

Golden Threshold

One-Act Plays

Questions and Answers

(from the text)

Matsyaganddhi – Sajitha M.

Answer the following in a word or a sentence

- a) Who is the central character of the play, *Matsyaganddhi*?
 Answer: The central character of the play is a fisherwoman (a woman belonging to the *araya* community).
- b) What is a monologue?
 Answer: A monologue can be defined as a long speech delivered by one actor in a play (here in *Matsyaganddhi*, there is only one character and hence it is also known as a ‘Solo-Play’).
- c) What is the significance of the two constellations referred to in the play?
 Answer: Orion, the Great Bear and the Southern Cross are the two constellations mentioned in the play and they always act as indication for the boatmen. It guides them, provides a sense of safety and also acts as an indication of where the fishes are.
- d) Comment on the attitude of the public towards the fisherwoman.
 Answer: The public (people) hold their noses at the fish baskets and the smell of the fish but they love the taste of a plate full of fish on the dining table.

Answer the following in about 50 words each

- a) Identify the major themes of the play, *Matsyaganddhi*.
 Answer: *Matsyaganddhi* presents the plight of the *araya* (fishing) community during the post-globalization era. It also deals with the marginalization of women, double standards of the society and the process of commodification.
- b) According to the play, what are the problems that a fisherwoman encounters in the market?
 Answer: In *Matsyaganddhi*, the woman says that if she couldn’t reach the market in time, it becomes a hassle. The tidy and better spots will be occupied by the males who can also go around and sell fish in vehicles. The women are forced to take whatever dirty spots are left and they are troubled by flies and

mosquitoes. The tap in the fish market lacks water and under it, the women fight against one another for a drop of drinking water. These are the problems faced by the fisherwoman in the market.

- c) Comment on the myth prevalent in the *araya* community that is referred to in the play.

Answer: The myth prevalent in the *araya* community says that the women or the wives of the *mukkuv*as (fishermen) should remain chaste so that they will be protected by the *Kadamma* (Sea-Mother), that is, the safe return of a fisherman from the sea depends on the fidelity of his wife waiting for him on shore. If the woman turns immoral, *Kadamma* will take away the life of her man. The film *Chemmeen* which is referred to in the play deals with this theme.

- d) The play uses a number of transliterations from the Malayalam. Comment on the effect of this in the reading of the play.

Answer: Transliteration is the process of transferring a word from the alphabet of one language to another. The play *Matsyaganddhi* has been originally written in Malayalam and later translated into English by Prof. V.C. Harris. Words like *arayan*, *mukkuva*, *chemmeen*, *Kadamma*, *Molay*, *aila*, *mathi*, etc. appear in the English translation too in the form transliteration. The translator has deliberately restored these words to convey the original tone and intent of the message, taking into account cultural and regional differences between the two languages (Malayalam and English). Moreover, it provides a realistic impression and takes the audience closer to the culture of the particular community.

Answer the following in about 100 words each.

- a) Comment on the significance of the mythological story of Matsyaganddhi, with reference to this play.

Answer: In *Matsyaganddhi*, Sajitha M., the playwright has used the mythological story of Matsyaganddhi to juxtapose the past and present situation of the women of the *araya* community. In the original story of *Mahabharatha*, Satyawati who is also known as Matsyaganddhi used to ferry people across the river in her little boat. Once, an old sage named Parashara fell in love with her as he was fascinated by the *Matsyaganddham* (smell of the fish). He created a cover out of the thin blue mist and made love with her in the boat itself. Later, he gave her a musky fragrance and got her renamed as

Yojanagandha. She gave birth to Vyasa, the legendary author. But in the modern era, the playwright ironically narrates the story of Flory, a hapless fisherwoman who was brutally raped publicly by three ruffians in Trivandrum. This incident shows the attitude of the modern people towards the women of *araya* community (women in general too). Thus the playwright proves how things have changed by referring to the mythical story.

- b) Comment on the intertextual elements in the play.

Answer: In the play *Matsyaganddhi*, a few intertextual elements can be traced. It means the interconnection between similar or related works of literature. The play refers to the story of the film *Chemmeen* by citing the myth which is prevalent among the *araya* community. The play also refers to the story of Matsyaganddhi and Parashara depicted in the epic, *Mahabharatha*. The playwright employs this story to narrate the plight of the fisherwomen in the new era. Thus, through these intertextual elements, the playwright has skillfully juxtaposed the past and the present.

- c) How does the central character bring out the glorious past of the fishing community, in the days before the advent of trawling?

Answer: The central character of the play recollects the glorious past of her community in the play *Matsyaganddhi*. She says that in the past the sea was full of fish and it was less expensive too. The children of the community were healthy at that time and the women didn't have to hunt for fish at the harbour and other markets. The shore itself had abundance and her mother used to pick a few fishes and sell at far-off markets. She and her siblings waited for her mother's return as she would come with the basket full of rice, vegetables, peas, chillies and bananas. She believes that, labour had its rewards and *Kadamma* used to protect her children. Her husband too confidently went to sea for fishing and returned safe with plenty of fishes. Later, the whole scenario changed with the motorboats and trawler boats disturbing the sea. This is how the woman reveals the glorious past of the fishing community.

- d) Bring out the use of irony in the play.

Answer: The play *Matsyaganddhi* subverts the central motif, taken from the *Mahabharata*, to narrate a story of poverty and despair. The playwright uses irony effectively to depict the plight of the *araya* community of the present era. The woman says that the people hold their noses at the fish baskets and the smell of the fish but they love the taste of a plate full of fish on the dining table which is quite ironic. The playwright takes the story of Matsyaganddhi and Parashara from the epic *Mahabharatha* to juxtapose with story of Flory, a

hapless fisherwoman. It is too ironic because in the past the women of the *araya* community received respect and love from others while nowadays, they are treated with disdain. Towards the end of the play, the woman says that the community has lost everything and the government has even snatched away *Kadamma* from them which is also ironic. With the advent of modernization, the ethnic community has lost their roots. It is time to ponder and address this issue too. The women are forced to sell their bodies to earn their living and the central character says that shore will be full of illiterate, fatherless little Vyasas unlike the legendary Vyasa born in the epic story. These are examples of irony in the play.

e) Comment on the ending of the play.

Answer: The play ends with the depiction of the impact of globalization in the life of the *araya* community. Towards the last part, the central character is seen with an umbrella on which it is printed as 'God's own Country'. She says that the government has decided to build a harbor on the sea shore which will lead to the arrival of many foreign ships. More people will get jobs and a new hotel will be opened. But the problem she feels that, the wall which is going to be created will affect the lives of the *araya* community. They won't be able take out their boats to the sea and she feels that the sea itself will be gone. The women will be forced to sell to sell their bodies to earn their living and the shore will be full of illiterate, fatherless little children. The play concludes with a few questions raised by the central character. She thinks what she is doing on the shore with her hair down. She asks whether the government can return her husband who had died when the trawler vessel hit his little boat. The woman says that if the story which says *Kadamma* will be angry if a *mukkuva* woman stands on the seashore with her hair unloosened is true, let the sea rage and break all trawler boats and foreign vessels. The central character of the play says that the stench is not the fish-stink as people believes and it is also not from her basket but it is the stench of the sea decaying and stench of the little fishes being slaughtered by the trawler nets and above all, it is the stench of the decaying dreams of Matsyagandhis.

Write essays of about 300 words on each of the following.

a) *Matsyagandhi* is a play with contemporary relevance; it looks at the life and times of a fishing community in the context of globalisation. Comment on this statement.

Answer (Points to be included): *Matsyaganddhi* is a solo-play – a monologue by a fisherwoman – the play as an expression of her angst, anguish and anxiety – the play presents the life of the fishing community in the context of globalisation and the ecological and economic issues related to fishing in the aftermath of globalization – examines how the members of the community are affected by the technological innovations brought about by globalization – depicts the glorious past of the community when the shore was full of fishes and their lives were safe – the coming of the modern era which has created many issues in the community – struggle of a fisherwoman to sell the fishes – perspective of men and general public regarding the fisherwomen – reference to the myth and the epic – death of her husband – decision of the government to build a harbor – alters the equation of their lives – lamentation which later turns out to be a curse – contemporary relevance – class struggles and the issues of being marginalized – plight of the women – universality of the play.