

Ethics of Human Life in Pablo Neruda's 'Keeping Quiet'

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“Poetry arrived in search of me. I don't know, I don't know where it came from, from winter or a river. I don't know how or when, no, they were not voices, they were not words, nor silence, but from a street I was summoned [...] there I was without a face and it touched me.”

– Pablo Neruda

Abstract:

Pablo Neruda explored various themes in his poetry which attracted the poetry lovers. His usual themes of his poetry were love, time, destruction and alienation etc. Love, sex, history, nature and people's daily activities are the common themes of his poetry. In 'Keeping Quiet', the poet wants to emphasize on the need to introspect and to bring in the spirit of brotherhood among the people of the world. He wants people to stop talking and stop all movements till he counts twelve, that is, for a short period of time. These moments of silence would be strange and exotic because in our everyday life we are working towards selfish goals, regardless of our requirements and others' emotions. Hence, this sudden silence would give us an opportunity to introspect. Since we would not speak for a while, barriers between communities would break and a sense of brotherhood would prevail. Man would get an opportunity to realize how he is destroying nature and how he is harming himself. Futile wars against men and nature would be stopped and a new feeling of unity would be experienced. This paper will analyze how Pablo Neruda has used the technique of introspection for universal unity and peace.

Keywords: Poetry, introspection, universal unity, peace, brotherhood

Introduction:

Pablo Neruda, original name Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto, was a Chilean poet, diplomat and politician. Neruda was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. Neruda is regarded as the most important Latin American poet of the 20th century. In his poetry, Neruda explored various themes which attracted the poetry lovers. His usual themes of his poetry were love, time, destruction and alienation etc. Love, sex, history, nature and people's daily activities are the common themes of his poetry. The theme of love, the impact of war, the influence and aspects of Chile are very much present in his poetry and he synthesizes them very carefully. (Karmakar, 4) In his poetry not only great matters, but also the common objects like a lemon or a cat found place. The themes of Neruda's poetry gradually developed which manifest a changing trending of his thinking process and his experiences in life. His poetry is bestowed with both synchronization and agony, also fumed with political energy, ideas of social deterioration, seclusion, hostility, communism and tyranny.

Poetry is a branch of literature. The basic aim of poetry is to mould human behaviour and to form a society replete with universal brotherhood and peace. Those who love poetry, they always find a beauty in poetry. For them poetry is like a painting. Poetry helps us to see the world around us from different angles. From poetry, we get enormous pleasure which can not be compared with anything else. Poetry is a teacher which guides us for a better life where everything is beautiful, everything is peaceful and everyone is united. Poetry can lead human mind to a state where he can open his eyes widely and can a single united universe around him.

Ethics of Human Life in 'Keeping Quiet':

Pablo Neruda's 'Keeping Quiet' is a fine poem which deals with the theme of universal peace and brotherhood. Pablo Neruda always supported humanity. He believed that human beings are the wisest animals of the earth and therefore, human beings should live like a responsible being with proper and unbiased treatment to each and every component of the earth. He wanted people to behave with their fellow

people like brothers and also to be sympathetic towards the environment. In the 'Keeping Quiet' Neruda wants to say that there is sense of loss of humanity on the earth because we do not introspect what we are and what we should do. We do not have self-realization about our originality and therefore, the entire earth is chaotic. Therefore, in the poem 'Keeping Quiet' he wants to give us a message that only self-inspection can make us united which will lead to universal brotherhood and peaceful living on the earth.

In this poem, the poet wants to emphasize on the need to introspect and to bring in the spirit of brotherhood among the people of the world. He wants people to stop talking and stop all movements till he counts twelve, that is, for a short period of time. These moments of silence would be strange and exotic because in our everyday life we are working towards selfish goals, regardless of our requirements and others' emotions. Hence, this sudden silence would give us an opportunity to introspect. Since we would not speak for a while, barriers between communities would break and a sense of brotherhood would prevail. Man would get an opportunity to realize how he is destroying nature and how he is harming himself. Futile wars against men and nature would be stopped and a new feeling of unity would be experienced. The poet does not want his desire for inactivity to be misunderstood as a state of uselessness. He wants men to learn a lesson from the Earth. The Earth appears to be inactive yet it is selflessly productive. Men too could be productive and progressive without any aggression, selfishness and the urge for destruction.

The title of the poem "Keeping Quiet" suggests the importance of silence. The poem is about the importance of self-examination and introspection. The poet believes that introspection even for a short moment would break barriers between communities and a sense of brotherhood would prevail and this would bring universal harmony.

The poet begins with counting twelve advising everyone to be silent. He chose 'twelve' for several reasons. 'Twelve' hints at the twelve hours of a day. 'Twelve' refers to twelve zodiac signs which are believed to be the controlling forces of our lives. 'Twelve' refers to twelve months of a year. 'Twelve' even may be aimed for a preparation for all to be ready to plunge into the state of silence.

The poet urges all people across the earth irrespective of country to keep quiet and to stop works for a very short moment and wants us to concentrate on how we feel during the moment and to feel the change in our attitudes after this practice.

The poet says that we are always on move. We are all busy in doing our works and go on rushing in our lives. The poet says that as soon as we keep quiet for a moment the moment will be an exciting moment as there will be no crowd and there be no sounds of engines. So this silence will make us suddenly feel that we are all united and members of one single family on the Earth.

It will be an exotic moment
without rush, without engines,
we would all be together
in a sudden strangeness.

If we keep quiet for a moment, we shall be able to introspect the mistakes and wrongs done by us. After this introspection, the fisherman would not kill the whales in the cold sea and the man gathering salt would look into his hurt hands. Here the fisherman is the representative of all kinds of tyrants and killers. The poet believes that after keeping quiet the tyrants and killers would change their nature. The salt gatherer is the representative of poor and lower section of the society. They go up to any level to earn their livelihood and often hurt themselves irreparably. But after keeping quiet they also would limit their labour and live a healthy life. Thus, he could link a very simple and common thing to a vast idea. Neruda's poetic power was such that he linked a common element to a vast world. (Karmakar, 5)

The poet condemns war as war brings no peace and progress. War gives victory but with no survivors. So, the poet believes that after keeping quiet for a while and after introspection those people who prepare wars with biological weapon and with atomic energy will give up their cruelty and behave their enemies as their brothers.

Those who prepare green wars,
wars with gas, wars with fire,
victory with no survivors,

would put on clean clothes
and walk about with their brothers
in the shade, doing nothing.

The poet clarifies that his urge for silence should not be confused with death. He also believes that life is for living not for death. He just wants us to keep quiet for a while so that a positive introspection can be done for realizing our mistakes in life

The poet says that human beings are single minded. We are always busy in achieving our goals, completing personal responsibilities. While running after our goals in life we never get an opportunity to realize ourselves. Human beings are always unhappy and the sources of this sadness make us free from this sadness of human life. The poet refers to the 'sadness' of failing to understand oneself in the monotonous every day existence. He also finds it sad that the humanity is moving towards its own ruin owing to its unanalyzed actions. He regrets the rush of outdoing others that has made us forget the values of humanity.

In conclusion the poet teaches us through the example of the earth. The earth seems to be dead at one season but comes back with life in another season. Likewise, our life will also bear certain meaning when we walk on the right path i.e. introspecting in silence. We have still sufficient time and hope to cultivate our human qualities in us.

Perhaps the Earth can teach us
as when everything seems dead
and later proves to be alive.

In the last two lines the poet leaves us and urges us to keep quiet for a while so that we can introspect our mistakes and wrong doings for bringing peace to the earth. The poet uses the symbol of the earth to illustrate the point that there can be life under apparent stillness.

Conclusion:

Pablo Neruda talks about the necessity and importance of quiet introspection. For Neruda, self and quiet introspection can develop a feeling of mutual understanding and universal peace among human beings of the globe. The poem is an anti-war poem. In the poem the poet shows an anti-war attitude. He shows a deep concern about cruelty to nature, cruelty to other living creatures, and pitiable situation of the working people. Therefore, from his understanding, Pablo Neruda provides us with a simple solution to this serious social, political, religious, and communal problems and the solution is self-introspection. If it is so, there will be one family on the earth and everyone will feel that they are the members of a single family as said by Radhakrishnan.

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