

“Like the Sun”

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Name: _____ Per: _____

When you get to a *, stop and answer the question in the sidebar.

Truth, Sekhar reflected, is like the sun. I suppose no human being can ever look it straight in the face without blinking or being dazed. He realized that, morning till night, the essence of human relationships consisted in tempering truth so that it might not shock. This day he set apart as unique day – at least one day in a year we must give and take absolute Truth whatever may happen. Otherwise life is not worth living. The day ahead seemed to him full of possibilities. He told no one of his experiment. It was a quiet resolve, a secret pact between him and eternity.*1

The very first test came while his wife served him his morning meal. He showed hesitation over a tit-bit, which she had thought was her culinary masterpiece. She asked, “Why, isn’t it good?” At other times he would have said, considering her feelings in the matter, “I feel full-up, that’s all.” But today he said, “It isn’t good. I’m unable to swallow it.” He saw her wince and said to himself, “Can’t be helped. Truth is like the sun.”

His next trial was in the common room when one of his colleagues came up and said, “Did you hear of the death of so and so? Don’t you think it a pity?”

“No,” Sekhar answered. “He was such a fine man...” the other began. But Sekhar cut him short with: “Far from it. He always struck me as a mean and selfish brute.”*2

During the last period when he was teaching geography for Form A, Sekhar received a note from the headmaster: “Please see me before you go home.” Sekhar said to himself: It must be about these horrible test papers. A hundred papers in the boys’ scrawls; he had shirked this work for weeks, feeling all the time as if a sword were hanging over his head.*3

The bell rang and the boys burst out of the class.

Sekhar paused for a moment outside the headmaster’s room to button up his coat; that was another subject the headmaster always sermonized about.

He stepped in with a very polite “Good evening, sir.”

The headmaster looked up at him in a very friendly manner and asked, “Are you free this evening?”

Sekhar replied, “Just some outing which I have promised the children at home...”

“Well, you can take them out another day. Come home with me now.”*4

“Oh... yes, sir, certainly...” And then he added timidly, “Anything special, sir?”

“Yes,” replied the headmaster, smiling to himself... “You didn’t know my weakness for music?”

“Oh, yes, sir...”

“I’ve been learning and practicing secretly, and now I want you to hear me this evening. I’ve engaged a drummer and a violinist to accompany me- this is the first time I’m doing it full-dress and I want your opinion. I know it will be valuable.”

Sekhar’s taste in music was well known. He was one of the most dreaded music critics in the town. But he never anticipated his musical inclinations would lead him to this trial... “Rather a surprise for you isn’t it?” asked the headmaster. “I’ve spent a fortune on it behind doors...” They started for the headmaster’s house. “God hasn’t given me a child, but at least let him not deny me of the consolation of music,” the headmaster said, pathetically, as they walked. He incessantly chattered about music: how he began one day out of sheer boredom; how his teacher at first laughed at him, and then gave him hope; how his ambition in life was to forget himself in music.

At home the headmaster proved very ingratiating. He sat Sekhar on a red silk carpet, set before him several dishes of delicacies, and fussed over him as if he were a son-in-law of the house. He even said, “Well, you must listen with a free mind. Don’t worry about these test papers.” He added humorously, “I will give you a week’s time.”

“Make it ten days, sir,” Sekhar pleaded.

1. What pact or promise does Sekhar make? What will he do for one day?

2. What truth does Sekhar tell his wife? What truth does he tell his co-worker?

3. What does Sekhar think the headmaster wants to talk to him about?

4. What personality trait does this statement reveal about Sekhar’s headmaster?

“All right, granted,” the headmaster said generously. Sekhar felt really relieved now- he would attack them at the rate of ten a day and get rid of the nuisance.

The headmaster lighted incense sticks. ‘Just to create the right atmosphere.’ He explained. A drummer and a violinist, already seated on a Rangoon mat, were waiting for him. The headmaster sat down between them like a professional at a concert, cleared his throat, and began an *alapana* (improvisational Indian classical music), and paused to ask, “Isn’t it good *Kalyani* (a traditional folk song)?” Sekhar pretended not to have heard the question. The headmaster went on to sing a full song composed by Thyagaraja and followed it by two more. All the time the headmaster was singing, Sekhar went on commenting within himself, ‘He croaks like a dozen frogs. He is bellowing like a buffalo. Now he sounds like loose window shutters in a storm.’ The incense sticks burnt low. Sekhar’s head throbbed with the medley of sounds that had assailed his ear-drums for a couple of hours now. He felt half stupefied. The headmaster had gone nearly hoarse, when he paused to ask, “Shall I go on?” Sekhar felt greatest pity for him. But he felt he could not help it. No judge delivering a sentence felt more pained and helpless. Sekhar noticed that the headmaster’s wife peeped in from the kitchen, with eager curiosity. The drummer and the violinist put away their burdens with an air of relief. The headmaster removed his spectacles, mopped his brow, and asked, “Now, come out with your opinion.”

“Can’t I give it tomorrow, sir?” Sekhar asked tentatively. *5

“No. I want it immediately- your frank opinion. Was it good?”

“No, sir...” Sekhar replied.

“Oh! ...Is there any use continuing my lessons?”

“Absolutely none, sir...” Sekhar said with his voice trembling. He felt very unhappy that he could not speak more soothingly. Truth, he reflected, required as much strength to give as to receive.

All the way home he felt worried. He felt that his official life was not going to be smooth sailing hereafter. There were questions of *increment* (salary increases) and *confirmation* (job security) and so on, all depending upon the headmaster’s goodwill.

All kinds of worries seemed to be in store for him... Did not Harischandra lose his throne, wife, child, because he would speak nothing less than the absolute Truth whatever happened?

At home his wife served him with a sullen face. He knew she was still angry with him for his remark of the morning. Two casualties for today, Sekhar said to himself. If I practice it for a week, I don’t think I shall have a single friend left.

He received a call from the headmaster in his classroom next day. He went up apprehensively.

“Your suggestion was useful. I have paid off the music master. No one would tell me the truth about my music all these days. Why such antics at my age! Thank you. By the way, what about those test papers?”

“You gave me ten days, sir, for correcting them.”

“Oh, I’ve reconsidered it. I must positively have them here tomorrow...” *6 A hundred papers in a day! That meant all night’s sitting up! “Give me a couple of days, sir...”

“No. I must have them tomorrow morning. And remember, every paper must be thoroughly scrutinized.”

“Yes, sir,” Sekhar said, feeling that sitting up all night with a hundred test papers was a small price to pay for the luxury of practicing truth. *7

5. Why does Sekhar want to give his opinion tomorrow instead?

6. Why does the headmaster “reconsider” the extension he gave Sekhar? What does this show about his personality?

7. What does this final comment reveal about Sekhar? Does he regret the pact he made?

Write a 4-5 sentence summary of the important points of the story: