

Soft Storm

by Abhi Subedi

Notes, Summary, Questions and Answers

(Exam focused Questions)

Class 12 English

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About the Author

Abhi Subedi is one of Nepal's distinguished poets, playwrights, critics, and scholars. Born in Nepal in 1945, he taught English at Tribhuvan University for nearly four decades and became one of the country's respected literary figures.

Besides writing poetry, he has made significant contributions to drama, literary criticism, translation, and cultural studies. His work has also helped introduce Nepali literature to international audiences.

Subedi's poetry often combines natural imagery with social and political realities. Rather than describing beauty alone, he uses symbols from everyday life to expose human suffering, injustice, violence, poverty, environmental destruction, and political instability. His poems encourage readers to develop compassion while questioning the contradictions of modern society.

Soft Storm is one of his powerful contemporary poems. Written in free verse, it reflects the turbulent atmosphere of Nepal during years of social and political unrest. Through the repeated refrain I became soft,

the speaker transforms personal compassion into a gentle yet powerful rebellion against violence, corruption, and inhumanity.

Summary

Soft Storm is a deeply compassionate and symbolic poem by Abhi Subedi that reflects the social, political, and emotional turmoil of Nepal during years of conflict and instability. Written in free verse, the poem combines vivid natural imagery with painful scenes from urban life to show how an ordinary person's compassion gradually grows into a quiet but powerful form of resistance.

The central paradox of the title, *Soft Storm*, captures the speaker's emotional journey. Although his feelings are gentle and compassionate, they gather the strength of a storm whenever he witnesses injustice and human suffering.

The poem is built around the repeated refrain *I became soft*, which appears whenever the speaker encounters another disturbing reality. At first, he becomes soft while observing the strange contradictions of Kathmandu. The earth crashes against an eerie stillness, the sky blooms like crocuses over stones, and the moon skids down walls while speaking the language of posters, politics, rituals, and reasons.

These unusual images create a surreal atmosphere where natural beauty exists alongside political instability, pollution, and social disorder.

One of the most heartbreaking moments occurs in Thamel, where the speaker sees homeless children crying with hunger beneath the banyan trees of Kesharmahal. The contrast between Kathmandu's lively

tourist district and the neglected children reveals the painful gap between wealth and poverty.

While some people enjoy parties, hotels, and celebrations, innocent children struggle simply to survive. This scene makes the speaker's compassion deepen even further.

The emotional intensity increases when the speaker witnesses a forlorn child wandering through the violent corridors of history with a transistor radio around his neck, desperately crying for his mother. The child symbolizes countless victims of poverty, conflict, and social collapse who lose security, family, and hope.

Soon afterward, the speaker sees an innocent man being mercilessly beaten before his own family for no apparent reason. This exposes a society where violence has become frighteningly ordinary.

Another unforgettable image appears when the speaker notices a blood stained shirt speaking with bruised human lips. The injured person seems unable to speak aloud, yet his suffering silently communicates with the earth itself. This powerful symbol represents victims whose voices have been suppressed by violence while society remains indifferent to their pain.

The poet suggests that history, dreams, and humanity continue playing hide and seek inside an open museum where compassion has almost disappeared.

Throughout the poem, the speaker repeatedly describes the present as a mad time, where ordinary logic no longer works. Stones grow flowers,

rhododendrons bloom during winter, history runs beneath old lampposts, birds sing strange songs over a warming earth, and environmental destruction accompanies moral decline.

These strange images symbolize a society whose natural, political, and human balance has been disturbed.

Despite its painful images, the poem ends with hope rather than despair. Instead of answering violence with greater violence, the speaker wishes to melt like a rainbow, allowing his soft storm to dance gently across the reader's uneasy heart.

His rebellion remains compassionate rather than destructive. The poem therefore suggests that kindness, humanity, and empathy possess the power to challenge even the darkest times.

Ultimately, *Soft Storm* becomes both a protest against social injustice and a celebration of compassion as humanity's strongest response to chaos.

Important Themes

Compassion

The speaker responds to suffering with empathy instead of hatred, making compassion the emotional foundation of the poem.

Social Injustice

The poem exposes poverty, violence, corruption, inequality, and the

neglect of vulnerable people.

Political Instability

Posters, politics, and unlawful activities symbolize Nepal's turbulent social and political atmosphere.

Human Suffering

Street children, injured victims, and broken families represent the painful realities of ordinary people's lives.

Environmental Disorder

Nature itself appears disturbed, reflecting the moral disorder within society.

Silent Rebellion

The speaker protests injustice not through violence but through compassionate resistance.

Character Information

Although the poem has no traditional characters, several symbolic figures shape its message.

The Speaker

The speaker is a sensitive and compassionate observer whose emotions

transform into a gentle rebellion against injustice.

The Hungry Children

The hungry children represent neglected victims of poverty who suffer despite living beside wealth and luxury.

The Forlorn Child

The forlorn child symbolizes children affected by violence, poverty, and family separation.

The Injured Man

The injured man represents victims whose suffering remains ignored by society.

Important Events

The speaker becomes soft repeatedly.

Each disturbing scene awakens deeper compassion within him.

The city reveals its contradictions.

Natural beauty exists alongside political instability and social disorder.

Hungry children cry in Thamel.

The speaker witnesses poverty hidden behind urban prosperity.

A child searches for his mother.

The painful image reflects the human cost of violence and hardship.

An innocent man is beaten.

The speaker witnesses senseless violence before a helpless family.

The poem ends with hope.

The speaker chooses compassion over hatred and wishes to melt like a rainbow.

Difficult Vocabulary

Word Meaning
Tumult Loud and violent disorder.
Eerie Strange and frightening.
Crocuses Flowering plants in the iris family.
Seamless Without interruption or visible boundaries.
Forlorn Lonely and abandoned.
Mercilessly Without showing kindness or pity.
Transistor A small portable radio.
Leela A divine or cosmic play.
Pensively Thoughtfully and sadly.
Minuscule Extremely small.

Key Message and Main Idea

Abhi Subedi teaches that compassion can become a powerful form of resistance against violence, poverty, corruption, and social injustice. Even during chaotic times, humanity should respond with empathy rather than cruelty.

Literary Devices

Abhi Subedi combines surreal imagery with emotional symbolism to portray Nepal's troubled social reality.

Paradox

The title Soft Storm itself is a paradox because softness suggests gentleness while a storm suggests violence and power.

Symbolism

The poem's strongest literary device is symbolism.

Soft Storm: Compassionate rebellion.

Seamless City: A lawless and morally disturbed Kathmandu.

Blood Stained Shirt: Silenced victims of violence.

Rainbow: Hope and peaceful transformation.

Moon: A witness to society's hidden realities.

Imagery

The poem creates unforgettable pictures of hungry children, blood stained shirts, political posters, old gutters, and winter rhododendrons.

Repetition

The repeated line I became soft builds emotional intensity throughout

the poem.

Free Verse

The absence of a fixed rhyme scheme reflects the unpredictable nature of modern society.

Textbook Exercise and Answers

Understanding the Text

a. When does the speaker grow soft? Enlist the occasions when he grows soft.

The speaker grows soft whenever he witnesses painful realities that reveal the suffering and contradictions of society. His compassion deepens each time he encounters another disturbing scene, showing that his emotions become stronger rather than weaker in difficult circumstances.

The occasions include:

Hearing the tumult of the earth.

Seeing the sky grow like crocuses over stones.

Watching the moon skid down the walls while speaking the language of posters, politics, rituals, and reasons.

Seeing hungry homeless children crying beneath the bat bearing trees of

Kesharmahal in Thamel.

Watching a forlorn child search desperately for his mother.

Witnessing an innocent man being mercilessly beaten for no reason.

Seeing a blood stained shirt silently express the pain of forgotten victims.

Observing the strange and disturbing changes of a mad time.

These experiences gradually transform his compassion into a soft storm that quietly rebels against injustice.

b. What do you understand by this seamless city?

The expression this seamless city refers to Kathmandu, but it carries a deeper symbolic meaning than simply describing the capital city.

On the surface, seamless suggests a place without boundaries or interruptions. However, the poet uses it ironically to describe a city where lawlessness, political instability, pollution, crime, and social indifference have become part of everyday life.

In this city, political posters cover walls, old lampposts stand beside polluted gutters, and unpleasant incidents can happen at any moment. The moon itself becomes a witness to these hidden realities.

Thus, the seamless city symbolizes a society where moral boundaries have disappeared and disorder has become normal.

c. Describe the poor children portrayed in the poem.

The poor children portrayed in the poem are homeless, hungry, neglected, and emotionally abandoned. The speaker sees them crying beneath the bat bearing trees of Kesharmahal in Thamel, one of Kathmandu's busy areas, where the contrast between prosperity and poverty becomes painfully visible.

These children spend their nights on the streets without proper food, shelter, or care. While wealthy people enjoy hotels, parties, and celebrations nearby, the children remain ignored by society and the authorities.

Through them, the poet exposes the harsh reality of social inequality and the failure to protect the nation's future generation.

d. What do you understand by the unwedded gardens of history?

The expression the unwedded gardens of history symbolizes Nepal's pure cultural heritage and historical identity before it became corrupted by violence, political instability, and selfish human actions.

The word unwedded suggests something untouched, innocent, and sacred. According to the poet, the present generation has polluted this once holy land through irresponsible behavior, corruption, and social disorder.

The image therefore contrasts the dignity of the past with the painful realities of the present.

e. Why was the forlorn child wailing?

The forlorn child was wailing because he was desperately searching for his missing mother while wandering through the violent corridors of history. With a transistor radio hanging around his neck, he continues crying for his mother as he searches through a world shaped by poverty, conflict, and social collapse.

The child symbolizes countless children who become victims of violence, economic hardship, migration, and family separation. His cries represent both personal loss and the larger suffering experienced by vulnerable people during troubled times.

f. What do you understand about soft storm?

The term Soft Storm is the poem's central paradox and symbolizes the speaker's compassionate but powerful emotional response to society's suffering.

Although a storm usually represents violence and destruction, the poet combines it with soft to show that his anger remains gentle, humane, and nonviolent.

His soft storm grows stronger each time he witnesses injustice, corruption, hunger, or violence, making compassion itself become a form of resistance.

g. Why does the speaker call our time mad time?

The speaker calls the present mad time because he sees a world where

both nature and society appear to have lost their normal balance.

Strange events such as flowers blooming on stones, rhododendrons flowering during winter, history running beneath old lampposts, and birds singing strange songs symbolize a reality where ordinary logic no longer works.

At the same time, corruption, violence, poverty, selfishness, and political instability have made human behavior equally irrational. The combination of natural disorder and moral collapse convinces the speaker that he is living in a truly mad time.

h. What does the speaker want to do in hard times?

During hard times, the speaker wishes to melt like a rainbow instead of responding with violence. The rainbow symbolizes hope, beauty, peace, and emotional healing after a storm.

Rather than spreading hatred, he wants his gentle soft storm to dance across people's troubled hearts and inspire compassion, freedom, and humanity even during society's darkest moments.

Reference to the Context

a. Explain the relation between the speaker and the environment in the poem.

The speaker shares a deep emotional and compassionate relationship with his surroundings. Rather than remaining a distant observer, he personally absorbs the pain, injustice, and contradictions that exist

around him.

Every disturbing event he witnesses affects him emotionally, which is why he repeatedly says I became soft. His softness is not a sign of weakness but a reflection of his growing sensitivity toward both people and nature.

The environment in the poem constantly influences the speaker's emotions. The crashing earth, blooming crocuses, moon sliding down walls, hungry children in Thamel, polluted gutters, and victims of violence all become powerful experiences that shape his thoughts.

He feels connected not only to human suffering but also to the changing landscape of Kathmandu.

At the same time, the relationship works in the opposite direction. The speaker does not merely receive impressions from his environment. His compassionate response becomes his own form of resistance.

Instead of answering violence with anger, he wishes to become a soft storm that spreads hope, kindness, and humanity throughout society.

b. Why does the speaker call himself a soft storm?

The speaker calls himself a soft storm because he wants to protest injustice without becoming violent himself. The title combines two opposite ideas: softness, which suggests kindness and compassion, and storm, which represents power and destruction.

By joining these opposite meanings together, Abhi Subedi creates a

powerful paradox that defines the speaker's character.

Every painful experience strengthens the speaker's emotions. When he sees hungry children, a lost child crying for his mother, an innocent man being mercilessly beaten, and a blood stained shirt silently expressing pain, his compassion grows stronger instead of disappearing.

His soft storm therefore becomes a peaceful but powerful rebellion against corruption, violence, poverty, and inhumanity.

Unlike a destructive storm that leaves ruin behind, the speaker's soft storm aims to awaken people's conscience, heal emotional wounds, and inspire hope during difficult times.

c. Explain the use of imagery in *Soft Storm*.

Imagery is one of the poem's strongest literary features because Abhi Subedi creates vivid pictures that allow readers to experience both the beauty and the pain of Kathmandu.

Instead of describing social problems directly, he presents unforgettable images that carry emotional and symbolic meanings.

Some of the poem's most powerful images include:

The earth crashing against eerie stillness.

Crocuses blooming over stones.

The moon skidding down walls while speaking the language of posters

and politics.

Hungry children crying beneath the bat bearing trees of Kesharmahal.

A forlorn child wandering with a transistor radio around his neck while crying for his mother.

A blood stained shirt speaking with bruised human lips.

Rhododendrons blooming during winter.

A rainbow melting into the speaker's soft storm.

These images create both visual and emotional impact. Natural beauty appears beside violence, poverty, pollution, and political unrest, helping readers understand the disturbing contradictions of modern society.

d. How does the poet criticize society through surreal images?

Abhi Subedi criticizes society by using surreal images that make ordinary reality appear strange and unsettling. Instead of presenting realistic descriptions alone, he combines impossible or unusual images with actual social problems to reveal how unnatural modern society has become.

For example, the moon slides down walls while speaking the language of politics, history runs beneath old lampposts, flowers bloom on stones, and rhododendrons bloom during winter. These impossible scenes symbolize a world where both nature and human society have lost their normal balance.

The surreal imagery becomes even more meaningful when combined with realistic suffering. Hungry children, innocent victims of violence, polluted streets, and ignored human pain create a society that feels both real and dreamlike at the same time.

Through this unusual combination, the poet exposes corruption, inequality, violence, and moral decline more powerfully than straightforward description could achieve.

e. Why does the poem end with a rainbow instead of another image of violence?

The poem ends with a rainbow because the speaker chooses hope instead of revenge. After witnessing so much suffering throughout the poem, readers might expect an ending filled with anger or destruction.

Instead, the speaker wishes to melt like a rainbow, allowing his soft storm to dance gently across people's troubled hearts.

The rainbow symbolizes peace, healing, beauty, and new beginnings after a storm. It suggests that compassion can become stronger than violence and that humanity can recover even during difficult times.

This hopeful ending transforms the entire poem from a simple social protest into a vision of emotional renewal and collective healing.

Reference Beyond the Text

a. Write an essay on Compassion as a Form of Resistance.

Compassion as a Form of Resistance

Compassion is often considered a gentle emotion, but history has repeatedly shown that it can become one of the strongest forms of resistance against injustice. While violence may create fear for a short time, compassion has the power to transform individuals, strengthen communities, and inspire lasting social change.

A compassionate person refuses to ignore the suffering of others. Instead of becoming indifferent to poverty, violence, discrimination, or inequality, such a person responds with empathy and action. Even small acts of kindness can challenge systems that depend on hatred and selfishness.

Many great leaders demonstrated this principle throughout history. Mahatma Gandhi resisted colonial rule through nonviolence, Martin Luther King Jr. fought racial discrimination through peaceful protest, and Nelson Mandela promoted reconciliation after years of oppression. Their examples show that compassion can become a powerful force for justice.

Abhi Subedi's Soft Storm beautifully expresses this idea. The speaker repeatedly becomes soft whenever he witnesses hunger, violence, abandoned children, and human suffering. His softness does not make him powerless. Instead, it becomes his quiet rebellion against a cruel society. Rather than responding with another storm of violence, he chooses a rainbow of hope.

Compassion also strengthens communities because it encourages people to help one another during difficult times. Whether supporting disaster

victims, protecting vulnerable children, or speaking against injustice, compassionate actions create trust and unity.

In today's world, where conflicts, environmental problems, and social inequality continue affecting millions of people, compassion remains important. It reminds us that true strength does not always appear through force. Sometimes the greatest courage lies in protecting others while refusing to lose our humanity.

In conclusion, compassion is not weakness but quiet strength. Like the speaker's soft storm, it can challenge injustice, heal emotional wounds, and inspire people to create a kinder and more hopeful world.

b. How does modern urban life affect human relationships?

Modern urban life offers many opportunities, but it also creates challenges that can weaken human relationships. Large cities bring together people from different backgrounds, yet they sometimes produce loneliness, inequality, and emotional distance despite physical closeness.

One major problem is the growing gap between wealth and poverty. In many cities, expensive hotels and shopping areas exist beside homeless children and struggling families. This contrast appears clearly in *Soft Storm*, where the lively streets of Thamel stand beside hungry children crying beneath the trees of Kesharmahal.

Another challenge is increasing social isolation. Busy lifestyles often leave people with little time to build meaningful relationships with neighbors, relatives, and friends. Technology connects people digitally, but emotional connection can sometimes become weaker.

Urban life can also increase stress. Competition, unemployment, pollution, traffic congestion, and political instability create anxiety that affects people's behavior toward others. When society becomes less compassionate, violence and indifference become easier to ignore.

However, cities also provide opportunities for positive change. They bring education, cultural exchange, creativity, and social awareness. If people choose empathy instead of indifference, urban communities can become places where diversity becomes a strength rather than a source of division.

Abhi Subedi's poem reminds readers that modern cities should not lose their humanity. The speaker's compassion encourages people to notice those who suffer around them and respond with kindness instead of indifference.

In conclusion, modern urban life shapes human relationships in both positive and negative ways. While cities create opportunities for growth, they also demand greater compassion if people wish to build stronger and more caring communities.

Simple Question Explanations

Why does the speaker repeatedly say I became soft?

The speaker repeatedly says I became soft because every painful scene he witnesses makes him more compassionate instead of making him emotionally numb. Rather than becoming angry or violent, he develops greater empathy for people suffering from poverty, violence, corruption, and injustice.

The repetition also shows that compassion grows stronger with every experience. His softness gradually transforms into a soft storm, proving that kindness itself can become a powerful form of resistance against cruelty.

What does the seamless city represent?

The seamless city represents Kathmandu, but it also symbolizes a society where moral boundaries have disappeared. The city appears seamless because corruption, pollution, political instability, and social inequality have become so common that they blend into everyday life.

The moon observing the city, political posters on the walls, and polluted gutters all suggest that disorder has become an ordinary part of urban existence.

Why are the children in Thamel important?

The hungry children in Thamel represent the painful contrast between wealth and poverty. While tourists enjoy hotels, restaurants, and entertainment, homeless children struggle for food and shelter only a short distance away.

Through this contrast, Abhi Subedi criticizes society for ignoring its most vulnerable people despite visible prosperity around them.

What does the blood stained shirt symbolize?

The blood stained shirt symbolizes victims whose voices have been silenced by violence. Although the injured person cannot speak openly,

the shirt itself seems to communicate suffering through its bruised human lips.

This powerful image reminds readers that pain continues to exist even when society chooses not to acknowledge it.

Why does the poem end with a rainbow?

The rainbow symbolizes hope, peace, healing, and new beginnings after suffering. Instead of ending with revenge or destruction, the speaker chooses compassion, showing that humanity can respond to difficult times without becoming cruel itself.

Important Lines and Passages

I became soft

This repeated refrain forms the emotional backbone of the poem. It shows that every painful experience increases the speaker's compassion instead of weakening his humanity.

The moon skidded down the walls

This surreal image suggests that even nature witnesses the hidden realities of Kathmandu, including politics, corruption, and social unrest.

Mother! Mother!

The forlorn child's repeated cry becomes one of the poem's most emotional moments, symbolizing children affected by violence, poverty,

and family separation.

A blood stained shirt spoke

This unforgettable symbol shows that silent suffering can communicate more powerfully than spoken words.

I want to melt like a rainbow

These closing lines transform the poem's protest into hope, suggesting that compassion can become stronger than violence.

Exam Focused Questions

1. How does Abhi Subedi present compassion in *Soft Storm*?

Abhi Subedi presents compassion as a powerful response to social injustice. The speaker repeatedly becomes soft whenever he witnesses suffering, showing that empathy can become a peaceful but determined form of resistance against violence, poverty, and corruption.

2. Explain the significance of the title *Soft Storm*.

The title is a paradox that combines gentleness with strength. It symbolizes the speaker's compassionate rebellion against injustice, proving that kindness can possess the power of a storm without becoming destructive.

3. What does Kathmandu symbolize in the poem?

Kathmandu symbolizes a modern society filled with contradictions, where natural beauty exists beside poverty, violence, political instability, and moral decline.

4. How does the poem criticize social inequality?

The poem criticizes social inequality by contrasting prosperous areas such as Thamel with hungry homeless children, showing how wealth and suffering exist side by side while vulnerable people remain ignored.

5. What is the significance of the forlorn child?

The forlorn child represents innocent victims of conflict, poverty, migration, and family separation whose suffering reflects the larger pain of society.

6. Why is Soft Storm considered a contemporary poem?

The poem addresses modern issues such as political unrest, urban poverty, violence, corruption, environmental degradation, and social indifference, making it relevant to contemporary society.

7. How does the poet combine realism and surrealism?

Abhi Subedi combines realistic scenes of hunger, violence, and poverty with surreal images such as the moon sliding down walls and flowers blooming on stones. This combination makes his social criticism more emotionally powerful.

Commonly Confusing Points

Is the storm actually destructive?

No. The storm is symbolic. It represents compassionate resistance rather than physical destruction.

What does seamless city mean?

It symbolizes Kathmandu as a city where social, political, and moral disorder has become deeply woven into everyday life.

Why does the moon speak?

The speaking moon is a surreal symbol showing that nature silently witnesses the hidden truths of society.

What does the transistor radio symbolize?

The transistor radio around the forlorn child's neck suggests both communication and loneliness, highlighting how the child remains connected to a troubled world while searching for his mother.

Why do rhododendrons bloom during winter?

This unusual image symbolizes a world whose natural and moral order has become disturbed by social and political chaos.

What is the central symbol of the poem?

The soft storm itself is the central symbol, representing compassion that quietly but powerfully challenges injustice.

Quick Revision

Poet

Abhi Subedi

Genre

Free verse poem.

Beginning

The speaker repeatedly becomes soft as he witnesses the disturbing realities of Kathmandu.

Development

He observes hungry children, violence, political instability, and social inequality while his compassion continues growing stronger.

Turning Point

The speaker realizes that his emotional softness can become a powerful form of resistance against injustice.

Ending

He wishes to melt like a rainbow, choosing hope and compassion over violence.

Major Themes

Compassion, social injustice, political instability, human suffering, environmental disorder, and silent rebellion.

Important Symbols

Soft Storm: Compassionate resistance.

Seamless City: Lawless Kathmandu.

Blood Stained Shirt: Silenced victims.

Rainbow: Hope and healing.

Moon: Witness to hidden realities.

Literary Devices

Paradox, symbolism, imagery, repetition, surrealism, and free verse.

Key Lesson

The poem teaches that genuine compassion can become a powerful force against violence, poverty, corruption, and social injustice. It shows that humanity remains strongest when it chooses empathy over hatred.

One Minute Revision

Soft Storm is a free verse poem by Abhi Subedi that portrays the social and political turmoil of Kathmandu through surreal imagery and emotional symbolism.

The speaker repeatedly says I became soft whenever he witnesses hungry children, abandoned victims, blood stained shirts, political unrest, and human suffering. Instead of responding with violence, his compassion grows into a soft storm, a gentle but powerful form of resistance against injustice.

The poem ultimately ends with the hopeful image of a rainbow, suggesting that kindness, empathy, and humanity can challenge even the darkest periods of society.

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