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War, Anti-War and Peace: A Perspective of Peace- Literature Genre

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Abstract:

The objective of this research paper is to explore the human-nature nexus and the war-peace polarity. This paper questions whether anti-war poems should be included within the genre of peace- literature. The study investigates how anti-war poems bear the fragmentary rudiments of peace- literature. There is an attempt to find and redraft the theoretical and analytical issues of the peace- literature genre and to integrate certain Western concepts of anti-war poems to support the arguments for a peace- literature genre. Thus the study reveals how the concept of peace has changed across ages in literature dealing with war and how anti-war poems become included within the genre of peace- literature. The present paper explores how literature reflects peace and serenity found in different cultural contexts. It also reveals how narratives and story-telling in the context of peace and human values have fostered the culture of serenity, tolerance and solidarity to promote peace and harmony as the ultimate need of human relationships. The findings also reveal the need to eradicate poverty and inequality in order to promote peace and harmony. The findings bring to the surface the inherent desire of human beings to fill the gap between what we are and what we want to be, in the varied contexts of society, culture, education and human values for achieving sustainable development goals. A random sampling technique was followed. A qualitative data collection method was followed with random sampling where the analysis was based on primary and a few secondary sources.

Keywords: Peace, Anti-war, Social justice, Disarmament, Re-integration.

Introduction:

Peace, suggestive of a calm of mind and a resistance to violence has been a central concern of observance in human mind, family, society, religion and literary representation since long past. Peace as a notion is embedded as one of the most essential concerns and fundamental principles of life. Wars, armed battles and terrorism, marked as brutal forces arresting peace opened up not only at the onset of the World Wars but they existed in ancient times as well and that found expression in literature of the then times. The concept of securing fame and glory with heroism in war has also found a considerable shift across the ages. Whereas the heroes of Anglo-Saxon heroic poems celebrated their martial exploits and secured their place by immortalizing them in the pages of history, and the war poems of the early twentieth century celebrated the patriotic fervour of a person, the anti-war poems of the late twentieth century brought in a new light in the field of real- life experiences of war, filled in horror. This group of anti-war poets reinforced the need for peace by exposing the horror and destruction of war through literature.

Harmony is considered to be the natural fruit of the process of generation and regeneration of the atmosphere of peace. Harmony is not a static concept, it means to enter into the process of change, and change is transformation, communication and fluidity. By accentuating the role of conflict, differences and fluidity, new interpretation of harmony emphasizes the role of mediations.

Peace- literature genre and the discussion:

The development of the concept of the genre of peace- literature is a dynamic one, and it resists any fixed and static definition should be limited within its boundaries. Peace- literature is not bound up by ant writers of specific genre but peace- literature provides both actions and thoughts to the readers and the critics. It is the critic and the readers who apply and label a literary work as peace- literature. Peace- literature genre differs from other genres like dramas, short stories, comedies, tragedies, sonnets or lyrics because of the fact that the critical strategies effective for peace- literature are not deliberately chosen by the writers of the literary work but are exclusively placed under the domain of the readers. Readers, considered to be the active agents of peace- literature endow semantic significance not only from the cognitive but also from the behavioural point of view. Considering the holistic point of view, peace- literature is subsumed under the tradition of reader response criticism. Peace-

literature defies any single identity or any single definition or any single corpus of ideas. Peace- literature criticism disrupts the monopolization of any single frame of reference. It only creates and recreates in a dynamic process of change. Peace- literature can best be said to create unity in diversity. Peace- literature thrives as a dynamically evolving genus in the light of new techniques of observation, analysis and interpretation.

Peace- literature includes a wide variety of subject matters, including peace of mind, inner peace, peace and nature, peace and unity, peace and religion, peace and anti-war, the peace of wild things and others. Peace as a thematic context appears in multiple literary works across different ages and in the global perspective as both cognitive and behavioural point of views. In the History of British Literature, a plethora of literary works fall under the rubric of peace- literature genre where the contexts of acquiring and procuring peace ranges far and wide. Peace- literature criticism, as a melting pot of multiple frames of reference, is inclusive of not only literatures that deal with nature and solace of mind, as Wordsworth had dealt with but it also includes literatures involving the contexts of war that foregrounds war behind the realm of beauties of social construct of rules of control and the idealism of war that connects to the peace of mind. Beginning with the Anglo-Saxon pagan poems, familiar as war-poems or heroic poems, the heathen spirit of the primitive Teutonic people represented their warring mood in literature that dealt with battles, heroism, fighting, death and victory. However, it is significantly noted that the literature of the Anglo-Saxon war-poems, inspired with the lofty ideal of self-sacrifice, gallantry, dedication and revenge motives were heroic in spirit, chivalrous in content and humanistic in appeal. War- poems of the Anglo-Saxon age in the history of British Literature, like *Beowulf*, *Waldhere*, *The Battle of Brunanburh* emphasized self-sacrifice and dedication towards the worthy cause of protecting the weak against the wicked. The Warrior heroes of the Teutonic tribes were the symbols of ideal man–heroic, noble and ready to serve and die for the good cause. The Teutonic heroes laid down their lives at the altar of the welfare of his land and people and died a peaceful death by virtue of self-sacrifice. Royal virtues, primitive idealism and true gallantry strike the keynote of the purpose of their social service, self-sacrifice and victory in achieving immorality in the pages of history. Achieving immortality through self-sacrifice in war raised them to the status of a hero and granted peace in dying a heroic death in war. Graphic description of the clear and colourful, vivid varied images of storms, seas, social manners and conducts, life-like representation of primitive life and society along with the graphic account of battles and scenes of Warfare, ring with a peaceful note joyous song over

the cruel defeat of the invaders in the oral narratives of the Anglo-Saxon War poems. Moreover, the predominant alliterative meter, employed in the narratives contributes to the creation of a peaceful atmosphere of sonority amidst the graphic description of turbulence of warfare. The peace of achieving victory shuns the heathen sentiments of hatred, vengeance and savage cruelty of the Teutonic tribes.

Living through a turbulent period of Reformation and the Dissolutions of the Monasteries in the British history of Tudor England and writing over a century before Shakespeare, Thomas Wyatt (1503 – 42) represents in his poem, "I Find No Peace" the need and significance of inner peace in his mind. Wyatt's poem relates to autobiographical references and brings out beautifully his craving for inner peace of mind. Turbulent emotions wage a war against the consequences of the lack of his inner peace of mind. Wyatt uses contrasting images and ideas to bring out the significance of mind's peace in the limelight:

> I find no peace, and all my war is done.
>
> I fear and hope. I burn and freeze like ice.
>
> I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise;   (Foundation)

George Herbert (1593 – 1633), one of the devotional and metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century longs for religious peace of his mind in his poem, "Peace". The poem bears witness to the perfect balance between emotional exuberance and intellectual ingenuity that showcases the utter need of peace that the poet seeks frantically in the objects and elements of nature. The poem bears touches of religious peace with the employment of Biblical allusions and religious themes. The end rhyme and the internal rhyme used by Herbert reinforce the quest motive in the poem. The quest for peace subsides only at the end of the poem and is symbolized by the bread of the Eucharist that represents Christ:

> Take of this grain, which in my garden grows,
>
>   And grows for you;
>
> Make bread of it : and that repose
>
>   And peace, which ev'ry where

With so much earnestness you do pursue,

Is only there. ("Peace by George Herbert - Peace Poem")

The American poet, Walt Whitman (1819 – 92) presents the sun as a beacon of peace in his poem, " O Sun of Real Peace" in the volume, *Leaves of Grass* (1855). Whitman's extensive use of free verse in the poem relates to the mood of freedom and liberation leading to the profundity of his peaceful mind. Here, the poet sings in praise of the peace that followed the end of the American Civil War:

O sun of real peace! O hastening light!

O free and extatic! O what I here, preparing, warble for!   ("Walt Whitman")

Emily Dickinson (1830 – 1886) in her poem, "I Many Times Thought Peace Had Come" expresses her ardent desire to find some hope of peace, even when peace remains far away. The peace she talks of here is surely her love of coming back home and staying there peacefully. The images used from nature and domestic activities enhance the urgency of peace in the life of the poet. The natural images used in the poem, identify with the self of the poet and mingle with the ideas of life, death, love and immortality that lead to the path of peacefulness:

I Many Times Thought Peace Had Come

When Peace was far away –

As Wrecked Men- deem they sight the Land –

At Centre of the Sea. (Poetry Foundation)

Greg Garrard in his book *Ecocriticism* observes, "Animals, …make us human in a continual process of reshaping, just as we affect the evolution of both domesticated and wild species" (151). Animals are much more peace- loving than human beings. The animals kill only when they are hungry and require food for their sustenance. Nevertheless, human beings kill animals and birds even for sheer entertainment purposes. Every year, thousands of animals and birds get killed by human beings either for poaching or trafficking. Specific aboriginal

communities are also seen to sustain on the food matter obtained from animals and birds. Human beings jeopardize the peace loving environment in and around them and wages war unnecessarily.

In the introductory note to *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, William Scammell observes, "The two words that always come to mind when one reads Hughes are 'imagination' and 'generosity'. The first he has called 'the original cauldron of wisdom'. The second is a function of his honesty as a man speaking to men, one who inspires by his own vibrant responsiveness to the primordial world in and around us, including its cloud-caps of literature, music, and art" (xiv). The most precarious situation unveils itself when the human beings ignore the practices that can lead towards the apocalyptic end, even after apprehending the disastrous consequences in the future. The human beings are the epitome of wilful ignorance of their disruption of peacefulness.

Post-war poems:

The effect of the First World War found reflection on the poetry of the time. War poetry served as an important social document of the contemporary period. Poets like Rupert Brooke (1887- 1915) and Julian Grenfell (1888- 1915) marked patriotic enthusiasm and glorification of the death of English soldiers in the front for England. Rupert Brooke wrote many war sonnets on the eve of World War. His sonnet "The Soldier" highlights his pride of an Englishman and glorification of the death of English soldiers in the front for England. His poems mark the sensuousness and yearning for beauty of Keats's poems. Julian Grenfell differs from other war poets by dint of a spirit of tranquillity as found in his poems. He extracted solace from the calm in the natural objects like trees, birds, grass and stars. His famous verse "Into Battle" reflects a serene attitude where even death is free from any horror. The poetry of Rupert Brooke and Julian Grenfell are marked by a romantic concept of war that abounds in ideal notion of war. Theirs were a revival of the romantic conception of the knight-at-arms.

The other group of poets contrasts the romantic war poets by the upholding of a realist view of war. Siegfried Sassoon (1886- 1967), Wilfred Owen (1893- 1918), William Gibson (1878- 1962) and others are marked as Realistic war-poets who depicted the brutality of war. These poets treated the theme of war in their poems as a horrifying realism. They satirised war and used irony to depict the truth about war in their poems. In Wilfred Owen's poem

"Strange Meeting", the personal factors loom large and the poem marks as a noble illustration of the evocation of pity and poetry. The pity is that man in fury hardly listens to sense and reason. Here the pity lies in the premature death of a young soldier who is represented as a strange friend. The young soldier proves to be at once a different human being; indeed an enemy the poet-soldier had killed but does not recognize now, as well as an aspect of his own psyche, a veritable alter ego. He is a veritable doppelganger of the poet's self. Owen here asserts that the death in war prevented the young soldier from revealing the 'truth untold'. Here the truth is undoubtedly the horror of war.

These two types of war -poems quite conform to the genre of war- poetry where the last group craves for peace. The realistic war- poets, in their attempts to reveal the horrors of war, have tried to bring peace in the world by denouncing the spirit of war that brings death and destruction. The last group of war poets who are realistic in their approach to war have written poems that can well be grouped under the genre of peace- literature as these poems crave peace.

Seed of anti-war in the poems of Ted Hughes:

About Ted Hughes's father, William Henry Hughes, Elaine Feinstein, in his book, *Ted Hughes: The Life of a Poet*, records "William was one of only seventeen survivors of a whole regiment of the Lancashire Fusiliers who had been slaughtered at Gallipoli and, in Ted's memory, he was so shattered by his experience that he remained reluctant to speak of it even when other soldiers were exchanging stories. In his son's poems, William is usually sitting in a chair, wordless; but on Sunday mornings Ted and his sister Olwyn, who was two years older, sometimes lay one on each side of their father listening to stories of the First World War" (6). The horror of war is well perceived from the description provided by Hughes's father, William Hughes. The loss of mind's peace is well apprehended from the words of the soldier who survived the horrific war. The seed of anti-war spirit is thus trying to find a proper ground for germination in the little listeners of the stories about war. The two little listeners are obviously, young Ted and his sister Olwyn.

Conclusion:

Greg Garrard also notes, in *Ecocriticism*, "animals may be conceived as undamentally like or unlike humans. Once contiguity (metonymy) is granted, animals may be understood in human terms (Gathropomophism) and each of these appears in both crude and sophisticated,

critical forms. Even if animals are represented as different to humans, that difference can be constructed as a deficit (mechanomorphism) or, or rarely, as a kind of superiority (allomorphism) (154). In *Ted Hughes, Class and Violence*, Paul Bentley reflects on the technique of free association to be working together in the unconscious and the poetry of Hughes. He observes:

> 'In so far as it freely associates, Hughes's poetry inevitably comes into contact with the history buried unconsciously in 'nature'. In effect, if not exactly in intention, what Hughes explores in nature are the literary, cultural, religious and political discourses that nature has always supported. Approached in this way, nature is a social question. Only when we understand this can we begin to formulate the relevance of Hughes in terms of his social and political contexts. Far from being mindless, we might think of Hughes's associative technique as demonically intelligent: as opening onto subliminal social and religious meanings embedded in a demonized nature.' (3-4)

Culture shapes reading and comprehending of animals. With the change of culture there is a change in the cognition of the amplitude of significance of an entity. In the same way, animals also shape the reading of culture. Representation of animals, birds, nature, environment and others in literature reaffirms the culture associated with it. War and Anti-war themes in literature have always tread the path of cognition of seeking peace as the ultimate realization. Though war and anti-war sounds contradictory and that they really are so, the final craving always leads to the searching for peace, even if it is in the grave or in the mind of the surviving few.

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