

Unit -2 (A)

The pot Maker

 (Temsula Ao)

About the author

Temsula Ao (1945–2023). She was a renowned poet, author, and academic from Nagaland, India, who wrote extensively about Naga life, culture, and identity, and received the Padma Shri in 2007. She was a professor of English at North Eastern Hill University from where she retired in 2010. Her famous works include **Laburnum for My Head (2009)** and **The Tombstone in My Garden: Stories from Nagaland (2022)** The story ‘The Pot Maker’ is taken from her collection **These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone**.

Introduction

The story revolves around the traditional hand pottery practiced in Nagaland. It describes the journey of a girl named Sentila who dreams of becoming a pot maker like her mother and grandmother. The story highlights the growing conflict between the low-profit labour-intensive Naga pottery making and more profitable weaving profession which Sentila’s mother Arenla, wants her to follow. However, as it would mean extinction of local pottery culture, the village council wants Arenla to pass on the skill to her daughter Sentila. Arenla agrees to teach Sentila but Sentila is unable to grasp the nuances of making a pot by hand. Sentila’s dream of being a potmaker comes true when Onula a widow teaches her the technique of making a pot. She polishes her skill by watching her mother, and one day is able to make a perfect batch of pots. However, her happiness turns to grief when she finds that she has lost her mother. Amidst the grief, Onula realizes that a new pot maker is born.

Summary

A young girl named Sentila wants to become a potmaker, but she does not reveal her passion to her parents as she had overheard her mother Arenla complaining to her father Mesoba about the unrewarding and exhausting profession. Arenla wants Sentila to become a weaver as it is more profitable and requires less labour. She says that she has to go to the riverbank that is sixteen miles away and carry the heavy load back. It is also frustrating to prepare the clay to the right consistency by pounding it in the bamboo cylinder and then baking the pots in the klin. In return for all the hard work she gets hardly any money. Weaving can be done even during the monsoon and was more profitable.

Sentila watches the other expert pot makers when her mother goes to the fields. Her visits become the village gossip, and the village council summons Mesoba to enquire why Arenla was refusing to teach Sentila the family profession. It is the duty of experts to pass on the traditional skills to the next generation failing which such crafts would die. Mesoba explains that they are waiting for Sentila to grow up. Arenla reluctantly begins to teach Sentila. However, when Sentila fails to make pots she does not intervene. When Sentila becomes matured she has to stay for a week at the dormitory under the supervision of a widow named Onula.

Onula notices that Sentila’s tensed and clumsy efforts at making pots. She gently teaches her the correct technique of making pots and Sentila learns it quickly. She also advises her to watch her mother intently when she shapes the mouth of the pot.

One sunny day Arenla tells Sentila that they would need to make as many pots as possible. She finishes her batch of Pots and goes to rest complaining of headache and backache. Sentila completes her batch of pots perfectly, and goes to the hut for lunch. There she finds her mother’s lifeless body and runs to the village centre for help. She cries out to her mother that her pots were made automatically by her, she never meant anything else. Nobody understands what she means, but when Onula sees the two perfect rows of pots, she realizes that with the death of the older pot-maker a new has been born. The skill of making pots has been passed on to the next generation.

Message

The story delivers a powerful message about the importance of preserving traditional skills, the necessity of passion and perseverance in achieving goals, and the transmission of cultural heritage across generations.

Theme

The primary theme is the preservation of traditional skills, resilience, and the passing of cultural legacies through generations. It highlights the conflict between following a passionate, yet demanding traditional craft of pottery, versus choosing more profitable profession of weaving. It portrays the dedication of artisans towards their art.

Word Meanings

Accompany	–	to go with someone
Outgrow	–	to lose interest in something or someone as one grows older
Indifference	–	lack of interest in something
Insistence	–	strong demand
Pittance	–	very small amount of money earned
Pounding	–	repeated beating
Tedious	–	tiring
Deftly	–	skillfully
Spatula	–	tool with flat head used by potter to shape a pot
Lump	–	shapeless mass
Consistency	–	firmness due to certain texture
Klin	–	furnace for baking pots or bricks
Tend	–	take care of
Followed suit	–	did the same thing as others did before
Dao	–	instrument used for digging
Malleable	–	that can be hit or pressed into shape easily without breaking or cracking
Trough	–	long container for holding things
Dormitories	–	a large bedroom with a number of beds in it, especially in a hostel
Custom	–	traditional practice
Resolved	–	(here) determined
Wearily	–	tiredly
Slackened	–	relaxed
Momentum	–	driving force
Dexterity	–	skill
Tally	–	calculating a total, keeping a record of numbers
Threshold	–	ground at the entrance of a room
Intuitively	–	based on feelings
Clumsy	–	Awkward
Momentous	–	of great significance
Phenomenon	–	unusual incident
Profound	–	powerful
Revelation	–	moment of realization