

Ecological Concerns In The Poems Of Robert Frost

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Abstract:-

Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in the works of poets and other writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world. Today the intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in all departments of knowledge and development. . Eco-criticism looks back on a long tradition of criticism that approach nature as an aesthetic object and not a subject scientific study. For an eco-critic, the text becomes a place where different aspects of nature become various phenomena to be scientifically dissected and analyzed. A text is mere construct in which science is called upon merely to assess the inherent beauty as well as utility of Nature. Robert Frost is one of the greatest poets of nature who loved and penned her colours with a great message. A charismatic public reader, he was renowned for his tours. His popularity is easy to explain: He wrote of traditional farm life, appealing to a nostalgia for the old ways. His subjects are universal — apple picking, stone walls, fences, country roads. Frost’s poems create a memorable impression by the overwhelming presence of nature. Mountains rearing high above man’s head, valleys curving to man’s inquiring eye, roads, open or leaf-strewn, crowded trees, dense dark woods, hills of snow caving in heavily, tufts of flowers and many more – this memorable world of Robert Frost is all-pervasive and constant. In this paper, I would like to point out the close relation between Ecology and the selected poems of Robert Frost.

Keywords: - Eco-criticism , Technology, industrialism, urbanization, Eco-critics, Environment, ecology , environmental crisis, nature, green criticism, human society, ecosystem, culture and landscape

Introduction:-

Robert Frost is one of the greatest poets of nature who loved and penned her colours with a great message. He was born in California but raised on a farm in the northeastern United States until the age of 10. Like Eliot and Pound, he went to England, attracted by new movements in poetry there. A charismatic public reader, he was renowned for his tours. His popularity is easy to explain: He wrote of traditional farm life, appealing to a nostalgia for the old ways. His subjects are universal — apple picking, stone walls, fences, country roads. Frost’s approach was lucid and accessible: He rarely employed pedantic allusions or ellipses. His frequent use of rhyme also appealed to the general audience. Frost’s work is often deceptively simple. Many poems suggest a deeper meaning. Delight and morals combined in his poetry.

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I

Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in the works of poets and other writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world. Today the intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in all departments of knowledge and development. The literary critic tries to study how this close relationship between nature and society has been textualized by the writers in their works. In this context two terms have become very important today – ecology and eco-criticism. Eco-criticism is motivated by environmental activism and focuses principally on representations of the physical environment, especially of nonhuman nature. The dualistic separation of human from nature, promoted by Western Philosophy and culture as the origin of environmental crisis, demands a return to a monistic, primal identification of human beings and ecosystem. While nature is not a subject, it has a language of its own. It has been talking to us and its natural signs portend danger and perhaps catastrophe. Whatever happens Nature will go on without us. And so, we are the ones who must act wisely to sustain and value the present living ecosystem and our position in it. Eco-criticism, perhaps, originates with William Rucckert's essay "Literature And Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. But it has to wait for popularity. It is Cheryl Glotfelty, in 1989, who made it popular and brought out extensive and penetrating works on the subject. It was not until the beginning of the 1990s that ecocriticism became a recognised movement. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), a major organization for eco-critics worldwide, was founded in 1992 which gives a proper direction to the efforts of eco critics. Eco-criticism is also called as "green criticism". It analyses the role that the natural environment plays in the imagination of a cultured community at a specific moment. It examines what priorities are assigned or denied to nature. It examines how nature is portrayed in the work of art and also examines the relationship between humans and Nature. In short, it investigates how nature is literally and metaphorically used in the work of art.

Eco-criticism links science and literary criticism. It examines various ecological issues that are referred to in literary works. Technology, industrialism, urbanization, excessive chemical plants, increase in population degrade ecosystem to such a great extent that many social and ecological institutions have come up to fight for the rights of environment. The

ecological institutions and serials like "Bhoomi", 'Khel Khel Main Badlo Dunia', try their best for creating eco-concern among the masses.

Though Eco-criticism or green criticism may be relatively a recent branch of study, yet in literature and art, the study of nature and of human's relationships with Nature is not. Many Marxists have studied nature as a set of conditions to be overcome by technological progress and some psycho-analytical critics have studied nature as an object of unstated desires, political sentiments and social taboos. But the eco-critics study Nature for the sake of nature and try to find out the ways for the removing of the cultural blockage that hinder effective action against environmental crisis. Eco-criticism looks back on a long tradition of criticism that approach nature as an aesthetic object and not a subject scientific study. For an eco-critic, the text becomes a place where different aspects of nature become various phenomena to be scientifically dissected and analyzed. A text is mere construct in which science is called upon merely to assess the inherent beauty as well as utility of Nature. Eco-criticism also has enriched the dictionary of criticism by introducing various ecological terms. Eco-criticism contributes not only to the dialogue between literature and Science, but also to the awareness of a closer relationship between humans and Nature.

Ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that "human culture is connected to the physical world affecting it and affected by it" and that "as a critical stance it has one foot in literature and the other in land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman". The discourse counters the argument put forth by some cultural studies scholars that nature is a construct of culture. It holds that all human culture exists in the natural world and is ultimately affected by any human act affecting nature. Viewing current environmental problems as the byproduct of culture, eco-criticism seeks to find correctives through an eco-poetics, asserting that the need of the day is a viable environmental ethics which can successfully counter the Enlightenment myth of human preeminence and exclusiveness among the creations. Literature is believed to be capable of playing a very constructive role in promoting a vision and a language appropriate to such an environmental ethics. Eco-criticism focuses on the role of environment in the life of an individual and his relationship with nature as it is represented in literature. For an ecocritic the world means the ecosphere and not just the human society. The natural background which is thrust to the margins as the mere setting by some critic is brought to the centre as a major element in an eco-critical approach.

Just as Feminism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, so eco-criticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary work. Eco-critics study how is nature represented in art? How is the land/nature described in literature? Texts are evaluated in terms of their environmentally harmful or helpful effects. They analyzed Nature in an attempt to understand the cultural developments that have led to present global ecological crisis. Searching for the alternative to the most destructive forms of industrial development,

Eco- critics have looked to native non industrial cultures and try to explore a closed affiliation between these culture and environment.

In general, any literary theory examines the relation between writer, text, and the world, but eco-criticism expands the notion of the world to include entire eco- sphere into it.

Robert Frost has so often written about the rural landscape and wildlife that one can hardly avoid thinking of him as a nature poet. He, though not a high priest of Nature like Wordsworth or a Pantheist like Emerson or Thoreau, is a person who has a deeper understanding of nature. Being a true realist and a strong advocate of individualism, Frost saw man as learning from nature, the zones of his own limitations. Neither a radical nor conservative, Frost searched for an ideal reconciliation between the opposing claims, of the individual and the group and also between man and nature. Thus nature, to him, was at once harsh and mild and man's relation to nature, as to his fellows, is both "together and apart". His poems have overtones of deep ecology which offers a philosophical basis for environmental advocacy which may, in turn, guide human activity against perceived self-destruction. Another sign of his uniqueness is that his nature poems do not evoke the same variety of emotional response. Much of his popularity is traceable to the fact that he has managed to write of nature without exploiting the emotional effects.

His poems create a memorable impression by the overwhelming presence of nature - mountains rearing high above man's head, valleys curving to man's inquiring eye, roads, open or leaf-strewn, crowded trees, dense dark woods, hills of snow caving in heavily, tufts of flowers and many more. He uses nature as a background to reveal his concept of the human relationship to this planet upon which the human race is destined to live out its days. Rural scenes and landscapes, homely farmers and the natural world are used to illustrate a psychological struggle with everyday experience faced by men but met with courage, will and purpose to keep moving on.

In "Nothing Gold Can Stay" this analogical method is obvious:

"Nature's first green is gold, Her hardest hue to hold. Her early leaf's a flower; But only so an hour. Then leaf subsides to leaf. So Eden sank to grief, So dawn goes down today. Nothing gold can stay."

The first five lines are mainly descriptive, and it may seem that the poem merely expresses regret for the transience of natural beauty. Then, in the sixth line, the image is suddenly placed in a new context. The loss of beauty in the leaf is likened to the loss of innocence in Eden. One feels a mixture of sadness and inevitability in the change from gold to green. The subject is not just the passing of a beautiful sight, but the corruption which seems to

be a necessary part of maturing. The fall of man reveals this in human nature taken as a whole, and through the next image - "So dawn goes down today" - we see the same process in the cosmos. Since the period from dawn to sunset is the established symbol of the individual life span, one can hardly avoid the suggestion that each man suffers a similar loss as he develops from childhood to maturity. However, this need not be insisted upon; what is important is Frost's method of comparing a process in the human sphere with a process in nature. The analogies do not weaken his description - quite the opposite. The leaves seem preternaturally bright, because they hold so much meaning for man. We do not look away from the leaves to Eden, to dawn, to the life of the average man. We see all in a single line of vision. This is the perspective of pastoral, and when we turn from imagery to the emotional tone of the poem, we find a characteristically pastoral irony. The tiny leaves, seemingly so trivial, enfold the problem of man's fate!

Nature, to Frost, is an open book with lessons of mutability which is taught by repetition of days, seasons, years etc. Man learns his limitations, and his lessons for survival from nature. But at times, out of his unquenchable desire, he tries to break the decreed limits of nature. He feels, that, man learns quickly that he cannot range beyond what his own physical nature permits, and that he is inevitably guided towards his destination by some force that keeps working on man. This inevitability is brought out in his poem "The Road not Taken" where man recognizes to his sorrow that he cannot travel both roads being one traveler, and also learns not only that choices must be made but that his decisions also will prove irrevocable. Time, space and capability set the zones within which nature allows man to harvest. In this poem, the images of road, untraded path, are used to hit the purpose. in the poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

*"Whose woods these are I think I know. His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here, To watch his woods fill up with snow.
My little horse must think it queer, To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake, The darkest evening of the year.
He gives his harness bells a shake, To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep, Of easy wind and downy flake.
The woods are lovely, dark and deep, But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep."*

The poem "Stopping by woods on a snowy Evening" reproduces a scene almost identical to "Desert places". Here the traveler is enticed and mesmerized by the black trees. The horse in the poem is confused and wants to keep going. But the traveler with his "promises to keep" has a ready rationalization for withstanding the bait". He does not need to look far to find misery and loneliness. He considers nature essentially as a symbolic philosopher and guide disseminating subtle and secret lessons of life to mankind. The beauties of woods, pastoral images and deep philosophy are yoked together in this poem. He uses very simple language,

imagery, and day today events/ experiences for his poetry. Frost's technique of personification serves his serious purposes.

III

Conclusion:-

To sum up, as a distinctive approach to the practice literary criticism, eco-criticism gives increased attention to literary representatives of nature and is sensitive to interdependencies that ground the author, character or work in the natural system. This approach shifts critical focus from social relations toward natural relationships and views the individual as a member of ecosystem. It values highly the 'literary sense of place' not as setting but as an essential expression of bonding with or alienation from a specific natural context. Robert Frost has shown interest towards nature, culture and landscape. He uses nature as an image that he wants us to see or a metaphor that he wants us to relate to on a psychological level. Dark woods, mixing fear and desire, typify the great concern of man for knowledge of the unknown that awaits him. He often emphasized in his poems, the contrast between man and nature as well as the conflicts that arise between the two entities. He recognized the harsh facts of the natural world and viewed these opposites as simply different aspects of reality in his poetry.

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