



Rereading of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner as an allegorical poem, a ballad with Ecocritical touch

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Abstract— In recent times many critics view Samuel Taylor Coleridge epoch-making work 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' from many different perspectives. This paper mainly tends to unify all major perspectives of critics in one single reading. 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' as a supernatural poem, a lyrical ballad, a Christian allegory of sin, sufferings and exploitation leading to spiritual elimination along with ecocritical conscious with which 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' recently associated by the Eco critics and environmentalist. Within the structural framework of seven parts, the poem is formally designed as a romantic lyrical ballad in which the basic ingredients of medieval gothic ballad tradition are satisfactory found how an adventurous journey change into a journey of sin and how the mariner harm the natural world and how he realises his sin and bent before God for forgiveness. The main motto of this paper is to discuss the above mention aspects of the poem which can give a new light to the poem as well as to bring forth the poetic genius of Coleridge.

Keywords— Allegorical poem, Ecocritical reading, S.T Coleridge, Rime of the Ancient Mariner, ballad

I. INTRODUCTION

Together with 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan', 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is unanimously acclaimed as one of the three precious gems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge that bear true testimony to the romantic poet's outstanding genius and his sharp romantic sensibility. Along with Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' was initially accommodated in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* which was published in 1798 and is considered to be the Magna Carta of English Romantic Movement. Needless to say, it was a movement against the neoclassical notion of nature methodized and against the concrete and artificial poetic diction in favour of lyrical, lucid language, pristine purity and primeval simplicity, elemental patience, genuine feeling and emotion, glorification of the noble savage, naturalness and more predominantly a return to nature. Viewed from this perspective 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is a lyrical

ballad and a powerful romantic poem, in which nature plays a powerful role instead of being methodized. Here it is pertinent to mention that celebration of nature is a fundamental feature of English Romantic poetry, of course with a regard to its many-sided ramification. Arthur Compton aptly observed that Wordsworth naturalized nature by virtue of his pantheistic vision. Whereas Keat's sensualised her, Shelly And Byron revolutionized her, Wordsworth's union with friend Coleridge on the other hand not only supernaturalized nature but also naturalized the supernatural with considerable psychological and human touch and this is all the more true in the case of his three supernatural surcharged poems such as 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner', 'Christabel', 'Kubla Khan'. Besides Coleridge's introduction of three kinds of fear in his poems as physical fear, psychological fear spiritual fear and moral fear. Scholars locate Coleridge profound elegy to medieval beliefs and gothic ballad tradition on the one hand and Shakespear 's moral and psychological treatment of the

supernatural in *Hamlet*, and *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* on the other. A supernatural in the hands of Coleridge as it was for Shakespeare was not an abstract, shadowy and fearful invisible entity but a living reality.

II. DISCUSSION

In the first place, it is a story of the sin of suffering from a strong moral crisis experienced by an Ancient mariner possessing glittering eyes, which is strongly reminiscent of the mediaeval ballads and folk traditions. The ancient mariner is in the opening stanza characterized as possessing glittering eyes and skinny hands which are strongly reminiscent of the mediaeval folk beliefs and folk traditions. A ballad is defined as a popular narrative poem with a story that needs to be told in an effective manner to the satisfaction of the listener. As epic is divided into two categories such as primitive epic and literary epic, the ballad is also classified into two heads folk ballad and literary ballad. Whereas the former is defined as a narrative poem of anonymous origin with an emphasis on storytelling, abrupt beginning, dramatic development, the revelation of lives and works. So apart from using a rhetorical device such as simile, metaphor, alliteration, symbol, onomatopoeia, lyrical diction which make the poem all the more pleasing and aesthetically relishable. Viewed from this perspective 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is primarily a literary ballad that retains, however the basics of the gothic ballad tradition. For instance, it begins abruptly with an ancient mariner dramatically detailing one of the three wedding guests to listen to his story and then force him with his skinny hands and glittering eyes. In the opening stanza, Coleridge characterized the Ancient mariner as a mediaeval hypnotizer, who by virtue of his mysterious physical features exercising his mesmerizing effect on the wedding guest to arrest their attention till the story is over. The wedding guest had no choice except to listen to the story of sin and suffering which is reminiscent of mediaeval magicians and practitioners of witchcraft who used to make the audience stood bound "The Wedding-Guest stood still,/And listens like a three years' child:/The Mariner hath his will". The emphasis on Mariner's will and the wedding guest being reduced to the state of the three years child shows that Coleridge satisfactorily subscribes to the mediaeval ballad tradition and allows the narrator to take up an upper hand of the listener, which is a characteristic feature of storytelling in the Ancient ballad tradition.

The abrupt beginning of the poem " It is an ancient Mariner,/And he stoppeth one of three" can be correlated

with the unexpected surprising and dramatic clouse of the first part and this is a typical ballad feature that Coleridge reintroduce in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. The real story begins with the journey of the ancient mariner in a ship with two hundred messengers driven by storm towards the cold country and south pole and from there to the topical latitude of the great pacific ocean. Coleridge's romantic imagination is at its best in his graphic description and onomatopoeia presentation of the tyrants. Its loud road and the wondered cold climatory condition intensified by mist and snow which is interestingly picked up by recent critics like Jonathan Bate to analyse 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' in the light of ecocriticism and environmental discourse,

"The ice was here, the ice was there,

The ice was all around:

It cracked and growled, and roared and howled

Like noises in a sound !"

The dramatic appearance of an albatross out of the fog and mist gives a new twist to the poem. Coleridge himself characterized the albatross as a Christian soul and the sellers, all the birds in the name of God and the albatross is increasingly humanized because the bird comes and for long nine days, it flew around the ship and as a protector and the divine sentinel taking food and playing with the Mariners thereby vindicating the notion of communion between man and nature in romantic poetry. But unfortunately, with a dramatic twist, the characteristic of ballad tradition vindicates as the Mariner kills the auspicious bird all of a sudden with his crossbow for no-fault begins with a surprise signified by the arresting of the wedding guest and ends with another big surprise with the sudden killing of the auspicious albatross. The end of part one throws a boundless of questions number, first Is the theme of ancient mariner an allegory of sin suffering and supreme expression and spiritual lamination? and Is the bird a Christian figure and nature' is vegetable bless?. The second is that is the innocent killing of the albatross and the onslaught on nature, the divine mother. The third is that does it is a clear cut vindication of the future catastrophe that is going to visit the ailing humanity by nature in form of revenge. So there are a series of questions that prick the mind of the twenty-first-century reader.

Part two of the poem begins with the mariner realizing that he had done an atrocious sin and the seller acquires him as a wretch and he called with regard to the auspicious bird that caused the south wind blow as a protector of the human world, as the poet says;

"The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea."

The killing of the innocent bird invited the wrath and fury of nature and the divine world. The mariner had to suffer because he murders an innocent bird just as Shakespeare's Macbeth murdered the innocent sleeping and drunken king "Shall sleep no more". Coleridge who loves Shakespeare and called him a subtle soul psychologist has imbibed Shakespeare's metaphysical crisis of Macbeth in order to situate the spiritual and moral crisis of the Ancient Mariner who has been metamorphosed by his crime against nature into a potential killer of innocence. Therefore like Macbeth, he has to undergo terrible suffering and repentance to atone for his sin and his suffering is not exclusively physical rather spiritual as well. Subsequently, nature becomes furious the fair breeze dropped down, the sky became copper hot and the bloody sun reddened with anger. The mariner had no motion and their tongues thirst and choked with soot and in a state of great psychological discomfort on the entirely blamed the Mariners for the innocent killing of the albatross which occasioned the harrowing condition and towards the end of part two. They dramatically hung the dead albatross around the Mariner's neck which reminds the reader of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The suffocating human condition is here aptly stated by Coleridge with the help of the image of water;

"Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink."

Water which is a traditional symbol of spiritual rain here ironically presented as anathema and in part three the matter goes back to with the choked black leaves the seller could neither laugh nor cry and through utter doubt they stood dumbfounded and doors for benevolent Christian Gramercy were close for them. Uncertainly loom large and an uncanny atmosphere of supernatural fear is created. The Mariner's marked that a skeleton ship was driving nearer and it had a woman who is neither Mother Mary nor her son Jesus. It was rather a ferocious woman sitting on the skeleton ship, whom Coleridge called the nightmare life in death and she is found dancing with her partner death itself. Symbolically, speaking the playing of dice between the night Mary's life and death and partner death points to the fact that the lives of the Mariners hung between life and death and that their condition oscillates between life in death and death in life. Though she lives in fear and anxiety, physical suffering and moral suffocation the life of the Ancient mariner is as good as the life in death and

viewed from the moral perspective he is moral death following the killing of the innocent bird and hence he experiences death in life.

The description of the physical features of the nightmares is a woman not only remind the reader of the mediaeval witch's but also vindicates Coleridge art of establishing the supernatural as a living reality by negotiating the human and the supernatural world

"Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold."

Without drinking water without a breeze without a tide the seller experiences suffocating insight fear for the dance of death signified by the dice and three-time whistling of the nightmare woman and her partner death outside the two hundred sellers suddenly dropped dead one after another except the sinner, the Ancient Mariner, the souls of the dead seller rushing by the Mariners presence a ghastly supernatural site which is really rare in English literature.

Coleridge art of naturalizing the supernatural and his theory of 'willing suspension of disbelief' is working here in unison with his powerful visual appeal so as to make the incredible credible and the supernatural situation aesthetically relishable. Coleridge is a past master creating a dramatic situation and their psychological effects on the reader and the wedding guest is filled with nameless fear to hear the blood-curling story and asked the ancient mariner not to tell the story to anyone and is afraid of his skinny hands and glittering eyes, long linky figure and his horrible narration and art of presenting which intensified the situation of fear in a big way ;

"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribbed sea-sand."

As part four of the poem begins, the poet unfolds the allegory of Christian spirituality with the killer of the Albatross and the alleged lonely figure standing in the midst of dead bodies. Needless to say, isolation and loneliness, characterized the sensibility and philosophical outlook viewed from an allegorical perspective, every human being is essentially a lonely traveller and life is a trajectory of trials and tribulations in loneliness. More

significantly in a spiritual journey, human friendship is hardly matters because what is required for the individual soul is virtue and goodness which she has accumulated to compensate for his sins and sufferings in life. Coleridge, therefore, describes the Mariner's spiritual crisis in terms of fear, psychological torture, guilt consciousness and physical loneliness ;

"Alone on a wide wide sea!

And never a saint took pity on

My soul in agony."

It is now evident that the mariner experiences a spiritual wasteland in the sea bereft of divine mercy and has agonized soul is dramatically against the appetite against the death of his two hundred friends. It is this realization that matters. He looks upon the rotting sea, rotting rock and corpse of his dead friend below and a thousand slimy things living all around in the sea of repentance for the sin and love for the beautiful sky and the shining white water, snakes in the sea done upon his mind the noble thought that it is love, not hatred but the natural world that counts. Coleridge bends upon the Christian notion of loveable and benevolent god and the moment the mariner experiences a spring of love, the happy loving things of nature his progression starts and the prayer is to by the divinity. But core comes with a dramatic tone, characteristic of ballad tradition and the dead albatross hung around his neck, suddenly felt down and then sunk into the sea. In Christian ethics love and prayer and repentance never go unrewarded, symbolically designated as the recovery of the soul and spiritual marriage signified by the Mariner's sound sleep sent from the heaven which he acknowledges candidly at the blessing of mother Mary and the mother's blessing unburdened his soul and the silly buckets on the dead were filled with dew, much more miraculous thing happened which add to the supernatural glory of the poem. His dry lips and purged flowed with rain and the denying blessings of rain, wind and moon imbibe his ship to move and beneath the lightning and the smiling moon that broke through the clouds. His dead friend gave back their lives with a sweet sound, the mariners deeply realize all objects of the world of nature both big and small carry the divine message of love for what ecocritics and environmentalists of the 21st century would say in terms of the message of "love others and let other life". This is the greatest ecocentric lesson that was learnt and realized by Mariner that the biotic and abiotic elements of the ecosystem must not be destroyed or disturbed by merciless misuse or onslaught of nature. Which hammers at the very design and constructive mechanism of divinity. The mariner now realizes that the sun and the moon have become pleasantly

healing and glittering. The song of the little skylight and for that matter of all little birds feel the sea and the air with the sweet aroma of their song. The morning stars danced and the upper air created a pleasant atmosphere. The angelic spirit emerges from the land of mist and snow and drives the mariner's ships back. As the poem proceeds through parts six and seven the Mariner was spirituality luminous after his profound realization of the fact. The two voices in the air that represented the two sides of the Mariner souls, one reminding him of his destructive and dark side that propelled him to kill the innocent Albatross and the other points to his repentance state of mind in which he has done penance through prayer and love for God's beautiful creation.

The message, as it signed in Christianity, is that the human mind is a mixed fabric in which wood is constantly changed off by evil. The message is that Coleridge wants to impart through the romantic ballad the fact that evil manifested through the destructive passion of man needs to be subdued by good gifts. This is all the more true in the case of the dark passion of the Ancient mariner. Subsequently followed by his repentance and ordinal of his suffering.

Part six of the poem open two voices again that add beauty to the ballad discourse which has in fact many voices which are strongly reminiscent of Michel Bakhtin 'polyphonic voices' in fiction and this vindicate the fact that contraries characterize our existence and the spirits guide the mariner's ship for a smooth journey back home. The mariner who fell into a trance and wonder at the divine guidance signified by the gentle weather from culm night the glittering moon and the ocean bring and what surprised them most are the stony eyes of his two hundred dead friends who stood together on the boat with a new life.

Viewed from the standpoint of morality "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a moral allegory in which a mariner had a new life with rebirth, with spiritual knowledge. The miraculous wind not only facilitated the swift movement of the mariner's ship but also ceased at the worries and anxiety, the tension of mariner. Soon a band of syrup welcomed the mariner and it was in the woods in words of Coleridge a heavenly sight indeed, as the poet says,

" This seraph-band, each waved his hand:

It was a heavenly sight!

They stood as signals to the land,

Each one a lovely light;" and soon the cheering sound of woods and pilot and the pilot sound and the holy hermit

was heard, as they were all roaming in a boat to greet the ancient mariner. The spiritually confused Mariner now hoped that the hermit would be in a position to absorb him of his sins as is characteristic of a ballad, a series of dramatic and unexpected incidents and events take place to surprise the wedding guest on the one hand and the readers of the poem on the other. As the pilot and his soon reached the mariner's ship, the ship suddenly experienced the whirlpool and sank deep into the water leaving the mariner putting underwater. Now, symbolically speaking this is a spiritual regeneration and the birth of a new life, which is signified by the pilots of the boat, which can be contrasted with the sailing ship of the mariner that sank into the water. Spiritually, finally defeated bestiality and the mariner admittedly accepts the fact that everything happened under the supervision of "dear lord in of heaven".

In part seven, the hermit of the wood who kneels at morning, none and evening on a cushioned seat strongly reminiscent of the three-time ritual 'Trikal Sandhya' of the Indian sages and takes the centre starts and the repentant mariner surrenders himself to the hermit with all humanity "O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!/The Hermit crossed his brow!". The hermit message or instruction to the mariner is that he should narrate his story of crime and punishment, suffering and spiritual realization before others. This shows another aspect of the poem It is not a mere lyrical and romantic ballad nor a mere moral allegory on the solitary trajectory of a shining soul but more predominantly a confession which is usually divided into three categories; spiritual confession, romantic confession and secular confession. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is reminiscent of St. Augustine's spiritual confession and Rousseau's romantic confession combines both spiritual and romantic ramifications with a brilliant message that human beings should love god's creation and respect nature and of objects of nature both tiny and big.

III. CONCLUSION

The poem has a compact ballad structure and along with an address to the wedding guest, it began with a wedding guest. The mariner candidly confesses that after the revelation or narration of the story his lonely soul moving alone on a wide sea is now relieved and unburdened from the tragic burden of sin. He also claims that history is sweeter than the wedding feast which was already over thereby justifying the supremacy of the narrator over the listener in the ballad discourse. While bidding farewell to the wedding guest the Mariner lives the greatest Christian moral lesson to the readers that God is love and love is god

and god can be pleased through our unalloyed love of his creation and creatures "He prayeth best, who loveth best/All things both great and small;/For the dear God who loveth us,/He made and loveth all.".The poem concludes with the spiritual realization of both the narrator and the listener. It bears true testimony to Coleridge's romantic imagination and his art of supernaturalizing the natural and naturalizing the supernatural within the framework of a ballad, a Christian allegory of sin, suffering and expression and spiritual illumination. The greatest topical rather ecocritical message that the poem delivers for 21st-century readers is that any injustice to the natural world means the wrath of god inviting thereby retribution or nemesis. C M Bowra in his seminal book the *Romantic Imagination* observes that the poem presents a series of incredible events through a method of narration that makes them not only convincing and exciting but also realistically relishing which very few poets of supernatural have done in English Literature.

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