

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 5: A ROADSIDE STAND



A ROADSIDE STAND

~Summary~

-by Robert Frost

Stanza- 1

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.

Explanation: On the roadside there is an old house which has an extended shed. This shed is towards the edge of the road. The owners have made this towards the edge so that the fast-moving vehicles speeding by may notice and stop there to buy the food and refreshments sold there.

This shed made a pitiable sight, it almost seemed as if it was begging for food but that was not so. Rather it was made so that the rich people who passed by the shed in their beautiful cars would stop there and buy something, so that some cash would flow into the hands of the owners, who then would be able to buy some of the things that are sold in the city.

The poor feel that the money the rich spend to adorn their gardens with flowers can be used to better the lot of the less privileged. But, the rich people passed by without paying any attention to the shed. If anyone cared to stop, it was only due to the irritation at the paint and decor in poor taste that was marring the picturesque scenery of the area. Also, the shed had a board on which the word STAND was painted such that the letters S and N in it were written in reverse, displaying the carelessness of the local people. This shed sold wild berries in wooden boxes and gourds with twisted necks and silver lumps on them

Besides these things, the place also offered a stay in the scenic surroundings. However, the travellers felt that these poorly kept stands spoiled the pristine beauty of the landscape. The rich who passed by the place had the money but had no desire to spend it. According to them, persons who looked after the roadside stand, they were mean and miserly. They wanted to keep the money with themselves.

Stanza- 2

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.

Explanation: The poet does not want to accuse the rustics of marring the beauty of the landscape. He is more worried about the untold pain that unsaid words cause to the faith of the people belonging to the countryside. The rustics have installed a roadside stand so far away in the countryside just to earn some hard cash.

They long to have a comfortable lifestyle as depicted in movies. They hope against hope that the city citizens may fulfil the promise of giving them economic independence although it was within the purview of the party in power to do so.

Stanza- 3

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.

Explanation: It is in the news that these countryside folk are to be relocated in the villages where they will have all comforts. They will enjoy privileges of the theatre and the local store just like their urban counterparts So busy will be these people in enjoying these comforts that they will have no time to think about themselves or fight for their rights. The 'haves' are called 'beasts of prey' because, in the garb of benefits that they will provide to the rustics, they will exploit them no end. Later the privileged ones will easily forget their promises they made, leaving these poor people more impoverished.

Stanza- 4

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?

Explanation: The poet is very disturbed and feels very helpless when he sees their childish longing for money which is never fulfilled. These people keep their windows open all day as if in prayer waiting desperately and uselessly for someone to stop at the stand. Sadness at their disappointment can be noticed all around the place when no one stops there. Out of thousands of cars passing by, just one stopped only to inquire the prices of things sold there. Another stopped just to use the backyard of the place to reverse their car. Yet another stopped just to inquire about the directions for where it wanted to go. The fourth stopped to know if they could sell them a gallon of gas (petrol). The farmer grumbles in an angry manner that they could see for themselves that it was not sold there. Actually, the country people are upset over the callous attitude of city dwellers. Moreover, it shows the contrast between the thinking of the city denizens and the stark reality of the rural people.

Stanza- 5

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.

Explanation: Finally the poet bemoans that the spirit to scale new heights to break the shackles of economic dependency is not present in the rustics. That is why they do not stop complaining against the economic inequalities. The poet strongly feels that the countryside people should be freed from the pain of poverty and deprivation. Next morning when the poet gains his senses, he wonders what if someone else thinks in the same manner for him so that he is gently relieved from his pain and agony of seeing the miserable condition of these people.

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NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 102) (Think It Out)

Question 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?

Answer: "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"

According to the city folk, the stalls having inartistic signboards blemish the landscape with scenic beauty.

Question 2. What was the plea of the folk who had put up the roadside stand?

Answer: The rural folks pathetically pleaded for customers to stop and buy their goods. City folks passed by on this road and therefore the rural folks set up the stand on the roadside to grab their attention and sell the goods.

Question 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.

Answer: The poet criticizes the government for the double standards and the social service agencies, which promise to improve the living standards of the farmers and guide them to the right side of life. But when it comes to delivering the promise, they forget them or fulfill them by keeping in mind their own benefits. The poet calls them as "beneficent beasts of prey" and "greedy good-doers", who "swarm over their lives". The poet says that these people make well thought out and calculated shrewd moves, to which farmers who are unaware and innocent fall prey. These clever people rob off the peace of mind of these simple and humble farmers. The poet says,

"..... 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.”

Question 4. What is the ‘childish longing’ that the poet refers to? Why is it ‘vain’?

Answer: According to Robert Frost, the people running the roadside stand suffer from ‘childish longing’. They always expect customers and wait for them. Their windows are always kept open to attract them. When no one turns up, they become sad. They always wait to listen to the squeal of brakes and the sound of a car stopping but all their efforts go in vain.

Question 5. Which lines tell us about the insufferable pain that the poet feels at the thought of the plight of the rural poor?

Answer: Being filled with empathy, the poet is not able to bear the plight of the innocent and unassuming rural people. The lines which tell us about the insufferable pain is:

“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”