

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S POETRY IN THE LIGHT OF LONGINUS'S SUBLIMITY

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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda has always been the pinnacle of sublimity. His poetry bewilders us through his vision of unison. His Vedantic interpretation brings a beautiful combination of thematic and aesthetic aspects. His philosophy is not the hash presentation of life; he always inspires us to reach to our home - the abode of Peace- without neglecting our mundane duties. His pomes can be counted on fingers but they are remarkably classical. His original poems and the translation of his poems (from his own pen) stand to poetic craftsmanship and nobility. The poetic expression and spiritual longings are equally important. Merely the presentation of noble and sober thoughts is not sublimity, there must have been a noble approach to language and emotions and swami Vivekananda is true to this touch stone of Longinus' concept of sublimity.

Key words - Sublime, Noble thoughts, strong emotion, figuration of language, Nobility of diction, dignified composition.

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Introduction

Swami Vivekananda, one of the most shining stars in the galaxy of Indo- Anglian literature, is greatly considered orator and poet of India. The world knows him as a giant intellect, social reformer, philosopher, religious teacher and a great patriot with cosmopolitan feelings. His splendid attempt to unfurl the flag of the Hinduism is well adorned all over the world. It was a spiritual occasion through which, the soul of India interacted with the world from the dais of the Chicago Assembly in 1893. Actually his reforming spirit is so enchanting that it has illumined the world not to peep into his poetic soul. His literature is certainly distinct and excellent in composition. His poetry is not the expression for external world but is the result of a man's search of his own permanent identity and to convert that identity to the identity of others and thus from the soul to 'the super soul'.

Basically, sublimity in literature was introduced by Longinus whose identification is not clear. Longinus is called "the first comparative critic of literature" (Abercrombie) and "the first romantic critic" (R.A. Scott James). According to him, he should think,

.....To be beautifully and truly sublime which please all people at all times. For when man who differ in their pursuits, their lives, their test, their ages, their language, all agree together in holding one and the same view about the same writings, then the unanimous verdict, as it were, of such discordant judges makes are faith in the admired passage strong and indisputable.(p.7-8)

Longinus, in his world famous treatise, 'On the Sublime', counts both natural and artificial aspects of sublimity. For him, poetry is not a mechanical process but rather a thing perceptible through spirit, imagination, passion and words. For Longinus, the purpose of the great writers has been to instruct, to delight (in poetry) and to persuade (in prose) and this purpose is supported by sublimity, made of five basic aspects. In this way, he has indicated to the treatment of the subject and the exposition of the sublime method. His main purpose was to show the sublimity, which is the root of nobility of creations. Decline and degradation of literature results from the downfall of nobility in soul. For Longinus, the ultimate aim of the literature is to reach to sublimity and its effect on the readers is the transformation to a new ever widening horizon.

(a)-Grandeur of Thought-

The sublimity of thought is urgent for a noble soul. Longinus says that, 'Sublimity is the note which rings from a great mind'. It can't be expected from the minds, full of servile ideas, habits and mean life style. Only the deep thinkers, full of majesty, can express the immortal expression. In spite of being innate, they can be achieved by stability in noble and generous choice of manner and expression. The grandeur of thought is to be emphasized and made effective by suitable treatment of materials. Swami Vivekanda stands at this touchstone. His teachings, musings and poetry are marked in oneness, faith in ourselves, God-realization, toleration of other religions and synthesis of the east and the west. He inspired the people of India to be united and to have faith in their language, heritage, philosophy, literature and physical and mental strength and to come to ground of reality and Karma in 'To the Awakened India'. His thoughts on God, spiritual life, man and his concern to the divinity and nature are not common touches. Above all, his optimism is the sole mark of his grandness of thought. He seems to echo Jesus Christ when he says to us to love the sinner as equally as saint in 'The Living God':

He who is at once the high and low,
The sinner and the saint,
Both God and worm,

Him worship-visible, knowable, real, omnipresent,
Break all other idols! (6-10)

(b)-Capacity for strong emotions-

Longinus promised to deal in the second aspect of sublimity in his other book but unfortunately the other book is not found. The scattered remarks about the strong emotions make the picture a bit clear. He said that nothing contribute sore to loftiness of tone in writing and expression than genuine emotions. But the emotions should be true emotions and in their right place. He discards the emotions such as fear, grief and which are far from the concept of sublimity. The invocation of such mean emotions brings the work below to the standard of excellence. Longinus did not accept penmanship without the power of strong emotions which help in raising the standard of noble thoughts. Swami Vivekananda's extempore speech at Chicago is ample proof in this concern. Sometimes he is humorous, sometimes ironical and sometimes pathetic. His pathos is not for the material output but his heart used to weep to see the pathetic condition of the dear of Mother India and to remember its glorious past. The melody of speech and poetry rank him with the great orators of the worlds. His specialty lies in the blending of thought and emotions to give the form of sublimity. How passionate is he in 'In Search of God':

When dire calamity seizes me,
The heart seems weak and faint,
All nature seems to crush me down,
With laws that never bend. (57-60)

(c)-Appropriate use of Figures-

Longinus is very attentive in the usage of figures of speeches and devotes near about one-third part of the treatise to this aspect. His discrimination and originality of this field is above the mark. The mechanical use of figures is rejected. They should come in expression, being deeply rooted in genuine emotions. Their natural implication elevates the style. To blend

strong thoughts with generous emotions, Longinus counts figures of speech into two categories- 'figures of thought' and 'figures of language'. Apostrophe, 'Asyndeton', 'Hyperbaton, Periphrasis' etc are noted by Longinus. As Swami Vivekananda was the prince of oratory, he used to present figures of speech naturally. His works are full of the examples of Metaphor, Synecdoche, Metonymy, Euphemism, Repetition, Inversion, Rhetorical Question, Climax, Anti-climax, Hyperbole, Alliteration, Irony, Epigram, Paradox, Periphrasis etc. The metaphors and similes suggest the relation between the major and the minor. The metaphors of the lost child in the dark and dismal world, of life to the tossing ship on the sea of uncertainty, the comparison of temporary life to the violet are profound in this poetry. How figurative his expression is from 'My Play is done':

Open the gates of light, O Mother, to me They Tired son

I long, oh, long to return home! Mother, my play is done. (17-18)

K.R.S. Iyengar rightly holds the view:

The words gushed out as it were, and carried with them the native energy and impetuosity of his mind and his feelings for the common people..... like all great teachers, Vivekananda too made adroit use of figures of speech (p. 436)

(d)-Nobility of Diction-

The proper use of words, metaphors and hyperbole is the fourth element of sublimity. The discussion of diction is incomplete because of missing some important pages of the treatise. If the subject is trivial, the splendid words will destroy its beauty. Apart from Aristotle, he allows the usage of two or more metaphors together. Longinus's emphasis on the right usage of words is aptly followed by Swami Vivekananda in his speeches and poetry. Through his word, Swami ji commotioned the west to such an extent as the west hailed him as 'the cyclonic monk of India'. Through his mastery over language, he expressed everywhere without artificial tint. In spite of his philosophical touch to the subject, the diction and expression is heart-touching and sober. His diction and style reaches to the Romantic spirit when he presents the picture of Nature in 'In Search of God':

The moon's soft light, the stars so bright,
The glorious orb of the day,
He shines in them: His beauty might,
Reflected light are they,
The majestic morn, the melting eve,
The boundless billowy sea (49-54)

(e)-Dignity of Composition-

The proper arrangement of words, thoughts, emotions, themselves proceed to the composition of elevated literature into a harmonious whole. Negativity, deformity and non-grandeur are the results if composition is either extremely concise or extensive, first does not expend the thought or the other overloads it. Swami Vivekananda's poetry leads to the 'culmination of ecstasy and take us to the world of 'Satyam' (truth), 'Shivam' (welfare) and 'Sundaram' (beauty)'. Dr. Radhika Nagar is very true when she says:

Just as Vivekananda was ever filled with bliss, peace and elevating thought so the poems too are a continual bubbling spring joy that are not tainted by a touch of the morbid melancholy of romantic art. (p. 25)

It's the combination of strong thoughts, emotions, language and figures of speech that leads to the true sublime. Indeed, his poetry is full of thoughts, images, symbols, metaphors and words. His usage of proper words in proper order with command on thoughts and emotions form the immortal impact of his works and poetry. Satish Kumar comments on his poetic style:

His poetic style is characterized by simplicity, gracefulness, picturesque, abundant use of highly suggestive symbols and image, spontaneity, harmony, lyrical intensity, musical motion and rapidity of movement. (p. 32)

Conclusion-

Sublimity is a guide to Swami Vivekananda's poetry towards great themes and divine handling of language as in his final speech at Chicago, he inspires the world to 'Help and not Flight', 'Assimilation and not Destruction', 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissection'.

The preface of the 'In Search of God and other poems' reads:

Some of the poems of Swami Vivekanda closely indicate the high ecstatic state in which they were shaped and expressed ---- no words that it stands to raise the mind of the reader to a very high place and to infuse him with lofty aspiration.
(p.5)

In 'The Song of the Free', how splendidly he concludes-

'From dreams awake, from bonds be free!

Be not afraid. This mystery

My shadow cannot frighten me!

Know once for all that I am He!' (41-45)

The disorganization of the four aspects leads to the false sublime. The false sublime is characterized by timidity (bombast of language), puerility (parade and pomp of language), parenthesis (meaningless passions), variation of syntax, and defects of style, but they have no place in the sublime expression of a sublime soul. Dr. Mita Biswas says:

The philosophical poetic output of the first cultural ambassador to the best, though limited, is yet the microcosm to the microcosm of all the gorgeous volumes of his lectures. In movements of great ecstasy, he composed some poems and hymns which mark with the creation of sublime poetic art. They are like excerpts from the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita in the authentic voice of prophet, rendered in exquisite English. (p.7)

In a long run, Swami Vivekananda is a classist in the treatment of truth, nature, God and self but his romantic sensibility is present in his treatment of poetic techniques. His poetry has the impact of the Vedic Mantras which come out mouth of a 'Seer' and knocked gates of our long slept hearts.

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