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Formal Writing: “A Modest Proposal”

‘A modest proposal’ is an essay written by Jonathan Swift in 1729. It is about the societal issues that were contemporary to the writer. The essay is a harsh criticism of the values of that society. The writer wants to satire those values and provide an eye-opener to the readers in this regard. He wrote the essay with an intention to find out a solution to the financial problems that were confronted by the Irish people of that era. People in the society he lived in demonstrated a disappointingly harsh attitudes towards the underprivileged individuals. Therefore, the writer satirizes the society and suggests them to start selling their infants to the wealthy people of England. This practice may enable them to get sufficient funds to eliminate their financial miseries.

The essay describes one of the biggest problems that the Irish people faced and it created a massive upheaval in their social order. Poor women were seen everywhere in the streets who had no caretakers and were forced to beg for making both ends meet. They had little children with them all the time, mostly infants. Their condition was miserable and the society did not take any notice to eliminate their plight. The author is concerned about the future of these infants and children and he wants a plausible solution to end their sufferings (Contractor). In his essay, he claims to come up with a plan that will most probably end the distress of these women and children, that is, they start selling their people (infants) to the affluent people of other countries. He is actually condemning the way people regard others in the society that they all share to live.

The writer ascertains that he has spent years in thinking critically about solving this problem. He writes in a serious tone and concludes that other writings that had been written by “gentlemen” or civic-minded writers were not capable to present accurate, workable, or result-oriented plans (Beaumont). He says that those plans do not seem to be practically effective to bring about the desired changes in the social order and financial wellbeing of the country. To propose a viable solution, he makes certain computations on his own. He proposes that each child would be released from the parental care one year after the birth. The context of his proposed plan is that the number of couples involved in active “breeding” is two hundred thousand on average, and about thirty thousand couples among that number are capable to bring up their child appropriately. Around fifty thousand from the total number of breeding couples lose their children during the first year after the birth due to diseases or during pregnancy by miscarriage. The remaining one hundred and twenty thousand couples prove to be incapable of bringing up their children efficiently. The author’s concern was about these children. Since the Irish did not engage in building houses or cultivating lands, these children could not be trained in the related crafts. The children can't steal from others at that young age. They could not be sold either in auction for being too young to be worthwhile for any buyer. Therefore, the author suggests a horrible plan to sell these children of age one to the wealthy people who would eat them up to their pleasure. This practice will unleash the burden of poor parents and give rise to the economic growth of the country (Castañeda). The satire on society is clear while the reader gets an insight into the society of that time as well.

After reading the essay, it can easily be understood that the affluent class exhibited severe discrimination towards the poor people. Their cruel behaviors forced the writer to create such a serious satirical prose that is almost unique in literature. Humans are supposed to be worried about each other’s problems and strive collaboratively to end the problems. The author is surprised as well as annoyed to see the indifference of the influential people of his society. He tries to make them feel ashamed of their indifference that they had been showing towards the deprived people of that time.

Works Cited

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