



## Coleridge and his supernaturalism...

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### Abstract

Supernaturalism is something that is totally different from the natural things. It is something that is above and beyond what is natural. Common laws and observations are not enough to explain supernaturalism. Actually, it is a word that comes from the Latin word 'super' meaning 'above' and 'nature' which means 'nature'. In his discussion of supernaturalism, Mr. Hobsen Quinn explains the meaning by contrasting it with natural. The natural is 'comprehended' while the supernatural is 'apprehended'. In English literature there were many writers who had written on the theme of supernaturalism. But it was Samuel Taylor Coleridge who showed his mastery in the particular field of supernaturalism. Here, this paper attempts to deal with the elements of supernatural used by S.T Coleridge in his three major poems - 'Kubla Khan', 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel'.

**Keywords-** Supernaturalism, observation, nature, apprehend and element.

### INTRODUCTION

Romantic Movement was a significant incident in the history of English literature. It was a literary, artistic and intellectual movement that took place towards the end of the eighteenth century. Literary works that were produced in the Romantic period were known as Romantic literature. This period was enriched by a vast number of poems written by the Romantic poets. Romantic poets were divided into two groups- the first generation of the romantic poets and the second generation of the romantic poets. William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey belonged to the first generation of the romantic poets. On the other hand, Lord Byron, P. B Shelley and John Keats were the poets belonging to the second generation of the romantic poets.

#### A brief sketch on Samuel Taylor Coleridge.....

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an eminent Romantic poet. He was born in the year 1772 and

was only two years junior to William Wordsworth. Coleridge took his first formal education at Christ Hospital School, London. There he met with Charles Lamb who later became a famous essayist. After the completion of his Education at Christ Hospital School, he was sent to Jesus College, Cambridge University. Since his days at Cambridge, Coleridge had been suffering from the instability of nervousness. To get rid of this nervousness, he started to take opium. The first evidence that we have of his taking of opium was Nov.28, 1791. In a letter to his brother George, Coleridge wrote-" opium never used to have any disagreeable effects on me, but it has on many". Gradually his constant taking of opium had become a habit and he became a great opium addict. In the year 1798 Coleridge extended his helping hand with William Wordsworth resulting the publication of the " Lyrical Ballads" which is considered as the manifesto of the Romantic movement. This book was consisted of twenty three poems, out of these poems nineteen

were written by William Wordsworth and the remaining four poems were written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Actually, there was an agreement between William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge that Wordsworth would write poems on the theme of nature. On the other hand Coleridge would deal with poems on the themes of supernatural. Anyway, this great Romantic poet wrote a number of poems throughout the whole range of his life but among them the three important poems were written on the supernatural themes. It is the fact that Coleridge showed his superb mastery or craftsmanship and uniqueness in his three important supernatural poems-' The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', 'Kubla khan' and 'Christabel'.

#### **Differences between Coleridge and the Gothic novelists in their works of supernatural....**

S.T Coleridge was the greatest poet of the supernatural in the whole gamut of English poetry. But the fondness for the supernatural can be seen even in the literature of the 18th century or in the Neo- classical era. Few writers like Horace Walpole, Mrs. Anne Radcliff, Gregory Lewis, Clara Reve produced a different kind of novels which were known as 'Gothic Romance'. Gothic Romances were the novels of terror. In their works few common things were chiefly used to produce horror and mystery. Such things were - haunted castles and houses, Abbeys with secret passages and subterranean vaults, grated dungeons and ruined piles. Although these novels were lacking of refinement and subtlety.

But Coleridge's use of Supernaturalism was at once exciting and convincing. He used it as a part of the wider area of human experience. He used supernaturalism in his poems with total conviction. His presentation of supernaturalism never seemed to be an artificial one rather it was "for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith".

Coleridge's use of Supernaturalism in reference to his three important poems -' The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', 'Kubla khan' and 'Christabel' are discussed as below.

#### **'The RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER'**

Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is one of the most important supernatural poems along with his other supernatural poems like - 'Kubla khan' and 'Christabel'. In fact this is the first poem among all other poems in the list of poems in 'The Lyrical Ballads' (1798). Supernatural elements are scattered here and there in this poem. Coleridge has shown his craftsmanship in dealing with wonderful note of Supernaturalism and horror in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'.

This poem is an experience faced by a Mariner sailing from his native city to Polar Regions. At the very beginning, it was a fine journey indeed. But after crossing the equator, a terrible storm which was 'tyrannous and strong' hits the ship towards South and finally the ship falls in an iceberg in Antarctica. Meanwhile an Albatross' who came through the fog' comes up and it is given good food by the sailors. The 'albatross' is taken as a good omen because with its presence, the ice starts to break and the ship makes its way out. It was really a 'Christian soul'. But one day the ancient Mariner impulsively shoots the albatross and it died. As a result, the albatross brings the bad weather back as the breeze stops to blow, the sun becomes bloody red and all of the crew of the ship feel thirsty Coleridge writes - "water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink". They accuse the ancient Mariner for their ill suffering as it was he who killed the innocent Albatross without any reason but just for getting impulsive pleasure. So they hang the dead Albatross around the mariner's neck.

After a few days of such situation, the Mariner sees a ship approaching from the West which brings a light of hope in the mariner's mind. when it comes to him, it is found that the ship has not been an ordinary ship rather it is a ghost ship inhabited by two spirits the 'death' and 'life in death' These spirits start to play with the Mariner and his shipmates bringing death to all if the sailors make the Mariner physically and mentally exhausted.

His suffering and miserableness continue for long seven days and nights until he sees water snakes in the water and blesses them unaware. With his blessing to such creatures like the 'water -

snakes', his sufferings come to an end and the hanging albatross falls from his neck down. Moreover, his good fortune returns to him, the winds start to blow and the ship once again starts to make way. To add this, the dead sailors are come back their lives for the second time. But when the ship is towards home, it sank unfortunately in the whirlpool resulting the death of the sailors, while the ancient Mariner is somehow saved by a hermit, a pilot and a pilot boy of a boat. Since then for the rest of his life the Mariner is seen to wander and relate whole story of the ship as a result and penance for shooting the innocent Albatross.

### Supernaturalism in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'

'The Rime of the ancient Mariner' is considered as the masterpiece of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge's superb use of Supernatural elements in this poem are highly praiseworthy. Naturally, most of the incidents that happen to the Mariner after the killing of the 'Christian - soul' Albatross are full of supernatural and mysterious. For example- the manner in which the 'Spectre- ship' appears near the mariner's ship is full of supernatural. It comes without tide or wind. Through it's ribs the Sun peers' as Through a grate'. The description of the ship with its' ribs' and its' gossamer like sails' fill the readers like us with terror. It is a strange mystery that the ship should sail on the sea without wind and without a tide while the mariner's ship stands still' like a painted shop upon a painted ocean'. Surely, all of these events happen because of the supernatural forces Again' death' and' life in death' who thick man's blood with cold are the only crew of the ship. Moreover, the sudden death of the mariner's shipmates and his seeing of their souls fly from their bodies and every soul goes past him " like the whiz of my cross - bow" are fully filled up with supernatural flavor. In this poem Coleridge also paints horrors and describes supernatural in few words while giving the description of the appearance of the life - in - death. The following line shows the appearance of the life - in - death -

"Her lips were red, her looks were free/ Her locks were yellow as gold/ Her skin was as white as leprosy".

Next two lines follow as - "the night more life - in - death was she - Who thick man's blood with cold"

Here he tries to deal with the sight of the ghost woman's freezing effect on a man's blood. Again after his praising of the 'creatures', the dead Albatross falls of from around the Mariner's neck bringing his suffering to an end is an instance of the Supernatural event in' The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Besides this, the ancient Mariner also has a terrifying experience when the dead crew are revived to life. The poet says - " The dead men gave groan / they groaned, they stirred, they all uprose/ nor Speak, nor moved their eyes/ they raised their limbs like lifeless tools. . . . We were a ghostly crew"

Besides this, the mariner's ship is driven by Supernatural power and here happens the strongest thing. The dead men groan and rise. They do not speak or move their eyes, but they start steering the ship. The body of the mariner's nephew stands by him -' knee to knee'. They pull at the same rope. sweet sounds come from their dead men groan and rise. They do not speak or move their eyes, but they start steering the ship. The body of the Mariner's nephew stands by him -' knee to knee'. They pull at the same rope sweet sounds come from their dead bodies when they gather round the mast to pray God. A troop of angelic spirits have entered the bodies. These spirits finally leave the dead bodies and appear in their own forms of light. All of these events happen to the ancient Mariner is brought about by supernatural forces. He suffers because the spirits of the Polar Regions wants to avenge the death of the innocent Albatross.

### Supernaturalism in "Kubla Khan"

'Kubla Khan' is another important poem written by S. T Coleridge also bears few supernatural elements in a real sense. Coleridge published the poem under the title' Kubla khan': or A vision in a Dream'. About the composition of the poem, we are informed that this poem was written after a deep sound sleep slept by Coleridge. At the time of

composing this poem, the health condition of Coleridge was not in good order. Before the composition of, 'Kubla Khan' he was reading 'purchase' pilgrimage' wherein the description of the Mongol Emperor Kubla Khan had been stated. In this book there was a line like - 'Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed with a wall'. Then he went directly to the lap of sleep and it was because of the high impact of opium. He slept almost for three hours and in such sleepy situation he composed a poem consisting of 200 - 300 lines. With his usual creativity of imagination and mystery.

After waking up from his sleep, Coleridge started to note down the poem from the lane of his memory. But just after the composition of only 54 lines, a peon came to meet him for an urgent reason and Coleridge spent a few hours with him. Soon after the departure of that man (peon) it was seen that he has forgotten to call up the remaining part of his dream

A note of mystery in 'Kubla Khan' has been seen in the description of the pleasure dome to be built with a stately garden into it. The poet says - 'ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed with a wall'. J L Lower's book 'The Road to Xanadu' there was a perfect illustration of Coleridge's imaginative power which has transformed simple facts collected during his receding into something mysterious and impalpable. Coleridge's superb use of Supernaturalism has also been reflected in the adjacent atmosphere of the pleasure dome also. For instance, the river Alph flowing "Through caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea". The 'immeasurable river' and 'the sunless sea' stir in the readers' mind the feeling of mystery and even fear. Again in the delineation of the 'romantic chasm' which "slanted Down the green hill athwart a cedared cover" also bears a note of mystery and this sense of mystery is heightened by the mention by the line like - "woman wailing for her demon lover". Moreover, 'the caverns measurable to man', 'the intermittent burst of water from the fountain', 'the sunless sea', they all create a world of wonder and spell-making impact on the readers.

### **Supernaturalism in "Christabel"**

'Christabel' is another perfect example of supernatural poem written by S T Coleridge. Before introducing the supernatural elements in his poems Coleridge does not show any hurriedness. He takes his readers to the unfamiliar world of the Supernatural through the familiar world of reality. In 'Christabel' Coleridge slowly creates the Supernatural atmosphere. Before introducing Geraldine, he carefully presents the natural atmosphere with the color of supernatural in the very first line of the poem. The poet says - "Tis the middle of the night by the castle clock" and the owls have awakened the sleeping cock - "Tu-Whit. . . Tu-who". As soon as the castle clock strokes it indicates midnight, the owl starts hooting so that an uncanny Atmosphere is created. Again the description of the toothless mastiff bitch's responses to the striking of the clock of the tower and its ability to view the coffin of the dead mother of charitable also indicates Supernaturalism used by S. T. Coleridge. In one fine line he says - "sixteen short howls not over loud; Some say, she sees my lady's shroud" Coleridge does not expose Geraldine's evil nature immediately. The evil nature of Geraldine is first seen before the huge iron gate - "belike through pain". Again she expresses her reluctance in joining prayer to virgin Mary by saying of her weariness; she was an evil spirit who had been scared of God. Another example of Supernatural scene lying in the poem is while entering the hall, Christabel is able to have a look at the eye of Geraldine with the help of the dying ashes which produced "a tongue of light, a fit of flame". Actually Geraldine had the eye of a serpent. But Coleridge deliberately avoids to tell the readers about the real - identity of Geraldine. Again the repulsive look of Geraldine also brings a note of horror in the poem. Coleridge writes - "a sight to dream of, not to tell, O shield her! Shield sweet Christabel' Afterwards, Coleridge describes the ugly bosom of Christabel, he does it only through the description of its effect on the mind of Christabel. "The vision of fear, the touch and fun! She shrunk and shuddered, and saw again ( Ah, wow in me! Was it for thee / those gentle maid ! Such sights to see"

## CONCLUSION

S.T Coleridge, the great romantic poet is ever remembered to the entire world of English literature for his creative power of supernaturalism. It is this field of his writing, wherein he has displayed his craftsmanship. In contrast to the supernaturalism used by the 18th century Gothic writers, Coleridge's use of Supernaturalism is full of refinement and subtlety. His treatment of Supernaturalism is convincing and at the same time suggestive also. Coleridge does let his readers a free hand to use their imagination. Again it would have not been an exaggeration to say that in introducing supernaturalism in his poems, he strictly avoids abruptness. He takes his readers to the world of Supernaturalism through the world of familiar landscape and then slowly moves forward to exploit this faith and introduce the supernatural elements. His treatment of Supernaturalism in his poems are much enough to spell a magical influence on his readers. To conclude, it has to be admitted that like the epic poet Homer, and the greatest dramatist William Shakespeare, Coleridge too uses the supernatural as a component of the wider spectrum associated with human experience and not as an indispensable part of it.

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