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Amar Nath Prasad's *The Priest of Nature* : A Critical Appreciation



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ABSTRACT

"The Priest of Nature" is a very fine poem in rhythmic language by Amar Nath Prasad. It is concerned with the life of an average Indian farmer who has to pull a life of hardship from cradle to grave . The poem has been prescribed in the syllabus of B.A III Semester of Sant Baba Gadge Amravati University, Maharashtra. Free from the din and bustle of city life , the farmer is always in the lap of nature enjoying the natural beauty, freshness and

greenness in its full measure. The poem is also very good in language and techniques. Some of the images and symbols of this poem are highly suggestive.

KEY WORDS

Farmers, Grains, Nature, Financial Net, Miserable life of farmers, Trapped Mouse, Rhyme and rhythm, Unlamented death

RESEARCH PAPER

The poem, "The Priest of Nature" opens with the poet's yearning for going to the fertile field of the farmers who are the real pearls and diamonds hidden under impoverishment. For this the poet takes an appropriate image of the ocean which contains in its bosom the purest gems mostly unknown and unnoticed. Similarly in the remote rural villages, there are some valuable gems in the form of farmers whose tireless work and saintly behavior must be recognised. The poet in a very rhythmic tone observes:

*"Let me go to the depth of sea
Where pearls and diamonds lie
Let me go to meadows and lea
Where farmers work and die.
(Aspirations,47)*

On the second level of meaning, these lines may also be interpreted by making comparison of the grains of the farmers with the valuable pearls and diamonds of the sea. The pearls and diamonds generally lose their light, glory and beauty unseen in the dark caves of the ocean ; but those pearls of the farmers in the form of grains of the field often fill the empty stomachs of millions and millions of people. Here the metaphor of pearls and diamonds is very appropriate and highly suggestive. The grains of farmers not only help the general life cycle of the people but also give life to unknowingly several birds, soil worms and so many unnoticed living creatures on this earth. Perhaps this is why the poet wants to go to the farming field which is metaphorically compared with the vast unfathomable sea and the grains no less than pearls produced by the farmers with the help of their sweat and blood. In this way the title of the poem "The Priest of Nature" is fully justified because the real priest is one who lives for others.

In the second stanza the poet is of this opinion that the farmers living in the villages are often seen leading a very miserable life and they often find them caught in the financial net. The phrase, "financial net" seems to be very much suggestive of the contemporary life of the farmers particularly in India who have to commit suicide due to poverty. The newspaper

is often flooded with this type of news. But in spite of the financial crunches and miserable life, the farmers are the real priests of nature because like a true saint they treat both grief and gaiety alike . Even in the hour of deep distress, they never lose confidence and devotion to God, rather they learn more from hardships:

*"Blithe and happy in the lap of nature
A saintly priest indeed
Even in hardship he gets pleasure
And seldom pines for meed"*

Here the phrase, 'pining for meed' is highly suggestive. It is generally seen that the people who are away from spiritualism often hanker after wealth, pelf and power ; they pine for mead, prizes and accolades ,but on the other hand, a farmer who has been compared to a priest or saint is always satisfied with what he has. Perhaps this is why John Milton in his great work ,” Lycidas" rightly observes:

*“Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
That last infirmity of noble mind”
(Milton, John. Lycidas. Palgrave’s Golden Treasury. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.1964.P. 56)*

In other words the farmers are the real priests of Nature because they are the embodiment of the famous quotation of Sanskrit "Yoga karmasu kaushalam", that is , "excellence at work is yoga". (*Srimad Bhagavad Gita* .Sloka no.23. Chapter 6. Gorakhpur. Geeta Press.

The poet further says that the farmer gets his bread from the field where he has to pour his blood in the form of sweats from dawn to dusk. He again takes the image of such a brave soldier who has to fight the inclemency of weather, sometimes drought and other times flood without any rhyme or reason and, that too, without any shield or armour :

"He gets his bread from the field

*In which he pours his blood
He fights his life without any shield
To face the drought and flood"*

It is interesting to note here that Amar Nath Prasad is a budding poet and critic of Indian Writing in English. His latest books, "Pebbles on the Seashore" and "An Ark without Shore" are fine example of the proper fusion of the feelings and forms, matter and manner. These books are the true mirror of the modern materialistic world where man seldom pays any attention to the clarion call of mother nature; where man feels alienated and suffocated in the world of moral and spiritual breakdown; where " Nature, distanced from man stood aside watching the desperation of his galloping progress as the more he acquired, the more barren he felt inside"(Rajimwale,1). So far as his poetic style is concerned, it is very simple, lucid and tantamount to common speech. His poems are his modest attempt to give expression of his feelings which he encountered in his day to day life particularly in his solitary musings in the lap of nature. What matters most in his poetry is the various poetic and structural devices in order to suit the sentiments of the situation.

Here in this poem the poet has used some images and symbols very beautifully and skillfully. The miserable condition of the farmers has been visualized through an appropriate image of the "trapped mouse" who is caught in the unbreakable net of poverty. The poet says:

*"He pulls a tired and miserable life
In little clay made house
His life becomes a bundle of strife
And he a trapped mouse"*

In a spite of all the miseries and hurdles of life, the farmer feels inwardly happy and quite at ease with his cattle and crops. His grief and gaiety are closely associated with his farming. He smiles and sings when he sees his crops dancing in the field, his cattle grazing in the meadows. So the poet is of the opinion that we should purchase his grains without any haggling. The price we paid is the price of his labour, and never the love of the farmers which is closely connected with his crops from the day of seeding to cutting. In other words, the

farmers are the real gems of any society. In the words of Thomas Gray they are such flowers who are born to blush unseen:

"Full many a gems of purest ray serene

The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,

And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

(Gray, Thomas. Elogy Written in a Country Churchyard. Palgrave's Golden Treasury. New Delhi .OUP. 1964. P.146)

It is interesting to note here that the poet has not expressed his ideas and visions in a dry and monotonous way, rather he has taken the help of some poetic devices like images and symbols, metaphors and similes to weave his thoughts into the fabric of art and beauty. Aristotle in his magnum opus "The Poetics" says that the main test of a poet's talent is to see his command over metaphor. In other words, in literature there must be a very fine fusion of the feeling and form, matter and manner. This is exactly what we find in this poem.

In the last stanza the poet mourns the death of farmers who in spite of their best services to the nation, die unknown and unlamented. The poet observes:

"No poets write; no bards sing

He unlamented dies—

In funeral march, no bells ring

No one sobs and sighs "

Here this piteous plights and miserable condition of the farmers remind us of the various poor farmers in the stories of Premchand, the great Hindi novelist and short stories writer. In the description of the saintly nature of the farmers, the poet seems to be very much influenced by the spiritual book "Gramgeeta" by the Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj who advocated the cause of the village and the farmers throughout his life.

About the poet's natural probing and his extraordinary love for diving deep into the remote villages, Sharad Rajimwale rightly observes :

“Reminiscent of the 18th century contemplative generation of twilight zone poets, the dominant mood in the present anthology is one of self introspection which gains depth with deeper exploration of nature.. The larger frame of perception which emerges from this probing appears to convey that the pristine relation between man and nature urgently needs to be restored.” (Rajimwale, S. Foreword. *The Pebbles on the Seashore*. Raipur. Aditi Publication. 2021. Print.)

Thus, the poem has the fine blending of both poetic truth and poetic beauty. The poet has deliberately made this poem simple so as to suit the simple life of the farmers. In short, the poem seems to be the "Emotional equivalent" of the trials and tribulations, cares and anxieties the saintly way of life of the farmers with some proper images and symbols.

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