

## **BBA – Semester II – Zeitgeist – Reading on Contemporary Culture**

### **Module 3: GENDER**

#### **LESSON- 2**

#### **THE STORY OF AN HOUR by KATE CHOPIN**

The story is written by an American author, Kate Chopin. It was published in the year 1894.

The main themes are:

#### **1. ‘The forbidden joy of independence’**

In ‘the story of an hour’ independence is presented as a forbidden pleasure that can be imagined only privately. When Lousie hears from Josephine and Richard about the death of her husband Brently, she reacts with obvious grief and her reaction is perhaps more violent than any other woman. Though the reaction was inappropriate, Lousie slowly begins to realize that she is now an independent woman, which excites her. Realizing that, it is just a personal feeling, she tries to resist the excitement and ‘to beat it with her will’. Such resistance reveals how forbidden this excitement really is. Finally when she does acknowledge the joy of the excitement, she is possessed by it and abandons herself to it and the word ‘free’ escapes her lips.

Country life will not offer refuge to this kind of joy and the rest of the society will never accept it or understand it. Extreme circumstances have given Lousie a taste of this forbidden fruit, and her thoughts are in turn extreme. She sees her life as being absolutely hers and her new independence as the core of her being. Overwhelmed by this, Lousie turns to prayer, hoping to enjoy this feeling for a long time. When unexpectedly Brently returns, she unwillingly takes away her ‘freedom’. The forbidden joy disappears as quickly as it came but the taste of it was enough to kill her.

## **2. 'The inherent oppressiveness of marriage':**

Chopin suggests that all marriages, even the kindest ones are inherently oppressive. Lousie who readily admits that her husband was kind and loving, is happy to know about his death. Her reaction does not suggest any malice and Lousie knows that she will cry at Brently's funeral. However despite the love between the husband and wife, Lousie views Brently's death as a release from oppression. Marriages in general, stifles both men and women. Through Lousie's thoughts the inherent oppressiveness of all marriages and the freedom it takes away are described in the story.

### **LESSON-3**

#### **WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE A TRANSGENDER**

**-Lee Mokobe**

Transgenders have the problem of choosing between to be a male or a female. They are part of our society, which do not accept them like a normal human being.

A gender refers to a person's internal sense of being a male or a female or being something else. It is usually identified at a person's birth based on the physical organs.

Transgenders face many challenges in the world. The poem is about a child who is a transgender.

Transgenders have the freedom to choose to be a male or a female. The child in the poem decides to be a boy and lives his life with courage. The world always mocks at him but the boy realizes that he is what he is. He states that God has finally listened to his prayers and made him understand that he is perfectly created the way he is.

## **MODULE: 4 - HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **1. Refugee Blues**

**By A H Auden**

This poem is about the plight of Jewish refugees in the 1930's

When the poem was written in 1939, millions of Jews were trying to flee from Nazi Germany. The speaker thought that the country was 'fair', just and a safe place for the Jews to live. It brings about the abuse of human rights and the suffering of all refugees. The poem raises broader questions about isolation, loneliness, and exile. It depicts the trauma and pain of being forced to leave home—and of being unable to find a place of safety and security in a violent and uncertain world.

The poem deals with what is spoken by a Jewish refugee living in New York, who is addressing his lover and reflecting on the fact that he and many other refugees are in a similar position – as they are not welcomed in the city. 'Fleeing from here to New York, we were told if we didn't have a passport we were "officially dead", even though we are very much alive.

I went to a committee to get a job, and they asked me to sit down, but later they turned me down for the job and told me to come back next year. But, in the meantime how are we going to survive? At a public meeting someone argued against letting refugees like us into the country, because according to him we will steal the native New Yorkers' work and food.

'I heard the thunder rumbling and it put me in the mind of Adolf Hitler calling for Jews like us to be killed. I looked around and saw the European dogs and cats, which have been allowed into America to live; but German Jews like us are not allowed to come here. Even the fishes in the nearby harbour and the birds singing on the trees seem to be freer than us. I dreamed and saw a vast apartment building with a thousand floors, a thousand windows and a thousand doors – yet there wasn't any room for us. I stood in the snow and saw ten thousand soldiers marching around, looking for illegal refugees like us.' This is a powerful poem, though not well-known as many of Auden's other poems written when Europe and America was on the brink of another world war. Those written following the

outbreak of the war, is much more famous, in spite of the fact that – or perhaps precisely because – Auden himself later sought to suppress it. (It's important to keep in mind the musical title of the poem and the fact that it was originally grouped with other poems to form a suite titled 'Ten Songs': this is poetry, but poetry that is lyrical in the truest sense, demanding to be sung).

The bitter irony of the Jewish speaker's position – a refugee to New York, home of the Statue of Liberty with its inscription proclaiming America the 'Mother of Exiles' is neatly captured by Auden in his poem 'Refugee Blues', through the ambiguous words and phrases like 'Went to a committee; they offered me a chair' – not a chair as in a position on the committee (we realise the cruel twist in the next line - he's to try again for that next year, but right now, forget it), but merely a seat at the table where they will explain to him that they cannot offer him a job (the other kind of 'chair').

The word 'souls' in the opening line of the poem strikes us at first as synonymous with 'people' (New York has, let's assume, ten million inhabitants, the speaker surmises), but 'souls' will take on an added poignancy when we realise that there are many in the world – not just Hitler (seeking to exterminate the 'German Jews' such as the speaker and his lover), but many 'ordinary' inhabitants of the city – who would vehemently deny the idea that Jewish people like him even have 'souls'.

## **2. Amnesty**

### **Nadine Gordimer**

This story is a heart touching one, written by Gordimer. It takes place in South Africa during the time of apartheid. The story is about a woman whose fiancé is imprisoned on Robben Island because of his political beliefs. At the end of the story, the woman is waiting for her fiancé's return and for a better life in South Africa.

Nadine Gordimer who was a white, was an early and active member of the African national congress, but she did not craft political manifestoes. Her role as an author, she said, was simply to 'write in my own way as honestly as I can and go as deeply as I can in to the life around me'.

### **3. The Outcaste:**

#### **Sharan Kumar Limbale**

Sharan Kumar Limbale is an Indian writer, who writes in Marathi language. He has written more than forty books.

Providing rare insights on the question on identity, 'The Outcaste' is an emotionally violent autobiography of a half caste growing up in the Mahar community. About a century back, the Indian society had the darker side of casteism. This autobiography gives a true and realistic picture of it.

The playtime narration of the children in the story reveals the extreme form of untouchability that prevailed in India. The Mahar boys played touch and go, while the others played Kabbadi. In the past the caste of an individual determined everything about life, including the clothes one will wear, the person one will marry, the food one will eat etc. Limbale describes him as an outcaste and the autobiography brings out the real cross section of life in ancient India.

Even though untouchability and casteism are prohibited by law, it still exists in the minds of the people.

### **4. Chemical Happiness and the Meaning of Life.**

#### **Yuval Noah Harari**

Human happiness is not determined by external parameters like income, social relations or political rights. It is instead determined by complex systems of nerves, neurons and various biochemical substances like serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin.

This theory was put forward by an Israeli historian from Jerusalem. He emphasises that happiness is not the result of winning a lottery, getting a promotion, or events of such sort.

Here the author Yuval Harari suggests a scale which varies from one to ten. Some people are born with cheerful biochemical system that allows their mood from six to ten, stabilizing with time as eight. Such persons will always be happy

irrespective of the external conditions. Whereas a person who gets the stabilising point as five (scale three to seven) are rarely happy. Whatever good conditions prevail, the person will not be satisfied. To support his theory, Harari gives the examples of French revolution and Huxley's perception of happiness.

According to Daniel Kahneman, though the counting moments of joy and the moments of dullness in bringing up a child turns out to be an unpleasant affair, yet most parents affirm that their children are their main source of happiness.