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The Price of Flowers

Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay

1. Why was the narrator's attention drawn to the English girl?

The narrator's eyes were attracted to an English girl looking straight at him. But when he looked at her she suddenly turned her eyes away.

2. What was the girl's appearance like?

The girl was only 13 or 14 years old. Her clothes revealed that she was poor. The most noticeable factor was that her large eyes had a very sad expression.

3. What did the girl enquire about the narrator?

Somewhat the narrator looked showed that he was an Indian. The girl asked her doubt to the cashier, if that gentleman was an Indian. She also enquired whether he used to visit that hotel often.

4. Why was the narrator curious about the girl?

The narrator saw the girl looking carefully at him. He also wondered why she wanted to know

whether the narrator was an Indian.

5. What did he do to meet her?

He first asked the waitress about her. Then he started to search for her on the streets and in the shops near St. Martin's Lane, right from Monday. He found her only on Saturday in the same vegetarian restaurant where he had first seen her.

6. What was the girl's impression of India?

She heard that most Indians are vegetarians. People had told her mother that India is full of tigers and snakes and fevers too. Moreover her brother was a soldier in India. She also believed that yogis in India had occult powers.

7. Where did Maggie work? Was she satisfied with her work?

Maggie was a typist in the Civil Service Stores. She was not satisfied with her work. She thought it was mechanical. She wanted work in which her brains could be put to work, she wanted to be creative and be a secretary. All this was to earn more salary and take her mother to a better place to stay.

8. How is Saturday special to the poor in Lambeth?

The poor neighbourhood of Lambeth enjoyed life on Saturdays. It was PAY DAY. On that day the streets would be crowded with people they would buy things they wanted and also sell things they had made at home. The whole village was in festivity.

9. How did Mr. Gupta answer Mrs Cliffords doubts about India?

Mr. Gupta soothed her heart by saying that India was a beautiful land. Snakes, tigers and fevers were there, but not always in all places. Animals lived in forests and they never came to men, because they would get killed. Especially about The Punjab he told her that the place was healthy.

10. What is your opinion about superstitions? Do you believe in any?

Superstitions are as old as man. They have been a part of society and culture. No one knows the truth behind their origins. If used in good terms they may promote good living. Otherwise, they make man have blind faith which hides away reality. We should use our logic and reasoning power to reject them.

11. What was Maggie's request to the narrator, when Mrs Clifford was sick?

Mrs. Clifford was ill, and worried if her son Frank was alive or not. She was sinking. She somehow had some belief that, Mr Gupta being an Indian could predict the whereabouts of Frank by looking into the crystal. She believed that the crystal had magical powers. Maggie was depressed, but she wanted Mr. Gupta to say a small lie for her mother's sake. If a lie - that her son Frank was alive - could save her mother, it could prevent Maggie being an orphan. Maggie knew Mr Gupta didn't believe in this superstition, but her request was to save her mother.

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1. It is neither the same everywhere, nor the same all the year round in India? Why Mrs Clifford and Maggie were anxious to know about India. They had heard many things about the land and were frightened that their son Francis would be harmed by tigers, snakes and fevers. But Mr. Gupta cleared their doubts saying that India was beautiful and that the climate in different areas was different at all times of the year. Fever and diseases were common, but not existing always.
2. Why did the narrator decide to take the shilling given by Maggie? Maggie's brother, a soldier in the Punjab, had been killed by fighting. He was buried at Fort Monroe near Dera - Gazhi - Khan. When she knew that the narrator was leaving for India, she wanted him to place some flowers on his grave. For this she gave a shilling from her hard earned salary. The narrator wanted to give it back and say that flowers grew in plenty in India. But something made him not do so. Maggie would be happy to think that the shilling was spent for her brother whom she loved so much. She had sacrificed

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it for him. The joy of doing this was beyond the price. The price of flowers.

3. What is the role of faith in the story?

"Faith is everything" and faith can do wonders" — can be noted out through the story "The Price of Flowers".

① The mother and daughter have formed opinions about India — its animals, its climate and superstitions. They are worried that their son must be hurt, when his letter does not arrive. The son has sent a crystal ball home, which is believed to predict the future. Somehow Mrs. Clifford believes that this crystal ball will show the whereabouts of her son, who is fighting in the North Western Frontier. Mr. Gupta knows very well that the crystal is only a glass piece and that it cannot predict anything. But on Maggie's request he is ready to say a small lie for Mrs. Clifford. He looks into the crystal and says that Frank is alive and well. The trick worked. The lie saved Mrs. Clifford. Her faith that the crystal predicted truth worked. Her faith made her come back to life.

② Secondly, Maggie had faith that Mr. Gupta would go to India, to Fort Monroe where Frank was buried and place some flowers on his grave. She took out a shilling to buy those

flowers. She was happy to believe that she had given a shilling for Frank. The joy of giving up her shilling was her faith. It was the price of love, love for a brother who was no more alive.

Activity II

"The Price of Flowers"

The story "The Price of Flowers" brings a tear to even a strong person. The value of relationships is the theme of this story. It is an anecdote, a real life situation, the writer experiences in life. Maggie and her mother are waiting eagerly for the news of Frank, who is a soldier in India in the Punjab. The mother Mrs Clifford, even falls ill, when there is no news from her son. Finally they come to know he is dead. Maggie learns that the author Mr Gupta is leaving to India. Maggie takes out a shilling from her savings and asks Mr. Gupta to place some flowers on his grave. She is ready to sacrifice a shilling for her brother. She has worked hard to earn money even at this young age. This money - a shilling - may be a small amount but it is the price of flowers, the price of love to her brother, who is no more. He has gone away, never to return to life.

Activity III

The story 'The Price of Flowers' centres around three characters, Mr Gupta, Mrs Clifford and Maggie. Maggie is an adolescent girl, fourteen years old who had to perform the duties of an earning member in a family. She sacrifices all her joys of education and enjoyment to earn money for her aged and ill mother. Her brother serves in the British Army and is presently posted in India. Maggie's first appearance in the hotel, shows that she is anxious to learn about India and Indians, to enquire something about the land where her brother is serving. Her clothes reveal her poverty. The waitress of the hotel tells Mr Gupta that Maggie works as a typist in the civil service stores. She often takes no lunch and waits for Saturday, her pay-day to have a meal. Maggie is a girl full of love and care towards her family. She is modest and humble. She is well behaved and mannered. She is depressed about her brother, but still we have many instances which show her positive attitude - especially when she requests Mr Gupta to say a small lie for her mother. She is practical in life and is ready to face hard realities in life.

Her aesthetic sense and talents are shown through her violin recital. She keeps her house neat and clean. She respects elders and her words to Mr. Gupta show how caring she is about others' feelings. — "Mr. Gupta, I have read in books that Hindus are extremely truth loving. If you could say a lie, just once, for my mother, will it be wrong, very wrong?" Yes... she was a virtuous girl with strong will power to face life as an adult does.

And we feel more sympathetic about her, when we see her ready to sacrifice — A SHILLING — her hard earned money to place flowers on her brother's cemetery. She believes that Mr. Gupta will do this for her. She prays for her lost brother, now dead. She prays his soul will rest in peace.

Activity IV

Q. Which category does the story 'The Price of Flowers' belong to? Discuss.

The dictionary mentions ANECDOTE as "a short amusing or interesting story about a real incident or a person."

2. - a short narrative of an interesting, amusing or biographical incident.

In line to these definitions, the story 'The Price of Flowers' belongs to this category, as it is a narrative. It is also the real life experience of Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay. The story is interesting and we are amused at each line of the story and we eagerly wait with anxiety for the climax.

Activity V

Write up

"I want work that will make me use my head, brain work" -

These are the words of a teenager, a girl of fourteen, named Maggie, a character of strong will power and positive attitude, in the story "The Price of Flowers". The girl Maggie represents the face of people who suffer the "loss" in war. Her only brother is a soldier who dies leaving Maggie and her mother alone without a supportive, earning member in the family.

We the present generation are lucky that we ~~live~~ live in a war free world. We are also free to enjoy the fruits of education too. Child

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labour is also prohibited. Formal education enables us to develop an intellectual culture. Usually BRAIN WORK is considered superior to PHYSICAL LABOUR, as the brain is involved. Brain work is a result of thinking, planning, designing and executing. It gives satisfaction to the mind. The product is visible to all and a high salary is paid for the effort put into it. It does not seem tiring like body labour. Maggie, in the story wants to use her brains to earn satisfaction.

And moreover she wants money to take care of her mother.

I too would like to take up a job in my life in which my intelligence can be used.

As Abraham Lincoln said

"Teach him to sell his brawn and brain to the highest bidders"

I want to work in a field I feel satisfied with my earnings. I want to develop my personality and communicative skills. I want to be a nice citizen of some use to my country.

Activity VI (Letter)

Dear Maggie,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and peace of mind. Mrs Clifford is also well, I hope and pray, and surely the Lord Almighty will take you both safely through the difficulties of life.

Maggie, I have reached India after weeks of voyage through the Oceans. I have joined office in the state of Punjab. All these days my main aim was to keep your shilling safe in my hands, till I get a chance to visit Fort Monroe, the place your brother's soul rests. Finally yesterday I set off. After making enquiries at the British Military Office in the state of Punjab, I learnt that Fort Monroe was the official Cemetery of the British Military. I bought flowers with your shilling and proceeded to his grave. His tomb was in marble, and an epitaph was written —

" Here lies a brave soldier
Who sacrificed his days
For our safe tomorrows " —

I kept the flowers on the grave and remembered the face of Mrs Clifford. I murmured that a mother who was full of love to him was fine in London

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I saw your face too, Maggie and told him that his sister loved him immensely. She was brave. He need not worry. She would look after mother. I saw a tear fall from the eyes of the officer who accompanied me. I prayed once more. Maggie, I am satisfied that I could keep my word to you. Your brother surely knows your love.

Now you can move on in life with a positive attitude. You can depend on God to be a shoulder you can lie on in times of need.

Let prayers lead you both forward. And of course, I am miles away from you, but still you can always believe that your prayers will reach your brother through me. I will spend shillings for you, to buy flowers for you and keep them on his grave whenever possible.

Bye for now

Mr. Gupta.

Activity VII Telephone Conversation

Imagine one day Mr Gupta receives a call from Maggie. Prepare a likely conversation between them.

Maggie: Hello, is it Mr. Gupta?

Mr. Gupta: Yes, hello, may I know who is speaking?

Maggie: Oh, hello Mr. Gupta, it's me Maggie.

I just wanted to call you up and thank you for doing me that favour. I read your letter with so much joy.

Mr. Gupta: No mention, Maggie, I thought it my duty to convey your love to your brother.

Maggie: Oh! Sir, I thank you for the pains you took. Mother too conveys her love and regards to you.

Mr. Gupta: No need of any formal words of thanks. I felt proud to do so.

Maggie: Sir, does that marble cemetery have my brother's photograph on it?

Mr. G: Yes, Maggie, he is in uniform and looks like a perfect gentleman.

Maggie: Sir, if you don't mind, could you please take a photograph of the grave and the epitaph written on it and send it to us. It would be a reminder for us.

Mr. G: Oh! sure, Maggie, I shall do so.

Maggie: Sir, thank you so much. Do remember us in prayers. I shall keep in touch.

Mr. G: Sure, Maggie, I'll do anything for you and Mrs. Clifford. Bye and take care.

Activity VIII Review:

'The Price of Flowers' - an anecdote, which brings a tear from every reader is a writing which portrays the "Price of Relationships". The length of this story determines the depth of the emotions involved. The characters are all silent in their own respects, and are faithful to their own duties. They are only a handful in number. Mrs Clifford the mother of Maggie and ~~her~~ ~~son~~ Frank is a symbol of pure love. She is in all senses a loving mother. Her children are her happiness. Maggie, the daughter too is a caring, responsible child. She behaves older than her age, she becomes the earning member of the family and she is eager to get a higher payment job, so that she can improve the living conditions of her mother. The narrator Mr Gump becomes a friend, philosopher and guide to the Clifford family. He understands their sorrows and how much they value family relations. Living conditions are not favourable for them.

The mention of India and many misconceptions of the country are revealed through the words of Maggie and Mrs. Clifford. Their

concern is about Frank, Mrs Clifford's son who is a soldier in Punjab. ^{Financial} ~~Economic~~ problem of the family prompted Frank to take up a job in the British army. Mrs Clifford is worried that her son works in a country full of snakes and wild animals. Thus the characters are all fully drawn by the writer in a very interesting manner.

The style of narration is simple, straight forward and is in the first person narration. The story is located in London. We get a picture of the class system in London society. The rich and the poor have their own lifestyles. The poor live in the borders of the city. Their houses are crowded and Saturdays are their day for enjoyment. The characters of the story are real life characters. We get a clear psychological insight into all the characters. A lot of dialogues are included. The dialogues lead the narration into beauty.

The story opens with a meeting between Mr. Gupta and Maggie. It is their first interaction. The story also ends with a meeting between Mr. Gupta and Maggie. The opening and the closing scenes are dramatic. The story is enjoyable and smooth, but it always brings a feeling of pain in our heart. We feel sad for Maggie and Mrs. Clifford.