

**Question:**

*The poem enterprise is a good example of juxtaposing ambition and achievement, dream and reality, Utopian ideals and worldly matters of life inseparably woven into a metaphor of pilgrimage. Discuss with close reference to the text.*

**Answer:**

Nissim Ezekiel's "*Enterprise*" is one of the most brilliant poems from the collection - "*The Unfinished Man*". The undertone of being unfinished or incomplete is profound in the poem "*Enterprise*" as well. The poet adeptly brings out through his poem, the vast sea of difference between the ambition of a man and his achievement which makes him admit at the fag end of a so called glorious journey:

*"Our deeds were neither great nor rare,  
Home is the place where we have to gather  
grace."*

The poem starts on a very bright note thereby

*“Exalting minds and making all  
The burdens light.”*

Ezekiel makes it a failure of this Enterprise from the first line saying, *“It started as a pilgrimage”*, while its true worth was realised by none,

They went on exploring, taking down *“copious notes”* on trifles such as *“things the peasants sold and bought”* and nature of snakes and goats, but ignored taking a note of the *“three cities where a sage had taught”*, or what he imparted. So the poet shows that the exploration in the second stage was merely worldly and not spiritual.

Till the second stage, the pilgrims were in high spirits when the poet says that, even the “Sun” or symbol representing nature and natural forces, *“beat down to match our rage”*. But differences arose later on which resulted in the loss of a fellow spiritual traveller.

The poet makes it a point to gradually bring forth the façade, that the Enterprise and its entrepreneurs were. The journey seemed to be alright till their call was not tested. But as the time to prove themselves worthy of the

Enterprise came near, a shadow of disregard started devouring the true agenda which the poet explains by saying “*A shadow falls on us - and grows*”.

The journey was furthermore put to test when they were twice attacked. The poet here alludes to another spiritual journey and holds close reference to the journey of the Israelites led by Moses, in Exodus. The reference is to bring out a sharp contrast. Despite being twice attacked in their Exodus, the Israelites did not abandon their leader or journey or purpose, while in the pilgrims’ congregation,

“*A section claimed its liberty  
To leave the group.*”

The poet says that their leader tried to keep up the spirit of oneness in the group and declared that “*he smelt the sea*”- thereby trying to infuse some hope in the group. But the desolation of the pilgrims’ minds and purpose became even more evident as they were now “*A straggling crowd of little hope*”. They were no more taking copious notes. They “*noticed nothing*” as they moved on. This shows that

they were emotionally and spiritually deserted. They ignored their inner spiritual calling symbolized by thunder and were more keen on trivial, common place needs such as “*soap*”. The mental and spiritual desolation due to enormous physical hardships has been brought out by the poet through the lines, “*Some were broken, some merely bent.*”

The ultimate stanza of the poem stands in sharp contrast to the first. The poet does this deliberately to portray the futility that a purposeless enterprise is destined to suffer in its finality. The enormity of the journey was such that on reaching their destination they remained far away from it. A noble journey has been stripped off its true cause and the poet says “*We hardly knew why we were there.*”

The “*exalting minds*” were now burdened. What started as a pilgrimage was now a mere trip that “*had darkened every face*”. The poet declares now, as he has understood the true meaning of spirituality through his futility, that grace can be gathered in our “*home*” which is but our inner self.

Through this poem the poet quiet adeptly brings out a sharp contradiction between

dream and reality, theory and practicality, aspiration and achievement. “*Enterprise*” in its true essence is a metaphor for life which ends in futility after all the endeavours of a man. It justly brings to mind, conforming the veracity of the words of Browning from “*The Last Ride Together*”,

“*Fail I alone, in words and deeds?*

*Why, all men strive and who succeeds?”*