



SYNTHESIS OF GREEN POETRY AND SPIRITUALITY: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF G. M. HOPKINS

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Abstract: Ecocriticism focuses an earth-centered approach to literary studies and stresses the relationship between literature and the physical environment, defines Cheryll Glotfelty (Glotfelty xviii). It has great relevance in today's environmental crisis. Nature is the primary source of inspiration and spiritual enlightenment. And this aspect of nature is deteriorating nowadays as humans disfigure it in terms of urbanization and ecological exploitation. The role of human being is to guard the natural environment. Nature's beauty has a curative effect and it is a solace to the inner soul. According to C. S. Lewis, "If you take nature as a teacher, she will teach you exactly the lessons you had already decided to learn" (Cronon 19). Real happiness lies in experiencing nature through an inspiration from God. Gerald Manley Hopkins is the nature mystic of 19th century who sees God in and through nature. He had greater concern and deep rooted interest for the maintenance of the ecological balance and nurturing care for the environment. He celebrates nature, God and spirituality in his poetry. This paper aims to examine the synthesis of nature and spirituality in the poems of G. M. Hopkins. An ecocritical study of his poems reveal the importance and worth of nature's gifts and its spiritual connection. This aspect may lose in future as human beings run after technological wonders. The crucial aim of Ecocriticism is to harmonize the relationship of human with their environment in order to protect the earth.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, G. M. Hopkins, Environment, Divinity

Introduction

This paper aims to examine the synthesis of nature and spirituality in the poems of G. M. Hopkins. An ecocritical study of his poems reveal the importance and worth of nature's gifts and its spiritual connection. The poetry of G. M. Hopkins has been the object of much ecocritical interpretation in recent years. He had deep sympathy and sensitivity for the natural world. The relationship between nature, God and human beings is interconnected and is studied in this paper where the theory of Ecocriticism has been explored through the poems of G. M. Hopkins. It focuses on how the non-human and human functions together and ultimately influences each other to experience the divinity.

Nature is the principal source of inspiration and spiritual enlightenment. And this aspect of nature is deteriorating nowadays as humans disfigure it in terms of urbanization and ecological exploitation. The role of human being is to guard the natural environment. In earlier times, human beings, nature and other creatures lived together in harmony caring for each other. As years passed and as the material interests of man stirred up, he began to separate himself from nature. The habit of plundering nature mercilessly for his selfish needs and pleasures in a way, hurt nature and other living and non-living creatures. Now he has become the exploiter of nature. Nevertheless nature still bestows its good gifts irrespective of man's exploitation. Nature's beauty has a healing effect and it is a solace to the inner soul. According to C. S. Lewis, "If you take nature as a teacher, she will teach you exactly the lessons you had already decided to learn" (Cronon 19).

Ecocriticism focuses on an 'earth-centered' approach to literary studies and stresses the relationship between literature and the physical environment, defines Cheryll Glotfelty (xviii). It has great relevance in today's environmental crisis. In fact, it is a study of environmentalism. Greg Garrard while commenting on Glotfelty's definition writes, "eco criticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory" (Garrard 3). The

crucial aim of Ecocriticism is to harmonize the relationship of human with their environment in order to protect the earth. Earth is our mother and provider. In the Atharva Veda, earth is seen as mother: “O Mother Earth! Born of you and living on you, we all creatures . . . human beings, birds and animals are being nourished by your water, air and the sun energy” (12.1.15). In ancient days, earth was worshipped as Goddess. Therefore, preserving the earth is similar to worshipping the Goddess of earth.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), an English poet, a Jesuit priest, a typical mid-Victorian and the nature mystic of 19th century sees God in and through nature. He had greater concern and deep- rooted interest for the maintenance of the ecological balance and nurturing care for the environment. He celebrates nature, God and spirituality in his poetry. Joyful expression, positive faith and mystical perception are the main components of his poems. He gave depth and spiritual power to everything he wrote. He wrote to serve and praise God. God was always supreme in the mind of Hopkins. To Hopkins, all nature is a manifestation of God. The hovering falcon, the harvest, the skylark, the moon rise, the starlit night and the air we breathe speak to him of God. John Parham’s book *Green Man Hopkins: Poetry and the Victorian Ecological Imagination* considers G. M. Hopkins as an ecological writer. Nature enchanted him with her beauty of colours and sounds. In fact, he is eminent for his sensuousness, spiritualization and mysticism for nature. Hopkins was a very keen and acute observer of nature and natural phenomenon. In the opinion of W. H. Gardner:

Hopkins describes trees, breaking waves, the ribbed glacier, and the distant hill whose contour is like a ‘slow tune’. He eagerly observes the growth and disintegration of anything from a cloud to a bluebell. Nevertheless, he was always looking for the individual essence of a thing which gives it a surprising uniqueness. Very often this for Hopkins, is like a religious ecstasy (Gardner 10).

A crucial aspect of Hopkins's poetry is the synthesis of nature and spirituality. Nature acts as a close link between human being and God. When he was a young church member, Hopkins wrote in his journal: "I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it. Its Inscap is mixed of strength and grace" (Cash 90). Hopkins used to observe the beauty of nature sacramentally and he realized a great truth that everything in nature has a touch of its master and an individuality of its own. He termed this individual quality as 'inscape' and the inscape of an object reveals its own beauty and the divine aspect in that object. Obviously, Nature is a mixture of diverse elements of divine beauty and therefore it is an avenue to God. "Pied Beauty" is a devotional poem in which Hopkins sings of God as pied beauty and recognizes the presence of God in everything:

Glory be to God for dappled things-
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim. (Phillips 132-33)

In the poem "Nondum" Hopkins wrote: "We see the glories of the earth / But not the hand that wrought them all." (Phillips 82). Here he was conscious of the handiwork of God behind all outward manifestations of nature and wished that his readers too realize this truth.

The harmony and bonding between human and non-human forms can be seen in the poem, "Barnfloor and Winepress". The bread made of wheat flour and the wine made of grapes are the fruits of the earth and the outcome of human's labour. There occurs a miracle when these non-human objects undergo an invisible transformation into the Body and Blood of Christ, while it is

sacramentally consecrated. The poem ends with a perfect mystical union in the Body and Blood of Christ through nature's gifts of bread and wine.

In "Binsey Poplars," Hopkins condemns human being for harming nature that is equal to hurting God. He literally cried, when he found his lovely trees are cut down. His inner pain is expressed in the poem as a lamentation : "My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled, / Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun, / All felled, felled, are all felled;" (Phillips 142). In "*Revaluing Nature: Towards an Ecological Criticism*," Glen A. Love quotes renowned English Historian, Arnold Toynbee as:

. . . mankind now has the power to make the biosphere uninhabitable, and that it will, in fact, produce this suicidal result within a foreseeable period of time if the human population of the globe does not now take prompt and vigorous concerted action to check the pollution and the spoilation that are being inflicted upon the biosphere by short-sighted human greed (225).

Hopkins records his grief over deforestation. He ventilates his agony and pain as man fails to realize the damage he causes to the environment. Under the pretext of improving the countryside, only destruction goes on: "To mend her we end her" (Phillips 143). Hopkins voices for the lovely trees, which is a deliberate voice for nature (Post 12).

Hopkins' environmental poem "Ribblesdale" celebrates nature. He mourns earth's loss of trees and grass. He is truly a lover of God and God's earth: "Earth, sweet Earth, sweet landscape, with leaves throng / And touched low grass, heaven that dost appeal" (Phillips 156). He implores that humans must serve as the "Earth's eye, tongue, or heart else," (157) and preserve the earth. Human beings never forget that the whole world is the handiwork of God and therefore, everyone has a grave responsibility to conserve the beautiful earth. We can be the masters not to damage but

to increase its vitality as it is written in the Holy Bible: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1: 28).

Man’s action of plundering the earth for industrial advancement irreparably destroys the landscape. Hopkins disapproves the ridiculous materialism of the age and addresses the consequences of soil pollution in “God’s Grandeur”. In *The Diversity of Life*, Harvard entomologist, Edward O. Wilson tries to establish the fact that human beings act as important agents in the process of destruction. The extravagant and wasteful lifestyle of humankind results in plundering and destruction of the earth. An unsustainable life style adopted by human beings is destroying their own existence (Wilson 17). Hopkins strongly condemns the irresponsibility of human being regarding earth in the name of material production. Yet, he maintains that despite man’s greed and wastefulness there is hope for the world as long as God continues to brood over it.

Conclusion

G. M. Hopkins insists that separation of human being from nature is dangerous for both nature and human society. In fact, it is a separation from God. He conveys a message through his poetry that human being can enjoy the bliss of nature only by living in absolute closeness with nature. He recommends his reader to create a bond of relationship between human being and nature for environmental rejuvenation. And they should never break this link. The study of Hopkins’ poetry from ecocritical perspective makes the poetic expression more significant in environmental consciousness. Hopkins enjoys his contact with nature and he realizes the divine power in the natural objects which energizes the whole universe. As a poet and as a priest, he admonishes human being to preserve the green for the better future.

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