

The Theme Of Democracy In The Novels Of Herman Melville

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People used to say in the later half of nineteenth century that, "There are better ships now a days, but a better man". The early years of nineteenth century were properly thought of as a golden age, though it was soon enough to slip in to a gilded one. Even the golden days were shadowed by an illicit but profitable slave trade. It could only be compared with a number of intrinsic evils in the symbolic relationship between those who owned and commanded the ship and those who worked on them. There emerged two global and major faults of democracy. These were clear and persistent in America's flourishing prosperity and geographical extension.

The economic prosperity demonstrated that money is power and this power made a wider gap between haves and have not. On whaling ships an illusion of democracy was imported to the process where by each man contracted a set share of the profit of the voyage. But the appearance of the democratic sharing only made the actual exploitation more cynical. As a result the laborer came home from three years voyage in debt to his employer as one observes in *Red burn*. The same pattern could be seen in company and factories in countless American communities throughout the country.

The tragedy of *Moby Dick* takes place only due to the autocratic mastery of Ahab. The law extends to the civil government that all must act by delegated authority. Rosenberg views :-

"what was too often lacking in the maritime society was moral accountability, of the sort that can derive only from enlightened society social legislation, rapid and dependable communications and above all humanity on the part of those in authority".¹

Expansion of aggrandizement are expressions of simple greed, for which democracy has no remedy. There was unremitting war between slave states and free states, but amid all this, American patriotism has its well spring in the dream of the fathers of nation. The secular symbols feel in the place behind the biblical, headed by the great George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. The poets like Walt Whitman interpreted the democratic faith to and for the country with dignity and fervor.

Democracy was to be the master theme of the national literature and new breed of the author was to be the man of people, Whitman and Hawthorne were strong links between democratic government and reading public. Hawthorne was life long democratic even holding minor offices under several administrations. Melville like Hawthorne was drawn by personal friendships with Duyckinck and the young American group in New York. He spent the rest of his life uttering criticism of all politicians. The first problem that type confronts us with, is one of the tyranny of the Captain. He burns with outrage at man's injustice towards his man. This feature of Melville's humanism is comparable to the democratic note of the romantic poet William Wordsworth where he writes the "lines written in Early spring" :-

Herman Melville is opposed to war, to the manufacturing of deadly weapons. His powerful affirmative response to the call of democracy is further revealed in type in his comment on the dealing engines. In chapter XVIII of this novel. Melville is severely critical of the Christian society of the United States which prides itself on the materialistic civilization based on Christian gospel of love and kindness to all. Melville's bonds of comradeship for the cannibalistic types are remarkable. His sense of comradeship with them has grown quickly and strongly. *Omoo* which is sequel of type presents First twenty six chapters aboard the ship *Julia*. Paul the narrator and his companion Long Ghost play on the ship. They give verbal expressions to resentment Weidman says:

"The figure of one who has lost or recreated lost place is firmly established in the *Julia* chapter"²

Melville like Whitman loves his America dearly. He is deeply attached with the bio-diversity of America. At the same time *Mardian* can be studied as a social, philosophical and political allegory. Melville satirizes King Media of Oda for his Jupiter like postures of headless of human dignity in blatant violation of the rights of men and then he proceeds to an animation of his land and rule and his cursing of Citizens of this country. The people are serfs and few of them can choose. Few of them are intelligent enough to exercise their democratic rights. In *Demisora* the people rise in revolt urging for bread and for the elimination of land lords. This is a revolt in ultra Marxist style or can be compared

with naxalite movement in India for the establishment of classless society. Melville is most vocal about American politics. In the words of Ray B. Browne:

“In America (Vivenza) Melville's sharpest criticism about politics is unsheathed on the helmeted family. The deities of Vivena are inscribed with in land all men are born free and equal and further down in print very minute” 3

Political statements about the evils of tyranny and about the human rights of freedom and democracy are closely related with those in affirmation of humanism. He clearly writes, “Freedom is only good as a means, is no end in itself” 4

Redburn looks upon each ship as an island with all the characteristics traits of the tribe or the nation it represents. Redburn has the feeling of cosmopolitan brotherhood like Mahatma Gandhi who in spite of his strong sense of identity looked upon himself as the citizen of the world. At the age of fifteen Redburn has a strong sense of national identity as an American. He has a sense of history and the vivid perception of United States if America.

“Settled by the people of all nations, all nations may claim her fir their own. You cannot spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world.” 5

The blood of an American is a democratic and cosmopolitan blood. The novelist goes on to play tribute to the great American nation which represents the democratic system. Like India or any democratic country America has seen assimilation of diverse cultures and civilizations ranging from Red Indian the Anglo Saxon, Norse, French, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese and other cultures. Every person is important to America as a nation.

“No our blood is as the flood of the Amazon made up of thousand noble currents all pouring in to one.” 6

The American ideal of democracy as lead by Abraham Lincoln projects democracy as a government of the people, the people, by the people, and for the people, Redburn supports this ideal and loves America as a nation all are equal. In white jacket Melville uses the man of war as a microcosm. He chooses a novel narrative with microscopic. Allen Priscilla observes that Melville's microcosm, the central metaphor of the narrative informed a broad democratic argument and protest.

Jack Chase, a Christian heroic figure is worshipped in the fashion of idolatry. They divide his laced hat and count among themselves and carry him on their shoulders, in triumph along the gun deck. He is a man of the people, a hero of democracy. He distinguishes between the public and the people and the associates himself with the people, his words are memorable:-

“The public and the people Ay,ay,let us hate the one and clean to the other's.”7 Melville suggests that the government and the people should go hand in hand. Through the narrator if White Jacket, the novelist recounts the selfless service rendered by these humble nameless seamen, “In the time of trumpets when all hands are called to Paris. (The massare of the three days of September) every one marvels who they are, and where they come, they come, they disappear as mysteriously are seen no more until another great commotion”, (Chapter III). To large extent Melville is here identifying these people with all the sailors and with White Jacket. Ray B. Browne comments that in the eyes of Melville Jack Chase is “both democrat and humanist.”

In speaking against privilege, Melville think it is a sweet thing to observe officers admitting human brotherhood. The sailors perform just as well as the officers. The true heroism is not in the hand but in the heart and head. This is the shrewd comment of Melville, the democrat on the concept of true heroism. He says that every American should be placed in such a position as that he might finally aspire to command a squadron. In White Jacket as in other works of fiction, we hear Melville thundering against the cruel practices of flogging the ship's crew. A human being whipped like a slave and worse than a hound. And for what? For things not essentially criminal but only made so by arbitrary law. Melville not only presents his hellish cruelty but he also tries to give certain suggestions.

He says that sailors should not be punished only to keep the dignity of high rank officers. They should not be treated like slaves by sea lords. There should be a law of universal applications Dr.M.Q.Khan writes:-

“Melville contends justly that flogging is opposed to essential dignity man. It is the violation of human rights and the Rousseauistic ideal of ‘liberty, Equality and Fraternity.’”8

Melville affirms that the hope of the world lies in man himself. He is ambivalent about the choice between the individual man and collective man, while pointing out that each has his role and function, Melville lashes at the

tyranny let loose by the sea lords. He says that no human being can tame another. There in each man should be his own savior.

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