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Poets and Pancakes

Fastrack Revision

Main Points

- ▶ **Gemini Studios: est-1940 Madras**
- ▶ **Asokamitran**
 - Cut newspaper clippings
 - Most well-informed person
- ▶ **Make-up room**
 - Up stairs—Robert Clive's stable
 - Look of a hair cutting salon
 - Bright lights and mirrors
- ▶ **Hierarchy in the make-up department**
 - Chief—Chief actors and actresses
 - Senior assistant—Second hero and heroine
 - Junior assistant—The main comedians
 - Office boy—Crowd
- ▶ **National Integration in make-up department**
 - First headed by a Bengali then Maharashtrian
 - People—Kannada, Telugus, Tamils, Christians, Anglo-Burmese etc.
- ▶ **Office boy**
 - In early forties
 - Work—to mix paint in a vessel and paint faces of crowd
 - Frustrated—couldn't become actor, writer, poet or director
 - Extremely jealous of Subbu
- ▶ **Subbu**
 - Enjoyed No. 2 position
 - Faithful, creative man of versatile talents
 - Brahmin
 - Helpful to all, very popular
- ▶ **Visit of Frank Buchman's Moral Re-armament Army**
 - No of members—around 200
 - Presentations "Jotham Valley" and "The Forgotten Factor"
 - Special effects—scenes of sunrise + sunset
- ▶ **Stephen Spender's visit—editor of "The Encounter"**
- ▶ **General Temperament in the Studio**
 - People wore Khadi
 - Worshipped Gandhi
- ▶ **The God that Failed**
 - a collection of six essays by six writers including Stephen Spender
 - Price—50 paise
 - Purchased from footpath in front of the Madras Mount Road Post office
 - Theme—Writer's journey to communism and final disappointment



Summary at a Glance

- ▶ Poets and Pancakes is an excerpt from a book *My Years with Boss* written by Asokamitran a Tamil writer. Here he recollects his days at Gemini studios. He brings to light the influence of movies on every poet of life in India. The duty of Asokamitran in Gemini Studios was to cut out newspaper clippings on a wide variety of subjects and store them in a files.
- ▶ He gives an elaborate description of the various departments of the Gemini studios. Its make-up department was situated in Robert Clive's erstwhile stable. It used the make-up material brand named 'Pancake' which was used in enormous quantity. The make-up room had the appearance of a hair salon crowded with mirrors and flooded with light. The make-up department was the manifestation of national integration. Initially it was headed by a Bengali followed by a Maharashtrian who was assisted by people from different states. The make-up department observed a strict hierarchy while dividing the work among its employees, chief make-up man managed the lead role actors, senior assistant was assigned to attend to the second hero and heroine. Then junior assistant took the charge of the main comedian. And the crowd fell to the lot of the office boy.
- ▶ The office 'boy' was not actually a boy, but a man in his early forties who joined the studios with a dream to be a top film star or top screen writer lyricist or director. But he could never realise his dream. He felt frustrated on the days of crowd shooting, his job was to mix up material on a large scale and paint faces.
- ▶ The narrator's position in the studio was not more than collecting newspaper clippings his files. He was often lectured by other employees. The office boy often vomited out his frustration in the writer's cubicle. And the writer felt relieved when there was a crowd shooting to keep the office boy busy.
- ▶ Kothamangalam Subbu was no. 2 at Gemini Studios. He was a man with multifarious talents. Being a Brahmin he got opportunities of exposure to high class people. He was loyal to the boss. He offered several solutions whenever the producer was in a fix. He was tailor-made for films.

- ▶ He was a good poet. Though capable of more complex and higher forms of writing poetry, he always choose to address his poetry to the common masses.
- ▶ Despite being a charitable and improvident man, he had his enemies. Probably because he was so close to the boss and enjoyed his favours. People like the office boy were jealous of him.
- ▶ The Gemini studios had a story department, which comprised a lawyer and a group of writers and poets besides Subbu. This department was closed. Gemini studios was a favourite haunt of literary people. It served good coffee round the clock. People enjoyed leisure time at the studio.
- ▶ Politically speaking writers at Gemini studios were khadi and admired Gandhi an ideology. They despised communism.
- ▶ The studios received Frank Buchman's Moral Re-Armament army MRA which was a counter movement to international communism and it comprised 200 heads. MRA presented two plays 'Jotham valley' and 'The Forgotten factor'. Their sets and costumes were extraordinary. MRA performance impressed 600 members Gemini family and Tamil and Madras drama fraternity. Gemini Studio's hospitality broke monotonous routine.
- ▶ A few months later another visitor who claimed himself to be a poet or editor visited Gemini Studios. Boss welcomed him but his speech was not understood by anyone. A short story contest was organised and the writer checked up in British Council Library and found out that the editor's name (of the Encounter weekly) was Stephen Spender who was the mysterious guest at Gemini studios. Then the writer bought a low priced book 'The God that Failed'—a collection of six essays by different authors and Stephen Spender was one of those six. This is how the mystery of Stephen Spender's visit to Gemini Studios was unveiled.

Theme

- ▶ The lesson gives a biographical description of the Gemini studios in the early days of the film industry in India. The story also dwells on various themes like favouritism and sycophancy at the place of work, hierarchy at the place of work, social integration at the place of work, propaganda at the place of work and jealousy at the place of work.



Practice Exercise

Extract Based Questions ↘

Directions: Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow:

1. "Greta Garbo must have used it. Miss Gohar must have used it.

Vyjayantimala must also have used it but Rati Agnihotri may not have even heard of it."

(a) What does 'It' stand for in the first line of the given extract?

(b) Whom does 'Greta Garbo' refer to?

- (i) Make-up artist in Gemini studios
- (ii) Fashion designer of 18th century
- (iii) Dancer
- (iv) Famous Swedish actress

(c) What was the reason of Rati Agnihotri not having heard about the pancake make-up material?

- (i) It was no longer in use in the time of Rati Agnihotri
- (ii) Rati Agnihotri was an old artist
- (iii) Pancake make-up material was not available for every artist
- (iv) None of the above



- (d) The name of the lesson is
- (e) Who is the speaker of the given lines?
- (f) Who is the author and who is the narrator?

Answers

- (a) 'It' stands for pancake make-up material.
- (b) (iv) Famous Swedish actress
- (c) (i) It was no longer in use in the time of Rati Agnihotri
- (d) 'Poets and Pancakes'
- (e) The narrator 'Ashokamitran' is the speaker of the given lines.
- (f) Ashokamitran is the author as well as the narrator of the lesson.
2. He was succeeded by a Maharashtrian who was assisted by a Dharwar Kannadiga, an Andhra, a Madras Indian Christian, an Anglo-Burmese and the usual local Tamils. All this shows that there was a great deal of national integration long before A.I.R. and Doordarshan began broad casting programmes on national integration.

- (a) Who was succeeded by a Maharashtrian?
 (i) Dharwar Kannadiga (ii) A Bengali
 (iii) An Anglo-Burmese (iv) None of these
- (b) Who first headed the make-up department of Gemini studios?
 (i) A Maharashtrian (ii) An Andhra
 (iii) A Bengali (iv) An Anglo-Burmese
- (c) Where was a great deal of national integration?
 (d) Give an antonym of 'succeeded'.
 (e) The full form of A.I.R. is

(f) Who is 'he'?

Answers

- (a) (ii) A Bengali
- (b) (iii) A Bengali
- (c) A great deal of national integration was in the make-up department.
- (d) An antonym of 'succeeded' is preceded.
- (e) All India Radio.
- (f) 'He' is a Bengali who was the first head of the make-up department.
3. The players who played the crowd were the responsibility of the office boy—on the days when there was a crowd shooting, you could see him mixing his paint in a giant vessel and slapping it on the crowd players.
- (a) Who held the responsibility of the crowd players?
 (i) The senior assistant
 (ii) The junior assistant
 (iii) The office boy
 (iv) None of the above

- (b) What was the age of the office boy?
 (i) In his teens
 (ii) Thirty years
 (iii) In his early forties
 (iv) Twenty five
- (c) What task was assigned to the office boy?
 (d) Why did the office boy enter the studios years ago?
 (e) A word from the extract which means 'a big container' is

(f) Give an antonym of 'giant'.

Answers

- (a) (iii) The office boy
- (b) (iii) In his early forties
- (c) The office boy had to mix paint in a vessel and slap it on the crowd players.
- (d) The office boy entered the studios years ago in the hope of becoming a star actor or a top screen writer, director or lyrics writer.
- (e) vessel
- (f) An antonym of 'giant' is tiny.
4. Seeing me sitting at my desk tearing up newspapers day in and day out, most people thought I was doing next to nothing. It is likely that the boss thought likewise too. So anyone who felt I should be given some occupation would barge into my cubicle and deliver an extended lecture.
- (a) Who is seen sitting at his desk? (1st line)
 (b) What did the boss think?
 (i) He was tearing up newspapers
 (ii) He was mixing paint
 (iii) He was doing next to nothing
 (iv) None of the above
- (c) Who would deliver him an extended lecture?
 (i) His boss
 (ii) The legal adviser
 (iii) Anyone who felt like
 (iv) None of the above
- (d) Who is the 'Boss'?
 (e) 'Barge' means

(f) Give an antonym of 'extended'.

Answers

- (a) The narrator is seen sitting at his desk.
- (b) (iii) He was doing next to nothing
- (c) (iii) Anyone who felt like
- (d) The boss is the owner of Gemini studios.
- (e) to enter rudely or push carelessly.
- (f) An antonym of 'extended' is curtailed or reduced.
5. "The 'boy' in the make-up department had decided I should be enlightened on how great literary talent was being allowed to go waste in a department fit only for barbers and perverts. Soon I was praying for crowd-shooting all the time."

- (a) **Whom does 'I' refer to?**
 (i) The office boy
 (ii) The narrator
 (iii) The chief make-up man
 (iv) The senior assistant
- (b) **What was the public opinion about the narrator's work?**
 (i) His talent was going waste
 (ii) He was doing next to nothing
 (iii) His work was very important
 (iv) None of the above
- (c) **What does the 'boy' want the narrator to be enlightened on?**
- (d) **The 'boy' was a bit of**
- (e) **Find out a word from the extract which is close in meaning to 'to be made known or aware'.**
- (f) **Why did 'I' pray for crowd-shooting?**

Answers

- (a) (ii) The narrator
 (b) (ii) He was doing next to nothing
 (c) The 'boy' wants the narrator to be enlightened on that his great literary talent was going waste.
 (d) a poet
 (e) Enlightened.
 (f) 'I' prayed for crowd-shooting because it could save 'I' from the boy's epics.
6. **In all instances of frustration, you will always find the anger directed towards a single person openly or covertly and this man of the make-up department was convinced that all his woes, ignominy and neglect were due to Kothamangalam Subbu.**
- (a) **Whose frustration is being talked about?**
 (i) The narrator's
 (ii) The junior make-up man's
 (iii) The office boy's
 (iv) None of the above
- (b) **Who is 'this man of the make-up department' mentioned in the extract above?**
 (i) The chief make-up man
 (ii) Chief's senior assistant
 (iii) The office boy
 (iv) None of the above
- (c) **His anger was directed towards a single person. Who is this single person?**
- (d) **'Ignominy' means**
- (e) **Give an antonym of 'covertly'.**
- (f) **Who was Kothamangalam Subbu?**

Answers

- (a) (iii) The office boy's
 (b) (iii) The office boy
 (c) This single person is Kothamangalam Subbu.

- (d) public disgrace
 (e) An antonym of 'covertly' is openly.
 (f) Kothamangalam Subbu was the No. 2 at Gemini Studios.
7. **"Even in the matter of education, especially formal education, Subbu couldn't have had an appreciable lead over the boy. But by virtue of being born a Brahmin—a virtue indeed!—he must have had exposure to more affluent situations and people."**
- (a) **Why was the office boy always frustrated?**
 (i) He was never appreciated by his boss
 (ii) His colleagues did not like him
 (iii) He couldn't realise his dreams
 (iv) None of the above
- (b) **In what matter could Subbu never have had a lead over the 'boy'?**
- (c) **Choose the word similar in meaning to 'affluent'.**
 (i) Prosperous (ii) Disaster
 (iii) Lacking (iv) Inadequate
- (d) **An antonym of 'virtue' is**
- (e) **Who is the narrator?**
- (f) **What is the full name of Subbu?**

Answers

- (a) (iii) He couldn't realise his dreams
 (b) Subbu could never have had a lead over the boy in the matter of education, especially formal education.
 (c) (i) Prosperous
 (d) vice
 (e) Asokamitran is the narrator.
 (f) The full name of Subbu is Kothamangalam Subbu.
8. **Such a charitable and improvident man and yet he had enemies! Was it because he seemed so close and intimate with the Boss? Or was it his general demeanour that resembled a sycophant's?**
- (a) **Whom does 'such a charitable' refer to?**
- (b) **Who had enemies?**
 (i) The office boy
 (ii) The narrator
 (iii) The one who was 'charitable'
 (iv) All of the above
- (c) **Why did he have enemies?**
 (i) He was number 2 at Gemini studios
 (ii) His behaviour was not good with people in Gemini studios
 (iii) He was non cooperative
 (iv) All of the above
- (d) **Find out a word from the passage which means 'flatterer'.**
- (e) **'Improvident' means**
- (f) **Give an antonym of 'intimate'.**

Answers

- (a) 'Such a charitable' refers to Subbu.
(b) (iii) The one who was 'Charitable'
(c) (i) He was number 2 at Gemini studios
(d) Sycophant.
(e) spendthrift or thoughtless.
(f) An antonym of 'intimate' is distant or formal.
9. Like so many of those who were close to the Boss, he was allowed to produce a film and though a lot of raw stock and pancake were used on it, not much came of the film. Then one day, the Boss closed down the story department and this was perhaps the only instance in all human history where a lawyer lost his job because the poets were asked to go home.
- (a) Who was allowed to produce a film?
(i) Kothamangalam Subbu
(ii) The narrator
(iii) The office boy
(iv) The lawyer
- (b) Why did the lawyer lose his job?
- (c) Name the author of the chapter from which this extract has been taken.
(i) Selma Lagerlöf
(ii) Asokamitran
(iii) Christopher Silvester
(iv) A.R. Barton
- (d) 'Instance' means
- (e) Give an antonym of 'allowed'.
- (f) Where does 'he' work?

Answers

- (a) (iv) The lawyer
(b) The lawyer lost his job because the story department was closed down.
(c) (ii) Asokamitran
(d) an example or a case.
(e) An antonym of 'allowed' is prohibited.
(f) 'He' works in the story Department.



Short Answer Type Questions

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

Ans. The writer describes that the make-up room looked like a hair-cutting salon which was encircled with mirrors and flooded with incandescent lights at all angles. It was a very torturous experience for the artists who sit there for getting each and every pore of their faces closed with pancake. It was extremely painful to sit through the process in all the heat and the dazzling lights.

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

Or

Why does the author think there was a great deal of national integration in the make-up department?

Ans. People from every corner of India picked up jobs in Gemini studios. The make-up department of the studio had Bengalis, Maharashtrians, Kannadigas, Andhraites, Tamils, Anglo-Burmese, Brahmins and Christians as its members. Hence, the writer thinks there was a great deal of national integration in the make-up department.

Q 3. Why did the writer appear to be doing nothing at the studios?

Ans. In fact, the author was given a cubicle. His job was to keep a record of all the relevant news items and articles that appeared in different newspapers. Therefore, he was always busy at his desk tearing up newspaper clippings which gave an impression that he was simply wasting time doing nothing.

Q 4. Why was the office boy frustrated?

Ans. When the office boy entered the Gemini studios, he had lofty dreams of becoming a star actor or a top screen writer, director or lyrics writer. But he could not become any of these. Now that he had crossed forty, none of his dreams could be materialised. He felt his literary talent was not getting recognised and that he had been given a job that was much below his calibre.

Q 5. Who did the office boy show his anger on and how?

Ans. Since the office boy was a frustrated man, he directed his entire anger on one man and that was Kothamangalam Subbu who, in his opinion did not deserve to be placed on no. 2 position in the Gemini Studios. He held Subbu responsible for all his woes, ignominy and neglect and went about maligning him in the studios.

Q 6. Who was Subbu's principal? What relationship did Subbu have with him?

Ans. Mr S.S. Vasan, the founder of the Gemini Studios was Subbu's principal. Subbu enjoyed the closest relationship with him. His sense of loyalty made him identify himself with his principal completely and turn his entire creativity to his principal's advantage that was why he enjoyed no. 2 position at Gemini studios.

Q 7. Why was the legal adviser referred to as the opposite by others?

Ans. The lawyer who was officially known as the legal adviser was referred to as the opposite. He was a man of cold logic. He was also very close to the Boss. There was hardly anyone who liked him in the Gemini studios. His mind was always working on evil designs. His stupidity and mischief making brought an abrupt end to a brilliant actress career. Therefore, he was rightly called the illegal adviser.

Q 8. What made the lawyer stand out from others at Gemini studios?

Ans. The lawyer in the story department of the Gemini studios was quite different. Unlike the majority of imaginative dreamers of the story department, the lawyer was a man of cold logic. His political views did not match the Gandhians that comprised the department. Besides this, while other members of the department wore a kind of uniform – Khadi dhoti with oversized white khadi shirt, the legal adviser wore pants and a tie.

Q 9. Why was the Moral Re-armament Army welcomed at Gemini studios?

Ans. In fact the Moral Re-armament Army was a sort of counter-movement to the international communism. The army was welcomed at Gemini studios due to their political affiliations, since they were averse to communism, they played into the hands of this army. Since they thought that they were welcoming a force which stood against those who spread unrest among innocent people, they received them warmly.

Q 10. How was Gemini studios influenced by the plays staged by MRA?

Ans. The MRA presented two plays titled 'Jotham Valley' and 'The Forgotten Factor'. These influenced the Gemini fraternity so much that six hundred people of the studios saw them time and again. Their high quality costumes and well made sets earned a lot of admiration. The scenes a sunrise and sunset in the play 'Jotham Valley' impressed them so much that the Tamil Drama companies reproduced them in their drama for the years to come.

Q 11. Who was the Boss in Gemini studios? What do we learn about him from this account?

Ans. The founder of the Gemini studios Mr S.S. Vasan was the Boss. In addition to his being a film producer, he was also the editor of a popular Tamil weekly 'Ananda Vikatan'. He was a great admirer of learned people. Being simple by nature he could be taken for a ride by the calculating flatterers around him.

Q 12. What caused the lack of communication between the Englishman and the people at Gemini studios?

Ans. The Englishman who visited the Gemini studio was a total stranger to the people there. The speeches made to honour him were also not understood by him. At the same time the content of the visitor's speech and his accent were beyond the understanding of his audience. Hence, there was no question of communication between him and his audience.

Q 13. Why is the Englishman's visit to the Gemini studios referred to as an unexplained mystery?

Ans. The visit of the Englishman to the Gemini studios was 'an unexplained mystery' in several ways. It gave rise to many questions and doubts in the minds of the people working there. His name was not familiar to them and his credentials were also not confirmed. Then whatever he spoke during his address to the audience was not understood. His visit to a film studio could not be digested by Gemini people who produced Tamil films only and had no taste for English poetry.

Q 14. Who was the English visitor to the studios?

Ans. The identity of the English visitor to the studios remained a mystery for a pretty long time. Nobody was clear about the visitor's identity. It was years later that Asokamitran the author, discovered that it was Stephen Spender—the editor of The Encounter—a British Periodical who visited the Gemini studios.

Q 15. What does 'The God that Failed' refer to?

Ans. 'The God that Failed' refers to a low-priced student edition of a book which was a compilation of six essays by six eminent essayists who described their journeys into communism and their disillusioned return. It was a paper back of American origin that was issued to commemorate 50th anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

Q 16. What were the positive qualities of Subbu that the writer admired? (CBSE 2020)

Ans. Kothamangalam Subbu was the master of multifarious talent. He had the ability to look cheerful at all times. His sense of loyalty made him identify himself with his principal's advantage. He could be inspired when commanded. He was tailor-made for films. He had a separate identity as a poet. He had a solution for every problem. So these qualities made him no. 2 at Gemini studios.

Q 17. How does the author describe the incongruity of an English poet addressing the audience at Gemini studios?

Ans. The English poet who visited Gemini studios failed to establish any rapport with the audience at Gemini studios. The audience could neither understand his accent nor the content matter of his speech. The studios produced Tamil films for the simple innocent people and the poet talked about the thrills and travails of an English poet. The two were absolutely incompatible.

Q 18. What do you understand about the author's literary inclinations from the account given in 'poet and pancakes'?

Ans. The author was a very knowledgeable young man. But his job in the studios was to sit all day in his cubicle and cut the newspaper cuttings. He was a through literary man who had deep interest in story writing and other creative arts. His interest in reading becomes conspicuous when in the end of the chapter, he is seen buying story books even when he was short of money.

Q 19. What does 'Pancake' stand for in the chapter 'Poets and Pancakes'?

Ans. 'Pancake' was the brand name of the make-up material used by Gemini studios to close every pore on the face of the actors and actresses to make them look presentable in front of the camera, while the actresses of the yesteryears were familiar with the brand, the modern actresses might not have even heard about it.

Q 20 How and why were the decent looking artists painted into 'hideous crimson hued monsters'?

Ans. The decent looking normal artists were subjected to the fiery misery and were made to look ugly with the help of many lotions and potlons and layers of pancake slapped on their faces. It was done to make them look attractive on the sets in studio lights and eventually on the screen in the movies.

Q 21. Though the 'office boy' was in his early forties, why was he still called a 'boy'?

Ans. Years back the office boy joined the Gemini studios with the lofty dreams of becoming a lyricist, a star actor or a top screen writer. He joined as an 'office boy' whose duty was to slap paint on the faces of the crowd artists. But with the passage of time, though the grew in age yet his position remained the same. So he was still called an 'office boy'.

Q 22. Why was the narrator praying for crowd shooting all the time?

Ans. Since the writer was wrongly supposed to be having no work to do, the office boy often came to his cubicle to give vent to his frustration and impress upon him that a great talent was being wasted. So the author was fed up with office boy's never-ending lectures, he wished him to return to his make-up and prayed for crowd shooting so that the boy was busy and did not bother him.

Q 23. Why did the office boy have so much of bitterness against Subbu?

Ans. The office boy was in the impression that he was much more talented than Kothamangalam Subbu who enjoyed no. 2 position at Gemini studios for which he thought Subbu hardly deserved it. He considered himself fit for the great heights which Subbu attained undeservedly. He held Subbu responsible for all his miseries and stagnation. So he was filled with bitterness against Subbu.

Q 24. How did the lawyer unwillingly bring an end to a brief and brilliant career of a young actress?

Ans. An extremely talented actress, who was also very temperamental, once blew over on the sets. The lawyer recorded her voice and replayed it. On hearing her voice, she got terrified and left the sets never to return. Thus her career came to an abrupt end before it began. And the lawyer was responsible for it.

Q 25. How did the lawyer lose his job in the Gemini studios?

Ans. The lawyer, like many others was close to the Boss. He was allowed to produce a film. A lot of raw stock and pancake were used on it. But not much came of the film. So the Boss closed down the story department. Then automatically the lawyer lost his job.

Q 26. What misconceptions did the author and his khadi-clad friends have about communists?

Ans. The author and most of his friends were the ardent worshippers of Gandhiji. Naturally, they all were averse to the term 'communism'. A communist according to them was a godless man—who had no filial or conjugal love. He was always out to cause and spread unrest and violence among innocent people.

Q 27. In what connection did the writer visit British council library?

Ans. 'The Hindu' published an announcement that a short story contest was being organised by a British periodical 'The Encounter' which was hardly known among Gemini literati. Before sending his entry by post the author wished to confirm the authenticity of the periodical. So he visited the British council library to find out the antecedents of 'The Encounter'.

Q 28. Stephen Spender's visit to the Gemini studios was viewed as an unexplained mystery by the Gemini family. How did Asokamitran solve this mystery years later?

Ans. Stephen Spender's name was absolutely unfamiliar among the people of Gemini studios. So his visit to the studios was an unexplained mystery for them but years after, the author found a book titled 'The God that Failed' on the footpath in front of the Madras Mount Road Post office. He bought the book and found that the scholar had co-authored the book with many eminent writers. Then he realised the reason of his being in Gemini studios and his visit no longer remained a secret.

Q 29. What does the story of Subbu's success in the film industry reveal about the importance of loyalty, creativity and versatility in this field?

(CBSE SQP 2023-24)

Ans. Subbu's success in the film industry reveals that loyalty, creativity and versatility are essential qualities for success in this field. Subbu was an extremely loyal employee who identified himself completely with his principal and turned his creativity to his principal's advantage. He was also a highly versatile and creative person who could come up with numerous options when given a problem to solve. These qualities made him successful in the film industry.



Long Answer Type Questions

Q 1. Describe the make-up department of the Gemini studios.

Ans. The make-up department of the Gemini studios was in the upstairs of a building that was believed to have been Robert Clive's stables. It had the look of a hair-cutting salon with lights at all angles around half a dozen large mirrors. They were all incandescent lights. People from different states worked in the department where the work was divided and a strict hierarchy was maintained. The Chief make-up man was responsible for the make-up of the main actor and actress. The man next to him attended to the second hero or heroine. The next man in the hierarchy took charge of the main comedian and the crowd was the responsibility of the office boy. Paint was mixed in a giant vessel for them and their faces were plastered with it. The dazzling lights made the process of make-up a very torturous one and the 'pancake' turned the artists into hideous crimson hued monsters.

Q 2. The author has used gentle humour to point out human foibles. Pick out instances to show how this serves to make the otherwise prosaic piece, interesting.

Ans. The chapter 'Poets and Pancakes' is quite a dull and dry one if seen thematically. But Asokamitran has added bits of humour here and there in the story. The entire chapter is punctuated with subtle humour which the author has used to expose the human foibles without hurting anyone's feelings. Exposing Robert Clive's ambitions nature the writer says, "For his brief life and an even briefer stay in Madras, Clive did a lot of moving, fought impossible battles and married a maiden in St. Mary's Church". The office boy's boasting and bragging about his talent is brought out when the author is repeatedly enlightened on how great a literary talent was going waste. Commenting on Subbu's exposure to affluent situations, he ridicules his 'virtue' the virtue of being a Brahmin. His inefficiency is pointed out subtly when he comments, "He could never do things on his own—but his sense of loyalty made him identify himself" and "he always had work for somebody." The speed with which Subbu offered the boss alternative solutions is also very amusing. Again at one place Asokamitran pulls Subbu's leg by calling him an amazing actor who never aspired for the lead roles. Referring to his sycophancy, the author remarks was "It his general demeanour that resembled a sycophant's". His weakness for flattery is highlighted as his house is referred to as "a permanent residence for dozens". The legal adviser is referred to as an "illegal adviser"—is another example of humour. The author has the guts to expose his own weakness, thus adding to the humour when he says "anything at a reduced price attracted my attention." 'The Boss' weakness for being seen in the company of scholars creates amusing situations as it results in his inviting known and unknown personalities. Thus, the entire chapter is replete with traces of humour without even a tinge of malice anywhere.

Q 3. Bring about the humour of Stephen Spender's visit to Gemini studios.

Ans. When the news came of an English poet's visit to the studios, a wave of enthusiasm and curiosity among the Gemini family was generated and it yields a lot of amusement for the readers. Despite the fact that none knew whether he was a poet or an editor, they all assembled there to welcome him. The speeches were marked with incongruity and his accent was also so indistinct that it did not let the audience understand even a single word of his speech. Stephen Spender found himself totally misfit in the midst of Gemini fraternity. His speech was a perfect example of incongruity as he spoke to Tamil speaking audience about the joys and difficulties of an English poet. What was the height or irony, was neither the guest nor the host knew why they were going through the ordeal. Quite interestingly, his visit remained a mystery for years to come.

Q 4. What are the narrator's views about prose writing? Does he actually mean what he says?

Ans. The author is of the opinion that prose writing is not and cannot be the true pursuit of a genius. It is for the patient, persistent, persevering plodger with heart so shrunken that nothing can break it. A prose writer faces rejections quite boldly. He continues to try his luck time and again with indifferent and callous editors. He doesn't think much about the capabilities of prose writers. The writer, in fact is not belittling the prose writer with a tongue in his cheeks, he is simply trying to expose those elements of literati who believe in the superiority of verse and consider prose writing to be mundane and ordinary. The humour in this passage is very subtle and it shows the author's talent for saying something and meaning something else.

Q 5. Give a brief character sketch of the lawyer.

Ans. The lawyer in the Gemini studios was officially known as the legal adviser. But people often referred to him as its opposite. Like Kothamangalam Subbu, the lawyer was also very close to the Boss. He has the knack of making himself important and useful in the eyes of the Boss. His mischief making bent of mind has earned him the title 'illegal adviser'. He is the sort of a person who is least bothered about the opinion of those who don't matter much in the promotion of his career. A man of cold logic, he stands out in the crowd of dreamers. Neither his political affiliations match with those of his co-workers nor his dressing style bears any resemblance to theirs.

The lawyer is equipped with a great presence of mind. Rather than getting stunned by blatant bashing of the producer by an actress, he records and replays her outburst to her great bafflement and thus gets rid of her. Devoid of any brilliance, he could neither produce successful films nor retain his job by proving his indispensability.

Q 6. What idea do you get about the narrator after reading the chapter "Poets and Pancakes"?

Ans. Asokamitran emerges as a responsible and conscientious man, who kept himself busy in the studios. Sitting in his cubicle, he cuts newspapers clippings day in and day out without making his work look tedious and tiring. Everybody in the studios had the impression that he was doing next to nothing but he never tried to say anything in his defence. Though he kept himself busy with his work, without poking his nose into anyone's affairs, he was wide vigilant and highly observant. Having a deep psychological insight into human mind, he could see through Subbu's sycophancy the lawyer's smartness and the office boy's frustration. Fond of reading, as he was, he bought books even when he was running short of money. His sense of humour surfaces itself several times in the chapter. The description of S.S. Vasan's battling with half a dozen pedestal fans while reading his welcome speech and an account of Stephen Spender's accent defeating every one's attempt to understand his speech are some examples of his brilliant humour.



Chapter Test

Extract Based Question

Q 1. "It is for the patient, persistent, persevering drudge with a heart so shrunken that nothing can break it; rejection slips don't mean a thing to him; he at once sets about making a fresh copy of the long prose piece and sends it on to another editor enclosing postage for the return of the manuscript."

- (a) Who is being talked about in the lines above?
(b) 'Nothing can break it' what does 'it' stand for?
(i) Heart (ii) Silence
(iii) Relationship (iv) A flower vase
(c) Find a word for 'a person doing long boring job'.
(i) A drudge (ii) Patient
(iii) Persistent (iv) None of these

- (d) An antonym of 'persistent' is
(e) What is the name of the lesson?
(f) Who is the narrator?

Short Answer Type Questions

- Q 2. Why was Subbu considered No. 2 at Gemini Studios?
Q 3. What misery did the people face in the make-up room?
Q 4. How was the lawyer different from others?

Long Answer Type Questions

- Q 5. Throw light on the characteristics of the legal adviser.
Q 6. Discuss the look and hierarchy of the make-up room.

