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COVID-19 PANDEMIC: RE-READING WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S SELECTED NATURE POEMS FOR A PANACEA

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Abstract:

Poets and panorama are inextricably connected as man's visual sensory motor organ always anticipates in response to its recipience. It recreates an additional faculty of imagination in poet's mind that resonates with the random recipience and the most influential and impactful get a transformational embodiment in the generational process through a poet's aesthetic and synthetic version of thought process thereby taking representation in poetry form. William Wordsworth's poetry embodies the same after going through all the filtering process in mind and Muse. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic onslaught in the world and the 'trial and error' process of the governments and policy makers across the world relating to invention of an effective inoculation against the virus as a part of permanent panacea with no reportedly handy solution so far at hand could not but lead the world into a state of apathy and anarchy in respect to mental and psychological kept-up, and the pandemic paranoid fevered minds across the globe seek an intermediary alternatives for solace and salvation of their suffering souls and to remain abode and oblivious of the ongoing onslaught. In this connection, re-reading and re-interpreting Wordsworth's nature poetry could serve as an intermediary panacea to pacify the panic and phobia as well as to introspect the inner self in respect to man's works and deeds that how far man's activities could be liable for the present global threat in the guise of Covid-19 (Corona Virus Disease 2019).

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It is a human habit that in the tough time man always seeks a medium to repose his/her griefs or to relate thing with the medium only to find out solace and solution from the griefs and pains. The troubles and turbulences in human lives always bring them down in reality and generate self-realization about their true existential essence. India's former President Abdul Kalam's (2018) observation in *Strong Roots* is worth mentioning:

Whenever human beings find themselves alone, as a natural reaction, they start looking for company. Whenever they are in trouble, they look for someone to help them. Whenever they reach an impasse, they look to someone to show them the way out. Every recurrent anguish, longing, and desire finds its own special helper. (p. 49).

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And the easy and all-time available way of taking a way out from the sorry situations is to take refuge in nature, literature and scripture as a special helper and mediator which are literally always there for human help from hostilities. The scriptures lay down the foundations of rules and regulations of human beings' life patterns and provisions with discipline, restrictions and limitations from one's inner demonic self and the worldly ornated or ornamented attraction and attachments. It basically relies on the Biblical 'Seven Virtues' of life which could kindle and restrain the 'Seven Deadly Sins. On the other hand, nature casts a magic spell in shaping and reshaping the overall human behaviour, judgements and judicious thoughts process which lesson to follow a systematic way of living following nature. Thus, Nature has an educative influence on man. Literature is basically a combination of these two – scripture and nature. Man's creative faculties find their soil in literature. It is both sweet and useful what Horace coined them as *dulce* and *utile*. Its function is to relieve both writers and readers from the pressure of emotions. Poetry has a special forging capacity to attain sublimity. Besides, it helps to formulate an ethereal and aesthetic sense within man's inner self which ultimately lead man to be 'devised' and 'methodized' with Nature. Pope's (2014) lines from *Essay on Criticism* are matching thus:

First follow Nature, and your judgement frame
 By her just standard which is still the same;
 Unerring Nature, still divinely sight
 One clear unchanged universal light

 Those rules of old discovered, not devised
 Are Nature still but Nature methodized. (p. 67)

The SARS-COV-2 hence COVID-19 pandemic, since its inception in Hubei City, under Wuhan Province, China in December 2019, has created a panic like pandemonium across the globe threatening the *homo-sapiens* and other living and non-living species of their very existence and expansions. It brings forth a challenging way of living with full of precautions and protocols. Any mistake in following and executing the set protocols and directives from health bodies and health experts nationally-internationally time to time implemented, will lead into the potential chance to get affected by the contagious virus. As a result, men cocooned own selves in forced isolation with utmost care and precautions such as washing hands, using sanitizer, wearing masks and above all remaining hygienic. The stress of maintaining all these guidelines for a long period of time make a negative impact on body and mind leading towards in a gloomy and remorseful state. At this precarious time with all types of restrictions and limitations, nature and poetry, however among others, seem to be the only panacea for the time being that a man can find in to relieve his pains and sufferings.

Wordsworth, the seventeenth century's sensational and mostly influential nature poet, for the first time in world literature very convincingly and courageously started regarding Nature as the 'guardian of all his moral being'. Nature was all in all to him. He believes in pantheistic and panegyric influence of nature on human lives and in shaping reshaping human



values. He finds in nature the panacea of all type of pains and infliction that mankind tends to receive in course of his/her daily intercourse with earthly affairs. In *Lines Composed Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth writes,

In Nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse
The guide, the guardian of my heart and soul
Of all my moral being. (2004 p-26)

In the present fevered and inflicted time that the entire world is facing in the name of contagious Covid-19, the very lines from Wordsworth's poetry seems absolute relevant in terms of seeking relief and release from the panic as well from the grief-stricken mind in isolation or solitude. They cast an ethereal impact in one's mind serving as a temporary panacea and to say, a virtual inoculation in the intermediary ill-times till the availability and accessibility of real inoculation. He further writes:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of town and cities, I have owned to them
In hours of weariness, sensation sweet.
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration..... (ibid.)

Almost same is echoed in another poem of him, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud/ Daffodils*. The fever and fret of worldly affairs sometimes hover heavy on his mind and he remains in pensive mood, then the recollection of the daffodil's flowers serve as a bliss as well as a blessing of Nature in the poet's solitude. The present 'social distancing' (physical distancing) or forced isolative mode of living in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic, poetry like *Daffodils* would surely cast a magic spell on to the reader's mind to get out from his/her pensive mood and be busy renovating and refreshing the aesthetic scope only to cast away the panicked-stricken psychological pressure formulated from the existing scattered confusions and catastrophes. It would further relate things in pantheistic way of thoughts arousing a 'feel good' space which inspire man to do goods for the sake of man and environment. He writes,

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood.
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude. (online. poetry Foundation)

Man being superior, develops an instinct through evolution to defy the nature's set patterns and even cross the limits in course of his mad rush to materialistic pursuit and manipulate to its maximum which is inevitably boomeranged by "... Nature red in tooth and claw" (Tennyson) resulting complete disorder and disaster in man's health, habitations and humanities. The present pandemic outbreak, no doubt, is the desired result of man's malpractice which is all time silhouetted with the unsystematic patterns. Wordsworth in his

contemporary period showed his anguish and disagreements with man's unlimited and unsatiating explorations of nature and natural resources at the advent of Industrial Revolution. Wordsworth did not support the so called ongoing fast developing process by cutting trees and reducing natural resources which in anticipation brought about a 'sordid' type of 'boon' to man. It is a 'boon' of rather malevolent as well as malignant quality which cost heavy on life and society in terms of disease, disability and derogatory values of human lives. Wordsworth expresses out his anguish and aspirations in his poem *The World is Too Much with Us*. Everything becomes a commodity and man starts seeing things with a materialistic viewpoint and employs all his energies and powers in this mindless pursuit of wealth which, according to Wordsworth, accounts for the present plight and predicament. Day by day with the improvement of scientific explorations and findings, man's insatiable greed and gluttony seemingly escalated resulting in a severance of the vital bond between man and Nature in one hand and letting loose the 'pandora's box' of disease and unease, weal and woes, war and weariness on the other, thereby leading towards a complete breakdown of the mother-earth's own unique functions and supports system. The bearing of man's insensitivity towards nature is too heavy to carry for a sensitive soul like Wordsworth whose bonding with nature was like mother and son. He would rather abjure his own religious faith and embrace paganism permanently only to show his love and solidarity with Nature. Thus, Wordsworth painfully depicts the situation in his poem *The World is Too Much with Us*,

The world is too much with us, late and soon
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
 Little we see in Nature that is ours.
 We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

I would rather be
 A pagan suckled in a creed outworn. (2009, p-28).

In the present Covid-19 context, Wordsworth's *Lucy Poems* also can be re-interpreted as a remedial stand against the ongoing malignant malady on earth. The poems play a crucial role in bringing out the absolute truth of man and Nature's obedient and interconnected relationship establishing the fact that man is made from earth and its returning back to earth. And in his intermediary course in between life and death, Nature takes all the responsibility and liability of man's growth, health, healing power. In *Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower*, Wordsworth projected Lucy as purely Nature's child in heart and soul. Nature take Lucy to turn her into a lady of Nature's own. Wordsworth here gives a minute description of the growth of Lucy under the direct influence of Nature and its education. Nature intended to affect an ideal fusion of restraining force and driving force in Lucy's character and personality. Thus, the lines go,

She shall be mine, and I will make
 A lady of My own
 Myself will do my darling be
 Both law and impulse: and with me



The girl,.....
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle and restrain. (2009, p-7)

The connection of the poem with the present sorry scenario is to convey the message and to lay emphasis onto the fact that everything that is natural or nature oriented is good and benevolent for humanities. It helps to ennoble or elevate the good and to restrain or check the bad in mankind which ultimately sustain man's credibility. But unfortunately, in the materialistic world it seems to be a far cry with no clear intention to retreat or recheck. Here man born out of mother earth as pure but then the corrupting and contaminating degenerative process are going on in leaps and bounds. At one stage, he stands at daggers hand against the foster Nature and starts inflicting her in manifold ways only to get more calamities and catastrophies in the name of pandemic or epidemic deadly viruses and diseases, wars, worries, contaminated air, water, land and even edibles.

To Wordsworth Nature has a chastening influence on man. It has ample power to make difference in things and thoughts if not check and restrict one's evil instinct what the present post pandemic world is facing and paying. The rejection to country life and the increased adoption of artificial town life is considered to be the root cause of all griefs and diseases. Thus, Cowper says, "God made the country, and manmade the town" (Cowper). The gradual inclination towards town life and the expansion of its periphery equipping with all sorts of modern amenities and luxuries cannot, but make reducing forests and forests' life which play havoc on man nature relationship. It left a long-lasting deteriorating and damaging imprint on health and habitation of both man and nature. The direct action of man in the name of rapid industrialization and commercialisation causes an indirect reaction from nature in the name of discomforts, diseases and deaths. And it is high time to rationalise things in a restrictive way to check the impending calamities. We have seen a silver lining of hope of a new world with a new social order during the forced lockdown as in the intermediary restricted times, nature goes unrestricted, unchecked, uncut only to rekindle and regenerate its own self with promised abundancy in everything that is natural and which, as per the Wordsworthian philosophy in *Tintern Abbey*, has a chastening as well as recompensating influence on man barring the 'loss' due to the cursed Covid-19 pandemic.

.....other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompense.....
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. (2004, p-25)

Wordsworth believes nature in heart and soul, so he believes his poetry as a nature's bound entity free from foul. He blindfoldedly follows the nature's way of living and healing "knowing that Nature never did betray / The hearts that loved her". (2004, p-27). For Wordsworth, the feeling for nature rises to a passionate veneration that is love and religion too.

He is of the opinion that Nature is not merely a procession of seasons and seasonal changes; but it is the eye of all things, natural and supernatural, into which the observant soul can peer and behold the spirit that inhabits all things. Nature is thus amplified and glorified; it is to be sought, not only in the flowers and the fields, but also in-

.....the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky and in the mind of man. (qtd. In Edward Albert p-290)

Thus, Wordsworth has always advocated for the harmonious and holistic approach of living and livelihood with nature and natural agents. In his poetry, nature is always placed at the epitome of the divinity only to be revered and to get amply rewarded. In this present pandemic situation, nature has given man enough time to introspect into his own self of his daily receptive and productive activities in respect of nature's point of view. Is not that man relying too much on nature without making any fruitful contribution in shaping, reshaping nature? Is not that man's selfish dealings with nature with no 'give and take policy' and only 'take and take policy' gradually leading all and sundry towards apocalypse? Is not that the ongoing pandemic and other fatal diseases have a direct and deliberate connection with man's random ravaging of nature? These all are the questions that need to make a focus upon of utmost importance for the salvation and survival of lives on earth. And it's not that it will take place all of a sudden. It needs compassion, love, care and a positive initiation from the very individuals of society. So, to say with Wordsworth,

We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service; rather say
With warmer love – oh! With far deeper zeal
Of holier love. (2004, p-27).

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