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Chapter 1: Chandalika

NCERT · Class 12 · English · Kaleidoscope · Drama

Exercise - Thinking About the Play

Question 1

Why does something so ordinary and commonplace as giving water to a wayfarer become so significant to Prakriti?

Solution

Ans: In the play, the Buddhist monk named Ananda wanders around and is one of Buddha's most beloved disciples. Upon returning from a visit, he meets Prakriti, a girl from the lowest untouchable caste who has been told all her life that she is a chandala and faces hatred and despise from higher caste members. However, the monk treats her with respect and seeks water from her without any distinction between himself and Prakriti. This act enlightens Prakriti and makes her realize her worth, liberating her from the strings of social demands. The monk's simple act of asking for water becomes significant to her.

Question 2

Why is the girl named Prakriti in the play? What are the images in the play that relate to this theme?

Solution

Ans: The play 'Chandalika' by Tagore centers on the significance of Prakriti, which translates to 'nature', in portraying the main character's self-awareness and her rediscovery of her identity as a woman. The protagonist, a low-caste untouchable girl named Prakriti, is touched by the compassion shown to her by Ananda, the Buddhist monk, which inspires her to awaken to her own humanity. Prakriti embodies the innate desires of a woman who is deeply moved by human values.

Question 3

How does the churning of emotions bring about self-realisation in Prakriti even if at the cost of her mother's life?

Solution

Ans: Prakriti, who was the one to give water to the Buddhist monk, developed feelings for him. She asked her mother, who was skilled in magic, to cast a spell on the monk. Despite his efforts, the spell proved too strong, and he found himself at their house one night. However, when he saw the girl prepare a bed for him, he was overcome with guilt and prayed for his master's help. Realizing the error of her ways, Prakriti begged her mother to undo the spell. She saw how she had tarnished the monk's purity and felt remorse. She pleaded for forgiveness at his feet and acknowledged the consequences of her cowardly act. In the end, her mother paid the price, and Prakriti learned the harsh lesson of her actions.

Question 4

How does the mirror reflect the turmoil experienced by the monk as a result of the working of the spell?

Solution

Ans: Prakriti's mother cast a powerful spell, which had a significant impact on the monk and stirred up his deep-seated passions. Tagore gives glimpses of the monk's inner turmoil through Prakriti's eyes as she traces his steps to their home in the mirror. In the beginning, Prakriti hints at the monk's turmoil by saying, "Must the king of the forest crash to the dust, at last, his cloud-kissing glory broken?". As the play progresses, the readers witness the monk engulfed in flames, representing his internal struggle between the pure fire of his soul and the serpent-like fire of the spell. The image ends with the monk's agony, indicating his defeat to the mighty spell.

Question 5

What is the role of the mother in Prakriti's self-realisation? What are her hopes and fears for her daughter?

Solution

Ans: Prakriti's mother was well aware of the gravity of casting a wicked spell on the monk, and she usually acted as a guiding voice in her daughter's life. Despite her love for Prakriti, she had no choice but to support her daughter's impossible wish. However, she also reminded her daughter of the severe consequences of this cowardly act and the toll it would take on their lives. Prakriti eventually realized the horror of what she had done in subjecting the monk to such pain against his will. Her mother urged her to confront the consequences of her actions by looking in the mirror and witnessing the monk's

suffering. Prakriti understood the gravity of the situation, but sadly, undoing the spell cost her mother's life.

Question 6

‘Acceptance of one’s fate is easy. Questioning the imbalance of the human social order is tumultuous.’ Discuss with reference to the play.

Solution

Ans: Tagore's play 'Chandalika' is based on a Buddhist legend where the famous disciple of Buddha, Ananda, teaches human values to a lower-caste girl named Prakriti. She was considered unclean by society due to her birth into a despised caste. Ananda imparts wisdom to her and helps her realize her full potential as a human being in the community. He teaches her to judge herself not by the artificial values that society attaches to birth but by her capacity for love and service to the community. However, she goes against society and loses her mother. She questions the social imbalance that led to her realization of worth and a sense of equality. The play highlights the message that accepting fate is easy, but questioning the imbalance of the social order is tumultuous.
