

M.A - English

Semester - II

Paper - CC-6

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Topic:- "Keats's Odes grow directly out of inner conflicts."  
Explain

John Keats was one of the greatest poets of Romantic period of English literature. He was the last great poet of Romantic era. Although he lived a short span of life of twenty seven years only but in this short age he wrote his name with golden pen among great poets of English literature.

John Keats wrote some of the finest odes of English poetry. The odes of Keats deal basically with some of the conflicts that troubled Keats. These conflicts give to his odes a dramatic quality. The principal conflict, of course, is between the real world and the ideal world. Keats is always trying to escape to the world of imagination, the world of beauty, the world of perfection, such as, the world of the nightingale or the Grecian urn. But his escape is always obstructed or thwarted by a painful realization of the actualities of life. Almost each of the great odes of Keats reveals this conflict in one form or the other. The principal stress in the most important of these odes is a

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is a struggle between ideal and actual. They also imply the opposition between pleasure and pain, imagination and reason, fullness and privation, permanence and change, Nature and the human, art and life, freedom and bondage, waking and dream.

'Ode to a Nightingale' is the most popular ode of John Keats. In this poem the draught of vintage symbolizes an imaginative escape from reality. The longing to fade away in to the forest dim results from a desire to avoid another kind of fading away, namely, the melancholy dissolution of change and physical decay. The actual world is presented as the world of weariness, fever and fret, a world where palsy shakes a few and where youth, beauty and love are transient. This picture of the actual world is in direct opposition to the ecstasy of the nightingale and the golden world of Flora. The poem also contrasts the mortality of human beings with the immortality of the nightingale. Of course, Keats here thinks of the race of nightingales, and not the individual nightingale, though in the case of mankind he thinks not of the race but of the individual human being. The bird here represents a universal and undying voice, the voice of Nature. The poem is thus about man's world as contrasted with the world of Nature or death contrasted with deathlessness. The bird is in harmony with its environment, unlike man who is in competition with his ("No hungry generations

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tread thee down"); and the bird can not conceive of its separation from the world which it expresses and of which it is a part. It is in this sense that the nightingale is immortal. Man knows that he is born to die, knows 'what thou among the leaves hast never known', and this knowledge overshadows man's life and all his songs. Such knowledge overshadows this poem and gives it its special poignancy.

In 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' the duality of the theme is indicated in the very opening stanza where Keats gives us a contrast between something unchanging (the urn) because it is dead, and something transient because it is alive. The poet goes on to say that music which is imagined is much sweeter than music which is actually heard. The music of the flute-players depicted on the Grecian urn cannot be actually heard by us. We must imagine what tunes they are playing. These unheard, but imaginable melodies are sweeter than the songs that we actually hear. Besides, the lover who is trying to kiss his beloved on the urn will always be seen in the same mood of pleasurable anticipation. In real life, love and beauty decline and fade; but the love and beauty depicted on the urn will remain ever fresh. In real life, spring is short, and the trees must shed their leaves. Similarly, in real life a musician will at least feel tired of playing his music and will stop. The enjoyment?

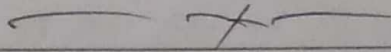
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of the pleasures of love in real life is followed by disgust and satiety. But the trees depicted on the urn will never shed their leaves, the melodist will for ever play his tunes, and the heart of the lover will always throb with passion while the beauty of the beloved will never fade.

The poem 'Ode on melancholy' is another poem of contrasts. The general idea of this poem is that true melancholy is to be found not in the sad and ugly things of life such as wolf's bane, nightshade, yew berries, the beetle and death moth but in the beauty and pleasures of the world. The world's true sadness dwells with beauty and joy, for the pain of suffering is less acute than the pain of knowing that beauty and joy will soon fade. The poem expresses Keats's experience of the habitual interchange and alteration of the emotions of joy and pain. The idea of the transitoriness of beauty and joy is vividly conveyed by means of concrete picture: melancholy, we are told, dwells with Beauty, Beauty that must die, and Joy whose hand is ever at his lips bidding adieu. Pleasure, we are told, turns to poison, in the very process of being enjoyed. True melancholy can be experienced only by him who has a capacity for enjoying the keenest pleasures. Thus, this poem too has a dual theme. It shows the inseparability of pain and pleasure, joy and

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sorrow, transience and permanence. The poem is about the inter-relations of beauty that must die, passing joy, aching pleasure.



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