
THE THEME OF 'SPIRITUAL EXISTENCE IN NATURE' IN THE POEMS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

William Wordsworth (7 April 1770- 23 April 1850), was the poet of the movement of the romantic revival. He believed that an invisible power is working behind the whole activities of Nature. He was priest, harbinger, slave as well as master of Nature. Wordsworth with S.T. Coleridge, helped to launch the Romantic Age in English with the joint publication of Lyrical Ballad in 1798. He was poet Laureate from 1843 to 1850. One of his most famous works is Prelude (1799) that is a romantic epic and semi-autobiographical poem, considered his magnum opus. He has enriched English Literature with his large number of poems like Lucy Grey (1800), To Milton (1802), The Cuckoo (1802), Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood (1807), The Solitary Reaper (1807), Composed Upon Westminster Bridge (1807), The World Is Too Much With Us (1807), The Daffodils (1807), and so on. It was he who hosted the flag of Romanticism. He was highly influenced with French Revolution. This is why he advocated very first that the diction of the poetry should be the diction of such person who lived in the lap of Nature. He was always in the favor of liberalism in literature. For him Nature is teacher, guide, nurse, balm and panacea of all human miseries. There is a fragrance of ecofeminism in his literary works. He established a profound connection between man, spirituality and Nature. His work reveals a deep-rooted spiritual engagement with the natural world, positioning it as a source of solace, inspiration, and moral guidance. His poetry underscores Nature's capacity to evoke profound emotional and spiritual responses. Wordsworth's poetry offers a compelling exploration of the intricate relationship among man, Nature and spirituality. Through his lyrical evocations of the natural world, he invites readers to embark on a journey of self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment.

Keywords: Romanticism, Nature, Spirituality, Eco-feminism, Liberalism, Humanity.

“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” -**William Wordsworth**

1. INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth's spiritual faith in Nature has already been an integral part of Indian culture. In India all the natural elements like river, mountain, sun, moon, banayan tree, peepal tree and other heavenly powers (visible and invisible) are worshipped since centuries. Wordsworth was throughout his life guided by the idea of 'simple living and high thinking'. It was the rule and the guiding principle of his life. His life was a living embodiment of the purity, the lofty temper, the utter transparency of his soul, which we find in his life and in his literary works. He was like his own skylark-

"Type of the wise who soar, but never roam;
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home !"

William Wordsworth revealed against the stereotyped moulds and excessively changed diction of the 18th century. His pronouncement that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and that it takes its origin from "emotions recollected in tranquility", heralded the new school of poetry- The Romantic school. Wordsworth started from an interest in life rather than in art. In his doctrine of poetry he emphasized the ordinary man and the language spoken by him. Wordsworth laid emphasis on simple objects as best themes of poetry. Like Rousseau he advocated the self seeking individuals were incapable of being move by those primary feelings and emotions. He postulated a hypothetical list of observation, description, sensibility, reflection, imagination and judgment.

Wordsworth's Spiritual Development

Spirituality is the science of soul. He believed that an invisible power is working behind all activities of Nature. His love of Nature was moved true and tender. Nature comes to occupy in his poem such as independent status. Nature really comes to her own for the first time in the poetry of Wordsworth. He is "harbinger of Nature", "the high priest of Nature" and the "worshipper of Nature". Since his boyhood the external world was more important and regardable for him. Wordsworth for the first time, in English poetry, gave to Nature a separate soul and life of her own.

Herbert Read says-

"The distinction drawn between the life of Nature and the life of Man, is perhaps the most important point to remember in considering Wordsworth's poetry."

Wordsworth spiritualized Nature and made her a moral teacher. He believed in the education of Man by Nature. He realized that there is a divine spirit pervading all the objects of Nature. He preached that company of Nature gives Joy to the human heart. He looked upon Nature as exercising a healing factor. He also emphasized the moral influence of Nature. He elevated Nature to heights of spiritual Glory and made it a better moral teacher-

Wordsworth says-

"One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can."

This shows that there is mutual consciousness or 'mystic intercourse'. Wordsworth initiates his readers into the secret of the soul's communion with Nature. He depicted that Nature can teach as more than sages or monk. For Wordsworth Nature is not 'red in tooth and claw' like Tennyson, wild and stormy like Byron, darkest scenery of the sea and sky like Shelley or highly sensuous like Keats. Wordsworth stressed upon the moral influence of Nature and the need of man's spiritual discourse with her.

W.H. Hudson says-

"Wordsworth find a never failing principle of joy in Nature."

Wordsworth also believes that there is a "Holy Plan" at work in world of leaves and flowers.

Wordsworth as the First Great Poet of Nature

Wordsworth is the high priest and worshiper of Nature. Nature finds its most sublime as well as sustaining expression in his literary works. As Alexander Pope is known as a poet of the town and artificial life, so is Wordsworth aptly considered the greatest poet of the

countryside and of the life of Nature in its physical and spiritual aspects. All the poets earlier to Wordsworth as Burns, Cowper, Crabbe and Goldsmith had portrayed a beautiful appreciation of Nature in its external aspects in their poems of exquisite beauty and loveliness, but none of them had seen a soul in Nature. They were also not prepared to take lessons of morality, wisdom, peace, and guidance of Nature. They felt nearly external charms without having any mystical and philosophical approach to its inner life and spiritual or moral message. It is Wordsworth who reveals the inner soul of Nature in his poems and to make it a better teacher than moral philosophers of the present and the past. In Nature, he was concerned for less with the sensuous manifestations that delight most of our Nature poets, than with the spiritual that he finds underline these manifestations.

Four Stages of Wordsworth's Treatment of Nature

The spiritual conception of Nature did not come at once. There were four stages in the development of his love of the outer world. This stage of "dizzy joys" and "aching raptures" came to an end with his experience of human sorrow and suffering during French Revolution. He had kept watch over human morality and in his eyes Nature took on a "sober colouring". It was soon followed by the last and the most important stage - the stage of the spiritual and mystical interpretation of Nature. Wordsworth now felt "there is a spirit in the wood".

- **First Stage - The Period of the Blood**

Wordsworth's youth and formative years of life were spent in the midst of Nature's beautiful surroundings. In this first stage his love for Nature was without any mystical and spiritual touch. In his youth he was attracted by the physical beauty of Nature. He haunted The hills and the Wales for the sake of angling, snaring birds, hunting and enjoying the lonely spectacles of Nature's varied life. He felt Nature with a passion which was all physical.

Wordsworth says -

"In youth from rock to rock I went
From hill to hill in discontent
Of pleasure high and turbulent,
Most pleased when most uneasy;"

- **Second stage - The Period of Senses**

It was the age of sweet sensations. Wordsworth was thrilled and enchanted by the sights and sounds of Nature. She developed a passion for sensuous beauty of Nature. He viewed Nature with a purely physical passion. He felt himself in close communication with Nature. Wordsworth says-

"The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye."

- *Tintern Abbey*

Here, the appeal of Nature to the poet to lay merely in its physical aspects. The noisy waterfall, the mountain, the dark thick wood and other natural objects had an attraction for the poet only in account of their forms and colours. He loved them all passionately but only for their outward beauty.

He goes on describing how during this period, Nature becomes the object of passion-

Wordsworth says-

“For I have learned

To look on Nature, not as in the hour
of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity”.

- **Third Stage- The Period of Imagination**

The first rumbling of the change from the physical to the spiritual interpretation of Nature are heard in the 'Nutting' like most of his schoolmates Wordsworth was "no impassioned nutter". The poem describes a boyhood trip to the woods to gather hazel-nuts. It illustrates the process and incidents by which Wordsworth's animal joy in Nature in boyhood and school days was gradually exalted and purified. The hazel- grove gave him nuts to enjoy in his school days.

He says-

"I now

Confound my present feelings with the past;
Ere from the mutilated bower I turned
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky.—
Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods."

Here, the poet reveals a typical honest awareness. He is now imagining himself to have felt things that he did not at the time feel. He is projecting adult awareness on to his childhood senses. He powerfully presented sense of Nature's active involvement in all life. In Wordsworth's poetry there is no equivalent of Blake's *Oothoon*, Shelley's *Emilly* or Keats' *Medeline*. There is the enigmatic mistress, Nature and her complex dealings with the poet generally take subtler forms than do his with her in the fragment nutting.

- **Fourth Stage- The Period of Soul, Spirit and Spirituality**

Now, Wordsworth begins to find in the objects of Nature a soul and a living spirit. In the later period of his life his physical and sensuous appreciation of Nature takes the form of spiritual and mystical apprehension of the inner spirit of Nature.

Wordsworth says-

"All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In Nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being."

- *Tinter Abbey*

The poet experiences that there is something present in Nature and that is the universal spirit. The spirit is all pervading. It is in the ocean, in the twilight, in the air, and also in the mind of the man. All the subjects and objects of thought are interfused with it. In Wordsworth's mind, animate and inanimate objects, God and Nature were so closely connected and

interwoven, that he could feel the presence of one divine spirit diffused and working through the whole realm of Nature and Man.

He says-

" I, so long A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service: rather say
With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. "

In his fourth stage Wordsworth became highly spiritual and worshiper of Nature.

2. CONCLUSION

Wordsworth's spirituality is not static. His advancement from the honesty of adolescence is one that is loaded up with change. In his childhood, he moves towards the magnificence of the Wye at Tintern as a kid move towards a Christmas tree on Christmas morning. After five years, when he visits a similar spot once more, he is more mindful of his developing spirituality. He receives reality that is available in Nature. His way of seeing in the Nature is changed, "the world is accused of the glory of God". During his second stage, he turns into a developed mind with its appearance and soothingly music gushing from the cave of the universe. Wordsworth feels that Nature offers arousing delights. He finds a connection between Nature and man which ties up the entire creation on the earth. Moreover, he receives the Nature's revelation of Divine Law. Nature is teacher, sage, guide, guardian, nurse, soothing balm and subject to worship for William Wordsworth. Spirituality has become his core philosophy of life.

"Where Wordsworth spiritualizes and Shelley intellectualizes Nature, Keats is content to express her through senses."

- Compton Rickett

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