

A Devoted Son by Anita Desai
Summary, Questions and Answers
(Exam focused Questions)
Class 12 English

(By NEBGPAcalculator.com. Visit for more notes.)

Summary

The story follows Rakesh Varma, a hardworking and intelligent young man who brings great pride to his humble family after standing first in the country in his medical examinations.

His remarkable success turns their small house into a place of celebration as neighbours, relatives, and friends gather to congratulate the family. Rakesh continues to excel by winning scholarships, studying in the United States, and returning home to establish a successful medical career.

Despite his achievements, Rakesh remains devoted to his parents. Instead of settling abroad, he returns home and carefully looks after them. After his mother dies, his elderly father becomes lonely and physically weak. Rakesh takes full responsibility for his father's care by controlling his diet, providing medicines, and following strict medical routines.

However, his father's life gradually becomes more restricted. He misses his favourite foods and begins to feel that he is being treated as a patient rather than a father. He secretly asks his grandchildren to bring him sweets and complains about his lack of freedom.

The growing tension reaches its peak when Mr Varma finally refuses to take any more medicines and expresses his desire to die instead of living under constant control. The story leaves readers questioning whether true devotion should focus only on physical health or also on emotional happiness and personal dignity.

Important Themes

Parental sacrifice

The story highlights how parents make lifelong sacrifices to give their children better opportunities.

Filial devotion

Rakesh sincerely loves his parents and dedicates himself to caring for them throughout their lives.

Generational conflict

The difference between Rakesh's medical approach and his father's emotional needs creates conflict.

Love versus control

The story shows that excessive care can sometimes become controlling instead of comforting.

Aging and dignity

The story explores the challenges elderly people face when they lose independence and personal freedom.

Character Information

Rakesh Varma

Rakesh is the main character. He is intelligent, disciplined, ambitious, and hardworking. After becoming a successful doctor, he remains devoted to his parents and returns home instead of staying abroad. However, his strict medical treatment eventually makes his father feel controlled.

Mr Varma

Mr Varma is Rakesh's elderly father. He works hard throughout his life to educate his son despite his humble background. After losing his wife, he becomes lonely and increasingly dependent on others. Although he appreciates his son's care, he longs for freedom and happiness during his final years.

Mrs Varma

Mrs Varma is a caring and hardworking mother who spends her life supporting her family. She plays an important role in helping Rakesh achieve success through her sacrifices. Her death deeply affects her husband.

Rakesh's wife

Rakesh's wife is described as calm, traditional, and supportive. She comes from a rural background and helps care for the family.

Important Events

Rakesh tops the medical examination.

His outstanding result becomes a source of pride for the entire family.

The neighbourhood celebrates.

Friends and relatives gather to congratulate the Varma family.

Rakesh studies in the United States.

He wins scholarships and receives advanced medical training.

Rakesh returns home.

Instead of staying abroad, he builds a successful medical career in his hometown.

Mrs Varma dies.

Her death leaves Mr Varma lonely and emotionally broken.

Rakesh takes charge of his father's care.

He introduces strict diets, medicines, and daily routines.

Mr Varma rebels.

Frustrated by constant restrictions, he refuses further treatment.

Difficult Vocabulary

Ambiance: The atmosphere or feeling of a place.

Prestigious: Highly respected or admired.

Scholarship: Financial support given for education.

Regimen: A planned system of diet or treatment.

Deteriorate: To become worse over time.

Restrictive: Limiting freedom or choice.

Devotion: Deep love, loyalty, and commitment.

Autonomy: The ability to make one's own decisions.

Bribe: To give something in exchange for a favour.

Compassion: Sympathy and concern for others.

Key Message / Main Idea

The story teaches that genuine devotion involves both physical care and emotional understanding. Love should protect a person's dignity and

happiness instead of becoming overly controlling.

Textbook Exercise & Answers

Understanding the text

a. How did the morning papers bring an ambiance of celebration in the Varma family?

The morning paper created an atmosphere of celebration because it announced Rakesh's outstanding academic success. He had secured the highest marks and ranked first in the country, making his family proud.

b. How did the community celebrate Rakesh's success?

The community celebrated by gathering at the Varma family's house to congratulate his parents. Friends and neighbours offered flowers, sweets, gifts, and warm wishes, turning the occasion into a joyful celebration.

c. Why was Rakesh's success a special matter of discussion in the neighbourhood?

His success became special because he was the first member of his family to receive higher education. His parents had worked hard and made many sacrifices, so his achievement inspired the entire neighbourhood.

d. How does the author make fun with the words America and the USA?

The author humorously shows that educated people call it the USA, while less informed neighbours simply call it America. This playful

contrast highlights differences in perception and social awareness.

e. How does the author characterize Rakesh's wife?

Rakesh's wife is presented as calm, traditional, and cooperative. Although she is not highly educated, she supports her family and helps care for Rakesh's parents.

f. Describe how Rakesh rises in his career.

Rakesh succeeds through hard work and dedication. He performs brilliantly in his medical studies, earns scholarships, trains in the United States, returns home, and eventually becomes one of the town's most respected doctors.

g. How does the author describe Rakesh's family background?

Rakesh comes from a humble family. His father works in a kerosene depot, and his mother spends her life managing the household. Despite limited resources, they give their son every opportunity to succeed.

h. What is the impact of Rakesh's mother's death on his father?

Her death leaves Mr Varma feeling lonely and emotionally broken. Without her care and companionship, his health gradually begins to decline.

i. What did Rakesh do to make his father's old age more comfortable?

Rakesh looks after his father carefully by bringing him tea, arranging

time in the garden, supervising his meals, and providing the best medical treatment possible.

j. Why did the old man try to bribe his grandchildren?

The old man secretly asks his grandchildren to buy sweets because he misses the delicious food he once enjoyed and is no longer allowed to eat.

k. Are Mr Varma's complaints about his diets reasonable? How?

Yes. His complaints are understandable because he wants to enjoy his favourite foods during old age. Although Rakesh restricts his diet for medical reasons, Mr Varma values happiness and personal choice as much as physical health.

Reference to the context

a. How did Varma couples make sacrifices for their son's higher education?

Mr and Mrs Varma worked tirelessly to support Rakesh's education. His father spent decades working in a kerosene depot, while his mother managed the household with limited resources. They saved their earnings so that Rakesh could study, and their sacrifices eventually helped him become a successful doctor.

b. Mr Varma suffers from diseases one after another after his wife's death. Would he have enjoyed better health if she had not died before him? Give reasons.

Yes. His wife's presence would likely have improved his emotional well being. She provided affection, companionship, and daily care that no one else could replace. After losing her, loneliness became one of the major reasons behind his declining health.

c. Dr Rakesh is divided between a doctor and a son. As a son, he loves his father and worries about his weakening health but as a doctor he is strict on his father's diet and medicine. In your view, what else could Rakesh have done to make his father's final years more comfortable?

Rakesh could have balanced medical care with emotional understanding. Along with protecting his father's health, he could have allowed him occasional favourite foods, listened to his wishes more carefully, and respected his need for independence and dignity.

d. What does the story say about the relationship between grandfather and grandchildren?

The story shows that Mr Varma shares a warm and affectionate relationship with his grandchildren. They become his closest companions after his wife's death and bring joy into his lonely life.

e. Do you call Rakesh a devoted son? Give reasons.

Yes, Rakesh can be called a devoted son because his actions consistently show love and responsibility toward his parents.

Reasons:

1. He returns home after completing his studies in the United States

instead of settling abroad.

2. He chooses family responsibility over personal comfort and success overseas.

3. He cares for his mother until her final moments and does everything possible to help her.

4. Despite his busy career, he regularly looks after his elderly father.

5. He provides the best medicines, treatment, and daily care because he genuinely wants to protect his father's health.

Reference beyond the text

a. Write an essay on how parental sacrifice shapes a child's future.

Parents often make countless sacrifices to provide their children with better opportunities. They work hard, save money, and put their children's needs before their own comfort. These sacrifices help children receive education, develop confidence, and achieve success.

Rakesh's parents are a perfect example of this. Despite their humble background, they support his education with determination. Their dedication allows him to become a successful doctor, proving that parental sacrifice can create a brighter future for the next generation.

At the same time, children should remember that success should be accompanied by gratitude, emotional understanding, and respect for their parents' happiness.

b. How should children care for their elderly parents while respecting their independence?

Children should care for elderly parents with both love and respect. Providing food, medicine, and medical treatment is important, but listening to their wishes and allowing them to make personal choices is equally valuable.

Elderly parents often need companionship, freedom, and emotional support as much as physical care. A balanced approach that combines responsibility with understanding helps preserve both their health and dignity.

Simple Question Explanations

Why does Rakesh return from the United States?

He returns because he values his family and wants to build his career while caring for his parents.

Why does Mr Varma become unhappy?

He feels that his son's strict medical care has taken away his freedom and enjoyment of life.

What creates the main conflict?

The conflict develops because Rakesh thinks like a doctor, while his father wants to live with dignity and personal choice.

Important Lines / Passages

The old man's refusal to take medicine

This moment marks the climax of the story because it reveals his frustration with losing control over his own life.

Rakesh's careful treatment of his father

These scenes highlight the difference between physical care and emotional comfort, which is the central conflict of the story.

Exam Focused Questions

1. How does Anita Desai present parental sacrifice in A Devoted Son?

She shows how Rakesh's parents work hard throughout their lives to educate him, making his success the result of their dedication and sacrifice.

2. Why does the relationship between Rakesh and his father become strained?

Their relationship becomes strained because Rakesh's medical care becomes too controlling, while his father longs for independence.

3. What is the central conflict of the story?

The central conflict lies between professional duty and emotional responsibility, as Rakesh struggles to balance his role as a doctor and a

son.

4. Why is the title *A Devoted Son* appropriate?

The title is appropriate because Rakesh sincerely loves and cares for his parents, even though his devotion becomes excessive at times.

5. What lesson does the story teach about caring for elderly parents?

The story teaches that proper care should combine medical attention with compassion, respect, and personal freedom.

Commonly Confusing Points

Is Rakesh a good son or a controlling doctor?

He is both. His love for his father is genuine, but his excessive medical control creates emotional suffering.

Why does Mr Varma secretly ask for sweets?

He wants to enjoy simple pleasures that have been taken away by his strict diet.

Why does the story criticize excessive care?

It suggests that physical treatment alone cannot guarantee happiness if emotional needs are ignored.

Quick Revision

Author: Anita Desai

Genre: Short Story

Main Characters: Rakesh Varma and Mr Varma

Beginning: Rakesh tops the medical examination and makes his family proud.

Development: He studies in the United States, returns home, and becomes a successful doctor.

Conflict: He strictly controls his elderly father's life after his mother's death.

Climax: Mr Varma refuses further medicines and expresses his desire for freedom.

Ending: The story leaves readers thinking about the true meaning of devotion.

Main Themes: Parental sacrifice, filial devotion, aging, dignity, love versus control, and generational conflict.

Key Lesson: True devotion means caring for both a person's health and their happiness.

(By NEBGPAcalculator.com. Visit for more additional notes.)