

B. A. Part- I
English (Subsidiary)
John Milton's 'On His Blindness'

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John Milton, the writer of the most celebrated epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, became blind at the age of merely forty four. He wrote 'On His Blindness' after he lost his eyesight. That is why it is also called an occasional sonnet. It is one of the finest and most sublime works of poetic art. This sonnet expresses a sacred religious idea which forms the fundamental basis of Christianity. The poem expresses the mental agony of the poet when he became blind. It starts with the complaint against God. The speaker, who is most probably the poet himself, says that he has been bestowed with a talent with which he wished to serve God. But now he cannot use that talent as his eyesight has been snatched. Though, his soul is more inclined to serve his Maker, that is, God. With that talent he wanted to serve God and wished to give the account of his service to God on the Judgement Day, so that He (God) may not scold him for keeping the gifted talent lodged with him useless.

Then there is a '*volta*', that is, turn, in the poem and the patience of the poet replies to his own question, in the form of rhetorical question ¹, 'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?' and the answer to this question is in negative. He realises that God does not need anyone's service neither he takes his own gift back. He who resigns himself to the Will of God does the best service to Him. He who surrenders to Him completely is His best servant. This realisation gives him the spiritual strength to endure his blindness with patience and to overcome his bitterness towards God. God's kingdom covers the whole universe and thousands of angels are always ready to obey Him. Finally the poet consoles himself with the assertion, 'They also serve who only stand and wait', that is, people who are willing to serve God but are unable to get a chance on account of some difficulty, are also His good servants. They should neither worry nor feel discouraged. Their willingness to serve the Lord will not be unrecognised. God will accept them like those who render real service to Him.

Milton is known for his sublime thought and grand style. In comparison to his other poetic works this sonnet is very lucid and simple in expression of thought as it has a kind of uniformity of thought and expression. This sonnet has been modelled upon the **Italian** or **Petrarchan** (named after the Italian poet Petrarch) form of sonnet. So it comprises an octave, consisting of eight lines and a sestet, of six lines with the rhyming scheme of the poem is *abba, abba, cde, cde*.

Note- 1. **Rhetorical question** is a figure of speech in a question is asked not for the sake of the information or reply but to achieve a greater expressive effect than a direct assertion.