

***Father Returning Home* by Dilip Chitre**

Dilip Purushottam Chitre was one of the foremost Indian writers and critics of the post Independence India. Apart from being a writer, he was also a painter and a filmmaker. He graduated from the University of Bombay in 1959. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award (1994) for his Marathi book of poems *Ekun Kavita*. *Father Returning Home* is a short and appealing poem about an old man in a cosmopolitan city where his own sons and daughters treat him as an alien. He himself is estranged from the man-made world. Through this poem, Chitre has denounced the **urban rootlessness and alienation**.

Analysis

The first stanza of *Father Returning Home* describes the train journey of his father while returning home one evening. The father stands among commuters in the yellow light of a local compartment. The poet describes his father's reaction against the sights of the suburbs that pass by. His father remains **unmoved by the sights because they are too familiar to him**. That is quite normal. **We hardly pay attention to those places where we travel every day**, unless the place has something interesting to offer. Same was with the poet's father.

The poet then describes his **father's pathetic condition**, as he travels during the rainy season. His clothes become **damp and dirty**. The black raincoat that he wears becomes stained with mud. His bag crumbles with the heavy load of the books. Due to old age, the **poet's father's eyesight has become poor and therefore** he finds difficulty to move about in the dark. The poet says:

“Now I can see him getting off the train

Like a word dropped from a long sentence”

The poet says that he can see his father getting down the train ‘like a word dropped from a long sentence.’ The sentence is highly unique and it provides an evocative image of an old man who gets down from the train **as if he is no longer relevant to it**. The poet then sees his father hurrying through the long, grey platform.

The man seems to be as old as the platform, who has been using it as a part of his routine. He crosses the railway tracks and hurries home through muddy lanes on a rainy day. This is indicated by his chappals which are sticky with mud. This stanza portrays the monotonousness of the old man, who sustains the vagaries of weather as well as the estrangement from the man-made world.

In the second stanza, the poet represents the alienation of his father that he experiences in his own dwelling. The poet tells us that his father drinks a weak tea and eats a stale chapatti when he comes back home. This shows that even his basic requirements are not properly carried out by his family. A sense of pity for the poet's father arises in us. Dilip Chitre says:

“His sullen children have often refused to share

Jokes and secrets with him.”

The father is then seen going into a contemplative mood after reading some kind of a philosophical book. He goes to the toilet and contemplates over man's alienation from the man-made world. This exhibits that the man is visibly upset with his predicament. He is terribly shaken when he comes out of the toilet and trembles while he washes his hands at the wash basin. It seems that he trembled not only because of the cold water but also due to the thoughts that came into his mind while he was thinking in the toilet.

The father finds himself all alone in his room as he is written off by his children. The children do not interact with their father; they do not share their joys or sorrows with him. To compensate their company, the father listens to the radio. Then he goes to sleep. In his sleep, he dreams about his ancestors and grandchildren.

It seems that he is trying to communicate with his ancestors who had entered the subcontinent through the Khyber Pass in the Himalayas in the past. The dream mirrors that the old man is either thinking about his past (his ancestors) or his future (his grandchildren). It is a kind of relief to him from his mundane routine, devoid of any human contact.

Theme: The poem, *Father Returning Home* focuses on the theme of alienation or estrangement experienced by the aged in their twilight years. Dilip Chitre talks about his own father and through the poem, we get to know the alienation, isolation and misery experienced by elderly people, especially in cities.

Style: Dilip Chitre's poetry follows the tradition of dramatic monologue. In the poem *Father Returning Home*, the poet talks about his father's loneliness and alienation from the man-made world. He has brought out the emotions of his father, who is isolated from his family as well as from the outside world. He has painted the mundane and fatiguing routine of his father in order to highlight the darkness and misery lurking inside his father's soul.

Imagery in the poem: The poet uses some fine imagery to describe the lurking loneliness in the man's soul as he travels in the local train. To convey the 'twilight atmosphere' the poet has used a number of descriptive words in the poem, like evening train, yellow light, unseeing eyes, his eyes dimmed by age, fade homeward and gray platform.

An example of imagery is found in the following lines describing the father's routine of travelling by a local train,-

"My father travels on the late evening train
Standing among silent commuters in the yellow light
Suburbs slide past his unseeing eyes
His shirt and pants are soggy and his black raincoat
Stained with mud and his bag stuffed with books
Is falling apart."

In the above mentioned lines, the pathos of an old father, returning to his mundane home late in the evening, is highlighted. A wonderful image is used to describe poet's father getting down the train. The poet says that he can see his father getting down the train 'like a word dropped from a

long sentence.' The sentence is highly unique and it provides an evocative image of an old man who gets down from the train as if he is no longer relevant to it. This imagery is used to depict the monotonousness and meaninglessness in the father's life. The old man is just a word in the syntax of life. The sentence that is long enough to carry several words forward each contributing to its overall meaning now drops off one stray word, which is no longer required.

The poet uses some fine imagery to describe the pain and misery lurking in the old man's soul as he travels in the local train. His bag stuffed with books is falling apart refers to the state of the old man's mind which has turned senile after all that knowledge it has acquired through years of dedicated study.

The other interesting image is the eyes and vision, which occurs in the poem again and again. The suburbs slide past his unseeing eyes is a pretty image. The second one is his eyes dimmed by age fade homeward.

The imagery of dream has been used to show the connection the poet's father has with his past and his future. He dreams about his ancestors and his grandchildren. Thus, it signifies his feelings that he has suppressed in himself and cannot express openly.

Above all we may look at the dexterous use of words to convey the "twilight" atmosphere in the poem : evening train, yellow light, unseeing eyes , his eyes dimmed by age fade homeward ,gray platform.

Therefore, we can conclude that the poem Father Returning Home is autobiographical in nature. The poem draws a picture of the poet's father. He speaks about the loneliness that his father goes through in his everyday life.

The poem speaks about the inner loneliness of the poet's father, the utter alienation he is experiencing in the twilight years (man's estrangement from a man-made world) as he ceases to matter to his children who no longer share anything with him. All the while he is trying to evoke, through the racial conscious, the invisible connection with his ancestors who had entered the sub-continent through the Khyber Pass in the Himalayas in some distant past (the allusion is perhaps to the migration of the Aryans to the Indian subcontinent from Central Asia).