

BACCALAUREAT
ANGLAIS LV1 - SERIE S - SESSION 2008
Oral du second groupe

TEXT 1

"Why America?"

Jagan is a sixty-year-old shopkeeper in a small town in southern India. He would like to know more about the future plans of his son Mali, an arts student¹ aged twenty. He has asked his cousin, a teacher in Mali's college, to investigate.

The cousin came back four days later and said, "New things are coming your way; your son
5 wants to go to America. Didn't I hint to you long ago that it was coming?"

The first shock of the impact blanked out Jagan's mind for a time, and he caught his breath as he had a momentary panic at the thought of his son removing himself geographically so far. He inanely² repeated, "America ! Why America ? What has happened to his book? Has he written it? Hasn't he written it?"

10 "He thinks he will have to learn the art in America."

Jagan was furious at this notion; it was outrageous and hurt his national pride.

"Going there to learn story-telling ! He should rather go to a village granny," he said, all his patriotic sentiments surging.

"Exactly what I told him," echoed the cousin.

15 "Did Valmiki go to America or Germany in order to learn to write his *Ramayana*³?" asked Jagan with pugnacity. "Strange notions these boys get nowadays!" he said, avoiding gently any specific reference to his son. [...]

"What has happened to his book?" he asked desperately.

"He will write it in America," said the cousin.

20 Jagan felt completely crushed; adverse forces seemed to hem him on all sides. "What has America to do with writing his book?"

"He has read in one of the magazines at the library about a college where they teach novel-writing." [...]

"Why America?" asked Jagan. [...]

25 "Because, perhaps, it's the only country where they teach such things."

"They eat only beef and pork in that country. I used to know a man from America and he told me..."

"They also drink a lot of intoxicating drinks, never water or milk," said the cousin, contributing his own bit of information. "And the women are free," he added. "I have seen some of their magazines
30 about films; their women mix freely with men and snap off marriages without ado⁴, and bask in the sun without clothes."

"Where did you see all this?" asked Jagan, and did not note the answer from the cousin, who flourished⁵ his arms vaguely. Jagan went on, "It may not all be true," not wishing to think a country to which Mali was going was one to corrupt his body with wine, women and meat, and his
35 soul with other things. He said with a sudden determination, "But it's unthinkable. Mali shall stay here."

R. K. NARAYAN, *The Vendor of Sweets (1967)*

1. arts student: *étudiant en lettres*
2. inanely: *bêtement*
3. Ramayana: an epic poem, composed about 300 B.C.
4. without ado : *sans cérémonie*
5. flourish: *agiter*