



Impact of Indian Mythology on the Literature of Herman Melville

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Abstract

Many an English poet and philosopher like T.S. Eliot has taken a great inspiration from Indian mythology, this impact has imparted a unique touch to his creations. The American poets, novelists and philosophers, like Emerson, Thoreau, Walt Whitman and Melville etc. have also been profoundly influenced by it. Herman Melville has studied, explored and employed the Indic lore and mythological references in his novels, stories and poems in order to give a better and sharper view of life. Herman Melville was gifted person with a vision He was inspired and stimulated by Indian thought and philosophy. Indian Mythology is universally appreciated for its depth of thought and profundity of ideologies. Morals of "Ramayana" and "Mahabharata" had been influenced the foreign literature so far. The social principles of Bhawadt Geeta and its theory of Karma and Yoga had influenced the English Literature of entire globe. Melville has been tremendously influenced by Indian thoughts, philosophy and mythology. The impact of Indian mythology and philosophy in found in all his works.

KEY WORDS: *Mythology, Indic lore, Ideologies, Allegorical.*



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DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS: An allegorical story based on Indian mythology is 'the apple Tree Table or Original spiritual Manifestations'. Melville was influenced by a guide book. A History of the country of Berkshire, Massachusetts The beginning is remarkable for its allegorical element: "when I first saw the table, dingy and dusty in the fur-thest corner of the old hopper-shaped garret, and set-out with broken, be -crusted, old purple vials and flasks and a

ghostly dismantled old quarto it seemed just such a necromantic little old table as might have belonged to friar Bacon.”¹

Melville presents the insect in an allegorical manner: The mysterious insect did not long enjoy its radiant life; it expired the next day. But my girls have preserved it, embalmed in a silver Vinegrette, it lies on the little apple-tree table in the pier of the cedar parlor.”² ‘The Piazza’ is a very brilliant story full of symbolism and allegorical element. Melville has taken epigraph from Shakespeare’s Cymbeline-act IV Scene II. Arviragus is tortured for Imogen who is unknown to both. The piazza is a beautiful place-“A very paradise of painters.

The circle of the stars cut by the circle of the mountains.”³ A piazza adds to the beauty of a house” “Now for a house so situated in such a country, to have no piazza for the convenience of those who might desire to feast upon the view and take their time and ease about it, seemed as much of an omission as if a picture gallery should have no bench; for what but picture-galleries are the marble halls of these same limestone hills.

Melville is provided with all mysterious and symbolical pleasure by a piazza: “But every night when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness, No light shows from the mountain, To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna’s face and many as real a story.” ‘Two sides to a tortoise’ is also a very interesting and fascinating –‘the tortoise, dark and melancholy as it is upon the back, still possesses a bright side, its calipee or breast-plate being sometimes of a faint yellowish or golden tinge, ‘Norfolk Isle and the Chole Window’ I also rich in Indian mythology. “A Chole or half-breed Indian woman of Payta in Peru, three years gone by, with her young new-wedded husband Felipe, of pure Castilian blood and her one only Indian brother Truxill ...” Melville has achieved all artistic excellence and technical exquisiteness in his stories also.

Historians like Crawford, A.C. Kern and M.H. Needleman admire the stories of Melville for their symbolical illustrations from Indian mythology. They give the example of Kimpel who says:”the Lightning rod man (is) a declaration of independence of the Orthodox Creeds.”⁴ Robert Spiller observes:”... the short tales like ‘Benito Cereno’ and Bartleby- the scrivener- he weaves rational webs of increasing subtlety and complexity.

Melville has been deeply influenced by the giant tortoises, he believes like the Hindus that the entire world rests on the back of an enormous tortoise.”Yes, they seemed the identical tortoises whereon the Hindu plants this total sphere-with them, I lost myself in volcanic mazes: brushed away endless boughs of rothing thickets, till finally I found myself sitting cross-legged

upon the foremost, a Brahmin similarly monted upon either side forming a tripod of foreheads which upheld the universal cape.”^{5,6}

Melville has also been fascinated by the Indian theme of patience and endurance: “ The Agatha theme of patient endurance, however, was still in his mind and he may not have wanted to tell a tale of adventure so much as one which would enable him to make use of the ‘significance’ with which his material was ‘instinct’ ...the barren loneliness of the Galapagos, the strange currents which made them almost unapproachable by ordinary navigation and caused them to be called ‘The Enchan-ted Isles’ and the emblematic potentialities of the slow but long-lived tortoises.”⁷

The reference to chole window is also Indian in tone and character: “The one story connected with the islands which he developed at some lenth, either from some unidentified written some source or from some tale he had himself and in the Pacific was of a Chole woman who had gone to Norfolk Isle with her husband and brother to hunt tortoises and had been left as a sort of female crusoe after her companions were killed in a fishing accident. Through the character of Himilla in the eighth of his sketches, Melville at last managed to get his admiration for a strong patient widow into print.

The theme of the tortoises had always appealed to Melville immensely. “In the Pacific ‘under the Pilot age of Melville, ’the post promised, ‘all readers will be sure’ of being refreshed by fountains of pleasure and delight.” Melville has further illuminated his creative faculties by allegory an invention. “As the spensonian quotations used in ‘The Encantadas’ show he had been attempting to stimulate his flagging invention not only with allegory buty with complementary of contrasting themes, and he continued to do so during the later winter months,”⁸

Melville has further given two contrasting descriptions-(the first dealing with the vain attempt of a poorly dressed man to gain admission to public worship in a fashionable new church and the describing an agreeable experience, of the same travel-stained stranger, in finding refuge in the shilling gallery of the\Royal Lyceum theatre in London.”⁹

The theme of Israel and its natives has also provided a great momentum to Melville. Consequently, has written a reflective story, ‘Israel Potter or fifty Years of Exile. ’The theme of patience has made the background of the story, “Patience, interpreted as a form of pride had caused him to observe in (Poor Man’s Pudding’ that ‘the native American poor never lose their delicacy or pride and it now made him take care that Israel, The American, although reduced in

his later years to the physical degradation of a European pauper, should not be allowed to descend to actual beggary.”

Melville has also presented the theme of endurance in ‘The Happy Failure’ and Fiddles wonderfully and artistically. The first story gives a picture of an old man who becomes kind-hearted after his failures. The second story deals with a vilin teacher who has learnt all happiness after his failures. The change of emotion has been beautifully presented: “He was turning away from the theme entirely, and these two stories took their emotional life from a revulsion which continued throughout that winter.”² Melville’s stories have also become a thing of beauty and a joy for-ever. They have acquired a universal significance because of this quality. The use of myths has provided a life and vitality to them, they became more impressive and more brilliant with classical references. Melville’s brilliance lies in their apt and befitting use; he has established himself as a wonderful story writer with great art and craft. The stories of Melville are universally appreciated for their great touches of Indian thought and mythology.

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