

Review of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' From Karmic Perspective

Abstract

Every work of art is multilayered and it depends upon the reader to take out the hidden message embedded beautifully in it. This paper represents a detailed study signifying the essence of karmic chain in every pursuit of human endeavor through the study of the life of Mariner in context with the poem 'The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner'(1). This paper is an illustration of a deep study of various critics which helped in bringing out the mysterious elements in a very natural way.

Keywords: Karmic, Humanism, Suffering, Regeneration.

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to figure out the spiritual crisis of an age-old poetic character who underwent a spiritual transformation within his journey and leaves an eternal humanitarian message. The story of the ancient mariner is moving on two parallel levels. At one level it is the physical journey, the journey of the ship, the experiences undergone by the Mariner and his crew members while on the other hand the whole tale is a story of a voyage into the interior. The latter unravels the fundamental ignorance through the structure of supernatural events.

Aim of Study

The Review is centered on the working of 'karma' through the example of 'Mariner' in context. It is a symbolic poem because it has not one, but several layers of significance. It has been maintained that the story of 'The Ancient Mariner' recapitulates the history of mankind, or of everyman, or of a man's enquiring spirit. Thus the aim of studying this particular work is quite the same where Coleridge wrote it with the same quest of the mystic revelation of 'action' and to bring forth the spirit of compassion on both the personal and universal level. It also emphasizes the prevalence of the invisible law that pervades the Universe the natural world and human beings is same.

The Karmic View

The Rime Of Ancient Mariner was planned by Wordsworth and Coleridge to extricate English poetry from the 18th century artificiality.

He presented this "haunting narrative poem of symbolic adventure in which the handling of visual detail, the selection and ordering of the incidents, the manipulation of mood and tone and the counterpointing between the familiar and the exotic, the factual and the magical combine to produce an appeal so rich and powerful that any schematic analysis seems to mock rather than to explain the total meaning."(2)

He wove the supernatural machinery with the dramatic truth of human emotions so well, that howsoever improbable the events might appear, the actuality of human experience is never violated. Similarly, when we look deeply the mystic path entails a struggle to maintain life.

In the beginning of the poem, when the albatross hovers about the ship or makes its appearance in the life of the Mariner, it is hailed as a "Christian Soul" which is a good sign and the voyagers make a pet of it. Their companionship continued for nine days. Then the Ancient Mariner killed the Albatross with his cross bow which is the most crucial moment of his life and the tale. He committed a heinous crime by killing the bird, which at the moment was objectified to a mere bird pursued for a man's whimsical hunt. He died with the death of the Albatross and here his death is spiritual. So from a karmic angle, the cause which he created will bring an adequate effect on him.

Further in the narrative, earlier the sailors condemned the action of the Mariner for killing the bird of good luck but when the fog cleared away and a bright and glorious sun shone in the sky, they too justified his action, thus making themselves accomplices in the crime. Here at this

Mamta Bansal

Lecturer,
Dept. of English,
YMCAUST, Faridabad,
Haryana, India

juncture, they too created a similar cause for which they have to pay off equally in the later part of their lives.

When Coleridge was writing this poem, he believed in the principle of 'One Life'. *"It is commonplace that the full experience of reading romance is like that of passing into a different world; what Coleridge wanted to investigate was the psychological truth within that commonplace. Against the current of eighteenth-century thought which allowed for such diversions simply as a relief from the more serious concerns of the everyday world, he was inclined to believe that the romance played a far more important part in human experience –and that it was, among other things, associated importantly with the religious sense."*(3)

Thus, the Albatross was a symbol of 'Life' itself. It was a cog in the wheel of life, where the bird too represents the principle of One Life. Besides, it was their guest. When the Ancient Mariner shot it dead he does not quote any strong reason for his action; which made the killing of the bird a deliberate and irresponsible action. *"The Mariner's wanton shouting of the bird is of course the crisis of the action. This gratuitous act of destruction was a violation of the deep natural sanctity, and the rest of the poem shows how the curse fell and how it was at last if not completely cast off at least greatly mitigated. No summary or partial quotation can give any indication of the haunting richness of detail with which Coleridge develops the action from this point. The Mariner's shipmates, who take no moral responsibility for any thing, at first blame him for having killed the bird "that made the breeze to blow," then when the mist disappears and the sun rises no longer dim and red but gloriously golden and haloed, praise him for having killed the bird that brought the fog and mist but soon the wind drops, and first part of the curse manifests itself."*(4) Here the words 'suffering' and 'regeneration' fit in with the perception of cycle of 'karma' where the familiar principle of science says, *"for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction"*. So through suffering which he and his crew members will undergo so that they can learn the eternal lesson of humanism and will start respecting the beauty and sanctity of life in all forms.

The suffering starts with the change in the external universe. When in a hot and copper sky, the bloody sun stands right up above the mast and the ship stands

*"As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean."* (117-118)

Slimy things are seen crawling upon the slimy sea. At night 'death fires' dance and water burns like a witch's oils.

The lines

*"Water Water everywhere
Nor any drop to drink"* (121-122)

completes the image of the universe which becomes the reflection of the internal suffering and agony of the Mariner. In fact, the unmoving ship, the beating sun, the rotting water creates, according to *Florence Marsh*, a more powerful image than *T.S Eliot's* rock with no water in 'The Wasteland' and is a very clear,

vivid and lucid manifestation of a sick and paralyzed consciousness.

Now, the cycle of karma will be complete with the visible sense of guilt and so the shipmates hung the Albatross around the neck of the Mariner. The cross was ripped off from him which is again symbolic act of highlighting the fact that the Mariner will carry the guilt of his act as a punishment. With the arrival of the spectreship and the mysterious game of Dice between Death and Life in Death, where Death is a winner of all the 200 shipmates which is metaphorically true as they were already dead; since their judgment was not based on any well defined standard of right or wrong but on the results it brings to them. Thus their karma was settled off in a very symbolic way.

The Mariner who was won over by Life-In – Death underwent an experience of extreme suffering for 7 days and 7 nights. He tried to pray but prayer was impossible for an impenitent heart, but under the benign influence of the moonlight, he becomes aware of the beauty of the water snakes which appeared as 'slimy things' earlier and he blesses them. Here comes the required shift, the shift in his attitude where he can acknowledge and appreciate the *Oneness of Life* in all forms. Thus here comes the aspect of learning, the realization of a unified self and henceforth the Mariner's new journey starts with the break of the curse and the dropping off of the bird. This is the beginning of the Mariner's recovery. He is now endowed with a sense of recognition of the working of cause and effect. Thus the man becomes the protagonist of his own destiny, he becomes his own saviour, saviour of his soul, by keeping a check on his own actions and thoughts. The moment the man takes up the responsibility of his own actions he becomes victorious and leaves a message for all the people who are enveloped in the character of 'The Wedding Guest' who at first is hesitant to hear the story but is bewitched by the magical spell. *"At the same time the Mariner's tale is a story of a voyage into the interior. Not only into the unfathomable depths of the sources of human action to be discerned in the unpremeditated shouting of the albatross that causes him his suffering, and the spontaneous blessing of the water snakes that begins his restoration, the story also takes us beyond the human world altogether. Again it is a voyage of extreme contrasts, of suffering and expiation, of the human and social world and an altogether alien cosmos with its own terrible, yet beautiful order. It is exactly right the listener should be a wedding guest and that the Mariner's denies him his expectations of the natural enjoyment of the music, the celebration and happiness of the feast. It is also right that the guest should be afraid of the Mariner and feel that he is a being from another world, he is exactly that"*(5) The Mariner himself is an embodiment of supernatural as fits well in the machinery due to the perfect blend of imagination and realism, the constant transport of the reader from the world of acute realism to the world of awe and wonder makes the poem and the character eternal and believable. The Mariner seems to be like one of us who doesn't contemplate or reflect upon his each and

every thought and action and after the completion of his arbitrary and irrational act he faces his own cruelty. The depth of the origin of the human action is showcased followed by the suffering and the transition phase where the mariner changes his perception of beauty and divinity with the change of his self from ordinary to mature, his environment too reflects a new look when the same slimy creatures appear to be beautiful to the mortal eyes. The vast ocean becomes the reflection of his own self and it started to manifest his truest identity. The sense of realization is still far far away from the mariner. Thus these lines....

*"The man hath penance done,
And penance more will do." (408-409)*

The emergence of the sense of mistake or guilt is emphasized. Until and unless he doesn't realise his sense of mistake, the sense of aligning his actions with a thoughtful purpose, he suffers in the ocean. Finally when he realizes, he receives a chance from his life to spread the message of One life far and wide. So from a deeper karmic perspective this whole story is nothing but a chain of actions. The universal law which is suspended on one and all is active incessantly life a 'Wheel', 'Wheel of Action', if it is positive then life moves ahead and takes a new direction and if it is negative it experiences jolts and jerks to let the life force realise his or her sense of mistake. The sense of right and wrong is the force which propels the wheel of action in its desired direction and to unify oneself with the principle of Oneness.

So, here in these lines the significance of the remaining suffering which he has to undergo so that he can reconcile himself also with the Creator is enforced.

Conclusion

At the end he reached his own country rescued by the pilot and hence starts the process of lifelong repentance. He now wants to share the lesson

which he finally learnt through direct contact with supernatural forces. Thus at the end the lines

*"He prayeth well , who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast
He prayeth best , who loveth best
All things both great and small.
For the dear ,God who loveth us
He made and loveth all." (612-617)*

signifies the essence of dignity of human karma, where his actions are rewarded accordingly and hence he understands the importance of a benevolent heart full of warmth and prayers for mutual coexistence of all beings.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.poetry.foundation.org>.
2. Page 892-893-lines(32-39), Blake, Wordsworth & Coleridge- Volume four "The Romantics to the Present day" A Critical History Of English Literature, David Daiches, Revised Edition.
3. Page 49, Lines (2-4), John Beer, Coleridge and Poetry: I Poems of the Supernatural.
4. Page 894, Lines (1- 15) Blake, Wordsworth & Coleridge- Volume four "The Romantics to the Present day" A Critical History Of English Literature, David Daiches, Revised Edition.
5. Page 122, Lines (1-13), A Preface to Coleridge by Allan Grant.

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