

Iswaran The Storyteller - R.K. Laxman

Answers to NCERT Questions

THINK ABOUT IT

1. In what way is Iswaran an asset to Mahendra?

Ans: Mahendra was a junior supervisor, who would be posted at various locations. His job required a lot of travelling. The biggest asset in his peripatetic (excessive travelling around) life was his cook, Iswaran. He cooked, washed clothes, and gave him company by weaving endless stories spiced up with thrill and horror.

2. How does Iswaran describe the uprooted tree on the highway? What effect does he want to create in his listeners?

Ans: The uprooted tree on the highway was described with a lot of dramatic gestures and suspense. He begins by saying that the road was deserted and he was alone, when he suddenly spotted something looking like an enormous bushy beast lying sprawled across the road. He continues to say that he was about to escape from there, but did not do so because when he came closer, he realised that it was a tree that had fallen and its dry branches had spread out. All this, just to say that a tree had fallen on the highway. He wanted to build up a sense of suspense and fear in his listeners.

3. How does he narrate the story of the tusker? Does it appear to be plausible?

Ans: Iswaran narrates the story of a tusker that had escaped from a timber yard when he was a small child. The tusker began ravaging all that he laid his eyes on. Finally, he reached his school. The children, playing on the ground, ran into their classes, and everyone in the school was watching the elephant and its madness in fear. Iswaran, who was on the terrace of the school, snatched a cane from a teacher's hand, and threw it on to the toenail of the tusker, which he says shivered from head to toe and collapsed. It may seem plausible that such a thing happens because the pain inflicted by the cane that landed on its toe, could have been very severe. The skin of the elephant being very sensitive, would explain the collapse of the jumbo.

4. Why does the author say that Iswaran seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters?

Ans: The author says that Iswaran made up for the absence of a TV in their quarters because of his dramatisation and fascinating style of storytelling. He recounted every story with a lot of spice and often delivered it with passion and joy. His stories had adventure, horror, suspense, and crime, which he imbibed from the books he read, and Mahendra enjoyed listening to them because of the inimitable way in which they were told by Iswaran.

5. Mahendra calls ghosts or spirits a figment of the imagination. What happens to him on a full-moon night?

Ans: One night, it was a full-moon night, Mahendra was woken up from his sleep by a soft moaning sound close to his window. He initially thought it would be a cat prowling behind a mice. But he noticed that the sound was too guttural for a cat. He could not resist checking, as the sound began getting louder. He was scared, but he mustered up the courage to look out. He saw a dark cloudy form clutching a bundle. He broke into a cold sweat and fell on to his pillow, panting. This was perhaps because of the story about a female ghost, that Iswaran had told him earlier, and had remained somewhere in his subconscious mind. He had actually told Iswaran that all what he was churning out about ghosts was a figment of his imagination. The experience was ghastly.

6. Can you think of some other ending for the story?

Ans: The author has ended the story by making the protagonist, Mahendra, escape from the scene, instead of finding out or investigating the matter.

I would end it in a very different way. Mahendra, a brave and tough person, was intrigued by the sounds that appeared on the moonlit night. At the back of his mind, the story of Iswaran was gnawing his sensibilities. Not willing to succumb to any kind of fear, he took his torch and stepped out of his quarters. He did not wake up the sleeping cook. Armed with a huge stick, he went close to the sound and handed over a strong blow to the 'apparition'. It started shouting and running helter-skelter. Now, the sound was even more familiar. Assuring himself that the problem was sorted out, he went back to bed.

The next morning, he called out to Iswaran to bring his coffee, when he noticed that Iswaran's shoulder seemed dislocated. He then disclosed the truth that he had pretended to be the ghost to prove that it was not a figment of his imagination. Iswaran gave up his fascination for thrill and crime. The shoulder took two months to set.

Additional Questions

Short Answer Questions (30-40 words: 2 Marks each)

1. What was Mahendra's job?

Ans: Mahendra was a junior supervisor in a firm which offered supervisors on hire at various types of construction sites, factories, bridges, dams, etc. where he was to keep an eye on the activities at the site. He had to keep moving from place to place, as and when he got posted to a new site.

2. What kind of a life did Mahendra lead?

Ans: Mahendra was a bachelor, who led a very simple life and had no problem in adjusting to the varying conditions that he had required to face in the course of his job.

He could be living in a make-shift tent, in the middle of a stone quarry, or in an official quarter provided by the employer. The only constant feature in his life was his cook, who stood by him through thick and thin.

3. Why did Iswaran want to make something special for dinner one night?

Ans: One morning, while having breakfast, Iswaran asks his master, if he could make something special for dinner that night. He said it was an auspicious day, on which according to the tradition, delicacies are prepared to feed ancestors.

4. What did Iswaran tell his master on the night of the full moon?

Ans: After being appreciated for his culinary skills, Iswaran slipped into his storytelling session. He launched into a most garish account that involved the supernatural. He told Mahendra that the place where they were, i.e., their living quarters and the factory were set up on a graveyard. He reported having seen remains of human skulls and bones. Going a step further, he says that he has seen ghosts during the night time on several occasions. He says that he has seen a female apparition with a shrivelled face and matted hair, holding the skeleton of a foetus in her hands. Frightened to the depths of his being, Mahendra tries to put a brave front and tells him to stop imagining silly things.

Long Answer Questions (100-150 words: 8 Marks each)

1. As Mahendra, make a diary entry of the full moon night. Express your fear and decision of moving out.

Ans: Friday, 15 January 20XX

9.20 p.m.

Dear Diary,

It was the most horrible day of my life. That stupid Iswaran, really had me in jitters. He asked me permission to make delicacies to feed the ancestors. I agreed to it, and after a sumptuous dinner, he began giving me eerie details of the area where we live and work. He spoke of seeing ghosts, skeletons, bones, and claimed that the place was initially a graveyard. He told me about the ghost of a lady whom he had seen. That frightened me. I told him to stop and retire for the night. The fear in my subconscious mind, created a panic situation. I began hearing eerie sounds and images while sleeping. I was extremely frightened. I decided that there was no fun leading such a life. I am going to report the matter and get away from this horrible place tomorrow itself. This place is haunted!

Good night

2. Write a character sketch of Iswaran.

Ans: Iswaran was the second character, who was shown to be multi-faceted in the story, "Iswaran the Storyteller, written by R.K. Laxman. He was the cook of the protagonist, Mr Mahendra, who was working as a junior supervisor. He had a transferable job, and the transfers were generally sudden and frequent. Iswaran was the biggest asset in his life. Iswaran was very loyal to him, and followed him wherever he got transferred. He lived in tents, work sites or quarters, without any form of dissent. Iswaran filled in as a cook, housekeeper, washerman, and companion. The author also describes him to be serving as a make shift TV to Mahendra. The only weakness this man possessed was that he was a voracious reader of Tamil thriller and crime, and he used these to entertain his master while interacting with him during their dinner time and after. Iswaran's story of ghosts, bones and graves had a huge impact on Mahendra one night, making him decide to leave the place for good. A humble and simple character, who could do a lot of harm in all his innocence, Iswaran was the only steady influence in an otherwise changing world for Mahendra.

Self- Assessment Test

Short Answer Questions

1. What did Mahendra decide to do after his experience on the full moon night?
 2. How did the story of the female ghost affect Mahendra?
 3. Do you think that Mahendra actually saw a ghost?
 4. How can you say that Iswaran was a fascinating storyteller?
 5. Write a character sketch of Mahendra.
-

Long Answer Questions

1. What are the qualities of a good listener? Elaborate with reference to Mahendra.
2. If there was a ghost haunting the area, what could be the reason for it wandering about? Give your point of view.
3. You are Mahendra's employer and being a good worker, you do not want him to leave. As his employer, write a letter to Mahendra, requesting him to continue at his current posting, giving adequate reasons for the same.