CONCLUSION

The motifs of death and rebirth, the motif of love, the motif of sleep, dream and supernaturalism and the motif of quest for self recurrently appear in the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. But with the changing vision of the poet, these motifs acquire new meanings. The psychological ideas of Freud, Jung and Lacan help us to view the motifs of the poems from the psychological angle by establishing a close resemblance with the life of the poet.

The motif of death and rebirth appears recurrently in the poems like “The Ancient Mariner,” “The Wanderings of the Cain,” “Kubla Khan,” “Psyche,” and “Self-Knowledge.” But this motif has a different meaning in each poem. In “The Ancient Mariner” death means sufferings, isolation and spiritual vacuum and the awareness of it is rebirth. The killing of albatross by Mariner is a moment of reckoning for the Mariner and as a result, he suffers death-in-life and spiritual anguish and at last he has a communion with God and utters: “He prayeth best who loveth best.” This is the moment of rebirth for the Mariner. But in “Kubla Khan” death means the loss of poetic inspiration and the regain of this inspiration is rebirth for the poet. The poem begins with the river meandering through valleys and gardens with incense bearing trees and finally disappearing into the caverns. As a result, the place becomes haunted and a woman wails for her demon lover. It erupts with swift intermittent bursts and huge vault like rebounding hail. The sacred river flows from the underworld. The river is associated with the conscious in terms of gardens and rills whereas the dark caverns and living catacombs signify the unconscious. The poem probes the journey of the river through various geographical regions and creates a sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice giving the poet a mingled pleasure. The serene movement of the river suggests the ease and harmony of the creative achievement of man before it disappears into oblivion. When the river returns to the underworld, the poetic inspiration fades. Coleridge knew that conscious mind is nourished by the unconscious and the images like ‘river,’ ‘fountain’ and ‘dome’ flow into one another and can be understood at many levels. It shows the process of association and disassociation of images in the unconscious mind. As Wilson Knight states:
The dome which Kubla khan so magnify decreed may, perhaps, stands for the achievement of Civilization, the artifact created by man from the wilderness. (Knight 97)

The poem, which begins with the river plunging into the underworld ends with the divine madness of the poet, is about the mysterious unconscious sources of creative inspiration.

In “Psyche” the motif of rebirth is revealed through a kind of revelation about the true nature of love to the poet. Coleridge feels that true love can never be achieved in the ordinary human condition and we hurt and destroy others in the name of love, as the butterfly destroys the caterpillar. In another poem “Self-Knowledge,” the motif of rebirth acquires a different meaning with the broadening of Coleridge’s vision about life. The poem is woven around the old Greek maxim, ‘know thyself’ which Coleridge finds impossible. There is moment of rebirth for Coleridge when he turns to God Who may offer a solution. Coleridge’s “Epitaph” treats the motif of death and rebirth in a different manner. Coleridge who spent a kind of death-in-life hopes to find a life-in-death. Uncertain about everything but his lifelong need for certainty, Coleridge records the earthly suffering that has brought him to an end that he hopes will be a beginning. He had written years earlier that Thought and Reality are “two distinct corresponding Sounds, of which no man can say positively which is the Voice and which is the Echo” (Coburn 2557) and we find him constructing such balances, but declaring that his Being rests in the coming together of opposites.

The motif of love is the most recurrent motif in the poetry of Coleridge. But this motif is presented differently by Coleridge in his poems. Coleridge felt a ‘lack’ of love in his childhood when his father died and Coleridge’s deep-felt need for affection became his constant poetic theme. With the help of Lacan’s theory of lack and desire, the motif of love has been explored. The poems written in the early years of his life are concerned with physical love. When his two love-affairs, with Sara Hutchinson and Mary Evans failed, he got frustrated and did not find satisfaction in physical love and he moved to spiritual love as he found that the marriage of two individuals proved to be unsatisfactory expression of the higher, universal power of
love. Coleridge became more philosophical in the later years of his life. He always wanted to seek absolute union in love but as it was not possible, he turned towards God. His poems also celebrate the different forms of love like the love of nature, love of father for son, love of daughter for father and above all the love of God.

Coleridge’s poetry abounds in sleep, dreams and supernatural motifs. These motifs also acquire different meanings with the changing vision of the poet. When the poet is in happy mood, sleep is welcome and dreams are full of life and joy as in “The Ancient Mariner,” “The Garden of Boccaccio,” “Religious Musings,” and “Songs of Pixies” but the same sleep becomes terrible and horrifying with the change in context of the poems and dreams become dark dreams with the changing vision of the poet as in “The Pains of Sleep,” “Dejection, an Ode,” “Christabel,” “Ode to Departing Years” and “The Wanderings of Cain.” The motif of supernaturalism also appears recurrently in the poetic world of the poem. But sometimes it heightens the mystery and horror and sometimes it reveals the conflict between good and evil. The supernatural images sometimes become terrifying and sometimes philosophical. For example the image of 'phantom’ in the poem “Phantom” is a more terrifying spectre, a diabolical force energised by a corrupted will. The same phantom figure becomes a beneficent agent of ultimate Being in “Apologia Pro Vita Sua.”

The poems written in the later years of his life like “Phantom,” “Human Life,” “Limbo,” “Time, Real and Imaginary,” “Self-Knowledge,” “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” “Psyche,” “The Blossoming of a Solitary-Date Tree,” and “Love’s Apparition and Evanishment” are concerned with confronting the mystery of Being, the hidden reality. The motif of quest for self appears recurrently in these poems. The poet found himself on the “threshold,” in the poem “Limbo” and consequently suffered anxiety, doubt and the pangs of being an outsider. Man must risk himself in order to find himself; and like the Mariner, he must enter the abyss and endure isolation and loneliness before he can begin to discover what lies on the other side. (Kessler 7) As Coleridge moved into his later years, traditional metaphor, “a mere metaphor, or conventional exponent of a thing,” (Coleridge, H.N. 110) became inadequate as a means of expressing a Being that was steadily moving beyond the world’s appearances. Coleridge felt that the poetic image as a representation could only re-present the already known; it was of questionable aid in creating a new self,
the Being about to be. Thoughts, not things, are the objects of the mind and
Coleridge believed that the greatest minds do not depend on the world to reflect
them and “rest content between thought and reality, as it were in an intermundium of
which their own living spirit supplies the substance and their imagination the ever-
varying form” (Shawcross 20).

Quite early in life Coleridge began suffering the anxiety that was to pervade
his later poems: that doubt and ‘negative Being’ which he came to see as a necessary
stage in his spiritual growth. Like an organism, he needed to divide in order to
recreate himself (Kessler 9). Coleridge in his later poetry tries to resolve the conflict
between the opposites. Coleridge’s journey to his “ultimate Being,” may continue
beyond the “Epitaph” he created for himself. The Life-in-Death that appeared as a
nightmare figure to the suffering Mariner is no longer an image but an abstraction,
grounded in experience and not in an object or poem - the “toil of breath” suggesting
the poet’s articulations as well as the man’s struggle for Being. Paradox remains the
best means of confronting despair and Coleridge accepts a past discovery (“Found
dead in life”) that unites with a future possibility (“May here find life in death,” a
forgiveness that is to be).

The motif of quest for self is treated in a different way in his later poetry.
Coleridge wanted to seek an ‘Absolute’ self, ‘Permanent’ Being and ‘Real’ but
‘Real’ as Lacan says, is impossible to define and can not be conceptualised, the final
reconciliation was not in his hands. Coleridge tried to resolve the conflict between
the opposites but the final reconciliation was not in his hands.

Thus meaning of the recurrent motifs of death and rebirth, motif of love,
motif of sleep, dream and supernaturalism and motif of quest for self undergo a
subtle change with the changing vision of the poet.
WORKS CITED

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