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## INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

The Bible being the Holy Words of God is the sacred book of the Christians. The literary influence of the Bible has been tremendous, all pervasive and perennial. In fact, the Bible has been providing the English men of letters spiritual themes and also modulated their literary style. It has gifted ample vocabulary, most beautiful quotations, maxims and phrases. The whole range of English language and literature is much indebted to the Bible for its dignity and richness.

**Keywords:** Bible, Literature, Language

The greatest and the most popular version of the Bible is King James I Authorized Version of Bible (1611), a work of 47 recognized biblical scholars for four years. They compiled the Hebrew, the Greeks, the Latin vulgate and many other translations into a new excellence. Its sweet fragrance pervades almost the entire arena of English language and literature. As Moody and Lovett put it

“In the King’s Bible we possess monument of English prose of no particular age, but gathering into itself the strength and sweetness of all ages.”

According to Compton-Rickett: “The influence of Bible is two folds – there is the rhetorical influence of the Old Testament and the convention of the new. It has both the thematic and stylistic influence.”

The Bible carried new coined expressions to all the strata of society: ‘tender mercy’, ‘loving kindness’, ‘peace maker’, ‘glad tidings’, ‘scape goat’ and so on. Many Biblical phrases are now used as

idioms, ‘to hope against hope’, ‘olive branches’, ‘to cast pearl before swine’, ‘the eleventh hour’, ‘wash one’s hands of’, ‘to kill the flatted calf’, ‘a howling wilderness’, ‘a broken reed’, ‘a good Samaritan’, ‘swear of the brow’, and so on.

The influence of the Bible spreads all over English literature, particularly the thought and style of great English prose writers. This Holy book ignited Bunyan a lot to pen down his magnum opus, Pilgrim’s Progress. The historian Clarendon and Fuller, catch some measure of the stately rhetoric of the Old Testament. While Sir

In the world of English poetry Milton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Pope, Dryden, Tennyson, Browning was highly charged up with the light of the Bible.

English drama has also been influenced by the Bible. In fact, it was in the middle of the Church that English drama was born and brought up. Previously Miracle and Morality plays of the Middle Ages originated from Bible. Playwrights like

Marlowe, Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, G.B. Shaw owed much to Bible.

Among other writers Cromwell, Wesley, Richards, George Fox, Emerson, Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, and also Mahatma Gandhi were under the influence of it that changed their outlook and sharpened their imagination.

The literary influence of the Authorized Version of the Bible has been wide, all pervasive and perennial. In fact, the Bible provided the English men of letters, scriptural themes and also modulated their literary style. It has provided vocabulary, most beautiful quotations, maxims and phrases too.

Wisdom literature: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (Sirach), Wisdom Psalms: Psalms, Song of Solomon, Lamentations. Novella: Esther (Judith, Tobit, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees)

The influence of the Bible on English has been both thematic and stylistic; that is, it has provided the English men of letters Scriptural themes and has also modulated their literary style. Thus Bunyan and Oscar Wilde imitated the simple, rhythmical, repetitive style of the Bible.

The Bible has influenced authors in various aspects. Poets and writers may take a scene from the Scripture as the subject of a poem or story. The language of a piece of writing may echo a passage of Scripture. An author may incorporate a theme from a scriptural book or story in his or her work.

The poems "The Lamb" and "The Shepherd" are clearly symbolisms of Jesus Christ and the Biblical interpretation of God as a shepherd, guiding sheep/men. Blake writes, "He is called by thy name, / for he calls himself a Lamb" which is a direct reference to the Apostle John's description of Jesus. "And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36) Here, Blake intends to use the imagery of the Lamb as a sign of creation by God.

The poem, "The Little Black Boy", was written as the poet's response to the evils prevailing in the society at that point of time like child labour. The poet's ability to holistically view the universe is evident when he describes earth as "a little space".

This is a direct contradiction to the geocentric theory that the Church propagated at a point of time. Traces of the Bible are found in this poem too, in the use of words such as "lamb". If one were to point at a trademark feature of Blake's poetry, it would be the description of simple elements of nature in splendid, yet facile language with subtle echoes of concepts, events or people in Christianity and the Bible. His poetry uses images and illustrations to the effect that the readers are able to visually imagine the anecdotes and occurrences in the Bible and hence enjoy them better.

However, he disagreed with many of the aspects of the Christian religion as an "institutionalized system." Blake believed a person can only truly understand Christ through knowledge, every person should desire to be like Jesus, all men are the sons of God, and God's religion as an "institutionalized system." Blake believed a person can only truly understand Christ through knowledge, every person should desire to be like Jesus, all men are the sons of God, and God's presence can be seen in all of humanity. Blake articulated his biblical outlook on life and his opinions of the church through several of his poems and essays. "The Lamb" exhibits Blake's outlook on life as a Christian. The poem is best known for "the lamb" symbolizing innocence. In literature, a lamb represents innocence and the biblical lamb represents Jesus Christ's purity and innocent sacrifice.

His dynamic way of interpreting the Bible could not be accepted by the Church in those times or by a large majority of the readers because that was an era when the Church had a lot of influence on the State. He uses the image of 'lamb' to symbolize Christ, perhaps because the emblem of the Moravian Church is the Lamb of God, surrounded by the Latin inscription meaning "Our lamb has conquered, let us follow him".

Also, it can be perceived as Jesus. "The lamb is also a metaphor for the child speaker, who belongs to Christ's 'flock.' In Christianity, Jesus is compared both to a lamb going to the sacrifice and to a shepherd who protects his flock of lambs and sheep". At the beginning of this poem, it starts out with the question of "Little Lamb, who made thee... I am a

child and thou a lamb" (Line 1, 17). It refers to the saying in the Bible, "...in the beginning when god created the heavens and the earth. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind".

The lamb has the same name as the creator. "Lamb" is the name of the creator, the lamb is a symbol of Jesus Christ. The child continues to explain to the lamb and answer his own questions that God is the number one provider and has given him life, clothing, food, and such a sweet voice. The answer to the child's concern is God. Blake believed that God was the creator... ... middle of paper ... ... engenderment in a simplistic light of all things being made by God, where as "The Tyger" seeks to understand the motivation behind formation

The diction portrays the Tyger as evil, with a "twist[ed]" heart (10). Lines 13-16 make up the fourth stanza and compare the creator to a blacksmith. Lines 19 and 20 ask two questions that are different from the rest: "Did he smile his work to see?/Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" These lines ask of the Tyger if his maker was happy to see what a monstrous being he had created, and if it was the same maker that made the pure and innocent Lamb. In a sense, ... ... middle of paper ... ... lets the reader find the deeper meanings in the poem. The Tyger stands for darkness and evil, while the Lamb is exact opposite

*Proverbs & phrases:* Many proverbs and phrases, which are in common use in modern English, are the gifts of the Bible. Quotations from the Bible are given profusely. English language has been enriched by the Bible so much that a proper assessment is practically impossible. Some illustrations of Biblical phrases are given below:

'arose as one man', 'broken reed', 'a law unto themselves', 'the man of sin', 'moth and rust', 'clear as crystal', 'the eleventh hour', 'city of refuse', 'whited sepulcher', 'wash one's hands off' and many other familiar scriptural phrases and allusions. From Tyndale we owe 'long-suffering', 'peacemaker', 'stumbling block', 'the fatted calf', 'filthy lucre', 'mercy seat', 'day spring' and 'scapegoat'. From Coverdale we have 'tender mercy', 'loving-kindness', 'valley of the shadow of death', 'avenges of blood' etc. Many such Biblical phrases and idioms are

current in modern English without even knowing its source.

*Poetry:* Right from Chaucer to the present day the influence of the Bible is clearly discernible in poetry. Even Chaucer drew the material for some of his tales from the Bible. Spenser's *Fairy Queen* is also "steeped in the humanism of the classics and Italian literature and it everywhere testifies to the strenuous idealism and moral earnestness of Protestantism". Milton's *Paradise Lost* is Biblical.

**PROVERBS and PHRASES:** Many proverbs and phrases, which are in common use in modern English, are the gifts of the Bible. Quotations from the Bible are given profusely. English language has been enriched by the Bible so much that a proper assessment is practically impossible. Some illustrations of Biblical phrases are given below: 'arose as one man', 'broken reed', 'a law unto themselves', 'the man of sin', 'moth and rust', 'clear as crystal', 'the eleventh hour', 'city of refuse', 'whited sepulcher', 'wash one's hands off' and many other familiar scriptural phrases and allusions. From Tyndale we owe 'long-suffering', 'peacemaker', 'stumbling block', 'the fatted calf', 'filthy lucre', 'mercy seat', 'day spring' and 'scapegoat'. From Coverdale we have 'tender mercy', 'loving-kindness', 'valley of the shadow of death', 'avenges of blood' and so on. Many such Biblical phrases and idioms are current in modern English without even knowing its source.

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clove, broke in poetry mastered by Tennyson, Morris, Coleridge and so on. Instead of using 's' ending in verbs we have: "He prayeth best who loveth best/All things both great and small"- *Ancient Mariners*.

#### Superlatives, Scriptural Proper Names:

On the analogy of the scriptural 'holy of holies' which contains a Hebrew manner of expressing the superlatives, we get in modern English similar phrases such as: In my heart of hearts, the place of all places, a friend of friends, the pearl of pearls, a prince of princes and so on.

Further scriptural proper names are often used as appellatives to designate types of character. As for example, 'to raise Cain' meaning to make a determined angry fuss; 'David and Jonathan' means 'any pair of devoted friends'.

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Revival of Some Archaic Words: Biblical usage has revived some of the lost words into full life. Such words are like 'damsel' for young women, 'raiment and apparel' for dress, 'firmament', a poetical synonym for sky'.

The modern world has seen many changes; but it has, so far, seen no

movement that has shaken the supremacy of the greatest of English books 'The Bible'.

#### CONCLUSION

The Bible has been providing the English men of letters spiritual themes and also modulated their literary style. It has gifted ample vocabulary, most

beautiful quotations, maxims and phrases. The whole range of English language and literature is much indebted to the Bible for its dignity and richness.

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