A Critical Appreciation of John Keat's "Ode To Nightingale"

1. **Mr.Devidas Basappa Koli**
Asst.Professor

2.Mrs. Rathod Priyanka Rajendra
Asst.Professor

Basic Science & Humanities Department
Vidya Vikas Pratishthn's Institutes of Engineering & Technology Solapur, Maharashtra, India.

Abstract:

'Ode to a Nightingale' is one of the greatest odes in English literature. It is a masterpiece from the pen of John Keats. The poem comes from the heart of the poet. It displays most of his poetic qualities. The poem was written in 1819, when Keats was living with his friend Charles Brown. During these days Keats' brother Tom died of consumption. Keats' was deeply attached to his brother. His death was a great shock to the poet. In addition, he was deeply in love with Fanny Browne. His passion for her was violent and he was quite disturbed by that. In such a mood he needed relief. It came through the song of the nightingale and the outcome was this ode. Shelley's poem addressed to a skylark, is also an ode. But these two poems fired by the sweet songs of two birds, are quite different in their treatment. Shelley speaks of the supreme joy on listening to the skylark. Keats also experiences the joy. But his response is still deep-rooted. It comes from heart. That is why the poem is more personal, more intense more moving and more appealing.

Keywords:

The Poet, The Nightingale & The Physical world of nature

Introduction:

An ode is a rhymed lyric often in the form of an address. In this ode Keats addresses a nightingale. He describes the wonderful effect of the song of the bird.

The **'Ode to a Nightingale'** is considered one of the greatest odes in English poetry. It has been regarded as one of the finest odes written by Keats. The Ode was written in the Spring of 1819 and was published in July of the same year. Keats heard the song of the nightingale at Hempstead and composed the poem.

This poem is divided in eight stanzas. The poet is excessively happy to hear the music of the nightingale. He is over-powered by its deep musics. So he desires to run away from world of sorrow and suffering and became one with nightingale. For this purpose he needs the help of wine. Later on he gives up the idea of using wine. He seeks the aid of poetic inspiration and becomes one with the spirit of the nightingale. He is at the extreme point of joy. He wishes to die at this moment when the bird is singing. In spite of his wish to die he calls the bird immortal one. It must continue its sweet song. Then he feels that the song of the bird cannot keep him for long in the world of imagination. The music of song passes away gradually. He is brought back to reality. This experience appears to him like a dream. Such, in short, is the main argument of this poem.

The poem is Hellenic in tone. It presents the best qualities of Keats' Hellenic art. We, in this poem, have got Keats' love for the Greek approach to life. The nightingale has been called the Dryad of the trees. The poet also thinks of Bacchus and his pards. He also presents his love of the Greeks by presenting the objective realities of nature in a beautiful and charming manner. He refers to the river of forgetfulness - Lethe. There

is reference to Hippocrene, the fountain of Muses. He speaks of Ruth, Provencal song, magic casements and princesses.

The descriptions of nature given in this poem are very beautiful and charming. There is a very nice description of the queen Moon on her throne, she is surrounded by her starry fays. The description of the various flowers appeal to our senses. The darkness is 'embalmed'. There is 'soft incense' of the flowers. The 'murmurous haunt of flies' is heard. The Hawthorne is white. The night is tender. Thus there is a plenty of color and sound in the poem.

There is none of pessimism running throughout the poem. The poet contrasts the happy lot of the nightingale with the unhappy lot of human being. No human being is excepted from the miseries and illnesses. The young men also grow weaker and weaker. Beauty is short lived. Thus, he has drawn a dark picture of the human life which is very painful and pathetic. The poet's love for death is quite characteristic. The worst is wished for at the happiest moment. He has been 'half in love with easeful Death.' Death is not horror but a reliever to him. In addition to this, he wishes that the sweet song of the nightingale would be a requiem. All this is strange and romantic.

The poem is full of romantic atmosphere. Keats loves old Greek culture and mythology. He refers to distant fairy lands in the following lines:

"The same that oft times hath

Charmed magic casements opening on the foam

Of perilous seas, in fairy land forlorn".

These lines present the very essence of romance.

The poet points out one important truth about art and life. The truth is that we can forget the world with the help of imagination and poetic fancy; we cannot forget it permanently. The song of the nightingale helped him to escape from the bitter realities of life but ultimately, he had to come again to the real life. This truth is expressed in the following lines:

"Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well

As she is famed to do, deceiving elf ".

When we examine the structure of the ode, we see that the stanzas are connected by a word in the last line or by taking up the thought in the last line. This is not really a logical argument. Image leads on to image, or idea to idea. The association of ideas is similar to that which we find in 'stream of consciousness' writing.

The most striking characteristic of this ode is that it deals with the effect of single moment-of intuition. It imitates a complex mood. The moment caught in this ode is the moment when he heard the happy song of the bird. The effect of that single moment is described throughout the poem. The poet does not tell us about the color, size or the appearance of the bird.

The stanza-form used in this poem is an invention. The rhyme scheme is delightful. The long lines are melodious. The short line comes when variety is needed. Every stanza is marvelously musical.

The subtle alliterations like beaded bubbles', 'breezes blown', 'deep delved earth' makes the poem still more beautiful. The various images in this poem such as of a beaker, Ruth standing with her tearful eyes in the stranger's field makes the poem extremely beautiful. The poet's fond love for using composite adjectives such as 'deep delved' is more marked. The figure of speech 'transferred epithet' is used often. The plot is melodious, mirth is sunburnt. All these poetic ornaments magnify the ideas. Hence, they are equally important as the mood of the poet in this poem.

Indeed **'Ode to a Nightingale'** reaches the high-water mark of romantic poetry. There is intense mood and its expression is rich. Surely it is not without defect in workmanship as the **'Ode to Autumn'**, but is preferred to the 'Ode to Autumn' or even to the **'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.**

Conclusion:

Thus, we notice that there is a development of thought from stanza to stanza in a proper manner as follows:

Stanza I: The poet feels an aching joy and drowsiness when he hears him a song of the nightingale. This makes him wish that he should be with the nightingale. The means that can enable him to be with the bird is a drink of wine.

Stanza II: The poet speaks of wine in stanza II. Wine will enable him to reach the bird and to forget the miseries of the earth.

Stanza III: He wants to forget these miseries by flying to the nightingale.

Stanza IV: But a better way of reaching the bird would be by the use of poetic imagination. So he speaks of it in this stanza and reaches the bird. But the bird is sitting in a dark plane where it is not seen. So he describes in it the darkness.

Stanza V: There is not only csomplete darkness in the place where the bird and the poet are, but there is also complete silence. This brings on thoughts of death.

Stanza VI: But the thoughts of the death of the poet who is a mortal being, leads him to the thoughts of the immortality of the bird.

Stanza VII: The immortality of the bird and of its song makes the poet think of Ruth and the princess impressioned in fairy lands forlorn.

Stanza VIII: The poet awakes from his romantic dream to the realities of life. We notice that one thought leads to another which is associated with it. The poem thus, shows a harmonious development of thought.

Acknowledgement:

During this research I am very grateful to the VVP INSTITUTE OF ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY, SOLAPUR for offering facilities and resources.

References :

1. Stylistic Analysis of the poem “Ode to Nightingale” by John Keats published by 1. Abdul Bari Khan 2.Iram Zehra & Ghulam Hafsa M.phil Linguistics, The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus, Pakistan .
2. A Stylistic Analysis of “Ode to A Nightingale” by John Keats Hafsa Zia D/O Dr.Muhammad Sadiq Zia