

# Vaughan's works direct us to proceed our journey by faith, not by sight: An aesthetic appeal of the conspicuousness of the Divine phenomenon.

Mr. Shantanu Siuli

\*Assistant Professor & \*\*Ph.D. Research Scholar

\*Department of English,

ICFAI University, Tripura

Kamalghat, Agartala, India-799210

\*\*Seacom Skills University

Birbhum, West Bengal, India

## Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to examine Vaughan's works under the light of his mystical senses and to experiment whether his consulting formulas in assessing the divinity through the prospect of nature is the strong blend of conspicuousness or not. This paper also aims to investigate his principle psychology and doctrine of his subtle transformation to vindicate the uncontrollable stasis of the Divinity around the universe. Vaughan's spiritual struggle for the finding out and have the divine sense is aptly to be discussed in this paper to crosscheck the basic principles of his devotional journey under the careful guidance of his master George Herbert whose *The Temple* incorporated and imbibed a brilliant impact on Vaughan.

## Key words:

Mystical sensibility, spiritual struggles, naturopathic diagnosis and its keen consciousness, principle of hermeticism.

## Introduction:

Henry Vaughan, a keen observer of nature and its truest signifier, introduced us with the concept of the personification of God in the broadest realm of nature. Vaughan's native place Llansantffraed of Brecknockshire learnt him gradually to imbibe the rich core of nature and helped him to manifest and introspect the dark and deep philosophy of nature. Vaughan's intense desire to be associated and assimilated with the realm of God stately defines his subtle psychology of his mind that divulged his strong understanding of mysticism. He was a true practitioner of alchemy and was thereby renowned to be a great doctor near about his native place under the guidance of his brother Thomas Vaughan with whom he keep his balanced relationship till the end of his life. He valued deeply his ancestry and adopted the title "silurist" to claim himself to be the part of the ancient Celtic tribes Britons, the Silures- an inhabitants of the South East Wales. Vaughan started gaining his faith by his slow observation of nature and the creations through the lens of his absolute mysticism, surrendering himself to arrest his keen conscience and observation about the omnipresence of his God, for to Vaughan to have His primary concern of his unrest and absolute motifs of his life. His transformation from secular to sacred one at one time reciprocates us about his mystical union with Divine, explaining his deep dazzling awareness of God through his mystical observation, and leads us directly towards his manifestation

*Silex Scintillians*. His reflection, in *Silex Scintillians*, often reminds us of his deep understanding of his finding out and exploring God in His every creation, and simultaneously aims us towards the divine projection around us (Richardson 23). *Silex Scintillians* is basically a record of his firm and prolonged faith over his journey and longings for God, of his realization about that God is present on earth and can be seen through one's believe.

Vaughan's marking up the possession of God in every creation and its gradual effects on the minds of himself remind us of his thorough and regular practice of the Divine prayer with utmost sincerity, ranging up our devotion identity and outlook with full ease, and helping us to sum up our lost feeling of evangelical and devout thoughts with high fidelity. Vaughan's view of the landscape presents it as a reflection of the unseen into the seen, and his Augustinian distrust of the reason insists on the reality of faith in experience (Garner 2). In fact his view of the ultimate reality is Christian and to the by only Christian. His allegorical refinement and temper of feeling seem to pale and fade into tenuous and rarefied gropings for the indefinable. To be sure, the modern readers do find in Vaughan occasional incitements to understanding. He captures rather arrests an instant of experience in a single word, even his anticipation of Wordsworth in nature poetry and in suggestions of pre-existence and natural innocence, together with his religious perception, infact given Vaughan a core of respectability. To a few one Vaughan is a religious poet, to a few one he is a mystic poet, and to many others he is a poet of nature. Vaughan's religious poetry has nothing to do with his religious experience, for his poetry, some has argued, was gleaned from his readings, while there are those who oppose that view. Critics have divided their views by narrating two different view points which are dissimilar to each other. Some have said him as a 'mystical' and other called him 'experimental', 'hermetic' genius of poetic appeal. Vaughan's work make establishes into admirable autobiography.

As Burnaby points out "the image of God is manifested not in the mere passive possession of certain qualities but in action, the power to use reason for its proper ends. The mind, even in its fallen state, is thus conceived as a center of power, a source of creative activity: Human nature is a great thing, but because it is not the highest it was liable to spoiling, and although liable to spoiling because it is not the highest, yet because it has a capacity for the highest and is able to become partaker in it, it remains great" (xiv). Vaughan, unlike many others co-poets of his genre, believed so in his heart to encompass the stasis of the human believe about the God. Martz has brilliantly noted that "Vaughan's *Silex Scintillians*, a volume that, along with Milton's miscellaneous *Poems* of 1645, marks the emergence of the layman as a central force in religious poetry of the period. Vaughan's volume, though written by a staunch Royalist and Anglican, nevertheless stands as a sign of a profound mutation in human affairs. It is the symbol of a vital transformation in the religious outlook of the age" (4). Vaughan showed his allegiance in his undistinguished volume of secular poems in 1646. His poetry starts with a flash of power with positive vitality and thus swims across on the wave of the link of God and the mankind. Vaughan's habit of composing, his aesthetic appeals and propositions, are more elusive and vital at his writings to demonstrate the skills of his heart. We really know very little of his poetic methods and the source of his materials. The critics who uses his response as a hypothesis to be proved by evidence and analysis, it seems to me, may very well justify his involvement in the immediacy of Vaughan's expression by marshalling the evidence; at least the process of inquiry may prove profitable, even if it transpires that there is really nothing there. In fact, Vaughan's work makes up into admirable autobiography, the very best in the sense that it grows out of the elusive and subtle realities of the psychological response. Vaughan's subtlety is exactly the same as Herbert's: "Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations", but the main title demonstrates a vast and major difference in the 1650 volume alone. Evelyn Hutchinson, a friend of Martz, exposed his deep observation that "a man within can be clearly seen through an opening in the heart's wall" (Martz 5). Vaughan's deep yearning for the illimitable gifts and holy spirits demonstrates the psychology and the principle ethics of the religious experience. The religious poetry of Henry Vaughan is both universal and particular, but universal and particular in some sort of specific ways; the particular experience of which the poems are a universal re-creation and re-enactment are not the indefinable mist of religious feeling but a series of specific events which

require a conventional outlet, a presupposed tradition, if their universal nature and sentiment are to be understood.

There is a third series in Vaughan's understanding the position of his soul and the universe and to idealize the concept of the God in the realm of the pessimistic undertones that present us with a more serious problem. In that series of understanding the awareness of the spirit-body dichotomy becomes increasingly intense and deep with subtle care and ease. Vaughan declared that he is "the gourd of sin, and sorrow"<sup>1</sup> and a "quicken'd masse of sinne".<sup>2</sup> Man is a "very brute"<sup>3</sup>, a "toylsom Mole"<sup>4</sup>, and men are "dull, wretched wormes!"<sup>5</sup> The world is "corruption"<sup>6</sup>, and the roots of plants "suck but diseases"<sup>7</sup>. Man is "all stone, and Earth"<sup>8</sup>; He has "foul, Clay hands"<sup>9</sup>, and even Christ's body is "this impure, rebellious clay"<sup>10</sup>. To Vaughan, the human body is a worse 'Cott/ All filth, and spott"<sup>11</sup>, and the flesh is "vile, and low"<sup>12</sup>. In Vaughan mysticism turns to nature and finds there its Metaphysical imagery and its inspiration. Through his sympathy with nature the conceit annexes another great domain of symbolism, for Vaughan made Nature his father, guide and his special province and explored its riches with peculiar insight. As a poet of nature Vaughan is partial and akin to evening well to accomplish the direct conversation with his God in some pantheistic norms that anticipates and influenced Wordsworth in the later part of his century. A reader of Vaughan gets some ideas of pessimism and optimism, rejection and embrace, longing and fulfillment, raises and measures problems of a sort which may well combine starting point and motive for an intensive analysis of single poems in their relationship to each other and the body of Vaughan's religious verse as a whole (Ross 19). H.C. Beeching, in this regard, in his introductory note to the Chambers edition of the poet in 1896 argued that "the extent of Herbert's influence is nevertheless prepared to acknowledge that Vaughan owed to him his religious life, and so the practice of religious poetry" (Durr 4).

Our discovery of the role of the hermetic philosophy in his writings has served at the best to sum up a few specific areas of difficulty; it has not provided grounds for a conception of the work as a whole. With few and recent exceptions we have not understood Henry Vaughan, we have understood neither his meaning nor his manner. He was a passionate believer in the symbolic code of the world of nature, and if the narrative of the poet's pilgrimage is a confessed fiction, the journey of his soul for which it stands is actual and purely genuine. Edith Sichel found Vaughan to be efficient, intellectual learned man of pure and genuine habits blended with divine light. Garner's efforts, in this regard, to qualify the prevailing assumptions about the importance of hermeticism in Vaughan lead him in effect to proceed farther than the case requires or allows. This is especially true of his attempt to prove that Thomas Vaughan was a hermetical dualist and therefore- *ergo*- disqualified as an influence upon his brother. Garner's argument is full of begged questions, wrenching, and arbitrary conclusions (Durr 113). His vision is normally tangential and fugitive in comparison, but it is genuine vision: he has the strength and power to see with his own eyes and declare the truth what he sees.

#### Discussion:

While Vaughan characteristically incorporates the idea of the Divine element in the soul through his imagery of seed and flower, he occasionally has alternatives to other images. When, in 'Vanity of Spirit' he came to search within himself instead of in nature, he found what he describes as 'traces, and sounds of a strange kind':

Here of this mighty spring, I found some drills,

With Ecchoes beaten from th' eternal hills;

Weake beams, and fires flash'd to my sight,

Like a young East, or Moone-shine night....

Vaughan's experience and his poetry are two different things, and if he uses mystical writings, he uses mystical writings, he uses them not as embodiments of his own response to the ultimate but as poetic *patterns*, and the assumption that Vaughan's poetry does reflect his inner life is an "exegetical fallacy" which takes its origin 'from unwarranted assumptions about the poet's conversion and his manner of using devotional themes" (Durr 133). Vaughan's habit of poetic composition depends upon the use he could put his material to as a reflection of his own experience. Vaughan was no mystic from Kermode's point of view because there is a complete divorce between Vaughan's religion and his poetry. Like Sydney, Vaughan uses a specialized language which is neither original nor to be taken at its face value, it is a cheque drawn on the bank of Hermes Trismegistus. Miss Guiney noted that "Vaughan, of all religious poets, makes the most charming secular reading, a peculiarly backhanded compliment. Miss White farther, noted that 'That Vaughan has the mystic's desire for immediate contact with reality behind all the shows of things, there can be no question" (Durr 131).

Vaughan saw God in nature, as most of Vaughan's critics have argued, from two points of views- one from nature imagery<sup>13</sup> and the other from the relationship of the idea. Vaughan's awareness of God in nature is evidenced in his poetry by the interaction of four notions. The first and most fundamental of them is implicit in the irony of the first stanza of the poem upon which this chapter is centered, that the creatures are not wholly inanimate. The idea is focused in the four lines of "The Starre":

For where desire, celestiall, pure desire  
 Hath taken root, and grows, and doth not tire,  
 There God a commerce states, and sheds  
 His Secret on their heads.

Vaughan looks at a stone or tree or flower, as he does in the second stanza of "And do they so? Have they a Sense? he sees it responding to Christ in a way denied Vaughan; it dwells in Christ, whereas he must somehow be vouchsafed the grace to will his own surrender. He says:

There's not a *Spring*  
 Or *Leafe* but hath his *Morning-hymn; Each Bush*  
 And *Oak* doth know *I AM*. ("Rules and Lessons"; II. 14-16)

Vaughan noticed a great compromise between creations and the Maker not only in terms of the active response of the creatures to Him, but in terms of the active response in them, through the agency, as he indicates elsewhere, not only of Christ but of angels that foreshadow his realization. In "Religion" he observed:

My God, where I walke in those groves,  
 And leaves thy spirit doth still fan,  
 I see in each shade that there growes  
 An Angell talking with a man. (1-4)

Additionally, in “Ascensionp-day”, Vaughan states a statement directly without any compromise of experience of his belief:

What stirs, what posting intercourse and mirth  
 Of Saints and Angels glorifie the earth?  
 What sighs, what whispers, busie stops and stays;  
 Private and holy talk fill all the ways?  
 They pass as at the last great day, and run  
 In their white robes to seek the risen Sun;  
 I see them, hear them, mark them haste, and move\  
 Amongst them, with them, wing'd with faith and love. (25-32)

Vaughan, here, accepts the Pauline conception of the renewal of creation and the Spirit of God in Christ at work in nature, and finds in the order he is thus enabled to see an evidence for the truth of the Pauline conception he had on other grounds originally accepted.

Vaughan has used the terms of seed and planting to denote the determined Christian life where he again asks the God to protect the seed's frailty and its gradual growth:

Let not preserve,  
 And foolish thoughts adde to my Bil  
 Of forward sins, and Kil  
 That seed, which thou  
 In me didst sow,  
 But dresse, and water with thy grace  
 Together with the seed, the place.....

In “Cock-crowing” and “Vanity of Spirit” Vaughan demonstrates the Christian tradition, positing “a peece of Divinity in us”. Man's spirit is a celestial blossom planted by God in the ground of the heart with the sun of righteousness. Regeneration is the effect of God's action upon His own essence of human beings. In ‘Corruption’, the soul's essential simplicity is unshaken, but it is hidden out of sight beneath a thick cloak of duplicity of human fraud, hypocrisy and shame.

Vaughan's writings are full of the consciousness of the God's grace and of man's miserable ingratitude and failure to return His love and mercy. The Biblical command to love and seek the grace of God with a whole and

pure heart is clear and fundamental. All creation is intent on heaven, but giddy man is loose and aims at all things:

I would I were a stone, or tree,  
Or flowre by pedigree,  
Or some poor high-way herb, or Spring  
To flow, or bird to sing!

Vaughan is developing his images of light and darkness through the symbols that suggest one of his favorite Biblical passages: the third chapter of St. John's gospel, where Nicodemus hears the words of Jesus by night:

“except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit” (Martz 10)

Vaughan's is aware of the importance of the Eucharistic allusions in Herbert's *The Temple*. His poem “The Passion” is an extended effort to meditate upon the traditional themes, but the poem is wooden and static. Vaughan's one success in this kind of poetic celebration comes significantly in his poem “The Sap”, where he approaches the Eucharist indirectly through a tale to himself:

Come sapless Blossom, creep not stil on Earth  
Forgetting thy first birth;  
Tis not from dust, or if so, why dost thou  
Thus cal and thirst for dew?  
It tends nor thither, if it doth, why then  
This growth and strength for heav'n?  
Who plac'd thee here, did something then Infuse  
Which now can tel thee news.

.....

The whole poem bears resemblance to Herbert's poem “Peace”, but defiantly different to each other in context. Vaughan does not want to end up his poetry with an echo of the ecclesiastical ritual.

Vaughan's finest poetry draws its interest from the central tradition of Platonic Christianity. **It is the central image of *Silex Scintillians* the flash, the spark, the glittering of the light that comes from the memory of an ancient birthright of blessedness- *utrum singillatim omnes, an in illo homine, qui primus peccavit*: where it be amemory of each man's individual life, or whether it be a memory of each man's individual**

life, or whether it be a memory of Adam's original happy life-that memory remains, yet un-put-out in men (Martz 27).

Vaughan considered the state of affairs intolerable, and he urged God to bring on the Day of Judgment quickly:

Yet, when thy mercy nothing wins

But meer disdain, let not man say

Thy arm doth sleep, but write this day

Thy judging one: Descend, descend!

Make all things new! And without end! ("The Day of Judgement" 42-46)

In the poem 'Affliction' Vaughan's profession and observation lead him to the same conception: trouble is man's medicine. He delights to feel that there is a secret energy and intelligence in what looks lifeless, an infallible wisdom in what a hasty observer might have dismissed as "nature's scorn". He preaches against dynasts in the poem "Abel's blood", objecting what Gray less convincingly phrases in the Elegy:

What thunders shall those men arraign

Who cannot count those they have slain,

Who bathe not in a shallow flood,

But in a deep, wide sea of blood?

A sea, whose lowd waves cannot sleep,

But Deep still calleth unto deep:

Whose urgent sound, like unto that

Of many waters, breathe at

Conclusion:

The seventeenth century doctor had not suffered by the long period of inanition. The present day seeshim as a standard author and he has been splendidly and magnificently remembered in 1986, in 1915 and again in 1924. **Vaughan gives us to feel that he was aware of his chances in the eventual history of Britain. He never let his voices goes off.** Vaughan was not uninterested in the actualities of his day. He is thereby a determined churchman, finding blessing in worship that he is intolerant of any common gaiety, and in this austerity one does not follow him easily today. His verse is chiefly the intimate record of his spiritual verse. In respect of vocabulary and general use of language Vaughan anticipates the theory of Wordsworth, selecting from the language of ordinary man. His achievements are always spoken and discussed in the idioms of good conversation:

If thou canst get but thither,  
 There growes the flowre of peace,  
 The Rose that cannot wither,  
 Thy fortresse, and thy ease,

In fact, the object of his journey is to render and seek the solace of God around the universe. He never, as it arguably true, lifts up his voice in imitation of the Horatian or Ovidian trumpet –call, for he claimed monuments more solid than bronze and one half of round eternity; but his natural impulse is deeply impressive as he addresses his serious intimacies “Ad Posteris” (Blunden 8).

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<sup>1</sup> *Repentance*, B-1

<sup>2</sup> *Distraction*, B-1

<sup>3</sup> *The Law, and the Gospel*, B-1

<sup>4</sup> *Quickness*, B-1

<sup>5</sup> *Thou that know’st for whom I mourne*, B-1

<sup>6</sup> *Vanity of Spirit*, B-1

<sup>7</sup> *The Sap*, B-1

<sup>8</sup> *Corruption*, B-1

<sup>9</sup> *Praise*, B-1

<sup>10</sup> *The Incarnation, and Passion*, B-1

<sup>11</sup> *Buriall*, B-1

<sup>12</sup> *The Dawning*, B-1

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Preston Lehmann, “Characteristic Imagery in the Poetry of Henry Vaughan” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1942). This is a most complete and documented study, which gives paramount importance of the biblical sources.