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Dept. of English, Narajole Raj College**

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A Critical Study of the poem "The Lamb"

Included in *Songs of Innocence*, the poem, "The Lamb" may be stated as the simplest of poems of William Blake, who sees unity of all living creatures with Nature and God, particularly Jesus Christ. It 'presents a pleasing description of a lamb, together with a child's natural affection for it and a child's simple but pure understanding of God'. Posing multiple questions, who created such a gentle and mild creature, Blake is all praise for the sheer beauty and meekness of the lamb. The poem stands as a direct contrast to "The Tiger", a remarkable poem in *Songs of Experience*, where poet convincingly establishes that the creator of a meek and innocent Lamb also is capable of creating an awesome, fierce, mighty creature like the tiger. The lamb and the tiger taken together represent the quality of human nature. The former symbolizes the innocence and gentleness of human nature and the later, the violent terrifying forces within man.

The expression is at once very simple and a series of questions are asked. Here, the statements are turned into questions. These questions are to be found in the first stanza and the answers are to be found in the second. The child, the narrator in the poem, asks the lamb whether he knows who made it,

Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Curiosity of a child is at once so appealing and fascinating. Here these questions are followed by answers, unlike the pattern found in the poem *The Tiger*.

Gave thee life and bid thee feed,
By the stream and o' ver the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,



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Making all the vales rejoice?

The speaker puts these questions because of the wonderful qualities which this creature possesses. The lamb is blessed with life and the capacity to feed by the small river and over the grassy land. It is endowed with shining and soft wool which serves as its clothing. It has a tender voice which fills the valley with joy and bliss. Thus we have here a true portrait of the lamb.

The second stanza changes the pattern of the poem by identifying the lamb with child Jesus and with the child-speaker in the poem. Jesus is the 'lamb of God' in the European Christian tradition. They all share same qualities - meekness, mildness, and innocence. Divine spirit present in every being created is manifest in the lamb. Here, the poet's intention becomes clear. Innocence and ability to rejoice looking at simplest things are a child's prerogative. Divine spirit present in childhood slowly makes way to many undesirable elements as one grows up. Reference to Jesus the child and lamb representing mankind directly link to Biblical images and beliefs. Child's curiosity and implicit obedience in accepting what is told makes it quite impressive:

He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb.
He is meek and He is mild;
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb
We are called by His name.

Since the speaker in the poem is a child and the questions are of simple nature and the answer provided are correct, the poet didn't resort to an abundant use of symbols to drive home the truths. The child shows his deep joy in company of the lamb who is just like him, meek and mild, simple and innocent. The child in the poem does not pass through any spiritual crisis or psychological conflict for he occupied with present actualities of the lamb and with the actualities of his own protected existence. The poet conveys the very spirit of childhood - the purity, the innocence, the tenderness of childhood and the affection that a child feels for little creature. The pastoral background of the poem contributes to the charm of the poem and perfectly harmonizes with meek, mild, and innocent nature of the animal.

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