

Unit II -Poetry

‘Ecology’ - A. K. Ramanujan

Introduction

A. K. RAMANUJAN (1929-1993) is probably the most well known of Indian English poets who made Indian verse in English internationally popular. He belonged to Mysore in India and taught in many universities in the country. Then he migrated to America. He became a lecture in the University of Chicago in 1962 where he worked till his death in 1993. Most of his works breathe Indian culture and tradition.

'Ecology' is Ramanujan's well known poem. It depicts the blind and innocent faith of an educated Indian woman. This woman is the poet's own mother. She has great love and respect for the champak trees in her yard. They have been there from the time she could remember and provided basket full of flowers to the women in the family to offer their Gods. But the fragrance of the flowers gave her severe attacks of migraine and so her children decide to cut them down. When she hears about this she flies into a fury and adamantly protests against her children. The poet implies that through her love for the trees, unaware, his mother is becoming a strong spokesperson for the protection of nature and her trees. And the poet himself represents the educated modern man and luxury forgets his duty to nature.

A.K. Ramanujan is devoted to his mother. He is very angry because the flowers of the Red Champak tree caused a severe headache to his mother. Even the breeze and his home cannot protect her from the ill effects of the pollen of the flowers. He decides to cut off the tree.

A.K. Ramanujan's mother prevents him. She sees the only positive side of the tree. She says that the tree is as old as her. It gives many flowers to worship Gods and to decorate

the girls of the household. It is germinated by the droppings of a passing bird. So, it is a good omen. It may give a terrible headache to one line of cousins.

The poem shows the poet's strong interest in the family. His mother has a kind of emotional attachment to the tree. That is why she does not allow her son to cut the tree.

Ecology - A. K. Ramanujan

The day after the first rain,

Monsoon.

for years, I would home

in a rage,

Interesting. What are you so mad about, speaker?

for I could see from a mile away

From a mile away, on the way home

our three Red Champak Trees

OUR three red champak trees

had done it again,

meaning they've done it before

had burst into flower and given Mother

her first blinding migraine

first but not last; blinding because of the extent of the pain she's in in

of the season

these migraines last the whole season

with their street-long heavy-hung

yellow pollen fog of a fragrance

The pollen grains have made the air thick like fog - in fact the air IS yellow with it's heady
scent

no wind could sift,

the breeze cannot blow away this fog

no door could shut out

and the doors cannot keep it out either. the whole street in front of them is thick with it; it will
seep in through the gaps

from our black-

pillared house whose walls had ears

and eyes,

begins personifying the house

scales, smells, bone-creaks, nightly

visiting voices, and were porous

pollen will get in through the holes

like us,

self-explanatory: we will breathe in this fog of pollen

but Mother, flashing her temper

like her mother's twisted silver,

giving the mother's anger some physical quality: shiny, radiant, expressive in her temper

grandchildren's knickers

soaked, then wrung (twisted)

wet as the cold pack on her head,
 wet because she was sweating - cold sweats
 would not let us cut down
 a flowering tree
 Flowering tree. Religious significance. Bad omen.
 almost as old as her, seeded,
 she said, by a passing bird's
 providential droppings
 Taken as a blessing - came from the sky

to give her gods and her daughters
 and daughters' daughters basketsful
 of annual flower
 This^ is the extent of what this tree is good for.

and for one line of cousins
 adower of migraines in season.

Burn!

(perhaps the pollen allergy is inherited?)

Summary

The poem, 'Ecology' is taken from Ramanujan's third volume of poems, 'Second Sight', published in 1986. The speaker seems to be the poet himself or some imaginary person who is loyally devoted to his mother. He is very angry because his mother has a severe attack of migraine; a very bad kind of headache, often causing a person to vomit;

which is caused by the fragrance of the pollen of the flower of the Red Champak every time it is in bloom. The fragrance is heavy and suffocating as the yellow pollen spreads everywhere. Even the doors of the speaker's house cannot prevent the strong smell from entering the house. The walls of the house are able to absorb almost everything-the sounds, sights, the human voices, the harsh sounds produced when new shoes are worn. But they cannot stop the fog of pollen dust from the Champak trees.

The loving son therefore decides to cut down the tree, but he is prevented from doing so by his mother who sees the positive side of the tree in her garden. She says that the tree is as old as her and had been fertilized by the droppings of a passing bird by chance which is considered to be a very good omen. The positive side of it is that the tree provides many basketful of flowers to be offered to her gods and to 'her daughters and daughter's daughters' every year, although the tree would give a terrible migraine to one line of cousins as a legacy. The yellow pollen fog is the yellow dust of pollen carried in the air which is thick and heavy like fog which covers the earth.

This poem portrays Ramanujan's strong interest in the family as a very important theme of his poetic craft. His memories of the past would inevitably bring pictures of his family, especially his mother who is self sacrificing. There is also a reference to his Hindu heritage as he mentions the gods and the ancient beliefs in the poem. The sense of irony is indicated when the mother very angrily protests the idea of cutting down the tree even though she is suffering very badly from the migraine caused by it. She has a kind of emotional attachment to the tree, saying that it is as old as herself.

'Ecology is a poem which could be read as one single sentence. However, each stanza has one particular idea. There is a casual connection between the ideas and they flow from one stanza to the next. 'Flash her temper'; an instance of the use of irony because she is very

angry at the idea of having the tree cut down. The actual meaning of the word 'Ecology' is not followed here but the poet seems to convey the thought that a particular kind of tree may have both negative and positive factors and therefore it need not be pulled down.

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The Owl and the Chimpanzee

- **Jo Camacho**

“The owl and the chimpanzee went to sea
 In a beautiful boat called The Mind
 The owl was sensible, clever and smart
 The chimp was a little behind
 The owl made decisions, based on fact
 And knew where to steer its ship.

 The chimp reacted a little too fast
 And often the boat would tip
 The waves would come and crash aboard
 The chimp would start to cry

Large tears would roll right down his face

Afraid that he would die

The chimp and the owl would wrestle at night

When the world was quiet and still

The chimp would jump up and rock the boat

And the boat would start to fill

Then the owl stepped in and grabbed a pail

And started to empty it out

And the chimp would start to get quite cross

And would often scream and shout

The battle continued night after night

Until the chimp started to see

That if it let the owl take control

A more peaceful night it would be.”

This poem was written by Jo Camacho. He articulates the inner workings of a human. Some may experience internal conflicts where their brain (chimp brain) creates irrational thoughts and beliefs. The important part is that we recognize such irrational thoughts and use the wisdom and courage we all have to fight through that which is represented by the wise owl. Camacho showcases how despite conflicts arising in one's life, as they are inevitable, it is up to us to fight with our inner wisdom and strength to live a more peaceful healthy life.

Summary of "The Owl and the Chimpanzee" by Jo Camacho

The poem "The Owl and the Chimpanzee" by Jo Camacho metaphorically explores the dynamics of decision-making and emotional regulation, using the characters of an owl

and a chimpanzee. The owl, representing reason and wisdom, and the chimpanzee, symbolizing impulsive emotions, embark on a journey together in a boat called "The Mind."

The owl, sensible and calculated, makes decisions based on facts, while the chimpanzee reacts impulsively, often causing chaos. As they face challenges, such as waves crashing onto the boat, the chimpanzee panics, but the owl remains calm and takes practical steps to manage the situation. At night, the two struggle for control, with the chimpanzee's restless behavior threatening to sink the boat, but the owl consistently works to stabilize it.

Over time, the chimpanzee learns that allowing the owl to take control leads to a more peaceful experience. The poem illustrates the internal conflict between rational thought and emotional impulses, highlighting the importance of letting reason guide emotions for a calmer and more balanced life.

Questions and Answers:

1. What is the name of the boat in the poem?

The boat is called "The Mind."

2. What do the owl and the chimpanzee represent in the poem?

The owl represents reason and wisdom, while the chimpanzee represents impulsive emotions.

3. How does the owl handle challenges in the poem?

The owl makes decisions based on facts and remains calm, steering the ship and emptying water when needed.

4. What does the chimpanzee do when the boat faces rough waves?

The chimpanzee panics, cries, and fears for its life.

5. What happens when the chimpanzee tries to take control at night?

The chimpanzee rocks the boat, causing it to fill with water, and screams in frustration.

6. How does the owl respond to the chimpanzee's behavior?

The owl steps in calmly and tries to stabilize the boat by emptying the water.

7. What lesson does the chimpanzee learn by the end of the poem?

The chimpanzee learns that letting the owl take control leads to a more peaceful experience.

8. What is the central message of the poem?

The poem highlights the importance of allowing reason and wisdom to guide emotions for a more balanced and calm life.