

Ques I Discuss the plot construction of the novel *Journey to Ithaca*.

Ans. Anita Desai is a well known Indian novelist. She grew up during World War II. Her writing is focused on discovering truth, quest for meaning and value and freedom of human being. She has to her credit several novels like *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* and *Fasting* nominated for the Man Booker Prize. She is honored with Guardian's award for Children's Fiction to her literary works *Feasting* (1999), *The Village by the Sea* (1983), *Cry the Peacock* (1980).

The novel *Journey to Ithaca* is a beautiful picture of the people's struggling hard to seek the spiritual truth and their journey for this attempt. It is published in 1996. It is the picture of multiple journeys undertaken by major characters in the novel. The novel begins with Matteo and Sophie's journey. Matteo belongs to a luxurious European family. He is grown with sophisticated parents living in Italy. In the childhood Matteo is a misfit child to the worldly life. He used to feel suffocated to the rich material in the house like velvet hangings and tapestries. Unlike normal boys he was very cool and silent boy. He used to be quite incommunicative with the teachers as well as his mates. He used to refuse to eat meat, gravy, and pastries. He used to prefer very simple life. So he is taken out from the school. His mother appoints an English tutor named Fabian for him. But when the tutor introduces him with Hermann Hesse's books it instilled in him the desire for mystical East. So his mother dismisses the tutor. After the tutor's departure Matteo becomes lonely and from then onwards he begins his alienated life. After his marriage with Sophie also it doesn't stop. He undertakes the journey with Sophie to East for spiritual quest.

Sophie is a journalist, self-reliant, frank and believes in logical explanation of things. According to plan this newly married couple moves from Italy to India for celebrating marriage. They start their journey from Hotel Monaco in Bombay.

Actually this is the journey of Matteo for spiritual quest. He leaves western life and changes his life style and also dress style. He begins to wear pyjama and cotton vest. As Anita Desai has described Matteo makes his journey , “ to find India, to understand India, and the mystery that is at the heart of India”. In the search of a saga he comes across several fake sages like- babaji sitting on water, woman wearing string of wooden beads and lecturing to the crowd, a mediating yogi unaware of fearful tigers, a woman sitting and meditating in cave sitting for several hours in the company of snakes and scorpions etc. Even he with Sophie joins a group of pilgrimage to shrine outside the city. But nowhere he gets the expected spiritual truth.

Sophie and Matteo is a strange couple. Sophie dislikes the Matteo's life style and his foolish attempts. She needs answers to everything. So she feels tired of wandering with Matteo aimlessly. So for Sophie, Matteo decides to go Goa. In Goa Sophie joins the drug tribe on the beach. She prefers the worldly enjoyments lie smoking and drinking with them. But later she feels tired of it. Matteo also feels suffocated in this atmosphere so this couple now shifts to a Ashram in Bihar. This ashram becomes a dungeon for them. Matteo takes there a class in Sanskrit. They experience the strong discrimination in the ashram. The guru of the ashram rejects Sophie's touch even to the water. In addition to it her pregnancy is considered as the sinful touch. So the guru pushes out to Matteo from the ashram. Both decide to come out of this fake atmosphere.

Then they reach in the ashram run by a woman addressed as the mother at the foothills of Himalaya. The mother allows families to live in ashram. There is no religion that inspires Matteo well. He thinks this place as his destination. He devotedly begins to work in ashram. He performs the role of letter writer for mother, washer man in kitchen sink and then in charge of publication unit for printing and publishing Master Premkumar's message. Sophie lives in the hospital.

She is taken care by a doctor. Meanwhile she gives birth to two children, Giacomo, son and Isabel, daughter. Sophie feels hateful towards Mother and her ashram. She feels her as, “ a monster spider that had spun this web to catch these silly flies.” She goes back to Italy but when she gets the news of Matteo’s illness she comes back to meet him. She feels that the root cause of Matteo’s indifferent nature is Mother. So she decides to reveal the past of mother. She goes back to Italy and keeps her children at their grandparents and begins her journey to find out the past of Mother.

Sophie undertakes her journey through Mediterranean, Alexandria, Cairo, Paris, Venice, New York and then to India. She collects the fact about Mother that the real name of Mother is Laila, daughter of Hamid and Alma. She is born in Cairo. Like Matteo she was a misfit child and caused trouble to her parents and teachers. She dislikes to live in home because she considered home as a prison. So her parents shifted her to Paris, her French aunt, Francoise. Her house Laila feels quite suffocated in Paris. She rejects to go church. She leaves the house and begins roaming around the city. There she joins a dance troupe run by Master Krishna where she thinks she will seek spiritual quest. So she wanders with this group for divine experience but she realizes that the real intention of this troupe is to earn money. So she leaves this group and comes to India at the foothills of Himalaya where she gets divine experience and she becomes ‘Mother’ of ashram.

The novel develops with the epilogue where Sophie comes back to the ashram to narrate the whole past about Mother to Matteo but after reaching there she gets the news of Mother’s death and Matteo’s imitation of the same path. She gets the information that Matteo has gone on the mountain peak for the search of peace. There Sophie realizes the meaning of pilgrimage and she also decides to follow the path of Matteo. She decides to go on mountain for divine experience.

In the end, Giacomo, son of Sophie and Matteo comes home frightened at his grandparents and informs that he has seen his father in the white cloth and looking like Jesus. Everybody disagrees with him and the child is made quite.