



## Think India (Quarterly Journal)

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**Indira Gandhi Government Post Graduate College,**

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### Understanding ‘Body’, ‘Soul’ and Spirituality through William Wordsworth

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#### Abstract:

*Literature is one of the mediums of communication through which the author expresses his/her thoughts on social, political and cultural issues of his surroundings replete with feelings and imagination; and gives aesthetic bliss and solace to the mind of the common man. In their works English poets have concentrated on various experiences of human life extending from personification of beautiful mountains, flowers, butterflies, rivers, trees, cliffs, sea, ocean, west wind to the dehumanized modern cities, commercialized human emotions and fragmented human personality; from myths, folklores and folktales to utopian, globalized and modern anecdotes; from ‘sad music of humanity’ to humdrum of motor cars. In their expression of human experiences they have aimed to lead the humanity towards everlasting goal of attaining spiritual state and peace of mind; they have idealized the characters who have perfected the journey from mundaneness to divinity; from ephemerality to eternity; and from ‘reason’ to ‘emotion’. They have keenly observed the real goal of literature as to transport the human beings from darkness to light; from ignorance to knowledge; from outer experience to inner experience; and from the ‘body’ to the ‘soul’. William Wordsworth in English literature is such a poet who has relieved the poetic creativity from ‘high society’ and “my lords and ladies gay”; inspired poetic sensibility and inflamed the human ‘soul’ by romanticizing commonplace objects of man, nature and human life.*

*The present research paper aims to study William Wordsworth in respect of his understanding of ‘body’, ‘soul’ and their mutual conflict, inter-relation, juxtaposition and yogic harmony in bringing sense of ‘subjective isolation and poetic bliss’; and his perception towards spiritualism as ‘best and final goal’ of human life.*

**Key words:** *Literature, Body, Soul, Spirituality, Romanticism, Mysticism and Subjective isolation, Industrial Revolution, Nature.*

The soul is an immaterial element in which intellect, emotion and free will are housed, and which controls the body in its all spaces. The soul is immortal in the sense that it cannot be annihilated or perished; therefore it remains alive even if the body is physically dead. Since in it the free will is located it is very element that carries the massive burden of sin performed by



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body. The role of ‘body’ and ‘soul’ and human efforts for their unification has been subject of literary brooding and discussion for the time immemorial. Someone supports the bodily experiences as the essence of all human efforts while others believe that satisfaction of soul is the real core of all human actions and it is immortal and eternal being the imperishable part of the Supreme Soul. There are others who favour the ‘unification of body and soul’ as the essential goal of human life. To be free from bodily attachment even being in bodily cage is the salvation. From the advent of human civilization the thinkers have tried to seek the path for attainment of the salvation (Mukti) in various names in different civilizations; and the Indian culture is not different where the final goal of human life has been declared as to get the salvation ‘Moksh’. The Bhagwad Gita is the most reliable and precious book in the Hindu culture that explores in detail the solution to solve the mental conflict between bodily, materialistic world and spiritually enlightened soul, the nature of the universe whether it is alive or dead, mechanical or organic whole, chaos or cosmos with or without a divine power, nature of soul and man’s position in relation to his freedom and creativity in such a universe. The immortality of soul and ephemerality of body; the importance of action beyond of results and relations have been efficiently illustrated in the Bhagwad Gita as:

नैनं छिन्दन्ति भास्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।

न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न भोशयति मारुतः ॥ (Bhagwad Gita, 2:23)

(Weapons can not cut, fire can not burn, water can not wet and wind can not dry this Atma)

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाणि नरोऽपराणि ।

तथा भारीराणि विहाय जीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ (Bhagwad Gita, 2:22)

(As a person puts on new garments giving up old ones, similarly the soul accepts new material bodies giving up the old and useless ones.)

Having the above mentioned thoughts in the mind the analysis of the poetry of Wordsworth provides that they reveal the spiritual significance of the world and show that the man is ‘an inmate of this active universe and an agent of the one great mind’ (Wordsworth, 1805) and the Grand Supreme Soul which provide the energy, force and identity to all souls of the world. Wordsworth’s poetry becomes more relevant in the present world when like Sybil at Cumae modern we have been facilitated with ‘immortality’ by magic of science, ‘the modern Apollo’ but in this process we have forgotten our natural existence and spiritual interactions with Nature. “Getting and spending we lay waste our powers, /Little we see in Nature that is ours; / We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!” (Wordsworth, 1807:239) We are caught into a narrow lane of ‘living death’, boredom, emptiness, hollowness and claustrophobia- an extreme fear of being in a small enclosed place. (Yadav, 2016)



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William Wordsworth, a Poet Laureate and romantic poet has been praised as the “poet of humanity” (Gill, 1989:396) who has regarded poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth, 1798:881) which “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” (Wordsworth, 1798:881) Poetry, according to him, “is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression that is in the countenance of all science.” (Wordsworth, 1798:881) Devoting himself to revive the simplicity, lucidity, subjectivity, love for nature and imaginative flight in the content and style Wordsworth, in his return to the Nature, never grows morbid like Rousseau, or animal like D.H. Lawrence. ‘Love, had he found in huts where poor men lie? (Keynes, 1919:223) He has not tried like Whitman, ‘to turn and live with the animals’. That is why Wordsworth is still a living voice, crying in the wilderness its prophetic protest, not only against the unhealthiness of all over-civilization, but also against the drab brutality of the machine-world and of the mass-state.( Lucas, 1995:223) In the process he, like his own imaginative daughter Lucy Gray, surpasses the burden of earthly fears due to ‘an overseeing power’ and feels ‘the silence’, ‘beauty born of murmuring sound’ and ‘vital feelings of delight’ which can only be felt by the enlightened soul. In a way Wordsworth’s poetry is a journey to find solace of soul ‘in earth’s diurnal course.’ Wordsworth himself accepts that the victory of soul over earthly fears is inevitable:

A slumber did my spirit seal;  
I had no human fears:  
She seemed a thing that could not feel  
The touch of earthly years. (Wordsworth, 1800:232)

It is ‘Nature’ that makes William Wordsworth able to find out the difference between outer and inner world; ‘body’ and soul; and foremost materialistic world and heavenly abode. In his blog Craig Pearson observes that the ‘Nature’ in its soothing mood takes Wordsworth into a state of increasing tranquility. The ‘weary weight of the intelligible world’ grows lighter and eventually fades away. His breath and even his blood flow seem ‘almost suspended’ and he feels as if ‘laid asleep in body’, ‘become a living soul’. From this deep level he is able to ‘see into the life things’, a unique way of knowledge. From deep within, he experiences ‘harmony, and deep power of joy’ consequentially he perceives in him ‘a blessed soul’. (Pearson, 2012) It reflects his collective conscience journey from darkness of bodily ignorance to the light of enlightened soul. That is why Wordsworth writes in his poem ‘Tintern Abbey’-

...; that blessed mood,  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened:-that serene and blessed mood,



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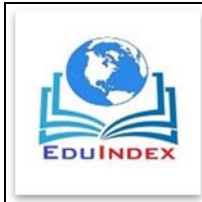
In which the affections gently lead us,-  
Until, the breath of this corporal frame  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul: (Wordsworth, 1798:236)

In his poetry Wordsworth treads the path of ‘eternal bliss’ because he knows how to find himself and, above all, how to lose himself (Lucas, 1995:222) which is an essential step to bring harmony between body and soul. Wordsworth’s approach to behold the divinely elements in the worldly objects is part of his perception to feel ‘living soul’ everywhere. This ability of Wordsworth provides him “power of seeing more than to be seen, hearing more than to be heard, smelling more than to be smelt, touching more than to be touched, tasting more than to be tasted and reasoning more than to reasoned.”(Yadav, 2016) He transcends from earthly experiences and starts to feel the divinely element in each and every objects of the materialistic world because Wordsworth perceives a ‘presence that disturbs me with a joy/ Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime,/ Of something far more deeply interfused,/ Whose dwelling is the light of setting sun.’ (Wordsworth, 1798:237) In such ‘blessed mood’ Wordsworth suggests that the ‘poet could not but be gay’/ In such a jocund company’. (Wordsworth, 1807:234) He dances with the daffodils-

In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils. (Wordsworth, 1807:234)

Wordsworth opines that the ultimate pleasure of humanity lies not in physical world but in soulful nature. His ‘thoughtless youth’ hears oftentimes the ‘still, sad music of humanity’ to ‘chasten and subdue’. His ‘mighty world of eye and ear’ can see ‘anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,/ The guide, the guardian of my heart, the soul/ Of all my moral being.’ (Wordsworth, 1798:238) Only the city of Wordsworth which can ‘doth, like a garment, wear/ The beauty of the morning.’ (Wordsworth, 1807:240)

Wordsworth has been keen supporter of opinion of soul’s immortality and secondary position of human body in human existence and his poem *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* is an apotheosis of the glorification of soul in high words; it narrates whole journey of human soul from its separation with the Supreme Power to its survival struggle in the world; from its spiritual existence to its impurities of materialistic world. He believes that the soul of man is divine; it comes into the earthly life, not a blank, but bringing with it high spiritual instincts and powers. But the interests of the mundane and temporal encroach upon it; the divine life instincts



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are stifled. Hence he makes to understand the difference between earthly body and heavenly soul. Better to quote these lines-

Our Birth is but a sleep and forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy! (Wordsworth, 1807:244)

In the poem Wordsworth gives solution to come over this miserable condition to keep these instincts alive, to maintain the continuity of spiritual life, and to translate into the reasoned convictions of manhood the child's innate and spontaneous faith. According to Wordsworth to do this we must live as much as possible among the deeper things our own natures and in intimate communion with divine soul of the universe. In doing this man can rejoice the reminiscences of the distant past, faint and shadowy though may be, do in fact bear witness to the soul's divine origin and heritage and to its kinship with the eternal order of things. Wordsworth remarks-

The Clouds that gather round the setting sun  
Do take a sober colouring from an eye  
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;  
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.  
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do lie too deep for tears. (Wordsworth, 1807:247)

The poetry of Wordsworth reflects a soothing and elevating influence upon us. "More than all but a very few English writers," says M.H. Abrams, "Wordsworth has altered not only our poetry, but our sensibility and culture." (1976) In his presentation of human instincts and humanity Wordsworth shows a kind of magic purity and reveals the most sublime truths of life in the simplest language. In understanding of soul and body Wordsworth has awakened the thoughts of man to the permanence of soul by correlating the liveliness of Nature as the gateway between human world and the Supreme God and inspired human beings with noble ideals of life.

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