

The Pot Maker ---- Temsula Ao

PART A

- a) Why was Arenla reluctant to teach Sentila the craft of pot making?

According to her the craft of pot making was back breaking work and was often frustrating, especially when a sudden shower ruined weeks of labour and the pots drying in the sun were destroyed by the rain.

- b) Why does Arenla feel that weaving is a better craft to learn than pot making?

Arenla wants Sentila to learn weaving than pot making because it is a skill highly valued as an asset in girls. So she was reluctant to teach Sentila the art of pot making.

- c) Why did Mesoba returned home with a heavy heart after meeting the elders?

Because he knew that they had to agree with the village council's wish. They ordered him that, Arenla should be willing to pass the gift of pottery to Sentila, otherwise she will be considered as the enemy of the village.

- d) Who is Onula? What was her attitude toward's Sentila's wish to become a potmaker?

She was kind ,middle aged widow who was supervised the dormitory where Sentila stayed when she attained puberty. She resolved to help Sentila in every possible way so that the girl could fulfill her dream of becoming a pot maker.

- e) Why was Sentila surprised when her mother left her in the shed to make pots?

Because this is the first time Arenla told her daughter that they should try to make as many pots as they could. Sentila was surprised at her mother's assumption that she could make a decent pot at all found it odd that her mother did not stay back to gloat over yet another failure.

- f) What was Sentila's reaction when her mother's body was carried out for burial?

When Arenla's body was being carried out of the house the next morning she ran after it shouting, "Mother I did not wish it to happen this way; it simply came to me. Please forgive me".

PART B

- a) Describe Sentila's visit to the old pot maker's shed

When Sentila was left in the village to look after her baby brother she would strap him to her back with a piece of cloth and walk up the steep hill to reach the old potmaker's shed. She would carry some cooked rice in a leaf packet with her. When the baby became hungry she would chew some of the rice till it became soft and then feed it to him. She would sing a lullaby to put him to sleep while watching the old women work work. One of the old women would sing beautiful folk songs sometimes substituting words to suit her anger and frustrations and making others laugh. Sentila would stay till late afternoon and then return home.

- b) What was response of the elder's of the village council to Mesoba's explanation?

The village council questioned him about Arenla's attitude towards Sentila's wish to become a pot maker. He explained that Sentila went to the old pot maker's shed to sing lullabies and one of them give her sweet potatoes. Her mother has never refused to teach her how to make pots. Also he ordered a small digging Dao for Sentila at the blacksmith yesterday.

After listening Mesoba's explanation they decided to let him go as there was no need to take any drastic action against him. They told him to remind his wife that it was her duty to train Sentila in the skills handed down over generations. They also told him that skills like pottery not only catered to the daily needs of people but also symbolized the tradition and history of the community. It did not belong to any individual. Experts had to pass their skills not only to their own children but also to anyone who wished to learn. Mesoba's wife was expected to do the same. Anyone refusing to do so would be considered an enemy of the village.

- c) How did Onula help Sentila with pot making on the night of the music band's visit.

Sentila did not go with the other girls to see the music band but instead stayed back so that she could practice pot making. Onula saw Sentila's movements and understood how difficult it was for Sentila and decided to intervene. She showed her how to make pot using the clay. She pointed out some of the things that Sentila was doing wrong. She sat on the stool and showed her how to hold the thigh muscles taut and use sacking to cover the thigh so that the lump did not slip. When she dipped her hand in the water she showed her how not to make it too wet and how to hold the spatula. She also showed her how to tap to a rhythm while rotating the clay. Thus Sentila learned some of the techniques to make a good pot.

- d) What did Sentila experience while making pots after Arenla left her in the shed?

Sentila watched carefully at Arenla's movements in potmaking. She paid much attention to every detail like fashioning the mouth of the pot. One day Arenla told her daughter they should try to make as many pots as they can. Sentila was surprised at her mother's assumption that she could make a decent pot. As expected, the mother completed a batch quickly and asked Sentila to take over from her by complaining of a head ache and sore back.

After Arenla left the shed Sentila sat down on the stool to begin making clay pots. As she took the spatula to begin beating the dough to give it the required shape she felt as if another pair of hands had taken over and directing her movements. She began to beat the dough in perfect coordination with her rotating hands. Before long she had transformed the clay into perfect pot. She finished the mouth and neck of the pot. After she had stopped looking in amazement at her work. Soon she found her momentum and began making pot after pot like her mother with same speed and dexterity. When she finally stopped she realized, she had made just one pot less than her mother.

- e) What was Onula's impression about the two batches of moist pots in the shed?

When heard about the mother's death Onula visited Sentila's home. After she went back to her home she saw two neat rows of freshly made pots in the shed. She could not find anything to differentiate one set from the other. Onula realized that it could not have been the mother's work alone as Arenla had left the shed before the mid-day hour. It could also not have been Sentila's work as she was too young and inexperienced to accomplish this level of work. Onula felt that both mother and daughter had been involved in making the pots as it was difficult to differentiate between the pots that stood in perfect symmetry in the shed.

PART C

- a) Describe how Sentila becomes a pot maker against the expectations of her mother?
- b) Critically analyse and respond to 'the pot Maker' as a story about tribal value systems that place collective good over individual interests.

Temsula Ao is a renowned poet, short story writer and ethnographer. The story "The pot Maker" included in her anthology *These Hills Called Home* highlights the formative influence of tribal tradition and customs on an individual and her aspirations. The indigenous beliefs cultural and traditional practices and systems of tribal societies tend more to the interest of the community as a whole, sometimes against individual pursuits.

The pot maker is set in such a Naga tribal community. It is the story of Sentila who wants to be a pot maker like her mother Arenla. But she is reluctant to pass on the traditional knowledge and craft of pottery to her daughter. Arenla wants Sentila to learn weaving a skill jighly valued as an asset in girl's life. The story shows how Sentila picks up the art despite her mother's refusal to pass on the art to her.

Arenla was reluctant to teach Sentila the art of pottery because she considered it was a back breaking work and was often frustrating especially when a sudden shower ruined weeks of labour. . But sentila wanted to learn pot making because it was her dream. When her parents went out of to the fields, Sentila visited the old poakers and tried to learn from what she saw them do. She would carry her baby brother along with her.

When village council came to know about this they questioned Mesoba, Sentila's father. They instructed jim to tell his wife to teach Sentila the art of pot making. As it was their traditional art and the girl was expected to learn it as well. Arenla reluctantly began showing her daughter potmaking. She would not help Sentila in any way.Sentila would make misshapen lumps and Arenla would not in any way guide her.

When Sentila attained puberty, she went to girl's dormitory. Onula was the supervisor there. One night all girls went to enjoy the musical performance, Sentila began her work. Onula watched everythig and helped Sentila with her expertise in pottery. She pointed out sometings to Sentila and encouraged her to observe certain things when her mother made the pot.

After that Sentila looked carefully at her mother's work and made a thorough knowledge about the art of pottery. One summer day Arenla left Sentila to finish the pot making. It was as if someone else had entered Sentila as she made perfect pots like her mother. When Onula saw them she could not distinguish between the two pot maker's work. They were identical. It was as if when Arenla died somehow her potter's spirit entered Sentila who could now be called a potmaker.