

The Theme Of 'Humanity' In The Novel 'Silas Marner' By George Eliot

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Abstract

George Eliot (November 22, 1819 to December 22, 1880) is known as Mary Ann Evans. She is an English novelist, translator, poet and journalist. She occupied a very high place among the writers of the Victorian era. She is well known for the psychological depth of her characters. She depicted English rural life in her novels. Her notable novels are 'Adam Bede' (1859), 'The Mill on the Floss' (1860), 'Silas Marner' (1861), 'Middlemarch' (1871-72), 'Daniel Deronda' (1876). George Eliot is the greatest of the women writers of the Victorian era. She came to be regarded as a novelist of the first rank in her own lifetime. George Eliot believed that humanity is a virtue in itself. It symbolizes human love, knowledge, sympathy and compassion towards each other. Humanity is also different from justice in some contexts. There is a level of altruism towards individuals included in humanity more so that the fairness found in justice. It is humanity which differentiates us from other animals and only humanity can bind us together. The power of humanity is the strength of individual commitment and the force of collective action. The sole purpose of this research paper is to throw light on the theme of humanity in the novel 'Silas Marner'. In the beginning of the novel, Silas Marner is leading a life of solitary linen-weaver in a small stone cottage in the area called Stone-pits, with his flabbergasted faith. Being falsely accused of robbery, he moves on to a village of Raveloe on the English countryside from Lantern Yard, a town to the north. Here he was considered as a young man of exemplary life and ardent faith.

“The past becomes dreamy because its symbols have all vanished, and the present too is because it is linked with no memories.”

George Eliot

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In fact the novel 'Silas Marner' opens in an English countryside where weavers lived isolated. The boys of the village used to listen the sound of his loom. Silas Marner, a linen Weaver was leading a life of isolation. The boys of the village used to listen the sound of the loom. Silas Marner is proficient in his profession. But the people believed that Silas Marner has special power of his craft. In those days any kind of skill was considered as magic, devil or witch craft. So during his fifteen years life's journey as a craft man of loom at Raveloe, Silas Marner made no effort to get friendly with other villagers. His isolation from others has given rise to number of rumors among the town people. Mr. Macey, the Parish clerk believed that Silas Marner has communication with the devil rather than human beings. Silas Marner's best friend William Dane suggested that Silas Marner's fit might have represented to visitations from the devil rather than from God. But Silas Marner has a great soul which is filled with humanity and human values.

Silas Marner as an Isolated Person

The village of Raveloe considered Silas Marner with suspicion. They thought that he has come from a mysterious place. He was totally unfamiliar to them. They knew nothing about Silas Marner or his parents. He was victim of his own bosom friend namely William Dane. He accused Silas Marner for theft in order to marriage himself with Silas's fiancée, Sarah. He (Silas Marner) was accused of stealing the church money from Deacon's room and was declared guilty of crime at lantern yard. Moreover the community of God destroyed Marner's faith completely. He left the community of Lantern Yard.

Silas Marner says-

“There is no just God that governs the earth righteously but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent.” (Ch-1, Pg.35)

The above lines are very similar to the ending lines of Thomas Hardy's novel namely 'Tess of the d' Urbervilles'.

Thomas Hardy says-

“Justice was done and President of the immortal has ended his sport with Tess.”

Silas Marner had a bitter past with people. He was falsely accused of stealing the Deacon's money. He was excommunicated from the church. His fiancée, Sarah called off their engagement. In the beginning Silas Marner was very friendly man, keeps much to him in the town of Raveloe. He was considered as a "wandering man" because of his unfriendly behavior and isolated life. Due to his odd situation, he himself has been betrayed. He was not friendly to anyone. It was the act of reclusive behavior, which has created suspicion about him among the Raveloe's people. Silas Marner's knowledge and efficiency about herbal causes turns the negativity of the villagers for him. They regarded him as a person who is sometimes depending on them for food. His hard work transformed him as a man of gold coins.

Silas Marner as a Man of Sensation

Silas Marner was expert of his profession of weaving. So, he re-established himself at his new place Raveloe. He felt Raveloe completely different from Lantern yard. The villages of Raveloe are more care free and less loyal in their religion. Silas Marner was seeking his fate and career in his own skill of weaving. He was known as "Master Marner" at Raveloe due to his efficiency. He was keeping himself strong enough to work sixteen hours in a day. He wanted the heaps of ten to grow into a square and then into a large square in his strange world. After coming at Raveloe he worked far on into night to finish the tale of Mrs Osgood's table - linen sooner than she expected and he was paid in gold unexpected money by her. He seemed to weave, like a spider with his all effort and impulse. Silas Marner had to provide his own breakfast, dinner and supper in his solitude. He hated the thought of his own past -life. Years after years Silas Marner had lived a life of isolation. His guineas are rising in the iron pot. His life was narrowing and hardening itself more and more into a mere pulsation of desire and satisfactions. His life was centered to the mere functions of weaving and hoarding. He has been cut off from faith and love only for the loom and a heap of guineas. Marner's face and figure shrank into a constant mechanical relation of the object of his life. But his sensation aroused when he came to know

about the cobbler's wife Sally Oates was suffering from dropsy. Sally awakens in Silas Marner memories of his mother. So, he offered Sally a herbal (Foxglove) that his mother had used to ease the pain. Since then women started to bring their sick children for cure to Silas Marner's house for his herbal medicine. Silas Marner never earned money by curing to anyone as a human being except his loom. He was always loyal to him. He personified his brown pot as if it was a comrade of his lonely times. When his brown pot was broken, he tried to put the pieces together but he saved the pot in a special place in his house as a memento. The greed and love for money are common weakness of human nature. But for Silas Marner his love for gold is his strength. Because he earned gold by doing hard and hard labor with loom during his isolated period of time. He never cursed to his fortune.

Silas Marner as a Religious Man

Silas Marner has a deep sense of religion. He has faith in God and religion both. He was known for his devotion to Chapel and divinity. The people believed that his fainting fits are messages sent from God. Silas Marner has trust in every person. He never saw the flaw in people especially in his bosom friend William Dane. The social centre of Raveloe was its Church. The people of Raveloe were thinking and working according to their religion or religious faith. But Silas Marner was unable to recognize the connection between religion and Christmas, when Dolly requested him to attend the church. He knows nothing about Christmas holidays as a person of Lantern yard. Neither has he known why church bell rings on Sunday, nor why Christmas carols are sung. When Silas Marner finds the child (Eppie) in his home, he believes that it is God who sent her to him at a time when he is in bitter need of companionship and love. Silas Marner is ready to accept a new set of religious beliefs for the good of Eppie as well as for other human beings. Silas Marner is devoted to the Raveloe church. Silas Marner and Dolly both are agreed that the world is full of darkness and evil. But at the same time they accepted about morality and humanity of the world. Eppie came in his life because of the worldly goodness. Silas Marner adopted and accepted Eppie and nourished her like his own child. He considered her (Eppie) as a boon in his life and gift of God for himself. So he rebuked Godfrey when he asked him to return her. In Lantern Yard, Silas Marner is known for his devotion to Chapel and religion. So religion in various ways plays an important role in the novel 'Silas Marner'. It is the dominating factor in the early part of the novel. There is everlasting contrast between the differing versions of religious faith and practice in the novel from beginning to the end.

Obsession of Silas Marner with Gold

As we know that greed and lust are the greatest weakness of human beings. Silas Marner has affection for gold. So after shifting himself at Raveloe, Silas Marner was working hours and hours with his loom for money (Gold). He was absorbed in his work and earnings. He had more

than two bags which were of gold coins. But it was Dunstan Cass who has stolen the bags which were filled of golden coins. He has been robbed. Silas Marner told the story of the robbery which people of Raveloe believed. Because he appeared so crushed and pathetic. The news of the theft transformed Silas Marner's reputation. The people of Raveloe became more pathetic with him after robbery of two hundred seventy two pounds and twelve and six pence. Silas Marner remembered the time when he was falsely accused so he retracted his accusation towards Jem. Silas Marner's obsession with good made him an isolated linen- weaver. But the loss of gold transformed his life totally. The villagers also had sympathy with him unhurriedly. Silas Marner felt the need to seek help from people. The men who didn't react to the news of robbery at first. But after knowing the reality they became very kind to him.

George Eliot says-

"A vague sensation of blurry faces, voices, and the fire's warmth unlocks Silas Marner's heart, and a new kind of feeling starts to grow inside him..." (Ch -7, Pg.119)

This shows that no man can live in complete isolation. Silas Marner, who was considered a "mysterious character", living completely "in isolation", is suddenly in bitter need of the villagers. He has told his trouble of strange situation to his neighbors of Raveloe. Godfrey and other residents of the village visited Silas Marner's cottage to gather evidence. Silas Marner is good natured man. He seems to automatically offer his help to others. Due to his simplicity others took advantage of him at Lantern yard. Even after theft of his gold in Raveloe Silas Marner manages to accept the event. He had learnt much from the happenings. This shows his

strength of character and dignity. Silas Marner suspected that Gem has stolen his money. But after a long discussion he came to know the reality.

Silas Marner says-

"I was wrong," he said - 'yes, yes - I ought to have thought. There's nothing to witness against you, Jem. Only you'd been into my house oftener than anybody else, and so you came into my head. I don't accuse you - I won't cause anybody- only," he added, lifting up his hands to his head, and turning away with bewildered misery, "I try- I try to think where my money can be." (Ch- 7, Pg.114)

This shows that Silas Marner has a sound mind. He is honest in himself. Gold can't attach him.

Silas Marner Earns Sympathy of the Villagers

Villagers have changed their opinion about Silas Marner slowly and gradually. After passing several weeks without any clue to the robbery, no one cares for Dunsey's disappearance. Silas Marner is still weary and passes the days weaving without any purpose. He is in a state of agony. The villagers have compassion on him. They think of him as helpless rather than mysterious and dangerous. The villagers bring food for Silas Marner. They helped him over his loss. Mr. Macey offers Silas Marner to come to the church. Dolly Winthrop also encourages him (Silas Marner) to attend church especially on Christmas time. Everyone in town goes to the church on Christmas except Silas Marner. Their simple and blunt honesty reflected in their conversation. Macey also encourages Silas Marner to come to church for worship. Silas Marner is proportional to the fact that the single act (robbery of gold) has changed the attitude of the whole community towards understanding and unity both. There is also growth in community relationships. The community realized about the need and support of others in odd circumstances. They came to know that what happened to Silas Marner could have happened to anyone of them. Silas Marner have been changed internally and externally both. As an isolated man, he wanted nobody near him and as a greedy man only gold was everything for him. But the theft of his hoarded gold taught him the reality of life and importance of society. The thought of the money, he would get by his actual work could bring no joy.

George Eliot says-

“He (Silas Marner) filled up the blank with grief. As he sat weaving, he every now and then moaned low, like one in pain: it was the sign that his thoughts had come round again to the sudden chasm- to the empty evening- time. And all the evening, as he sat in his loneliness by his full fire, he leaned his elbows on his knees, and clasped his head with his hand, and moaned very low - not as one who seeks to be heard”.

Now, Silas Marner is known as "poor mused creature" rather than an isolated man. Silas Marner's misfortune had brought him in the memory of Mrs. Osgood.

Mr. Macey says-

"Come, Master Marner, why, you've no call to sit a- moaning. You're a deal better off to ha' lost your money, nor to ha' kept it by foul means. I used to think when you first come into these parts, as you were no better not you should be; you were younger a deal than what you now; but you were allays a staring, white-faced creature, partly like a bald-faced calf, as I may say."

Here, Mrs. Osgood, Mr. Macey and old Harry all are consoling to Silas Marner for his betterment and goodness. They advise him to go to church for peace and prosperity. Mrs. Winthrop, was a comfortable woman, good-looking, fresh complexioned, having her lips always slightly screwed, one Sunday afternoon, she took her little boy Aaron with her and went to call on Silas Marner. She had carried in her hand some small lard- cakes, and flat paste- like articles for him. Dolly's long effort of speech was just like a medicine on a sick man like Silas Marner. He was too simple to evade Dolly's appeal.

Dolly says-

"Well, Master Marner, it's never too late to turn over a new leaf, and if you've niver had no church, there's no telling the good it'll do you." (Ch-10, Pg.161)

In spite of all, Silas Marner spent his Christmas-day in loneliness. He has eaten his meat in sadness of heart, though the meat has come to him as a neighborly present.

Eppie as a boon in the life of Silas Marner

Silas Marner has lost his gold. He is always thinking about it. He had been into the habit of looking out as if expecting his gold to come back. In the same series one day when he gets back to his hearth after doing so, he thinks that gold must come back as mysteriously as it has been taken away. He finds a "soft - warm curls" of a lovely little child, who somehow had entered in his cottage. She was sleeping besides the hearth. In his insane obsession for gold he confuses the blonde hair with his lost gold. This little child (Eppie) became just as precious to Silas as his hard earned gold. The sight of the little girl sleeping beside the hearth, bring to Silas Marner the memory of his lost little sister. The warmth of love and tenderness which were once in Silas Marner's life, returned to him since he had come to Raveloe.

Conclusion

Thus Eppie has transformed the thought, feeling, emotion, sympathy and companion of Silas Marner. Now Silas Marner is not thinking about his lost - gold. For him love is above all blessings of Life it is true that no one can live in isolation for a long time. The child (Eppie) is the sunshine of his life. Eppie's appearance at Silas Marner's door is also an allegory of Christian salvation, the moment of rebirth of the lost faith in Silas Marner. Eppie has come in his life on

the day of Christmas. The worth of love and the old quivering of tenderness that were once in Marner's Life, returned to him. Christmas is honored as a time of celebrating salvation; the same has done Eppie in the life of Silas Marner. When Mrs. Kimble asks Silas Marner to leave the child at Red House, he replied "It's come to me- I've a right to keep it." It was just a chance or fate that should bring them together. Eppie and Silas are baptized together. This brings Silas more close to the villagers. His little daughter forces him away from his work to play outside. Silas realizes that he has found Eppie something greater than gold. Silas realized that humanity and human values are essential for the human beings rather than any kind of wealth (gold) and worldly prosperity.

"The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity"

-Leo Tolstoy

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