

Comprehension Passages

Passage

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

Of the seven hundred villages dotting the map of India, in which the majority of India's five hundred million live, flourish and die, Kritam was probably the tiniest, indicated on the district survey map by a microscopic dot, the map being meant more for the revenue official out to collect tax than for the guidance of the motorist, who in any case could not hope to reach it since it sprawled far from the highway at the end of a rough track furrowed up by the iron-hooped wheels of bullock carts. But its size did not prevent its giving itself the grandiose name Kritam, which meant in Tamil coronet or crown on the brow of the subcontinent. The village consisted of fewer than thirty houses, only one of them built from brick and cement and painted a brilliant yellow and blue all over with

gorgeous carvings of gods and gargoyles on its balustrade, it was known as the Big House. The other houses, distributed in four streets, were generally of bamboo thatch, straw, mud and other unspecified material. Muni's was the last house in the fourth street, beyond which stretched the fields. In his prosperous days Muni had owned a flock of sheep and goats and sallied forth every morning driving the flock to the highway a couple of miles away.

Question 1.

Name the village in which Muni lived.

Answer:

The name of the village in which Muni lived was Kritam. It was "probably the tiniest" of India's 700,000 villages. Of the thirty houses in the village, only one, the Big House, is made of brick.

Question 2.

What did the Big House look like?

Answer:

The Big House, as it was known, was built from brick and cement and painted a brilliant yellow and blue all over with gorgeous carvings of gods and gargoyles on its balustrade.

Question 3.

How many houses were there in the village?

Answer:

There were thirty houses in the village.

Question 4.

Describe the other houses.

Answer:

The other houses were poor in appearance and were built of bamboo thatch, straw, mud and other unspecified material.

Question 5.

Where was Muni's house located?

Answer:

Muni's was the last house in the fourth street, beyond which stretched the fields.

Question 6.

Describe Muni's prosperous days.

Answer:

In his prosperous days Muni owned a flock of sheep and goats but was now left with only two scraggly goats which could neither be sold nor eaten.

Passage 2

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

He flung himself down in a corner to recoup from the fatigue of his visit to the shop. His wife said, "You are getting no sauce today, nor anything else. I can't find anything to give you to eat. Fast till the evening, it'll do you good. Take the goats and be gone now," she cried and added, "Don't come back before the sun is down."

Question 1.

Where had Muni gone and why?

Answer:

Muni had gone to the shop to get the other things like dal, chilli, curry leaves, mustard, coriander, oil and a potato.

Question 2.

Did The shopkeeper give Muni what he needed? Why/ Why not?

Answer:

The shopkeeper refused to give Muni any more items on credit until he paid off his previous debt. He also humiliated Muni.

Question 3.

How much money did Muni owe to the shopkeeper?

Answer:

Muni owed the shopkeeper five rupees and a quarter.

Question 4.

What lie did Muni tell the shopkeeper?

Answer:

Muni told the shopkeeper that he had a daughter in another town who had promised to send him some money.

Passage 3

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

Unleashing the goats from the drumstick tree, Muni started out, driving them ahead and uttering weird cries from time to time in order to urge them on. He passed through the village with his head bowed in thought. He did not want to look at anyone or be accosted. A couple of cronies lounging in the temple corridor hailed him, but he ignored their call. They had known him in the days of affluence when he lorded over a flock of fleecy sheep, not the miserable grawky goats that he had today.

Question 1.

What did Muni do to urge the goats to move on?

Answer:

Muni uttered weird cries from time to time to urge the goats to move on.

Question 2.

Describe Muni's prosperous times.

Answer:

In his prosperous days Muni had a flock of 40 sheep and some goats which were healthy.

Question 3.

Why did people prefer sheep?

Answer:

People preferred sheep because they bred fast and people came and bought the fleece in the shearing season.

Question 4.

How had Muni lost the animals?

Answer:

Some pestilence had struck and then Muni could not sell his animals at even half the price to his friendly butcher.

Question 5.

Did Muni know his age?

Answer:

No, Muni did not know his age. It was the shopkeeper who told him that he was seventy.

Passage 4

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

The horse was nearly life-size, moulded out of clay, baked, burnt, and brightly coloured, and reared its head proudly, prancing its forelegs in the air and flourishing its tail in a loop; beside the horse stood a warrior with scythelike mustachios, bulging eyes, and aquiline nose. The old image-makers believed in indicating a man of strength by bulging out his eyes and sharpening his moustache tips, and also decorated the man's chest with beads which looked today like blobs of mud through the ravages of sun and wind and rain (when it came), but Muni would insist that he had known the beads to sparkle like the nine gems at one time in his life.

Question 1.

Describe the horse.

Answer:

It was a big life-size horse made from clay which had been baked, burnt and then coloured brightly. The horse was posed standing proudly with his head reared high, its legs prancing in the air, flourishing its tail in a loop in the air. Next to the horse stood a warrior with sharp, scythe-like moustache, eyes that protruded and a aquiline shaped nose. The image makers had made him have such eyes and nose to depict his strength.

Question 2.

Why had the image makers given the warrior bulging eyes and aquiline nose?

Answer:

The image makers believed that by giving a man bulging eyes and an aquiline nose in a statue they depicted his strength.

Question 3.

What destruction did the village boys do to the things near the statue?

Answer:

The village boys carved and gashed tree trunks with their knives, they tried to topple milestones and made lewd designs on all the walls.

Question 4.

What was the effect of the construction of the highway?

Answer:

Before the highway was made the statue had been closer to the village as the spot had bordered the village but once the highway was laid the village had shifted more inland.

Question 5.

Had anyone seen the splendour of the horse?

Answer:

No one could remember seeing the horse in its pure- white condition with a cover of pure brocade and red and black lace.

Passage 5

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

The village consisted of less than thirty houses, only one of them built with brick and cement. Painted a brilliant yellow and blue all over with gorgeous carvings of gods and gargoyles on its balustrade, it was known as the Big House. The other houses, distributed in four streets, were generally of bamboo thatch, straw, mud, and other unspecified material. Muni's was the last house in the fourth street, beyond which stretched the fields. In his prosperous days Muni had owned a flock of forty sheep and goats and sallied forth every morning driving the flock to the highway a couple of miles away.

Question 1.

What is the name of the village referred to here? Where is it situated?

Answer:

The name of the village referred to here is Kritam. It is a tiny village, situated far away from the highway at the end of a rough track. 'Kritam' in Tamil mean 'crown'.

Question 2.

Describe the Big House.

Answer:

The Big House was built with brick and cement. It was painted in a brilliant yellow and blue colour. There were carvings of gods and gargoyles on several posts.

Question 3.

What had Muni owned in his days of prosperity? What did he do every morning?

Answer:

Muni had owned a flock of forty sheep and goats in his days of prosperity. Every morning he went out with his cattle to graze them.

Question 4.

What did Muni feed his flock with? When did he come back home? What did he carry home?

Answer:

Muni fed his flock with foliage. He came back home at sunset. He gathered faggots and dry sticks and carried them home for fuel.

Question 5.

What did Muni's wife cook for him in the morning? How did she cook it?

Answer:

Muni's wife cooked balls of millet flour for him in the morning. She boiled water in a mud pot. then she threw a handful of millet flour into it, and added salt in it. then she made balls of millet flour.

Assignments

Question 1.

Show how Narayan depicts women in the story and their role in a man's life.

Answer:

When Muni the Indian peasant and the red-faced American meet and converse in "A Horse and Two Goats," the differences between them are immediately apparent, and these differences inform the main idea of the story, the clash of cultures. One of the few things the two men have in common is kept in the background of the story, but resurfaces frequently—each has a devoted wife on the sidelines, making it possible for them to keep going.

To begin to understand Narayan's sense of women, it would be useful to look briefly at how Indian and Hindu culture has perceived and shaped women's lives. It is believed that the ancient Tamil societies may have been matriarchal, that is, ruled and guided by woman. The great Indian epics, composed approximately two thousand years ago, contain stories of several important female characters.

In practical terms, however, the life of a woman in India as recently as one hundred or two hundred years ago was almost unimaginable today, even in comparison to the restrictions placed upon American women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hindu law and tradition dictated that women were under the protection of their fathers, and then of their husbands. In fact, although Muni has never kept track of his age, "He was told on their day of wedding that he was ten years old and she was eight. During the wedding ceremony they had had to recite their respective ages and names." This is the tradition under which Muni had grown up. Women were honored on the one hand, and subordinate on the other—no more simple or straightforward than gender roles in any society.

Muni and his wife were married in a traditional ceremony at a young age and have lived together nearly all their lives. His expectations for their roles in relation to each other, based on tradition, have not been met. He remembers that "he had thrashed her only a few times in their career." The tone here is casual, without regret; thrashing is what husbands do when wives get out of line. But the balance of power did not hold, at least not in Muni's eyes: "later she had the upper hand." In the opening, the narrator shows the town and a typical day. "His wife lit the domestic fire at dawn, boiled water in a mud pot, threw into it a handful of millet flour, added salt, and gave him his first nourishment of the day. When he started out, she would put in his hand a packed lunch, once again the same millet cooked into a little ball, which he could swallow with a raw onion at midday." It is a spartan meal, the most nutrition for the least money, but there is no mention of her preparing anything for herself. Is the narrator simply not interested in her diet, or does she skip the morning meal to leave more for Muni? "She was old, but he was older and needed all the attention she could give him in order to be kept alive."

The American's wife is even more on the periphery of the main action than Muni's wife; in fact the action could go along just as smoothly without her even being mentioned. But Narayan has a reason for introducing her. The American's wife's name is Ruth, the name of an Old Testament figure who stands in Judeo-Christian tradition as a model for wifely loyalty. The Biblical Ruth is loyal to her dead husband's family; the Ruth in "A

Horse and Two Goats" is loyal to her husband and stands by to prop him up when he is about to do something off-balance. She seems to be a good sport, to support her husband's whims: "Next day she called the travel agent first thing and told him to fix it, and so here I am."

Having a loyal, grounded wife gives each of the husbands the freedom to move out into the world. Muni goes to the highway each day so he can "watch the highway and see the lorries and buses pass through to the hills, and it gave him a sense of belonging to a larger world." Ruth has come to

India with her husband, but he tells Muni that she is “staying back at Srinagar, and I am the one doing the rounds and joining her later.”

Muni remembers that in his youth he was often chosen for the women’s roles in the plays the community performed. Sometimes he was the Goddess Lakshmi, a nurturer and a model for devoted wives. It is her obedience to Vishnu that gives her power. Muni also played the part of Sita, another incarnation of Lakshmi and the wife of Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, an exemplary wife, who remains loyal to Rama in spite of many trials.

A possible reason for Muni’s memories of these plays may lie in town gossip. To the delight of the men in town, the postman’s wife has run off to the city with another man. The postman “does not speak to anyone at all nowadays. Who would if a wife did what she did? In this speech, Muni comes as close as he ever will to stating the truth about wives: it may be annoying when they stay, but it is devastating when they leave. As Muni drives his goats out to the statue in the beginning of the story, he reflects on his age. “At seventy, one only waited to be summoned by God. When he was dead what would his wife do?” In fact, his wife would be lonely, but she is the one in the family with survival skills. The real question is what would Muni do without his wife if she were summoned by God? Where would a man be without a loyal wife?

Question 2.

Show how the story though Indian in context is quintessentially human also. Discuss.

Answer:

Narayan has, on occasions, been criticized for focusing on middle-class urban India in his stories, thereby excluding the poor of rural India who continue to make up the vast majority of the Indian population. But Narayan’s purpose as a storyteller has never been to educate the non-Indian reader about India. So although we can learn specific things about village life in India from this story, it isn’t about Indian problems or about Indian sensibilities as such. While what happens in “A Horse and Two Goats” is accurate to the particular of the Indian experience, it deliberately deals with themes that are quintessentially human, also. William Walsh has suggested it is a story about misunderstanding, a story about the gap between supposed and real understanding, a story about the element of incomprehension in human relationships.

“A Horse and Two Goats” is typical of Narayan’s pre-Modernist, village storyteller style of writing. In a deceptively simple, linear narrative Narayan unfolds the story of Muni, an old goatherd. In keeping with his usual narrative formula, Narayan carefully follows Muni as he goes about his daily, frequently humiliating existence—eating his meagre breakfast, visiting the local shopkeeper in a typically unsuccessful attempt to get a few items of food on credit, and then taking his two scraggy goats to graze near the foot of the horse statue at the edge of the village. He spends the rest of his day crouching in the shade offered by the clay horse, or watching the traffic pass on the highway.

This is where the comedy of misunderstanding takes over. After initially thinking he is being questioned about a crime by the khaki-clad foreigner, whom he assumes must be either a policeman or a soldier, Muni concludes that the man wants to buy his goats. Meanwhile the red-faced American, assuming the Tamil peasant owns the clay horse statue, which to the villagers, as Muni explains, “is our guardian, it means death to our adversaries,” sets about trying to buy it, so he can take it back to the United States to decorate his living room: “I’m going to keep him right in the middle of the room . . . we’ll stand around him and have our drinks.”

Narayan does a very good job depicting the relationships of long married couples. In just a few lines he can make us understand their lives. Maybe there was a time when the man was the boss but those times are long gone. Muni’s main occupation now is taking his goats for long walks where they can hopefully find something to eat. His wife tells him not to come back until the goats are fed and he knows if he is gone long enough she would find some way to put together a meal for him. If he stays out longer maybe she would be in a good mood when he gets home.

Question 3.

How does the story “A Horse and Two Goats” develop the idea of the need to interact with people who have vastly different identities from your own?

Answer:

“A Horse and Two Goats” is a story by Indian author R. K. Narayan. Its main focus is cultural insularity and miscommunication. Although some of the effect of this is comic, it also raises some serious points about the harm that such insularity does to both India and the colonial powers attempting to govern India and help India’s development.

Both Muni and the American do not know each others’ languages and thus have difficulty understanding one another. Muni therefore thinks that the American is trying to buy his goats, while the American thinks that Muni is selling him the statue. If we look at the story more analytically, though, we find that it addresses more complex issues.

Muni is a poor villager, who we feel is justified in having little knowledge of American culture, but we also think that the American, who traveled to India, and is intent on taking back souvenirs to show off his sophistication, should be more sensitive to Indian culture.

We are made aware of different traditions and value systems. Although Muni is a poor villager, he is very knowledgeable about the great Sanskrit epics that are at the center of the Hindu religion. He is himself pious, and understands and explains the spiritual significance of the horse. The American, by contrast, appears crudely materialistic.

In the exchange, both seem unaware of each others’ needs and values. Muni’s misunderstanding of the American leads him to sell off, for a desultory sum, a crucial part of his cultural heritage. In respect to the American, the author is trying to explain that donations of aid in the form of cash will not transform the lives of poor villagers for the better, and that colonialism is actually culturally impoverishing as well as exploitative.

This suggests that in a globalized culture and economy it benefits people in both developed and developing nations to understand each, others’ cultures better.

Question 4.

Besides being an amusing tale about a failure to communicate the story “A Horse and Two Goats” makes some crucial points also. Justify.

Answer:

“A Horse and Two Goats” by R. K. Narayan may simply seem like an amusing tale, but it has a far more profound meaning when read in terms of its cultural context. Narayan was born when India was still ruled by the British. His father was the headmaster of a school, and Narayan was educated in English literature and wrote in English. Many of his stories take place in southern India and reflect upon colonialism and its legacy.

In this story, the misunderstandings between Muni and the American are symbolic of their two cultures. Muni is poor but understands the value of the horse as an important religious symbol, seeing it as the spiritual guardian of the village. The American, who is quite wealthy by Indian standards, sees the horse statue only as a potential material possession, one to be displayed as a way of showing off his wealth and as a form of entertainment at parties.

Although the failure of Muni, who only speaks Tamil, to communicate with the American, who speaks only English, is the source of some humor in the story, it also reflects cultural differences. Even if the two spoke the same language, they might still have been unable to communicate given the differences in their values and world views.

Another issue raised by the story is that of western aid to India and the developing world. Muni is desperately poor. The American gives Muni one hundred rupees, which seems like a trivial amount of money to the American but a small fortune to Muni. Still, at the end of the story, we do not get a sense that Muni's life has been improved. This suggests that largesse without understanding is unproductive.

Finally, the story suggests what it means to be cosmopolitan or sophisticated. The story opens with a description of the setting: Of the seven hundred thousand villages dotting the map of India. Kritam was probably the tiniest, indicated on the district survey map by a microscopic dot. This suggests that Muni is a poor villager with little contact with the outside world. Yet, as the story progresses, we come to see the ironic point that the wealthy, well-traveled American is just as monolingual and ethnocentric as the poor villager.

Question 5.

Discuss how the author uses comic irony to describe the incident surrounding the statue?

Answer:

Comic irony takes place in the story 'A horse and two goats' during the interaction between a very poor Indian man, Muni, and a very rich American tourist because they lack the ability to communicate. While this might cause anger or frustration in a similar situation, Narayan deftly makes the story amusing.

Muni, an old man who was once 'prosperous', spends his days with his two goats— he cannot sell them for money nor eat them for they are worthless. They are, however, his constant companions. One day while Muni is lounging at his regular spot next to the large statue of a horse, a car pulls up and an American steps out, trying to communicate with Muni in English. Muni, who speaks only Tamil does not understand what the foreigner wants. In fact, the only English he knows is "Yes, no." The narrator shows the reader that the American wants to buy the statue, believing that Muni is the owner. Without knowing it, Muni appears to consent to the sale. However, comically, Muni believes that the American wants to buy his goats. He understood that the red man was actually making an offer for the goats... When he was reflecting thus, the red man shook his hand and left on his palm one hundred rupees...'

Muni is more than happy to sell the goats. Conversely, the American is more than happy to buy the statue. The details of the exchange are lost in translation. Muni takes his money. The American take the horse:

Meanwhile, Muni returns home with his money. Humorously, while he is pleased to bring the money to his wife, she does not believe that he came by it honestly. His wife glared at him and declared, "If you have thieved, the police will come tonight and break your bones. Don't involve me. I will go away to my parents..." She has good reason to doubt Muni's story because the goats he thought he sold had followed him home.

Specifically, the comic irony is that Muni thought he was selling his goats. Without knowing it, he has sold the statue of the horse. However, both men get what they wanted. Muni unexpectedly gets to keep his goats.

Question 6.

Narayan has created a memorable character in Muni. Discuss.

Answer:

Muni is memorable because he is realistic and also comical. The reader can sympathize with Muni because he is faced with the real life struggles of poverty. He sometimes is ridiculed by others in the village, and has insecurities about being able to provide for himself and his wife.

Muni is old and very poor. Although Muni is initially described as poor, the author then goes on to say that he wasn't always as poor as he is. "In his prosperous days Muni had owned a flock of forty sheep and goats and sallied forth every morning driving the flock to the highway a couple of miles away. There he would sit on the pedestal of a clay statue of a horse while his cattle grazed around. He carried a crook at the end of a bamboo pole and snapped foliage from the avenue trees to feed his flock

More is revealed about Muni during his conversation with the American tourist. His dialogue with the tourist is sincere but amusing at the same time since neither understands much of what the other is saying. They both ramble on as if they understand each other. The only real connection that is made (which also ends in a misunderstanding) is that the American wants to buy something. He wants the statue but Muni thinks he wants the goats.

Since the American is financially sound enough to be able to make trips to India, he is the rich character and Muni is clearly poor by comparison and poor relative to the other villagers. This story becomes like a fairy tale where the poor man stumbles onto some fortune. So, Narayan makes us root for Muni. We sympathize with him and want him to find some success in life.

Question 7.

Examine how cross cultural differences bring out humor in "A Horse and Two Goats."

Answer:

Cross cultural differences bring out humour in the story as is seen when Muni meets the khaki-clad outsider for the first time. From the initial greeting of "Namaste! How do you do?" Muni launches into a fairly detailed diatribe regarding his life: "My name is Muni. These two goats are mine, and no one can gainsay it though our village is full of slanderers these days who will not hesitate to say that what belongs to a man doesn't belong to him." This difference in cultural and language helps to bring out humor in the initial interactions between both men, that is Muni and the American. Muni's launch into how the politics of the village maligned his name is about the last thing that the traveller wants to know or cares about. The initial exchange between both men is obscured by cultural differences. The lack of connect through language helps to bring out humour.

Cross cultural differences also reveal themselves in the sense of purpose in both men's lives. Purpose has been established for Muni. His purpose is so clearly established that it never dawns on him to question it. He has lived his life as a goat herder with his wife in the village for so long that it is embedded within him. By contrast, the foreigner talks about how he is in India because of being trapped in an elevator "on the fortieth floor of the Empire State Building." The need to "look at other civilizations" is what motivates him to be at the same place that Muni has called home for so long. This cross cultural difference illuminates humour because both men are thrown into the same place at the same moment with such a sense of surreal randomness. There is little in way of logic or rationality to determine why their paths cross. As a result of the cultural condition of both men, reflective humour emerges.

Finally, cross cultural differences reveal humour in the ending of the story. Muni thinks that he has sold his goats and made a profit. The traveller thinks that he has purchased the statue at market price, something at which he can marvel back home. Humour is enhanced by the fact that Muni understands the spiritual significance to the statue, and yet cannot understand the nature of the transaction of which he is a part. This is further enhanced in the fact that the traveller wants the statue for decorating "in his living room," but fails to understand how it is an avatar of Vishnu that punishes those who have done evil at the end of the world. In the resolution to this misunderstanding, cultural differences in the form of language prevent either one from understanding the other. Yet, both get what they want. Muni gets the money he so coveted. The foreigner gets the statue he coveted. Neither one understands the other, believing opposite to what is true, and yet both find a sense of contentment. The lack of cultural understanding helps to provide an ending that is thought-provoking in its humour.

Question 8.

What is the main message of the short story “A Horse and Two Goats” by R.K. Narayan?

Answer:

The story “A Horse and Two Goats” is about an Indian man Muni, a Tamil peasant who meets a wealthy American tourist. Through a complete lack of communication (as neither can speak the language of the other), the poor man receives a large sum of money from the American who wrongly believes that the Indian man has sold him an enormous statue of a horse that actually belongs to the town, not to Muni.

Muni, who was once a prosperous man, is now destitute, the butt of jokes by the townspeople. He is living with his wife and two goats—goats that are so puny that no one will buy them. The “red-faced” American is extremely wealthy, driving up in a beautiful car with money to spare. Neither man understands the other: Muni and the Red-faced Man are hopelessly trapped discussing entirely different subjects simultaneously.

As the American tries to communicate with Muni, the poor man believes the American wants to buy his goats. Muni’s interest is in how the American intends to move the goats:

‘This will be their first ride in a motor car. Carry them off after I get out of sight, otherwise they will never follow you, but only me even if I am traveling on the path to Yama Loka.

However, while the American believes he and Muni understand each other regarding transportation, in truth, they are not both discussing the statue or the goats.

Whereas he has been unable to sell the goats to anyone else, Muni is more than pleased to take the large sum of money the American offers, and turns to go home, leaving (he thinks) the goats with the American. Meanwhile, the American, believing he has bought the very old statue of the horse, waits for Muni to get men to help remove the statue so that he can ship it home and put it on display in his house.

When Muni gets home and tells his wife what has happened, she does not believe him...especially when the goats return shortly thereafter, making it seem as if Muni has made up the entire story. This is another entertaining moment: Muni has brought home an unexpectedly large sum of money—but his wife does not appreciate his achievement, finding his story incredible—impossible to believe.

The message at the heart of this tale is unique. Whereas poor communication can divide families or communities, or bring about war between nations, Narayan sees a more positive light in this particular lack of communication—for both parties are quite satisfied with the end result: Neither character can understand the other; the cultures and languages vary greatly, yet both succeed in their interaction.

Perhaps it is the positive way in which the men speak, and their demeanours, which fill in the gaps where language is not present. They are willing to work together (though unaware that they are working at cross-purposes) to overcome their lack of ability to talk to one another, and both leave satisfied with the outcome. Perhaps the author is pointing out that we often communicate without using words at all. Our attitude, gestures and facial features may lack something “in the translation.” However, the spirit of the exchange can be pleasant and positive for people who don’t understand our language—or simply don’t understand our perspectives.

Question 9.

In “A Horse and Two Goats”, how did Muni feel about his married life?

Answer:

In the story, “A Horse and Two Goats” by R.K. Narayan, the main character Muni struggles to

survive. The setting for the story is harsh, rural India. Using third person omniscient narration, the story moves through Muni and the characters that he encounters. He and his wife have been married for some sixty years.

In India, marriage is thought to be for life; consequently, the divorce rate is extremely low. Muni and his wife were ten and eight when they were married. Now after sixty years of life together, the couple have settled into a daily, yet troubled routine.

Muni and his wife live in poverty in a remote Indian village. In his prosperous days, Muni had forty sheep and goats. Now in his old age, Muni has just two goats. Each day he takes his goats out to graze to avoid a wife whose temper was “undependable” in the morning. When he returns, his wife will have prepared a simple meal for him. Life is harsh for Muni and his wife, yet they are surviving. He thinks that he controls the home but actually his wife does—she will go out to work and “conjure” up a meal. He does not know how she does it, but she always does.

This elderly couple have no children to help them in their old age. Because of this, the village looks down on Muni. He has so often been humiliated that he can barely raise his eyes to face the towns people. To hide his humiliation, he even lies to a shop man and tells him that he has a daughter in another town.

Through prosperity and poverty, Muni’s wife has stayed beside him. Although she is gruff with him now, she is willing to indulge his request for a special meal. She works as hard as he does, or harder, getting up at dawn to fix his breakfast. Unfortunately, poverty has worn her down. Each day she prepares a packed lunch and hands it to Muni. Whether it is love or practicality, she wants him to stay alive. Frustrated by his ineptness, she sends him out the door, threatening him with no supper. Muni fears his wife, but he also know that she will in the end take care of him.

After Muni’s encounter with the white man and his fortune tucked safely at his waist, Muni hurries home to share it with his wife, thinking his troubles are over. Sadly, her first reaction when she sees the hundred rupees is to accuse Muni of stealing, threatening him again. This time she will leave him and return to her parents. Obviously, things are not going as well as Muni had hoped.

Muni’s marriage is important to him. He depends on his wife. They have been together for so long that it would be hard for Muni to imagine living with her. It is doubtful whether Muni will survive without his wife because he has lost his ability to manage on his own. Muni wants to share his good fortune with her, probably hoping that she will once again be proud of him.

Question 10.

Make a critical appreciation of the short story, “A Horse and Two Goats,” by R.K. Narayan.

Answer:

The story of R.K. Narayan called, “A Horse and Two Goats,” is about a poor Indian man who meets a wealthy American. The men are not only separated by language, but by their status in society. Muni and his wife have known prosperity in the past, but a string of bad luck and weather have reduced the old couple to living in one of the many shacks in their village, having great debt, and owning only two goats. Muni belongs to a low caste and cannot improve his lot in life.

The food that Muni and his wife share is meagre fare: they cannot afford anything else.

However, one day Muni is able to shake “drumsticks” from a tree and asks his wife to prepare them for him. She sends him to the store for ingredients, but he has no money and the shopkeeper sends a deeply mortified Muni away. When Muni gets home, his wife tells him to forget eating until the end of the day—fasting will be good for him. So Muni walks away to sit next to a statue of a horse, that has been there for the past seventy years. Soon a large station wagon arrives, carrying an American. Neither man can understand the other, but they carry on a conversation. Each man speaks about what is important to him: the American wants to buy the statue, believing Muni owns

it. Muni understands none of this, but neither does the American understand Muni's story of his life (including a childhood of poverty) and the history of the statue.

The story shows a clash of two very different cultures. By the end of the tale, the American believes he has bought the statue from Muni, and he presses a hundred rupees into Muni's hand. It is humorous to note that Muni has no thought of the statue, but believes that he has sold the American his old scraggly goats—that are too worthless to be sold or eaten. Muni takes the money and runs to tell his wife. She refuses to believe the story. It becomes even more difficult when the goats finally find their way home, making the story seem even less credible. The story ends with Muni being verbally beaten down by his wife. They have money, but now Muni has no peace.

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