

# NCERT SOLUTIONS

CLASS - 12th



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Class : 12th

Subject : English

Chapter : 1

Chapter Name : Chandalika

Q1 Why does something so ordinary and commonplace as giving water to a wayfarer become so significant to Prakriti?

Answer. Prakriti belonged from the lower cast of chandals. She was a chandalini herself. Throughout her life, she has faced contempt and was detested by members of the higher caste as is the common fate of everyone belonging to the lower castes. She was considered 'unclean' and 'untouchable'. As a result of the years of neglect and contempt, she had never grown to love and respect herself for who she is. However, when the Buddhist monk Ananda made her realise her worth, treating her with respect and even accepting water from her hands, despite of her being a Chandalini - a feat which was considered a blasphemy in those times- she was overcome with the newfound emotions of self-respect as well as regard, honor, and love for the monk who had changed her through his words "Give me water" and washed away the years of self-loathing in an instant. She found a new freedom as she says that it was a new birth which the monk gave her through his words. She felt she was as much a human as others and had every right to perform the common acts like others. An ordinary act of giving water to a wayfarer liberated her from the chains of societal pressure and hence, it became so significant to Prakriti.

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Q2 Why is the girl named Prakriti in the play? What are the images in the play that relate to this theme?

Answer. Tagore's play 'Chandalika' is interwoven with the decorations of language. Tagore has used metaphors in his character's names to express the themes of the play. 'Prakriti' which means 'nature' stands for the character's realization of being a woman and awakening to her identity as a woman. Her yearning for natural desires depicts the workings of nature. She comes to realize and embrace her identity, breaking free from the shackles of the society which had unjustly treated her as an 'untouchable' throughout her life. Her realization instills in her new courage and she understands that she is as much a human and a natural part of the society as

any other person. She becomes sensitive to her natural needs as a woman, thereby justifying her name.

The image of Prakriti finding liberation through the act of serving water to the monk hints at the theme of the play. 'Water' is a part of nature and it washes away all the dirty and unwanted things. Similarly, Prakriti, through serving water to the monk, washes away the years of unjust oppression and tyranny of the society and truly becomes one with nature when she realizes her worth as a human, thus justifying her name 'Prakriti'. Her name proves ironical in another instance in the play when she forces her mother to put the monk under a spell and bring him to her so that she can offer herself to him and she yearns for his love in return. This very act goes against the nature of the monk since he is sworn to celibacy and can neither reciprocate her feelings nor satiate her womanly desires. Thus, despite her name being 'Prakriti', she goes against the natural order of things by committing this act and it leads to a heavy price which she had to pay.

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Q3 How does the churning of emotions bring about self-realisation in Prakriti even if at the cost of her mother's life?

Answer. Prakriti's mother, at her behest, had cast a spell on the monk to bring him to her daughter. However, performing the spell demanded every ounce of her strength. While at the very end of it, she asks Prakriti to look into the magic mirror to see how far the monk is from their home. However, when Prakriti does so, she recoils in horror at the sight. Up until then, her ego had blinded her to the point of being so selfish that she had begun to hope for the impossible even at the cost of her mother's death. She was ecstatic in her thoughts about the monk. She had dragged the monk against his will to herself in the hope of receiving his love and offering herself to him. She had forced her mother to perform the spell despite her mother's warnings. However, when she looked into the mirror, she saw a weary image of the monk. All the radiance, the purity, and the heavenly glow had dissipated. His head hung low in shame since he unwillingly went against his sworn of celibacy. When she witnessed how she had reduced the purity of the monk to such depths, she understood the weight of her actions and cried out for her mother to stop and undo the spell. She realized her mistake and begged for forgiveness at his feet saying "the dust has soiled your feet, but they have not been soiled in vain. The veil of my illusion shall fall upon them." The realization finally dawned upon her about the seriousness of her dastardly act and she had to pay the price in the form of her mother's death.

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Q4 How does the mirror reflect the turmoil experienced by the monk as a result of the working of the spell?

Answer. The spell cast by Prakriti's mother at her behest was a very powerful one. It manifested its effects in the monk building up a turmoil within him between his duties and his natural desires evoked by the effect of the spell. Tagore provides glimpses of the turmoil to the readers through Prakriti's eyes, as she looks into the mirror to trace the monk's steps to her home. At the beginning of Act 2 of the play, the readers are given a glimpse of the monk's turmoil when Prakriti says, "Must the king of the forest crash to the dust at last, his cloud-kissing glory broken?" As the play progresses, another image of the monk engulfed in flames is portrayed. This depicts the inner fire of purity in the monk fighting against the 'serpent-like' fire of the spell cast by Prakriti's mother, locked in a deadly duel to the finish. The image ended with torment on the monk's face symbolizing his defeat against the powerful spell.

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Q5 What is the role of the mother in Prakriti's self-realisation? What are her hopes and fears for her daughter?

Answer. Prakriti's mother acts as the voice of reason in her daughter's life. In every step of the way, she tries to make her see reason. Although she agreed to fulfill her daughter's impossible desire of being with the monk because Prakriti was the apple of her eyes, yet she warned her of the grave consequences of this dastardly act that she was going to perform. While performing the spell, she chides Prakriti continuously while sensing the monk suffering under the effects of her spell. She even gives her life to make her adamant daughter realize the injustice of her actions. Prakriti is overcome with grief when she realizes she has destroyed the purity of the monk and subjected him to terrible suffering by trying to drag him to her against his will. Her mother makes her look into the mirror and witness his suffering so that she comes to her senses. Prakriti's self-realization comes but it claims her mother's life in undoing the spell.

Prakriti's mother hopes that her daughter will find a better life through marriage. She tells Prakriti that she had a good chance to be with the king's son when he came deer-hunting and stopped at the well near their house, saying 'Women alone can in a moment overstep the bounds of caste; when once the curtains of destiny are drawn aside, they all stand revealed in their queenliness.' However, she fears the reckless nature of her daughter. She is wary of her adamant desire of obtaining the monk and warns her against the negative consequences of such an act- a warning which indeed comes to be true.

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Q6 'Acceptance of one's fate is easy. Questioning the imbalance of the human social order is tumultuous'. Discuss with reference to the play.

Answer. The play 'Chandalika' deals with several themes of equality, human nature and the self-realization of Prakriti, a girl born in the lower caste of chandals. Being from the community of the 'untouchables' she had consistently faced the wrath of the upper castes and of society, in general, treating her as 'unclean'. Her fate, as dictated by society, was to rot under the burden of ill-treatment and inequality. However, when the Buddhist monk Anand imparted her words of wisdom regarding her stature as a human in the society, deserving of every right as others, she began to question the imbalance of the societal and religious order. 'A religion that insults is a false religion..... I am afraid of nothing now' she says. However, by questioning it (i.e. thing to be with the monk, yearning for his love and offering herself to him) and trying to go against the social order, she endangers the life of her mother and the devout nature of the monk subjecting both to terrible suffering, which claims her mother's life in the end. However, questioning the imbalance brought forth the self-realization of her worth and imparted in her a sense of equality. If she had accepted her fate then she would have lived as an 'untouchable' throughout her life, which, although the easier path, wouldn't have brought her happiness in the long run. Therefore, 'Acceptance of one's fate is easy. Questioning the imbalance of the human social order is tumultuous'.

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Q1 How does the dramatic technique suit the theme of the play?

Answer. The play Chandalika is a social drama intertwining the themes of equality in caste and gender, class struggles and the triumph of good over evil. Tagore through this play has highlighted the social condition and the inequality existing in his time. The dramatic technique used by him is symbolism. In various sections of the play, he uses symbolism to express the themes. The first instance is the use of natural imagery of water. By serving water to the monk who is a symbol of purity, Prakriti washes away all the stigma of her birth that society had imposed upon her. She realizes her worth and this hints at the theme of class struggles and social inequality.

The next instance is that of the names of the characters- Prakriti, Anand, and Mother. 'Prakriti' meaning nature, symbolizes the natural instincts of a woman when she realizes her stature and

rights as a human. This relates to the theme of social equality. 'Anand' which means happiness, is the name of the monk. It is a symbol of purity and happiness that comes with dissociating oneself with material and worldly pleasures. 'Mother' is the name of the character of Prakriti's mother in the play. Just like a mother sacrifices her all for her children similarly the character gives her own life to fulfill the adamant wishes of her daughter, ultimately making her daughter realize her mistake. This relates to the theme of good over evil.

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Q2 By focusing attention on the consciousness of an outcast girl, the play sensitises the viewer/reader to the injustice of distinctions based on the accidents of human birth. Discuss how individual conflict is highlighted against the backdrop of social reality.

Answer. The play 'Chandalika' depicts the individual conflict of its protagonist Prakriti, against the backdrop of social reality. Being shunned her entire life by society due to the stigma associated with her birth, she finds liberation in the self-realization of her value. The words of the monk and his action of drinking water from her 'untouchable' hands, elevates her position in her eyes and she finally begins to break through the farce nature of society's unnecessary impositions. Her reverence for the monk who had given her a new life through his words, increased manifold. She felt liberated so much so that she began to desire him in ways which were impossible. Despite being aware of the fact that he was sworn to celibacy, she began to desire him, yearning for his reciprocation and wanted to offer herself to him. The societal norms dictate a monk to be celibate and more so a Chandalika to be an 'untouchable', making such a union impossible. Thus, the individual conflict of desire and freedom is highlighted against the backdrop of the harsh social reality.

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Q3 'I will enthrone you on the summit of all my dishonour, and build your royal seat of my shame, my fear and my joy'. Pick out more such examples of the interplay of opposites from the text. What does this device succeed in conveying?

Answer. There are many examples of the interplay of opposites in the play 'Chandalika'. An example of that is- "I started up trembling and bowed before his feet, without touching them." The interplay of words strongly brings out Prakriti's emotions for the monk. She trembles before him, very much aware of her desire to possess him. However, she is also aware of the fact that her desire will lead to her being ostracised by society. It will never be honored. In spite of that,

she keeps the monk in high regard in her heart. The interplay of such opposite ideas strongly expresses the ideas that the author wants to communicate to his readers.

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Q4 'Shadow, mist, storm' on the one hand, 'flames, fire,' on the other. Comment on the effect of these and similar images of contrast on the view/reader.

Answer. Tagore uses similar images of contrast to create a lasting impression on the minds of his readers. The impact of these phrases is similar to the societal order where human beings, who are supposed to be equal, are discriminated against based on their birth. There are many such instances of contrasting images used in the play since the contrast create powerful connotations of the text. Hence, this device is used by the playwright.

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