

The Canopy of Trees

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Abstract

Nature has always been seen as interwoven with human lives, plants and animals. No one can deny its existence and our dependence on it. As we are getting more into this modern world, living with all sorts of luxuries in high tower buildings, we have lost connection with soil. We are left inexperienced by the soothing advances of the nature. On a single day, a gentle walk through the pavement covered with vines and trees all around, strikes an idea to discuss and reveal the human relationship with nature which is getting lost in this glittering world. The motive is to revive the age old bond, to make people realise its divinity and also to develop a perspective of finding beauty in ordinary things of life. The paper also precisely discusses the journey of nature poets and writers from past to the present and their immense contribution to literature. It is an attempt to reconcile human relationship with nature and the paper concludes with an optimistic perspective that the bliss of nature can be experienced even in a small scale of a leaf.

Keywords- Nature, Divinity, Romanticism, Eco- Criticism.



1. Introduction

Nature has been fascinating almost everyone from centuries. It has long been a source of inspiration particularly during Romantic period. It relaxes and heals physically, mentally and spiritually. Nature and its healing power doesn't demand any discussion instead; it's worldwide accepted truth. Actually, "people have a fundamental physical, emotional and intellectual dependence on nature." (Kellert, 7) In the words of Raymond Williams, "the idea of nature contains.....an extraordinary amount of human history." (67)

Green Carpet all over, wild flowers, misty leaves, chirping of birds, crying of peacock, twinkling of stars, changing of seasons, the salient blossoming of flowers soothes the senses. The voice of flowing water sometimes seems to end our curiosity to want anything else from this world. The trauma of modern man is his urge to flow with the advancement of society. In order to prove his independent and individual existence, he is indulging himself into maximum effort and in doing so, unintentionally he has lost his connection with soil. These city dwellers have limited their sense of feeling nature. In doing so, they are putting their lives in jeopardy. In the words of Ruskin Bond, "Nature is a reward in itself. It is there, to be appreciated, to be understood, to be lived and loved. And in its way it gives us everything_ the bounty and goodness of the earth, the sea, the sky. Food, water, the air we breathe, all the things we take for granted." (ix)

The paper aims to reveal the influence of nature in such a way that it can inspire one to ponder over its importance and influence on humanity. It also reminds us the harmony between natural world and the human life. It plays a vital role in shaping human consciousness. Furthermore, it also reveals the role of profound writers like Wordsworth, Coleridge etc. who were hailed as nature poets and also inspire the poets and writers of future generation. By delving more into the themes and images of these nature poets, the aim is also to apprehend the profound influence of nature of romantic poetry and its never ending influence on literature and human beings.

2. Emergence and growth

Nature as a prominent theme was quite suppressed in the works of neo-classicists. It however presented in the form of natural scenery as background only. Nature gained its prominence in the poetry of the middle of the eighteenth century. It was first appeared through James Thomson's poem 'The Seasons' (1730) As Patrick Murdoch says, "no poem surpasses it in felicity of theme; in ethical tendency; in the pathos of its episodes; in the truth, the richness, the variety of its details of scenery." (vii) 'The Seasons' although written in the Augustan age but "sharing with the major poetry of the period an awareness of the valued past, the corruption of this past in the present, the limited nature of human life, and the faith that a better life exists beyond this dark state." (Cohen,1)

William Cowper (1731- 1800) can also be called as the precursor of the romantic poetry. As remarked, "From every line Cowper has written the very man beams forth, always natural, consistent, and unaffected; while his descriptions of nature excite sensations rather than ideas and the poet lives and moves in every scene." (Chatterjee, 9) Cowper was an ardent supporter of nature. What he sees, he exactly reveals that with minute accuracy. As he says,

No bard could please me but whose lyre was tuned

To nature's praises (winter evening, L1, 704, 5) (Chatterjee)

Unlike Wordsworth who dived deep in exploring nature, Cowper commenced it from surface level. In 1785, he released his greatest work 'The Task'. It was written in blank verse and comprises of six books. The first book is titled as 'The Sofa'. It was actually a homework given by his neighbour Lady Austen. She said, "you can never be in want in want of a subject; you can write upon any; write upon this sofa." (Chatterjee, 20-21) He completed the task which is quite evident that he bore the potential to write and elaborate a noun.

3. Romantics and Nature

One of the our most celebrated and inspiring, often named as lake district poet was William Wordsworth (1770- 1850). A romantic age poet for whom nature is not just a subject of aesthetic beauty but also a matter of spiritual and emotional healing. Romantic age started in the late eighteenth and continued to the middle of the nineteenth century. Different from neoclassist who had strict restraints, romantics paved way for freedom, imagination and creativity.

It was the time of industrial revolution when people were swathed with noise and dark smoke vented through chimneys dominated the beauty of white clouds. After witnessing the scenario, which was near to the destruction of mankind, Wordsworth decided to use nature to redeem human souls. Nature played a vital role in the life of Wordsworth from childhood to the adulthood. His emotional and spiritual bonding with nature matured along with his personal and poetic development. His poetry not only provide a treasure in the form of his nature poems but also laid the foundation stone for ecological and psychological study in literature. He has invited the readers to explore and rediscover various aspects in literature.

In his famous poem, 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye' (1798), Wordsworth wrote,

Five years have past; five summers, with the
length
Of five long winters! And again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur (1)

The poet describes a portion of land which was untouched by the industrial civilization and taken the entire world into its control. In this devastating scenario, Wordsworth put nature to the highest pedestal as it has the power to save the entire world from this destruction. He calls nature as a divine force which can bring solace at the time of despair. Similar flow of thoughts can be seen in other poems like 'To the Cuckoo', first published in 'Poems, in two volumes. The poem tries to bridge the chasm between the present reality and the innocent childhood memories.

The poem 'Upon Westminster Bridge' is a wonderful work of art by William Wordsworth which depicts the beautiful experience the poet had early in the morning while crossing the Westminster bridge built upon the river Thames. The poet actually draws parallel between the two different phases of the day.

It throws light upon the busy culture of London which conceals the beauty of the city. That view of the city in the early hours of the day is completely different and remained unnoticed by everyone in the busy hours astonished him and inspired him to that extent that he decided to give words to his feelings.

The beauty of the morning: silent, bare
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky,
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air. (4)

Nature as a thematic concern is not confined to the poetry of Wordsworth only. The other great romantics like Coleridge, Shelley and Byron, also provided a great treasure on nature but they carried varied perception for nature. Coleridge depiction of nature in the realm of the supernatural elements distinguished him from Wordsworth. His masterpieces are ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, ‘Kubla Khan’, ‘Dejection: An Ode and Frost at Midnight’. In ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, the use of beautiful nature images like the sun shining, the mist, the fog surrounding etc, are evident to call him as a nature poet. He says,

The fair breeze blew the, the white foam fled,
The furrow follow free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.” (part II, lines 21- 24)

It was Coleridge who takes reader into his dream world. It has been assumed that he had written the poem under the influence of opium. Instead, the poem has become a masterpiece in the world of supernatural poetry. The usage of phrases like ‘bright garden’, ‘incense bearing trees laden with blossoms’, ‘sunny spots of greenery’ etc. marked his presence as a romantic nature poet.

The era ended with the emergence of Victorian age which is marked by the depiction of realism in literature but the nature as a subject continued to mark its existence in the works of many poets and writers. Some of them are Robert Frost, Ted Hughes etc. Robert Frost (1874- 1963), an American twentieth century poet celebrated nature through the portrayal of rural American life in his poetry. His famous works like ‘The Road Not Taken’, ‘Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening’ and ‘The Mending Wall’ illustrates his expertise of using nature in reflecting the complicated human experiences.

4. Growth After Hiatus

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed tremendous critical expansion. A number of factors contributed to the sudden shift in the taste and culture of the modern man. One of them could be the gradual and continuous developments in science and technology. The other could be the rising of the intellectual population who refused to accept the ideas and concepts of their ancestors. Literature in this era have become experimental, interdisciplinary and multidimensional. In the wake of development of these critical theories, eco- criticism marked its existence. The term was coined by William Rueckert in 1978. As a branch of study, Cheryll Glofelty founded it in 1980s in USA. It basically focuses on the

relationship between man and the environment. The motive is to promote ecological understanding and also to understand human culture from eco- centric perspective.

Another versatile figure from this genre is Ruskin Bond (1934). His life and writings are mostly influenced by nature. For Bond, nature is the only life giving force. “There were other more pleasant aspects of the natural world that remained in my memory: collecting seashells on the beach, feeding the turkey on the state’s turkey farm, wandering through a glade of tall cosmos flower, watching the village boys wash down their buffaloes at the edge of the lake.” (vii)

5. Conclusion

Nature writing as explained earlier in this paper has long been a subject of study to redeem human souls. It has also become the source of writing this paper. Being a nature lover and the perception of finding beauty and joy in simple and ordinary things of life actually became the source of writing this paper. What Wordsworth had noticed in the early hours of the day is being noticed by me in the busy hours of the day. The motive is to honour his perception of finding beauty in simple and ordinary things of life. It’s just a matter of vision and experience because of which an ordinary thing or at place can become a matter of inspiration.

Being inspired by Wordsworth, Cowper and many more, I dare to make an ordinary place to an extraordinary. I was driven with solace and divinity while crossing it. The aim of the paper is to reveal rejuvenating beauty in the ordinary pavement in the campus of our college. It is to experience the divinity, the solace in just a minute walk. Chirping of birds, fanning of leaves soothes our ears. one can have the exotic experience of nature in the fields of college itself. It sounds quite weird but true.

Wading through the fields of the Saraswathi Medical College unnoticed by almost everyone, one can peer a beautiful pavement covered with foliage and vines. The calmness and wealth of nature can be seen in the field where lies a beautiful canopy of trees. It is nothing but a mundane crossing from one building to another but it is arrayed out with vines and creepers across the green shed. Designed beautifully, swathed with foliage, it is a place where one can lounge in the scorching summer. Showering of water from the clouds itself is a pleasant experience. It becomes more pleasant when you find tiny droplets coming in the form of shower while crossing. The tiny vines as if strived hard to protect beholder from rain but failed.

More than a pavement it can be called as a blessing of nature although it is man- made but still a relief for many from this sweltering summer. Lies in the extreme corner of the field with beautiful vines hanging all around but won’t disturb as if it wants everyone to walk through it. The Asoka trees planted alongside favoured the way and giving a tough competition to the emanating heat waves of the sun to get in. The pavement takes us back to the centuries when these natural coolers were used by emperors in their gardens to defeat heat waves. They used to spend their quality time resting inside it. Although it is an ordinary way like any other but from the eyes of a nature lover it is like bliss of nature.

The paper developed and presented is just a bliss that was experienced at the first sight. It demanded to be vented out through words. It also motivated to get back to the centuries, turning pages and stuffed yourself with the writers who were the ardent supporters of nature. It also demanded the answers of certain questions like What pulled them so much that they wrote piles of work just to present

their devotion towards nature? What was the energy that they driven with? What was the flow that they flowed with? And at last, the unforgettable sight answers each and every question. That experience ends the curiosity to find answers. I strived hard to reveal the encountering of the divine experience but still the words are not enough.

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