



Elements of IKS in W.B. Yeats' The Second Coming

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Abstract

William Butler Yeats was a major poet of the twentieth century. He was a central figure of modernism in English poetry. Many of his early poems were influenced by Celtic myths and legends which reflected the pastoral and seafaring culture of the people. He had a deep interest in the occult. His early poems are characterized by a lyrical and imaginative mysticism. The wealth of subjects that Yeats explored in his writings includes Indian Philosophy. He collaborated with Shri Purohit Swami in a translation of the Upanishads in 1935. He also worked with Rabindranath Tagore on the translation of Tagore's *Gitanjali* into English. Indian themes occur even in his earliest collections of poems. His association with Indian scholars and thinkers got him interested in Indian culture, philosophy and religion. The main aim of this research article is to explore the elements of IKS in the poem *The Second Coming* and to point out how the world literature is highly influenced by Indian Knowledge System.

Keywords: IKS, Occult, Mysticism, Celtic Myths Upanishads, Indian Culture, Philosophy.

Introduction

Indian Knowledge System is not a new discourse. It has been there in the world of literature for centuries. If explored, one can find abundant references in the global literature. There have been many writers who pondered a lot on Indian philosophical, mystical, divine, supernatural, magical dimensions and gave space to them in their literary works. American Writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson studied the Bhagwat Gita, Upanishads, even Kalidasa. It indicates that great writers in the world were extremely fascinated by IKS. T. S. Eliot was a student of the Eastern Metaphysics hence his grand literary work like the *Waste Land* has several references to Bhagwat Gita and Upanishads. W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) Yeats's interest in Indian spiritual thought was shaped by his acquaintance with several key individuals. His friend, the painter George Russell, introduced him to eastern thought and mysticism, while his interest was further sharpened by the theosophist Madame Blavatsky and Mohini Chatterjee, whose lecture in Dublin on Upanishadic philosophy Yeats attended in December 1885. In 1928, Yeats wrote a poem titled 'Mohini Chatterjee', and his 'Quatrains and Aphorisms' show the distinct influence of Chatterjee's Hindu thought. With Rabindranath Tagore, Yeats maintained an epistolary relationship until 1930, writing the introduction to *Gitanjali*, in which he described finding "a world I had dreamed of all my life long." His later familiarity with Shree Purohit Swami allowed him to work closely with both Vedantic and Yogic philosophy. The concept of metempsychosis (transmigration of souls), deeply rooted in Indian philosophy, pervades much of Yeats's mature poetry,

particularly *A Vision* and late poems like "Sailing to Byzantium." *A Vision* is one of the greatest literary works. It is about the system of thought. It highly mystical and philosophical work. He ponders on soul, and cosmic connection. He talks about yugas like the Satya Yuga, Treata Yuga, Dwapara Yuga and kali Yuga. In his another poem "Sailing to Byzantium" which reminds the reader the Indian vedantic philosophy that is liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Hence Yeats association with Indian knowledge System is very close one. Basically, the West philosophy believes in the linear order of life like if one is born, one has to die. On the other hand, Indian Philosophy believes in the cyclical order of life that's why his concept of gyre in the poem indicates his interest in Indian philosophy.

Review of Literature

W B Yeats is one of the most researched and read poets from Modern English Literature. Across the world, the researchers have done in-depth research on the poet. His literary corpus provides multiple issues for the research. The Poem "The Second" Coming has been approached from different angles such as theology, Christianity, history so and so forth. This research article is unique in the sense that it highlights a different issue that Indian culture and philosophy as reflected in the poem. Writers like Ellmann deals with Yeats' mysticism and symbolism, Bloom speaks about his vision of history and apocalypse and Jeffers provides a detailed commentary on *The Second Coming*. Many scholars have studied the literary productions of Yeats from socio-political scenario of the world post World Wars. Therefore, a clear

research gap exists. While Yeats's poem has been widely studied from historical, symbolic, religious, and modernist perspectives, only limited attention has been given to its relationship with the Indian Knowledge System. This research aims to fill that gap by examining the poem through Indian concepts of cyclical time, cosmic order, destruction, renewal, and spiritual transformation. Such a study seeks to demonstrate that Indian philosophical ideas provide a meaningful framework for understanding Yeats's vision of the end of one age and the beginning of another.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology has been applied. A close textual reading has been carried out in order to find out images and imagery used in the poem. There have been comparisons with other writers and their interpretations of the poem. Hence it also follows comparative methodology in this research article. Secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and critical essays on Yeats, modernism, mythology, and the Indian Knowledge System, are used to support the interpretation. These sources provide historical background, critical perspectives, and theoretical insights that strengthen the comparative analysis.

In the regard, Richard Ellman observes:

Yeats viewed history as a series of recurring cycles in which one civilization declines as another emerges. According to Ellmann, Yeats's theory of historical gyres reflects his belief that periods of order inevitably give way to periods of chaos and transformation (Ellmann 123).

Analysis and Discussion:-The Second Coming and IKS:

Indian Knowledge Systems refers to the vast body of knowledge produced on the Indian subcontinent across millennia. It includes philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine (Ayurveda), linguistics, aesthetics, logic, ethics, and more. It includes texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, Arthashastra, Natya Shastra, Charaka Samhita, and countless others across Sanskrit, Tamil, Pali, and regional languages. Our Rishis, Munis and Viadhyas at court meditated on the available natural resources, like trees, leaves, fruits and vegetables to apply on different diseases in ancient times. They invested centuries in their experimentations and came out with major inventions. This body of knowledge in different areas is known as IKS. It is true that in ancient time India was self-sufficient; it developed itself in almost all areas of life. India had a glorious past. It influenced the world. Therefore, one can see that many countries in the world got attracted to it. Its impact can be seen in all domains of life and literature is not an exception to it. The world literature also got impacted and as a result of it many writers took interest in India Knowledge System. W. B Yeats is one of the Irish poets who studied the Vedantic Philosophy and its reflections can be seen in his poetry. The Second Coming is a philosophical poem. It has got several references to India Knowledge System. If studied critically, one can come across the essence of Indian religions in the poem especially Hinduism. In this regard Shweta Saxena puts her observation on record:

Its central argument is that Yeats's *The Second Coming* can be read in the light of the ancient Indian myth of the Narasimha avatar — the human-animal hybrid incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The idea of the Second Coming of Christ, sounds very much like the concept of reincarnation, which lies at the heart of Hinduism. (Saxena, 17, 18)

Saxena has rightly observed the close connection of poem The Second Coming and IKS. One of the fundamental principles of IKS is rebirth and reincarnation. When the world is full of injustice, murders, deception, when the weak are oppressed by the dominant then God himself comes down on the earth and settles all the problems and establishes new order in the world. The poem Second Coming has got all those features of IKS in it right from beginning to the end. The poem begins with:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed,
And everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction,
While the worst Are full of passionate intensity. (Yeats, 45)

This is the first stanza of the poem and clearly begins with a bleak situation of the world. The poet creates a vision in which the order of the world has collapsed. Since there no order, the chaos has emerged. The world is full of wars, bloodshed, death and murders. It really reflects the current condition of the world. There is moral decadence and spiritual decay. Hopelessness has spread in the world. It seems that the poet might have read the Mahabharata closely. The picture he creates in the poem resemblances the chaotic condition as described by Lord Krishna. Definitely these lines remind the reader the famous lines from Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4, and Verse 7:

*Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata |
Abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmy aham ||
Paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām | Dharma-
samsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge ||* (Bhagavad Gita, Verse 7)

("Whenever there is a decline of righteousness, O Bharata, and a rise of unrighteousness, then I manifest Myself." "For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.")

What exactly W B Yeats envisions in the poem regarding declining of virtues and destruction of the evil, an avatara takes birth and protects the righteousness and establish order in the chaos. This is a clear example of the influence of IKS on W B Yeats' literary works. The first line of the poem indicates the concept of time in both European and Indian philosophies. It is not merely a poetic image but a cosmological statement that resonates profoundly with both European and Indian philosophical frameworks of time. The "turning and turning" maps almost perfectly onto the continuous revolution of the Kālachakra. In Indian philosophical framework, it is found that time which means Yugas which is constantly in flux. It keeps on changing. According to the Hindu Philosophy there are four Yugas, the Satya Yuga, the Treta Yuga the Dvapara Yuga and finally the Kali Yuga. Each Yuga has its own features as during the Satya Yuga, there was an order in society. Satyam Shivam and Sundaram was the principle of life. People were righteous. Goodness was celebrated. It was the kingdom of God. People were close to God. But in the following Yugas one notices that decline of righteousness begins and in the last and current Yuga there is a complete fall of virtues in the

world. W B Yeats depicts the conditions of the kali Yuga in the Second Coming where chaos rules the world. Once the soul was close to God. Now, it has lost its connection with its creator. This disconnection from God, goodness, righteousness has put the world in jeopardy. It has become the world of darkness. The poet describes the present world which has lost its connection with Creator and as result mere anarchy loosed upon the world. The poet envisions the coming of new civilization, new order which resemblances with the Vedantic notion of coming of the tenth Avatara of Vishnu that the Kalki Avatara similarly in the Islamic philosophy the coming of Mehndi Alaisalam and Jesus Christ. All these elements denote the notion of oneness and intertextuality. Bloom's reading in this regard has its own significance:

The Yuga Chakra — the wheel of ages as elaborated in the Mahābhārata, the ViṣṇuPurāṇa, the BhāgavataPurāṇa, and systematized in Manusmṛti — offers a framework that is structurally parallel to Yeats's gyres in certain respects but philosophically far richer and more precisely articulated in others. (Bloom 1970)

It is evident that the poem The Second Coming has several elements of Indian Knowledge System. W B Yeats has incorporated all the major inferences of the Hinduism in this poem. The richness of Indian mythology, philosophy and religion is reflected in the poem. Hence, it is difficult for an ordinary reader to grasp the essence and beauty of the poem if one is not well-acquainted with Indian philosophy.

Conclusion

The Second Coming is one of the most enduring and widely quoted poems in the English language. It is about Indian as well as European philosophy. It has a universal implication. it explains beginning and the end of the universe. It deals with cosmic power. It explains the end of an old civilization and beginning of a new civilization. The most interesting feature of the poem is its relation with Indian Knowledge system. It shows the universalism of Indian philosophy, mythology and religion. It is crystal clear that poet might have written this poem under deep influence of Indian philosophy and religious scriptures. It is about different yugas that is kalchakra. It speaks about the kalyuga, an era of destruction, violence, chaos and disorder. The degradation of ethics and moral conduct in this yuga is common. It may be said that this poem is a combination of Indian, Jews and Christian mythological references. The domination of religion that is adharm is rising. The world is facing issues of existentialism. It indicates the conditions of the pralaya that is the end of the world. The dharmic influence is over. By reading The Second Coming through the lens of IKS, we do not diminish the poem's status as a masterpiece of modernist literature. On the contrary, we restore to it a dimension of philosophical depth and global resonance that purely Eurocentric readings have tended to obscure. At the same time, we affirm the universal significance of Indian Knowledge System — its capacity to illuminate and make sense of human experience across cultural and historical boundaries. In this sense, Yeats's poem serves as a powerful instance of the enduring vitality and global reach of the Indian intellectual tradition.

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