



Research Paper

Harmony in Philip Larkin's Poems

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of Larkin as literary artist was to convey his ultimate message that man has to transcend the gross environment for the attainment for final goal. His poem opens with important question which prompt us to scrutinize ourselves. According to Philip Larkin "when you come to talk about once duty as writer then ones can say that his duty is to write for harmony". In this paper there an urge in Larkin's poem to attain transcendental knowledge by which everything is known. The meaningful change in environment through literature result from the development of qualities and attitude that foster constructive pattern of human interaction through literature. In an age of highly industrialized and mechanized structure of our society where we have 'given our hearts away a sordid boon' and where all spiritual values have been thrown overboard, the relevance of selecting this topic "Spiritual Quest in Philip Larkin" becomes important. In Larkin's poetry there is invariably, an element of spiritual crises, a note of subsequent struggle to step out of it. This inner conflict to proceed forward in the path of Divine realization lends magnificence to his poetic and spiritual personality.*

Keywords: *Disharmony, Distrust, Eternal, Gross environment, Harmony, Inner struggle, Spiritualism, Trust.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Philip Larkin in his formative years, suffered from spiritual pangs of separation, which led him to turn within to explore his real existence. His spiritual urge results in unquestioningly beautiful poetry. Philip Arthur Larkin was born in Coventry on 9 August 1922, the only son and younger child of Sydney and Eva Larkin. In October 1940 at the age of 18 Larkin went to St. John's College, Oxford. He failed in the army medical test as a result of weak eyesight and so was able to complete his degree, uninterrupted, graduating with First class Honors in English in 1943. As a poet Larkin made his debut with the collection *The North Ship* in 1945, written with short lines and carefully worked-out rhyme schemes. It was published by his expense and showed the influence of Yeats. Larkin's anthology, *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Verse* (1973) is generally regarded as a disastrous potpourri; and while it certainly demonstrated his critical shortcomings, it also contained good poems that more fashion conscious editors might well have ignored.

The following remarks of Andrew Motion (biographer of Philip Larkin) deserve to be quoted here: 'The Less Deceived' made his name, 'The Whitsun Weddings' made him famous, and 'High Windows' turned him into a national monument^[1]. His three mature collections have developed attitudes and styles of greater imaginative daring; in their prolonged debates with despair, they testify to wide sympathies, contain passages of frequently transcendent beauty, and demonstrate a poetic inclusiveness, which is of immense consequence for his literary heirs.

Larkin is one of the most popular poets of today for his significance message to the world. With the loss of spiritual values, Larkin has always thought about the brutality that has entered into the mind of human being. Modern man is not discriminating between gross and higher plane of life. Philip Larkin's restless soul wants to stop the indulgence of 'toad' which is poisoning all of us. The question raised by Larkin has a moral and spiritual significance. The poet feels that he has to purify his inner self and to cure himself before doing anything for the welfare of humanity. In the poem *Toads* he explains,

***"Why should I led the toad
work squat on my life
can't I use my wit as kitchfork
And drive the brute off"***

(Poem No. 89)

There is nothing negative or inhibited in his poetry. He writes in a language that is only lucid and memorable, but is natural and forceful too. And he gives the impression of being a friendly, sensible person whose

comments on life and people are both sympathetic and stimulating. His skillful craftsmanship enables him to build up a firm structure in his poems and to portray the realistic details of the contemporary scenes in a language that has a recognizable rhythm and a consistent polish. The extra qualification he has is his technical ability, a power to compose sequence of words that express fully and adequately, the human situation.

II. FROM MATERIALISM TO SPIRITUALISM

There is a perennial urge in mankind for spiritual realization and attainment of peace - peace that passeth all understanding. It would not be out of place to say that the socio-political chaos and other disturbances of the modern age are so ugly, crude and horrible that the poets have tried much to shift their attention from the gross material life to the spiritual life of love, peace, harmony and ecstasy. The creativity of new poets is flowered by their spiritual insight and experience. The new poets have a large vision to grasp the spiritual truth which enables them to conclude that lack of spiritual faith which is the root cause of all types of crises. In the present world there is a breakdown of all moral values.

With the loss of moral values, Philip Larkin has always thought about the brutality that entered into the mind of human beings. As a champion of his age, Larkin significantly stands apart in his crystallized vision of man in quest, which teaches one how to save oneself from the narrow worldly afflictions, sorrows and sufferings. In a nutshell this marks the Divine path and the consummation of spiritualism. Larkin has shown great concern with the contrasting theme of materialism and spiritualism. Submerged in spiritual chaos, the contemporary civilization has threatened Church with extinction and Larkin is compelled to mediate over the gradual loss of faith. In the poem *Church Going* the protagonist is bycycling aimlessly, he enters the Church just like a casual visitor devoid of any religious feeling and convictions.

*“When Churches fall completely
out of use
Shall we avoid them as
unlucky places”
(Poem No. 97)*

Nothing is more ironic than the fact that the visitor thinks of the futility of such places in a complete atheistic age. Thus for Larkin religion is an experience and realization instead of visiting Church and attending the sermons. All creative thinkers and writers inherited the tendency to look within. One could get peace and bliss only by retiring to one's own self. This quest for spiritual awakening is explicitly expressed in Philip Larkin's poem *Faith Healing*:

*“Their heads are clasped abruptly then exiled
Like losing thoughts they go in silence”
(Poem No. 126)*

Here Larkin is in the process of knowing and communicating Divine truth:

*“As if a kind of dumb
An idiot child within them still survives
To re-awake at kindness, thinking a voice
At last calls them alone that hands have come
To lift and lighter; and such joy arrives”
(Poem No. 126)*

The outside world in this poem becomes important in relation to the stationary person inside. According to Doan Morrise "*Composition of good and great literature is possible only by discovering the spiritual truth*"^[1]. Larkin tries to probe into the minds of those who try faith-healing at the hands of a preacher. Larkin understood that nothing could cure except love - a scarce commodity in the modern world. Larkin's satirical comment upon the modern ways of living awakens our dormant sleeping soul which has forgotten its divine centre.

In the poem *Mr Bleaney*:

*“That how we live measures our own nature
And at this age having no more to show”
(Poem No. 102)*

Mr. Bleaney may be said to be an Everyman in his old age in the modern world. To quote Ted Hughes: "Looking through the lens of this poem, it seems we could see every detail of any situation this man could ever get into"^[2].

Pure poetry enables the reader to be free from the tyranny of continuous anxiety caused by the ignorance and worldly desires. Larkin's poetry, as revealed in these pages, paves the way towards spiritual

freedom. It is well to start by distinguishing the poet who not only changed the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but they are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote, the awareness of the possibilities of life. So said F.R. Leavis, "Indeed among the major poets Larkin's position has remained unrivalled"^[3].

In these circumstances many writers believed that literature was useless if it does not serve a definite social and political purpose, and those who failed to share this conviction were thought to be mere literary artists. The writings of the 1950's however, were as much preoccupied with the condition of the whole world for air-travel had made the world appear as small, a place as Britain a century before, and humanitarian hopefulness has been displaced by partisan propaganda which offered some political doctrine, as a means to world salvation. Literature was permeated by a spirit of non-violent humanitarianism.

III. FROM DISHARMONY TO HARMONY

Larkin's uniqueness lies mainly in his technical ability, his power to compromise sequences of words that express fully and adequately the human situation. He writes poem after poem, which one waits for the dying fall. Behind the veils of ignorance and falsehood Larkin has achieved success in perceiving the rays of the inner soul. We are thankful to Larkin who helps us to eliminate the gross and the negative aspects of our being. Needless to say that his poem act as a catharsis and purify us.

Larkin presents the theme of Harmony, Eternity and spiritualism in his poems and thereby he emphasizes the necessity of self introspection and the discovery of the self. According to him the goal of human life is the liberation from the worldly attractions. The attainment of this goal requires rigorous preparation of body, mind and the intellect. So his poems are giving a call to the whole humanity to come forward to realize soul.

*"His poetry is notable for its melancholy,
bitterness and stoic wit"^[4]*

Larkin's utilitarian and skeptical views were the cause of over mechanism in his day. His influence was far reaching in effect; he has given new turn to the modern thought. In the poem *Reason for Attendance* he talks about the real happiness:

*"But not for me, now I for them; and so
with happiness. Therefore I stay outside,
Believing this; and they maul to and fro
Believing that; and both are satisfied"*

(Poem No. 80)

A very meaningful point of view which is sought to be emphasized here is the importance of true happiness. The human mind is composed not only by the rational powers but also by the emotional and the instinctive elements which feel the presence of certain truths, which Larkin emphasizes adequately. His use of symbols by any object from man's perception reality that suggests and comes to stand for something that is not palpable in the real world, here something eternal is symbolized. Thus the Divine vision is possible only when we will cross the dustiest road of material existence. According to Leonard Lief : "In England the better poets after World War II (Thomas, Betjeman and Larkin) used unconventional forms in their art, through Thomas work seems more impassioned then does the wry, intellectual poetry of Betjeman and Philip Larkin"^[5].

Thus the universe is nothing but the Absolute beheld through the channels of human perception. In this attempt to bring the temporal and eternal together, the poem *I have started to say* presents a picture of divine perfection commingled with human sufferings:

*"All that's left to happen
In some deaths (my own included)
Their order, and their manner
Remain to be learn".*

(Poem No. 185)

Here we see that people are afraid of war, disease and death; thus they are afraid of living as well as dying. Larkin's poem presents that we have gone too far from ourselves to remember that we came to live in joy, to serve a higher purpose, to manifest the pure light of consciousness. By his poems Larkin is willing to share the secrets by which the world can be changed and the positive energy can be transmitted to liberate humanity from the forces of destruction. Larkin wanted to share the power of this transformation to rediscover our spiritual power which can lead us to self awareness. As Peschmann says, "What links Larkin with the movement is its fundamental honesty to experience a clear-eyed, view of contemporary living and its problems Larkin presents a world of here and now." The poems which we are concerned here, try to bring ultimate solution. As the social structure is breaking down, the sensitive individual will have to take the initiative for the

reconstruction of his own inner spiritual life. This is high time for us to rise from the state of stagnation and to proceed forward to have self-awakening.

Larkin's poetry comes to us as a message to review our choice. A change in our whole outlook is sure to come. Every event reflects a Universal condition and does not stand as an element abstracted from the whole. The concern of Larkin's work covers a variety of subjects. It also deals with human consciousness and human life. Poetry was not only important part of his writings, but an important part of his life for which he was ready to sacrifice almost everything else. According to R.L. Brett, "Poetry was a psychological necessity which allowed him to express his emotions and at the same time to control and give form to them" [6].

The poems provided a means of relieving his fears and anxieties. A greater liberation of mind came which allowed him to express his feelings. The expressed aim of Larkin was a revolution against all the restraints on the free function of the human mind and psyche. Poetry was a field of new experimentation of them. The exploration of inner self sounds vague and ambiguous for many readers. By inward groping Larkin tried to spread a message that man will do better if he withdraws from the material world and steps forward in the final path of soul. He must strengthen, cure and purify his inner self before doing or saying anything for the welfare of the society.

IV. FROM EPHEMERAL TO ETERNAL

Larkin's poetry is much less an expression of man's attitude to the life and directly phrased summary of lifetime experience. His general outlook of life was very gloomy and bleak; and his poetry is deeply colored by his pessimistic outlook. When he attained the age of sixty, Anthony Thwaile brought out a book in which various persons paid their tributes to him. But one of the contributors, Alan Bennett thus commented upon his gloomy outlook on life, "Apparently he is sixty, but when was he anything else. He has made a habit of being sixty; he has made a profession of it. Like lady Dumbleton he has been sixty for the last twenty-five years. On his own admission these was never a boy Larkin, no young lad Philip, let alone Phil, ever"

A great writing that is transcends in its own time and remains relevant for future generations. That doesn't mean that the poet sets out to write about vague immortal subjects in a remote and artificial language. What is meant is whatever subject he deals he is able through the strength of his own feelings and powers of expression to make us far away from him in time and space share his feelings. This is what means by universality of a great poets work. The internal is what matters finally – not the external, shown in the poem *The Trees*

*"Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In fullgrown thickness every May
Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh".*

(Poem No. 166)

Larkin does not take a pessimistic view of life and existence. He has an evolutionary and idealistic approach towards life and its problem. The sweetest song of life, the portrait of human feeling through poetry, interpretation of truth accompanied by mystical touch-inclined altogether to the religious bliss, all have clustered in his poems [7]. There was Larkin's increasing fame as a poet, something which depressed and even frightened him. He accepted and enjoyed some of the honors sometimes, but found it an inhibiting burden too. And these gradually began those ills of age that he so much dreaded premonitions as they were of 'The only end of age'. As a thinker Larkin was a deep observer too. He just expresses his points of solution, choice of words which has deep ideas. His words convey his mind. One attempt to confront Larkin's poetry occurs in Davie Thomas, Hardy and British Poetry (1972) in this same volume Davie argues that the merit of Fisher's collected Poems, (1968), Larkin was facing urban scene, smothered both its vulgarity and warmth in his own dejection. He employed an elevated style and philosophical images, written chiefly on the eternal themes of life and death.

Larkin has arrived at a luminous perception of reality and this perception has plunged him into the state of creative excitement which has enabled him to light upon the words. An inspired utterance enables us to see the sunbeam through the rainbow which has brought into being. We live in a state of spiritual squalor, forgetting the splendor and the beauty that are everywhere around us. There is the example in the poem *Who called love conquering*

*"Who called love conquering
When its sweet flower
So easily dries among the sour
Lanes of the living"*

(Poem No. 45)

Perception of this kind results in a new view of God, Nature or Man. It reveals in a flash, as it were the situations which confront man, the character which Larkin has developed, the sentiments he experiences or the

moods and modes of life through which he passes. There are poems about country, moss covered barns, cottages. What takes Larkin to countryside is the desire to turn away from the contemporary reality lies and suffering. Nature is tranquilizing pill. He resorts to nature as a daydream to escape the reality much like the Decadents. The following lines are from the poem *Gathering Wood* which is the representative of typically insipid verse.

*On short, still days
At the shut of the year
We search the pathways
Where the coverts were”*

(Poem No. 91)

Clarity of perception and strong emotional vigor distinguish his poetry from the verse of other modern poets. The very spirit of English countryside is expressed through this poem. Nature presents psychological subtleties and an inner tension. It is for this reason that unlike the other modern poets Larkin achieves an unpretentious, yet dignified humanity in his poetry. *The View* is the poem of withdrawal and retreat but with its enchanted world it shines out by its honesty and truth. The quality of Spirituality can be best illustrated from his poem –

*“And drops away in mist.
The view does not exist.
Where has it gone, the lifetime?
Search me what's left is drear”.*

(Poem No. 195)

By subtle ‘verbal music’ Larkin can create an atmosphere of idyllic tranquility or one of distant forebodings. The magic of his words can suddenly transform an object or scene and cast a hypnotic spell. This happens in most of his poems. Throughout the dreams and charms that Larkin’s poetry weaves we continue to get glimpses of the disquietude sorrow ‘heats vacancy’ and ‘anguished sigh’. These far from being the weakness of his poetry are his strength. Philip Larkin once confessed that “The lotion of expressing sentiments in short lines, having similar sounds at their ends, seemed to me as remote as mangoes on the moon”^[8]. Larkin’s emphasizes on the sadness of human condition, most of his poems are about the old age Other themes in his poetry are failure, the fragility of human choices, the importance of vocation in life, the horrifying reality of death, the struggles of the common people and the universality of human misery and sadness. According to Terry Whalen, “Larkin is not only an analyst of human mind but also a romantic deeply concerned with the spiritual health of human beings”^[9]. And we may add the man’s alienation from this world and his sense of isolation from his environment from nature and from things in general is also a prominent theme in Larkin’s poetry.

V. CONCLUSION

Every poem of Larkin gives some serious and striking message. Thou it is really a difficult task to trace through poems, his ideas of developing spiritualism. A pervading thread of divine consciousness in the poems of Larkin offers a tempting subject for the literary investigation. Larkin propitiates moral, ethical and spiritual values for a peaceful and meaningful life. But the attitude of conscientious objections also impressed him. Larkin who always hoped for Godliness but never objected on the religious ground. The idea that all his poems uphold with unanimity is detachment from ephemeral world to remain unaffected by pairs of opposites. Larkin transcend the opposites in life and accepts all on equal footing. These are the qualities universally acknowledged as the ultimate goal of spiritual endeavor. He gives the impression of being friendly, sensible person whose comments on life and people are both sympathetic and stimulating^[10].

Larkin emphasizes on the dilemmas of our own times - our relationship to our fellow human beings. As the expression of human spirit he presented the selection capture the eternal joys. Yet the modern writers' quest for identity, purpose and meaning in life remains”^[11].

Larkin's exorcism played a part in producing some of the best poems of second half of this century. Slowly the new age movement brought Larkin more into focus. But for years there was uneasiness and some amount of scorn associated with the unshaven look and excessive gullibility. Modern poetry is free from both mystical and logical compulsions and empirical in its attitude to all that comes. Larkin's poem is known for its real rather than ideological honesty. Larkin suggests that an escape from the horrors of the present into the transcendental realm alone can save mankind in general. The acceptance of this truth not be merely for academic research and discussion, but has to be the foundation of the life of each and everyone. It is the moral responsibility of poets and revolutionaries to reconstruct the whole structure of society. There is an intense consciousness of death and immortality in Larkin's poetry. The spiritual insight of Larkin is different from the mystical aspirations of

Wordsworth. In his poem we can find traces of his deeply spiritual nature. As a poet Larkin wants to serve whole humanity. It is surprising that Larkin reconciles himself by the feelings which cannot be cured, must be endured. Larkin has explored the different dimensions of his spiritual faith by his poems. He was always reluctant to discuss his poetry and never lectured on it in the University. This "area was a Holy - of Holies, which he alone entered". This may seem an extravagant way of putting it, but he himself always spoke of his poetry as a gift which came from outside and which he could not explain^[12]. So his visionary approach to the inner world gives him a different identity among the movement poets. He inspires us to rise above the gross reality for reunion with the Eternal Force.

The forgoing analysis has underlined the "Spiritual Quest" in the Poems of Philip Larkin. A sober regard for truth has lent his poems the stamp of authenticity, which other modern poets could not achieve. Over and above this we can observe a measure of self-discipline in Larkin's poetry, which amounts to a fine spiritual awareness.

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