

Apu (Bandyopadhyay's novel *Aparajito*)

Character In this sequel to *Pather Panchali*, Apu, the young boy becomes a man, albeit troubled by conflicting loyalties. Apu begins to mature when he decides to leave his village home and his widowed mother to study at the university in the city. Slowly he withdraws himself from his childhood memories of the countryside and his family. He works in a printing shop to pay the university fees but is too proud to admit this to his university friends. He appears almost indifferent to his mother's lonely and vulnerable position as a widow in their village; he visits her but more out of duty than affection. When she dies, during one of his absences, he feels a mixture of relief and grief. He is free but he has lost his mother. Apu remains a dreamer, hoping to become a writer and caring little about his lack of money; but, at the same time, he does make himself accept work that will bring in the minimum cash necessary to survive. Later, after marrying almost as a whim (see below), he learns to love his upper-class wife, although he had not known her before the wedding. His conflicted nature is displayed later, after his wife's early death, he is paralysed with grief but is unable to accept the responsibility of bringing up their son. At the end, he does finally embrace his role as a father, and yet he does not give up his carefree attitude and takes to the road with his son on his shoulders.

Activities Much of Apu's time is spent studying in school and at university. He also works in a printing shop and, after university, takes on a number of low-paid jobs. During these days of near-poverty in the city, he dedicates himself to becoming a writer. After his marriage, he spends even more time working at unrewarding jobs, while still finding time to read in the evening. When his wife dies, he takes to wandering the countryside and doing manual labour.

Illustrative moments

Irresponsible Although Apu has matured, by breaking the deep bond with his village and his mother, he remains incapable, or least unwilling, of accepting adult responsibilities. This is dramatically revealed when, following the death of his wife in childbirth, Apu rejects his role as a father and leaves Calcutta to wander and work as a manual labourer.

Kind Apu's strange wedding displays his essential kindness, even if it is hard to separate from his nonchalance. Apu is a guest at another man's wedding when the mother of the bride declares that she is breaking off the arrangement because it has been revealed that the groom is mentally ill. In this crisis (the bride will be tarnished forever almost as a divorcée used to be in some western countries), Apu agrees to step in and become the groom.

Matured The transformation of Apu's character, from dreamy child nestled in the uncomplicated world of his mother's love in a village, is dramatized by his growing emotional and geographical distance from his mother. When he returns to the village one day, from his life as a university student in the city, he falls asleep as she tries to tell him about her worries, left alone in the village, and what will happen if she falls ill.

Impetuous Despite, or perhaps because of, his withdrawal from his mother, Apu is loving husband. In a highly charged scene, Apu is reading a letter from his wife (in their village) while returning from work, only to find her brother waiting for him with news of her death. Shocked, shattered and enraged, the normally passive Apu punches the brother, as the bearer of such news.