

Chapter 10: The Comet -II

Comprehension Check

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Question 1: "For a moment James wondered if he had done his sums right." Why was James doubtful about his sums and calculations?

Answer: Based on his calculations, James Forsyth had predicted that Comet Dutta would collide with the earth within ten months. Sir John made him realise about the panic his prediction would create throughout the world. After reaching his hotel room, he looked up from his window. He saw a star-studded night sky. He felt that it was difficult to calculate exactly the impending calamity in advance. That is why he grew doubtful about his sums and calculations.

Question 2: What did the scientists at the conference say about James's sums?

Answer: Many experts and scientists from all over the world had attended the conference. They checked and rechecked James' calculations with the latest observations of Comet Dutta. They found his sums right. There was no escape from direct hit of the Comet with the earth. However, there can be partial loss to life and property if the Comet grazes the atmosphere of the earth.

Question 3: Immediate action was needed, the scientists decided. Give one example each of 'defensive' and 'offensive' action mentioned in the text.

Answer: It was decided by the scientists that immediate action was needed. The 'defensive' measure was to dig underground bunkers and live in them. The 'offensive' measure was to deflect the Comet from its path by giving it a push. It could be achieved by a well-timed and directed gigantic nuclear explosion through remote control.

Question 4: "I am not buying any Christmas presents till December 15th." What did Sir John mean by that?

Answer: Duttada asked Sir John if he thought they would succeed in their efforts to avert the tragedy of the collision of Comet Dutta with earth. Sir John was not seemed to be sure. That is why he said that he was not going to buy any christmas presents till December 15. Fifteenth of December. It was the day when the Comet was expected to strike with the earth.

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Question 1: What is Duttada expected to do on his return from London?

Answer: Duttada's wife Indrani Debi wished to pacify the evil spirit behind the Comet seen by her husband. So, she had arranged a 'yajna' to be performed by Guruji at their home. It was arranged so that the Comet may not cause any ill effect on earth. So, on his return from London, Duttada is expected to participate in this 'yajna'.

Question 2: What is the reaction to the proposal?

Answer: Duttada had a rational and a scientific mind. He knew that yajna had not scientific advantage in the age of science. The movements of Comets were forecast precisely by mathematical calculations. Their visits had no correlation with disasters on the earth. That is why he refused to be a part of the 'yajna' in any way.

Question 3:

(i) What does 'Project Light Brigade' refer to?

(ii) What does Sir John say about the Project in his letter to Duttada in October ?

Answer:

(i) 'Project Light Brigade' refers to a highly secret astronomical operation. It was chalked out by the top experts and scientists of the world. Sir John Macpherson, the Defence Science Advisor to the British Government was the main brain behind it. It was designed to avert the collision of Comet Dutta with the earth.

(ii) Sir John wrote to Duttada in his letter "The charge of the Light Brigade has begun. Let us hope for the best." Thus he conveyed to Duttada that the spacecraft had been launched on time.

Question 4: Did Sir John buy Christmas presents on December 15? How did Duttada get to know about it?

Answer: Yes, Sir John bought Christmas presents on December 15. Duttada got an urgent telex message from the British Council. Its contents were 'I am confident now of buying my Christmas presents on December 15th-John Macpherson. This is how Duttada came to know about it. It indicated that the operation Light Brigade was going to be successful.

Question 5: Why, according to Indrani Debi, had the Comet not been disasterous? Do you agree with her?

Answer: Indrani Debi believed that the disaster was averted because of the 'yajna' being performed at their house. She told Duttada that there could be some major disaster on earth. So, she gave all the credit to the Yajna. I do not agree with her because I am not superstitious like she.

Question 6: Is Duttada's general outlook

(i) rational?

(ii) moral?

(iii) traditional?

Choose the right word. Say why you think it right.

Answer: I think Duttada's general outlook is 'rational'. He has a scientific approach. Scientists are rational in their approach to a problem. They have analytical mind. That is why Duttada is against all the superstitions and unnecessary rituals. He did not participate in the 'yajna' performed at his house.

Exercise

Discuss the following topics in small groups. Write your answers afterward.

Question 1: Should a scientist's findings be suppressed if they seem disturbing? Give reasons for and against the topic.

Answer:

FOR

Sometimes a scientific invention or discovery can be too dangerous to reveal. It can create panic throughout the world. For instance, a scientist's findings in the story, if revealed, could create the worldwide panic. If it was told to the people that a Comet was going to strike the earth, then the people of the whole world would have been disturbed. Then there would have been a total chaos. These people could not have done anything to avoid the disaster. Rather they would have worsened the situation. That is why I earnestly believe that if any scientific finding seem disturbing, it is better to hide these from the general public.

AGAINST

I firmly believe that under no circumstances the truth should be suppressed. Therefore if a scientist's findings seem to be disturbing even then these must be revealed to the world. This way the people of the world can try to find a solution unitedly. There have been many attempts to suppress or negate some scientific discoveries. Some scientists were punished also. But for the overall progress of humanity it is essential that truth should not be suppressed. The scientific discovery of earth being round was very much opposed initially. But now it is an established fact. Therefore I think under no circumstance a scientist's findings should be suppressed.

Question 2: Do you think ours is a traditional society? What are some of the things we do to be called traditional? Do you find these things useless or useful?

Answer: Despite a lot of scientific advancement, most of the people of our society are still tradition. Still they do many things or rituals based on old beliefs and superstitions. Their approach is not rational and scientific. In the world we find more people of the traditional views held by Mrs. Dutta in the story "The Comet. She believed that the Comet would bring ill-luck and disaster on the earth. Therefore, she had arranged a Shanti yajna to pacify the evil spirits. As compared to it there are comparatively less people like Mr. Dutta who think logically, rationally and scientifically. I don't agree with the traditional beliefs of Mrs. Dutta. In this age when science has been so much advanced, it is useless to have such beliefs.

Question 3: Give two or three examples to show how science has been useful to us.

Answer: There are many scientific inventions which have made our lives much more comfortable. For instance, the invention of electricity has proved to be very beneficial for the mankind. If now we are living in air-conditioned comforts and moving in cars, trains and aeroplanes it is all due to the advancement of science.

Question 4: Give one example to show how science has been misused, and has a result been harmful to us.

Answer: I think one example of science being misused is invention of atomic bomb, which can destroy the world completely within minutes. Nuclear War can really be very dangerous.

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