



The Spiritual Aspects in the Poetry of John Keats

Chandan Kumar Rakesh, (Ph.D.) Department of English,
S.G.I. College, Nagra, Saran, Bihar, INDIA

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Corresponding Author

Chandan Kumar Rakesh, (Ph.D.)

Department of English,

S.G.I. College, Nagra, Saran, Bihar, INDIA

shodhsamagam1@gmail.com

Received on : 28/09/2020

Revised on : -----

Accepted on : 06/10/2020

Plagiarism : 09% on 29/09/2020



Plagiarism Checker X Originality Report

Similarity Found: 9%

Date: Tuesday, September 29, 2020

Statistics: 160 words Plagiarized / 1782 Total words

Remarks: Low Plagiarism Detected - Your Document needs Optional Improvement.

The Spiritual Aspects in the Poetry of John Keats Abstract John Keats is a great poet par excellence. He is famous for his feelings and thoughts related to nature, human beings and arts. Apart from his leanings towards hellenism, imagination, escapism, medievalism, lyricism. His poetry is also known for the elements for spiritualism.

A thorough study of his poems clearly shows his spiritual bent of mind particularly in the

Abstract

John Keats is a great poet par excellence. He is famous for his feelings and thoughts related to nature, human beings and arts. Apart from his leanings towards hellenism, imagination, escapism, medievalism, lyricism, his poetry is also known for the elements for spiritualism. A thorough study of his poems clearly shows his spiritual bent of mind particularly in the hour of critical juncture, fret and fever. Some of his poems written in the last phase of his life are full of spiritual meanings and Vedantic thoughts.

Keywords

Spiritualism, Sensuousness, Mysticism, Fret and fever.

It is Keats' deep and profound thoughts related to the mysticism and spiritualism that merit our attention much today particularly in his odes. Keats has shown his brilliance about the mystical approach of life which is very much identical with the thoughts and concepts of a number of snints and sages of the world. Today Keats' genius is recognised by the literory critics as well as his readers. Tennyson the most fastifious of the Victorians declared that, "Keats with his high Spiritual vision would have been, the greatest of all of us"¹ Prof. Stopford Brooke considers Keats' odes as, "above criticism, pure gold of poetry-virgin gold."² While Prof Selincourt is raptures over Keats' odes. He says, that in the odes he (Keats) has no master; and their indefinable beauty is so direct and so distinctive an effluence of his soul that he can have no disciple.

John Keats who suffered a lot in his life evolved his own philosophy which is closely related to spiritual and mystical thoughts of great sages and saints. His realization of self and beauty

is very remarkable. Keats' concept of beauty was all encompassing, he saw life clearly and felt intensely the terrible truth of its evils and sufferings; he had a distinct realization of self and reality. Thus idea of reality and self and its annihilation was as real as the evil that destroys it. He was an ardent admirer of Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton; he believed that a great poet like Shakespeare looked at human life so intensely: felt its pain acutely, saw terrible truths of the evils so much so that it became an element of truth.

John Keats, in his early phase of life was very much captivated towards the enthralling beauty and enticing fancy. But when he came in contact with the drab reality of life, he developed his own spiritual concept. Keats suggests a fearful aesthetic possibility of being victimized by a false, illegitimate fancy in one's unconsciousness. In 'The Poet' Keats is highly democratic and defines the social aspect of poetry, to assimilate all animate and inanimate, to be master of one's mother language that is a social instrument of fellowship, to suspend one's own identity, and thus serve a social purpose. His philosophy seems to be destructive of poetic imagination in 'Lamia', where 'all charms' seem to perish 'at the mere touch of cold philosophy' and 'clip an angel's wings' and further, the same philosophy is responsible to, conquer all mysteries by rule and line. We find similar experience in 'Sleep and Poetry' where he bids good bye to enslaving enchantment.

Through out his life Keats continued to be an ardent lover and worshipper of beauty, and the ultimate aim of Keats had to be to reconstruct ideal beauty. Beauty was, for him no less than God, and his devotion to it was more than religious passion. The passion for beauty was so intense in Keats that on Oct, 27th, 1818, he wrote to Richard Woodhouse :

I feel assured I should write from the mere Yearning and fondness I have for the Beautiful even in my night's labour should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever shine upon them. But even now I am perhaps not speaking from myself but from some character in whose soul I now live.³

Keats's universal concept in visualizing beauty in both ugly and the sublime, the low and the high is very spiritual and mystic. A great saint who attains the supreme bliss does not make any discrimination between the rich and the poor, the rough and the sublime;

Keats as a thinker is better seen in his realization that poetry of the highest order should not divorce itself from life. Great poetry can be achieved only when the poet has passed numerous ordeals and sufferings and has attained maturity. No doubt, in his earlier phase, he craved for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts, but he soon grew tired of sensuousness.

Keats's principal objective as a poet of beauty was to explore truth in beauty and beauty in all aspects of life. He loved the abstract idea of beauty in all things. In this context Bradley remarks that this search for beauty in truth was the poet's end and therefore by virtue of his intuitive perception he discovered this blend of beauty and truth in all manifestations. In the opinion of the poet, beauty and truth are not two different entities, they are inseparably and indistinguishably one. Arnold says that they are connected and made one.

In this context of Keats's conception of beauty and truth, we can draw an analogy between his creed of beauty and the Indian Vedantic concept of God as an epitome of Satyam, Shivam and Sundram. The Hindu Vedantists realize God in terms of these Sanskrit words. According to their conception, God represents Truth (Satyam) and Joy (Shivam) are Beauty (Sundram). He is the Supreme Truth that radiates eternal beauty, which is a source of joy forever. The Hindu devotees of God also conceive of him and identify him as Sachidananda in terms of the abstract qualities—sat, chit, and ananda. The Mundaka Upanishad and the Bhagwad Gita depict the figure of God as an embodiment of Satyam, Shivam and Sundram. To Keats, truth presupposes beauty and joy. From this view point his implicit

import of these words – beauty and truth—is identical to the vedantic interpretation of God. Just as Keats uses these words with profound philosophical implication, the Hindu saints too use these words to describe God in terms of beauty, joy and truth.

Keats's famous poem, "Ode to a Nightingale", contains the rich Vedantic concept of Yoga, enshrined in our great heritage particularly in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, which very brilliantly shows us the way of liberation by dint of renunciation. The poem, "Ode to a Nightingale" contains the process of liberation from mundane reality to Supreme Bliss. Dr. A.N.Prasad in his scholarly article, "The Vedantic Concept of Yoga in Keats" "Ode to a Nightingale" finds spiritual and vedantic mysticism in this poem and he rightly thinks:

The poem beautifully presents the process of 'Yoga', that is, union with the Supreme Reality, hidden beneath the ephemeral world. The poem, as we shall see, has three parts -

- (a) materialistic, mundane and other world full of fret and fever, trials and tribulations;
- (b) the process of escape of the soul from the dull brain which 'perlexes and retards' : and
- (c) the realization of the supreme bliss of art and beauty which makes the poet great.⁴

It is interesting to note that when a man's mind is entangled with various problems and upheavals of life, he begins to ponder over a thing spiritually and he also wants to get the Supreme Bliss by neglecting the physical world. We know that when the poem, "Ode to a Nightingale" was composed, at that moment, Keats' mind was full of tensions and tussels, fret and fever of life. Through various letters written by Keats to his friends, we know that at the time of the composition of this poem, Keats was undergoing so many carking cares and corroding anxieties, 'the weariness, the fever and the fret', the pangs of unrealized love, his frustration in his affairs with Fanny Browne; the death of his brother, Tom, the unbearable blows of the incurable disease etc.

When the poem opens, we find Keats in a sad and lonely mood. His letter shows that he is very shocked at the dishonesty and disloyalty of his beloved. The death of his brother also added fuel to the fire. So all these thoughts collectively organised made the poet hearts full of grief and sorrow. Perhaps this is why the poet wants to take the help of wine:

O for a draught of vantage! That hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep delved earth.
Tasting of flora and the country green
Dance and provencal song, and sun burnt mirth
Or for a beaker full of warmth south
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim.⁵

A critic is of the view that if this stanza is analyzed critically it is found that the whole stanza deals with the pleasures of five senses which are related to the short-lived body bound to be burnt or buried in the soil. Draught of wine and that too, produced from deep delved earth transports the drunkard from the world of grief and sorrow to the world of dream for a very brief period of time. Its effect is very temporary, perhaps this is why Keats in his next stanza does not want to go to the realm of divinity and art with the help of wine. Keats also wants to take help of dancing, music, merry making, and feasting. He longs for a cup of wine of the warm southern region. He longs for these sensuous pleasures only to forget the grieving world completely and to escape into the dim forest and join the nightingale:

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.⁶

Conclusion

Thus this brief critical analysis of Keats's various poems clearly shows that Keats has a great taste for spiritual and philosophical ideas which he has projected in his various nature poems and even in his autobiographical poems. Before the fatal disease which caused the death of John Keats, the poet John Keats was a man of seeking beauty in the lap of nature or a man having fed up with the trials and tribulations of life, wanted to escape from the drab reality to the world of dream and fantasies. But as Keats matured in years and the changing circumstances, he also matured in moral, spiritual and philosophical concerns. When Keats saw in this world a bitter struggle for existence, his unfulfilled desires, the unwanted bumps and obstacles in the form of disease and fake love, his tender heart unconsciously burst with uncontrollable passions and thoughts which lead him to self consciousness, renunciation and mystical thoughts and observations.

References

1. Tennyson: quoted by Herbert, J.C.Grierson & J.C Smith, (1965), *A Critical History of English Poetry*, London : Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1965, P.370
2. Prof. Stopford Brook, quoted by B.L.Shaney, in *Critical Excursion* (Delhi: Yugbodh Pub. House,1979), P.60
3. Hugh I' Anson Fausset, (ed) *Letters of John Keats* (Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd), P.223
4. Prasad, Amar Nath: The Vedantic Concept of Yoga in Keats' "*Ode to Nightingale*", Recritiquing John Keats, Sarup & Sons Pub., New Delhi.
5. Keats, John, "*Ode to Nightingale*", *Golden Treasury*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1964, P.248
6. Ibid., P.249
