



Echoes Of The Divine: The Pantheistic Vision In The Works Of William Wordsworth And Raghunath Choudhary

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Abstract: Pantheism has been a powerful element in religion and literature and its practitioners identify God with everything. The two poets—William Wordsworth from 19th century England and Raghunath Choudhary from 20th Century India displayed deep pantheistic inclinations in their poetical works. Wordsworth's pantheism was the outcome of his familiarity with Plato and Spinoza. Choudhary's pantheism, on the other hand, was based solely on Indian philosophical traditions. Although Wordsworth discarded pantheism later in his life, Choudhary never modified or discarded his pantheistic outlook.

Index Terms- Pantheism, Wordsworth, Raghunath Choudhary

Introduction

The term “pantheism” comes from the Greek language and is a combination of two words—*pan* which means ‘all, every’ while the second word *theos* means ‘god’. The term “pantheism” has been defined in the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* as “the view that God is identical with everything. It may be seen as the result of two tendencies: an intense religious spirit and the belief that all reality is in some way united” (Audi 673). Since it believes that “All is God”, it holds the opinion that the universe as a whole is worthy of reverence and that none other than the Universe and Nature are worthy of that degree of reverence (Harrison 1). Pantheists maintain that there is a profound unity that links all things of the universe and this interconnectedness and interdependency is the root of all joy and peace that human beings hanker after in their life.

Pantheistic perspectives are divided into a number of categories such as Absolute pantheism, Emanational pantheism, Developmental pantheism, Modal pantheism, Multilevel pantheism, Popular pantheism and Poetic pantheism. Although pantheism is one of the oldest of the religious beliefs whose ideas were propagated by the composers of the Indian philosophical texts the *Upanishadas* of 6th or 7th century B.C. as well as by the Greek Philosopher Heraclitus in 500 B.C., the emergence of Christianity and Islam forced it to take the backseat in philosophical and religious discourses for more than a millennium. However, pantheism reemerged in the 19th century through the writings of great philosophers and poets such as William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

William Wordsworth (1770—1850) is best known as the foremost nature poet of England who scripted the rise of nature poetry to a position that it could not attain throughout its existence for centuries. However, besides being a worshipper of nature, he was also a poet of man and a mystic. It has been rightly pointed out that Wordsworth was not only a poet, he was also a seer and a mystic and a practical psychologist with an amazingly subtle mind and as unusual capacity for feeling (Woodring 54). He derived joy not from the beauty of nature,

but mainly from the life in nature. He himself had caught a vision of that life—he knew it and felt it—and, it transformed the whole of existence for him. Actually, it was because of his mystical attitude to nature that he developed an interest in the pantheistic philosophy and is credited as one of the significant voices who is responsible for the revival of pantheism in the nineteenth century (Harrison 3) .

Raghunath Choudhary (1878—1967) is one of the greatest poets of Assam, the North-Eastern state of India. Although he is primarily a romantic poet celebrating different facets of nature, it is for the unique treatment of birds in his poems that he is called the “Bihagi kavi” (the bird poet) of Assam. However, most of his poems, whether based on nature or not, reflect the mystical leanings of their creator. This mysticism attitude of Choudhary is also responsible for the expression of pantheistic ideas through his works.

Pantheistic Vision in the Works of William Wordsworth and Raghunath Choudhary

Pantheism has influenced the outlook of many poets and writers since ancient times in both Eastern and Western worlds. Among the English Romantic poets, both Coleridge and Wordsworth came under the influence of pantheistic ideas through their attachment to Plato and his followers. Besides the influence of Platonism, the philosophy of Spinoza also contributed greatly to the growth of pantheism in Wordsworth’s poetry.

Both Coleridge and Wordsworth found substance in Spinoza’s doctrine of psycho-physical parallelism that of the infinite attributes of God, man is capable of grasping only two—namely, thought and extension. God, or nature, has two aspects: body and mind. Spinoza asserted that neither can exist independently of the other, a fact that leads to the idea that everything possesses both an inner life and an outward bodily form.

Moreover, Spinoza’s monistic pantheism—“God is not an external contriver, but an immanent, all-pervading, and indivisible presence”—appeared as a natural sequel to ideas already embraced by both Wordsworth and Coleridge. Consequently, it was not difficult for Wordsworth to form the conviction that each small thing is an integral component of the living universe, and therefore the sacredness associated with the Supreme Being is infused in every small or large element of the world—the belief which prompted Wordsworth to write in *The Prelude*:

I would not strike a flower
As many a man would strike a horse; at least
If, from the wantonness in which we play
With things we love, or from a freak of power,
Or from an involuntary act of hand
Or foot unruly from excess of life,
It chanc’d that I unwittingly used a tuft
Of meadow-lilies, or had snapp’d the stem
Of foxglove bending o’er its native rill
I should be loath to pass along my way
With unreprieved indifference.

(VIII, 131—141)

During his early period, Wordsworth believed that one can find a reflection of God not only in its most cherished creations but also in nature itself. This conviction of the poet is well expressed in the lines where he spoke of “the one interior life”:

In which all beings live with God, themselves
Are God, existing in the mighty whole,
As indistinguishable as the cloudless East
At noon is from the cloudless West, when all
The hemisphere is one cerulean blue.

(*The Prelude*, XIV, 70—74)

For him, nature is actually a revelation of the divine, and, therefore, the close the man is to nature as a child and simple person, the close he stands to the supreme being as well (Chauhan 146). As he says in the sonnet “It is a beauteous evening, calm and free”

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free.
 The holy time is quiet as a Nun
 Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
 Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
 The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea:
 Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
 And doth with his eternal motion make
 A sound like thunder—everlastingly.

(1-8)

Although Wordsworth later denied his belief in pantheistic ideas, it is quite obvious that pantheism had crept into his mind quite early in life and by the time when his “seventeenth year had come” he was speaking about his faith that he found a unitary “Being” everywhere:

...for in all things
 I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.
 (The Prelude, II, 429-30)

In fact, one may easily pick out passages liberally sprinkled over the original version of *The Prelude* which are thoroughly imbued with pantheistic ideas:

- (a) Thus much for the one Presence: and the Life
 Of the great whole,
 [The Prelude, (1805), 111. 130-31]
- (b) A soul divine which we participate,
 A deathless spirit.
 [ibid, V. 16-17]
- (c) Great God
 Who send'st thyself into this breathing world
 Through Nature and through every kind of life
 And mak'st Man what he is, Creature divine.
 [ibid, X. 386- 89]
- (d) The feelings of life endless, the great thought
 By which we live, Infinity and God.
 [ibid, XIII. 183-84]

In his other poems like *A slumber did my spirit seal*, popularly referred to as the last of the great Lucy poems, and in *Tintern Abbey* also, he incorporated passages deeply coloured with shades of pantheism. In fact, the following passage in the later poem is referred to as an instance of “profound and undoctinal pantheism” by a critic no less than Graham Hough (51):

... sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused
 Whose dwelling in the light of setting suns
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
 A motion and a spirit that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

[95 - 102]

However, by 1814 Wordsworth had gradually abandoned pantheistic ideas which was partly because of Coleridge's influence who had already renounced Platonism and entreated his friend to follow suit, and partly because of the fact that Wordsworth's pantheistic faith received a jolt in the face of the "scientific neutralisation of nature."

A similar note of pantheism also runs through many of Raghunath Choudhary's poems which is thoroughly imbued with the traditional Indian philosophical belief in the presence of God in fire, earth and water as well as in every single object of nature. According to Hem Barua, Choudhary, like a true mystic, found the revelation of God in various forms of nature which includes birds and animals, flowers, rivers etc. As the poet says in the poem 'Anjali':

Saudaryyar mahamela viswa-mandirat
Jwale Gandha-pushpa-dip-dhup |
Yeni cao teni yen mahimahimar
Visvabhola premananda rup ||

(21-24)

[In the temple of the universe, which is a great fair of beauty, burns the incense sticks, earthen lamps and the flowers besmeared with sandal-wood pulp : wherever I look I find the enchanting image of the Supreme Being.]

Choudhary feels the presence of a divine power even in the bud of a water lily. As the flower is created by the Supreme Architect, it shares the 'divine light' of its Creator and the poet wants to have a part of it in his quest for 'divine wisdom' :

Kowacon ka't pala ene isa-jyoti
Durbhagak diya samidhan |
Sikowa dharam niti karicho gohari
Hridayat labho dibya jnan ||

['Bhetkali', *Sadari*, 33-36]

[Will thou tell this unlucky fellow where have you got such a divine-light; I entreat thee to teach me the principles of religion and virtue so that I may acquire divine wisdom in my heart.]

Another important point to note about Choudhary's pantheism is that he imagines various natural objects such as flowers and birds as harbingers of God. The poet does not think that these natural objects are reflections of God, neither are they incarnations of the Supreme Being. Rather, they exist to perform duties assigned to them by the Almighty:

(a) Marttyabasi manavak dibaloi jurani,
Toma hen priya nidhi
Pathiyai dile bidhi;
Swargiya dutar bese kanthe sudha sani;
Gowa he ebar mor priya bihanigini.

['Gowa he ebar mor priya biharigini', *Sadari*, 31-35)

[The Creator has sent a beloved treasure like thee to provide solace to the earthly mortals. Will thou sing but once like a heavenly messenger with thy enchanting voice, my darling bird?]

(b) Toke yen bidhi srsti patanite
Gadhile yatan kari,
Premat sovad bilaba ahicha
Devaduti rup dhari

[*Keteki*, I. 85-92]

[It seems that the Creator created thee carefully at the beginning of the creation and thou have arrived in the guise of an angel to spread the flavour of love.]

Choudhary is of the opinion that nature and its objects, at times, function as a link that bridges the gulf existing between the poet and the Supreme Being by inculcating in the former virtues that are helpful in amalgamating the bond between the Creator and a member of his favourite creation:

Labhicho yadio manavi janam
Manavi dharam niti;
Kintu tor gite sikale pranat
Svargiya maram priti.

[Keteki, I. 137-40]

[Although I have attained human life and learnt the human virtues, still, it in thy music that has instilled divine love and affection in my heart.]

Conclusion:

In this way it is possible to discover a number of similarities between the pantheistic attitudes of William Wordsworth and Raghunath Choudhary although one should not underestimate the significance of the difference between them. First of all, the pantheism of Wordsworth was based on certain western philosophies such as Platonism, whereas the pantheism of Choudhary was based on Indian philosophy only. Secondly, pantheism was only a passing stage in Wordsworth's faith in nature which he discarded afterwards. However, pantheistic ideas had a permanent influence on Choudhary's poetry and he never felt the urge to discard or modify his conviction in this regard. Unlike Wordsworth, Choudhary was not agitated by the contemporary development in science which explained most of the natural phenomena from the mechanical or logical viewpoints. Again, some critics like Willard L. Sperry have denied the presence of pantheism in Wordsworth on the ground that pantheism is amoral but Wordsworth was never amoral in his poetry. It has been pointed out that he "was burdened with the mystery and the heavy and weary weight of all this unintelligible world" which pushed him "far apart" from pantheism. However, there is no such complexity in Choudhary who had great faith in the revelation of God through nature and its functions. He never bothered about the question of morality or amorality of western pantheism and clung steadfastly to the Indian views of pantheism.

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