



## Portrayal of estrangement and loneliness in Dilip Chitre's poetry "Father returning Home"

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### ABSTRACT

Versatile Marathi writer Dilip Chitre's work etches out various moods ranging from alienation, fear of unknown and death as well as a powerful anguish which comes from a feeling of being ripped asunder. Dilip Chitre's only first and only book of English poems 'Traveling in a cage' focus on modern man's myriad emotions effectively. In this poem 'father returning home', we get an inkling of the prodigious skill, and sense of acute observation of the poet. Nothing misses his eye. He describes the life of a lonely old man travelling to his even more lonelier home after a day of hard work. Every adjective used to refer to his external appearance brilliantly emphasizes both his shaggy and emaciated persona and depressing life. He is returning to stale food and even more isolation and has nothing to look forward to. He ruminates over his past experiences and thinks about his family members. The poem efficiently describes the feelings of loneliness and unhappiness which often fills the minds of the modern man in a society which in its mad race has no time to spare for such pallid wandering souls. Even though the theme of the poem is poignant and profound there is a surprising lack of suffocating sentimentality that seems to suffuse many such works with similar theme. The poetry with evocative imagery and subtle use of irony emphasizes the pointless, thoughtless peregrinations of modern nomad by super imposing his traits with those of old father in the poem.

Keywords: Myriad emotions, Isolation

### 1. Introduction

Dilip Chitre's work 'Father returning home' is a hard hitting poem which portrays the miserable condition of an aged person trying to earn his daily bread living amidst the hustle and bustle of modern urban city. He is a representative of the hardships faced by the aged people who in their desperate efforts to eke out an existence wage a constant battle with the uncaring social realities. The poem begins with the image of a father returning to his desolate home. Though the pronoun 'my' is used the identity of the speaker is not revealed throughout the poem. He contemplates quietly on the habitual activities of his father, though ironically without a glimmer of sentimentality. He just mediates and leaves things at that but does nothing to ameliorate the conditions of his father.

### 2. Man's estrangement from the modern world

The narrator describes how his father would travel on late evening train. Here he uses two significant adjectives. With respect to the train 'late' and 'evening'. It emphasizes how the commuter towards the fag end of his life is dragging slowly forward towards the inevitable eventuality of death, similar to the day being



embraced by Night. Just as he travels in the late hours of the day after tiring work. Metaphorically, he is a tired human being who yearns with all his heart for the oblivion of death after a long hard life. The narrator describes how he stands among silent commuters in the yellow light 'Suburbs slide past his unseen eyes' the reference to the silent commuters surrounding him emphasizes the unfeeling, uncaring nature and also equal helplessness of other members of society. They are pictured as standing in the yellow light. Yellow is usually a colour which denotes happiness but over here it makes the readers feel as if they are witnessing an absurd drama in which all the characters are flooded with limelight, yet are forced to remain as actors with no dialogues. As emphasized by the use of the word silent they don't have much roles in what is going on. They are pointlessly captured on the stage of life, reminding us invariably of Shakespeare's reference to the pointlessness of life, "Life's but a walking shadow- a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and is heard no more" (233). As the train passes through the suburbs there are flashes of yellow light. Of course that is thrown in by the street lamps when the train passes near the outskirts of the town. The eyes of the father do not register any details, he stares listlessly on. There are further references to his appearance which are equally heart-rending because of its pathetic quality. His shirt and pants are described as "soggy". He is drenched in sweat and rain. His black rain coat seems stained with mud. Black is a colour which portends ill fate. Narrator describes father carrying a heavy bag, which he elaborates is stuffed with books and is falling apart. His life too is in a state of ruin. He carries more burden than he could both physically and emotionally. The books suggest that he is a man following an academic profession. The Old man's eyes are described initially as "unseeing" eyes. Later on, it is described as 'dimmed by age'. He is no more than a ghost. He is said to 'fade' homeward. His life too is one filled with faded colours. Even the atmosphere seems to be depressing. It is a night humid with monsoon rain. The imagery which comes up with regard to the father is closely related to the world of words and books.

The narrator's description underscores this impression. He is described or compared to a word dropped from a long sentence. The use of simile is very apt. It highlights the theme of estrangement and sordidness. When a person decides to cut short a sentence he removes unnecessary words. Yet he succeeds in making a successful sentence. The aged father in the poem is like one such unnecessary word. His presence is not missed either by his fellow commuters or by the unfeeling metallic train, which emphasizes the hazy unfeeling fast-paced social world. His age makes him even more disposable and useless. He is described as 'hurrying across the length of grey platform'. Notice the use of colours. First it was the yellow colour, shed on him when the train races through the suburbs, then the reference becomes even more sordid and miserable. There is a reference to his black rain coat stained with mud. Now the colour shade changes to grey. It reminds us of similar use of the dull colour in Yeats' poetry "The Lake Isle of Innisfree". Father in the poem crosses the railway lane and enters the lane which leads to his lonely home. His Chapals are sticky with mud. His rain coat is stained with mud. This constant reference to mud may imply that wherever he goes he has to encounter dirty mudslinging of all, in the form of harsh criticism. There are no references as to why his family members have abandoned him. Maybe they too might have moved on in life, while his partner may have succumbed to death.

When the father eventually reaches home he has to make his own food. He settles down with a cup of weak tea and stale chappathi. Two things can be inferred from this reference to food. Either he is in a state of extreme penury or it might be a reference to his own physical weakness and mental detachment which makes him unaware of his own requirements. He doesn't bother to make fresh food. The food a person eats always indicates his or her state of mind. Usually when people refuse to take food they might at times be going through extreme anguish or desolation like the loss of the loved ones. Or it can be suggestions of detachment, a lack of interest to live which are signs of extreme state of depression. Again, the father is said to be reading a book. So far there has been three references to books. In one instance the father's bag is said to



be stuffed with book and was falling apart because of its weight .Human beings are creatures of habit. This man has been described as giving a great deal of importance to academic life or his work, indicated by the late hour in which he is returning home. May be when he was young he might have given more importance to his work than family. His attachment to family members might have been so less that they might have ceased to matter for him and eventually they might have reciprocated by dropping him, like an unnecessary word from their long sentence of their life. Even in the extreme age books are described as his constant companions. He is said to contemplated “man’s estrangement from a manmade world”

He must be a thinker, a decidedly intellectual person. He cannot gel or change himself to suit the change that has taken place around him and the society. He lives a life of an introvert, a recluse, a hermit who had embraced the state of ‘Vanaprastha’, a renunciation of all worldly joys. Each and every action of his are described in minute proportions. He trembles at the sink after coming out from the wash room. It shows his physical condition. All these quivers indicate his un healthiness. While he washes a few droplets of water, cling to the graying hairs on his wrists. Hence throughout the poem the colour grey is referred to twice. First to suggest and emphasize the theme of sordidness and estrangement with reference to grey platform, and then to highlight the age and extremely dull life led by the father. Now there is a reference to some memory. His children are described as often reluctant in sharing jokes and secrets with the father. They are further described using an adjective. They are called ‘sullen’ children. So clearly there had been emotional lacunae which prevented any sort of intimacy. If your children are open with you, it indicates that they have accepted you as their own kind, as someone who can understand them .Now that sort of rapport seems to be lacking, hence that small reference suggest that father was a failure both in society and in family. He couldn’t change to the dictates of the society, He was not able to understand the children to enjoy their jokes. He is always so disciplined in his habits that his son is able to predict all his actions. He ‘prophesies’ all the actions of his father including how he would go to sleep. The narrator says that the old father would always sleep listening to ‘the static on the radio’ but his mind would not be completely engaged by what he is hearing He would think about his ancestors and grant children. He would ruminate on his roots, his heritage, and would also meditate on recent memories regarding his grandchildren. Poem ends suggesting that father’s memories would eventually embrace thoughts regarding his nomadic Aryan ancestors who reached Indian subcontinent by a pass, Kyber pass to be more specific. All this indicates the father’s pride in his ancestry and ancient heritage. He cherishes those memories that provided him with a noble lineage, this pride in past events and memories might have prevented his easy identification with the society of his times.

### 3. Conclusion

All in all Dilip Chithre’s work is a rumination on modern societies callousness and the weakness of human relationships. It speaks of the hardships aged people suffer, and is a profound meditation on man’s estrangement from manmade world.

### References

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