

CHAPTER - 6

THE THIRD & FINAL CONTINENT

Page No: 83

1. Indicate the details that tell us that the narrator was not very financially comfortable during his stay in London.

Answer

The following details depict a very uncomfortable picture of life, faced by financial crisis: The author travelled in a third class cabin. The author talks about 'struggling' to earn a livelihood and establishing oneself abroad. The author and three or four friends resided together and shared a wash-room which was icy cold. The author, along with his friends, took turns cooking pots of curry which they ate with their hands on a table covered with newspapers. His rugged life could well be understood by instances such as watching cricket at Lord's or listening to Mukesh. Habits such as walking barefoot, smoking, drinking tea and strolling around on weekends show that he wasn't all set in his life. The word 'penniless' quite describes the financial crunch which he faced while he was studying at LSE.

2. How did the narrator adjust to the ways of life first in London and then in Cambridge, U.S.A.?

Answer

The narrator has seen various shifts in his life. Firstly, during his bachelorhood, he adjusted a great deal surviving under very absurd and unfavourable conditions. He started working in a library to meet his expenses while he was attending lectures at the LSE. He adjusted his accommodation with other people like him, sharing food, toilet, etc. He led a reckless life eating with hands, soaking dirty dishes in the tub, lounging barefoot, doing things only expected from aimless and lethargic people. Next came a phase in his life when he got married and found a permanent job in America. He shifted because he was given a full-time job in the processing department of the library at MIT. This, however, did not mean that he had started living lavishly. His budget remained just the same it was when he was a student. The aspect that changed drastically was the pace of life in America. Every person was in a hurry to get to the top. Even in his new accommodation, he adjusted to various noises such as

flashing sirens, fleet of buses rumbling along all night, distracting and suffocating him. Life wasn't as peaceful and calm as he had expected with no "glittering ocean to thrill" him or no "breeze to cool" his face. His change in schedule can be reflected at various incidents such as buying milk, etc. His life at the YMCA building turned to be stifling and intolerable with the inconvenient living conditions and unbearable noise because of which he had disturbed sleep.

3. What do you understand of the character of Mrs Croft from the story?

Answer

Mrs. Croft, as seen in the beginning of the chapter, is very commanding with an authoritative tone in his voice. She could be interpreted as a hypocrite when she asked the author as to whether he was a Harvard or a Tech, depending on which she would be renting out her flat. She was very firm when it came to following instructions. She was a very orthodox lady whose ideals were very strong and needed to be followed without any questions. However, with passage of time, more of her character was revealed. She just seemed hard from outside but was a soft person from within. She was an old lady who was a little bit forgetful. She was strict when it came to not allowing any lady visitors at her place although the author didn't fail to mention that he was a married man. With passage of time, her character moulded which appealed and made the author develop an affection for her. She was grateful and kind as per the demand of the situation. Mrs. Croft also seemed vulnerable at times, especially, after the author came to know that she was one hundred and three years old. Overall, there are various shades of light which can be thrown while drawing her character sketch.

4. What kind of a relationship did Mrs. Croft share with her daughter Helen?

Answer

The relationship of Mrs. Croft's with that of her daughter did not seem to be that of love and affection. They shared a very practical life based on strong reasons and logic. She seemed to be a matter of fact person who didn't believe in getting emotional on stuff. She carried on her responsibilities for her mother as a mere schedule. Care and empathy was what lacked in her. She knew what were her mother's weaknesses. This is clear when she says: 'She slips sometimes.' The gap in between their generations was visible when they differed on women wearing miniskirts on the streets. Helen was quite indifferently calm of the fact that Mrs. Croft was three years older than a century and needed constant assistance, supervision and above all, love.

5. How does the narrator bring out the contrast between the Indian way of life and American society? Do you think his wife Mala adjusted comfortably to the new way of life?

Answer

Indian life and American life have a very obvious line of difference. The author found it quite difficult to adjust to the American lifestyle.

Page No: 84

Talking about the Text

1. Living abroad is challenging in many ways.

Answer

Few of the various things which needs to be taken into consideration when one shifts to abroad to settle are:

Identity crisis is one among the various very important concerns because of which shifting to abroad becomes very difficult. One is always treated as a second-hand citizen. People of that particular nation, may it be France, England or Australia would never accept Asian people residing there. The feeling of diaspora and multiculturalism exists throughout even if one attains the citizenship abroad and settles there forever.

Violence on many levels could harm an individual on a physical as well as psychological level. The recent case of Indian students being bullied, beaten up and even killed in Australia could be taken into consideration while talking about violence. The difference in ethnicity strikes people of other nations a lot. There are very few nations who are as hospitable as India who believe in the concept of accepting guests as Gods just like the Sanskrit sloka which says: Athithi Devo Bhava."

Stability in life is struck a huge blow. People live on very uncertain grounds. Issues such as recession could hit the economy anytime. Alternative to income are usually neither found nor provided to such people who immigrate from other nations.

The difference in climate, cuisine and standard of living holds prior importance too. People usually face

a financial crunch because of the huge gap between the money they earn and the type of life they want to live. Education, health, etc are also very expensive which might make people feel unsuitable and, thus, unwelcome in a country.

The law and order system differs from one nation to another. It is very difficult to cope up with the changes so soon. Thus, even when someone gets caught up with some issue, people find it hard to find a solution.

2. The Indian family system offers more security to the aged than what is found in the West.

Answer

In India, the very basic family values which are followed are respecting elders, taking care of parents at old age, respecting our Guru or spiritual teacher, contributing towards the society and mankind as a whole selflessly and passing on our cultural, spiritual and ancient heritage to our children. It is very well known and a very age-old fact of Indians to take care of their parents in old age. Senior citizen homes and assisted living concept has just begun. They are still more prominent and often practised abroad and not in India. In India, it is still considered a taboo and hasn't yet become a conventional to send our aged parents or relatives to Old Age Homes. Taking care of parents in their old age is a basic duty of a child – and, as believed in India, he or she gets lot of 'sukarma' points for doing so, and substantial negative karma for not doing so.

The elderly in India are generally obeyed, revered, considered to be fountains of knowledge and wisdom, and treated with respect and dignity by family and community members unlike the way aged people are treated in abroad. Old age is a time when a person is expected to relax, enjoy solitude, retirement, pray, enjoy spending time with the grandchildren, and not worry about running the household or about finances because the oldest son is now in charge of the finances and family matters, and the oldest daughter-in-law is generally running the household. In most instances, the elderly care for their grandchildren and assist with cooking and household chores. Even grown up children continue to consult their parents on most of the important aspects of life.

3. The eccentricities of the old are often endearing.

Answer

Various eccentricities of aged people might sometimes seem to be quite endearing. Their forgetfulness evokes laughter. The innocence with which they speak their mind out causes amusement in the family. Their urge for various things such as chocolate, etc. grows similar to that of children. They tend to disobey whatever they are told not to do. This comes out to be a subtle source of amusement in the family. These eccentricities might seem annoying at times, however, one should not be disturbed by it. They are the sources of endearment. One should embrace these habits and lifestyle with grace and smile on his lips.

Appericiation

1. Discuss the manner in which the author interweaves details of the narrator's family with the flow of the main narrative.

Answer

The details about the narrator's family is important for the readers in order to understand the psyche of the narrator. He had a very turbulent childhood and was brought up among very disturbed conditions at home. This is important for us to understand the bond he shared with Mrs. Croft. The words written by the author expresses that he was very attached to his mother and had fulfilled the role of an eldest son till the time she was cremated. He missed his mother a lot and recollected small incidents about she never forgetting to drape her head before coming in front of his father. When he came to know of Mrs. Croft's age which had crossed a century, he contemplated on how his mother couldn't adjust to his father's death and turned insane. Her insanity led to deterioration of her health. Her death gave him a heavy blow but he cared for her till the very last moment before cremating her. This shows his reason for growth of empathy towards Mrs. Croft because of her old age. Thus, his concern for Mrs. Croft grew which can be clearly reflected in the line: I was mortified. I had assumed Mrs. Croft was in her eighties...that this person was a widow who lived alone mortified me further still.

2. 'Mrs Croft's was the first death I mourned in America, for, hers was the first life I had admired; she had left this world at last, ancient and alone, never to return'—how do these lines encapsulate the bond that is possible between two strangers?

Answer

A person usually feels very detached from people staying around him abroad. Here is where epiante...

A person usually feels very detached from people staying around him abroad. Here is where originates the feeling of diaspora. The same happened with the narrator. He was away from his home and his family and, thus, never grew any feeling of affection towards anybody in America. He was quite alienated with the people of America. However, the course of action justifies his attachment and the emotional bonding which grew between him and Mrs Croft. In the foreign land, he grew a fondness towards the old lady because of various reasons. When he got to know that she was older than a century, he felt a sense of responsibility towards her. He was amazed and was quite awestruck at the idea of a widow of that age residing all alone, with nobody to take care of her. Taking up chores like heating her soup every evening or giving her eight dollars in the envelope every month satisfied him. All these instances and many more cite the fact that a very strong bond had developed between the lady and the narrator.

3. Examine the pieces of conversation in the story. How do they reflect the world view of each of the speakers?

Answer

The various conversations taking place in bits and pieces during the course of action of the story reflect a lot about people's perception on various issues and attitude towards each other and humanity in general. We see a very firm and hypocritical attitude prevalent in the tone of Mrs Croft when the narrator arrived at her place for the first time. This is when for the first time he realised that belonging to a very high standard place was important, anywhere such as Tech or Harvard. The greatness and biasness of Americans to be the first one to step on the moon, considering it an unattainable and impossibly splendid feat to be attained. However, she becomes mild for the first time when she receives the eight dollars from the narrator. Mrs Croft's orthodox ways become prominently visible when she objects to a lady and a man talking in private without a chaperone. Her conventional ways are quite evident keeping in mind the fact that she had already crossed hundred. The ways of the western world is shown to be in a very high contrast when we see Mrs Croft's daughter Helen being quite indifferent towards her mother's health or meals. Her casual tone when she says "she might have slipped" might disturb readers. However, even with the differences in opinions, perceptions and norms, the bond which had developed between the narrator and an American widow of a hundred years is worth appreciation.

4. There are many instances of gentle humour in the story. Point out some of these and state how this contributes to the interest of the narration.

Answer

Few instances of gentle humour which contributed to the interest of the narration were:

- ▶ When Mrs Croft said with disbelief and delight after meeting Mala: She is a perfect lady. The gentle laugh the couple shared at this moment was very important although quite subtle.
- ▶ The old lady asking it repeatedly everyday: 'A flag on the moon! Isn't that splendid?' and the compulsion with which the author used to reply: "Splendid!"
- ▶ There was a point in the story when Mrs Croft expressed the fact that she didn't accept the physical proximity between a male and a female. She found improper for a lady and gentleman who are not married to one another to hold a private conversation without a chaperone! The situation portrayed here might seem amusing.

Language Work

1. 'Don't expect an English cup of tea'—how does this phrase bring out the contrast between the English and American attitudes?

Answer

Britishers are supposedly more polite and hospitable to their guests as compared to Americans. The pace in which the lives of Americans rush is quite different and, in fact, faster than people residing in Britain. The feeling of competition is so immense that 'Everybody feels he must get to the top.'

2. How did the narrator learn to distinguish between 'a flask' and 'a thermos'?

Answer

There was a time when the narrator went to buy tea bags and a 'flask'. This is when he came to know that the thing which he was looking for was actually known as a 'thermos' and 'flask' was something which was used to store Whisky. The reason for the narrator having limited knowledge on the subject was the fact that he hadn't consumed whisky till then.

3. It took the narrator quite some time to understand that what he heard as 'piper', in fact, meant 'paper' and the phrase 'mind the gap' in the Tube. What do you think caused the problem?

Answer

The narrator had the mentioned problems with his language when he shifted to US because in the beginning it was a new language for him to speak. He was not habituated to speaking fluently in any language other than his own mother tongue, i.e. Bengali. Also, the pronunciation was quite different from how it was spoken in London, where he stayed before moving to US.

4. Make a list of items that are referred to differently in British and American English, for example, 'lift' (BE) 'elevator' (AmE).

Answer

Few words which are spelt differently in British and American English are:

- Barrister (BE) : Attorney (AE)
- The cinema (BE) : The movies (AE)
- Flat (BE) : Apartment (AE)
- Holiday (BE) : Vacation (AE)
- Lavatory (BE) : Bathroom (AE)
- Lift (BE) : Elevator (AE)
- Favour (BE) : Favor (AE)
- Wardrobe (BE) : Dresser (AE)
- Barrister (BE) : Lawyer (AE)
- Windscreen (BE) : Wind shield (AE)

5. See if you understand what the following words that are parts of a house mean. Look up the dictionary if you don't.

parlour	foyer	lounge	porch
lobby	attic	portico	

Answer

Parlour – It means a small room for guests away from the public rooms in an inn, club, etc. In a house, in old fashioned English, parlour meant the living room especially kept neat and tidy for reception of visitors.

foyer – Foyer means a vestibule or entrance hall in a house or apartment. Foyer could also refer to the lobby of a theatre, hotel, or apartment house.

Lounge – A lobby or a living room might also be referred to as a lounge in a house. However, lounge also means a sofa for reclining, sometimes backless, having a headrest at one end.

Porch – A porch refers to a verandah. It is the open space or the extended enclosed space in front and on the sides of a building.

Lobby – It is a hall or a waiting room at or near the entrance to a building. It is a corridor or a vestibule which usually serve as a space to an entry into a larger room.

Attic – Attic is that part of a building, especially of a house, directly under a roof. It is a story or room directly below the roof of a building, especially a house.

Portico – A structure consisting of a roof supported by columns or piers, usually attached to a building as a porch is called a portico.