

Subject-English

Hons. Core Course

Semester- IV

Paper- ENGH-H-CC-T-8

“Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”

5 marks questions:

1. “Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;”

What kind of mockery does the speaker disapprove of? What does he mean by the “destiny obscure” ?

This poem is reflecting on the lives of the ordinary, humble people who are buried in the graveyard of the church. The poem explores the daily lives of those poor villagers and describes how once they have led simple lives. “Ambition”, “Grandeur” such abstract ideas are personified and they are imagined to behave like human beings. The speaker disapproves the mockery of the rich, ambitious people of the society to the poor villagers for their useful but humble occupation. He reminds that the labour of the villagers is beneficial to mankind and further says that these are very simple people. It is

because of their farming activities, others are enjoying their lives in the cities. Wealthy people should not condemn short and simple annals of the poor. Their choices are very homely and their joys are simple. Those high-born people should not slight the obscure destinies of the poor. He advises the proud and ambitious people not to ridicule the simple pleasures, obscure destinies and agricultural labour of these villagers. Here the idea is implicit that the people in the city look down upon the people from the countryside. The speaker is not endorsing the pride of the city dwellers.

As the poor villagers live in certain obscurity that does not mean they are of no value. They may have had great potential or talent but in absence of opportunities, their talents can not flourish and they die unknown. They remain unappreciated and unrecognized. They remain hidden from the knowledge of the world and so their destinies are very obscure. Nobody really knows about them. The speaker requests the ambitious, rich persons and people of the higher strata of the society not to scorn the poor humble folk.

2. Explanation:

“The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e’ver gave,
Awaits alike th’ inevitable hour: -
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.”

The lines occur in the Thomas Gray’s poem, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”. Unlike a typical elegy, this poem does not mourn the death of a single person. It does not mourn the death of a rich or famous person. The poem reflects on the lives of ordinary and humble people who are buried in the graveyard of the church. The speaker is standing all alone in a country churchyard. The setting of this poem is twilight and the mood that is evoked is of quiet meditation and of tranquillity. Besides, a sense of melancholy pervades the poem. In midst of this, the speaker, standing in a graveyard, meditates on the nature of human mortality. He is speculating about the obscure

lives of the villagers who lie buried in the graveyard of the church.

These lines point out the inevitability of death. Death affects everyone with no distinctions. The elegist depicts how this universality blurs the temporary differences among the people. The paths of glory lead to the grave as surely as does the humble ploughman's plod. The boasting or the pride of noble ancestry, the display of power, wealth and the beauty can not stand against death and these are all subject to decay and destruction. In these lines, it is described that death waits passively for man's display, power, beauty and wealth to come to it and all of these things wait for the "inevitable hour" or the unavoidable event which will extinguish them. Death destroys differences between the great and the poor and in death, all are equal. It does not matter how glorious one's life is, death comes to everybody. This stanza of this poem brings out the idea of the futility of man's achievements and power in the hands of death. It wipes out the differences between the rich and the poor and reduces them all to dust. Death is seen as a leveller,

for however glorious the achievements, the final end of human life is death.

The speaker dismisses both wealth and power and this poem invokes the classical idea of *memento mori*. This is a Latin phrase and it states to all mankind, “Remember that you must die”. In that sense, this poem is also about the fact that irrespective of the social position, all must eventually die. The epigram of the last line points out this underlying meaning that the lives of rich and poor alike “lead but to the grave”.