

3. (i) The Guitar Player (ii) Svayamvara

Suniti Namjoshi

About the writer :

Suniti Namjoshi was born in India but left for Canada where she lived for a number of years. Currently, she lives in the U.K. She has published numerous poems, fables, articles and reviews. Her books include *The Conversations of Cow* (1985), *Aditi and One Eyed Monkey* (1986), *The Blue Donkey Fables* (1988), *Because of India: Selected Poems* (1989) and *The Mother of Maya Diip* (1989).

The Guitar Player :

A girl played on her guitar and it so happened that someone passing by listened and fell in love with her. 'Is it my music you love', inquired the girl, 'or me?' The music continued, water from a fountain rose into the air and fell away. The listener thought hard and finally said, 'I don't know'. What is the right answer?' 'Shan't tell you', replied the girl, 'but that's not it,' and she went on playing. Soon another passer-by happened to see her and also fell in love. 'Is it me you love', inquired the girl, 'or my guitar?' The second passer-by stared at the guitar, smiled at the girl and at last ventured to say, 'Well, I don't know. It's a beautiful instrument. What is the right answer?' But she just said that wasn't it, and went on playing.

The two passers-by were greatly perplexed. All night long the guitar music ran through their heads, and when they returned the next day it was perfectly obvious that they had both prepared their speeches. 'I would love you', declared the first, 'even if you could not play a note of music.' 'And I would love you', swore the second, 'even if you did not own a guitar.'

'You don't understand', replied the girl. 'I am a musician. Which me do you love, if you do not care about my music at all?'

'Oh', they said. 'Did we give you the wrong answer?'

'Yes', replied the girl.

'Well, what is the right answer?'

‘You must love me altogether, just as I am, all my gifts, all my possessions, everything I’ve been and ever shall be from now on.’

‘But that’s impossible!’ they cried out together.

‘Yes’, agreed the girl and chose a sad little tune to suit the occasion.

Svayamvara

Once upon a time there was a little princess who was good at whistling. ‘Don’t whistle’, said her mother. ‘Don’t whistle’, said her father, but the child was good at it and went on whistling. Years went by and she became a woman. By this time she whistled beautifully. Her parents grieved. ‘What man will marry a whistling woman?’ said her mother dolefully. ‘Well’, said her father, ‘we will have to make the best of it. I will offer half my kingdom and the princess in marriage to any man who can beat her at whistling.’ The king’s offer was duly proclaimed, and soon the palace was jammed with suitors whistling. It was very noisy. Most were terrible and a few were good, but the princess was better and beat them easily. The king was displeased, but the princess said, ‘Never mind, father. Now let me set a test and perhaps some good will come of it.’ Then she turned to the suitors, ‘Do you acknowledge that you were beaten fairly?’ ‘No’, they all roared, all except one, ‘we think it was magic or some sort of trick.’ But one said, ‘Yes.’ ‘Yes’, he said, ‘I was beaten fairly.’ The princess smiled and turning to her father she pointed to this man. ‘If he will have me’, she said, ‘I will marry him.’

About the stories :

‘The Guitar Player’ and ‘Svayamvara’ are taken from her book *Feminist Fables* (1981). In these stories she focuses on the condition of women in a patriarchal society. She raises her voice against gender inequality and stresses the fact that women should have their own identity. These stories are very thought-provoking and highly relevant to the contemporary Indian society. The story ‘The Guitar Player’ depicts a girl who wants her talents, skills and the art that she possesses, to be greatly valued, recognized and given importance. The story ‘Svayamvara’ is about women’s freedom and focuses on the fact that certain set roles are assigned to women in the Indian society and if she wants a little more freedom, the parents and members of the society are unhappy. Men think themselves to be superior to women and do not like to accept their defeat. However, a woman likes to choose a companion who believes in gender equality, values her talents, and accepts his own shortcomings.

GLOSSARY

The Guitar Player

fountain (n)	:	a spring of water, especially a jet of water made to spout artificially as an ornament
stared (v)	:	looked or gazed fixedly with the eyes wide open
ventured (v)	:	dared
perplexed (adj)	:	puzzled, bewildered, confused
obvious (adj)	:	easy to see or understand, clear
possessions (n)	:	belongings

Svayamvara

Svayamvara (n)	:	the choosing of a husband by the bride herself
grieved (v)	:	felt sad, experienced deep sorrow
dolefully (adv)	:	sadly, mournfully
proclaimed (v)	:	announced officially or publicly, declared
jammed (v)	:	crowded or blocked (an area) with people or things
acknowledge (v)	:	admit that something is true
beaten (v)	:	defeated
roared (v)	:	made a long, deep, loud sound

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS :

A. Choose the correct alternative (from both the stories):

- How many passers-by responded to the girl's question the next day?
(a) 2 (c) 5
(b) 3 (d) 10
- At the end of the story which tune did the girl choose to suit the occasion?
(a) happy (b) melodious
(c) sad (d) sharp
- The little princess was good at
(a) eating (b) whistling
(c) rebuking (d) dancing

4. What was the King's offer?
- | | |
|--|------------------|
| (a) Half of the kingdom | (b) The princess |
| (c) Half of the kingdom and the princess | (d) A whistle |

B. Answer the following questions in 30-40 words each:

The Guitar Player

1. What feelings arose in the heart of the passers-by after listening to the music?
2. According to the girl, did the passers-by give the right answer?
3. How did the girl react to the reply of the passers-by?
4. Why were the passers-by greatly perplexed?
5. What was the right answer according to the girl?

Svayamvara

1. What is the meaning of the word 'Svayamvara'?
2. Why did her parents grieve?
3. On what basis was the princess finally able to choose her husband?
4. Why did the parents tell the princess not to whistle?
5. Why was the king displeased when the princess beat the suitors at the whistling?
6. Whom did the princess choose as her husband and why?

C. Answer the following questions in 115-125 words each:

The Guitar Player

1. What was the right answer according to the girl?
2. Why did the girl choose to play a sad little tune and what did the writer want to convey through this?

Svayamvara

1. 'Most of the suitors did not accept the fact that they were fairly beaten'. Why? Explain. How does it reflect the Indian society?
2. Discuss the deeper meaning and significance of the story.

D. State True or False:

1. The girl stopped playing the music after she heard the reply of the first passer-by.
(True/False)

2. The passers-by said that they would love the girl even if she did not own a guitar and could not play a note of music. (True/False)
3. The girl said that her lover must love her altogether, just as she was, all her gifts and all her possessions. (True/False)
4. The princess knew the art of whistling better than the men. (True/False)
5. Only one of the suitors accepted the fact that he was fairly beaten. (True/False)
6. The princess did not marry the person who accepted the fact that he was fairly beaten. (True/False)

E. Creative Writing :

Suppose your elder sister is very talented and working as an officer in the Indian Administrative Service. She gets engaged to a boy who asks her to leave her job against her wish. How will you deal with this situation?