

- Poets and Pancakes Introduction
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## Poets and Pancakes Introduction

"Poets and Pancakes" is an excerpt from Asokamitran's book "My Years with Boss," which provides a humorous and insightful look into the workings of Gemini Studios, a prominent film studio in Madras (now Chennai) during the early days of Indian cinema. The author, who worked at the studio clipping newspaper articles, describes the studio's makeup department, the people who worked there, and the social dynamics within the studio.

The title "Poets and Pancakes" refers to two key elements: the poets who were scriptwriters at the studio and the brand of makeup called "pancake" used extensively in film production. The narrative humorously contrasts the artistic aspirations of the poets with the practical realities of filmmaking, including the use of makeup that often made actors look less attractive.

### Key Elements

- **Setting:** Gemini Studios in Madras during the early years of Indian cinema.
- **Makeup Department:** Located in a building rumored to be Lord Clive's stables, it used "pancake" makeup to prepare actors for filming.
- **Characters:** The office boy aspiring to be a star, Kothamangalam Subbu—a multi-talented poet, novelist, actor, and filmmaker—and the legal advisor who inadvertently harms an actress's career.
- **Themes:** Nepotism, hierarchy, social integration, jealousy, and publicity within the workplace.

- **Social Commentary:** The story highlights the contrast between reel life and real life and the complex relationships among studio employees.

## Textual Evidence

The author humorously notes that the "pancake" makeup made "decent looking boys and girls ugly," illustrating the practical demands of film production. The office boy's frustration and jealousy towards Subbu reveal the hierarchical and competitive nature of the studio environment.

## Practice Set

### Level 1 – Easy

- What is the significance of the title "Poets and Pancakes"?
- Where was the makeup department located in Gemini Studios?

### Level 2 – Moderate

- Describe the character of Kothamangalam Subbu and his role in the studio.
- Explain the theme of hierarchy as depicted in the story.

### Level 3 – Challenging

- Analyze how the story portrays the contrast between reel life and real life at Gemini Studios.
- Discuss the social integration within the makeup department and its significance.

## Answer Key

- **Title Significance:** It refers to the poets who were scriptwriters and the "pancake" makeup used in the studio.
- **Makeup Department Location:** Upstairs in a building rumored to be Lord Clive's stables.
- **Kothamangalam Subbu:** A talented poet, novelist, actor, and filmmaker who was loyal to the boss and did not aspire for stardom.
- **Hierarchy Theme:** The studio maintained strict ranks, with the chief makeup man handling lead actors and the office boy handling crowd scenes.
- **Reel vs Real Life:** The story shows how the glamorous film world contrasts with the personal ambitions and frustrations of the people behind the scenes.
- **Social Integration:** The makeup department included people from various parts of India, reflecting national integration.

## Quick Reference

- **Poets and Pancakes:** Poets = scriptwriters; Pancakes = makeup material.
- **Hierarchy:** Ranking system in the studio's makeup department.
- **Subbu:** Multi-talented artist and loyal employee.
- **Office Boy:** Aspiring but frustrated employee.

## Glossary

- **Hierarchy:** A system of ranking people according to status or authority.
- **Cubicle:** A small partitioned area in a room.
- **Unwittingly:** Without being aware; unintentionally.
- **Disillusioned:** Disappointed after discovering something is not as good as believed.

## Poets and Pancakes Summary

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The story humorously describes the makeup department of Gemini Studios, where "pancake" makeup was used to prepare actors for filming. The makeup often made actors look ugly to suit the lighting and sets. The department had a strict hierarchy, with the chief makeup man handling lead actors and the office boy responsible for crowd scenes.

The office boy, a forty-year-old man, aspired to be a star but remained frustrated and blamed his lack of success on the studio. Kothamangalam Subbu, a talented poet, novelist, actor, and filmmaker, was loyal to the studio boss and did not seek fame. The legal advisor, dressed in western clothes, was an odd presence among the khadi-clad poets and writers who opposed communism.

The story also touches on the arrival of the Moral Re-armament Army, an anti-communism group that performed plays at the studio, influencing Tamil drama but not the studio's outlook. An English poet's mysterious visit to the studio is later explained as related to his disillusionment with communism.

## Key Elements

- **Makeup Department:** Location, makeup use, and hierarchy.
- **Characters:** Office boy, Kothamangalam Subbu, legal advisor.
- **Themes:** Frustration, loyalty, social and political influences.
- **Events:** Visits by Moral Re-armament Army and English poet Stephen Spender.

## Textual Evidence

The office boy's repeated recitations of his poems and his blame on Subbu highlight his jealousy and frustration. The legal advisor's recording of the actress's angry words led to her career's end, showing the power dynamics within the studio.

## Practice Set

### Level 1 – Easy

- Who was Kothamangalam Subbu?
- What was the role of the legal advisor in the story?

### Level 2 – Moderate

- Explain the significance of the Moral Re-armament Army's visit to Gemini Studios.
- Describe the office boy's aspirations and frustrations.

### Level 3 – Challenging

- Analyze the impact of political ideologies on the people working at Gemini Studios as depicted in the story.
- Discuss the reasons behind the actress's career ending abruptly.

### Answer Key

- **Kothamangalam Subbu:** A multi-talented artist loyal to the studio boss.
- **Legal Advisor:** A western-dressed official who inadvertently ended an actress's career by recording her angry words.
- **Moral Re-armament Army:** An anti-communism group whose plays influenced Tamil drama but did not change the studio's outlook.
- **Office Boy:** A frustrated man aspiring to be a star but stuck in a lowly position.
- **Political Ideologies:** The studio had poets and writers opposed to communism, reflecting the political tensions of the time.
- **Actress's Career End:** Resulted from the legal advisor's recording of her angry remarks, which shocked her and led to her disappearance from the stage.

### Quick Reference

- **Subbu:** Talented and loyal artist.
- **Legal Advisor:** Western-dressed official with significant influence.
- **Office Boy:** Aspiring but frustrated employee.
- **Moral Re-armament Army:** Anti-communism theatrical group.

### Glossary

- **Hierarchy:** Ranking system within an organization.
- **Unwittingly:** Without intention or awareness.

- **Disillusioned:** Feeling disappointed after false beliefs.

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