



## 2.8 Small Towns and Rivers

### ICE BREAKERS

- (i) Most of the civilizations have flourished on the banks of the rivers. Discuss the reasons in the class. One is done for you.
- (a) Availability of water
- (b) .....
- (c) .....
- (d) .....
- (ii) Write down the names of the famous cities that are situated on the banks of the rivers given below. One is done for you.

River	City
Ganga	Varanasi
Yamuna	
Godavari	
Varada	
Krishna	
Tapi	

- (iii) Write down the names of the rivers on the banks of which following cities have prospered:

City	River
London	
Cairo	
New York	
Paris	

- (i) Divide your class into groups and discuss the changes that might have taken place when the cities grow on the banks of the rivers.
- (ii) Share your views in the class on the topic ‘Conservation of Rivers and Development of the Cities.’

**Mamang Dai (born 1957)** is a poet, novelist, journalist and former civil servant from Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, who writes in English as well as Adi language. She is also an active radio and TV journalist covering news programmes and interviews for All India Radio and Doordarshan, Itanagar. She was a programme officer with World Wide Fund for Nature and worked with Biodiversity Hotspot Conservation Programme. She has received Padmashree Award in 2011 and Sahitya Akademi Award in 2017. Mamang Dai is a strong voice from the North East, a writer and a poet par excellence whose work has the fragrance of her land and her people.



The poem, 'Small Towns and Rivers' is taken from the collection of the poems, 'The River Poems', published in 2004. The poem describes a landscape and Nature where river is a dominant phenomenon. Through the concepts like 'river has a soul' and 'river knows immortality of water,' the poet makes us aware of the lively nature around her hometown 'Pasighat' and the eternity of the natural elements. She finds that even life and death are transient. The poem is based on the belief of the tribal people from the North East, that the souls of the beloved ones always continue to dwell in the natural elements around. So she remembers death when she sees the towns. The towns, she implies, have prospered when Nature has been destroyed. The poet has expressed anxiety at the developments in the small towns.

## Small Towns and Rivers



**wreath:** an arrangement of flowers, leaves and stems fastened in a ring and used for decoration or laying on a grave or a dead body

**rituals:** religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed way

Small towns always remind me of death.  
My hometown lies calmly amidst the trees,  
it is always the same,  
in summer or winter,  
with the dust flying,  
or the wind howling down the gorge.

Just the other day someone died.  
In the dreadful silence we wept  
looking at the sad **wreath** of tuberose.  
Life and death, life and death,  
only the **rituals** are permanent.



The river has a soul.

In the summer it cuts through the land  
like a torrent of grief. Sometimes,  
sometimes, I think it holds its breath  
seeking a land of fish and stars

The river has a soul.

It knows, stretching past the town,  
from the first drop of rain to dry earth  
and mist on the mountaintops,  
the river knows  
the **immortality** of water.

A **shrine** of happy pictures  
marks the days of childhood.  
Small towns grow with anxiety  
for the future.  
The dead are placed pointing west.  
When the soul rises  
it will walk into the golden east,  
into the house of the sun.

In the cool bamboo,  
restored in sunlight,  
life matters, like this.

In small towns by the river  
we all want to walk with the gods.

- Mamang Dai

*Describe the river in the  
3<sup>rd</sup> stanza.*

*Guess the meaning :*

- immortality

**shrine:** a place regarded  
as holy because of its  
associations with divinity  
or a sacred person or relic  
marked by a building or  
other construction

*Give reasons –*

The dead are placed  
pointing to the west.

## BRAINSTORMING

(A1) Discuss the importance of Nature in the lives of the people from the Northeastern part of India as expressed in the poem with reference to—

- (a) Flowers
- (b) River
- (c) Bamboo
- (d) East

(A2) (i) The poet has described her small town in Arunachal Pradesh. Pick out the lines that describe the poet's town.

(ii) Make a list of natural elements mentioned in the poem.

(iii) 'The river has a soul.' Elaborate the concept in your words as the poet has explained it in the poem.

(iv) The poet is convinced with the thought of immortality of water. Pick out the relevant lines.

- (a) .....
- (b) .....
- (c) .....

(v) The poet has used some unconventional expressions. Illustrate them in your words.

- (a) Torrent of grief
- (b) Shrine of happy pictures
- (c) The land of fish and stars

(vi) The poet is anxious about the existence of natural beauty of her town in the future. But she touches the strings of the hearts while appealing to conserve the Nature. Explain the way she has expressed it in the first and the last line of the poem.

(vii) The poet has connected the need to preserve Nature with the belief of particular community and her childhood memories.

Write down the measures you would take to convince the people regarding the need to conserve the Nature.

(A3) (i) Write down the expressions related to 'the seasons' from the poem.

(ii) Match column 'A' with column 'B'.

A	B
Cool	Silence
Happy	Earth
Dreadful	Bamboo
Dry	Pictures

(A4) (i) Read the expression 'a sad wreath of tuberoses'.

'Is the wreath sad?' Explain the figure of speech.

(ii) List and explain the metaphorical expressions from the poem. For example, 'torrent of grief.'

(iii) 'The river has a soul.'

'Life and death.'

These are the two expressions that are repeated in the poem; but both of them indicate different figures of speech. Find out and discuss.

(iv) Find out the beauty of the free verse reflected in this poem.

(A5) (i) Prepare the arguments for group discussion on the topic -

'A balanced progress never harms the Nature.'

(ii) Compose 4 to 6 lines on 'Gift of the Seasons'.

(iii) Write an appreciation of the poem 'Small Towns and Rivers'. Refer to the earlier poems for the points to be covered for appreciation.

(iv) Write a dialogue between two friends on 'Importance of the rivers'.

(A6) (i) Collect information about rivers in Maharashtra.

(ii) Further reading :

'The River Poems' - Mamang Dai

'The World Is Too Much With Us' - William Wordsworth

