

# CHAPTER - 5

## PAPPACHI'S MOTH

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### Understanding the Text

1. Comment on the relationship shared by Mammachi and Pappachi.

#### Answer

Pappachi and Mammachi had a gap of 17 years. A retired high ranked officer, Pappachi was always jealous of Mammachi's talent and of the attention she received. Whether it was pickle making or her violin classes in Vienna, Pappachi was always jealous of her. Despite of all the friction they had in their relationship, Mammachi bore with him. Mammachi was more used to Pappachi and was not exactly in love with him. Pappachi used to beat him with brass vases and still Mammachi could not let go of him. She wept bitterly on his funeral not because the man she had loved was gone but because he will not be around her any more. He was an old shoe for her and she could not let go of him. She was too attached to him, to having him slouching around the pickle factory, and of course, used to being beaten by him.

2. How does Mammachi stand out as an independent resilient woman in the text?

#### Answer

Mammachi was a woman who was always discouraged by her egoistic Entomologist husband. He never supported her and was jealous of her talent and any sort of attention she received. Probably it was so because of the frustration pent up inside his heart for not receiving the deserved fame of his discovery of the moth he wished to be named after him. However, her pickle recipe was a famous one and she was called by the Kottayam Bible Society to make some of her famous banana jam and tender mango pickle for an upcoming fair. It sold quickly and received more orders than she could cope with. Thrilled with her success, Mammachi decided to persist with the pickles and jam and was kept busy for the whole year. Gradually she set up a pickle factory and made a success of it.

3. Why does John Ipe consider retirement to be a dishonour?

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## Answer

Benaan John Ipe, Pappachi, got retired from the post of Joint Director, Entomology. He was a reputed man. He was proud of being a high-ranking government officer; however, now retired he was finding it difficult to cope with the ignominy of retirement. He was seventeen year older than Mammachi and realised with a shock that he was an old man when his wife was still in her prime. He had always been a jealous man and he resented the attention his wife was suddenly getting. For him his retirement that was a constant reminder of his old age stung him deeply. A man who was once so strong to beat down his wife with brass vases was not put to a stop by his young son. He felt neglected and dejected. A once Imperial Entomologist was now reduced to a withered old man and this gave a jolt to his ego.

### 4. What was the underlying reason for John Ipe's disgust with the world?

## Answer

John Ipe was disgusted with the world. He did not get his due. The moth, Pappachi discovered, was not named after him and it fuelled the fire that burnt within him, consuming him. He was ill humoured already, yet the fact that he was a retired government official without any fame, his wife who was seventeen years younger to him, still in her prime, was making good out of her pickle factory. This hurt Pappachi, it wounded his pride. He started beating Mammachi now regularly. Everything, from his never got fame to his wife's success wounded him badly and his frustration proliferated.

## Talking about the Text

### 1. Chako's firmness in dealing with the irrational behaviour of his father.

## Answer

Pappachi used to beat Mammachi with brass vases every other night until Chako came home for a summer vacation from Oxford. He had grown into a big and strong man. It had been a week to him since he arrived that he found Pappachi beating Mammachi in the study. Chako strode into the room, caught Pappachi's hand by which he held vase and was beating Mammachi and twisted it around his back. He told loud and clear to Pappachi that he would not want the incident to happen again, ever! The father was flabbergasted. He never dared to touch Mammachi again and yet he never talked to her again till he lived. The firm attitude of the young son stopped the domestic violence that used to take place every day in the house. It was a good action taken by the boy. Men in our society beat their wives without any cause just to prove their physical superiority. The boy made it clear to the father that he is not the only one with muscles in the house putting a stop to the violence.

### 2. The contrast between the outward elegance of a person and his private behaviour.

## Answer

Pappachi, John Ipe, was an ex high-ranking government official, a Junior Director, Entomology. A well qualified and socially dignified personality who always wore immaculate three piece suits and his golden pocket watch. However, the grotesque reality that was locked inside his house was this that he was one of those men of our society who could not see their wives prospering and successful. He resented her talent and never approved of her pickle factory or even her violin classes in Vienna. The face that his family knew was an ugly reality. He used to beat his wife almost every day with brass vase. Anybody would be disgusted at the behaviour of such a man who appeared to be so dignified in his exterior and did domestic violence with his wife.

### 3. Approval from the outside world and approval within the family.

## Answer

Mammachi was a woman with exceptional talent and of this Pappachi was jealous. Once when her violin teacher remarked on her being so talented, Pappachi called off the classes. Even when later in life when Pappachi was retired, his ego did not give way to soberness and he disapproved of her flourishing pickle factory. The Kottayam Bible Society in Ayemenem was full of appreciation for Mammachi, while her own husband looked down upon her. He was jealous of his wife's success, a male chauvinist, Pappachi was not an ideal husband in any case who had a dutiful wife he never appreciated.

## Apperciation

### 1. How does the author succeed in raising crucial social issues not through open criticism but through subtle suggestion?

### Answer

Roy hit the nail right on the head in describing the male chauvinistic society we live in, though suggestively. How pride is all that matters to a male and for a female, no matter how cruel her husband is and even if the love is worn out of their relationship, her want for him never ceases. This is the society we live in where a male beats her wife no matter how qualified he is. It does not matter if he is a top notch government official who comes from a so called modern background, he can not tolerate his wife's success. A man always wants his wife to be a subordinate to him. It is in our minds that a woman can not rise higher to her husband. It is also highlighted in the story that how we run after momentary pleasures. Recognition is important for a human undoubtedly; however, the way Pappachi ruined all his life and relations because of what he did not get, rather than accepting that may be it was not fated after all. We humans, especially men, crave for fame and recognition. In what of what we can not have, we lose what we have.

2. Within a few pages the author has packed the important events in the lives of John Ipe and his wife. Discuss how conciseness and economy of expression can achieve effective portrayal of entire lives.

### Answer

There are two ways of narrating a story, one style is the elongated narration with the detailing of each and every emotion and situation giving length to the story. The other style is crisp one that keeps the story short yet highlighting the important events and emotions. Roy has narrated using the second style. She has kept the story short, yet she did not miss out anything. She has described the relation of a husband and a wife with all the necessary details, though she did not ponder over the sentiments for long. She explained the face of the society we live in. Jean Genet was so correct when he said that society dwells on images and this is what Roy has tried to emphasise in her story. John having lost the chance to gain the recognition, he could have, felt the loss of identity along with it. Roy is economical when she describes the emotions and makes sure that nothing worthless is portrayed. All that she has spent in the short tale is worth the while. The narration is simple enough and achieves effectively the portrayal of the entire lives of the characters. The disturbance in the marriage, the physical violence, the emotional loss, the intervention of the young child and its impact on the father. All have been portrayed wisely not wasting any time or making the reader to wait for the following happenings.

3. Identify instances of ironical comment in the story.

### Answer

It is ironical that despite being brutally beaten by Pappachi, Mammachi used to love him. She cried bitterly on his death. However, the fact is that Mammachi was not in love but was used to Pappachi and his beatings.

### Language Work

1. Entomologist and lepidopterist are mentioned in the text and you must have guessed the meanings of these words or found them out in the dictionary.

Now match the kinds of scientists given with the work they do:

| A             | B                            |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| ornithologist | study of the skin            |
| gerontologist | study of cells               |
| ergonomist    | study of birds               |
| dermatologist | study of old age             |
| cytologist    | study of design of equipment |

### Answer

| A             | B                            |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| ornithologist | study of birds               |
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| dermatologist | study of the skin            |
| cytologist    | study of cells               |

2. A short report announcing the death of a person in a newspaper is called an 'obituary'. Where would you find the following

|             |              |            |
|-------------|--------------|------------|
| a citation  | an epitaph   | a glossary |
| an abstract | a postscript |            |

**Answer**

a citation: Words or lines taken from a book or a speech are called citations. It is somewhat similar to quotation.

an epitaph: Lines written in remembrance of a person on her/his gravestone is an epitaph.

a glossary: The list of terms, used in a book, presented at the end with their meanings is called glossary.

an abstract: A short piece of writing containing the main idea in a document is an abstract.

a postscript: The extra message written at the end of any message is called postscript (p.s.).