

6- As A Mystic Poet

- Q. Discuss William Blake as a **mystic poet**. (UOS-2016)
- Q. Discuss William Blake as a mystic poet. (UOS-2015)
- Q. Discuss William Blake as a mystic poet. (UOS-2013)
- Q. It is often said that William Blake is a Mystic Poet. Elaborate. (UOG-2012)
- Q. Elaborate the theme of mysticism in Blake's poetry. (UOS-2014)
- Q. Discuss Blake as a Mystic poet?

Ans. A **mystic** is one who seeks union with God and the realization of truth beyond man's understanding. So a mystic poet is one who reveals, in his poetry, the relationship of soul with God, and analyses the states of soul and man's predicament in this earth and in heaven. He also ponders over the purpose of life and tries to answer the questions related to soul. Blake also ponders over these questions, regarding man's predicament in this earth, the present state of soul and the need of salvation.

The most important **mystical influences** on him were: Christianity, Swedenborg and Boehme. Boehme's 'Doctrine of Contraries' attracted and influenced Blake. In an early passage of "*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*" Blake observes that there is no progression without contraries, attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate are necessary for human existence.

His "Songs of Innocence" and of "Experiences" are the two contrary stases of human soul. Both **naturalism and mysticism** of the Romantic Revival found expression in Blake; and on this point he differs from pioneers like Burns, who is simply naturalistic, or Cowper, who is slightly touched by mysticism. On the naturalistic side, he deals with the simplest phases of life; with the love of flowers, hills and streams, the blue sky, the brooding clouds; and yet the mystical vision of

the poet is always transforming these familiar things into something strange and wonderful. To Blake every spot is holy ground; angels shelter the birds from harm, the good shepherd looks after his sheep, the divine spark burns even in the breasts of savage animals. Cruelty to animals incensed Blake, he would give them the same freedom what he wishes for humankind.

**"A Robin Redbreast in a Cage
Put all Heaven in a Rage!
A Dog starve at his Master's Gate
Predicts the ruin of the State**

Similarly, he says:

**A Horse misused upon the Road
Calls to Heaven for Human-Blood.
Each outcry of the hunted Hare
A fibre from the Brain does tear.
A Skylark wounded on the wing
A Cherubim does cease to sing.**

Mysticism in poetry is blended usually with a **wistful melancholy**, "the desire of the moth for the star" animates the poets' soul; and in his hunger after eternity, he feels more and more dissatisfied with the show of life, but Blake is an exception. He is a joyful mystic, for him the morning stars sing together, and the splendour of life outweighs its shadows. There are no mournful regrets in his verse, no sighing for a day that is dead. Evil rouses his anger, not his tears. Sorrow he accepts cheerfully as a necessary twin to joy

**"Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine;
Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine**

And

**"It is right it should be so
Man was made for joy and woe;
And when this we rightly know,**

Safely through the world we go."

Unlike some mystics, he did not seek after the spiritual world and despised the world of senses. His mysticism was not an **aspiration for the future**; it was a realisation of the present. He thought:

"The Kingdom of Heaven is within you: we have only to free ourselves from what is base and paltry and we live in this realm of spiritual beauty now".

Like a mystic, the only unreal for Blake was the external world. The great reality for him was the world of his **visions**. Whatever validity one may attach to these visions, one cannot write them off as the delusions of an unbalanced mind, for he never confused these with the phenomenon of ordinary life. They were differentiated by him as something holy and distinct.

In a way, it seems that the mind of Blake was abnormal, because he had an extraordinary faculty for visions. But the fact that one cannot share them does not discredit those visions. However, the practical side of his mysticism is deep-rooted with the problem of life. His view of love **resembles Shelley's**.

For **theology** he had no love, and the priest-craft he abominated. It was the theologian and the priest who had added to the misery of the world by their distorted picture of God. Love, thought Blake, was so often confused with self-love:

**Love seeketh only self to please,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a Hell, in heavens despite!**

One more bond that Blake shares with Shelley is his passion for liberty. He **thunders at Kings** and priests and the representative rulers, in his prophetic writings. Nor will he spare his own country when he thinks that it has been false to freedom;

**But vain the sword and vain the bow,
They never can work war's overthrow.
The hermit's prayer, the widow's tear**

Alone can free the world from fear.

And

For a tear is an intellectual thing,
And a sigh is the sword of an angel king,
And the bitter groan of the martyr's woe,
Is an arrow from the Almighty's bow?

Blake continually told people that his poems were directed to him by "authors in eternity". **Imagination** was the name for this kind of inspiration. He admitted that he was the only man who could see his particular vision of life and the world, but he denied the validity of that common sight. He believed that common sight is an illusion, and that the phenomenal world is unreal, because the 'five senses are bodily, therefore, these are imperfect. To Blake, common sense is only a partial view. "Mental (or imaginative) things alone are real." Hence, to Blake, belief in the reality of external nature, the visible world, was a kind of atheism. He called Wordsworth a pagan:

"I fear Wordsworth loves Nature, and Nature is the work of the Devil".

Blake holds that real knowledge is attainable only by spiritual vision. But this does not mean that the world does not exist; Blake saw a divine spark in every manifestation of life. He believed not only in the spiritual nature of the soul of all living beings, but also in an intimate connection between soul and body. He says that the body is nothing but also the portion of the soul, discerned by the five senses.

Blake believes that **everything that lives is holy**. To Blake the meanest and the lowest among the people partakes of the same divine soul as the "loftiest" and the "best". Thus Blake cries out against cruelty and oppression, against exploitation of man by man and against the inhuman treatment that the poor workers, the chimney-sweepers, the prostitutes, the orphans and the other unprivileged sections of society receive at the hands of the rich. The exploiters and the oppressors are the enemies, not only of the people but they are

the worst sinners against God, so, they can be given no quarter. In fact, by ending exploitation and sufferings one can do the greatest service to God and attain ones full divine stature. Blake certainly advocates forgiveness, but this forgiveness must not be allowed to become a weakness.

Blake was a mystic. He thought so much upon the clear and radiant light of heaven. Though mysticism frees from irritable reaching after facts yet if it tends to be completely divorced from reality, it loses its validity. The mystic may find **solution to the problems** by taking flights of imagination, but until his imagination finds a contact point with reality that solution will be merely in the nature of wistful thinking.

So, according to the common-sense standard, to some people of his time Blake was "mad". He is comprehensible only when he compromises with **common sense**. He declared that his books were dictated by spirits; yet his greatest poems are those which were produced not by immediate intimation, but by inspiration followed by critical and rational revision. He declared that **"allegory addressed to the intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding is my definition of the most sublime poetry"**, yet, Blake's greatest poems are not the hidden allegories, but the simple songs e.g., "The Lamb", "Infant Joy". "Holy Thursday", "The Divine Image", and "The Tiger", etc.

However, it is wrong to say that being a mystic poet, Blake did not see the dark side of life. One has only to go through the "*Songs of Experience*" to see Blake's indignation against the evils prevailing in society. "*Songs of innocence*" may project the idealism of the mystic, but the *Songs of Experience* record the protest of a kind humane person, who felt the injustices of society on his pulse, and felt them through his heart.