Atithi (Guest) by Rabindranath Tagore

Revision sheet for ISC Class 12 English Literature · *Prism: A Collection of ISC Short Stories* LitGram

In one line: Tarapada, a Brahmin boy of about fifteen who cannot stay in one place, is taken in and loved by a zamindar's family, who secretly fix his marriage to their daughter Charu; just before the wedding, he slips away.

About the story: written in Bengali in 1895; collected in *Galpaguchchha*. "Atithi" means guest. Spellings vary across translations (Motilal/Matilal, Kathaliya/Kanthalia): use your textbook's.

The story in five stages

1. **The boat.** Motilal Babu, zamindar of Kathaliya, is going home by boat. Tarapada asks for a lift; he is heading to Nandigram to join a jatra. He has run away from home many times, to jatra troupes, panchali singers and a gymnastics troupe.
2. **The home.** Motilal takes him home. Annapurna, who longs for a son, mothers him. He wins the household with songs and stories.
3. **Jealousy.** Charu, the only daughter (about nine), resents him. She smashes his flute and is jealous of his friendship with Sonamoni, a child widow.
4. **Lessons.** Ramratan Babu, the village headmaster, teaches him English; Charu joins. She pours ink on his book, tears pages and locks him in, then is sorry. Her jealousy turns into attachment.
5. **The wedding plan and escape.** The Raydanga family's visit fails when Charu will not come out. Annapurna proposes Tarapada; his mother and brother agree; the wedding is fixed for Shravan, and he is not told. Festival boats pass on the way to a Rath fair, a storm breaks, and Tarapada slips away before the wedding.

Characters

Character	Who	Key incident
Tarapada	Brahmin boy, about fifteen; a born wanderer	Leaves just before his own wedding
Motilal Babu	Zamindar of Kathaliya	Arranges English lessons; plans the marriage
Annapurna	Motilal's wife	Loves Tarapada as a son; proposes the match
Charu (Charushashi)	Only daughter, about nine	Breaks his flute, inks his book, refuses the Raydanga visitors
Sonamoni	Charu's friend, a child widow	Her friendship with Tarapada makes Charu jealous
Ramratan Babu	Village headmaster	Teaches Tarapada and Charu English

Tarapada: three traits

- **Restless and free:** runs away again and again; leaves at the call of the festival boats.
- **Charming and gifted:** sings, plays the flute, learns English quickly; everyone loves him.
- **Detached, not unkind:** takes Charu's tantrums calmly; forms no tie that holds him.

Title meaning

"Atithi" means guest: one who arrives, is honoured, and leaves. Tarapada is loved like a son yet stays a guest. The moment the family tries to make him permanent, he goes. **Always link the ending to the title.**

Themes

Theme	Where it shows
Freedom against attachment	The family's love becomes a plan to bind him; he leaves at that moment
Love that tries to possess	Annapurna wants a son, Motilal a son-in-law, Charu a companion
Oneness with nature	River, boats, the Rath festival and the storm call him; he belongs to the open world
Childhood feeling	Charu's jealousy turns into attachment she does not understand
Hospitality	A stranger becomes family but stays a guest at heart

Symbols and devices

- **River and boats:** movement and freedom.
- **The flute:** his free spirit; Charu breaking it is her first attack on it.
- **Monsoon storm:** matches the storm inside him on the night he goes.
- **Dramatic irony:** everyone prepares a wedding he knows nothing about.

Word meanings

- **Zamindar:** landowner who collected rent
- **Jatra:** Bengali travelling folk theatre
- **Panchali:** sung narrative verse
- **Rath Yatra:** chariot festival
- **Shravan:** monsoon month (July-August)

What ISC examiners look for (2025 paper and report)

- **Asked in 2025:** why Charu smashes the flute (jealousy and anger); why Motilal is at first reluctant to accept Tarapada (unknown family, only daughter, wants a good match, Tarapada a wanderer); and a 10-mark, 200-250 word question on Tarapada's relationship with Annapurna and Charu, and why he leaves Kathaliya.
- **Answer both halves:** most candidates skipped why he leaves and did not tie it to his nature.
- **Keep it balanced:** equal space for Annapurna and for Charu.
- **Prepare:** Tarapada's nature and attitude to life (found difficult), and Tagore's oneness with nature.

Source: CISCE, ISC 2025 Analysis of Pupil Performance, Literature in English.

Common mistakes

- Tarapada is **not an orphan**: his father is dead, but his mother is alive.
- He does not leave because he dislikes Charu or the family; he leaves because of his own nature.
- Do not mix up Charu and Sonamoni (the friend, a child widow).
- He is **never told** about the wedding date: say so, it explains the sudden ending.
- Do not retell the story when asked why or how: examiners mark the reasons.

Memory trick: *boat, books, bride, break-free*: the journey, the lessons, the marriage plan, the escape.

Practice: 8 quick questions

1. What does the title Atithi mean?
2. Where was Tarapada going when he met Motilal Babu?
3. Who is Annapurna?
4. Why does Charu smash Tarapada's flute? (ISC 2025)
5. Who teaches Tarapada English?
6. Who is Sonamoni?
7. In which month is the wedding fixed?
8. How does the story end?

Answers: 1. Guest. 2. To Nandigram, to join a jatra. 3. Motilal's wife. 4. She is overcome with jealousy and anger. 5. Ramratan Babu, the village headmaster. 6. Charu's friend, a child widow. 7. Shravan. 8. Tarapada slips away before the wedding.

Full guide with model answers and a character sketch: **litgram.in/atithi-by-rabindranath-tagore-summary/**