

THE NATURE OF MORALITY IN THE LIGHT OF WORDSWORTH'S POETRY

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William Wordsworth was a pioneer of romanticism in English poetry and ranks as one of the greatest lyric poets in the history of English literature. He was born on April 7, 1770, in Cockermouth, Cumberland, a small quiet market town in northwest England, on the edge of the Lake District. From the very beginning he was associated with that region which he loved more than any other, and except for brief sojourns in Britain, Germany, and Italy, he never left his beloved Lake Country. He died in 1850 and was buried at Grasmere, Westmoreland. William Wordsworth was one of the key figures in Romantic Movement. Generally Wordsworth was renowned as a poet of Nature. But through this paper I want to expose The Nature of Morality in the light of Wordsworth's Poetry.

Since Wordsworth's own day, there were so many poets who wrote poetry which were replete with the love of nature but his treatment of nature is different from others. Poet unfolded a new and individual view of Nature. As a poet of nature Wordsworth puts upon the moral influences of Nature. Here, Morality can be termed as a body of standard or principles derived from a code of conduct from a particular philosophy, religion, or culture. Biblically, morals are derived from God's character and revealed to us through the scriptures.

Morals differ among cultures, and there are morals that are dependent upon situations. Subjects of morality vary but deal with person-to-person relationships as well as person to animal and person to environment. William Wordsworth also throws light on the importance of knowledge which has moral ground. From poet's point of view, knowledge is the staple of human glory and dignity. In a letter to Sir Robert Inglis (June 11, 1825) poet emphasizes that "by the exclusion of knowledge; humanity is abused."¹

Poet says that power may be precarious if it does not have a strong moral root. So, this superiority should merely be based on the strength of knowledge. Therefore, the poets, philosophers and thinkers of all ages have endlessly emphasized on the importance of morality so that the world of knowledge can be preserved. Similarly, having enriched with knowledge, poet considers himself

"A moral agent, judging between good
And evil, not as for the mind's delight
But for her safety" (The Prelude VIII: 668-670) 2

In this paper the Word 'moral' is crucial to understand the problems which troubled Wordsworth were no longer those of politics but of morality. At first Wordsworth teaches that man should approach Nature in the right mood, which is defined as a mood of 'wise passiveness' with a 'heart that watches and receives'. Poet further says that in this modern and advanced technology world Man has become commercialized and machinery as he has gone totally blind to nature in the race of advancement. Consequently, this deviation leads man to dehumanization

as human beings waste away their energy and does not identify themselves with the moral order of nature. While in the world of morality, a proper co-ordination is established between thought and action. A mental act proves its worth as it is materialized through action; hence both thinking and doing are essential for a moral agent as Northrop Frye remarks that:

“An inactive thinker is a dreamer; and unthinking doer is an animal.” 3

Here, we see that he has a personal sense of morality which propelled him to play a moral agentive role not only for the sake of present happiness but for the future betterment of humanity also. This is only Wordsworth’s poems which could only spring from a noble nature, dedicated to the daily contemplation of lofty purposes as they have sweetness and gravity. Wordsworth presents an ineffable and almost saintly charm through the depiction of green solitudes of lake and mountain. He tries to inject the feeling of consolation and encouragement into the tired hearts and falling spirits. As a apostle of peace, he sings of love and duty, of disciplined desires but his voice is that of a great prophet, who speaks words, which are for the healing of the nations and welfare of the country. In one of his letters to Lady Beaumont the poet observed:

“There is scarcely one of my poems which do not aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiment or to some general principle or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution.... My writings (and among them these little Poems) will cooperate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, wherever found; and that they will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better and happier.” 4

On another occasion, William Wordsworth himself says that he aims through his poetry:

“To console the afflicted, to add sunshine to day-light by making the happy happier, to teach to the young and the gracious of every age, to see, to think, and to feel, and therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous.” 5

It is this moral pre-eminence of Wordsworth, which is the secret of his mastery over such very different minds as Mill’s, Ruskins’s, George Eliot’s and Arnold’s. It is largely his moral fervor, which has given him priesthood in literature. Early in 1808 Wordsworth wrote to Sir George Beaumont that:

“I have not written down to the level of superficial observers and unthinking minds. Every great poet is a teacher: I wish to be considered as a teacher or as nothing” 6

Poet sees in every natural object an inward moral meaning as he writes in *The Prelude* that

“To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower
Even the loose stones that cover the high-way
I give a moral life’ (III: 130-132) 7

It requires the creative and conscious mind that can perceive that moral significance in every object of contemplation in his poetry. He sees every objects of nature divinely and discovers an embedded moral meaning in them. Watson remarks that:

“The higher minds catch the smallest hints and suggestions from nature, build up their consciousness of a higher power within it and are able to lead lives of inner peace, cheerfulness and delight. 8

In the poem ‘*The Tables Turned*’ Wordsworth’s advice ‘Come forth into the light of things/Let Nature be your teacher’ (15-16). Such type traces of moral nature in Wordsworth’s poetry is most apparent. From Nature man can get moral lesson:

One impulse from a vernal mood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,

Than all the sages can. (The Tables Turned) 21-24) 9

These lines indicate that like a spring season, a moral action has intrinsic goodness in it. Without this balmy effect human actions cannot be taken as morally good. The vernal wood is a silent natural educator that over and over again tries to inject in man's mind the idea that its real vernal-hood lies in its sweet odour; hence man's actions should provide happiness to mankind at the global level without any discrimination.

In the poem 'Michael' poet says that the purity and simplicity of human heart does the job of binding together the fellow-beings in a bond of love. But it has been violated by the modern commercialized society wherein all cardinal virtues like love, peace, sympathy, courage and co-operation have no place. Here poet emphasizes that man's true happiness lies in the adoption of the moral values deduced from the system of nature in the modern materialistic and technologically advanced society. Having had an esthetic apprehension of nature, man must establish accordance to it. Man can derive moral values from the divine source, Nature and can make himself best even in the modern commercialized and technologically advanced society.

In his poem 'In The Borderers' Wordsworth's articulation that 'suffering is permanent, obscure and dark/And shares the nature of infinity (III, V-64-65) also corroborate the point that suffering is endless and has its own importance in the world. Suffering has obscure and dark nature, apparently it seems striking against man but its real nature is to intensify and strengthen goodness of the heart. As Shakespeare, in *The Tempest* speaks through Miranda that 'O! I have suffer'd/ With those that I saw suffer' 17 Similarly in the moral world, Wordsworth has given his opinion that suffering is the great teacher and even suffering of the other beings also germinates altruistic tendencies in human heart.

Wordsworth's moral treatment is seen in a number of poems. In *Intimations of Immortality*, the poet works upon the philosophical conviction: 'child is the father of man.' Child, who comes with clouds of heavenly glory gradually, forgets his pre-natal experiences as it grows up. The whole poem is reflective and meditative, teaching such profound ideas about Nature as the following:

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. 10

Ode to Duty is a unique combination of sublimity of thought, grandeur of morality and excellence of poetry. In this poem, poet takes duty as religion and surrenders himself to its power. In this poem poet personifies duty as the 'stern Daughter of the voice of God'. If we obey her command,

Serene will be our days and bright,
 And happy will our nature be,
 When love is an erring light,
 And joy its own security" 11

Poet says that we should yield the call of duty as the voice of God as it comes directly from the core part of man's soul. We should accept duty voluntarily and willingly and follow its path, but it should not be the result of compulsion. Dorothea Krook's perception is appropriate that "The moral activity is distinctively an activity of the will and The sphere of morality is the sphere of will" 12

Thus, Wordsworth gives his most significant message for the human being that we should have a 'plain living and high thinking. He wishes that his readers should also be:

Type of the wise who soar, but never roam;
 True to the kindred point of Heaven and Home! 13(*To a Skylark*)

Thus we can conclude that William Wordsworth is a high priest of nature. But he has employed moral treatment in his poetical work. Through his poetical work he tries to expose that nature is the real source of moral and values and man can learn from it. He says that in this modern and advanced society man has commercialized and materialistic. In the race of advancement and development man has forgot his duty and has completely been blind to nature. While it has offered and unlocked to us the treasure of bounty. He advocates that we should not fear from the dark and obscure face of nature as this face makes man liberal, fearless and mighty to face the hard phase of life. Nature is the teacher which teaches us the complete definition of life. Thus, he says that Happiness and peacefulness may be gained through a life of faith, fortitude, virtue and self sacrifice and there is no need of money for it.

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