



ROMANTICISM: FLOWERING AND FACETS

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ABSTRACT:

An ideology of Romanticism is an inevitable corollary of the Renaissance and reformation which brought into vogue an unusual impulse in art and life. An in-depth study of the contemporary social life reveals that certain crucial events like the emergence of new idealistic philosophy of European thinkers, outbreak of French Revolution, political upheaval in America and the onset of the Industrial Revolution gave an impetus to the Romantic Movement that moulded literature into a new fashion. William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge who postulated their poetic manifesto in Lyrical Ballads (1798) emphasized the realistic representation of life and imparted a new vision to the blooming generation of poets. As a result of this, the earlier literary trend of classicism that lay emphasis on the faculties of reason, intellect and order paved the way to Romanticism. The ideology of Romanticism has its superstructure on the foundation of imagination, intuition, ethics and morality. Different interpretations of critics and historians highlight the fact that this new trend in poetry is an all-inclusive generalization that reveals the thoughts and feelings, the aspirations and ideas, the doubts and struggles, the faith and hope, of a great intense, complex and turbulent period of history, is rightly termed as Romanticism.

Keywords:

Romanticism, Classicism, Utilitarianism, Masonic, Grandeur

INTRODUCTION:

Pulse of the Time: An in-depth study of an ideology implies an effort to define and correlate phenomena, which in casual reading remain vague and hazy. The task of an inquisitive person is to pursue his inquiries along ever-widening lines so that he would be able to formulate the fundamental features that are otherwise taken for granted. For analysing the quintessence of Romanticism, it is necessary to highlight various factors such as the origin and development of the ideology; the age and period during which its flowering took place; the socio-political events





which prompted the emergence of this new trend in poetry; the underlying characteristics which link the writers of the period together in a Masonic brotherhood; the emotional tide which ebbs and flows throughout literary history and above all, the general inclination of the writers of this age, more precisely, whether the romantics were living in the world of ivory tower or they possessed social and moral conscience. A study of these factors reveals that an ideology of Romanticism is an inevitable corollary of the Renaissance and reformation which transformed not only English but also European life. It is an unusual impulse in art and life which deals with the dignity and importance of man as man and unfolds the glories of the world of nature. These ideas govern the political climate of the eighteenth century. They were rather gradually working in men's minds throughout the political unrest of this period. Although the first flowering of romanticism in England is attributed to the horrors of the French Revolution, there were so many other factors such as the new idealistic philosophy of European thinkers, the political upheaval in America and the onset of the industrial revolution. The romanticists looked at society as a whole and confirmed the fact that this period does not coincide with a phase of exuberance but with that of unrest which urged them to speak on behalf of the dispossessed section of society.

MATERIAL AND METHOD:

Literature study

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Impact of Eighteenth Century Philosophical Thought The causes that gave an impetus for the upsurge of the ideology of romanticism were manifold. However the impact of the eighteenth century philosophy and thought was one of the prime factors. The leading philosophers and





thinkers changed the outlook of the contemporary writers because of which a new kind of literature started springing up. In this regard, we can quote the names of numerous philosophers and thinkers. But here we are concerned with the views of those who really moulded literature into a new fashion. Hence a study of their writings becomes imperative. From this point of view, the contribution of Lord Shaftsbury is quite significant. As a typical English moralist, he influenced not only the philosophical and metaphysical world of his time but also explained the intricacies of the doctrines of his Natural Morality. Later, John Locke presented his empirical views in the form of his Essays on Human Understandings which proved to be a motivating spirit for the succeeding generation of writers. He treats natural revelation as the fountain of knowledge and points out that all knowledge comes from experience and all experience is by way of the senses. The other spiritual thinker who had imbibed the spirit of natural religion was Samuel Clarke. He enunciated the Theory of the Law of Nature and concluded with the lesson: "Moral virtue is the foundation and the Summ, the Essence and the Life of all True Religion."¹ With the same sentimental and humanitarian zeal, George Berkeley proposed the plan of National Regeneration which he deems essential in order to quicken the conscience of an impious and corrupt age. He had a high notion of his episcopal role and presumed that it was his bounden duty to concern himself with social reforms. His writing is a staunch defence against materialism and money worship. David Hume proposed to destroy the flimsy superstructure of pure reason and pointed out what should be considered as worthwhile to use: "It is a good thing to trust to instinct, to give oneself up to Nature, without being duped by any logical illusion."² Here we see Hume closer to the romantic ideology because he demonstrates his dislike for reason and intellect which are the prerequisites of classicism. Above all, the capital impact came from a





notable French philosopher, J. J. Rousseau who was one of the forerunners of the Romantic Movement and the prophet of the French Revolution. He expressed his views practically on every aspect of the eighteenth century civilization which include conception of religion, art, education, marriage, society and government. In book after book, he propounded his ideas and dealt a severe blow to the established ideas of his time. He advocated the The Theory of Primitivism and asserted that man is happy and good in the natural state and it is only society which makes life artificial and produces evil. These assertions about the whole epistemological enterprise were analyzed by a German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Having detected certain inconsistencies in the whole affair, he sought to enunciate his epoch making Theory of Transcendentalism. It is based on the hypothesis that knowledge is a joint product of the mind and the external world, arising in experience. It was his assumption that the form of knowledge is contributed by the mind and the content is contributed by the external world. His conception of the mind denotes the subjective condition of the sensibility of an individual which is subject to change in relation to time and space. A collective impact of all such philosophical writings brought about a sea-change in the European literary taste and style which stirred the imagination of the contemporary writers and turned their thoughts in the direction of greater freedom, greater spontaneity and a richer play of fancy which set new values before the blooming generation of poets. Beginning of the Romantic Movement The continental philosophical and literary intercourse all over Europe influenced the intelligentsia of the contemporary European world. The overall focus of their writings was on the well-being of the society in general and liberty to the passion of an individual in particular. Such kind of ideas and views which were percolated through their philosophical writings, made a remarkable impact on the sensibilities of the writers of this age. They assimilated the





ideas of the contemporary thinkers and changed their attitude to life and literature altogether. The earlier pattern of classicists which was acknowledged as the refined and pleasing communication to the educated ears of civilized community soon fell out of vogue. Obviously some sort of deviation in the literary style was observed. The succeeding generation of writers who were labelled as romantics emphasized both the purpose of pleasing and edifying. Through their poetic creed, they asserted that the major function of poetry is the expression of emotions and feelings which shows that its relation to the composer is more significant than its relation to the audience. This shift in the function of poetry demonstrates fidelity to the poetic creed which marked a violent revolution in the literary domain. This simple test of fidelity tells us where and when a particular ideology has been in the ascendant and where and when it has waned. By this simple logic, we can very well judge how far, at different epochs, classicism was at the zenith of its popularity and how far it has been considered as detrimental for paralyzing individual genius. As a matter of fact, many contemporary writers had such kind of social commitment but very few had the knack of manifesting inner world in the outer form. Among all these stalwarts, Joseph Warton has been cited as the first literary figure to question the prevailing Augustan taste and practice. Edmund Gosse describes him: "The earliest person in the modern world to observe what vain sacrifices have been made by the classicists and in particularly by the English classicists."³ According to him, Joseph Warton's youthful poem, *The Enthusiast* (1740) is the first clear manifestation of the great Romantic Movement. It depicts the essence of romantic hysteria which is unwaveringly emphasized and is entirely new in literature. The general theme of revealing the superiority of nature to man becomes quite explicit from the following couplet: "To dwell in palaces and high-roofed halls Than in God's forest, architect supreme?"⁴ This is a beautiful





example of the superiority of nature over conscious art. It is his conviction that man finds much pleasure in 'God's forest' than in palaces and 'high-roofed halls'. This poem is a landmark in the history of English literature which marks the beginning of the Romantic Movement. Lyrical Ballads, which was the first rousing call or the first articulate protest against the matter and form of the predominant type of poetry, marked the beginning of the romantic era. The authors of this book, William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge knew clearly what they had done and what they wished to accomplish. William Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge and Southey belonged to the same generation of romanticists which was in the full flower of youth in 1789. They had before them a specific aim and they tried to accomplish it through their writings. But the following generation of the romanticists, which came to manhood about 1815, showed it to be intrepidly liberal. The earlier romanticists showed concern to the emotions that are common to all and sought to idealize them into poetry while the later romanticists had priority for personal emotions and feelings. Although their political principles were different, they had a common faith in poetry which bound them together. Their supreme faculty was imagination, which took the place of reason for the solution of the riddle of life and nature. Individually speaking, certain predominant qualities are associated with each poet, Wordsworth gives importance to the familiar objects, simplicity and suggestiveness; Coleridge is endowed with remarkable critical insight and chooses the supernatural as his theme; Southey possesses a genuine gift of comic exaggeration; while Shelley, Byron and Keats whose literary works appeared after the first decade of the nineteenth century, had their own principles. Shelley's poetry is marked by the transcendental reading of nature; Byron reflects his bold imagination while Keats dedicates himself to aestheticism. Interpretations of Romanticism With the advent of the Romantic Movement, tenets of classicism like order, clarity, tranquility,





importance to the faculties of reason and intellect began losing control. A study of the critical commentaries of historians shows that romanticists revolted against the classical conventions which had fettered the natural flow of emotions and sentiments. As a result of this, Romanticism, a new form in the poetic style, obsessed English minds with its glory, glamour and grandeur. There are different interpretations of this ideology of romanticism. Certain critics have their focus on the imaginative, intuitive and mystical aspects of his ideology. For example, Cazamian defines the spirit of Romanticism: "It is an accentuated predominance of emotional life, provoked or directed by the exercise of imaginative vision."⁵ This definition gives stress on sensibility and imagination not as independent entities but as a fusion of the two. It shows that there is a close reciprocal dependence of these two inner faculties, and through the exaltation of the groups of tendencies, the poetic outpouring is made. Pater deals with the awakened sensibility, which led to the study of the past or to fond dallying with medievalism. He found this aspect more significant because some writers turned from the modern conditions of life towards the folklore and legendary wealth of the middle ages. Therefore, Pater describes Romanticism: "The addition of strangeness to beauty"⁶ and points out that a faculty of nostalgic strangeness in an artist is always in quest of a certain form beauty. For Herford, "Extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility"⁷ is the true romantic spirit. This definition reflects faculty of consciousness as an integral part of a poetic sensibility. Paul Elmer More considers Romanticism as: "The illusion of beholding the infinite within the stream of nature itself, instead of apart from that stream."⁸ It was his conviction that science fails to find out any indication of a spiritual or ideal purpose in the flux of natural phenomenon. Victor Hugo opened up a new horizon before us. He defines Romanticism: "Liberalism in literature. Mingling the grotesque with the tragic or sublime; the complete truth of life."⁹





Victor Hugo here points out that Romanticism is an element in literature and art, which does not tie down the individual genius in terms of its theme, treatment and style. Theodore Watts Dunton explains Romanticism from aesthetic standpoint. He defines Romanticism “The Renaissance of wonder in poetry and art”¹⁰. This short definition denotes that the art objects evoke aesthetic response within us. The subtle sense of mystery which is a compendium of awe in the presence of the unknown and wonder in the presence of known leads an individual to express his exquisite response to the manifestations of beauty. Alan Rodway, in his *The Romantic Conflict* treats romanticism from a sociological standpoint that signifies both an outward conflict and inner conflict which indicates the conflict between the poets and their society as well as the conflict within themselves. On this ground, he adopted the hypothesis-“Romanticism is the expression of artist as outcast.”¹¹ He believed that the romantics suffered from outcast complex or the complex of alienation which urged them to manifest their ideas and emotions with special reference to the prevalent socio-political conditions. Conclusion The above interpretations of this ideology of romanticism reveal the fact that it is an all-inclusive generalization. As we have seen that different critics and historians have analyzed this ideology from different points of view, we cannot overlook the fact that different poets of this age had their own characteristic views towards this ideology and they described it in their own characteristic fashion. This is owing to their differences in terms of origin, schooling and formative influences, but collectively they were keenly conscious of the differences between the two worlds. One was the world of ideal truth, goodness and beauty, while the other was the world of actual appearances, which to the idealist was so obviously full of untruth, ignorance, evil, ugliness and wretchedness as to compel the composer to disappointment and indignation. The romanticists desired the world of congenialities for which they had before them a





definite aim or a vision of just social order based on freedom, equality and justice. They externalized their inner conflict through their writings and emerged as prophets, social reformers and commentators and their poetry, which reveals the thoughts and feelings, the aspirations and ideas, the doubts and struggles, the faith and hope, of a great intense, complex and turbulent period of history, is rightly termed as Romanticism.

CONCLUSION:

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11

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48

