

Analysis of The Enterprise By Nissim Ezekiel

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the prolific Indian writers in English of the 20th century. He was playwright, editor, critic and poet. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his Poetry collection, 'Latter-Day Psalms'. He was also awarded the Padma Shree by the Government of India in 1988. He is often called the "Father of Modern Indian English Poetry." Ezekiel's poetry has different themes and styles. His poems are a depiction of his craftsmanship, restraint and intellectual approach to everyday life.

While reading Enterprise, one may think of Eliot's 'The Journey of the Magi.' Though that poem is different in approach but it is also about a very cold and tiring journey by three wise men in search of spiritual pacification. Enterprise is one of those wonderful poems published in Ezekiel's collection of poems named 'The Unfinished Man.' It revolves around a metaphorical journey of man on this earth followed by hardships and failures which man is subjected to by the very nature of the earthly life that he leads.

Summary of Enterprise by Nissim Ezekiel

Stanza 1:

The poem, Enterprise, begins with a group of people which includes the poet himself (as it is clear from the use of 'we' in the sixth line) journeys to a holy place. At that time, their minds were full of ideas to reach their destination. Therefore, they started their journey with a lot of vigour and excitement, sure enough, that they can easily overcome all the difficulties that they face. Inconveniences seemed insignificant to them. However, our real strength emerges when we face a crisis, isn't it? Similarly, the travellers were full of enthusiasm and reached the second stage of their journey. During this second stage, they confronted the adverse natural difficulties, symbolizing the blazing Sun. But nothing could detain them from reaching their destination or take away their enthusiasm. Their passion to reach their destination was as hot as the blazing Sun above their heads. The heat of the sun is symbolic of Mother Nature being hostile towards human ambitions. The more the human beings aspire, the more the nature tries to put up a hindrance to beat them down.

Stanza 2:

The group of the travelers continues their journey, experiencing the difficulties put in their way. Carried away by the unrestrained excitement, the pilgrims kept a record of the events that they witnessed- goods being bought and sold by the peasants and the ways of serpents and goats. The travelers passed through three

cities where a sage has taught. But they were unconcerned about what he taught or what his message was.

Stanza 3:

The third stanza talks about the differences that cropped up among the members which made a hole in their unity as they continued their journey. As they reached a desert, differences arose among on the question of how to cross the challenging landscape. One of the members, an excellent prose writer, left the enterprise. He was considered the most intelligent among the lot. Therefore, a shadow of discord fell onto their enterprise and continued to grow as one of the members parted from the group.

Stanza 4:

The poet describes the hindrances that follow the enterprise. In the next stage of their journey, the travelers are attacked twice and while saving themselves they lose their ways and forget the noble ambitions which had motivated them to come so far. The enterprise slowly breaks into two. Some of the members, claiming their freedom, quit the journey and went their own ways. The poet feels helpless and upset at the breaking of the enterprise, looking at the disorganized lot of pilgrims, the only thing he could do was to pray. And why do you think we pray? The answer is that the act of praying implies seeking the help of a divine personality when human efforts go in vain.

Stanza 5:

There is still an assurance from the leader of the group. He assures them that the sea or the destination was at hand. It seems that they members have lost their enthusiasm and hope as they see nothing noticeable as they move forward. The pilgrims have now turned into a crowd of aimless wanderers instead of being bounded by a well-focused goal like before. They were not bothered about the roar of the thunder; some of them were too exhausted to stand erect.

Stanza 6:

The final stanza of Enterprise is a relief to the readers, as the poet tells us that they did reach their destination in total disorder- exhausted and frustrated- and without any sense of satisfaction. Instead of bringing a sense of fulfillment and achievement, the journey had only brought them frustration. They now started to doubt the importance of their journey; they began to find it futile and meaningless. They found nothing heroic in their achievements. They had a belief that their journey would be unparalleled and that its success would give them a place in history. So was it disillusionment? They later realized that such a journey was already undertaken by others before them and would be repeated in the near future. This gave them a sense of disillusionment and they felt the journey was futile. In the end, they feel that staying back home would have been better than venturing out on such a dangerous journey with disastrous consequences.

There might be a question that may come to our minds. That was the journey really a fruitful one or was it as the members think, meaningless? What are your views?

Critical Appreciation of the Enterprise: The poem 'Enterprise' is written in a conventional form. The poem consists of six stanzas, each having five lines. The pattern is iambic tetrameter, with rhyming scheme ababa that is the first line rhymes with the third and fifth, while the second rhymes with the fourth.

Use of Verbal Antithesis: The poem has used verbal antithesis to achieve a balance. Antithesis is a contrast or opposition in the meanings of contiguous phrases, lines or stanzas. In this poem, verbal antithesis is not only found in the entire poem but in the same stanza and in the same lines. Some of the examples are listed below:

*The initial activities of the pilgrims are juxtaposed with those in the final stage as the pilgrims turn into 'a straggling crowd of little hope.'

*The 'exalted minds' of the pilgrims are turned into 'darkened faces.'

*In the beginning the pilgrims found themselves as the 'burdens light' but at the end of the poem they are broken in spirit and bent down physically.

Symbolism: 'Enterprise' is a symbolic poem. Symbolism refers to the use of symbols to represent ideas or facts. The various symbols used in Enterprise are listed below:

*Pilgrimage in the poem symbolizes life.

*The 'crowd of pilgrims' symbolizes a group of men, who undertake to achieve common goal which begins with excitement and hope but ends with disillusionment and frustration.

*The 'Sun' is the symbol of hostility of nature towards human aspirations and ambitions.

*A 'desert patch' is symbolic of the challenges and hardships which the group faces or the differences that rise among them.

* 'A shadow falls on us and grows' is symbolic of the differences in opinion that leads to a discord in the enterprise and consequently, a member leaves the group and the disharmony grows.

* 'A straggling crowd of little hope' symbolizes a group of people who had a well focused goal and during the course of their journey loses their zeal and becomes a crowd of aimless and frustrated wanderers.

* 'Thunder' is symbolic of man's inner voice.

* 'Home' symbolizes remaining rooted to the soil or remaining true to oneself.

Allegory: Allegory can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning. The poem 'Enterprise' is allegorical in nature. The group of men all set for the journey, enthusiastic and full of vigour set out for the spiritual quest. They face hardships, difficulties yet they do not lose their aspirations. But during the second stage of their journey, disharmony and differences in opinions among the members arises and soon a conflict breaks out which results in disunity. The final stanza raises a question, 'Was the journey worth all the struggles?' The journey here is a metaphor of life. The poem is a stark depiction of the condition of men on this earth who are subjected to such failures, hardships and disillusionment during their course of journey of life.

Epigrammatic:

An epigram is a brief, sharp, witty and polished saying giving expression to a striking thought. It is used to convey the poet's message in the poem.

'Home is where we have to gather grace' is epigrammatic. Here, the poet wants to convey the message that in the journey of life, home is symbolic of one's inner self which must be accepted and faced and not shirked away. This is the only sane and balanced way of life that man should accept.