

The Gold Frame

R K Laxman

Answer the following questions in about 200 words each:

1. Write about the Modern Frame Works and its owner.

Ans. The Modern Frame Works was actually an extra-large wooden packing case mounted on Wobbly(shaky) legs placed in a gap between a drug store and a radio repair shop. Its Owner, Datta, with his concave figure, silver-rimmed glasses and a complexion of seasoned timber, fitted into his shop with the harmony of a fixed object.

He was a silent, hardworking man. He gave only brief answers to the questions his customers asked and strongly discouraged casual friends who tried to interrupt his zone of silence with their idle gossip. He was always seen sitting bent over surrounded by a confusion of cardboard pieces, bits of wood, glass sheets, boxes of nails, glue bottles, paint tins and other remnants that went into putting a picture in a frame. In this medley glass-cutter or a pencil stub was often lost and that was when he would uncoil from his posture and fumble impatiently for it. Many times, he had to stand up and shake his dhoti strongly to free the lost object.

This operation shook the whole shop, setting the pictures on the walls gently swinging.

There was not an inch of space that was not covered by picture; gods, saints, hockey players, children, cheap prints of the Mona Lisa, national leaders, wedding couples, Urdu calligraphy, the snow-clad Fujiyama and many others co-existed with a cheerful strangeness like some fabulous world awaiting order and arrangement.

2. Give an account of the conversation between Datta and the customer.

Ans. One day while Datta was busy in his work in his shop the customer standing outside on the pavement announced that he wanted to frame the picture he had brought with him. Datta, with his habitual indifference, ignored him and continued to be engaged in driving screws into the sides of a frame. The customer emphasized that he wanted a really good job done. He also told him that he wouldn't care the cost of the frame. While unwrapping a faded

newspaper and exposing a sepia-brown photograph of an old man he gave an information about the old man whose picture he wanted to frame. The photo was attractive despite of its antiquity. Bending over his work, Datta asked him what sort of a frame he would like. The customer replied that he wanted the best frame and he wouldn't care the cost of the frame as the departed soul was really great. The love of the customer for the elderly person's portrait was not unusual. Datta encountered many such customers who wanted to demonstrate the similar kind of homage the customer had shown. Everyone wanted a glittering frame for the portrait of the person they loved dearly.

The customer was busy in describing the greatness of the old man. His overgenerous qualities of nobility, compassion and charity were the qualities to respect the old man. The customer was praising the old man like chanting a holy scripture. The old man was like God to the customer. He also added that if this world had just a few more like him, it would certainly have been a different place. Datta interrupted the customer and asked what kind of frame he wanted plain, lacquer, gold, plastic or just enamel painted. The customer silently surveyed the various frames. He just pronounced the word that he wanted the best frame. Datta told him that he didn't have any second-rate stuff in his shop. The customer was confused by the variety of frames. At last Datta came to his rescue and recommended one with a profusion of gold leaves and winding creepers. He told the customer that the frame was imported and made in German. The customer got impressed and satisfied. Datta asked him whether he wanted a plain mount or cut mount. The customer again got confused and Datta suggested him that a cut mount looked more elegant. At last the customer asked the cost of the frame. Datta told him that it would cost him seventeen rupees. The customer tried to bargain but Datta didn't pay heed to the customer. The customer finally agreed and asked him when would have it be ready. Datta told him that it would be ready in two weeks.

3. Summarise the talk between Datta and the customer who had come to receive the framed picture.

Ans. Datta had replaced the picture of the old man with another one. He was afraid that his plan

would be revealed by the customer. The customer came to receive the photo exactly at the given time. The customer asked him whether it was ready. At that time Datta was bent over a piece of work. As he heard the customer's voice, he got slightly stiffened. Datta didn't give him a reply for a minute. Then he put aside the scissors in his hand with a slow deliberation and reached out to take the neatly wrapped package in a corner. The customer was glad and excited to see the photograph. He spread his arms to receive it as if it was a long-lost person he was greeting. Datta took his time to remove the wrapper from the frame. The customer waited impatiently, filling in the time showering more praises on his worshipful master who was to adorn the wall of his home. Datta finally revealed the glittering frame and held it towards him.

The customer seemed visibly struck by its grandeur and fell silent like one who had entered the inner sanctum of a temple. Datta held his breath and watched the man's expression. Suddenly he saw the customer straighten, the reverential look and benevolent expression vanished from his face. He told him that he ordered for a cut mount with an oval shape but the frame was having the square design.

4. Relate the instances of humour in "The Gold Frame."

Ans. 'The Gold Frame' is the story described in a very humorous manner by R K Laxman.

The description by the author creates the true picture of the owner of the frame work Datta, his conversation with the customer and the location of the shop before the reader's eyes. Datta's shop was so tiny that the author describes it as an extra-large wooden packing case mounted on wobbly legs tuck in a gap between a drug store and a radio repair shop. Datta, the owner himself fitted into his shop with the harmony of a fixture. The sitting of Datta in a hunched position and the things surrounded to him like cardboard pieces, bits of wood, glass sheets, boxes of nails, glue bottles, paint tins and other odds and ends that went into putting a picture in a frame. In this medley of how the glass-cutter or a pencil stub was lost and how Datta would make an effort to dislodge these things by shaking his dhoti is narrated in a very humorous manner.

Datta's indifference to the customer and his laconic answer to them make us laugh. Datta's conversation with the customer who brings a picture of old man to be framed and his display of respect and devotion towards the departed soul really creates

humorous feeling in the minds of reader. Datta's conversation with the customer and his answers to his question show his business skill. His answers and suggestions to the customer create humour in the minds of readers. The blunder made by Datta and the plan he devises to come out of the depressing situation are the reasons to create humour. His deliberate plan to increase the intensity of the customer while handing over the photograph and the customer's surprising reaction over the frame and not on the changed picture are real instances of the humour in the story.

B. Answer the following questions in about 75 words each:

1. Describe how the shop of Datta was highly congested.

Ans. The Modern frame Works was actually an extra-large wooden packing case mounted on shaky legs placed in a gap between a drug store and a radio repair shop. Its owner, Datta, with his hollow figure, silver-rimmed glasses and a complexion of seasoned timber, fitted into his shop with the harmony of a fixture. He was always seen sitting hunched up surrounded by a card-board pieces, bits of wood, glass sheets, boxes of nails, glue bottles, paint tins and other odds and ends that went into putting a picture in a frame. There was not an inch of space that was not covered by picture.

2. How did the customer describe the greatness of the man whose picture was to be framed?

Ans. Datta was familiar with the feelings of the customers who came to him for framing the picture of the person whom they adored. The customer came to Datta was describing the greatness of man. He was describing his qualities of nobility, compassion and charity. All these qualities were described in a manner as if he was chanting the cantos of a holy scripture. According to him, if this world had just a few more like him, it would certainly have been a different place. The customer equated the person with demons who would not agree with his views about the old man in the picture. For him, they were the people who wanted to disgrace his name and destroy his memory. Whatever may be the opinions of others about the man but the customer was thought him God in his home.

3. Write about the discussion regarding the paint, quality and mount the frame for the picture.

Ans. After listening the greatness of the old man by the customer Datta asked him what sort of

frame he wanted; plain, wooden, glossy, gold, plastic or just enamel painted. After surveying the various frames on the wall the customer said that he wanted the best. Datta told him that he didn't keep any second-rate stuff in his shop. When the customer was confused in his selection Datta came to his rescue and suggested him a frame with a profusion of gold leaves and winding creeper. In order to clear the doubts in the customer's mind he told him that the frame was imported from Germany. Then he asked about the design the customer wanted. He asked him whether he wanted a plain mount or cut mount. The customer was puzzled. Datta helped him out by showing his various mounts and later suggested that a cut mount looked more elegant.

4. What had Datta learnt by experience about the customers who brought pictures for Framing? What was his experience about the new customer?

Ans. Datta had learnt by long experience that his customers never came punctually. They came days in advance and went away disappointed or came months later, and some never turned up at all and their pictures lay unclaimed in a box, gathering dust and feeding cockroaches and silver fish. Therefore, he made frames for those who came to him and visited him at least twice before he actually executed their orders.

The new customer came to Datta ten days later and asked him whether the picture had been framed. He told him that he was passing by and thought he could collect it if it was ready. When Datta cast a side look at him and continued with his work the customer told him that he knew him that he had come four days early. The customer asked him whether it would be ready by Tuesday. The new customer came there exactly on the day promised by Datta.

5. What happened when Datta looked for the pencil stub for marking the measurement?

Ans. When Datta convinced that the new customer will exactly arrive on the promised date, he kept aside all other pictures and began his work of framing the picture of the old man. The photograph was lying on a shelf among many others. He took it and carefully kept it on a wooden plank on the floor. Then he looked for the pencil stub for marking the measurements. As usual it was missing. He swept his hand all round him impatiently, scattering fragments of glass and wood. False shapes that he mistook for the pencil harassed him no end and stoked his anger. Frustrated in all his attempts to find it, he

finally stood up to shake the folds of his dhoti, an ultimate move which generally yielded results. But he shook the folds so violently that he upset a tin containing its thick, slimy contents on it.

6. How did Datta proceed to frame the picture the customer had brought?

Ans. The same as the answer of question 5.

7. Describe the after-effect of Datta's attempt to reach the pencil stub.

Ans. The same as the answer of question 5.

8. How did Datta try to remove the stain of paint on the picture? What was the result?

Ans. Datta stood transfixed and stared at the disaster at his feet as if he had suddenly lost all faculty of movement. He could not bring himself even to avert his eyes from the horror which he seemed to be cruelly forced to view. Then his spectacles clouded with perspiration and helpfully screened his vision.

When at last he fully recovered from his sense he set about rescuing the picture in such desperate hurry that he made a worse mess of it. He rubbed the picture so hard with a cloth that he peeled off thin strips of filmy coating from its surface. Before he realized what he had done half the old man's face and nearly all of his turban were gone.

9. Describe Datta's state of mind when the picture was 'mutilated beyond recovery'.

Ans. When the picture was mutilated beyond recovery by Datta in an effort to remove stain on it, he looked helplessly at it. He sat with both his hands clutching his head. Every nerve in his head throbbed as if it would tear itself apart if he did not hold it down. He had no idea about the answer he would be going to offer the customer who had a fanatic devotion to the photograph he had just mutilated beyond recovery.

His imagination ran wild, suggesting nightmarish consequences to his own dear self and to the fragile inflammable shop. He racked his brain for a long while till sheer exhaustion calmed his agitated nerves and made him accept the situation with a hopeless resignation. Meanwhile the plethora of gods, saints and sages gazed down at him from the walls with a transcendental smile and seemed to offer themselves to him to pray to. With a fervent appeal in his heart he stared at them.

10. "At the back of his mind an idea began to take shape". How has R.K. Laxman elaborated the statement?

Ans. While looking at the mutilated picture Datta realized that it was not possible to recover.

Datta tried to find an alternative picture hanging on the wall to the picture of the old man which was mutilated. But initially he could not find the one with similar features. All the same, at the back of his mind an idea began to take shape. He saw the possibility of finding an acceptable substitute. He brought down the old wooden box in which he had kept all the photographs unclaimed over the years. As he searched in it, fearful cockroaches and spiders hurried helter-skelter all over the floor. Unaware of them Datta anxiously searched for the brownish photographs of the old man's vintage. Soon there was a pile before him. He was surprised he could pick up so many which qualified to take the old man's shape.