UNIT : 8

SONNET AND TYPES OF SONNET-2

(Shakespearean sonnet 116, "How do I love thee" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "On his Blindness" by John Milton

:: STRUCTURE ::

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8.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall discuss:

- The concept and definition of sonnet as a form of lyrical poetry
- Types of sonnet
- How poets have used different types of sonnet as an effective medium for their poetic expressions

On completing the unit, you shall be able to-

- Recognize and appreciate form of sonnet as type of lyrical poetry
- Distinguish between different types of sonnets
- Appreciate the use of sonnet as a form of lyrical poetry by poets

8.1 INTRODUCTION

You are familiar with many literary forms like novel, play or a poem. A sonnet is a specific form of poetry in English. It is a prominent form of lyrical poetry.

Do you know what lyrical poetry is? Any fairly short poem expressing the personal mood, feeling or meditation of a single speaker is called a lyric or lyrical poetry. In ancient Greece, a lyric was a song to be sung with the 1.lyre. In present time, a lyric often suggests a songlike quality in the poems. Lyrics may be composed in almost any 2.meter and on almost every subject. The most common emotions presented in a lyric are - love and grief. The major forms of lyrics are sonnet, 3.ode, 4.elegy, 5.haiku, and the more personal kinds of 6.hymn.

1. Lyre: A stringed musical instrument used in ancient Greece
2. Meter: It is a unit of rhythm in poetry, the pattern of the beats. It is also called a foot. Each foot has a certain number of syllables in it, usually two or three syllables. The type of meter is decided by the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a foot.
3. Hymn: a song of praise to God
4. Ode: a lyric poem usually marked by exaltation of feeling and style, varying length of line, and complexity of stanza forms
5. Elegy: a song or poem expressing sorrow or lamentation especially for one who is dead
6. Haiku: an unrhymed verse form of Japanese origin having three lines containing usually five, seven, and five syllables respectively

8.2 CONCEPT AND ORIGIN OF SONNET

The word *sonnet* is derived from the Italian word "sonetto" which means a "little song" or small lyric. This form originated in Italy in early 13th century. It is said that it is invented by Giacomo da Lentini, head of the Sicilian School under Emperor Frederick II. The sonnet was established by Petrarch in the 14th century as a major form of love poetry. This form of poetry was accepted and explored in Spain, France and England in the 16th century and in Germany in the 17th century. The sonnet form is widely used by the poets of different time.

Initially, the standard subject-matter of early sonnets was the hopes and pain of an adoring male lover but in the 17th century John Donne used sonnet for religious themes and Milton for political themes. The form was largely neglected by the poets in the 18th century. But it was revived in the 19th century by great English poets like Wordsworth, Keats, and Baudelaire and it is widely used in contemporary time.

Some poets have written linked series of sonnets, known as sonnet sequences or sonnet cycles such as Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595), andakespeare's *Sonnets* (1609), Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) and W. H. Auden's 'In Time of War' (1939). In this a series of sonnets are linked together by exploring various aspects of relationship between lovers.

- **Check Your Progress 1**

1. What is a 'Lyre'?

_____

_____

_____

2. Which are the most usual feelings conveyed by lyrical poetry?

_____

_____

_____

3. Write two examples of sonnet sequence.

_____

_____

_____

8.3 WHAT IS A SONNET?

As said earlier, sonnet is a type of lyrical poetry. It has a specific format. It has 14 lines, and is written in iambic pentameter. Each line has 10

syllables. It has a definite rhyme scheme, and *a Volta, or* a specific turn. The form of a sonnet is explained in detail in 1.3.1.

The structure of a typical Italian sonnet consists of two parts that together put forward a solid form of argument. First, the octave (a stanza of eight lines), forms the "proposition", which depicts a problem or question followed by a sestet (a stanza of six lines) or two tercets (a stanza of three lines), which proposes a "resolution". For the most part, the ninth line begins with the "turn", or "volta", which indicates the shift from proposition to resolution. The turn or volta is a change in thought which solves the issue placed in the opening of the poem or defines the theme or central idea of the sonnet.

- **Check Your Progress 2**

In a poem, *stanzas* are visual groupings of lines. Think and fill the gaps in the given sentences:

1. A group of two lines is called **a *couplet.***
2. A three line stanza is called ***a tercet.***
3. A four line stanza is a _____ and a five line stanza is a *quintet*.
4. Two other common lengths are a _____*of* six lines; and an _____*of* eight lines.

8.3.1 Form: As said earlier, most of the sonnets are written in Iambic Pentameter. What is Iambic Pentameter? To understand this, first we need to understand what is meter. It is the main component of any kind of poetry. A meter is the regular pattern of strong and weak stress (emphasis) in lines of a poem.

Now what is a syllable? It is a unit of pronunciation having one vowel sound, with or without surrounding consonants, forming the whole or a part of a word; for example, there are two syllables in ‘water’ and one syllable in ‘boy’. What is a stressed syllable? We stress or emphasize a part of word (syllable) by speaking it with more force or changing the pitch. It is the syllable that is emphasized part of the word by way of changing the pitch. The unstressed syllable is not emphasized part of the word.

A sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines, written in iambic pentameter. A line of a poem has many stressed and unstressed syllables. A simple grouping of two or three syllables - some stressed, some unstressed, is called a foot. An iambic foot has two syllables- an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Pentameter means there are five feet in the line. "Iambic Pentameter," then, means a line of ten syllables, which alternates unstressed and stressed syllables according to the iambic rhythm. Most of the sonnets have Iambic Pentameter as its form.

An example of an iamb would be ‘good BYE’. In its pure iambic form, the pentameter shows a regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, as in this line by Percy *Bysshe* Shelley:
Shall I / com PARE/ thee TO / a SUM / mer's DAY?
Thou ART / more LOVE / ly AND / more TEM / per ATE (Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare)
For understanding purpose, stressed syllabus is written in capital letters and unstressed syllable is written in small letters. A pair of two syllables is separated with the help of (/).

- **Check Your Progress 3**

Write the given lines as shown in the above examples which have division of five pairs of syllables. Identify stressed syllable and write in capital.
If winter comes, can spring be far behind?’

_____

_____

_____

8.3.2 Rhyme scheme: The rhyme scheme of a sonnet refers to the pattern formed by the rhyming words at the end of each line. Each end-rhyme is assigned a letter, and the fourteen letters assigned to the sonnet describe the rhyme scheme. Different kinds of sonnets have different rhyme schemes.
Rhyme schemes may follow a fixed pattern, as in the sonnet and several other forms or they may be arranged freely according to the poet's requirements.
To understand the form of a sonnet and rhyme scheme better, have a look at Sonnet 130 by William Shakespeare given below:
My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun; **A**
Coral is far more red than her lips’ red; **B**
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun; **A**
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head**. B**
I have seen roses damasked, red and white, **C**
But no such roses see I in her cheeks; **D**
And in some perfumes is there more delight **C**
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks. **D**
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know **E**
That music hath a far more pleasing sound; **F**
I grant I never saw a goddess go; **F**
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground**. F**

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare **G**
As any she belied with false compare. **G**

1. This sonnet is 14 lines long. It is written in iambic pentameter.
2. This sonnet is the best example of the turn or 'volta' in the last two lines where the speaker changes the tone completely.
3. The first twelve lines rhyme in alternating pairs. To show how this works, we can assign a letter to each rhyme:
   My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; **A**
   Coral is far more red than her lips' red; **B**
   If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun; **A**
   If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head. **B**
   So, for the whole poem, the rhyme scheme would be ababcdcdefefgg.
4. A Shakespearean sonnet always ends with two rhyming lines.

8.4 TYPES OF SONNET

(1) **The Italian sonnet**: It is also called the Petrarchan sonnet. It comprises of an 8-line 'octave' of two quatrains having the rhyme scheme abbaabba. It is followed by a 6-line 'sestet' usually rhymed cdecde or cdcdcd. The transition from octave to sestet is usually marked with a 'turn' or volta in the argument or mood of the poem. The Italian sonnet has remained the most widely used in English and other languages. The main exponents of Italian sonnet in English were Milton, Wordworth, Christina Rossetti and D. G. Rossetti.

(2)**The English sonnet**: It is also called the Shakespearean sonnet as Shakespeare was its leading practitioner. It comprises of three quatrains and a final couplet, rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg*.
An important variant of this is **the Spenserian sonnet** (introduced by the Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser), which links the three quatrains by rhyme, in the sequence *abab bcbc cdcd ee*. In both the forms, the 'turn' comes with the final couplet.

- **Check Your Progress 4**

Fill the relevant details about form of a sonnet in the given table:

	Lines	**Rhyme scheme**	**Division of Stanza**	**Volta Line**	**Chief Exponents**
The Italian sonnet					
The English sonnet					
the Spenserian sonnet					

8.5 USE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Using figurative language is an effective way of communicating an abstract or complex idea. It is used to compare one idea to a second idea to make the first idea easier to visualize. It also is used to link two ideas to influence an audience to see a connection even if one does not actually exist. Writers of prose and poetry use figurative language to draw out emotion or help readers form mental images.

Figurative language takes many different forms in linguistics and literature. A simile is a comparison of two things using the words "like" or "as." A metaphor is a more direct comparison of two things. Personification imparts animate qualities to an inanimate object, as in the phrase, "the laughing brook." Periphrasis uses a descriptive phrase in place of a simple noun.

8.6 FUNCTION OF SONNET

The sonnet has become popular among different poets because it has a great adaptability to different purposes and requirements of poets of different time and language. It is an ideal setting for a poet to explore strong emotions.

8.7 EXAMPLE 1 TEXT APPRECIATION

Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds **(A)**
Admit impediments. Love is not love **(B)**
Which alters when it alteration finds, **(A)**
Or bends with the remover to remove: **(B)**
O no; it is an ever-fixed mark, **(C)**
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken**;(D)**
It is the star to every wandering bark, **(C)**
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken. **(D)**
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks **(E)**
Within his bending sickle's compass come; **(F)**
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, **(E)**
But bears it out even to the edge of doom**.(F)**
If this be error and upon me proved, **(G)**
I never writ, nor no man ever loved. **(G)**

8.7.1About Sonnet:

Sonnet 116 is generally considered one of the most admirable love poems ever written. The poem is a regular English sonnet of fourteen lines arranged in three quatrains and a concluding couplet.

It is about love in its most ideal form. The first four lines reveal the poet's pleasure in love that is constant and strong, and will not "alter when it alteration finds." Lines five and six say that true love is indeed an "ever-fix'd mark" which will endure any crisis. In lines 7-8, the poet claims that love can be measured to some degree, but it cannot be understood fully. Love's real value cannot be known – it remains a mystery. Lines 9-12 confirm the nature of love that is unshakeable throughout time and remains so "ev'n to the edge of doom", or death. In the final couplet, the poet declares that, if he is wrong about the steady, unmovable nature of love, he must take back all his writings on love, truth, and faith. In addition, if he has judged love inappropriately, no man has ever really loved.

- **Check Your Progress : 5**

Read the sonnet 116 carefully and answer the following questions about it:

Analysis of the Sonnet:

1. The central theme of this Shakespearean sonnet is_____.
2. The type of this sonnet is_____.
3. Division of the stanza: _____
4. The rhyme scheme_____
5. Volta from the line_____.

8.8 EXAMPLE 2 TEXT APPRECIATION

When I Consider How My Light Is Spent (On His Blindness) By John Milton

When I consider how my light is spent**,(A)**
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide**,(B)**
And that one Talent which is death to hide**(B)**
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent**(A)**
To serve therewith my Maker, and present **(A)**
My true account, lest he returning chide; **(B)**
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?" **(B)**

I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent **(A)**
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need**(C)**
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best**(D)**
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state **(E)**
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed **(C)**
And post o'er Land and Ocean without rest**:(D)**
They also serve who only stand and wait."**(E)**

8.8.1: About Sonnet

John Milton's "On His Blindness" is a Petrarchan sonnet. About Sonnet "On His Blindness" refers to the struggles John Milton had after he lost his sight. The speaker of the poem feels he has lost the purpose of his life. Also he cannot work for God anymore and he asks God for guidance as to what he should do. At the end of the poem, he gets the response that God is happiest when people are obedient and do as best as they can.
According to the poet, half of his life or sight or intelligence has been spent in serving humanity, but now he has lost his eyesight and so his other half-life is dark and challenging.

The poet laments over the loss of his eyesight and wonders what this talent means for him now as without eyesight he cannot use it.
In stanza two, the poet talks about is desire to serve his Maker but because of this blindness he cannot do so. He wonders if God still wants to serve Him in spite of the fact that his sight is gone. The poet says that this foolish thought often haunts him. In these lines, the poet says that when such foolish thoughts come into his mind, the patience at once comes to reply that the work of man does not please God, but the 'who best bear his mild yoke' i.e. the one who remains patient and content with what he has is most liked by Him.

God has a huge Kingdom and there are thousands of angels who remain in motion to carry God's order. They never take rest. The poet compares them with those who have talent and use it to serve God. On the other hand, there are some other angels also who serve Him just by standing and waiting before God. According to him, their service is equally valuable to God as that of the first category angels. The poet compares himself with the later Angels who just keep patience. Thus, in the end, the poet is quite satisfied as he is also serving God just by keeping patience.

- **Check Your Progress : 6**

Read the sonnet 'On His Blindness' carefully and answer the following questions about it:

Analysis of the Sonnet:

1. The central theme of sonnet is_____.
2. The type of this sonnet is_____
3. Division of the stanza: _____
4. The rhyme scheme_____
5. Volta from the line_____

8.9 EXAMPLE 3 TEXT APPRECIATION

"How do I Love Thee" by Elizabeth Barret Browning"

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. **(A)**
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height **(B)**
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight **(B)**
For the ends of Being an ideal Grace**. (A)**
I love thee to the level of every day's **(A)**
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight. **(B)**
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right; **(B)**
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise. **(A)**
I love with a passion put to use **(C)**
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith. **(D)**
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose **(C)**
With my lost saints, I love thee with the breath, **(D)**
Smiles, tears, of all my life! and, if God choose, **(C)**
I shall but love thee better after death. **(D)**

8.9.1 About Sonnet

The first line of this sonnet is remarkable. It is in form of a question asked in conversational manner. "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways." Here, the poet has challenged herself to compile reasons for her love. **The second, third and fourth lines** suggest that her love is all encompassing. She feels that her even if her existence and God's divine help - *Grace* -will end, her love will sustain.

In the fifth line, the poetess plainly says to the reader that, be it day or night, her love fills those quiet moments, those daily silences that occur between two people living together. Her love is unconditional and free. She doesn't want any thanks for this freely given love; it is a humble kind of love.

The sestet starts at line nine. The speaker now looks to the past and compares her new found passions with those of the old grief. Turning to religious feelings **in line eleven**, the speaker refers to her lost love for the saints. She suggests that this love has now returned and will be given to her husband. This returned love is her very breath. And, **in the final line,** if God grants it, she'll carry on loving her husband even more after she dies.So her love will go on and on, beyond the grave, gaining strength.

- **Check Your Progress : 7**

Read the sonnet "How Do I Love Thee' carefully and answer the following questions about it:

Analysis of the Sonnet:

1. The central theme of sonnet is_____.
2. The type of this sonnet is_____
3. Division of the stanza: _____.
4. The rhyme scheme_____.
5. Volta from the line_____.

8.10 LET'S SUM UP

The sonnet is a form of lyrical poetry used extensively by poets of various era. It has a specific format. In this unit, we explored the form, themes, types, meter and rhyme scheme of a sonnet. We also studied three examples of sonnets by its very successful exponents. Web and print resources for further reading are suggested below:

8.11 BOOKS SUGGESTED

1. Mabillard, Amanda. *Shakespearean Sonnet Basics: Iambic Pentameter and the English Sonnet Style*. *Shakespeare Online*. 30 Aug. 2000. < http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sonnets/sonnetstyle.html >.
2. Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphors to Idioms: Sam Glucksberg
3. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms. New York: Oxford UP, 1990.
4. Abrams, M H, and Geoffrey G. Harpham. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Boston, Mass: Thomson Wadsworth, 1999. Print.

❖ **Answers**

Check Your Progress 1.

1. A lyre is a musical instrument like Indian Veena used in ancient Greece to accompany singing of songs.
2. The most usual feelings conveyed by lyrical poetry are love and grief.
3. Examples of sonnet sequence are: Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* and Spenser's *Amoretti*

Check Your Progress 2

3. A four line stanza is a **quatrain** and a five line stanza is a *quintet*.

4. Two other common lengths are *a **Sestet** of six* lines; and an **Octave** of eight lines.

- **Check Your Progress : 3**

Write the given lines as shown in the above examples which have division of five pairs of syllables. Identify stressed syllable and write in capital.

If WINter COMES, can SPRING be FAR beHIND?

- **Check Your Progress : 4**

	Lines	**Rhyme scheme**	**Division of Stanza**	**Volta Line**	**Chief Exponent**
The Italian sonnet	**14**	*Abbaabba cdecde or cdcdcd*	8-line 'octave'+ 6-line sestet	**In ninth line**	**Petrarch**
The English sonnet	**14**	*abab cdcd efef gg.*	three quatrains and a final couplet	with the final couplet	**Shakespeare**
the Spenserian sonnet	**14**	*Ababbcbccdcdee*	three quatrains and a final couplet	with the final couplet	**Spenser**

Check Your Progress : 5

Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare

Read the sonnet carefully and answer the following questions about it:

Analysis of the Sonnet:

1. The central theme of sonnet is nature of true love.
2. The type of this sonnet is Shakespearean.

3. Division of the stanza: Three quatrains and a couplet.
4. The rhyme scheme is ababcdcdefefgg.
5. Volta from the line thirteen.

- **Check Your Progress : 6**

When I Consider How My Light Is Spent (On His Blindness) By John Milton

Read the sonnet carefully and answer the following questions about it:
Analysis of the Sonnet:

1. The central theme of sonnet is poet's blindness and his faith in God.
2. The type of this sonnet is Petrarchan.
3. Division of the stanza: An actave and a sestet
4. The rhyme scheme: abba abba cde cde
5. Volta from the ninth line.

- **Check Your Progress : 7**

"How do I Love Thee" by Elizabeth Barret Browning"

Read the sonnet carefully and answer the following questions about it:

Analysis of the Sonnet:

1. The central theme of sonnet is love.
2. The type of this sonnet is Petrarchan.
3. Division of the stanza: An actave and a sestet
4. The rhyme scheme: abbaabba cdecde
5. Volta from the ninth line.