

## CHAPTER 02

# Childhood

–by Markus Natten

### In this Chapter...

- Stanzawise Explanation of the Poem
- Word Meaning
- Chapter Practice

#### Central Idea of the Poem

In this poem, the poet thinks deeply over the question of his lost childhood. Childhood is a stage of innocence in which the child believes others and loves unconditionally. The poet has tried to identify some stages of his life when his thoughts and perceptions of the world changed. The poem describes the first step to maturity or loss of childhood as when one is able to think logically and rationally. Forming one's own opinion and not getting influenced by others is also a sign of maturity or loss of childhood. The poem also hints at the hypocrisy prevalent in our society, where people pretend to be nice to each other but in reality they do not like each other.

### Stanzawise Explanation of the Poem

#### Stanza 1

When did my childhood go?  
Was it the day I ceased to be eleven,  
Was it the time I realised that Hell and Heaven,  
Could not be found in Geography,  
And therefore could not be,  
Was that the day!

#### Word Meanings

go - end; **ceased to be** - stopped being;

**Explanation** The poet wonders when he lost his childhood. He reflects that perhaps it was the day when he crossed the age of eleven. Maybe it was the stage when he realised that the concepts of Hell and Heaven, about which he had been taught since his childhood, did not exist in reality. Geography textbooks did not give the location of any such places. The poet realises that he might have lost his childhood when he gained education.

#### Stanza 2

When did my childhood go?  
Was it the time I realised that adults were not  
all they seemed to be,  
They talked of love and preached of love,  
But did not act so lovingly,  
Was that the day!

**Explanation** In this stanza, the poet reflects that maybe the loss of childhood occurred when he was able to see through the hypocrisy of adults. These people followed double standards, actually following and preaching different standards of behaviour.

They told the poet to be loving and caring; however they themselves were argumentative, violent and discourteous. Their behaviour was far from the love they sermonised about and advocated so reverently to the child.

### Stanza 3

When did my childhood go?  
Was it when I found my mind was really mine,  
To use whichever way I choose,  
Producing thoughts that were not those of other  
people, But my own, and mine alone  
Was that the day!

#### Word Meanings

really mine - when not influenced by others' opinions;

**Explanation** The poet asks the same question again and again.

He is trying to guess when he actually lost his childhood. Perhaps, it was the day when he realised that his mind could think independently, form his own opinions and was able to take his own decisions. He gained a sense of individuality, which set him free from the preconceived opinions of others. His own individual opinions and experiences shape his thoughts now and he realised that this might have been the time when he lost his childhood innocence completely.

### Stanza 4

Where did my childhood go?  
It went to some forgotten place,  
That's hidden in an infant's face,  
That's all I know.

#### Word Meanings

forgotten - unremembered;

**Explanation** In this stanza, instead of wondering about the time, the poet wonders about the location where his childhood has gone. He realises that his childhood has gone been lost forever. He can never relish his childhood now.

The only way in which he can see his childhood is by looking at. The innocent face of a child who does not have any pretensions and rationality and who trusts others unconditionally. In other words, one can find one's own childhood in a small child's innocent face and that is everything that the poet knows.

#### Poetic Devices Used in the Poem

- **Alliteration** In this figure of speech, a number of words having the same first consonant sound occur close together in a series. For example: 'Hell and Heaven', 'that the day', 'my mind', 'whichever way,' etc.
- **Antithesis** This figure of speech refers to the placement of opposing or contrasting ideas together. It can be seen in the use of words Hell and Heaven.
- **Enjambent** This figure of speech refers to the practice of running lines of poetry from one to the next without using any kind of punctuation to indicate a stop. The example is in the second line of the second stanza.
- **Personification** It is the attribution of human characteristics to non-human things. In the poem, 'childhood' is personified in the line 'It went to some forgotten place'.
- **Repetition** It is the repetition of a word or a phrase to put emphasis or bring poetic effect. In the poem, the phrases, "when did my childhood go? "and" was it that day!" is repeated to emphasise the difference between childhood and adulthood.

# Chapter Practice

## PART 1

### Objective Questions

#### • Multiple Choice Questions

1. What did the poet believe about Hell and Heaven when he was a child?  
(a) That they were actual places  
(b) That they were imaginary  
(c) That they belong to the Church  
(d) That they were in America

**Ans.** (a) The poet believed that Hell and Heaven were actual places, when he was child.

2. Antithesis is where two opposite words are used together in a sentence in a poem. Where did the poet use it?  
(a) Infant's face (b) Forgotten place  
(c) Hell and Heaven (d) Preached of love

**Ans.** (c) Hell and Heaven are opposites of each other and thus, is used by the poet to bring out antithetical elements in his poem.

3. When did the poet begin to feel that his childhood was lost?  
(a) When he went on a trip  
(b) When he saw the reality of life  
(c) When he called his parents  
(d) When he read more books

**Ans.** (b) The poet began to feel that his childhood was lost when he found out about the reality of life which shattered his imagination.

4. The repetition of the questions shows that the poet is .....  
(a) helpless (b) excited  
(c) stubborn (d) desperate

**Ans.** (d) The poet is desperately looking for the childlike innocence and hence, asks a lot of questions in his attempt.

5. The poet's trust on adults breaks because .....  
(a) they lie to the poet  
(b) they preach love and fail to act on love  
(c) they are selfish  
(d) they are lazy

**Ans.** (b) The adults seem who they are not because they are hypocrites who preach love but fail to act on love.

6. Select the word that suits the poet's description of adults.  
(a) Cunning (b) Intelligent  
(c) Smart (d) Pretentious

**Ans.** (d) The poet seems to describe adults as 'pretentious' as they are double faced about their ideas of love.

7. The literary device 'refrain' is used in the poem 'Childhood' in the line  
(a) When did my childhood go?  
(b) Hell and Heaven  
(c) Could not be found in Geography  
(d) That's all I know

**Ans.** (a) In poetry, a refrain is a word, line or phrase that is repeated within the lines or stanzas of the poem itself. In the poem it has been employed in "When did my childhood go?"

8. What did the poet sense about himself when he realised he could use his own mind the way he wants?  
(a) He sensed that he is as intelligent as his friends  
(b) He sensed his own individuality and a separate personality  
(c) He sensed that he is very smart  
(d) He sensed that he could use his mind in creative work

**Ans.** (b) The poet sensed his own individuality and separate identity as he realised that he could use his own mind the way he wants.

9. Select the option that justifies 'To use whichever way I choose'.  
(a) To form perspective  
(b) To create newer ideas  
(c) To question  
(d) All of the above

**Ans.** (d) All the options given above justifies 'To use whichever way I choose.'

10. Where could he see his childhood now?  
(a) In an infant's face  
(b) Only in his memories  
(c) Nowhere  
(d) Only in the poem

**Ans.** (a) The poet could see his childhood now in an infant's face as it reminded him of purity and innocence.

- 11.** Which of these is NOT one of the options where the poet thinks that his childhood has gone?  
 (a) The time when he ceased to be twelve  
 (b) The time when he realised that hell and heaven could not be found in Geography  
 (c) The time when he realised that adults were hypocrites  
 (d) None of the above

**Ans.** (a) The poet has understood the loss of his childhood as he ceased to be eleven. Thus, it is not the time that he had ceased to be twelve.

- 12.** What is the tone of the poem?  
 (a) Inspiring (b) Challenging  
 (c) Hopeful (d) Nostalgic

**Ans.** (d) The poet uses a tone that is nostalgically remembering his childhood.

- 13.** What are the aspects of adulthood that are discussed in the poem?

- |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| I. Individuality | II. Bravery      |
| III. Rationality | IV. Hypocrisy    |
| (a) I and II     | (b) I, II and IV |
| (c) III and II   | (d) I and III    |

**Ans.** (d) The poet points out that adulthood comes with rationality and individuality.

- 14.** Select the suitable option for the given statements, based on your reading of 'Childhood.'

- (i) The poet states that the childhood innocence and the happiness is lost as one becomes an adult.  
 (ii) The poet want the childlike innocence and happiness to remain forever.  
 (a) (i) is true but (ii) is false  
 (b) Both (i) and (ii) are true.  
 (c) (ii) is a fact but unrelated to (i).  
 (d) (i) is the cause for (ii).

**Ans.** (a) The poet believes that childhood innocence and happiness is lost with adulthood. As one becomes an adult one becomes a rational individual as well as a hypocrite.

- 15.** Markus Natten says that his childhood has gone to an 'unremembered place'. Which option indicates the significance of 'unremembered place'?

- (a) Childhood is not lost to the rational world.  
 (b) Childhood is nowhere visible in the hypocritical world.  
 (c) The loss of childhood is permanent.  
 (d) Both (a) and (c)

**Ans.** (c) By stating that childhood had gone to an 'unremembered place', the poet indicates that once gone, childhood will never return. The loss of childhood is permanent.

## ● Extract Based MCQs

- 1.** Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

"When did my childhood go?  
 Was it the day I ceased to be eleven,

Was it the time I realised that Hell and Heaven,  
 Could not be found in Geography,  
 And therefore could not be,  
 Was that the day!"

- (i) Why is the age of eleven so important to the poet?  
 (a) Because he can now differentiate between fact and fiction  
 (b) Because he now know about his parents  
 (c) Because he can now get a new bike  
 (d) Because he can now get new gifts

**Ans.** (a) It is because at the age of eleven, he can differentiate between what is fact and what is fiction.

- (ii) What quality has the poet acquired as mentioned in the extract?

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| (a) Individuality | (b) Rationality |
| (c) Patience      | (d) Imagination |

**Ans.** (b) The poet has gained the quality of a rational person at this stage.

- (iii) What shatters the poet's illusion about the world?

- (a) When he is unable to find hell and heaven in geography book  
 (b) When his geography book is torn  
 (c) When he turns twelve  
 (d) When he talks to his teacher

**Ans.** (a) The illusion for the poet shatters when he is unable to find hell and heaven in his geography book.

- (iv) What is the cause of the poet's worry?

- (a) Loss of purity and innocence  
 (b) Increase in age  
 (c) Breaking of trust  
 (d) Loss of fantasy

**Ans.** (a) The cause of the poet's worry is that he has lost the purity and innocence in his thoughts while gaining rational thinking.

- (v) Which literary device has the poet used in the given lines?

- |              |                  |
|--------------|------------------|
| (a) Refrain  | (b) Alliteration |
| (c) Anaphora | (d) All of these |

**Ans.** (d) Refrain is a literary device in which a line or phrase is repeated in every stanza. In the stanza 'When did my childhood go?'. Alliteration is a literary device in which a sound at the beginning of a word is repeated in closest placed words. Herein the sound of 'h' is repeated in 'hell and heaven'. Anaphora is the repetition of a phrase at the beginning of consecutive lines. Herein 'was it' is repeated.

- 2.** Read the extract to attempt the questions that follow.

"When did my childhood go?  
 Was it when I found my mind was really mine,  
 To use whichever way I choose,  
 Producing thoughts that were not those of other people  
 But my own, and mine alone  
 Was that the day!"

- (i) Explain 'my mind was really mine'.
- The poet was afraid of himself
  - The poet was completely in control of himself
  - The poet felt strong yet indecisive
  - The poet felt confused by his environment

**Ans.** (b) The poet was completely in control of himself and felt that his mind belonged to him completely.

- (ii) What is meant by: "producing thoughts that were not those of other people's"?

- The poet gains confidence in individuality
- The poet gains resilience in tough times
- The poet takes on new challenges without a care in the world
- The poet is still learning to express himself

**Ans.** (a) This line points that the poet has finally gained confidence in individuality and is able to express himself well.

- (iii) Select the statements that justify why the poet is eager to know the lost place of his childhood.

- The poet cherishes childhood the most.
- The poet is eager to find pieces of his childhood again.
- The poet wants to tell his friends about his childhood.
- The poet wants to find the innocence he lost.

- All statements are correct
- I and III are correct
- Only II is correct
- I, II and IV are correct.

**Ans.** (d) All statements justify the poet's eagerness except statement three which is false about the poet's intention.

- (iv) Through the given lines, which characteristic of childhood is highlighted?

- Blind belief
- Innocence
- Lack of rationality
- All of these

**Ans.** (a) Through the given lines, the poet states that in childhood one used to believe what parents or elders told them blindly. But as he became an adult this blind belief on elders broke.

- (v) What does the poet feel when he utters these lines?

- Anxiety
- Dejection
- Regret
- Disdain

**Ans.** (b) The poet feels dejected at the loss of his childhood.

2. Bring out the hypocrisy that the adults exhibit with regard to love.

**Ans.** As the poet grew up, he could make out the double standards of the adults. He realised that though adults preached of love and talked of love, their behaviour was totally different and full of manipulation. They were all hypocrites who behaved differently from the way they talked.

3. What did the poet notice about independent thinking? How important was this discovery?

**Ans.** The poet discovered that he was different from others and could think independently. He could have his own opinions without getting influenced by anyone else.

This discovery was very important to him as it revealed to him his abilities for independent thinking and decision taking.

4. What is the poet trying to convey when he says that childhood is hidden in an infant's face?

**Ans.** The poet says an infant is really innocent as he trusts everyone and does not try to fool others. The poet brings out this fact by contrasting it with the behaviour of adults, who become manipulative and are hypocrites. As a person develops rational thoughts, his childlike innocence fades away.

5. What do you think are the most poetic lines? Why?

**Ans.** The most poetic lines in the poem are (NCERT)

"Where did my childhood go?  
It went to some forgotten place,  
That's hidden in an infant's face,"

These poignant lines explain beautifully what most adults feel. These lines take us back to the innocent world of an infant where the poet thinks his childhood seems to be lying hidden. Naturally, the pure and unadulterated childhood will never come back to us, though we can find it in an infant's face.

6. According to Markus Natten, when does the child become an adult?

**Ans.** Becoming an adult is a complex process which is associated with physical, mental and social development. A child becomes an adult when he is able to live his own life and takes care of his responsibilities individually. He also develops his own thought process, using which he can form his own beliefs and opinions.

7. What is the poet's feeling towards his childhood?

(NCERT)

**Ans.** The poet regards childhood as a period of innocence. A child sincerely feels that he is free from all evils and that there is really a Hell and a Heaven. A child knows no hypocrisy. There is no difference between his thoughts and actions. In short, childhood is a state of innocence and purity of heart.

8. How does the poem expose man and present him in true colours?

**Ans.** According to the poet, childhood symbolises innocence, purity, softness and love. As a child grows up, these qualities start receding. Man adheres to lying, shrewdness, cunningness and hypocrisy. Adults preach about truth and honesty but themselves practise hatred and lying. The simplicity and honesty of childhood evaporates the moment man crosses the threshold of innocent childhood.

## PART 2

# Subjective Questions

## • Short Answer Type Questions

1. How did the poet conclude that Hell and Heaven were imaginary places?

**Ans.** The poet concluded that Hell and Heaven were imaginary places because Geography books contain names of places, but there was no mention of places like Hell or Heaven in these books.



9. The poet has discussed two stages of life — childhood and adulthood. How do we differentiate one from another?

**Ans.** Childhood has been considered by the poet as a blissful period in one's life, where a child trusts everyone. Adulthood is marked by rational and creative thoughts, ability to perceive and differentiate and learn new things. In this stage of life one also learns to be double faced and crafty.

10. What according to the poem is involved in the process of growing up? (NCERT)

**Ans.** According to this poem, the process of growing up involves many stages. Attainment of mental maturity can be seen as an indication of growing up. When a person becomes logical, rational and is able to maintain individual thoughts, he is assumed to be grown up. A grown up can discriminate between reality and fantasy and between reality and hypocrisy.

## • Long Answer Type Questions

1. Is independent thinking a step towards adulthood? If yes, then how? Explain with reference to the poem 'Childhood'.

**Ans.** Yes, independent thinking is a step towards adulthood. As a child, one is not able to make one's own decisions and one's thinking is always influenced and directed by adults. A child is so innocent that it is not able to distinguish between truth and imagination.

As a child's thinking is influenced by others, it has no individuality. Moreover, it is prone to manipulations which lead to fickle-mindedness. Independent thinking makes us what we are. It shapes our personality and we are known among people through what our mind thinks and what decisions we take.

If we want to stay away from evil people who try to influence our thoughts for their selfish purposes, then only independent thinking can help us. We cannot claim to be an individual if we cannot take decisions ourselves.

2. Write an article about childhood and the process of growing up in reference to the poem 'Childhood.'

**Ans.** **Childhood**  
*by Manav Singh*

When I was a child, the world seemed to be a place of joy and happiness to me. There was nothing worth worrying about. Whenever I cried, somebody consoled me. When I did not like to sit alone, I was always in somebody's arms. My mother always looked after me. These are my most cherished memories and I believe that looking at a child playing and enjoying childhood makes me somewhat nostalgic.

Childhood is free from all cares. There are no duties or responsibilities on the shoulders of a child. A child only eats, drinks, sleeps and plays. Thus, a child lives in the bliss of ignorance and innocence. As we grow in age, worries about

studies, choice of profession, shouldering responsibilities, etc., keep haunting us. Tensions, stress and worries become a part of adult life and the individual forgets to live a carefree life.

## • Extract Based Questions

1. Read the extract to attempt the questions that follow.

“When did my childhood go?  
Was it the time I realised that adults were not  
All they seemed to be,  
They talked of love and preached of love,  
But did not act so lovingly,  
Was that the day!”

- Do you think that the poet is appreciative of the adults?
- Explain ‘They talked of love and preached of love, but did not act so lovingly’.
- What had happened with the poet in the given lines?
- The poet is continuously asking questions and answering it himself. What does this show?
- What can be said about the feelings of the poet as per the extract?

**Ans.** (i) I do not think that the poet is appreciative of the adults as he finds his trust on them to be breaking.  
(ii) The given lines highlight the hypocrisy of adults. They tell us to be loving and caring but were themselves not very loving and caring.  
(iii) In the given lines, the poet depicts how he had grown up. One of the stages of growing up for him was to realize that adults were pretentious.  
(iv) The poet's act of continuously asking questions and answering it himself shows that the poet feels that the journey from childhood to adulthood is set in stages.  
(v) As per the extract, one can ascertain that the poet is nostalgic about his childhood.

2. Read the extract to attempt the questions that follow.

“When did my childhood go?  
Was it when I found my mind was really mine,  
To use whichever way I choose,  
Producing thoughts that were not those of other  
people  
But my own and mine alone  
Was that the day!  
Where did my childhood go?  
It went to some forgotten place,  
That is hidden in an infant's face,  
That's all I know.”

- (i) Why is the poet eager to know the lost place of his childhood?
- (ii) Which quality is achieved by the poet in the given extract?
- (iii) Explain 'Producing thoughts that were not those of other people but my own and mine alone'.
- (iv) The poet says that his childhood has gone to a forgotten place. Comment.
- (v) Do you think the poet will be able to see his childhood?

**Ans.** (i) The poet is eager to know about his childhood because he cherishes childhood the most and once again wishes to lead the innocent life of a child.

- (ii) In the given extract, the poet has achieved 'individuality.' He now can form his own opinions and ideas.
- (iii) The given lines point out that once a child gains individuality, his trust and blind belief on adults break. Now, the child can form his own perspective and ideas that are unique.
- (iv) The poet, in saying that his childhood has gone to a forgotten place, points out that once childhood is lost it will never be seen again. The loss of childhood is a permanent loss.
- (v) I don't think that the poet will be able to see his childhood as it is lost to him now. However, he can see the childhood innocence in an infant's face.