
UNIT 2 MARGARET LAURENCE’S: “MY FINAL HOUR”

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall read and discuss excerpts from a speech delivered by Margaret Laurence at Trent University. After a careful reading of this unit, you should be able to:

- outline the life and works of Margaret Laurence;
- understand a speech as a form of literary expression;
- consider the commitment of Laurence to the cause of nuclear disarmament; and
- explain the main features of Laurence’s speech.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall acquaint you with a spoken form of non-fictional prose — a speech. For this, we have selected a speech by Margaret Laurence, “My Final Hour”, given at Trent University. You will be reading excerpts from this speech in this unit.

History is witness to many a powerful speech made by eminent persons like Swami Vivekananda, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Winston Churchill, Subhas Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, to name just a few, that have marked a turning point in the life of people and nations of the world. For instance, Swami Vivekananda won recognition abroad for India and Vedantism with his magnetic personality together with the thought-provoking address he gave at Chicago in September 1893, during the World Parliament of Religions, in which he advocated tolerance and universal acceptance and condemned bigotry and fanaticism. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the most famous black civil rights

leader, changed the way America treated its black citizens with his most stirring and fiery extempore speech 'I Have A Dream'. Delivered in 1963 to more than 2,50,000 people in Washington, this speech marked a turning point in American history. Following the speech, the cause of the blacks occupied centre stage, with 'I Have A Dream' as the national mantra, till the 1964 Civil Rights Act made racial discrimination illegal. One still remembers that unforgettable and landmark speech 'Tryst With Destiny' made by Jawaharlal Nehru to the Constituent Assembly, at the midnight hour of Indian independence, August 14, 1947, in which he defined and captured the essence of the triumphant culmination of years of freedom struggle against the British Empire in India.

2.2 WHAT IS A SPEECH?

A speech is a "continuous spoken utterance" or a "spoken communication or expression of thought in prose" addressed to an audience. It presents the personal viewpoint of the speaker in a convincing manner, on a subject that is of universal importance. A speech can be spoken from a written draft or be delivered extempore (given on the spur of the moment; without prior preparation; an extempore speech is one that is delivered without the help of any text or notes).

Speeches are generally associated with politicians. But not all political speeches have literary merit. Usually, a political speech becomes a mere vote-catching rhetoric (a showy and declamatory expression), that is designed to elicit superficial public applause. On a slightly lesser scale, it becomes an oration rather than a speech. Is there a difference between an oration and a speech? Only very slight as both terms are generally treated as having interchangeable meanings. But, since we are analyzing a speech as a form of literary expression, we must point out the difference between an oration and a speech, especially with regard to their aim, content and presentation.

Oratory is the art of public speaking. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.), a great Roman orator who captivated his audience with his stately oration, wrote a textbook on oratory, *Treatise de Gratore*, in which he laid down the laws of rhetoric. The aim of the orator is to sway multitudes and decide dynastic fortunes, electoral issues, and fates of national and international issues. What differentiates an oration from a speech is the presentation or style. The content of an orator is not as important as its presentation. In other words, oratory is more a matter of style than of substance; more an issue of manner than of matter; less a question of content (subject matter) and more of diction (choice of words). The same ideas may occur to many, but an orator dresses them well, thereby capturing the attention and admiration of the listeners. When we call someone a good orator, it is not because we like the content of his or her speech but because of the manner in which the speech is delivered. Thus, an oration is a skilful speech intended to create an impression, and relies on slogans, catchphrases, epigrams, and, in its extreme form, on rhetorical devices like a high flown and pompous language and a great deal of theatricality. Most, not all, political speeches are rhetorical orations with an inflated, over-decorated and insincere style. In fact, it would not be wrong to call them harangues (loud, pompous and wordy addresses made to a multitude). Some modern-day religious discourses are in the nature of rhetorical orations.

A fine speech, on the other hand, is not delivered with the aim to excite or rouse the audience to tumultuous applause. Rather, it is made to inspire and persuade the hearers to think along the lines the speaker wishes them to. Unlike in an oration, it is the content in a speech that is of primary importance and which lends force to it. A power-packed speech is one that is charged with the sturdy conviction the speaker has in his or her beliefs. This makes his/her speech persuasive and convincing. It comes direct from the heart of the speaker and goes, just as direct, into the hearts and minds of the listeners, bringing a radical change in their way of thinking.

Both a powerful content and the manner of speaking imbue a speech with literary merit. By manner is meant style or presentation of the subject matter. A judicious and effective use of language and literary devices adds literary value to a speech. Good speakers have a way with words. They are persons of eloquence, that is, they know the art of expressing their strong emotion in correct, appropriate, expressive and fluent language. Since a speech is vocal, voice modulation and intonation (the rise and fall in pitch in the voice) in its delivery are also desirable. Literary devices like humour, pathos, irony, metaphorical expressions, forceful repetitions etc. give additional flavour to a speech.

In a nutshell, an orator speaks for effect, banking on a skilful use of language, while a fine speaker is one who reasons justly and expresses himself/herself elegantly upon a subject he/she passionately believes in. Margaret Laurence's "My Final Hour" is a good example of a fine speech.

2.3 MARGARET LAURENCE: LIFE AND WORKS

Margaret Laurence (1926-1987) is universally acclaimed as one of the most compelling voices of Canadian Literature. Although firmly rooted in the, Canadian soil, her stories and novels touch the psyche of all developing nations.

Born on July 18, 1926, in Neepawa, Manitoba, as Margaret Wemyss, she began writing at the age of seven, though she took herself seriously as a writer only when she was twenty-three. In 1948, Margaret married a civil engineer, Jack Laurence, with whom she first proceeded, to England and then to Somaliland in East Africa, where they lived for two years. Later the Laurences lived in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) for five years. This seven- year sojourn in Africa, where she had a first-hand experience of the stunting effects that colonization can have over the natives and their cultures, shaped her socio-political commitment as a writer. Here she also saw the bondage and subjection of women and realized their position to be that of victims of a "male-centric society" a theme she took up in her African novels and later elaborated in the Canadian novels. In 1957, the Laurences moved to Vancouver. In 1962, Margaret separated from her husband and settled in England where she wrote four out of her five Canadian novels. She finally went back to Canada where she was honoured with various awards and citations for her work. In 1986, she was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, and, in 1987, unable to bear her illness, she took an overdose of sleeping tablets and ended her life.

A prolific writer, Laurence has seven novels to her credit. *This Side Jordan* (1969) and *The Tomorrow Tamer* (1963) constitute her African novels and are set in Ghana. *The Stone Angel* (1964) is the first of Laurence's Canadian novels and

tells the story of ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley and her life-long journey towards self-understanding; *A Jest of God* (1966) tells the story of Rachel Cameron, a woman struggling to come to terms with herself and her world; *The Fire Dwellers* (1969) explores the dilemmas of personal identity of the protagonist Stacey MacAindra; *A Bird in the House* (1970) is a set of eight interconnected stories that constitute the “fictional autobiography” of Laurence; *The Diviners* (1974) is the last of the Canadian series and is a powerful story of an independent woman, Morag Gunn, who refuses to abandon her search for love.

In addition to the novels, Laurence has also written four books for children. Her autobiography *The Prophet's Camel Bell* was written in 1963 and a book of translations *A Tree for Poverty: Somali Poetry and Prose* in 1954. A large number of her essays, articles, interviews and speeches have been published in various anthologies, the more prominent ones being *Long Drums and Cannons* (1968) and *Heart of a Stranger* (1976). Her memoir *Dance on the Earth* was published posthumously in 1989.

Check Your Progress 1

i) What is Margaret Laurence’s nationality?

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ii) Name any two novels of Laurence that are set in Canada.

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iii) What was the main cause of Laurence’s death?

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iv) Who gave the speech ‘I Have A Dream’?

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2.4 LAURENCE'S SOCIAL CONCERNS

Before you begin to read the speech "My Final Hour" by Margaret Laurence, it will help you to know something about her commitment to social causes, especially the one of nuclear disarmament, so that once the background to the speech is clear to you, you can understand the views expressed by Laurence more clearly. "It is my feeling that as we grow older we should become not less radical but more so," said Margaret Laurence in her speech "My Final Hour". Acting on this belief, Laurence turned from fiction-writing to promoting causes like nuclear disarmament, social justice and environmental protection, through didactic lectures, essays and even direct-mail fund raising campaigns during the final decade of her life. Animated by moral and religious urgency, she even lent her prestigious name to other causes.

On all nuclear questions, Laurence's arguments were the simple observations of a moral, sensitive person. She argued that when it comes to a nuclear war, "there are not two sides," as there will neither be any victors nor any vanquished, but only a handful of survivors, that too if the earth survives the nuclear holocaust. To Laurence, the nuclear issue was most important. If the issue of a nuclear attack was not solved, according to her, there was not going to be anyone around to solve any of the other issues like those of starvation, disease, hardships and sufferings that existed in so many parts of the world. To quote her: "For the price of one Trident nuclear submarine, malaria could be wiped off the face of the earth. That gives me pause. These two issues, the old one of the needless suffering in the world, and the building of nuclear weapons, are very closely tied together."

For Laurence, the problem in the nuclear arms race was due to a "crisis in the imagination" on the part of world leaders, particularly the two great super powers, who talked about megadeath without realizing, as Laurence put it, "that these are real live human beings, that they're talking about our children, real people, who in a nuclear holocaust would die horribly... ..". She further pointed out that while writing a novel she always tried to feel that her characters were as real as she was, that their joys and pains were as real as hers, and declared that, "...the inability to feel the reality of others is what enables people to become so brutalized that they are able to torture and murder their fellow human beings."

Laurence emphasized the importance of the ordinary people who could have an effect in halting the nuclear arms race. If people realized that none of them was ordinary, that they all were unique human beings who mattered, they could get together and force their respective governments to bring about global disarmament of nuclear weapons.

As a writer, too, Laurence was committed to solving the nuclear issue, although she found it hard to address the question or tackle it through her articles, talks, lectures etc. As she summed it: "I cannot write novels that preach, but what I can do is to affirm my whole life-view through the characters in my books. I think that in all my writing, a very strong kind of celebration of life itself comes through."

This speech expresses Margaret Laurence's commitment to resolve the nuclear issue. She speaks out against the use of nuclear arms and the expenditure of billions of dollars on their production. She emphatically advocates global nuclear disarmament.

2.5 “MY FINAL HOUR” : EXCERPTS FROM LAURENCE’S SPEECH

Margaret Laurence had a long and close association with Trent University. After her return to Canada in 1969, Margaret finally established permanent residence in Lakefield, a small town ten minutes drive from Trent University. She was awarded an honorary degree by Trent in 1972, and she joined the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Canadian Studies* in 1973. Her association with Trent University deepened in the years that followed. She became Trent’s first Writer-in-Residence in 1974, participating generously in the life of the university, attending tutorials and seminars, delivering formal and informal talks and counselling young writers. Two most splendid examples of Laurence engaging her friends and community in a direct way are her addresses “Books That Mattered to Me” and “My Final Hour” given at Trent University. “My Final Hour”, is an address first delivered to the Trent University Philosophy Society on 29 March 1983, at the Trent Seminary.

2.5.1 Text

“My Final Hour”

This is the first time I have ever had the privilege of addressing graduating students who are candidates to the **ministry** of the church. I must admit to a feeling of nervousness, in standing here and making a statement of personal belief. In accepting this invitation, I requested that a solid **lectern** be provided something I could lean on. I told a friend about this need, and she said, “Margaret, what you really want is not a lectern but a **pulpit**”. Well, I don’t think that is the case at all, but it is true that in speaking to you now, I feel the need of something solid to lean on, physically, but also the need, not just now but every day, of something spiritual to lean on. This **sustaining** force is faith.

First I would like to pass on one piece of advice. If, as you grow older, you feel you are also growing stupider, do not worry. This is normal, and usually occurs around the time when your children, now grown, are discovering the opposite — they now see that you aren’t nearly as stupid as they had believed when they were young teen-agers. Take heart from that. True, your new- found sense of stupidity will no doubt be partly due to the fact that the technology of the age has far outstripped any feeble knowledge of it that you may once have felt you had. It may, however, also be due to the fact that at last you may be learning a little healthy humility — humility in its true and indeed religious sense, which of course has nothing at all to do with self- effacement but with a recognition of your human limitations. I would not claim that I have learned that kind of humility — that struggle to learn which will never cease. But at least I now can accept with some sort of equanimity that many things are beyond my power.

My limitations extend to many fields. I know now that I will never know an enormous amount about music and painting. My knowledge of science is likely to remain minuscule. I will never know as much as I would like to about the planets and their patterned courses. Even in my own area of so- called expertise, I will never read all the novels I would like to read, even though I read great numbers of them yearly. I will also never write a novel with which I am really satisfied.

.... Well, an acceptance of limitations does not mean that one is not constantly trying to extend the boundaries of knowledge and accomplishment. And it certainly does not mean an acceptance of defeat, in whatever fields our endeavours take place. It is my feeling that as we grow older we should become not *less* radical but *more so*. I do not, of course, mean this in any political-party sense, but in a willingness to struggle for those things in which we passionately believe. Social activism and the struggle for social justice are often thought of as natural activities of the young but not of the middle-aged or elderly. In fact, I don't think this was ever true, and certainly in our own era we are seeing an enormous upsurge of people of all ages who are deeply and committedly concerned about the state of our hurting and endangered world.

We are faced now with an emergency that concerns not only our own personal lives, but the lives of all people and all creatures on earth.

Ours is a terrifying world. Injustice, suffering and fear are everywhere to be found. It is difficult to maintain hope in such a world, and yet I believe there is hope. I want to proclaim and affirm my personal belief in the **social gospel**. I speak as a Christian, a woman, a writer, a parent, a member of humanity and a sharer in life itself, a life I believe to be informed and infused with the holy spirit. I do not think it is enough to hope and pray that our own lives and soul will know **grace**, even though my entire life as a writer has been concerned with my belief that all human individuals matter, that no one is ordinary. Our Lord's new commandment speaks very clearly. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

The social gospel is no easier now than it ever was. My generation was the first in human history to come into young adulthood knowing that the human race now had the dreadful ability to destroy all life on earth and possibly the earth itself. Only later did we realize the full extent of the destruction of life, a continuing destruction passed on to the then-unborn children of survivors, but we did know that after **Hiroshima**, August 6th, 1945, the world would never be the same again. The **annihilation** caused by the first atomic bombs was unthinkable, but it had happened. Also, we had **taken it for granted** that through wars, through disasters, yet would the earth endure for ever. It was clear to many of us in 1945 that this was no longer to be taken for granted. We have lived with that thought ever since, and have yet borne our children, lived our lives, done our work. The will to survive and to pass on important caring to future generations is very strong. But today we have to realize that the bombs used at Hiroshima and **Nagasaki** were *small* bombs, compared to today's nuclear weapons.

I ask you to think of the **Holocaust** in Europe, when the **Nazis** murdered a very great part of all the Jewish communities. That horror, surely, must *never* be forgotten. No amount of mourning will *ever* be enough for those millions of children, women and men whose unique and irreplaceable lives were torn away by the group of **dehumanized humans** who had taken power in **Hitler's** Germany. Despite the lessons of Hiroshima and of the Holocaust, today's leaders can speak with apparent **complacency** of "winning a nuclear war" or of "a limited nuclear war", or—in a **jargon** that **demeans** languages itself-of "**overkill**". Such concepts must be called by their true name, and that name is Evil.

Do the world's leaders really suppose that it is all just an act on TV and that the dead would get up again and take on a different role in another TV series so they might be killed again and again? I fear greatly that many of the world's leaders

have so little imagination and so little caring that they cannot visualize at all what a nuclear holocaust would mean. Do they really think that they and their families and executive staffs would survive in deep-buried **bunkers**? And if, by any unlikely chance they did, what kind of a world do they think they would emerge back into?

It is precisely this failure of the imagination on the part of militarists and leaders that is so dangerous today, the failure to visualize what a nuclear holocaust would mean, the apparent inability to imagine the scorched and charred bodies of children ... our children or children of Russian parents or parents anywhere, and to know, by an extension of imagination that *all* children are our children. The jargon of the militarists is a distortion and a twisting of language, of our human ability to communicate. Language itself becomes the vehicle of concealment and deception. Such words as “overkill” and “**megadeath**” do not convey in any sense at all what would really happen — the dead, mutilated, and dying people clogging the ruined cities and towns like so much unvalued discarded rubbish, the suffering humans screaming for help with no medical help available, no water, no relief at all for the unbearable pain of millions of humans except finally the dark relief of death for all. Any shelters that the few might reach would in time turn into tombs. Civil defence plans are a sham. In a nuclear war there would be nowhere to hide, and nowhere except a dead and contaminated world to emerge back into. I profoundly believe that we must proclaim that *this must not happen*.

In Somaliland, many years ago, I saw people, I saw children, who were dying of thirst. I can never forget. Now, in that area, things are much, much worse. The late Dr. Barbara Ward, the great economist, in one of her books put forward the thesis that if the world’s economy could be geared less towards arms production and more towards helping people, it would be possible for anyone in the world to have enough fresh water. Dr. Helen Caldicott says that for one third of the cost of trident nuclear submarine, malaria could be eliminated from the world. In East and in West Africa I saw children who were desperately ill with malaria. My own two children had malaria, as babies, in Ghana. They were fortunate. They had medical help, and had previously been given anti-malaria medication, and they recovered. But I remember as though it were yesterday — and it was in fact nearly thirty years ago — my own sense of helplessness and anguish. How many parents in malarial areas, now as then, mourn their children, killed by a disease that could have been eradicated years ago? One third of the cost of a Trident submarine! Here in Canada, native people in such places as Grassy Narrows are slowly and painfully dying of Minamata disease, caused by mercury poisoning in the fish they must eat for lack of other food. These are only a few, a very few, of the tragic issues in this desperately hurting world. These sufferings and deaths could be halted, could be prevented. Yet world-wide spending on instruments designed only for killing goes on and is escalating.

As a writer, therefore, I feel I have a responsibility. Not to write pamphlets; not to write **didactic** fiction. That would be, in many ways, a betrayal of how I feel about my work. But my responsibility seems to me to be to write as truthfully as I can, about human individuals and their dilemmas, to honour them as living, suffering and sometimes joyful people. My responsibility also must extend into my life as a citizen of my own land and ultimately of the world.

Dr. Helen Caldicott speaks of “psychic numbing” — the temptation to shut out from our minds and hearts all the horrifying things in our world. To think that

the problems may just possibly go away if we ignore them. They will not go away. It is not all happening on TV. It is happening on our earth, and we are the **custodians** of that earth. We cannot afford passivity. We must take on responsibility for our lives and our world and we must be prepared to make our government listen to and hear us. Our aim must be no less than human and caring, justice, and peace...*for all people that on earth do dwell.*

2.5.2 Glossary

ministry	: office of clergymen; the clerical profession.
lectern	: a reading desk from which the lessons are read.
pulpit	: a raised structure in the church for preaching from. Note: since the audience comprised graduating clergymen, her friend thought perhaps Margaret needed a pulpit for giving a religious discourse.
sustaining	: anything that supports or helps to keep things going.
radical	: holding extreme views favouring fundamental changes.
social gospel	: a strongly advocated system, belief in social changes.
grace	: undeserved mercy of God.
Hiroshima	: A Japanese city on which America dropped its first atom bomb on August 6, 1945.
annihilation	: total destruction, reduction to nothing.
taken for granted:	to presuppose; to assume, tacitly or unconsciously.
Nagasaki	: a city in Japan on which a second atom bomb was dropped on August 9, 1945.
Holocaust	: a huge slaughter or destruction of life; here the word beginning with a capital 'H' refers to the state-sponsored systematic killing of millions of Jews by the Nazis under the rule of Hitler during the Second World War (1939-45)
Nazis	: National-Socialist; the National Socialist German Workers Party led by Hitler.
dehumanized	: people who lack human qualities.
humans	
Hitler	: Adolf Hitler (1880-1945) German Nazi dictator.
complacency	: self-satisfaction; unwarranted calmness.
jargon	: artificial or barbarous language, language used by a particular group of speakers.
demeans	: makes mean; degrades.
"overkill"	: the word is explained in the following paragraph.
bunkers	: bomb proof shelters, generally underground.
megadeath	: death of millions.
fantasy	: fanciful imagination or mental image.
didactic	: intended to teach, instructive.
custodians:	caretaker or keeper.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Where did Laurence give two of her most splendid addresses : “Books That Mattered To Me” and “My Final Hour”?

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- ii) Who was Margaret Laurence addressing in her speech “My Final Hour”?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.)

2.6 DISCUSSION

You have just read excerpts from Margaret Laurence’s speech “My Final Hour”. The speech is simple and direct with no ostentation and theatricality to mar its appeal. The ideas expressed follow each other in a connected and systematic manner that leaves no place for ambiguity. We shall now take up a brief summary of the speech to analyse the main points that Laurence is putting across to her audience. At the same time, we shall note Laurence’s deep commitment to social causes.

2.6.1 Summary

At the outset, Laurence admits to being nervous in presenting her personal belief before would-be clergymen graduating from Trent University. She feels the need to have a physical prop to lean on. At the same time, she feels she needs a spiritual prop i.e. a strong **faith** that will sustain her.

In the next paragraph Laurence suggests -that as we grow old we should not feel inhibited by our limitations or accept defeat in our endeavours, but we should become more radical and struggle for things we passionately believe in. She feels happy to see that the old and the young alike are feeling concerned about the “state of our hurting and endangered world” and are rising to save it. This quite naturally leads Laurence to list the dangers being faced by the world today, namely, injustice, suffering and fear. Despite these dangers, she feels there is still hope for mankind. She affirms her personal belief in the social gospel and in the Lord’s commandment that says we should love our neighbours like ourselves.

Laurence then comments on two world events that changed the face of the earth. First, the dropping of atom bombs, by America, on the Japanese cities of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, which caused unbelievable annihilation and established beyond doubt, man's dreadful ability to destroy himself and his earth (though people still hope the earth would endure through all disasters, a hope belied by the appearance of nuclear arms); and second, the Holocaust in Europe when the Nazis exterminated millions of Jews and proved how little human lives mattered to world leaders. (You already know something about this after reading Anne Frank's diary in the previous unit.) Despite these two catastrophes, world leaders are contemplating fighting a war using nuclear weapons that are far more deadly than the atomic bomb.

Laurence expresses astonishment at the enormous amounts of money being spent on the production of nuclear arms - amounts which, if properly utilized, could supply enough fresh water to everyone in the world or eradicate malaria from the face of the earth.

In concluding her speech, Laurence makes two points " one, that a person must affirm life and, therefore, we should all actively commit ourselves to saving the world by bringing about nuclear disarmament; and two, that an artist must commit to the generations of the future and, therefore, she as a writer feels it her responsibility to write truthfully about the dilemmas being faced by individuals everywhere and to ensure that the succeeding generations live to inherit the wonderful achievements of the human mind.

2.6.2 Features of Laurence's Speech

Conversational Tone

The first thing we notice in "My Final Hour" is the conversational style that Laurence has adopted. By admitting at the very beginning that she is nervous in making a statement of her belief before an august audience of graduating candidates who will be priests in the church, Laurence at once takes them into her confidence, while at the same time making it clear that she is going to talk **to** them, one to one, and not talk **down** to them. Hence, the tone adopted by her is personal and subjective. She shares with her audience instances from her personal experience in Africa. She recalls how she saw children dying of thirst in Somaliland and of malaria in East and in West Africa. She also discloses before them her commitment as a writer to the cause of nuclear disarmament.

Clarity of Expressions

There is clarity of expression in the speech which reflects the clarity of Laurence's thoughts. She is very clear in her mind what she has to present before her listeners and uses a language that is lucid and simple. There is no disjointedness in her discourse. One idea leads to another very systematically. For instance, she first mentions the catastrophes that have already overtaken man and destroyed large chunks of human life on earth and then proceeds to talk about the imminent catastrophe — a nuclear war — that might finish the earth itself. Thereafter, she makes out a clear case for the necessity for nuclear disarmament by all nations.

A Forceful Style

Without taking recourse to any rhetorical devices, Laurence succeeds in delivering a powerful speech. The power comes from her sturdy conviction, in her belief that the nuclear arms race must stop. She quotes facts and figures given by eminent

people, like Dr. Barbara Ward, to convince her audience about the sheer undesirability of using nuclear weapons.

Use of Humour and Pathos

Laurence’s speech displays both her sense of humour as well as pathos. There is a touch of humour in her advice to her listeners not to worry if they grow stupid as they grow old. She informs them that this is quite ‘normal’. She pokes fun at the parent-child relationship, saying “your children, now grown, are discovering the opposite - they now see that you aren’t nearly as stupid as they had believed when they were young teenagers”. She also succeeds in creating a pathetic picture of a post-nuclear-war world with graphic description like “...the dead, mutilated and dying people clogging the ruined cities and towns like so much unvalued discarded rubbish, the suffering humans screaming for help with no medical help available, no water, no relief at all for the unbearable pain of millions of humans except finally the dark relief of death for all.” The easily-visualised description leaves a deep impact on the minds and hearts of the listeners. And this is what a good speaker always aims at — to make the audience think and feel.

A speech that is heard leaves a greater impact on the mind than the one that is read because while hearing it you can feel and share the passion with which it is delivered by the speaker. Therefore, it will help you to get a feel of “My Final Hour” if you read it aloud to yourself or before your friends at the study centre. Also note, that some words and phrases are in italics - Laurence would have given greater emphasis to these when delivering her speech.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) In what ways did Margaret Laurence become a radical in the last decade of her life?

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- ii) What moral responsibility does Laurence have as a writer?

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have:

- discussed a spoken form of non-fictional prose, i.e; a speech;
- acquainted you with the life and works of Margaret Laurence;
- read and discussed a speech given by Laurence at Trent University; and
- discussed the style of her speech.

2.8 SUGGESTED READING

Margaret Laurence : "My Final Hour"

Jawaharlal Nehru : "Tryst With Destiny"

Martin Luther King Jr.: "I Have a Dream"

2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Canadian
- ii) *The Stone Angel; A Jest of God.*
- iii) An overdose of sleeping pills.
- iv) Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Trent University
- ii) Graduating students who were candidates to the ministry of the Church.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) In the last decade of her life, Margaret Laurence turned a radical and promoted causes like nuclear disarmament, social justice and environmental protection through didactic speeches, lectures, essays and even direct-mail fund raising campaigns.
- ii) She has the moral responsibility to work against the nuclear arms race and to make the governments and military leaders realise that nuclear weapons must never be used, but must be systematically reduced.