BLAKE’S POEM: ‘TO SPRING’

Dear students, today I am going to discuss Blake’s poem: ‘To Spring’; first, I would like to make a short paraphrasing upon it for your convenience of grasping its essence. Here’s the poem:

O Thou with dewy locks, who lookest down

Thro' the clear windows of the morning, turn

Thine angel eyes upon our western isle,

Which in full choir hails thy approach, O Spring!

The hills tell each other, and the list'ning

Valleys hear; all our longing eyes are turned

Up to thy bright pavilions: issue forth,

And let thy holy feet visit our clime.

Come o'er the eastern hills, and let our winds

Kiss thy perfumed garments; let us taste

Thy morn and evening breath; scatter thy pearls

Upon our love-sick land that mourns for thee.

O deck her forth with thy fair fingers; pour

Thy soft kisses on her bosom; and put

Thy golden crown upon her languish'd head,

Whose modest tresses were bound up for thee.

The poem is indeed part of his seasonal cycle poems. This is the first of them. He personifies Spring as an angelic male figure. Spring is conspicuous by His “Dewy locks,” “angel eyes,” “holy feet,” and “perfumed garments”. Against this male figure, the poet imagines the earth to be a female. The earth, as it were, has been maturing to an age of sexual willingness. The speaker in the poem invites the Angel: Spring- to come down to earth and initiate a new cycle by sowing seeds of procreation in “our western isle”:

“scatter thy pearls / upon our lovesick land”

It is in this context that the spring can be compared to a dawn (a new beginning). The speaker in the poem then goes to describe a picture of primal unity and innocence. Hope is the overall tone of the poem, which he tries to build up through befitting imagery. The suggestion is that winter has had shown its tough temperament of scorn to the earth and now it is time for the land to rise to a fresh awakening ; let the land experience nature with its fresh, innocent eyes.

Structural aspects:

The poem comprises of erratic rhyme patterns and yet, it is able to evoke from the reader’s mind spontaneous response. Blake was a true artist in his poems in that the reader gets the feeling of viewing some ‘poetical paintings’ through them. This poem is also one of them. In this way, he tries to work out an idiom which is characteristically of his own invention. The combination of art and verse resulted in a durable appeal in the mind of his readers. The accompanying drawings, indeed guide the readers with their symbolic significances. The impact of the poem is powerful and immediate, and the theme is clear enough to the reader, thanks to the symbolic pattern of the poem (The poem shows the effectiveness of symbolic compression).

Blake as a visionary:

Blake was a visionary poet. To him all knowledge came through the exercise of imagination. Said he:

“Vision or imagination is a representation of what

eternally exists, really and unchangeably…”

He went out to work out his vision of the world, which was manifested in a mythic design with extremely complex symbolism informing it. The following excerpt of a poem by him may give us an impression about the mystic process, which he believed to be associated behind Nature:

“To see a World in a grain of sand,

And a Heaven in a wild flower,

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,

And Eternity in an hour-”

This poem too gives us an impression of his visions that constituted the motifs in his poetry. These motifs are often textured with his personal symbolism.

Blake’s religiosity also had much to do with this mythical element in his poetry. He had his literary sources and inspirations from the Bible and the Bible-derived epic structures of Dante and Milton. During the British Romantic period, various writers used materials from the Bible or imitated the Bible in style of writing or content. As a Romantic writer, William Blake also believed that “the Bible was the greatest work of poetry ever written”. The Bible influenced him throughout his life, specifically influencing both his writing and his art. Therefore, his poetry is pervaded with the symbolism, imagery, and prophetic utterances of the Bible. He in his poetry searched for new patterns of religious symbolism and experience.

There are many references to Biblical themes within his writing, and there are also many references to specific passages of Scripture.

The lines “O thou, with dewy locks, who looked down / Thro’ the clear windows of the morning . . .” give us a picture of the window from the Bible. “Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by . . .” (King James Bible, Josh. 2.18).

The hills mentioned in the line “Come o’er the eastern hills . . .” echo the hills written about in the Song of Solomon. “. . . Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon this hills” (2.8).