



NATURE AND MAN: IN ROBERT FROST POETRY

Dr. B. S. Kavhar

(Assistant Professor)

Appaswami Mahavidyalaya,

Shendurjana (Adhao).

Tq. Manora, Dist. Washim (M.S)

Abstract:

Robert Frost is first and foremost a nature poet, but the center of his concern is always Man. Frost has written many poems depicting natural scenery but never has he isolated the nature scene from a human content. His earlier poems, contained in the 1913 collection *A Boy's Will*, manifest his lively interest in the contemplation of nature by means of careful observation. But it is interesting to note that the human element is never found absent from the scene depicted. Frost began as a Nature poet and his interest in nature persisted throughout his career. Marion Montgomery says: "*Frost is a great Nature poet but he is not a nature poet in the tradition of Wordsworth. He is a nature poet of a different kind and hence the failure to appreciate his nature poetry correctly*".

Keywords: Simultaneous, Illustration, Manifestation, Inexplicable, Picturesquely.

Frost's Natural Scenes-Vivid and Accurate:

The importance and the use of the Frostian treatment of nature may be debatable but it has to be acknowledged that Frost's poetry is a living tribute to his capacity for minute observation and accurate description. Frost is to be the most wonderful thing in his poetry. A snowfall, a spring thaw, a bending tree, a valley mist, a brook these are brought not to, but into the experience of the reader. The method is simple and can be analyzed. What he describes is never a spectacle only, but an entire adventure... With the sight and the act the emotional response comes naturally. The three fuses together and the experience come as a whole to us. It is an effect rare even in the best poetry. The simultaneous description gives the reader almost a sensory instrument with which to share the perception; and since it is natural, anyway, for the reader to identify himself with the author, the result is to bring the reader into closer touch with this aloof poet than with many poets who directly seek such a companionship. Any attempt to systematic what one wants to say about Frost's nature poetry would remain a futile effort without any illustration of Frost's rare descriptive powers. In *Birches* as in many other poems, we find Frost constantly chasing and tracing the flickering nuances of nature.

Frost's Nature Poetry:

Of Common Things and Human Folk: There is a plain fact about Frost's treatment of nature - he does not idealize or glorify nature or its manifestations. His attitude towards nature is not that of exalted glorification as of romanticists but that of realists who do not attribute to nature anything beyond the barest facts. W. H. Auden feels that "*his poems on natural objects are always concerned with them not as foci for mystical meditation or starting points for fantasy, but as things with which and on which man acts in the course of his daily work of gaining a livelihood. Nor is he, like Wordsworth, a poet who has had vision in youth which he can spend the rest of his life interpreting*". These poems tell us, not so much of rare, exalted chosen moments, of fleeting inexplicable intuitions, but of his daily, and one might say, common experience. "*There is very little poetry about the*

country which one can feel confident would be immediately understood and appreciated by countrymen, but of these poems, one is certain, that they are not written for townies".

Frost is Philosophic but not Didactic:

From his works one can be sure that a philosophy of life can be extracted. Many of Frost's poems contain a moral. But the moral is generally not very obviously tagged on the poem. It either runs as an argument in descriptive, sensuous lyrics or is envisaged in dramatic action of the poem. *"He is a serious moralist as well as a serious artist. But his peculiar intimacy with nature prevents him from being openly didactic. He teaches, like nature, in parables...leaving you to draw your own conclusions, never permitting himself more than the tender humorous sort of comment."*

Directed to Regional Plane:

As in the case of Wordsworth, Frost's love of Nature is mainly directed to the local or regional plane. The hills and valleys, the streams and the sylvan regions, the plants and flowers, the birds and the animals, even the insects and hornets of New England find a place in Frost's poems. Accuracy of Even The Minutest Details distinguishes Frost's power of description. The critic Isidor Schneider says: *"The descriptive power of Mr. Frost is to be the most wonderful thing in his poetry. A snowfall, a spring thaw, a bending tree, a valley, mist, a brook, these are brought not to, but into the experience of the reader"*. What our poet describes is not restricted to the spectacle alone but it is remarkably extended to an ardent adventure.

The poem A Hillside Thaw paints the graphic picture of the poet on his knees trying to feel with his hands the process of snow turning into water. The fidelity of description is only excelled by the minuteness of observation. How the birches react to a storm is described very picturesquely in the poem Birches, the most popular of all Frost's poems. As mentioned earlier Robert Frost does not stop after painting pleasant landscapes. His excessive pleasure in the observation of the sensuous charms of nature is no bar to his keen scrutiny of the sinister and ugly lying hidden beneath the surface.

Love of Birds and Animals:

Frost had abundant love for birds and animals and even for insects and other low creatures. His interest in the habits of birds is evident from many of his poems. The eight-lined short poem A Minor Bird speaks a lot and the two lines at the end will ring and reverberate in the brains of the readers for a long time:

The interpretation of creature's behavior in human terms in Departmental is extremely humorous and delightful. The detailed analysis of the behavior of a society of ants is an implied comment on departmentalism in human life. Lynen says: *"The whimsical effects of the comparison are of the very essence for the poem is funny just because it explores the resemblance between ants and men.... so thoroughly. And such thoroughness is only possible for a poet who sees man and nature separated by a boundary which is both definite and inalterable"*.

Philosophy of Man in Nature:

Has Robert Frost any philosophy of Nature? As an established poet he cannot but have one. Nature was glorified like a benign mother by Wordsworth and other Romantic poets. To them Nature appears to have a holy plan of her own for the good of mankind and she keeps a benevolent watch over man. But Robert Frost views nature as hostile to man and other living beings. The external calm and beauty of nature is highly deceptive because sinister and terrifying potentialities reign Supreme. The poet continuously warns the readers that man must constantly struggle against nature for his own survival. The bleakness and harshness of nature is responsible for man's woes.

Betrayal of Nature:

Wordsworth used to assert that Nature never did betray the heart that loved her. But Frost does not agree with it. To him Nature is an ever-hostile menace and not a comfort at all. Nature is ever indifferent to man. Frost's later poems have much to say about the helplessness of man in the face of natural calamities in some of his earlier poems he had proudly recorded man's control of Nature and subduing it.

Woods, hills and pastures are described by Frost with certain symbolic significance. The woods are symbolic of the unexplored regions within ourselves, full of possible beauty with horror lurking behind. *"Frost is a poet neither of the mountains nor of the woods, although he lives among both, but rather of the hill, pastures, the intervals, the dooryard in autumn with the leaves swirling the closed house shaking in the winter storms and no one has described such scenes more accurately and in more*

lasting colors". By insisting on the gulf separating Man and Nature Frost directly opposes the Romantic attempt to bring the two together.

Robert Frost Deliberately Disassociated Himself From the Pantheistic Tradition of Wordsworth: He expresses nature in terms of mountains and hills, birches and wild flowers, woods and stone walls, pasture springs and precarious farms, brooks and woods-lots, seeds and buds. Such phenomena do not require detailed philosophical speculation. He was fully aware that nature cannot provide 'transcendental truths' to any poor, bare, forked creature who straggles near a brook or tuft of flowers. She can destroy and thwart, disappoint, frustrate and batter. She may prove as flinty as the rocky soil of New England, and as difficult to till profitably. This is why Frost never describes nature as having the virtues to *"become a panacea to soothe the ills of society as the 19th-century worshippers of nature had thought of it. Frost's Nature is not even possessed of immitigable violence. Again, neither a radical nor a conservative, he steers a middle path. Nature is at once harsh and mild. Man's relation to nature, as to his fellows, is both together and apart"*.

His Themes in the Nature Poems are the Usual Themes of the 20th Century Poets-fear, grimness, terror, horror, loneliness, isolation, paradoxes. Inconsistency causing duality etc. His attitude to nature is Modern because it is neither Epicurean, nor Renaissance. His attitude to nature is scientific in so far as he thinks that nature is indifferent to man and does not take notice of him. On the whole, he suggests, it should be taken as a little more in favor of man. His is assuredly a modern attitude towards Nature and he should be given his place as the twentieth-century exemplar of the American tradition of interpreting Nature. John E Lynen appreciates the freshness of Frost's thought and suggests that he should be rightly admired for it. He says: *"It is possible to write in the modern idiom and yet to show little newness or originality in one's response to the contemporary world"*.

Conclusion:

Frost's view of nature possesses ethical or metaphysical dimensions but he does not make a philosophy out of it. A mask of whimsical ambiguity is offered by him but to do him justice we can assert that he seems to think that Man will be making a serious mistake if he goes again to Nature or natural processes. But unfortunately, Frost does not realize the consequences of this belief in as much as that if interference with Nature wrong then for success in life harmonizing with Nature becomes a must. To put everything briefly Frost is a poet for whom Nature is something of philosophical import. He is not one who makes portraits of natural objects for the mere delectation of the reader.

References:

1. Nolan, C. E. Robert Frost : His treatment of nature and humanity. Boston University Libraries 1942.
2. Isaacs, Elizabeth, An Introduction to Robert Frost, Denver, Alan Swallow, 1962.
3. Doyle, John Robert, Jr. , The Poetry of Robert Frosts An Analysis, New York, Hafner Publishing Co., 1962.
4. Salamathullah Khan. The Dimensions of Nature in Frost's Poetry. Asian Response to American Literature, ed. By C. D. Narasimhaish, (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1962)
5. Squires, Radcliff J. , The Major Themes of Robert Frost , Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1963.