

Life of the villagers in “Elegy
Written in a Country
Churchyard”

Sandip Tikait
Department of English
Saltora Netaji Centenary College

Elegy:

The poem deals with sad theme
Lamentation for someone who is absent or dead

Elegy written in a Church Yard:

Poet is telling about the dead forefathers who are lying inside the grave in an unfamiliar place.

The poet narrates the simple life of the villagers.
They had talents but poverty failed them.

“The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built
shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly
bed.” (17-20)

Forefathers' woke up in the morning:

- a) Flowers' fragrance
- b) Swallow's harmonious music
- c) Cock's trumpet like sharp alarm

“For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.”
(21 - 24)

Family Life:

- a) Cook food in home for the family
- b) Housewife completes her household work before the dark
- c) In the evening babies are waiting for their father's return
- d) Babies are competing with each other to get kiss from their father

“Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy
stroke!” (25 – 28)

Forefathers' livelihood:

- a) Cultivation
- b) Animal husbandry
- c) Cutting woods

“Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.”
(29 – 32)

Poet warns the educated city dwellers not to ridicule the simple humble life style of the villagers:

- a) Their hard work (physical labour)
- b) happy family life (love & share)
- c) As farmers' life is uncertain (in the hands of nature)

“Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre:”
(45 – 48)

Hidden Talents :

- a) to be a great saint
- b) to be a great emperor
- c) to be a great musician

“But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.”
(49 – 52)

Hardles in life:

- a) Fail to pursue education
- b) Extreme poverty
- c) Repressed learning spirit

"Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood."
(57 – 60)

Villagers might have the eminence like:

- a) Fearless Hampden
- b) Great poet Milton
- c) Great leader Cromwell

“Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,”
(65 – 68)

Their virtues:

- a) Though they failed to attain noble status
- b) They were not drowned into vice also
- c) Vice: murdering someone to achieve power,
- d) No forgiveness or sympathy

“The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.”

(69 – 72)

Humble stauts:

- a) villagers always try to cover up humble status.
- b) Ashamed
- c) Fail to showcase richness

“Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.”
(73 – 76)

Villagers :

- a) Never involve in crazy frantic conflict
- b) Gentle and moral
- c) Peaceful life

“Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect,
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture
deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.”
(77 – 80)

For the dead:

- a) Poor villagers made simple ordinary tomb
- b) write few lines on the tomb in their own language
- c) Sculptures were made on the tomb without any artistic perfection

"Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd Muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die."
(81 - 84)

On the tomb:

- a) Name, date of birth and death are engraved
- b) Text from the Bible
- c) Accept death easily as they learned Bible by heart

"Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;"

(88 -90)

Villagers at the time of death:

- a) No more expectation
- b) want near and dear (close to heart)
- c) want some "drops" of tears

References:

Board of Editors, Ed. *An Anthology: Poems, Plays and Prose*. The University of Burdwan, 2012.



Thank you