

Page No. 142

Understanding The Poem

1. The poem has a literal level and a figurative level. Why has the poet chosen ‘tigers’ and ‘sheep’ to convey his message?

Answer:

The poem is a small story in which the shepherd made a pact with the king of tigers to keep peace between both communities. If we try to measure, it is more than a jungle story. It expresses the difference between the proletariat and the proprietor. It is the struggle for class between the oppressed and the oppressor. The politician is the shepherd, the ruler, as explained in the poem, while the sheep are the subjects. The warrior is the sheepdog, the army, to protect the sheep. In order to maintain sovereignty, the shepherd gives up a few sheep to hold a cordial relationship with the tigers and signs the pact. It is picturised on how the rulers sacrifice a few people for a good regime.

2. What facet of political life does the behaviour of Ajamil illustrate?

Answer:

This poem is a political satire representing the corrupt politicians and the subjects they oppress. The sheep depicts the mass while the sheepdog depicts the army. It shows how the sheep, sheepdog and the commoners are destroyed by the rulers like Ajamil and how their thoughts and feelings are ignored. Arun Kolatkar has retold Ajamil’s story, trusted to be a good shepherd, as he had heard in Jejuri. When the sheepdog captured the tigers, Ajamil leaves them loose, on being notified by the dog. He did not hear the sheepdog and did not make eye contact with it to show his prominence. He offered the tigers with the gala feast and provided them with gifts like sheep wool, skin and meat. The warriors are not paid heed to and the subjects are given up by Ajamil as he wanted to keep up his supremacy.

3. Why have the words, ‘pretended’ and ‘seemed’ been used in the lines:

**...*pretended* to believe every single word
of what the tiger king said.**

And *seemed* to be taken in by all the lies.

How does the sense of these lines connect with the line ‘Ajamil wasn’t a fool’?

Answer:

The shepherd, Ajamil, was not a fool. The king of the tigers asked him to free the tigers; the sheepdog tried to convince the shepherd that the tigers had arrived to offer him a friendly hand. Though Ajamil agreed to him, set them free and even provided them with a feast with gifts like sheep wool, skin and meat. He made a concord with the tigers’ king that they were friends after that. Ajamil was a good politician, who did not want to mess with the tigers and wanted to maintain a cordial relationship with them. Though he was aware that the sheep would be attacked today or tomorrow by the tigers, he pretended to believe what all the tigers’ king told him and acknowledged the friendship offered to him. He depicted it well that the shepherd seemed to be taken in by the lies but was aware that the tigers would come back to hunt. He felt that sacrificing a few sheep each time is better than losing all of them in a battle where he would lose his reign completely. It is disheartening to know his lack of confidence in the sheepdog. He played safe to avoid the risk which his kingdom would face.

4. Why did Ajamil refuse to meet the sheepdog’s eyes?

Answer:

When Ajamil accepted the friendship offered by the king of the tigers, the sheepdog understood the intentions hidden behind it and asked him not to agree. The sheepdog was a straightforward one who never lied and made panic signs to signal the shepherd. However, Ajamil refused to make eye contact with the dog and signed the pact with the king of tigers. As Ajamil was a safe player, he offered dinner to the tigers. He was a politician who was mature enough and would do anything to keep up his supremacy. He displayed a lack of confidence in the sheepdog and went on to sign the pact while he could have challenged the fierce battle. He tried to solve it by sacrificing a few sheep and not messing with the tigers. This incident explains how the ruler, who is one of the essential pillars of democracy, is at the mercy of the legislature. In the end, it was the shrewd politics that saved his regime.

5. 'He is free to play a flute all day as well fed tigers and fat sheep drink from the same pond with a full stomach for a common bond.'

What do the phrases 'play the flute all day' and 'a common bond' refer to?

Answer:

The story demonstrates how politicians relish their kingdom at the cost of their subjects. Ajamil, a good shepherd on the outside, was a shrewd politician from inside whose every move was a calculated one. He made a concord with the king of tigers which was not possible to maintain forever. When the hunting instinct takes over the tigers, it is evident that they will attack the sheep again. Ajamil was ready to lose a few sheep rather than challenge a fierce battle and lose all the sheep at once. Like an intelligent shepherd, he was prepared to sacrifice a few sheep to protect all and go on to relax and play his flute the entire day. He did good for both the animals; he saved the sheep and fed the tigers also. In the jungle, "the survival of the fittest" is believed in, and the other fact is that no matter how weak or strong an animal is, they all consume water from the same pond. Therefore, all of them survive together, and for the common good, Ajamil did what he could.

6. The poem is a satire against the present political class. How effectively does it convey the anger and anguish of the common man trapped in the system?

Answer:

The clash between the proletariat and the proprietor is inevitable and natural. The oppressed and the oppressor will always remain a class apart from each other. A commoner is jammed between the political groups which are present in our society. The crowd struggles; however it is a war against the powerful who give up their subjects to attain power and play politics. It is similar to how it occurred in the poem, how the shepherd and the tigers destroyed the commoners, the sheep. Though the army, the sheepdog, tried to stop this, the proletariat was sacrificed in the name of "common good". They cannot raise their voice against the powerful and have to obey the laws which are laid down by the authorities.