

## Critical Introduction to "On His Blindness by John Milton"

John Milton's poem "On His Blindness" is an autobiographical sonnet in which Milton broods over his own loss of sight. He thinks how for most part of his life, Milton had been able to see flawlessly, but his late-night reading and writing on behalf of the government of the short-lived English Republic, in which he held a very prominent position, helped ruin his eyesight. This sonnet written in the "Petrarchan" rhyme scheme associated with the fourteenth-century Italian poet Francesco Petrarca is divided into an eight-line "octave" and a six-line "sestet." The octave rhymes abba abba. The sestet rhymes cde cde. The sonnet is therefore a typical Petrarchan sonnet in form, but in subject matter, the poem departs from the topics usually associated with Petrarchan poems. Petrarch (the English version of Petrarca's name) was most famous for writing about love; Milton departs from that conventional topic to deal with a very practical, very physical problem, but a problem with many broader spiritual implications. The poem is about the poet himself. He became blind at an early age, which he calls as half of his life. Due to blindness, the whole world is dark and gloomy. The gift of being a creative writer and poet, which has been accorded to him by the God is now useless for him. Though the gift or skill given to him by the God would remain with him till death, but he will not be able to use it.

As God has taken away his eye sight, he has become more submissive and wants to serve God with his poetic power. He was greatly inclined to write poetry in praise of God and present to him a true account of his writings. He wants to do this so that God may not snub him after his death. He mildly wants to ask God that how can he be required to do work equal to any normal person in spite of his total blindness. In the answer to this heart felt feeling of the poet, his conscience comes to his rescue to tell that he must keep patience as God does not want anything from man. God's Kingdom is very rich and splendid. Thousands of angels are every time ready to act on God's command. They carry out God's wishes on land and sea without rest. The mortals on Earth cannot serve God at this speed, so they must wait in silence for his mercy. Milton says that those who are not able to serve God should simply stand in service of God and wait for their chance to receive mercy of God. On His Blindness is one of the finest sonnets in English poetry. It is an autobiographical sonnet and brings before us the personality and

character of the blind poet John Milton. Milton became blind in 1652 when he was 44 years of age. Milton's life was full of gloom and despair and he was overcome by sadness and grief.

At this time his learning of religious and biblical literature came to his rescue. His faith in God and religion comes forth in this sonnet. His strong faith in God and belief in the benignity come to help him. The God always shows mercy on everyone. This philosophy is very near to Indian philosophy of the Veds and the Bhagwat which teach man to do his duty towards God and Society and have faith in the deeds of God. Everything done by God is essential and is being done for ultimate good of mankind. Milton is also conscious about his life after death. In spite of being blind, he wants to make use of his poetic power so thus after death when he is presented before God, the God may not reproach him. When his inner self tries to make a complaint against God, as to how he could be able to do full work when he is blind, he is shown the right path by patience. Patience if being personified in the poem. Patience tells him that God would not make query about his work, as God has thousands of very efficient angels, who work to carry out commands of God all the time over land and sea without taking any rest. Patience advises that a man should accept all the pleasures and pain afflicted by God and in spite of being in pain, one should not complain and bear them in spirit of calmness. The last line of the sonnet explains the purpose of the poet. One should have devotion and faith in God and work with all his capacity and wait patiently for mercy of God. There are the true devotees of God, who do not complain and silently wait for their turn to have mercy of God.

The supremacy of God and complete faith in God is the basic theme of this sonnet. This is one of the noblest poems in English language. This autobiographical poem raises the complaint of an afflicted person against God and then gives the solution also. It is a complete poem in this sense. It raises a genuine complaint and then provides the solution for accepting the afflictions of God with calmness and faith. These two, are the qualities which one must have towards the maker. The sonnet tells us that faith and confidence in God should not be shaken in anyway. As only such persons are loved by God and are amply rewarded, we find that this has been proved in the life of Milton as well. His major and legendary compositions were written by him when he was blind. Milton will always be remembered and praised for 'Paradise Lost', 'Paradise Regained', and 'Samson Agonistes', the masterpieces which he wrote when he was blind. Milton

is the supreme master of grand style. We find glimpses of this in the present sonnet as well. The language used is learned and remote from familiar associations. It is a mixture of Latinism and archaism with a small sparkling of Italian phraseology.

His sonnet is highly allusive and bookish and has the stamp of a mind not only replete with a wide, various and even obscure learning. The sonnet is a continuous reverberation of echoes and suggestions. Its effect is produced not by means of what it expresses but what it suggests. Milton adopted Petrarchan style in writing this sonnet. He brought back the sonnet to its original and strict type, the type which Petrarch had fixed. The first eight lines are called Octave while the last six lines are sestet. His octave has run into the sestet. The rhyming scheme is : abba, cddc, ffg ffg.