

DAWN OF ROMANTICISM

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ABSTRACT :

Romanticism was a literary movement that began in the late 18th century and ended around the middle of the 19th century—although its influence continues to this day. It focused on the individual often guided by irrational, emotional impulses, a respect for nature, and a celebration of the common man, Romanticism is witnessed as a reaction to the huge transformation in society that happened during this period. The awakening of sensibility is the most radical change that comes over the English literary scene about the middle of the 18th century. ‘Sensibility’ primarily means the power of generation or perception, but this meaning has become over-laid with another, that of quickness and acuteness of apprehension or feeling, which in turn was extended during the 18th century to mean the capacity for refined emotion, sensitiveness generally in the face of external nature and the readiness to feel the poor and the suffering. Rationalism which had prevailed during the Augustan era and the order, discipline and respect for tradition and authority which the Augustans had inculcated, had not satisfied. The commonly held assumptions about man, God and society were breaking down, and the writers were thrown back on their own reactions and responses to the facts of life. Johnson called, “that hunger of the imagination which preys incessantly on life”. This awakening of sensibility accounts for the change that comes both over literature and literary inquiry in the latter half of the 18th century. The neo-classical dogma is felt to be too cramping and narrow and writers turn to a freer mode of self-expression.

Key Words:- Sensibility, Emotion, Augustan era, Neo-classical dogma

Romanticism was a literary movement spanning roughly 1790–1850. The movement was characterized by a celebration of nature and the common man, a focus on individual experience, an idealization of women, and an embrace of isolation and melancholy. Prominent Romantic writers include John Keats, William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Mary Shelley. The term *Romanticism* does not stem directly from the concept of love, but rather the French word *romant* (a romantic story told in verse). Romanticism focused on emotions and the inner life of the writer, and often used autobiographical material to inform the work or even provide a template for it, unlike traditional literature at the time. Romanticism celebrated primitive and elevated "regular people" as being deserving of celebration, which was an innovation at the time. Romanticism also fixated on nature as a primordial force and encouraged the concept of isolation as necessary for spiritual and artistic development. The reviewers judged the works of literature on the basis of their own likes and dislikes and not on the basis of rules. No doubt, much of their criticism is prejudiced, but they paved the way for the rise of impressionism and individualism which is the keynote of romantic criticism. Critics and poets, in all ages and countries, have tried to explain their own theory and practice of poetry. Romantic criticism is creative. It is the result of imagination. Critics express their imaginations into thoughts and feelings of the writers. Romantic criticism ignores traditional rules, which emphasizes that works of literature are to be judged on the basis of the impression they produce. Preferences were given to the Pleasure rather than instruction. Coleridge says, “If poetry instructs, it does so only through pleasure”. Poetry should make people ‘nobler’ and ‘better’. Its appeal should be to the heart and not to the head. Imagination and emotion should be emphasized and not on reason and good sense. Poetic enthusiasm is no longer looked down upon, as by the Neo-classics. Imagination is emphasized both as the basis of creation and of judgment on what is created. The imagination only leads to the production of great work of art.

It deals with the fundamentals, such as the nature of poetry, and its functions and not with the problems of style, diction or literary genres. It concerns mainly with the theory of poetry and the creative process of poetry. New definitions were created for Poetry. It is not considered as mere imitation or invention but expresses the emotion and imagination.

ROMANTICISM THROUGH POETRY:

Poetry is a medium for communication, and the poet communicates his own imagination and pleasure. Traditionally, the function of poetry was to instruct and delight, but for Wordsworth “the function of Poetry is to give pleasure”. However, his conception of pleasure was an exalted one. When we say Poetic pleasure, It is not mere idle amusement like dancing, or singing. Serious poetry delivers the pleasure which results from increased knowledge and understanding. Wordsworth considers poetry superior to both history and philosophy, and science. He regards poetry as the most philosophical of all writings, the impassioned expression that is the countenance of all science. He argues that science is merely to the intellect, whereas poetry complements science by adding feeling to its truths, and by its imaginative impact it makes people enthusiastic and imaginative. Wordsworth clearly states that, “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. Poetry proceeds from the internal feelings, mood and temperament of the poet.. Poetry cannot be written without this proper mood and temperament. We cannot force a poet to write at our sweet will; poetry cannot be produced to order; it must flow out voluntarily and spontaneously from the soul of the poet.

“Poetry is born not in the mind but in the heart overflowing with feelings”. Poets are gifted with greater sensibility than ordinary individuals. Beauties of nature, which may leave ordinary mortals cold and untouched but the same thing excited in the poet’s powerful emotions and it creates an urge to express those emotions to convey his joy to others. Wordsworth himself says that his heart leapt up with joy on beholding a rainbow in the sky or daffodils dancing in the breeze and he expressed his powerful, overflowing feelings spontaneously, in his immortal poems.

As regards, the true function of poetry is to give pleasure. Even if the subject is painful in itself, it must result in an “over plus of pleasure”. The poet is himself in a “state of enjoyment” and it is his responsibility to communicate his own enjoyment to his readers. But pleasure is not the chief aim of poetry. Its aims are much more exalted and noble. He tells us, “It is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression that is in the countenance of all science”. Its mission is to, “Arouse the sensual from their sleep of Death, and win the vacant and the vain to noble Rapture”. Thus poetry, to be worth the name, must serve the purposes of life and morality.

The mental process by which this aim is achieved has already been discussed above. It should also be noted that for Wordsworth it is the feeling and emotion that is important and not action and situation. “Feeling developed in a poem gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling”.

The History of English Literature is a chronological account of the books which have been written in English. In every book, a man behind it, of whose genius it is a powerful imagination, thoughts and feelings it embodies. In the History of English Literature, we go through and must fix attention up on the personalities by whom this has been made. Every great writer brings one absolutely new thing into the world, that his work becomes its own special hall-mark and has something which makes it unlike the work of others.

A writer of exceptionally powerful personality is certain to stamp his impression up on his age, and amongst those who follow him. The school of Pope, the whole succession of poets, who wrote in the particular style which brought perfection in the ‘classic’ movement. Literature as a whole grows and changes from generation to generation in style. In each age has its own particular lines of interest and particular way of thinking and feeling about things and it differs from those of every other.

SOCIAL ISSUES IN ROMANTIC POETRY :

At the time of Romantic period poetry, rebellion was springing up all across Europe. The lower

classes were revolting against Aristocrats, terrible living and working conditions. The intellectuals and artists were dissatisfied with standards and expectations put on the society. Particularly, many early Romantic poets were enchanted by the French Revolution and adopted its ideals, but with the Bloody Reign of Terror that followed, they became more cautious. Still, Romantic poets were revolutionaries. In addition to the challenges facing the lower classes, monarchy and religion were highly debated subjects.

The French Revolution supported for complete freedom from social authority, and thus Romantic poets were highly inspired. The establishment of the church and its deeply rooted political ties was subject to constant critique by Romantic poets, who often advocated pantheism or atheism, although most of them not accepted confidently on any one set of beliefs. The monarchy was also attacked as an inferior mode of government, one in which the people were not being represented, and Romantic poets consistently challenged these ideas with satire and irony, or the contrast how things seem and how they really are. William Blake's poem 'London' is an example of poets tackling these issues.

*How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls*

In the Romantic period, many authors make references to different social concerns and enabled them to hint towards different concerns in their writing, but not directly pointing out and state their concerns. William Blake, Robert Burns, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld had unique concerns that they were able to get across in their own way. Blake wrote two poems with entitled "Chimney Sweeper." One version was found in his 'Songs of Innocence' and the other was found in 'Songs of Experience.' Although the first was told with a child almost in mind, and the second was told in a darker, colder point-of-view, they both contain the same concern about very young children working as chimney sweepers. Blake emphathise how the boys were almost forced into such kind of career.

William Wordsworth and Samuel Tylor Coleridge, were considered as the precursors of the Romantic movement in England. The works of Words Worth and Coleridge demonstrates not only the illustration of the genius and enhancing the importance of nature and the sublimity of human emotions but also the imagination in their perception of nature through the power of meditation and imagination. The emergence of Romanticism paved way for an intellectual and spiritual upheaval for classicist writers, whose ideologies were limited to the praise of reason and the power of the mind in their works. In Europe, the early Romantics revolutionize a new age of literary composition and creation in their approach to the Self through their perception of nature, but the impact of their ideas leads the later Romantic writers to contribute much in advocating the principles and concepts of Romanticism in literature.

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