Chapter - VIII

Philosophical Currents in Melville's Works
Both on his mother's and father's sides Melville's family belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church which prided itself on having allowed no changes in its standards of Calvinistic doctrine since its inception two hundred years before Melville was born. One has only to read the letters exchanged among the members of his family during his early life, to appreciate fully the God-fearing tradition he was born into. A few words from Allan Melville's letter to Peter Gansevoort, kept in the Gansevoort Lansing Collection at the New York public library will prove how deeply religious Melville's father was.

...that divine first cause, who always moulds events to subserve the purposes of mercy & wisdom, often subjects poor human nature to the severest trials, that he may better display his sovereign power... 1

Melville's mother too was a devout Christian and subjected her young son to her influence for many years after her husband's death. The Albany Academy where Melville studied till he was thirteen is described by Mrs. Eleanor Metcalf as a 'God-fearing' school. 2 Even his near relatives and his...

2 Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle, ch.1, p.11.
parents' friends were devoted Christians. Church-going was a regular practice among the Melvilles, the Gansevoorts and their friends. Melville's communications as well as his *Journal* (1849-50) and his works till 1850 directly or indirectly prove that he attended Church regularly which means till then at least Melville's faith in Christianity had not totally disintegrated. However, Melville gradually came out of this traditional and devout atmosphere. As has already been mentioned, the most important factor that led to the crumbling of his early unquestioning faith was his life at sea both as an ordinary traveller and an active whaleman.

Next to this was of course his vast reading specially during the year 1849-50 which led to his intellectual and imaginative flowering. Both these experiences engendered a sceptical turn of mind which in turn paved the way for the total collapse of faith even in the most simple tenets of Christianity. It is not surprising therefore to read in Mrs. Metcalf's letter to William Braswell that from the 1850s onwards Melville seldom went to church and for many years in his later life never.

Yet however quickly he got out of his inherited orthodoxy, he could not get out of the impression the Bible had left on him. Nathalia Wright's study of Melville's use of

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the Bible shows to what extent Biblical allusions, themes and plots, characters and types permeate his works and affect the style of his writing. Specially illuminating in the fact Miss Wright notes of Melville's use of the Old Testament. Two thirds of the six hundred and fifty references in Melville's prose works, according to her statement, belong to the Old Testament, a fact of interest in connection with Melville's pessimism. Referring to his deep interest in the Bible she says:

He pored over the writings of the prophets and the wisdom books, marked wherever they appeared verses treating of the accessibility of God, the nature of Jesus, damnation, immortality, predestination, and occasionally commented on them.4

Another important obsession that Melville retained from his old tradition was his speculation on the central problem of Calvinism viz. the freedom of the individual will. The doctrine of predestination propounded by Calvin did not satisfy Melville intellectually for he wondered how far it was possible for an individual to assert his free will if all was predestined. More than this such a doctrine excluded all moral struggle from the life of man. Yet however much he desired to discard the belief in the fall of man and his

innate depravity he could not, for he was well aware of its theological and symbolic implications. He spoke more about his own self than he did about Hawthorne when he wrote:

Certain it is, ... that this great power of blackness derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free. For, in certain moods, no one can weigh this world without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance.5

Thus Evil and its source remained cardinal problems throughout Melville's life.

One sees the first stirrings of Melville's scepticism and dissent in Mardi for by the time he wrote this work he had experienced enough to question why a benevolent God permitted Evil. Babbalanja's words in Mardi may well stand for Melville's own questioning:

...Oro (God) is not merely a universal onlooker but occupies and fills all space, and no vacancy is left for any being or any thing but Oro. Hence Oro is in all things, and himself is all things - the time-old creed. But since evil abounds, and Oro is all things, then he cannot be perfectly good; wherefore, Oro's omnipresence and moral perfection seem incompatible.6

This question too, in one form or the other kept haunting

6 Mardi, ch.135, p.355.
him throughout his life and compelled him to give attention to it in all his works. The God he saw reflected in the misery and suffering of mankind was not the benevolent God, the compassionate and loving Father of Jesus Christ but the stern and severe God of the Old Testament. Father Mapple's sermon in *Moby-Dick* shows the tension Melville must have undergone in facing the conflict between his will to believe in a benevolent God and his inability to reject his belief in a harsh and chastening God. Nathalia Wright is right when she states that,

> In his sermon to the whalemen he (Father Mapple) endeavours as no other person in all Melville's novels to illuminate and rationalize the workings of an apparently blind fate.7

Since Melville was brought up in the Calvinistic tradition, a study of its major premises will prove helpful in understanding why Melville revolted against it. Calvin's dominant thought is that God's sovereignty is infinite and transcendent. While God is the source of All Good, man is guilty and corrupt. The first man was made in the image of God. This fact indicates his original purity, integrity and sanctity. Through Adam's fall, depravity and corruption attach to all men. Through Adam's transgression man has

7 Nathalia Wright, *Melville's Use of the Bible*, ch.4, p.79.
been brought under a curse. From him punishment has over- 
taken man and a pestilence derived from Adam resides in man, 
for which punishment is justly due. From this relentless 
law, even infants are not exempt. The Calvinists insist that 
God alone has the power to elect those who are to be saved 
and that nothing that men can do contributes in any way to 
their election. In other words man's salvation or damnation 
is predestined. Incidentally it should also be noted that 
Calvin formulated his doctrine of the attributes of God, 
largely out of the Old Testament wherein He appears chiefly 
as a 'God of the Old Dispensation'.

Dissatisfied with the Christian solution of the problem 
of Evil, Melville turned to non-Christian and heretic doctrines 
and sought a solution there. Although there is no proof of his 
having dived deeply into these doctrines, it is safe to presume 
that he was fairly well-acquainted with them. Various refer- 
ences in Mardi, Moby-Dick, Pierre, Clarel and his later Poems 
show that he knew something about Hinduism, Buddhism and the 
Persian religions. References to Zoroastrianism and Manich- 
æism oblique though they are, are important specially because 
of Melville's obsession with Evil. The Gnostics, the 
Marcionites and the Ophites, the early Christian heretics, 
are mentioned in Mardi, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick, Clarel and 
his Poems. There are casual references to Egyptian, Assyrian, 
Chinese and Norse beliefs and quite many references to the
Greek and Roman mythologies in *Mardi*, *Pierre*, *The Piazza Tales* and *Billy Budd*. Finally, there are references to Prophet Mohammed in *White-Jacket*, *Pierre* and *The Confidence-Man*.

One of Melville's favourite authors akin to him in his scepticism was Pierre Bayle, a seventeenth-century Frenchman, brought up in the Calvinistic tradition. His anti-theological *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* ("Dictionary Historical and Critical") was published in French in 1697 and issued in English translation at London in 1710. This work came to be known among the rationalists as the 'Bible of the eighteenth century'. Melville bought a copy in 1849 and is known to have consulted it for *Moby-Dick*. Critics are unanimous in their opinion that Bayle exerted a great influence on Melville. William Braswell's remark in this connection is worth noting:

...Melville's buying a set of Bayle's Dictionary in the spring of 1849 may have resulted in more profound influences in the development of his religious thought than any ordinary literal evidence will reveal. 8

At a time when his faith in the Calvinistic God was at its lowest, Bayle's veiled attacks on Calvinistic dogma must have captivated Melville. It was from Bayle that Melville

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collected most of his information about the Oriental myths and religious beliefs as also the Christian heretic beliefs. Melville was a voracious reader; hence it is not improbable that apart from Bayle's work, he also chanced to read many books and periodicals devoted to these subjects. An examination of the books he bought or borrowed before writing Moby-Dick and his markings and marginalia in them, will show how wide-ranging Melville's interest in and knowledge of these subjects was. Since the theme of Moby-Dick, his greatest work, is the struggle between Good and Evil, it can be presumed that Melville was attracted considerably by reflections of such a struggle in the various religious philosophies he became acquainted with. A brief discussion of each of these systems with special reference to Melville's interest in them will aid one's understanding of Moby-Dick.

The MANICHAEAN system is one of consistent, uncompromising dualism. The founder of the sect Mani, (A.D.216) equates good with light and evil with darkness. From the contradictory character of the world, he postulates the existence of two beings originally quite separate from each other - Light and Darkness. The two kingdoms of Light and Darkness stand opposed to each other from all eternity. They touch each other but remain unmixed. Satan who is a product of the kingdom of darkness intruded into the
Kingdom of Light. The 'God of Light made primal man and sent him to fight against Satan who proved himself stronger. Then the God of Light with the help of His aeons or angels defeated Satan totally and set man free. But man was robbed of part of his light by the forces of darkness. What is significant about this system is that while the formation of the world is considered to be the work of the good spirits, the creation of man is referred to the prince of darkness. Man carried within himself both the forces of light and darkness. He stood under the dominion of Satan but was instructed regarding his divine nature by the spirit of Light, through his aeons including Jesus. The spirits of light and darkness try to pull man into their own dominions. These portions of light when once set free ascend to the God of Light. Then the elements of light have at last been completely freed from the world, the end of all things comes. Once again everything falls into ruin. A tremendous conflagration consumes the world and the perfect separation of the two powers takes place once more.

Manichaeism as a doctrine is not referred to directly in any of Melville's works. But the Manichaean struggle between Good and Evil forms the cosmic background of Moby-Dick. The struggle between Ahab and Moby-Dick assumes Manichaean proportions and appears almost like the struggle between the two opposing principles of Good and Evil.
However it is Pierre which portrays this struggle more aptly than Moby-Dick. For, insignificant as the resurrection of Ishmael appears besides the destruction of Ahab and his crew, it cannot be overlooked. Ishmael’s sanity prevails and the balance tilts to the side of Good. In Pierre the Manichaean struggle is more vividly portrayed for Evil affects the lives of Pierre and his companions to such an extent that they all end up in a vortex of destruction.

Another heretic doctrine which seems to have influenced Melville is Gnosticism. The Gnostics regarded the material world as intrinsically evil. They transformed the physical dualism into a metaphysical one. Under the influence of Greek speculation the conflict between light and darkness became that of spirit and matter or that of the higher world of pure being and the lower world of the senses. These two were considered to be irreconcilable opposites but have become mixed. Evil and misery arose in this world due to this intermingling of opposite principles. The Gnostics believed in a supreme God who stood for pure light and who was transcendent, impersonal and unknowable. From Him proceeded a number of beings in a descending scale of dignity consisting of pairs of males and females. This group was known as the Pleroma, later called Aeons. Sophia, the lowest in this hierarchy fell from the Pleroma by leaving her appointed place to
reach the Supreme Light. The world was created due to her passion and consequent fall. Prior to her fall, the world of Light ruled over a formless world of darkness. Through Sophia's fall, light and darkness became mingled. The agent of creation was DEMIOURGOS, represented as the son of Sophia. He was ignorant of the PLEROMA and the Supreme God and believed that as governor of the created world, he was himself the Supreme God. The Demiourgos was represented not as an evil power but as a cosmic force which acted unwittingly.

The Demiourgos was identified with the God of the Old Testament and differentiated from the God of the New Testament.

The harmony of the PLEROMA being disturbed by the fall of Sophia, an AEON of supreme rank CHRISTUS OR SOTER was sent to deliver light from darkness. The main thesis of the Gnostics was that the principle of evil is inherent in matter, whether animate or inanimate. They believed the antagonist principle in the universe to have been by nature bad and as residing in matter.

The main point that attracted Melville here was that the Creator of this world was an inferior and imperfect being and that evil was inherent in matter. In his poem Fragments of a Lost Gnostic Poem, Melville states a similar idea:

Found a family, build a state
The pledged event is still the same:
Matter in end will never abate
His ancient brutal claim.9

The Gnostic practice of differentiating the Gods of the Old
and New Testaments is reflected in Melville's reference to
Jehovah in Clarel as the

Author of evil, yea, its god;
And Christ divine his contrary:
A god was held against a god,
But Christ revered alone.10

Many allusions in the chapters entitled: 'The Candles' and
'The Dying Whale' in Moby-Dick become clear if we keep the
basic principles of this doctrine in mind. Ahab's invocation
to the burning corposants in 'The Candles' (chap.119) specially
lends itself to a Gnostic interpretation. A few words from the
invocation will make the point clear.

...Light though thou be, thou leapest out of
darkness; but I am darkness leaping out of
light, leaping out of thee.11

The intermingling of light and darkness that Ahab refers to
can very well stand for the intermixture of light and darkness

9 Fragments of a Lost Gnostic Poem of the 12th
Century, from the Collected Poems of Herman
Melville (ed.), Howard Vincent, p.234.

10 Clarel, Part III, Canto v, lines 42-45.

11 Moby-Dick, Ch.119, p.499.
presupposed by the Gnostics to be the characteristic both
of the Demiourgos and Man. Further in the same passage Ahab
exclaims,

Oh, thou magnanimous! now do I glory in my
genealogy. But thou art but my fiery father;
my sweet mother, I know not. Oh, cruel! what
has thou done with her? There lies my puzzle;
but thine is greater. Thou knowest not how
came ye, hence callest thyself unbegotten;
certainly knowest not thy beginning, hence
callest thyself unbegun.  12

Melville must have had the Demiourgos in mind when he used
the words 'my fiery father', who does not know his origin.
For,

there is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee,
...to whom all thy eternity is but time, all
thy creativeness mechanical,  13

says Ahab. There is a Supreme God beyond the Demiourgos of
which fact the latter is unaware. Finally, the words "my
sweet mother" in the passage may have been used with SOPHIA
in mind. Ahab has no knowledge of the whereabouts of Sophia
who represents the spiritual force in man.

Mention should also be made of the MARCIIONITES another
second-century offshoot of the Christians. The distinctive
teaching of Marcion, the founder, originated in a comparison

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the Gospels. In the Gospels he found a God revealed who is goodness, and love and who desires faith and love from men. This God, Marcion, could not discover in the Old Testament. He found there the revelation of a just, stern and wrathful God who demands from his servants blind obedience. Mention has already been made of Melville's tendency to differentiate the God of the Old Testament from the God of the Gospels. Melville refers directly to the Gnostics and Marcionites in *White-Jacket* (ch.38). The dualism between two opposite principles as propounded by these two sects must have had special appeal for Melville at a time when he was projecting a dualistic struggle in *Moby-Dick*.

The OPHITES are mentioned in *Moby-Dick* (chap.41). Like the Gnostics, the Ophites believed that the Creator of the world was not the Supreme God. He was not spiritual and so he opposed the spiritual principles in man. The Ophites worshipped the serpent for having succeeded in withdrawing man from Eden and inducing him to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge thus thwarting the Creator's narrow purpose of keeping back from man the knowledge of "that Power which is over All". Ahab's devil worship seems to have much in common with the Ophites as also with Goethe's Faust. The tempering of the White Whale's barbs in the harpooners' blood and Ahab's
invocation of the devil:

Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli. 14

have overtones of devil worship.

Melville's deep interest in the problem of Evil must also have led him to read Andrews Norton's The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels published in three volumes in 1844. It was a widely-read work. Hence it is possible that Melville became familiar with the divergent doctrines formulated and expressed by Christian theologians of the second, third and fourth centuries, from Norton's volumes. Norton mentions ARIUS, an Alexandrian who died in 336. Arius had taught that the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity was not valid. Melville too had similar views about the trinitarian conception of God. Mardi has a reference which may well reflect Melville's idea of the Trinity. Two servants of Media are disputing about the tritoed footprints of some huge heron or fowl. The dispute is whether the footprints show three separate toes or one foot with three toes. Babbalanja is asked to settle the dispute. He feels that both the disputants are right for

...Every unit is made up of parts, as well as every plurality. Nine is three threes; a unit is as many thirds, or if you please, a thousand thousandths; no

14 Ibid., ch.113, p.483.
Incidentally Melville seems to have entertained similar feelings towards the Christian belief in immortality. In *Mardi* one finds this subject being discussed repeatedly. Questions posed by Old Bardianna and Babbalanja come very close to those that Melville was preoccupied with. For example, the skeletons of Donjalolo's sires, provoke Babbalanja to exclaim:

...shall I not be as these bones? To come to this! 
...Nothing abideth; the river of yesterday floweth not today; the sun's rising is a setting; living is dying; the very mountains melt; and all revolve—systems and asteroids; the sun wheels through the zodiac, and the zodiac is a revolution. Ah, gods! In all this universal stir, am I to prove one stable thing?  

In other words Babbalanja's problem is that if no part of Creation abides, how can man alone expect to? Another important English theologian whose doctrine Melville seems to have approved of was PELAGIUS (4th-5th century). The latter believed that the doctrine of inherited original sin was false and insisted upon the freedom of the individual. CLEMENT and ORIGEN of the Alexandrian school taught that God might be mistakenly considered the Author of Sin, and that the evil proceeding from God was actually meant for disciplinary

15 *Mardi*, ch.132, p.346.
16 Ibid., ch.78, p.205.
purposes which a father might inflict on a child. Melville's thought ran divergent to this for, at least, when he was writing Moby-Dick and Pierre he was in such a mental state as to believe that God WAS the author of sin and that He inflicted punishment arbitrarily. The arguments of ARMINIUS, the Dutch theologian (1560 - 1609) are also worth noting. He accused Calvin of developing the doctrine of predestination in such a way as to make God the source of sin. For, Arminius argued, it restricted God's grace and made multitudes of men feel that salvation was denied to them and gave a false security to a few who believed themselves to be the elect of God. Arminius therefore argued that man's freedom of will was a self-determining power which gave the individual sovereignty over his own self. That the problem of individual free will disturbed Melville throughout his life has repeatedly been mentioned. Melville was perhaps also familiar with the PAULICIANS and CAINITIANS. The former were a heretic sect of the seventh century whose beliefs were a blend of Manichaeism and Gnosticism. The Cainites who magnified Cain must have been familiar to Melville specially as Melville had read Byron's works with great interest and because there is a direct reference to Jackson being a

Cain afloat; branded on his yellow brow with some inscrutable curse.17

17 Redburn, ch.22, p.100.
To be sure, Melville has not used these doctrines directly and consciously. But he has fused them and transmuted them to serve his own philosophic and artistic needs.

Zoroastrianism is another important doctrine that influenced Melville specially during the period in which he was writing Moby-Dick. Like the Manichaean doctrine, Melville found in Zoroastrianism support for the dualistic struggle he saw in the universe. The Zoroastrians believe that at the beginning of things there existed two spirits representing good and evil. Ohrmazd is the spirit of light and life and produces all that is pure and good. His antithesis Ahriman is the spirit of darkness and produces all that is evil in the world. All creation divides itself into that which is Ahura's and that which is Ahriman's. Zoroaster concentrated the whole of the divine character into Ahura who was called 'the wise' and meant God. The wise Lord is the 'All-father' who existed before the world came into being. The world has emanated from him and is governed by him. His guiding spirit is the Holy Spirit which wills good but is restricted in his power by his twin brother and Evil Spirit called Ahriman. According to the GATHAS, which is a part of the HOLY AVESTA, the Good Spirit and the Evil Spirit are two great conflicting principles equal and eternal. This would mean that the Zoroastrians are dualists. However, according to the Zoroastrians both the Evil and Good Spirits proceed from Ahura Mazdah (One God)
or the Wise Lord and hence the Evil one is not coeternal with and independent of the Wise one. Moreover the Zoroastrians believe that the Evil principle will be destroyed ultimately and Ormazd will emerge triumphant. Thus Zoroastrianism differs from Manichaeism according to which Good and Evil are coeternal principles. Fire is the most essential part of the ritual of Zoroastrianism. It is worshipped as the representative of 'divine essence' on earth and a great source of life.

The reference to Fedallah as the fire-worshipping Parsee gives the impression that Melville conceived him as the Evil Spirit which the Zoroastrians believed to be in conflict with the Spirit of Light. Moreover, Melville's use of the fire-worship in Moby-Dick appears to be a reflection of the Zoroastrian rite. But Melville has perverted this representation of fire to suit his own artistic and symbolic purposes. Fedallah's fire-worship has become Ahab's devil-worship for the latter worships fire not as a symbol of light and truth but as a symbol of darkness and evil. Fedallah becomes Ahab's 'alter ego' and prompts him to worship fire in its perverted form i.e. as a means of defying God. To understand the fire symbolism in Moby-Dick it is necessary therefore to understand its heathen connotations. The Parsees hold the white-forked flame the
holiest, Ahab considers it as a disguise for evil. Instead of leading Ahab to God who is the source of good, the white flame but lights the way to the White Whale,\textsuperscript{18}

the embodiment of evil. The whole of the chapter entitled 'The Candles' (\textit{Moby-Dick}) is a remarkable exposition of the perverted use Melville has made of the worship of fire. The crew of the 'Pequod' refer to Fedallah as the 'devil' or 'ghost-devil'. His influence becomes more potent towards the end of the book as Ahab's monomania for the white whale, increases in intensity so much so that he almost becomes Ahab's shadow. Henry Murray's opinion that the character of Fedallah is superfluous is surprising. Murray feels that Fedallah represents,

\begin{quote}
the cool, heartless, cunning, calculating, intellectual Devil of the Medieval myth-makers, in contrast to the stricken, passionate, indignant and often eloquent rebel angel of \textit{Paradise Lost}, whose role is played by Ahab.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Dramatically, at least, Fedallah is not superfluous. His appearance on the deck of the 'Pequod' is so well-timed that his role becomes effective. For, he is made conspicuous specially at moments when Ahab seems to relent from

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Moby-Dick}, ch.119, p.498.

\textsuperscript{19} Henry Murray, 'In Nomine Diaboli' in \textit{Melville (ed.) Richard Chase, Twentieth Century Views}, p.67.
his devilish pursuit or when one of the crew invokes God's mercy at the time of danger. Chapters like 'The Candles' and 'The Symphony' provide examples. Melville has used this technique to highlight the conflict between Good and Evil. If Murray could fit every person on the 'Pequod' into a psychological mould, it is a little surprising why he could not so fit Fedallah. For the latter stands for Ahab's 'other self', his 'alter-ego' which is obsessed with evil and which drives him to destruction.

Since the word 'Fedallah' very clearly offers an Islamic meaning, one can presume that when Melville conceived that character he also had some Islamic implications in mind. But ISLAM does not postulate an Evil Principle like Manichaeism or Zoroastrianism. Evil is not in any way treated in the QURAN as a theological problem. It is dealt with in the actual ways in which it usually occurs. In other words the problem is related to concrete particulars of life, not to theoretical abstractions. The Quran repeatedly stresses God's characteristic as Omnipotence in association with love and compassion. Hence as John Bowker puts it,

Whereas in Christianity suffering occurs as a problem principally because it conflicts with the assertion that God is love, in Islam it
occurs principally because it conflicts with the belief that God is omnipotent. 20

Hence suffering according to Islam can only be explained in terms of God's omnipotence. Evil occurs only within God's creation and since He is in control of the creation, it is presumed that even suffering and misery are under His control. This may raise a question regarding the nature of God but it cannot become a problem since God's omnipotence is accepted. Thus if God is omnipotent He is the author of Evil and there cannot be any dualism. Islam offers two suggestions for the purpose for which God permits suffering. First, suffering is a punishment for sin. This suggestion does not explain indiscriminate suffering for those who sin do not always suffer and conversely those who suffer have not always sinned. The second suggestion offered is that it is a trial or test for every faithful Muslim. Suffering thus forms character and exposes man's true nature. Man's response to his trials and tribulations should be acceptance with patience and endurance. This approach becomes acceptable to a Muslim for he accepts the strict justice of God based on the balance between Good and Evil which will be restored in the life hereafter. This belief has given rise to the impression that Islam is fata-

listic in its approach to Evil. But fatalism is a perversion of Islam not its true characteristic. For, Islam insists on an active response through participation in life and one's social obligations and also on alleviation of evil. Satan and his tribe have limited diabolic power in a universe governed by an omnipotent God.

Though Melville had greater access to books on Mohammed, Islam and related subjects than he had to books on Hinduism, he does not seem to have been impressed by the way Islam explained suffering. Moreover, Islam and Christianity are almost similar where the problem of Evil is concerned. References to Mohammed in White-Jacket and Pierre show that the prophet impressed him more as a sensuous character than as a spiritual hero. Islam's emphasis on 'resignation, endurance and patience' as an approach to evil and the misery it brings to man, must not have fascinated Melville at a time when in the person of Ahab he was out to defy Evil. In White-Jacket, Pierre and in his Journal (1856-57) there is a reference to the fatalism of the Mohammedans but he does not appear to be critical about it for he says that in different degrees, all men are fatalistic. But the attitude of 'resignation' and 'endurance' which characterizes Melville's later works has very little in common with the Mohammedan attitude to evil as expressed in the words: 'It is Allah's will'. For the Mohammedan approach springs from an absolute
beliefinthe omnipotence of God. Whereas one cannot say
the same about Melville. For his approach of 'resignation'
is not the result of a religious faith in Divine justice.

What seemsto have attracted Melville more than the original
teachings of Mohammed was 'Islamic mysticism and sufism'
which according to Dorothy Finkelstein's evidence was being
discussed and read in the nineteenth-century Western World.
She says,

...at a time when the characteristics of Islamic
mysticism were discussed far and wide..., he
(Melville) could hardly help coming across
them in his diversified reading. His intense
interest in dervishes and mystics of all kinds
was bound to acquaint him with the secretive
character of the movement, its quasi-masonic
organization, and the haze of mystery concealing
both doctrines and personalities from the un-
initiated.21

The approach of the Sufis towards Good and Evil must have
attracted Melville. Unlike the other Muslims who believed
that Creation is wholly good, the Sufis believed that Cre-
ation is a mixture of good and evil. Melville purchased
two books, Hope's Anastasius and Beckford's Vathek on his
trip to London. The characters of Ahab and Vathek have
much in common. Vathek too embraces destruction because
of his unholy desire to fathom the mysteries of the universe.

21 Dorothy Finkelstein, Melville’s Orinda (New
231-32.
Melville's interest in the YEZIDIS is also proved by his markings in Anastasius. The Yezidis or 'Devil-worshippers' were a religious sect whose beliefs came from Islam, Christianity and other sources. They regarded the devil as the creative agent of the Supreme God and propitiated him as the author of Evil. Miss Finkelstein's analysis of Fedallah's character proves to what extent Melville was guided by his knowledge of these offshoots of Islam. So much so that, in spite of being called a 'Parsee' and a 'fire-worshipper', Miss Finkelstein concludes that Fedallah is the most openly Islamic figure in Melville's works. For a Mohammedan reader the name Fedallah means 'the Sacrifice of God'. Fedai (Feidā'ī) means 'the devoted one' or 'he who offers up his life' and Allah of course is the name the Mohammedans use for God.

After discussing the various hidden mystic meanings and reflections of the elements which make up the word FEDALLAH and after showing how these names were connected with the various facets of a medieval Islamic movement which in turn was an amalgam of several mystic and Islamic sects, Dorothy Finkelstein concludes that Fedallah would symbolize the "destroying angel" sent by God to bring about the "assassination" of Ahab, the heretic, not only in body, but through the deep damnation of his spirit and soul by the satanic intoxication of hatred and pride which
possess the captain of the 'Pequod' in his fanatical pursuit of the White Whale. 22

But whatever interpretation one accepts, Fedallah ultimately comes to stand for the force of darkness, the principle of evil in God's universe. What is remarkable is the masterly way in which Melville has fused these various Oriental associations to project a single character who signifies diabolism and destruction. Melville transmuted what he knew of the dualistic principles of Gnosticism, Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism and of Islamic mysticism and Sufism to show what an inexorable and invincible force Evil is.

The Manichaean doctrine of the dichotomy between good and evil seems to have attracted Melville's attention as it helped him to project effectively the struggle between Ahab and the white whale. Mentally too he was prepared for such an explanation of reality, because the Christian approach failed to provide an answer that could satisfy him. The non-Christian and heretic doctrines served him better both thematically and artistically at a time when his faith in the justice, benevolence and compassion of God was at its nadir. What is remarkable about Melville's use of these doctrines is the skill with which he has woven them into a composite

22 Ibid., p. 238.
whole. No single creed suffices to explain the symbolic meaning of Ahab's struggle against Moby Dick. Melville's art of fusion has raised the struggle from the personal to the universal level. Yet dualism was not Melville's final word for, to use the words of Joad, it is not

an inspiring creed, since it prescribes neither a goal of endeavour, a spur to action, nor a ground for self-discipline. 23

And as Melville's later works i.e. his works after Pierre attest, it is with the help of the virtues of endeavour and self-discipline that Melville's characters face the irreconcilable and malevolent contradictions of life.

Part Two - Hinduism

Moby-Dick contains a couple of references to the gods of the Hindu Trinity viz. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The first reference to Vishnu occurs in chapter 55 wherein Melville jocularly describes the various pictures of whales that are extant either in the caves or temples all over the world. Significantly he says that

the most ancient extant portrait anyways purporting to be the whale's, is to be found in the famous cavern-pagoda of Elephanta, in India.... The Hindoo

whale referred to, occurs in a separate department of the wall, depicting the incarnation of Vishnu in the form of Leviathan, learnedly known as the Natse Avatar. But though this sculpture is half man and half whale, so as only to give the tail of the latter, yet that small section of him is all wrong. It looks more like the tapering tail of an anaconda, than the broad palms of the true whale's majestic flukes.24

Another important Indian reference is in chapter 82 where including among the fraternity of whalemen, such great names as Perseus, St. George, Hercules and Jonah, Melville refers to Vishnu as a whaleman. To quote Melville's words:

That wondrous oriental story is now to be rehearsed from the Shaster, which gives us the dread Vishnoo, one of the three persons in the godhead of the Hindoos; gives us this divine Vishnoo himself for our Lord; - Vishnoo, who, by the first of his ten earthly incarnations, has for ever set apart and sanctified the whale. When Brahma, or the God of Gods, saith the Shaster, resolved to recreate the world after one of its periodical dissolutions, he gave birth to Vishnoo, to preside over the work; but the Vedas, or mystical books, whose perusal would seem to have been indispensable to Vishnoo before beginning the creation, and which therefore must have contained something in the shape of practical hints to young architects, these Vedas were lying at the bottom of the waters; so Vishnoo became incarnate in a whale, and sounding down in him to the uttermost depths, rescued the sacred volumes. Was not this Vishnoo a whaleman then? 25

Obviously Melville has distorted the myth of Vishnu's

25 Ibid., ch.82, pp.360-61.
incarnation to suit his purpose. For, it was in the incar-
nation of the boar that Vishnu rescued the Vedas. In the 
incarnation of the fish, Vishnu saved the creation from the 
deluge. Two minor but pertinent references occur in Chapters 
40 and 116. The first one is in the words of the Lascar 
sailor on the 'Pequod':

By Brahma! boys, it'll be douse sail soon. The 
sky-born, high-tide Ganges turned to wind! Thou 
showest thy black brow, Seeva. 26

Of greater interest are the words of Ahab who invoking the 
head of the dying Sperm Whale says:

Oh, thou dark Hindoo half of nature, who of 
drowned bones hast builded thy separate throne 
somewhere in the heart of these unverdured seas;

... 27

At a time when the study of comparative mythology was 
gaining momentum, Melville's familiarity with the Hindu 
myth and religion is not surprising. For as Bruce Franklin 
says,

...the gods of strange lands poured from many 
directions and in many channels into the America 
of Melville's early life. From Africa, Asia, 
and Oceania, from South America, Central America, 
and the center of North America they came in the

26 Ibid., ch. 40, p. 171.
27 Ibid., ch. 116, p. 489.
works of European translators, mythologists, and poets, the tales of American sailors, settlers, and missionaries, and the accounts of explorers, archeologists, and historians of all nations.28

In the absence of definite evidence one cannot say with certainty what Melville had read in the literature of "Comparative religion". But Thomas Maurice's seven volumes of Indian Antiquities have been established as Melville's source for "Comparative religion". References to various oriental mythological and religious figures are found in Maurice's volumes. Another possible source for Melville's information was William Jones' essay, On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India, which was enlarged upon by Maurice's Indian Antiquities and History of Hindostan. Howard Vincent in The Trying-Out of 'Moby-Dick' makes an interesting suggestion which proves undoubtedly that Maurice supplied Melville's knowledge of the Indian myth. Vincent points to the spelling of 'Matsa' Melville uses in the first of the four passages quoted at the beginning of this discussion. He says,

... in no other works which Melville might have consulted, or seems to have consulted, do we find this consonance - not even between Moby-Dick and Maurice's other Indic study: The History of Hindostan... .29

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29 Howard Vincent, The Trying-Out of 'Moby-Dick', Part IV, ch.16, p.278.
Again both Maurice and Melville spell 'Seeva' and 'Hindoo' in the same way. In the first passage Melville speaks of the carving of the 'Matse Avatar' found in the caves of the Elephanta. Both Howard Vincent and James Baird after a long search for a whale in the accounts of the caves of Elephanta have concluded that these cave chambers actually do not contain a whale. Hence, Vincent says,

Melville's error, if such it be, probably occurred from hasty reading in Maurice's Indian Antiquities where Maurice passes rapidly, without adequate transition, from a description of the Cave of Elephanta to an account of the Matse Avatar. Only close study of Maurice's text would show that no connection between the Matse Avatar and the Cave of Elephanta was intended; the rapid reader might easily assume that Maurice was still discussing the cave, or one aspect of it.

Did Melville make a similar mistake in comprehending the deities of the Indian Trinity is a question that naturally arises when one reads Prof. Chandrasekharan's paper wherein he states that Melville's use of the words 'black brow of Seeva' and 'thou dark Hindoo half of nature',

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may be due to a misconception on Melville's part. He feels that Maurice supplied Melville with the information that the concept of 'Siva' and 'Vishnu' in the Hindu Trinity represents a dichotomy between the dark and bright forces of the Universe. In other words Prof. Chandrasekharan regards Melville's use of the words mentioned as an indication of the latter's misconception about the Hindu Trinity which in fact is a unity of Bhahma-Vishnu-Siva or the Creator-Preserver-Destroyer. It cannot be denied that Melville was specially attracted towards the myths of the world that expressed a struggle between the two conflicting principles of Good and Evil. Since Melville had some information about the Indian myth, he might have been prompted to use it to project such a Manichaean struggle which had taken hold of his mind at the time of his writing Moby-Dick. However a close reading of Volume IV of Indian Antiquities shows that Maurice presupposes a kind of trinity as the basis of all the ancient religions of the world more especially those of the Egyptians, Indians and the Christians, Maurice repeatedly insists that the three deities BRAHMA-VEESHNU- SEEVA constitute a TRIMOURTI. It is due to 'gross physics' and 'false philosophy' that VEESHNU and SEEVA have been separated into two distinct deities. Two quotations from Maurice will show how VEESHNU and SEEVA have been wrongly dichotomized and how the concept of 'Seeva' has been distorted.
Elephanta is, in fact a TEMPLE TO THE INDIAN TRIAD, evidenced in the colossal sculpture that forms the principal figure of it, and excavated probably ere Brahma had fallen into neglect among those who still acknowledge him as the creative energy, or different sects had sprung up under the respective names of VAISHNU and SIEVA. Understood with reference to the pure theology of India, such appears to me to be the meaning of this mistaken symbol, but a system of physical theology quickly succeeded to the pure, and the debased, but ingenious, progeny, who invented it, knew too well how to adapt the symbols and images of the true to the false devotion. The three sublime hypostasis of the true trinity were degraded into three attributes; in physical causes the sacred mysteries of religion were attempted to be explained away; its doctrines were corrupted, and its emblems perverted.33

Elsewhere in the same volume Maurice discusses the manner in which Siva's character had been distorted. Maurice sounds more vehement because devout as he was, he considered it blasphemous to compare the Hindu Trinity in its distorted form, to that of the Christian, more so because of Siva's character. Thus he says,

...it might border on absolute blasphemy, principally on account of the licentious rites and gross physical character of Seeva; a character which I cannot but consider as greatly misrepresented by them. In the CREATOR and PRESERVER of India,...this sublime truth beams forth with a lustre, which no physics have been able to obscure. Possibly ... it may appear, that, as their system of Philosophy allows not of the absolute destruction of any object in nature, but asserts, that only a change of being

takes place, the character of Seeva, as a destroyer, may be found inconsistent with their principles; and that, however misconceived in their present corrupted system of devotion, and however degraded by symbols equally hostile to all religion and all morality, their third hypostasis was originally intended only to symbolize the quickening and regenerative power of God.  

That Maurice was absolutely clear about the nature of the Hindu Trinity is evident from the words quoted in both the passages. If still in spite of this Prof. Chandrasekharan feels that Melville has used the concept of Siva as signifying the dark forces of the universe, on the basis of Maurice's work, it must be attributed to Melville's hasty reading as in the case of the 'Matsa Avatar' and the Elephanta Caves. But this presumption can also be ruled out for Melville does not violate the Hindu concept of Siva in so far as the latter is believed to be the Lord of the thunderbolt and the destroying wind. Prof. Chandrasekharan states,

...Melville...knew that in the Trinity of the Hindus Siva represented the forces of annihilation. With his imperfect knowledge of Hindu philosophy he must have equated the Hindu scheme of the Universe with the Manichaean creed with its clear division of good and evil. ...The rigid distinction he (Ahab) makes between these two forces is identical with the distinction which, according to Melville's mistaken notion, the Hindus make.  

34 Ibid., p.427.  
Besides, the context in which Melville uses the reference is also an important factor in determining the validity of the statement. A violent storm is raging on the sea while the sailors of the 'Pequod' are engaged in a spell of crude merry-making in the forecastle. In such a mood, each member of the cosmopolitan crew speaks something that is typical of his nationality. The Lascar sailor who represents India appropriately invokes 'Brahma' and 'Siva'. Like a few other chapters in Moby-Dick this one takes the shape of a scene in a play. The influence on Melville of Shakespeare's dramatic technique is well known. So Melville may have been prompted to use such a device to enhance the dramatic effect of the scene. There is nothing in the setting of the whole tableau or in the exclamation of the Lascar sailor in particular to suggest that Melville is highlighting the forces of darkness as against those of light.

The second reference 'thou dark Hindoo half of nature', raises controversial issues. Professor Chandrasekharan in his article mentioned above, arguing from the analogy of the reference to 'Siva' concludes that the words 'dark Hindoo half of nature' reflect Melville's mistaken notion of a dichotomy in the Hindu concept of reality. He says:

Ahab's sin was to accept the Manichaean doctrine - a doctrine which Melville identifies with not only
Hindu thought but also Zoroastrianism. ... Melville thus sees no difference between the Hindu view and the Zoroastrian view of life. 

Two questions come to mind here. Did Melville use the word 'dark' to imply a distinct Manichaean force in the universe? Secondly, did Melville see the Hindu concept of life as representing a dichotomy? The words 'thou, dark Hindoo half of nature' addressed to the dead whale which is harpooned and hoisted to the ship are spoken by Ahab. The monomaniac captain sees the white whale as the embodiment of "all evil". To him the dark side of the universe is the only reality. Although this soliloquy expresses Ahab's attitude to life in general, it should be remembered that the invocation is not addressed to Moby Dick whom particularly Ahab looks upon as the embodiment of evil, but to one of the four whales harpooned. Even then where Ahab is concerned, his use of the word 'dark' may be taken to imply the Manichaean dark half of the universe. But since Ahab uses the word 'dark' along with the word 'Hindu' to describe 'half of nature', one questions if Melville himself viewed the universe as Ahab did. The action of the book has progressed considerably when the invocation on Ahab's part occurs. Readers by now are sufficiently aware of the fact that Melville's

36 Ibid., p.197.
philosophy of life is not analogous to Ahab's. There is sufficient indication in the book to show that although Melville sympathized with Ahab's intellectual torment, he did not approve of it. Again, the possibility of Melville's understanding the Hindu view of the world as offering a dichotomy is doubtful. Since, as has been shown, Melville's established source for the Indian myth was Maurice and since the latter saw Brahma, Vishnu and Siva as forming a trinity, there is every possibility of Melville's having known the unity of the Indian Trinity. This argument receives support from Bruce Franklin who in his work *The Wake of the Gods* has discussed *Moby-Dick* as an 'Egyptian Myth Incarnate'. Among the six reasons he advances for Melville's using the Egyptian mythic struggle between the destroying and the preserving powers rather than the Hindu one, two are pertinent to this discussion. Franklin states the first reason thus:

In the Hindu myth, the fish incarnates the preserving power. *Moby Dick* is the Destroyer, and Melville's precise ridicule of the Matse Avatar forestalls any mythological mitigation of this fact.37

The second argument is more illuminating. It runs thus:

Since the cosmic struggle between Vishnu and Siva ultimately resolves into the unity of the Trimurti,

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This struggle (Ahab's against the white whale) cannot support a tragic conception.38

This statement specially lends support to the argument that Melville did not see any dichotomy in the Hindu view of the universe. Further, in the course of his discussion, Franklin also mentions that Melville had at one time considered using more symbols from the worship of Siva the Destroyer, but the only important remnant of this consideration is Fedallah. Finally, Franklin feels it is because Melville knew that the struggle between Vishnu and Siva is ultimately resolved into the unity of the Trimurti that it could appropriately support the comic conception of The Confidence-Man rather than the tragic struggle of Moby-Dick. As Franklin says:

Melville made the shape-shifting struggles and the ultimate identity of Vishnu and Siva into the central structural fact of The Confidence-Man. Confidence and distrust, tame animals and wild animals, love and hate—all become indistinguishable in a universe in which black is only another appearance of white. 39

Another significant explanation of the word 'dark' in the quotation under discussion has been offered by James Baird.40 Discussing Melville's obsession with the primeval East, he refers to the various symbols and images Melville

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., ch.6, p.187.
40 James Baird, *op.cit.*, ch.5, p.177.
employed to express the Oriental timelessness, or the Oriental Mysteriousness and stresses that it is feeling which informs Melville’s symbol that governs his use of reference to Oriental religion. As an example he quotes Melville’s words in chapter 70 of *Moby-Dick*.

It was a black and hooded head; and hanging there in the midst of so intense a calm, it seemed the Sphynx's in the desert.  

Baird finds in the word 'black' here the same sense of the 'unknown' or the 'undisclosed' as expressed by the word 'dark' in the quotation in chapter 116, where Ahab, unable to comprehend the mystery of the whale, cries out in despair: "Oh, thou dark Hindoo half of nature... ." Reading the two quotations closely one finds a similarity between the meanings of both the passages. Melville is more concerned with the head of the whale as an image of timelessness or agelessness. And like the other western writers of his age he associates the Orient with the Timeless or the Unknown. Hence the use of the words 'dark Hindoo'. A similar use is made of a part of the Orient in the chapter entitled 'The Prairie'. Melville is trying to describe the white whale's brow but accepts it as an impossible task. He says at the end of the chapter,

41 *Moby-Dick*, ch.70, p.308.
...there is no Champollion to decipher the Egypt of 
every being's face. ...If then, Sir William 
Jones, who read in thirty languages, could not 
read the simplest peasant's face in its profounder 
and more subtle meanings, how may unlettered 
Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the 
Sperm Whale's brow?...

Words like 'Egypt' and 'Chaldee' definitely signify something 
that is 'inscrutable' or 'unfathomable'.

Since Melville was familiar with both the Gnostic and 
Indian myths, Thomas Vargish's42 interpretation of the words 
'dark Hindoo half of nature' is illuminating. If accepted, 
it helps to refute the contention that Melville has dicho-
tomized the Hindu concept of reality. The writer feels that 
the words cannot refer to the whale because Ahab usually 
refers to it as 'he'. So the words "thou queen" in the same 
quotation could be taken to indicate the fallen mother of the 
Gnostic myth, Sophia, who fell from the Pleroma because of 
her overweening love of the Supreme Being, whose passion 
produced the Demiurge and of whom she is both the mother and 
adversary. To stress his point Vargish refers to Andrew 
Horton's opinion that Sophia of the Gnostic myth could be 
associated with the "female energy" or the "female principle",

42 Thomas Vargish, "Gnostic Mythos in 'Moby-Dick'", 
Publications of the Modern Language Association 
of America (June, 1966), LXXXI, No.3, pp.272-77.
the Spouse of the Supreme Being worshipped by the Hindus. (Andrew Norton's Evidences, Vol.II, pp.204-205). This is one more proof of how Melville could transmute various associations and implications to serve his own symbolic and artistic needs.

Unlike Thoreau, Emerson and Alcott, Melville did not have access to the source books of Hinduism in translation. Still considering what Melville knew about the Hindu belief one is prompted to ask if it in anyway finds reflection in his works. Right from the Vedic days, HINDUISM has looked upon Evil as a result of a conflict inherent in creation. It accepts a duality in almost all the particulars of creation. Speaking about the place of suffering in the VEDAS the most important Scripture of the Hindus, John Bowker says,

The Vedas ... have a far more complex understanding of suffering than at first sight might have seemed to be the case. In personified form, the gods represent the view that occurrences of apparent suffering cannot be defined as evil or afflictive in advance. It depends how they are viewed and assimilated. ...basically suffering is an experience, a part of the universe of being, which needs to be seen in perspective.43

The treatment of suffering in the UPAISHADS too is similar. According to the Upanishads, suffering is a result of introducing duality into a non-dualistic situation. Existence

is a unity. All that is, is an aspect or manifestation of 'Being-itself' or 'Brahma'. To break down that unity is to introduce conflict and strife. Evil is not the final truth about life although the experience of suffering is real. The world is a composite of conflicting opposites of good and evil, joy and sorrow. If one isolates one part of this duality as though it were the whole truth, one is led into one-sided action. The clearest illustration of this lies in the fact that all the gods who represent evil and destructive tendencies also represent the opposite qualities. For e.g., Siva is not only fearful but also auspicious. Since he is the Lord of Death he can also be the destroyer of death. Siva symbolizes the destructive as well as the regenerative power of God. The GITA stresses the importance of suffering as a means by which 'atman' or the 'individual self' attains 'Brahma' or 'Being-itself'. And 'Brahma' cannot be attained by overlooking the world of suffering and evil but by viewing it in the right perspective. Hence without 'dharma' or 'appropriate action' 'Brahma' cannot be realized for 'Brahma' is not merely an intellectual proposition but a practical ideal to be achieved. The evil in the world, according to the GITA falls into its place if one faces it with detachment. Dr. Radhakrishnan, the most modern Indian exponent of Hindu thought makes the point clear when he says,
Cosmic process is one of universal and unceasing change and is patterned on a duality which is perpetually in conflict, the perfect order of heaven and the chaos of dark waters. Life creates opposites as it creates sexes in order to reconcile them.  

Hinduism thus, does not see the conflict between good and evil as a conflict between two conflicting principles. The apparently opposite principles are in reality two aspects of a single entity. Moreover Hinduism believes that it is easier for one to mend and modify one's life according to one's circumstances than it is to change the nature of the world. Hindu thought differs from Western thought in an important way. According to Western thought metaphysical evil cannot be explained in terms of moral evil. They are believed to belong to two distinct realms. This is not so where Indian thought is concerned. Shankara, one of the greatest exponents of Hindu religious philosophy, explains even natural evils like earthquakes, floods or epidemics as originating through the agency of evil 'Karmas' or actions. Thus according to him the moral and metaphysical views of evil are one. Every event in man's life is subject to an inexorable moral law. Speaking about the treatment of Evil by Shankara, Dr. R.S. Naulakha says,

...in the hands of Shankara all other evils of the world come to be subordinated to moral evils, for all our afflictions and agonies, whether here or elsewhere are believed by him to be due to our own evil doings. Nobody else, whether godly or devilish in nature, nor even matter which is in fact neither, can mete out to us what we have not ourselves earned. Such a high and rigid conception of morality is undoubtedly conspicuous by its absence in the West.

The writer feels that the moral view of evil, expressed by Shankara, is more appealing to one's practical reason or moral consciousness than the belief in one's unearned sufferings.

There is no direct reflection of Hindu thought or belief in Melville's works. But the overall view of Melville's approach to the problem of evil suggests that indirectly it was in many ways analogous to the Hindu view. Melville too seems to be suggesting that the struggle between good and evil cannot be dichotomized. In all his works from Typee to Billy Budd one finds Melville accepting this approach. No doubt in Moby-Dick the struggle between Good and Evil takes a violent Manichaean turn. But Melville keeps the balance tightly in control. He does not allow evil to triumph completely. It is only in Pierre that Melville loses that artistic detachment which makes the work what it is. The

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Confidence-Man is a dark book too, but it portrays Melville's scepticism regarding the existence of good rather than a struggle between two opposite principles. All in all it is the 'double vision' that emerges from Melville's works.

Yet, Melville's approach to the problem is influenced by his Western sensibility. His is the rationalistic or the critical approach. Through the destruction of Taji, Ahab and Pierre, Melville no doubt shows that the problem of Truth cannot be solved merely with the help of one's intellect but in conjunction with one's intuition. Moby-Dick shows how empirical knowledge alone does not solve the mystery of the universe. Through the tragic struggle of Ahab and his consequent destruction Melville indirectly shows what an Indian consciously believes; that Truth is something that is lived and not merely logically comprehended. Ahab's futile attempt to fathom the unfathomable shows how different an approach it is from that of the East which accepts the fact that there are realities which cannot be clearly seen and comprehended and that any logical attempt to fit them into communicable propositions is futile. Too much insistence on the intellect as the only means to the solution of the mysteries of the universe has fatal consequences. Western man has tended to approach all his problems from the point of view of reason. The faculty of reason according to Western thought functions independently of the other faculties of man. The East takes
a different approach to reason. It is an integral not a distinct part of man's personality. To the solution of his problems, man in the East brings his whole personality into play. Taji, Ahab and Pierre and even the passive Bartleby are typical Westerners. They show a sickness of over-reason and super-intellectuality. Melville expressed his own view clearly when he wrote to Hawthorne:

I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head! I had rather be a fool with a heart, than Jupiter Olympus with his head. The reason the mass of men fear God, and at bottom dislike Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch.46

All through his works Melville shows how important a role a man's heart, his intuition and his sentiments, plays in his life. This struggle between the head and the heart as portrayed both in Melville's and Hawthorne's works will be discussed in the following chapter. Typee, Omoo, Redburn, White-Jacket, Ishmael, Amasa Delano and Clarel are some of the important characters who are able to survive in a world of monstrosities because they accept the importance of the intuitive faculty in man which leans towards love, compassion, forgiveness, resignation and brotherhood. Thus Melville highlights the primitive Christian virtues recorded in the Gospels which because of their insistence on intuitive

46 Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle, ch.8, p.109.
realization and non-aggressiveness come so close to the Eastern or Indian approach.

Another important reflection of the Indian approach in Melville's work can be seen in his portrayal of the misery that a life of isolation brings. Man according to Indian thought is a product of God, a finite part of an infinite Being. There is a cordial harmony between God and man. God is not an entity outside man, He is but the Self in man. The West tends to consider man in opposition to God. This tendency got special impetus after the Reformation removed the mediation of the Church and opened up a direct and personal approach to God. Hence the relationship between an individual and God became an 'I-you' relationship in which 'I' and 'You' became separate entities. Much of the intellectual torment of Western man arises because he holds God, man and nature as distinct entities. Rabindranath Tagore expressed the Indian attitude to God aptly when he stated,

...when man attains his highest end by merging the individual in the universal, he becomes free from the thraldom of pain.47

Melville shows the mistake Taji, Ahab and Pierre make in refusing to accept this fact. They not only do not treat

the universe as a larger part of themselves but also treat it as something hostile and inimical. All these three, sin by making self higher than God. The ego in each of them denies the supremacy of the whole. Bartleby is the most poignant example of what excessive self-awareness and isolation can do to a man.

Melville's letter to Hawthorne quoted above illuminates an important difference between the two approaches. The West has usually anthropomorphized God. There is an insistence for definition and form in the Western religions. Western man is not satisfied with the Eastern or Indian conception of the Supreme as a spiritual reality. The terms 'Eternal Spirit' or 'Supreme Consciousness' or 'Universal Will' do not satisfy him. According to Hindu belief God is not the highest form to be known but the highest being to be realized. Man in the West, has always wanted to know God and not succeeding in his efforts has come to the conclusion that either there is no God or if there was one, he is dead and hence there is a mere 'Nothingness' in the Universe. In extreme cases, he has presumed, like Ahab, that if there is a God, He is definitely hostile to man and therefore, must be defied and destroyed even at the risk of one's own destruction.

Ahab's approach to the white whale apart from being a monomaniac hunt for an object which is an embodiment of evil,
is also a typical western approach to Nature. In the West, Nature is looked upon with the spirit of subjugation and conquest. The ravages nature brings to man make him feel that she is malignant towards him. The Indians approach nature with a sense of harmony and repose, accepting its benignity and malignity with reverence, and in a spirit of acceptance and peace. Melville may not have been conscious of the Indian overtones in Ishmael's attitude to nature. But the latter's approach to Moby-Dick is to a great extent Indian. For Moby Dick as representing nature, possesses the attributes of the deities of the Indian Trimurti. Moby Dick is the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer all in one. It is Ahab's mistake to concentrate on a single aspect of Moby Dick and treat it as the only real one.