

Class: XII	Department: ENGLISH	2024- 25
	VISTAS- Topic: Poets and Pancakes- Asokamitran	

Summary:

1. The Gemini studio was located in Madras (Chennai).
2. The writer recounts his years in the company.
3. The make-up department was in the upstairs of a building that was believed to have been Robert Clive's stables.
4. Pancake was the brand name of the make- up the material used by the artists in Gemini Studios.
5. The make-up room had the look of a hair -cutting salon with incandescent lights at all angles around half a dozen large mirrors, the writer speaks about the 'fiery misery' 'of those subjected to make-up.
6. There was a great deal of 'national integration' in the department and a strict hierarchy was maintained there.
7. The players who played the crowd were the responsibility of the 'office boy' in his early forties, a frustrated person, who turned all his anger towards Kothamanagalam Subbu.
8. The author's job was to cut out newspaper clippings and store them in files.
9. Most people including the 'boy' thought author was doing 'next to nothing'.
10. S S Vasan (editor of Tamil weekly Ananada Vikatan') was the owner of the studios.
11. **Subbu was No.2.** Subbu – a Brahmin, had the ability to look cheerful at all times, could be 'inspired when commanded', was tailor-made for films, had a separate identity as a poet and actor, had a genuine love for bothers, was charitable, always seen with The Boss, attached to Story.
12. **Department.** Story Department – assembly of poets and writers wore khadi.
13. **A lawyer (legal adviser)** – referred to as 'the opposite'-caused the end of a brief and the brilliant career of a talented actress, looked 'alone and helpless', a man of cold logic in a crowd of dreamers, close to the Boss, wore pants, coat and a tie, attached to Story Department, lost his job when the Story Department was closed down.
14. **Gemini studios** –a favourite haunt of poets, an excellent mess which supplied good coffee, Congress rule meant prohibition, almost everyone radiated leisure, wore Khadi and worshipped Gandhi, averse to Communism.
15. **Visit of MRA (a kind of counter-movement to international Communism) in 1952-** presented two plays 'The Forgotten Factor' and 'Jotham Valley' in a professional manner impressed Madras and Tamil drama community.
16. **Another visitor** – a poet from England, tall man, very English, addressed 'a more dazed and silent audience', visit remained an unexplained mystery, staff did not know whether he was a poet or an editor.
17. **Author's conviction about prose-writers** – 'prose writing is for the patient, persistent, persevering drudge', short story contest by a British periodical 'The Encounter'-found in the British Council Library almost untouched by readers', discovered Stephen Spender was the editor.

18. The **author** bought 'The God That Failed' years later –six essays describing the disillusionment of six eminent men of letters with Communism, Stephen Spender one among them, the author suddenly realized the relevance of his visit to Gemini studios.

COMPETENCY/ EXTRACT BASED QUESTIONS

1. Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow :
- Then the poet spoke. He couldn't have addressed a more dazed and silent audience. No one knew what he was talking about and his accent defeated any attempt to understand what he was saying. The whole thing lasted about an hour; then ~~the~~ poet left and we all dispersed in utter bafflement what are we doing? What is an English poet doing in a film studio which makes Tamil films for the simplest sort of people? People whose lives least afforded them the possibility of cultivating a taste for English poetry? The poet looked pretty baffled too, for he too must have felt the sheer incongruity of his talk about the thrills and travails of an English poet. His visit remained an unexplained mystery.
- (i) Choose the appropriate option with reference to the extract.
'The audience were dazed' because
- (a) they were not accustomed to listening to poetry.
 - (b) they had never before seen an Englishman.
 - (c) they failed to comprehend what the poet was speaking.
 - (d) they were already bored.
- (ii) Complete the sentence with reference to the extract :
The English poet was _____ when he was addressing the dazed audience.
- (iii) Where did the talk take place? Choose the correct option.
- (a) The Main Mall
 - (b) Story Writing Department
 - (c) Film studio
 - (d) Subbu's office
- (iv) The English poet's visit remained an unexplained mystery because.....
_____.
- (v) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract :
noisy : silent : : assembled : _____
- (vi) Explain the following phrase with reference to the extract :
'The poet felt the sheer incongruity of his talk'

2. His success in films overshadowed and dwarfed his literary achievements-or so his critics felt. He composed several truly original 'story poems' in folk refrain and diction and also wrote a sprawling novel *Thillana Mohanambal* with dozens of very deftly etched characters. He quite successfully recreated the mood and manner of the Devadasis of the early 20th century. He was an amazing actor-he never aspired to the lead roles-but whatever subsidiary role he played in any of the films, he performed better than the supposed main players. He had a genuine love for anyone he came across and his house was a permanent residence for dozens of near and far relations and acquaintances. (CBSE QB, 2021)

1 Which of these statements is NOT TRUE about Subbu?

- A) His literary accomplishments stole the limelight from his films.
- B) He was a gifted poet and writer and his literary works were noteworthy.
- C) He was selfless in nature and was empathetic towards others.
- D) He never hankered after lead roles and performed minor roles in films.

Ans. A) His literary accomplishments stole the limelight from his films.

2 The word 'sprawling' has been used with the word 'novel'. Pick the option with which the word 'sprawling' CANNOT be used.

- A) metropolis
- B) handwriting
- C) campus
- D) portrait

Ans. D) portrait

3 The phrase 'deftly etched' shows that Subbu

- A) created the roles delicately.
- B) was skillful in creating the characters.
- C) pondered beyond necessity about the characters.
- D) gave very little thought to the characters

Ans. B) was skillful in creating the characters.

4 Pick the option that best describes Subbu according to the extract

- 1. benevolent
- 2. powerful
- 3. accomplished
- 4. witty
- 5. generous
- 6. temperamental

A) 4, 5 & 6

B) 2, 3 & 4

C) 1,3 & 5

D) 3,4 & 6

Ans. C) 1,3 & 5

3. Barring the office boys and a couple of clerks, everybody else at the Studios radiated leisure, a prerequisite for poetry. Most of them wore khadi and worshiped Gandhiji but beyond that they had not the faintest appreciation for political thought of any kind. Naturally, they were all averse to the term 'Communism'. A communist was a godless man-he had no filial or conjugal love; he had no compunction about killing his own parents or his children; he was always out to cause and spread unrest and violence among innocent and ignorant people. Such notions, which prevailed everywhere else in South India at that time also, naturally, floated about vaguely among the khadi-clad poets of Gemini Studios. Evidence of it was soon forthcoming. (CBSE QB, 2021)

1 Pick the option that uses the same figure of speech as ‘A communist is a godless man.’

- A) She is as determined as Gandhi when it is a fight against injustice.
- B) She is a Gandhi when she raises her voice against ‘himsa’ or violence.
- C) She, like Gandhi, feels that the earth is crying for deliverance.
- D) She lives a life of opulence and calls herself a follower of Gandhi.

Ans. B) She is a Gandhi when she raises her voice against ‘himsa’ or violence.

2 Based on the extract, choose the correct option with reference to the two statements given below.

Statement 1: At Gemini Studios, the poets had a profound knowledge about Communists.

Statement 2: Communists were responsible for anarchy and discontent in the country.

- A) Statement 1 is true but Statement 2 is false.
- B) Statement 1 is false but Statement 2 is true.
- C) Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 cannot be inferred.
- D) Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 can be inferred

Ans. D) Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 can be inferred

3 Why do you think leisure is a prerequisite for poetry?

- A) Poetry means freedom of expression.
- B) One can enjoy poetry when there’s free time.
- C) In order to write poetry, one needs free time.
- D) Poetry means freedom from work.

Ans. C) In order to write poetry, one needs free time.

4 Asokamitran says that leisure is a prerequisite for poetry. He says this because poets

- A) need to relax for a period of time before composing lines.
- B) maintain a leisurely pace in all tasks they do.
- C) are creative and need to have free time to weave their thoughts.
- D) begin poetic compositions in a rushed way and end in a relaxed manner.

Ans. C) are creative and need to have free time to weave their thoughts.

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. What does the writer mean by ‘the fiery misery’ of those subjected to make-up’?

A. By ‘the fiery misery’ of those subjected to make-up, the writer is trying to throw light upon the difficulties actors and actresses have to face because of half a dozen mirrors surrounded with large light bulbs. The bulbs generated a lot of heat and were definitely not a pleasure for the eyes.

2. What is the example of national integration that the author refers to?

A. At first, a Bengali was the head of the make-up studio but then he outgrew Gemini Studios and left it for better opportunities. After him, it was supervised by a Maharashtrian who was assisted by a Dharwar Kannadiga, an Andhra, a Madras Indian Christian, an Anglo-Burmese and the usual local Tamils. The fact that people from different cultures worked together puts forward the post-independence national integration scenario. It shows that people were united way before All India Radio and Doordarshan raised the concept.

3. What work did the ‘office boy’ do in the Gemini Studios? Why did he join the studios? Why was he disappointed?

A. The ‘office boy’ had the duty of slapping paints on the faces of players at the time of crowd-shooting. He joined Gemini Studios with a dream of becoming a first-rate actor, screen-writer or producer.

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

A. The author’s job was to cut and collect newspaper clippings or sometimes even writing them by hand. This was easier and lesser in comparison to what others were doing at the Studio.

5. Why was the office boy frustrated? Who did he show his anger on?

A. The office boy was frustrated because he thought his literary talent was going wasted in a room full of barbers and make-up artists. He somehow managed to deviate his anger on Subbu.

6. Who was Subbu’s principal?

A. The Boss, S S Vasan, who was also the founder of Gemini Studios, was Subbu’s principal

7. Subbu is described as a many-sided genius. List four of his special abilities.

A. Subbu, as a man of many qualities, had the ability to look cheerful at all times, was an excellent actor who could portray his roles in several ways, was an accomplished poet, and loved anyone he met.

8. Why was the legal adviser referred to as the opposite by others?

A. The legal adviser was referred to as the opposite by others because he once resorted to blackmailing an actress by recording her while she was throwing tantrums on the set. This is not considered to be legal, thus he was usually called the opposite.

9. What made the lawyer stand out from the others at Gemini Studios?

A. Gemini Studios was filled with dreamers and creative personnel. A lawyer in between them was the only man with logic. The writer calls him a ‘neutral’ man.

10. Did the people at Gemini Studios have any particular political affiliations?

A. No, although they dressed up in Khadi, they did not have the slightest political affiliations.

11. Why was the Moral Rearmament Army welcomed at the Studios?

A. Frank Buchman’s Moral Re-Armament army was welcomed at the studio mainly because of their political association. The MRA came as a welcome change to their monotonous days at the studio.

12. Name one example to show that Gemini studios was influenced by the plays staged by MRA.

A. Frank Buchman’s Moral Rearmament Army staged two plays – “Jotham Valley” and “The Forgotten Factor” in a most professional manner. The Gemini family of 600 and the people of Madras city watched them times and again.

13. What caused the lack of communication between the Englishman and the people at Gemini Studios?

A. The British accent of the Englishman caused lack of communication between him and the people at Gemini Studios.

14. Why is the Englishman’s visit referred to as an unexplained mystery?

A. The Englishman's visit to the Gemini Studios is referred to as an unexplained mystery because no one could decipher his identity, whether he was a poet or an editor. Besides, when he spoke, no one at the studio understood what he intended to say as his accent was beyond their comprehension.

15. How did the author discover who the English visitor to the studios was?

A. Before investing money in participating in a short story contest organized by an English periodical- The Encounter, the author did a research on the magazine. He went to the British Council Library where, while going through an issue of that periodical, he discovered that its editor was Stephen Spender, the poet that had once visited the studio.

16. What does The God that Failed refer to?

A. The God that Failed refers to a collection of essays by six authors who wrote about their journey into Communism and their disillusioned return, one of them being Stephen Spender.

17. The author has used gentle humour to point out human foibles. Pick out instances of this to show how this serves to make the piece interesting.

A. The author portrays the make-up artists and the usage of the pancakes in an interesting way. Even the caricature of Subbu is hilarious. The way he tries to help his principal is quite amusing. The episode of the legal adviser that inadvertently causes the end of an actress's career is yet another example. The frustration of the office boy, the superficial praising of Gandhi, hatred of Communism and the 'mystery' surrounding Stephen Spender are some of the instances where the author has incorporated gentle humour.

18. Why was Kothamangalam Subbu considered No. 2 in Gemini Studios?

A. Kothamangalam Subbu was successful in securing the place closest to The Boss by means of flattery. He was not brilliant but a rather cheerful person and loyal to The Boss. He offered solutions whenever The Boss was in a fix. Thus, the staff considered him No.2 in Gemini Studios.

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

A. The English poet was addressing the Tamil audience at Gemini Studios in English with a typical provincial accent. He was talking about the thrills and travails of an English poet to a dazed and silent audience. This was the incongruity because his audience could not understand him at all.

20. What kind of effect does Asokamitran's style of writing have on the reader? (CBSE QB, 2021)

Ans. His works are distinguished by their simplicity and clarity of thought, and they are based on his professional and personal experiences. The majority of his stories are about middle-class people. As a result, he was able to touch the hearts and minds of countless readers both at home and abroad. His skill and imagination as a creative writer have led several generations of Tamil readers to a greater understanding of their plight in today's world and, ultimately, a reflective assertion of their own humanity.

21. Discuss the significance of the make-up room in the chapter, 'Poets and Pancakes'. (CBSE QB, 2021)

Ans. A Bengali was the head of the make-up studio at first, but he outgrew Gemini Studios and moved on to better opportunities. Ans was in charge after him. A Maharashtrian led the charge, with help from a Dharwar Kannadiga, an Andhra, a Madras Indian Christian, an Anglo-Burmese, and the usual local Tamils. The fact that people from various cultures

collaborated promotes the post-independence national integration scenario. It demonstrates how people came together.

22. ‘In all instances of frustration, you will always find the anger directed towards a single person openly or covertly...’ Do you think it is right to direct our anger towards someone who is not responsible for the cause of anger? Justify. (CBSE QB, 2021)

Ans. No, it is not appropriate to direct our rage at someone who is not the source of our rage. We become angry when we encounter roadblocks on our path to growth, when someone challenges our authority, when someone mocks us and our self-esteem suffers, or when things are simply not the way we want them to be. Weaker people become the target for our rage because it is assumed they will not retaliate.

However, this is a bad practice, and one should try to control one’s anger to the greatest extent possible.

23. The people left in ‘utter bafflement’ after the English poet’s speech. Mention two things the speaker could have kept in mind before addressing an audience to avoid such a reaction. Give your rationale for it. (CBSE QB, 2021)

Ans. Stephen Spender was summoned to the Gemini Studios to speak with the staff about Communism, but what he said was about his struggles as a poet. Regardless of what he said, no one seemed to be listening. When Spender realized that his audience had not followed his talk, he came to a halt in humiliation at having given a speech to a deaf audience, while the Gemini staff dispersed in humiliation because Spender’s accent had failed them.

So the speaker should have anticipated the audience’s interest and spoken accordingly.

24. Give one example to show that Gemini Studios was influenced by the plays staged by MRA. (2010 Outside Delhi)

Ans. ‘Jotham Valley’ and ‘The Forgotten Factor’ were staged by the MRA. These were delivered in the most professional manner possible. Because of the fantastic sets and costumes, the Gemini family of 600 people saw these plays several times. For years, the Gemini Studios imitated the ‘Jotham Valley’ sets and costumes. Also for some years almost all Tamil plays had a scene of sunrise and sunset in the manner of ‘Jotham Valley’.

25. How did the people of Madras and those at Gemini Studios respond to the plays staged by the Moral Re-Armament Army? (2010 Outside Delhi)

Ans. The Moral Re-Armament Army performed two plays, ‘Jotham Valley’ and ‘The Forgotten Factor,’ in an extremely professional manner. Gemini Studios employees saw the plays numerous times. Though the message was simple, the costumes and sets were excellent. These plays were performed several times in Madras and had a significant impact on the studios and Madras in general. For many years, almost all Tamil plays imitated the scenes of ‘Jotham Valley’ at sunrise and sunset.

26. Account for Subbu’s importance in Gemini Studios. (2009 Outside Delhi)

Ans. Subbu was an all-around genius. He was a great poet, writer, and actor. He gave Gemini Studios a new meaning and direction, as well as the art of filmmaking, by channeling all of his energy and creativity into the company’s benefit. Furthermore, almost everyone admired him for his noble and charitable nature.

27. What does Asokamitran’s narrative in Poets and Pancakes demonstrate about Subbu? (CBSE Sample Paper 2022)

Ans. In “Poets and Pancakes,” Asokamitran’s narrative delves into the character of Subbu, a young writer working for a magazine in Chennai. The story depicts Subbu’s struggles with creative expression and the pressures of the literary establishment through his experiences. Subbu is portrayed in the story as a talented but insecure writer who frequently clashes with the conservative and commercially-driven ethos of his magazine. The story reveals the complexity of Subbu’s character and the conflicting motivations that drive him through his encounters with other writers and editors.

Long Answer Questions

Q1. Author has used gentle and subtle humor to point out human foibles and idiosyncrasies in the lesson 'Poets and Pancakes'. Elucidate.(CBSE Sample Paper 2019)

Ans. This piece contains several instances of gentle humor. The description of the make-up department consuming truckloads of pancakes (which they did not eat, of course) is particularly intriguing. The make-up room, complete with mirrors and lights, resembled a hair salon. Because there was a gang of people from different parts of India, the make-up department was a symbol of national integration. This gang of nationally recognised make-up artists could transform any decent-looking person into a hideous crimson-colored monster. The task of making actors look ugly was assigned to a strict hierarchy in the make-up department.

There was a young man in the office (though he was not a boy but a grown up man of forty). He had joined the Studios years before in the hopes of becoming a famous actor, screenwriter, director, or lyricist. He came to the author to inform him of how great literary talent was being squandered. The author, on the other hand, prayed for a crowd, shooting all the time to get rid of a genius or a bore.

Q2. Why is Subbu described as a many-sided genius? Give a reasoned answer. (2013 Comptt. Outside Delhi)

Ans. The author depicts a caricature of the so-called "go-getters" who are not actually talented but manage to create an aura of talent around themselves through the character of Kothamangalam Subbu. Though he worked in the Story Department at Gemini Studios, he was always with the boss. Subbu uses all of his energy and creativity to benefit his boss. He successfully delves into the various spheres of filmmaking, giving the impression of being a brilliant storyteller, a talented actor, and a man who is always ready with numerous solutions to any problem. He makes the art of filmmaking appear simple to his boss. Thus, Subbu, with his cunning, exploits his boss's gullibility and presents himself as a multi-faceted genius with multi-faceted abilities.

Q3. Subbu was 'tailor-made for films'. How did he use his genius in various activities in the Gemini Studios? (2008 Outside Delhi)

Ans. Subbu is portrayed by the author as a man with diverse abilities who can successfully delve into various aspects of filmmaking. Subbu had mastered all aspects of filmmaking, from storyboarding to poetry and character development. He had been 'tailor-made' for filmmaking. Filmmaking appeared to be rather simple with an expert like Subbu walking around, as he understood all of the minutiae and technicalities of filmmaking. Subbu was the one who gave the Gemini Studios a "new direction and definition" during its golden years. Subbu focused all of his energy and creativity on his boss, Mr. Vasan. If his boss was unhappy with one scene, Subbu would offer him several alternatives. He was familiar with all of the complexities of filmmaking and could demonstrate his talent in any artistic arena.

Q4. How was the Moral Re-Armament Army welcomed at the Gemini Studios? (2008 Outside Delhi)

Ans. In 1952, Frank Buchman's Moral Re-Armament Army, consisting of 200 people from twenty different nationalities, paid a visit to Madras. The MRA was seen as a counter-movement to international communism, and the Gemini Studios did not hold communism or communists in high regard. But because Mr. Vasan, the boss at Gemini Studios, was fascinated by the MRA, they couldn't have found a "warmer" host than Gemini Studios in India. The MRA performed two plays, 'Jotham Valley' and 'The Forgotten Factor,' in a professional manner. Six hundred Gemini Studios patrons saw the plays several times. Although the messages in these plays were simple, the sets and costumes were of the highest

quality.

Both the Tamil drama community and Gemini Studios were impressed. The sunrise and sunset scenes from 'Jotham Valley' were copied for years.

Q5. 'Subbu was a troubleshooter.' Do you agree with this statement? Give an account of Subbu's qualities of head and heart. (2012 Outside Delhi)

Ans. Subbu was a self-centered go-getter whose subservience brought him close to his boss and propelled him to the number two position at Gemini Studios. He was a cunning individual who preyed on his boss's gullibility and portrayed himself as competent and capable. Despite the fact that he was undeserving and lacked talent, he always maintained a positive attitude and refused to let anything dampen his spirits. He had something nice to say about everyone. With an expert like Subbu around, filmmaking appeared to be simple. He put all of his energy and creativity to work for his boss.

Subbu was also a fantastic poet and actor. He wrote truly original poems for the masses, and as an actor, he was better at playing secondary roles than the main actors. His adoration for his boss earned him enemies. He also enraged many of these people, who saw themselves as far more talented and deserving than him.

Q6. What political significance does Gemini Studios' invitation to Moral Re-Armament army and Stephen Spender show? (2012 Outside Delhi)

Ans. The Moral Re-Armament army was a counter-movement to Communism, and the Gemini Studios had a natural dislike for Communists and Communism. They believed that the Communists' goal was to sow discord and violence. By acting as a "warm host" to the Moral Re-Armament army, the Gemini Studios demonstrated a counter-movement to Communism's ideas. The Gemini Studios invited Stephen Spender to highlight how a renowned English poet, who was once attracted to Communism, was later completely disillusioned by it. This fueled their antipathy towards Communism, which they were able to publicly express.

Q7. What was the Moral Rearmament Army? Describe their visit to the Gemini Studios.

Ans. In 1952, Frank Buchman's Moral Rearmament Army paid a visit to the Gemini Studios. It was a theater company. In reality, it was an anti-international communist movement. It had 200 participants and was billed as an international circus. The players were from twenty different countries. They performed two plays in the most professional manner possible. The plays were simple homilies with fantastic costumes and sets. Their play, "Jotham Valley," made an impression on the Tamil theater. For years, they imitated sunrise and sunset scenes in their own unique way. The scenes were performed on a bare stage with a white backdrop and a flute tune.

Though the MRA was anti-communist, and anti-communist sentiment existed at the Studios, the arrival of the MRA had no effect on the bosses' attitude; their businesses continued as usual.