

## Ode to the West Wind

Q.) Discuss the function of the West Wind both as 'destroyer' and 'preserver' with reference to Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind'.

Ans.) In Ode to the West Wind, the west wind has been portrayed by P. B. Shelley as a great force of Nature. It is a force that both destroys and creates anew. It brings about an annual revolution in the physical world. The poet ronii\_Ltgly observed the role of the Wind, which is to destroy things in order to create them anew according to the laws of Nature. In the physical world creation and destruction moves

in a cyclic order.

This dual-role of the West Wind as a 'destroyer' and 'preserver' has been realistically presented within the scope of the poem. The dual-role is suggested by the Hindu conceptions of 'Siva' and 'Vishnu' who destroys and creates respectively. Shelley has the pagan spirit and has expressed adoration of the forces of Nature such as we find in the Vedic hymns. Ode to the West Wind contains (= holds) the poet's prophetic and inspired faith in the dawn of Millennium where all his dreams and visions will be realized. The West Wind, conceived by the poet as an unflinching force, will drive away all old and dated customs and social orders and thereafter, ruse mankind from bondage of old custom and convention and pave the sure way of rebirth and regeneration (= renewal).

The death and rebirth themes are announced in the opening stanza of the poem. The Wind drives away the dead leaves and conducts the seeds, apparently cold and dead, to their graves, but the graves — are also cradles in which they are to be reborn in the spring. The second stanza pictures the Wind in its

stormy and terrible aspect. The third stanza opens with an iridescent (= sparking) picture of other West Wind, the zephyr who produces flowers and fruits by the sweetness of his breath. The stanza concludes with a return of the spirit of terror --- the same wind which ruffles (= disturbs) the surface of the Mediterranean also clears the Atlantic chasms and frightens the submerged vegetation of the ocean. In the fourth stanza Shelley's own sense of oppression and constraint (= limitation) is related to the Wind's freedom and strength. He would like to be a dead leaf, a cloud or a wave to be swept along by the Wind's power.

As a force of the death and rebirth the West Wind is one manifestation of the creative principle that runs through the whole universe. Therefore, the poet says:

"Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:

What if my leaves are falling like its own!"

But in the fifth stanza the withered leaves metaphorically stand for the dead thoughts that give birth to new thoughts in order to help towards setting up a new social order which will regenerate mankind. The West Wind destroys "withered leaves" to help them contain (= hold) in them the germs of new soil. Similarly "dead thoughts" may contain in them the germs of new ideas.

Death is only the prelude to renewed life; and the poem ends as it began with the cycle of the seasons:

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"if winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

When winter comes we may be sure that it too will pass away and that spring and rebirth of regeneration can be far distant. Thus the dual-role of the West Wind as a destroyer and a preserver is well-conceived and a natural outcome.