

Rusticism in Wordsworth's Poetry: A Study

Dr. Mukesh Kumar

*Asst. Professor, Dept. of English, Pt. Y.K.J. College, Bagahi, B.R.A.B.U. Muzaffarpur,
(Bihar) India*

Abstract

It was quite natural for Wordsworth to elect and to deal lives of cottagers and rustics who lived in close proximity to Nature in their country surroundings, than with politicians and statesmen stupefied with victory and intoxicated with glory and power. Wordsworth freely moved among peasants and gathered his knowledge of peasant ways and of the peasant character by watchful investigation.

Key Words: Rustic, Nature, Beauty, Peasant, Glory

It was quite natural for Wordsworth to elect, to deal lives of cottagers and rustics who lived in close proximity to Nature in their country surroundings, than with politicians and statesmen stupefied with victory and intoxicated with glory and power. Wordsworth's refusal to glorify the lives of kings and princes and men belonging to higher strata of society because he found in their lives an artificiality that he despised and a lack of appreciation for the beauties of nature that he loved. He chose rustic life for poetic treatment for in that condition of life, "the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint and speak a plainer and more emphatic language." In order to present rustic life in his poetry; Wordsworth freely moved among peasants and gathered his knowledge of peasant ways and of the peasant character by watchful investigation. But it should be unhesitatingly admitted that the poet threw over peasant life a halo of glory which it did not possess. He idealised peasant life and made his peasant heroes more than they were worth in actual

life. Ignoring the coarseness and pettiness of this' life of rusticity, he fixed his gaze upon the qualities of strength, endurance unaffected simplicity, courage and hope. He winnowed away the baser elements of rustic life, he found the pure gold. "He watches men and women with the expectant gaze of a man who is looking for some particular attitude of pasture which he is, anxious to portray. No doubt by this method he missed a deal of rich material, but he is a moralist at heart with one steady, purpose inhuman material, but he is a moralist at heart with one steady: view, and leaving aside much., that was fascinating and perplexing, he contented himself with a few broad, simple issues, and there, at his best, he exhibits a massive splendour of compelling power."

Wordsworth emphasized the moral side of his rustic heroes, and from them he derived lessons of morality and wisdom for his own life: He has given to his heroes a moral dignity, and a tone of sublimity which they hardly possessed in actual life. He made them moral monitors of human life * In *Resolution and Independence*, Wordsworth presented in the simple leech

gather a hero of resolution and independence, who inspired the poet with his noble 'idealism and dragged him out of the morass of pessimism and despair in which he had been engulfed. The Cumberland Beggar and the farmer of Tilbury vale, Margaret and Michael the peasant heroes of Wordsworth were all inspired by higher and nobler ideals of life, and they proved to be beacon lights of hope for erring humanity. Referring to this point Wordsworth wrote to Lady Beaumont: "There is scarcely one of my poems which does not aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiments or to some general principle of law of thought."

Wordsworth treated his rustic characters with utmost sympathy and dignity. He could never think of stirring them for their feeble foibles or pick holes in their seemingly affected morality. He was all out for elevating them and that is why, his presentation of rustic characters is marked with a genuine note of sympathy and admiration. "He draws attention to the pathetic figure of the aged Cumberland beggar, and in our sympathy for the old leech gatherer, placing each of these simple figures in a noble background of landscape and cloudscape until they are dignified by the spacious beauty of the earth." He was the first English poet "who threw around the lives of ordinary men the story and sweetness of a song. He was the first who poured around the salesmen's cottages and the wandering life of the pedlar, and the unheard struggles of the country and the mountain folk, the consecration and the poet's dream. He was the first who isolated life after life in tender and homely narrative, and made us feel that God was with the simple men and women; that in their lives were profound lessons; that the same equal heat beat in

the palace and the hamlet hidden in the hills; that all men were brothers in the charities which soothe and bless, in the feelings which nature awakens in their hearts; that a spirit of independence and stern liberty is the birthright and the passion of the poorest shepherd as well as of the patriots who fill the pages of history" (S.A. Brooke).

Through his rustic characters, individuals though they may appear, Wordsworth portrayed the qualities that were commonly to be shared by all human beings. He made his rustic characters the mouthpiece of humanity. They stood for certain types rather than for narrow individual qualities of heart and head owned by them. This point has been beautifully stated by Compton-Rickett in the following words "Just as in Nature he (Wordsworth) is always eager to pass from the concrete to the abstract, so in dealing with humanity he is less concerned with individuals than with certain qualities; common to mankind." Wordsworth did not dwell on accidents of temperament and disposition that go to differentiate men and women from each other, but on those primal qualities of humanity where Man and Nature touch and blend. He clearly touched this aspect of his treatment of human character when he stated in the Prelude-

My theme (i)

No other than the very heart of Man.

In Michael he tells us how he was led on to think-

On man, than the very heart of Man.

And how he loved man as man and

To the mean and the obscure

And all the homely in their holy works

Transferred a courtesy, which had no air of condescension.

Wordsworth concentrated his attention only on the good aspects of human life. He did not emphasise the evil aspects of life "Wordsworth admits the presence of evil in the world" says Oliver Elton, "but is unwilling to admit it as a principle in things, because he is a pantheist, to things are portions of the divine." In his most representative poem A Michael he stresses the filial piety and affection of the old shepherd for his son Luke but he left unadorned the tale of the evil ways on which Luke had fallen at the end.

Wordsworth paid no heed to the tumultuous and fiery aspect!! of human life. As his own life was marked with a note of tranquility, placidity and peace, so he supplied in the presentation of human life, the peace and tranquility that swayed his mind. In Heart Leap Well, the poet stated –

The moving accident is not my trade
To freeze the blond, I have no ready
art;
and the same note he struck in Peter
Bell :
The dragon's wings, the magic ring;
I shall not cover for my dower.

In his classical poem Landonia, he concentrated not on the tumult and turbulence of passion but on the control that a good wife ought to exercise on her emotional exuberance. The message in Landonia is

Control rebellious passions, for the
Gods approve,
The depth and not the tumult of the
soul.

Wordsworth believed that human life was worth living in spite of the sorrows and

sufferings that may come to assail it from time to time. Suffering was, in fact, a means to an ethical end. "The still sad music, humanity" is neither harsh nor grating, and has ample power to chasten and subdue." Man can rise above the suffering by calling to his help the strength of his moral life and the resources of divine providence.

Wordsworth emphasised that all human beings were entitled to live and lead a good life. He was opposed to the theory that promoted the extermination of the weak. Survival of the fittest was not the principle of Wordsworth's life. He was a devout believer in equal rights for the weak and the strong, the healthy and the crippled human beings. The Cumberland Beggar brought home to Wordsworth's mind that the meanest individual was not useless. He said –

'Tis Nature's law
That none the meanest of created
things,
Of jays created the most vile and
brute
The dullest or most noxious, should
exist
Divorced from good—spirit and pulse
of good;
A life and soul, to every mode of
being
Inseparably linked.

Conclusion: Wordsworth emphasised that all human beings were entitled to live and lead a good life. He was opposed to the theory that promoted the extermination of the weak. Survival of the fittest was not the principle of Wordsworth's life. He was a devout believer in equal rights for the weak and the strong, the healthy and the crippled human beings

References:

1. A.C. Bradley: Oxford Lectures on Poetry, Radha Publishing House, Calcutta, 1985.
2. Abrams M.H.: Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revaluation in Romantic Literature. New York, 1971.
3. (Edited by) Abrams M.H.: Wordsworth: A collection of Critical Essays. Prentice Hall of India, New Delhi – 1979.
4. Grierson, Herbert J.C. and J.C. Smith: A critical History of English Poetry : Chatto and Windus. London – 1950.