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* Lecture No-05.

class-B. A. I

Paper-II

Topic - A critical appreci-

ation of the poem 'To A skylark'

A critical appreciation of the poem 'To A skylark'

Shelley's skylark is a fine symbol of spiritual and aesthetic aspiration. It is an image of poetic rapture, of romantic ecstasy. Shelley, unlike Wordsworth, does not recognise the earthly form or abode of the bird. He emphasises simply the upward flight of the bird while singing. According to Shelley, the skylark is not a bird whose nest is on the ground. It is a winged desire, always rising, aspiring. It is 'like an unbodied joy'. Its note of joy is contrasted with the sad note of human songs. A note of sadness comes into the poem when Shelley refers to the tragedy of man's limitless aspirations.

— "we look before and after,
And pine for what is not,
our sincerest laughter
with some pain is fraught."

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought. In form, the poem is an ode. It is a poem of address to the skylark. But the poet does not follow the form of the classical ode. Shelley is a romantic poet and he gives his own form to the ode. Shelley makes the skylark an ethereal creature by divesting it of its earthly qualities. We find a wealth of imagery in this poem. Shelley hints at the nature of the bird through a series of images. Shelley says —

"What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?"

Shelley compares the skylark to six different objects, but the comparisons make the picture vague. Shelley is not at his best in the use of images. The products of his rich poetic imagination are not always synthesised.

02

Shelley is a poet of airy things and looks upwards. He escapes life and the world. He often takes high aerial flights and forgets the world. His imagination is "Prometheus unbound". In fact Shelley's skylark is the very embodiment of his poetic aspirations and his attitude to the world.

Shelley's Skylark is the eternal pilgrim of the sky. It moves up higher and higher 'like a cloud of fire' until it appears as a spirit and not a bird. The Skylark of Shelley which hides itself in the sunbeams and 'shows a rain of melody' is not a bird, but a sightless joy. Thus Shelley's Skylark loses its very identity and becomes an idea. The skylark is unbound, unfettered and has no mooring to the earth. It is a thing of imagination. Shelley's Skylark hates the earth since it is full of sorry things. Thus the skylark has one sided learnings and ventures, as Wordsworth's skylark strikes a happy balance between Heaven and Home.

Shelley has introduced mixed feelings in his poems. Here is a happy mood, followed by a sad note. Melancholy is the soul of Shelleyan poetry. However his spirit may soar up, it comes down in no time to a sorry level. His poem moves up to a happy world of un bodied joy at the very start. But his spirit fades and fails at the end of the poem. He gets sad and melancholy when he grows conscious of a sharp contrast between the skylark-world and the human world. This is typical Shelley - the happy aerial dwindles into a stricken deer, almost invariably. Shelley loses balance in his skylark poem. He indulges in romantic excesses in expressions. He is drunk and intoxicated with words and images; and images pour incessantly to describe a simple idea that the skylark can not be seen but its song can be heard. Shelley's poetry is the 'poetry of adolescence', to quote T. S. Eliot.

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