

Article Info

Received: 01 Aug 2012 | Revised Submission: 22 Aug 2013 | Accepted: 28 Aug 2013 | Available Online: 20 Sept 2013

Reflection of Lament in Literature

Neha Anand*

ABSTRACT

It is rightly said that "Literature is a mirror of life." Literature is a mode of expression of feelings and emotions. All the ills, customs, rituals, sacraments even the human emotions are beautifully expressed in literature and so are the case with lament also. Lament is simply a song or poem expressing deep grief or mourning. It is such a strong feeling that nothing and no one in the world can give relief from lament. Many of the oldest and most lasting poems in human history have been laments. Even Lament is there in Hindu Vedas and in ancient Near Eastern religious texts, including the Mesopotamian city laments such as Laments for Ur and the Jewish Tanakh. As long as human beings do have emotions & feelings, literature will be created and will be read. Through this paper I would like to discuss lament which is present in different works of different poets and authors.

Keywords: Literature; Mirror of Life; Human Emotions; Lament.

1.0 Introduction

The age is called the age of science still we can't deny the importance of literature. Literature is a mode of expression of feelings and emotions. Literature is said to be the mirror of the society. Whatever is present in the society can be seen in the various genres of literature. All the ills, customs, rituals, sacraments even the human emotions are beautifully expressed in literature. All the major human emotions like pleasure, pain, satisfaction, pity, anger, affection, jealousy, dissatisfaction can be easily noticed in literature. As long as human beings do have emotions & feelings, literature will be created and will be read.

Lament is what; it is simply a song or poem expressing deep grief or mourning. The feeling of grief is called lament. If anybody has even been sad about the death of a loved one, he knows how grief can take over his life.

There are the various stages of lament. The first stage, **Denial**-In this stage of lament the person is not ready to accept the bitter truth that his loved one has gone. After the death of Spouse, friend, kinsman, a person's lament takes the form of refusing to believe the fact. Person tries to escape the reality of someone's death. In this way he wants to divert his/her mind & is not willing to accept the reality at all. In second stage, **Aggression**, person starts

showing anger and start blaming him/her or others for the loss. He strives to find who or what is to be blamed. But he can't find the answer of his nagging question "**Why me?**"

In the third stage of **Bargaining**, he starts to bargain with almighty God to reverse the misfortune or whatever has done with him. He begs him to give him a chance so that he could do something to undo the death of his loved one. In the forth stage, **Depression**, finding no answer to his question a person use to sink in the sea of depression. Now he begins to realize that his loved one has really gone and whatever may happen nothing can bring him back and put the sigh of breath in his dead body.

In the last stage of lament, person starts to console him that life must go on; he becomes aware of the fact that he/she will have to bear the loss of his loved one.

In literature we feel all these stages of mourning. Many of the oldest and most lasting poems in human history have been laments. Elements of laments are present in both the Iliad and the Odyssey and literature continued to be sung the elegiacs accompanied by the auros in classical & Hellenistic Greece. Even Lament is there in Hindu Vedas and in ancient Near Eastern religious texts, including the Mesopotamian city laments such as Laments for Ur and the Jewish Tanakh. In the art of Lamentation of Christ is a common subject from the Life of Christ,

*Corresponding Author: Department of Humanities Department, College of Engineering, TMU, Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, INDIA (E-mail: nehaanand002@gmail.com)

showing his dead body being mourned after the fructification? Islamic Lament song is also there in literature. Islamic lament song or Nauha is satyred in 61.A.H after the incident of Karbala, where Husayn ibn Ali was killed by the Muslims brutally. People called Shia started to recite lament songs or Nauha after the killing & disrespect of the family of Muhammad.

Lament can be easily seen in William Carlos Williams' „The widow's Lament in springtime.“ In this poem the poet has used a variety of symbols, emotions to express the widow's lament on the death of her husband's. She is remembering her husband. Whatever she saw, reminds her of her husband. The white flowers of the tree remind her about the loss of her husband. She wanted to lay down beside them and sink into the ground.

The fifth and sixth line of the poem *“the cold fire/that closes round me this year”* shows very beautifully how her sorrow had engulfed her. The moments she had spent with her husband were so closed to her heart that nothing was able to give her a sigh of relief.

When she realized that her husband would not come back in her life, suddenly her pain became greater and she felt that the only escape from her pain was death only. The widow also mentioned the white trees in the distance. The tree offered an escape from the speaker's sorrow. She states,

*I feel that I would like
To go there
And fall into those flowers
And sink into the marsh near them.*

The poet has painted a beautiful picture of widow's grief in spring time.

Element of lament is also there in the Gillian Clarke's Lament. This poem is an elegy, an expression of grief. This poem discusses the devastating effect of the gulf War. Even in the title also the poetess starts with gloomy picture of gulf war which happened in 1991, when Iraq invaded Kuwait and the United states with the Britain's help, bombed Iraq. She talked about disasters created by men and its adverse effects on animals also.

The gulf war devastates not only the ecology but also the lives of so many people who died without any reason. It is well known fact that every year thousands of birds die because of oil leaked into the ocean. She has used a word phrase „murder weapon“

for leaked oil. In this way she put blame on mankind for killing the innocent birds. In the line *„for the cormorant in the funeral silk”*, she talked about death, where she created the image of funeral, *being black, and silk, being oil.*

She said that although we human are the cause of war and oil leaks but again it is us who are the victims. In the last line of the poem *“For vengeance and the ashes of language”*, She put the idea of people who want revenge and the ashes of language might be the metaphor of language being the start of war and how war is the fire and when it is over all that is left is its ashes only. She wanted to give message by introducing war is harmful for man and animals as well.

John Milton has also used lament very beautifully in his poem *“On his blindness”* where he was mourning over his premature blindness. This poem is all about his lament only. John Milton became blind at his middle age. So he felt that now he could not use his poetic talent in the service of Almighty God.

When I consider how my light is spent Ere half my days in this dark world and wide, And that one talent which is death to hide Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent To serve therewith my Maker, and present My true account, lest he returning chide, "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"

He compared himself with the third servant in the Parable of Talents. He feared that he would be rebuked by the God; as the third servant was rebuked by his master for not using his talent. But all of sudden a question came in his God are his best servants. Those who bear his dispensations without protest and remain ready for his decrees serves him best.

"God doth not need either man's work or his own gifts: who best bear his mild yoke, they serve him best.

“The Wife's Lament” is one of the most recognizable Anglo-Saxon elegias. In this poem she is lamenting because of her exile and hardship which she had never faced before.

I sing this song about myself, full sad, My own distrees, and tell what Have had to suffer since I first grow up, Present and past, but never more than now; I ever suffered grief through banishment.

She was sad because of her isolation. Her husband had left her and moved to some other place

leaving her back behind him. She was also very much anxious about his whereabouts. Her lord's kinsmen did not want that the couple should be reunited and they wanted that they should be at the different sides of „the world wide“. Ultimately she got her husband and they moved to a place where she had no kith & kin because of this she remained to live sad and lonely. Very soon she came to know that her husband was plotting against her back.

She remembered the time when she both tied up the nuptial knot and took swear that now only death could make them separated. To keep herself safe, she started to live in forest grove in a cave under an oak tree, and all the time she was lamenting over what had done with her. She wrote that **landscape around her is bleak, the hills are high, the strongholds are overgrown with briars and there is nothing that can give her joy**. She was unable to give herself relief. She again and again thought about the happy couples who live together always but she was too unfortunate to have her husband with her. Her lament for her husband shows the real pictures of grief of those who are not with their loved one.

The element of lament is well shown in the following lines written by William Blake.

*Can I see another's woe?
And not be in sorrow too?
Can I see another's grief?
And not seek for kind relief?
Can I see a falling tear?
And not feel my sorrow's tear?
Can a father see his child?
Weep, nor be with sorrow filled?
Can a mother sit and hear
An infant groan, an infant fear?
No, no! never can it be!
Never, never can it be.*

Lament is very beautifully present in the Anton Chekhov's short story „lament“. As the name of the story itself suggests, the story is all about lament. Iona Potapov, the protagonist has been described as a helpless father who was expressing his lament on the death of his only son. In the very opening of the scene Chekhov has narrated Iona's character **“quite white and looks like a phantom.....”** And that **“if a whole snow draft fell on him, it seems as if he would not find it necessary to shake it off”**.

The story began with the pathetic statement of Iona **“To whom shall I tell my grief”**. It is very easy to glean from this line that how depressed he was! He was so much engrossed with his grief that he even did not hear his first customer's voice. The customer officer had to repeat himself and finally he shouted **“Are you asleep”**. Iona wanted to have anyone with whom he could share his grief, with whom he could share his helplessness. He tried to talk to that officer: **“my son.....er...my son died this week sir”**.

The officer simply replied **“Hm! What did he die of?”** Iona started to explain but the officer interrupted him by saying **“we shan't get there till tomorrow going on like this. Hurry up!”** Again he had three customers very rude and impolite. Iona again tried to share his grief but they also did not take any interest. He lamented, **“here my son's dead and I am alive....It's a strange thing, death has come in at the wrong door....Instead of coming for me it went for my son.”** He met with several people but all were too busy to listen to him.

At last he saw his little mare that was munching the grass. He said **“ That's how it is ,old girlKuzma Ionitch is gone....He said good bye to me ...He went and died for no reason.....Now, suppose you had a little colt, and you were own mother to that little colt.....And all at once that some colt went and died.....You'd be sorry, wouldn't you....?”** Lament is present from starting to end. But when Iona saw his mare, he found a way to get his feelings off his chest.

At the end of the story readers feel satisfied with a sense of victory that nobody is alone in the world.

Through the different genres of literature lament can be easily expressed. But the fact is that the feeling of lament is so strong that nothing can give relief from it. Person suffering from lament can divert his/her mind from lament for a short while but from his/her heart it can't be vanished. There is nothing in the world that can compensate the life of a loved one.

All the luxuries, jewels and wealth can never afford to purchase the life of anyone or to put the sigh of life in a dead one.

References

- [1] <http://colecizj.easyvserver.com/pohaonwif,html>
- [2] [www.studymode.com/essays/the wife's lament](http://www.studymode.com/essays/the%20wife%20s%20lament)

- [3] [Http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/achekhov/bl-achek-misery.htm](http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/achekhov/bl-achek-misery.htm)
- [4] <http://englishlanguage-literature.com/2011/02/17/lament-by-gillian-clarke/>
- [5] <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/4671>http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Management_information_system