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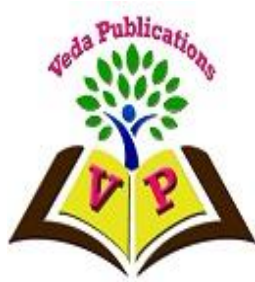
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RESEARCH ARTICLE**ON DECODING THE TRAJECTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN BLAKE'S POETRY****Dr.Jeyashree G***(Principal, Dr.Ambedkar College of Commerce and Economics, Wadala.)*Email: jeyashreeiyer@gmail.comDOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2022.9210>**ABSTRACT**

Poetry is defined as spontaneous overflow of feelings recollected in tranquility by one of the remarkable poets of the romantic age William Wordsworth. Human beings are conditioned by emotions and feelings that come out in varied forms like paintings, sculptures, poetries etc. An artist absorbs elements that prevail around him and effuses in art forms. An artist is adept at reading the nuances of socio economic and political impact of the society and shares his/her thoughts through their artistic products. Unless there is a balance maintained between the emotional and intellectual quotient, an art cannot reach the audience. Critics speculate the language and the content of poetry. Language is a channel of expression where the poets try to exploit to reach the audience effectively. William Blake is one of the remarkable poets of the Romantic age and the paper attempts to unveil the submerged consciousness of the poet reflected through his poems. Short poems are pecked for the study to illumine the impact of the contemporary society on the psyche of the poet. Literature mirrors a society and aspiring scholars can certainly accrue knowledge by perusing the literature of the past. The elements of romanticism in Blake's poems are elicited and the poetic devices reflect in his poems are explored. Blake's poems reflect multi layered emotions firmly anchored in ethos and pathos that permeate in the social lives of the people. The elements of romanticism in his poems are discussed.

Keywords: *Emotions, Feelings, Poetry, Art, Language.**Author(s) retain the copyright of this article*

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Romantic Movement originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century and was more vibrant between 1800 and 1850. The style of romantic poetry is focused on simplicity, instead of inflated and artificial mode of expression adopted by the classical poets. The romantic poetry flows naturally depicting the contemporary environment with simple and direct style which worships the elements of nature and thereby accentuating the significance of human consciousness for a peaceful society. Blake's poetry illumines multiple layers of his consciousness revealing not only his artistic skill but also his moral responsibility of an artist as it is a known fact that a message in an art form reaches the audience/readers effectively.

William Blake was born on November 28th in 1757 in London. He developed love and passion for painting at his early stage. His father James Blake was a hosier and his mother was Catherine Wright Blake. On seeing Blake's interest in painting his parent enrolled him in drawing classes and later he emerged as a skilled engraver from Royal Academy. His passion for arts propelled him to seek admission in Royal Academy. He experienced divine vision in early days and his spiritual experience is reflected in his poems.

His artistic instincts facilitate him to effuse his emotions and feelings in his paintings, engravings and poems. He was one of the remarkable romantic poets, who penned his poems replete with the romantic elements of influence of nature, resonance of emotions, feelings, mysticism that blend with social consciousness. Romantic poetry is very much subjective recording the inner feelings of the poets.

Being an engraver by profession, he was a prodigy to replicate the nuances of the contemporary environment in romantic canvas as the art of poetry stems from imagination and passion like the art of design that was engraved reflecting the inner feelings of the producer. His poems were on etched on copper plates by himself with decorative designs but his poems were widely read posthumously and was extolled as one of the genius of the creative movement of late 18th and early 19th century. His early work *Poetical Sketches* reveals the influence of Shakespeare, Spencer and that of Milton. This work comprises of nineteen lyrical poems. The opening four poems, *To Spring*, *To Autumn*, *To Summer*, *To winter*, vivid representation of four seasons and its impact on the lives of the people. Every season has its own character and influence on the living condition of people. The opening lines of the poem *To Spring* is extracted from the collection *Poetical Sketches*, 1783 personifies the nature,

O THOU with dewy locks, who lookest down

Through the clear windows of the morning,
turn

Thine angel eyes upon our western isle

Which in full choir hails thy approach, O
Spring!(lines 1-4)

The serene beauty of the spring vividly depicted here. The freshness of the poem illumines Elizabethan influence nevertheless love for nature and taking cognizance of its influence is a common factor of romanticism. These feelings make the world lively and beautiful. But every beauty has also ugly side to it. The dichotomy of life cannot be ignored. Blake's poems reflect the philosophy of good and evil.



Personification of spring in the poem brings forth the significance of the nature and illumines fresh environment which people have lost due to industrial revolution. Today in this digital world though people seek the company of computers and smart phones, they do retreat to hill stations for relaxation seeking the company of nature. Spring is the season that brings happiness and enjoyment and the poets welcome the season with zeal and enthusiasm. Thomas Gray in his *Ode on Spring* thus welcomes spring,

Lo! where the rosy-bosom'd Hours,

Fair Venus' train appear,

Disclose the long-expecting flowers,

And wake the purple year!

The Attic warbler pours her throat,

Responsive to the cuckoo's note,

The untaught harmony of spring: (lines 1-7)

Gray depicts the approach of the season; where the rosy-bosom'd Hours/ Fair Venus' train appear..... Venus, a Roman goddess represents love, beauty, desire and fertility. The poet calls her fair Venus symbolizes joy and fertility. Blake on the other hand entreats the spring to turn her *angel eyes upon our western isle*...the season spring is adored and loved by the poets. Consciousness of nature encompassed by love and passion is illumined here. The healthy companion of nature is very much necessary today. Poems incite aesthetic sense and make people sensitive and caring towards nature.

Being an artist, Blake is adept at capturing the elements of nature that make the society healthy. Spring seems to predict *tharmas, the peaceful*

embodiment of sensation, who comes to healour love-sick land that mourns with soft kisses on her bosom. (Wikipedia, Poetical sketches, para, 16)) The opening four poems of four seasons representing the four seasons had laid foundation to Blake's later lyrical poem *Spring* which was first published in *Songs of innocence* in 1789 and then published in the collection of the *Songs of innocence and Experience* in 1794. The readers could certainly evince difference in the style of presentation between the Lyrical poem *To Spring* which was published in his *Poetic Sketches* and the lyrical poem *Spring* which was first published in the collection of poems, *The Songs of innocence*. The former poem reflects the style of Elizabethan and the latter poem explicitly depict the happiness of innocence and the role of environment that add joy to the children with brief expressions,

Little boy,

Full of joy;

Little girl,

Sweet and small;

Cock does crow,

So do you;

Merry voice,

Infant noise;

Merrily, merrily to welcome in the year.

The Songs of innocence expresses happiness of innocent children and *Songs of Experience* refers to the awareness of the materialistic world that assails the growing years of human lives. The presentation of *Songs of innocence* and *Songs of Experience* illumines the resonance of John



Milton's 'L'Allegro and Il Pensaroso. L'Allegro is a pastoral poem and the title L'Allegro represents the happy man in Italian and Il Pensaroso represents the melancholy man, the following lines from L'Allegro depicts happy atmosphere that prevail in Spring,

But com, thou Goddess fair and free,

In Heav'n ycleap'd Euphrosyne,

And by men, heart-easing Mirth;

Whom lovely Venus at a birth

With two sister Graces more

To Ivy-crowned Bacchus bore:

Or whether (as some Sages sing)

The frolick Wind that breathes the Spring,
(lines 10-17)

.....

The Songs of Innocence and Experience projects two perspectives- the former illumines the freedom and innocence of the Childhood and the latter projects the waning of innocence in due course when humans experience difficulties in life. The pastoral settings in the poems represent pure joy and freedom. The philosophy of life that has ebb and flow is lucidly revealed.

The poem *The Echoing Garden* that is presented in *The Songs of Innocence* exemplifies pure, unadulterated happiness of children. Even The very title *The Echoing Green* suggests the motif of the poem. Consciousness of nature is evinced lucidly. The poems *The Echoing Green* and the companion piece *The Garden of Love* was published in the collection of the *Songs of innocence* and the illustrations were done by Blake himself. The poet establishes a happy

environment where the readers could have tacit understanding with the emotions of the poet.

The sun does arise,

And make happy the skies,

The merry bells ring,

To welcome the spring

The sky-lark and thrush

The birds of the bush

Sing louder around,

To the bells' cheerful sound.

While our sports shall be seen

On the Echoing Green. (lines 1-10)

The poem, *The Echoing Green* is representative of not only the grace towards one another, but toward nature as well. There is no mention of religion in the poem, its peaceful and focuses on the beauty of nature and the company of other. (amozzoni, para:2)

The bilateral settings of *L'Allegro* and *Il Pensaroso* and the *Songs of innocence and Experience* vividly reveal the dichotomy of human lives and hence in his lyrical poem he claims,

Joy and woe are woven fine,

And when this we rightly know,

Safely through the world we go. Lines (1-3)

He shares his joyful mystic experience. He strongly condemns evil but he accepts sorrow whole heartedly justifying that joy and sorrow are woven fine.



Linguistic relativity is the one of the significant poetic devices of the poets of all times. The relative terms that the season spring brings forth are mirth, frolick, sun rise, merry bells and Venus, Goddess of love and fertility and Bacchus, god of wine and giver of ecstasy. Gray in his poem *Ode on Spring* has referred to Venus to depict the joyful season of the spring. Blake in his poem *Spring* uses the terms of joy and mirth and hails the upcoming spring season. Translation of thought process to verbal expression is one major expertise of the poets. Verbal expressions vividly depict the socio cultural environment of the poetic setting. Influence of Elizabethan poets like Shakespeare, Spencer and Milton can be evinced in the earliest Blake's lyrical poem *To Spring* published in the *Poetical Sketches*. The expressions like THOU dewy locks...../thine angel eyes (lines 1-4) parade the linguistic behavior of the Elizabethan poets. But in his lyrical poem *Spring*, there is a change in style and linguistic behavior of the poet. The expressions as full of joy, alliteration of sweet and small, merry voice and the repetition of merrily, merrily reveal the rhythm and expression of the poem.

Blake's poems blend mysticism and naturalism; mysticism in his poetry is blended with wistful melancholy. His collection of poems in the *The songs of Experience* speculate the society that is cloaked with hypocrisy. Like other romantic poets his reactions to the industrial revolution and urban living is very much pronounced in the following of his poem *The Garden of Love*,

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,

Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door,
So I turn'd to Garden of Love,

That so many sweet flowers bore; (lines 1-8)

Spiritual consciousness: *Anyone who has experienced spiritual consciousness has spoken of coming in contact with divine love. God is love, our soul being of the same essence as that of God is love. The ocean of spiritual consciousness is the ocean of love* (Maharaj, para:1)

Love permeates spiritualism and not limited to materialistic world. The poem *The Garden Love* strongly reflects Blake's intense objections to institutionalized approach in the ecclesiastical world. His spirituality affirms on Selfless love that makes the world beautiful. Robert Rix in his article, In infernal love and faith observes, *Blake evidently sees true worship of God to be one person's active grace towards another but finds no use for the passive reception of sacraments as practiced in the liturgy of the New Jerusalem Church.* (Rix, 111). The tenets of religion are one of the medium of spirituality but parochial mind set on religious practices do not lead to spirituality. Blake's love for God strengthens him with spiritual powers and he effuses his love and passion in his poetry. He opines that experience of love takes over innocence and he uses Chapel as a symbol of experience. Hence in his poem *Song*, he expresses how he lost his liberty and his innocence when he is caught in the web of love.

How sweet I roam'd from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride
'Till I prince of love beheld



.....

He caught me in his silken net,

And shut me in his golden cage.

.....

And mocks my loss of liberty. (lines 1-16)

He vividly portrays human lives when experience and knowledge outshine innocence and love for worldly desires is a golden cage. His philosophy of life blends with spirituality that engages him in soul searching of true love. The transient nature of life is expressed in this poem. Sublime of love is the motif of the poem that gives spiritual experience.

Blake is ahead of his time. His soul search for real love for God and his subsequent disappointment with the hypocrisy of the ecclesiastical institutions is highlighted in his poems. The institutions which are supposed to give solace and guidance to the people are devoid of love and the poem accentuates the need and importance of love in human lives. Like William Wordsworth his retreat to nature vividly reveals the significance of nature. The spiritual vision he encountered in his early days channelized to register his religious sentiments. He used objects of nature as symbols to drive home his philosophical approach to life. The feeling of Love is implicitly compared to garden that bear sweet flowers. His symbolisms also bear biblical relations.

Blake's poems show the influence of Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. His poem *The Divine Image* is implicitly Swedenborgian and he claimed that his *design is based the Spiritual Preceptor (1809) on the theologian book True Christian Religion*. (Britannica, para, 3) Yet his poems

reveal his objection to institutionalized religion. Hence he mentions a Chapel that is closed to the garden of love and some critics feel that the innocence of childhood wanes while assailing through growing years unearthing various factors that teaches the crude reality of the world.

Father, father, where are you going

O do not walk so fast.

Speak father, speak to your little boy

Or else I shall be lost,

The night was dark no father was there

The child was wet with dew.

And away the vapour flew.

The helpless child's unsecured feeling in the materialistic world propels him to seek the protection of God is indicated in the poem. Spiritualism certainly gives a solace for the disturbed mind. But the worldly pleasures tempt the human mind. The industrialization and the subsequent urban development in England might have planted apprehension that the people were digressing from spiritualism. Critics on *William Blake's* opine that he projected the society he lived in *the Songs of Innocence and experience*, observes that the mechanical world was making people selfish and self centered was a great concern of the poet. He never missed the opportunity to express his pain in his work. The child's prayer to father to stop for him and to protect him is a distress call that implicitly refers that people may get lost in the materialistic world that robs the innocence and peace of mind. The contemporary environment has a great impact on the psyche of the poets. The poets possess an inbuilt ability to read the positive and



negative aspects of the contemporary life and society. He feels that the world is unsafe for the children and the society is moving fast towards urbanization and industrialization. He expresses his anguish in the poem, *Infant sorrow*,

My mother groan'd, my father wept,

Into the dangerous world I leapt. (lines 1-2)

The child has to go through the dangerous world where selfish love that makes one despair and life miserable, mighty tiger that lurks behind awaiting for its prey. The vicissitudes of life is effectively portrayed- On one side beautiful nature but on the other side the danger that hides amidst the beauty of nature.

Blake has exploited his poetic skills to reach the readers accentuating love and passion as poems are one of the most significant literary genres that reach the people effectively. The poet's spiritual quest to spread love and goodwill in the society is expressed in his poems. The feeling of love that prevails in the mechanical world is transient and does not signify the pure love. Hence in his poem *The Clod and the Pebble*, he says,

Love seeketh only self to please,

To bind another to its delight,

Joys in another's loss of ease,

And builds a Hell in Heaven's despair. (lines 9-12)

The selfish love that puts other in despair builds a Hell in Heaven's despair. The alliteration of the letter *h* adds musical rhythm to the poem. Blake's realm of nature symbolizes sublimity and spirituality. The Sun, the Moon, the stars all natural phenomena symbolize love and spiritual significance that lay behind the

beautiful nature. He firmly believes, *Where Mercy, Love and Pity dwell/ There God is dwelling too*. Apparently the lines appear to be simple but it speaks the reality of life. *The Clod and the Pebble* symbolizes selfish love and hypocrisy.

His love for animals and portrayal of crude reality is lucidly revealed in the Poem "The Tiger", the poem reveals the universal truth pertaining to the strength and power of the Tiger. He portrays the reality of the world where the weak are affected by the strong. The rhetorical question he puts forth is *Did he who made the lamb made thee?* The facts and reality of life is presented behind the fleeting realities of life.

The weak and the strong live under the canopy of the sky. The weak on the run to protect itself from the strong but in the end the weak succumbs. This is the reality of life. The poem *The Lamb*, biblical reference, Little Lamb who made thee

Dost thou know who made thee

Gave thee life and bid thee fee. (lines 1-3)

The lamb symbolizes Jesus Christ and the image of the Christ with the lamb arises in the mind of the readers accentuate purity, love and compassion. Love for the something that is weak and needs the protection. The soft woolen skin and the meek voice symbolize tenderness. Blake's poems reflect the contemporary society where love and compassion replaces selfishness and corruption.

Social consciousness: His poem *London* exemplifies his social consciousness when he portrays the degradation of the society,

In every cry of every Man,

In every Infant's cry of fear,



In every voice, in every ban,

The mind-forg'd manacles I hear. (lines 5-8)

The society that diverges from love and compassion do not provide friendly environment for the humans. Urban life style owing to industrial revolution had brought nothing but misery and poverty.

CONCLUSION

Blake's poems transcend time and place. His poems are well read posthumously. Many a time people do not recognize the greatness of the contemporary poets. Today in this digital world the components of beautiful nature has become just a branch of study and do not incite any interest. The pandemic that emerged in 2020s and the subsequent lock down have tapped social consciousness driving home the fact that nature is omnipotent and mere money and wealth cannot buy happiness and peace. Selfishness and lack of social consciousness have resulted in degradation of moral values. Blake's contemporary society did not take cognizance of reality that he portrayed in his poems. The freshness of his nature depicted in his poems also illumines contrasting image of crude reality of sufferings and pains experienced by the people during his days. He insists on true love that will bring peace and happiness to the society.

Where Mercy, Love and Pity dwell,

There God is dwelling too.

Mercy, Love and Pity are the elements that could make the society healthy.

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