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A Poet's Creative Grace as Reflected in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

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Abstract

A Poet- The very moment one sees the word or hears it, instantly a momentary image pops up in the mind's eyes. One finds a person standing in front, a person who is just like anybody having the same physical shape/structure but from the very view point of mentality totally different. Different in terms of giving shape (in no time) to the various things, activities that take place every moment around us and putting all those in a rhythmic, systematic manner in the form of a beautiful, meaningful poetry; something which would seem to be quite difficult for an ordinary man to produce who happens to be too busy for survival in this acquisitive planet. In the light of

poetic excellencies John Milton's *Paradise Lost* will always remain illuminated with its prolific characters, themes, motifs and symbols.

Keywords

Obedience to God; Light and Dark; Conversation and Contemplation.

Just at the line where ordinary persons mind stops and finds it difficult to proceed further in the direction of creating a meaningful verse, it's right from here where a poet starts his celestial journey into his cosmic never ending "Kingdom of Poetry". The point of his pen, gives his thoughts, wings.

When it comes to English author, regardless of whichever format, prose or poetry, John Milton is quite a well-known and reputed name. Deemed as the most momentous author after William Shakespeare he is also a very well known as pamphleteer and a historian. Milton was greatly influenced by some of the very famous names in history. Shakespeare, John Donne, Spencer, Homer, Dante, Virgil, Hugo Grotius to name a few. Born to a middle-class family on December 09, 1608 in London, Milton is also known as a great freedom fighter. He is still remembered as a pamphleteer who started the struggle for English liberty.

Paradise Lost is undoubtedly the masterpiece of John Milton. During his school years he was greatly influenced by Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, which afterwards made him visualize of bringing such creative lustre into the English language also. Many subject matters came into his mind based upon which he could start the writing of his epic *Paradise Lost*. In the beginning he thought of many stories, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table was a very fine subject that came to his mind. As he matured enough in age as well as in his mind, he thought of Oliver Cromwell to be a proper subject based on which he could start writing his epic. Cromwell took control of England after executing King Charles I. These two topics evidently state that Milton had

already made up his mind to write his epic based on a British topic that would certainly generate love for the country inside his countrymen. But however Milton gave up the plan of writing an epic at all, for some time. But during the middle of 1650 he came up again with the idea of writing an epic and taking Adam and Eve as the subject matter. By the time Milton started writing out this epic he already had lost his eye-sight. Thus in 1656, he started to dictate his verses so that one of his daughters could pen down all for him. For several years Milton continued dictating *Paradise Lost* and finally on 1667 he got his work finished and got it published in 10 books. Later on after making some minor revisions he made a second edition of the classic and got it published in 1674 and this time in twelve books. Critics all over, take *Paradise Lost* as one of his key works that justifies his status as one of the greatest English poets of all time.

This great epic of Milton carries within some very important characters. The major characters we come across are God, Son of God, Satan, Adam, Eve, Raphael, Michael. Other minor characters comprise of those who inhabit the Hell (devils) and of those who inhabit the Heaven and the Earth (angels). Beelzebub is the prime follower of Satan. Along with Satan, Beelzebub tries to find out their choices when thrown into the Hell. After discussions Beelzebub recommends that they should explore earth. Both of them carry within themselves distorted motives. They are powerful and sensible but still they use this ability of theirs for all the crooked purposes.

Belial, one of the key devils inside the hell is not in favour of a war with Heaven and he does so solely because he is a picture of laziness and idleness. His ability of knowledge and persuasiveness is huge. Such that, he even succeeds in convincing the devils by his flawed interpretation. Mammon, a devil, who as per the Bible, is the embodiment of wealth. His moving posture always gives an impression that he is always in a lookout for treasures. He disagrees to the thought of a war amidst a discussion with other devils citing it

to be nothing but just a loss. As per his suggestion, Hell can get better by taking out the ornaments and other resources.

Mulciber another devil in hell is linked to the Greek mythological character better known for his pitiable architecture. Mulciber is solely responsible for creating the palace of Satan in Hell. Milton portrays him as the finest, dynamic and experienced of all the devils in Hell. Moloch, another absurd and harsh devil is in favour of a war against the God and His servants.

Sin, the daughter of Satan, is in charge of guarding the gates of Hell. In the form of a woman above her waist and that of a serpent below the waist she got her origin from Satan's head during his stay in Heaven. Death is the son of Sin. Together they guard the gates of Hell. Chaos is the ruler of abyss and along with his companion Night rules the abyss between Hell and Earth. He serves Satan in making his way to Earth. Night, the partner of Chaos, along with him rules the abyss between Hell and Earth. Both Night and Chaos help Satan in making his way to Earth.

Gabriel is an Archangel of Heaven. He guards the Garden of Eden. He is the guard of the Paradise. When his angels find Satan murmuring to Eve in the Garden, he tries to tackle Satan. Uriel is an Archangel of the sun. He is in charge of guarding Earth. In the disguise of a cherub Satan tries to deceive him when Uriel is on his way to Earth. To rectify his mistake, as a mark of goodness inside him he tries to make other angels around him aware of Satan's presence. Afterwards he throws Satan out of the Paradise. Abdiel, an angel at first decides to join Satan in a revolt. Somehow afterwards he goes against Satan and returns to God and remains faithful. His character is a strong demonstration of regret. Ithuriel is an Archangel. Zephon is an Archangel.

God, the omnipresent, supreme, is the creator of everything. He creates the Heaven and Hell, Universe, angels and man and leaves up to man to choose His actions. God is the father of the Son. Upon the Son He confers the power of judging men. Satan tries to go against God as he does not believe that God is

all powerful and omnipresent. God creates Adam and Eve towards the last. Through both of them he could anticipate the downfall of mankind but He does not stop it. Rather He allows His son to suffer for their sins. God is portrayed as less developed rather than an image of theoretical facts. In a smart way Milton puts many of the speeches of God in the Bible into his speeches in *Paradise Lost*. God the creator, loves His creation and shows His love for all through His son, the Christ. God, the supreme, is flawless, filled with good motives. God knows just about everything. Nothing is hidden from him. He gives a detail about certain things, incidents and why they take place, Satan's taking Adam and Eve into his confidence, makes His angels aware of what is going to occur next. He also gives a logical explanation regarding his actions, from a religious view point. God is the main cause behind the presence of Evil. It is because of God that Evil comes. He makes Evil appear. But no doubt that God will take care of Evil and ultimately will produce good out of Evil.

Son of God is God's son and has been given by God the very power of judging a man. Before Earth's creation Christ gives Satan a lesson, and sends all of Satan's forces to Hell. When man's downfall is seen coming He offers himself as a sacrifice to pay for all of mankind's sin so that all powerful and omnipresent God can be merciful. Here the Son acts as the medium through whom God is connected with the creation, mankind. God the Father, Son of God, collectively shape an ideal God. The Son no doubt plays an important part, in driving away Satan and his evil followers and ultimately punishes him. Sympathy, love, kindness etc. are reflected through Son. He provides Adam and Eve with proper help after they appear on earth. His eagerness, willingness to pay for the sins that mankind has done, to undergo the sufferings for the sake of humankind, to bear all the burdens that mankind has done, explains his heart that always carries within itself a noble commitment towards all of humankind!

Satan, the main enemy of God, the chief of all the defiant fallen angels from Heaven was once one of the top positioned Archangels known as Lucifer in Heaven. He is known as the creator of sin. He displays no sign of any type of gratitude towards God's blessings, at all. He causes Adam and Eve's downfall. He has the ability to get into any shape or form and throughout the epic and we find his character keep on changing. His sense of arrogance and revolt makes him fall in Hell but there he comes out with a palace of his own and becomes the ruler of the place. He happens to be the father of Sin and Death. Taking the form of a serpent he traps Eve and makes her eat the very fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. Many believe Satan to be the central character of *Paradise Lost*. For, with all his efforts, he conquers all of his uncertainties, flaws and ultimately poisons the humankind, which happens to be his sole aim. And since the aim, the sole purpose of Satan turns out to be evil, slowly and slowly he loses the position of being the central object of the work for towards the end of the work, Adam and Eve try to help mankind recover and thus are portrayed as ethical idols making Satan's position go down due to his evil motives. It also turns out to be utter garbage for someone under such and such conditions to praise, rejoice a character just as Satan, for his evil doings. Satan's utmost imperfection lies in his sense of superiority. Milton has no doubt offered a great deal of his time, patience towards widening up the character called Satan. Satan's such thought process that he is above God the Father and has the power, capacity to bring Him down at any time defines the huge amount of arrogance that he nourishes and which keeps on increasing inside him, always. Once Satan reaches Earth he shows a sense of soreness, isolation and as a matter of fact quite a few readers pity him. Still then doing bad or evil, remains the main motive or purpose of Satan. Every action, every gesture of Satan turns out to be deceptive. Satan happens to be quite a clever and much difficult a character. And to fetch such imperfect characters i.e. Satan, Adam, Eve with a look of perfectness just as God the

Father, God's Son and the angels, seems somewhat quite a task for even the great Milton! The character of Satan remains unsteady all through the books starting from Book I till Book X. In the beginning of Book I he seems to possess great powers, competence, authority upon everything but towards the end, i.e. Book X we get to see him slithering down into Hell in the figure of a serpent. A fallen angel, comet, cherub, as a cormorant, toad, a snake-Satan tries taking on different forms throughout the epic.

Adam, created by God Himself and known as the first human, he is the father of our race. He happens to be the husband of Eve, created from his ribs. He is very much obliged towards God and is filled with much gratitude towards Him. Adam is advised much before by Raphael not to break the rules, perform a sin. And Adam loses God's Grace when he tries to attain immortality by joining his wife Eve and tries to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. As punishment he gets mortality and to do hard work at field. Quite amazing is the bond between Adam and God the Father. He possesses a very gifted, sturdy character of having the ability to recognize all sorts of things. He is even able to cope up with Raphael. But quite surprisingly, after the fall, we get to see a different Adam, a changed Adam. His behaviour changes, his capacity of judgement falls down to a great extent. He easily falls in to a fit of anger. Moreover he fails to maintain the features that he used to possess before the fall. From the discussion that he does with Raphael, it seems that he falls in love with Eve as soon as he sees her though Raphael cautions him to keep his fondness within limit still Adam fails to do the judgement properly and seems to be lost in Eve's enchanting beauty. He is so much attracted towards Eve, his lifelong partner that he doesn't even hesitate from following Eve towards the Tree of Knowledge and eating the forbidden fruit just after her, thinking that if Eve faces any kind of punishment and is sent to somewhere else, he might too be able to follow her and be with her as a part of

the crime he too has committed. Even if it means to go against God's wish. Such becomes Adams spirit!

Eve, Adams wife, is the first woman. She was formed from a rib of Adam and is known as the mother of mankind. She happens to be fragile, as compared to Adam. Hence Satan finds it much easier to put his evil eyes on her. He makes Eve fall into his trap, arises her temptation to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge in order to gain immortality and going against God's order and the result of which makes Eve mortal and to suffer pain during childbirth. Eve is superior to Adam only in the case of her tremendous beauty. She is so much in love with her beauty when she sees her reflection for the first time in water that she fills herself with great amount of egotism, to such an extent that when Satan praises her beauty with an intention of making her commit a sin, she is quite easily driven by Satan's temptation of eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. In the epic Eve passes through many situations proving her piousness, intelligence, astuteness etc. though she proves herself to be of less enough when measured, comparing to these features of her. But she shows her eagerness of grasping everything through Adam! Thus we do not get to see an entirely advanced Eve in all sections, as the poem is recited, but it is just before the closing stages that Eve practically starts gaining true astuteness. She fails to grasp everything, be it proper knowledge or judgement as she falls short of her actual presence that was needed during the discussions going between Raphael and Adam. As a matter of fact to some extent she lost the possibility of grasping something good. As a result of which her mind at once starts to jump to the conclusion that the place is not proper for her to acquire any good sensible knowledge.

Raphael happens to be an Archangel of Heaven. God sends him as a messenger to make Adam and Eve aware of Satan's evil motives. He makes them know about Satan's intention of making them fall into sin. Later on he goes on describing the fallen angels and the fall of Satan. Michael, the head of

the Archangels in the battle in Heaven, guides the good forces against Satan and his followers. He guards the gate of Heaven. Later he goes on to tell both of them of the future world, of the good and bad incident that would take place.

Without themes, motifs and symbols it is impossible to compose a great poem and present it before the readers. No doubt Milton's *Paradise Lost* carries within itself a series of themes, motifs as well as symbols. And so very well mannerly, taking every aspect of all the major as well as minor characters into consideration, Milton puts forth the themes, motifs, symbols of the poem in quite a rhythmic line.

The basic and collective facts, vividly looked into, be it in any poem, novel, short stories or prose work, can be regarded as the themes. Some of the themes that Milton has portrayed in his great epic, *Paradise Lost*, come in a spectacular sequence such as: The Importance of Obedience to God, The Hierarchical Nature of the Universe and The Fall as Partly Fortunate, are some of the major themes that Milton has taken into account in this poem.

Paradise Lost displays two ethical courses a person may follow after disobeying God, the Father of the Creation. The spiral mounting sins and filth, characterized by Satan, and the other one, the corridor to salvation which both Adam and Eve embody. Milton presents to us the narration, the disobedience of both Adam and Eve and the very cause and effect of their disobedience. He forms the poem taking into account most part of Satan's mutiny against God and the resurgence of Son of God. In an attempt to give Adam a definite knowledge about the danger that Satan's as well as mankind's disobedience could cause, Raphael gives Adam a vivid account of Satan's disobedience. No doubt the very beginning of the poem clearly declares, 'Man's first disobedience' as the very theme of the epic. The first of all humans to disobey God are Adam and Eve whereas Satan becomes the first of all creations who disobey God. Satan's judgement of going against God and disobeying Him is all his own and not inspired by anyone else. After Satan's fall into Hell, his choice of still

continuing to disobey God only certifies that he is not worthy of God's blessings and forgiveness. We find Satan in a position where out his immense pride he fails to recognise what God really is capable of. Whereas both Adam and Eve are capable of knowing what their disobedience to God has caused and that still they are worthy of getting God's mercy, forgiveness, blessings, and that their sins would get washed off after they have undergone ages of hard work, sufferings on earth. This is certainly the most truthful proper course to follow. Book XI and XII reveal to the readers that even after repeated falls if Obedience to God is there, then there can always be a path that leads to mankind's salvation.

'Obeying God' is nothing else but directly admiring the hierarchy itself. The divine bond of things in space guides to the communal hierarchy of Angels, Humans and Devils. Son of God is the one, very next to God. Archangels and cherubs follow Him. Adam, Eve and other earthly creatures are next to them. Whereas Satan and other fallen angels coming last. Satan never accepts the fact that Son of God is always greater than him and directly rejects the very idea of respecting Son's honour. And thus indirectly questions God's hierarchy. The angels dwelling in Satan's place start revolting against God and defeat Him and therefore make an attempt to drive away the unjust thought of hierarchy in Heaven. The revolting angels of Satan are taken down by the Son of God and his good angels, and are thrown away from Heaven as a part of their punishment. Afterwards Satan jumps to the conclusion that he can create his own hierarchy in Hell taking all his evil followers but still then he will stay connected to God's hierarchy, where they come as the lowest beings. But Satan carries on with his disobedience to God and God's hierarchy and tries to make mankind sin adapting the most evil dishonest methods. Mankind's disobedience to God is somewhat directly polluting God's hierarchy. Before committing the sin, Adam and Eve treat their fellow angels with great respect and care. In Book XI and XII Adam's revelation shows more signs of his

disobeying God and the universe's hierarchy. But at the same time also reveals the fact that the hierarchy would be re-established once the Son of God, the Christ undergoes His sacrifice.

Adam sees the fall of mankind in a different perspective. Instead of pure disaster he takes the fall in a positive manner. In Book XII when Adam foresees the Son of God's salvation of mankind, he addresses his own sin as "happy fault". It's a point where he feels that the fall brings something excellent in it. The fall here is presented not in a fully negative manner instead it has been accepted as bringing some good in it, too. God is able to show His immense grace, forgiveness and control in His punishments, upon Adam and Eve and also in His divine intervention toward mankind, due to their simple disobedience to God! The exhibit of love, sympathy, care to mankind through the gesture, behaviour of the Son of God is indeed no doubt a great reward in itself, to mankind. If at all there would have been no disobedience, then humankind would not have been able to taste the sweetness of forgiveness, deliverance and refinement along with the knowledge of pain and death. Whereas as a whole, mankind is deprived of grace, as an individual one can still rectify, accumulate oneself by nonstop commitment and obedience toward God. Mankind can once again be taken to its earlier status after Christ's surrender, rebirth which can be accepted as mankind's salvation. Ultimately mankind would be rewarded only after sin and death make way for good through them. This possible fortunate outcome in itself validates God's own ways of thinking and puts forth His final plans for mankind.

The significant motifs of this great epic *Paradise Lost* needs to be discussed. Motifs are frequent formation, difference, fictional mechanism etc that facilitates in building up and enlightening a work's foremost themes. *Paradise Lost* reflects some major motifs that can be named as: Light and Dark, The Geography of the Universe, Conversation and Contemplation.

Heaven and Hell, God and Satan, Good and Evil, all the contrary, just thrive in this great epic of Milton's. In grandeur way Milton has put forth his metaphors of light and darkness in an attempt to put across all of these contraries. Devils are usually presented through their indistinguishable darkness whereas Angels are most often portrayed in the form of light. At many a places the light is also used by Milton to represent God and God's Grace. Milton himself shows his eagerness to dwell within light in order to progress in his story telling, most precisely. During his prayers in Book III he explains this desire. Whereas we get quite a clear picture of the lack of presence of light within Satan as well as in Hell that directly represent the nonexistence of God and God's Grace in all forms.

In a very precise yet striking way the universe is split into four chief regions- 1. The divine Heaven, 2. The fearful Hell, 3. The mystifying Chaos and lastly in between 4. The young and beautiful Earth. As the poem starts, the very opening parts reveal to the readers mind the major evil plans of Satan against mankind and God Himself. An idealistic and a divine perspective for the poem are made when during the transitional scenes in Heaven, God Himself reveals to His angels His future plans. And based upon the characteristics of Good and Evil, light and dark most feat takes place upon Earth, in between. There are many sequences of Evil and Good that Earth experiences. The beautiful Earth changes to a battleground where the forces of Good and Evil go against each other. Satan goes against the will of God and fights with Him. He even goes to that extent of poisoning humankind with sin by corrupting Adam and Eve. Simultaneously God too showers His mercy upon mankind through His son, the Christ who never hesitates to bear all of mankind's sin. Milton considers all the other information regarding the geography of the universe not to be of major importance. Milton very much accepts the fact of the sun going around the earth and vice versa. Here, according to Raphael it is not important who circles around whom and goes on

to say that Milton's idea is based mostly upon his religious message he wants to express rather than being based upon the findings of science or astronomy.

Many a readers of this great epic of *Paradise Lost* have been seen quite often raising a line or two against the poem that it contains less action and more of the conversation and contemplation of the characters. All through the poem Milton has tried his best to make the reader concentrate more upon his characters rather than giving more attention to the heroic battles. It would simply not be an exaggeration, if one goes on to say that near about five books cover up most of the conversations of this great epic. It means half of *Paradise Lost* is composed simply of conversations only. Milton's emphasis on conversation brings forward his importance that he has given to conversation and contemplation. Two major hobbies that are believed to be quite of significance for an ethical human being, between Adam and Raphael and again between Adam and Michael thoughts are exchanged and thus here two people spread unknowingly God's views, His messages. Through the process of conversation, hence dwelling over God's views and thoughts can only make a person move a step more close toward the Heavenly Father and be more obedient towards Him. Moreover before the fall Adam all the time contemplates God just to the opposite of Satan, where Satan contemplates himself only. The major thing that the fall reflects is that if at all Adam and Eve are to be filled with happiness outside of paradise then they ought to know how to maintain their conversation and contemplation.

Characters, figures, objects that portray the theoretical ideas, notions are known to be symbols. The Scales in the Sky and Adam's Wreath can be taken as symbols that Milton has made good use of here in this great epic.

Before Satan begins to fight with Gabriel in Paradise, an image of a pair of golden scale pop up in the sky. And God makes it appear. On both sides of the scale God puts the different consequences. One, where Satan runs away and the other where Satan stays and fights with Gabriel. Surprisingly enough

the side, the scale upon which Satan is seen staying and fighting with Gabriel, flies away and thus indicating its insignificance and flimsiness. In other words, these two scales bring before the readers the very fact that, both God and Satan are never placed opposite to each other in a battle and that all mighty God is all powerful. Both Satan and Gabriel obtain their full power from God only. And ultimately God's scale make Satan accept the fact of very senselessness of going against one of God's very own angel, Gabriel, and fighting against him.

In Book IX Adam and Eve work separately and the wreath that Adam makes is quite symbolic from many angles. The foremost thing being his immense love and attraction toward Eve. Just as Adam proceeds to give the wreath to her he drops it at the dreadful jolt of very fact that Eve has eaten the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. The falling of the wreath itself represents the fact that his love towards Eve is gradually lessening. Her position as of a pious mate all of a sudden gets crushed in the eyes of Adam as soon as he accepts her fall. This fallen wreath itself is a representation of loss of pure love.

Thus, Milton's *Paradise Lost* gives a deep reflection of personal fervour, a passion for autonomy and self-determination, and the imperative issues and political commotion of his day. Writing in different languages like English, Latin, Greek, and Italian, he accorded international acclaim within his lifetime attributing a great deal of creative gracefulness to his literary excellence.

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