

English (Hons) Part-3; Paper-07; Unit-2; Topic
"The Tiger and the Deer"; Lec-notes by
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The Tiger and the Deer: Sri Aurobindo.

This short philosophical poem by Sri Aurobindo deals with a contrast between evil and good, innocence and experience, life and death. It also shows the bright and burning terror of the forest. It has a beautiful internal rhythm, contrast of cacophonous and euphonic sounds, symbolic pattern and an artistic design. It is a poem which deals with life and death through the symbols of the deer and the tiger. The poem begins with the description of the tiger who is crouching and searching:

Brilliant, crouching, slouching, what crept
Through the green heart of the forest,
Gleaming eyes and mighty chest and
Soft soundless paws of grandeur and murder.

These opening lines show the balanced approach of Sri Aurobindo about the tiger. Generally, people hate and neglect the tiger because it is very savage, rough and dangerous. But Aurobindo's attitude to the tiger is both positive and negative. Here, the word tiger

Stands for death, darkness and dull brain. The deer of this poem suggests love, peace, innocence and soul. The killing of the innocent deer by tiger suggests that the death and destruction of the healthy values of life by the cruelty of modern civilization or the materialistic mind. On the social and historical plane, it suggests the cremation of old ideals and traditions by the fire of modern science and fashion. On the ethical and mystical plane, it suggests the mass neglect of the voice of soul by the various waves of mind.

The poet seems to be very optimistic about love and peace. He thinks that in spite of the various blows of death and darkness, life is a thing to be enjoyed. He also foretells that the day is not so far when both the tiger and the deer will drink water from the same pond.

"Still then shall the beautiful wild
deer drink from the
coolness of great pools in the leaves'
shadow
The mighty perish in their might,
The slain survive the slayer."

Here the last alliterative lines suggest the strong optimism of Sri Aurobindo.

The sentence has the theme of blood and murder, but the language is not Calophonic. The author has deliberately created music and melody in this sentence. It shows that in spite of death and desolation, life is a thing to be enjoyed. The phrase 'Coolness of great pools' suggests love and sympathy, peace and prosperity.

Well, the poet is of the opinion that the tiger is crouching and slouching brilliantly through the green heart of the forest. He has gleaming eyes and mighty chest. He here, with the phrase 'soft soundless paws' is very apt and suggestive. It shows how cruelty has soft sound. It reminds us of villain character "Iago" in Shakespeare's Othello, who says: "I am not what I am".

It also recalls a famous English proverb: "A serpent beneath the rose." The movement of the tiger has also been suggested through the zig-zag sentence.

"But the great beast crouched and crept and crept and crouched a last time noiseless fatal"

The phrase "noiseless fatal" seems

to be an imagistic variation of the phrase 'soundless paws'. Generally it is seen that the fatal things are noiseless.

The poet expresses his philosophical ideas of life and death, innocence and experience through the symbolic story of the tiger and the deer. The innocent deer is about to drink the water of the forest pond. She was unconscious of her death. Suddenly, the fierce tiger leaped upon the innocent deer and torn her to pieces. The poet says:

"Destroyed, the wild hermits beauty by the strong cruel beauty in nature".

It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo has presented here a balance picture of nature where both nectar and poison are equally essential for the existence of life. Everything which God has made has some meaning. Perhaps this is why in this poem he has praised even the cruel beauty of nature. The implicit philosophy in the poem reminds us of the Vedas and Upanishad and also of the last poem of John Keats where the darkness has also a fruitful meaning.

Thus, this beautiful philosophical presentation of death and life, innocence and experience through some beautiful images and phrases shows the poetic talent of Sri Aurobindo.