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Lesson No.

A CHOICE OF SHORT STORIES

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LESSON NO. 1.1

A CHOICE OF SHORT STORIES

I. The Refugee

II. The Nose-Jewel

THE REFUGEE

Introduction to the Author

Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973) was an American novelist, story writer and biographer. She was born in Hillsboro, Virginia. Buck grew up in China where her parents were missionaries. After receiving her education in America, she returned to China as an English teacher. She worked in a number of fields in China. She wrote a trilogy - *The House of Earth*, *The Good Earth* and *A House Divided*. Pearl was awarded Nobel Prize in literature for *The Good Earth*. Her other novels are *East Wind : West Wind*, *The Mother*, *Dragon Seed*, *Come, My Beloved* and *Pavillion of Women*. She has three collections of short stories namely *The First Wife*, *Today and Forever*, and *Far and Near*. She promoted understanding between America and China.

Introduction to the Story

The present story, "The Refugee", is based on Buck's first experience in China. Buck was touched by the plight of the Chinese farmers. She has written the saga of the Chinese peasants's life in her novel, *The Good Earth*. In the present story she describes the miserable condition of the Chinese farmers who were rendered homeless by the furious floods in the Chinese rivers. Her account of their tragedy is realistic as well as touching. No names are mentioned in the story. The moving account also signifies universal human sufferings.

Summary

The writer gives a descriptive account of the uprooted persons. The peasants had become alien in their own country. Though they were in the capital city yet to them it was very far. They looked puzzled because they were taken by surprise. They found themselves in the posh street of their capital. They were so lost in their thought that the strange new things of the capital did not attract their attention. There was an air of total loss.

The city was crowded with refugees. The ill-fed and ill-clad refugees were housed in a camp outside the city. Endless lines of rustic men, women and children could be seen marching towards the camps throughout the day. The townspeople were bitter lest they themselves should starve feeding these refugees. The small shopkeepers rebuked many beggars, loudly. The refugees swelled the ranks of the rickshaw pullers which resulted in the reduction of fares and the

starvation of the usual, local rickshaw pullers. The destitutes resorted to begging and swarmed the unskilled trade and service. Some of them were found dead on every winter morning. The fresh wave of refugees alarmed the people.

But these were not disreputable people. They were proud of their country. They hailed from one region, because both men and women were wearing the same kind of blue cotton garments with beautiful and intricate design on them. Men and women had sound physique. Some children except girls and infants were also with them. Every man and lad carried blue bedding, cauldrons and quilts. But there was no trace of food either in the quilt or in the cauldron. The flood-stricken peasants were starving. Starvation left mark on their faces. They were not interested in new things because they were on the verge of death. These peasants stayed back till they were driven out by hunger.

One of these refugees was an old man. He was carrying two baskets slung on a pole. He carried a quilt and a cauldron in one basket while there was clean crumpled quilt in the other. The load was rather heavy for him. The poor wretch seemed not accustomed to such work. He followed the crowd lest he should be left behind. Suddenly the man lowered his baskets and collapsed. He was breathing heavily. A little blood rose to his eyes. The light from the stand of the simple noodles vendor fell on the old man. A passerby was moved by the sight of the old man. He offered the old man a silver coin and a copper penny. The old man did not stretch his hand to receive the money. He told the stranger that he did not beg of him. They had fertile lands and had never starved like this. The river caused havoc to their lands. The young hungry people ate up even the seeds despite his warnings.

The stranger gave money to the old man and left. The old man regained his strength and asked the vendor to prepare a small bowl of noodles. He, then, pulled aside the other quilt and there was spotted a small boy, who was his grandson. The child was shrunk and thin. He could be taken for dead but the old man went to him and fed the nearly dead child with the bowl of noodles. The old man told the vendor that the parents of the child were killed in the flood. The old man licked the last traces of food with his tongue. The vendor reminded the old man that he could buy more noodles with his silver coin. But the starving man informed him that he would buy seeds with that. The vendor was moved to hear this. Had he himself not been poor, he would have fed the old man. The old man silenced him saying that he had not asked for food. The vendor could not understand the problem. If the seeds were not sown, the people would starve the following year also. He was doing all that for his grandson. Even if he died, others must plant seeds.

The old man lifted his load and moved on.

SHORT NOTES

Q.1. *Why were the refugees not liked by the local population ?*

Ans. The local population was bitter against the refugees. The very appearance of the refugees annoyed the local people because the former always remained ill-clad and ill-fed. They feared that they would starve themselves by feeding the refugees. The refugees plied rickshaws at low rates forcing the local rickshaw pullers to starve. The refugees also accepted the unskilled jobs which rendered the local labourers jobless. The swelling ranks of the beggars troubled the shopkeepers. Hence the refugees were not liked.

Q.2. *How did the refugees earn their living in the capital city ?*

Ans. The starving refugees were eager to earn something. Some of them joined the ranks of beggars, while others plied rickshaws. Many of them worked as unskilled workers to earn food. The peasants knew nothing except farming. Hence they could earn their food only through manual labour.

Q.3. *Why didn't the old man buy noodles for himself ?*

Ans. The old man was tired and hungry. He refused to accept alms. But when a man forcibly gave him a copper and silver coin, he bought noodles not for himself, but for his grandson. He wanted to buy seeds with the silver coin because the hungry people had eaten the seeds also. Seeds must be sown so that the people did not face hunger next year. The old man was worried about the future of his grandson. He wanted to save him from starvation.

THE NOSE-JEWEL

Introduction to the Author :

Chakravarti Rajagopalachari (1879-1972) was an illustrious son of India. Born in Hosur, Salem district of Tamil Nadu, and educated at Bangalore, Rajagopalachari took an active part in the freedom struggle of India. He was also a very close friend of Gandhi. Rajagopalachari had been the Chief Minister of Madras State (now Tamil Nadu) and the last Governor-General of India. Besides being a freedom fighter, Rajagopalachari was also an eminent writer in English and Tamil. His Tamil works include *Vyasara Virundu* (1956), *Chakravati Tirumagan* (1956) and *Karpanikkadu*. He has also produced his own versions of *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*, updating them and making them relevant to modern times.

Introduction to the Story

'**The Nose-Jewel**' is a fable translated from Tamil into English. A fable usually is a short story with animal characters but in this story we have human characters also. This story like other fables has a moral and the moral is : the house-wife should always be obedient to her husband. A disobedient wife always comes to grief. This moral may not be to the liking of the present day feminists.

Summary

Once two sparrows built a nest in the roof of Ramayya house. The mother sparrow laid some eggs in it for hatching. There was no love lost between Ramayya and his wife. The he-sparrow wanted to know why the wife of Ramayya quarrelled

with her husband. The she-sparrow professed ignorance and urged her husband to mind his own business. At this the male sparrow chided her for being self-centred. He wanted to help the couple but female sparrow reminded him not to bother about the affairs of others and asked him to protect their nest from the cat.

It so happened that the male bird saw a nose-jewel on the dunghill and brought it to his wife. The female sparrow found no use for the nose-jewel. So the he-sparrow dropped it down and flew away to bring worms for his young ones. Ramayya's wife picked it up and wore it. Ramayya doubted the integrity of his wife and wanted to know the name of the rascal who had presented the nose-jewel as a gift to her. His wife told him that she recovered it from the floor of their house. This disclosure alarmed Ramayya. He wanted to hand it over to the village magistrate. He did not want the nose-jewel to be discovered by the police from their house.

In fact the nose-jewel belonged to Minakshi Ammal's younger daughter, who lived in the nearby house. The daughter had left the nose-jewel in the bathroom and the maid servant had swept it to the dunghill. Both the mother and the daughter wanted to conceal this loss, but they had to admit it to Ramanathan Pillai. Soon the theft of the nose-jewel became the talk of the village. The maid servant was suspected but the nose-jewel could not be found from her hut.

Ramayya's wife kept the nose-jewel in her box. But the fear of disgrace haunted the husband and the wife. No one suspected them. But Ramayya's wife was down with fear. The he-sparrow enjoyed the fun, but the she-sparrow pitied the poor house wife. The male sparrow considered it to be an appropriate punishment for a disobedient wife. The she-sparrow held her partner responsible for tempting the lady into trouble. The he-sparrow retorted that such would be the fate of a woman who always disobeyed her husband. The she-sparrow got the proper message and promised not to disobey her husband in future. The two flew away to collect worms for their young ones.

SHORT NOTES

Q.1. write a short note on he-sparrow's reaction to his wife's suggestion to mind his own business.

Ans. The he-sparrow did not like the idea that the wife of Ramayya should always quarrel with her husband. He wanted to help Ramayya. He sought the advice and help of his wife in this matter. But the she-sparrow did not want to interfere in the affairs of others. She wanted her husband to mind his own business. At this, the he-sparrow called his wife self-centred.

Q.2. Ramayya's reaction on seeing his wife wearing the diamond nose-stud.

Ans. When Ramayya finds his wife wearing the nose-jewel, he suspects that his wife received the ornament as a gift from some rogue. Ramayya is an honest and respectable man. He does not want to be accused of theft in case the nose-jewel is recovered from his house. He urges his wife to hand the piece over to the village magistrate lest they should be insulted for keeping it with

them.

Q.3. *Comment on the moral of the story.*

Ans. "The Nose-jewel" is a fable with a moral. It teaches us the lesson of marital harmony. In Indian context, the wife should be docile and obedient to her husband. When she transgresses this, she comes to grief. The fate of Ramayya's wife brings home this fact. Ramayya's wife is obstinate and quarrelsome. She discovers a nose-jewel and does not return it to its owner. As a result, she grows panicky and feverish. The story also highlights the evil effects of temptation. The story has another moral also. We should never interfere in others's affairs. Our unwanted help may create problems for others. The he-sparrow's concern for the warring couple creates a problem for Ramayya and his wife.

LESSON NO. 1.2

A CHOICE OF SHORT STORIES

I. The Interview

II. Miracle

THE INTERVIEW

Introduction to the Author

Khushwant Singh (1915-2015) novelist, historian and editor, was born in Hadali in Pakistan and educated at Government College, Lahore and King's College, London. From 1947 to 1951 he worked for the Indian High Commission in London and Ottawa. It was with *Train to Pakistan* (1955) that Khushwant Singh gained reputation as a writer. The novel is based on the experiences of the people tortured by the traumas of the partition in 1947. Hereafter Khushwant Singh established a reputation as a fiction writer. He wrote many stories, and these were compiled under the title '**The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories**' (1950). He has written some books on Sikh history and religion. Many readers are familiar with his personality, as the editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* from 1969 to 1977, New Delhi from 1978 to 1980 and *The Hindustan Times* for sometime.

Introduction to the Story

"**The Interview**" is an amusing story. It reflects Khushwant Singh's humour. The narrator unexpectedly finds himself in an embarrassing situation when an American acquaintance who deals with the study of coins and medals drops in. Mr. Towers is an American numismatist who begins a conversation on the subject of numismatics with the narrator of the story. Though the narrator does not know anything about numismatics, he keeps himself engaged in the conversation trying in the process to find out what the word exactly means.

Summary

The narrator of the story is once taken by surprise by his unexpected guests. Mr. Towers, a numismatist, walks in the house of the narrator, along with his wife and child. He shows his desire to have coffee with the narrator. The visitors settle comfortably in the room. Mr. Towers expresses the great desire of his family to visit the American Ambassador and the Indian High Commissioner. He announces that they had already made themselves acquainted with them and now they are with the Public Relations Officer. The narrator can do nothing other than to accept and welcome the guests. Mr. Towers announces that they had come from Chicago and that he is a numismatist. He shows his confidence in the Public Relations Officer and takes it for granted that the latter has enough knowledge about numismatics. The narrator has no courage to say frankly that he is ignorant

of such a term. Mr. Towers announces proudly that he is one of the world's nine leading numismatists. He claims that his articles have appeared in the best numismatical journals, including the annual number of the Calcutta Numismatical Journal. He inquires if the narrator is aware of the Calcutta Numismatical Society. The narrator helplessly replies in the positive, and this he does with emphasis. Feeling happy with the reply, Mr. Towers begins to talk of Germany and its famous numismatists. Without really understanding the meaning of Mr. Towers's words, the narrator bravely attempts to put in a word. He remarks that may be the Russians took over the German Numismatists. This does not please Mr. Towers much because the narrator's trick has not worked. Once again Mr. Towers puts an unexpected question to the narrator. He asks if the latter had heard about the famous numismatician known as Dr. Bannerjee. The narrator has little choice other than to say 'yes'. The narrator gathers another piece of information when Mr. Towers tells him that he and Dr. Bannerjee had been carrying on a controversy in Numismatists about the age of a treasure unearthed near Tutankhamen's tomb. The narrator once again ventures to participate in the conversation. He speaks doubtfully of having read a book on *Excavation at Mohenjodaro* written by Dr. Bannerjee. At this Mr. Towers expresses his regret that he had not come across any such book and it shows his ignorance about Dr. Bannerjee's interest in archaeology. The narrator's maid walks in with coffee and he feels he is saved from an embarrassing situation. He quickly scribbles a note for one Miss Merriman and offers to converse with Mr. Towers's wife Margery and his daughter, Pam. But unfortunately, Mr. Towers has not yet got over the book which the narrator had mentioned. He picks up the conversation once again. The narrator cleverly tries to get out of the situation by saying that may be he is mixing up names. Mr. Towers is sure that the narrator is confused about the name of the book. The latter feels relieved and accepts his mixing up of names. Before the tension is resolved, Miss Merriman, the narrator's secretary walks in with an open book in her hands. With her glasses balanced on the tip of her nose she smiles at Towers and begins to read about the definition of Numismatics. The narrator hurriedly prompts in and he introduces Miss Merriman to the Towers and takes the dictionary from her. Mr. Towers shows his pleasure of meeting someone interested in numismatics. Miss Merriman is equally baffled. Mr. Towers gets more heated in his discussion about the subject. Meanwhile, the narrator gathers some information from the dictionary and begins to converse once again. Thinking the book in the narrator's hand to be that by Mr. Bannerjee-Mr. Towers takes it off the narrator's hand.

SHORT NOTES

Q.1. Write a short note on the entry of the unexpected and unknown guests, who take the narrator unawares.

Ans. Even before the narrator can decide whether he intends to meet the announced visitors, Mr. Towers walks in confidently into the narrator's room.

He is followed by his wife Margery Towers and his daughter Pam. The whole family settles down comfortably in the narrator's room. Mr. Towers shows his desire to have coffee with the narrator. The narrator is left with no choice except to welcome his guests

Q.2. *Write a short note on the narrator's situation when Mr. Towers takes it for granted that he knows much about numismatics.*

Ans. Even before the narrator can say a word about his knowledge of numismatics, Mr. Towers speaks in his taken for granted kind of a way, that it is silly of him to ask the narrator about his knowledge about the science. The narrator is left with no choice other than to reply in the positive.

Q.3. *Describe how Miss Merriman saves the situation by bringing in coffee at the right time.*

Ans. The narrator begins to participate in the conversation with Mr. Towers. He says that he had perhaps read a book on Excavation by Dr. Banerjee. At this Mr. Towers asserts that he had not come across any such book so far. Mr. Towers wonders at the ignorance of the narrator. As the narrator finds himself in the extreme situation of embarrassment because of his remark on the book which he had never seen, Miss Merriman enters with coffee for the guests. The narrator is much relieved by this interlude.

MIRACLE

Introduction to the Author

Kartar Singh Duggal (b. 1917), Punjabi short-story writer, was born in Dhamial (now in Pakistan) and educated at Panjab University, Lahore. His stories are collected in *Sver Sar* (1942), *Ladai Nahin* (1953), *Phul Todna Mana Hai* (1954) and *Karamat* (1957). *Andran* (1948) and *Sat Natak* are among his other works. His writings are marked by a deep psychological insight.

By contrasting the miracle of the Guru's palm with the incidents of the 1920s', Duggal is able to question the power of faith to accomplish everything. An otherwise innocent talk suddenly lights up with the intrusion of reality.

Introduction to the Story

"The Miracle" is a very fine story by Kartar Singh Duggal. Its theme is that faith has great power. Anything and everything can be accomplished through faith which works miracles. Miracles do happen. It is the great men who have power to do things which otherwise seem impossible. Nothing is impossible for those who have faith and courage. Common people fail to understand such things, and as such do not believe in miracles.

Summary

Once Guru Nanak Dev was passing through a forest. His disciple felt thirsty. There was no water for miles around. Gurujī said if he went up the hill, he could find water there. The disciple ran up the hill. A *Dervish* came out of the hut. The

disciple requested him for water. The Dervish asked him who he was and with whom he had come with. The disciple told him about Guru Nanak Dev.

The Dervish felt angry and did not oblige the disciple because he was non-Muslim. The disciple came back. Guruji advised him to go again. This time he should say that another *Dervish* had sent him. Again he did not give water. After coming back the disciple almost collapsed at Guruji's feet. He was too thirsty to get up. However, Guruji directed him to go a third time. The *Dervish* became very angry this time. He said that if his Guru was a holy man, why he could not provide him water.

The disciple returned and told Guruji everything. Guruji pointed to a place and asked the disciple to lift a stone lying there. The disciple removed the stone and water rushed out of the ground. When the Dervish looked at his well, he found it dry. He threw down a large stone. The disciple saw it and warned Guruji who kept his calm and asked the disciple to pray to God. When the rock was almost upon them Guruji put out his hand and stopped it with his palm. It has been standing there till this day and is known as 'Panja Sahib'.

The author had heard this story many times but he could not believe in the miracle. He lived in a village near the temple of Guruji's palm. Once several Indians had been fired upon by the Englishmen. Many were killed and the remaining were put into a train. The train was due to pass the railway station known as 'Panja Sahib'. The villagers rushed to the station. A large number of the persons in the train were hungry, thirsty and wounded. The driver was ordered not to stop the train under any circumstances. The villagers were keen to serve those inside the train. When the train came, some of them lay down on the track. Many of them were crushed but none moved. The train came to a halt. The passengers shouted "Praise to the Almighty. There was blood everywhere.

The author's younger sister too did not believe the story about Guruji. The author told her, "If the train which comes like a storm can be held, why not boulder down a hill?" On hearing it, tears rolled down his mother's cheeks.

SHORT NOTES

Q.1. write a short note on the Dervish's refusal to give water to Guruji's disciple.

Ans. The disciple of Guruji was feeling very thirsty and wanted water. Guruji directed him to go up the hill. The disciple went there but the Dervish refused to oblige him. The disciple went there thrice but the Dervish refused to give him water from his well. The Dervish was a Muslim. His belief was that the one who had no faith in the Muslim religion was a 'Kafir'. So he did not give him water. He told him that his Guru should procure water for him if he was a holy man.

Q.2. Why is the Temple of the Guru's Palm known by that name?

Ans. The temple is known as **Panja Sahib**, because Guruji stopped a rolling boulder with the palm of his hand. The palm left a permanent mark on the

rock. The rock then came to be known by that name only.

Q.3. *How did the Guru satisfy the thirst of his disciple ?*

Ans. When the disciple was repeatedly refused water by the Dervish the man felt miserable and collapsed because of the thirst. Then the Guru asked him to lift a stone lying in front of him. When he lifted it, water gushed out of it. This way the Guru satisfied his disciple's thirst.

Q.4. *Why did the narrator refuse to believe that a human being could stop a landslide?*

Ans. The narrator's mother told him in his childhood the story of the miracle performed by Guru Nanak Dev, the legend that the Guru drew all the water from the Dervish's well to the place where they were sitting. In anger, the Dervish threw a huge boulder at them. The Guruji stopped it by the mere lifting of his palm. The narrator did not believe it as he had no faith in miracles and superstitions.

Q.5. *How did the people of the village manage to stop the train ?*

Ans. The people of the village came to know that a train carrying wounded men and women would pass through the Panja Sahib railway station. They were to be put in a jail. So they were being taken to an unknown place. The villagers wanted to serve those wounded men and women with food and water. They requested the railway authorities to stop the train at the station but their request was not acceded to. They were determined that the train must stop there and they must serve food and water to those men and women. When they found no way out, they lay down on the railway track singing and chanting the glory of the Almighty. The train did stop but not before many of them were crushed and mowed down.

A CHOICE OF SHORT STORIES

I. Cyclone

II. The Babus of Nayanjore

CYCLONE

Introduction to the Author

P. Padmaraju, a writer from Andhra, writes in Telegu, his mother tongue. He is a regular contributor to Telegu Magazines. The story 'Cyclone' was first written by him in Telegu and later he himself translated it into English. He sent this story in an international contest of short stories and it won a prize.

Introduction to the Story

The story gives a moving account of a beggar woman's miserable position in life. A drunkard husband and responsibilities of her life push her to take to begging. Yet she retains her motherly love and affection. On the other hand, the narrator, Rao, indifferent to misery and suffering around, wakes up to realise how the burden of life cruelly deprives some. The story teller subtly weaves this opposition into the tale.

Summary

'Cyclone' is a story about a successful lawyer named Rao. He was fifty years old but he thought it was the right age for him to give up his profession. He had been a lawyer but he had passed on his practice to one of his sons. Now he wanted to devote his time to meditation and social service. He was a talented speaker and loved to speak. Now he was travelling to some place to give a talk to a society of theists.

During the journey, the weather became foul. At first a wind storm came. Then it started raining heavily. In the well guarded second class compartment they felt cold and became worried about their safe arrival at their destinations as owing to the furious cyclone, the train was moving very slowly. When the train halted at a wayside station, a beggar woman, half drenched entered their compartment. Despite the heavy rain, she went from one compartment to another begging alms. Everybody resented her presence, particularly, Rao, for Rao had set principles in life. He hated begging. So when the beggar woman approached him, he refused to give her anything. There was force and hatred in the way he dismissed her.

Rao was nearing his destination. He got down at the station. From there he had to go to a place which was about two miles away. The beggar woman also got down with him and no porter was in sight, the beggar woman offered to carry his luggage to the waiting room. Accepting whatever Rao gave her, the beggar woman

went away.

Rao was alone in the waiting room. It was a dark and dismal place. Reaching the waiting room he had got wet in the torrential rain that had not yet stopped. He now changed into warm clothes. After some time the beggar woman also entered the waiting room. She had been pushed out of the running train by the ticket examiner. There she came and Rao who hated very sight of this woman now felt relieved when she came, for in this weather, he wanted some one to be near him. He felt for the poor woman and gave her clothes to wear and something to eat. The woman narrated to him the story of her misery. The entire responsibility of family lay on her as her husband did nothing and was a drunkard. Rao now realised how this brave woman was facing life. His heart was moved and he developed sympathy and fellow-feeling for her.

The beggar woman helped Rao to spend the night comfortably. Together they closed the door and collected furniture behind the panels but the strong wind pushed it. They spent the night in a corner where the force of the wind was not so great. The woman looked after him and tried to make him feel comfortable. She put her arms around him and gave him strength. Rao did not object to it. Protected by her motherly care, he went to sleep in her arms.

Next morning it was still dark. Rao was awakened. The beggar woman had gone off before he woke up. He felt for his purse. It was not where he had placed it. He thought it must have been lost the previous night. Getting out of the room, he found the traces of destruction all around. Many trees had been uprooted. Some injured persons were lying at one end of the station. The roof of the booking office had also collapsed and it lay scattered. Now he saw somebody lying under the wreckage. He had no problem in recognising her. It was the beggar woman. She was holding his purse in one of her hands and in the other some notes and coins stolen from the booking office. He was very much moved at the sight. This dear creature had shown so much affection for him last night. Her company had helped him to pass that difficult time so well. How could he forget the kindness she had showed him ? She had been a sharer in his suffering. He was overcome with gratitude. He kissed her forehead. At once, he took away the money from her hands and returned it to the drawer from which she had taken it. But he left his purse in her other hand. Only he removed his card with his name and address and went away.

It is, indeed, a moving story. It tells how a person outwardly rather harsh appears in a different colour in another situation under the stress of circumstances. Then his real qualities are revealed. The outward cover which concealed the lawyer's essential nature is pushed aside and he now comes before us as a loving, kindly person conscious of the fact that big or small, high or low, all are fellow human beings in a world which is full of suffering and hardships and it is the

social set up which is sometimes responsible for forcing a person to take to begging and even to acts of crime.

SHORT NOTES

Q.1. *Write a short note on what sort of a person was Rao.*

Ans. Rao was a lawyer by profession. He was fifty years old. Having lived an active and successful life, he could look back with a certain self-satisfaction. As a professional lawyer, he was a good speaker and he liked his own voice. Now that he had retired, he did a lot of public speaking. He prided himself on his health. His wife looked older than him. He liked to tell her that many people thought her to be his elder sister or even his mother. He certainly did not look like a father of twenty five years old son. He was very proud of his four children. He was against smoking and begging.

Q.2. *Briefly comment on the beggar woman becoming the centre of interest for all the passengers in the railway compartment ?*

Ans. At a wayside station, a woman in tattered, half-drenched clothes came in. Immediately there was a howl of protest. But the woman quietly closed the door and stood in a corner, her clothes dripping. She was about thirty. She did not look well-fed. Soon she started begging. She used the words, 'father', 'grandfather' while addressing them. She bent down and touched the feet of the old man. She said that she had got into the compartment thinking that the rich people would not see her faint with hunger. She thought she could get her day's food there. The poor people in the third-class were more generous. They would not be cold or be harsh on a poor woman for begging. They knew what she suffered and they had pity in their hearts. By using honeyed words and with the style of addressing the passengers, she had become the centre of interest. Rao's neighbour stopped reading his crime story and looked at her. His interest was aroused.

Q.3. *Write a short note on Rao's condition after the Beggar woman had left.*

Ans. The train had stopped. Rao did not know it for some moments. He got up and opened the door, umbrella in hand. The wind threw him back with such force that he almost fell down. The beggar woman offered to carry his things down. He did not stop her. He ran across the platform into the shelter of the station. The beggar woman staggered with the burden of his luggage behind him and put things in the waiting-room. There was not a single light anywhere on the station. He took some money out and offered it to the woman. She did not actually refuse if but said something which he could not make out and was gone. The next moment Rao felt dazed and went into the waiting room, his mind a blank.

Q.4. *Comment on the way the beggar woman touched the inmost chords of human warmth in Rao.*

Ans. When the day was breaking, Mr. Rao came out on the platform. There were

signs of destruction all over the place. The booking office had collapsed. The beggar woman was lying motionless under the wreckage. He bent down and touched her forehead. It was cold and lifeless. The lower part of her body had been crushed. In one of her hands he saw his purse. In the other, there were a few coins and currency notes, evidently from the booking clerk's chest. He bent down and kissed her forehead again and again. He lived through every trivial incident of the night. There lay that dear creature, who gave him so much comfort and assurance through the cyclone. There she lay, a victim of that very cyclone. He did not like to blame her for stealing his purse or raiding the booking office. He felt that he understood her. She had touched the inmost chords of human warmth in him which nobody else even in his family had done.

THE BABUS OF NAYANJORE

Introduction to the Author

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a prominent Bengali poet, was born in Calcutta and educated mostly at home. He took charge of his father's estates at the age of 24. In 1901, he founded a school at Santiniketan at Bolpur which later developed into the Visva Bharati University. There is hardly a form of literature which has been left untouched and which he has not adorned by his writings. His work is marked by religious feeling and a keen appreciation of the landscape of Bengal. Tagore also played a notable part in the struggle for India's Independence. Of his works the best known is 'Gitanjali' (1912) for which he was awarded a Nobel Prize in 1913. Among his other works are *The Gardener* (1913), *The Crescent Moon* (1913), *Fruit gathering, verse*; (1916), *The Post office* (1914), *Sacrifice* (1917), *Red Oleanders* (1925), plays; *The Home and the World* (1919), *The Wreck* (1921), *Gora* (1924), novels; *Hungry Stones and other Stories* (1916), *Mashi and other Stories* (1918), *Broken Ties and other Stories* (1925), short stories; *My Reminiscences* (1917) and autobiography *My Boyhood Days* (1940). Tagore wrote mainly in Bengali, but he also wrote in English and translated into English some of his own writings.

Introduction to the Story

The short story '**The Babus of Nayanjore**' written around 1900 vividly evokes a decay of the landed aristocracy in Bengal. It ironically exposes the pretensions of Zamidar Kailas Babu who had migrated to Calcutta after having become bankrupt due to his extravagance. His ancestors were so extravagant that they spent thousands of rupees over the wedding of a kitten. They were so delicate that they would tear off the rough border of the then famous Dacca Muslin cloth because it irritated their delicate skin. Their pompous living led to misery. Thus their lord-like habits could not continue for long.

Summary

Babus of Nayanjore were land holders and famous for their extravagant life

habits and pompous life style. But soon after the floods the family became insolvent as the whole property was sold to liquidate the debt and it was not possible to maintain the ancestral splendours. Kailas Babu, the last heir of “the Babus of Nayanjore” migrated from Nayanjore to Calcutta along with his only granddaughter. The account of Babu's life style is given by the narrator who is Kailas Babu's neighbour in Calcutta. He belongs to the lower middle class. Thus Rabindranath Tagore in this story juxtaposes two families diametrically opposed to each other to explain the decay of the landed aristocracy and the rise of lower middle class. The narrator is a self-made man with frugal habits having no glorious family background. The narrator feels that Kailas Babu does not like him for his family background. This is perhaps the narrator's own prejudice because Kailas Babu is social and amiable person. He is polite and courteous and is always ready to inquire about the welfare of his neighbours. As for his life style, despite his limited resources he is very particular about his dress. On special occasions he is meticulously dressed up. He maintains his small room with limited but presentable furniture. He has some antiques which are very costly but somehow they have come down to him from his ancestors, such as silver cruet, a filigree box for otto-of roses, a small gold-silver, and a costly antique shawl and an ancestral turban. In his speech he boasts of his family pride. He is fondly addressed as Thakur Dada by the people of the neighbourhood. His neighbours would gather at his house, to whom he would tell stories about his lifestyle. The listeners did not question the exaggeration. The neighbours were very considerate. Knowing fully well that his means were very limited they would bring their own tobacco and would ask him to taste it. He would pretend that he also had superior quality of tobacco but he would blame his servant Ganesh for misplacing it. When Kailas Babu would invite them to dinner, his friends would politely say that they would decide it some other day. Apparently Kailas Babu, when he would talk about the days of Nayanjore, appeared to be stupid because he indulged in absurd exaggeration which amused listeners. Without contradicting him they pretended to believe him.

The narrator is a young post-graduate who believed himself to be the most eligible bachelor for he possessed flawless character and was very handsome. Many a wealthy fathers with extremely beautiful and educated daughters sent offers to him but he rejected all of them with the hope to get still a better one. He had developed a strong feeling that there would be an offer from a girl with peerless beauty but at the back of his mind was the grand daughter of Kailas Babu whom he never thought to be very beautiful. In his heart of hearts he felt insulted and injured because Thakur Dada never considered him a suitable match for his granddaughter and therefore never made any proposal. The narrator bore all this insult with patience.

One day, the narrator thought of a plan to hurt Kailas Babu's pride. During his exaggerated conversations, Kailas Babu very often would show his familiarity

with the lieutenant Governor of Bengal. The narrator told Thakur Dada that in his meetings with the Lieutenant Governor the day before, the latter first inquired about him and then stated that he would visit Kailas Babu that afternoon. Kailas Babu was such a simpleton that he tended to believe him. He was greatly excited at the news but at the same time he felt depressed for his ignorance of English. The narrator told him that lieutenant Governor was always accompanied by an interpreter to facilitate the conversation with the members of landed aristocracy.

On a fixed day, about mid-day, when the neighbours were at work and the rest were asleep, the two servants dressed up in official robes announced the arrival of Chota Lat Sahib. Kailas Babu prepared himself for the occasion. He put on his old fashioned ceremonial dress and his ancestral turban. In great excitement and awe he received his guest and offered him the hard wooden chair, covered with his old family shawl, to sit. He presented him a string of gold mohurs and the golden salver. His servants sprinkled scent from time to time from the filigree box. After a short sojourn the so called Chota Lat Sahib took leave and two of his servants carried away all the relics.

The narrator was an eye witness to all this. It amused him a great deal. The grand daughter had come to know about the plot. She was tense and sobbing. With a fear-choked voice she inquired from the narrator why he had deceived her grand father. It made the narrator realise that he had played the cruelest joke on Kailas Babu. The narrator felt extremely ashamed of his ugly act. Next day he decided to carry all the goods taken from Kailas Babu and apologise. When he was about to enter Kailas Babu's room, he saw Kusum, the granddaughter of Thakur Dada, requesting him to narrate the entire conversation which he had with Chota Lat Sahib. This aroused the sense of pride in him and with a beaming face he started narrating all that the Lat Sahib had been good enough to say about their family.

The narrator was deeply touched by this scene and tears appeared in his eyes. Against the norms of the modern style, the narrator made a low bow and touched Kailas Babu's feet. Kailas Babu on the other hand believed that the narrator was doing so because the Chota Lat Sahib had visited him and again began to indulge in exaggerations and the story of ten minutes interview became an epic. The story ends with a positive and a touching note. The narrator made a proposal of marrying his grand daughter. Kailas Babu embraced him with extreme joy. For the first time he confessed that he was a poor man. He is transported from the glorious past to the present day reality.

Theme of 'The Babus of Nayanjore'

"The Babus of Nayanjore" is rooted in the social scenario at the end of the nineteenth century Bengal. The landed aristocracy had by then witnessed rapid decline and this story by Rabindranath Tagore evokes the decay of that landed class. It ironically exposes the pretensions of Kailas Babu, a zamindar, who has become bankrupt because of his ancestor's extravagance. It also reflects the attitude

of educated middle class of urban areas towards the landed aristocracy.

Character of Kailas Babu

Kailas Babu is the main character of the story. He belonged to highly respected landed class of Nayanjore. But with the passage of time the Babus of Nayanjore became bankrupt due to their habits of princely extravagance. Kailas Babu spent a lot of money on the funeral of his father and thus faced insolvency. When he found it difficult to keep up the pomp and show of his ancestors, he migrated to Calcutta along with his granddaughter. Here he tried to maintain the pretensions of a big Zamindar, although he lived in a small room, washed his own linen and ironed his dress, cleaned his room after closing the door and made sure that nobody saw him.

The author portrays the character of Kailas Babu by giving details about his habits and life style. In his behaviour he was a very sociable and amiable person. He always enquired about the health and welfare of people when he met anyone in the street. The people of the neighbourhood would flock to his house and would stay there for hours together. His house consisted of one small room. He had certain things which he had inherited. It included silver pot for sprinkling scented water, a filigree box for Otto-of-roses, a small gold salver, a costly old shawl and a ceremonial dress along with the turban.

Although at heart he was a modest man, very polite who would exchange pleasantries with everyone, yet in his conversation he would give free play to his pride. He was adept at hiding his poverty by making many pretentious statements. Suffering from inferiority complex, Kailas Babu never accepted that he had no money and could not pay rent for a large house. He rather declared that he was staying there for he desired to stay near his friend. He indulged in such boasts that he appeared to be a fool. His friends were very co-operative and were so nice that they never contradicted his absurd exaggeration. In fact, they felt amused. He was not that stupid. He was a fine man who was consulted by his friends about their day to day problems.

Kailas Babu often said that Lieutenant Governor knew the Babus of Nayanjore very well and often expressed his intention to visit them. The narrator with a view to take revenge plays a trick on him. He says that the Lieutenant Governor would visit him on a fixed date. Kailas Babu being innocent and child-like believed in what the narrator said. He was so credulous that he could not detect that he was being befooled. When a friend of the narrator with a paraphernalia arrives at Kailas Babu's house, a ten minute meeting with the pseudo lieutenant governor makes Kailas Babu very happy and he keeps on narrating this episode to all and one. Everytime he would add something new. The ten minute meeting thus acquires the size of an epic.

A typical representative of the class Kailas Babu belonged to, he in nutshell, was a fine gentleman who would not hurt anybody's feelings. He had command over Urdu language though completely ignorant of English language. In his heart

he was very conscious of his poverty. When the narrator proposed to marry his grand daughter, for the first time he admitted that he was a poor man.

The Trick the Narrator played on Kailas Babu

The narrator had utter dislike for Kailas Babu. His mischievous mind once hit upon a plan in order to release the smouldering indignation and anger. Encouraged by Kailas Babu's tacit acceptance of the intimacy of Lieutenant Governor and the Babus of Nayanjore, the narrator told him that during the official reception a day before he told the lieutenant Governor that Kailas Babu had migrated to Calcutta. At this, the Lieutenant General said that he would pay a private visit to Kailas Babu. Kailas Babu being credulous and simpleton believed all this and was very much excited.

The narrator sent his friend in the guise of the Lieutenant Governor. He was accompanied by two servants in uniform. He also arranged for a carriage. Kailas Babu made thorough preparation for a suitable reception. He put on his old-fashioned ceremonial robes and his ancestral turban. His servant Ganesh also dressed up for the occasion. When the arrival of the Lieutenant Governor was announced, he felt very nervous. He went up to the door and bowed low to offer his repeated salams. He had a hard wooden chair which was covered by the old shawl for the Lieutenant Governor to sit. Thereafter, he made a speech in chaste high flown Urdu as he did not know English. He offered him gold Mohars and the golden salver. His servant Ganesh kept on sprinkling scent from time to time from the filigree box.

Kailas Baboo regretted that he could not extend magnificent reception as could have been arranged at Nayanjore. The narrator's friend stayed there only for ten minutes. The two servants in uniform took with them the gold mohars, the gold salver, the ancestral shawl, silver scent sprinkler and the filigree box. Kailas Babu was left with nothing. The irony was that he was not able to detect that a trick had been played upon him. Therefore, he talked about this incident to all those who came to his house, every time adding something or the other.

The Title

The title of the story "The Babus of Nayanjore" is appropriate. In this story the writer Rabindernath Tagore vividly brings out the decay of the landed aristocracy in Bengal at the turn of nineteenth century. Although the main character Kailas Babu is now settled in Calcutta and lived in small room, the story highlights the background of the splendour and magnificence of the Zamindars of Nayanjore. The author with the help of flashbacks narrates the life of magnificence of the Babus.

SHORT NOTES

Q.1. Write a short note on the narrator's dislike for Kailas Babu.

Ans. The narrator belongs to the family of educated middle-class who has worked hard and never indulges in extravagance. The narrator is thus a self-made

man. While Kailas Babu, on the other hand, belongs to the family of landed aristocracy, the narrator lacks the family background of aristocracy. Kailas Babu spends a lot of money on the funeral of his father. He makes a show of his riches and lives like a lord. Therefore, he dislikes Kailas Babu.

Q.2. *Write a short note on Kusum's reaction to Chota Lat Sahib's visit ?*

Ans. The narrator tells Kailas Babu that Lt. Governor would visit him. Kailas Babu makes preparations to welcome him. The narrator sends his friend in the guise of the Lieutenant Governor. Kailas Babu offers him gold mohurs. Kusum knows well that a trick is being played upon her grand father. She stands in the corner and weeps on hearing the loud laughter of the narrator. She becomes tense and inquires with tear-choked voice why such a dirty trick has been played on her grandfather and what harm he has done to the narrator. Covering her face with her hands she breaks into sobs.

Q.3. *Write a short note on the change in the narrator's life ?*

Ans. The reaction of Kusum makes the narrator feel guilty for causing pain to her tender heart. He realises the ugliness of his trick and feels like a whipped dog. After spending the whole night in restlessness, the narrator on the next morning bows before Kailas Babu and touches his feet. He humbly makes a proposal to marry Kusum while accepting that he never felt worthy of being married to the girl of an illustrious family.

LESSON NO. 1.4

A CHOICE OF SHORT STORIES

I. The Lost Child

II. Dusk

THE LOST CHILD

Introduction to the Author

Mulk Raj Anand, a reputed Indian Writer in English, was born in Peshawar in the year 1905. His father was a non-commissioned officer in the British Indian Army. His family belonged to the Ismaili Hindus whose traditional occupation was beating copper sheets into domestic utensils. He had his early education in the cantonment school. He pursued his higher studies in the University of Punjab and got his Honours Degree. Later he went to London to study Philosophy under Professor Dawes Hicks, the great Kantian Scholar. Between 1948 and 1965, he taught at the universities of Punjab, Benaras and Rajasthan. Some of his famous novels are *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953). *Morning Face* is an Autobiographical work for which he received Sahitya Academy Award in 1972. His short stories are collected in *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934), *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944), *The Power of Darkness and Other Stories* (1959), *Lajwanti and Other Stories* (1966) and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1973).

Anand is a writer with a mission and commitment. His closeness to Punjabi village life, his wide travels, his experience of the complexity of life, his initiation into and affirmation of Gandhian ideology, his secular humanistic faith, his deep and searching probes into human dilemmas and predicaments in the Indian context, form the matrix of his novels and stories. His work reveals compassionate concern for the destitute of humanity.

Introduction to the Story

"The Lost Child" is the story of a little child who gets lost when he goes to a fair with his parents. Lured by the glitter of things around, the child expresses his desire to possess them all, but his parents refuse to buy these on one pretext or the other. Suddenly, the child realizes that he is alone in the crowd and his parents are nowhere to be found. Now the child wants nothing but his parents. Written in simple and lucid style, the story has metaphorical and allegorical suggestions. We the children of the world are lost in the material things of life but deep inside somewhere the human soul always yearns for a spiritual anchor.

Summary of the Story

During the festival of Spring, a surge of humanity, colourfully dressed up in a gay mood, enthusiastically moved towards the city gates to attend a fair.

People from all walks of life came. Some came on horses, some in bamboo and bullock carts. Everyone seemed to be in a cheerful mood.

A small child accompanied by his parents also came to see the fair. In front of a toy shop, attracted by the colour and variety of toys, he expressed a desire to buy these. But his father's stern gaze was an indication that his wish was to remain unfulfilled. Then in front of the sweets shop he wanted his parents to buy him Gulab-Jamun and Barfi, in front of a florist shop, he wanted a garland of gulmohar, in front of a balloon shop, he wanted balloons. He wanted to stand with crowd to see a juggler perform his tricks. He wanted to sit in the merry-go-round but not even a single wish was to be fulfilled. All his desires were chilled because his parents would not allow him to buy anything. Suddenly the child realized that his parents were not there. He could not locate them anywhere in the crowd.

He ran here and there and everywhere but his parents were nowhere to be seen. Sobbing fiercely the child kept saying 'Father, Mother.' Hearing his shireks a man from the crowd picked up the child and tried to console him. He offered him a joy-ride, he took him to the place where the juggler was performing. He tried to console him by offering to buy balloons. He took him to the florist shop, to the sweet shop but the child kept on repeating "I want my mother, I want my father."

Mulk Raj Anand has beautifully and realistically captured the essence of the two worlds - the world of the grown-ups-cool, indifferent, realistic and the innocent world of a child-imaginative, inquisitive and taken in by the beauty and abundance around. For every innocent wish of the child the parents have an excuse saturated by their adult experience. The excuses at times are lame and meaningless - the usual stock excuses, but the emphasis is not lost on the readers that the adult experience refuses to accommodate the child's curiosity. They want to impose on him their own experience. The child can anticipate their reactions but he has no say in front of his parents who are his protectors in this wild and unsheltered world. The point is raised pertinently when the child gets lost in the crowd when his parents are not there to protect him. The things he wanted to buy and possess are offered to him, but now he wants his parents only. The child has his first experience of the harsh reality of life. Nothing in the fair could attract him any more.

The simple story has obvious symbolic suggestions. The child has not been given any name, (he could be any child). He is shown to be a symbol of lost humanity, lured by material attractions of the world. The colour, the beauty, the thrill all bind human beings in a net of illusions. The point is beautifully illustrated when the story writer comments :

A group of dragon flies were bustling about on their gauzy, purple wings, intercepting the flight of a lone black bee or butterfly in search of a sweet perfume from the hearts of flowers. The child followed them in the air, with his gaze, till one of them would fold its wings and sit down and he would try to catch it. But it would go, fluttering, flapping, hovering in the air, when he had almost caught it in his hands.

Hopping butterfly symbolizes the restless human desire to possess

everything. The colours and hue of the butterfly are the temptation of the material world. The child follows this butterfly and as soon as is ready to catch it, it flies away. Such is the dilemma of human pursuit. As soon as man is near the object of temptation gloating in the pride of having achieved it, it slips out of hand, and he is left alone in the quagmire of crowd and experience.

The mother symbolizes the mother earth who lures, pacifies and consoles and the father is the symbol of the supreme protector-God. Like God, father too here in the story has no name. The symbolic strands of the story get together, when the child realizes his utter loneliness. Nothing attracts him anymore, nothing consoles him. Union with the ultimate protector can only provide some support. Nothing else can.

SHORT NOTES

1. The reaction of the parents on child's demands

The parents did not relish his demands. The father especially was harsh and ruthless. When the child pleaded with his parents to buy him toys, his father looked at him red eyed in his familiar tyrant's way. The mother lured him to other attractions in the fair but inside his heart, he knew that his requests would not be acceded because his parents would say that he was greedy. The child can anticipate their reactions at every stall he halts. The typical adult reaction is as a matter of fact experience accumulated - the sum total of their lessons in life. The eternally yearning human spirit-symbolized by the child- is made to realize the futility of this pursuit, by the reaction of his parents.

2. The plight of the child after he lost his parents

The frolicking child kept hopping from one stall to another, desiring to possess all those attractive things. Suddenly he realized that his parents were not around. He became scared, tears rolled down his cheeks. Panic-stricken he ran around and looked for them in all directions. He found everything dull, uninteresting. When a Samaritan lifted him up in his arms and offered him all those things, he so imploringly had requested his parents to get him, he refused. He wanted nothing. He only wanted his parents. A full, colourful, crowded world appealed to him so long as he was under the protection of his father and mother.

DUSK

Introduction to the author : Hector Hugh Munro (1870-1916) wrote fiction under the pseudonym Saki. He began his literary career, as a political satirist for the "Westminster Gazette" and during 1902-08 was a correspondent in Russia. Later he was a correspondent in Paris of "Morning Post". '*Reginald*' was the first collection of short stories which he published under the pseudonym in the year 1904. Then came '*Reginald in Russia*' in the year 1910 and '*The Chronicles of Clovis*' (1911) and '*Beasts and Superbeasts*' (1914). '*The Unbearable Bassington*' - a novel appeared in 1912. The most prominent feature of Munro's art of story telling is the sudden surprise ending. "Dusk" also reveals this characteristic of Munro's

style. His stories are full of humour-biting, mocking, sarcastic and cynical.

Introduction to the story : "Dusk" is an interesting story, typical in style - a style which characterizes Munro's art. A cynical and a practical man Gortsby is duped by a benighted young man, who weaves a yarn of utter helplessness and cleverly extracts a sovereign from Gortsby. Despite his experience, he cannot fathom that somebody was deceiving him. The story, infact, becomes a comment on the various guises, deceit and guile can be cloaked in. Not only Gortsby, even the reader feels cheated and herein lies Munro's skill in the art of story-telling.

Summary : At the time of dusk (a time when the sun is about to set) a man named Norman Gortsby was sitting on a bench in the park. It was early March and the time was around six-thirty. The roads were empty. There was silence all around, but some people could be seen around the park. The ambience of the place was to the liking of Gortsby who identified himself with the dusk, which according to him was the time of the defeated. Though for Gortsby money was not the problem but his frustration in life lay in the defeat of some 'subtle ambition.' Sitting in the park at the time of dusk he sought a strange kind of pleasure in cynically observing people around him.

On the bench, by his side, sat an elderly gentleman. He carried an air of defiance. He appeared as one of the world's lamenters. As Gortsby was busy observing and analyzing him, this man vacated the bench which was soon occupied by a young man who looked frustrated. As he sat on the bench he used an expletive which aroused Gortsby's interest. He could not help asking the young man the reason for his bad temper. Gortsby was told about the foolish mistake he had made.

He told Gortsby that he was new to the city. He had come in the afternoon and was to stay at the Patagonian Hotel in Berkshire Square - but when he reached there he came to know that the hotel had been dismantled and in its place stood a cinema theatre. The taxi-driver took him to another hotel. On reaching the hotel he rang up his family members to give them his lodging address. Soon after that he realized that he had forgotten to pack a soap cake. As he hated to use hotel soaps he came out to buy one. Out to buy the soap, he strolled around looking at the shops. When he was to return, he realized that he did not remember the name of the hotel or the street it was in.

It was a real precarious situation for a man who had no friends or connections in London. Without sufficient money in his pocket (as the little money he had was spent on buying the cake of soap and a drink), he found himself in real predicament in a strange place without any acquaintances or friends to depend on. The young man was apprehensive that the listener would take the entire episode as an impossible yarn. But Gortsby could understand his situation as he himself had once passed through exactly one such critical situation, the only difference being that he was not alone. One of his friends was with him and he remembered that their hotel was by the side of a canal. In a foreign land, this even was quite something.

Gortsby's reaction pleased the young man. However, Gortsby wanted the

young man to produce the soap cake as a proof to the story he had narrated. The young man frantically looked for soap cake in his pockets but it was not there. Before Gortsby could comment on his carelessness the young man had left. But soon after that Gortsby spotted a small oval packet properly wrapped and sealed. Gortsby was sure that it was soap cake and he quickly came along the path to look for the young man. On finding him, he handed him over the soap cake along with his apologies for disbelieving him. Gortsby also lent him a sovereign to help him through that critical situation.

But the story reaches its climax when Gortsby is musing. "It's a lesson to me not to be too clever in judging by circumstances, "another elderly gentleman appears near the bench looking for something he seemed to have lost. On Gortsby's enquiry the gentleman told him that he had lost a cake of soap."

A short and crisp tale "Dusk" appeals to us on more than one level. Written in the stock manner of detective writing with a neat but a skeletal plot, the story has a serious message. Deceit has many guises and no experience is worth it when faced with corrupt and benighted characters. Gortsby's practical, cool and dispassionate wisdom suddenly is in for a rude jolt when he realizes that the elusive cake of soap did not belong at all to the young man who not only had convinced him of his situation but also duped him of a sovereign. The reader observes the entire situation as a mere fact of experience. However in the end along with the story writer, he has a last laugh at the cost of Gortsby.

SHORT NOTES

1. Gortsby's views about dusk

Dusk, according to Gortsby, was the hour of the defeated. Men and Women who battled in life but lost and did not want others to probe into the reasons of their defeat, identified themselves with this hour of the day. Gortsby, himself, sitting in the park at around six-thirty in the evening counted himself among the defeated. The park had emptied of the rightful pleasure seekers. At dusk only those were to be seen around, who like Gortsby chose to come out in that fashion and tried to seek pleasure in sadness.

2. Portray Gortsby

Norman Gortsby counted himself to be a defeated man. Materially he was a successful man. Money troubles did not press him. Had he wanted, he could choose to roll in wealth. His frustration in life was due to the failure of some subtle ambition. Presently he was disillusioned and heart sore. His frustration had made him cynical, cold, indifferent and judgemental. He prided himself on his cold detachment. Yet he is shown to be duped. Demanding in a detective like manner, a proof for the story the young man had narrated to him, about his plight in the foreign land, Gortsby instead was robbed of a sovereign. Though cold in demeanour he was not cold at heart. But the story-writer has a last laugh at him, so have the readers.

LESSON NO. 1.5

A CHOICE OF SHORT STORIES

- I. A Cup of Tea**
- II. An Astrologer's Day**

A CUP OF TEA

Introduction to the Author

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) is the pen-name of Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, a prominent short story writer. In fact, there are critics who hold the view that Katherine Mansfield's genius was almost equal to that of Anton Chekhov, whom she greatly admired.

After her school education Katherine Mansfield went to London hoping to develop her musical talent and to seek a career in that field. But before long she discovered her genuine bent, namely, the short story when she started writing for THE NEW AGE. In England, she met and married John Middleton Murry, the well-known literary critic, with whom apparently she frequently quarrelled. For a long time she had to battle with ill-health and died of tuberculosis.

Katherine Mansfield published a good number of short stories collected in volumes such as *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920), *The Garden Party* (1922), *The Dove's Nest* (1923), etc. After her death Middleton Murry brought together her letters and published them.

The chief quality of her short stories is their psychological realism which reminds the reader of Maupassant, the great French short story writer. She writes in a flowing racy style, but bringing in a great deal of the dramatic style in her technique takes the reader by surprise.

Introduction to the Story

"A Cup of Tea" deals with an upper-class woman, who is a bundle of social snobberies. But Mansfield shows that whatever the status, a woman of Rosemary's type is a woman after all, frail, and jealous, in spite of her desire to appear otherwise. Mansfield's method makes the best of the medium, though limited in its scope.

Summary

Rosemary Fell, the central character in the story, was not exactly

beautiful but she was young, brilliant, extremely modern, exquisitely well dressed, amazingly well read in the newest of the new books. Her parties were a grand mixture of the really important people and artists. She had been married for two years. She had a handsome husband, who almost adored her. They were very rich. If she wanted to shop, she would go to Paris for shopping as one would go to Bond Street.

One winter afternoon she had been buying something in a little antique shop in Curzon Street. It was a shop she liked, and the shopkeeper was also very fond of serving her. He was filled with joy whenever she came, and knew how to flatter her. He showed her a little box which, he said, he had been keeping for her and had not been shown to anybody else. Rosemary examined the box, liked it and decided to have it. Its price was twenty guineas. Although it was very high price for a little box, she showed no sign, and asked the shopkeeper to keep it for her. The shopkeeper was so glad to keep it for her forever.

Rosemary had to cross the pavement to reach her car, but she waited since it was raining. Just then a young, thin and dark girl came from somewhere and she wanted to talk to her. She begged for the price of a cup of tea. Rosemary felt that it was not in the least the voice of a beggar girl. It was so simple and sincere. She suddenly became adventurous. She wondered what would happen if she took the girl home. She had read about such things or seen them on stage, yet it would be thrilling. She asked the girl to come home to tea with her. The girl was greatly surprised. She feared that she might not take her to the police station but Rosemary assured her that she meant it and asked her to come and sit in her car with her. She told her that she wanted to make her feel warm and then hear anything she cared to tell her. She wanted to prove to the girl that wonderful things did happen in life, that rich people had hearts and that women were sisters. She had a feeling of triumph as she looked at the little captive and she was kindly, loving, affectionate and generous to the girl.

Soon they reached her house. The girl stood simply dazed and fascinated by the warm softness inside the house. Rosemary then gently half-pushed the girl into an easy armchair (in her bedroom) near the fire so that she could get warm. Sitting in the chair, the girl looked rather stupid. Rosemary asked her to take off her hat and feel comfortable. She then pulled the girl's coat herself though it was quite an effort. As she was going to take a cigarette off the mantelpiece, the girl told her that she was going to faint if she did not have something. Rosemary immediately ordered the maid to

get the tea and some brandy. The girl told her that she only wanted a cup of tea and no brandy. Saying this she (the girl) burst into tears. Rosemary tried to console the girl affectionately as she was really touched beyond words. She told her that both of them would have tea first and then they talk. Thereafter she served her well at the tea table which had a tremendous effect on the girl. It was after Philip's arrival (Rosemary's husband) that the girl disclosed her identity and introduced herself as Miss Smith. Thereafter they both (Rosemary and Philip) went into the Library to have a talk. There Rosemary explained to Philip that the girl was a real pick-up. She had asked her for the price of a cup of tea and she had brought her home with her. Now she wanted to be nice to her and look after her and asked Philip also to be nice to her. But he said that it simply could not be done. Rosemary argued that as she wanted to keep Miss Smith, no more reason was needed. Moreover, she had read about these things in books.

At this Philip said that Miss Smith was wonderfully pretty. Rosemary was surprised to hear this as she had not thought about it. Philip remarked that the girl was absolutely lovely and he was bowled over (conquered) as soon as he entered her room. He then asked her if Miss Smith was going to dine with them.

At this Rosemary expressed her disgust and went to her writing-room. Her heart beat like a heavy bell as she could not digest Philip's words. She opened a drawer and took out three five pound notes and went back to her bedroom where Miss Smith was sitting.

Half an hour later, she came to the library again where Philip was sitting. She told Philip that Miss Smith won't dine with them that night. She explained that the girl insisted on going. So she gave her a present of money as she could not keep her against her will.

Rosemary had also dressed herself up and put on some make up. She asked Philip if he liked her to which he replied that he liked her awfully. She then told him that she had seen a fascinating little box costing twenty eight guineas which she wanted to have. Philip called her little wasteful creature but that was not really what Rosemary wanted him to say. She then asked Philip in a whisper, if she was pretty.

Some comments

"A Cup of Tea" is a psychological story. The writer has beautifully worked out the theme of female jealousy. "Vanity thy name is woman", appropriately sums up the theme of the story. It deals with an upper middle class woman who is full of social snobberies. Whatever her social position

and whatever her desires, she cannot rise above a petty sense of jealousy. A life of pretensions is not real life at all. Women, the writer shows are by nature jealous and cannot brook the praise of another woman of her beauty by men especially their own husbands.

SHORT NOTES

Q1. *Write a short note on Rosemary's personality.*

Ans. Rosemary was not exactly beautiful but she could be called pretty if we looked at her minutely. She was young, brilliant, extremely modern, well-dressed and well read. She was very fond of giving parties and there was grand mixture of the really important people and artists. She was generous and spendthrift by nature. She wanted to purchase a little box for twenty guineas. She was very generous towards the beggar girl and wanted to keep her in her house. She was also possessive of her husband. As she feels her husband had started loving the beggar girl, she dismissed her away.

Q2. *Write a short note describing what Rosemary wanted to prove to the poor girl.*

Ans. Rosemary took the girl home. She offered an arm chair to the beggar girl to sit in and permitted her to enjoy the warmth of fire. She served her well at the tea table and consoled her as she was weeping. She wanted her to live in her house for ever. She thought that by helping the girl she would prove that rich people also had feelings and warm hearts and that women were sisters. She would also prove to the girl that wonderful things did happen in life, that fairy godmothers were after all real.

Q3. *Write a short note describing Rosemary's reason for sending the girl back.*

Ans. Rosemary took the poor girl home. After the girl had tea and meals, her spirits were revived and she looked like a new thing, a light frail creature with tangled hair, dark lips and lighted eyes. Philip praised the beauty of the poor girl and this aroused jealousy in the heart of Rosemary. She gave the poor girl a present of three five-pound notes and sent her back. She told her husband that the girl insisted on going and so she (Rosemary) could not compel her to stay against her will.

AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY

Introduction to the Author

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan (1907-2001) is an important Indian

writer, writing in English. He was born in Madras, and educated at Maharaja's College, Mysore. His well-known novels include : *The English Teacher* (1945), *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958), for which he was awarded Sahitya Akadmi Award in 1961, and *The Man Eater of Malgudi*. In fact, most of his novels have Malgudi, a fictional South Indian town as their setting. He has written many stories also and these have been collected in *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947), *Lawley Road* (1965), *Gods, Demons and Others* (1964) and *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970).

In his works, we find an all-embracing, all-compassionate acceptance of the absurdities, pathos, frustrations and humour of everyday life and this gives an irresistible impression of truth and realism.

Introduction to the Story

In "**An Astrologer's Day**" Narayan gives an account of a day in the life of a wayside astrologer. Sitting in a crowded city place, this man used to make money for his wherewithal. But one day a man confronted him to know his future. This was the man whom Astrologer had tried to kill years ago. Very shrewdly the astrologer changed the situation which made his customer happy as well as helped him to come out of his guilt.

Summary

In *An Astrologer's Day* R.K. Narayan tells us of a day in the life of a wayside astrologer. Punctually at midday, this man opened his bag, spread out the things that he needed for his trade, i.e., a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a note book and a bundle of palmyra writing. On his forehead, he put on sacred ash and vermilion and he wore a saffron coloured turban. The people could not resist the appeal of this man and so were attracted to him as bees are attracted to dahlia stalks. The place that he occupied suited his profession. A surging crowd was always moving up and down this narrow road and a variety of trades were represented all along its way. This man had never intended to be an astrologer and he knew nothing at all about astrology. Still he was successful in his profession simply because he said things which pleased and astonished his customers.

This man was forced by his circumstances to leave his village without telling anyone and he could not heave a sigh of relief till he left it behind a couple of hundred miles. Then he settled in the town and somehow adopted the profession of astrology though he knew nothing about stars. He knew about common problems faced by human beings-problems related with

marriage, money and the tangles of human relationships. Within five minutes, he understood what was wrong. First he made his customer talk about for ten minutes and from the information provided during these ten minutes, he got enough stuff for a dozen answers and suggestions.

One day when he was about to bundle up his things, he saw a man standing before him. In his usual way, the astrologer pressed the man to get his future predicted. The other person lit a cheroot and the astrologer caught a glimpse of his face by the match light. Immediately, he felt nervous but somehow he started in his usual way. 'There is a woman.... The other person put a straight question 'Shall I succeed in my present search or not?'

The astrologer now wanted one rupee for the answer (His normal fees was three pies per question) and after a great deal of haggling the other agreed. The astrologer said, "You were left for dead : Am I right?" And he continued telling the man how a knife was passed through him once and how he was pushed into a well nearby. At this, the other person told him that he would have been dead, if some passerby had not saved him. The astrologer even addressed him by his name Guru Nayak and told him everything about his village and then advised him to leave the town immediately as there was again great danger to his life. "Never travel southward again, and you will live to be hundred."

That other man told him that he had left his village simply to find and finish the man who had tried to kill him. At this the astrologer said, "He was crushed under a lorry." The man looked very satisfied to hear this and left after giving the astrologer a handful of coins.

That day the astrologer's wife was happy to have so many coins. The astrologer too felt easy. All these years he had been thinking that he had the blood of a man on his hands. But that day he had come to know that he was alive.

Some Comments

It is a humorous story and Narayan, with his wry sense of humour tells of a day in the life of a wayside astrologer. We have a very realistic description of the activities and the mode of working of an Indian astrologer who knows nothing about the stars. With his saffron turban, sacred ash on the forehead, sparkling eyes, he attracts innocent people. His experience of life has given him enough knowledge to understand and classify common human problems and this knowledge is enough for him to satisfy his client. In his ironic mode, Narayan tells us how the astrologer makes his clients talk about ten minutes and then out of the information provided by them,

gets enough material to give them answers and suggestions.

The events take a dramatic turn when the astrologer is forced to read the palm of a man he tried to kill years ago. At first he feels nervous and uncomfortable but then he handles the situation tactfully, satisfies his client without revealing his own identity. Reaching home that day, he feels relaxed. The thought that he had killed a man was gone.

The character of the astrologer has been drawn with great understanding of human nature. He has his weak points, his absurdities and his oddities, still the author shows a great liking for him.

SHORT NOTES

(Some Solved Examples)

Q1. *Write a short note describing the way the astrologer began his work.*

Ans. The astrologer started his work at midday. He always sat on a narrow road surging with crowds. He opened his bag and spread out his professional equipment which consisted of a dozen 'cowry' shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a note book and bundle of palm writings. He rubbed sacred ash and vermilion on his forehead and wore a saffron turban. Sitting under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree, he waited for customers with a searching look in his eyes. The people were impressed by his appearance and personality.

Q2. *Write a short note describing the way the astrologer usually made predictions.*

Ans. The astrologer knew nothing about the stars or astrology. But he had a working knowledge of mankind's troubles : marriage, money and the tangles of human ties. The long practice had sharpened his perception and so within five minutes he understood what was wrong. He made the clients speak for ten minutes and this provided him enough material for a dozen answers and suggestions. He would judge people with his experience. Then gazing at the palm of customers, he said things which pleased and satisfied them.

Q3. *Write a short note describing the mental state of the astrologer when he met Guru Nayak.*

Ans. One day when the astrologer was about to pack his things, he saw a man standing before him. This man was Guru Nayak whom the astrologer thought he had murdered years ago. Seeing him alive, the astrologer was afraid being recognised by him. He felt uncomfortable. He was no longer eager to earn money by reading the palm of this

man. He tried his best to get out of that situation but somehow he couldn't. Then he controlled himself and proceeded to read the palm though his throat was drying up.

Q4. Write a short note on the advice that the astrologer gave to the stranger.

Ans. The astrologer after telling the stranger everything about the way someone had tried to kill him finally advised him to take the next train and be gone. He warned the stranger of the great danger to his life if he left his home. He advised him never to travel southward again and told him that he would then live to be a hundred. Actually the astrologer wanted the stranger to abandon his search for the man who had tried to kill him because the astrologer himself was that man.

LESSON NO. 1.6

A CHOICE OF SHORT STORIES

- I. A Friend in Need**
- II. The Silver-Lining**

A FRIEND IN NEED

Introduction to the Author

William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) is a well known writer whose outstanding works of fiction has won him a good reputation. He is famous for his stories-witty and ironical, frequently expressing a cynical attitude towards life. He has written many outstanding novels and plays also and these works have placed him among the literary figures of great acclaim.

Introduction to the Story

“**A Friend in Need**” is an ironic story about a man who is considered to be a kind, generous and charming fellow by the narrator. But one day he narrates a story to the narrator and this reveals the true character of that man. In reality he turns out to be a cruel, unscrupulous man. The theme highlights the complexity of human nature.

Summary

The narrator begins the story with a reflection on the complexity of human nature and inability of man to study and judge his fellow men correctly. He himself is a poor judge of human behaviour. He believes that all of us are self-contradictory, a haphazard bundle of inconsistent qualities. Those who say that their first impression of a person is always right have either insight or they simply say so out of great vanity. In his own case, “the longer I knew people the more they puzzled me.”

These reflections occurred to him because in that morning’s paper he had read about the death of Edward Hyde Burton whom he had known a little. Burton was a rich merchant and he had been in business in Japan for many years. Once he narrated a story and that really shocked the narrator. If he had not heard the story from his own lips he could never have believed that Burton was capable of such an action. From his appearance and manner,

he appeared to be a very definite type. "Here if ever was a man, all of a piece." He was a tiny little fellow, very slender, with white hair, wrinkled face and blue eyes. He seemed to be popular at the club.

The chief quality of Edward Hyde Burton which impressed the narrator was his kindness. There was something very pleasing in his mild blue eyes, his smile was benign and his voice very gentle. He appeared to be a man who had real love and affection for his fellowmen.

One day the narrator was sitting in the lounge of the Grand Hotel. Burton joined him there and while they were engaged in conversation, Burton started talking about one Lenny Burton whom he considered to be a remarkable bridge player. Lenny Burton was a smart looking handsome man and was popular with women. One day he came to see Edward Hyde Burton in the office and asked for a job. He said that he had bad luck at cards and had become totally broke. He couldn't pay even his hotel bill. He was completely down and out. On being asked by Edward Hyde Burton if there was anything he could do except playing cards, he replied that he could swim and had swum for his university. Edward Hyde Burton told him that if he could swim from Shioya club, round the beacon and land at the creek of Tarumi, he (Edward Hyde Burton) would give him a job.

At first Lenny Burton was bit hesitant on ground of his bad health but finally agreed that Edward Hyde Burton was to meet him at half past twelve at the creek.

Edward Hyde Burton reached the creek at Tarumi at half-past twelve, but Lenny Burton never turned up. In fact, because of his ruined health, Lenny Burton could not manage the strong currents and his dead body was found after three days.

This gave a shock to the narrator and he could not speak for a moment or two but then he asked Burton if he knew Lenny Burton would be drowned when he had made the offer of a job. Edward Hyde Burton laughed and said, "Well, I hadn't got a vacancy in my office at the moment."

Some Comments

'**A Friend in Need**' is the study of a man who in his appearance and manners seemed to be a very kind, generous, gentle and charming person. But as it often happens in the stories of Somerset Maugham, the story takes an ironic turn and the true character of the man is revealed only at the end of the story. The cool, quiet and benign man turns out to be a cruel person. He himself tells the narrator about the dirty trick that he played on a friend. So the narrator's first impression of Edward Burton proves to be wrong. This

convinces the narrator that he is a poor judge of human character. In fact, human nature is so complicated that it is not possible to judge the real character of a person from what he appears to be.

SHORT NOTES

Q1. *Write a short note on the first impression that the narrator had of Edward Hyde Burton.*

Ans. The narrator's first impression about Edward Hyde Burton was very positive. From his appearance and manners, he seemed to be a definite type. He considered Edward Hyde Burton to be a 'man all of a piece', a man who was very kind, generous, gentle, charming and very pleasing. He appeared to the narrator to be a man who felt real love for his fellow beings. He also seemed to be very popular at the club.

Q2. *Write a short note on the real character of Edward Hyde Burton.*

Ans. When Edward Hyde Burton narrated a story about Lenny Burton's problem and his death, the narrator was shocked. Lenny Burton had lost everything at the cards and had become penniless. He requested Edward Hyde Burton to lend him some money. But Edward put a condition that if Lenny could swim from Shioya Club up to Tarumi he would give him a job. But while swimming, Lenny lost his life. The story revealed the true character of E.H. Burton. In reality he was very cruel and unscrupulous. He could play a dirty trick on a helpless person who had come to him to seek his help in need.

Q3. *Write a short note on Lenny Burton's personality as described by Edward Hyde Burton.*

Ans. As described by Edward Hyde Burton, Lenny Burton was a well-dressed and smart looking fellow. He had curly hair and pink and white cheeks. He was handsome and very popular with women. He was a remarkable bridge player and seemed to have an instinct for cards. He had a bad luck and had lost everything at the cards. He also drank too much and this appeared to be his weak point.

Q4. *Write a short note on the narrator's reflections about men's ability to judge fellowmen.*

Ans. The narrator believes that human nature is very complex; we are self-contradictory and a haphazard bundle of inconsistent qualities. So it is very difficult for a man to judge his fellow men. Those who say that their first impression of a person is always right have either some insight or they say so out of vanity. The reality is that the more you know people, the more they puzzle you, so it is not easy to judge

people. Human mind is full of complexities.

THE SILVER LINING

Introduction to the Author

Chaman Nahal, the author of this story, was born in 1927 in Sialkot. He is popular for his writing in English. Nahal was educated at the University of Delhi. His best novel, titled *Azadi* (1975) won him the Sahitya Academy Award in 1977. As a visiting Fellow at Princeton University (1967-70), Nahal came out with his work on D.H. Lawrence titled *D.H. Lawrence : An Eastern View* (1970), and *The Narrative Patterns in Ernest Hemingway's Fiction* (1971). His other popular works are *My True Faces* (1973), *Into Another Dawn* (1977) and *The English Queens* (1979). The popularity which has won this Indian writer of English a place among the good writers of the world, is justified in his writings. Chaman Nahal deals well with the human emotions and often depicts them with lots of vitality.

Introduction to the Story

'**The Silver Lining**' is a touching story about a handicapped child, whose parents suffer the agony caused by a helpless situation. The parents of this handicapped child run a Guest House and entertain many people with their warm hospitality. But there is a note of sorrow in their lives because of their child who runs around the House and is the main object of attraction, only because she is a handicapped child. The writer shows how a guest who is similarly handicapped brings some joy into the child's life.

Summary

The writer begins the story by referring to the human emotions. He says that he cannot gauge the human emotion. In the first paragraph, he talks about the strange affairs of life where one cannot judge the underlying emotions by their face values. He then goes on to relate a personal experience at a private Guest House, at one of the hill-resorts. This Guest House was very comfortable. It was situated near the post office, the market and the bus-stand all close to it. And in spite of all this public life, it had the beauty of being isolated and away from the humdrum of life. Other than all its facilities, the hostess of this Guest House was the most charming woman. In fact, this hostess, her husband, and their daughter proved to be the centre of attraction for the writer. The lady of the House was South Indian who had married a man from the North. She was rather dark, but had a pleasant face. The husband was big-built and sturdy, but he was good mannered and polished. In fact, both seemed to impress the writer, specially. Mrs. Bhandari, who won him over with her sweetness. The writer made a

special note of their daughter who seemed to be about eight years of age. Her hair was closely cut with a straight fringe across her forehead. The child was sweet and attractive, but she seemed too timid to be normal. The writer wanted to make friends with her, but she disappeared with tears in her eyes. The writer could make out a painful look on the faces of the Bhandaris. Mr. Bhandari explained that their daughter could not hear anything, nor speak. This was the reason why she had run away from him. The writer failed to say anything. He was almost wordless. The writer felt that he had hurt the parents. But he soon realized that the Bhandaris had to face such a situation many times. For everyday one or two guests left and new ones came along. And everyone was fascinated by the child's beauty and charm. But every time one approached the child, she withdrew and the revelation of the disability of their child caused the same pain to the parents. They were naturally quite disturbed to explain the nature of the child's problem everytime. The child could not go to any school, neither could she study at home. The only communication she had with the outer world was through the gestures that she made with her hands. To save the child from humiliation, the writer suggested to have bits of paper typed and to hand them over to every new visitor as soon as he came to the Guest House. The information would announce that the child was deaf and dumb. Her feelings might be hurt if she was approached for friendship too soon, as she could neither understand nor reply to the kind words, so all were requested to give her time to approach them and make an acquaintance. The note was to end with a 'thank you'. Mrs. Bhandari found it rather rude to welcome the people who came to make her Guest House, their temporary house, with such a note. But she gave consent only because such a note would save her daughter from the misery and helplessness which she had been experiencing for all these years. The introduction of the note worked well and not many bothered the child anymore. The Bhandaris also felt that they were relieved of the burden for sometime. Then a strange visitor arrived one day. This young man was barely twenty five and he was clad in an ill fitted outfit. His face anyhow carried a cheerful appearance and a look of vitality. This young man was Mr. David, and he had booked a room in the Guest House for the season. Mr. David very soon discovered the sealed envelope that contained the typed message. But, before he could open it, Mr. David was approached by Mrs. Bhandari's natural hospitality. Both the Bhandaris were anyway hurt, for they felt that their new guest was arrogant and rude, because he did not answer through words any of their greetings

and queries. As soon as Mr. David read the typed note, he looked around in astonishment. The small child Promodini was at that moment playing in the courtyard. The young man went straight towards her. The Bhandaris and the writer were surprised at this action of the new comer. They were surprised to see that the child was sitting comfortably in the stranger's lap and she seemed to be the happiest one. The Bhandaris had never heard their daughter laugh in such excitement and she was pointing out at the young man. Very soon they realised that Mr. David was also deaf and dumb. Mr. and Mrs. Bhandari tried to apologize for their behaviour, but David, it seems could understand their situation. He interacted through signs and at times with the help of pen and paper. In any case very soon he made it clear that though he was deaf and dumb, he could lead a normal life. The next day Promodini's mother was the happiest woman on earth because she had learnt from David that there were schools and institutions all over the world, which trained such handicapped children and catered to their special needs. David himself had been a student of such a school abroad, and now he had come to India to serve the children of this kind. He was planning to start a school for the deaf and dumb, and the highlight of the news was that he intended to take Promodini as his first student. Mrs. Bhandari's joy was endless. All her tension seemed to be at an end, when David told her that very soon even her child would be able to live almost normal life as the rest of the world.

SHORT NOTES

Q1. *Describe briefly the small child who peeped from behind the settee.*

Ans. This girl, Promodini, seemed to be about eight years of age. She was sweet and charming like her mother. Her hair was cut closely with a straight fringe across the forehead. She wore jeans and a half sleeved loose jersey with high boots. She is described in the story as a kind of a miniature jungle queen. The child was attractive but she was too timid to be normal. She could not hear anything nor speak. Her eyes had a look of horror and self-pity as inside she was conscious that she was the topic of discussion. She suffered the agony of God-ordained deprivation every moment.

Q2. *Write a short note on the embarrassment suffered by the parents everytime a new visitor to the Guest House approached Promodini.*

Ans. The parents suffered embarrassment when a new visitor approached the child. The child was so attractive that all the visitors who came to the Guest House tried to make friends with her. But the child

withdrew with sadness in her eyes. The Bhandaris found it very embarrassing to explain everytime that their child could neither hear nor speak. They were pained when they had to explain their daughter's situation to every stranger who came to their place.

Q3. *What suggestion did the writer give to save the child from repeated humiliation?*

Ans. The writer suggested that they should type out a note and keep it ready for every visitor. The note would announce that the daughter of the Bhandaris was deaf and dumb. She may get hurt if approached for friendship too soon, for she could neither hear nor speak. The visitors were requested to give her time to allow her to approach their acquaintance at her own convenience. The note ended with a word of thanks.

Q4. *Describe Mr. David's reaction after he read the note.*

Ans. Mr. David read the typed note and as soon as he did so he ran towards the place, where Promodini was playing on the grass. The Bhandaris found this quite rude, but soon they were surprised to see the closeness between David and their child. The child was laughing in excitement in the company of David and was sitting comfortably in his lap. Promodini got happy in David's company because David himself was deaf and dumb.

Q5. *Write a short note on the optimistic news that brought a silver-lining in the depressed lives of the Bhandaris.*

Ans. David was also handicapped, but he brought joy into the lives of the Bhandaris. He told Mrs. Bhandari about the institutions which catered to the special needs of the children like Promodini. The best news was that David, who had been a student of such an institution, now planned to open a school for the deaf and dumb children, and he offered to have Promodini as his first student.

LESSON NO. 1.7

A CHOICE OF SHORT STORIES

- I. Post Haste**
- II. The Child**

POST HASTE

Introduction to the Story

'Post Haste' is a humorous story by Colin Howard. Herein, the writer describes the comic situations in which a henpecked husband finds himself fixed up. He makes a fool of himself when he seriously sets out to fulfil the command of his wife, who, in the middle of the night sends him to post out a late invitation to dinner. Once out of the house, this man realizes that he does not have loose change to buy stamps, so he approaches the narrator of the story. Then a series of misadventures follow and there is a constant humour which gives the story a comic colouring. The letter is finally posted without stamps at the suggestion of the narrator and the comedy is heightened by the fact that very soon the narrator realizes that the invitation was meant for him. The story ends on a note of laughter, when the narrator receives a stampless letter early in the morning and he can recognize it immediately, because he has been handling it throughout the night.

The Summary of the Story

The narrator of the story recognizes his new neighbour Mr. Simpson. He sees him standing dejected by the pillar box in the late hours of the night. As soon as Mr. Simpson sees that he has been recognized, he asks for help. He requests the narrator, if he could lend him three and half pence. His wife it seems had given him a letter to post and he had not first noticed that it wasn't stamped. Mr. Simpson is too worried about the letter, for his wife has instructed him to post it at any cost. He seems to plead with the narrator for help. But unfortunately even the latter does not have any change in his pocket. The post office is obviously closed at such a late hour of the night, so Simpson is in trouble, for he does not have change to get a stamp out of the machine. Even if he tries, the narrator fails to leave this man in his plight and he stops back to help him. He offers Mr. Simpson to accompany him to

his house, where they might be able to help him. At home they manage to find the much needed three and a half pence.

Simpson takes the loan with gratification and makes a formal note of it in his diary. But he does not leave, he still needs help. Being a stranger in this new surrounding, he does not really know the way to post office. The narrator tries to explain the way, but Simpson is too simple headed to follow the directions. Finally the narrator has to accompany Simpson. Once at the post office Simpson tries his luck, he inserts the coin into the machine, but the coin falls with a hollow rattle, without giving any positive results. The stock of half-a penny stamps is also exhausted. Simpson gets so nervous at this discovery that he unintentionally drops the letter from his hand, and it gets a large block of mud on it. This agitates Simpson even further. By now the narrator finds himself an active partner of the posting-party. He begins to feel that the posting of the letter is as much his duty as it is Simpson's. He suddenly recollects that he does have a book of stamps at home. Simpson shows his disapproval for such a late thought. Hurriedly they proceed towards the narrator's house, once again. Anyway the hunt for the stamp book is futile as the book is only empty. The narrator is embarrassed by Simpson's disapproval in his despair. Simpson asks what they should do with the letter and the suggestion comes from the narrator that they post it unstamped. Simpson inquires in his simplicity, if they could do so. The narrator confirms that the letter would reach in any case, only the receiver would have to pay the double postage. Though Simpson wouldn't like to do such a thing, but there is no choice left. Simpson cannot in any case miss the last collection. He runs toward the post office, but in confusion he cannot find his way and the narrator ultimately catches him firmly by his arm and escorts him to the post office. They are just in time for the midnight post. After Simpson has finally posted the precious letter, the narrator does not risk leaving him behind, he takes him finally to his home. On his door step, Simpson begins to thank the narrator. He shows his gratitude and tells the narrator that without his help, it would not have been possible for him to post the letter, which was only an invitation to dinner, and before he can say for whom it was, Simpson remembers something. He is utterly regretful but he does not say anything to the narrator. He simply says good night and withdraws into the house. The narrator keeps wondering what it was that Simpson had remembered. Only the next morning he finally discovers Simpson's secret, when by the morning

post he has to pay the double postage for a blue envelope with a great muddy patch on it. The invitation had actually been for the narrator himself.

SHORT NOTES

Q1. *The opening line of the story presents Simpson as 'the little man standing dejected by the pillar-box'. Briefly point out Simpson's plight in the story.*

Ans. Simpson is a comic character in the story. He is scared of his wife and does not have courage to disobey her. She has asked him to post a letter of invitation and he feels that he must do so at the cost of anything, even if the letter is unstamped and he is without any change to buy the stamps. He is in a fix how to arrange the little money as he has to put the stamps on the letter. The post office is shortly going to close.

Q2. *Give two points that show that Simpson completely depends on others.*

Ans. In spite of the fact that the narrator gives clear instructions of how to find his way to the post office, Simpson cannot venture alone. He is simple-minded and cannot remember the instructions to find out the way alone to the post office. Secondly, he acts only according to others' decisions. The narrator suggests him to post the letter unstamped and in spite of not wanting to do such a thing, Simpson does not have his own mind to think of an alternative.

Q3. *The narrator does not have the heart to leave Simpson. Give a short account of this fact.*

Ans. After the narrator digs his empty pockets, he realizes that he cannot help Simpson. He moves to leave but Simpson looks forlorn, standing there clutching a blue, unstamped envelope; so the narrator does not have the heart to desert him.

Q4. *Mark the lines which show that Simpson is really scared of the consequences, if the letter did not get posted.*

Ans. Simpson expresses the essential need to post the letter. He speaks of his wife's insistence about the letter to be posted at any cost. He cannot explain the urgency : but he can only say that it is extraordinarily important. He better post it.

Q5. *The narrator begins to get a feeling that the posting of the letter is as much his own responsibility as it is of Mr. Simpson's. Comment.*

Ans. After the transit of the coin in the machine it fails to produce the desired stamp. The narrator begins to get a feeling that he too is a member of the posting party. He also gets seriously involved in the entire process of getting the letter through the post. Even Mr. Simpson

begins to give the narrator a feeling that the letter is equally the narrator's responsibility also.

THE CHILD

Introduction to the Author

Prem Chand (1880-1936) was a renowned Hindi novelist. He was born at Lamhi, near Varanasi and was educated at the Central Training College at Allahabad. Prem Chand's name stands out in the anthologies of Indian Literature. Till about 1914, he wrote mostly in Urdu. Later, he wrote in Hindi. 'Godan', one of his most popular novels, was published in 1936 and this brought him the recognition which he deserved as a writer. Prem Chand is known as the writer of the down-trodden. He gives a realistic picture of the poor class especially the one belonging to Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Many of his stories are translated into English.

Introduction to the Story

In this story, the writer exposes the hypocrisy and insincerity of the middle classes. The story revolves around an illiterate brahmin servant, who lives a life according to his own codes. He marries a woman of doubtful reputation and generously accepts her illegitimate child. The narrator, who has always shown great interest in the ways of Gangu, is taken aback when he learns about the deep rooted sense of selfless love that lies within his soul. Gangu is presented as a true 'embodiment of goodness'. The story is a representative of Prem Chand's work. The writer often exposes such hypocrisy as is confronted by the real values of the down-to-earth people. The story is written in the first person to give it a personal touch.

The Summary of the Story

The story begins with the introduction of Gangu, who considers himself to be a vain Brahmin. The narrator says that though other servants bow to him, Gangu never makes any such gesture. Like a true Brahmin, he never even touches the used utensils. Even when he fans the dripping and perspiring master, it is done as a great favour. Gangu has a reputation of being ill-tempered and cannot stand any kind of scolding. Naturally, he does not have any friends and he considers it below his dignity to sit among the people of lower class. He stands apart from his class, for neither he shares their tastes, nor their moods. Gangu never even prays. He is completely illiterate and accepts all the respect due to a Brahmin.

Next the narrator shifts the focus to himself. He says that he does not converse much with his servants, except when it is essential to do so. The

narrator also says that he likes to do his ordinary work himself. This shows that the writer likes his independence and enjoys self-reliance. The servants know the habits of their master and seldom bother him. They avoid approaching him, except for certain reasons, such as asking for advance, or complaining about the other servants.

Then, after the general, the narrator comes to the specific. He begins to narrate the extraordinary incident in the life of his peculiar servant Gangu. One morning the boy comes to the narrator and asks for permission to talk to him. When permitted to do so, Gangu reluctantly announces his secret. He says that he wants to be relieved of his duties. He states that he would not be able to serve his master any more. The narrator does not seem to be used to such kinds of requests so he is both surprised and hurt. He has always been too confident about himself being a good employer. Gangu assures his master that he is no doubt an image of kindness, yet the situation in which he seems to have landed, does not leave him with much choice. He tells the narrator that he does not wish to bring a bad name to his master. The master is intrigued at this statement and demands to know the truth clearly. Gangu comes out with the truth. He announces that he wants to marry a woman known as Gomti Devi. Now this woman who has just been turned out of the widow's home has a reputation that would keep all men of honour, far from her. She is known to have taken up more husbands than one, and even the narrator is aware of this fact. The narrator is completely bewildered by such an announcement. He cannot imagine the old fashioned Brahmin to marry a woman of such low reputation. The master anyhow felt both annoyed and sympathetic toward Gangu. He was sure that Gomti would not stick to Gangu for long. But even when he tries to convince Gangu, the latter is not ready to give in. He states that all said about her is a lie. He tries to defend her reputation, blaming the men who had failed to keep her as a respectful wife. Gangu feels that no woman can stay without true love. Mere boarding and lodging is not the basis of marriage. Moreover, most of the men had married her, only to do her a favour. Then comes the most philosophic statement. Gangu says to win someone over, it is necessary to forget oneself. The master has finally to give in to Gangu's decision, for the latter is determined about his marriage with Gomti. Though the narrator of the story claims not to believe in old customs and meaningless traditions yet he confesses that keeping Gangu in the house seemed quite dangerous.

At the same time, he fails to understand Gangu's true love for Gomti. He feels that Gangu is behaving merely out of infatuation. Anyway, he

shakes himself of any involvement. Five months pass, Gangu and Gomti live in the same locality, as a very happily married couple. Gangu does not earn much, yet his happiness is reflected on his contented face. Then one day the narrator hears that Gomti has run away, leaving Gangu in his bewilderment. The narrator exposes his hypocrisy when he says that this news seemed to make him happy. He feels that after all he was right in his judgement about Gomti. Gangu looks completely shattered and lonely yet he does not accept defeat. The narrator tries to show sympathy towards Gangu, which he confesses, to feign. Gangu begins to cry but he keeps on defending Gomti. He still feels that it was merely because of this that the woman had left him. He proudly says that whatever she might have been for other men, for him she was a Goddess. He still considers her to be without any flaw. He is quick about the fact that she had not taken any money with her and had not shown any faithlessness. The narrator still cannot understand Gangu's true love for Gomti. He feels that the former is only being a fool by showing so much faith in Gomti. When Gangu is not prepared to listen to anything against Gomti, the narrator provokes him to go and look for her. Gangu takes the challenge and proceeds to search for his beloved. After this incident the narrator leaves for Nainital for some time. When he returns after a month he is in for yet another surprise. He finds Gangu standing with a new born baby in his arms. His joy is written clearly on his face. The narrator, mockingly inquires about his quest for Gomti. To this Gangu confidently answers in the positive. He tells him that he found her in a hospital in Lucknow, where she had delivered the baby, now in Gangu's arms. Gangu is too happy to announce that he had accepted the baby as his own, even if it is obvious that he is not his legitimate father. The child is born only six months after their marriage yet this does not seem to bother Gangu. He is determined that a child born of Gomti would not be the reason of their separation. This finally touches the narrator's sentiments. He begins to feel like a fool. He extends his hands and takes the child from Gangu. This gesture gives Gangu confidence and he reiterates his views about his master being an embodiment of goodness. The narrator anyhow, feels rather ashamed at his own hypocrisy. His middle class morality is shamed by Gangu's courage and sincerity.

SHORT NOTES

Q1. Write a note on the vanity in Gangu's attitude as a Brahmin.

Ans. The narrator introduces Gangu as a Brahmin, with a vanity for his religious ancestry. Gangu does not seem to bother about the world

and lives in a world of his own. He does not bow to his master, like the others of his class. He never touches the used utensils. He considers it below his dignity to sit among the people of lower class. He lives in his illiteracy, and seems to be beyond this world.

Q2. *Write a short note on the narrator's interaction with his servants.*

Ans. The narrator keeps distance with his servants. He does not converse with them unless it is essential. The narrator does not rely upon them for every small task and does the minor jobs himself. He is a good employer with a reputation of a good pay master. They love and respect him. However, his servants hesitate to approach him except when they have to ask for an advance of money or they have any complaint.

Q3. *Write a short note on the scene where Gangu announces his intention to marry Gomti.*

Ans. Gangu approaches his master with a certain reluctance. When provoked he announces that he wants to leave his master, because he does not want to bring him shame and embarrassment. His decision to marry Gomti is not welcomed by his master. So Gangu's desire to leave is sanctioned by the master, who thinks it dangerous to be involved in such a matter. The master does not appreciate Gangu's true love for Gomti.

Q4. *In the end of the story Gangu repeats his words-addressing his master as the 'embodiment of goodness'-comment on this ironic statement.*

Ans. Gangu addresses his master as the embodiment of goodness. This is very ironical. Actually, it is Gangu who has shown goodness in accepting a woman who has been rejected by the world. The men have used her and thrown her, it is Gangu, who has shown courage in accepting her as she is and that too without making it look like a favour. The narrator feels ashamed, when in the end Gangu shows his own goodness. He creates goodness in his master.

Q5. *Write a short note on Gangu's character.*

Ans. Gangu is the protagonist of the story. He is presented as a vain Brahmin, who does not bother to mix up with the world around him. Yet he finally emerges as an embodiment of goodness himself. He is the real image of God himself. His selfless love for Gomti is a rare example. In fact, in Gangu's projection the writer has introduced a real, out-of-the world kind of character.

LESSON NO. 1.8

A CHOICE OF SHORT STORIES

I. The Boss Came to Dinner

II. Two Red Roosters

THE BOSS CAME TO DINNER

Introduction to the Author

Bhisham Sahni, a Hindi novelist was born in Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Educated at the Government College, Lahore, Sahni finally came to settle in New Delhi, where he taught English at the Zakir Hussain College, University of Delhi. He died in July 2003. He is well known for his works such as *Tamas* (1974), *Zharokhe* (1967), *Kadian* (1971) and *Basanti* (1980). Sahni had often shown great interest in the ordinary and everyday life of the people around him. In fact, he studied the lives of the people around him from a psychological point of view. Many of his stories have been translated into English. His collection *The Boss Came to Dinner* (1972) has many such stories.

Introduction to the Story

'*The Boss Came to Dinner*' is a representative work by an author, who makes a deep study of the day-to-day life of ordinary people. The story presents the true and selfless love of a mother for her son, and also exposes the hypocrisy of the children. The young man named Shamnath is an ambitious man, who would not allow his old mother to stand in the way of his career. Rather even at the last stage of her life, he uses her for his future prospects. The story might seem exaggerated and melodramatic at places, yet the theme is made clear through the action. The writer in fact is trying to draw attention to the neglect that the children show towards their parents and yet use them wherever and whenever they want. Shamnath, in his desire to please his American Boss, whom he had invited for dinner, is ready to tax his mother to any extreme. But the old woman even in her frailty is ready to do anything for his (her son's) promotion.

Summary of the Story

Both Mr. Shamnath and his wife are engrossed in their effort to make the best arrangement for the evening dinner. This they are arranging for Shamnath's American Boss, who can enhance Shamnath's career even further. By five, in the evening, everything is finally arranged and in order. All the

unnecessary items are piled up behind the cupboards or under the beds. Just as Shamnath is ready to relax after his tiring venture, a problem arises before Shamnath. He sees his mother and her presence begins to bother him. Shamnath discusses the problem with his wife who suggests that they can send her to the neighbour's place. But this idea is rejected, as Shamnath does not want to renew interaction with his neighbours. He suggests that they would tell the mother to finish her food early and retire to her room. This is a good proposition but the wife reminds Shamnath of the high volume of mother's snoring, which could create embarrassment, if the guests were to hear it. Shamnath thinks that he can ask his mother not to go off to sleep, but they cannot take a chance, supposing she dozed off to sleep. Shamnath begins to lose his temper and shouts at his wife to have kept her in the house. The wife does not really bother to argue back and leaves the matter to Shamnath himself. Reviewing the situation, he tries to stay cool and broods over the matter. Shamnath visits his mother's room where the old lady is engrossed in her prayers. She only prays for her son's future prospects. Shamnath is not bothered about his mother's meals. He begins to instruct his mother about the evening. He tells her that he would be receiving the guests in the drawing room. Till then she can stay in the verandah and when they move to the verandah she should quietly slip into the drawing room through the bathroom. For sometime the mother looks at her son, and agrees to do as she is told to do. He cautions her not to sleep, because her snoring can be embarrassing. Even this arrangement did not seem foolproof. What if the boss took into his head to step into the verandah. Any one of the guests might like to use the bathroom. So finally the mother is asked to wear a presentable kameez salwar and respectable shoes and sit on a chair in the verandah with her legs dangling down the chair. Shamnath gives her strict instructions against pulling her feet up on the chair or doing any of the other unpresentable gestures.

Still Shamnath considers his mother to be a problem. The mother, on the other hand, immediately dresses up according to her son's instructions and tries to impress her son. Shamnath further instructs his mother to behave smartly in the presence of his boss. The mother begins to feel quite nervous about facing the American Sahib. She had always been scared of the English Sahibs and this one was an American. Anyway, she keeps sitting there with her legs hanging from her chair. The dinner had begun to reach its height of success and everything seemed to be going perfectly well. The American Boss seems happy with the dinner and his wife appreciates the decor of the house.

At ten thirty the guests begin to pour into the verandah. The mother is forgotten by Shamnath and his wife. He only realizes her presence when he gets a shock on seeing her fast asleep on her chair. Her feet are nicely tucked up under her legs and her dupatta hangs low around her. The mother is completely unconscious of the world around her. The sight of his mother upsets Shamnath but he is forced to control his anger, as he is surrounded by his guests. The presence of the people around her and the stir wakes the mother and she gets up in confusion. The boss wishes her and offers a hand for shaking. Holding her beads in the right hand, she offers her left hand. Shamnath is furious but the boss is not conscious which hand is being offered. He simply enjoys the shake. The crisis seems to pass after an exchange of few greetings between the mother and the boss. Even Shamnath begins to feel easier. He tries to defend this situation by saying that his mother belongs to a village that is why she is so shy. The Sahib seems interested. He shows his interest in the folk-songs and the folk dances and the mother is asked to sing for the boss. Shamnath shows no hesitation in asking his old and embarrassed mother to sing for the boss. The mother sings an old wedding song and there is laughter around her. Her song definitely makes the boss happy and this changes Shamnath's mood too. The boss next shows his interest in the products of village industry in Punjab specially the items prepared by women at home. Shamnath tells his boss about the traditional Phulkari which the Punjabi women are supposed to produce in their homes. The mother comes out with an old and worn out Phulkari. Shamnath offers to present his boss with a Phulkari prepared by his mother. He does not realize that his mother may not be able to do embroidery at this age. He just takes her for granted. After the guests settle for the meals the mother withdraws to her room and her eyes are full of tears and she cries helplessly. Yet she prays to the Lord for the long life of her son. After the guests depart, Shamnath visits his mother's room and shows superficial affection towards her. He is happy because the evening has been a great success. The mother asks her son to send her to Haridwar but Shamnath has something else in mind. He cannot let her go because she has yet to fulfil the promise which he has made to his boss. The mother has to make a Phulkari for the American boss, so that her son gets promoted to a better position.

SHORT NOTES

Q1. *Describe the preparation for the formal dinner that Shamnath has arranged for his American boss.*

Ans. Both Shamnath and his wife are extremely busy in setting the whole

house according to the tastes and needs of his American boss and his other colleagues. Everything is in its place by five o'clock. The chairs, tables, side tables, flowers, napkins and even the bar is all set. The mother is also made to look presentable and acceptable. She is advised to wear a good kameez salwar and respectable shoes and sit in the verandah with her feet hanging down the chair. She is also asked not to pull her feet up on the chair as it is considered the sign of illiteracy.

Q2. *Write a short note on the final arrangement made for the mother to look presentable.*

Ans. The mother is asked to be clad in her best clothes and a nice dupatta. She is to keep awake as long as the guests are around, so that there is no embarrassment, caused by her snoring. She is to be seated erect on a chair in the verandah, like a lifeless statue, with her legs dangling from the chair. She is to greet the boss, if he happens to come across her.

Q3. *'Reaching the verandah, Mr. Shamnath stopped short'. Give an account.*

Ans. Shamnath forgets all about his mother once his party gets into full swing. As soon as he comes to the verandah with his guests, the mother's position shocks him. The old lady is fast asleep with both her feet on the seat and her head swaying from side to side. Her snoring grew louder and embarrassing.

Q4. *Describe in a few words the mother's reaction to her son's behaviour.*

Ans. After the guests settle down for dinner, the mother quietly withdraws to her room and the tears fill up her eyes. Soon they begin to pour without her control over them. Amidst the flow of her tears, she prays to God for a good and a long life for her son. Though she is disturbed yet she prays for the prosperity of her son.

Q5. *Write a short note on the mother's final request made to her son.*

Ans. The mother requests her son to send her to Haridwar. She proposes to spend her last days in the holy place, where she could find some peace, and where she could spend some time in meditation. But this plea is rejected, because the son has to keep up the pretence of looking after his mother. Moreover, the mother has yet to fulfil the promise which Shamnath has made to the American boss. She has to make a Phulkari for the boss so that her son can get promotion to the higher post.

TWO RED ROOSTERS

Introduction to the Author

Manohar Malgonkar (1913) is an Indian writer writing in English. He was born in Bombay and educated at Dharwar and Bombay. He also served in the Indian army and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. At present he is running a farm near Belgaum. His novels include *Distant Drums* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), *The Devil's Win*, *Nana Sahib's Story* (1972) and *The Princes*, *The Sea Hawk* and *The Bandicoot Run*. His short stories have been published in collections entitled *A Toast in Warm Wine* (1974), *Bombay Beware* (1975) and *Rumble Tumble* (1977). His works bear the imprint of his own as well as Indian experience.

Summary of the Story

The writer highlights the ignorance and superstitious nature of the Indian villages in this story. The poor illiterate villagers believe in evil spirits and resort to animal sacrifice to please them. They also follow the outmoded farming methods. As a result they remain poor and ignorant. They are also averse to the new scientific techniques.

Malgonkar exposes the ignorance and blind faith of the villagers with the help of two simple incidents. The first incident relates to a simple farmer Sonba. His thin and old buffalo died on the eve of the sowing season. Sonba held the evil *Churail* that resided in the Palash trees responsible for the loss. Sonba could not offer the sacrifice of a red cock to the evil spirit. The *churail* punished him with the death of his buffalo. Sonba prayed to the evil spirit with folded hands and sought forgiveness for his sins. He requested the spirit to give him means to plough his fields. He wanted either help from the landlord or money to buy a new buffalo. He also promised to offer two red roosters if the evil spirit granted his wish.

The second incident of the story deals with the visit of the agriculture officer to the village. The officer wanted to tell the villagers how they could grow more food and increase the yield of their fields. The village pandit, the fountain head of superstitions, ridiculed the officer by saying that the officer would tell us how farmers in foreign countries had produced thirty cart load of wheat by pressing a button. The village headman had to intervene to control the derisive laughter. Sonba wanted to know what had been the fate of his application for loan. The other villager questioned the officer to know how Japanese farmers produced rice or that the American farmers had double story houses and scores of buffaloes. Irritated by the ignorance of the farmers the officers informed them that there are no buffaloes in America. He enlightened

them that the farmers in America worked with tractors and one machine could do the work of hundred buffaloes. The pandit again interrupted to say that a tractor consumed so much petrol also. Sonba did not believe that a machine can plough better than a buffalo.

The officer was disgusted with the ignorance of the villagers. He held these ignorant farmers responsible for the poverty and backwardness of the country. The officer announced that the tractor would plough a furrow in their village the next day. The villagers wanted the entire field to be ploughed. The officer showed his inability by saying that the tractors could not be shown in all the villages, if all the fields were to be tilled. Moreover, their fields had already been ploughed. Sonba informed the officer that his field had yet to be tilled. The entire village gathered near the field of Sonba next day. The tractor ploughed the entire field to the satisfaction of the farmers. Sonba was happy that his wish had been granted by the evil spirit. He offered two red roosters to the *churail*.

SHORT NOTES

Q1. Write a short note on Sonba's reaction to the death of his buffalo ?

Ans. Sonba was an ignorant farmer. He was upset over the death of his buffalo because the animal died near the sowing season. He did not know how he could plough his fields without a buffalo. There was another strong cause of his tension. It was practice in his family to offer the sacrifice of a red cock every year to appease the evil spirit residing in the *palash* trees. Sonba could not offer the rooster this year. He thought the spirit had punished him for his sins.

Q2. Write a short note on Sonba's offering of two red cocks to the evil spirit on a dark moonless night?

Ans. After the death of his buffalo, Sonba prayed to the evil spirit to provide him means to plough his field. Incidentally the agriculture officer arrived in the village to demonstrate the working of the tractor to the villagers. The tractor ploughed the field of Sonba. The poor villager offered two red cocks to the evil spirit for the fulfilment of his prayer. The officer gave a demonstration of the tractor to liberate people from their ignorant and superstitious ideas. But it is an irony of fate that the good deed ended up in strengthening the superstitious beliefs of the villagers.