

Chapter 20

Ajamil and the Tigers

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Understanding the Poem

1. The poem has a literal level and a figurative level. Why has the poet chosen 'tigers' and 'sheep' to convey his message?

Answer

Though literally the poem talks of a short story in which a shepherd made a concord with a king of tigers to maintain peace among the two communities. However, if one tries to gauge, there is more to it than just a jungle story. It speaks of the distinction between the proprietor and the proletariat. It is about the class struggle and the oppressor and the oppressed. The shepherd is the politician, the ruler, as depicted in the poem, and other sheep are subjects. The sheepdog, is the warrior, the army, to protect sheep. However, shepherd wants to maintain his sovereignty, so sacrifices a few sheep to maintain a cordial relation with the tigers and goes on signing the pact. It is depicted how the rulers sacrifice their people to maintain their regime.

2. What facet of political life does the behaviour of Ajamil illustrate?

Answer

The poem Ajamil and the Tigers is a political satire by Arun Kolatkar; Ajamil and the Tigers represent the corrupt politicians and the oppressed subjects. The sheep represent the mass, the mob; the sheepdog's is the incarnation of the army. It is to be seen how the commoners, sheep and sheepdog, are annihilated by the rulers, Ajamil. How their sentiments are overlooked. The poet has beautifully retold the fantastic story of Ajamil, the believed to be good shepherd, which he possibly heard in Jejuri. When the tigers are captured by the brave sheepdog, Ajamil lets them lose, despite being warned by the dog. To show his prominence, he did not listen to the sheepdog and did not even make any eye contact with him. Rather he offered a gala feast to the tigers and gave them gifts like sheep meat, skin and wool. The audacious warriors are paid no heed to

and the subjects are sacrificed for Ajamil wanted to maintain his supremacy.

3. Why have the words, 'pretended' and 'seemed' been used in the lines:

...**Pretended** to believe every single word

of what the tiger king said.

And **seemed** to be taken in by all the lies.

How does the sense of these lines connect with the line 'Ajamil wasn't a fool'?

Answer

Ajamil, the good shepherd, was not a fool. The tigers' king requested him to set all the tigers free; the sheepdog tried to convince Ajamil that the tigers had come to him to offer a friendly hand. Ajamil though agreed to him and cut them all loose and even offered them a feast and signed a pact with the king of tigers that they were friends thenceforth. Ajamil was a fine politician and did not want to mess up with the lot and believed it best to maintain cordial relation with them. So, though he knew inside that, today or tomorrow, the tigers would attack the sheep again. He pretended that he believed all what the king told him and accepted the friendship offered by the tiger. He portrayed it so well that Ajamil seemed taken in by all the lies of the tiger, but in heart he knew that they will return to hunt. So, he felt it better to sacrifice a few sheep every time rather than losing them all in a possible fierce battle where he might lose his reign absolutely. It is also a little disheartening, his lack of confidence in his sheepdog. However, he played it safe and avoided the risk that was hovering over his kingdom.

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4. Why did Ajamil refuse to meet the sheepdog's eyes?

Answer

When Ajamil accepted the tiger king's offer of friendship, the sheepdog realised the hidden intentions and tried to convey him to not agree. The sheepdog was a simple one who never told a lie. He made frantic signs to signal Ajamil. The shepherd, however, refused to meet the dog's eye and went on signing the pact and offered the tigers to stay for dinner. Ajamil was a safe player. He took calculated risk. He was a mature politician, not to mess with, who would do anything to maintain his

supremacy. He disrespected by displaying his lack of confidence in his sheepdog and rather went on signing a treaty, while he could have challenged a fierce battle. However, he tried to sort it out by sacrificing a few of the sheep and not messing with the ferocious lot. The incident shows how the executive, one of the pillars of democracy, is at the mercy of the legislature. It was not jingoism that saved his regime but by shrewd politics.

5. 'He is free to play a flute all day as well fed tigers and fat sheep drink from the same pond

with a full stomach for a common bond.'

What do the phrases 'play the flute all day' and 'a common bond' refer to?

Answer

It is so that the leaders relish their living at the cost of their subjects. So did Ajamil who was a good shepherd on the exterior but a shrewd politician inside whose each and every move was a calculated one. He signed a pact which was impossible to maintain forever, though it was to be so. It was obvious that once when the hunting instinct will take over the tigers they will try to attack the sheep again. However, Ajamil did not mind losing a few foot soldiers rather than waging a war and lose all his sheep in one go. He did what a smart shepherd does, to protect all, sacrifice a few. So, he can sit back and relax by playing flute all day long. He did good to both the species. He fed the tigers and saved the sheep as well. In jungle raj everything is defined by one thing alone, "the survival of the fittest" and another fact that no matter how strong or weak an animal is, they all drink water from the same pond. All survive together and so for common good, Ajamil did what he could.

6. The poem is a satire against the present political class. How effectively does it convey the anger and anguish of the common man trapped in the system?

Answer

Karl Marx said, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." The clash between the proprietor and the proletariat is natural and inevitable. The oppressor and the oppressed will always be class apart. A commoner who has no say is sandwiched between the political groups. The mob struggles; however, it is a futile war against the powerful who sacrifice their subjects to gain power and play petty

politics. Like it happened in the poem how the two groups, the tigers and the shepherd, exploited the commoners, the sheep. Even though the social forces, the sheepdog, try to stop it all, on the name of "common good" the proletariat is always sacrificed. They can not raise voice against the powerful and simply have to obey the laws laid down by the dogmatic authorities.