

I. INVOCATION TO THE MUSE

Invocation is one of the essential features of an epic. An epic opens with an invocation to the Muse, and this form of opening was established in epic poetry by Homer, followed by Virgil. The invocation is an address appealing to a deity or Muse for aid. Since *Paradise Lost* is an epic, Milton employs an invocation to "Heavenly Muse" in conformity with epic conventions. The Muses of the classical mythology, whom Homer, Virgil and others invoke were the goddess who presided over poetry, painting and other arts. Homer begins the *Iliad* with the lines :

"Achilles' wrath, to Grace the direful spring
Of woes unnumbered, Heavenly Goddess sing !"

Virgil opens the *Aeneid* with the words : "Arms and the man I sing." Milton states the theme of *Paradise Lost* "Man's first disobedience."

Milton follows the classical poets by invoking the aid of Muse for the successful composition of his great poem, remaining "unattempted yet in prose or rhyme." But as a Christian poet, writing on a Christian subject, he cannot invoke the Muses that are pagan goddesses. The 'Muse' he invokes, is heavenly; it is divine inspiration that seized Moses and David and enabled them to sing of Genesis¹ and the glory of God. Though Milton follows the well established epic convention of invoking the Muse, the difference is that the Muse is no classical symbol of poetry. In this epic he aims at dealing with the great argument that God is fair in the dispensation of divine justice. In the first twenty six lines of the epic, he has fused² three great civilizations, the main sources of Renaissance religious poetry : Classical, Hebrew, and Christian.

The first twenty six lines of *Paradise Lost* Book I is Milton's invocation to the 'Heavenly Muse'. He opens his invocation with the brief narration of how Man fell from Heaven. Man's fall from Heaven constitutes the theme of the poem, and Milton proposes to compose his great poem on the Biblical story of Man's disobedience to God's command not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. Satan's temptation to Eve provoked her to taste the fruit, and this resulted in their expulsion from Paradise as punishment for the disobedience committed. To this subject Milton adds that Man was not doomed³ to eternal punishment. Jesus Christ redeemed Man from the punishment of the original sin and brought him back the bliss of Heaven after death. The subject is grand and unique and so the poet invokes the Christian Muse, i. e., the Divine Spirit that inspired Moses, the prophet on the tops of Horeb and Sinai to recount⁴ the story of creation and give laws for the chosen people of God :

Paradise Lost Book-1

Sing heavenly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed
In the beginning how the Heaven and Earth
Rose out of Chaos.

Milton calls up the Divine Spirit to receive divine inspiration required to write this grand poem on the grand theme. He feels that but for divine inspiration it is not possible for him to write this poem. He seeks divine aid because his ambition is high and his contemplated poem, *Paradise Lost*, seeks to outsoar⁵ in grandeur of the epics of Homer and Virgil, which were inspired by the Muses dwelling in Mt. Parnassus with its 'secret well'. He claims that the subject of his epic is 'higher' than theirs. He invokes the "Heavenly Muse" to endow him with such power and vision as will enable him to be equal to his subject. His poem is to deal with the creation of mankind and with the time when Adam and Eve lived a heavenly life in the Garden of Eden. Hence he prays for divine inspiration. He seeks, in his prayer almost, divine help in understanding what is true and what are God's real intentions. Milton invokes the Muses in *Lycidas* (15 - 16) as

Sisters of the sacred well,
That from beneath seat of Jove doth spring.

The "Heavenly Muse" is thus offered a dwelling-place superior in holiness to those of the Greek goddess." *Milton hopes to be filled with a higher inspiration, so as to treat of higher things, than the classical poets whose inspiration came from the Muses of antiquity*" (Verity). He invokes the Holy Spirit, because he "wants now to emphasise the creative aspect of his Muse." (Daiches). Another point related to Milton's invocation to his Muse is that the poem he intends to write is based on grand, novel and elevated idea, and it is his this poem, of which originality he claims. Divine inspiration is indispensable for the composition of such a great poem.

Milton invokes the Muse to receive light and wisdom so that he is able to present the lofty theme successfully in this poem. He wishes to match up to the demands, of his great subject. He seeks the Muse to elevate and sustain him and to remove all impurities from his heart and mind. Milton's believes that a pure-hearted man alone receives divine inspiration. His aim to write this poem is not only to deal with the creation of Man and Man's Fall from Heaven but also to vindicate that God is just in His dealing with man. He makes no discrimination⁶ between man and man. God is always fair and just in rewarding and punishing man. Milton concludes his invocation :

..... what in me is dark
Illume, what is low raise and support,
That to the height of this great argument

I may assert eternal providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.

Milton's invocation to the Muse is an inseparable part of the epic. In these twenty six lines the poet not only prays to the Divine Spirit for divine inspiration but also gives expression to the lofty and elevated theme of the great poem and his aim to write it. He states his subject in the first five lines and invokes the Muse in the lines (6 - 23) and the remaining three lines of this part (Lines 24 - 26) contain his purpose of writing this poem. In this part of the epic Milton has fused three great civilizations — Classical, Hebrew and Christian. His invocation to the Muse reveals his deep faith in God and in the miraculous power of the Divine Spirit.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is cast in the classical epic mould. Like Homer's *Iliad* it begins with the invocation to the Muse. Virgil's *Aeneid* also begins with a similar invocation. The subject is clearly a Christian one and in these twenty six lines Milton has brought together and combined classicism, Hebraism and Puritanism. *Paradise Lost* is epical not only in form and content but also in grammatical structure which is typically Latinate. Its beginning is emphatic, simple and suggestive of amplitude⁸. The sense is developed, extended, modified, qualified and reconsidered in a variety of ways.

The beginning of *Paradise Lost* with an invocation to his Muse conforms to the correct epic manner of classical epic poetry. The theme of the poem which he states here is epical. The poet's announcement of the theme of the epic satisfies our high sense about the poem. The aim of the poem to write it is grand, and this grandness is in consistence with the grandness of an epic theme. The poet's statement of the grandness of the theme is expressed in sublime, dignified and majestic language.

The invocation is an integral part of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It announces the theme of the poem — the theme of Man's fall from Heaven due to the temptation and seduction of Eve by Satan. It also states Milton's profound faith and belief in the Heavenly Muse, the fountain of divine inspiration. Here we also trace Milton's puritanic view of life and his support to the moral law. Adam and Eve defied God who punished them by way of the expulsion from Heaven. This expulsion subjected them to earthly sufferings and then to mortality. This part of the poem also records his deep faith in God as the dispenser of justice.