

**Study Material for Degree III (Hons.) English, Paper-VII**

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**Name of the Poem: DELHI**

**Name of the Poet: R. Parthasarthy**

‘Delhi’ is written by R. Parthasarthy. In this poem Parthasarthy presents the realistic picture of the city of Delhi. He writes about the cultural as well as the social deterioration of the old city of Delhi. He could not reconcile with the present situation of Delhi. This poem is, in fact, an effort to trace the reason that has caused the crumbling of the old civilisation. The poem is divided into three parts. In the first part of the poem the poet while portraying the present situation traces the past incidents, too. The second part reveals the frustration of the poet. The third part focuses on efforts to restore the lost glory of the country. R. Parthasarthy belongs to the new generation of poets. As a post colonial poet, Parthasarthy is also concerned with contemporary issues of post-independent India. The loss of cultural values and past glory became the source of sorrow for him. In other words, the poet suffers from a conflict between past memories and present day social reality. His poems also voice his linguistic and cultural alienation. Like Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, A. K. Ramanujan and others, Parthasarthy also desperately searches for his roots.

Parthasarthy was born on 20 August, 1934 at Tirupparaiturai near Tiruchchirappalli in Tamil Nadu. He is popularly known as a poet, translator and an educator. He published ‘Rough Passages’ in 1977 which consists of three parts- Exile, Trial and Homecoming. He has also translated a fifth century Tamil epic into English as A tale of the Anklet: An Epic of South India. Parthasarthy has received many prestigious awards like, Ulka Prize and Sahitya Akademy Translation Prize.

*The ochre air irritates  
the tongue. Dust thickens it.  
The squalid city groans  
.....  
Under the loo familiar  
As on.....*

These are the opening lines of the poem ‘Delhi’ that describes the pitiable condition of the city in present day. The city of Delhi, which is the capital of India, looks dull and miserable due to filth and poverty. Poet uses the colour image ‘ochre’ or the light yellow

colour to describe the unhealthy condition of the city. The condition of the city arouses feelings of pain as well as anger. The hot wind blowing in summer day turns the city into a 'cemetery of stones'. During summer days the heat of the scorching sun is so intense that people prefer to stay indoors. So the isolation almost makes the city appear barren and depressive. The city looks like a cremation ground. The image, 'cemetery of stones' is used to express the misery and sorrow spread all over.

*'I see everywhere:  
.....they stick to its face'*

In the poem 'Delhi', Parthasarthy mentions about the several dynasties that ruled over India from time to time. But it was under the British rule that India suffered most. She lost her pristine glory as she had to suffer the pangs of slavery. The condition of the country worsened as she lost the prestigious image of being called a golden bird. Very soon India became a bird whose wings were chained. India suffered a long subjugation, of almost eight hundred years by foreign rule. This had completely ruined her and left the Indians helpless. The country was drained off all powers, valour and dignity. Those were the unpleasant and unfortunate moment for India which was also marked by heavy bloodshed. The word 'eunuchs' depicts the inactivity, hollowness and emptiness. The people were left 'once for all unsettled'. The peaks of Himalaya and sun referred to as 'ominous skull' are the witness of those moments of defeat and humiliation. Hence, all together the poem 'Delhi' is a sordid tale of sadness and misery. The city of Delhi is the image of dirt and abject poverty.

The thought of the miserable condition disturbs the poet's concentration and distracts him from composing poetry. The visitors coming to his place at Churiwala continuously disturb him. The poet is frustrated and desperate as he finds no respite from pain. The woeful condition of the old city makes him sad. The poet tries to find respite from pain in the arms of a slut named Zohra Jan, but it was all in vain. The thought of forsaking the lanes of Delhi made him cry in pain:

*'How can anyone', I ask, 'forsake  
Delhi and its lanes?'*

The ruthless attitude of English rulers had left India's condition deplorable. Their harshness added to the humiliation and disrespect of India. The poet perfectly indicates the callous and harsh attitude in the following lines:

*'The Angrez impudently rub salt  
in our wounds. Our pride  
bites the dust....'*

The impact of the British rule in India had ruined the country so much that it almost seemed irreparable. The poet complains against those kings who remained ignorant about the

dangerous advances of imperialism. Instead of crushing the advances they wasted their power and energy over worthless games and activity. The plight of Jamuna that was telling the tale of bloodshed was also unheard. The Urdu poet Zauq mourned the destruction of the old city, Delhi. The line ‘who is left to speak of Delhi?’ expresses his anguish as well as his state of bewilderment. With a desire of resurrection of the old city the poet decides to write about the city. No doubt, the dirt exists, the squalor remains, the game of kite flying is prevalent but the hope to restore the lost glory of Delhi is equally strong. Poet’s hope lies in the young generation. The poet finds answer to his question, ‘Will Indraprastha rise again?’ in the youth of India. The ancient glory of India can be restored. ‘Indraprastha’ is an image of pure and prosperous India. The poet decides to write poems that will help him to enthuse the young generation to work for resurrection of India. The youth must be inspired by the spirit of patriotism that will energise them to reshape and rebuild India.

Parthasarthy is prolific in his choice of images in the poem. He uses concrete and suggestive images that help him communicate his ideas and views.

#### **Points to remember**

- Poem: Delhi
  - Poet: R. Parthasarthy
  - Period: Post Colonial India
  - Theme: Socio-cultural condition of Delhi in post-independent India
  - Lines: 78 lines, divided in three parts.
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