

## **I SIT AND LOOK OUT**

**-Walt Whitman**

"I sit and look out" by Walt Whitman echoes all miseries and atrocities of life that rose to the surface in the wake of capitalism. 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a sea of change in the lives of people as rat race for materialistic possession became more prominent. The advent of capitalism had a tremendous impact on the lives of the people and in the manipulative & calculative rat race, principles were relegated and human concerns & emotions were sidelined. The poet pens pictures of such a sad tale of human life by attempting to pose as onlooker who watches everything but does nothing to alter situations. 'I Sit and Look Out' describes a dark, sad, corrupted, sorrowful world after the World War II & the poem is largely about the different kinds of social evils like injustice, humiliation, sufferings, exploitation of the poor and oppression of the weak that existed in the society. The tone of the poem is pessimistic and the imagery presented is apocalyptic.

**I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame;**

**I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men, and anguish with themselves, remorseful after deeds done.**

The poet silently sees the sorrows of the people arising from oppression, ill-treatment and humiliation. He is able to hear paroxysmal sobs of the youth frustrated and stifled with the disillusionment of the World War, full of regret and remorse for his own misdeeds.

**I see, in low life, the mother misused by her children, dying, neglected, gaunt, desperate;**

**I see the wife misused by her husband-I see the treacherous seducer of young women;**

Still lower, the speaker visualizes the mother, in the poor classes being taken advantage of and being ill-treated by her very own children. She lies emaciated, distressed, dying in solitude, desperate for help and affection, but ignored when she needs them most.

Neglect and oppression of women are reflected in their abuse at the hands of the men as the speaker next sees the wives being ill-treated, misused and cheated by her husband. The husband comes across as a treacherous and callous lover who seduces young women and ruthlessly deceives them.

**I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love, attempted to be hid—I see these sights on the earth;**

The poet sees the feelings of jealousy, bitterness and anger of unrequited love in the rejected lovers which they try to hide and bear it in solitude. He seeks to demarcate emotions in his poem by introducing camouflage to pertain jealousy and unrequited love behind the mask of smiles and affability.

The angst and the anxiety of the poet, the fear and the tension that rumbles up his mind while he sits comfortably in his place is an awakening call for the readers to rise up and take a step in altering the situation.

**I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny—I see martyrs and prisoners;**

We are ushered into a world rife with violence as the poet goes on to see how wars claim a number of innocent lives and make young men-prisoners of war. He describes the dangerous aftermaths of war, the deaths of millions and autocracy that causes dents within the state. He has to bear the pain as he beholds the sight of prisoners, tortured and tormented -the most terrible byproduct of wars and battles fought. We are shown how moral depravity has set in and the cruelty that prevails in the society we live in.

**I observe a famine at sea—I observe the sailors casting lots who shall be kill'd, to preserve the lives of the rest;**

**I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons upon laborers, the poor, and upon negroes, and the like;**

He next presents a gruesome imagery where sailors on ships that have lost their way, cast lots to decide whom among them should be killed, so as to survive to the shores due to acute shortage of food supplies.

He sees the poor workers and the Negroes who subjected to slavery at the hands of the capitalist world where nothing prevails but oppression and penury. He portrays the insults and low treatment meted out to the weak and poor.

**All these—All the meanness and agony without end, I sitting, look out upon,  
See, hear, and am silent.**

Just as a helpless observer, the poet sees all the malady, sufferings, agonies of the world and all he does is makes a comment. The poem is a poignant criticism of life that the poet observes in a detached manner. He catalogues this collective collapse of humanity piled one upon the other. Neither does he analyze these nor does he make any comment on these sights and leaves it on to the reader to react and judge. He himself does not get involved or pass a moral value to be learnt or followed. This is what he means when he uses the word 'silent'. Instead, he freely allows his reader to think and react in their own way. This however establishes, the philosophy of individualism —a significant movement that Whitman was a part of. He opens a window for everyone to see.