

NON-DETAILED TEXT

The Trunk of Ganesha

A. Before you read :

- What do you know about superstitions ? The class will be divided into 4 groups. Group one will collect two stories that talk about superstitions. Group two will observe people around them and mark the incidents / events that bring good or bad luck. (For example, crossing the road in front of you). Third group will talk to the parents/grandparents / elders to know about the certain superstitions in our society. Group four will talk to some doctors, teachers, bankers etc. to know about their attitude to superstitions.
- Now the group leaders will read all their findings and the discussion will follow.
 - ❖ Do you believe in supernatural powers ?
 - ❖ Can this be scientifically proved ?

We will now read the story "The Trunk of Ganesha". It tells us how the trunk of Ganesha breaks every night. Is it because of God's anger or is it the doing of some supernatural being ?

B. The Text :

I

It was just one of those days when nothing seemed to go right for Gobinda Maharana. Once again there was this unhappy incident which kept bothering him.

At sunrise he finished his bath in the courtyard and took a glass of tea from his wife's hand. His fingers suddenly slackened and the glass slipped from his hand. It was his first conscious knowledge of the fear he carried. The superstition haunted him throughout his life.

This day there was a special reason for his gloomy, tense manner, for it was the third day in succession that such a thing had happened.

Gobinda had learnt the trade from his father, as had his father from his father's father: the substance of the art of idol-making, the Durgas and the Ganeshas and the Sivas.

"Perhaps I have no right," he told his wife, "to meddle with the private lives of gods. That is why they are angry. Perhaps I have been, of late, using my powers too carelessly, and the icons I have been making are not exactly those my father would have made in his time."

Sulochana looked at her husband with frightened eyes. Perhaps he was right, she thought. But may be he was growing older, and his hands and eyesight were not as strong as before.

"You must be tired working without a break," she said, her words betraying her simplicity.

"You know what day it is." He studied her for a moment and continued. "And I am already late on the large Ganesha".

What had gone wrong ? He could not understand. Making an image was child's play for him: only in this case the idol was somewhat larger than most, the trunk a little heavier, a trifle longer. That was all.

Perhaps the clay he had been using was just that measure short of its adhesive quality which makes for a smooth, tight binding. But it was the same

clay he had been using for years, for innumerable images he had perfected and sold. Then why the sudden tear at the point where the elephant trunk took a turn and swung gently downward ? Was the weight too heavy for the clay mould of the image's face to support it ? Sulochana didn't want to question him about his work, for she knew that he was one of the best image makers in the whole valley. "Gobinda Maharana's images; it's hard to find better work than his!" she had heard the townsfolk often say. He was one of the few excellent craftsmen left. And she nursed her pride in secret.

And yet some inner voice hammered at her, was it because he had asked for a better price, a rather exorbitant one, than what was considered reasonable for an image of that size? She was convinced that her husband was a righteous man, but wasn't it possible that his seeming greed (provided her surmise was correct) had angered the Unknown.

Answer the following questions :

1. Soon after his bath, what did Gobinda Maharana do ?
2. Why was he anxious in the morning ?
3. What was Gobinda Maharana trade ?
4. What was bothering him since last three days ?
5. Worried Gobinda Maharana gave reasons for the breaking of the trunk. What are they ?
6. Sulochana did not want to question him for his work. What is the reason behind this ?
7. What thoughts did come to Sulochana's mind when the trunk broke again on the third day ?
8. Do you think Gobinda Maharana had become old and his hands and eyes were not strong enough to prepare the day for the idol ? Is there some supernatural power playing the trick ? Let's read to findout.

II

The sixty-one-year-old Gobinda had a large family to support; this included a son who had a wife and two children. He had turned out to be an irresponsible drifter who spent his days away from the house fishing idly for shrimp and carp in the Mahanadi. The second son had been taken in as an apprentice in a paper mill. There remained only the youngest, a mere thirteen-year-old. Out of the three he alone showed promise of taking up the ancestral profession, thus restoring a measure of calm to the father's mind.

In all these years this experience of his was a new one, a feeling of being alone in a ravenous darkness. All his thinking brought Gobinda to the inescapable conclusion that there was an element of the supernatural in the mysterious breaking of the image; but what had he done to deserve this? His life was ordered, restrained; so where could he have gone wrong? True, that a subtle change had come about in the designing of the clay figures, in the eye-catching new apparel, and in the shades of luminous paint he was using these days. But he hadn't gone about making the changes on his own; they had wanted their gods to be more in tune with the times. Gradually, therefore, he had endowed the goddesses with slim and curved bodies.

But there was nothing flashy about this image of Ganesha he was at work on. Then why should this happen now?

Or was it because the price of two hundred and fifty rupees he had asked for was a large and unreasonable sum for a six-foot-high image of Ganesha? He saw his youngest son, Ranju, come into the workroom and stare at the unfinished Ganesha.

"There, it's happened again," the boy mumbled bitterly, and flinched at the pain he saw in the old man's eyes.

The image stood, incomplete, to one side of the room facing the grilled window set into the northern wall. Cracks had started appearing at several places where the clay had dried. The straw skeleton of the image showed its forks through the mud where the trunk had torn.

Quickly Ranju cleared the debris surrounding the image. He brought a fresh mass of clay and placed it before his father to knead. Gobinda looked closely at his son. No, there was no trace of ridicule evident on the young face, no harshness of youth; merely a mute acceptance of the moment. His glance turned to the image again.

And before he realised what he was doing, his hands were once again kneading the clay, warmly, professionally; making it into the right stickiness as he began carefully filling the tear.

Gobinda had nearly finished mending the broken trunk when Ranju interrupted him, "Father, the draught from the window. May be it should be closed."

The image now appeared as clean and smooth as a mannequin. There were no traces of the recurring disaster.

The possibility of a gust of wind breaking the image was too remote. Gobinda thought. But the image had been placed very close to the open window, only a metre away. He had shifted the image himself, deliberately, in order that more light would be available for his work. And the wet clay would dry up sooner, facing the draught of wind. But that the wind could be a destroyer had never entered his mind. He decided, "Not the wind. It seems impossible.

Answer the following questions :

1. How old was Gobinda Maharana ? Who were there in his family ?
2. Was Gobinda happy with his eldest son ? How did he spend his day ?

3. List the changes that had come in the designing of the day figures ?
4. Who was Ranju ? What was his contribution to Gobinda's family ?
5. Where was the idol placed ? Why did Gobinda keep the idol there ?
6. Why did Ranju request Gobinda to close the window ?
7. Did Gobinda think that the wind was responsible for the breaking of the trunk ?
8. Who could be the destroyer the wind, or the anger of the God ? or the hands of the supernatural element ? Section-I will solve the mystery.

III

"We'll sit up tonight," he told his son with an air of finality. "That is the only way we will ever learn what's happening."

"Here?"

"Yes, here," Which way would the intruder come? He looked round the room and pointed to a dark corner further away, about three metres from the window. "That would be just the right spot for us to keep watch, unnoticed. You can observe the door, the window and the image at the same time from there."

"Right, Father, I suppose it's the only way for us."

So the plan was agreed upon for the night. Gobinda, who usually had his evening meal quite late, decided to have it early, along with his youngest son. The hours passed. A light drizzle came, which lasted only for a couple of minutes.

The night appeared darker to both father and son, the darkness denser as they took up their prearranged positions in the corner of the workroom,

At first they found it difficult to distinguish one object from another, but soon the darkness emptied itself. The image of Ganesha stood as they had left it earlier in the afternoon — apparently unperturbed and dominant. Somehow the idol appeared to have grown in size in the dark.

Huddled close to his father, Ranju's initial excitement had given way to a cold weariness as the night progressed. Perhaps the boy should be sent to bed, Gobinda thought. He heard him yawning in the dark.

The workroom remained still and quiet. The air was heavy, as though bound by invisible ropes to Gobinda's guilt. Nothing appeared to disturb the silence; a few mosquitoes buzzed about them. Where was the intruder they had imagined? Wasn't it more likely an act of the supernatural?

Soon the boy dozed off and slumped to the floor. Gobinda was awake, keen to the sound filtering into the room, his eyes glued to the dark, and to the silence. He put an arm around the boy. Time went by.

Then there was a sound — a soft, distinct sound. The intruder! Gobinda's heart thudded. His eyes met the unfinished eyes of the idol. His gaze swept across to the open window. There, between two vertical bars, was the unmistakable shape of a cat crouched, ready to jump. Unable to move, he watched the animal lithely leap across and land on top of Ganesha's trunk.

A smile beamed across his exhausted face. He gently began shaking the boy awake.

(Jayant Mohapatra)

C. Glossary :

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| exorbitant | : much bigger or much more expensive |
| shards | : pieces |
| surmise | : guess |
| drifter: | a person who leads an aimless life. |
| carp | : a large freshwater fish |
| flinched | : moved back |
| draught | : current of air in an enclosed place |
| mannequin | : life-size dummy of a human body used in shop windows to display clothes. |

Answer the following questions :

1. Why did Govinda tell his son to sit in the workroom ?
2. Why did he choose that particular place to sit ?
3. Was Ranju awake all through the night ?
4. What was Gobinda thinking in darkness ?
5. Who was the intruder ? How was it coming into the room ?
6. Why did Govinda Maharana smile at the end ?

D. Let's write :

Answer the following questions in about 50 words each.

1. Why was Govinda Maharana worried ? What thought came to his mind ?
2. What were Sulochana's reaction to the breaking of the trunk ?
3. Why was she proud of her husband ? How did she value her husband's work ?
4. Was Govinda Maharana superstitious ? What proof do you get from the story ?
5. Who helped Govinda in repairing the trunk ? How did they differ in their point of view regarding the breaking of the trunk ?
6. Govinda Maharana thought of many reasons for the broken trunk. What are they ?
7. How did Govinda solve the mystery ? What did he find ?

E. Activity :

1. Discuss how the superstitions created problems in Govinda Maharana's life ?
2. The traditional art of idol-making is dying. Discuss in the class and note down the reasons for the near extinction of this art.