A Quest

Through Poems

Literary Criticism

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Vaddu – West,

Vaddukoddai.

Sri Lanka.
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R. Jeevakarunyan
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LEGEND

Derrik De Silva

Tormented between two noises
The infant Gemunu
On one side inarticulate sea
On the other Tamil raging

And he crouched in bed
Listening to the voices
Which bade him rise
And drive out from his native land

How much of waste
And trouble of bright swords
Stream of bloodshed reeking
In the aboriginal darkness
Of a child's fear.

--- X ---

Sri Lankan ethnic problem which has been prevailing for a long time reached its peak in 1983. After that it has turned to be an undeclared civil war. We have already witnessed tremendous destruction. Both Sinhalese and Tamils have lost innumerable lives and valuable properties. Our culture is deteriorating day by day. A great number of children are left orphans and wives are left widows and many other people are made refugees. A considerable number of people have lost their limbs on land mines. Houses, schools, temples, churches and most of our great institutions have been demolished. There have been
mass exodus from Jaffna Peninsula and many other places. People who take refuge in jungles have been undergoing untold hardships due to lack of medicine, food, clothes and housing and, due to the bad climate, diseases prevail in those areas where they take refuge. A lot of people live in refugee camps like animals. Our Fishing, agriculture, industry and all other resources of wealth have been neglected and gone dry. Everyone lives in fear. Sinhalese youths die everyday in battle. Similarly, the Tamil youths do. No one, a Tamil, a Sinhalese or a Muslim can live without fear even in Colombo or Kandy or Galle. Thus the ethnic problem stretches its demonic hands everywhere in Sri Lanka.

This situation gives a severe pang to everyone except the fascists and the war profiteers. The poet, Derrik de Silva is one of those who are tormented by the situation. So he tries to find out the cause for this absurd ethnic problem.

The poem can be divided into three parts

1. The title of the poem.
2. The first stanza.
3. The second stanza.

'Legend' the title of the poem itself, implies the cause of the ethnic problem. Legend means fictional stories handed down from the past. The Dutugemunu story is in the Mahavamsa, a chronicle, which contains partly historical incidents and partly fabricated stories such as Buddha's visit by air from North India to Ceylon and a man called Sinhabahu, father of Vijaya, an ancestor of Sinhalese race was born to a woman, Suppadevi (mother) and a lion.
(father) [A lion carried off Suppadevi to his cave and made her his wife. She lived with him and she had a son, Sinhabahu, and a daughter Sinhasivalki. Ceylon History by David Hussey] Similarly the Dutugemunu story also seems to be the fabulous one. Dutugemunu lived during the period of second century B.C. The Mahavamsa was written during the period of 5th century A.D after seven hundred years. So the information it gives is incredible. It's a myth, not fact. That is why the poet entitles the poem 'Legend'.

The poem speaks in two tones. In the first stanza the poet says.

Infant Gemunu tormented

Note the word infant. Dutugemunu was not even a boy; he is only an infant. So his thoughts are not the result of proper thinking. It is only a childish view. With this childish view he wants to drive out the strangers from his native land. He can't stretch his body on the bed because on one side is inarticulate sea and on the other side Tamil raging.

The legend of Dutugemunu, obviously, plays a significant role in our present politics. It is used to fan the fire of enmity between Sinhalese and Tamils. Sinhalese get inspiration to act against other races from this myth. See the following lines.

On one side inarticulate sea
On the other the Tamil raging
Bade him rise
And drive out from his native land
The stranger chattering gibberish


In fact, if we examine the lines carefully, we can find this tone is similar to that of Sinhalese fascists.

In the second stanza the tone is entirely different from the first stanza. The poet clearly gives his opinion here.

'How much of waste'
'Trouble'
'Stream of bloodshed'
'Reeking'

The poem is a free verse. The poet doesn't use much poetic techniques to enrich the poem.

But the power packed words open a vista of the history of Sri Lankan ethnic problem.

Tormented
Inarticulate sea
Tamil raging
Crouched in bed
Drive out from his native land
Stranger chattering gibberish

Are the words or phrases that have power to create enmity.

Waste
Trouble
Stream of bloodshed

Are the words or phrases which call our attention to the problems.
Infant
Child’s fear

Show the absurdity of the cause which provokes the violence between the two races.

Finally the poet ends the poem with a sharp ridiculing comment.

‘In the aboriginal darkness
Of the child’s fear’

In other words, we are in darkness – aboriginal darkness – in the state of a savage.

Instead of love, kindness, tolerance or having mind to give and take we develop barbaric characters such as ‘tooth for tooth’ and ‘eye for an eye’. We are not refined with the experiences we have gone through for the past several centuries. We have not come out of the brutal nature. That is the cause for all our troubles. ‘Aboriginal darkness of the child’s fear!’ that makes the Sinhalese think ‘On one side an articulate sea and on the other Tamils raging. So we must drive out the strangers chattering gibberish from our native land’. Note the phrase that is used to describe Tamils, ‘strangers’ chattering gibberish. This phrase is enough to show the mentality of the fascist Sinhalese who fan the fire of chauvinism.

In short the poem succeeds in portraying the real dimensions of Sri Lanka’s ethnic problem. A legend, an infant’s dream and a childish fear bring tremendous destruction to Sri Lanka.
THE PATRIOT
Sir Walter Scott
Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
'This is my own, my native land?
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd
As home his footsteps he hath turn'd
From wandering on a foreign strand?
If such there breathe, go mark him well;
For him no Minstrel raptures swell:
High through his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;
Despite those titles, power and pelf,
The wretch, concentrated all in self,
Living, shall forfeit, fair renown
And doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust, from whence he sprung
Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung

---X---

We live in an age when the world has become a global village. In other words, communication has brought the countries of the world very closer. The people of one country breaks their bounds and spread and mixed with the people of other countries. Distinctive culture and special characteristics of a nation gradually lose their hold on the people concerned. When we think logically keeping these facts in mind we may come to the conclusion that patriotism has no place in the present world. But to our surprise the truth is contrary to this assumption. In reality no one forgets his identity with the country he was born in and the ethnic group he belongs to, for example a Jew is a Jew wherever he goes; his identity will trail behind him.
The poem 'The patriot' was written by Sir Walter Scott almost 150 years ago, before the advanced communication facilities emerged. Even then the theme it has is most appropriate to the present day.

A person who returns from foreign land must experience a strong feeling of love for his country. His heart must 'burn' – note the extent of the feeling the word 'burn' implies – with the Feeling 'This is my own native land'. Here the poet uses an excellent yard stick to measure who a patriot is. We usually don't feel much about our country; when we are there residing in one's own country, it seems to be a mere natural thing for us. But when we happen to leave our country our heart thirsts for the natural surroundings of our own country. Everything seems unnatural for us in the foreign countries. In short we feel a nostalgia for our country.

Sir Walter Scott, the poet uses an unusual technique to highlight the feeling of patriotism. He takes a character, a non patriot, and describes what would happen to him if he is so.

The poet gives the theme effectively in the following lines: "Breathes there the man with soul so dead. Here every word is loaded with meaning. A sarcastic note underlies in the above line. People call him man because he breathes. If we examine him closely the so called man's soul is dead. He might have high titles, boundless wealth or power but they are useless because nobody is going to recognize him. He shall forfeit fair renoun, he will be buried.

unwept
unhonoured
and 'unsung'

In other words he will receive no respect even at his death as he has no respect during his lifetime. Above all, a
line powerfully exposes his degraded state.

'go down to the vile dust
from whence he sprung'

Here the poet posits that a non patriot is equal to vile dust. We normally have a belief that we take birth from the spirit. But the poet says, to the contrary to the belief, the non patriot takes birth from the dust - note the word 'dust' and the adjective vile, the most contemptible thing - and goes back to dust. Thus the poet brings a despicable picture of a non patriot. If we reverse the descriptions we will get the right picture of the patriot:

He will be "renowned"
He will be "Wept" at his death
He will be "honoured"
He will be "sung" by minstrel.

The poem provokes many a new idea in us. It clearly points out mere existence or accumulating wealth and power doesn't make a life meaningful. Man must have some qualities to be called 'man'. Our mind is not an empty vessel. It doesn't operate in vacuum. It inherits the culture of a nation. The collective life and the real association among people are based on love we have for the country and the culture. The love for our country expands our mind and make our life lively.

The poem has not only end rhymes such as 'dead, said', 'land burnt, turned strand, well swell, name claim', 'pelf, self, renown, down' 'sprung, sung' but also has alliteration schemes. 'There the' 'soul so' 'himself hath' 'heart hath', 'he hath'. 'can claim'. 'power pelf' 'forfeit, fair', 'doubly dying', 'unswept, unhonoured, unsung'. The rhyming scheme enhances the beauty of the poem.
Love's Secret

William Blake.

Never seek to tell thy love
   Love that never told can be;
For the gentle wind doth move
   Silently, invisibly.

I told my love, I told my love
   I told her all my heart
Trembling cold, in ghastly fears
   Ah, she did depart.

Soon after she has gone from me,
   A traveller came by,
Silently, invisibly
   He took her with a sigh.

-----X-----

To understand the poem ‘The love’s secret’ by William Blake, we must know something about mind. It seems to me that our mind dwells in five planes.

1) Deep sleep (This is an unconscious and unknown state. It is said to be a store house. We reckon its value from its after effects. That is we feel happy when we have woken up from sound sleep)

2) Dream state (half sleep or half consciousness state. Sometimes something stored in unconscious plane may ooze out in the from of dream) images and visions appear in this stage.

3) The third plane involves intuition, feelings and emotions. It includes happiness, sorrow, love, anger, jealousy, desire, longings, aspiration, inspiration etc., (It is said these aspects may radiate its qualities to others who have had contact with the person.)
4) The next plane is thinking process, it involves ideas and feelings. So it uses language partly.

5) Finally, we express our emotions, feelings, ideas through language. Here our intellect checks every word we utter or write because it is observed and judged by others.

In this background we can clearly understand the poem. Love is one of the great emotional treasures our mind possesses. It dwells from unconscious plane to the thinking process plane. Here the poet uses a metaphor ‘the gentle wind’ to denote ‘Love’. Further he says how it dwells in our inner sphere.

‘The gentle wind doth move
Silently and invisibly’

What do you feel when gentle breeze touches your body. Silently, invisibly? A similar emotion of love arouses feeling within us.

The narrator could have preserved the love if he hadn’t told it out. But he told it out and lost his sweetheart. Note how the word ‘told’ emphasis in two lines.

“I told my love, I told my love
I told her all my heart.”

Here the poet uses the word ‘Love’ in two meanings, One ‘love’ denotes ‘the sweet heart of him.’ The second love denotes his love feeling.

Now we the have to think about the reason for his loss after he told her all her heart. The poet puts effectively, in a few words, the narrator’s state of mind. When he is expressing his love to his sweetheart he is trembling, cold, in ghastly fears.” Here the poet posits the weak or confused
state of the narrator's mind. But the main reason is when one tries to express an inexpressible emotion in words it loses its vigour. Firstly the words have no power to convey the richest feeling we cherish in our heart. Secondly when we translate them into words we add logical, intellectual, ornamental qualities to make it look sincere or to be effective. But these artificial devices, on the contrary, bring insincerity in his expression, so it fails to touch the listener. The narrator says I told her all my heart" But it is obvious that nobody can tell the heart. A message can be told, but not the heart.' The word 'told' also implies the shallowness of the verbal expression. The result is 'she did depart'.

The poet again uses the words 'silently and invisibly.'

'A traveller came by
Silently and invisibly''

Here the traveller means 'an unknown person'. The narrator is a known person to her who cherishes love for her for a long time. But the unknown person, a traveller robs her with a sigh, in a short period of acquaintance. Note the relationship between the words 'Wind' and 'Sigh'. Here again Blake reveals love's secret. He came by 'silently and invisibly 'Which are the key words to solve the puzzle of love's secret.

In this poem Blake portrays how weak an outward expression is. I have said earlier, our mind is a vast store of treasures. We can't reduce it into words. When we try to translate the great wealth of our mind into words it loses its vigour. This is the theme of the poem. The title 'Lover's secret' is aptly suit to the context.

01/08/1999
THE RAIN

Kalidasa

The Rain advances like a king
In awful majesty,
Here, dearest, how his thunders ring
Like royal drums, and see
His Lightning banners wave, a cloud
For elephant he rides
And finds his welcome from the crowd
Of lovers and of brides

The clouds, a mighty army, march
With drum like thundering
And stretch upon the rainbow's arch
The lightning's flashing string
The cruel arrows of the rain
Smite them who live, apart
From whom they love with stinging pain
And pierce them to the heart

The forest seems to show its glee
In flowering niap plants;
In waving twigs of many a tree
Wind swept, it seems to dance,
Its ketak — blossoms opening sheath
Is like a smile put on
To greet the rain's reviving breath,
Now pain and heat are gone.

To you, dear, may the cloudily time,
Bring all that you desire
Bring every pleasure, perfect prime
To set a bride on fire;
May rain whereby life wakes and shines
Where there is power of life.
The unchanging friend of clinging vines,
Shower blessing on my wife

---X---

Rain is an ordinary experience for the common man. For an ecologist it may give some deeper meaning; he may see how every being in Nature depends on each other. But all these views are based on seeing Nature as a soul-less phenomenon. But when a poet like Kalidasa walks through Nature he experiences the mystic soul of it. The Rain is a king and other being as his subjects.

The poem creates three dimensional images.

(1) A king's procession
(2) Feelings of the subjects who are welcoming the king.
(3) The lively existence of Nature.

The poem begins with a simile "the rain advances like a king."

Here the poet stresses the greatness of the Rain. As we all know a king may give us gifts or punishment. He has the power to do both. Similarly the Rain can make us prosperous or destroy. That is why it is received with awful majesty.

The procession consists of many items.

The king rides on an elephant
“Clouds for elephant he rides”

Drummers beat their drums
“Thunders ring like Royal drums”

Others carry banners
“Lightning banners wave”

Then mighty army march
“Clouds mighty army march”

The archers shoot arrows

‘Rainbow arch’ – bow
Lightning flashing – string
‘Arrow’ ……………… of rain (drops)

This is the complete portrayal of the procession of the king. Here the poet uses a simile and metaphors.

Simile : Thunders ring like Royal drums
Metaphors : Clouds mighty army
Lightning flashing string
Cruel arrows of Rain.

Then our attention turns towards the subjects welcoming the king – from sky to earth. Here we see the two states of mind. Many of them greet the Rain with pleasure, but a small group with pain.

The group which welcomes with pleasure contains.

‘Forest seems to glee’
Flowering nipa plants
(Twigs are wavering when wind sweeps)
It seems to dance
Ketak blossom's opening sheath
It's like a smile put on.

The group which suffers consists of parted lovers... The youth and the lass suffer from their separation. The poet effectively brings out their sufferings.

"Cruel arrows smite them"
(They) Pierce them to the heart
These are the pros and cons of the aspects of the Rain.

Then the benefits of the rain are depicted.

(Rain is) Reviving the breath'
(Note the word' reviving = Coming back to consciousness)

'Now pain and heat are gone'
(Rains) 'Bring every pleasure'

These are the blessings that every being on earth aspires. As a result of this.

'Life wakes and shines'
Where there is power of life'

Here the poet powerfully connects the earth and sky. If rain fails, everything. On the earth will wither and die. If rains bless the earth everything will flourish.

Note the phrase (Rain is an) 'Unchanging friend'. By this the poet implies the nature is always friendly with
us, if we reckons its awful majesty’ it means we will give
due respect to it; we should not spoil or pollute it.

The poet’s personal touch enhances the effect of the
poem. The poem is in the form of an address. The poet
addresses the dearest and portrays all, these scenes. In the
last line he invokes the Rain to bless his wife. “Showers
blessing on my wife.” This line is enough to realize how the
poet drenches with the feeling of the rain.

It is a splendid picture of Rain as A.W.Rydes, who
translated this poem into English from Sanskrit, puts it. He
says, ‘Rarely has a man walked the earth who observed the
phenomenan of living nature, as accurately as he’. Here
‘he’ means the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa.

24/7/1999
Moon and New York City

Mahagama Sekera

Only cement walls
Blackened competitively rising
No sky, no greenery
In New York City
At the topmost floor
Of the one hundred storied building
I am imprisoned in a room
With doors and windows all closed
A bed, a chair, a table
And me.

I think
Of my beloved parents
Friends and relations, wife and children
On the other side of the earth
To dispel the loneliness
I recite a poem aloud
My voice comes ringing
Back to my ears
Not knowing where to go

I open the window and look out
I look down far below
It invading cold
Pierce face.

Caught in the glare of neon lights
Vehicles speed along
Lacking any patience
Ant—like human machine
Dart in all directions
There was no one here
Who would pause for a moment
To look at kindly
To exchange a few words with me
Such persons are all
On the other side of the earth
I think of them

I look up sadly
Shining brightly in the sky
Like plate of a gold –
The moon
The moon that I know so well
The moon that sparkles on the field at home,
The moon that sparkles on the temple sand.

(Translated by Wimal Dissanayake)

Mahagama Sekera handles a grave problem that prevails in the world – Alienation which is the result of migration to the West from the East.

The title of the poem is ‘Moon and New York City’. Moon symbolizes Nature, beauty, happiness and calm. It represents the villages in the East, especially in Sri Lanka, where people lead a pleasant life closer to the nature. New York city is one of the developed cities in U.S.A, which represents sophisticated artificial western cities. To the poet the city seems to be a concrete desert. The following phrases reveal this fact.

Cement walls
One hundred storeyed building
Competitively rising (buildings)

The adjective ‘blackened’ (walls) shows how the poet feels about the city. The phrase ‘no greenery’ emphasizes that it is a desert. The sky is everywhere above us. The ‘moon’ is in the West as in the East. But the people in the great city are unable to enjoy the beauty of the sky and the moon. The sky scrapers block them from our eyes. So they see many artificial moons, neon electric bulbs, instead of the original moon.

Further the city dwellers have no time to enjoy it. The poet says,

Ant-like human machine
Dart in all directions.

Here the poet uses a simile and a metaphor.

Simile : Ant-like human
Metaphor : human machine.

The simile and the metaphor reduce man to lower level. The simile ‘Ant-like reduces the human beings to animal level. Ant is busy: but it has no ideal, which is essential to make human existence meaningful. Similarly ‘human machine’ – the metaphor – reduces man to matter level. Matter has no feelings. It implies the so called scientific development reduces ‘Man’ to inanimate matter level. Lack of love, lack of sincerity, and lack of humanitarian approach are the result of this achieve ments. Here the neon bulbs take place of the moon. Competitively rising (buildings) implies competitively enterprises, which exploit common masses inexorably.
The hundred storeyed building implies the advancement of the technical knowledge. But the advancement ‘Imprisons’ Man. He longs for human relationship; he is provided with inanimate objects; so he suffers from loneliness. He is completely alienated from the society.

I am imprisoned in a room
With doors and windows all closed
A bed a chair, a table
And me.

Note the word ‘Imprisoned’. It creates an image of a prison before our mind eye. He is in the peak of technical advancement, on the top floor of the hundred storeyed building. But he has no person to share his feeling with. Note the phrase with doors and windows all closed. It enhances the image of the ‘prison’ where a sentenced criminal is kept. But in the city room, a man who has done nothing wrong suffers like a prisoner. His companions are a bed, a chair, and a table, which don’t inspire him or communicate with him. This is the plight of Man in a highly developed city.

Even though he doesn’t cease in his effort to be happy.

To dispel the loneliness
I recite a poem aloud.

But it comes ringing back to his ears as there is no one to enjoy it. His acute loneliness is expressed in these lines.

Vehicles speeding along
Lacking any patience
Human machines
Dart in all direction.
The above lines reveal the hasty life the city dwellers lead. They have no time to stand and stare. Then he suffers from nostalgia of his birthplace — a Sri Lankan village. He thinks of his beloved parents relations, wife and children.

It is said that the East and the West represent entirely different or we can say opposite traits — the East spiritual and the West rational. The villagers in the East lead a simple life enjoying the beauty of Nature. But the West is interested in artificial development. The Poem tries to weigh the difference between the East and the West. The climate of the western city is very cold. But a Sri Lankan village has a warm climate. When the poet opens the window of the room in New York city it invades cold air that pierce his face — But in a Sri Lanka village.

(Moon) Shining bright in the sky
Like the plate of gold

(H) Sparkles on the field at home
On the temple sand.

Every line gives us a warm feeling which contrasts the cold climate of the western cities. The temple connotes the spiritual aspect of the East.

Every year a great number of Sri Lankans migrate to western countries with two great expectations. One is amassing great wealth. The other is to enjoy the great happiness the highly developed countries bestow through their advanced technical facilities. Some of them may achieve the first aim to a certain extent, but not all. As far as the second aim is concerned they have been thoroughly disappointed. They feel like fish out of water. Because not
only the climate of the West and the East differ, but also the cultures differ greatly. Every Eastern longs for deep mutual love, mutual respect. They wish to share their inner feelings with their family and their relations. They want human warm relationship with others. The dry rational approach make them exhausted when they step in the Western countries. They become anonymous there; no one cares for them. The material luxury is not going to satisfy him, because he has already had the experience of human warm relationship. Material comfort can't substitute the profound experience or satisfy the depth of his innermost self. This is the theme of the poem.

10/07/1999
IDENTIFICATION

Nimal Somaratne.

You never knew me  
Although you labelled me  
For your own advancement  
When I blossomed  
With youthful vigour  
You were suspicious  
So I wilted with bitterness.  

(1)

When I cried for freedom  
You only thrashed me  
When I screamed with pain you only played  
To the rhythm of my lament  
When I pleaded you did not listen  
When I warned you only mocked  
So it started the growing hatred.  

(2)

When I reasoned  
I am called a rebel  
But you who lie to the people  
You are the leader  
When I awaken the sleeping people  
You are the just avenger  
Always for your own advancement  

(3)

When I fight for a cause  
You call me an extremist  
Both from the north  
And the south.  

(4)
When you take arms
You are a patriot
When I defend myself
I am a terrorist
-- Always for your advancement

When I speak for a minority
I am an Ecelamist
When I resist separation
I am a racist
Always for your advancement

When I was burnt inside a tyre
In a deserted street corner
With dogs and crows
Feasting on my half burned body
You call me a subversive.

You never know or tried to know
That is my identification
What’s yours then.

----X----

Two groups are involved in this poem. The first group acts with youthful vigour. The second group is suspicious. The first group is the youth who fights for justice. The second group consists of power hungry politicians, businessmen, Religious leaders and others who wish to hold on to power for ever. Among them politicians are the front liners who are ready to play their dirty tricks on the opponents to achieve their own end. Highlighting the conflict between the two groups is the theme of the poem.
There are eight stanzas. The poem has many clauses start with 'When........' Most of the clauses reveal the feeling of youths. The next lines show the power seekers reflections to them.

When I blossomed  
   You were suspicious
When I reasoned  
   You called me rebel

When I awakens the sleeping people  
   (You take revenge on me)
When I fight for a cause  
   You called me an extremist.

When I defend myself  
   I am a terrorist.
When I speak for minority  
   I am an Eelamist.

The above lines reveal the power seekers are in a dominating position and they always try to control the youth for their own advancement. By the phrase “for your own advancement ”which occurs four times in the poem, the poet posits where the fault lies. Youthful vigour ‘blossomed with’ signifies natural change. Youths try to see the world in its true identification.

"They cry for freedom"
"They reason"
"They awaken the sleeping people"
"They fight for a cause"

In short we can say they are interested in the true development of the society. They are innocent, pure and sincere. But the power seekers oppose all these activities
and label them as ‘rebel’, ‘extremist’, ‘terrorist’ and ‘Eelamist’ in order to cover their weakness. Most of them are either traditionalist or hypocrites or both. They don’t want to change with the changing world. They hold outdated ideas firmly and advocate for them. Racism, fundamentalism, fanaticism of religion, chauvinism and other emotional aspects are their main device to hold power for ever. And they want to lead the nation as they wish, ignoring the youth’s genuine ambitions. So they play all sorts of dirty tricks. They know if they loosen their grip on youths they can’t hold the power over the nation. So they use army and police to suppress youths’ genuine rise saying they, the politicians are patriots. Indeed they use the word ‘patriot’ to camouflage their ulterior motive. Further they don’t understand the youth and ignore them. The following lines show this aspect.

I screamed with pain
You only played to the rhythm of my lament
When I warned
You mocked.

The above lines suggest how deeply the youths are offended by every action of the power seekers. They want to treat them like worms. Finally everything take the form of hatred between the groups. Even a worm will turn against such ill treatment. This is really happening everywhere in the world.

When we think of the background of the poem, we may get some clues to understand the poem fully. The poet is Sri Lankan, Sinhalese; Nimal Somaraine. Although the theme of the poem has worldwide context, the immediate root cause which inspires the poet to compose the poem is the
situation, now prevailing in Sri Lanka. ‘Rebels’ and
‘extremist’ are the names given to the Sinhalese youths
who have fought in the South. ‘Eelamist’ and ‘terrorist’ are
the labels given to the Tamils who fought for their rights.

Identification is an apt title because the key lies in
finding true identity of the problems. Every false identity
will lead to destruction. This is the message the poet gives
in his poem. He doesn’t use much poetic techniques, but his
language is simple and direct and makes us enjoy the poem.

10/07/1999
FROM AN INHABITED PLANET
Chad Walsh
(End of Nature)

This paradise and torture chamber
This thing alive, this green and red,
This April and December
Of the planets, sped.

Screaming and singing
Down the lanes of space
By gravitation clinging
To the sun’s red face.

From venus comes
No word of water
From cold Mars hums
No wireless chatter.

The probes of space
Televise back
No smiling face,
No maniac.

No reptile creeping,
No insect hive,
Space is sleeping
I am alive

This blue, green ball
Of laughs and groans
Treat it kindly, it may be all
God owns.

-----X-----
“Screaming and singing
Down the lanes of space
By gravitation clinging
To the sun’s red face”

Having finished reading the above lines, the whole universe – Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto – orbiting round the sun seems to appear before our mental eye. It creates a paramount image of the Universe. But when we read through the poem the first image shrinks into nothingness, but the Earth alone emerges as a great lively entity in the universe.

“The green and red
The April and December
Of the planet sped”

The word green symbolizes the good qualities of the Earth and the red symbolizes the sun which helps to keep the Earth lively, but it is itself unsuitable to live.

As we know the Earth is composed in such a way as though all elements – air, water, sea, climate, air current, water current, season etc – were scientifically calculated and constituted in every detail precisely suit for the existence of human beings and other beings. But man doesn’t seem to take account of this miraculous coincidence and the great value of its nature, it’s what the theme of this poem.

I have a reason to say that it is a miraculous coincidence. Man probes into space sending rockets and spacecrafts to see if there is life in any other planet.
“From Venus comes
No word of water
From cold Mars hums
No wireless chatter

The probes of space
Televise back
No smiling face
No maniac

No reptile creeping
No insect hive”

So no other planet in the Universe, according to the researches so far made, has life. The poet beautifully puts it in two lines.

“Space is sleeping
I am alive”

Here the Earth is personified.
The following words are to be given serious consideration. They show how the poet sees the world. He does point out its contrary nature while he repeatedly expresses his admiration.

“Paradise – torture chamber
Smiling face – maniac
The blue green ball
Laughs and groans
Screaming and singing

Paradise is believed to be the place, according to Christianity, where Supreme bliss is enjoyed. Here the poet
refers the earth as paradise – a place of Supreme bliss. The opposite of Paradise is hell. But the poet doesn’t like to use that word. Instead, he uses ‘torture chamber’. It means the Earth is the happiest place, but we make it a torture chamber by our own activities. ‘Smiling face’ blue (sad) and green (happiness) ball, laughs and groans, screaming and singing express the same contrary nature in different ways. But the word ‘maniac’ gives more weight. It implies all sort of destructive activities including ‘atomic tests’. Similarly the request “Treat it kindly” points out other evil aspects such as ‘pollution’. These activities may turn our environment unsuitable to live as that in other planets.

The poem deepens our insight and makes us realize our responsibility towards the Earth; because:

“It may be all
God owns”

14/03/1999.
HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE
When The Tourist Flew In.
Cicil Rajendra

The Finance Minister said
"It will boost the economy
The dollars will flow in

The Minister of Interior said,
"It will provide full
And varied employment
For the indigenous.

The Ministry of Culture said,
"It will enrich our life
Contact with other cultures
Must surely improve
The texture of our living.

The man from Hilton said,
We will make you
A second paradise
For you, it is the dawn
Of a glorious new beginning!

When the tourist flew in
Our Island people
Metamorphosed into
A grotesque carnival
A two week side show.

When the tourist flew in
Our man put aside
Their fishing nets
To become waiters
Our women become whores.

When the tourist flew in
What culture we had
Flew out of the window
We traded our customs
For sunglasses and pop
We turned sacred ceremonies
Into a ten cents peep show

When the tourist flew in
Local food became scarce
Prices went up
But our wages stayed low.

When the tourist flew in
We could no longer
Go down to the beaches
The hotel manager said
Native defile the sea.

When the tourist flew in
The hunger and squalor
Were preserved
As a passing pageant
For clicking cameras
A chic eye sore.

When the tourist flew in
We were asked
To be wide ambassadors
To stay smiling and polite
To always guide
The lost visitor  
Hell, if we, could only tell them  
Where we really want them to go.

---X---

Once we finish reading the poem, we feel the poet doesn’t employ much poetic devices to enrich the poem. He directly puts forward the facts and lets them speak for themselves. The utterances of the Ministers and the man from the Hilton Hotel are not imaginary. We often come across this type of news in our papers and magazines. The poem is, indeed, a criticism of the tourist industry.

The poem has eleven stanzas. The first four stanzas present what actually Ministers and the man from Hilton said. The other seven stanzas expose the effect of tourist industry.

The Finance Minister and the Minister of Interior present mere facts.

It will boost the economy  
The dollar will flow in.  

(Finance Minister)

It will provide employment.  

(Minister of Interior)

They don’t seem to be concerned about the other matters. But at least, the Minister of Cultural Affairs should be concerned about the degrading effect on the culture of Sri Lanka. But he confirms what other Ministers say.
Contact with other cultures
Must surely improve
The texture of our living

One may argue that the minister himself believed that it would bring benefit to the country. But it is not true. On the contrary we can assure that he tries to ape the people knowing very well the degrading effect of tourism.

We can excuse the man from Hilton Hotel because his is pure business. He doesn't say anything to the natives but he appeals to the foreigners.

'We will make you second paradise'

The other seven stanzas expose what really happened when they had flown in.

We see the reaction on the seashore first. The fisher folk turns their attention towards tourists. They give up their present means of livelihood, earning easy money. Fishing is a useful, self dependent, honest occupation. But they become waiters losing their self respect and self dependence.

Sri Lankan culture preserves some human values that Westerners lost. It is true western culture has brought a rational outlook. But at the same time it has grown out of proportion to the extent of disregarding some aspects which our culture cherish for a long time. Eastern culture, which includes Sri Lanka's too preserves ethical codes, religious beliefs, social values, chastity, family responsibilities, sincerity etc, which are useful to hold our life intact. Especially the inhabitants in the villages are simple, naive
and closer to nature. This purity is spoilt by the sophisticated tourists. The poet reveals it effectively in the following lines.

'When the tourist flew in
What culture we had
Flew out of the window.

'Please note the antithesis 'Tourists flew in ............. (our) culture flew out of the window'. Then he lists everything one by one. Our women become whores, Chastity is valued as a great wealth. It is the foundation of unshakable family life. Here the foundation is shattered and the mansion will collapse subsequently. Further it reminds us how the diseases like 'Aids' spread in Sri Lanka, it includes all sorts of immoral activities carried out by foreigners.

Our religious ceremonies are sacred which have great values, they guide us to be pure, sincere and to live an honest life. But they are also degraded.

'We turned our sacred ceremonies into peep shows,
'We traded our customs,

Seeing all these absurdities of selling' our culture for sun glasses and pop music the poet gets wild and curses the tourists. 'Go to hell'. See how the poet puts it in his own words.

'Hell if we could only tell them
Where we really want them to go'
The poem has two titles: 'Hell is other people' and 'When the tourist flow in'. Both the titles explicitly give out the message of the poem at the beginning. The last seven stanzas begin with, 'When the tourist flow in' to emphasise the message he wishes to give.

Though the poem brings out the evil of the tourist industry effectively, I doubt, the open economy would listen to the poet's voice. It, the open economy, is ready to flirt like a bitch to earn foreign exchange.

06/02/1999.
As I walked out one evening
Walking down Bristol street
The crowds upon the pavement
Were fields of the harvest wheat

And down by the brimming river
I heard a lover sing
Under the arch of the railway
"Love has no ending"

I'll love you dear, I'll love you
Till China and Africa meet
And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street

I'll love you till the ocean
Is folded and hung up to dry
And the seven stars go squaking
Like geese about the sky.

The years shall run like rabbits
For in my arms I hold
The flower of the ages
And the first love of the world.

But all the clocks in the city
Began to whirr and chime
O! Let not time deceive you
You cannot conquer Time.
In the burrows of the nightmare
Where justice naked is
Time watches from the shadow
And coughs when you would kiss.

In headaches and in worry
Vaguely life leaks away
And time will have his fancy
Tomorrow or today

Into many green valley
Drifts the appalling snow
Time breaks the thread dances
And the divers brilliant bow

O! plunge your hands in water
Plunge them in up-to the wrist
Stare, stare in the basin
And wonder what you’ve missed.

The glacier knocks in the cupboard
The deserts sighs in the bed
And the crack in the teacup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

Where the beggars ruffle the bank notes
And the Giant is enchanting to Jack
And the lily white boy is a Toarer
And Jill goes down on her back.

O! Look look in the mirror
O look in your distress
Life remains a blessing
Although you cannot bless.
O! Stand, stand at the window
As tears scaled and start
You shall love your crooked neighbour
With your crooked heart

It was late in the evening
The lovers they were gone
The clocks had ceased their chiming
And the deep river ran on.

While we read through the poem, a great many visual images move before our minds eye. The poet deals with two aspects in this poem. One is 'Love' and other is 'Time'. He highlights the merits of the 'Love' in order to place it in its due place. He uses similes, metaphors and hyperboles to portray a vivid picture.

Love is the greatest aspect in life. There is nothing in the world to compare with it. So the poet gives great emphasis to love at the beginning of the poem.

I'll love you dear, I'll love you
Till china and Africa meet
And the river jumps over the mountains
And the salmon sing in the street.

I'll love you 'til the ocean
Is folded and hung up to dry
And the seven stars go squawking
Like geese about the sky.
Please note the hyperboles.

(Till) ‘China and Africa meet’
  ‘The river jumps over the mountains’
  Salmon sing in the street.

Then his images move up to sky.

(Till) ‘The ocean is folded and hung up to dry’
  ‘Seven stars go squawking
   Like geese about the sky!"

No lover can give greater promises than these. The poet gives a concrete background to build up this mansion. He says it is first-hand experience. The title, the first line, establishes this fact.

(The poet) I walked out one evening.

Walking down the Bristol Street
  Down by the brimming river
  I heard a lover sing.

Suddenly all clocks in the city began to whirr and chime reminding ‘You cannot conquer time; then he moves from ‘love’ to ‘time’, where he employs ‘great images’.

‘The years shall run like rabbits - (Simile)
  ‘In the burrows of the nightmare - (metaphor)
  ‘Many a green valley drifts the appalling snow’
  ‘Time breaks the thread dances’

(Time breaks) divers brilliant bow’

Then he uses hyperboles.
‘The glaciers knock in the cupboard
The deserts sigh in the bed
And the crack in the tea cup opens
A lane to the land of dead’

Then he personifies the time.
‘The time watches from the shadow’

(It) ‘Coughs when you would kiss’

In the above lines, the poet implies death is creeping near us little by little and awaiting a chance to rob us away.

Finally he summarizes everything in the following two lines.

‘In headaches and in worry
vaquely life leaks away
And time will have his fancy
Tomorrow or Today.

All these images take us to a world where tremendous incidents are taking place.

‘Rabbits, nightmare, thread dances, divers, brilliant bow are trivial things when compared with ‘Many a green valley drifts’ ‘glaciers knock’ ‘Desert sigh’

We can understand, the crack in the tea cup opens a lane to the land of dead’ as a trivial thing leads to a death of a person, but how can we understand’ ‘glaciers knock in the cupboard’ ‘the deserts sigh in the bed’ unless we open our insight to visualize a world that goes beyond ‘logical assumption’. The poet does not preach pessimism;
but it is not the optimistic view either. He calls us to see the truth as it is in his own poetic way, but he suggests a positive note also.

Life remains a blessing
Although you cannot bless it.

These two lines suggest ‘Life is a blessing’ but it depends on something else – what is it? We don’t know. The question is unanswered. So we come to a conclusion along with the poet.

“ You cannot conquer time”

20/09/1998
THE solitaire Reaper.

William wordsworth

Behold her, single in the field,
You solitary Highland lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands;
No sweeter voice was ever heard
In spring-time from the cuckoo bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Her brides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of today?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again

What’ ever the theme, the maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And over the sickle bending;  
I listen'd till I had my fill;  
And, as I mounted up the hill,  
The music in my heart I bore  
Long after it was heard no more.

---X---

The title 'The Reaper' suggests that the poet is not going to speak about kings or Queens Noble or knight, God or Goddess but about ordinary village folk. It is the trend some poet took after the French Revolution. It seems Wordsworth is one of the pioneers of this trend.

The adjective 'Solitary enhances the meaning of the poem. It draws our sympathy towards the Girl. Further it raises some questions, why is she solitary? Has she lost her parents, brothers, sisters and relations? Or else why is it? Is it due to war or due to some natural disaster? These questions occur to us before we go deep into the poem. Even after we have finished reading the poem, we don't find any key for these puzzles. They remain puzzles forever and ever engage our mind in the task of finding solution for these questions, which is the beauty of the poem.

The poet creates a vivid visual image on our inward eye:

A beautiful girl  
Standing in a cornfield lonely  
Sings a sweet melancholy tone  
She has a sickle
She bends and reaps.
We should note the word 'melancholy' which suggests she has lost something dear to her. In every way the poem portrays the plight of a young forlorn girl.

The poet paints the picture with different colours.

Stanza (1) Addressing
Stanza (2) Descriptive: Comparing two songs to the girl.
Stanza (3) Talking to himself
Stanza (4) Recollecting past events and absorbed into it.

First he addresses,

'Behold her! Single in the field'

'Stop here or gently pass'

(Don't disturb her)

The following lines deepen our sorrow.

'O listen! the vale profound'

Is overflowing with the sound'

It seems that her sorrow encompasses the whole surroundings through her sweet music.

Then he compares her with the nightingale and the cuckoo bird they are also solitary. The nightingale is in the Arabian desert. The cuckoo bird is breaking the silence of the seas. 'Desert and Seas' give us a picture of lonely nature. In the Arabian desert the travelers are tired due to
thirst and hunger when the Nightingale's sweet song makes them refresh and soothe their tiredness, and bring them a sort of happiness. Similarly the cuckoo's song breaks the silence of the seas. Both comparisons signify her lonely and sweetness of her song and how it is enjoyed by others.

In the next stanza the poet wants to know what she is singing about.

He says himself.

'Will no one tells me what she sings?'

But he couldn't understand. Why? She may be standing far from him, or she may be singing in a foreign language. The reason is not given. However he feels underlying sorrow, but he cannot understand the words. He questions himself if she is singing about the past events or about the present difficulties or about the future troubles she expects. But he is unable to find out. So he gives up his attempt and says whatever it may be we keep the thought of her in our mind.

In the final stanza he describes the event in the past time. In other words he is recollecting the past incident.

'I saw her singing at the work'

When we try to guess the poet's character from the poem we can say the following.

The poet is a lover of nature. The description of nature shows this fact.

Highland lass.
O listen, for the vales of profound
Is overflowing with the sound
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the fartherest herbridges

Secondly he is a lover of music. He talks about
the music through out the poem when he says,

“As if her song could have no ending”

“I listen, till I had my fill”

The music in my heart I bore?

He emphasizes the universal nature of the
music. Further he introduces “nightingale” and ‘Cuckoo’
the two songbirds to show how a song gives solace to
troublesome minds.

Thirdly as I said at the beginning he loves
ordinary people. He wishes to share their sorrow and
happiness. He uses very simple language to describe their
simple nature. In other words he blends love towards man
with love towards nature to give us meaning to our
existence. He sees both have same origin.

Finally he gives permanence to an incident
ephemeral by recollecting and enjoying it. It lasts
permanently in his mind even after the incident has ended
up. Here it is imprinted in his mind and gives him eternal
peace; pain and happiness mingle in his recollection. He is
absorbed into this pensive mood. Indeed aesthetic feeling is
such which combines mind and outer world to bring a
lasting peace.

13/09/1998
LONDON

William Blake

I wander thro’ each charter’d street,
Near where the charter’d Thames does flow
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infant’s cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind — forg’d manacles I hear.

How the Chimney — Sweeper’s cry
Every black’ning church appalls,
And the hapless Soldier’s sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro’ midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot’s curse
Blasts the new born Infant’s tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

---X---

When we have gone through the poem we have to pause for a while to guess what it is about. Then it starts to create a mental picture of London after the industrial revolution. A shock like feeling passes through our body when we visualize the horrible scene of London.

‘In every face (we see) marks of weakness
Marks of woe in every man’s cry
Marks of fear in every Infant’s cry’
This is what the industrial revolution has brought into existence. He uses an excellent metaphor to show its pathetic state.

In every voice, in every ban
This mind forged manacles.

Men, children, Soldiers and poor women – all are in manacles. Powerful minds force them to be in manacles. Before the industrial revolution people lived in their villages calm and quiet. They could manage to run their life without much difficulty. Their life in a village was not complicated. Nature and life went closely knitted. But after the revolution they were forced to move to towns where big industries grew up rapidly. But the new change dehumanized man.

When this inhuman attitude comes from an owner of an industry who invests his capital in it, it is tolerable, because the purpose of his investment is to get as much profit as possible out of the investment. So in a way it shows the change from feudalism to capitalism. But when it comes from a church, which represents Christ who saw God in children it should be despised. The other institution, which should safeguard the common masses against injustice is the state. But it also helps the capitalist to exploit the common mass. In short the two institutions, which should work for the benefit of the people worked against them.

In the following lines the poet reveals this fact.

(In) Chimney sweepers cry
Every blackening church appalls.
One must note the phrase ‘blackening church’ – it suggests the shameful practice of the church.

When he mentions about the state he says.

The hapless soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls.

Soldiers are unlucky persons. The state employs them to be killed or to kill other human being at war for the sake of the state. So the words ‘sigh’ and the line ‘Runs in blood down palace walls’ give us a deep meaning. ‘Sigh’ signifies their perpetual unhappiness and the blood signifies the ‘death’. The line creates a mental picture of how a government runs its affairs. In general – it suits any government in the world.

In the beginning of the poem the poet says’ charted street’ and ‘charted Thames, which imply that everything runs with the authority of the government. In other words the government is partially responsible for the injustice prevailing in London.

Finally he comes to the harlot. He blames the society itself – its crooked nature. Moneyed people, for their enjoyment, maintain harlots. They are very poor; they have no other way except selling their bodies for their existence. Here he uses some power – packed words and phrases. Harlots curse will.

‘Blast the new born infant’s tears’
‘Plague the marriage hearse’
Please note the combination of words 'Marriage hearse'. He pours out his emotion in the words and phrases. He warns the society if they allow it to continue, ultimately it will explode everything the whole social structure. 'Blast', 'Plague', 'Infant tears', 'Hearse', 'Sigh', 'Curse' all suggest the gravity of the problem he deals with.

The poet walks through the city and he hears only 'cry'

'Cry of every man'
Cry of infant
Cry of chimney sweepers.

So the poet epitomizes the result of the industrial revolution in the word of 'cry'.

When a poet brings out his emotions and feelings he exposes the real nature of the society. So it turns to be a criticism of the society he lives in. Further it turns to be a true historical record too. This poem also turns to be a criticism of the state, church and the society of London and a historical record of the events that happened immediately after the industrial revolution.

30/08/1998
Once upon a time, son
They used to laugh with their hearts
And laugh with their eyes;
But now they only laugh with their teeth,
While their ice-block – cold eyes,
Search behind my shadow.

There was a time indeed
They used to shake hands with their hearts,
But that’s gone, son,
Now they shake hands without hearts
While their left hand search
My empty pockets.

‘Feel’ at home ‘Come again’;
They say, and when I come
Again and feel
At home, once, twice
There will be no thrice
For then I find doors shut on me.

So I have learned many things, son.
I have learned to wear many faces
Like dresses – home face,
Office face, street face, host face,
Cocktail face, with all their conforming smiles,
Like a fixed portrait smile.

And I have learned, too
To laugh with only my teeth
And shake hands without my heart.
I have also learned to say 'Good bye'
when I mean 'Good - ridance'.
To say, glad to meet you!
Without being glad, and to say 'It's been
Nice talking to you, after being bored.

But believe me, son.
I want to be what I used to be
When I was like you, I want
To unlearn all these muting things.
Most of all, I want to relearn
How to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror
Shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs.

So show me, son
How to laugh, show me how
I used to laugh and smile
Once upon a time when I was like you.

-----X-----

The narrator of the poem seems to have lost his happiness and he longs to regain it. How has he lost it, and how is he going to regain it? It will be interesting to go with the poet and search for the cause and remedy.

In the first three stanzas the narrator speaks about 'They' and compares how they used to be and how they are now.

'They used to laugh with their hearts'
'Now they only laugh with their teeth'
'They used to shake hands with their hearts'
'Now they shake their hands without hearts'

They don't stop with that, but they go beyond that
Their 'Ice block cold eyes'
'Search behind my shadow'
'Their left hands search
My empty pocket'

Why do they do so? They have some ulterior motive, they may deceive us or harm us, while they pretend to be innocent or friendly with us. The phrases 'Ice-block cold eyes' 'and' search behind my shadow 'suggest a crafty aspect in them.

What has made them to change like that? The narrator doesn't give any answer for the question. But we have the right to guess. It may have come along the modern sophisticated life. It may have come with the renaissance, which has turned mind from 'belief' to scepticism. It may have come when ethical codes lost their hold in society whatever the reason may be, the discrepancy between 'thought' and words' and 'words and action has come to stay.

The third stanza gives us an episode. The narrator thirsts for a friendly atmosphere. He approaches some friends who seem to give it to him. At first, they say,

'Feel at home'
'Come again'

He takes it for granted and goes there the third time, and he is disappointed.
'The door is shut on' him
What does he learn from these lessons?

(1) He can’t be now as he used to be
(2) He himself has to pretend according to the situation.

If we put them in the narrator’s language, he has to wear

“Home face” at home
“Office face” at office
“Street face” in the street
“Host face” when he receives guests
“Cocktail face” at the party.

He also learns to say “good bye” when he means “good riddance”.

While he goes on wearing many faces according to the situation, he loses his own face and ultimately he becomes a faceless man. His self-identification dissolves into a vacuum.

The following quotation may help us to understand his present state.

My laugh in the mirror shows only my teeth like a snake’s bare fangs. The image of ‘bare fangs’ is enough to understand his present terrible nature. Is he satisfied with his present state? No. He is completely fed up, so.

He wants to be
What he used to be.
He wants to unlearn
All these muting things

He wants to relearn how to laugh

Note the words unlearn and relearn. They have special connotations. Is it possible for a man to unlearn what he has already learnt? The word relearn also has the same meaning.

The last stanza gives us a clear picture of what he means.

Show me son how to laugh
Show me how to laugh and smile
Once upon a time when I was like you.

The father asks his son to show the way. The whole poem is a monologue, in which the father addresses to his son. Here ‘laugh’ and ‘smile’ symbolize the real happiness. Similarly the ‘son’ is the personification of happiness. Babyhood and childhood are unstained period in one’s life—pure and sincere, period. Is it possible to go back in time, or go back in one’s age? Though physically it is not possible, he believes, mentally he can go back to childhood. It is the remedy he sees for his problem.

The theme of the poem seems to somewhat akin to a religious goal. For example the word ‘relearn’ has relation with ‘religion’! Religion means go back to one’s original state — pure state. Here also, the narrator wishes to go back to his original state, the baby hood, in other words, the pure state.
In short, the poem throws light on the alienation problem. The problem of how Man has become stranger to himself and has lost his real identity and how it can be remedied are handled in a profound way. His simple language makes the poem very enjoyable.

26/07/1998
TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

Wole Soyinka

The price seemed reasonable, location
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. 'Madam, I warned
I hate a wasted journey - I am African',
Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurized good breeding. Voice, when it came
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette holder pipped. Caught I was, fouly.
'HOW DARK?'........I had not misheard ..... 'ARE
YOU LIGHT OR VERY DARK?' Button B. Button A.
Stench
Of rancid breath of public hide and speak.
Red booth. Red pillar-box, Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar. It was real shamed
By ill-mannered silence, Surrender
Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis -
'ARE YOU DARK OR VERY LIGHT?' Revelation came.
"You mean - like plain or milk chocolate?"
Her accent was clinical, crushing in its light.
Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
I chose. "West African Sepia" - and as after thought,
'Down in my passport. "Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. "WHAT THAT'S?" conceding
'DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.' 'Like brunette'.
'THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT? Not altogether.
Facially, I am brunette, but, madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blonde, friction, caused –
Foolishly, madam – by sitting down has turned
My bottom raven black – One moment madam-sensing

Her receiver rearing on the thunder clap
About my ears – ‘Madam’, I pleaded,
Wouldn’t you rather
See for yourself?

---X---

Our first look catches some bold words in the poem.

“How dark?”
“Are you very light or dark?”
“That’s dark, Isn’t it?”

Immediately we assume the poem is going to tell about ‘dark’ what is that?” We are puzzled. We are in the twentieth century. We are talking about equality. All countries speak loudly that they hate discrimination. They have enacted laws to effect equality. But what about the reality? Do we give any respect to these laws? This poem tries to answer this question.

The poet reveals his experience in Britain a country where it is believed equality is maintained. He sees an advertisement ‘to let’ and phones up the number given. He is satisfied with all the conditions of the place.

“The price seemed reasonable”
“The landlady lived off the premises”
So what else does he want? The landlady is very anxious to let her house, and the seeker is satisfied with all the conditions. So we jump to the conclusion nothing there is to block their transaction. Is that so?. No there is something between? What is that?

The phrases I cite at the beginning blink at us.
‘How dark.’
‘Are you very dark or very light?’
‘That’s dark isn’t it?’

Yes, he has to confess being born an African. This, the colour bar, is the theme of the poem.

The poet employs two devices to portray his theme. One is conversation. The other is description of the things, which surround him. The poem is a satire. But at the same time he provokes us to think deeply about our society and its hypocrisy.

He says “Long gold – rolled cigarette holder pipped” lipstick coated lady’. Indeed he doesn’t see her face to of he hasn’t had any chance of knowing her before, but somehow his inner vision tries to form a visual picture of her in his mind. The words’ good breeding’ give us a deep meaning. What is actually significant of good breeding. Having narrow mind or broad mind? Their culture breeds, narrow mind, which he puts ironically ‘good breeding’.

There are also some words, which enhance the meaning of the poem tremendously.

‘Clinical’
‘Impersonality’
These words show that we lost touch with human and turn to be lifeless matter, which goes under clinical analysis. The button A, button B also emphasize the mechanical nature of life. That's the cause for all trouble. We have no sympathy towards human beings. This is the prime message the poet gives us. Before go further we must note the phrase 'Stench of rancid breath of public hide and speak'. We always want to speak secretly about some which stench'. In other words the society secretly enjoys some perversion.

The final stage arrives; both have to conclude the conversation. Otherwise it should be regarded "Ill mannered" Somehow 'Wave length adjusted'. How do they adjust their wavelength? By using a spectroscopic fancy.

'How dark?'
'Are you light or very dark'
The reply puzzles the landlady a lot.
"West African sepia"
And an interesting conversation follows.
'What's that?'
'Don't know what's that?'

The spectroscopic analysis goes on. Here poet employs two words 'brunette' and 'blonde'. The satire works up to its climax.

One who reads these lines should laugh.

"I am brunette"
But the rest of me.

Palm of my hand
Soles of my feet – blonde

Foolishly, by sitting down
My bottom turns raven black

By this time the lady should have realized that she is being fooled, so she tries to put down the receiver, before that – the satire touches its peak.

"Madam, Wouldn’t you rather
See for yourself?"

Requests her to check his bottom to see whether it ‘brunette or blonde’

The poet handles a grievous problem, Colour bar, in which he himself is affected. He uses only one incident – a telephone conversation, but he brings the British (Western) society in our purview, injustice, hypocrisy, mannerism, good breeding. In which expression and experience fuse into one and give us a great aesthetic enjoyment.

19/07/1998
The Crows
Zulifikar Ghose

The crows will stick their beaks into anything.
Ugliness protects them; children don’t care
To pet them, and when they descended on trees,
Eagles discreetly go somewhere quieter.

They will sit on balconies and appear
To comment on passing traffic. Their black
Clock never conceals the dagger of speech;
Their communal weapon. They talk, talk, talk.

I’ve heard them break the silence of night
With sudden loud cawing as if provoked
Into dispute by a falling star,
And then flying skywards as through to look.

Up some evidence, keen as scientists,
Yet really when you see their missions
Come mostly to nothing, they appear more,
Like intensely dedicated politicians.

-----X-----

"The Crows" is a satirical poem, which uses 'crow' as a metaphor for politicians. Politicians and 'Crows have many things in common. So the poet seems to think that comparing them will create a good impression on readers.

A crow is a bird, which sticks its beak into anything. Similarly politicians poke their heads into anything. Both politicians and crows deal with ugly things. It means that
politicians can play any dirty game such as cheating, giving
bogus promises, killing opponents, instigating communal
riots, even mass level killing etc, to grasp power and hold
to it as long as possible. So all evade them. In the case of
the crows.

"Children don’t care to pet" (the crows)
"When they (Crows) descended on trees
Eagles discreetly go somewhere quieter."

So the poet finds similarity between them. So the
politicians are left alone to continue their dirty games
without much difficulty.

Crows have black feathers. Lawyers wear black gowns.
So we can identify the lawyers with crows. Lawyers
skillfully wag their tongues to prove what they want to
prove to be true. For instance they may prove murderer an
innocent or vice versa. They often sell their conscience for
money. The politicians also do the same thing in a greater
degree. So we find similarity between lawyers and
politicians.

He develops the same idea in the next stanza. Cawing is
the weapon of crows. Similarly the politician’s weapon is
"Talking" – during the elections, in the parliament, on the
stage wherever they go they always talk.

"They talk, talk, talk"

This is the only weapon they have to achieve their ends;
nothing else. Then ‘speech’ is metaphorized as a dagger;
Dagger is a weapon, which is often used by the possessor to
hurt or kill. The politicians can’t hide it in his coat because it always projects out of his coat.

Then he employs an image ‘falling star’. Falling star or meteor is usually burnt up as it’s moving rapidly in the sky, but the crows are ‘cawing that they have seen it fall somewhere near. It shows that out of nothing the politicians can create a variety of problems and finally they lead the people to a mirage. They seem to be scientists but the results end in vague. The following lines show it.

“Yet really when their missions
Come mostly to nothing”.

It seems to me ‘the crow is not an appropriate creature to compare with politicians. It is a harmless creature though it is black, by eating dirt it cleans the surroundings.

Its ‘Caw’ is an invitation to other crows to share the food it has found, and thus this ‘caw’ symbolizes the unity and co-operation among crows. However, these facts don’t occur to our mind when we are reading through the poem. The words and images he uses cast a magic spell on us.

At the beginning the poet doesn’t say, that he speaks of politicians. Starting with a suspense he lets the readers dwell on many guesses until he ends with the sarcastic phrase ‘like intensely dedicated politicians’. Thus the poet succeeds in creating a vivid picture in our mind.

17/05/1998
THE CALL OF LANKA

W.S. Senior

I climbed O'er the crags of Lanka
And gazed on the golden sea
When out from her ancient places
Her soul came forth to me;
"Give me a bard, "said Lanka,
"A bard of the things to be.

"My cities are laid in ruins,
Their courts through the Jungle spread,
My sceptre is long departed
And the stranger lords instead,
"Yet, give me a bard" said Lanka.
"I am living, I am not dead.

"For high in my highland valleys
And low in my lowland plains
The pride of the past is pulsing
Hot in a people's veins.
Give me a bard "said Lanka,
"A bard for my Joys and pains"

I offer a voice, O Lanka
I, child of an alien isle;
For my heart has heard thee and kindled,
Mine eyes have seen thee and smiled;
Take, foster mother, and use it,
Tis, but for a little while.

For, surely of thine own children,
Born of thy womb, shall rise
The bard of the moonlit jungle.
The Bard of the tropic skies,
Warm from his mother’s bosom.
Bright from his mother’s eyes.

He shall hymn thee of hoar Sri Pada,
The peak that is lone and tall.
He shall sing with her crags, Dunhinda,
The smoking waterfall,
Whatsoever is fair in Lanka
He shall know it and love it all.

He shall sing thee of sheer Sigiriya,
Of Mineeria’s wandering kine;
He shall sing of the lake and the lotus,
He shall sing of the rock – hewn shrine,
Whatsoever is old in Lanka,
Shall live in his lordly line.

But most shall he sing of Lanka
In the bright new days that come.
When the races all have blended
And the voice of strife is dumb
When we leap to a single bugle,
March to a single drum.

March to a mighty purpose,
One man from shore to shore;
The stranger, become a brother,
The task of the tutor o’er.
When the ruined city rises
And the palace gleams once more.
Hark! Bard of the fateful feature,
Hark! bard of the bright to be;
A voice on the verdant mountains,
A voice by the golden sea.
Rise, child of Lanka, and answer,
The mother hath called to thee.

---X---

When we see the title of the poem we try to guess something about her “call”. Lanka is personified as Mother; then the poet lets her speak herself. She says that she needs a bard to sing her glory.

“Give me a bard”
“Bards for my Joys and pains “

She knows most of the bards usually exaggerate things. So she is cautious about it. She requires a poet who speaks the truth.

“Bards of the things to be”

Here the poet implies that the things he speaks are real, not boasted. This is an apt technique to enlarge the poem effectively. Here two types of poets are referred to. One is the native poet, the other is an alien poet. This device also helps the poet to enrich the poem. The poet, W. S. Senior, is an Englishman, an alien poet, but he experiences a deep delight in seeing Lanka as foster mother. The poem is really an exposure of his feeling.

Golden sea
Highland valleys
Lowland plains
Sri Pada that is lone and tall
Dunhinda, the smoking waterfall
Sigiriya
Minneria’s wandering kings (cows)
Lake and the lotus
Rock hewn shrine

Lure the poet. The same aspects may attract tourists too. But there is a difference between the two. A soul of a country cannot be seen by a tourist. You need a poet to go deep into the soul of a country. That is why the poet says.

When out from her ancient places,
Her soul came forth to me

Lanka needs a poet so the poet offers himself to that position.

I offer a voice, O’ Lanka
I, child of alien isle
Take, foster Mother and use it.

The words child and foster Mother show the poet’s real attachment to Lanka. But he uses another to enhance the theme. He feels the Lankan poets are lucky because they have the chance of being real Children of Mother Lanka. A tone of longing to be a Lankan runs underneath the following lines. He says

For surely of thine own Children
Born of thy womb
Warm from his Mother’s bosom
Bright from his Mothers eyes.
Shall sing more profoundly than he does.

We must note that the poem was written during the period when Lanka was under British Colonial rule. So the poet points out that fact also. A country loses its strength
when it is being under a foreign rule; it often neglects indigenous welfare, it sucks the wealth of a country under its rule. This was the situation of Sri Lanka under the British rule. W.S. Senior is an Englishman, a member of the nation, which ruled Sri Lanka. But he feels Lanka’s pulse clearly. That's why he puts the following lines as if they are spoken by Lanka, even in her grave situation.

“I am living; I am not dead“

Please note the expression I am not dead. This line gives due weightage of danger under foreign rule. Even though “I am living” — she claims his powerful nature

My cities are laid in ruins
Their courts through the Jungle spread
My sceptre is long departed
And the stranger lords instead

The above lines suggest Lanka’s plight

Cities are neglected
Courts are covered by jungle
Her sceptre is long departed

Even though

“The pride of the past pulsing
Hot in a people’s veins
I am not dead; I am living

So she needs a bard to sing her ‘Joys and pains’ this is the; call of her

The last three stanzas speak about the future of Lanka; he has an optimistic view of Lanka’s bright, fateful future.

“The ruin city rises
And the palace gleams once more"
"The strangers become brothers"

But he alludes something between the lines.

In the bright new days that come
When the races all have blended
And the voices of strife is dumb
When we leap to a single bugle
March to a single drum.

Even at the time of colonial period he hears the voice of strife among the races but he hopes that will be erased in due course in the march of a mighty purpose. But his expectation turns to be untrue. The strife among the races plays a prominent role and changes the course of the history of Sri Lanka, contrary to the expectation of the poet, in recent times.

The following rhyme scheme enhances the effect of the poem

| Stanza: (1) see | see | me | be |
| spread | spread | instead | be dead |
| plains | plains | veins | pains |
| isle | isle | smile | while |
| rise | rise | skies | eyes |
| tall | tall | all | all |
| kine | kine | shrine | line |
| come | come | dumb | drum |
| shore | shore | o’er | more |
| be | be | sea | thee |

14/03/1999.
NATIONALITY

Mary Gilmore.

I have grown past hate and bitterness,
I see the world as one;
Yet, though I can no longer hate,
My son is still my son

All men at God's round table sit;
All men must be fed
But this loaf in my hand
This loaf is my son's bread.

---X---

The content of the poem expresses the feeling of 'I' an individual, but the title represents a community of people. So we have to take that the poem has two dimensions in regard to the problem the poet handles. One is the individual view and the other notional view. In other words, while he - the person denoted by 'I' is an individual, represents a nation too.

The other aspect we have to note is the contrary nature of a statement of 'I'

"I see the world as one" but
"My son is my son"
"All men must be fed" but
"The loaf in my hand"
"................. is my son's bread"

The following lines reveal the ideal state of man.
"I have grown past hate and bitterness"
"I can no longer hate"
"I see the world as one"

This is a matured state of mind most of the religions profess. Even philanthropists accept the following ideal.

"All human must be fed"

We can infer that the character ‘I’ denoted in the poem of course has reached the perfect state – His utterance

"I have grown past hate and bitterness" proves this even though he says,

"My son is my son"
"The loaf in my hand"
"is my son’s bread"

The contradictory statements show that there is always division between ideal and practice. How can one feed the whole world with limited resources? But the ‘I’ has an answer to the puzzle. Though the person denoted by ‘I’ is mentally matured, he is not duty bound to feed whole the world because it is impossible. His first duty is looking after his son. Please note the following line.

‘The men God’s round table sit’

It’s God’s round table. That means God’s round world, not the person’s denoted by I. So it implies that in the God’s world man’s responsibility is limited. It reminds us a saying of Jesus Christ.
“Love thy neighbour”

Note the word ‘thy neighbour’. Jesus specifies a limited people instead of giving an undefined vague word ‘all’. Similarly here the poet reveals the difference between ‘ideal’ and ‘practice’ and ‘ideal’ and ‘duty’.

But this conclusion gives way to a doubt. One may ask what the difference is between a selfish person and ‘I’. But a poet deliberately emphasizes the perfect state of I, which has some connotation with religious ideal because she believes hatred and bitterness are the main causes of all troubles prevailing in the world.

Further we must note the word ‘son’ doesn’t mean the narrow selfish relationship between a son and his father or mother. Here the poet personifies a country as father or mother and its citizens as son’. In this perspective we see ‘hatred’ among countries brings war and destruction. Therefore to keep balance a country must go beyond hatred and bitterness, but at the same time it is duty bound to look after its own citizens. It is the message the poet gives us.

27/03/1999
If
Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
   Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
   But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
   Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
   And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise.

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master
   If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and disaster
   And treat those two imposters just the same,
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
   Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
   And stoop and build'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
   And risk it on one turn of pitch—and toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
   And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
   To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
   Except the will, which says to them: 'Hold on'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
   Or walk with Kings—and lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,
And – which is more – you’ll be a Man, my son!

---X----

Can moral codes turn to be a piece of artistic work? It is the first thought which occurs to when we read the poem ‘If’ by Rudyard Kipling. In the history of literature there are some examples to say pieces of work teaching moral codes are taken as literature.

To understand this fact we must try to find the difference between the literature and non – literature. A piece of work that gives pure information or facts can be classified ‘non – literature’. But when a piece of work inspires the reader beyond ‘mere facts’ and lifts him up towards a deeper feeling we start to think it has some connection with literature or art. If they are organized into accepted forms such as ‘poem’, ‘drama’ or ‘novel’ etc they can be literature or art. Again we try to evaluate this piece of work with the yardstick of involvement or experience of the writer with the particular theme. In other words we try to check whether the writer has undergone the same or similar experience and reveals it true to him self and whether it arouses in the readers with the same feelings.

Mere moral codes have nothing to inspire. They are like our criminal and civil laws enacted by Government or other institutions. But in Literature they are transformed into a delicate nature by dialogues, characters, narration and
setting the sense. When they become part and parcel of literature they are accepted as inevitable part of the form. But here Rudyard Kipling put forwards some moral codes directly. Can they be taken as a piece of art? Do they lift our mind beyond factual comprehension and let us dwell on higher atmosphere of mind. Inter - action between mind including intuitive faculties and outer nature gives out real experience of life. The poet introduces a puzzle with eleven if clauses and gives the key at the last line. That is “You will be a man”.

To develop his theme he uses opposite characteristics of human nature.

Lose their head    -    Keep your head.
Doubt you    -    Trust yourself.
Wait    -    Tired.
Triumph    -    Disaster.
Dream    -    Make dream your master.
Win    -    Lose
Crowd    -    Virtue.
Kings    -    Common folk
Love    -    Hurt / hate.

Then he shows how to keep balance between the opposites. The following quotations may help us to understand the poet’s idea.

“The things you gave your life to, broken
And stoop and build ‘m up with torn out Tools’

‘Nothing in you
Except the will, which says to them “Hold on”

78
If you can force your heart
And nerve and sinew.

Some lines are very impressive.

"The truth you have spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools"

'Never breathe a word about your loss'

Finally he epitomizes the whole message in three lines, which make us realize the meaning of our existence.

"If you can fill the unforgiving minute with
Sixty seconds worth of distance run, yours is the Earth"

The phrase "unforgiving minute "and to request to use every second" (Sixty seconds) worthfully emphasise the message tremendously.

All these ideas have some connotation with religious faiths. But all religions show us the path to heaven, Moksha or liberation in the other world. But he establishes his faith in himself and shows the path "to be a man". That is the beauty of the poem. In short he turns "Some moral codes" into a very good poem.

24/05/1998
(1) Sri Lankan Literature in English

Some Prominent Figures.

(2) டி. மலர் பிரிவுக்காட்டில்

(3) ம. குலசாமி திரிகோணத்தில் - புது விளக்கம்.
Sairam Computer Printers, Chankanai.