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## The Comet-I

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## SUMMARY OF THE LESSON

Duttada was not a scientist or astronomer. But star-gazing was his pastime. He used to spend long nights studying the stars. His one ambition in life was to discover a new comet. He longed for enough money to buy a good telescope and also free time to study the stars. He got them both after retirement. He bought an eight-inch telescope to fulfil his secret ambition. He knew that comets come from the solar system. Like other planets they too go round the sun. But their movement is unusual. They could disappear for ages.

Indrani Debi, his wife, cursed the telescope. She called it Dibya or Dibya Chakshu i.e. Divine Eye. She thought that the telescope was another woman who had trapped her husband. It made him careless about his own well-being and the practical problems of living. He did not take precautions against cold.

The professional astronomers used big telescopes. Duttada's eight-inch Dibya stood very little chance of spotting a new comet. Still Duttada was hopeful. He knew that the great scientists looked chiefly at faint stars. They missed such an insignificant thing as comet.

One night Duttada noticed a new comet. Two days later the news appeared in the paper that a Calcutta man Manoj Dutta had seen a comet and it was reported at Indian Institute of Astrophysics. This comet was heading towards the earth, and it would be seen with naked eyes in the next few months. It was named 'Comet Dutta.' He became famous, a celebrity.

There were felicitations for Duttada. But he didn't like functions organised in his honour. He wished he had not discovered the new comet. His wife agreed but for a different reason. She was highly educated, still superstitious. She feared that comets brought ill-luck and calamities on the earth.

At Cambridge University, Dr James Forsyth got a message to see John Macpherson, Defence Science Advisor to the British Government. Sir John handed him an article which James had written and sent for publication to *Nature*. It was very important because James had forewarned that Comet Dutta would hit the Earth and destroy it.

The collision could be avoided if it got broken into pieces while coming near the sun or it might collide with some other comet. The tragedy could occur in just ten months.

It was decided to call an urgent meeting of experts to find out ways to save the Earth. They had to do something to push the deadly comet out of the way.

## TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED

## COMPREHENSION CHECK

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**1. Why does Indrani Debi dislike Duttada's 'hobnobbing' with Dibya?**

**Ans.** 'Dibya' was the name given by Indrani Debi. It was a telescope. Duttada was always busy during night with Dibya. He never cared for his wife or about himself. So his wife disliked it as her rival.

**2. She is complaining and smiling. Why is she smiling?**

**Ans.** She complains that *Dibya* has cast a spell on her husband. But she could not help smiling at his childlike behaviour. He did not bother to close the door and he forgot to put on his sweater.

**3. (i) What was Duttada's secret ambition?**

**(ii) What did he do to achieve it?**

**Ans.** (i) Duttada's secret ambition was to buy a good telescope and to have enough of spare time to watch the stars.

**(ii)** He waited for his retirement. After retirement he got sufficient funds. Then he bought a telescope and he started gazing at the stars without caring for his wife and life.

**4. What is the difference between a planet and a comet, as given in the story?**

**Ans.** A planet has a fixed orbit. A comet comes from the distant corners of the solar system. It keeps on changing.

**5. Why was Duttada hopeful that he would discover a new comet soon?**

**Ans.** Duttada was hopeful of discovering a new comet because he knew that professional astronomers did not consider them significant and ignored them.

**6. Why does Duttada say \_\_\_“I almost wish I had not discovered this comet”.**

**Ans.** The discovery of the new comet brought Duttada publicity which he did not like. He had to attend many receptions and functions. So he wished he hadn't discovered that new comet.

**7. Why is his wife unhappy about the discovery?**

**Ans.** The discovery of the new comet made Duttada's wife unhappy. She was superstitious. She thought that the discovery would bring calamities on the family as well as on the earth.

#### COMPREHENSION CHECK

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**1. How did Sir John get hold of James' original manuscript?**

**Ans.** Sir John got hold of James' original manuscript from Mr. Taylor who wanted to get his opinion before sending it to a professional referee.

**2. What is the important point the paper makes?**

**Ans.** The paper makes the important point that Duttada's comet would collide with the earth.

**3. Why does Sir John say that James' paper should not be published?**

**Ans.** Sir John opposes the publication of James' paper because his prediction would cause widespread panic in the world.

**4. What do the two men finally decide to do?**

**Ans.** The two men finally agree to organise a secret conference of international experts to plan how to avert the calamity.