

## Lesson 11



## Poetry

### About the Poet:



**Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto** (1904-1973), better known by his pen name and, later, legal name **Pablo Neruda**, was a Chilean poet, diplomat and politician. He derived his pen-name from the Czech poet Jan Neruda. He was born on 12 July 1904, in Parral, Chile. He wrote in a variety of styles and his works include poems, historical epics, political manifestos and a prose autobiography. He often wrote in green ink, which was his personal symbol for desire and hope. He won many awards and the notable ones among them are “*International Peace Prize; Lenin Peace Prize (1953); Nobel Prize in Literature (1971)*”

Pablo Neruda breathed his last on 23 September 1973, in Santiago, Chile.

### Glossary:

#### Stanza I

1. **Summoned:** called or ordered to be present.
2. **Abruptly:** suddenly and unexpectedly

[The amazing thing in Pablo Neruda’s achieving poetic inspirations is that instead of his search for poetic inspiration, poetry came in search of him, summoned him and touched him. How was he summoned- by voice or silence? Where was he summoned from – any street? When was he summoned- at night? When the poetry touched him whether he was alone or among others, whether he was in a peaceful mood or in a violent emotional disruption, he does not know all these. But, he knows that he was a man without a face – a man without a personal identity or popularity before the arrival of poetry to him.]

#### Stanza II

3. **Decipher:** succeed in understanding, interpreting, or identifying (something).
4. **Faint:** indistinct, vague or unclear.
5. **Substance:** importance, seriousness, or relationship to real facts
6. **Unfastened:** opened, untied
7. **Palpitate:** beat very fast (heart), (here) move or shake (trees, plants etc as in wind)
8. **Perforated:** having a series of small holes.
9. **Riddled with arrows:** holes created by hitting arrows.

[It's an inexplicable experience for the poet when he was touched by the poetry. He became somewhat blind and dumb. Something started in his mind, fever or forgotten wings – fire of poetic inspiration (a burning passion) or hidden and nameless emotions. Whatever, he was so inspired that he composed his first feeble and faint lines without much confidence, deciphering that fire. What he wrote may be utter nonsense from a beginner who knows nothing, or pure wisdom bestowed by poetic inspiration. Anyhow, when he started composing verses, the heavens opened up in front of him and he could see everything from the planets to plantations, shadows, fire, flowers, and all that make up this universe.]

### Stanza III

10. **Infinitesimal:** minute, tiny, extremely small
11. **Drunk:** (drink, drank drunk) (here) intoxicated
12. **Starry void:** (here) vastness of the starry sky
13. **Abyss:** a deep or seemingly bottomless chasm or cavity.
14. **Wheel:** (v) fly in a wide circle.
15. **Broke loose:** escaped from control.

[The poet considers himself to be a very minute and insignificant being as compared to the universe. He is almost intoxicated with the wide and starry sky. When the poet started writing poetry, he reached another world that was full of mystery and imagery. He wheeled with starts and his emotions started flying with every word of poetry that he wrote. He himself felt to be part and parcel of everything in this universe from boundless and starry sky to the fathomless abyss. His heart broke loose and started flying with wind, and his feelings had no bounds, and whatever he felt or experienced, he poured out into the verse of poetry.]

## Questions and Answers

**Reed the following lines from the poem “Poetry” and answer the questions that follow.**

And it was at that age ... Poetry arrived  
 in search of me. I don't know, I don't know where  
 it came from, from winter or a river.  
 I don't know how or when,  
 no they were not voices, they were not  
 words, nor silence,  
 but from a street I was summoned,  
 from the branches of night,

abruptly from the others,  
among violent fires  
or returning alone,  
there I was without a face  
and it touched me.

Q 1-6:

1. Do you think the speaker in the poem earnestly wishes to be a poet? Which line says so?
2. 'Poetry arrived in search of me.' Why does the poet say so?
3. According to the poet, where did poetry come from?
4. The words "Winter" and "river", representing a frozen state and the flow of life respectively, indicate a contrast. Find out a similar expression of contrast from these lines.
5. What is the figure of speech used in the expression 'poetry arrived'?
6. 'there I was without a face'. What does the poet mean by this line? Or, What was the poet's condition before the poetry arrived?

**Reed the following lines from the poem "Poetry" and answer the questions that follow.**

I did not know what to say, my mouth  
had no way  
with names,  
my eyes were blind,  
and something started in my soul,  
fever or forgotten wings,  
and I made my own way,  
deciphering  
that fire,  
and I wrote the first faint line,  
faint, without substance, pure  
nonsense  
pure wisdom  
of someone who knows nothing,  
and suddenly I saw  
the heavens  
unfastened and open,  
planets,  
palpitating plantations,  
shadow perforated,  
riddled  
with arrows, fire and flowers,  
the winding night, the universe.

Q 6-12

7. What happened to the poet when poetry arrived?
8. Poetic intuition is like seeing without eyes. Which line says so?
9. Pick out two examples of alliteration.
10. How did he feel about his first line and why?
11. How did he say when he started writing poetry, his imagination knew no bounds?
12. What do the words 'fire' and 'flower' stand for?

## Answers

1. The line 'And it was at that age ... Poetry arrived' shows that the poet was earnestly wishing to be a poet, and at that age when he was wishing to be a poet, it arrived and touched him.
2. At the time of the poet's earnest desire to become a poet, in a phase of his life when he could not express his ideas, he got abruptly a poetic inspiration and started writing his faint first line. This was like the poetry arrived in search of him.
3. He did not know where the poetry came from, how or when. He did not hear any voices speaking to him. He was summoned away by an invisible force and the poetry touched him.
4. Not voices, nor silence.
5. In the expression 'Poetry arrived', the figure of speech 'personification' is used.
6. Before the arrival of poetry, poet was unable to express his ideas and thoughts. He was a person without a self identity.
7. When the poetry arrived he felt something started in his soul. He could make his own way to express his ideas and thoughts by deciphering the fire of poetic passion.
8. 'My eyes were blind', 'and something started in my soul'.
9. 'and something started in my soul'. Planets, palpitating plantations.
10. He felt that his first line was faint and without substance. He was not sure whether it was wisdom or pure nonsense. When he started writing his first line he was not confident enough to compose a poem.
11. When he started writing poetry, the heavens opened up before him and he could see everything from the planets to abyss, everything in this universe.
12. 'Fire' and 'flower' are two things in the universe. 'Fire' stands for the poetic passion and 'flower' for beauty and ecstasy of poetic imagination.

1. What is the theme of the poem?
2. What are the expressions used by the poet to show the inspired moments?
3. What is the tone of the poem? (Choose and tick the relevant answer from the options given below.)  
i) cheerful ii) sarcastic iii) ecstatic iv) melancholic

1. The theme of the poem is the ecstatic experience of a poet who was embraced by the poetic creativity.
2. When he was inspired by the poetic touch, he did not know what to say. His eyes became blind and he felt something started in his mind –something like fever or forgotten wings.
3. The tone of the poem is 'ecstatic'.

## Let's revisit

### Activity 1, textbook page 127

The poem is an example of free verse and does not have end rhymes. The poet has made use of instances of alliteration to give rhythm to the poem.

**Underline the initial sounds repeated in the given lines.**

... something started in my soul,

#### **Alliteration:**

Alliteration is the repetition of an initial consonant sound in successive words, as in "a *peck* of *pickled peppers*"

**Note:** The repetition of similar consonant **sounds** makes the alliteration, not merely the letters.

E.g. A *cute child*. (Here, the letter C is repeated, but the sound is different. So, it is not an example of the Alliteration.)

A *clever king*. (Here, the letters are different, but sounds are same and repeated. So, it is an example of the Alliteration.)

#### **Examples of alliterations from the poem Poetry:**

"...*my mouth*"

"and *Something Started* in my *Soul*,  
*fever or forgotten wings.*"

"and I wrote the *first faint line,*"

"*planets*,  
*palpitating plantations*,  
*shadow perforated*,"  
"...*fire and flowers,*"

### Activity 2, textbook page 127

Good poetry can paint a vivid portrait of a scene or an emotion with words. Neruda uses many images in his poem. Read the poem and identify the images used in it.

#### **IMAGERY:**

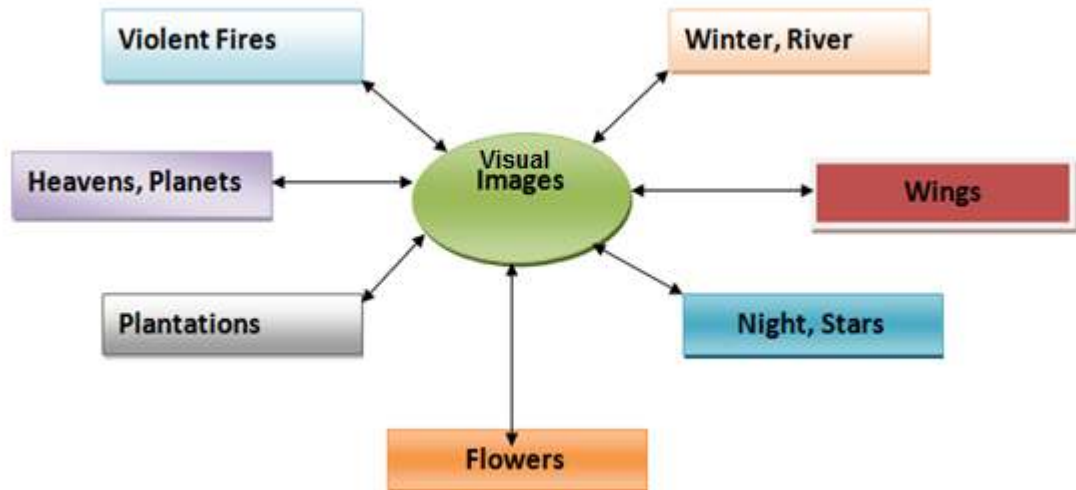
**Imagery** is the use of figurative language to create a visual representation of ideas in our mind. Though it is normally associated with visual images, it is also connected with other physical senses like sense of hearing (**auditory**), sense of smell (**olfactory**), sense of touch (**tactile**), sense of taste (**gustatory**).

- *It was dark and dim in the forest.*  
The words "dark" and "dim" are visual images.
- *The children were screaming and shouting in the fields.*  
"Screaming" and "shouting" appeal to our sense of hearing, or auditory sense.



- *He whiffed the aroma of brewed coffee.*  
“Whiff” and “aroma” evoke our sense of smell, or olfactory sense.
- *The girl ran her hands on a soft satin fabric.*  
The idea of “soft” in this example appeals to our sense of touch, or tactile sense.
- *The fresh and juicy orange is very cold and sweet.*  
“Juicy” and “sweet” – when associated with oranges – have an effect on our sense of taste, or gustatory sense.

➤ (Activity2, textbook page 127) Complete the word web with appropriate images from the poem.



### Activity 3, textbook page 128

Following is the review of the poem written by one of the students in Std X. Some parts of it are missing. Supply suitable words from those given in the brackets below.

Pablo Neruda's poem titled *Poetry* is taken from the poet's collection of **autobiographical** poems which appeared under the title *Isla Negra*; the name of his place of residence in Chile. *Poetry* is the inner evolution of a poet in the making. It is as abrupt and unexpected as if summoned by a mysterious poet whose origins are unknown. 'Where does it come from?' The poet doesn't know whether it is from **winter** or **a river**. Perhaps it came from the **branches of night** which symbolizes obscurity and mystery. The poet is trying to express the inexpressible. It is like **deciphering the fire**. The fire is an inner fire - the fire of poetic inspiration. Similar images occur at many places in the poem. It is something that started in his soul like **forgotten wings**. Wings also stand for the same inspired state of mind when the poet will be able to take a flight of imagination. When he started to write, the first line seemed to be pure nonsense. Then the poet saw the **palpitating** plantations and **perforated** shadows. In Keat's poem *Ode to a Nightingale*, we come across a similar expression, 'viewless wings of Poesy'. Through creativity the poet experiences a kind of inner expansion which discloses the vast expanse of the universe before his inner eyes. It is like being drunk with the **starry void** or **wheeling** with the stars.

[ **starry void, deciphering the fire, autobiographical, palpitating, winter, wheeling, a river, forgotten wings, branches of night, perforated** ]

**Prepare an appreciation of the poem “Poetry” focusing on the theme, style, imagery and other literary devices used.**

### **Poetry – an appreciation**

In the poem ‘Poetry’ the poet Pablo Neruda talks about poetry that arrived in search of him. He did not know where it came from, or how or when. He did not hear any voices speaking to him. He says he was summoned away by an invisible force, and the poetry touched him. The theme of the poem, in simple words, is the ecstatic experience of the poet embraced by the poetic creativity. He had in his mind ideas which he could not express effectively before he was blessed by that creativity.

*[The amazing thing in Pablo Neruda’s achieving poetic inspirations is that instead of his search for poetic inspiration, poetry came in search of him, summoned him and touched him. How was he summoned- by voice or silence? Where was he summoned from – any street? When was he summoned- at night? When the poetry touched him whether he was alone or among others, whether he was in a peaceful mood or in a violent emotional disruption, he does not know all these. But, he knows that he was a man without a face – a man without a personal identity or popularity before the arrival of poetry to him.]*

By the arrival of poetry, though he could not utter words and his eyes became blind, he felt something started in his soul, like a fever. He could make his own way to express his ideas and thoughts by deciphering the "fire" of poetry. He wrote his first feeble, faint and substance-free line, and suddenly, the heavens opened up in front of him and he could see everything from the planets to the shadows, fire, flowers and all that making up the universe. By the arrival of poetic inspiration, his imagination became boundless.

*[It’s an inexplicable experience for the poet when he was touched by the poetry. He became somewhat blind and dumb. Something started in his mind, fever or forgotten wings – fire of poetic inspiration (a burning passion) or hidden and nameless emotions. Whatever, he was so inspired that he composed his first feeble and faint lines without much confidence, deciphering that fire. What he wrote may be utter nonsense from a beginner who knows nothing, or pure wisdom bestowed by poetic inspiration. Anyhow, when he started composing verses, the heavens opened up in front of him and he could see everything from the planets to plantations, shadows, fire, flowers, and all that make up this universe.]*

Although he was an infinitesimal being, by the touch of poetry, he was suddenly elevated to a world of ecstasy, he felt about himself being pure part of the abyss and free to wheel with the stars. He describes the whole experience as his "heart breaking loose on the wind."

*[The poet considers himself to be a very minute and insignificant being as compared to the universe. He is almost intoxicated with the wide and starry sky. When the poet started writing poetry, he reached another world that was full of mystery and imagery. He wheeled with starts and his emotions started flying with every word of poetry that he wrote. He himself felt to be part and parcel of everything in this universe from boundless and starry sky to the fathomless abyss. His heart broke loose and started flying with wind, and his feelings had no bounds, and whatever he felt or experienced, he poured out into the verse of poetry.]*

**Free verse** is the style of the poem; passion or ecstasy is the tone. 'The poetry arrived in search of the poet and touched him'-assuming poetry as a person, the poetic device **Personification** is very aptly applied here.

'Winter' and 'river' represent a 'frozen' but 'flowing' state and which make a contrast. In the same way, expressions like 'not voices', "nor silence"; 'pure nonsense', 'pure wisdom' are example of subtle application of the literary device **Contrast**. The poet has not used the end- rhyme, but instances of **assonance** are there in the line "I don't know how or when" which add beauty to the rhythm. Application of Alliteration can be seen in lines, "and something started in my soul, / fever or forgotten wings" and "planets,/palpitating plantations,".

By the touch of the poetry, a world of ecstasy is opened in the mind of the poet. References to flowers, violent fires, the branches of night, the heavens, wings, planets, plantations, part of abyss etc. create beautiful and perfect **visual images** of the universe in the imaginations of the readers.

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### A line by line Paraphrasing of the poem, Poetry

1. At my early age when I wished to become a poet and wanted to write poems, poetry arrived [**use of personification**]
2. in search of me, but I don't know really where
3. it came from, from winter or from a river?
4. I don't know how it came or when it came in search of me.
5. (The poetry summoned (called) me), but not by any voices,
6. Not by any words, and nor by silence [**a silent call! – use of contrast**]
7. But I was summoned from a street = The poetry called me from a street!
8. ( where else was I called from?) from various moments of night (branches of night =parts of night)
9. Unexpectedly it called me from the other people ( when I was one among them)
10. Was it when I was part of some struggle, protest? [**allusion to anti-colonial protests**]
11. Or was it when I was alone returning (from such protest gathering)
12. (At that time) I was a person without any identity (without any acknowledgement or fame)
13. Then the poetry touched me (I got hold of the poetic inspirations and a poetic creativity arose in me)
14. (when I got inspired) I did not know what to say/write, my mouth
15. Had no way (**idiom, 'to have way with' = succeed in dealing with**) could not find
16. with names = suitable words to give names to my thoughts. [my mouth could not succeed in finding suitable words, so I did not know what to say or write.]
17. I became blind (by not finding ways to express my thoughts in words)
18. I felt some new changes in me or a sort of fresh and vigorous inspiration
19. Something like a burning poetic passion (fever), hidden or nameless emotions (forgotten wings)
20. I tried to go forward making my own way (in composing verses) (**idiom, 'to make one's own way' = to go in a particular direction or destination**)
21. Finding out and understanding meanings, making interpretations
22. Of that fire of poetic passions, complex and nameless emotions
23. Thus I wrote my first feeble lines (without much confidence)
24. Lines which were not much meaningful
25. Maybe mere nonsense (it may seem nonsense to readers)
26. Maybe pure wisdom (it may be felt like very wise and meaningful to some others)
27. (though) from an inexperienced person [**wisdom of someone who knows nothing – a contrast**]
28. (Anyhow, when I started writing my first lines) I saw suddenly (I could experience)
29. The heavens (everything in this universe)



30. were unlocked and opened (everything in this universe).
31. From planets to
32. Plantations (plants and trees, an estate) moving in the wind or throbbing in their lively growth. [*Maybe an allusion to colonial forces, 'Plantations' has the meaning of colonies and dependencies- palpating plantations = colonies suffering from colonial dominations*]
33. Shadow with spots of light [*an allusion to shadow of present sufferings but with rays of light of hope*]
34. Made holes (perforated)
35. With arrows [*the perforations/ holes were created by hitting arrows – an allusion to fights/struggles*]  
Fire and flowers [ things representing unrest, commotions, struggles and beauty of nature, hopeful and pleasing moments]
36. The winding nights and the universe (he listed the things he could see in the eyes of imagination when he started writing his first poem)
37. I am a very silly creature (compared to the vast and mighty universe)
38. Intoxicated (extremely attracted) by the beauty of the starry skies
39. And by the vastness of the boundless skies,
40. I am a resemblance, a pictorial similarity (likeness), an image of
41. Mystery, my unknown identity,
42. I, such an infinitesimal being, felt myself to be a real part
43. From the deepest point of the universe, (the one end of the universe being the nadir and the other end being the zenith. I felt myself to be a pure part of the whole universe from the nadir to the zenith).
44. I could fly with stars, my imagination knew no bounds
45. My heart escaped from all controls and confinements to the freedom of wind.

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### **A simplified stanza-wise summary of the poem, Poetry**

#### **Stanza I**

The amazing thing in Pablo Neruda's achieving poetic inspirations is that instead of his search for poetic inspiration, poetry came in search of him, summoned him and touched him. How was he summoned- by voice or silence? Where was he summoned from – any street? When was he summoned- at night? When the poetry touched him whether he was alone or among others, whether he was in a peaceful mood or in a violent emotional disruption, he does not know all these. But, he knows that he was a man without a face – a man without a personal identity or popularity before the arrival of poetry to him.

#### **Stanza II**

It's an inexplicable experience for the poet when he was touched by the poetry. He became somewhat blind and dumb. Something started in his mind, fever or forgotten wings – fire of poetic inspiration (a burning passion) or hidden and nameless emotions. Whatever, he was so inspired that he composed his first feeble and faint lines without much confidence, deciphering that fire. What he wrote may be utter nonsense from a beginner who knows nothing, or pure wisdom bestowed by poetic inspiration. Anyhow, when he started composing verses, the heavens opened up in front of him and he could see everything from the planets to plantations, shadows, fire, flowers, and all that make up this universe.

#### **Stanza III**

The poet considers himself to be a very minute and insignificant being as compared to the universe. He is almost intoxicated with the wide and starry sky. When the poet started writing poetry, he reached another world that was full of mystery and imagery. He wheeled with starts and his emotions started flying with every word of poetry that he wrote. He himself felt to be part and parcel of everything in this universe from boundless and starry sky to the fathomless abyss. His heart broke loose and started flying with wind, and his feelings had no bounds, and whatever he felt or experienced, he poured out into the verse of poetry.

കാവ്യ കല

(1) അക്കാലത്തായിരുന്നു എന്നെത്തേടി കവിത വന്നെത്തിയത്,  
 എവിടെ നിന്നത് വന്നെന്നെനിക്കറിയില്ലേയറിയില്ല  
 ഉറയും ശൈത്യത്തിൽ നിന്നോ ഒഴുകും പുഴയിൽ നിന്നോ?  
 എപ്പോൾ എങ്ങനെ വന്നെന്നറിയില്ല,  
 വിളി നാദമായി കേട്ടില്ല, ഉരുവിട്ട പദങ്ങളുമായിരുന്നില്ല,  
 നാദ-പദമില്ലാത്ത മൗനവുമായിരുന്നില്ല!  
 ഏതോ തെരുവിൽ നിന്നുമെന്നെ വിളിച്ചു,  
 രാത്രിയുടെ ഏതോ (2)ശിവരത്തിൽ നിന്ന്  
 അപ്രതീക്ഷിതം, ആൾകൂട്ടത്തിൽ നിന്നോ,  
 തീവ്രമാം സമര മുഖത്തു നിൽക്കേയോ,  
 ഒറ്റയ്ക്ക് ഞാൻ മടങ്ങുമ്പോഴോ,  
 ആരോരുമറിയാത്തയെന്നെ, കവിത തേടിയെത്തി തലോടി.

എന്നു ചൊല്ലേണമെന്നറിഞ്ഞില്ല,  
 വാക്കുകൾ കിട്ടാതെ വാവട്ടം വരണ്ടു,  
 കണ്ണുകളിൽ ഇരുളടഞ്ഞു.  
 ആത്മാവിലെന്തോ തുടിക്കും പോലെ,  
 അനിർവ്വചനീയമാം കാവ്യ ജഗമോ  
 കാവ്യകല തൻ കാണാത്ത ചിറകോ,  
 എന്നെച്ചുഴും വികാര തീഷ്ണതയുടെ  
 പൊരുൾ ചികഞ്ഞു ഞാൻ മുന്നേറി,  
 സത്തയില്ലാത്ത, അവ്യക്തമാം  
 എന്നാദ്യ വരികൾ ഞാൻ കുറിച്ചിട്ടു.  
 പാമരന്റെ നിരർത്ഥ ഭാഷണമോ,  
 പ്രാരംഭകന്റെ നിപുണതയോ!  
 കണ്ടു ഞാൻ പൊടുന്നനെയെൻ കൺമുമ്പിൽ  
 മലർക്കെ തുറന്നിട്ട പ്രപഞ്ച കവാടങ്ങൾ.  
 ആകാശ ഗോളങ്ങളും കാറ്റിലാടും തോട്ടങ്ങളും  
 അമ്പ് മുന്നേയേറ്റ് തുള വീണപോൽ  
 വെളിച്ചമരിച്ചിറങ്ങും നിഴൽ പാടുകളും,  
 അഗ്നിയും പൂക്കളും,  
 കാറ്റാഞ്ഞു വീശും രാത്രി തീർക്കും പ്രപഞ്ചവും.

അനന്തമാമി പ്രപഞ്ചത്തിലൊരു പരമാൽപ്പമാം ഞാൻ  
 അതിരു തീർക്കാത്ത ആകാശപ്പരപ്പിലെ  
 താര ചാരതയിൽ ഉന്മത്തനായി.  
 അജ്ഞത തൻ പ്രതീകമാം ഞാനും,  
 പ്രപഞ്ച നിഗൂഢതയിൽ വിലയം പ്രാപിച്ചു,  
 പാതാളത്തിനടിത്തട്ടു പോലും സ്വായത്തമാക്കി,  
 താരകക്കൂട്ടങ്ങളോടൊത്ത് സഞ്ചരിച്ചു,  
 കെട്ടുപാടുകൾ വിട്ടെൻ ഹൃദയവും  
 കാറ്റിനെ പോലെ സ്വതന്ത്രമാക്കി.

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- (1) കവിതയെ പ്രണയിച്ചു, കവിയാകാൻ മോഹിച്ച കാലം.
  - (2) രാത്രിയുടെ ഏതോ യാമത്തിൽ.