

POETRY

1. *The Frog and the Nightingale*

(Vikram Seth)

ABOUT THE POET

Born in Calcutta in 1952 to Prem Nath, a Shoe Company Executive, and Laila Seth, a Judge, Vikram Seth is the eldest of three children in the Seth family.

A brilliant student right from his days in Doon School, Vikram passed his "O level" exams with distinction. Later he went on to study at Tonbridge School (Kent) and Oxford University in England and Stanford University in the USA. He studied philosophy, politics and economics. During his two year stay in China (1980-82), he studied poetry and languages at Nanjing University and found himself "more interested in poetry than economics".

He shot into international fame with his verse novel 'A Suitable Boy' (1993). Published in fourteen countries, A Suitable Boy sold over one million copies worldwide and earned him the title "A Tolstoy - On His First Try" (*The Washington Post*). His works include: Mappings (1980), From Heaven Lake (1983), The Golden Gate (1986), All You Who Sleep Tonight (1990), Beastly Tales from Here to There (1991), Three Chinese Poets (1992), A Suitable Boy (1993), Arion and the Dolphin (1994), An Equal Music (1999).

ABOUT THE POEM

Introduction:

"The Frog and the Nightingale" is an allegory having a participation of more than half a dozen birds and animals like ducks, herons, loons, toads, teals, tiddlers etc. The poem lays bare the manipulation and hypocrisy of the unscrupulous scheming people who resort to all underhand means to survive and thrive in the competitive world.

he did.

Once again 'the crass cacophony' of the Frog began to blare from the sumac tree. The Frog once again became the unrivalled singer of the bog.

RHYME SCHEME

The rhyme scheme of the poem is *aa bb cc dd ...*

Done

THEME

suffering

innocent

The poem highlights the plight of those gullible people whose simplicity and credulous nature makes them complete misfits in the world of manipulation. The go-getters elbow their way to the forefront pushing the deserving to the background. The shy and the timid fail to put their foot down and the dominating and the domineering go about exploiting them without any sense of remorse or guilt.

12/5/17

TITLE

The story of "The Frog and the Nightingale" is based on two main characters - the Nightingale and the Frog. Hence, the poet has rightly included both of them in the title of the poem. However, though the Nightingale is the pivotal character, the poet has chosen to call the poem "The Frog and Nightingale" rather than "The Nightingale and the Frog". Thus, he cleverly hints at the dominating nature of the Frog. Hence, the poem has a well-chosen and a well-worded title.

21/07/21
MESSAGE

In order to survive in the manipulative world today, it is important to have worldly wisdom. It is only one's individuality and reasoning that can save one from getting duped and exploited. One must know one's limitations and capabilities to be able to decide the course of one's life.

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STANZAS FOR COMPREHENSION

Read the following extracts and answer the questions that follow in one or two lines.

(I)

17/5/12

Once upon a time a frog
Croaked away in Bingle Bog
Every night from dusk to dawn
He croaked awn and awn and awn.
Other creatures loathed his voice,
But, alas, they had no choice.

Once there lived a frog in Bingle Bog (in a marshy area) who used to croak incessantly (continuously) right from the evening till morning. The other inhabitants of the Bingle Bog found his voice very irritating but the poor creatures had no choice as the obstinate frog insisted on croaking.

- (a) Who is 'he' in the above lines? What did he do all night?

"He" is the Frog. He sang from dusk to dawn in his crass and croaking voice.

- (b) Which word has been invented? What is its meaning and purpose?

Awn. It means 'on'. It has been deliberately spelt 'awn' to make rhyme with 'dawn' both phonetically and visually.

- (c) What did the other creatures not have a choice in? Why?

The other creatures had no choice but to listen to the Frog because the Frog was the only singer of the bog and he forced his song on them.

- (d) Why did the other creature loathe that voice?

They loathed it because it was crass, meaningless and jarring.

13/5

(II)

And the crass cacophony

Blared out from the sumac tree

At whose foot the frog each night

Minstrelled on till morning light.

The other inhabitants of the Bingle Bog hated the loud and unpleasant noise created by the frog. However, they couldn't do anything as the stubborn frog croaked under the sumac tree all night.

- (a) Explain: 'crass cacophony'.

The Frog's voice was coarse, harsh and croaky and therefore unpleasant to hear.

- (b) Where did the frog live?

The frog lived under the foot of a sumac tree in the Bingle Bog.

- (c) Why did the frog 'minstrel' till morning light?

Carrying a fallacious ^{good singing} impression about his singing skills, the frog sang all night. Moreover being haughty and proud, the more the other creatures tried to stop him, the more he sang.

(III)

Neither stones nor prayers nor sticks,
Insults or complaints or bricks
Stilled the frog's determination
To display his heart's elation.

The stubborn frog would not stop croaking despite the other creatures' complaints and polite requests. Even pelting of stones and bricks and wielding of sticks had no effect on his high spirits and he continued giving expression to his pride and joy with his loud croaks.

(a) In what manner did the frog display his heart's elation?

The frog displayed his elation by singing loudly and heartily in his croaking voice. *happiness*

(b) How did the other creatures in the bog react to this?

They loathed his voice and pelted stones and bricks at him to silence him.

(c) Did they succeed in their efforts?

No, they did not succeed in their efforts to silence the Frog who continued to sing unmindful of the inconvenience caused to others.

(d) What personality trait of the frog is revealed here?

He is rigid, obstinate and unconcerned.

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(IV)

But one night a nightingale
In the moonlight cold and pale
Perched upon the sumac tree
Casting forth her melody.

One moonlit night, it so happened that a nightingale perched itself on a sumac tree and started singing melodious songs.

(a) **Whose songs had echoed in the bog all night earlier?**

The Frog's songs.

(b) **What did the nightingale do one night?**

One night the Nightingale sat on the sumac tree and sang a melodious song throughout the night.

(c) **How was the nightingale's song different from the frog's?**

The Nightingale's song was beautiful and melodious while the Frog's was coarse and jarring.

(V)

Dumbstruck sat the gaping frog.

And the whole admiring bog

Stared towards the sumac, rapt,

And, when she had ended, clapped.

The Nightingale sang so very melodiously that the frog was spellbound and he heard her with rapt attention with his mouth open. All the inmates of the bog were also spellbound. Engrossed in the melody of her song they all gazed at the sumac tree. As the bird ended her song, she was applauded enthusiastically.

(a) **Who is 'she' in these lines?**

'She' in the above lines is the Nightingale.

(b) **Why was the frog dumbstruck?**

He had never heard such a sweet and melodious voice. (He knew his own voice to be a crass cacophony)

(c) **Why was everyone staring 'towards the sumac, rapt'?**

They were surprised to hear a melodious voice coming from the sumac tree. Normally, they would hear the crass cacophony of the frog from there.

(d) **Explain the phrase: 'whole admiring bog.'**

All the creatures in the bog appreciated and applauded the Nightingale for her sweet and melodious singing.

- (e) What had been the frog's experience at the sumac tree?

The Frog had a very bad experience at the sumac tree. All the Bog creatures hated his coarse and jarring voice. They tried to silence him by beating him with stones, sticks and bricks and by insulting him and complaining against him but all their efforts had failed to silence him.

(VI)

Toads and teals and tiddlers, captured
 By her voice, cheered on, enraptured:
 "Bravo!" "Too divine!" "Encore!"
 So the nightingale once more,
 Quite unused to such applause,
 Sang till dawn without a pause.

All the creatures like toads, small ducks and fish were thrilled and they cheered the bird praising her voice and asked her to sing once more. The Nightingale who was not used to such applause obliged them and sang continuously till the morning.

- (a) Give two reasons why the audience praise the Nightingale's song so lavishly.

Firstly, it was really very melodious and sweet. Secondly, used to hearing only the crass cacophony of the frog, the song sounded very soothing in contrast.

- (b) The Nightingale was not used to such praise. How does she respond to it?

She obliged the bog creatures by entertaining them with her melodious singing throughout the night.

- (c) Who are 'toads and teals and tiddlers'?

They are a large frog like amphibian, a small duck and a small fish respectively. All three are inhabitants of the Bog.

(d) Which figure of speech does the poet use in this stanza?

The poet uses 'alliteration' in the first line of the stanza to lend a musical effect to it. 'T' sound is repeated to show a variety of audience that came to watch the Nightingale perform.

(VII)

Next night when the Nightingale
Shook her head and twitched her tail,
Closed an eye and fluffed a wing
And had cleared her throat to sing
She was startled by a croak.

Next night the Nightingale prepared to ^{start} commence her song. She shook her head and quivered her tail. Anticipating an ecstatic joy, the Nightingale closed her eye and fluffed her wings. Just as she cleared her throat to start with her song, to her utter surprise, she heard a croaking sound.

(a) How does the Nightingale prepare herself for singing?

She makes elaborate preparations before singing e.g. she shook her head, twitched her tail, closed an eye, fluffed a wing and cleared her throat.

(b) What do these lines tell us about the Nightingale as a singer?

She is a very ^{systematic} meticulous singer. She makes all the necessary preparations and has all the mannerism of a great singer.

(c) What had been the effect of her song the previous night?

The previous night her song had enraptured the audience who kept asking her to sing again and again.

(d) Why was the Nightingale startled?

The Nightingale was startled by the Frog's croaking voice.

(VIII)

"You see,
I'm the frog who owns this tree.

In this bog I've long been known
For my splendid baritone
And, of course, I wield my pen
For Bog Trumpet now and then".

Introducing himself as the owner of the sumac tree, the frog told the Nightingale that since a long time he was reputed to be a very good singer of the bog. Claiming to be an authority on music, he further boasted that in the capacity of a music critic he also wrote for the 'Bog Trumpet'.

(a) **How did the frog introduce himself?**

The frog introduced himself as the owner of the sumac tree and a popular singer with a baritone. He also boasted of writing for the 'Bog Trumpet'.

(b) **The frog boasts that : (i)..... (ii).....**

(i) He has a splendid baritone and is famous as a singer.

(ii) He also writes a column as a music critic for the Bog Trumpet.

(c) **What is a baritone?**

A baritone is a male singing voice between bass and tenor.

(d) **To whom is the frog speaking?**

He is speaking to the Nightingale.

(e) **What trait of frog's personality do these lines bring out?**

These lines reveal that the Frog is proud and boastful. His claim over the sumac tree shows his possessive nature.

(IX)

"Did you ... did you like my song?"

"Not too bad - but far too long.

The technique was fine, of course,

But it lacked a certain force."

Impressed with the frog's tall claims, the credulous Nightingale asked him if he liked her song. Like a knowledgeable critic, the frog said that her performance was not bad as the technique was fine but it lacked force and was too long.

- (a) Identify the speakers in line 1 and 2-4 respectively.

The speaker of line 1 is the Nightingale while the frog speaks lines 2-4.

- (b) What is their topic of discussion?

They are discussing the merits and demerits of the Nightingale's song.

- (c) Do you think the frog is fair in his judgement? Give reasons for your answer.

No, the Frog is not fair in his judgement. He is jealous and biased and deliberately dubs the Nightingale's song as 'too long' and lacking 'certain force.'

(X)

"Oh!" the nightingale confessed.
Greatly flattered and impressed
That a critic of such note
Had discussed her art and throat:

Though the frog didn't appreciate her song much, the Nightingale felt quite flattered and honoured as a critic of his calibre had commented on her technique and voice.

- (a) Who is the critic referred to in these lines? What were his comments on the Nightingale's song?

The Frog is referred to as the critic. He had commented that the Nightingale's song had a fine technique but was too long and lacked a certain force.

- (b) The Nightingale confessed.....

that the Frog's evaluation of her song was true. She does so out of modesty.

(c) **Why is the Nightingale greatly flattered and impressed?**

In her opinion, the Frog is a masterly singer. So when he discusses her song and talent, the Nightingale feels greatly flattered and impressed.

(XI)

"I don't think the song's divine.

But - oh, well - at least it's mine."

"That's not much to boast about,"

Said the heartless frog.

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The Nightingale admitted that there was no divinity in her song but she said confidently that the song had an originality as it was her own song which, she had neither imitated nor borrowed from anybody. But the heartless frog swept aside the nightingale's claim on originality as 'nothing much'.

(a) **Why does the Nightingale feel her song is not divine?**

The Nightingale feels that her song is not divine because she is very modest and humble about her singing talent.

(b) **What quality does the Nightingale attribute to her song?**

The Nightingale claims her song to have originality.

(c) **Why is the frog called 'heartless'?**

He does not appreciate the Nightingale's melodious song and criticizes her song without bothering about her feelings.

(d) **What personality trait of the Nightingale is reflected in these lines? Give one other trait of hers as seen in the poem.**

Humble, Modest (*in these lines*).

Simpleton, gullible, sensitive (*elsewhere*)

(e) **How does the frog change his own statement - 'that's not much to boast about' - later in the poem?**

Later on he calls the Nightingale stupid enough not to sing her own song.

(XII)

"Without proper training such as I
- And few others - can supply
You'll remain a mere beginner,
But with me you'll be a winner."

"Dearest frog," the nightingale
Breathed: "This is a fairy tale -

laying stress

Praising himself the frog claimed that few other artists had as much calibre as he had. He further told the Nightingale emphatically that she would remain a novice until she underwent training under his expert guidance. The training, he assured would make her a winner, that is, she would outshine others. The nightingale was thrilled at the frog's proposal. She couldn't believe her ears and everything sounded like a fairytale.

(a) What do the words 'beginner' and 'winner' suggest here?

'Beginner' stands for a person absolutely raw in some field and lacking perfection and professionalism. 'Winner' means a person who becomes an authority in some subject by achieving excellence, name and fame.

b) What characteristic of the frog can be seen here?

The frog is shown to be a very boastful creature who goes about blowing his own trumpet and criticizing others mercilessly.

c) What is a fairy tale? What does the phrase mean in the above lines?

A fairy tale is a fairy story marked by apparently magical success or good fortune. In the above lines the phrase conveys the surprise at the fact that as noted a singer and music critic as the Frog was offering to train the Nightingale to sing.

(XIII)

And you're Mozart in disguise
 Come to earth before my eyes.
 "Well, I charge a modest fee.
 Oh! But it won't hurt, you'll see."

उसके ऋण में

The nightingale complimented the frog saying that Mozart had revisited the earth in his guise. The calculating frog didn't take a minute to add that he would charge a modest amount as his fee. This disappointed the nightingale but the frog assured her that the fee structure won't pinch her at all.

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(a) How was the frog a 'Mozart in disguise'?

To the simple minded and credulous Nightingale the frog is as great a musician as Mozart. In fact, the Nightingale thought Mozart himself had come down to Earth in the guise of the frog.

(b) What did the frog say to entice the Nightingale?

The frog enticed her by promising to turn her into a singing sensation through his training.

(c) What trait of the frog's personality is revealed here?

The lines reveal the cunning and calculating frog's greed for money.

(d) Why is the Nightingale worried at the mention of the fee?

She is perhaps worried because she did not expect the frog to ask for a fee and perhaps she is too poor to afford it.

(XIV)

Now the nightingale, inspired,
 Flushed with confidence, and fired
 With both art and adoration,
 Sang - and was a huge sensation.

पूरी शरीर डूँ

The nightingale felt very much inspired. Bubbling with self-confidence she

sang very skilfully putting in all her feelings. Her song made her a singing sensation.

(a) What inspired the Nightingale?

Her own talent, the admiration of the Bog creatures and the Frog's acceptance of her as a trainee inspired the nightingale.

(b) How did the Nightingale become a huge sensation?

The Nightingale became a huge sensation as she had a melodious voice. Her hardwork and the appreciative attitude of the creatures of the Bog also contributed towards it.

(c) Explain: 'flushed with confidence.'

The generous appreciation of her song by the Bog creatures and the Frog's accepting her as a trainee greatly boosted the Nightingale's confidence.

(XV)

Animals for miles around
 Flocked towards the magic sound.
 And the frog with great precision
 Counted heads and charged admission.

Animals were drawn from all directions and long distances. The money-minded calculative frog counted every single individual among the audience and charged entry free.

(a) Why do the animals come flocking to the sumac tree?

Used only to hearing the crass cacophony of the Frog, the Bog creatures are quite surprised to hear the Nightingale's melodious voice. So they come flocking to the Bog to find out who the singer is and to enjoy the melody from close quarters.

(b) What is the magic sound?

The magic sound stands for the melodious voice of the Nightingale.

(c) How did the frog make money?

The frog minted money by commercially organising the Nightingale's concerts and keeping the ticket money all to himself.

15 | 5 | 14

(XVI)

Though next morning it was raining,

He began her vocal training.

"But I can't sing in this weather"

Come, my dear - we'll sing together.

The next morning, though it was raining and though the Nightingale expressed her inability to sing in such a weather, the frog insisted upon starting her training. He volunteered to sing along with her.

से करने को प्रस्ताव देने का अ

(a) What training did the frog give the nightingale?

The frog gave the Nightingale the training to sing effectively.

(b) 'But I can't sing in this weather'. Why can't the Nightingale sing?

She cannot sing in rainy weather because it is not natural for her to do so whereas the Frogs loves to sing during the rains.

(c) Why did the frog insist that the Nightingale should sing?

The Frog insisted that the Nightingale should sing because he was preparing her for another concert from which he could make a lot of money. Moreover excessive singing could seriously damage Nightingale's vocal cords - something the frog wanted to happen so that he could again become the unrivalled singer of the Bog.

(d) What was the effect of the training?

As a result of excessive singing the Nightingale burst one of her veins and died.