

Humanism in Select Poems of William Wordsworth**Gurudeva S.M.**

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Many thoughts on philosophy and theories have been evolved in the history of Man. Among them, 'Humanism' is an outstanding philosophy. It is rather a difficult task to offer an appropriate and convincing definition for the word 'Humanism' Because it has been variously defined by various great philosophers of Renaissance period and the present philosophers of modern age. Though, it is not possible for them to offer a perfect definition for it. It was passed through various stages or phases and there are different varieties of humanism interpreted with the use of 'appropriate adjective', for instance, Literary humanism, Renaissance humanism, Cultural humanism, Philosophical humanism, Christian humanism and Modern humanism and so on.

Basically it was a cultural, literary, scientific and intellectual movement that started in the 1300's in Italy. Later it spreads to various parts of Europe and outer world. In its initial period, it concentrated fully on civilizing man and making him understand his hidden potential and power that was bestowed upon him by the nature. (At this stage the study of the venerated texts of the past and how they tried to comprehend and depict man and his attempts to make his stay on this planet are meaningful. In achieving happiness, how he used his reason to convert the advert ant aspects of nature congenial to him

Although there is no use of the word 'Humanism' proper In any text of the ancient period, one may safely say that the idea of living a happy and productive life based on culture and proper reason is naturally found to be seen in almost all cultures and civilizations that cropped up several parts of

the world. Though man in the infancy of civilization that came under the influence of nature.

The rise or dawn of Reason is the first stage as it seems in the development of humanism or humanistic approach in understanding the universe, man and his abilities were given more importance. Man has freedom of creative choice and action slowly gained momentum. Thus man was regarded as the maker of his own life. Man alone is responsible for his upliftment. Man alone is response for his fall. Man alone is the best friend of himself and man alone is his own enemy. Wordsworth believed very strongly in individual identity, which is a ramification of humanism. As a poet, as a creative writer Wordsworth attached importance of humanistic values.

Wordsworth was a poet of the earth in the true sense of the word. He regarded common man's life as the major theme of his poetry. He was a poet of nature as well as the poet of man, this point, he voices clearly in his 'Preface to the Lyrical ballads':

"... humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity ----- because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature."

This observation goes to show that Wordsworths primary concern was man. He had great passion for earthliness and common experiences with common feelings. That is why the heroes that dominate his poetic are common people like a reaper, a labouring man, a beggar a tramp etc such personalities are delineated in his poems with this essential of elementary feelings. The poems like 'The Solitary Reaper', 'The Nutting', 'Michael', 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', 'The Leech Gatherer' show such kind of persons.

Man's life, as it is a subject to emotions, is likely suffering separation, sorrow, and gloominess is likely to take delight in session, happiness, brighter happenings. In the depiction of all such moments Wordsworth offers his readers a realistic aspect of human life. Wordsworth the moments

of depiction of such experiences appeared more humanistic and compassionate. He not only describes the existence of sorrow in the life of human beings he also offers solution to this. According to him, solution this lies in going back to nature and living in accordance with its laws. In the poem like 'Lines written In Early Spring' and etc, he voices the solution to such a sorrowful conditions of humanity. He opines quite strongly that nature offers innumerable lessons to humanity though it appears to stay back by itself.

The Age of Romantic poetry has been regarded as the age of reason and individual freedom or individualism. Before Wordsworth, English poetry was a poetry of the mythology, the bible and the celebrated rulers of the time. Unlike Wordsworth, none of them ever ventured to write about their own life or about the lives of this common fellow beings. He attempted such themes and thoughts in his poems like 'The excursion'. 'The Prelude' etc. Thus he exhibits of his concern for the man. It seems he was so much engrossed with man that even many times he humanizes nature in his poems like, 'Upon the west Ministers Bridge' and 'Daffodils'.

Thus through his attempts of humanizing or personifying nature and through his passionate description of common people and thus doings weals and woes he emerges not only as a poet of Nature but as a poet of people, poet of nature and man, a poet of the natural man essentially humanist poet.

Man is not only a social being but he is also a rational being. with his life of settlement after the nomadic life there evolved a social systems. Further this social system, as observed by many social scientists of the east and the west, went on improving continuously with additions of certain values and value system from time to time. The whole grant of this is known as culture. Culture is often regarded as the bundle of growth accumulated by man in his journey towards improvement and progress. Then came the civilization in its way. Perhaps man alone is the being in the creation who has created the important elements called culture and civilization. with his

constant observation of the Nature around him and experimentation with it there developed reason in him. With this reason and inquisitiveness he was able to formulate some natural laws which became the seeds of science. This science is a child of enquiry. Enquiry and science together ushered in many inventions and man was given ability by science to dominate the nature. This led to the negation and the beliefs in and respect for the supernatural elements which dominated the life of man hitherto. Thus man, who emerged as a unique being in the creation, presided over the life and events of lesser animals and creatures as he could tame them.

The individual, individual freedom and ability of the individual man in making and moulding the life on this planet assumed importance and man centred thoughts gained momentum. The very idea that this universe was a creation was begun to be questioned and evaluation took the place creation and religion was merely reduced to the point that of morality. Thus it led to the negation or rejection of religion. Life of morality that makes all happy and does not inflict any pain on the fellow beings was regarded as the motto of man.

During the Medieval period when the churches and the authorities of the churches became dominant. the people were tired of religious constraints. The humanism and humanists attached importance to character, individual and the ethics. When the ethics and ethical qualities were fountain head of human life. the very idea of life that redemption through religious practices underwent a change. Ethics and life according to certain ethical values assumed importance. Thus humanism assumed a form of philosophy. Life here and now is more important than the salvation or spiritual achievement.

The life of man on this earth, for a humanist, is not of any mystery as is held by the propagandists of other philosophies. The humanists regard the life here and now, as has already been noted, on important one. He does not attach any importance to the thought of life after death or salvation or heaven. To him the world of senses alone is important. That which is

perceivable, that which is tangible is alone considerable. Other thing such as supernatural beings and supernatural powers such as siddhis and supernatural achievements are nothing. The humanists even do not believe in rebirth. They regard that men are born, they live and die. And after death any man does not come back. They have a faith in man and his achievements during his life time as a man. While giving birth to his young ones man builds civilization and culture and passes them on to the next generation. As natural process in the history of growth of civilization and culture man has, as humanists believe, developed the ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality by his experience and experimentation. These and many other such values form the future happiness of the future generations. Thus a true humanist always aspires for creation of happy life and happy society on this earth.

Freedom in all walks of life is the highest ideal that a humanist attaches importance to. A true humanist believes quite strongly that man must live a happy life during the span sanctioned to him by the nature. It is not enough if he lives a happy life for himself. He must go on doing good for his fellow beings and leave this world a liveable happy place for the next generations that follow. In doing all this he must consider the humanity as his first preference in all walks and moves. He must propagate respect for every individual person who forms the part of human society, without any kind of discrimination. Thus humanism goes even a step ahead of patriotic feeling. Patriots love only those who belong to their nation which is restricted by territorial laws and rules. But a humanist loves the whole human race without any kind of discrimination based on caste, colour nation or nationality. Whole world is his family.

Creativity is a significant and distinctive ability that man is endowed with by the nature. Always a creative man widens the horizon of existing knowledge. By his creative thinking he comes forward with new ideas and thoughts, through which he can alter and revise the existing system of knowledge. It is because of his creative urge that man has gone on searching

new things in the terrains travelled not hereunto. Creativity involves invention, innovation, intervention, and discovery and ultimately enrichment of the existing body of knowledge. Writing of the man endowed with creative urge D.D. Bandiste observes, “Man is a self-conscious, intelligent, imaginative rational and a free agent. That is why he is also a creative agent. That is why he improves as an individual and also as a society. Being sufficiently helps man to be a free and creative agent”. (Bandiste, 87)

Thus humanism having total disbelief in superhuman or supernatural natural laws or isms believes incontrovertibly in the ability of man and his freedom. This creative freedom places the man as the central functional force in all activities.

As for as the theory of Humanism in the west is concerned one has to naturally turn to Greek philosophers and then to the Roman thinkers. In the temple of Apollo at Delphi there were inscribed the words “know thyself” This oft quoted logo like phrase shows enough evidence of the starting of the thought of humanism. Many Greek philosophers and thinkers like Pythagoras, Socrates, and others were great humanist thinkers. They believed in the democratic principles sincerely, were great free thinkers of the past. Pythagoras another great thinker ancient of Greece proclaimed: “Man is the measure of all things”. This statement shows how man was placed in the centre of all human thought and activities. This idea strengthened the democratic principles of free thinking further. The great historians of ancient Greece, like Thucydides and Herodatus propounded the idea of rational approach to history and historical studies. A careful study of the texts of the great writers like Homer, Sophocles, Aeschyles and others shows enough of entry of Gods in the life of human beings. The characters of gods as delineated by these venerated post masters are well loved in human nature. Like any ordinary man of our mortal world they show fancies and follies, weakness and versatile aspects of their personality. Sometimes they support the band of brave fighters of this side and

sometimes they take sides with the other, in spite of their being above the ordinary human beings in more than one respect.

During the Renaissance scholars in Italy undertook the study of ancient texts humanism and humanistic when studies gained momentum. Calucio Salutati (1331-1406) a chancellor of Rome, encouraged humanistic studies and many humanists. He asked many humanists to take shelter in the city. Under his patronage member of ancient texts were rediscovered and this laid a fine foundation for humanistic studies of ancient literature texts. Petrarch was a great Italian philosopher poet who believed quite strongly in humanism. He had great reverence for Roman life style, philosophy and art. He regarded Oratory as the best form influencing the population as it provides face to face contact. Through one's powerful way of argument one can induce the minds of men towards being and doing good. He held the view that virtue and truth are the highest values in human life. Hence every human being must inculcate them in his personality to make the most of life on this earth He also provided religious ramification or dimension to humanism. He included many Christian values in it.

Humanism and humanistic study or approach to literature made their way to France in 14th century. Many premier institutions of education including the University of Paris introduced humanism as a discipline in their academic studies. Many classical works and big books written by Italian scholars got translated to French language. It was during this period only that humanism also assumed artistic dimension. In other words great artists like L.B. Alberti and others opined strongly that painters and artists must study history and poetry. Thus during the 14th century humanism influenced almost all walks of life in Europe, including the all moulding field of education.

Later on the word humanism made its debut in 1832 into English, according to Webster's dictionary. We also come across a reference to the use of the word 'humanism' in the oxford Dictionary, according to which the word was used by a clergy man in 1812 to mean "a sheer belief in

humanity”. A dictionary of philosophy defines renaissance Humanism in the following words:

Humanism is the intellectual movement that characterized the culture of Renaissance Europe...were optimistic about human possibilities, attended enthusiastically to human achievements and eschewed refined enquiries into theological niceties. However in this sense, Humanism was perfectly consistent with belief in God.... In this century the label has been appropriated by those who reject all religious beliefs, insisting that we should be exclusively concerned with human welfare in this, allegedly, the only word. (Humanism def. 1,2)

The seeds of humanism, it may be said with safety. Were sown and scattered by Geoffrey Chaucer in British literature. Being the father of English literature and first writer he rode on altogether a new terrain untravelled by his ancestors, as well as contemporaries. His ‘Prologue’ virtually presents “God’s plenty’. The characters created and delineated by him dexterously show their idiosyncrasy as well as individuality. His work holds up the mirror to the dress, deportment and beliefs of the people along with their performances that were in vogue in his contemporary society. As he was a man who had toured and travelled relentlessly across the continent he had observed the human nature quite keenly.

Thomas Moore who wrote the great and monumental work ‘Utopia’ offers the admixture of humanism and Christianity in it. He seems to speak for all humanists of his time. He spoke quite emphatically about the principles of equality and freedom which are the two faces of the coin humanisms. He spits enough anger towards warmongers and war makers. Thus he underscores the true spirit of humanism, which takes indomitable interest in the welfare of each and every individual in society.

Many magic mirrors, the dramas that have been penned by William Shakespeare show him an ardent humanist with indomitable interest in renaissance humanism. The world of characters both male and female created by him breathe the air of humanism quite buoyantly. In more than

one play Shakespeare displays his fervent humanist philosophy. His firm belief in humanism, it seems gets crystallized in the 'Hamlet'. The eponymous hero of the play does not believe in any sort of discrimination among the human beings. He believes in the miraculous power of friendship and love. He is of the opinion that man is endowed with ineffable ability for rare achievements and accomplishments. For instance we may cite the following words of Hamlet which end in exclamation. "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god – the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals". (William Shakespeare in *Hamlet* II 2-293-97).

One comes across almost the same tone and tenor getting resounded in his other works like '*Othello*', '*Macbeth*', '*As you like It*' and many sonnets. Thus he appears as a rare apostle of humanism.

Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* is a real representative of Renaissance humanism. Dr. Faustus who was born of a baser stock' aspires to achieve everything he can. his desire for knowing and knowledge is ineffably insatiable. His making the religious men a laughing stock in the church of Rome shows how profound a humanist he was. Like Marlowe, Bacon was also an ardent humanist. Through his works like '*Advancement of learning*' '*New Atlantis*' and *Essays*, he tried to spread humanism during his time.

In Milton also one may discern a strong humanist. When he wrote '*Paradise Lost*, he declared it 'unattempted yet in prose or to this rhyme' and aspires to justify the ways of god to man'. Thus for Milton to man is the centre of attraction and creation. Then Dryden and Alexander pope took clue from Milton. Alexander Pope who wrote '*Essay on Man*' says, "Know then thyself, presume not god to scan: (write reference to this) the proper study of Mankind is Man". Thus one may witness that though not explicitly stated from Chaucer to Pope the river of idea of humanism has flown down the ages inactively. Later on the humanism and humanistic studies underwent various forms, turns and movements. Humanism was entwined with

enlightenment, positivism, existentialism and many other theories. Where in man, his doings, achievements and accomplishments in all spheres of life are fore grounded and attached greater importance than anything else.

As for the theory of humanism in the east it can be traced centuries back. In the oriental side of the sphere moral ideas and spiritual attitude are entwined together with metaphysics. The master pieces of our nation namely the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* hold up the mirror to the humanitarian values through innumerable characters created by Vyasamuni and Walmiki respectively. While emphasizing the spiritual and moral aspects of human life both the venerated texts emphasize the essential dignity of man. The composers of the texts extol the man as the centre and the crown of creation. They appreciate the spiritual quality of man along with the need for the development for the rational and moral values. They emphasize the point that man can attain divinity by developing the spiritual qualities lying dormant in the soul or spirit. Therefore the personalities like Rama were raised to the level of supreme human being- 'maryadapurushottama'.

In the moments of suffering and the desire to get released from suffering the philosophical speculations were pushed forward in India. With a deep contemplation about Karma and Karmabandhana leading to impurification of soul man suffers. Hence the Indian philosophic thought time and again revolves around the goal of human life, self-knowledge and realization of the self which are possible only through self-purification and self-realization was the ultimate goal of every Indian. Everybody's soul is endowed with divine qualities and divine essence. So all are equal, eligible and qualified for self-realization or liberation [moksha]. This becomes possible only through Samadarshitva. The *Bhagavadgeeta* proclaims the importance of Samadarshitva in one of the slokas of Sanskrit.

Thus when there is Samadarshitva there is no scope for discrimination there is only universal approach to all things created and all human beings that surround one. Quite naturally unity and fraternity begin

to become the breathing air in society. These two elements as has already been observed in the previous pages constitute the very essence of humanism.

Even the Non Vedic cults like Jainism and Buddhism emphasized and preached that everything created in the universe is made of the same mother and the soul, as it is full of infinite capacity can become eligible for salvation or Kevalajnana or nirvana through unbridled and unbounded love for everything in the creation.

In the far East of China Laotzu, Confucius and Mencives popularized the humanitarian value based philosophy. Who, while attaching importance to individual ethics and equality among human beings, spread the idea of understanding the universe with the ability that lies hidden in the human heart with humane behaviour and action. In doing so, they negated the supernatural elements.

The Advaitic Vedanta does not deny the reality of this world outright. Rather, on the contrary, it fully affirms the reality of the world from the practical standpoint. And from this stand point all ordinary human relationship are fully real so that there is a full-fledged scope for a human ethics. (Tiwari K. 35)

According to the Vedantic Universal humanism, humanity or human beings can be understood well and accurately when one understands the Divine or the Absolute properly. This can be sought with the achievement of the liberation of soul which can be possible only with the liberty of the body. Thus rationalism and humanism are the two important undercurrents of Indian philosophy. Harmonious life style and fraternity with the very world around man is the point that one comes across repeatedly invariably in every venerated text related to Indian philosophy. The following quotations from different texts hold testimony to this observation.

(I am Brahma) (Brihadaranyake Upanishad 2-5-9)

(You are that)

Chandagya Upanishad 6-8-7m 6-9-4m 6-14-3)

(Ishavasya Upanishad2)

This very world is incarnation of the Almighty, the lord. One must not get hold of the things belonging to others. On contrary one must accept and own only these things which are exclusively for his necessity).

Oriental humanism is well loved in liberty of the individual while it honours difference and dualism. It gives full freedom to the practitioners. It respects their intellectual or rational approach. In the venerated text of our nation The Bhagavadgeeta we come across the statement made by Lord Krishna himself. He utters it before Arjuna after advising him the essence of the Upanishads in the form of the Bhagavadgeeta: (Sri Madbhagavadgeeta 18-63) [In this way I have brought to you the most secret knowledge. Consider the pros and cons and then you may do as you please].

Vaishnavism is an important ramification of the Hindu philosophical speculations, because it puts forward the concept of anthropomorphism of God. It praises the devotion to Lord Almighty in the form of man. Extollings for bhajans or Keertans by Meera and the Haridasa are abundant in Indian literature. Through immaculate bhakti one can attain doubtlessly the proximity of God. This is achieved through Sakhya or friendliness with Him. Sakhya is one of the nine forms of bhakti. When friendliness or comradeship occurs between a devotee and the Lord it is exactly humanism. Which attaches importance to dignity of devotee the Man.

The bhajans and the Kertanas composed by the followers of the bhakti cult extol the Lord and his 'leela' as human being. Because Lord incarnated Himself as man and played the role of relationship of a son, father, husband, enemy, friend etc. thus humanizing the God is a unique trend in Indian philosophy. This goes to show the point that there was enough of discussions and allusion to humanism and humanistic thought in Indian Literature though not said explicitly.

Thus humanism made appearance, even in philosophical discussions. Passing through various phases and stages humanism has recently assumed the form of humanities, or literary humanism. Literary humanism

intends to study the humanities which are the products of culture which again is a product of human society. Literary studies invariably deal with man and his doings as a member of the society literature is often regarded has the reflection of society. It's major interest is in man and human life. Poets and writers are always free thinkers in their world of Imagination. Thus what they write is always full of universal offer for all reasons, seasons of nations.

Before getting into the discussion of the idea of humanism as it gets reflected in the poetry of William Wordsworth it would be worthwhile to dwell a little to know about the formation of the idea of humanism as it got formulated in his personality. The days in England, when William Wordsworth lived and wrote are documented as period of great turbulence in the history of England. They were the days when French Revolution broke out, they were the days when England fought continuously with France (1793-1815), they were the days when the American war of Independence had disturbed the peaceful sleep of parliamentarians in England. England faced enough of hard day's events after closer of the war. There was ineffable unrest in the society and severe protest from the factory workers in England as the workers in the factories in spite of hard work they were made to stay in slums. They were not even provided with the basic amenities like proper residences and educational and medical facilities for their families and children. Much of the population from rural areas emigrated to city in search of employment in the factories. Thus there emerged demographical disparity in the population at villages and urban centers where the factories and Industrial estates had cropped up. Wordsworth who was brought up in Lake District, in the North-West of England, which was known for its serene, unspoiled. Verdurous surroundings, was very much fascinated by its beauty. It was a place of solace for him. The kind of social bleakness referred above harassed him very much. He was a young man of nineteen years then. He was disgusted with the kind of social environment around him and ran away to France. Then in France, Revolution was high in the air. The

French Revolution was based on the three fold principles of Equality, Fraternity and Liberty. These qualities appealed to young Wordsworth very much and influenced him so much that he would have remained there in France fighting for the cause of common and gone to guillotine. Humanity there had his guardian not commanded him back to England. In this regard John F Danby's remark is quite noteworthy.

The determining factor in this career was the French Revolution the great movement which made out very modes of thinking anew. While an undergraduate in Cambridge Wordsworth made several vacation visits to France. The first peaceful phase of the Revolution was at its height..., the little group of revolutionary orators who took their name from the south western province from which most of them came, and with this group - the girondists Wordsworth threw his lot. Had he remained he would probably have gone with them to the guillotine. As it was, the commands of his guardian brought him back to England, and he was forced to contemplate from a distance the struggle... This darkly passionate man tortured himself with his longings and his horror. War came and the prayers for victory in churches found him in his heart praying for defeat; then came the execution of the king. Before all this Wordsworth trembled as Helmet did when he learned the ghost's story. His faith in the world was shaken. First his own country had taken up arms against what he believed to be the cause of liberty. Then faction had destroyed his friends when he believed to be its standard bearers. What was in the world, in religion, in morality that such things could be? in the face of this tremendous problem Wordsworth, unlike Hamlet, was resolute and determined.

Thus so much was the influence of French Revolution on the young poet as it was rooted in the freedom of man. From this it goes to show that he was very much influenced by French Revolution. It also incontrovertibly believable that the French Revolution was very much instrumental in

developing humanistic outlook in the poetic career of William Wordsworth. “It is also reported that he became a conservative in his later years, but his faith in the ideals of the Revolution remained as steadfast as ever.”

Thus through the ideals French Revolution which percolated into his personality made him take interest in the life and happenings around him. This slow interests later on grow into a healthy creeper full of flowers of humanism. It gets expressed unimpeded in his poetry incessantly thereafter. In the same way one may find enough influence of the American war of Independence as this one was also fought in the humanistic base.

Apart from the influence of these contemporary wars one may also observe the influence of the great personalities like Kant and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It was through his contact continuous with Samuel Taylor Coleridge who was very much influenced by Kant that William Wordsworth came under the influence of Kant. This observation is clear in the following remark of Douglas Kellner and Tyson Lewis.

Kant’s revision of the liberal humanist tradition replaced metaphysics (Speculation about external reality) with critique. In for Kant critique consisted of tracing the origins of experience back to the faculties of the mind..... Kant’s humanistic side is the most clearly articulated in his theory of freedom. For Kant, humans are not simply the aggregate national forces. Humans are distinctly unique creature we freely give to ourselves an imperative to follow.

Wordsworth was greatly influenced by Coleridge. There might have occurred enough sharing of thoughts between the two friends during the course of their promenades and palaver. As Coleridge was influenced very much by Kant his ideas might have infected the thought process of Wordsworth. There are instances of this in his poetry. For instance, in ‘The preludes’, and ‘Ode to Duty’, Wordsworth voices much of humanism.

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