

Poets and Pancakes Notes

Question 1.

Why is the Englishman's visit referred to us as unexplained mystery?

Answer:

The visit of the Englishman raised many queries and doubts in the minds of those who were working in Gemini Studios. The Englishman's name was unfamiliar and his credentials too were unconfirmed. No one could understand his speech so everyone wondered why he had come to a film studio that made Tamil films for simple people who had no interest in English poetry.

Question 2.

Who was the English visitor to the studios and what was the purpose of his visit?

Answer:

The Englishman who visited the studios was Stephen Spender. He was an English poet and the editor of a British periodical, 'The Encounter'. He visited the studio to deliver a speech at the invitation of Mr. Vasan who was the boss of Gemini Studios. He was unable to establish a rapport with his dazed

audience. No one really understood the purpose of his visit. Even his identity was discovered by Asokamitran years later, that too by sheer chance.

Question 3.

What was MRA and why it was welcomed at the Gemini Studios?

Answer:

The MRA, the Moral Rearmament Army, was a kind of counter movement to international communism. They were welcomed at the Gemini Studios due to their political affiliations. The big boss of the studio, Mr. Vasan literally played into their hands. Also, people at the Gemini Studios were averse to communism. So the Moral Rearmament Army could not have found a better host in India than the Gemini Studios, who welcomed them warmly.

Question 4.

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

Answer:

The English poet's address was a complete misfit in the midst of the Tamil knowing audience at Gemini Studios. His speech was incongruous and his accent so indistinct that no one actually understood a word of what he said. He was talking about the thrills and

travails of an English poet to a dazed audience. Finally, neither the Englishman himself nor his audience understood why they were going through the entire ordeal.

Question 5.

Why did everybody in the studio think of giving the author some work to do?

Answer:

The author's job was to cut out newspaper clippings on a wide variety of subjects and store them in files. Most people saw him doing this and considered it as useless work as they felt he was doing next to nothing. So everyone in the studio thought of giving the author some work to do.

Question 6.

Why did the 'boy' in the makeup department come to the author? Why was the author praying for crowd shooting all the time? **Answer:**

The 'boy' in the makeup department thought that he had a great literary talent and he wanted to enlighten the author how this talent was being allowed to go waste and that the department was fit for barbers and perverts. The author was very eager to avoid his epical narrations so he prayed for crowd-shooting all the time to keep the 'boy' busy.

Question 7.

Who was Subbu's enemy? Why?

Answer:

Subbu's enemy was the 'boy' at the make-up department. All his anger and frustration were directed against him. The boy was convinced that Subbu was the cause of his woes and miseries. This 'boy' was jealous of Subbu's rising stars, his success and his intimacy with the boss.

Question 8.

What were the positive qualities of Subbu that the writer admired?

Answer:

The writer admired Subbu as he was a multi-faceted genius and gave a new direction and . definition to Gemini Studios. Subbu knew the technicalities and details of film-making and was a good actor and writer. He was civil, friendly and completely devoted to his boss, Mr. Vasan.

Question 9.

Account for Subbu's importance in Gemini Studios.

Answer:

Subbu was a multi-faceted genius. He was a poet, a writer and a great actor. He gave a new meaning and direction not only to Gemini Studios but also to the art of film-making by using all his energy and

creativity to the company's advantage. Moreover, because of his noble and charitable nature he was loved by almost everyone.

Question 10.

Why was Subbu considered number two at Gemini Studios?

Answer:

Subbu was a go-getter and made a position for himself in the studios by pushing his way to the forefront with flattery. Mr. Vasan was the boss at Gemini Studios and Subbu, his right-hand man, became the number two at Gemini Studios. Subbu used his entire creativity to his boss's advantage. He was a multi-faceted genius and if a producer was not satisfied Subbu would come up with fourteen alternatives. With Subbu around, film-making became a sheer pleasure. Moreover Subbu gave direction and definition to Gemini Studios during its golden years.

Question 11.

How did the people of Madras and those at Gemini Studios respond to the plays staged by the Moral Re-Armament Army?

Answer:

The Moral Re-Armament Army presented two plays 'Jotham Valley' and 'The Forgotten Factor' in a very

professional manner. The people at Gemini Studios saw the plays over and over again. Though the message was plain, the costumes and sets were first rate. These plays ran several shows in Madras and left a great impact on the studios and on Madras in general. For some years almost all Tamil plays imitated the scenes of sunrise and sunset of 'Jotham Valley'.

Question 12.

Why was the Moral Re-armament Army welcomed at the Gemini Studios? (2010 Outside Delhi; 2011 Outside Delhi)

Answer:

The Moral Re-armament Army was a kind of counter movement to International Communism. The big boss of Gemini Studios, Mr. Vasan literally played into their hands. People at the Gemini Studios had an aversion to communism. So the Moral Re-armament Army could not have found a better host in India than the Gemini Studios who welcomed them warmly.

Question 13.

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

Answer:

The MRA staged two plays 'Jotham Valley' and 'The

Forgotten Factor'. These were presented in the most professional manner. The six hundred strong Gemini family saw these plays numerous times because of their fabulous sets and costumes. For years the Gemini Studios copied the sets and costumes in the manner of 'Jotham Valley'. Also for some years almost all Tamil plays had a scene of sunrise and sunset in the manner of 'Jotham Valley'.

Question 14.

Which example of national integration in Gemini Studios is given in 'Poets and Pancakes'?

Answer:

The make-up department of the Gemini Studios gave a rare example of national integration. The department was first headed by a Bengali who was succeeded by a Maharashtrian. He was assisted by a Kannadiga from Dharwar, an Andhra, a Madras Indian Christian and an Anglo-Burmese. Then there were the usual local Tamils. All this gave ample proof of national integration.

Question 15.

Why did Asokamirtan pray for crowd-shooting all the time?

Answer:

Asokamirtan was wrongly believed to have nothing to do so the office-boy often came to his cubicle to

give an outlet to his frustrations and stress the fact that a great talent was being wasted. The author was bored with the office boy's never-ending babble and prayed for crowd-shooting all the time so that the boy remained busy and did not pester him.

Question 16.

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

Answer:

The author's job was to sit at his desk and tear up newspapers all day. He used to cut newspaper clippings on a wide variety of subjects and stored them in files. His job was not directly related to film making at the studio. So he appeared to be doing nothing at Gemini Studios.

Question 17.

How did the author discover who the English visitor to the Studios was?

Or

How did Asokamitran come to know that the English visitor to the Gemini Studios was Stephen Spender?

Answer:

Years later, when Asokamitran was out of Gemini Studios he bought a pile of brand new books at a reduced price from a footpath in front of Madras Mount Road Post Office. In a book 'The God That

Failed' six eminent writers had described their journeys into communism. It was in this book that he came across the name of Stephen Spender and finally discovered the identity of the English visitor to the Studios.

Question 18.

What made the lawyer lose his job? What does the writer find so funny about the situation?

Answer:

The lawyer was the legal adviser of an assembly of writers of the Gemini Studio's Story Department. One day, the Boss terminated the services of the poets and writers as he found their contribution to the Studio negligible. With the closure of the Story Department the lawyer too lost his job. The writer found this situation funny because the lawyer lost his job as the poets and writers were told to go.

Question 19.

Why was the office boy disappointed with his job in the Gemini Studios?

Answer:

The office boy had come to work in the Gemini Studios in the hope of becoming a star or a renowned screen writer, director or lyricist. But he felt disappointed because in spite of having crossed

the age of forty he had not been able to fulfil any of his dreams.

Question 20.

Kothamangalam Subbu was treated with regard in the Gemini Studios. Why?

Answer:

Kothamangalam Subbu was treated with regard at Gemini Studios. He held the No. 2 position there. His sense of loyalty made him turn his entire creativity to his Boss' advantage. Moreover, he had the ability to inspire when commanded and he made the art of film-making appear very easy. He was a most charitable and improvident man.

Question 21.

Why is the Englishman's visit to the Gemini Studios referred to as an unexplained mystery?

Answer:

The Englishman addressed a dazed and silent audience at Gemini Studios. No one knew who he was and what he was talking about. His accent also defeated any attempt to understand what he was saying. The Englishman himself looked equally baffled due to the incongruity of his talk. So his visit is referred to as an unexplained mystery.

Question 22.

Why did Asokamitran pray for crowd-shooting all the

time?

Answer:

Asokamitran was wrongly believed to have nothing to do so the office-boy often came to his cubicle to give an outlet to his frustrations and stress the fact that a great talent was being wasted. The author was bored with the office boy's never-ending babble and prayed for crowd-shooting all the time so that the boy remained busy and did not pester him.

Question 23.

Kothamangalam Subbu was a 'many-sided genius'. Elaborate.

Or

Why is Subbu described as a many-sided genius? Give a reasoned answer.

Answer:

It is through the character of Kothamangalam Subbu, that the author depicts a caricature of the so-called 'go-getters' who are not really talented but manage to create an aura of talent around themselves. Though officially on the rolls of the Story Department at Gemini Studios, he was always with the boss. Subbu directs all his energies and creativity to his boss' advantage. He delves into the various spheres of film-making successfully giving the impression of being a brilliant story-writer, a talented actor and a man who is always ready with

many solutions for any problem. He makes the art of film-making appear rather easy for his boss. Thus Subbu with his scheming nature takes advantage of his boss' gullibility and passes off himself as a multi-sided genius with multi-faceted abilities.

Question 24.

Asokamitran has used humour and satire effectively in 'Poets and Pancakes'. Discuss.

Or

How does humour and satire enliven the account of the events and personalities at Gemini Studios as portrayed by Asokamitran in 'Poets and Pancakes'?

Answer:

In the chapter, 'Poets and Pancakes', Asokamitran uses a lot of subtle humour and satire to highlight human foibles. Petty professional differences and inconsequential differences not only keep our minds occupied but also bring out a subtle humour that is spontaneous without being superfluous. The characterisation of the office boy, Subbu and the legal advisor, have subtle touches of humour. Asokamitran's chatty style changes from one thought to the other rather quickly. For example, he makes fun of the makeup applied to artists which can change any decent looking person into a

hideous crimson hued monster. Such references invoke laughter. The purpose of the visits of the Moral Rearmament Army and the English poet also baffles everyone. Satire is also directed towards people who are against communism and can go to any length to oppose it. The writer's tone of ridicule is devoid of the slightest trace of mockery, which is most commendable.

Question 25.

Subbu was 'tailor-made for films'. How did he use his genius in various activities in the Gemini Studios?

The author portrays Subbu as a man of versatile abilities who could delve into various aspects of film-making successfully. Subbu had mastered all the arts related to film-making ranging from story-writing to poetry and characterisation. He was in fact 'tailor-made' for film-making. Film-making seemed rather easy with an expert like Subbu walking around as he understood all the trivialities and technicalities of film-making. Subbu was the one who gave 'a new direction and definition' to the Gemini Studios during its golden years. Subbu directed his entire energies and creativity to his boss, Mr. Vasan's advantage. If his boss was dissatisfied with one scene Subbu would offer him many alternatives. He understood all

the complications of film-making and could showcase his talent in every artistic arena.

Question 26.

Why and how was the Moral Re-Armament Army welcomed at the Gemini Studios?

Answer:

Frank Buchman's Moral Re-Armament Army comprising of a group of two hundred people belonging to twenty nationalities visited Madras in 1952. The MRA was seen to be a counter movement to international communism and people at the Gemini Studios did not think highly of communism and communists. But Mr. Vasan, the boss at Gemini Studios was fascinated by the MRA, so they could not have found a 'warmer' host than Gemini Studios in India. The MRA presented two plays 'Jotham Valley' and 'The Forgotten Factor' in the most professional manner. Six hundred people of the Gemini Studios saw the plays many times. These plays conveyed simple messages but their sets and costumes were 'first rate'. They impressed both the Tamil drama community and the Gemini Studios. The sunrise and sunset scenes of 'Jotham Valley' continued to be copied for years to come.

Question 27.

'Subbu was a troubleshooter.' Do you agree with this

statement? Give an account of Subbu's qualities of head and heart.

Answer:

Subbu was a perfectly selfish go-getter whose obsequiousness brought him close to his boss and shot him to number two position at Gemini Studios. He was a very conniving person who took advantage of his boss' gullibility and portrayed himself as a rather competent and able person. Though he was undeserving and lacked talent, he always remained cheerful and did not let anything dampen his spirits. He always had something good to say about everyone. Film-making appeared easy with an expert like Subbu around. He used all his energy and creativity to his boss' advantage. Subbu was also a great poet and an amazing actor. He wrote truly original poems for the masses and as an actor he played secondary roles better than the main actors. His sycophancy to his boss earned him enemies. Also he angered many such people who considered themselves much more talented and deserving than him.

Question 28.

What political significance does Gemini Studios' invitation to Moral Re-Armament army and Stephen Spender show?

Answer:

The Moral Re-Armament army was a kind of counter movement to Communism and the people at the Gemini Studios had a natural aversion towards Communists and Communism. They considered that the aim of Communists was to spread unrest and violence. So by being a 'warm host' to the Moral Re-Armament army the people at the Gemini Studios actually displayed a counter movement to the ideas of Communism. By inviting Stephen Spender, once again the purpose of the Gemini Studios was to highlight how a renowned English poet, who was once attracted to Communism, was later completely disillusioned by it. This further strengthened their aversion to Communism and they were able to publicly display this aversion.