

## ECOLOGY

The day after the first rain,  
for years I would come home  
in a rage,

for I could see from a mile away  
out there Red Champak trees  
had done it again,

had burst into flower and given Mother  
her first blinding migraine  
of the season

with their street-long heavy-hung  
yellow pollen fog of a fragrance  
no wind could sift,

no door could shut out from our black-  
pillared house whose walls had ears  
and eyes,

scales, smells, bone-creaks, nightly  
visiting voices, and were porous  
like us,

but Mother, flashing her temper  
like her mother's twisted silver  
grandchildren's knickers

wet as the cold pack on her head,  
would not let us cut down  
a flowering tree

almost as old as her, seeded,  
25-she said, by a passing bird's  
providential droppings

to give her gods and her daughters  
and daughter's daughters basketfuls  
of annual flower

and for one line of cousins  
a dower of migraines in season.

- A.K. Ramanujan

### About the Poem

'Ecology' is deeply rooted in the traditions of India which the poet is intrinsically attached to and finds that with all the separation from the country in terms of his physical distance, it is in fact getting even stronger than it used to be. The poem shows how the mother here would not like the typical champak trees cut down even though they give her a migraine after the first rain. The tree that stood near the house was as old as her and for the sake of the annual flowers that it provided for her daughters and their daughters, she would not have it cut even though it meant that she would get her seasonal migraine just as the daughters also would. Even though the poet dislikes her aversion to cutting down the trees, he is very much attached to the feeling of home that it gives him every time he comes back.

Born in Mysore, A.K. Ramanujan moved to the United States of America for higher education. He was a poet, folklorist, critic, translator all rolled into one.

### GLOSSARY

**Ecology:** branch of biology that deals with the habits of living things, especially their relation to their environment.

**Line 7.** burst into flower: blossomed and yielded flowers

**Line 8.** blinding migraine: a severe headache that can almost make you feel blind

**Line 10.** street-long heavy-hung: wafted right through the street in a strong fragrance

**Line 12.** that no wind could sift: that no breeze could blow away or dispel

**Lines 14-18.** whose walls... like us: The poet describes the walls of his house that could not keep away the smell of the champak flowers. They allowed everything to seep through or enter, including smells and movement of bones, ghostly voices in the night and so on.

**Line 25.** Seeded: grew out of a seed

**Line 26.** passing bird: a bird that flew by

**Line 27.** providential droppings: something that dropped by luckily or by chance

**Line 28.**her gods and her daughters:refers to the idols that she worshipped and which she decorated with the champak flowers, and also to her daughters (by putting them in the same list, the poet shows the irony of the mother's placing equal importance to both gods and daughters)

**Lines 29-30.**basketfuls of annual flower refers to the seasonal blossoming of the champak flowers

**Line 31.**and for one line of cousins referring to a whole generation

**Line 32.**dower dowry, gift of nature

**Line 32.**a dower of migraines in season The flood of migraines that the girls get is like a dowry in that season.

### Comprehension Questions

- 1) What makes the speaker in the poem angry the day after the first rain, year after year?
- 2) What, according to the mother, is the story of the origin of the champak trees?
- 3) Why is the pollen fog 'street-long'?
- 4) Why does she oppose the idea of cutting down the champak despite the fact that its pollen gives her a migraine?
- 5) Comment on the appropriateness of the title 'Ecology'.
- 6) The poet explores the heart of Indianness in the poem in many ways. Substantiate.
- 7) There is a spirit of agelessness about the champak trees which forms the heart of the poem. Do you agree, and if so, why?

### Creative Writing

- 1) Describe the entire setting of the poem with the help of the vocabulary used by the poet to do so.  
(Hints: the first rain - Red Champak trees - had burst into flower - street-long heavy-hung yellow pollen fog of a fragrance - no wind could sift - scales, smells, bone-creaks, nightly visiting voices)