

Know Then thyself

By
Alexander Pope

MS. SANGEETA SETHI

**DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION
KURUKSHETRA UNIVERSITY,
KURUKSHETRA**



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Lesson No. 4

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1. Objectives

Detailed Study of the Poem :


- to understand the meaning of the text from *Chronicles of Time*.
- To comprehend the poet's reference to the old injunction '*Know thyself*'.
- Learn about poet's conception of man.



2.1 The poet

- Alexander Pope (1688-1744) was born to prosperous London linen-merchant.
 - Since Pope's father converted to Roman Catholicism, Pope was not allowed to be taught by Catholic priests.
 - Being a voracious, avid reader, Pope studied the works of Latin, English, French and Italian poets.
 - Pope was a versatile genius. He tried his hand at pastorals, didactic & elegiac poetry and satire.
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2.2 The Poem

- Is an extract from – *An Essay on Man*.
 - *An Essay on Man* is the second epistle, a long argumentative poem.
 - The first epistle deals with man in relation to universe and the second epistle shows man with respect to himself as an individual, the third man in relation to society and the fourth man in relation to God.
 - The poet argues and justifies the ways of God to man. He maintains that man must not indulge in finding faults with God or his schemes. He advises man to limit himself to a study of his own nature.
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3. Paraphrase

"Know then The stoic's pride"

- The poet advises man not to indulge in the vain pursuit of examining and judging God's ways. He says that a study of man's own self is the proper study for man. Man according to the poet stands on the isthmus of divinity and bestiality.
- Man is a strange mixture of wisdom and folly, greatness and pettiness. Though he has the wisdom to be truly great he seldom exhibits that.

"He hangs too much"

- He oscillates between a state of doubt to act or a state of staying at rest, thus he always remains caught in a conflict.
- Due to his paradoxical nature man fails to understand whether he should think himself a god or a beast.

- Man's birth is nothing but the beginning of his end. He reasons only to stand deceived.

"Chaos World."

- Pulled in opposite directions by his intellect and heart, man remains confused.
- He becomes his own friend and his own enemy depending on whether he acts wisely or unwisely.
- It is man who attains victory and it is he only who fails.
- He is a great Lord of things as he has mastered material things, yet he is vulnerable to fall prey to these things.
- Being the sole judge of truth, he tends to commit errors.
- The conflicting pulls of man's powers and frailties make him a laughing stock and he remains a riddle of the world.

4. Glossary

(Pages 26, 27: Chronicles of Time)

presume – to be arrogant to examine closely; *scan* – to examine closely; *isthmus* – a narrow strip of land with water on either side; *darkly wise* – foolishly wise; *rudely great* – great and yet mean; *stoic* – a person who is not disturbed by pain or not excited by joy; *hangs between* – neither a god nor a beast; *in doubt* – not sure; *doubt prefer* – pulled apart by rival forces of the body and the mind; *born ... die* – once he is born, he can not escape death; *reasoning* – able to think logically; *alike* – same (remaining equally ignorant); *chaos* – completely confused;

abused – deceived, misled; *disabused* – self enlightened; *half to rise* – to succeed partially; *Great Lord* – the crown of creation; *sole* – man is the only being gifted with powers to know the truth from untruth; *glory* – crown; jest – laughing stock; *riddle* – puzzle.

5. Exercise

- a. What does paradox mean? Give examples from the poem. (Write a short answer).
- b. Sum up in your own words Pope's conception of man. (Write an essay type answer).