



## RESEARCH ARTICLE



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**TENNYSON'S 'ULYSSES': A LIFE OF SAGACITY, DETERMINATION AND ACHIEVEMENT**Dr. T. M. J. Indra Mohan<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. A. Devaraj<sup>2</sup><sup>1\*</sup>(Director (R&D) A.C.T. Group of Institutions, Chennai 600 095)<sup>2</sup>(Director (Academic & Administration), A.C.T. Group of Institutions, Chennai 600 095)

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**ABSTRACT**

Ulysses speaks of vigour and determination to achieve the unachievable as once thought of by the people. He is a symbol of determination with a constant endeavour for attaining and winning in order to be a successful achiever. He wins always because he has a will and determination to undergo all trials and tribulations.

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Tennyson's 'Ulysses' is written in a masculine vigour. Its philosophy appeals to a life of action and achievement whatever maybe the risks involved. The simple and lucid narration reveals that Ulysses as being a man of stern belief in adventure leading to achievements. He has a passion for wandering and seeking new knowledge. He does not want to be just the King of Ithaca, ruling the people like any other king. He considers it as a waste of his life and talents he has. He has a deep hatred for idle life as a king. He chooses to experience the last

extreme of sufferings, dangers and all that life makes exciting and fruitful. For him a real drunkard is one who drinks his cup of wine to the maximum and a true adventurer like Ulysses, would like to live an ever active and adventurous life till he meets his end. He has earned good reputation of being always ready to acquire knowledge and pass through risky paths to gain experience. He has imbued knowledge from everywhere and his thirst for knowledge remained ever increasing and unquenched. He calls each experience a gateway beyond which lies the



unknown and undiscovered world that invites to explore its mysteries; for him, there is no limit to the knowledge to acquire and assimilate.

Ulysses is of the opinion that life is not mere breathing and living: "As though to breathe were life". He stresses for hard work and useful activity; if not engaged thus, the meal or food people eat is like a piece of metal getting covered with rust. He thinks his ambition of gaining knowledge cannot be fulfilled even if he were granted a series of lives to carry out his mission. He addresses his companions,

"...Come, my friends,

'T is not too late to seek a newer world.

Push off, and sitting well in order smite

The sounding furrows;" 1

He is convinced that there is no sense in merely continuing to exist; it would be shameful on his part to do so when his old spirit is seized with a desire to acquire so much of knowledge as is considered beyond man's ability to be gained anywhere, anytime. Tennyson brings into focus this idea in a striking illustration. A star sets in our world and we think it is sinking into the sea. None can follow the course of this star once it is sunk into the sea; this task is beyond human world. So is the case with knowledge, and thus achieve something new and amazing, which no man has ever attempted before, much less succeeded in doing so. So is the burning desire of Ulysses who is young in spirits always. He is no ordinary adventurer or explorer. His mission of life can only end with his death. Whatever may be his state now – he wants to conquer newer kingdoms and reach the places none so far attempted to reach.

Ulysses' address to his son and also his character sum up two contrasting aspects of human life when one grows under prevailing circumstances, and the other when eventually one's character gets moulded according to the living standards. Ulysses wants his son Telemachus to be authoritative, under whose rule people should live. When he was a child, Ulysses left home to join the Trojan War. During his absence his son grew up and he is a man of peace. He is interested in teaching people how to grow as useful citizens. Ulysses is happy that his son Telemachus will take care of the kingdom well during his absence.

Having said farewell to his son, Ulysses speaks to his companions who will accompany him on his voyage. He reminds them of their past exploits which they fought against men and gods in the Trojan War and came out victoriously. They all lived together in glory and adversities; now they have grown old and mature. However, old age is no bar to perform great deeds in winning honour. In fact they must undertake to do something distinctive before death overpowers them and puts their career to an end on this earth. He remarks,

"Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." 2

He encourages his entire followers to be in high spirits always for achievements. His purpose is to sail beyond the sun-set, the distant west, which is the boundless ocean beyond the straits of Gibraltar, since little was known of what lay beyond this. In fact, the Greeks considered this to be the end of the earth. They should be prepared to strike with their oars the rising waves of the sea, that is ride the waves by using their oars, to take their boats forward, in the absence of a favourable wind. They may be washed away by the waves or they may be lucky enough to gain the Happy Isles, which is known as the Isles of the Blessed, where souls of the good and the great dwell in perfect happiness. Their efforts will be then recorded as they will be privileged to meet 'the great Achilles' and other warriors of fame.

Undeterred, by the onslaught of any natural forces, Ulysses and his comrades set out on the high seas. They were fighters all their life, though they became old, they possessed the spirit of youth. When they were youth, they had the strength which "moved earth and heaven" 3 and made them challenge mighty kings on earth. Though Ulysses and his comrades have grown old, their hearts remain young and strong. Above all, they are all united in their courage and capacity to suffer together. Thus much has gone out of their life due to old age, but much still remains with them as their prime possession, that is their strong will power which cannot be made weak by age or even by fate. Ulysses concludes his address with memorable words, "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield". They come as the final stroke of a hammer, hitting the nail on the head. They are like the clarion call which rings in



their ears, long after Ulysses's address is concluded. They are a challenge to every reader to rouse himself from his life of ordinariness and do and dare to achieve some work of a notable note for "tis not too late to seek a newer world".<sup>4</sup>

'Ulysses' is very much an ancient Greek epic model. The quest for knowledge and determination to find far new shores appears to be a rekindled renaissance spirit in the Victorian era. It also further highlights the indomitable mental frame of the individual to embark upon any course of adventure even if his body is not willing but the spirit cooperative, man's reach of attainments will continue to soar. This is what we symbolically see in Ulysses. Another salient aspect we notice in this poem is that if one is mentally prepared for any difficult task to accomplish, despite odds impeding his progress, still he can achieve - that is what Ulysses means to us.

#### REFERENCES

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- [4]. *Ibid.*, ll: 57