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Enduring Beauty: The Timeless Relevance of Keats' Poetry

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Abstract -

John Keats one of the eminent poet of all time belongs to the second generation of Romantic Poets. He was the youngest of the major romantic poets whose lifespan was very short. But within the short period of four productive years he reached the height of Shakespeare as a poet. His love for beauty made him a great poet. And he finds this beauty in the form of nature, women, art and literature. As a poet his works are relevant through ages and for all generations. His fame as a poet lies in his love her beauty, his sensuousness, negative capability, Hellenism and the blending of classicism with romanticism.

Keywords: Relevance, Classicism, Romanticism, Nature, Sensuousness, Negative Capability, Hellenism.

Introduction -

John Keats the eldest of four surviving children of Thomas and Frances Keats, was born on 31 October 1795. He had lost his father at the age of eight and his mother when he was only 14. He had to struggle with tuberculosis and financial crisis throughout his spanned life. The deadly disease at killed his mother his brother Tom and hennally himself at an early age. He had been a practitioner of medicine at first, but he left this because of his strong liking towards writings. He had penned almost every kind of poetry before his death at the age of 25. These works had been criticized bitterly in his lifetime. But after his death, his fame has touched the zenith of English literature. His works have been influential to the later generations. At present also his poems are among the most popular. Their relevancy lies in the most depressing period of epidemic like Covid-19 too.

Keats' poetic career -

During his school time Keats had developed a strong liking towards classics and history. When he was pursuing his medical training, he had written his first poem '**An Imitation of Spencer**'. Though he received his '**apothecary license**' in 1816, he made of his mind to be a poet rather than a surgeon. In the May of that year Keats' first poetry was published and it was a sonnet title '**O' Solitude**'. In his early stage of poetic career Keats was bitterly criticized, as a result he went through a state of depression. But his strong willingness towards poetry resulted in abundance number of a variety of poetry. It was in the period of 1818-19, when he wrote his most mature works. In this period he composed the great odes and long poems like '**The Eve of St. Agnes**', '**La Belle Dame Sans Merci**', '**Hyperion**', '**Lamia**', etc.

Relevancy of Keats Poetry-

As Keats' poetry were criticized bitterly, it is a matter of question, if his poetry have any relevance for mankind. But his poetry were criticized it means they were viewed and reviewed by his contemporary readers. Perhaps the bitterness towards his poetry was due to his classic theme, as the period has viewed the flow of romantic revival. Even if Keats himself has told,

“My name is writ in water.”

But the greatness of his poetry was broadly felt after his death. Some of his contemporaries have regarded him as an escapist, but in reality he was not an escapist because he had not ruined completely after his criticism rather than he produced in large number of such poetry which are read by the readers of every generations. His poetry has been influential for the future generations starting from Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. The great Indian English poetess Toru Dutt was also greatly influenced by John Keats. The following features of Keats' poetry have made them relevant for all time:-

1. His love for beauty:

If Wordsworth is the high priest of nature, Keats is the great lover of beauty. While Wordsworth worships nature, Keats worships beauty. And he finds this beauty in the form of nature, women, art and literature. To him,

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever”

His comparison of beauty with truth resembles the Indian philosophy of 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram', as he says,

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty”.

Keats prefers beauty in permanent form rather than temporary beauty. The beauty of art and literature is permanent and such beauty makes its creator immortal too. Likely Keats is immortal through his literary creations. He tries to prove this in the following lines,

**She cannot fade away, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love and she be fair!**

2. His treatment of nature:-

Keats neither spiritualises nature like Wordsworth nor he symbolizes it like Shelley. On the other hand he presents it directly as it is. He is attracted by the physical aspects of nature. Thus he finds immortal beauty on the paintings of a simple urn or in the songs of a Nightingale. He is enchanted with the songs of the bird to such an extent that he creates a stage in the natural world and travels through a fairy land. For Wordsworth nature acts like a tutor. But Keats finds in nature such kind of healing power which can remove all kinds of pains. So he forgets the sorrowful past and travels happily following the songs of the nightingale.

3. Sensuousness:-

Keats has been described sensual by many critics. His poetry can be enjoyed through the senses. Not one or two senses, but all the five senses (the Panchendriyas) are involved for their enjoyment. One may think that only the sense of hearing is needed to enjoy a birds song, but Keats has included all the five senses to enjoy the beautiful song of a nightingale in the poem **“Ode to a Nightingale”**. When the poet heard the song of a nightingale, he lost his senses. At that moment, he felt the taste of vintage wine; his eyes felt the sight of beautiful nature; his nose smelt the sweet fragrance of flowers and his feet felt the touch of soft flowers. In this way he can combine easily all the five senses at a point.

4. **Negative capability:-**

Negative capability is a situation when a human being is capable of facing odds and uncertainties without being affected by them. He gives equal value to both happiness and suffering, good and evil. Keats had first applied this for William Shakespeare. This theory is applicable for Keats himself also. As the poet forgets all the pains and suffering he had and enjoys the happy moments with the nightingale. In his poem '**The ode to Autumn**' also Keats has used this theory perfectly. He finds many greatness even in a season of suffering for all creatures including man.

5. **Hellenism:-**

Hellenism is derived from the '**Hellas**' of ancient Greece. It means the love for Greek art, culture, literature, mythology and expressing this love in literary works. Keats had a liking towards Greek literature and mythology from the very beginning. He has collected theme from Greek legends, for many of his great poems like '**Endymion**', '**Hyperion**', '**Lamia**,' etc. Even if most of his great odes have allusions from Greek mythology. There are many references to Greek Gods and goddesses, nymphs, muses, etc. in his poetry. In this regard the poem '**Endymion**' has abundance references from classical Greek gods and goddesses.

6. **Blending of Classicism with Romanticism:-**

Generally other Romantic Poets ignored classicism and focused more on romanticism. But Keats blended both these theories in his poetry. And this blending gives a special quality to his poetry. Readers of all ages are thus attracted towards his poetry. He takes classical theme and gives them romantic touch in such a way that they become more enjoyable for the readers.

Stress Management through Keats' Poetry:-

Recently the whole world has witnessed the epidemic of Covid-19. Many have lost their owns in this period. Everybody has gone through a period of stress in those days. Even if this stress has caused death to many people in such a situation Keats' life and his poetry can be helpful for stress management. Keats himself had gone through such stress because of immature death of his relatives and also because of other reasons. Still he had tried to find happiness in those negative situations. His negative capability helped him to fight with odd situations. His great odes can be a source of motivation for us to fight with worse situations and find some positiveness in them. "The Ode to a Nightingale" has presented a situation when a person feeling intolerable pains in his heart can also feel perfect happiness in the lapse of nature. Thus Keats' poetry are valuable at present scenario also.

Conclusion:-

To conclude, Keats' poetry are relevant for all generations and all times. They provide the readers the motivation to be happy in all kinds of situations. His poetry mainly his odes have an appeal to the senses of the readers. Even if in the age of science and technology, they have great value. The busy and tired persons get relaxed by reading his poetry.

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