

CHAPTER- 6

POETS & PANCAKES

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1. Notice these words and expressions in the text. Infer their meaning from the context.

blew over: give a long, angry speech of criticism or accusation

was struck dumb: render speechless, as by surprise or shock

catapulted into: to shoot forth or launch

a coat of mail: an armoured coat made of chain mail, interlinked rings, or overlapping metal plates

played into their hands: to act or behave so as to give an advantage to (an opponent).

the favourite haunt: a frequently visited place

heard a bell ringing: stirring an often indistinct memory

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Think As you Read

1. What does the writer mean by 'the fiery misery' of those subjected to make-up'?

Answer

The heat produced by the lights in the make-up room brought about a lot of discomfort to the actors in the make-up room. Hence the writer refers to this pain and trouble as 'fiery misery'.

2. What is the example of national integration that the author refers to?

Answer

The make-up division of the Gemini Studios was an example of national integration. According to the author, this is so because people from different regions and religious groups worked together in the same department. The department was headed by a Bengali who was succeeded by a Maharashtrian. The other helpers included a Dharwar Kannadiga, an Andhra, a Madras Indian Christian, an Anglo-Burmese and the local Tamils.

3. What work did the 'office boy' do in the Gemini Studios? Why did he join the studios? Why was he disappointed?

Answer

The office boy applies make-up on the players who played the crowd. On the days of crowd shooting, he would mix his paint in a big vessel and apply it quickly and noisily on the faces of the players. He had joined the studios with the hope of becoming a star actor or a screen writer, director or lyrics writer. He was disappointed because he failed and remained only a 'boy'.

4. Why did the author appear to be doing nothing at the studios?

Answer

The author's duty was to cut out newspaper clippings on a wide variety of subjects and store them in files. Many of these had to be written out in hand. The onlookers noticed him merely tearing up newspapers. Hence to them he seemed to be doing next to nothing.

1. Why was the office boy frustrated? Who did he show his anger on?

Answer

The office boy was frustrated because despite getting a good opening, he remained only an office boy. He had had a good formal education and would write poetry also. But his great literary talent was being allowed to go waste. He showed his anger on Kothamangalam Subbu, the No. 2 at Gemini Studios.

2. Who was Subbu's principal?

Answer

Mr. S.S Vasan, the founder of the Gemini Studios, was Subbu's principal.

3. Subbu is described as a many-sided genius. List four of his special abilities.

Answer

Four Special abilities of Subbu:

- i) Subbu had the ability to look cheerful at all times.
- (ii) His sense of loyalty made him turn his entire creativity to his principal's advantage: Film-making was quite easy with Subbu around
- (iii) He was literary inclined too-a poet and novelist. He was an amazing actor.
- (iv) He had a charitable and loving nature.

4. Why was the legal adviser referred to as the opposite by others?

Answer

The lawyer was in the Story Department. He was officially known as the legal adviser. However, his actions did nobody any good. He had unwittingly brought to an end the career of a promising young actress. Hence he was referred to as the opposite by others.

5. What made the lawyer stand out from the others at Gemini Studios?

Answer

The lawyer's dress that he wore made him stand out from the others. He wore a pant, a tie and sometimes a coat also. Others put on a khadi dhoti with a slightly oversized and clumsily tailored white khadi shirt, which looked like everyone's uniform.

1. Did the people at Gemini Studios have any particular political affiliations?

Answer

Most of the people at Gemini Studios were followers of Gandhiji and wore khadi. Beyond khadi and wearing of khadi they did not have any particular political affiliations. However, they were all against communism.

2. Why was the Moral Rearmament Army welcomed at the Studios?

Answer

The Moral Rearmament Army was a kind of counter movement to international communism. The Big Bosses of Madras like Mr. Vasan simply played into their hands. So the Moral Rearmament Army was welcomed at the Gemini Studios.

3. Name one example to show that Gemini Studios was influenced by the plays staged by MRA.

Answer

The plays staged by the MRA greatly influenced Madras and Tamil drama community. For some years almost all Tamil plays had a scene of sunrise and sunset in the manner of 'Jotham Valley' with a bare stage, a white background curtain and a tune played on the flute.

4. Who was the Boss of Gemini Studios?

Answer

Mr. S.S Vasan was the Boss of Gemini Studios.

5. What caused the lack of communication between the Englishman and the people at Gemini Studios?

Answer

Most of the 600 odd people at Gemini Studios were Tamil speakers. The Englishman was addressing them in his own language-English. He had a peculiar accent. Hence, there was a lack of communication between the Englishman and the people at who could not follow what he was saying.

6. Why is the Englishman's visit referred to as unexplained mystery?

Answer

The Englishman's visit to the Gemini Studios is referred to as an unexplained mystery because no one could decipher his identity, whether he was a poet or an editor. Besides, when he spoke no one at the studio understood what he intended to say as his accent was beyond their comprehension.

1. Who was the English visitor to the studios?

Answer

The English visitor to the Gemini Studios was Stephen Spender. He was the editor of The Encounter, a British Periodical, and a famous English poet, essayist and novelist of the twentieth century.

2. How did the author discover who the English visitor to the studios was?

Answer

Before investing money in participating in a short story contest organised by an English periodical The Encounter, the author did a research on the magazine. He went to the British Council Library where, while going through an issue of that periodical, he discovered that its editor was Stephen Spender, the poet that had once visited the studio.

3. What does 'The God that Failed' refer to?

Answer

'The God That Failed' was a compilation of six essays written by six eminent writers, namely, Andre Gide, Richard Wright, Ignazio Silone, Arthur Koestler, Louis Fischer and Stephen Spender. In each of the essays, the respective writers described "their journeys into Communism and their disillusioned return".

Understanding the Text

1. The author has used gentle humour to point out human foibles. Pick out instances of this to show how this serves to make the piece interesting.

Answer

The instances of humour, used by the author, mark the eccentricities and idiosyncrasies without making any direct and rude comment on anybody. For instance, the author portrays the make-up artists and the usage of the pancakes in an interesting way. Even the caricature of Subbu is hilarious. The way he tries to help his principal by offering quick solutions to his problems is quite amusing. The episode of the legal adviser that inadvertently causes the end of an actress's career is yet another example. The frustration of the office boy, the superficial praising of Gandhi, hatred of Communism and the 'mystery' surrounding Stephen Spender are some of the instances where the author has incorporated gentle humour.

2. Why was Kothamangalam Subbu considered No. 2 in Gemini Studios?

Answer

Kothamangalam Subbu succeeded in securing the place closest to The Boss by means of flattery. He was not brilliant but a rather cheerful person and exceedingly loyal to The Boss. He offered solutions whenever The Boss was in a fix. Thus, the other employees considered him No.2 in Gemini Studios.

3. How does the author describe the incongruity of an English poet addressing the audience at Gemini Studios?

Answer

The English poet was addressing the Tamil audience at Gemini Studios in English with a typical provincial accent. He was talking about the thrills and travails of an English poet to a dazed and silent audience. This was the incongruity because his audience could not understand him at all.

4. What do you understand about the author's literary inclinations from the account?

Answer

The writer was a prose-writer. He wanted to send a short story for the short story contest organised by a British periodical by the name 'The Encounter'.

Talking about the Text

Discuss in small groups taking off from points in the text.

1. Film-production today has come a long way from the early days of the Gemini Studios.
2. Poetry and films.
3. Humour and criticism.

Answer

1. Film production is more technical nowadays. While earlier only five per cent of the shooting was done outdoors, nowadays outdoor shooting is no more limited to such a negligible percentage. The cameras and other equipments are more advanced allowing for more varied and accurate presentation.

The quality of make-up has improved many folds from the days of the Gemini Studios where only pancake was used. The people involved in various departments are experts in their specialised work, be it the director, producer, scriptwriter, lyricist or the actors. The overall quality of the films is more striking and lively.

2. In India poetry and films are intricately linked. The people at Gemini Studios, all claimed to have the talents of a poet. The main reason behind it was their monotonous and leisurely life at the studios. However, these people were not knowledgeable or educated enough to be poets. Unlike poetry, films can be enjoyed by people with little resources who cannot afford to cultivate taste for poetry and literature.

3. The story is interspersed with instances dipped in subtle humour. The humorous instances, however, make interesting and relevant comments on the behaviour of general people. A humorous story has more readers, a humorous film more viewers. This is because they provide entertainment and a respite from the tedious existence. Criticism by means of humour is more effective, hence writers and film-makers often use humorous elements in their works and make sarcastic comments and criticism.