

Truth About Floods

Nissim Ezekiel

Author

- Indian English poet
- Major works: A Time to change, Sixty poems, Unfinished man, The Exact name, Hymns in Darkness

The Poem

- The poet gives a realistic picture about the lack of proper disaster management in flood affected area in India
- It is based on a newspaper report by V.K Dixit in The Indian Express , Bombay (25th December 1967)
- The poem is about the lack of proper administration and failure to provide proper rehabilitation facilities in a flood affected place, Balasore, Odisha.
- In this poem, there is a journalist who visits a low urban area where people are living under the belt of poverty
- He says that people there were living in bad conditions and there was no one to help
- The children were suffering from hunger and there were no medical facilities
- The villagers are suspicious of government officials and they never responded to the media

Nissim Ezekiel, in his poem "The Truth about the Floods", narrates the plight of the ordinary people who are ravaged by the severe floods in the villages. One villager speaks how he lets his two children to the mercy of god, while his remaining children are begging somewhere to sustain their lives. All the houses had collapsed, and they don't have any hope left as they don't get any help from the government

As the flood occurred during the night, all of a sudden, the villagers could not plan anything to sustain their life. The helplessness of the villagers can be seen throughout the poem. When the speaker visits the village, at first people were reluctant to talk thinking that he might be a government official. The poet says, "An atmosphere of desolation". The relief party, consisted of five students, came with a transistor, a tin of biscuits, and a camera. The only motive behind their arrival was to make use of this tragic situation for their own advantage. They can publicize the pictures taken to prove their philanthropic and humanitarian activities and even collect money in the name of that.

The poem was written in the 1960s, but we know that even in the present age of social media, things are not better.

The government officials are not at all worried about the poor villagers who have lost everything in the flood. They prepare the report that their block or division is the worst-hit, by incorporating statistics to prove the point. The government might have allocated funds based on the report submitted to them, however, no such help is given to the poor villagers. For the government officials, it is just another opportunity.

The significance of the title

For anybody who relies on government reports and statistics, the “truth” is that enough relief and rehabilitation work is done, and everything is perfect. However, in reality it is not true. The truth about the floods is that, people suffer no matter what the govt claims. This is the reason, for example, the eminent journalist P Sainath, after visiting the drought-stricken villages in India, published his study using the title “Everybody loves a good draught”.

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