

Chapter 16

For Elkana

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Understanding the Poem

1. Comment on the subtlety with which the poet captures the general pattern of communication within a family.

Answer

Nissim in his poem For Elkana has portrayed a common scene of any Indian home. On an April evening, strolling in the porch, the wife tries to discuss certain issues that the husband is indifferent to, as he believes that any man in the neighbourhood would know solution to them, while their son plays around. The lady of the house is keen on discussing the issues and needs no disturbance and demands her husband to pay attention. A simple style of how a conversation takes place between any husband and wife, be it on any topic under the sun. the husband finds the talk irrelevant and tries to ignore. He believes the issues the wife is discussing to be too simple to waste his time on and humorously declares that the wife is always correct to avoid any further argument. The reader may find it interesting to note that even during the argument the poet does not forget to mention the love of the wife for the husband.

2. Poetic effect is achieved in the poem through understatement and asides. Discuss this with examples.

Answer

The effect that an understatement or an aside creates is the vivid visual imagery that descends in the reader's mind while reading the poem. It brings the reader in resonance with the poet's mood while composing. The reader is overwhelmed with the setting through which the poet captivates the reader's mind. Thus, the work of these adjectives is to not just beautify but to create the image of the plot. The details of the background and other surroundings, the details about the characters that infuses the mind of the reader so that it all appears lucid to imagine and feel what the poet probably felt or is trying to convey through her/his creation.

When the poet details the environment like “on a broken window pane” and the rest, an image is imparted of the house the characters live in. The emotional effect is created when the narrator recalls “the man she loves who happened to be me” amidst the argument, it makes it clear that no matter how many debates or discussions happen the bond between a husband and wife is eternal and can not be challenged. The poet does not forget the little one around and his body language, he describes keenly. How with “his small legs well apart” he demanded his mother with dinner. The little boy is growing up, his body language reflects his attitude; “his crescent-moon-like chin uplifted eyes hard and cold” display his determination. These all draw a images cascading in the mind along while one reads the poem.

3. How is the idyllic juxtaposed with the pedestrian in the poem?

Answer

Nissim is known for bringing out the extraordinary in the ordinary. His poems are based on the ordinary settings and ordinary issues. The fashion with which he presents the common issues are appreciated by many critics. In fact he was the first Indian poet to have abandoned romance and write on ordinary issues in poetry composed in English. In his poems like *The Night of the Scorpion*, he portrays the emotions of the ordinary human being. An ordinary pedestrian scene of a village out of which he created a hyperbole presenting it in a very idyllic fashion. Even in the poem *For Elkana*, Ezekiel has exploited a very ordinary home situation in which the parents are discussing their household issues. It is just that through various figures of speech such as meiosis, undertones, asides and understatements he personifies the ordinary that any married couple may undergo or a parent may have for her/his child. Thus, through his creation Nissim has given the reader that even in an pedestrian lies an idyllic expression.

4. Explain the undertones in the statement:

'Wife and husband in unusual rapport

State one unspoken thought':

Answer

The statement explores the subtle relation of a husband and a wife. The statement shows both the sides of the relation. While the two are

probably in a heated argument, yet they both think alike and read each other's thought as well. Other than being husband and wife they are parents to a boy of seven. They have the same feelings towards their child; who, they both believed, should be disciplined. When the son approaches them demanding the dinner from his mother, she points a finger at him telling him to stay quiet for some time as there was an ongoing discussion that he was interrupting. However, the impatient child continued to nag. Both the parents gave each other a look as they both agreed at least on this that the discussion was being interrupted, no matter whether the father was least interested. However, later he agreed on that the boy should be given the dinner immediately due to his wits and logic. But at this time, they both think of the same thing, it is the parenthood that binds them other than their own relation. And just an exchanged look was all they needed to read what the other one was thinking only to realise that it was exactly the same.

5. Comment on the capitalisation of all the words in the line: 'Children Must be Disciplined'.

Answer

The line is heavy and carries authority of a parent. It was the thought that both the parents were thinking of when their son barged in their ongoing conversation. Though unspoken, the gesture that both the parents made made it clear what they were thinking about exactly the same thing. When a parent talks of how disciplined a child must be. The capitalisation highlights the stress laid on the words. They are unsaid by the parent, however they are authoritative implying that a child ought to be obedient and well behaved.

6. What makes the urgency of the child's demand seem logical?

Answer

The child is young and impatient. When he hears the mother discussing things with the father, on hearing her voice reminds him that he is hungry. So, he goes up to her asking for food. Even on being gestured by the mother to wait for five minutes he demands food throwing his logic at her that he will not be hungry any more. The argument is appealing to the father, he feels that a boy, so young, who is "such a logician deserves his dinner straight away." The urgency with which the boy demands and with such wittiness makes the mother laugh. This joy held the three

together. The mother then agrees to serve the dinner and they go inside the house.