

INDIAN DEW IN THE GREEN MEADOW OF SHELLEY

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“As a lyric poet”, says W.H. Hudson, “Shelley is among the very greatest.” His song is pure inspiration, a thing of lightness, melody, and grace. Indeed, it is on account of his lyricism that Shelley’s name as a poet has become immortal. Shelley is an intense lyricist as Alexander Pope is an intense satirist. Although his spirit was molded by the current of Hellenism, he lived not untouched by the culture, literature and the growth of the eastern world.

Shelley’s point of attraction was Indian culture and its life-style. Within the boundary of his country. Shelley felt a feeling of frustration and alienation, because in the eyes of his countrymen, he was an anti-socialist, unrealist and an atheist. Consequently, he wrote a letter to his frined Peacock, wanting a work under the East India Company. But Peacock’s reply was negative and Shelley changed his plan accordingly.

Shelley’s attraction towards India was increased because of his intensive study of books in which India was treated as the focal point. Shelley was tremendously influenced by the writings of Segel brothers, Schopenhaur, Dupera, Willkins, Jones, Robert Southey and Thomas Moore. As a result of this, we find the very touch of India in his works and specially in his poetry. This influence is found frequently in all his poems like ‘Alastor’. ‘The triumph of Life’ etc. As time passed his “Spontaneous attraction” turned into “Deep faith” and here lies the very impact of Indian philosophy. This development of his mind finds best reflection in his poem “Adonais”.

Shelley’s philosophy was the propaganda of “Platonism” (He liked everything belonging to India but did not like to involve in it). Broadly speaking, his state of mind was higher than that of Platonic concept. His spirit was enriched by the Indian culture but his way was Greek. For his enthusiastic and revolutionary spirit, Shelley could mingle the eastern and the western elements. Symbolism plays a pivotal role in his works and it made him a mystical personality. The proper mingling of his feeling and faith enriches his position to the position of an ideal man. For instance, in ‘Alastor’, he says :

“Art and Eloquence / and all the shows O’ the world are Frail and rain / To rain / To weep a loss to turn their lights to shade Nature’s vast Frame, the web of human things / Birth and the grave that are not as they were.”

(L - 710 - 20)

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*Again in his elegiac poem 'Adonais', he remarks :
"The one remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's Shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many colored glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments. ---- Die,
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek.
Follow where all is Field? "*

(L - 460 - 66)

In one of his famous poems, Shelley tries to establish his own view:

*"The awful shadow of some unseen power
Ploats though unseen among us"
(Hymn to Intellectual Beauty)*

That we find influence of India in Shelley's works is due to the writing of Sir William Jones. As a result, we find similarity between Jones' "Hymn to Narayan" and Shelley's "Hymn to Apollo" and Jones' "Hymn to Surya". In "Hymn to Apollow", Shelley says:

"I Feed the clouds, the rainbows and the flowers / with their nethereal colours ; the moon's globe / and the pure stars in their eternal bowers / are cinctured with my power as with a robe / whatever lamps on Earth or Heaven may shine / are portions of one power, which is mine."

Similarly, Jones in his "Hymn to Surya" writes:

"Fountain of living light / That o'er all nature streams / of this vast microcosm both nerve and soul / whose swift and subtle beams / Eluting mortal sight / parvade, attract, sustain the effulgent whole".

Shelley had a great regard for India and its belongings and it is best reflected in a letter written by his friend.

Thomas Munel, where he writes:

"The volume of which you speak, if it resembles the "pin address" (sketches in Hindustan with other poems), I can't doubt, is calculated to produce a considerable sensation. That poem is highly fit for popularity, considered in its subject, these being a strong demand in the imagination of our contemporaries. For the scenery and situations which you have studied..... (Letters no; 361, April 16, 1820) .

In few of his poems, specially in 'Queen Mab', 'Hellas', 'The Triumph of Life' and in 'Fragments of an unfinished drama', we find Indian nature, Indian atmosphere, Indian culture and its characters and colours. The image of chariot which i found in the poem "The Triumph of

life” is similar to that of the chariot of Jagannath depicted by contemporary eastern scholars. Again “Veiled maid” of ‘Alastor’ and “Asia” of Prometheus Unbound” reflect Indian home and its background. On the contrary, Indian Gods like Siva, Kamdeva, Buddha and Brahma are found to be mentioned in the poem “Queen Mab”.

That Shelley was influenced by India and Indian colours is excellently clear from a letter that he wrote to his friend Hogg :

“..... Have you read a novel “The Missionary” by Miss Owenson? It is a divine thing. Luxima, Indian priestess, were it possible to embody such a character is perfect. “The Missionary” has been my companion for sometimes. I advise you to read it.”

The various Indian elements brought a change to the mind of Shelley. His intensive study, the renaissance attitude, obstacles of life helped him to compose the supreme pieces which enriched his position to the pinnacle as a poet. For a few moments living under the veil of frustration, alienation, a little bit of happiness and sorrows, if we read his lyrical poems, we feel as if we are audience and are watching the songs of a singer, namely Shelley.

Having a revolutionary attitude, being influenced by the classics of France and India, Shelly’s personality became much or peculiar and abstract. Lacking the set rules, he tried to establish a new with the help of the instrument “Illusion”. Being a son of the richest family of Sussex he lived a life of poverty and frustration, parted from the contemporary society. His untimely born “The necessity of atheism,” his marriage with Harriet Westbrook, his elopement with Godwin’s daughter---- all these combined brought a critical juncture to his life. Later on, in Italy he lived a peaceful life keeping touch with Byron, Leigh Hunt etc. but he could not realize the meaning of the word “peace” in his heart of heart.

This great poet lived a life of revolution and died a tragic death in the lap of the ocean:

“I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed.” (Ode to the West Wind) He had fallen victim to the irony of fate. But he roared like a lion until his death: no frustration could make him a lame; no suppression could make him a manikin. How all these were possible? Indian philosophy is the eastern philosophy of satisfaction and was the cause behind the satisfied personality.”