

A Living God

Essay type questions for 10 marks:

Q. 1. Write the summary of 'A Living God' in your own words.

OR

Discuss the theme of 'A Living God'.

Answer:

Lafcadio Hearn (Koizumi Yakumo) authored a wonderful short-story entitled as "*A Living God*". It was published in September 1896, three months after Japan's Sanriku tsunami. He was a Japanese writer, translator, and teacher who introduced the culture and literature of Japan to the West. His writings often presented Japanese culture. His well-known short-story, *A Living God*, is the story of self-sacrifice of an elderly and respectable person named Hamaguchi who lived in a Japanese coastal village and was called the "Muraosa" or the Chief of the village.

Hamaguchi was the richest man in the village although there was no marked difference among the farmers in terms of riches. They all lived in perfect peace and happiness. But Hamaguchi was specially respected by the villagers for his prudence and wisdom. The livelihood of all these villagers including Hamaguchi depended on the agriculture only.

There being a rich harvest, the villagers were going to celebrate it by a dance. The entire village was decorated and they were in a festive mood. Old Hamaguchi was leisurely looking at those from his balcony and suddenly felt a different kind of earthquake. A sixth sense made him look at the sea which was fast receding from the coastal line.

Curious men and children ran towards the beach to discover the hitherto unseen sea-bed and the sand ribs. The sea was still receding. Seemingly, Hamaguchi received an electric shock and asked his grandson to give him a Pine-Torch immediately. His grandson complied and Hamaguchi ran to his stacks of rice and set those on fire.

In no time, it became a towering inferno and drew every villager's attention. Sensing some imminent danger, the huge bell of the Hill Temple started its gong on seeing the blaze. People came running from every corner of the village suspecting some danger. Some people wanted to douse the fire, but Hamaguchi stopped them.

No sooner did the villagers assemble at the blazing terrace of Hamaguchi, than the sea, like a raging monster and a towering cliff, pounced back on the village. It withdrew and then came back raving over everything in the village again and again. Hamaguchi only said that that was the reason why he had set fire to the rice-stacks.

Finding no time to send alarms to the villagers to escape from the tsunami, he selflessly set fire to his rice-stacks as a signal for all. Hamaguchi, thus, lost his worldly possessions in order to

save the villagers. His sacrifice elevated him from the level of an ordinary man to a divine identity. Thereafter, people started calling him God after this incident.

The theme of “A Living God”, thus, is simple but moving. The story revolves round an ordinary peasant of a coastal village, who is subsequently elevated to the lofty height of a divine identity by dint of wisdom, prudence and self-sacrifice. Hamaguchi did not know what his family would eat the next day, nor did he hesitate to burn his own crop, but his sacrifice elevated him from the state of an ordinary peasant to a divine identity. He therefore transformed from manliness to Godliness and people so termed him God – their saviour.

Q. 2. Sketch the character of Hamaguchi from the short-story that you studied.

Answer:

Lafcadio Hearn’s “A Living God” tells us the story of Hamaguchi, a simple natured village-chief in a Japanese coastal village, and his elevation to Godliness from the state of manliness. The principal occupation of the villagers was cultivation of crops and Hamaguchi was no exception except that he was a little more well-off than other villagers. Life was very peaceful in the village.

Hamaguchi was the “Muraosa” or the headman of a coastal village. Like other villagers, his principal occupation was cultivation. He was liked as well as respected by the village peasantry. People also called him “Ojiisan”, or rather, grandfather of the village.

Being the richest among the village peasantry, he was sometimes officially referred to as the “Choja”. He advised the small farmers about their interest, arbitrated when they disputed, advanced them money at need, and helped them sell their rice on the best possible terms. Gohei, the central character and village chief.

Whereas the principal occupation of the villagers has been described to be crop cultivation, it is not quite clear as to why they did not take up fishing as an additional part of their livelihood since the village stood by the sea.

However, the story rolls on smoothly. The diction is well applied. Hamaguchi’s extra sensory perception about the impending tsunami, and his prudence, coupled with self-sacrifice of burning his rice-stacks so as to alert the villagers, makes him an outstanding personality among the peasantry. The portrayal of ferocity of the tsunami and the description of the landscape during and after the tsunami deserves applause for the character. Old Hamaguchi didn’t know what his family would eat the next day. The tsunami swept over the entire village and all the crops. But Hamaguchi could save the lives of the villagers by his prudence, wisdom and sacrifice. This selfless action elevated him to a state of divinity from manliness. People started worshipping him and thought that he would thus save them. In future distress. Their faith was so deep rooted that they built even a temple with one of his images inside. Hamaguchi’s elevation to Godliness from manliness is, thus, well portrayed in the short-story – ‘A Living God.

(Reference: <https://bhaktived.com/a-living-god-summary/>)