



The Theme Of Freedom Consciousness In *Paradise Lost*: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

John Milton (09 December, 1608- 08 Nov, 1674) is a poet, playwright, politician, thinker civil servant as well as social reformer. He himself is a great literary man and politician. The entire age of Milton is dominated by Civil War. Intellectual life continued with vigor surprisingly in view of the purpose of church and universities. But Puritanism, the iron - rule of Cromwell became intolerant of all artistic activities. Music, dancing, theatrical arts suffered much. Moreover, theatres were closed and all artistic activity was banned. In such situation his consciousness awakened. As we know that the freedom of will is essential for creativity. And Milton's philosophy defended freedom of will. He believed that God has given reason to man to choose the right path. Men was free to choose between wrong and right path. His will was not constrained in any way. Since, he chooses freely with any constrained, man himself was responsible for all his fortunes and misfortunes.

This paper explores the doctrine of the freedom of will in *Paradise Lost*. Satan was left free to tempt Adam and Eve because God had given freedom of will to all including Satan. In *Paradise Lost* freedom consciousness signifies a state of ideal existence where individuals are liberated from fear, ignorance and societal divisions living with autonomy and united in knowledge. Adam's true spiritual freedom is found in his voluntary submission to God's Law of Reason while the "fall" into human condition can be seen as a fortunate event that allows for a "paradise within" to be discovered through the struggle of gaining and using reason.

Keywords: Freedom, Choice, Responsibility, Reason, Knowledge, Power

Introduction

Being a child of Renaissance and Reformation Milton has quest for freedom, knowledge, morality, religion and courage. Renaissance was a movement which was distinguished by an awakened interest in the old writings of the Greeks, the Romans and the ancient classics. The Scholars of the Renaissance period intended to infuse into English the beauties of Greek and Roman literature. Renaissance stands for broader outlook of life, refined and culture attitude towards sunny and jovial aspects of life. Similarly, Reformation was a religious movement. It aimed at the cultivation of religious, moral and spiritual values. The spirit of the reformation includes all spiritual discipline, moral austerity and other- worldly out-look. His childhood was spent at a time when the forces of the Renaissance were in the ascendency. His youth witnessed the friction of Puritanism. His old age was co-incidental with the consumption of the Puritan ideals. The Puritan element finds expression in lines as-

"Mortals that would follow me,

Love virtue, she alone is free,

She can teach ye how to climb

Higher than the sphery chime;

Or if virtue feeble were,

Heaven itself would stoop to her."

Impact of Renaissance on *Paradise Lost*

Milton's great epic, *Paradise Lost* is the product of Renaissance. He employs the art of the learning of the Renaissance in the service of those religious and moral truths which had now become the dominant factor in his life. His aim in writing the epic is to assert "eternal providence" and "justify the ways of God to men". The character of Satan is conceived and glorified in the light of Renaissance culture. In the presentation of Satan's character, Milton is animated with the Renaissance love for romance, chivalry and adventure.

Hanford wisely remarks-

"Milton's true kinship is not the Bunyan or Baxter, not yet together with Cromwell and the heroes of the battle for religious and political liberty but with those men of older days, whose spiritual aspirations were united with the human passion for truth and beauty and who trusted the imagination as an important medium for the attainment of their ideals".

Milton advocated about individualism which he had inherited from the Renaissance. The individual has the freedom of will and is responsible for his every actions. This Renaissance ideal made *Paradise Lost* a work of humanist culture.

Impact of Reformation on *Paradise Lost*

The Reformation was a religious movement. It was focused on the cultivation of religious, moral and spiritual values. So, Milton aimed at self purification rather than humanistic culture. All the writers of Puritan Movement were moralist, preacher and reformers rather than artists. The Puritan element begins to assert in *Comus*, *Lycidas*, and *Paradise Lost*. The Reformation is center to *Paradise Lost* as a reflection of Milton's deeply Protestant ideas. Milton uses the poem's Biblical narrative of the fall to critic human tendencies towards corruption and forgetting God. He is arguing that true liberty comes from inner righteousness and the personal relationship with the divine rather than external authority or institutions. Milton's involvement the political struggles of the English Civil – War and his active writing for the puritan cause directly influenced *Paradise Lost*. He champions liberty and the right of individual to resist unjust authority, aligning this with God's law and true Christian virtue.

Freedom of Will in *Paradise Lost*

Milton's imagination is superb. Only a man of Milton's imagination could have shaped the *Paradise Lost*. The theme of epic is vast and of more universal human interest. The imagination of poet create a world of heaven and hell which could only have been possible with his the superb imagination, he has an imagination that can soar above time and space.

Lowell says-

“in reading *Paradise Lost* one has a feeling of vastness, you float under an illimitable sky brimmed with sunshine or hung with constellation; the abysses of space are about you, you hear the condense surges of an unseen ocean's thunder mutter round the horizon; and if the scene changes, it is with an elemental movement like the shifting of mighty winds.... .”

Milton says-

“to reign is worth ambition though in hell: Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.”

Here, Milton depicts that freedom is the source of creativity. To live with freedom in hell is better than to live in heaven and serving others.

Rabindranath Tagore says-

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake!”

In the above lines the poet explores about the importance of freedom praying God to awake his countrymen. They should not have any kind of fear .They must think and do with freedom of consciousness without any kind of domestic walls.

After going through the Epic *Paradise Lost*, we find that Satan has gone through a transformation from hero to devil. *Paradise Lost* begins with the fall of Lucifer. Satan wants to achieve same position as God. So, he provokes other angels to revolt. Satan still has a glorious dream. He calls on all demons and angels to revolt against almighty, God. Although he has lost Paradise, still fully enjoyed freedom.

Satan says-

“What though the field be lost?

All is not lost; the unconquerable will,

And study of revenge, immortal hate,

And courage never to submit or yield;

And what is else not to be overcome.

That the glory never shall his wrath or might.”

There is in *Paradise Lost* the ‘Life Blood’ of a man who was always a fighter, there is also in this epic the incomparable elevation of the style. The stamp of his originality can be found both in subject – matter and manner of treatment of subject.

Theme and Subject in *Paradise Lost*

The themes of *Paradise Lost* is man's fall, his redemption through Christ and purpose is 'to justify the ways of God to man'. The epic opens with an account of the fallen angels – Satan and his followers in Paradise in Hell. Satan, though defeated, has not lost all hope. He encourages his followers; they collect together in Pandemonium to hold a conference to decide upon their future course of action. After much discussion it is decided that they should have their revenge upon God by corrupting the new created man. So Satan undertakes a journey to the world through chaos, reaches the Earth and the Garden of Eden. He assumes the form and guise of serpent and attempts Eve to taste the fruit of the forbidden tree. Due to temptations of Satan, Eve and Adam tasted the fruit of the tree of the knowledge. They commit the sin of disobedience. The Result is divine punishment for them and their coming generations (Humankind) throughout futurity.

Paradise Lost as a Classical Epic

Paradise Lost is a classical epic. It has all the common features of the epics of Homer and Virgil . It is based upon Christian theology. Its framework is classical and design is like that of Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* . It is an objective narrative poem having unity of theme and treatment. It has a historical theme, that is history of human race. Its characters are super human First Man and Woman, God, Satan and Angels. It is divided into twelve books. Its subject and matter are lofty as well as grand. The poem begins with the invocation of the Muse. It similes are epical. It is full of descriptions of events like several other classical epics. There is also description of supernatural elements.

Autobiographical Element in *Paradise Lost*

Milton's poetry is mirror of his own life. He draws no line between literature and life .His personality and opinions are reflected in almost all his literary works. Milton's rich personality interposes in his works. His revelation of self can be seen in his poems easily.

Coleridge says-

"Shakespeare's poetry is characterless; that is, it does not reflect individual Shakespeare; but John Milton himself is in every line of the *Paradise Lost*."

In *Paradise Lost* Milton expresses himself in three ways: firstly there are certain direct observations of the poet regarding his own personal life. Secondly, some of the Milton's prominent traits and characters are reflected through the character of Satan. And thirdly, some of the opinions and convictions of the poet are brought fourthly by Adam. His knowledge of History. Geography Classical literature and the Bible is

employed for the construction of similes. We can see that the certain aspects of Milton's character are clearly revealed through the character of Satan. In certain respects the character of Satan is a projection of Milton's own life as his love of freedom, courage, republicanism and hatred of tyranny are represented through the character of Satan. Satan's opposition of God is Milton's opposition of the Stuart Kings, who considered themselves the representatives of God by theory of divine right of Kings. Milton expresses his spirit of defiance, his courage, and his unconquerable spirit.

Satan points out-

“Mind is its own palace, and itself, can make heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”

Here the descriptive power of Milton is at its height in *Paradise Lost*. It abounds in the fine colorful descriptions. In his descriptions Milton observes large decorum and majesty. Freedom of mind is the real freedom. Swami Vivekananda also depicted that the soul's birthright and the goal of the universe, manifesting as spiritual, mental and physical liberty from all limitations and the law of cause and effect (Maya).

Conclusion

Thus, Milton's scholarship gives to *Paradise Lost* a place among the great classical epics of the world. In learning and scholarship the poem stands on a very high pedestal. Milton had explored all learning, ancient and modern. In fact all the innumerable resources of knowledge have been drawn upon by Milton in his monumental work - *Paradise Lost*. For creation, leisure and security both are essential. Milton belonged to a time when his contemporaries had the Bible in their hands. They had little freedom to deviate from the Bible. Yet he has used the Hebraic theme creatively. He allowed his imagination to soar higher and higher. His faith in “Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven.” Shows about his freedom of will and its importance for the creativity of human kind. Due to freedom of consciousness, subject and forms in *Paradise Lost* has been recognized as the greatest poem in English language. The message of the *Paradise lost* is that the history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom.

“Life without liberty is like a body without spirit.”

- Kahlil Gibran

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