

Critical Analysis of Nissim Ezekiel's "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S."=

In "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.," a friend of Miss Pushpa gives a speech at her going away party to a group of people. The speaker begins by addressing the crowd and tells them that Miss Pushpa is "departing for foreign / in two three days" (lines 3-4). He also reminds the party why they are gathered together: "we are meeting today / to wish her bon voyage" (6-7).

The speaker moves to remind the crowd of Miss Pushpa's "sweetness" and says that she is sweet internally as well as externally (9). He recalls how often Miss Pushpa smiles, "even for no reason," but just because she feels like it (12-14).

The speaker also takes the opportunity to remind the party that Miss Pushpa comes "from a very high family" (16). He informs them that her father was a diplomat in Balsar or Surat, though he cannot remember which one.

The speaker then goes on a tangent about Surat: "Surat? Ah, yes, / once only I stayed in Surat / with family members" (20-22).

The speaker then returns to the topic of Miss Pushpa and says that she is popular with women as well as men. He praises her for doing everything he asks of her, saying that her response is always "Just now only / I will do it" (30-31). The speaker believes this is indicative of a "good spirit." Additionally, Miss Pushpa never says no: "Whatever I or anybody is asking / she is always saying yes" (35-36).

In the final stanza, the speaker informs his listeners that it is time for him to let others speak, and then "afterwards Miss Pushpa / will do summing up" (191).

This is one of Ezekiel's most famous poems, both because of its subject matter and the way in which it was written. There are two abundant sources of humor in this poem: Ezekiel's use of Indian English and the character of the speaker, who seems to be lacking certain public speaking skills. Ezekiel uses a type of register and style of speaking that many people in India use when speaking English, particularly when English is their second language. This type of English deviates from standard English, but it is spoken by a large number of Indians, the number of which is still on the rise. Ezekiel's use of this English demonstrates his commitment to the everyday as a poet—he relays a relatively ordinary bit of speech, exactly as he imagines it would sound. Additionally, this realism adds a bit of humor to the overall message of the poem, since the ability to speak English is a huge marker of status in India and the characters in this poem struggle with the language without even seeming to notice. For those with a keen eye, the ability to speak English indicates social status faster than many other markers, such as material wealth, titles, or names. The speaker makes several mistakes that are humorous for a speaker more familiar with standard English (for example, a person from the United States or Britain), including calling Miss Puspa "sweet" on the inside and outside, and saying that she is popular among the men and the women.

The character of the speaker himself also strives for humor. From these short few stanzas alone, it is evident that he is a jovial character who uplifts the poem into something positive and humorous. Additionally, his apparent lack of public speaking skills—his tangent about

Surat in which he gets too involved in himself and his note at the end of the speech of who will talk next—allow for humor as the reader imagines what it would be like to be in attendance. The speaker's narrative style is also representative of the everyday—he is not given a lofty or magical ability to speak and instead speaks like someone the reader might have heard in person. Furthermore, English does communicate a certain social superiority which the narrator is attempting to flaunt through his usage of "bon voyage," his tangent about his travels, and his mention of Miss Pushpa's social class. Thus, readers come to realize that the speaker is flaunting a certain social superiority during his speech, which is discordant with the way he speaks.

Ezekiel uses both of these elements—the use of Indian English and the speaker—to wryly comment on postcolonial India's fascination with going abroad. Irshad Gulam Ahmed expands on this idea in "Nissim Ezekiel's Critical Nationalism and the Question of Indian English": "This is the yet-to-be decolonized Indian psyche that the poet seeks to foreground. Thus Ezekiel's critical nationalism manifests itself in the expression of a new kind of outlook on the very notion of colonialism which consists not so much in the use of the English language in its unaltered or undistorted form but in the perpetuation of a colonized psyche, a colonial mindset still persisting in the colonial era." In other words, Ezekiel uses this poem to parody the Indian fixation on going abroad in the hopes that it will "improve [their] prospect" (38).

Ezekiel's commitment to the everyday and the ordinary is, ironically, a bit risky in the poetic sense. For example, the speaker's tangent about Surat runs the risk of being boring or off-putting for the reader. However, Ezekiel's careful modulation of the speaker's voice prevents it from becoming either truly boring or overly parodic, masterfully conveying a complex and ultimately sympathetic portrait of the speaker's character.

Formally, "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." is in line with a lot of Ezekiel's later work. It is in free verse, which means that it does not have a specific rhyme scheme or meter. However, Ezekiel does endow the poem with musicality through line breaks and punctuation. Ezekiel also is unafraid of colloquial language in this poem, as is the case for many of his poems in which he satirizes Indian culture. Colloquial language allows for humor in a way that stuffy or obviously written language would struggle. Finally, there is a lack of capitals at the beginning of every line, which shows a conscious decision on Ezekiel's part to keep this poem colloquial and easy to read.