

Passage 2**A Devoted Son**

- 1 When the examination results appeared in the morning papers, Rakesh scanned them, before taking the good news to his father, Varma, and bowing down to touch his feet. 'I'm at the top of the list, Papa,' Rakesh murmured, after this mark of respect. 'First in the country.'
- 2 Bedlam broke loose then. All day, visitors streamed into the small yellow house to congratulate the parents of this wonderful son, to slap Rakesh on the back and fill the house and garden with the sounds and colours of a festival. There were gifts – clothes, garlands, enough fountain pens to last years, even a few watches – all in a multicoloured whirl of pride and of shining vistas newly opened. So much had been sacrificed to send Rakesh to school, and at last the fruits of the sacrifices had arrived. When the neighbours heard that Rakesh had bowed down to touch his father's feet when he got the results, they shook their heads in wonder and approval at such exemplary filial behaviour. But some said, 'Do you think Varma is giving himself airs? He himself has never even seen the inside of a school.'
- 3 That was only the beginning of Rakesh's success. He won a scholarship, went to university, became a doctor in the most prestigious of hospitals, and even returned occasionally to the small yellow house, where the first thing he did was to bow and touch his father's feet. Rakesh eventually established his own clinic, which he took his parents to see in his new limousine. His mother gloated over the strange fact that he did not marry a foreign girl, but one from his own village, a girl so placid that she settled into the household like a charm, apparently too good-natured to want Rakesh to set up home independent of his parents, as any other girl might have done.
- 4 However, none of this was accomplished in the wink of an eye: it was the achievement of a lifetime. His mother died contented: was it not her own son who looked after her in her last illness? Rakesh's father retired from work and grew old; he developed such mysterious diseases that even Rakesh could not decide when it was something of significance and when it was merely a figment of his father's imagination. Varma had an exasperating habit of stretching out very suddenly and lying absolutely still, allowing the whole family to fly around him in a flap, weeping and wailing, and then suddenly sitting up, stiff and gaunt, as if to mock their mistaken belief.
- 5 After a while, no-one paid much notice, all except, of course, Rakesh. It was Rakesh who brought Varma his tea in the morning, and who persuaded him to take the evening air out in the garden. All of this was very gratifying for the old man, but then dramatic events ensued. When his son started to supervise Varma's diet – 'Nothing rich, like oil, butter or cream, Papa,' – he stared at Rakesh with a disbelief that darkened quickly to reproach. A son who actually refused his father the food he craved? He complained in a martyred tone to his old neighbour: 'That is what it has come to.' If Varma asked for another helping, in a voice which cracked theatrically, Rakesh himself would come to the door, gaze at him sadly and shake his head. Although the daughter-in-law kept tactfully out of the way, the old man could just see the cruel smiles she was trying to hide. Varma soon became a genuinely sick man. Powders and pills were not only brought in when dealing with a crisis like an upset stomach, but became a regular part of his diet – became his diet, complained Varma with melancholy triumph. Sometimes

the hypocritical daughter-in-law would pile up the pillows under his head in a way that made his back ache.

- 6 One evening the limousine drove smartly into the yard and the great doctor stepped out. Ever the devoted son, he went first to the garden where his father sat, stricken, gazing at some undefined spot in the dusty yellow air. He did not turn his head to look at his son. ‘Papa,’ his son said tenderly, reaching out to touch his feet. Old Varma tucked his feet under him, and continued to gaze stubbornly into the evening air.

Section 2: Reading for Meaning

After reading Passage 2 in the insert and answer all the questions below.

From paragraph 1

- 4 (a) What ‘good news’ did Rakesh receive that morning?
 [1]
- (b) What was the ‘mark of respect’ shown by Rakesh to his father?
 [1]

From paragraph 2

- 5 (a) What were the most surprising gifts given to Rakesh?
 [1]
- (b) Pick out and write down **four consecutive words** which show that Rakesh’s future was likely to be a happy and successful one.
 [1]
- (c) Describe in **your own words** the neighbours’ reaction to Rakesh’s ‘exemplary filial behaviour’.

 [2]
- (d) Why do you think the writer tells us that Varma had ‘never even seen the inside of a school’?

 [1]

From paragraph 3

6 Rakesh’s mother thought his choice of wife was ‘strange’. Explain fully what kind of woman his mother thought he would marry.

.....

 [2]

From paragraph 4

7 (a) Why did Rakesh’s mother die ‘contented’?

..... [1]

(b) Describe the **two ways** in which Rakesh viewed his father’s ‘mysterious diseases’.

Answer in **your own words**.

(i)

(ii) [2]

(c) When the family flew around Rakesh’s father ‘in a flap’, what do you think was ‘their mistaken belief’?

..... [1]

From paragraph 5

8 (a) ‘After a while, no-one paid much notice, all except, of course, Rakesh.’ What effect is created by the inclusion of the expression ‘of course’ in this sentence?

.....
 [1]

(b) ‘dramatic events ensued’. Pick out and write down the **single word** used later in the paragraph which continues the idea of ‘dramatic’.

..... [1]

(c) Rakesh ‘started to supervise Varma’s diet’. Explain the **two ways** in which he did this.

(i)

(ii) [2]

(d) According to Varma, what did his diet eventually become?

..... [1]

(e) Varma thought the daughter-in-law was ‘hypocritical’ when she piled up pillows under his head. Explain fully the other way Varma thought she showed her hypocrisy.

.....
 [1]

From paragraph 6

9 Varma ‘tucked his feet under him’. Why do you think he did that?

.....
 [1]

From the whole passage

10 Choose **five** of the following words or phrases. For each of them give **one** word or short phrase (of not more than seven words) which has the same meaning that the word or phrase has in the passage.

- 1. bedlam (line 4) 5. apparently (line 18) 2. streamed (line 4) 6. in the wink of an eye (line 21)
- 3. fruits (line 9) 7. gratifying (line 31) 4. prestigious (line 14) 8. reproach (line 33)