



## WORDSWORTHIAN ROMANTICISM: A DALIT CRITIQUE

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### ABSTRACT

Wordsworthian Romanticism, which shattered the neoclassical dogmas and conventions, pervaded the fragrance of 'Nature' in the literary world. With the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* and its preface, Wordsworth propounded the Romantic theory of poetry and proved that poetry is entangled with the feelings and emotions of human mind. The Neoclassical strictness which appealed to the human reason was replaced by the fluidity and tenderness of human mind, elated with the sense of freedom. The masses or the laity who were relegated from the mainstream of literature became the fulcrum of discussion in the literary genre with the romantic revival. Romanticism kept itself away from the tangles of language and complex themes to make poetry accessible to the masses. Thus romanticism brought poetry from the desks of think-tanks to the vicinity of the laity to 'interest man permanently'.

Though Wordsworthian Romanticism gave importance to common man's theme and language, the problems of the lower classes of the society is away from the Wordsworthian romantic realm. The poet who stood for the common man's theme and language found the pathetic conditions of the poor as a part of the Nature. While Romanticism itself was a great change from the existing, traditional literary style, it lacked the call for revolutionary change in the pathetic conditions of the poor class.

Here arises the necessity to analyze Wordsworthian Romanticism in the light of Dalit criticism. This paper tries to scrutinize Wordsworthian Romanticism with a Dalit eye.

**Keywords:** Wordsworth, Romanticism, Dalit, Common Man

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Changes make life worth living. Life without changes makes hell in this very world. The changeless world brings boredom and fatigue. The changing mind, the changing world, the changing shapes of the clouds, the colours of the sky, the changing positions, the changing men and matters makes the world move forward filling the minds with expectations. The natural changes beautify the world and bring breath to the life of human beings to sustain in the world. Human mind despises the

monotonous journey of life and it expects changes in every moment of the life journey. Man expects change in whatever he explores and confront in his sojourn of life. The fruitful changes in the minds and brains of human beings brought about literature as result of the unquenchable thirst to express the changes and experiences in the journey of life. Literature itself underwent changes in all its manifestations from the primitive poetic forms to the virtual literary world.

The revolutionary changes will remain in the golden pages of history of literature as it turns the flow of literature upside down or disturbs it to a fruitful way. The revolutionary change which shook the altars of the literary towers was the change from the dogmas and principles of the neoclassicism to the ever-widening wings of romanticism. The romantic revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> century shattered the shackles of neoclassical strictness and supplied the fresh breeze of freedom and imagination to the hearts of millions of literature lovers. The lines and verses which remained in the brains of the think tanks and erudite scholars of the time flowed through the very slums and streets of the unexplored literary world and the fragrance of literature reached the very hearts of the laity.

The publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge pervaded the fragrance of change from the neoclassical strictness to the romanticism in the literary world. The preface to the much celebrated collection of poems established the foundation for romanticism in the English arena. The conjoint effort of 23 poems by Coleridge and Wordsworth differed in many aspects. While Wordsworth turned the natural into supernatural, Coleridge changed the supernatural in to the natural. The principles of Wordsworth which he substantiated through the publication of Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* were unacceptable for his fellow companion and he explained the defects and drawbacks of the Wordsworthian concept of romanticism through his *Biographia Literaria*.

The preface established the romantic view of art redefining poetry with the essentialities of making poetry. But the prime focus of Wordsworthian romanticism was on the common man. His romantic theory of art revolved around the common man with the language and subject matter taken from the rustic common places. The focus and revival of common man was revolutionary in the specific contemporary society as the common man was out of the realm of the literature and its subject matter. Literature of the time was confined to the personal matters of poets and scholars. The skill and erudition to compose poetry remained a dream for the common man and poetry was never meant for the common men of the time. Wordsworth brought

poetry from the closets of the scholars and poets to the very nooks and corners of the society without the entanglements of tough diction and alien subject matter. He opted for the diction and subject matter of the common men working in the fields and the very nerves of the society. It opened the doors of enjoying literature to the laity and they became the part of the literary endeavour of expressing experiences of the minds and brain. The literature which suffocated in the entangled shackles of neoclassical reason flew with the wings of imagination to the very hearts of both the common men and the learned.

But the modern contemporary analysis of the poems by Wordsworth necessitates the scrutiny of the concept of common men in his poems. The poems of Wordsworth are the words of a man speaking to men in the language of common man. The subject matter of 'speaking' is taken from the very life of the common man and his life is delineated in his poem to please man permanently. The subject matter of common man's life blended with subjectivity produced immortal poems proclaiming the beauty of unexplored nooks and corners of the nature. Nature for Wordsworth was the prime element of discussion as he portrayed the spontaneity of thoughts, feelings, and emotions recollected from nature. Nature for Wordsworth was a wide canvass including men as a mere creation like the other organisms. The man-made alterations in the nature, whether positive or negative, were considered by Wordsworth as the deviation from the laws of nature. Man for Wordsworth was simply a part of nature with all his hardships and sufferings. This attitude towards the common man's life is evident in his poems also. He portrays the life and sufferings of the common man as a part of nature and there is a little effort in his words as a voice against the hardships of the common man and the voice for the change in the pathetic condition of the lowerclass men and call for their development and progress is absent in the poems of William Wordsworth. "Apart from the sanctifying touch of Nature, men and women are poor creatures to Wordsworth" (Compton- Rickett 311).

This necessitates the scrutiny of Wordsworth's poems on the basis of Dalit criticism. Though Dalit studies and criticism sprouted from the minds of the legendary autobiographical touches of Indian subcontinent, it spread its foliage to the very nooks and corners of the world. The studies developed from the thinkers of the 80's in India based caste as the pivotal element in determining the Dalit identity. The heartrending, blood spilling, stories of the hardships in the life of the downtrodden men of the lower castes emerged as the genre of Dalit studies. As the word Dalit indicate, Dalit studies discussed the stories of the 'crushed' under the suffocation of the caste system. Post-colonial studies supplied a fertile soil for the growth and development of the branch of analysis.

The analysis of Wordsworthian romanticism on the basis of Dalit criticism evokes confusion among the critical minds as romanticism flourished in the beginning of nineteenth century and Dalit studies came in to the fresh breeze of criticism in the verge of twentieth century. The analysis of the development of Dalit studies reveals that the term Dalit is not only confined to the study of the writings of a special caste or class of the society. The modern concept of Dalit is that it is not an inborn identity of a particular caste but an identity acquired or attained based on the circumstances or environment of the society. The marginalised, relegated, and the outcaste of the society in every fields of livelihood can be considered to be Dalit. Dalit studies questions the pre-established concepts and notions of the mainstream society and speaks for the voice of the voiceless. The fight through words and deeds pervaded the genre to develop with all its manifestations.

While Indian subcontinent discussed the suffocations and hardships of the people based on caste system and feudalism, the western world was worried about the discriminations based colour and creed. The analysis of Wordsworth's poems reveals that the very subject matter of the common man which he used to please man permanently was at the cost of the life and hardships of the suffering souls. The very romanticism which came to the breath of the world as a revolutionary change from the shackles of neoclassical dogmas was ignorant of

the importance of the change in the lives of the man in the lines of poetry. The lives of hardships and poverty portrayed by Wordsworth shows little sympathy for the poor class of the society and the poetry is devoid of the calls for change in the condition of the lower class of the society. Wordsworth's aim was not to show sympathy or generate sympathy in the hearts of the reader but to paint the beautiful nature in the hearts of the readers without blemish of the 'ugly' lives. He was not a man speaking to the brains of men but was a man speaking to men to generate the concept of beauty of nature and thereby interest man with permanent aesthetic pleasure. Wordsworth was trying to fulfil men's yearn to enjoy the beauty neglecting the hardships of the men behind the beautiful. The hardships of the poor class with their rags and dirt were used as a raw material to process beauty and elegance to make it enjoyable for the elite. "Human types ...are introduced as foreground figures in the land scape, to heighten the romantic effect ..." (Moorman 128-29). The portrayal of the cries of the poor class out of the hardships and poverty generated pleasure in the minds of readers and the readers are never invited by Wordsworth to sympathise with them.

Thus, the solitary reaper which sang the melancholic song in the field was enjoyed as an elegant natural landscape with the sweetness of the song and the affluent flora and fauna. Wordsworth enjoyed the sweetness of the song and compared it with the aery things. The overflowing profound sound of the melancholic song of the reaper was felt by Wordsworth as the song of nightingale as a relief for the weary travellers in the dry desert sands of Arabia. The voice for him was so thrilling like the song of the Cuckoo- bird in the spring to break the silence of the seas in the farthest Hebrides.

"No nightingale did ever chaunt  
More welcome notes to weary bands  
Of travellers in some shady haunt,  
Among Arabian sands:  
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard  
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides." (*The Solitary Reaper* 9-16)

The true life of the common man with all its hardships and sufferings became the elements to spread the wings of imagination in the mind of the poet. Though melancholic, Wordsworth never went behind the reasons of melancholy and made the melancholic tone sweet for his mind and the mind of the readers. The pain and agony out of the sufferings of the common man are 'natural' for the poet. "Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain, /That has been, and may be again?"(22-23). The search for the cause of melancholic tone of the song of the reaper culminates in the assumptions of the incidents in battles or contemporary society. The analysis on the reasons of melancholy and the circumstances of the reaper which made to work in the vast fields alone to make both ends meet diminished in search of beauty and the reaper confined to a being among the others things of nature. "The human figure is seen in its beautiful setting, as we see things in a dream..." (Darbishire 62)

Wordsworth's subjectivity never allowed him to think about the hardships of the leech gatherer in *Resolution and Independence*. The leech gatherer who came to "gather leeches, being old and poor" was "the oldest man" with a body "bent double" as if "some dire constraint of pain, or rage/ Of sickness felt by him in times long past"(55-100). But his sufferings never touched Wordsworth's reason as he felt the inspiration from the old man to make his life and soul free of the hardships of the world. The sight of the old man made the poet to think about firm mind of the leech gatherer to wander and earn his living despite his old age. The tragic thoughts of despair and madness of the poet were cast away by the encounter with the old leech gatherer. The conversation with old man made the poet to realise the comforts and luxuries he is bestowed with. The poet never thought of the social conditions prevailing in the contemporary society which led the leech gatherer to work and earn a living in spite of his old age and weakness. He seemed to the poet like a man in the dream or like one sent from the other world to give him courage and faith in life. "...the poet is saved from self-pity by contemplating the Leech-gatherer, who is so much grosser a victim of 'the way of men' and who yet retains a measure of cheerfulness" (Bateson 161).

The reality of the poverty and hardships of the old man became the raw materials of experiences to fly in the wings of imagination for the poet. The experience with the leech gatherer never aroused reason in him as he is a romantic poet painting his creations with the blend of subjective thoughts, feeling and emotions.

*The Old Cumberland Beggar* portrays the beggar with all his poverty and hardships spending his life on the alms of the travellers and dwellers that passed him. But the beggar's hardships and sufferings was the nature's law for the poet and he wanted little change in the condition of the beggar.

"'Tis Nature's law

That none, the meanest of created things,  
Or forms created the most vile and brute,  
The dullest or most noxious, should exist  
Divorced from good--a spirit and pulse of good,  
A life and soul, to every mode of being  
Inseparably linked."(73-79)

The urge for development and progress of the condition of the beggar was the alteration of the law of nature for the poet. The alteration in the conditions of the beggar made the nature to lose its beauty and originality. The poet wanted to keep the beggar as he is with all its manifestations.

"And, long as he can wander, let him breathe  
The freshness of the valleys; let his blood  
Struggle with frosty air and winter snows;  
And let the chartered wind that sweeps the  
heath  
Beat his grey locks against his withered  
face."(173-77)  
"...and, finally,  
As in the eye of Nature he has lived,  
So in the eye of Nature let him die!"(196-98)

While Dalit literature and criticism portrays real life with the hardships and sufferings of men and matters and cries for the revolutionary changes in the real life of man, Wordsworthian romanticism portrays the life of real man as a an inspiration for the poet to fly on the wings of imagination. The portrayal of the blood spilling, heart rending experiences of the Dalit are the cries for the revolutionary change in the livelihood of the human

beings and the demolition of the factors which crush the powerless to the ditches of sufferings and ill-treatment. Wordsworthian romanticism by speaking the life of common man in the language familiar to men arouse the feelings, thoughts, and emotions of the poet to create poetry which will interest and please mankind permanently rather than thinking and finding solutions for the hardships of the common man. However Wordsworthian romanticism became the pioneer in bringing poetry from the entanglements of think-tanks to the true life of the common man.

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