Chapter V

CONCLUSION
**YEATS'S LATE SYMBOLISM**

The Great Wheel from *A Vision*, showing the twenty-eight phases from dark of the moon to full and back to dark, and the four symbols of flower, cup, fruit, and sceptre, which are related to the four elements.
CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

What they undertook to do
They brought to pass;
All things hang like a drop of dew
Upon a blade of grass
- W. B. Yeats
(Gratitude to the Unknown Instructors)

Literature is the efflorescence of culture and culture has its roots in the mythology of a nation. It may be said that myths are the works of primitive man's literature. The difference between modern literature and myths is that literature is the work of an individual poet or writer whereas myths are neither authored by any single person, nor written by co-authors. Myths are the products of a community created over a prolonged period running into thousands of years to form themselves and emerge out of collective unconscious of a race in a territory. Myths are the out come of a community's common interests, aspirations, fears and dreams symbolically expressed in the form of fantastic stories and presented as codified messages or pieces of advice or instructions regarding the ways of the world, solutions to problems and giving ethical laws of conduct. They are the quintessential lessons of morality and norms of social inter-action. If myths are compared to theoretical teachings the rites and rituals connected with them may be compared to the practical in a science class.
In all nations, myths have entered largely into literature. There is hardly any book of literary value where an author or poet has not borrowed something from the source of mythology. If the readers are acquainted with the original stories from mythology they can easily identify the basis of the plot and theme of a novel or a story; and for the benefit of those who are not acquainted with the myths the author or the editor has to give explanatory notes or the reader has to refer to some classical dictionary of mythology from where the poet has borrowed the seed; otherwise it becomes impossible for him to understand the allusions met with in the poem or the novel.

Indian literature is replete with allusions from The Ramayana and The Mahabharata just as European literature is profusely inlaid with classical mythological references. In literature myths are very often used as

"... an aesthetic means to explore and recreate the individual experiences and to apprehend the contemporary man's response to the central question of his time... It provides "an essential matrix" to poetry". 1

The cultural values of a race are articulated through myths. Myths were created in primitive societies as a habit of human mind and the urge to communicate experiences by colouring them with imagination. In their book Theory of Literature Rene Wellek and Austin Warren observe that a myth is the spoken part of ritual or the story which the ritual enacts.
"... myth comes to mean any anonymously composed story telling of origins and destinies: the explanations a society offers its young why the world is and why we do as we do, its pedagogic images of the nature and destiny of man."²

considering the didactic qualities of myths and legends they should be studied for the messages codified in them. They tell us about the roots of our traditions and unfold before us the mysteries of life and death with cohesive themes and specific structures.

If myths are the literature of ancient times, literature today creates myths of modern world. It may be said that there is a cause and effect relationship between myths and literature. This may be explained by taking the analogy of trees in a forest. The vast number of myths from different countries of the world are like vegetation in a dense forest. There are a variety themes in myths as there are variety of trees in a forest. The original trees in the forest bear fruits and the ripe fruits yield seeds that are scattered around by men and animals. The seeds again sprout into new trees. Just so, old myths provide us the seeds of thoughts and experiences of human predicaments. Ancient myths and legends provide blueprints for new construction of literary art. In doing so the basic problems, solutions and skills of narration are modified and reshaped into new myths to suit the needs of time and changing values of life. This is an unending process according to the laws of nature and those of literary landscape.
Therefore, a poet exploits ancient myths to present his views about life. This is as natural as the growth of vegetation in a forest.

Transmutation, transportation and combination of myths may also occur as an inevitable part of civilization. Myths travel to far off places, so that acculturation of themes and plots takes place. Some centuries ago a community had to live with its own myths confined to its geographical boundaries due to lack of transport facilities; but today besides our own myths and culture we have access to the myths of different nations. The monumental works done by Sir James Frazer and Miss Jessie Weston by compiling and arranging the myths of the world are great assets to the students of myth. Robert Graves compiled Greek myths and Peter Ellis did an equally important work for Irish and Celtic myths. In pre-Christian times travellers from Greece, Rome, China and Middle East exchanged myths and the same process has continued till today. Myths have taught us to search for meaning in life. In many cases myths have become so closely associated with religion that it is impossible to separate myths and religion.

In the 19th century a science emerged to study the activities of human mind and social interaction. Psychologists like Sigmund Freud, C. G. Jung and Adler have given us new insights into behavioural science and the thought process of man as an individual and in relation to society. They revealed the psychology of myths through the study of the
deep dark crater in human mind called collective unconscious which is the basis of all our mental activities and also the source of all myths in the world.

Jung wrote that myths are the dreams of a race carried over from the beginning of human species till the present day. He maintained that very strong emotional experiences and the primitive man's reactions to them have been permanently recorded in the minds of men and women. Infact mind is a very vague term because it does not have any physical existence in human body. Whatever feelings, emotions, traumas and pleasant encounters the primitive man experienced were infact recorded in the brain. They have been collectively inherited by all human beings irrespective of geographical or linguistic differences. Hence there are noticeable similarities in the myths of all the countries.

The theory of myth criticism is based on the findings that every writer or poet creates his work of art from the blue prints called myths and he does it because these blue prints are imprinted in our unconscious mind.

Jung's theory of collective unconscious and myths in relation to literature is very important for studying the mythopoeic vision of a poet. A creative artist is quite susceptible to realize the passions and problems of mankind. He has a gift of nature to formulate them artistically into literary artifacts. In the book Principles of Literary
Criticism Lassellis Abercrombie mentioned that Socrates once interrogated many poets regarding what their poems meant. Nobody could explain his own poems. Socrates concluded that poets write poems not because they are intelligent but because they have a special gift to write poems. This is similar to Plato's theory of "inspiration" regarding poetry. In this connection David Daiches observed that -

"The poet was a possessed creature not using language in the way that normal human beings do but speaking in a divinely inspiring frenzy".3

Thus a poet is very close to a prophet because he delivers the word of God. He draws inspiration from collective unconscious or The Great Memory, which is the storehouse of all human emotions and experiences, problems and solutions. He finds the parallels of his experiences in the Great Memory or Anima Mundi as W. B. Yeats calls it.

Psychologists studied the process behind the act of literary creation and special qualities in it. Just as a poet's personal life is reflected in his lyrics similarly his diction, allusions and metaphors reveal his knowledge and indebtedness to the tradition to which he belongs. It is true of the characters referred to in his poems, plays or novels. The images and symbols in his work show a distinct link between his work and the distant past, because they show "some perennial aspect of human mind" so that the poet is at once

"more primitive, as well as more civilized, than his contemporaries".4
This is a mode of writing in which characters and situations from myths are used to explain the everyday experiences of modern man. Persons with certain psychological traits and typical situations enact our problems and become recurring images and symbols to create a pattern in poetry. Jung calls them the archetypes. In the study of myths anthropologists and psychologists explain this aspect of human society. This method is applied to discuss imagery in poetry. The point made by Jung, Northrop Frye and Maud Bodkin is that a poet draws on archetypal images to narrate personal experiences in terms of universal models. Dr. R. K. Singh remarks -

"... a poet is expected to transmute the external experiences into a vision of eternity, and archetypes are the means to transmute the personal destiny into the destiny of mankind. Poets with archetypal vision use myths and images as very real".5

Hence myth becomes an archetypal design of a poet for articulating personal views in poetry. It is an intriguing fact that using myths or archetypes in literature is a literary art which requires a certain temperament to weave experiences and myths into poetry to give it a balance of meaning and form, as well as a combination of personality and impersonality, where the temporal touches the permanent. In doing this the poet recreates the pictures of the remote past to form present shapes of "being".
Though it is the habit of human mind to find parallels of our life experiences in the remote past of mankind, poets and writers have exploited myths for artistic purpose. Shakespeare created new myths in his own way about typical human idiosyncrasy in the characters of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. There have been attempts to typify psychological traits by taking examples from myths and legends symbolically but in the 20th century, due to the extensive research in the fields of anthropology psychology and mythology modern poets have had easy access to world of myths.

Poetry received a new boost in this direction and myth making became a tool to unearth types of human behaviour so that myths are reflected in poetry more than before. Poetry found the support of "Anima Mundi" and myths became structural principles in the archetypal designs of a poet which is an aesthetic creation of parallels in life.

Myth critics like Northrop Frye, Richard Chaze, Kenneth Burke and Herbert Weisinger found new ways to appreciate literature in relation to myths and reality. Critics also are interested in acknowledging a poet’s private mythology.

"More important is the fact that every poet has his private mythology, his own spectrascopic band or peculiar formation of symbols of much of which he is quite unconscious... the same psychological analysis may be extended to the interplay of characters... only in relation to literary conventions".
Literature and myths are inseparable. Since earliest times literary artists, poets and playwrights have used myths. Kalidas wrote plays based on Ramayana and also on the myth of Shakuntala. Bhavabhuti, Bhasa and other Sanskrit playwrights used myths from Shiv Puran and Vishnu Puran.

In Europe Virgil’s Aeneid, Dante’s Divine Comedy, Milton’s Paradise Lost used mythic perception to show not only the past and present but even to predict future of humanity by creating imbibing symbols of human nature. A poet transforms a myth or a legend into a frame work of a poem to express symbolically the discovery of his self and the world mythologems.

(2)

Compared to the poets of the Elizabethan age and the age of Pope and Dryden the romantic poets used their mythopoeic art in a more direct and obvious manner. Wordsworth hardly came out of the Lake District Landscape with his obsession with nature as god, friend and teacher. For him pastoral life was of immediate concern but Coleridge, Keats and Shelley had mythopoeic vision to send out moral messages through poetry. Coleridge’s The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Kubla Khan, Shelley’s poetic play Prometheus Unbound and Keats’ Odes concerning Greek myths and culture are clear examples of this art. William Blake’s use of christian myths can not be forgotten.
In the 20th century poetry underwent a number of changes in themes and techniques. T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* are fine examples of using mythological allusions. W. H. Auden, Ezra Pound and Ted Hughes had their own ways of myth making in poetry to relate the truth about life, but W. B. Yeats had a unique way of using myths. He created his personal mythology by mentioning the related mythical persons as metaphors. His short poems are potent messages about man's predicaments as his longer poems are mythological translations of life.

(3)

This dissertation is an effort to trace Yeats' use of ancient myths in his poems to give expression to his poetic talent and personal agonies. It is aimed to show how he has used his creative prowess to camouflage his emotions with mythological counterparts of modern man and how he has intellectualized and symbolized his likes and dislikes, love and hate, honour and insults in the cloak of mythology to give them universal color. His poetry mostly falls in the category of sincere poetry defined by him. Therefore, he did not grumble or grudge the disillusionments in life but expressed them in poetry all through his life.

As a poet Yeats has been a living counterpart of Rodin's "Musee" - A poet as a thinker. Every time he faced a happy or sad situation, mostly sad, he got new insight into the problem and put his pen to narrate the experience symbolically to forget the mental bruises caused to him. Being very
sentimental by nature he often repeated the events mentally to
 crystalize them into poems. He was a man of vision and
 perseverance with tremendous optimism and stellar performance
 in poetry. He was not to be daunted by frustrations in life.
 Loneliness isn’t exactly an ideal situation in life, but Yeats
 used solitude and sorrow to give his readers an insight into
 life’s bitter pills and showed how one can digest sorrow and
 create pearls in poetry.

(4)

A painter turned poet, Yeats had the natural talent for
 picturesque description. He not only described the landscape
 and ocean but also the inner topography of mind in his lyrics.
 He differed from Eliot in his use of myths in an important way.
 Eliot had a great concern for society and the crumbling values
 of life which he expressed by comparing the ancient cities, and
 social life with the contrast seen in the contemporary society.
 His mythological allusions provide information and solutions to
 be noted and followed by all the nations of the world. He was a
 modern preacher of virtues and values with purely altruistic
 intentions. Yeats, on the contrary, was too busy with his
 personal problems, his local politics and national pride. His
 poems deal with acute agonies within a limited range of social
 experiences, though they are intensely universal in their
 treatment and effects.
Basically Yeats was a lonely poet and consequently a seeker of knowledge. His attitude to life was very plain and sincere. He was always very sensitive to the problems of his own life as well as those concerning justice, humanism and national pride. In his youth he was highly influenced by the utopian world of ancient myths and legends which inculcated in him a love of humanism and natural justice but when he encountered the harsh reality in political field and personal life he was dis-illusioned and frustrated.

Having spent his growing up years in Sligo, a countryside in Ireland, he drew his inspiration from natural landscape, the unexplored terrain and a large number of Celtic myths heard from the grand parents, mother and residents of sligo. As a result of this his poems are very much rooted in the landscape and myths born in that countryside. He produced fantastic long narrative poems like The Wanderings of Oisín, The Song of Happy Shepherd, The Sad Shepherd, Anusuya and Vijaya etc. He brought animation in the ancient mythological stories through his dialogue poems. The absurdity and fantasy of myths caught his imagination and boosted his creativity.

The second chapter deals with politics as metaphor. It covers his political poems. Yeats used myths as metaphors and he created pen pictures of many patriots and political leaders of Ireland. John O'Leary, Kevin O'Higgins, Parnell and Robert Gregory were glorified to make them immortal in literature. He revealed his resentment at the ill-treatment given to his
political leaders and gravely lamented their death. In the poem
The Municipal Gallery Re-visited all those persons are
remembered and referred to directly or at least hinted at.

"Around me the images of thirty years
An ambush, pilgrims at the water-side,
Casement upon trial, half hidden by the bars,
Guarded; Griffith staring in hysterical;
Kevin O'Higgins's countenance that wears pride,
A gentle questioning look that cannot hide
A soul incapable of remorse or rest
A revolutionary soldier kneeling to be blessed". 7

He gave due respect to his personal relations of blood as well
as friendship. Yeats never failed to acknowledge his
indebtedness to all those who shaped his career and gave him
solace in the times of trouble. All these persons are thanked
in one way or the other by paying them tributes in his poems.
Lady Gregory had been his mentor and godmother who collaborated
with him in writing many books and articles. He was faithful to
friends, to his associates and made them immortal by weaving
them in the poems of his socio-political background. He wrote -

"John Synge, I and Augustus Gregory thought
All that we did, all that we said or sang
Must come from contacts with the soil, from that
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong
We three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man". 8

He was a patriot in his own way. Though he might not
have actively participated in the actual freedom movement he
showed great interest in the day-to-day affairs of the
nationalists and encouraged the spirit of nationalism in the
minds of freedom fighters.
"Yeats' nationalism... was primarily Literary and artistic, not political; Concerned more with the cultivation of the taste of his people than with oratory and confabulations of the parties and groups around him. Through art and literature he sought to heal the old breach between the Catholic and Protestant parts - to unite Montagu and Capulet in the one movement". 9

He used Irish mythology to awaken the spirit of nationalism in the minds of his country men and mythicized the great leaders to give them their due share of appreciation and expressed gratitude for their work or lamented their deaths to make the masses aware that they have lost great patriots and they should remember those people.

(5)

Romantic poetry had taught him sincerity to one's emotions and to take life at face value. Besides this, having lived a very protected life with limited social interaction, Yeats found more interest in myths, magic, occult sciences and personal relations than society at large, and the ways of the world. He was an introvert by nature and dived deep into the hot waters of introspection. Thus his poetry springs only from emotional sincerity. The major themes of his poetry are his unrequited love, Irish national movement, the patriots and committed leaders of society, the death of his near and dear persons and people's rights in the civic affairs.

At the age of 24 he experienced what is called love-at-first sight. Since then Maud Gonne became an obsession for him. Her friendship and the keen desire to win her love and to marry
her seemed to be his life's mission. Being extremely emotional in this matter he wrote hundreds of poems about almost every new incident that took place in his love life. To add insult to injury Maud Gonne rejected his marriage proposals five times in a period of over 28 years. This is perhaps the only example of its kind. The talented, gorgeous and charming Maud Gonne became the most prestigious person in his life. He could not marry her but during his long period of wooing he produced scores of poems on each aspect of his love life. After her marriage to Major MacBride his attitude to life in general and to love in particular changed and he looked at it stoically and set about rebuilding his life.

Maud Gonne had been the source of his poetic inspiration, and his "Anima", but having rejected his love she became his 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. Keats' enchantress was atleast kind enough to disappear from his life for ever; but Maud Gonne was the living enchantress who tantalized him for years. In that she was more cruel to him than kind. As such she was the White Goddess, an epitome of feminine cruelty. She was not romantic by nature but earthly in her outlook to life. She ruled the subconscious of the romantic minded William Yeats. She has been at once his muse and crone. It may be noted how Yeats identified her with the fish or a mermaid in the poem The Song of Wandering Aengus or a queen in The Old Age of Queen Maeve. She turned all his dreams into mighntnares, which is said to be the cruelest aspect of the White Goddess. However, though
she behaved in this manner with him Yeats never compared her
directly with the White Goddess nor made any remarks to this
effect; but Maud Gonne bears a close resemblance to the White
Goddess. The fish and the fisherman symbols have been used in
many of Yeats poems like The Fish, The Fisherman and likened
her to a queen in many poems and plays but the main comparison
of Maud Gonne has always been with Helen of Troy as far as
passions and personality were concerned. She had been compared
to and was symbolized as queens, the princesses and
enchantresses from Celtic and Greek mythology.

(6)

William Yeats was born in a Protestant Christian family
but his father was influenced by J. S. Mill’s Utilitarianism
and mother was an Evangelical, so the confused poet took interest
in myths, magic and Pagan beliefs and turned a non-believer.
This view of life and religion found way into his poetry,
specially in his death poems. He believed in incarnation and
rebirth and also in life after death.

As a romantic poet he considered death as an escape
from life and a door to the other world where lovers can
ultimately unite. He did not fear death but looked at it as an
interval between two lives as Pagans believed. He wanted to
probe the mysteries of death. For this he took interest in
esoteric and occult practice and became a member of the Golden
Dawn Club.
Though he was never daunted by the idea of death he disliked old age. In his youth he often sympathized with old men and women and wrote ballads about *Old Moll Magee*, *The Old Foxhunter* and *The Old Men Admiring Themselves in Water* and *Old Father O’Hart*. As he grew old he began to hate old age and considered it as a burden, — "... a paltry thing, a tattered coat upon a stick" etc.

He considered old age as a nightmare and even confessed that he would like to live his life again though it meant suffering the hardships of boyhood. The dreamy sweetness of his early poems gave way to bitter realization of ageing. *The Tower*, *Sailing to Byzantium*, *The Black Tower*, *The Man and The Echo* and *An Acre of Grass* show his disgust about old age, and the limits imposed on old men by the society.

In 1934 he got himself operated for rejuvenation and the success of the operation gave him a new lease of life and energy. He seemed fresh in mind and body, but in his *Last Poems* the thought of approaching death again made him pensive. He began to look forward to life after death and a search for it.

"... in that endless research into life, death, God, that is every man’s revery, he expresses himself with the indirection of a Zen Buddhist, and offers the conclusion... that Eternity expresses itself through contradictions".

He aspires for eternity and immortality and also admits its uncertainty. He believed that an eternal circuit exits. It is the circuit of birth-death-birth. He had two attitudes towards death, and in his last poems he was mainly pre-occupied with
them. He believed that death is a man made illusory. This new
is expressed in Under Ben Bulben which is Yeats’ own epitaph.

"Many times man lives and dies
Between his two ternities
That of race and that of soul
And ancient Ireland knew it all
Whether a man dies in his bed
Or the rifle knocks him dead,
A brief parting from those dear
Is the worst man has to fear".

The other view about death is expressed in Lapis Lazuli. Death
is born with a man and death is infact liberty. He says that
‘Unity of Being’ is to be found only in death. This idea is
very close to John Donne’s poem Death Be Not Proud, that man
must dare to face death because it is not an end at all.

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REFERENCES


8. Ibid, P. 603.


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