Critical analysis of the Poem Snake by D H Lawrence

**The snake is generally seen in a negative way by man. Man is taught to be afraid of it, and to kill it if they encounter it at any point. However, Lawrence feels that this is a most unjust way to treat the snake. He attacks the snake because he does not know any other way to react to its presence. However, in the course of watching the snake at his water-trough, his own view of the snake has changed. Even though the snake is as fearful as the serpent Typhon, it has not harmed him in any way. In fact, it is a gentle and pensive creature. It has just got on with its own business of drinking and gone back peacefully. In the end, the poet is left only with regret – first at seeing it go, and then for having attacked it for no reason.**

**.Central Idea of Snake by D.H.Lawrance:The poet comes across a snake drinking at his water-trough. Like a second-comer, he waits for it to finish drinking. While watching it, he realizes that it is a gentle and magnificent creature. Even though he has learned to fear and kill snakes, he does not do so. When the snake is preparing to leave, he becomes sad and tries to stop it by hitting it with a log. But this only makes the snake leave faster. In the end, the poet feels he has treated the snake very badly, and is filled with regret.**

**Through this poem, Lawrence has successfully changed our impression of the snake from a negative one to a positive one. This is no easy feat in itself, but the fact that Lawrence has managed to do so through the brevity of a form like poetry is extraordinary. His use of myths and legends regarding the snake has also enriched the poem and taught us to respect all creatures of the earth equally.**

 Snake” is a seventy-four-line free-verse poem divided into nineteen verse paragraphs (stanzas of unequal length). Like many modern lyrics, it incorporates a narrative element, recording the poet’s encounter with a snake at his water-trough. Through this structure and carefully mobilized imagery, the poet reveals his conflicted, deepening consciousness, which moves from casual description to epiphanic confession. Written when D. H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda were living in Taormina, Sicily, in 1920-1921, the poem is derived from Lawrence’s actual experience there. Its imagery and themes, however, are anticipated in the second section of his 1917 essay “The Reality of Peace.”

The poem begins with the arrival of the snake on the poet's water trough on a very hot day and his (poet's) arrival at the same place to fetch water, putting on pajamas due to the hot weather. Since the snake came there before him, he decided to wait for it to finish drinking. According to him, the snake came through a hole in the "earthwall" which was deliberately built to encircle the trough.

As the snake drinks through the straight mouth into its body, it looks round, not minding whoever was around. According to him, the snake's style of drinking water is exactly the cattle's style, for it "lifted his head from his drinking as cattle do/and looked at me vaguely as drinking cattle do" (Lines 22 - 23). At this juncture, the poet begins to contemplate on what to do with the snake as he had been trained to believe that black snakes were harmless while golden ones were harmful.

Conflicting voices begin to flash across his mind to kill and to spare the reptile and finally he decided not to harm it. Suddenly, the snake intensified its drinking in utmost alertness, looking in different directions in the manner of a god "unseeing into the air". And then, it gradually returns to its hole through the same broken wall from the edge of the water trough. Seeing the snake disappearing, he changes his mind - "I picked up a clumsy log/and threw it at the water trough with a clatter". However, he misses his target because a greater part of the snake's long body has already entered the hole while it immediately twists fast the remaining part into the hole like "lightening".

He begins to regret his action of attempting to kill the snake. He remembers a story an ancient sailor had told him concerning an albatross (a bird) he once killed which later brought untold punishment upon him (the sailor). The poet becomes afraid that such punishment is likely to come upon him for attempting to kill the snake, hence, he begins to desire for the snake's return which was practically impossible. The snake appears to have assumed the position of an exiled king who cannot be crowned anymore. He concludes that pettiness has robbed him the opportunity to teach the world how not to use might, especially against lesser creatures of nature.

**Personification: This rhetorical device is used to bestow human qualities on something that is not human. In this poem, the poet uses the device of personification with respect to the snake.**

**Simile: This rhetorical device is used when an overt comparison is made between two different things. The poet uses the device of simile in the fifth stanza when he compares the snake drinking from his water-trough with cattle drinking from a pond or other water body, and also uses the word “as” while making this comparison. He again uses this device in the twelfth stanza when he compares the snake to a god, and the eighteenth stanza when he compares the snake to a king.**

**Tone of the Poem;**

**The tone of this poem is quite ambiguous. This is because of the ambiguity in the poet’s attitude to the snake. At first, he is scared of the snake and hears voices in his head asking him to kill it. However, in time, he realizes that it is a beautiful and harmless creature, and feels honoured at its coming to his trough. However, towards the end of the poem, he is filled with regret and guilt for hitting the snake and making it crawl back to its crack in the wall.**

NB: The last three points like Personificatipon,,Simile and Tone have been given extra to the Answer. If any of the points are asked then it can be written otherwise not.