

CRITICAL APPRECIATION - POETRY

'Poetry' is a 1964 poem written by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, one of most influential Spanish American poet. The poem narrates how poetry reached him unsought straight from burning life around and the visions and awakening he experienced thereafter.

Poetry came to him uninvited from the light and shade of life. He is unable to recollect exactly from where, but for sure, it was not in the form of word, not in the form of silence. Poetry 'summoned' him and he had no other go but to obey. This summons was in a language beyond language. Poetry called him from the street, from the violent fires, directly from other people. He heard the call also from the branches of night and from his lonely return after all the sound and fury. Poetry called him, came to him and touched him.

The effect of the touch was electrical. Suddenly he lost something. Words failed him. He lost the naming language. He became blind. But when the senses and language broke down, new senses and new 'language' were achieved. Something stared in his soul. It was as if he became possessed. This impact of poetry on him is presented with the image of a man possessed by some invincible spirit. The fit of possession by poetry is described as fever. The re-achievement of consciousness beyond consciousness is described as forgotten wings. Then the poet starts to write, not as an individual agent, but like an oracle speaking, not his words, but those of the indwelling spirit. He wrote his first faint line in that fitful excitement. It didn't have any substance,- name or form. It was either pure wisdom or pure nonsense. Suddenly the heaven was unfastened before the eye of his soul. The poem then presents a series of visions-images of a cosmic vision that mixes life with matter, overpowering darkness with piercing arrows that the stars shed, submissively trembling plantations with unending planets. He saw the universe.

The poet experiences a new awakening in the flood of these visions. He realizes the infinitesimal nature of his person. He took in the spirit of the sky- the starry void. The vision took him to a new consciousness. He lost himself and became part of the huge abyss where everything is in infinite movement without an anchor and without a stop.

The tone of the poem is conversational, but the words are not too informal. The poem begins at the middle of a narration referring to 'that age as if the reader was someone who shared knowledge about the time. The structure of the poem involves two parts- the first one describing the story up to the arrival of poetry. This part is composed with relatively simpler and clearer sentences. The second part- that after the great lift he gets- is more like a non-structured series of images. It resembles the utterances of an oracle in her frenzy.