of cultures, and conflict between good and evil, triumph and failure constantly recur in his works. He looks at the past not from the present but from the perspective of his characters. He is both a world renowned writer and the 'Homebush boy'. He is a prominent Republican, social commentator, rugby league supporter, historian and raconteur. He enjoys a larger than life presence in the Australian literary world.

12.2 EARLY LIFE

Keneally was born in Sydney, Australia in 1935 as the son of Catholic parents of Irish ancestry. Though born in Sydney, his early years were spent in his ancestral town Kempsey, New South Wales and he was educated at St. Patrick's College in Strathfield, New South Wales. By 1942, their family moved to Sydney where Keneally was enrolled at Christian Brothers St. Patrick's College, Strathfield. He studied for priesthood at St. Patrick's Seminary, Manly from 1953-1960. Though he was ordained as deacon, after six years he walked out of the seminary in a state of depression. He worked as a high school teacher in Sydney during the early 1960s and from 1968 to 1970, he taught drama as a lecturer at the University of New England in New South Wales.

12.3 CAREER

In a literary career spanning more than fifty five years, Thomas Keneally has written more than sixty books including thirty novels. His first story was published in the magazine *Bulletin* in 1962 pseudonymously as Bernard Coyle. His first novel *The Place at Whitton* was published in 1964. In 1966, he received the Commonwealth Literary Fund grant and in 1967 and 1968 he won consecutive Miles Franklin Literary awards for his *Bring Larks and Heroes* and *Three cheers for the Paraclete* respectively. Keneally also had a stint in film industry. Keneally acted in a small role in Fred Schepisi's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) – a film based on Keneally's own novel and played Father Marshall in the award-winning film *The Devil's Playground* (1976), also by Schepisi.

In 1985 he was made an officer of the 'Order of Australia'. He is bestowed with a status of 'Australian Living Treasure' for his outstanding contributions to Australian culture and society. He was a member of the Literature Board of the Australian Council from 1985 to 1988 and President of the National Book Council from 1985- to 1989. The Tom Keneally centre which houses Keneally's books and memorabilia was opened in August 2011 at the Sydney Mechanics School of Art.

He was the founding Chairman (1991-1993) of the Australian Republic Movement and he was also a prominent spokesperson of the movement. As a leader of this movement, he worked for the separation of Australia from the British Commonwealth and recognition of true national status for Australia. He has been named a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. In March 2009, a copy of his autographed biography was given to President Barack Obama as a state gift by the then Prime Minister of Australia.



Thomas Keneally (source: www.flickr.com)

12.4 EARLY NOVELS

Keneally's early works deal with history, spiritual concerns and contemporary social issues. He gained success as a historical novelist with the publication of *Bring Lark and Heres* (1967) which deals with Australia's early history as a British penal colony. The novel met with huge success as Australians thought it was very much Australian in its essence and it was an answer to those who attacked bush narratives. It was recognised as a work which had all the required values and merits, which proved the worth of Australian literature. It was seen as deserving of Australia's most important literary award, the Miles Franklin Literary award. Its huge success convinced Keneally that he had a future as a writer and to choose writing as a career option. Two of his earlier novels *The Place at Whitton* and *The Fear* though they received attention and appreciation, had failed to create such a huge impact as *Bring Lark and Heroes*. Keneally has created an imaginative space on his own where he deftly sets his drama in motion. From the very beginning, he carefully signals that this is a work of imagination and distances himself from actual historical events in the real world. Through this novel Keneally expresses his dissatisfaction with the current system which is so cruel and unreasonable.

Three Cheers for the Paraclete – Keneally's satirical novel resounds with humour and intellect. In this fictional narrative, he reviews and reflects upon the experiences he has gained at the seminary which he left before the ordination. Though it is not an autobiography this book challenges some of the existing orthodoxies in the Catholic Church. Set in a Roman Catholic Church, it is about the dilemma of a young priest who rebels against the established authority as it is wrong, but doesn't know how to correct it as he himself is very much part of the system. The faith of the young priest is torn between the orthodoxy of the Church and the modernity of the society. It showcases the expectations of the current generation which expects the Church to change its dogmatic ideologies in tune with the changing world. Through the character of the priest, Keneally questions the status quo of the Church in the more pressing issues such as divorce, celibacy and abortion. The secure yet stale world of the seminary is in complete contrast to the

exotic and enigmatic outside world, and in this novel, Keneally effortlessly straddles two different worlds. By winning Miles Franklin award for this novel, a successive one, he proved himself to be a major contemporary Australian writer. .

In *A Dutiful daughter* (1971), Keneally portrays the plight of families abandoned by their children. The novel focuses on the lonely life and nightmarish experiences of a close –knit family coping with unexpected tragedy that hit the parents who had suddenly evolved into half human and half cow forms. The dutiful daughter takes charge of the parents and the farm while the college going son begins to turn away. It is an allegory of the old and rigid religious doctrines that cripple the lives of the people. After *A Dutiful Daughter* his novels depart from fantastic parables but still continue to use myth and fables.

Racism and violence are the two issues that figure prominently in many of his early novels. In one of his acclaimed early works, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, he records his views on racial relations. In the 1960s, Australia witnessed massive changes in the relationships between indigenous and non- indigenous people. The 1967 referendum which recognised the rights of the aborigines as Australian citizens and the ‘Freedom Rides’ in the mid 1960’s which advocated that indigenous Australians be granted access to public utilities in New South Wales influenced Keneally’s writing of this novel. The novel reflects the national mood during that period. The central character Jimmie Blacksmith is based on indigenous Australian myth and tradition. Jimmie Blacksmith was born to a White father whom he had not seen and an Aboriginal mother. Jimmy was considered half caste, a character trapped between two cultures and races and rejected by both of them. Throughout the novel he is seen as a man who tries to act as a bridge between two societies. His attempts to prove to the Whites that blacks too can be educated and civilized do not gain their acceptance. His marriage with a White girl, who cheated him, failed to gain White people’s recognition. As he is rejected by both the societies he goes on a rampage by killing others. Though he tries to act as a peaceful link between two cultures neither of them allows such a move. When all his efforts to bridge the gap are seen to be in vain, he wishes to avenge the society which cheated him, and forced him into crime and killing as the only alternate option. Keneally also addresses the role played by the indigenous Australians in the development of pastoral industry. *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* won the Heinemann Award of the Royal Society of Literature in 1973.

In his next work, *Blood Red Sister Rose: A novel of the Maid Orleans* (1974) he has revives a medieval tale in a contemporary manner. He has retold the familiar story of Joan of Arc, recreating the scenes, the settings, the voices, the Dauphin’s court at Orleans in a way that is very contemporary. By giving a new lease of life to fifteenth century history, he reiterates the fact that in a society, the common man’s voice should not be dismissed merely as the voice of frustration. He reconstructs the horrors of fifteenth century warfare to expose the truth that wars are fought due to human vanities and to highlight their meaninglessness and destructiveness. He has portrayed the legendry Joan of Arc as a simple peasant girl Jehanne with human dimensions. In this novel he has moved from Australian themes, and local history to international history and settings. His long stay abroad kindled his interest in overseas events and backgrounds. By this time, though he had established himself as one of the renowned Australian writers he had a grievance that he could not break into the best seller list.

A Victim of Aurora (1977) written in the late 1970's is a thrilling novel based on the adventurous Antarctica expedition and the solving of a mysterious murder of one of the crew members. During the beginning of the twentieth century Men braved the extreme weather conditions to explore the new frontiers. Keneally vividly writes about how individuals cope with the darkness of the continent and their fight for survival.

Check your progress 1

1. Write a short note on Keneally's early novels.

12.5. LATER NOVELS

Albeit, many of his later novels are set in Australia, Keneally crosses the border in *Gossip from the Forest*. *The Playmaker* is a novel written for the Australian centenary celebrations. His themes range from settlement of Australian convicts to the contemporary issues that haunt Australia and the world. In 1993 he released three books namely: *Jacko* a festive comedy, which turned out to be not so popular, *The Utility Player*, his loyal tribute to his favourite Manly Rugby League team and *Our Republic* which expresses his longings for refined Australian policies. His later writings signal a shift from his earlier writings, away from exhibiting alienation in early works, towards an optimistic attitude of his characters in his later novels. From 1991 to 1994, Keneally was serving as a visiting professor at University of California at Irvine. During this period, he published a nonfictional work titled *The Place Where Souls are Born: A Journey to the Southwest* (1992), in which he describes his trip through the Southwest with his family. In this travel writing Keneally explains the beauty of the landscape and the native people of the American West which brings to mind his relationship with the topography and indigenous population of Australia.

Recently, in association with his daughter Meg Keneally, he has published the historical crime series *The Monsarrat series* set during the initial period of Australia's colonial settlement. The first of the proposed twelve series *The Soldier's Curse* was published in (2016), followed by *The Unmourned* (2017) *The Power Game* (2018) and *The Ink Stain* (2019). Though Thomas Keneally has written an impressive body of fiction and non-fiction, he has also been caught in lot of controversies. He has been accused of plagiarism in his novel *Season in Purgatory*, and even in *Schindler's Ark*.

12.6. THEMES IN HIS NOVELS

12.6.1 Clash of cultures:

Though his works and themes are diverse in nature, certain themes and settings recur constantly in his work. A common theme he often focuses on is the clash of cultures which is best reflected in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* in which a picture of the non-indigenous White establishment physically, economically and morally exploiting the indigenous, Aboriginal culture is clearly drawn. In *A Family of Madness* conflict arises between twentieth century Australians and descendants of Byelorussian emigrants who had settled in Sydney in the late 1940's. Keneally conveys that though the descendants of Byelorussian emigrants are geographically dislocated,

psychologically they are free. *Schindler's Ark*, often considered his all time best, portrays how intolerant attitudes between two cultures lead to war and genocide.

12.6.2 HISTORY:

Albeit, his novels are known for historical authenticity, Keneally does not belong to the traditional group of historical novelists including Sir Walter Scott, Irving Stone and Kenneth Roberts. Though his narrative imagination is woven with historical fabric, much attention has been paid to the deeds of the person, rather than the plot. Keneally's concern for social issues in the contemporary society in addition to the popularity of his film adaptations of *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* and *Schindler's List* (1993) have made him an acclaimed international writer of works with historical authenticity.

In *Gossip from the Forest* Keneally seems to suggest that intelligent and civilized individuals will not find a place in the twentieth century world. The backdrop of the novel is the signing of the Armistice that ended the World War I. It gives a clear picture of the chaotic German government and the revolution brewing among the public. *Shame and Captive* which is his thirtieth book is based on a real life historical event – the prison-break by Japanese prisoners of war from their camp in New South Wales in 1944. In this novel, he explores how ordinary lives are trapped in extraordinary events during World War –II. The reader is introduced to the private lives of the Japanese prisoners, British and Australians fleeing the camp, and local farmers who accommodate the prisoners from different cultures. The Japanese prisoners' desire for glorious death by attacking the enemies, to avoid the dishonour of surviving as prisoners is also brought out in the novel. Suttor - the commander of the camp, treats the prisoners humanely as his own son is in Japanese prison camp. The author paints a beautiful picture of wartime life in this novel.

The American Civil War and the various issues associated with it are well documented in *Confederates*. In this profoundly gripping and thought provoking novel, through his narration he takes us through the fields of war, what the soldier's have left at home, and the involvement of religious and political movements in the affairs of the army. Though many writers have written about the American Civil War, Keneally's novel lends a human dimension which is not found in other novels. The horrors of the Civil War, the innocence of the soldiers who desperately wish to go back home and meet their loved ones, are touchingly described. *Season of Purgatory* which is preceded by *A Chant for Jimmie Blacksmith* evokes the traumas of World War –II that are rarely explored. A young idealist British doctor sets up his hospital in the island of Mus to treat Yugoslav Partisans in their fight against the Germans. He realises that both sides do not excuse the savagery of the others and both sides do not hesitate to execute the person who opposes their system. The bitter experiences of war makes Keneally's hero lose his innocence, sacrifice his ideology and become realistic. As the story progresses, the hero's personal flaws and his upper- class British attitude is exposed by Keneally – something he does with all other heroic figures.

12.6.3 PLIGHT OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

Two of his novels *Flying Hero Class* and *Now and In time to be* are his anguished accounts of the sad history of the worsening relationships between European settlers and Australian Aborigines. *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* is a loud protest against the brutal treatment of

Aboriginal Australians. In this novel they are depicted as being empathised by some people as they thought that the Aboriginal people would become extinct and also persistently harassed to the extent where Jimmie murderously avenges those who assaulted him.

Keneally is of the view that the ill-treatment of the indigenous inhabitants by the non-native settlers is a national shame. In his *Flying Hero Class* he questions the stereotyping of Aboriginals as he knew this would be disrespectful towards them. In the earlier novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, Jimmie refutes White versions of aboriginality and he is pained at the thought of Whites stereotyping Aboriginal people without recognising their individuality. The roles are reversed in *Flying Hero Class*.

Keneally compares the situation in Australia with Ireland's Ulster. *Now and in Time to be* through a line taken from W. B. Yeats's *Easter 1916*, he describes the longest journey taken by both his maternal and paternal grandparents, the Irish diaspora from Cork to Australia. They travel with mixed feelings, a sense of despair, sorrow and grief for leaving their ancestral land, combined with excitement and expectations of going to a new land. Keneally has written not only about the Irish diaspora but also about the diaspora from other parts of United Kingdom who have come to Australia in search of greener pastures and for whom their homeland will be etched only in their memories. In *A River Town* he details the experiences of his ancestors, and the difficulties encountered by the Irish immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century in Australia.

Check your progress 2

What are the recurrent themes in Thomas Keneally's writings?

12.7 HISTORICAL WAR NOVELS

In a number of his works, Keneally gives an insight into the theatre of war from different angles, which includes the thoughts of a World War – I German peace negotiator, a liberal pacifist in *Gossip from the Forest* (1975), the activities of a British physician with Yugoslavian partisans during World War –II in *Season in Purgatory*(1977), the life of a band of American Civil War warriors and their preparation for second battle in *Confederates* (1979), the moral character of political and military leaders in *The Cut-Rate Kingdom*, the humane treatment of Japanese prisoners in *Shame and Captive* and his magnum opus *Schindler's Ark* which reflects the testimonies of the holocaust survivors. War has served as a perennial background in many of his works. He has been incited by war as it rends families and society not only at one particular time but for years to come.

His anguished accounts of ominous changes after wars in Europe and in contemporary Australia are captured in *A Family Madness* which covers social issues of contemporary Australia which is plagued by corruption, crime and opportunism. In this powerful and moving love story he intersects the ugly politics of Eastern Europe with the new fresh, Australian society through two families. The novel tells the story of Terry Delaney, a passionate rugby player and his love for Danielle Kabbel, the daughter of his employer Rudi Kabbel, who suffers from visions of forthcoming disaster as a result of his tormented childhood in which he was a puppet in the hands of the Nazis and Russia. He also picturises how war has ruptured the memories of nations. In

Towards Asmara, he has registered his first-hand experience as a partisan of the brave Eritrean People's Liberation front in the Eritrean war of Independence against the Sudanese.

For Keneally, war is both disastrous and destructive, deforming the contours of nations, a horrendous experience for people and sometimes unavoidable. He is very much interested in unfolding the historical events that happened during World War II rather than the deeds at Gallipoli. His childhood was overshadowed by World War II and at one point of time it appeared that Australia would be invaded. His reminiscences of those fearful days during his early life at home imbue many of his works: *The Fear* his second novel published in 1965 and which was later revised as *By the Line* in 1989, *The Cut – Rate Kingdom*, which was first published in a special issue of the *Bulletin* in 1980 and then *An Angel in Australia*. Later under the old pseudonym William Coyle he wrote two novels: *Act of Grace* and *Chief of Staff* which were set in the backdrop of European and Pacific wars. *The Tyrant's Novel* which is his 26th work of fiction is his all time favourite and he claimed in his personal covering note to reviewers that it was his best. Though Keneally refrains from mentioning any country, this novel reproduces the repressive condition of Middle Eastern countries under the tyranny of dictators like Saddam Hussein. He also attacked the international asylum system during the U.N. sanction period.

Thomas Keneally lends a new definition and dimension to women's strength and endurance in his *Women of the Inner Sea*. Keneally eloquently writes about the passionate heroine Kate's journey from her privileged childhood through a disastrous marriage and her love affairs till she meets with a tragedy which plunges her into a bleak future. Here he has handled all the ills that have riven Australian society - from the brutal treatment of indigenous people and the humane forces that battle for the aborigines to the ancient rivalry between Irish and English in the initial years of settlement. In this novel he tries to understand who the refugees are and the countries from which they have come, Australian policies towards refugees, their roots, their identities and the reasons for their displacement.

Schindler's Ark is Thomas Kennelly's bestselling novel. Though it is considered to be fictional, he has done extensive research and has included only those details which are established. Though some minor details in their conversation have been created by Keneally, the line between fact and fiction is blurred in *Schindler's Ark* and in most of his novels. He tries to establish the connections and interconnections between past and present. No other book by him has sold so many copies.

The Booker Prize judges for 1982, initially could not arrive at a conclusion whether the book came under the category of fiction or non-fiction as it definitely contained a lot of facts, which would make it non-fiction. Finally the judges decided to award him the prize as they were convinced that he had used his fictional imagination along with factual information in his magnum opus which was very compassionate and astonishing in its effects. In this novel he recounts the efforts a German industrialist who saved Jews from German execution. In the Australian literary scene, it was unusual for a Catholic author to write such novels on the Holocaust as it was usually the favourite theme of Jewish authors. Yet Keneally's expertise in exploring the historical moments of the holocaust, the worst of times - makes *Schindler's Ark* an outstanding novel.

12.8 LET US SUM UP

While trying to arrive at the strength of Keneally's writings, Steinberg comments in *Publisher's Weekly*: "In ancient times, Tom Keneally would have been a Celtic bard, such is his gift for wielding narrative and anecdote, witty quip and resonant observation. While his books never scant on storytelling brio, however, his work also reflects a concern for life's ambiguous challenges, glancing ironies and opportunities for moral behavior."

Even though he is mellowed by age, he still continues to write for the transcendental joy of writing. As he is a remarkable researcher, he has always maintained a standard in his choices of material which is a testimony to the power of his writings. He is a writer sure to be remembered across all the continents.

12.9 GLOSSARY

Oeuvre: the lifework of a writer or artist

Deacon: (in Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox Churches) an ordained minister of an order ranking below that of priest.

Imbue: inspire or permeate with (a feeling or quality).

Magnum opus: greatest work that a writer or artist has produced

12.10 Unit end Question:

Write an essay assessing the significance of Thomas Keneally's fictional work.

Unit 13 *SCHINDLER'S ARK* - THE TRIUMPH OF HUMANITY

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 About the title
- 13.3 Historical Background
- 13.4 Reading *Schindler's Ark*
 - 13.4.1 Beginning
 - 13.4.2 Condition of Jews
 - 13.4.3 Schindler's business
 - 13.4.4 Categorisation of Jews
 - 13.4.5 Schindler's testimony and promise
 - 13.4.6 Schindler's efforts
 - 13.4.7 Liberation of Jews
- 13.5 Film adaptation of the novel
- 13.6 Let us sum up
- 13.7 Glossary
- 13.8 Unit end Question

13.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous units of this block, we discussed Thomas Keneally as a novelist and gained an overview of the incredible variety of Australian war novels in which the various facets of war are dealt with. Among all the novels on the holocaust, Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* holds a position of prominence and it was awarded Britain's prestigious Booker prize for fiction. In this book, Keneally, while capturing the horror of the extermination of Jews in Nazi Poland by Nazi Germans also acquaints the world about the exemplary efforts taken by a young entrepreneur Oskar Schindler to save the lives of thousands of Jews in Poland and in Czechoslovakia during World War -II. In this unit we shall discuss how the author, with skill, compassion and poise, details the various obstacles and sacrifices encountered by Oskar Schindler in his mission of rescuing Jews from the blood thirsty Nazi Germans.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The Second World War witnessed many inhuman attacks on humanity. One such horrendous act which eclipsed all other tragic events in its notoriety was the holocaust. Several people who survived this turbulent time have recounted those tragic historical times. Many literary texts attempted to faithfully reproduce those horrendous moments of history. *Schindler's Ark* is one such intriguing narration of the trials and triumphs of Oskar Schindler – a German businessman who had saved many Jews from the gas chambers in concentration camps and the tribulations of

those survivors who survived the holocaust. The book offers glimpses of humanism in one of the darkest times in the history of mankind.

Keneally, on a visit to a Beverly Hills' luggage store in California, by chance met the store owner Poldek Pfefferberg, a Schindler's survivor, who urged the novelist to write about this war hero Schindler and the Jews he had saved. After examining the documents and listening to the narrations and interviews of Schindler's survivors, Keneally was greatly impressed by the moral ambiguity of Schindler. He found the novel the suitable medium and technique to portray a character of such magnitude. In his preface he states that *Schindler's Ark* must not be read as a novel as it is more of a historical account based on reports of eye witnesses, documents and visits to sites described in the novel. Further he confesses that efforts have been taken to narrate the events as they are, without any alteration. The author positions himself as a historian to report the true stories of victims, testimonies of survivors, their interviews, and people's personal accounts in a compelling manner.

13.2 About the title

The novel was first published in 1982 in England under the title *Schindler's Ark* – the ark refers to the ark of Covenant which in Judaism symbolically refers to God's promise of security to the Jews. The title metaphorically stands for Schindler's assurance of protection to his Jewish workers. The publishers also worried that the title might incur the wrath of people as the ark might be mistaken as Noah's ark – a huge boat which was built under God's order to save all the creatures of the world from the huge deluge. Also they felt that comparing Jews with animals would be humiliating. Finally it was released in the United States as *Schindler's List*.

13.3 Historical background

Germany was defeated in World War –I which ended in 1919. They were held responsible for the maximum damage of the war and were asked to pay compensation to Great Britain and France. Their economy was worst affected as strict sanctions were imposed on them. As a result, the people had to fight against poverty and unemployment. Amidst this atmosphere of anguish and frustration, Adolf Hitler, an Austrian by birth who served the German army, became the leader of the Nazi party. Through his rhetorical speeches he aroused the spirit of German nationalism and his Nazi party emerged victorious in the 1932 elections. Next year Hitler became the chancellor of Germany and very soon his rule became a dictatorship.

Nazis considered Jews as the reason for all the miseries of Germany after the World War-I. Hitler considered Jews as an inferior race who posed a threat to his vision of establishing Aryans, the German race as the superior race. His national and foreign policy clearly stated his futurist plans for imperialist Germany which would uphold the superiority and glory of the Aryan race. The Nazis passed Anti- Semitic laws which restricted the rights of Jews. The first concentration camp was set up by Nazis in southern Germany – which was followed by many other camps throughout the country for the imprisonment of Jews. As a part of their expansion policy to assert the supremacy of the Aryan race, they started annexing new territories. Hence Britain and France declared war against Germany in 1939 as it violated the treaty of Versailles by annexing many new territories. Bombing of Pearl Harbour by the Japanese military, one of Germany's allies,

forced United States to join hands with the British. Jews from Poland, Austria and Czechoslovakia, the newly occupied territories were transported and corralled into overcrowded and unhygienic ghettos where they were treated as slaves. The final leg of the genocide saw the transportation of Jews from the ghetto to death camps where everyday thousands of Jews were ruthlessly killed inside the deadly gas chambers.

The external world was totally ignorant of what was happening inside Germany and its occupied territories. During the final phase of World War – II, Nazi officials erased all the evidences of the genocide from the advancing allied forces. By the time the allied forces liberated the Jews from the clutches of Germans, around six million Jews had already been systematically killed by Nazis. The downfall of Germany started with its disastrous invasion of Soviet Union with whom it had a non-aggression pact. Hitler committed suicide when Germany was closed in on all sides by the allied forces and Soviet Union. Within a few days after Hitler’s suicide in his bunker in Berlin on 30th April 1945, World War II – the largest war fought in the history of the world, had accounted for the loss of highest number of lives. After the war, the Nazis who were involved in the holocaust were tried for their crimes. The Jews’ demand for a separated home land which was supported by the United States was accepted in the UN and in 1949 a separate homeland was created for them out of Palestine.

Check your progress 1

Examine the historical background of the Holocaust in *Schindler’s Ark*?

13.4 READING *SCHINDLER’S ARK*

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

Emilie Schindler

Reserved
Humanitarian

Schindler’s spouse

Amon Goeth

Cruel Nazi leader;
Commandant of
Płaszów
labor camp

Helen Hirsch

Jewish prisoner
Goeth’s abused
maid

Itzhak Stern

Intellectual Jewish
Prisoner accountant;
Schindler’s advisor
and confidant

Oscar Schindler

Businessman,
humanitarian, savior
of Jews

Poldek Pfefferberg

subversive prisoner
Jewish survivor
Black marketer,
Urged Keneally to
write this book

13.4.1: Beginning of the novel

The novel begins with a prologue which describes the dinner party at the villa of Amon Goeth – the Commandant of Plaszow labor camp, which is well attended by high ranking Nazi officials and elite businessmen like Oskar Schindler, his friend Julius Madritsch etc. Major characters are introduced and the plots and themes of the text that are going to dominate the novel are unfolded to the readers.

Schindler is born to Catholic parents of German descent in Zwittau - an industrial city in the Sudetenland which was a part of the Austrian empire and is invaded by Hitler's Nazi Germany in 1938. He has many Jewish friends and is studying engineering to look after and take over his father's farm machinery plant. He is portrayed as a man of contradictory and complicated character who lacks moral sense. He is a man of expensive tastes, drives a limousine, socializes at parties, loves travelling and has a passion for motor bikes. He works for the army as it gives him the opportunity to be close with Nazis. He wears a Swastika jacket as it gives him an advantage in his business dealings with Germans. He praises the Nazi rule for his personal benefits. He works for *Abwehr* – a military intelligence organization as this means he need not pay his duties. As his job demands collection of information from Poland and the neighbouring areas, he becomes familiar with Cracow – the city where he settles and builds his fortune and future. His job at *Abwehr* helps him to socialize with high ranking officials, and elite businessmen at various parties and to establish contact networks which help him later at the time of saving Jews.

Though he is married to Emilie he has many illicit affairs. Despite being a womanizer, he does not encourage the female escort at Goeth's party. Instead he sympathises and empathises with Goeth's Jewish house-maid Helen Hirsch who is often beaten up by Goeth. Schindler comforts her, consoles her and promises to save her from the clutches of Goeth. This impulse to rescue, to safeguard Jews from Nazis and give them protection in his factory later becomes his impeccable urge. Schindler's character is not morally sound. His extramarital affairs remind the readers that he is no saint. However, he does not make any attempt to conceal all his activities. When people criticize him he gracefully accepts the criticisms he is aware of his own flaws. Though he is a member of Konrad Henlein's Sudetan German Party, he has started criticizing the principles of Nazism after Sudetenland's annexation by Germany.

13.4.2 Condition of Jews

Contrary to Schindler's high profile life, the Jewish people living in Poland are leading a life of slaves and are constantly under fear of being sent to one of the extermination camps. Schindler's humane treatment of Jews makes him morally superior to Goeth and his men who always abuse and terrorize Jews. Though he does not approve of Goeth and his associates he maintains good rapport with them, as it is helpful for his business. In 1939, new rules and restrictions which limit the Jews' rights are imposed by the Nazi regime. With the establishment of Cracow ghetto, their free movements are curbed. Violence has started against Jews. Jewish owned businesses are seized by the Nazis and they are discouraged from taking payments.

13.4.3 SCHINDLER'S BUSINESS

Schindler shifts to Cracow with the hope of taking advantage of the cheap labour force of Jews. He has a lot of contacts with the underground Jewish community in the ghetto. There he is introduced to the Polish Jew Itzhak Stern – an accountant who has insights and knowledge in business. Though he confesses that he is a German capitalist, he wins Stern's confidence through his body language which communicates real feeling. As per Stern's advice, Schindler buys a failing enamelware and cookware company called Deutsche and Emailwaren Fabrik (DEF) which soon starts manufacturing field kitchenware and munitions to fulfill the military contracts. Though Stern openly criticizes the immoral policies of the Nazis, Schindler refrains from doing so. Instead his reference to the biblical saying "It must be hard for the churches to maintain the pretense that their heavenly father cared about the death of even a single sparrow" alludes that he too is unhappy with the regime. Stern replies quoting from the *Talmud*, a book of Jewish law: "he who saves the life of one man saves the entire world". At this time both of them are not aware that Schindler's bottom-line of the business is not profit-making but to rescue the Jews. Schindler's association with Stern enables him to indulge in black market trading.

Though at the outset Schindler's decision to make use of free labour, looked so opportunistic, his assurance to the new recruits that they would be safe working in his company demonstrates that his main intention is to save the Jews from the cruel hands of Nazis. Despite severe warning and slogans promising stringent punishment to those who helped Jews, Schindler makes this promise of salvation many times to his Jewish labourers in the years to come and strives his best to the upkeep of this promise. He uses the Nazis' unethical policies to his advantage. Though he accepts the benefits, he does not like others to suffer because of him. He makes compensation to the Jewish owner in whose apartment he resides.

In the meantime, Poldek Pfefferberg, a 'Schindler's survivor' who prompted the author to write this novel, has been appointed as a leader in the Cracow ghetto at the Plaszow labor camp. He also indulges in black market trade and using his links with Nazi higher officials he successfully moves his goods between the ghetto and the larger city. Though Schindler and Pfefferberg are seemingly close with the Nazi regime, they are not corrupted by power. They embrace the situation so as to save the lives of the Jews. Though they seem to play with the regime both of them go to great lengths to save the Jews from the blood-thirsty Nazi regime. They are the subversive characters in this story and they are not what they seem to be.

In 1941, Schindler is arrested for irregularity in book keeping. But soon he is released as he has an extensive network of close contacts with high ranking Nazi officials, which he has cultivated over the years by bribing them to help in his business matters. He is rearrested for kissing a Jewish woman on his birthday party, only to be released due to intervention from influential men. Unlike the first arrest, in the second one he is taken to Montelupich prison, not to SS headquarters and he is detained there for four nights and not one. There he realizes that Nazis made it a policy to exterminate all Jews, which challenges his previous assumption that Jews might survive if they are economically useful. The stark contrast between the two arrests brings to light the Nazi view that they would even tolerate black marketing and not any kind of association with Jews.

13.4.4 CATEGORISATION OF JEWS

Nazi officials sort the Jews in the Cracow ghetto into two groups: those who are doing essential work are given blue stickers and others without blue stickers are taken to labour camp. Though Pfefferberg is issued a card without a blue sticker, he escapes on his way to the railway station to the labour office, where his claim as a metal polisher is believed and is issued a blue ticket by a sympathetic Nazi official. In response to Nazi's categorization of Jews, Schindler builds a dormitory in his factory to save the Jews from the Nazis. When his office manager Abraham Bankier and some of his employees fail to report for duty in early June, he uses his influence to secure their release from the cattle cars which are bound for death camps. The failure to understand the importance of names with blue stickers and without blue stickers by his Jewish workers has proved fatal.

Schindler's terrified eyes watches a Nazi official shooting a woman unmindful of the presence of a young girl without any remorse, and he resolves to offer all sort of help to save as many Jews as he can. He comes to know that around 7000 Jews from the ghetto are taken to the concentration camp where crematoria are being used to kill Jews using deadly gas. But people in the ghetto are not aware of what is happening in the outside world until the return of a young man named Bachner who gives details to the inmates of how Jews are executed at the camp using deadly gas. His narration of his first-hand experience of witnessing the ghastly event could not be believed by some people as it challenges their rationality. This shows the human mind's refusal to accept the truth which is contrary to their belief as it retains little hope of survival.

13.4.5 SCHINDLER'S TESTIMONY AND PROMISE

Till 1942, the rest of the world had little information regarding the worst plight of Jews under the Nazi's regime. But the Zionist organization which was formed in the 19th century to create a separate homeland for Jews starts gathering information. This organization engaged Sedlacek –an Austrian dentist and one of its members to meet Schindler to get information about the real scenario in Poland. Schindler readily accepts Sedlacek's request to travel to Budapest to testify to the Zionist members. Though Schindler does not gain any personal profit, he travels beyond the borders of Poland to save Jews from the Nazi region. His travel to Budapest showcases his sense of moral obligation to rescue Jews. He arrives at Budapest by freight train where he meets the representatives of the Zionist organization and gives them a detailed description about the grave situation in Poland. He is assured that his testimony will be conveyed to the British and American Governments. Further he agrees to their request asking him to go to Istanbul to make another report before the Zionist bureau. Schindler also tries to expose the condition at Plaszow to the outside world through Stern's report and the filmed tour as he thinks justice will be rendered.

As Plaszow's ghetto becomes overcrowded and its population reaches 30,000, others join the safe haven at Emalia. Those who have not reached the safe haven at Emalia is cruelly treated and those who have sought asylum in Emalia is known as Schindler's Jews. Schindler tried to convince Goeth that he should restrain himself as it is good for him. He realizes that the fate of prisoners, and their freedom are dependent on him. He uses the large amount of money he has earned through his black market business for the welfare of the Jews. He doesn't even use the rescue money offered to him by the Zionists; rather sends it directly to the Jewish prisoners to spend as they

will. As he is known for his lavish spending, he is not doubted by the SS officials. They are so greedy that they are even willing to spare a Jew in exchange of Schindler's money. The opportunistic approach, using the Jews to help his business, which he exhibited initially, has been slowly replaced by altruism for the Jews.

13.4.6 SCHINDLER'S EFFORTS

In 1944, the Germans who were scared of advancing Russian armies, try to erase all the evidences by evacuating the camps, destroying them and the chambers, cremating and exhuming the corpses of the executed Jews. Goeth takes complete control of the Plaszow camp. His first move after taking control of the camp is to order the execution of a Jewish architect publicly, who finds fault with the Plaszow buildings. He ruthlessly murders four thousand Jews publicly who try to hide from incarceration. The whole place is filled with stench, ash and flames. Schindler who is disgusted and deeply moved, promises Stern that he will save all the inmates of Plaszow. Though it sounds unrealistic to Stern it reminds us of the verse which Stern quoted at the beginning "He who saves the life of one man saves the entire world" Schindler does not take any effort to hide his concern for Jews from Goeth. In the beginning he indirectly favored Jews using his industrial needs, as showing it explicitly was an offense. He exhibits his humanity, when he, in the company of Goeth hoses water down the cattle cars full of prisoners who are dying due to excessive heat on their way to concentration camps, to quench their thirst. This time he has not used his usual economic arguments to justify his action. Goeth does not disapprove of his action rather watches it with little amusement. Though Schindler does not like Goeth, he has developed this relationship carefully and consciously over the years with bribes and gifts.

He devises various schemes and strategies to safe guard Jews. Upon receiving the orders to relocate Emalia prisoners to Plaszow, where they will be executed, he immediately decides to move his factory operations and skilled workers to Czechoslovakia. Schindler as usual, bribes Goeth heavily and obtains permission for his decision to move Emalia under the pretext that his factory's production of arms and ammunition which are war essentials should not be hit. Schindler prepares his own list of workers who will be moved with him. For the regime, names in the list mean death whereas names in Schindler's list mean life. The list instills hope in the minds of the prisoners. 800 men and 300 women on the list board the freight cars on different days to a new camp in Brinnlitz, across the border in Czechoslovakia which is not under the control of Poland. That is the first time a train leaves the death camp carrying live passengers during the holocaust. The prisoners reach a safe place after encountering lot of hardships due to bureaucratic mix-up on the way.

In the meantime Goethe is arrested for his economic offences and along with him, Schindler is also arrested in front of his wife for his links with Goeth. Both Schindler and his wife Emilie who have been living separately get reunited in Britain. She runs the factory in his absence. Schindler uses his money to bribe or gift SS officials to save as many Jews possible. At other camps, when the patients are illtreated, in Brinnlitz, Emilia treats the sick with care. The Schindlers are not only committed to the health of the Jews, but also to their dignified survival.

Schindler knows that after the war, the power will be shifted and Nazis will be in mortal danger. Earlier though he was against Nazi ideology, he supplied munitions to the Germans as he was

making huge profit out of it which supported his noble cause. By the time he moves to Brinnlitz, he decides not to produce any useable weapons as it is not ethical to kill anyone. The factory has become nothing more than an asylum for Jews. He bribes and manipulates the officials so that Jews under his protection could survive.

Check your progress 2

1. How is Schindler different from most German Nazis at the time?

13.4.7 LIBERATION OF JEWS

With Germans losing the war against the allied forces Schindler too loses his wealth and power whereas workers on Brinnlitz are liberated. Schindler's prisoners are grateful and feel it is their turn to reciprocate. One of the Jews gifts him a ring inscribed with the verse – "He who saves a single life saves the entire world". His German identity which was an asset earlier, puts him in a disadvantageous position. Other Jewish prisoners write a letter detailing his war time efforts to save them. Impersonating as an escaped Jewish prisoner he, with his wife flees to Switzerland escorted by his loyal Jewish workers and their testimonies for his good deeds which save him from arrest for being mistaken as Jewish. Prisoners too honored his wish by treating the war criminals, enemies and the the SS in a very humane manner. Honored as "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Museum, Schindler spends his remaining years traveling between Germany and Israel. He dies in 1974 at the age of sixty-six and is buried in Jerusalem.

Check your progress 3

What is Schindler's "List"?

13.5 FILM ADAPTATION OF THE NOVEL

The novel was filmed by director Stevan Spielberg and released in the year 1993. Unlike the other movies of that period it is shot in black and white to make the people psychologically associate with WW –II a period without colour film or photography. Another technique which attracts the attention of the viewers is that the vital scenes are shot in colour to render visual effect. The goal of the director is to sensitize the world about the holocaust by making the viewers to connect with the characters so that whenever genocide occurs in the world, they will not be the passive onlookers. This film has won lot of prestigious awards which include Academy award and Golden globe awards for best motion pictures.

13.6 LET'S SUM UP

After the war, Schindler is unsuccessful in all his business efforts and becomes bankrupt. But his investment of good deeds in Jews paid dividends to lead a normal life. By the time he opens his factory at Brinnlitz, he has become totally a humanitarian rather than a business man. Schindler

and many of his Jewish workers participate in the judicial inquiry and testifies against Goeth and SS officials for their war crimes. Though he is not able to save all the Jews, the few Jews who survive the war are very thankful to him. He spends his last days in Germany and Israel. He dies in 1974 and is buried in Jerusalem.

What starts as an entrepreneurial project aimed at personal gain, gradually becomes a peculiar kind of paternalism. This worthless, morally disreputable war profiteer and hedonist with an expensive taste becomes one of the most admirable and celebrated heroes of the holocaust who sacrifices his entire wealth and risks his own life to save hundreds of Jews from the jaws of the death camps.

13.7 GLOSSARY :

Acumen : the ability to make good judgments and take quick decisions.

Holocaust : destruction on a mass scale, especially caused by fire or nuclear war.

Horrendous : extremely unpleasant, horrifying, or terrible

Incarceration : the state of being confined in prison; imprisonment.

13.8 UNIT END QUESTION

1. Consider *Schindler's Ark* as a story of the triumph of humanity.

FURTHER READING:

Berenbaum, Michael. *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1993.

WWW.britannica.com/art/Australian -literature

UNIT 14 *SCHINDLER'S ARK*: MAJOR THEMES

Structure:

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Ambiguity and Anxiety:
- 14.3 Identity
- 14.4 Virtue
- 14.5 Good vs. Evil
- 14.6 Symbols and Images
- 14.7 Lists
- 14.8 Power
- 14.9 Train
- 14.10 Death
- 14.11 Conclusion
- 14.12 Glossary
- 14.13 Unit end questions

14.0 OBJECTIVES

The previous unit described in detail the various compassionate deeds and the heroic acts of Schindler to safeguard the lives of Jews who were under his care, the triumph of humanity over inhumanity. This unit discusses the various literary techniques employed by the author Thomas Kenneally. Some of the popular techniques/devices that are employed by writers are symbolism, imagery, allusion, alliteration, allegory and figurative language such as simile, metaphor, and personification to make the narration more interesting. How effectively Thomas Kennelly uses these techniques in *Schindler's Ark* is analysed critically in this chapter.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The novel was surrounded by controversy even before it came to the lime light, when it was shortlisted for Booker McConnell Prize. The very next day after its publication, it received the Booker Prize - one of the most prestigious literary awards, which invited a lot of criticism from the reviewers. Many reviewers questioned the eligibility of this novel for this most coveted award. The real question behind this controversy is whether this is fiction or a real story. Kennelly has used the literary form called 'faction'. The author has used historical facts extensively which he had gathered from the memories recollected by the survivors and yet he bridged the gap between realities and reminiscences using fictional fantasies. This novel is also called a "documentary novel" as the description of the events are based on the interviews Kennelly had with the survivors of the holocaust who are called as *Schindlerjuden* (Schindlerjews) and his many visits to Kraków, Plaszow, and Auschwitz-Birkenau. The novel follows a narrative line that goes back and forth in time, including a number of individual narratives critically examining the various facts detailed by the author, and the survivors' accounts of certain events to give an idea of the history of the Holocaust. The author's intrusion

at times to offer different versions of certain events by witnesses and their attitudes towards Schindler clearly projects that this novel is not merely literary imagination but an authentic account and stark portrayal of the catastrophe that affected the lives of millions.

14.2 AMBIGUITY AND ANXIETY

In *Schindler's Ark* Kenneally registers the personal tragedies behind the six million personnel who lost their near and dear ones and others who encountered death. Though the repulsive darkness seems to be the dominant component of the book, it also captures the light in its skillful delineation of its master character Oskar Schindler. Kenneally employs two different narrative techniques to portray an ambiguous character like Oscar. This man is a long-term member of the Nazi party, a capitalist who makes money even during war, a black marketeer, womanizer, and alcoholic; yet he risks his life and fortune to safeguard some of the Jews by claiming them as his labourers who are engaged in doing war work in his factory. He bribes the German officials heavily to run his factories which produce enamelware that was used to feed the German army and shells that were used to kill the Jews. Later we find him bribing the Nazi officials to protect the Jewish prisoners who worked in his factory. In Kenneally's words, Schindler provided, "an acre of safety in that square mileage of horror" and saved more than thousand Jews from the Nazi death camps.

Schindler is notorious for his adulterous behavior. Poldek Pfefferberg was shocked to know about Schindler's disloyalty towards his wife and when Schindler's wife invited him to tea, he refuses as he considered it would be indecent to "drink tea with the victim". It is telling that Kenneally uses the term 'victim' to describe Schindler's wife to prove in later stages that he has become the savior of many Jewish prison victims. Pfefferberg who is against Schindler's promiscuity, approves his black market business. This moral ambiguity is found in many characters in the novel. Anxiety and ambiguity were heightened as the prisoners and the readers were not sure that who would survive and who would lose their lives. Even after the war many prisoners were under the grip of constant fear that they would be attacked by the retreating German army until the camp was liberated by a "Single Russian Officer". Till the end the readers were neither able to guess the character of Schindler nor to predict the destiny of Schindler's prisoners which leaves an indelible impression on the readers.

14.3 IDENTITY

To the Nazis their national and racial identity is far more important than religious identity. They attach respect to uniforms, tags and identification. People are treated according to their labels. They identify Jews as a separate race and did not consider them only as members of the Jewish religion. Schindler plays the card of his Nazi identity to safe-guard the Jewish prisoners in his factories. The Nazis also did not suspect his activities as he was a Nazi who is not expected to ever offer any sort of help to Jews. The Jews also in order to ascertain their identity perform a Jewish marriage by following all the Jewish rituals inside the camp. The Jews want to uphold their customs which their enemies despise even in the gloomy circumstances of their life.

14.4 VIRTUE

The novel traces the growth of virtue in Oscar Schindler. He is not virtuous as per customary definition. Kenneally comments that writing about evil is rather simple and straightforward whereas writing about virtue is highly complicated and involves certain elements of risk. Schindler is complicated as he is the amalgamation of virtuous and immoral characteristics. Though he is married he lives with his Polish mistress. He earns profit through shady dealings, purchases goods in the black market, bribes the officials to carry out his personal business and also in his mission of protecting the Jewish prisoners in his factory. Though Schindler unlike other Germans is very respectful towards Jews he seems to be oblivious to the cruelties unleashed against the Jews which portrays him as a person who is very much insensitive to what is happening around him in society. Itzhak Stern reflects Schindler's conscience. The more he becomes closer to Stern, his determination to save lots of Jews increases. The change in his moralistic attitude could be seen in his other acts. He promises his wife that he would be loyal to her. He decides to put an end to earning money by the exploitation of the workers in his factory. He stops manufacturing shells in his factory as he does not want those shells to be responsible for any death. After the war, after his heroic deed of rescuing the Jews he does not live any remarkable life: he does not do any charity work, nor champion the oppressed. He continues to cheat on his wife, spend lavishly, and eventually failed in his business ventures and became bankrupt. But as an acknowledgement to his remarkable feat of saving those Jewish prisoners in his factory, Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority (Yad Vashem) Museum in Israel confers him a title "Righteous Among the Nations".

14.5 GOOD VS. EVIL

Most of the movies and stories portray Nazis as evil and *Schindler's Ark* is no exception to this. Their atrocities against the Jews expose their evil side. To them Jews are the personification of all evil. Even at the beginning Kenneally says this story talks about the "pragmatic triumph of good over evil". The entire discussion of the book seems to revolve around the question "is Oskar really a righteous person?" Throughout the book though the author does not comment explicitly on what is good, he tries to infuse his ideas to understand by presenting various characters like Schindler, Goeth, the Jewish Policeman. Schindler is repeatedly compared to God: he is a "minor god of deliverance," a god like Bacchus, and he offers the "godlike promise" that his workers who stay in his factory would be alive after the war. By elevating him to the position of God the author conveys to the reader the complexity of this character who symbolically stands for good despite the mystery that shrouds this powerful person.

Schindler's positive qualities are presented in stark contrast to his "dark brother" Amon Goeth who is depicted as a power mongering character. The Jewish Policeman Symche Spira is always likened to "Napolean" and "Tsar". Both these men with their hunger for power fail to understand the concept of good as they were corrupted by power. All the three are from the same ethnic background, yet one has become a savior whereas the other two have turned out to be the murderers of Jews. Kenneally wisely restrains himself from locating the psychological reasons and personal life experiences that shape and inspire Schindler and the other characters' choice of activities and actions. But the author indirectly suggests the gradual realizations of the

circumstances and the surroundings that lead Schindler to change his mind. After witnessing Kracow ghetto's liquidation, Schindler announces "I was now resolved to do everything in my power to defeat the system." Till the end he assures his workers that nothing would happen to them as they are with him and he is successful in his attempts. By not explicitly analyzing the ideas of good, evil and power which recur in the novel the author leaves it to the reader to understand them on their own terms. Kenneally did not indulge in tracing the roots of the origin of good and evil, but rather he lets the question continue to arouse curiosity in the readers' minds.

Check your progress 1

Discuss the controversy that surrounded the award of Booker prize to *Schindler's Ark*.

14.6 SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

Kenneally has employed various images and symbols to describe the most sensitive issues surrounding the holocaust. Various objects, colours, and characters are employed to underscore the central idea of the novel. Though some of the images are recurring, these images vividly describe the events that surround the rescue of the Jews from the gas chambers. One of the most memorable scenes in the book is the appearance of little girl Genia in her red coat, red cap and red boots, while Schindler, by sitting on his horse, was observing the destruction of the Jewish ghetto. The moment he saw the little girl is the defining moment which forces him to confront the horrible life of Jews during the holocaust and his contribution to the inhuman treatment meted out to the Jews. Only after witnessing this event Schindler realizes that Jews in the ghetto are human beings with flesh and blood and he vows to defeat the system. To Schindler the little girl appears to be the embodiment of the innocence of the Jews. The "red coat" symbolizes the red flag waved by the Jews at the Allied forces during World War –II seeking their support. When the little girl is violently evacuated she avoids the horrific scenes around her as she cannot stand the carnage. This act mirrors the inaction of Allied Forces who did not help the Jews. The colour of red serves as a striking contrast to the dark activities of the Jewish prisoners' camp for Oskar Schindler and the red colour stands for the blood of the Jews. The innocence of the Jew is buried with the death of the little girl Genia whose body is spotted later amidst the pile of exhumed dead bodies by Schindler.

The other recurring images in the novel are those of Gods and Kings. Schindler is often compared with Gods as he is determined to give salvation to the Jewish workers. This raises the question about the complex nature of morality. He is not God in a customary sense whereas he can be identified more with Bacchus, the god of pleasure and revelry, who indulges in drinking and seeking pleasure, while at the same time performing a lot of good deeds. The image of the king is used while describing Goeth who always imagines himself as an emperor. He suggests power hungry rulers like the Roman emperor Caligula, who is known for his cruelty and excesses.

14.7 LISTS

Another image that dominated *Schindler's Ark* is that of the "List" that determines the lives of the Jews. The first list is the registration list of vast numbers of Jews who are forced into Krakow. This first list is the gateway to death and destruction of Jewish prisoners. Various lists categorise the Jewish prisoners to identify those who are fit to work and those who are unfit to work. Those names that are found unessential are placed in a different list from those to be evacuated to the gas chambers. The Nazis have a separate list to monitor the movement of Jews and they have a list even for the articles looted from the Jews. Stern whose name is included in the list to Auschwitz is saved by Schindler. An SS official's remark that names of the Jews who board the train are immaterial and tracking the name involves lot of paperwork symbolically conveys how Jews were dehumanized by the Nazis. During the World War II Jews were regarded as vermin and less than humans by Germans.

The systematic way of functioning through lists of the Nazi war machine conveys that they are organized in their efforts to eliminate Jews from Europe, thus reducing the Jews to subhuman levels. By repeatedly pointing out the German's style of execution of duties through lists, Kenneally asserts the Nazi's dominating attitude over Jews and also suggests that this impersonal petty bureaucracy assists in retaining the popular notion of German "civilization". Symbolically the "list" stands for dehumanization. Finally Schindler also prepares a list to draw names to save "his Jews" by relocating them to Brinnlitz factory camp, which shows that Schindler also meticulously follows the rules of Germans though he does not approve of it. Lists also throw light on the character and attitudes of people. Symche Spira, the Jewish police and other OD members have a separate "list" of ghetto dwellers who are unsatisfactory, to be sent to the SS officials, thus aiding the Nazis in annihilating their own brethren. Marcel Goldberg, another Jew and a personal clerk who is in charge of various lists accepts bribes to include the names of the Jews in their favourable list including Schindler's List and also maintains the secrecy of the names of those Jews who are supposed to be sent to Schindler's factory. Raimund Tisch who respects the individuality of people finds it difficult to remember the names of the people. People conveniently hide behind the list in the name of administrative procedures in order to escape from recognizing the crimes they might get involved in. The Nazi's "list" stands for evil and death whereas Schindler's "list" stands for good and life. Ironically the final list is the list of the signatures of all the saved Jews given to Schindler, vouching the goodness of Schindler and also to save him from being caught by the Allied soldiers. Thus the saved Jews turn savior.

- "The list is an absolute good. The list is life. All around its cramped margins lies the gulf." (Keneally 290)

14.8 POWER

Various kinds of Power are exhibited through different kinds of characters. The entire novel deals with the 'power' to assert who will survive. The willpower of one person Schindler to save the entire Jewish race in Germany underlies the entire novel. The ring that is gifted to him by the survivors and also the stones that are placed on his tomb as a mark of respect and gratitude resonate this theme. He also represents the power to command respect. Stern who is resilient, has

got the power to inspire Schindler's conscience to save Jews. His constant interaction and close work with Schindler has the power to turn the pleasure seeking, greedy Schindler into a saviour of Jews. Amon Goethe who always imagines himself as an emperor has got the power to kill. He takes pride in talking about his ability to kill thereby instilling fear in the minds of people. Schindler tells Goethe that true power does not come from the ability to kill, but in the willpower not to do so. Finally Goethe too after listening to Schindler pardons a Jewish boy. Nazis abuse power in order to eliminate Jews whom the Germans think of as inferior and in order to ensure that only the powerful superiors should rule. The novel also raises a question whether having power means earning respect or forcing others to obey and be subservient. The novel sends a message that power can be constructively used to help humanity instead of for selfish gains.

14.9 TRAINS

Trains form one of the recurring motifs in this Holocaust novel. Jews are stuffed inside freight trains which carry them to concentration camps. A train carries the first batch of Jews to Krakow and they are registered on the platform. As the Jews board the cattle cars, they have been instructed to leave their belongings on a platform which they are assured, will be transported in another train. But that never happens. Those belongings are carried to another room where they are categorized. The room is dumped with huge piles of personal belongings of the Jews on the train. Jewellers are forced to estimate the values of gold, silver and other valuable metals which are forcibly taken away from the Jews. The piles represent the millions of victims who have lost their lives in the holocaust. Stern is also saved from the crowded train which is bound for Auschwitz, leaving behind other Jews who are not rescued. In one of the scenes in the novel, Schindler requests Goethe to spray water on these cars which carry the Jews on a hot day to death camps. Goethe's refusal to do so citing that would give the Jews false hopes clearly indicates that the Jews are travelling towards death. The train which transports Schindlerjuden to Schindler's new factory in Czechoslovakia symbolises hope and life as the Jews are being taken to a safe haven. The train which carries only women to Schindler's camp is diverted to Auschwitz, Schindler interrupts the journey and saves the women from the jaws of death. As these women board the train of life, trains which are bound for concentration camps reach the place which symbolically suggests that death is never ending.

14.10 DEATH

Death and Fear of death that haunt the Jews pervade the novel. Death is shown through executions and gunshots again and again. The one-armed man who thanks Schindler for offering him a job is shot the next day by an SS Officer, when he is shoveling the snow. The blood that oozes from his head spreads on the snow and stains it. The woman Engineer who points out the fatal construction error is also executed by Goethe and the blood that flows from her head darkens the surrounding snow. In another instance when Goethe attempts several times to execute a rabbi in a kneeling position in a Plaszow labour camp, the gun jams and the rabbi is freed, suggesting the uncertainty that surrounds the lives of Schindlerjuden. Actually the blood that pours from the bodies of the victims metaphorically and symbolically denotes the lifeblood of the Jewish race.

Check your progress 2

- 1) Write short notes on the symbols and images used in *Schindler's Ark*.
- 2) What is the significance of “lists” in *Schindler's Ark*?

14.11 LET US SUM UP

Keneally uses these symbols and images to encourage the readers to arrive at their own readings about the situations depicted in the novel. He also combines “story telling” (where the readers are expected to uncover the layers of meanings) and the technique of ‘History Telling’ (which drives home the point that all the events described in this novel are true and that the characters are real people). Both these techniques complement each other. *Schindler's Ark* in its chilling portrayal of inhumanity, demonstrates through Schindler’s altruism that humans can achieve true empathy for fellow humans. One of Schindler’s Jews removes his gold dental work so that it can be melted and moulded as a ring for Schindler. A profound and meaningful verse from the *Talmud* is inscribed on the ring: “He who saves a single life saves the world entire.”

14.12 GLOSSARY

Altruism - Selflessness
Oblivious – Unaware
Resonate – reverberate

14.13 UNIT END QUESTIONS:

1. Explain how Keneally combines “story telling” with “history telling” in *Schindler's Ark* to create a compelling narrative of the Holocaust.
2. How does Keneally examine the complex nature of righteousness and virtue in *Schindler's Ark* through the character Oskar Schindler?