

**NKR GOVT ARTS COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, NAMAKKAL.**

**I B.A ENGLISH – SEMESTER –I**

**POETRY**

**UNIT – I**

**POEM – 1**

**HOW SOON HATH TIME**

**-JOHN MILTON**

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,  
Stoln on his wing my three and twentieth year!  
My hasting days fly on with full career,  
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.  
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,  
That I to manhood am arrived so near,  
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,  
That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.  
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,  
It shall be still in strictest measure even  
To that same lot, however mean or high,  
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven;  
All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.

**CRITICAL APPRECIATION**

John Milton's infamous literary classic, How Soon Hath Time has been analyzed from various aspects, reflecting on his mood, conflicts with beliefs, and personal shortcomings, and most of all, the expediency of time. John Milton, the poet of the Puritan age, authored the magnum opus Paradise Lost. All in all, he composed twenty-four sonnets in entirety. He invested six crucial years in studying works of notable poets such as Petrarch and

Virgil, being an ardent devotee of Yester greats. How Soon Hath Time is one of the most intriguing and poignant classic poems. The basic premises are time and its cavalier indifference to individualistic attitude irrespective altogether. The poem owing to its strength and vigor has stood the test of millenniums as a firm ode to Puritan age poetry among other notables such as Paradise Lost, Samson Agonistes, and Lycidas. The poem was a vital literary work in a long movement of poetry stirring in England.

The poem starts on a tragic note with John looking in retrospect at his years gone by, with his accomplishments running thin as opposed to years usurped. His belief in God remains shaky as his two poems indicate, furthered along by existential crisis externally.

John Milton was a staunchly religious person, considering himself a missionary to God's noble cause. Awaiting divine intervention is evident in his first lines of How Soon Hath Time where he laments, 'How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth', as well as in another sonnet released after his subsequent blindness, 'When I consider how my light is spent'. He awaits divine inspiration in his poetic publications. As the poem starts in a lamentable tone, he begins with 'How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth'. He feels betrayed by the speed at which youth and time have left him with years past, not recording achievement of substantial value. Career-wise and artistically, he has yet to produce his masterpiece and make a stamp on history.

Most critics and contemporaries would deem him as impatient and ungrateful. Having accomplished more than his contemporaries and future critics (having command of Greek, Latin, English, French, German, Hebrew, Spanish, Italian, Aramaic, and Syriac), and studied poetry linguistics for six years privately shows his apparent humility and measurement criteria. Only a handful of writers have published life-long classics at an early age including John Keats, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Arthur Rimbaud, while most others published their epic works in later years.

This is a direct linkage to his collegiate years where his feeble physical structure was deemed as girlish and feminine, resulting in him earning the title of, 'The Lady of Christ's'. With a feminine overall outlook, he continues to underestimate himself in comparison to contemporaries having accomplished much more in his prime age.

In conclusion, he ends his tragically-toned lament with having faith in God for assisting him in his quest for greatness. In another poem, 'On His Blindness', he lovingly accepts God's will in his divine scheme of things, bestowing his fellow men as he pleases. As he indicates, 'my great taskmaster' has sealed his fate. John Milton's monotonous tragic sonnet has tones of ambition, religious bent, and a maestro in making with his magnum opus Paradise Lost released afterward.

This is a direct indication of Jesus's parable for God's reward for all those reporting for duty on time and slightly late on time. God, being all the knowing and kind, views his pupils as equals. It's also an indirect attack on God's double standards ever so delicately.

John Milton mentions this discrepancy in his concluding lines, albeit with a certain delicacy, 'If I have grace to use it so'. He creates some ambiguity regarding his poetic grace. The grace could be within him or God-gifted. Using the word 'have', he's conflicted on whether his poetic talents are at his own command or God's will. This shows slightly negativistic attribution in his poem is later found in Paradise Lost poem, where Eve's epithet for God is 'Our Great Forbidder'. It shows veiled criticism of God's so-called willpower and judgment traits. Milton was an ardent advocate of this ideology in his lifetime. Young Milton was conflicted about God's role in life and its consequent play with freedom and freewill, obedience and justice, flowing freely in Milton's published works.

## **POEM-2**

### **THE VILLAGE SCHOOL MASTER**

**-OLIVER GOLDSMITH**

**Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,  
With blossomed furze unprofitably gay,  
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,  
The village master taught his little school;  
A man severe he was, and stern to view;  
I knew him well, and every truant knew:  
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace  
The day's disasters in his morning face;**

Full well they laughed, with counterfeited glee,  
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;  
Full well the busy whisper, circling round,  
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned;  
Yet he was kind, or, if severe in aught,  
The love he bore to learning was in fault.  
The village all declared how much he knew —  
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too;  
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,  
And e'en the story ran that he could gauge;  
In arguing, too, the parson owned his skill,  
For, e'en though vanquished, he could argue still,  
While words of learned length and thundering sound  
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;  
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew  
That one small head could carry all he knew.  
  
But past is all his fame. The very spot  
  
Where many a time he triumph'd is forgot

#### **CRITICAL APPRECIATION:**

"The Village Schoolmaster" by Oliver Goldsmith is an extract from "The Deserted Village". The poet returns to the village and finds it deserted. This poem is a lighthearted reflection of his village school master Mr. Thomas Paddy Byrne. As the poet himself was a pupil of this school master, he is able to create an authentic picture of him.

The village school master's little school was situated next to the damaged fence. Goldsmith recalls the characteristics of the master with a mixed feeling of fear, respect and humour. He was known as a strict person. He was familiar to all the truants in the village because they had endured the master's rage. When he cracks jokes, the children used to burst out in "counterfeited" laughter in order to avoid punishment.

The trembling pupils were curious to know the day's misfortunes on his face. If they observe a frown, they circulate the gloomy news throughout the class. Though he was stern, he was kind hearted too. He had an intense love for learning also.

The villagers admired the school master's knowledge. He was able to read and write well. He was good at arithmetic also. He could also survey land, forecast weather and tides. The village parson approved of his skills in debate. He was able to continue his argument even after losing a debate. He won the arguments with his thundering voice.

The poem ends on a note of humour. The villagers gaze at him whenever they pass the school. They wonder how his small head could keep that enormous hoard of knowledge. Thus the poet describes the characteristics of the village school master.