

English (Sub); Part-I; Unit; 2 Poems; TOPIC- ON HIS
Blindness; Lec- Seri- 32; by: GIANGESH KUMAR
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ON HIS Blindness: Jhon Milton

'On His Blindness' is perhaps one of the best and most popular of Milton's sonnet. It is believed to have been written in 1655, before the year Milton had started losing his eyesight and after some years he lost his eyesight completely. At that time he was about 47 years old and till then, he had written his great works "Paradise Lost" and "Samson Agonists".

This sonnet "On His Blindness" is a human document, a revelation of the struggle in Milton's own soul. It starts with a note of regret, then there is a mood of doubt and questioning which, however, melts in the final attitude of complete resignation. The beauty and exaltation of moral feeling raise the poem to a great height. The poem is full of allusions to the Bible. It is an exploration of moral dilemma of faced by Milton and conveyed through speaker, as he was forced to come to terms with his blindness.

This sonnet begins with the speaker's contemplation of how he has spent his span of life: "When I consider how my light is spent". Here, the poet uses the word "light" which

'life'. This light, as well as being a metaphor for life, is also a literal representation of the days of Milton's life in which he could see. The second line expands on that; "Ere half my days in this dark and wide world"; explains that before even half of the speaker's life had passed, he is forced to live in a world that is "dark and wide". Milton became blind at the age of 47 and since then he had had the opportunity to use his writing skills, his "talents" under the patronage of Cromwell. He had risen to what was, more than likely to peak of his possible achievement, the highest position a writer in England could hope to gain. He did not know at the time that his greatest works would be written in the state of his blindness. His "talents" come into play in the next lines:

"And that one talent
Which is death to hide.....
My true account, lest he
returning chide".

Here, Milton speaks of his "talent", the talent which is his skill of writing and his love for word. His whole life is dependent on this talent even his livelihood and self-worth. This word "talent" has significant meaning in this sonnet, as Milton was a Biblical scholar so he took reference of the 'Parable of Talent' from Matthew's Chapter 25 in which one servant buried the money

given to him by God in the desert rather than investing it wisely. Here, Milton relates his inability of writing and reading with this biblical story. For Milton, his talent, hidden beneath his blindness appears to him like 'death'. Further, he speaks about his devotion to God. He explains that his talents are still hidden even though his soul is more bent to serve God and present his account through writing. He wants nothing more than to do right by God and serve him. In this context 'account' refers to both his records in writing and money. He must do all what he can for God, "lest he returning chide". So that if God returns, he will not chide, or admonish, Milton for not taking advantage of the gifts that God has bestowed upon him.

"Doth God exactly day-labour,
light denied?" I fondly asked

Here, Milton asks question and tries to finish the sentence which he had, in the beginning of the poem, but with the word "when". He asks, "Does God require those without light to labour?". He wants to know if he is not able to continue his work, because of his blindness, will God still require work of him.

"But Patience, to prevent that murmur,
..... They also serve who only
stand and wait?"

Milton continues on, invoking the personification of patience as pacifying force to "prevent the

murmur" in which the speaker would question God. Patience explains that God does not need special gift or works from man, such as Milton's writing but He loves best those who "bear his mild yoke". Here yoke is used as complicated metaphor or as a conceit, stands for responsibility, for to follow the path as directed by the God. Patience comes to the final point of the poem in the following line:

"They also serve who only stand and wait"

Patience compares God to a king saying that his "state is kingly" with "thousand at his beeding". These people, in the state that is the world, are part of the unlimited resources of the king, God. The poem ends with the answer to the speaker's unasked question, that those who are unable to rush over land and ocean, like Milton, also serve God.

This sonnet is based on Petrarchan or Italian sonnet with rhyming pattern of AB AB ABAB CDE CDE. It is written in iambic pentameter and is divided into two part; one octave having eight lines and the other sestet of remaining six lines.

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