



Flamingo

Textbook in English for Class XII
(Core Course)



ASSAM HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION COUNCIL
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING



5 Indigo

About the author

Louis Fischer (1896–1970) was born in Philadelphia. He served as a volunteer in the British Army between 1918 and 1920. Fischer made a career as a journalist and wrote for *The New York Times*, *The Saturday Review* and for European and Asian publications. He was also a member of the faculty at Princeton University. The following is an excerpt from his book – *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. The book has been reviewed as one of the best books ever written on Gandhi by *Times Educational Supplement*.

Notice these expressions in the text.

Infer their meaning from the context

- urge the departure
- harbour a man like me
- conflict of duties
- seek a prop

When I first visited Gandhi in 1942 at his ashram in Sevagram, in central India, he said, “I will tell you how it happened that I decided to urge the departure of the British. It was in 1917.”

He had gone to the December 1916 annual convention of the Indian National Congress party in Lucknow. There were 2,301 delegates and many visitors. During the proceedings, Gandhi recounted, “a peasant came up to me looking like any other peasant in India, poor and emaciated, and said, ‘I am Rajkumar Shukla. I am from Champaran, and I want you to come to my district!’” Gandhi had never heard of the place. It was in the foothills of the towering Himalayas, near the kingdom of Nepal.

Under an ancient arrangement, the Champaran peasants were sharecroppers. Rajkumar Shukla was one of them. He was illiterate



but resolute. He had come to the Congress session to complain about the injustice of the landlord system in Bihar, and somebody had probably said, “Speak to Gandhi.”

Gandhi told Shukla he had an appointment in Cawnpore and was also committed to go to other parts of India. Shukla accompanied him everywhere. Then Gandhi returned to his ashram near Ahmedabad. Shukla followed him to the ashram. For weeks he never left Gandhi's side.

“Fix a date”, he begged.

Impressed by the sharecropper's tenacity and story Gandhi said, “I have to be in Calcutta on such-and-such a date. Come and meet me and take me from there.”

Months passed. Shukla was sitting on his haunches at the appointed spot in Calcutta when Gandhi arrived; he waited till Gandhi was free. Then the two of them boarded a train for the city of Patna in Bihar. There Shukla led him to the house of a lawyer named Rajendra Prasad who later became President of the Congress party and of India. Rajendra Prasad was out of town, but the servants knew Shukla as a poor yeoman who pestered their master to help the indigo sharecroppers. So they let him stay on the grounds with his companion, Gandhi, whom they took to be another peasant. But Gandhi was not permitted to draw water from the well lest some drops from his bucket pollute the entire source; how did they know that he was not an untouchable?

Gandhi decided to go first to Muzzafarpur, which was en route to Champaran, to obtain more complete information about conditions than Shukla was capable of imparting. He accordingly sent a telegram to Professor J. B. Kripalani, of the Arts College in Muzzafarpur, whom he had seen at Tagore's Shantiniketan school. The train arrived at midnight, 15 April, 1917. Kripalani was waiting at the station with

Think as you read

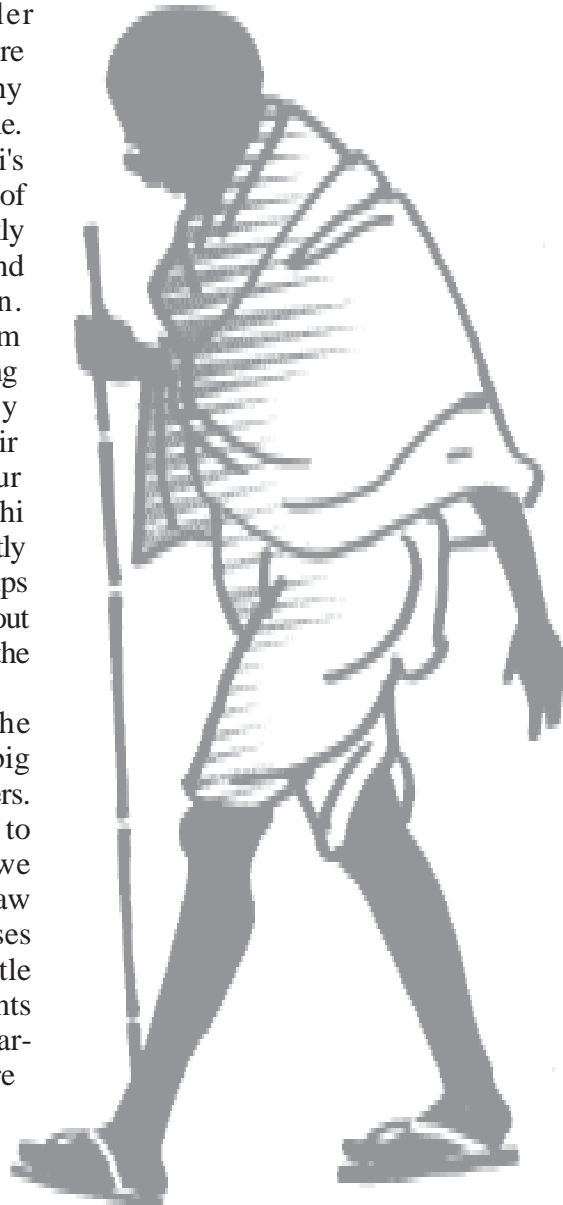
1. Strike out what is not true in the following.
 - a. *Rajkumar Shukla* was
 - (i) a sharecropper.
 - (ii) a politician.
 - (iii) delegate.
 - (iv) a landlord.
 - b. *Rajkumar Shukla* was
 - (i) poor.
 - (ii) physically strong.
 - (iii) illiterate.
2. Why is Rajkumar Shukla described as being 'resolute'?
3. Why do you think the servants thought Gandhi to be another peasant?



a large body of students. Gandhi stayed there for two days in the home of Professor Malkani, a teacher in a government school. “It was an extraordinary thing ‘in those days’”, Gandhi commented, “for a government professor to harbour a man like me”. In smaller localities, the Indians were afraid to show sympathy for advocates of home-rule.

The news of Gandhi's advent and of the nature of his mission spread quickly through Muzzafarpur and to Champaran. Sharecroppers from Champaran began arriving on foot and by conveyance to see their champion. Muzzafarpur lawyers called on Gandhi to brief him; they frequently represented peasant groups in court; they told him about their cases and reported the size of their fee.

Gandhi chided the lawyers for collecting big fee from the sharecroppers. He said, “I have come to the conclusion that we should stop going to law courts. Taking such cases to the courts does little good. Where the peasants are so crushed and fear-stricken, law courts are useless. The real relief for them is to be free from fear.”





Most of the arable land in the Champaran district was divided into large estates owned by Englishmen and worked by Indian tenants. The chief commercial crop was indigo. The landlords compelled all tenants to plant three twentieths or 15 per cent of their holdings with indigo and surrender the entire indigo harvest as rent. This was done by long-term contract.

Presently, the landlords learned that Germany had developed synthetic indigo. They, thereupon, obtained agreements from the sharecroppers to pay them compensation for being released from the 15 per cent arrangement.

The sharecropping arrangement was irksome to the peasants, and many signed willingly. Those who resisted, engaged lawyers; the landlords hired thugs. Meanwhile, the information about synthetic indigo reached the illiterate peasants who had signed, and they wanted their money back.

At this point Gandhi arrived in Champaran.

He began by trying to get the facts. First he visited the secretary of the British landlord's association. The secretary told him that they could give no information to an outsider. Gandhi answered that he was not outsider.

Next, Gandhi called on the British official commissioner of the Tirhut division in which the Champaran district lay. "The commissioner", Gandhi reports, "proceeded to bully me and advised me forthwith to leave Tirhut".

Gandhi did not leave. Instead he proceeded to Motihari the capital of Champaran. Several lawyers accompanied him. At the railway station, a vast multitude greeted Gandhi. He went to a house and, using it as headquarters, continued his investigations. A report came in that a peasant had been maltreated in a nearby village. Gandhi decided to go and see; the next morning he started out on the back of an elephant. He had not proceeded far when the police

Think as you read

1. List the places that Gandhi visited between his first meeting with Shukla and his arrival at Champaran.
2. What did the peasants pay the British landlords as rent? What did the British now want instead and why? What would be the impact of synthetic indigo on the prices of natural indigo?



superintendent's messenger overtook him and ordered him to return to town in his carriage. Gandhi complied. The messenger drove Gandhi home where he served him with an official notice to quit Champaran immediately. Gandhi signed a receipt for the notice and wrote on it that he would disobey the order.

In consequence, Gandhi received a summons to appear in court the next day.

All night Gandhi remained awake. He telegraphed Rajendra Prasad to come from Bihar with influential friends. He sent instructions to the ashram. He wired a full report to the Viceroy.

Morning found the town of Motihari black with peasants. They did not know Gandhi's record in South Africa. They had merely heard that a Mahatma who wanted to help them was in trouble with the authorities. Their spontaneous demonstration, in thousands, around the courthouse was the beginning of their liberation from fear of the British.

The officials felt powerless without Gandhi's cooperation. He helped them regulate the crowd. He was polite and friendly. He was giving them concrete proof that their might, hitherto dreaded and unquestioned, could be challenged by Indians.

The government was baffled. The prosecutor requested the judge to postpone the trial. Apparently, the authorities wished to consult their superiors.

Gandhi protested against the delay. He read a statement pleading guilty. He was involved, he told the court, in a 'conflict of duties'— on the one hand, not to set a bad example as a lawbreaker; on the other hand, to render the "humanitarian and national service" for which he had come. He disregarded the order to leave, "not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience to the higher law of our being, the voice of conscience". He asked the penalty due.

The magistrate announced that he would pronounce sentence after a two-hour recess and asked Gandhi to furnish bail for those 120 minutes. Gandhi refused. The judge released him without bail.

When the court reconvened, the judge said he would not deliver the judgement for several days. Meanwhile he allowed Gandhi to remain at liberty.



Rajendra Prasad, Brij Kishor Babu, Maulana Mazharul Huq and several other prominent lawyers had arrived from Bihar. They conferred with Gandhi. What would they do if he was sentenced to prison, Gandhi asked. Why, the senior lawyer replied, they had come to advise and help him; if he went to jail there would be nobody to advise and they would go home.

What about the injustice to the sharecroppers, Gandhi demanded. The lawyers withdrew to consult. Rajendra Prasad has recorded the upshot of their consultations – “They thought, amongst themselves, that Gandhi was totally a stranger, and yet he was prepared to go to prison for the sake of the peasants; if they, on the other hand, being not only residents of the adjoining districts but also those who claimed to have served these peasants, should go home, it would be shameful desertion.”

They accordingly went back to Gandhi and told him they were ready to follow him into jail. “The battle of Champaran is won”, he exclaimed. Then he took a piece of paper and divided the group into pairs and put down the order in which each pair was to court arrest.

Several days later, Gandhi received a written communication from the magistrate informing him that the Lieutenant- Governor of the province had ordered the case to be dropped. Civil disobedience had triumphed, the first time in modern India.

Gandhi and the lawyers now proceeded to conduct a far-flung inquiry into the grievances of the farmers. Depositions by about ten thousand peasants were written down, and notes made on other evidence. Documents were collected. The whole area throbbled with the activity of the investigators and the vehement protests of the landlords.

In June, Gandhi was summoned to Sir Edward Gait, the Lieutenant-Governor. Before he went he met leading associates and

Think as you read

1. The events in this part of the text illustrate Gandhi's method of working. Can you identify some instances of this method and link them to his ideas of *satyagraha* and non-violence?



again laid detailed plans for civil disobedience if he should not return.

Gandhi had four protracted interviews with the Lieutenant-Governor who, as a result, appointed an official commission of inquiry into the indigo sharecroppers' situation. The commission consisted of landlords, government officials, and Gandhi as the sole representative of the peasants.

Gandhi remained in Champaran for an initial uninterrupted period of seven months and then again for several shorter visits. The visit, undertaken casually on the entreaty of an unlettered peasant in the expectation that it would last a few days, occupied almost a year of Gandhi's life.

The official inquiry assembled a crushing mountain of evidence against the big planters, and when they saw this they agreed, in principle, to make refunds to the peasants. "But how much must we pay?" they asked Gandhi.

They thought he would demand repayment in full of the money which they had illegally and deceitfully extorted from the sharecroppers. He asked only 50 per cent. "There he seemed adamant", writes Reverend J. Z. Hodge, a British missionary in Champaran who observed the entire episode at close range. "Thinking probably that he would not give way, the representative of the planters offered to refund to the extent of 25 per cent, and to his amazement Mr. Gandhi took him at his word, thus breaking the deadlock."

This settlement was adopted unanimously by the commission. Gandhi explained that the amount of the refund was less important than the fact that the landlords had been obliged to surrender part of the money and, with it, part of their prestige. Therefore, as far as the peasants were concerned, the planters had behaved as lords



above the law. Now the peasant saw that he had rights and defenders. He learned courage.

Events justified Gandhi's position. Within a few years the British planters abandoned their estates, which reverted to the peasants. Indigo sharecropping disappeared.

Gandhi never contented himself with large political or economic solutions. He saw the cultural and social backwardness in the Champaran villages and wanted to do something about it immediately. He appealed for teachers. Mahadev Desai and Narhari Parikh, two young men who had just joined Gandhi as disciples, and their wives, volunteered for the work. Several more came from Bombay, Poona and other distant parts of the land. Devadas, Gandhi's youngest son, arrived from the ashram and so did Mrs. Gandhi. Primary schools were opened in six villages. Kasturbai taught the ashram rules on personal cleanliness and community sanitation.

Think as you read

1. Why did Gandhi agree to a settlement of 25 per cent refund to the farmers?
2. How did the episode change the plight of the peasants?

Health conditions were miserable. Gandhi got a doctor to volunteer his services for six months. Three medicines were available— castor oil, quinine and sulphur ointment. Anybody who showed a coated tongue was given a dose of castor oil; anybody with malaria fever received quinine plus castor oil; anybody with skin eruptions received ointment plus castor oil.

Gandhi noticed the filthy state of women's clothes. He asked Kasturbai to talk to them about it. One woman took Kasturbai into her hut and said, "Look, there is no box or cupboard here for clothes. The sari I am wearing is the only one I have."

During the long stay in Champaran, Gandhi kept a long distance watch on the ashram. He sent regular instructions by mail and asked for financial accounts. Once he wrote to the residents that it was time to fill in the old latrine trenches and dig new ones otherwise the old ones would begin to smell bad.



The Champaran episode was a turning-point in Gandhi's life. "What I did", he explained, "was a very ordinary thing. I declared that the British could not order me about in my own country."

But Champaran did not begin as an act of defiance. It grew out of an attempt to alleviate the distress of large numbers of poor peasants. This was the typical Gandhi pattern— his politics were intertwined with the practical, day-to-day problems of the millions. His was not a loyalty to abstractions; it was a loyalty to living, human beings.

In everything Gandhi did, moreover, he tried to mould a new free Indian who could stand on his own feet and thus make India free.

Early in the Champaran action, Charles Freer Andrews, the English pacifist who had become a devoted follower of the Mahatma, came to bid Gandhi farewell before going on a tour of duty to the Fiji Islands. Gandhi's lawyer friends thought it would be a good idea for Andrews to stay in Champaran and help them. Andrews was willing if Gandhi agreed. But Gandhi was vehemently opposed. He said, "You think that in this unequal fight it would be helpful if we have an Englishman on our side. This shows the weakness of your heart. The cause is just and you must rely upon yourselves to win the battle. You should not seek a prop in Mr. Andrews because he happens to be an Englishman".

"He had read our minds correctly", Rajendra Prasad comments, "and we had no reply... Gandhi in this way taught us a lesson in self-reliance."

Self-reliance, Indian independence and help to sharecroppers were all bound together.

UNDERSTANDING the text

1. Why do you think Gandhi considered the Champaran episode to be a turning-point in his life?
2. How was Gandhi able to influence lawyers? Give instances.
3. What was the attitude of the average Indian in smaller localities towards advocates of 'home rule'?
4. How do we know that ordinary people too contributed to the freedom movement?



TALKING about the text

Discuss the following.

1. “Freedom from fear is more important than legal justice for the poor.”
Do you think that the poor of India are free from fear after Independence?
2. The qualities of a good leader.

WORKING with words

- List the words used in the text that are related to legal procedures.
For example : deposition
- List other words that you know that fall into this category.

THINKING about language

1. *Notice the sentences in the text which are in ‘direct speech’. Why does the author use quotations in his narration?*
2. *Notice the use or non-use of the comma in the following sentences.*
 - (a) When I first visited Gandhi in 1942 at his ashram in Sevagram, he told me what happened in Champaran.
 - (b) He had not proceeded for when the police superintendent's messenger overtook him.
 - (c) When the court reconvened, the judge said he would not deliver the judgement for several days.

THINGS to do

1. Choose an issue that has provoked a controversy like the Bhopal Gas Tragedy or the Narmada Dam Project in which the lives of the poor have been affected.
2. Find out the facts of the case.
3. Present your arguments.
4. Suggest a possible settlement.

ABOUT THE UNIT ❖❖❖

THEME

The leadership shown by Mahatma Gandhi to secure justice for oppressed people through convincing argumentation and negotiation.



SUB-THEME

Contributions made by anonymous Indians to the freedom movement.

READING COMPREHENSION

- Intensive reading of factual writing to understand events and facts. The think as you read questions at the end of each section help in understanding descriptions of people, consolidating facts and focusing on what is important to understand further sections.
- Scanning for specific instance in the text to support given statements.
- Inferential questions to reason our certain statements in the text.

TALKING ABOUT THE TEXT

Discussion as a take-off from the text and making pupils think about issues such as freedom from fear as a prerequisite for justice. Understanding leadership qualities– direct relevance to pupils' prospects. Fluency development.

WORKING WITH WORDS

Making pupils notice the specialist vocabulary used in legal parlance.

NOTICE FORM

- Use of direct speech in narration. Pupils are already aware of the form changes when spoken words are reported. They should now be able to notice the choice of form in contexts of use to strengthen the effectiveness of narration.
- Use of the comma to separate subordinate clause from main clause if it precedes it, and its omission if it comes after the main clause.

THINGS TO DO

Extension activity to help pupils understand the method of Gandhian activism and relate it to current problems of national importance.

- Investigation of facts.
- Presentation of arguments.
- Settlement.



9 Memoirs of a Chota Sahib

John Rowntree

John Rowntree (1906–1975) was the last British Senior Conservator of Forests of Assam. He left Shillong with his family a few days after Independence and returned to England where he took up work as a journalist and media commentator. His *A Chota Sahib: Memoirs of a Forest Officer*, from where the lesson is an excerpt, is a light-hearted account of the times in Guwahati and its neighbouring areas on the eve of Independence as seen through the eyes of a British forest officer making the account not only local specific but also relevant to the present time.

Notice these expressions in the text.

Infer their meaning from the context.

- pug marks
- hot bed
- forded
- ingenious
- macabre
- epiphytes

We arrived at Gauhati after the long dusty journey across India and made our first home on the bank of the Brahmaputra as the cold weather was getting under way and the climate becoming bearable. The Public Works Department had given the walls of the bungalow a coat of fresh limewash and had painted the woodwork liberally with earth oil. In front was a raised portico which served as a car port, and on top, a veranda from which we had a splendid view of the river and its shipping and, beyond, the Himalayas. In the foreground was Peacock Island, with the dome of a Hindu temple just visible through the trees. I never discovered peacocks, but only monkeys on the island.

As the cold weather advanced the Brahmaputra shrank and the



distance between Peacock Island and the mainland grew less until, by the end of the hot weather, only a narrow dividing channel remained. There was a belief that if this channel ever dried up completely it would mean the end of the British Raj. In some years it very nearly did, but whether one could walk dry shod to the island in 1947, Independence year, I don't know because I no longer lived in Gauhati at the time.

Although Gauhati was the port of entry, so to speak, into Assam, most travellers passed through on their way between Calcutta and Shillong or to districts further up the valley. Occasionally, however, they stayed overnight, and sometimes we had unusual visitors, one of which was a tiger that had, presumably, been washed up by a flood. The pug marks of the large cat were clearly traceable through our compound.

The Kamrup district, of which Gauhati was the headquarters, extended to both banks of the river. The North Bank had a character all its own — a vast, remote stretch of flat, ageless land between the sandbanks of the Brahmaputra and the Himalayan foothills. It was a strange place, where the rivers dried up in the hot weather or suddenly disappeared under ground. Sometimes in camp we had to dig for water, which was so dirty that it had to be cleaned by dropping alum into the bucket to precipitate the mud. There were numerous *bheels* replete with wildfowl, peafowl strutted through the grass, and in the Manas Sanctuary bordering the Himalayan state of Bhutan, were a few rhino. The rivers were full of *mahseer*, and their banks a favourite site for the Governor's Christmas camps, which it was my task to build, and for which I sometimes received a polite letter of thanks from the great man.

This was the home of the Assam *cheetal*, and it was here that I once witnessed the delightful sight of a she sloth-bear carrying her cuddlesome cub on her back. Right in the middle of the wilds, a

Think as you read

1. Briefly describe the scene observed by the author from the veranda of his bungalow on the bank of the Brahmaputra.
2. What is the belief about the dividing channel between Peacock Island and the mainland of Guwahati that the author mentions?
3. What does the author say about the importance of Guwahati? Is the statement true in our time today also?



European and his wife had leased a piece of land from the forest department with a view to growing simul trees for the nearby match factory. They had rigged up miles of electric fencing in an attempt to keep out the deer, but with little success as far as the deer were concerned – they just jumped over it. On the other hand, never having met an electric fence before, I received the full treatment. I am afraid their enterprise was in no sense a very profitable one.

During the cold weather the North Bank was delightful. In the rainy season it was a hot bed of malaria and was best avoided. Travel at this time of year could also pose problems. The rivers were in flood and the bamboo bridges erected at the start of the cold weather were soon washed away. These bridges swayed and creaked alarmingly under a passing car, but were immensely strong and extremely useful. Once, I forded one of these flooded rivers on horseback. With difficulty, I persuaded my mount to plunge into the water, then slipped over his croup and hung on to his tail, which I was able to use as a rudder. When I pushed it to the right the horse veered to the left and vice versa, and we eventually made a safe landing on the other side of the river. More usually, crossings were made in a *mar* boat, a tedious performance at the best of times. The *mar*, which was a ferry, consisted of a plank platform covering two open boats placed alongside one another. These were either paddled across the river or, connected by a running cable to another stretched across the river, were propelled from one side to the other by the force of the current.

This ingenious device worked very well, but constant adjustments had to be made to allow for the rise and fall of the rivers. A whole series of ghats, or landing places, had to be constructed at different levels on the river bank. Fortunately traffic was light and, although

Think as you read

1. What character of the North Bank of the Brahmaputra does the author refer to?
2. What information does the author give us about Manas Wild Life Sanctuary?
3. Describe the author's experience of crossing a flooded river on horseback on the North Bank of the Brahmaputra.



crossing took time, there were few delays. The other difficulty about travel anywhere in Assam during the rains was the fact that the dirt tracks soon became unusable by normal cars, and the Jeep had yet to be invented.

Once when touring with my family on the North Bank, we left our return rather late, or rather the monsoon broke rather early, and although the roads were still motorable, driving became distinctly dicy. Most of the main roads were built on top of embankments to raise them well above the normal flood level, and they were narrow, single-track affairs. The road we were on became increasingly greasy, one skid led to another, and finally we slithered over the edge into a paddy field some six feet below the road. Paddy fields are divided into small enclosures by low banks in order to prevent the flood water running away, and we had one of the most bumpy rides of my experience before finding a way back onto the road.

At the start of our travels, before the rains broke, the roads had been so dry that the surface was almost invisible under a cloud of dust. Driving was difficult and one's destination uncertain. At one place, road work had been in progress, and one of the favourite hazards of road workers, a ramp, lay concealed from sight under the dust cloud. No warning signs were in use, or if they were they were not visible, nor was this one of the puny ramps usually encountered in civilised countries, but a step about six inches high. Needless to say, the impact when we hit it was considerable. As the car was carrying my wife, myself, the baby and her ayah, our servants and the usual mass of camp equipment, it says much for the motor engineers of those days that not a single spring was broken on either of these occasions. Probably the fact that we were packed like sardines in the car saved our bones.

The South Bank was more homely; distances were less and the terrain smaller. The reserve forests were mostly in one block. It was a

Think as you read

1. Relate the author's experiences of the road accident during the monsoon on the North Bank.
2. Relate the author's reminiscence of the forest bungalow at Kulsì.



country of low hills and valleys, the trees interspersed with villages and cultivation, and the forest itself, mostly of sal, had more the character of English woodland. Two comfortable forest bungalows served our needs. One at Kulsī was delightfully situated on a wooded spur above the river; the other, Rajapara, in a clearing, would have been equally charming if it had not been for the bats which lived in the roof. Their droppings were a constant reminder of their presence and the fusty smell of bat was ever with us. Larger, but less smelly, were the huge fruit-eating bats, with a wing span of five feet, which lived in a tree outside the bungalow and issued forth at dusk in search of food — a strange host of ghostly shapes gliding through the air on silent wings. Close to the bungalow was a large *bheel* where an earthquake had once lowered the surface, and the land became inundated with water. It was an eerie spot where tree skeletons still rose out of the water — a reminder that it had once been dry land.

In spite of its somewhat macabre associations, however, Rajapara was a pleasant place to work in, and the paddy fields where the jungle fowl gleaned the grain after harvest, and sometimes found their way into the pot, were cheerful, sunny and open spaces. But Kulsī was my favourite. The bungalow was surrounded by teak plantations, planted some sixty years before and now almost mature. In fact, growth in the Assam climate was too rapid to produce first-class teak and the local variety, though a useful furniture wood, was never up to Burma standards. Close by was a rubber plantation of *Ficus elastica*, but no tapping had taken place for some years, since Indian rubber was no longer able to compete with para rubber commercially. *Ficus elastica* belongs to the fig family, of which several species are found in Assam. Some grow to an immense size, having started life as climbing epiphytes on other trees. Eventually the host tree becomes completely encased by the *ficus* which forms a smooth bark around it — the host dies and the epiphyte takes over. Some, like the banyan, send down aerial roots from their branches which help to buttress the huge bulk of the tree.

UNDERSTANDING the text

1. Give an account of the author's experiences of the floods on the North Bank of the Brahmaputra during the monsoon.



2. Relate the author's observation on the use of *mar* boats as a mode of river transport in Assam.
3. Give the author's description of a sal forest.
4. Describe the author's experience with bats in the Rajapara forest bungalow.

TALKING about the text

1. The author makes a reference to "Peacock Island" located close to the Forest Officer's bungalow on the bank of the Brahmaputra. Can you make a guess which island the author is referring to? What is the 'Hindu temple' mentioned in the lesson (You may consult any books on the temples/heritage sites/history and archaeology of Guwahati)
2. Today Guwahati (note the change in spelling) is highlighted as the "Gateway to the North-East". What was the status of Guwahati like in the period around 1947. (You may draw references from the lesson.)
3. The author mentions a rubber plantation near Kulsi. Why had no rubber-tapping taken place for some years then? Find out the present situation of rubber plantation in the State.

THINKING about language

1. One of the interesting features of the vocabulary of English is that it is enriched by borrowings from a large number of languages. Likewise, English has enriched the vocabulary of other languages too. There are a large number of borrowings from English in Assamese and vice-versa. In this lesson you will find a few words that are borrowings from Assamese. Read these sentences:
 - (a) More usually crossings were made in a *mar* boat.
 - (b) Close to the bungalow was a large *bheel*.
 - (c) This was the home of the Assam *cheetal*.

Find out a few more examples of (i) Assamese words that are used in English and (ii) English words used in Assamese.



2. Notice the underlined words in these sentences and tick the option that best explains their meanings:

- (a) The pug marks of the large cat were clearly traceable.
- (i) stripes on the body
 - (ii) dots or spots
 - (iii) footprints
 - (iv) scratch marks left on the body
- (b) The rivers were full of mahseer.
- (i) sand banks
 - (ii) large reptiles like crocodiles
 - (iii) tortoise
 - (iv) fresh water fish
- (c) I once forded one of these rivers on horseback.
- (i) jumped across
 - (ii) crossed the river without using a bridge
 - (iii) swam across
 - (iv) crossed the river by using a bamboo bridge
- (d) It was an eerie spot where trees skeletons still rose out of the water.
- (i) very charming
 - (ii) causing a strange fear
 - (iii) noisy
 - (iv) very quiet

WRITING

1. Deforestation in Assam and elsewhere has resulted in loss of habitats for wild life besides destroying the ecological balance. Design a poster on the evils of deforestation. (Hints: The sal forests around Kulsi today have nearly disappeared.)
2. Write a letter to the editor of a local English daily drawing the attention of the State Government and the Inland Water Transport Corporation for exploring the feasibility of introducing regular water-transport facilities along the Brahmaputra to touch important river side towns.
3. Write a factual description of a flood situation.



5 A Roadside Stand

About the poet

Robert Frost (1874–1963) is a highly acclaimed American poet of the twentieth century. Robert Frost wrote about characters, people and landscapes. His poems are concerned with human tragedies and fears, his reaction to the complexities of life and his ultimate acceptance of his burdens. *Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening*, *Birches*, *Mending walls* are a few of his well-known poems. In the poem *A Roadside Stand*, Frost presents the lives of poor deprived people with pitiless clarity and with the deepest sympathy and humanity.

Before you read

Have you ever stopped at a roadside stand? What have you observed there?

The little old house was out with a little new shed
In front at the edge of the road where the traffic sped,
A roadside stand that too pathetically pled,
It would not be fair to say for a dole of bread,
But for some of the money, the cash, whose flow supports
The flower of cities from sinking and withering faint.
The polished traffic passed with a mind ahead,
Or if ever aside a moment, then out of sorts
At having the landscape marred with the artless paint
Of signs that with N turned wrong and S turned wrong
Offered for sale wild berries in wooden quarts,
Or crook-necked golden squash with silver warts,
Or beauty rest in a beautiful mountain scene,
You have the money, but if you want to be mean,
Why keep your money (this crossly) and go along.
The hurt to the scenery wouldn't be my complaint



So much as the trusting sorrow of what is unsaid:
Here far from the city we make our roadside stand
And ask for some city money to feel in hand
To try if it will not make our being expand,
And give us the life of the moving-pictures' promise
That the party in power is said to be keeping from us.

It is in the news that all these pitiful kin
Are to be bought out and mercifully gathered in
To live in villages, next to the theatre and the store,
Where they won't have to think for themselves anymore,
While greedy good-doers, beneficent beasts of prey,
Swarm over their lives enforcing benefits
That are calculated to soothe them out of their wits,
And by teaching them how to sleep they sleep all day,
Destroy their sleeping at night the ancient way.

Sometimes I feel myself I can hardly bear
The thought of so much childish longing in vain,
The sadness that lurks near the open window there,
That waits all day in almost open prayer
For the squeal of brakes, the sound of a stopping car,
Of all the thousand selfish cars that pass,
Just one to inquire what a farmer's prices are.
And one did stop, but only to plow up grass
In using the yard to back and turn around;
And another to ask the way to where it was bound;
And another to ask could they sell it a gallon of gas
They couldn't (this crossly); they had none, didn't it see?

No, in country money, the country scale of gain
The requisite lift of spirit has never been found,
Or so the voice of the country seems to complain,
I can't help owning the great relief it would be
To put these people at one stroke out of their pain
And then next day as I come back into the sane,
I wonder how I should like you to come to me
And offer to put me gently out of my pain.

quarts : bottles or containers
squash : a kind of vegetable (gourd)



THINK it out

1. The city folk who drove through the countryside hardly paid any heed to the roadside stand or to the people who ran it. If at all they did, it was to complain. Which lines bring this out? What was their complaint about?
2. What was the plea of the folk who had put up the roadside stand?
3. The government and other social service agencies appear to help the poor rural people, but actually do them no good. Pick out the words and phrases that the poet uses to show their double standards.
4. What is the 'childish longing' that the poet refers to? Why is it 'vain'?
5. Which lines tell us about the insufferable pain that the poet feels at the thought of the plight of the rural poor?

TALK about it

Discuss in small groups.

The economic well-being of a country depends on a balanced development of the villages and the cities.

TRY this out

You could stop at a *dhaba* or a roadside eatery on the outskirts of your town or city to see

1. how many travellers stop there to eat.
2. how many travellers stop for other reasons.
3. how the shopkeepers are treated.
4. the kind of business the shopkeepers do.
5. the kind of life they lead.

Notice the rhyme scheme. Is it consistent or is there an occasional variance? Does it indicate thought predominating over sound pattern?

Notice the stanza division. Do you find a shift to a new idea in successive stanzas?



THINK it out

1. How do 'denizens' and 'chivalric' add to our understanding of the tiger's attitudes?
2. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer's hands are 'fluttering through her wool' in the second stanza? Why is she finding the needle so hard to pull?
3. What is suggested by the image 'massive weight of Uncle's wedding band'?
4. Of what or of whom is Aunt Jennifer terrified with in the third stanza?
5. What are the 'ordeals' Aunt Jennifer is surrounded by? Why is it significant that the poet uses the word 'ringed'? What are the meanings of the word 'ringed' in the poem?
6. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer created animals that are so different from her own character? What might the poet be suggesting, through this difference?
7. Interpret the symbols found in this poem.
8. Do you sympathise with Aunt Jennifer? What is the attitude of the speaker towards Aunt Jennifer?

Notice the colour suggested in the poem.

Notice the repetitive use of certain sounds in the poem.