

## **UNIT 10**

## **THE SERMON AT BENARES**

### **GIST**

Sermon is a religious talk delivered by a prophet or Saint. Here we have the journey of Gautam Buddha from prince hood to his saintly life. He left the palace at the age of 25, after seeing the sufferings of the world, to seek enlightenment. He wandered for seven years, here and there, and under a peepal tree at Bodhgaya he got it. His first sermon was delivered at Benaras as it was considered to be the holiest place because of the river Ganga. He thinks that he who seeks peace should draw out the arrow of lamentation, complaint and grief. He who has drawn out the arrow has become composed, and will obtain peace of mind; he who has overcome all such circumstances will be free from sorrow and be blessed. Kisa Gautami was grieving over the death of her son. She moved from door to door and at last came to Buddha. She made him a humble request to make her son alive. Buddha said he would do but he asked a handful of mustard seeds. He further commanded it must be taken from a house where no one had lost a child, husband, parent or friend. She went from house to house but was unable to find one where nobody had died. She was tired and hopeless and sat down at the wayside watching the light of the city as they flickered up. And she realised that these lives flicker up for some time and are extinguished again. This way she was taught that the lives of mortals in this world are troubled and brief and there is no means by which one can avoid deaths. As all earthen vessels made by the potter are being broken, so is the life of mortals. Death is inevitable.

### **DETAILED SUMMARY**

Gautam Buddha was born in 563 B.C. He was born in a royal family. He was a prince. His name was Siddhartha Gautam. At the age of twelve, he was sent away for schooling. He studied all the sacred Hindu scriptures. He returned after four years. At the age of sixteen, he married a princess. They had a son. For ten years the couple passed a happy life. Siddhartha had been shielded from the suffering of the world. However, when he was twenty-five, Siddhartha saw a sick man, then an aged man, then a funeral procession. Finally, he came across a monk begging for alms. This was his first encounter with the harsh realities of life. These sights made him so sad that he decided to renounce the worldly pleasures. He left his family and became a beggar. He went out into the world to seek spiritual knowledge.

Siddhartha Gautama wandered for seven years in search of wisdom and truth. Finally, he sat down under a fig tree to meditate. He vowed to stay there until he got enlightenment. After seven days, Gautama got enlightenment. He named the tree as the 'Bodhi Tree'. that is 'The tree of wisdom'. He became known as 'the Buddha' which means 'enlightened' or 'the awakened'. He began to teach and to spread his message of wisdom and truth. He became known as the Buddha (the enlightened).

Buddha gave his first sermon at Benares. It is the holiest of places on the bank of the Ganges. His first sermon reflects his wisdom about one inscrutable kind of suffering i.e. death. Here, the Buddha tells about the universality of death which is inevitable and can't be escaped.

A lady named Kisa Gotami had an only son. One day, her son died. She wanted her child should become alive again. She wanted some medicine to bring her son to 'life. People called her mad. At last, she came across a man. He advised her to meet the Buddha. She approached Buddha with a request to give her medicine so that her only son could he live again. After deep thought, the Buddha asked her to bring a handful of mustard-seed. But there was a condition. She must bring it from a house where no one had died. Kisa Gotami went from door-to-door to get the mustard-seed. She found mustard: seed in every home but she could not find a home where nobody had died. By evening, she was sad and tired. She saw the lights of the city. Soon there was the darkness of the night. Now she considered the fate of man. Now she realised that death is inevitable. No one can escape it.

She came back to the Buddha and asked for his blessings. The Buddha in his sermon told her that our life is brief and painful. Everyone who takes birth has to die. The vessel made by the potter is not permanent. It has to break one day. In the same way, everyone has to die. Death spares none. A father cannot save his son. Everyone grieves when someone dear dies. But grieving cannot bring the dead back to life. So death and sufferings are unavoidable. The wise persons do not grieve as they know the truth. Weeping does not bring peace to the mind. On the other hand, a person's pain becomes greater by grieving. His body also suffers. One who has learnt to control his grief shall have peace of mind. That person is blessed, who has overcome his sorrow.

### **Extract Based Comprehension Questions Exercises:**

1. "The Buddha preached his first sermon at the city of Benares, most holy of the dipping places on the River Ganges; that sermon has been preserved and is given here. It reflects the Buddha's wisdom about one inscrutable kind of suffering."

#### **Questions:**

- (a) Name the holiest of the dipping places on the River Ganges where the Buddha preached his first sermon.
- (b) What does Buddha's first sermon reflect?
- (c) What did Gautama do after getting on light emend?
- (d) How was he known as then?

Ans.

- (a) Benares.
  - (b) Buddha's wisdom about one inscrutable kind of suffering.
  - (c) After getting enlightenment, he began to teach and share his new understandings with the common people.
  - (d) As he started preaching, he was known as Buddha, meaning, the awakened or the enlightened one.
2. "Kisa Gotami became weary and hopeless and sat down at the wayside watching the lights of the city, as they flickered up and were extinguished again. At last the darkness of the night reigned everywhere."

### Questions

- (a) Why do you think Kisa Gotami became weary and hopeless?
- (b) How many sons did Kisa Gotami have?
- (c) What did she notice while sitting at the wayside?
- (d) What message did she get from the flickering and extinguishing lights of the city?

### Answers:

- (a) it was because she could not find a house where no one had died.
- (b) Only one.
- (c) She noticed the flickering lights of the city.
- (d) Their lives flicker up and are extinguished.

3. At twelve, he was sent away for schooling in the Hindu sacred scriptures and years later he returned home to marry a princess. They had a son and lived for ten years befitting royalty. At about the age of twenty-five, the prince heretofore shielded from sufferings of the world, while out hunting chanced upon a sick man, then an aged man at a funeral procession, and finally a monk begging for alms. These sights so moved that he at once became a beggar and went out into the world to seek enlightenment concerning the sorrows he had witnessed.

### Questions:

- (a) What happened at the age of twelve?
- (b) What happened when he was out hunting———
- (c) Where was he sent away for schooling?
- (d) When did he marry?

**Answers:**

- (a) At twelve, he was sent away for schooling in the Hindi; sacred seen
- (b) He saw a sick man, then human image man and then a funeral procession
- (c) He was sent away for Schooling in the Hindu sacred scriptures.
- (d) He married at the age en after completing his schooling.

4. Buddha said, “The life of mortals in this world is troubled and brief and combined with pain. For there is not any means by which those that have been born can avoid dying; after reaching old age there is death; of such a nature are living beings. As ripe fruits are early in danger of falling, so mortals, when born, are always in danger of death. As all earthen vessels made by the Potter end in being broken, so is the life of mortals. Both young and adult, both those who are fools and those who are wise, all fall. Into the power of death, all are subject to death.”

**Questions:**

- (a) What did the Buddha say about the life of the people?
- (b) What does a ripe fruit fear?
- (c) What happens after reaching age?
- (d) What, according to Buddha, death is avoidable?

**Answers:**

- (a) The life of people is troubled and brief and combined with pain.
- (b) A ripe fruit fears the danger of falling.
- (c) There is death after birth.
- (d) There is not any means by which those that have been born, can avoid dying.

**SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS (30-40 Words):**

Q1. Who was Gautam Buddha? Write a few lines about his early life.

Ans. Gautam Buddha was a prince. He was named Siddhartha Gautam by his parents. He was born in 563 B.C. in North India. He was sent away for schooling when he was twelve years old but four years later, he got married to a princess.

Q 2. What did Buddha say about the mortals of the world?

Ans. The Buddha told Kisa Gotami that the life of mortals is troubled and brief in this world. Those who have been born can't avoid dying. As ripe fruits are in danger of falling, so mortals are always in danger of death. All earthen vessels end in being broken.

Q 3. Did Kisa Gotami get a handful of mustard seeds as directed by the Buddha?

Ans. Poor Kisa Gotami went from house to house. The people pitied her and were ready to give a handful of mustard seeds to her. But, she couldn't find a house where no one had lost a child, husband, parent or friend.

Q 4. Why did Kisa Gotami say, 'How selfish am I in my grief!' What did she realise about the fate of mankind?

Ans. Kisa Gotami became weary and hopeless. At last, the darkness of the night reigned everywhere. She realised that she had been very selfish in her grief. Death spares none. One who is born is destined to die sooner or later. No grieving or lamenting would bring a dead man to life.

### **LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS (100-150 Words)**

Q 1. "The life of mortals in this world is troubled and brief and combined with pain" With this statement of the Buddha, find out the moral values that Kisa Gotami learnt after the death of her child.

Ans. After the death of her only son, Kisa Gotami went to the Buddha. Firstly, she went to every neighbour, asking for medicine for her dead son. She had lost all her senses. She forgot that no medicine could bring back the dead. Then she went to Buddha for making her son alive. Buddha asked her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where no death had occur. But she couldn't find such a house. The Buddha made her realise that death is common to all. It also shows the detachment from mundane life. Only grieving cannot bring peace of mind.

Q 2. Why did Kisa Gotami understand the message given by the Buddha only the second time? In what way did the Buddha change her understanding?

Ans. Kisa Gotami had lost her only son and in grief, she carried her dead son to all her neighbours to get him cured and restored back to life. Finally, she went to the Buddha asking him for medicine to cure her boy. The Buddha felt that she needed to be enlightened about the truth of life - that death and sorrow are inescapable. He could see that grief had blinded her, and it would be difficult for her to accept the truth. So the Buddha told her to procure mustard seeds from a house where none had died. Kisa Gotami went from

door to door. Then she realized that there was no house where no one had died and that death is common to all. She came back to the Buddha where He sermonized her that life in this world is troubled and filled with sorrows. He gave her examples of ripe fruits and earthen vessels whose 'lives' are short. This way he made her realize that death is unavoidable and none — even the near and dear ones — can save anyone from death.

Q3. Describe the journey of Siddhartha Gautam becoming the Buddha.

Ans. Gautam Buddha began his life as a royal prince. He was named Siddhartha Gautama. At twelve, Gautama was sent away for schooling in the Hindu sacred scriptures. At the age of sixteen, he returned home to marry a princess. The prince was deliberately shielded from all sufferings of the world. But this attempt failed when the prince while out hunting chanced upon a sick man. Then, he saw an aged man. He also chanced to see a funeral procession. Finally, he saw a monk, begging for alms. These sights of suffering, sickness and decay shocked and moved the prince. He wanted to seek the final solution of all these sorrows and sufferings. He wandered for seven Years in search of enlightenment. Finally, he sat down under a fig tree. He meditated there until he was enlightened after seven days. He renamed the tree the Bodhi Tree or the Tree of Wisdom. He became known as the Buddha or the Awakened or the enlightened one. The Buddha gave his first sermon at Benares on the River Ganges.

### **UNSOLVED QUESTIONS:**

#### **Extract Based Comprehension Questions Exercises:**

A. And the girl said. "Please tell me, sir, who is it?" And the man replied. "Go to Sakyamuni the Buddha." Kisa Gotami repaired to the Buddha and cried. "Lord and Master, give me the medicine that will cure my boy."

The Buddha answered, "I want a handful of mustard-seed." And when the girl in her joy promised to procure it, the Buddha added. "The mustard-seed must be taken from a house where no one has lost a child, husband, parent or friend."

#### **Questions:**

- (a) Name the lesson from the above lines have been taken.
- (b) What suggestion did a man give to Gotami?
- (c) What request did (Miami make to the Buddha?
- (d) What did Buddha ask the girl to do?

B. The Buddha answered. "I want a handful of mustard-seed." And when the girl in her joy promised to procure it, the Buddha added, "The mustard-seed must be taken from a house where no one has lost a child, husband, parent or friend."

Poor Kisa Gotami now went from house to house, and the people pitied her and said, "Here is mustard-seed: take it!" But when she asked, "Did a son or daughter, a father or mother, die in your family?" they answered her. "Alas! The living is few, but the dead are many. Do not remind us of our deepest grief." And there was no house but some beloved one had died in it.

### **Questions:**

- (a) What did the Buddha ask Kisa Gotami to bring?
- (b) What was the condition attached to it?
- (c) Why did Gotami go from house to house?
- (d) What did the people tell Gotami?

### **SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS (30-40 Words):**

- 1. Kisa compared human life to an inanimate object. What is it and why does she do so?
- 2. How did the Buddha attain enlightenment?
- 3. What did Kisa Gotami learn at the end?

### **Long Answer Questions (100-150 words)**

- 1. Life is full of trials and tribulations. Kisa Gotami also passes through a period of grief in her life. How does she behave in those circumstances? What lesson does the story impart to the reader?
- 2. Give a character sketch of Gautam Buddha.
- 3. How does Gautam Buddha make human beings realise that death is common to all?

### **FOR ANNE GREGORY (POEM)**

"For Anne Gregory" by W. B. Yeats was published in 1933 as part of his collection of poetry entitled, 'The Winding Stair and Other Poems'.

In 1898, Yeats met Lady Augusta Gregory, an aristocrat and a poet who shared his passion for old Irish folktales and legends. Lady Gregory encouraged him to write plays on this very theme, and together they established the Abbey Theatre. Anne Gregory, who is mentioned in this poem's title, was Lady Gregory's grand-daughter.

## INTRODUCTION

‘For Anne Gregory’ is one of the best love poems by William Butler Yeats. In this poem, the love between a man and a woman is presented. Love is done by the core of one’s heart. It does not matter a little on love if the colour of the hair or the skin changes. The poet is in deep love for Anne Gregory and wants to love her in all forms.

## GIST

Yeats is of the view that most people love others just because they attract them physically. The complexion of the skin and the colour of the hair are more important for us than the ‘real’ worth of a person. We rarely love people ‘for themselves alone’. Even the beautiful Anne Gregory is not liked or loved for her inner beauty or her rare qualities of head and heart, but for her beautiful yellow hair. Shallow minded people adore only physical beauty. We should look for spiritual beauty before falling in love with a lady. Physical beauty is just skin-deep. It is momentary. Unfortunately, most of the people are attracted by the colour of the skin and hair. Only God can love a person for himself alone.

## Extract Based Comprehension Questions Exercises:

1. “I heard an old religious man  
But yester night declare  
That he had found a text to prove That only God, my dear,  
Could love you for yourself alone and not your yellow hair.”

## Questions:

- (a) What does the old man’s text prove?
- (b) What, according to the poet, is more essential in the eyes of God?
- (c) What does ‘I’ refer to here?
- (d) How is God’s love different from the love of the young lovers?

## Answers.

- (a) That only God could love Anne for herself.
- (b) God loves an individual for himself/herself alone.
- (c) The Poet, W. B. Yeats.
- (d) Young lovers love her hair that represents physical beauty whereas God loves an individual for being himself/herself.



2. "But I can get a hair-dye And set such colour there, Brown, or black, or carrot,  
That young man in despair May love me for myself alone And not my yellow hair."

**Questions:**

- (a) What different colours have been mentioned in the extract?
- (b) The speaker wants \_ \_.
- (c) Who does 'I' stand for?
- (d) Why does the speaker talk about changing the colour of hair?

**Answers.**

- (a) Brown, black, carrot and yellow.
- (b) That she should be loved for what she is and not for the colour of her hair.
- (c) Anne Gregory
- (d) So that she would be loved for what she is and not for the colour of her hair.

**SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS (30-40 WORDS):**

Q. 1. What is the theme of the poem 'For Anne Gregory'?

Ans. The poem conveys the idea that physical beauty may be important for young men or human beings. But God does not love human beings for their physical beauty. In this poem, the poet gives an example of a lover who loves the yellow hair of a young lady but does not like her ramparts. The lady disapproves his love.

Q. 2. To whom is the first stanza of the poem addressed? What does the speaker say to her?

Ans. The first stanza of the poem is addressed to a lady named Anne Gregory. She had a great influence on the poet. He had great respect for her. He tells her that although she is a noble lady, yet nobody would love her for herself alone.

Q. 3. What makes a young man not to love the woman referred to in the first stanza?

Ans. The woman has beautiful yellow hair. But the outer part of her ears is not attractive. The poet says that never shall man love her only for herself.

Q. 4. What does the woman say she can do to make herself more desirable to young men? What does this show?

Ans. The woman says that she would dye her hair brown, black or in carrot colour. This shows that young men give more importance to physical appearance than inner beauty.

### **LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS (100-150 words):**

Q1. Do we love people because we like their appearances or we are fascinated by their physical appearances? How does Anne Gregory want to be loved?

Ans. This is the world of pomp and show. Things and people are often liked and loved not because of their merit but because of their external appearances. Anne Gregory's honey-coloured yellowish hair looks like the ramparts of a fort when they fall on her ears. There are many who love Anne Gregory only for her yellow hair. However, Anne doesn't like to be liked and loved this way. After all, how does the colour matter? She can dye her hair the way she likes. She can dye them brown, black, of carrot's colour or the way she likes. If her lover likes only for her beautiful hair, she won't accept him. She should be loved for 'herself alone'. But this world doesn't go by her wish. Only God can love a person for what he is. Human beings will go on being tempted by beautiful yellow hair.

Q2. People are not objects. They should be valued for being themselves. What lesson does the poet want to give to the readers through this poem?

Ans. Absolutely true. People are not objects. Appearances may be deceptive. A person should be liked and loved for being himself or 'herself. Outwardly appearances do tempt and dazzle us. There may be many persons who would love to see Anne's beautiful hair falling over her ears like the ramparts of a fort. Many would love Anne Gregory for her beautiful yellow hair. It would be difficult to find a real lover who loves Anne for 'herself alone'. What is so great about yellow hair? Anne ridicules the idea of being loved for her yellow hair. She can dye her hair the way she likes — brown, black, carrot or yellow. But the irony of this world is that people will go on being tempted and dazzled by glamour, show and outwardly appearances. Only God can love a person for 'himself or herself' alone.

### **UNSOLVED QUESTIONS:**

#### **Short Answer Questions: (30-40 words each)**

1. What wisdom was imparted to the poet by an old religious man? Do you agree with the opinion?
2. Why is only God capable of loving Anne for herself?
3. Why will a young man never be thrown in despair?

#### **Long Answer Questions: (100-150 words each)**

1. Is it right to judge someone on the basis of his/her physical appearance. Elaborate.
2. The poet in the poem, 'for Anne Gregory' conveys that we should lay importance on the inner beauty of a person and not the physical appearance. Elaborate with reference to the poem.