



## INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2022-23)

### ‘Mother’s Day’ by J. B. Priestley (Snapshots)

Class: XI

Subject: ENGLISH

#### About the Playwright/ Play Background:

John Boynton Priestley (3 September 1894 – 14 August 1984) was an English novelist, playwright, screenwriter, broadcaster and social commentator.

His Yorkshire background is reflected in much of his fiction, notably in ‘*The Good Companions*’ (1929), which first brought him to wide public notice. Many of his plays are structured around a *time slip* (plot device in which a person or group of people seem to travel through time by unknown means) and he went on to develop a new theory of time, with different dimensions that link past, present, and future.

‘*Mother’s Day*’ (1950) is Priestley’s satirical depiction about the real status of women in the family.

#### Characters in the Play:

- **Mrs. Annie Pearson (Mother to Doris and Cyril; pleasant but meek and submissive)**
- **Mr. George Pearson (proud husband of Mrs. Pearson)**
- **Doris Pearson (20-year-old daughter)**
- **Cyril Pearson (demanding son)**
- **Mrs Fitzgerald (Mrs. Pearson’s neighbour; strong willed and bold)**

#### Summary:

##### Introduction of Mrs Annie Pearson and Mrs Fitzgerald

Mrs. Annie Pearson and Mrs. Fitzgerald are next door neighbours. Annie is a pleasant and nervous looking woman in her forties. Fitzgerald is older and heavier with a strong personality. Annie has a soft voice whereas Mrs. Fitzgerald has a deep, throaty voice.

Mrs. Fitzgerald is a fortune-teller. She has learnt this art from the East. She is reading Annie’s fortune. She advises Annie to be strict and become the ‘boss’ in her family. Actually, Annie is not treated well by her family. At present, Mrs. Annie Pearson has been reduced to the status of an unpaid domestic servant, who does all the work at home without even being requested for it or being thanked later on.

##### Mrs. Fitzgerald Outlines the Plan to Reform Annie’s Family

Mrs. Fitzgerald is very angry at the way Annie is treated like a servant by her family. One day, she suggests that they should temporarily exchange their personalities by using a magic spell that she had learnt in the East. She takes Annie’s hand and chants some magic words. A transformation takes place and the personality of Mrs. Fitzgerald shifts into the body of Annie and vice-versa.

Annie is scared, but Mrs. Fitzgerald assures her that the change is reversible. Mrs. Fitzgerald, now in the body of Annie, stays at Annie’s house and sends Annie (in Mrs.- Fitzgerald’s body) to her house where she can relax.

### Doris Gets a Shock

Doris, the daughter of Mrs. Annie Pearson, a beautiful girl aged 20, enters the house. She gets shocked at seeing her mother smoking and playing cards alone. Doris asks about her yellow dress, but her mother does not respond. She asks for tea and her mother answers rudely, telling her to iron her dress herself and make tea if she wants to. Doris gets angry, but gets a good scolding from her mother. Then Annie makes fun of Doris' boyfriend, Charlie Spence, for having buck teeth and being stupid. She tells Doris frankly that at her age she would have found somebody better than Charlie Spence. This strange behaviour is too much for Doris and she goes out of the room crying.

### Cyril also Gets a Shock

Cyril, Annie's son, enters the house and asks for tea in a demanding tone. Annie tells him that she has not bothered to get tea ready. Cyril asks her if everything is all right with her. She replies that she has never felt better in her life. When Cyril enquires why she has not got the tea ready, Annie replies that she wanted a change and that's why she has not bothered to make tea. Cyril announces that he is short of time, so she should get the tea ready immediately.

Cyril further enquires whether she has got his clothes ready. When she says no, he gets annoyed. He asks his mother what will happen if they all talked like that. Annie coldly replies that all three of them always talked to her like that, so what was wrong with her talking in the same tone. She says that if he does not want to do anything at home, he doesn't have to.

### The argument between Doris and Mrs Annie Pearson

Doris appears on the scene wearing a shoulder wrap. Annie remarks sarcastically about her dress. An argument starts between Doris and Annie. Doris comments that if she was looking awful, her mother was solely responsible, as it was she who made her cry. Then Annie enquires if any strong beer was left. Cyril is shocked to know that his mother wants to drink it. He is unable to understand what is going on.

### Discussion between Doris and Cyril about Mrs Pearson's conduct

Both Doris and Cyril are filled with horror and shock at their mother's behaviour. Both wonder what has happened to their mother suddenly. Doris thinks that she got hit on her head by something. She says that the manner in which their mother spoke hurt her the most and made her cry. Both start giggling at the thought of what will happen if their mother keeps behaving in this weird manner in front of their father.

### Annie's Remarks About Her Family

Annie remarks that it was high time they grew up. Doris then asked her if they had done something wrong.

Annie tells them that it is actually her children's and her husband's behaviour that bothered her the most. They

always came, asked for something and went without bothering to know whether she wanted to go out or how she was feeling. She always does her best to keep everybody happy but all three of them were not bothered about her. Annie also remarks that while the three of them do a job of eight hours a day with two days off at the weekend, she goes on working seven days round the clock. She warns them that on weekends, she will also going to take two days off. Doris is really worried about what will happen if her mother takes a holiday on weekends. However, Annie assures Doris that she would do some work on Saturday and Sunday only when she is requested for it and thanked for whatever she does. She might go out for weekends also as she was fed up of staying in the house for years together. None of them has ever bothered to take her out.

#### Mr George Pearson is Shocked at his Wife's Behaviour

Mr George Pearson now enters the house. He is about 50 years old and considers himself as a very important person. He gets annoyed at his wife who is sipping beer when he enters. He tells her that he does not want any tea as he has to go to the club for supper. The wife tells him that she has not prepared any tea anyway. At this, George gets annoyed that his wife is not bothered about him. Annie continues to rebuke him, telling him that he is not respected in the club where he keeps going every day. She tells him that people at the bar in the club call him 'Pompy Ompy Pearson' due to his self-important behaviour. George cannot believe what Annie says and confirms the truth from his son, Cyril. Annie tells her son that sometimes it does people good to have their feelings hurt. On hearing a knock, Cyril checks who it is and reports to Annie that it is Mrs Fitzgerald at the door. Annie tells him to let her come in.

#### The Real Mrs Annie Pearson Returns

Mrs Fitzgerald (actually Mrs Annie Pearson) enters and finds Doris in tears. Her family continues to get a scolding in front of her also. Mrs Annie Pearson (actually Mrs Fitzgerald) informs her that she was putting everyone in their place. When Mr George Pearson shouts at his wife, she threatens to slap his big, fat silly face.

#### Mrs Annie Pearson and Mrs Fitzgerald Change Back to their Original Personalities

The real Mrs. Annie Pearson (now Mrs. Fitzgerald) gets really disturbed and wants everyone to leave as she wants to talk in private with Annie (the real Mrs. Fitzgerald). She tells Mrs. Fitzgerald that it is enough. She wants to change back and get into their true selves. Mrs. Fitzgerald again speaks some magic words and they again get back to their own selves. Mrs. Fitzgerald says that she enjoyed every moment in her changed personality. Annie remarks that she did not enjoy this changeover. Mrs. Fitzgerald wants Annie not to be soft on her family. She wants her to remain firm.

Annie says that she will be able to manage her husband and children now. Mrs. Fitzgerald warns her not to give any apology or explanation, otherwise they will again start treating her indifferently. She must wear a tough look and talk to them rudely if she wanted them to behave in the right manner. For a change, when Annie smiles, her family members smile back and feel very relaxed. As they had cancelled their going out Annie feels that they all as a family should play a game of rummy. She also asks her children to prepare supper for the family, for which they readily agree. She also wants to have a talk with George, her husband, for which everybody agrees. The play ends on a happy note where the children and husband are willing to do whatever Mrs. Annie Pearson suggests.

#### Other Important Elements:

Themes-

- Status of women in the family and in a patriarchal society.
- Importance of prioritizing oneself, not allowing oneself to be exploited.
- Parenting techniques/ styles (their pros and cons)

*Message- One must stand up for oneself Genre- Satire*

**Textual Questions: (Use the suggested points to write your answers)**

**Q.1.** This play, written in the 1950s, is a humorous and satirical depiction of the status of the mother in the family.

**i.** What are the issues it raises?

Ans: status of women- taken for granted- does a thankless job- treated like an unpaid servant

**ii.** Do you think it caricatures these issues or do you think that the problems it raises are genuine? How does the play resolve the issues? Do you agree with the resolution?

Ans: genuine- interspersed with humour and satire- resolution: not completely practical- resolves with the help of magical powers from the East.

**Q.2.** If you were to write about these issues today what are some of the incidents, examples and problems that you would think of as relevant?

Ans: Domestic violence- underestimating the potential of women- unequal salary structures at work- women's security- conventional mindset about gender roles- minority as the decision makers etc

**Q.3.** Is drama a good medium for conveying social message? Discuss.

Ans: Yes- conveys message convincingly- audience can relate- creates awareness and arrives at a resolution- relation to the text

Brief Questions:

**Q.1.** How was the experience for the two women after the change of bodies?

Ans: The real Mrs. Pearson (now Mrs. Fitzgerald) had not enjoyed the experience as she had seen her family being treated roughly and rudely by Mrs. Fitzgerald. On the other hand, Mrs. Fitzgerald had enjoyed the experience, as she had been able to teach Doris, Cyril and George Pearson a lesson to value Mrs. Pearson.

**Q.2.** What was Mrs. Fitzgerald's advice to Mrs. Pearson after she had put back the family members in their proper place?

Ans: Mrs. Fitzgerald advised Mrs. Pearson not to be soft and waste all the effort she had put in to change the attitude of her family for the better. Mrs. Pearson is unsure how she would explain her behaviour. But Mrs. Fitzgerald warns her not to yield.

**Q.3.** What was the change that came over the Pearson family in the end?

Ans: When Mrs. Fitzgerald left, Mrs. Pearson's family was relieved to see her smile. Mrs Pearson decides to stay home for a family game of rummy and have the children prepare dinner. They readily agree and gather around Mrs. Pearson as the play ends.

**Q.4.** What were the two slips that could have let out the real identity of Mrs. Fitzgerald?

Ans:-Mrs. Fitzgerald, in her nervousness, addresses Mr. Pearson, as George. Mr. Pearson is surprised to be called thus, but Mrs. Pearson covers up for Mrs. Fitzgerald. Later, when Mrs. Fitzgerald attempts to slap George, following an argument, the real Mrs. Pearson exclaims and calls out to her, 'Mrs. Fitzgerald', which confuses George.

**Q-5.** What is Mrs Pearson's reaction to see her children giggling when she returns to the room?

Answer: Mrs Pearson asks them the reason for their amusement. Doris answers that she had never understood their jokes. To which Mrs Pearson retorts, rudely, that she was bored at their jokes even before they were born. Doris is tearful and Mrs Pearson blames them for being selfish about their needs.

**Q-6.** What reason does she give Cyril for not making the tea?

Answer: When Cyril again asks for tea as he had been working for an eight-hour day, Mrs Pearson replies that she had done her eight hours and henceforth she would work only for forty hours a week. She declared that she would have her two days off on the weekend.

**Q-7.** What, according to Mrs Pearson, were her plans for the weekends?

Answer: Mrs Pearson tells her children that at the weekend she would have her two days off. She agreed to make beds and cook a little as a favour, conditional to how she was treated. Mrs Pearson tells her children that in case they did not like the arrangement, she would go elsewhere for the weekend.

**Q-8.** Who is Mrs Fitzgerald? What does she advise Mrs Pearson?

Answer: Mrs Fitzgerald is Mrs Pearson's neighbour and friend. A fortune teller, who had learnt the art from the East, she tells Mrs Pearson that her fortune could turn either way. With effort and counsel, the situation would swing in her favour. She advised her to assert herself as the boss of the house.

**Q-9.** What was Mrs Pearson's reaction to Mrs Fitzgerald's advice?

Answer: Mrs Pearson said that it would not be easy to put her family members in place as she was very fond of them. She knew that they were thoughtless and selfish but felt, perhaps, they did not mean to be so.

**Q-10.** What was Mrs Fitzgerald's opinion of Mrs Pearson's attitude?

Answer: Mrs Fitzgerald said that Mrs Pearson's family was undoubtedly spoiled. She felt that it was Mrs Pearson's attitude that did them no good, tending to their needs, taking their orders, and staying at home every night while they went out enjoying themselves.

#### Long Answer Type Questions:

**Q-1:** The play 'Mother's Day' is a humorous and satirical depiction of the status of the woman in a family. Bring out briefly the elements of humour and satire.

Answer:

The play 'Mother's Day' treats a serious theme in a light-hearted manner. The humour in the play springs from an unusual situation where the personalities of two ladies change bodies. Their subsequent behaviour, which is in total contrast to their previous one, is a very powerful source of laughter. The ignorance of the characters about

the personality they are facing also creates humour. Suggestive dialogues also provide a lot of fun. For example, consider the following:

- “Mrs. Pearson if you had to live my life it wouldn’t be so bad. You’d have more fun as me than you’ve had as you.”
- “It’s that silly old bag from next door—Mrs. Fitzgerald.”
- “Ticking her off now, are you, Annie?”
- “They call you Pompy-Ompy Pearson because they think you’re so slow and pompous.”

The actions, gestures and reactions of the characters also provide humour. The housewife being given orders, treated like dirt and forced to stay home every night while other members go out to amuse themselves is sharply contrasted with the position at the end of the play where she is the mistress of the house. Then play also satirises the eight-hour work culture and threats to go on strike. Even the housewife adopts this weapon.

Q-2: The shock treatment makes the thoughtless and selfish persons realise the real position of the lady of the house.” How far do you agree with the statement? Give reasons for your answer.

Answer:

I fully agree with the aforesaid statement. Drastic situations need drastic remedies. The thoughtless, selfish and spoilt members of the Pearson family do not understand the language of love and affection. Mrs. Pearson with Mrs. Fitzgerald’s bold and dominating personality and her toughness makes them realise their own state. Doris is the first to learn her lesson in civility and politeness. The criticism of her boyfriend seems quite unexpected to her—perhaps more than the non-compliance of her orders of ironing the yellow silk dress. Doris has tearful eyes. Cyril is also told to help himself.

The mother’s declaration that she too will henceforth work forty hours a week, have the weekends off and go somewhere to enjoy herself come as a shock treatment. The balloon of her husband’s ego is punctured by disclosing to him how people at the club make fun of him. In the end all the three members come round and show their willingness to obey the mother’s command.

Q-3: Describe Mrs Pearson’s conversation with Cyril when he walks in and his reaction.

Answer:

Mrs Pearson’s son Cyril walks in and insists on Mrs Pearson getting the tea and his clothes ready. He reminds her of the promise she made the same morning, to mend his clothes. He is surprised to hear that she does not ‘Tike mending’ and that she would not do anything that she did not want to do. Cyril could not believe his ears. Cyril again asks for tea, telling her that he had been working for an eight-hour day, to which Mrs Pearson says that she had done her eight hours and henceforth she would work for only forty hours a week. On weekends, she would have her two days off. She might make a bed or two and do a bit of cooking as a favour but that would be conditional to the fact that they asked her very nicely and thanked her for everything and generally made a fuss of her. Cyril and Doris are surprised and wait for their father to arrive.

Q-4: “Sometimes it does people good to have their feelings hurt.” Who says this and what does she say to hurt Mr Pearson?

Answer:

When Mr Pearson announces that he did not wish to drink tea, after he returned from work, the real Mrs Fitzgerald informs him that his tea was not ready. He is angry and she reminds him that he was annoyed because he did not get the tea that he did not want in the first place. She adds that if he did that at bar—went up to the bar at the club and told them he did not want a glass of beer but got irritated because they had not already poured it out for him, they would laugh at him even more than they did already.

George was indignant and she added that he was one of their standing jokes and was called ‘Pompy-ompy Pearson’ because they thought that he was slow and pompous. George checks with Cyril on the truth of the matter, and Cyril accuses his mother of not being fair and sensitive. To which, she replies that sometimes it does people good to have their feelings hurt.

Q-5: Pick out the instances that bring out the element of humour in the play.

Answer:

The play is a light-hearted comedy. A mother accomplishes changing the attitude of her family by exchanging her body with her friend, Mrs Fitzgerald, a bold and assertive woman, thus, introducing humour in the play. The moment the spirits change, Mrs Pearson notices the cigarette, snatches it off Mrs Fitzgerald, while she looks down at her changed body and screams out of fright.

Mrs Pearson answers to her daughter’s query, sarcastically, that she was not whitewashing the ceiling. Mrs Pearson insults Doris’ date, comically, calling him ‘buck-toothed and half-witted’. Cyril is told that she does not ‘like mending’ his clothes, stunning him to silence. When Mrs Pearson walks out, Doris and Cyril laugh at the idea of her having gone crazy and decide to wait till the father comes. She tells Mr Pearson how he was a standing joke in the club and was called ‘Pompy-ompy Pearson’ because they thought that he was slow and pompous. She also tells him that he was George, and not the Duke of Edinburgh.

Q-6: Mrs Fitzgerald’s effort does not go in vain, as the family changes for the better. Justify.

Answer:

Mrs Pearson has a selfish and a thoughtless family, who is insensitive to the feelings of the mother. But after the staged trick, and when Mrs Fitzgerald leaves, the three—George, Doris, and Cyril look anxiously at Mrs Pearson, who smiles. They are much relieved, and smile back at her. Mrs Pearson tells them that since they have decided to stay at home, they would have a nice family game of rummy and then the children could get the supper ready while she talked with their father. All of them agree. Mrs Pearson wishes Mrs Fitzgerald goodbye and the family surrounds Mrs Pearson, implying a happy ending. It looks as if Mrs Fitzgerald’s effort is rewarded and they seem eager to appease the real Mrs Pearson.

**Unsolved questions:** *(Think and write yourself)*

Q1. Every woman and mother demands respect from her children and her other family members. Discuss this statement within 120-150 words in the light of the play ‘Mother’s Day’.

Q2. Mrs Fitzgerald advises Mrs Annie Pearson not to get soft with her family members. Do you think it is the right way to treat your family. Discuss within 120-150 words.

Q3. Compare and contrast the foil characters of Mrs. Pearson and Mrs. Fitzgerald.