

Humanism in Typee and Omoo of Herman Melville

Dr Meena kumari

"How often the term 'savages' incorrectly applied ! Non really deserving of it were ever get discovered by voyagers or by traders.... In a primitive state of society the enjoyment of life, the few and simple are spread over a great extent, and are unalloyed ; but civilisation for every advantage imparts holds 100 evils in reserve.... I will frankly declare that after passing a few weeks in this Valley of Marquises, I formed higher estimate of human nature than I had ever before entertained."(1)

If an appeal of this short seems to dedicate for the memories of a seller for the opinions of The Reader who pays his head to such a narrator; it is good to ponder that some issues of civilized life can have more Universal appeal than the life passed in the paradise by Melville. The escape of an ordinary young man from the gray realities that oppress his days to the momentary despite of a perfumed and painted paradise is by nature a metaphor for the most common dream of humanity. Nowhere in melville's writings does he appear so simply the born storyteller as in his first books Typee and Omoo. Rosenberry writes:--

"And he had the good judgement as he pointed out again in both prefaces to avoid the pretensions of philosophical search which was then characteristic of series writers of Travels among barbarous communities. he did insist on an anxious desire to speak the unvarnished truth but every leader has rejoiced in his irresistible penchant for colour and drama and humour in enlivening all the history and anthropology which he borrowed to embroider his story"(2)

The sequel most readers have more urgently desired the true story of the fabulous Fayaway , was never so much as hinted by Melville in after years and remains the despite all research, rumours, the romantic mystery. The lissome figure in the canoe silhouetted against the native dress spread out for sail, has expressed to the erotic fancy of generations of readers in conventional middle class homes. The Longfellow family not given to exotic indulgences read Typee aloud and was so captivated by the life it described as to inspire fancy for trying it. Prominent New York attorney George Templeton Strong normally a champion of realism against the cheap substitute, confessed to his diary in 1849 and inclination to emigrate to Typee and leave on bread fruits and bananas. The polynesian world Melville pictured was the last out post of natural man in a state of ecological grace where the farmer could be defined as one who owned several groves of breadfruit and palm and never hindered their growing.

The picture of ideal state is clearly the influence of Shakespeare on ideal state as he idealises in the Tempest. Gonzalo in the play talks about the purity, innocence of men and women. It will be a picture of primitive man where will not be any richest poverty and use of service.

"All things in common nature should

Produce without sweat or endeavour treason, felony,

Sword, pike, knife, gun or need of any engine,

Would not have; but nature should bring forth

Of it all kind, all foison, all abundance

To feed my innocent people."(3)

At bottom however it is virtue that defined the primitive ideal for Melville. The controlling vision of society in The South Sea romances is vision of Rousseau also. The overpowering first impression of the still interior of Nukuheva is that it has been untenanted since the morning of the creation .The narrator taking up his residence there,shedshis sailor name and is reborn as Tommo. The hidden thread that binds typee and Omoo to later and less lighthearted books is the running contrast to their draw between the representative of Western Civilization and the poor tattooed savage. The evidences of English, French and American influence which Melville observed in the Pacific in the 1840s were chiefly military and ecclesiastical and he makes a little distinction between the physical and spiritual forms of imperialism that had the great in the child like icelanders and brought into ionic question the very concept of Civilization. 17 years after his induction into the primitive community of the Typees the public lectures he delivered on the subject is still brilliantly contrast there kindly and hospitable nature to that of there would be civiliziers. In the light of his humanistic approach his somber works have close affinity with the works of Swift and Mark Twain. But before coming to the paradise of Typee valley it will be better to go through the heart rending experience of Melville's first glimpse of foreign lands. He met the suffering humanity at Liverpool while he was working at Saint Lawrence.

The slums of Liverpool stood contrast with the splendid public buildings. In the year of Melville's visit imports of cotton and wool had fallen of several years and there was probably more unemployment than usual in the district from which Liverpool through some of the more poverty-stricken elements of its population. As Melville and his companion left Prince's Dock at noon and at 4 o'clock each after noon, they made their first way to Queen Street and turned right through a by Street called Lancelot's Hey. The place had been a scene of a great fire five years ago and here Melville seems to have witnessed a sight which gives him his most vivid single impression of Liverpool. He is seen to be a man of wide experiences of sea life with the knowledge of the whole blow from India to Europe and Africa to America. He narrates his lucid and vivid experiences of surviving in Portuguese slaves on the coast of Africa. He tells with the diabolical relish of the middle passage. "Where slaves were stewed keel and point like logs and the suffocated dead were unmiracled (unchained) and wounded out for the living every morning before washing down the decks.(4) He tells of the days of slavery where the slaves had grown too old and infirm to work and when they died, were thrown into the sea like logs every morning. Quasiddin Khan writes:--

Melville's humanism In Flames him to protest against the in human treatment meted out to African Negro slaves by the white Portuguese and other Masters....This is a grisly account of man's inhumanity to man. (5)

Coming back to Typee and Omoo Melville gives the comparative account of the people who are not Christians. The reviewers of the early books debate whether Melville is a romancer or a historian or an anthropologist sociologist. He is magnetically enchanted towards the simplicity of Typees. Typees were sort of perpetually endowed leisure class.. Their garments were made of barks. Their food fell from the trees. Their water flowed at their feet. They did not whine about their sins and cry to God. Their days were torpid and free from care. He writes like Shakespeare:----

"To sum up all in one word- No money that root of all evils was known to be found in valley . In this schedule abode of happiness there were no cross old women, no cruel step dames, no withered spinsters, no love sick maidens, no in attentive husbands no melancholy young man.... All was mirth, fun and high good humour. Blue devils, hypochondria and doleful dumps went and hid themselves among, the nooks and crannies of the rocks.(6)

In the course of chapter 2 the narrator begins his careful portrait of the chief Mehevi and the family of Marheyo including the beautiful maiden, Fayaway and her brother Kory Kory who is assigned to be the attendant of the narrator who is called Tommo by the tribesmen. He becomes familiar with the tribesmen and their culture. His admiration for them and their Paradise grows. Horrible character imputed to these Typees appears to the author Holi undeserved. In Chapter 17 gives an evolution of the polynesian as compared to Europeans. He says that there are one of those thousand sources of irritation that the ingenuity of civilized men has created to mar his own felicity. Melville's savage is comparable to Swift's expression of savage indignation in his memorable travelogue Gulliver's Travels. Melville bitterly castigates the anglo sexon race for it's forcible propagation of Christianity at the point of gun. Melville like Lord Byron always expresses his indignation against the injustice, ill treatment and torture given by whitemen to the savages and the tribes.

He compares the governance of whites with those of Typee on Tahiti and Hawaii islands. The white government had been despotic while there was little government exercised by King of Typees. The king and the palace are of a most simple and patriarchal nature, wholly unattended by ceremonial pomp. Social peace of harmony resigned surely on the principles of honesty and chairity towards each other. "Melville's mind pulsated with man's love for mankind."(7)

Tommo becomes Omoo in the next book written by Melville. He prefers huminity to isolation, engagement with the problem and triumphs of people rather than protection from them. Whereever he goes he develops interest in the study of the cultural patterns of the lives of the people . He regards the place of mognition as his home for the time being. In this book Dr Long Ghost is the friend of Omoo (wanderer) . In chapter 27 he describes the Papeetee harbour:---

"The village of Papeetee struck round the bay, the tasteful mansionsb of the chiefs and foreign and residents imparts an air of tropical elegance, heightened by the Palm trees waving here and there and the deep green groves of the breadfruit in the background."(8)

These lines reveal Mwlville's genuine adoration and appreciation for the natural countryside. In Chapter 39 to 47 Paul the narrator describes the custom of the pollination friendship. He makes an iron Nickel comment that those very traits in the Tahitians which induced the London Missionary society to regard the most promising subjects for conversion eventually proved the serious of obstruction. He had worked down to the heart of what he knew but he wanted to write something like Milton's unattempted theme on the predicament of humanity.

References

1. Herman melville , Typee, (New York : Grosset and Dunlop; nd.), PP. 151, 180, 217.
2. Edward H. Roshanberry, Melville, (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul; 1979), PP. 35,35.
- 3.Shakespeare, The Tempest, second, I, 8 to 14.
- 4.Ibid, p.73.
- 5.Quasimuddin Khan, philosophical Themes in the Major Novels of Herman Melville, Delhi : Doaba pub.; 2001), page 74.
6. Typee, page 152.
- 7.Ibid, page 14.
- 8.Melville, Omoo,(Chicago : North Western University Press, 1968), page. 101.

