

Editorial

From Seminar to Journal: The Letter and the Spirit

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The term 'Victorian Age' is perhaps one among the more widely misunderstood of notions when applied specially to English Literature. The intricacy in the discourse is derived from the fact that the experts have forcefully yoked diverse views and ideas about this age into this single term. The name 'Victorian' is derived from Queen Victoria who ascended the English throne in 1837 and ruled till her death in 1901. However, the Victorian Age started much earlier in 1832 when the Great Reform Bill was passed in the English Parliament. This great age was characterized by constant and rapid changes in economic conditions, social customs and intellectual atmosphere. Therefore, it would be wrong to presume that these seventy years had any fixed likeness one to another just because more than sixty of these years were under the rule of Queen Victoria. The more prominent similarities seen in these seventy individual years of the Victorian era are however, identifiable in two governing factors: first, there was no great war and no fear of catastrophe from outside; second, the whole period was marked by a keen interest in religious questions that deeply influenced the seriousness of thought, and self-disciplined character, an outcome of the puritan ethos.

In the history of English Literature, Victorian era played a pivotal role in setting the tenor for normative concepts as well as critical thinking in the minds of the people. Some of them highlighted the values contained in the Bible whereas others sought after new strands of secular spirituality. G M Hopkins, a Jesuit priest and major poet of the era, for instance, took to writing poetry to share his thoughts with the ordinary people in the streets and to keep them rooted in their faith. Delving into the making of English Literature, some would find the prevalence of a nuanced Christian sensibility. It would be interesting to identify the origins of writing drama, poetry, and novel having had linkages with the Church practices. The attempts by the Church authorities to promote different modes of preaching the Good News, as well as the efforts by the authors and poets, despite scriptural influence, to deviate from the Church doctrines have left, it could be said, a mark on the lineage of Victorian Literature. The Victorian era through its stalwarts played an important role in providing stability and thereby making poetry of the time mature in outlook. These poets seem to have touched the hearts of common people and helped restore the true values of life embedded in the scriptures.

The focus of this issue of the journal is on 'Spirituality in the Victorian poetry'. In fact what one notices at the heart of all great literature, poetry, art, philosophy and

religion, is the contemplation and perpetuation of this 'something' which is called 'spirituality'. If Sigmund Freud speaks of 'a fire' at the centre of our lives, if Karl Jung talks about 'deep, unutterable, archetypal energies which structure our very souls', if James Hillman speaks 'of a blue fire within', they all speak, probably about spirituality, the creative energy in the human soul to be whole, to be divine.

The English Department of Salesian College organized a UGC sponsored seminar on the topic 'Spirituality in the Victorian Poetry' on 30-31 July 2008. The seminar initiated an explorative study on the poets of this era to gauge their impact amidst the upheavals of the time like the evolutionary discourse begun by Charles Darwin. The seminar took a closer look at the constant struggle in the British Literature between a group of authors trying to preserve the tradition of living by faith by nurturing a spiritual vision, and the others trying to break away from the credence to faith and spirituality. The present issue of this Journal contains the papers of the seminar on the theme, and it in no way claims to be an exhaustive attempt to pool together the existing studies on the topic or be comprehensive about the possible approaches to the thematic. However, these articles could help clarify to a great or less degree the issues involved and perspectives possible and also give some lead for the rare, critical, inquiring mind to go forward in his or her academic search for truth and wholeness.