

CHAPTER - 5

MOTHER'S DAY

QUESTIONS FROM TEXTBOOK SOLVED

A. Reading With Insight

Question 1. This play, written in the 1950s, is a humorous and satirical depiction of the status of the mother in the family.

(i) What are the issues it raises?

(ii) Do you think it caricatures these issues or do you think that the problems it raises are genuine? How does the play resolve the issues? Do you agree with the resolution?

Answer: (i) The play raises many serious issues. The first and foremost is proper appreciation of a housewife's role and responsibilities. Those who work eight hours a day and forty hours a week treat the housewife as an unpaid domestic servant, who must carry out their orders. They neither request her nor thank her for her services. The second issue is the reciprocity of love and gratitude towards the mother or wife. The husband, son and daughter leave the lady of the house alone every night and go out to enjoy themselves in their several ways. They do not take any notice of her and have become thoughtless and selfish. The mother's excessive love, care and promptness to serve them also spoil them.

(ii) The problems the play raises are serious. The treatment is of course, comic. The playwright adopts an unusual method to resolve the issues. He takes the help of magic of the East. Incantation of a magical spell helps in the interchange of the personalities. Now Mrs Pearson, with the strong and sinister personality of Mrs Fitzgerald, gives rough treatment to the daughter, son and husband respectively. Her stern looks and commanding tone suggests to them that she can be really tough. The spoiled members are brought round by the heavy dose of exposure of reality to them. They agree to stay and help in preparing the supper while the housewife has a talk with her husband.

The resolution of the issues seems far-fetched and unnatural but extreme means have to be adopted in disaster management.

Question 2. If you were to write these issues today, what are some of the incidents, examples and problems that you would think of as relevant?

Answer: Various responses are possible. One such response is given below:

The incidents of unfair treatment to the fair sex at home, at work, in public transport and elsewhere will prove handy. The examples of exploitation of female workers with lower wages,

harassment by seniors, indecent remarks, eve-teasing and molestation can highlight the problems of social inequality that women face in practice. Even in the twenty first century women face the same problems in spite of the talk of women empowerment. The poor housewives have to bear the physical torment and mental anguish at the hands of bullish husbands who boast of their masculinity by inflicting physical violence, barbs and taunts on the defenseless women. Examples of rapes and sexual harassment which hug the limelight in daily newspapers can also be included to highlight the problems of insecurity of women in modern society.

Question 3. Is drama a good medium for conveying a social message? Discuss.

Answer: Yes, drama is certainly a good medium for conveying a social message. Direct moralising is often resented and usually ignored. Drama is a presentation of a slice of life through characters placed in various situations. The attention of the spectators centres round their actions and reactions. Most of them feel fully involved with the protagonists. The working out of the theme generally leaves a message—sometimes obvious and explicit but in most of the cases, indirect and implicit. The social message of these plays seems to come out of the interactions of the characters and their traits of character. The victory of evil over good is usually portrayed indirectly. These days we find many plays centred around themes creating social awareness such as evils of drinking and smoking; dangers of pollution, child labour, the decreasing female ratio and need to empower women.

Question 4. Discuss in groups plays or films with a strong message of social reform that you have watched.

Answer: For group discussion at class level. There can be varied responses. One such response is given below: The latest film I have watched recently is 'SWADESH'. It has a strong message of social reform. It tells the story of an Indian scientist at NASA (America) who visits his ancestral home in India. The poor condition of the villagers and lack of basic facilities fills him with deep agony. He resigns his job in America and returns to his native country (Swadesh) to begin his work of rural uplift. He gives the villagers a message that self-help is the best help and we cannot depend for everything on the Government. This remote village is plunged in darkness after sunset as there is no electricity. With the help of a few villagers, the scientist is able to produce hydroelectricity and light the village homes. The water can be used for irrigation purposes also. Thus the economic and social condition of the villagers undergoes a sea change.

MORE QUESTIONS SOLVED

A. Short Answer Type Questions

Question 1. How are Mrs Pearson and Mrs Fitzgerald contrasted?

Answer: The two ladies are sharply contrasted. Mrs Pearson is a pleasant but worried looking woman in her forties. She speaks in a light, flurried sort of tone with a touch of suburban cockney. Mrs Fitzgerald is older, heavier and has a strong and sinister personality. She smokes. She has a deep voice, rather Irish tone.

Question 2. "I'm much obliged," says Mrs. J Pearson. What for does she feel obliged and to whom?

Answer: Mrs. Pearson feels obliged to Mrs Fitzgerald for telling her fortune. She thinks it quite wonderful having a real fortune teller living next door.

Question 3. What fortune does Mrs Fitzgerald predict for Mrs Pearson?

Answer: Mrs Fitzgerald is quite equivocal in her predictions. She says it could be a good fortune or a bad one. All depends on Mrs Pearson herself now. She asks her to decide firmly.

Her fortune depends on it.

Question 4. What problem does Mrs Pearson face? Who do you think is responsible for this state of affairs?

Answer: Mrs Pearson devotes all her time and energy to serve her husband, son and daughter. These thoughtless and selfish persons go out every night to enjoy themselves leaving Mrs Pearson alone at home. She is no better than a servant in her own home. Mrs Pearson herself is responsible for the ill-treatment, neglect and lack of concern shown to her.

Question 5. What course of action does Mrs Fitzgerald suggest to Mrs Pearson to tackle the situation?

Answer: Mrs Fitzgerald tells Mrs Pearson to decide firmly and stick to her decision. She must assert her position and become the real mistress of the house. Her own initiative can help her. She must let them went or look after themselves for once.

Question 6. What difficulties does Mrs Pearson face while dealing with the various members of her family?

Answer: Mrs Pearson loves her husband and children too much. She does not find courage enough to discuss the problem with them. She only keeps dropping hints. She hates any unpleasantness. She does not know where to start. She doesn't know how to begin discussion with the other members of the family.

Question 7. "Then let me do it", suggests Mrs Fitzgerald. How does Mrs Pearson react to it?

Answer: Mrs Fitzgerald offers to deal with the family of Mrs Pearson and teach them to treat her properly Mrs Pearson feels flustered. She thanks her saying that it wouldn't do at all. They would resent being ill-treated by somebody else and wouldn't listen.

Question 8. How does Mrs Fitzgerald plan to deal with the family of Mrs Pearson?

Answer: She tells Mrs Pearson that she will deal with her family not as herself but as Mrs Pearson. They will change places or really bodies. Mrs Pearson would then look like Mrs Fitzgerald and the latter would look like the former.

Question 9. Why does Doris Pearson feel astounded on returning home?

Answer: Doris finds her mother smoking away—lighting another cigarette and laying out the cards for patience on the table. She shoots her query about ironing her yellow silk, but feel astounded on seeing her mother's behaviour.

Question 10. What are the two reasons that annoy Doris Pearson?

Answer: Firstly, Doris is annoyed that her mother has not ironed her yellow silk dress which she has to wear that night. Secondly, she has returned home after working hard all day and mother hasn't even bothered to get her tea ready.

Question 11. How does Mrs Pearson refute Doris's argument about working hard?

Answer: Mrs Pearson tells Doris that she has a good idea how much Doris does. Mrs Pearson claims that she puts in twice the hours that Doris does, and gets no pay or thanks for it.

Question 12. How does Mrs Pearson criticize Doris on going out with Charlie Spence?

Answer: Mrs Pearson asks Doris if she could not find anyone better than Charlie Spence. He has buck-teeth and is half-witted. She wouldn't be seen dead with Charlie Spence. At her age she would either have found somebody better than Charlie Spence or stopped dating boys on seeing no hope of success.

Question 13. Why is Cyril Pearson annoyed with his mother? Give two reasons.

Answer: Cyril feels annoyed when his mother tells him that tea is not ready as she couldn't bother about it. He enquires if she is not feeling well and then asks her to be quick as he has not too much time. His mother has not taken his things out. She has neither mended them nor is she willing to do so.

Question 14. "That's a nice way to talk What would happen if we all talked like that?" says Cyril. In what context does he say so? What argument does he get in return?

Answer: When Mrs Pearson tells her son, Cyril that she has decided now that she doesn't like mending, Cyril objects to her words. Mrs Pearson gives him a taste of his own medicine by saying that all of them do talk like that. If there's something at home they don't want to do, they don't do it. If it is something at their work, they get the union to bar it. She has now joined the movement.

Question 15. How do Doris and Cyril react to Mrs Pearson's query about stout?

Answer: Cyril is the first to react. He hints that she doesn't want stout then i.e., at tea time. Her remark that she wants to drink surprises both Doris and Cyril and they exchange notes regarding her behaviour towards them since they returned home that evening.

Question 16. What changes in the behaviour of Mrs Pearson startle Doris and Cyril? What possible reasons do they suggest?

Answer: Doris couldn't believe her eyes when she saw her mother smoking and playing cards. Cyril too noted the change and asked her if she was feeling ill. She looks just the same but her behaviour is suddenly different. Cyril asks if she has gone slightly mad. Doris thinks that she has a concussion as a result of her head hitting something.

Question 17. How does Mrs Pearson teach her children to be responsible adults?

Answer: First she scolds them for their guffawing and giggling. Then she has a dig at their lifestyle. They just-come in, ask for something, go out again and then return as there's nowhere else to go. When Doris and Cyril boast of doing their work all day, Mrs Pearson tells them that she has also done her eight hours. She threatens to have two days off at the weekend.

Question 18. "But any of you forty-hour-a weekers who expect to be waited on hand and foot on Saturday and Sunday with no thanks for it, are in for a nasty disappointment," says Mrs Pearson. How has she planned to spend the weekends?

Answer: She might do cooking or make a bed or two as a favour: only if she is asked very nicely and thanked for it. They'll have to pay attention to her and show care and concern. Perhaps she might go off for the weekend. It will provide her a change. She is bored of remaining at home all the time.

Question 19. "I'll hit you with something, girl, if you don't stop, asking silly questions." says Mrs Pearson to Doris. Which 'silly' questions does she object to?

Answer: Doris at first asks with disbelief if she would go off for the weekend and then enquires where she would go and with whom. Mrs Pearson tells her that it is her business. Doris then asks her if she had fallen or hit herself with something. Mrs Pearson objects to this silly question.

Question 20. "Well that ought to be nice change for you" says Mrs Pearson. What 'change' does she refer to and how does George react to it?

Answer: George finds his wife Annie (Mrs Pearson) drinking stout at the wrong time of the day. Moreover, he has never seen her doing it before. Naturally, he is confused and surprised. When

he remarks that he doesn't like her drinking and it doesn't look right. Mrs Pearson remarks about the 'change' in her style.

Question 21. "Annoyed because I don't get a tea for him that he doesn't even want", says Mrs Pearson. What forces her to make this remark?

Answer: At first, George Pearson tells his wife that he wouldn't want any tea as there is supper at the club that night. He feels hurt to know that she hasn't prepared any tea. When he asks "suppose I'd wanted some," Mrs. Pearson makes this biting remark.

Question 22. How, do you think, is George Pearson treated at the club?

Answer: The members of the club laugh at George Pearson. He is, in fact, one of their standing jokes. They call him Pompy-Ompy Pearson because they think he is quite slow and pompous. Although this joke is quite famous, George is unaware of it.

Question 23. What objection does Mrs Pearson have against George's going to club so frequently ?

Answer: Mrs Pearson fails to understand why her husband George wants to spend so much time at the club where people are always laughing at him behind his back and calling him names. He leaves his wife alone every night. She wouldn't make him look a fool if he went out with her.

Question 24. "Sometimes it does people good to have their feelings hurt. " Do you agree with Mrs Pearson's observation?

Answer: Mrs Pearson has hurt the feelings of her husband, George by telling him the truth. She thinks that truth should not hurt anybody for long. I think she is right. It's no good living in fool's paradise.

Question.25. Why does Mrs Pearson doubt the value of Cyril's opinion?

Answer. She tells Cyril frankly that he knows nothing about worldly affairs. He spends too much time and good money at amusement shows like greyhound races, dirt tracks and ice shows.

Question 26. Why is George Pearson incensed at Mrs Fitzgerald's utterances?

Answer: George reacts with horror and surprise when his neighbour, Mrs Fitzgerald addresses him by his first name, George, instead of the formal Mr George Pearson. Her second remark "Oh-dear-I ought to have known" further incenses him as he thinks she has no business to poke "her nose into their family affairs.

Question 27. "Perhaps you'll excuse us.... " What lessons of civility does Mrs Pearson teach George Pearson?

Answer: Mrs Pearson tells George that she will not excuse him for his behaviour. She asks him to be polite to her friend or neighbour in future. He should greet her politely instead of coming in and sitting down silently.

Question 28. Why does Mrs Pearson threaten to slap her husband?

Answer: George feels angry at being humiliated in the presence of his neighbour. He loses his temper and asks his wife if she has gone mad. This is too much for Mrs Pearson to bear. She jumps up and threatens to slap George if he shouts at her again.

Question 29. "Either Pm off my chump or you two are". Why do you think George arrives at this conclusion?

Answer: Mrs Pearson threatens to slap George if he shouts at her again. Then Mrs Fitzgerald

begins to moan and addressing Mrs Pearson as Mrs Fitzgerald, requests her not to do so. George is bewildered and exclaims that either he is mad or both of them are mad.

Question 30. How is Doris taught a lesson in behaviour?

Answer: When Mrs Fitzgerald remarks that Doris was going out with Charlie Spence that night, Doris feels annoyed and retorts that she has got nothing to do with it. Mrs Pearson rebukes Doris harshly and tells her to answer Mrs Fitzgerald properly. She adds that she won't have her daughter behaving rudely with anyone.

Question 31. How does the real Mrs Pearson learn about her daughter's miserable state?

Answer: The real Mrs Pearson has the body of Mrs Fitzgerald. At her insistence Doris tells her that her mother has been criticizing her and making her feel miserable. According to her Charlie Spence has buck-teeth and is half-witted. All this has made her miserable.

Question 32. What forces the real Mrs Pearson to come to the conclusion: "That's enough quite enough"?

Answer: Mrs Fitzgerald who has the body of Mrs Pearson, has been quite harsh to George Pearson, Doris and Cyril. The real Mrs Pearson objects to her comments about Charlie Spence. Later when she is a bit rude to George, the real Mrs Pearson feels offended.

Question 33. What is Mrs Fitzgerald's final advice to Mrs Pearson after reversion to their original personalities?

Answer: Mrs Fitzgerald advises Mrs Pearson not to go soft on the members of her family again. She should not start explaining or apologizing. She should give them a look or a rough tone of voice now and then to suggest that she might be tough with them if she wanted to be so.

Question 34. What would Mrs Pearson like the members of her family to do?

Answer: She wants them to stop at home in the evening and give her a hand with supper. She would also like to play a nice game of rummy, which she fails to have except at Christmas.

Question 35. How does the stern treatment reform the spoiled children?

Answer: The children look apprehensively at Mrs Pearson. However, they smile back at her, as she smile. Since they are not going out, she suggests having a nice family game of rummy. She tells the children to get the supper ready while she has a talk with their father. The spoiled children meekly obey her.

B. Long Answer Type Questions

Question 1. What do you think is the theme of the play? How has it been worked out?

Answer: The theme of the play is the status of women in their own household. The housewife serves the members of her family with complete devotion, sincerity and love. However, she is never given the regard, attention or thanks due to her. Her leniency and eagerness to please everyone reduces her to the rank of an unpaid domestic servant in her own house. Instead of being politely requested for a favour, she is ordered to do it. She gets no thanks in return. The theme is worked out by portrayal of the Pearson family. Mrs Pearson is the harassed mother. Her daughter Doris, son Cyril and husband George take her services for granted and have become thoughtless and selfish. The interchange of personalities and the harsh treatment meted out to them by the personality of Mrs Fitzgerald (in the body of Mrs Pearson) reforms them and they obey the mother willingly.

Question 2. What impression do you form of Mrs Annie Pearson ?

Answer: Mrs Pearson is the main character in the play 'Mother's Day'. She is a pleasant but

worried-looking woman in her forties. She speaks in a light, flurried sort of tone, with a touch of suburban cockney. She loves her husband and children very much and runs after them all the time. Her excessive love and care have spoilt them and they have become thoughtless and selfish. She feels neglected and lonely but lacks courage to discuss things with them. Perhaps she hates any unpleasantness as well. She is not willing to act as a tough mom as she is nervous and fluttering by nature. She is so tender-hearted that she is shocked to see the rough treatment meted out to her children. She decides to change back to her original personality to deal with her family herself. She is indeed a loving and affectionate mother and a devoted wife.

Question 3. "The shock treatment makes the thoughtless and selfish persons realise the real position of the lady of the house." How far do you agree with the statement? Give reasons for your answer.

Answer: I fully agree with the aforesaid statement. Drastic situations need drastic remedies. The thoughtless, selfish and spoilt members of the Pearson family do not understand the language of love and affection. Mrs Pearson with Mrs Fitzgerald's bold and dominating personality and her toughness makes them realise their own state. Doris is the first to learn her lesson in civility and politeness. The criticism of her boy friend seems quite unexpected to her—perhaps more than the non-compliance of her orders of ironing the yellow silk dress. Doris has tearful eyes. Cyril is also told to help himself. The mother's declaration that she too will henceforth work forty hours a week, have the weekends off and go somewhere to enjoy herself come as a shock treatment. The balloon of her husband's ego is punctured by disclosing to him how people at the club make fun of him. In the end all the three members come round and show their willingness to obey the mother's command.

Question 4. Write a note on the role of Mrs Fitzgerald in the play.

Answer: Mrs Fitzgerald plays a very important role in the play. She is introduced as a fortune teller and the next-door neighbour of the Pearsons. It is through the initial conversation between her and Mrs Pearson that we come to know the problems that Mrs Pearson faces. Mrs Fitzgerald analyses the situation quite objectively and becomes the playwright's mouthpiece. She also suggests the ways and methods of tackling the situation. Since Mrs Pearson does not have the guts to stand for her right, Mrs Fitzgerald suggests a novel approach—exchange of personalities. Now as Mrs Pearson, with the personality Mrs Fitzgerald, she puts the plan of reformation in action. She smokes, drinks and plays cards. All this is unusual for the family. She further shocks them by being tough with them in word and action. She asks them to look after themselves. She clearly tells them that she has already worked for more than eight hours that day. She tells them plainly how they behave at home and workplace. She is equally blunt with Mr George Pearson, who goes away every evening to club, leaving his wife alone at home. She reveals to him how the people at club make a fun of him. In short, she makes them realise their responsibility towards the mother. In the end, she performs the exchange of personalities once again. Thus she is the main spring of initial action, climax and denouement.

Question 5. The play 'Mother's Day' is a humorous and satirical depiction of the status of the woman in a family. Bring out briefly the elements of humour and satire.

Answer: The play 'Mother's Day' treats a serious theme in a light-hearted manner. The humour in the play springs from an unusual situation where the personalities of two ladies change bodies. Their subsequent behaviour, which is in total contrast to their previous one, is a very powerful source of laughter. The ignorance of the characters about the personality they are facing also creates humour. Suggestive dialogues also provide a lot of fun. For example, consider the following:

- "Mrs Pearson if you had to live my life it wouldn't be so bad. You'd have more fun as me than you've had as you."
- "It's that silly old bag from next door—Mrs Fitzgerald."
- "Ticking her off now, are you, Annie?"
- "They call you Pompy-Ompy Pearson because they think you're so slow and pompous."

The actions, gestures and reactions of the characters also provide humour. The housewife being given orders, treated like dirt and forced to stay home every night while other members go out to amuse themselves is sharply contrasted with the position at the end of the play where she is the mistress of the house. Then play also satirises the eight hour work culture and threats to go on strike. Even the housewife adopts this weapon.

Question 6. Comment on the ending of the play 'Mother's Day'.

Answer: The play has a happy ending with a complete reversal of the initial situation. Mrs Pearson is now cheerful while the family looks anxiously at her. When she smiles, they feel much relieved and smile back at her. None of them is going out.

For the first time, perhaps she tells the members of the family what they should do. Instead of behaving timidly, she looks sharply at the family and asks if they have any objections. George is the first to yield. He agrees to do whatever she says. Still smiling, she suggests that they should have a nice family game of rummy and then the children could get the supper ready while she has a talk with their father. George supports her and looks enquiringly at the children. Cyril hastily approves the proposal while Doris agrees hesitatingly. A sharp command: "What Speak up!" does the trick and Doris agrees. Mrs Pearson bids good bye to Mrs Fitzgerald and smilingly asks her to come again soon.

The ending seems quite natural. It also leaves a message for the mothers. They should assert themselves.

Question 7. Write a note on the title of the play 'Mother's Day'.

Answer: The title of the play is quite appropriate. It sums up the theme of the play. It suggests that the action of the play revolves round a mother. The playwright confronts us at the outset with the problems the mother faces from her grown up children and their father. The novel technique employed to tackle the spoilt children and the grown up man is quite amusing and thought provoking. The bold and dominating mother acts tough with the children and makes them realise the need of proper attention towards their mother. They are made to learn lesson in courtesy

and polite behaviour not only towards the mother but also towards the visiting neighbour. The mother certainly has her day as the children learn to treat her properly. The supper being prepared by the children, their stay at home and the family game of rummy is a rare gift that the mother receives on this important day.