



**Compiled and Circulated by: Mr. Manas Barik, Guest Lecturer,
Dept. of English, Narajole Raj College**

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Symbols and Images in Blake's "The Lamb" and "The Tyger"

William Blake is a mystic par excellence, and perhaps the greatest poet in English Literature who expresses his mystical thoughts through symbols and images. Like Shelley, he uses the objects of nature as symbols to suggest the spiritual reality that lies behind appearances. The two sections of Blake's book, the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience* are contrasted elements in a single design. The first part sets out an imaginative vision of the state of Innocence; the second shows how life's challenges corrupt and destroys it. Both "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" display Romanticism through the use of symbolism which glorifies the disparity of nature's aspects. The lamb and the tiger are symbols employed to exhibit two different states of human soul. When lamb is destroyed by experience, the tiger is needed to restore the world. In fact, Blake's saying, 'without contraries is no progression', is the basis of all his philosophy.

In *The Lamb*, Blake uses pastoral images and symbols to depict nature as innocent, meek and mild. The Lamb is representative of nature as a whole and is described as tender, soft, wooly and bright. Also, Blake draws on traditional biblical symbolism to present the Lamb as pure, innocent, and childlike. The words used in this poem combine to create the image of unsullied purity and simple delight. This imagery advances the Romantic view of nature and of God. Blake relates the Lamb to God:

I a child and thou a lamb
We are called by His name.

The traditional image of Jesus as a lamb assures the Christian values of gentleness and peace. In this case, the naturalistic metaphor is more than figurative; it hints at a link between human and non-human nature. Blake's powerful visual imagery could provide the occasion for an extended discussion of precisely such a link. As his printed and illuminated texts remind us Blake's imagination that constantly saw natural objects in terms of their interconnectedness rather than their discrete separateness. Posing the question, which created such a gentle and mild creature, Blake is all praise for the sheer beauty and meekness of the lamb. In Blake's imaginative universe, to be in "Nature" is to be always fallen, but that does not prevent him from suggesting a powerful connectedness that unites all living things.

The most forbidding things of life have, perhaps a beauty and justification of their own, that seems to be the message of the poem *The Tyger*, a remarkable lyric which

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Charles Lamb rightly described as 'glorious'. The tiger seems to symbolize fierce, spiritual forces which are needed to break the shackles of experience. Blake believes in the all-embracing nature of God-head. The apparent evil in the tiger is only an expression of divine strength and energy. Blake's tiger has been traditionally interpreted as the symbol of divine wrath, the wrath which Blake found in Christ; his symbol of the divine spirit was the means by which he hoped to unite innocence and experience in some tremendous synthesis:

Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to human existence. Ordinary minds generally appreciate the lamb but are terror-struck by the tiger element in the universe -nature 'red in tooth and claw' or the tiger and ape in human nature. Unlike the lamb, the tiger is terrifying. But this terror is a manifestation of divine force. Blake seems to think that love cannot be absent from power. God's very power is a guarantee of His love. Blake's tiger is presented with a beauty that is fascinating ("burning bright") in spite of, or perhaps because of, its destructiveness. . It is debatable whether the tiger represents good or evil, but one thing is certain that it is the sense of impenetrable mystery, its resistance to any categorization or any explainable meaning in human terms that makes the figure of the tiger supremely amazing to Blake. In Blake's poem the radical nature is reflected in his creation of the "fearful symmetry" between ferociousness and beauty.

Many of the images and symbols used by Blake have their roots in Bible. In "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" Blake tried to draw a picture of God's creation of meek and fierce creatures together. Blake believed in Transcendentalism which means God is present in all creatures. Romantic poets were considered as prophet poets and their poems were considered as their prophecy. The symbolism in the poem "The Tiger" presents another face of Romanticism, the wild, uninhibited view of nature and of God. Henry Crabb Robinson wrote that "The Tyger" symbolizes the dreadful forces in the world just as "The Lamb" symbolized gentleness, vulnerability and innocence in the circle of Innocence. So both 'tiger' and 'lamb' may symbolize for Blake, the 'abundant life' assured by Christ. When the lamb is destroyed by experience, the tiger is needed to restore the world. Both are complimentary and explaining the two contrary states of human soul evoking the mystery of God's creation.

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