

Chapter 2: My Three Passions

NCERT · Class 11 · English · Woven Words · Essay

Understanding The Text

Question 1

Why does Russell call the three passions 'simple'?

Solution

This essay is a preface to the autobiography of Bertrand Russell. A passion/force drives every human throughout their life, which keeps them going. A few of them may wish for money, while others may desire fame. There are some people who wish for simple satisfaction as well. The desires which Bertie chased in his life were simple. He was driven by his passions which anyone might feel. At first, he wished for love and got it; he felt that it brought ecstasy. He got married four times. The next time, he wished for knowledge as we all seek it. He was a political activist, logician, mathematician, wrote on philosophy and contributed to literature for which he was awarded a Nobel prize. For the third time, he felt "an unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind". He stood against the Vietnam war and World War I. Anyone will feel pity for a man/woman suffering as they have a heart, and so did Russell. He did not lust for materialistic things; he was born into an aristocratic family in Britain, which gave much of what he inherited. In favour of the world government and suffragists, he raised his voice. He trusted in free thought in morals and religion.

Question 2

Why has he compared the three passions to great winds?

Solution

Russell compared the three passions to the great winds as they were the main force which was driving his life. His passions provided him with a reason for his living and directed his life. The three passions are love, knowledge and pity for the suffering of mankind. The first two passions took him to heaven, where he found ecstasy, while the third one brought him back to the earth to reality. From the words of the author, it appears to be a necessary part of his life. He found his life to be worth living because of

his passions and would live it again if a chance was offered. Therefore, his passions are like the great winds of his life, which give him direction.

Question 3

What, according to Russell, is the importance of love in life?

Solution

Russell has an opinion that love brings ecstasy into his life. He trusts that bliss brought by love is magnificent, for which he could sacrifice his life for a few hours of joy. It relieves him from the loneliness present in this world. He says that he has seen heaven in love which great poets and saints have imagined. In this essay, Russell has provided love with a spiritual dimension. Through love, he had reached beyond, and it was the pity for the suffering of mankind which brought him back to the practical reality of the earth.

Question 4

How does Russell's definition of knowledge differ from what is commonly understood by the term?

Solution

Russell was seeking knowledge which is a treasure. He craved it and tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which numbers held sway over the flux. He was a well-learned man who believed that he had only achieved a little and yet craved more. He wished to know why the stars shine. Knowledge and love, in turn, took him towards heaven.

Question 5

Why is the quality of pity earth-bound while the other two passions are elevating?

Solution

Russell had three passions which drove his life all through. The first two passions, love and knowledge, took him to the heavens, which the saints and poets have imagined. He also said that the third passion i.e., "pity for the suffering of mankind" brought him back to the practical reality of the earth. The pain which exists in the echoing cries reverberated in his heart. The sorrow which was present in the world forced him back to the earth; victims who were tortured by the oppressors, the children in famine, and old people who were helpless and became a burden to their children. The poverty, loneliness and pain

which mocked human life moved him. He imagined the ideal life of humans without any sorrows and suffering. Russel longed to alleviate the evil which brought suffering to him too. He respected the life of humans and found it worth living and, throughout his life, fought against the evils. Bertrand Russell supported the suffragists and fought in the Vietnam war. He fought for mankind throughout his entire life to make this world a good place to live.

Question 6

How have the three passions contributed to the quality of Russell's life?

Solution

The three passions in Russell's life are the great winds which contributed to driving him throughout. He found his life worth living and, if provided the opportunity, would live it again. Those were not passions but were the three virtues which governed his life. His passions offered him directions which were behind his actions. Russell believed in knowledge, love and pity for the suffering of mankind. Even in his relationship with women, his fight against the Vietnam war, his stand on Israel and his support towards the suffragists, these three passions ruled his actions.
