

## Victorian Poetry and Poetic Vision of Charlotte Bronte and Anne Bronte

**Dr. Santosh Kumar Singh**

*M.A. in English, Ph.D.*

*Teacher, M.S.V.M. Vijayahata,*

*Siwan*

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### Abstract:

*Most early Victorian poets felt that the contemporary social distress was a symptom of certain fundamental needs of civilization and that the responsibilities of their high vocation made it necessary for them deeply to probe into these needs. The early Victorian poets were far from being escapists. Poetry had become a drawing room pastime. In fact, as a study of early Victorian Poetics can convince us and the poets themselves were keenly aware of the climacteric in civilization that they were witnessing. A notable consequence of the Victorian Poets' attempts to interpret spiritual truths in the context of the requirements of their age is the emergence of idea of the representative man. The idea is an integral part of the poets' reaction to the social situation. Every Victorian Poet tries to visualize the representative man. Preoccupation with the representative man is indeed widespread in the whole Victorian literature.*

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Self-assertion on the part of womens particularly in secular field was strictly prohibited and the breakers were not only treated as sinners but also condemned to dwell apart. Speaking in public or writing was very well-when it was in the lords cause and could be claimed as the product of divine inspiration. The urge for self-assertion on the part of the artist is so very important for the growth of one's personality gradually gathered momentum in the course of political event in international fields. Protest against the prevailing condition was made now and then here and there but of no avail. An anonymous work entitled *The Woman's Sharp Revenge* (1640) argued that women's exclusion from learning was "devised by men to secure their own continued domination." (18)

Many early secular writers seem to have had a hard time. In 1621, Lady Mary Wroth (a niece of the poet Sir Philip Sidney) was engaged in writing a sonnet sequence, which she left unfinished. It was not printed until the 20th Century. Women complain that : "We are kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our houses, not suffered to fly abroad. We are shut out of all power and authority, by reason we are never employed either in civil or martial affairs, our counsels are despised and laughed at, the best of our actions are trodden down with scorn, by the over weening conceit men have of themselves and through despisement of us". (21)

Both the sisters believed that women had as clear understanding as men, if they were bred in schools to mature their brain and to mature their knowledge. Despite their best efforts as poetic geniuses they could not escape failure. A few woman such as Catherine Trotter, Mary Manley and Mary Pix- all tried to break new grounds and wrote plays but their plays were mocked in public though some of them were skilful and challenging playwrights. It was only in the 18th Century that a large number of women entered the field of reading and writing. But Dr. Johnson could not but

‘mocked at the new Amazons of Pen’. It was Wollstonecraft who strongly advocated the courage of women in 1792 and said women’s apparent weakness were not natural, but simply the product of mis-education. Catherine Macaulay under read her view and rejected the notion that woman were ‘the property of men’ with no right to dispose of their own persons. They paved the way for women to tread on and enter the field of reading and writing.

Despite the fact that both Charlotte And Anne were genuine poets at heart but their poetry was doomed to gather dust on shelves for century. I am reminded of the lines of Thomas Gray in the later part of the 18th Century in The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard:

‘Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.’(146)

This has been the fate of very many poets in the domain of English poetry. Milton has rightly said in his “Lycidas”:

‘The Poetasters are allowed to thrive  
While the genuine writes are plucked in prime.’(56)

Both the poetesses were destined to go unnoticed during their life time. But the fact is that they alone have composed a host of poems on the supremacy of Faith in the age of growing materialism. They were born two to four years earlier and latter than Matthew Arnold in the Victorian period. Matthew Arnold’s poetry may have influenced to theirs in relation to reclining faith in the age of growing materialism. Their poetry echoes in their own language - the glory of faith in the turbulent world.

But Arnold took recourse to love in the first declining faith under the spell of growing industrialism. He says in the Dover Beach:

‘Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world, which seems...(365)

He discovered love as a substitute for the declining faith. Perhaps he was not sure of the revival of faith in the age of growing industrialism whereas Charlotte Bronte and Anne did not load their heart in the fast-fading faith in the supremacy of God. Like George Herbert in the 17th century they could not but burst ..... through their poetry in the omnipotence of God as the only saviour in this turbulent world. When Herbert says that God is the only rescuer (The Grace) in this world.

I-who upon my mother’s knees, In childhood,  
read Christ’s written word...(54)

Despite the fact that both Charlotte Bronte and Anne Bronte were born two hundred years later than George Herbert but both of them appear to be his literary descendent in respect of their full faith and total surrender to Him in the Victorian age. Charlotte Bronte says that my mission as a poetess is the Missionary.

‘Then for my ultimate reward  
Then for the world-rejoicing word...(56)

They deserve a thorough comparison with George Herbert of 17th century. It is Lord Tennyson who had been proclaimed as the representative poet of the Victorian period who pinned his total faith in the supremacy of God in his “In Memoriam”:

“That makes the barren branches loud;  
And but for fear it is not so...(337)

Lord Tennyson heard the conflicting voices of science and religion and tried to unify the two voices into one, with a greater learning towards the superiority of Faith in the omnipotence of God. But Lord Tennyson had been chiefly remembered as a poet of compromise between science and religion where he says, there is more faith in honest doubt.

Much later than he Hopkins heard upon the same stream when he says:

“Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow”(390)

Where Wordsworth the great looks upon nature as God, it is Blake before him who looks upon nature ‘as window to God’.

The study of Charlotte Bronte and Anne Bronte calls for a deep seated comparison with the religious poets in English literature. A close study of the poems of Charlotte and Anne is that their poems represent their experience of men and women, their woes and joys, agonies and spiritual bliss, success and failures. Intense emotions, delicate sentiments, and staunch faith in God are some of the remarkable aspects of the poems. The poems confirm the fact that the source of regeneration and redemption lies ultimately in God’s love and grace; bestowed on persons who are moved to pray and repent, and are obedient with conscience as their guide towards the close of their life. It appears the young Bronte thought in an artistic necessity to create for themselves their own imaginary world as substitute for England.

It should be borne in mind that both Charlotte Bronte and Anne Bronte were the literary products of this changing attitude in social life of England. They deserve to be appreciated with Prof. Cable and Henry Newman who have been considered as the pioneers of Oxford movement in England. I am reminded of Taine, who has asserted the role of race, milieu and moment in the act of evaluation of artist. No artist stands outside his race, milieu and moment.

All the Victorian poets including Charlotte Bronte and Anne Bronte seem to have greatly been influenced by the Indian philosophy of the immortality of soul as expressed by Lord Krishna in the Shrimad Bhagwadgita :

Nainam Chhindanti, Shashtrani;  
Nainam dahati pawakah,  
Na cha enam kledyantapo;  
Na shoshayati marutah.”(32)

The Indian names used by Charlotte Bronte in her poem (Passion – “On Indian Sutlej’s flow” and in “The Missionary” – “Spread on each Indian river’s shore each realm of Asia covering o’er.”)

confirm my view about the influence of the Indian philosophy underlying their thought and philosophy of life.

All the three Bronte sisters- Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855), Emily Bronte (1818-1848) and Anne Bronte (1820-1849) have chiefly been presented as three major women novelists of the early Victorian period in the pages of Literary English history. It is true that Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne Bronte's *Agnes Grey* had created a great stir in the heart and mind of the then reading public. But it is surprising why the critics have paid less regard for their poetic creation when their poetry is in no way less significant than their novels.

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