

Task I

The given text is an excerpt from the novel “Fasting, Feasting” by Anita Desai, which was published in 2000. It is about Arun, an Indian exchange student, who goes shopping with his host, Mrs Patton, and is astonished at the wealth and the consumer behaviour of his American host. The first thing Arun is surprised at is the fact that all supermarkets, fast food outlets and banks are not in town, but in a rural area. He wonders why people who are living in town go into the country to go shopping.

Furthermore, he is confused when he sees the cars that are parked in front of the supermarket. In India, cars are designed in order to serve the purpose – carrying passengers. But the cars he sees in America are much more than just useful means of transport. The numberplates, stickers and the chock-full backseats are telling stories about their owners.

When he notices that Mrs Patton does not only look at the prices – which he is used to – but also at the nutrition facts, he is confused, too.

Mrs Patton seems to buy too much food, Arun notices worriedly, but his American host is not responsive to his worried question.

The behaviour of the other people in the supermarket also confuses – and annoys – the Indian exchange student.

Arriving at home, Arun feels forced to eat something from the stock they have just bought. But American food is not what he is used to and he only eats in order to satisfy Mrs Patton, who is watching him.

Task II

The author employs several means to show Arun’s and Mrs Patton’s differing attitudes towards shopping and consumption.

The way Mrs Patton is dressed when they go shopping, is explained in detail: she wears “flat rubber-soled sandals, her yellow slacks and [a] T-shirt that bore the legend *Born to Shop*” (Text A, ll. 35-36). Thus, her clothes reveal her attitude towards shopping and consumption: she does not go shopping in order to buy food but for fun.

The difference between Arun’s pragmatism concerning shopping and his American host’s attitude to shopping is shown very well by the author in lines 49 up to 52: “‘But will they eat?’, he asks worriedly. [...] ‘What does it matter, Ahroon? *We will,*’ she laughed gaily, at the same time weighing a cantaloupe in her hands and testing it for ripeness”.

Their extremely differing attitudes towards shopping and consumption are also shown when Arun and his American host return home after their shopping tour. While Mrs Patton happily puts away all the eatables they have bought, her Indian exchange student worries whether the family will eat that much: “Her joy lay in carrying home this hoard she had won from the maze of the supermarket [...]. Arun, handing her the packages one by one – butter, yogurt, milk to go in here, jam and cookies and cereal there – worried that they would never make their way through so much food but this did not seem to be the object of her purchases” (ll. 55-59).

Task III

3.1

“If she noticed his expression, she seemed incapable of doing anything about it” (Text A, l.70). This quote taken from Anita Desai’s novel “Fasting, Feasting” perfectly reveals the lack of cross-cultural understanding between Mrs Patton and Arun.

Arun, an Indian exchange student, is going shopping with his American host, Mrs Patton. He is dazzled by all the impressions but his host does not seem to notice that. She is caught by the shopping tour and buys food her family will probably never manage to eat.

Arriving at home, she happily stores her prey while Arun feels forced to eat something of it. But he does not like American food and thus, he has difficulties looking happy. He feels forced to eat whatever he is given. But Mrs Patton does not appear to recognize Arun’s unease – or if she recognizes it, she does not know what to do about it (cp. l.70).

But this is not the only misunderstanding between the American host and her exchange student: on their way to the supermarket, the Indian is confused about the fact that people who are living in town drive to supermarkets in the country. He asks his host about it, but Mrs Patton does not answer his question since she does not understand it: “ [...] why should anyone question what was *there?*” (Text A, l.8-9).

Furthermore, Mrs Patton does not seem to notice Arun’s unease when they are in the supermarket: While Arun is watching his host buying more food than her family will be able to eat, a woman wearing a T-shirt that says “Shop Till You Drop” leans over. Arun is annoyed by this situation, probably because of the consumer behaviour of the two women. But Mrs Patton does not notice that, too: “This unnerved Arun but Mrs. Patton did not seem to see” (Text A, l. 56).

Mrs Patton is not able to feel with and understand a person who has not grown up in America and thus does not think the same way as she does. When she is asked questions by Arun, she does not even try to answer them: when the Indian exchange student is, for example, confused about the fact that people who live in town go shopping in the country and he asks her, she “could only give a little shake of her head and a small smile, not having understood his question: why should anyone question what was *there?*” (Text A, ll. 7-9).

The lack of cross-cultural understanding between Mrs Patton and Arun is not only the American host’s fault. If Arun had explained his way of thinking to his host, Mrs Patton would have possibly been able to answer some of his questions. Both Mrs Patton and Arun should have talked in a more open way to each other to bridge the cultural gap between them.

Furthermore, both, Mrs Patton and Arun, should have been more aware of the cultural differences.

3.2

The short story "Fasting, Feasting," that was written by Anita Desai, tells the story of a young Indian exchange student to America having a cultural shock.

When Arun goes shopping with his American host, Mrs Patton, he is shocked at the consumer behaviour of his host since he is not used to such an abundance.

The short story "My Son the Fanatic" by Hanif Kureishi published in 1994 also deals with a young man who finds himself confronted with socio-cultural values different from his own.

Ali, whose parents immigrated to the UK before he was born, is not able to adapt to Western culture: he attacks the "sinfulness" of Western materialism.

The Indian exchange student, Arun, is confronted with Western materialism since he has travelled to America in the context of an exchange program. Going shopping with his host, he is shocked at the huge amount of vegetables, milk, jam and yogurt that his American host buys.

Ali in Kureishi's short story "My Son the Fanatic" does not only despise the Western abundance of food but Western values in general. He criticizes the behaviour of his father, Parvez, who has adapted to the Western culture. Parvez eats pork, drinks alcohol and has contact to a prostitute, Bettina, who has become a close friend of his. Before Ali turned to Islamic fundamentalism, he did not have anything against his father's behaviour. Turning into a fundamentalist, however, he stops studying accountancy, breaks up with his English girlfriend and starts to question Western values.

Arun is confused by Western consumerism because he is not used to it. He has been living in India since he was born and he has never been to America before.

Ali, on the other hand, has been living in the UK since he was born. He has grown up getting to know Western values. His father has taught him respect, freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Ali, however, neglects those values from one moment to another.

When Arun goes shopping with Mrs Patton, he wonders why people who live in the city go shopping in the country. When he asks his American host about it, however, she does not understand his question: "[...] She could only give a little shake of her head and a small smile, not having understood his question: why should anyone question what was *there?*" (ll. 7-9).

In contrary to Arun, Ali is unwilling to discuss things. He does not understand why his father behaves the way he does (not praying five times a day, drinking alcohol, eating pork) but he would never ask Parvez about it.

To sum up, one could say that Arun is confused by Western values because he is not used to them. But he is willing to understand the American way of thinking. If Mrs Patton had answered his questions he would have probably understood – or at least tried to understand – the different way of thinking in America.

Ali, however, was born and raised in the UK. Freedom of opinion should not be a foreign word to him but nevertheless, he is convinced that he alone is in possession of truth. He does not even try to understand the others' opinions.

3.3

Exchange programmes – a great opportunity... And a challenge

When I decided to take part in an exchange programme, I did so in order to get to know a foreign culture and traditions that are different from my own ones. Expanding my own horizon sounded interesting to me.

Indeed, I did expand my horizon. But the exchange would have probably been more pleasant and more informative if both my host, Mrs Patton, and I had been more aware of cultural differences.

An exchange is a great way to gain experience you cannot get by reading your textbooks. You are able to get to know the daily life of your exchange partners, their ways of thinking, their dreams and their fears. You are given an insight into a culture being completely different than yours.

But that might be dangerous: when I came to America, I was dazzled by all the impressions. When I went shopping with my host, I was hardly able to come to terms with all the new impressions. My host, however, did not notice that I was having a culture shock and thus, she did not even try to do something about it. I did not experience the shopping trip as an interesting way to get to know American habits, but as an exhausting, confusing way to get to know the American affluent society.

Nonetheless, I enjoyed my exchange. A culture shock can also be a useful experience for you. I became aware of the fact that I love India more than I would have thought. Moreover I learned that getting to know the plurality and the diversity between all the different cultures is a gift and a chance to expand one's horizon.

I do not only blame Mrs Patton for my culture shock and the negative experiences I have made during my exchange. It was also my fault. I should have talked to Mrs Patton more openly. She did not understand what I meant when I asked her the first time, but if I had explained it to her more detailed, she might have seen the cultural difference and thus might have understood my question.

Finally, my result is: if you talk to each other – and sometimes you have to ask again, if your question is not answered the first time – students and hosts can make the best of their shared experience.