



Treatment of Nature in the poetry of Robert Browning

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Abstract: Robert Browning, one of the major Victorian poets is mainly known for his Dramatic Monologues. His interests were wide and varied, but primarily he was a poet of Man. It does not mean that he has not given importance to Nature, He had a great love of nature, and his descriptions of nature have essentially Italian inspiration. His landscapes are real and actual, and they are always landscapes with human figures. Nature serves as an appropriate background for human thought and emotion. The present paper is an attempt to explore his treatment of Nature in his poetry.

Key words- God, Soul dissection, impressionism, distinct being

Robert Browning was one of the highly original genius poets and this credit of because of the versification, choice of subjects and his treatment of them. He was quite different from the other poets of the day. Browning and Alfred Lord Tennyson are the two important literary giants of the Victorian Period. Their Themes, their artistic methods, their view of God, man and his life did not alter with the alterations in the views of their contemporaries. But Browning remained much more aloof from his age than did Tennyson who was very much influenced by the political and social events of those years. The new movements of Science and Criticism had deep impact on Tennyson. But Robert Browning did not show any inclination towards contemporary social changes and trends which revolutionized both theology and religion. It is also to be admitted that he was not a man of his age, but a man much in advance of his age. He was more inclined towards soul-dissection, in the analysis of the human mind and art, in the study of man's motives and mental processes. Secondly, Browning was not exclusively interested in the inner history of a soul, he was also interested in outward action. He was also concerned with sudden moments of human passion, with sudden, fleeting impressions on the senses. He was as some critics have rightly pointed out an impressionist long before impressionism arrived and was recognized as such. He also represented the extraordinary complexity of human life, thought and emotion in his poetry.

In the midst of the doubts, the uncertainties, the scepticism, the conflicts and the contradictions of his age, he stands firm and unmoved. The strength of his character is reflected by this firmness of his faith. Browning also had clear cut views of Man, Nature and God and held firmly to them throughout his long career. If Browning's treatment of Nature is taken in to consideration, it is original and distinctive in many ways. The influence of earlier poets can also be seen but imitation is not found. Minuteness of observation, love of colour, impressionistic way of description, the breadth and freshness of landscapes, love for colourful flowers and animals all these feature his poetry. His attitude towards Nature is entirely his own, and he stands apart other Nature poets of the Romantic Period.

The world of leaves and flowers do not reflect human thoughts and emotions as it is done in the poetry of Tennyson. Nature in his poetry exists independently of man. Nature exists in her own right as a separate entity. Intention of Nature has always been to teach us and she never wants to teach herself. She shows forth her resplendence or beauty to us not to keep us with herself, but to make us aspire to rise upwards to the Infinite, God, who is the source of both of Nature and of Man. For Browning, Nature is an expression of the glory and splendour of God and it is a window to God.

Browning finds joy widely inter fused in all Nature. He feels that the different objects of nature are but an expression of the creative joy of God. This is the delight God finds in the act of creation. According to Browning, Nature is one form of this creative joy and man is another. Wordsworth finds preconceived harmony between Man and Nature and he humanizes nature i.e., speak of nature in human terms. But Browning does not find any such harmony between human beings and Nature. He takes care to make it plain that Nature is quite distinct from us. In the following lines from *James Lee's Wife* this attitude is very much reflected:

*Oh, good is gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet,
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones,
The white breast of the sea lark twitters sweet.*

The close examination of the above lines indicates that the smile, the mirth, the listening, might be said, to impute humanity to nature, but the Earth and the Sea are plainly quite distinct from us.

The smile of Nature is a 'gigantic smile' and it is different from human smile. God created Nature for the joy he takes in creation and He and Nature were alone together for many countless years before the birth of Man. It is believed that the creation of Man took place at the end and the difference between Nature and Man never vanishes. Man is not nature and he can never be. Nature takes a deeper interest in us, works for us and helps us to achieve the fullness of joy. She exists apart and Browning takes care to emphasize the separateness of Nature.

*It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
But that is its own affair.*

It is true that Nature helps us to achieve the fullness of joy, but such moments are seldom. It is because of the reason that the human beings are out of harmony both with love and joy and engrossed in mundane affairs. These worldly activities will not allow to be in the blessed mood of unselfconscious joy and love. When we are engrossed in worldly activities Nature becomes unsympathetic, mocks and plays with us like a fawn. Nature's unsympathetic attitude is reflected in *Sordello* :

*Quail before a quiet sky
Or Se, too little for their quietude.*

Nature's unsympathetic attitude is reflected in *The Englishman in Italy* too. Human qualities are not attributed to Nature as it is done by other major poets of the Romantic period. Browning makes it clear that Nature does not have any human attributes and she seems to us to have such attributes. Man throws back his soul and his soul's life on all the grades of inferior life which preceded him.

But one cannot suspect that Nature is not alive as she possesses a distinct personality. She has separate joys and sorrows. Browning considers and conceives Nature as a distinct being and because of this reason it becomes easy for him to describe her vividly and accurately. He does not cloud her with description with the mist of human emotion and sentiment as it done by Tennyson. He does not care much for nature divorced from human life; she has value for him only as a background to human action and passion.

Browning also uses nature as a store house of images to illustrate the doings, thinking and character of man. *Sordello* can be cited here as an example. The rich poetic soul of *Sordello* is compared to the luxuriant vegetation of Italy and it is also to be noted that Italian landscape occupies a prominent place than English English landscape.

His love of colour has also been extraordinary. Colour in a flower, at the edge of a cloud, on the back of a lizard all these are minutely described in his poetry. These descriptions reveal that he has observed them keenly and conveyed his own pleasure in them to his readers. Browning does not make an attempt to invent, but he paints what he has actually seen and this results in remarkable accuracy and minuteness of his landscapes. He could convey the exact atmosphere, the exact feel of things, the exact impressions he has formed.

Browning has also been very effective in painting narrow landscapes. He is equally good at the description of small shut in places of Nature. This is evident in the poem *By the Fireside*. He takes through the landscape describing step by step those parts of her which appeal and attract him. It is left to the readers to combine what he has presented in to the whole. Such countless miniature paintings characterize his poetry. Besides human beings who occupy a very prominent place in his poetry, his landscapes are thickly populated with animal life. He has a greater love of animals and describe them frequently. The description is not only carefully done, it is also quite amazingly done. In *Caliban Upon Stebos* animal life is very well described. Right points for description are chosen to make us feel the beast and bird in a single line.

The close analysis of his poetry reveal the fact that Browning's treatment of nature has undergone a slow process of evolution. He has tried to paint what he has seen and has not given importance to imitation. In the beginning of his poetic career, there is much direct and detailed description. Very soon, he got out of this elaborate way of nature painting and the later poetry is marked by a few sharp,high coloured words. There is an ample room for reader's imagination. He has also tried to introduce nature as a background to human activity and human emotion.In the later stage of his poetic career he has shown a lot of interest in human passion and psyche and this obsession has resulted in the decline of his interest in Nature.

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