



CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

PHILIP LARKIN:

THE MAN AND THE POET.

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I

The personality is centered around Rotter's theory of concept of locus of control. It tells that some men behave according to their internals motives and according to their ambitions. They are optimistic and believe in good change. But some men are externally controlled. Their locus of control is in the external world, i.e. situation, society and destiny. Such persons are mainly pessimistic and are fatalistic, Larkin seems to the category of external locus of control.

The literary personality of Philip Larkin developed from the very beginning of his school life. His parents had a good number of books and they always encouraged him by offering new books. Galsworthy and chesterton, the high priests of modernism encouraged him. His interest in reading was developed and his love for writing got an outlet. The lectures of eminent writers like Dylan

Thomas, Vernon Watkins and Orwell helped him to have a literary taste. The friendship of Alan Ross, John Wain and Kingsley Amis helped him to develop a healthy attitude to look at life. The two other influences shaped Philip Larkin and they were Yeats and Hardy. Hardy taught him that life around him and the language around him could be used as the material for poetry. Larkin, like Hardy believed in suffering. He accepted the philosophy of Hardy that fleeting nature of time plays a role in a life of man and man has no choice.

The personality of Philip Larkin moulded in the dark shadows of War, and in the chaotic environment. The World War Second (1939-1945) created a horror. The war brought misery and suffering. The people understood the futility and transitoriness of human life. The hopes cherished and people realised that they have to face the hardships, and uncertainty. They have to face the ultimate death. Larkin himself experienced a sense of separation. Larkin became pessimistic and melancholic. The attitude made him to meditate and contemplate about death.

The personality of Philip Larkin seems to be influenced by social changes. The 'modernism' entered and the social scenario changed. The new techniques, the new explorations destroyed the happiness of men & women. The industrilisation brought poverty and unemployment. The rich men and women were after the material prosperity. People enjoyed fashions, religious functions, parties and marriages. People lost their real happiness, the men & women became the victims of suicide, rape and of various diseases. Larkin made a vehement attack on modernism. He handled the subjects like loneliness, emptiness, death and failure. The duality developed as he got aware of the uncertainty in life.

Larkin's poetic talent and bitter experiences provoked him to write poems. He portrayed success and failure, happiness and sorrow. Certainty and uncertainty, transitoriness of human life were his subjects. The dual personality reflected in his poems as the personality was controlled by outward forces.

Philip Larkin was Born on 9 August 1922, at Coventry. His father was a city treasurer there. Philip Larkin was one of the most important writers to have emerged in Britain since the World War Second. He claims his childhood as a 'forgotten boredom'. He speaks that his biography could begin when he was twenty one and could omit nothing.

In 1930, he joined the school King Henry VIII.

Larkin himself says that he was

" very stupid until he could

concentrate on English".

Larkin got pleasure in playing and devising complex board games and reading. His parents took interest in reading books and they offered considerable number of books to Larkin.

Larkin says:

Not until I was much older

did I realise that most boys

of my class were brought up

to regard Galsworthy and

Chesterton as the apex of

modern literature and to think

Somerset Maugham a bit

"hot'. I was therefore lucky.1

Larkin developed his art of writing and reading. He started writing prose pieces and poems in the school magazine and worked with a fluency. He recalls his experience of his verse and says:

now verse which I sewed up into

little books, now prose, a thousand

words of night after homework.2

In 1940, he joined St. John's College, Oxford. He was shy and was introvert. He was a member of the University Jazz club and

of the English Society. His friend Bruce Montgomery described him as a "massive, affable, pipe smoking undergraduate" ³

His literary Career developed in the company of his friends.

About his College life Lakin in one of his novels "Jill, says:

Life in the college was austere

Its pre pattern had been

in same instances

permanently. Everyone paid the

same fees and ate same meals

Because of ministry a food

regulations the town could offer

little in the way of luxurious

eating and drinking and college

festivities such as commoration

balls had been suspended for

the duration. Because of petrol

rationing nobody ran a car.

Because of clothes rationing

it was difficult to dress

slyishly...

-Philip Larkin, Jill.4

He failed in the army medical test and further devoted to study in Oxford University. There he came across friends like Alan Ross, John Wain, Diana Golanez Edward de Cann and Kingsley Amis.

The World War Second became the more vital thing in his life. The war made an everlasting impact on his career. Larkin accepted a job of a librarian. He showed a real flair for the job. Maexe Drenam observed Larkin.

"A Librarian of national Statue

and a poet of international renown."

Larkin worked as a Librarian by day, and at night as a Writer.

The Byrnmor Jones Library of Hull University is a real memorial to the zeal and vision of Philip Larkin.

About his routine Larkin says:

"I write between eight and ten

in the evening then went to

the University bar till eleven, then

played cards or talked with

friends till one or two. The first

part of the evening had the

second part too and I could

enjoy the second part with a

clear conscience because I had

done my two hours." 5

During the year 1943 Larkin got the opportunity to express his views in poetry.

The "North Ship" a collection of thirty poems was published in the year 1945, the novel "Jill" was published in 1947 by Faber and his next novel, "A Girl in Winter" Faber was also published by Faber and Faber. "Less Deceived' Larkin published in 1955." The Whitsun Wedding' in 1964, and "High Windows' was published in 1974. The volumes brought him the Queen Gold Medal in 1965. The volumes also brought honorary doctorates from the Universities of Belfast, Leicester, Warwick. He worked as a Visiting Fellow of all Souls Colleges, Oxford.

About his own practice of poetry Larkin says:

"Poetry is an affair of sanity of seeing things as they are." ⁶

There is a consistency of his themes and language suits to the themes. Robert Spector and Christopher Ricks about his language

say:

"Larkin is committed to

portraying life in the language

of people, presenting the ordinary in an unsual way." They have the ordinary sorrows of mans life".

Philip Larkin owed to Keats, Wordsworth, Hardy, Arnold and Yeats. He followed Hardy in writing his poetry. He believed that poetry should give pleasure.

Andrew Motion says:

"Larkin's involvement with Yeats and Hardy represents, in miniature that struggle between two different traditions which has dominated English poetry for the last six odd years." 8

Dualism is a concept connected with a man divided in two things. Larkin thought about Time and Death, Idealism and Dualism, failure and success. Man is always standing on two plains ideal &

11

the real, impossible and possible uncertain and certain. About his experience of disillusionment Larkin says:

"But what sad scapes we can not turn

from then:

What ashes hills! What salted shrunken

Lakes!

How laden the rings looks,

Birmingham magic all discredited".

The dread of death always haunted him. The various blood tests and the horrible disease made him restless. The cancer suggested him that he was beyond consolation. He stood as a hopeless and flexible pessimist. Eric Homebarger says:

"Larkin was the saddest heart,

in the post war super market.'

Larkin about his poetry asserts:

What I should like to do is to

write different kinds of poems,
that might be by different people
Someone once said that the
great thing is not to be different
from other people but to be
different from yourself." 9

Larkin is a remarkably inclusive poet. He has flexibility and has a strong capacity.

Spender rightly says:

"Everyone would agree... that today poetry can not save civilization.

It may be misunderstanding to infer from this that poetry can not be and should not make inner worlds of elements in the public world...

There seems to be a tendency

reconcile outword things with
inner life in their poetry, but
they should only deal, with such things
which are already inner, personal
private or literary one. One can
sympathize with this tendency
which can become both stoic
and playful in poems as
excellent as those of bhilip Larkin"10

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Araham speaks:

"Romanticism brought the subjectivity

of the poet to the center of critical

theoritical attention, personal expression

became the goal, not only for content." 1

The ancient poets depicted a happy and prosperous picture of life and of the time. On the contrary the modern poets depicted ugly and terrible picture of life. It dealt with reality, and with the expression and communication with human feelings. The poetry stood introspective, meditative and with the movementary phases in the mind of the poets.

Cyril Conolly says:

The modern spirit was a

combination of certain intellectual

qualities inherited from enlightenment,

lucidity, irony, scepticism,
intellectual curiousity combined
with passionate intensity and
enhanced sensibility
of the Romantics their rebellion and
a sense of technical experiment and
their awareness of living in tragic age".²

Themes in Modern poetry

Modern poetry speaks about two things, humanitarianism and democratic feeling. The modern poetry describes almost its ugliness, and about its monotonous nature. It deals with the life of workers and toilers. The common people were the victims of doubt and fear. They were surrounded by darkness, by anxiety and by disillusion. The poetry mirrors the sufferings of the people. The poetry also reflects the dark shadows of death and terrible effects of war. The war poets stressed the wretched situation of war and of soldiers.

Siegfried Sassoon says:

But death replied: I chose him, 'So he went,

And there was Silence in the summer night;

Silence and safety; and the veils of sleep,

Then far away, the thudding of the guns.

There was a difference, in the attitude, in the language and in the subject. The old age was prosperous and the poets had a happy picture of it. They have rich and magnificient memories of the ancient life. On the contrary, the modern poets have ugly, terrible, dismal and practical picture of brief life. They brought the effects of industrilisation and the mechanical way of life. Their poems reveal the subjects and the language of day to day life of men and women. Masefield's poem "cargoes" presents a list of things like ivory, apes, and peacocks and sweet white wine. The poet speaks about Tyne coal, road rail, pig lead, fire wood and chip tin trays which were in the cargoes.

Thomas Hardy experssed his pessimistic view of life in his poems. Hardy in "Two Houses" says:

"-Will the day come",

said the new one, awstruck faint,

"When I shall lodge shades dim and dumb".

"-That will it, bay;

such shades will people thee..."

T. S. Eliot speaks about the tragic gloom and despair in his poem "The Waste Land". He sees life which is a mere misery and a headache. The life is an empty dream, a hollow picture.

Spender says about T.S. Eliot:

"He is quite possibly the greatest

poetic influence in the World's today." 3

The other poets Auden, Spender, Louise Macneice, John Betjeman brought the themes like disillusionment, realism and romanticism. The poets described the impacts of science. They accepted the most prosaic and common subjects, the thud of bus traffic, the rattling noise of trains, the drone of aeroplane. They

pictured the men and women standing between birth and death. They described the beauty of nature, religion, love but their stress was completely on the human weakness, and on the human frustration. So Spender speaks about the destruction of the city, the wretched condition of the poor.

Spender says:

All the posters on the walls

All the leaflets in the streets

Are mutilated or run in vain,

Their words blotted out with tears,

Skin peeling from their bodies

In the victorious harricane.

Herbert Read, Dylan Thomas, George Barker the poets of the 1940 dealt with the themes like birth, death and sex. The poets of 1950 Philip Larkin, KingleyAmis, Robert Conquest, Elizabeth

Jennings, D.J.Enright, Jonn Wain, Donald Davie, Thomas Gunn created an exact picture of modern age.

Kingsley Amis describes:

...the brain raging with prophecy

Raging to discard real time and place,

Raging to build a better time and place,

These modern poets studied psychology and they believed that each individual is a lonely soul. There is always a deep association between man and loneliness. The modern poetry concentrated more on the theme of 'self alienation.' The word 'self alienation' is related to isolation. Twentieth century welcomed the new scientific discoveries and inventions. The traditional values and thoughts remained absent and modern concepts entered and spread in poetry. Man became helpless, he became a slave. The machine became a master. The man lost his identity, he lost the faith in God. The modern technology brought a terror, the wave of uncertainty. The modern man experienced insecurity and he became selfish, self

centred, and felt isolated. He thought himself, physically and mentally uneasy. Loneliness created a hollowness. a sense of despair. The absence of social coherence created a problem.

P.R. King in his "Nine Contemporary Poets' says:

One joins the movement in a valueless world

Chossing it, till both hurler and the hurled

One moves as well, always toward, toward.

The Movement poets portrayed the grim experiences, the poignancy of the past, the change of renewal of nature, the dread of death.

Larkin speaks:

Therefore I stay aside,

Believing this, and they move to and tro,

Believing that; and both are satisfied,

If no one has misjudged himselfer or lied.

Thom Gunn, the another Movement writer in his poem "Fighting Terms' promotes a tough stance towards the world and his personal relations. He also believes that love is a fight, a struggle between two nations and a compramise is necessary to settle the fight.

The Movement poets have a nihilistic attitude. They believed that the universe in which people live never brings happiness. It has no purpose and a design. The poor man has to accept meaninglessness and has to live life without any complaint.

Thom Gunn says:

Only an infinite finitude I see

In those peculiar lovely variations

It is despair that nothing can be

Flares in the mind and leaves

a smoky mark of dread.

Larkin focussed "Attention on the expository, documentary, empirical and rational elements in his poetry. "He remained always honest to his experiences. He pictured the unillusioned view of contemporary life and the various problems.

The Movement poets united themselves by virtue, age, class and by professional employment. They realised the nature of life and tried to conclude the meaning of life.

The grand and heroic themes vanished and simple, direct, straight subjects took place. Nobody asked about the themes like paintings, about art galleries, Mythology and Legends, remained away and the poets removed themseleves from the ivory tower and kept themselves on the streets.

The Movement poets remained class conscious. They concentrated on the middle class and middle class man. The movement poets got successful in restoring Movement's own time, class assumption and specially English emphasis which implied a kind of exclusivity.

The movement was sceptical, robust, and was ironic. The movement prepared to remain firm and comfortable in a wicked, commercial and in a threatened world.

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