

Poets and Pancakes

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Question 1:

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

Answer:

- ***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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Question 1:

What does the writer mean by ‘the fiery misery’ of those subjected to make-up’?

Answer:

The make-up room of Gemini Studios looked like a hair cutting salon. It had around half a dozen mirrors with incandescent lights at all angles around them. The artists would feel the heat emanating from these lights. Thus, the writer uses the term ‘fiery misery’ to denote the uncomfortable situation of those subjected to make-up.

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Question 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.

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Question 3:

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

Answer:

The 'office boy' was responsible for the make-up of the people who formed part of crowd in the films. He used to mix his paint in a giant vessel and slapped the paint on the faces of the players.

He had joined the Gemini Studios years ago, aspiring to become an actor, or a scriptwriter, or a director, or a lyricist. He was disappointed with the studio that failed to recognise his talent. He called it a "department fit only for barbers and perverts".

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Question 4:

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

Answer:

The job of the author was to cut newspaper clippings and file them. For the other employees, all he seemed to be doing is tearing newspapers, which according to them did not qualify as work.

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Question 1:

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

Answer:

The office boy had joined the studio years ago in the hope of becoming an actor or a screenwriter, or a director, or a lyricist. The fact that he ended up becoming none of these left him frustrated. According to him, "great literary talent was being allowed to go waste in a department fit only for barbers and perverts". He used to direct his anger at the author even though it was meant for Kothamangalam Subbu.

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Question 2:

Who was Subbu's principal?

Answer:

The Boss, who was also the founder of Gemini Studios, was Subbu's principal.

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Question 3:

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

Answer:

Subbu was a multi-disciplinarian. He could provide solutions to problems, could remain cheerful all the time and was an actor, a poet and a novelist.

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Question 4:

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

Answer:

A lawyer used to be a part of the story department at the Gemini studios. Though, a legal adviser was supposed to be involved in legal matters, his cagey yet stupid idea led to the end of an actress's career. Due to this, he was referred to as the opposite of a legal advisor, by the people.

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Question 5:

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

Answer:

The lawyer wore pants and a tie and sometimes a coat whereas everyone else in the Story Department wore similar khadi dhoti with a slightly oversized and clumsily tailored white khadi shirt. Thus, the lawyer stood out from others at Gemini Studios as if he is a dispassionate man who did not take sides. Moreover, he was a logical man with no emotional attachment whatsoever.

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Question 1:

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

Answer:

The people at Gemini Studios did not have any particular political affiliations. The common political notions of the day managed to influence them but that was limited to wearing khadi and admiring the Gandhian philosophy. They were averse to the term 'Communism' but had only an erroneous understanding of the concept.

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Question 2:

Why was the Moral Re-Armament army welcomed at the studio?

Answer:

Frank Buchman's Moral Re-Armament army was welcomed at the studio mainly because of their political association. The people at the Gemini Studios were averse to Communism, and hence, were ready to play host to the MRA.

Apart from that, the studio people hardly had any occupation and suffered from boredom. The MRA came as a welcome change to their monotonous days at the studio.

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Question 3:

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

Answer:

Madras and Tamil drama community included scenes of 'sunset and sunrise in the manner of Jotham Valley' in almost all of their plays. This shows how the plays, staged by MRA, influenced Gemini Studios.

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Question 4:

Who was The Boss of Gemini Studios?

Answer:

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

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Question 5:

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

Answer:

The accent of Stephen Spender, the Englishman, was the main cause of the lack of communication between him and the people at Gemini Studios. Apart from that, the people did not have any idea about what he was talking.

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Question 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.

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Question 1:

Who was the English visitor to the studio?

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.

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Question 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.

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Question 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".

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Question 1:

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.

(The above answer is only a sample provided for students' reference. It is strongly recommended that students prepare the answer on their own.)

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Question 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.

Question 3:

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

Answer:

The audience at the Gemini studios was not knowledgeable enough to understand the thrills and travails of an English poet, of which the visitor poet-editor talked about, in his speech. The studio made films for simple people whose limited resources did not provide them with an opportunity to develop a taste in English poetry. The audience failed to understand anything the poet said, all the more, because of the latter's accent. The poet-editor, in turn, looked baffled realising the utter inappropriateness of his speech being directed to such an audience.

Question 4:

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

Answer:

Though the author had a very tedious and unchallenging job at the studios, his interest in literature and writing is apparent in his willingness to participate in the short story contest organised by the British periodical, *The Encounter*. Moreover, the author appears to be a keen reader visiting libraries and buying books on wide-ranging topics whenever he could afford them. Besides, the narrative also establishes the fact that the author was one of the most knowledgeable persons in Gemini Studios. His idea about how prose writing was not meant for geniuses but for those with patience and perseverance, highlight his reflective and deep thoughts on literature and creative writing.