



মণিপুরৰ শ্বৰে সৰ্বস্বত্ব (সংস্কৃত)

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (S)

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CLASS IX
ENGLISH LITERATURE READER
PROSE SECTION
CHAPTER 5
THE TASTE OF AN HILSA
(NONGTHOMBAM KUNJAMOHAN SINGH)

SOLUTIONS

EXERCISES

A. COMPREHENSION:

Based on your reading of the text, answer the follow up questions by choosing the correct options:

I. The morning prayer of the *Sadhu* indicated

- a. the approach of dawn.
- b. the coming of storm.
- c. that he was awake.
- d. that the people should awake.

Ans: (a) the approach of dawn.

II. Chaoba chides Mani when he exclaims in delight because

- a. somebody might hear it.
- b. he felt it was not good to speak like that.
- c. he would disturb the peace of the dawn.
- d. the fish might run away.

Ans: (b) he felt it was not good to speak like that.



III. Chaoba had to sell the fish because

- a. he wanted a huge profit.
- b. he had to buy rice.
- c. he wanted to do Thaninjao a favour.
- d. he wanted to teach his son a lesson.

Ans: (b) he had to buy rice.

B. Fill In The Blanks:

- a. The father and son are rowing towards the eddy of Langor Baaba.
- b. When father and son arrive at their home, the day has well advanced.
- c. Probably because of its innocence the dog is not hit.
- d. The child remains mum. He simply stares at the fish and stays still.

C. Answer the following questions briefly:

- i. **Where do Chaoba and Mani set out to fish before dawn?**

Ans: Chaoba and Mani set out to fish at the *Barak River* before dawn.

- ii. **What is the prayer of the shadhu in the morning?**

Ans: The shadhu's prayer in the morning was "*Bom Bholenath, Jai Siva Sambhu*" which is an invocation to *Lord Shiva*.

- iii. **Why is Chaoba reluctant to sell the fish to the old man of the Naorem family?**

Ans: Chaoba was reluctant to sell the fish to the old man of the *Naorem* family because his personal equations with the old man were not good. The old man was rich but niggardly and would not give the proper price for the fish. Also, he would go on bargaining for a long time.



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iv. Why did Mani hate to see the old man of Naorem?

Ans: Mani hated to see the old man of Naorem because his son Tomal beat him two days ago.

v. Who were the other fishermen at the river besides Chaoba and Mani?

Ans: The other fishermen at the river besides Chaoba and Mani were Rahimuddin and his son.

vi. What was the talk between Chaoba and Rahimuddin about?

Ans: The talk between Chaoba and Rahimuddin was about the number of fish they caught that day and the previous day; how much money Rahimuddin got after selling them the previous day and why Chaoba did not want to sell his only catch that day.

vii. Whom did Chaoba want to feed the fish?

Ans: Chaoba wanted to feed the fish to his daughter, Sanarei who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy and whom he wanted to treat to a nice meal.

viii. What did Tampha tell her father when he returned home?

Ans: When Chaoba returned home from fishing, Tampha told him that there was no rice for meal that day.

ix. Why does Chaoba shudder when he hears the voice of Konsam Kanhai?

Ans: When Chaoba heard the voice of Konsam Kanhai, he shuddered because he remembered the amount of two and a quarter of rupees which he owed to Kanhai.

x. Why did Chaoba throw the wooden stool to the dog?

Ans: One day, Chaoba caught a big hilsa and he did not sell it because he wanted to treat his daughter Sanarei who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy to a nice meal. Also, he had not tasted one for a long time. But when he returned home he came to know that there was no rice for meal. All the anger of poverty and of not having even rice at home fell on him. So, Chaoba, in frenzy, threw the wooden stool to the innocent dog.

xi. How does little Mukta react when he sees the fish being taken away?

Ans: When little Mukta saw the *hilsa* fish being taken away, he remained mum, stared at the fish and stayed still.



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D. Answer the following questions in about 80 words:

i. Write a short note on the harsh life of a fisherman.

Ans: Life of a fisherman is harsh and he has to face the challenges thrown on his way by nature. He has to face hardships like heavy rain, storm and tide in the midst of the sea. Moreover, he lives a hand to mouth existence and suffers great pangs of hunger and poverty. He has to go to the sea early in the morning and try his luck. At times, he has to return home empty handed and has immense guilt in not being able to provide food to those who are dependent on him. Also, if someone becomes sick in his family, he has to pay the medical bills and feed him and thus increase his burden. This drains him further. Living in extreme poverty may change him to a person who is quick to become angry, unreasonable and impulsive. He may say or do things which will make him repent later on. Thus, he lives a life of misery and struggle throughout.

ii. Under what circumstances does Chaoba have to sell his hilsa?

Ans: Chaoba is a poor fisherman who lives on the mercy of what the Barak River provides, for his living. Even though he catches Hilsa fish, he is not fortunate enough to consume them because eating a Hilsa fish is a luxury to the poor fisherman.

Once, when he went for fishing along with his son, he caught a big Hilsa in his net. He did not want to sell the fish as he thought of treating his daughter Sanarei who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy to a sumptuous meal. Further, he himself had almost forgotten the taste of a Hilsa and wanted to savour it. So he refused to sell his only catch to the niggardly old man of Naorem and he also lied and told Konsam Kanhei that he did not catch any fish. But when he returned home, he was told by his daughter Tampha that they had no rice for their meal. He did not have any money to buy rice and his wife was bed-ridden. So the only way out was selling the fish which he ultimately did to Thaninjao. It seemed, fate was against him and it was destined for his family not to taste the Hilsa. The fish that he had been preventing from selling so vehemently was the only way to provide for their hunger. Thus, for the greater good he was compelled to sell the Hilsa.



- iii. Do you think that the selling of the fish by Chaoba at the end of the story is justifiable? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans: Chaoba's selling of the fish at the end of the story is justifiable and it gives a dramatic twist to the plot of the story.

When Chaoba caught the big hilsa fish he had momentarily forgotten that he was a poor farmer and did not have the luxury to eat as tasty a fish as hilsa. He decided to treat his daughter who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy to a sumptuous meal. Also he had not tasted a hilsa in a long time and wanted to savour its taste. Therefore he refused to sell it to the old man of Naorem. Moreover, he lied to Konsam Kanhei by saying that he did not catch any fish. In short he was desperate to save the fish for himself and his family. He had, however, to reconsider his decision of having the fish when his daughter informed him that there was no rice for meal. He had no money for rice and could not expect anything from his bed-ridden wife. He was helpless and his miserable state made him angry and frustrated. But after all was said and done, what was left was their only hope – the hilsa. So he sold it to feed the hungry stomachs and save his family from starvation. It was unfortunate but he was helpless. Nobody wants to give up a prized possession but when the odds are stacked against us we are forced to accept and live with it. So, it is understandable why Chaoba had to sell the fish.

- iv. Why does Chaoba say furiously to his wife *“Let you die, if you are going to die”*?

Ans: Chaoba returned home with the hope of eating the hilsa fish which he caught. He wanted to treat his pregnant daughter to a nice meal and he also desired to taste it after a long time. But his hope was dashed because he came to know from his daughter Tampha that there was no rice to cook for meal. All the anger of the poverty and not having even rice at home fell on him. Chaoba, in frenzy, threw a small stool to their old mangy dog and went inside his house. It just happened to be the moment of the change of posture by the bed-ridden wife who had been in chronic illness for a long time. Seeing her husband she asked him what was to be done for the rice. The smoldering fire of the rage inside



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Chaoba flared up at that moment and he poured it on his poor wife. In his fit of anger, he told his wife that he could not manage the household alone and that she was a torture to others. Mercilessly, he added to his wife to die if she was to die. Thus, Chaoba who was a victim of cruel fate lashed out to his wife.

- v. **Irony refers to a situation when what happens is opposite to what one thinks or plans. In the light of this, discuss and bring out the element of irony the story contains.**

Ans: *The Taste of an Hilsa* is the story of a poor fisherman, Chaoba who caught an hilsa which he wanted to eat but was forced to give up. The title misleads the reader into thinking that the hilsa was consumed by Chaoba and his family but they did not and it was ironic. Also, we come across Chaoba as someone who wished not to part with the hilsa but in order to prevent his family from starvation, he sold it to Konsam Kanhei and bought rice instead which was more needed than the hilsa. With the hilsa, he wanted to treat his pregnant daughter to a nice meal and he himself wanted to savour its forgotten taste. But what he wanted was in direct contrast to what actually happened. Also, there is the element of irony when they had to go to the river very early in the morning to catch fish but able to catch only one. Lastly the little boy Mukta enthusiastically told his playmate Tomchou that they were going to eat in a short while the big hilsa fish which his father caught from the Barak River. And at the end of the story we find Mukta being a silent spectator to the fish being carried away by Thaninjao. Thus, we find a lot of irony in the story.



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