**Unit 3: Conflict and Hope**

**Section 2: Can We Change This? (Reading 1 - page 75)**

1. The narrator saw an elder of her street come along from the direction of the bazaar holding a parcel. The manner in which he was walking made her double up with laughter. The old man was holding the packet by its string, without really touching any part of the parcel.

No, it was not a funny sight because he was doing it as an ‘untouchable’. Being from a lower class, had he touched the *vadais*, they would have been considered ‘polluted’ and the Naicker would not have eaten the *vadais*.

2. The narrator’s Annan realized the significance of the act. He knew that the elder from their community had to humble and humiliate himself for a Naicker. It was not funny.

3. The narrator stopped feeling amused and became sad instead. She also felt provoked and angry at the unwarranted humiliation.

4. They had to run petty errands for the higher castes without ‘polluting’ them by touching their things. When the narrator’s grandmother was working in the fields, even tiny children from upper castes would call her by her name and order her about, just because they belonged to the Naicker caste. And this grandmother, like all the other labourers, would call the little boy Ayya, Master, and run about to do his bidding. Even the way they were given their drinking water was terrible. The Naicker women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while the narrator’s grandmother and the others received and drank it with cupped hands held to their mouths. The other grandmother had to sweep out the cowshed, collect the dung and dirt and then was given the left-over rice and curry from the previous evening.

5. Naicker was furious because a ‘Paraya’ lad, the grandson of one of the servants had dared to speak to him, a man from a higher caste, disrespectfully. No, it was not justified, but norms of the society made his behaviour accepted.

6. The narrator and the rest of the children from her caste were used for cheap labour. Children of her caste carried water to the teacher’s house. They watered the plants. They did all the chores that were needed in the school. Yet, if anything was stolen or if something terrible happened, it was taken for granted that the Cheri children must have done it.

7. One day, while the narrator and her friends were playing after school, they decided to run right up the coconut palm and touch its tip. The coconut palm grew at a slant, a convenient angle. If one came running along from a distance, at top speed, one could reach right to its tip and touch the coconut growing there. Encouraged by the excitement of the first few who managed to touch a coconut, those who came later grabbed it and twisted it before climbing down. By

the time the narrator got there, the coconut fell at her touch. All the children were frightened and ready to scatter. Everyone said she was the one who had plucked it.The next morning at assembly, the headmaster called out her name. He humiliated her in front of everybody by calling her a ‘Paraya’ and accused her of theft. Then he asked her to stand outside, saying she could not be allowed inside with the others.

8. The title recognizes the fact that certain social norms that have been carried on for centuries need to change. Ancient mindsets that propagate discrimination on the basis of birth, caste, class, religion, skin colour and community groups must change. Putting it as a question invites the participation of the reader.