

6. The Half-closed Eyes of the Buddha and the Slowly Sinking Sun (Summary)

The Half-closed Eyes of the Buddha and the Slowly Sinking Sun . This material is prepared by Mr. Shreekanta Poudel, President of STFT, Gandaki as well as an experienced English Teacher of Janapriya Secondary School, Pokhara-8, Kaski. About the author (Shankar Lamichhane)

Shankar Lamichhane (1928-1975) was born in Kathmandu but lived in Banaras with his uncle at a young age. After receiving college education at Tri-Chandra College in Kathmandu, he took his first job at the age of twenty-two and worked for a number of governmental and cultural institutions in the capital. In his later years, he became the manager of a handicrafts store. Lamichhane was an admirer of modern American fiction and frequently mixed with foreign visitors to Nepal. His stories are heavy with symbolism, often lacking a conventional plot and more closely resembling essays, but his prose is rich and poetic. This story is taken from Himalayan Voices: An Introduction to Nepali Literature, translated and edited by Michael Hutt.

The story deals with the monologues of two characters a tourist guide in Kathmandu valley and a foreign tourist. The story is different from conventional stories and, instead of showing actions and events, the story records what the two characters think in a stream of consciousness technique.

- Born in 1928 in Kathmandu, and lived in Banaras at the young age.
- Studied at Tri-Chandra College • Did handicraft business and mixed up with foreigners coming to Nepal • Awarded Madan Puruskar in 1967 for his magnum Opus "Abstract Chintan Pyaj"
- Died in 1975 early age of 47
- Main Characters

The guest: a tourist came to visit Nepal, loves Nepal and knows many things about it.

The guide: a tourist guide with different perspectives, sympathetic
A paralyzed boy: suffering from polio, cannot move his body parts except eyes
Plot of the Story

Exposition: The tourist expresses his joy watching the beauty of Nepal and its generous people.

Rising Action: The tourist talks about Buddha and Bhrikuti

Climax: The guide takes the tourist to see a house to show the pulse of their reality.

Falling Action: They meet a paralyzed boy who can only move his eyes.

Resolution: The guide thinks the boy's eyes are just as beautiful as the setting sun's reflection in the eyes of the Buddha.

Summary of the Story

The story expresses the feelings of a Western tourist visiting The Kathmandu Valley and a Nepali tourist guide. It begins with the Western tourist describing the panorama of the green valley. She likes the scent of the mountain and the peaceful atmosphere here as she grew up among the plains and the sea. She feels welcomed by the half-closed eyes of the Buddha.

The tourist says The Easterners have given them the religion and the Puranas, images of brass and ornaments of ivory, manuscripts of palm leaves and inscriptions on copperplate as well as a civilization and its wisdom. She has read many books about Nepal and can teach its history even to the guide. She says it has the cultural and religious diversity and the Nepali soil has enabled them to flourish together. She also talks about different kinds of food like mo:mo: and so on.

She remembers an old woman telling the story of Brikuti to her grandson while smoking hookah. She adores the smiling faces of Nepalese people to welcome them. She compares it with the time after her successful labour and being with her father, and many

more. Finally, she tells about the magical eyes and expresses her desire to see the pleasant light of sunset reflected in the eyes of the Buddha, unforgettable eyes.

The second part of the story deals with the feeling of the guide. He begins with history of Chobhar hill, the cleft made by Manjushri with the sword to outflow the water. He talks about Adinath to give living example of Nepalese tolerance and coexistence. Then he takes the tourist to a house where she can find the pulse of reality. He wanted to show her one of his maker's strangest forms of creation. It is a child whose body is completely paralyzed by polio. He cannot do any physical activities. He compares the gaze of the child with the samyak gaze.

He explains it as the capacity found only in an Easterner: the capacity for remaining speechless, inactive, powerless, and immobile, and yet to survive without complain. The guide lies to the child's parents and tells them she is a doctor. So, they think her as their eldest child coming for the remedy of the brother. They become delighted. There is intimacy, kindliness, and gratitude in their eyes. He also shows the child's sister whose body functions properly. She can do different activities as per her age. They can see the gleamed light in the child's eyes when his mother scolds his sister. He surely wants to say it is fun to do mischievous activities that he can't. They learn with the experience.

The guide concludes that the eyes that the tourist see welcome her and they hide the end of life. They are just as beautiful as the setting sun's reflection in the eyes of the Buddha.

Analysis of the Story

This story was published in 'Himalayan Voices: An Introduction to Nepali Literature' in 1991. It is written in stream of consciousness technique which is beyond the convention. Instead of having action and events, it describes the feelings of two main characters of the story: the tourist and the tourist guide. Its setting is Kathmandu

Valley that integrates the religious and cultural value with its natural beauty. The tourist seems to be fond of the natural beauty of Nepal. She admires its religious tolerance and cultural integration. She adores the generosity of the Easterners that many things have been given to the West. However, it is ironical that she says being a foreigner she is the expert at the history of Nepal and can even teach the Nepalese guide about it. The half-closed eyes of the Buddha refer to peaceful environment and its reflection in the setting sun symbolizes natural beauty of Nepal that the tourist wants to admire.

On the other hand, the guide wants to show the sorrow among the beautiful land and the instances of poverty among the rich culture. This is also an attack to the bookish wits who think themselves an expert without actually experiencing the reality. He may also want to tell the tourist that it is an opportunity to the Westerners to bring the smiles back to the sufferers and make the Easterners more prosperous in every aspect.