

MODERN LITERATURE - III

UNIT - IV Prometheus Unbound (Drama)

Introduction:

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born in Sussex, England in the year 1792. He was extremely rich both from parental and maternal descent in terms of culture, attitude and political points as well. From the very beginning he was engrossed with literary values in his surroundings.

Shelley's true spirit of nature, which always attracts us from the serene wind and the cloud, the beautiful sunset and moonrise, appears to be always with him. More often than not, he is a true poet and his work is without a doubt overwhelming.

If we can divide his poetic works, we would find two distinct modes as we have in our lives. The foremost is the one where he is a drastic transformer of the world, pertains always to throw away the traditional customs and beliefs and to make the millennium out of the slow track into the gallop. This very facet of his, produced poems like Queen Mab, Revolt of Islam, Hellas, and the witch of Atlas,

On the contrary, in the second facet Shelley is the perfect dreamer of dreams where he possesses the beautiful vision to see the splendid offerings of nature.

Introduction:

All the vision of Shelley are connected with the regeneration of mankind in a better world to come. To the people of his own times wedded to conservatism and old-fashioned ideologies, the visions of Shelley about liberated humanity might have appeared as dreamy visions or hallucinations. To us readers they are the visions of a sane man who had the good of mankind at heart and who was all the time inspired by a nobler and better order of human civilization and humble life. The lyrical strain is present in almost all the longer poems of Shelley. They contain things absolutely consummate, absolutely unsurpassed only by a few other things as perfect as themselves. Their intensity is partly the vividness of the poet's vision, partly the emphasis of impetuous soul.

Prometheus unbound too is no exception to this trend. We shall discuss the lyrical features of the poet in this essay.

Emotional Ecstasy:

Shelley's lyrics have an emotional ecstasy. The songs of "Prometheus unbound" are marked with an emotional feeling of joy probably at the liberation of man from thralldom. Ecstasy quality of Shelley's lyrics is not a permanent feature. Since the note of melancholy and despair can equally be sounded by the poet in his lyrics.

To love, and bear, to hope till hope creates
From its own wreck the things it contemplates.
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent,
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be,
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone life, joy, ^{em} Epic and Victory.

Prophetic Note and Touch of Humanism:

Prometheus resembles Jesus in that both uncompromisingly speak truth to power, and how Prometheus overcomes his tyrant, Jupiter; Prometheus conquers Jupiter by "recalling" a curse Prometheus had made against Jupiter in a period before the play begins. The word recall in this sense means both to remember and to react, and Prometheus by forgiving Jupiter, remove Jupiter power, which all along seems to have stemmed from his opponents 'anger and will to violence'.

However, in Act 1, Shelley relies on the Jew as the image of the crucifixion of Jesus. When Prometheus is tortured by the Jew, Panthea describes Prometheus as "a youth / with patient look nailed to a crucifix". Soon after Prometheus asks a Jew "Remit the anguish of that lighted stare / Close those wan lips; let than those-wounded brow / Stream not with blood" and "So thy sick throes shake not that crucifix".

The regeneration of mankind and the world is symbolized by the union of Prometheus and Asia. To achieve this, Shelley relies on classical myth to draw upon the idea of Saturn's Golden Age, and then he combines it with the Biblical ideas of the Fall and the millennium.

Simplicity:

Rapture and Simplicity are the two essential qualities of a lyric. A lyric is the expression of a passionate ideal. Besides being rapturous, Pure Passion is always simple, whether it be the passion of love, hatred, joy or despair. Shelley's lyrics have the quality of simplicity in a marked degree. His poetry is uniquely beautiful. It has the quality of music and the art of combining the outward rhythm of thought and imagery. It is because of the musical quality of the lyrics that Shelley has been called a "Perfect Singing God".

General Religious and Philosophic ideas:

Like Plato, Shelley conceived of a Supreme Power, which is at once immanent and transcendent and which moves through all objects of nature and human life. This spirit is the governing spirit of universe. Like Plato Shelley was vividly conscious of the universe and all the life. He celebrates this spirit in many different ways. In "Prometheus Unbound" this spirit is represented as spirit of goodness.

as in the speech of Asia:
How glorious art thou, Earth! And if thou be
The shadow of some spirit lovelier still,
Though evil stain its work and it should be
Like us creation, weak yet beautiful.

Shelley believed that the soul was immortal and has its pre-existence and reincarnation. When one soul reached heaven after struggling off its mortal coil, it had the chance of communion with other souls in the kingdom of God.

Cosmic Speculations:

Plato had taught that the entire universe is the evolution of an absolute intelligence. The sun is the visible embodiment of the supreme spirit. The planets are all divine work under the divine guidance. All these cosmic speculations of Plato are embodied in Shelley's poetry. In 'Prometheus Unbound' he represents the moon and the earth as living spirits endowed with intelligence of their own. They are bound together by the force of love. The moon circles round the earth: "Gazing on insatiate pride, on thy force every side."

Social and Political Ideas:

Shelley's entire philosophy of evil and good is based on the Platonic conception. He recognized evil as a force in the world which sometimes trampled goodness under its iron heel. But the ultimate success was of the spirit of goodness.

In Prometheus Unbound this dualism is well represented. Prometheus is a soul of man and is the embodiment of everything that is noble and good. A conflict goes on between the two forces and finally the triumph is on the side of Prometheus, which means the success of good over evil. Plato hated tyranny and so did Shelley. In 'Prometheus Unbound' Jupiter is represented as a tyrant inflicting torture upon human beings.

Conclusion:

Shelley in his lyric sings of what he wants to feel. The thrills of desire, the gushes of emotion are all straining after something distant or future or they are wails of passionate despair, utter despondency for something hopelessly gone. Yet it must be owned that these bursts of passionate desire after ideal beauty set our pulses throbbing with the strange vibration.

Such is the charm of his impressioned eloquence and the witchery of his music. In the drama 'Prometheus Unbound' also these qualities very much secure and keep us thrilled all the time.

Section-A

I

1. How is Prometheus pictured at the opening of the play?
2. Why is Mercury sent by Jupiter?
3. What is conveyed by Panthea to Asia?
4. What is the story of Prometheus about?
5. What does the epilogue in Prometheus Unbound suggest?
6. How does Shelley's faith find expression in the poem?
7. What do Prometheus and Jupiter stand for?

II

Section-B

1. How does Shelley represent the dualism of good and evil in the drama 'Prometheus Unbound'?
2. Prometheus Unbound is an allegory about humanity's struggle over nature - Describe.
3. Examine the importance of Act 1 in 'Prometheus Unbound'.
4. Sketch the character of Prometheus.
5. Sketch the character of Demogorgon in this drama.

III

Section-C

1. Explain Prometheus Unbound as a lyrical drama.
2. Write an essay on Shelley's Platonism as evident in 'Prometheus Unbound'.