

Chapter – 9

The Comet – I

Comprehension Check

Q1. Why does Indrani Debi dislike Duttada's "hobnobbing" with Dibya?

Answer. Indrani Debi disliked Duttada's "hobnobbing" with Dibya because for her, that telescope was like a designing woman who had ensnared her husband.

Q2. She is complaining and smiling. Why is she smiling?

Answer. She was smiling at the forgetful nature of Duttada. He used to overlook the practical problems of living. His doctor had told him to take special precautions against the cold. However, he would not remember to put on a sweater even if it was lying on his bedside chair.

Q3. (i) What was Duttada's secret ambition?

(ii) What did he do to achieve it?

Answer. (i) Duttada's secret ambition was to discover a new comet one day.

(ii) Duttada knew that he had only an eight-inch telescope, which was very small as compared to the gigantic ones that professional astronomers had. He also knew that his chances of fulfilling his ambition were very little. Yet, he was optimistic and he persevered. He sat every night with his small telescope and gazed at the stars, believing he would discover a comet one day.

Q4. What is the difference between a planet and a comet, as given in the story?

Answer. Like planets, comets also orbit round the Sun, but their orbits are highly eccentric. Once in a while, a comet comes close to the Sun. It has a longish tail that is lit brilliantly by the sunlight, and then it recedes into darkness, not to be seen again for years or for centuries.

Q5. Why was Duttada hopeful that he would discover a new comet soon?

Answer. Duttada was hopeful that he would discover a new comet soon because he knew that the professionals with their pre-assigned programmes would be looking at faint stars and hazy galaxies. They might miss such an insignificant thing as a comet, which they would not be expecting to see. Amateurs had often discovered new comets, which the professionals had missed.

Q6. Why does Duttada say — "I almost wish I had not discovered this comet."?

Answer. Duttada said that he almost wished he had not discovered the comet because it brought in unwelcome publicity for him. There were numerous receptions and functions which he had to attend. He was an introvert and such a lifestyle was not to his liking.

Q7. Why is his wife unhappy about the discovery?

Answer. His wife was unhappy about the discovery because she believed that comets brought ill-luck, and she wished a good man like Duttada was not associated with such a discovery.

Q8. How did Sir John get hold of James' original manuscript?

Answer. James' original manuscript was to be published in 'Nature'. Sir John got hold of it as the editor of 'Nature' was his friend.

Q9. What is the important point the paper makes?

Answer. The important point that the paper made was that Comet Dutta would collide with the earth.

Q10. Why does Sir John say that James' paper should not be published?

Answer. Sir John said that the paper should not be published because if the news of the inevitable collision became known to the world, it would result in panic.

Q11. What do the two men finally decide to do?

Answer. The two men finally decided to tone down the news of the collision by adding lots of ifs and buts in the paper, so that the conclusion would not seem very certain. Also, they decided to arrange an urgent meeting of experts from all over the world to think of a countermeasure.