

## **EXPLORING THE THEME OF HUMAN VALUE CRISES IN POETRY**

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**Abstract:** This article presents a critical study of the poem titled "The Cold Within" written by an American poet James Patrick Kinney in the 20th century. The main aim of the article is to explore the theme of human value crises in the poem. This article provides a significant critique of the value crises like selfishness of human beings, prejudice, malice among human beings, which ultimately leads to the destruction of human beings in the poem. Even though the poem was written in 20th century, the themes and ideas of the poem remain relevant and are extremely valuable for all human beings all over the world even today. The poem is simple yet powerful reminder that if we selfishly hold on to the world's resources, and the wealth that it has to offer, if we persist in discriminating on grounds of race, religion, caste, gender and ethnicity, we are lost.

The role of Literature is to reflect the society. It is the mirror of society. A person uses a mirror to correct his/her faults or to see how he/she is looking. And the purpose of mirror is to reflect the image of its user. It is in the same way Literature aims at correcting or bringing a change in the society by reflecting a true picture of it. It gives the scope of self-reflection to the people living in that society. A small attempt is made in this article to inculcate the concept of selflessness and to remove selfish individualism which aims at the destruction of human race in the poem "The Cold Within".

**A Short Summary of the Poem:** *The Cold Within* is a poem written by American poet James Patrick Kinney in the 1960's. The poem is about a group of six people who are caught in a snowstorm and how they conduct themselves. These six people are trapped in cold weather and are sitting in front of a fire which is in dying need of logs to be lit; but even though each of them is clutching a piece of log, they do not put it to use due to their selfishness, racism, and bigotry. These six people are; a white woman, a black man, a poor man, a rich man, a Christian and the last man who do not want to help others till he is helped by someone.

The white woman is driven by a sense of superiority, refuses to stick the log to keep the fire burning, as she does not want to share her log with the black man. The black man refuses to stick the log as he don't want to help the white woman.

The poor man does not want to provide comfort to rich man by sticking his log. The rich man selfishly refuses to share what he has with the lazy poor man. The Christian held back his stick as he finds someone who belongs to a different religious community. The last man with whom the Christian refuses to share the log is also caught in the vicious cycle of hatred and inertia, he don't want to help others until he is helped by someone, therefore he also refuses to share the log. Eventually, the fire dies out and in the morning all six of them are found frozen to death. Their cold heartedness invites death in the end and they die with their logs held tight in their hands.

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**Critical Analysis of the Poem:** The six people each possessing a stick of wood, were trapped together in a bleak and bitter cold. All of them have a stick of wood, which, if put together, could keep the fire burning. But none of them agreed to use their stick of wood to keep the fire burning. *"Each one possessed a stick of wood"*. Their prejudiced notions and rigidity held them back from uniting together as a group irrespective of race, religion or status. Overwhelmed by the feelings of anger, revenge and enmity, these people are unable to establish a bond. These people have lost their humanity as they are overpowered by the evil emotions of hatred, arrogance and revenge. The poem embodies the idea of lack of warmth and compassion in human relations. These six people are unwilling to help each other just because, they do not share the same social, racial or religious background.

The black and white, rich and poor, are all guided by hostility and bitterness against each other. They refuse to cooperate even in such critical conditions when their own life was at stake. These people are so cold from inside that they do not realize for once, that if they do not stick the wood to keep the fire burning, then they will all perish. This can be taken as an instance of the idea that human beings are, to a great extent, more concerned about others failures than their own victory. It is a shame to humanity that the reason for their end was not the freezing cold weather but the bitter cold existing in the hearts, minds and souls of the people that stopped them from letting go of their hatred and help each other. These six people from different backgrounds put together represent the illogical and inhuman attitude of human beings towards each other.

This poem, is a parable to teach the humans about their follies and help them better themselves. The poem gives out a strong universal message to build an egalitarian world. Discrimination and hatred does nothing but breaks and pushes a nation towards death. Discrimination on the basis on race, religion, and class, existing among the six people blinds their capability to make rational and humane decisions. The futility of discrimination leads to destruction of human race which is expressed in the last stanza of the poem *"They didn't die from the cold without. They died from the cold within"*. This poem makes us question humanity as a whole. It is ironical that all these people, driven by their selfishness and ego, die from the cold existing within them.

The poem gives out a strong message that if human values like being respectful towards other people, being sensitive to race and class specificities and having compassion for fellow human being are not practiced, it will lead to the destruction of human beings.

Human values are the virtues that guide us to take into account human element when one interacts with one other human being. They are our feeling for the human essence of others. It is both what we expect other to do to us and what we aim to give to other human beings. These human values give the effect of bonding, comforting and reassuring.

Human values play a decisive role in the overall development of individual, society and the nation. At present the world is facing value crises in all aspects like individual, family, social, political and administration. Even though more people than ever are getting educated, they are not becoming better people or happier people, and the world is not becoming a better place to live. This trend of absence of human values in the world, does not only pose serious threat to the future course of development of the people all over the world, but even for their survival, respect and authority itself.

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Human values are the need of the hour in this world. As people all over the world are becoming more competitive and achievement oriented, which is giving rise to selfish individualism, concern about personal success and protection; ignoring the value of existing in harmony with others, there is an urgent need to foster human values among all the people of the world. And this poem " *The Cold Within*" could be one medium of fostering universal human value of establishing an egalitarian society. The poem has figured out the cause and effect relationship, by depicting that if human beings, do not have the basic human values like respecting the fellow human being who is from a different social, racial or religious background, having warmth and compassion in human relations, it will lead to their own destruction.

**Conclusion:** The role of Literature is to reflect the society. It is the mirror of the society. A person uses a mirror to correct his/her faults or to see how he/she is looking. And the purpose of mirror is to reflect the image of its user. It is in the same way Literature aims at correcting or bringing a change in the society by reflecting a true picture of it. It gives the scope of self-reflection to the people living in that society. Literature has always been the best medium, that not only showcased the reality of our society but also works as a mediator to provide the best way to tackle the situation. This poem "*The Cold Within*", is one of the medium of literature which has showcased the reality of the discriminating nature of human beings towards each other on the basis of religion, race and class, all over the world. The six people in the poem can be seen as representatives of the whole human race. The "six humans" are devoid of humanity. Apart from showcasing the reality the poem also gives out a strong message that, absence of human values like, religious tolerance, selflessness, being respectful towards other people, being sensitive to race and class specificities, having compassion for fellow human being, will lead to the destruction of human beings. This poem is a critique of the human value crisis in the contemporary world. This piece of literature gives the scope for self-reflection.

Human values are like water, even though water is the most common natural resource which is available to all the human beings free of cost; they don't give it much importance as they give importance to other materialistic things like gold or money. Human beings can survive without other materialistic things, but we cannot survive without water. This article concludes with a famous quote on water by Benjamin Franklin "when the well is dry, we'll know the worth of water". Therefore, before it's too late to bring back the human values in the people its high time that all the agencies of inculcating human values like Literature, school, home, college, university, religious places, government and society focus on fostering human values and ethics among all the people all over the world.

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