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## **Human Phenomenon and Imperial Nature: An Ecological Study of Robert Frost's Poetry**

### **Abstract:**

Robert Lee Frost is one of the major American poets, born on 26<sup>th</sup> of March in 1874 in San Francisco. He is also known as the New England poet. He is rewarded four times Pulitzer Prize. Through the medium of his poetry Frost tried to spread awareness among human beings towards our environment and this message he conveyed beautifully through the medium of poetry. He dictates that nature is harsh and indifferent towards man and man should accept the troubles thrown by nature. Whatever we do, it directly affects our environment. He suggests that we must not be afraid of failure and defeats. We take from nature in abundance and return to it very little. So, he makes us aware that we must be Eco-friendly and must be aware of what is hidden in the lap of nature which our eyes are unable to perceive but which we can comprehend through our common sense.

**Key Words: Environment, Nature, Materialism, Technology, Exploitation, Science.**

### **Introduction:**

Man and Nature have been co-related with each other from primeval times. But 'man' made Nature as a source of development and as a result, we are facing a great natural disaster as the time is passing. In fact, the reason behind such an atrocity is somewhat related to the process of human development. During the course of development, the so called man interfered with our natural surrounding a lot and the result of it is in front of all of us. Just for the sake of progress, human beings adopted the way of deforestation. The worst thing is that for the establishment of

various sorts of industries, for fuels or in other words, in order to make their materialistic life luxurious and ultra-comfortable, human beings are still cutting woods without even considering over the fact that this man made natural disaster which is produced through various industries, mills are making our lives more difficult. Despite of the so called disaster, man is still going ahead on the way of upliftment, crushing our natural resources.

The fact cannot be ignored that it is Nature- our mother which teaches us the art of living. In fact, Nature plays a prominent role in up rearing our moral values. It must also be commented that man has a two way relation with environment. The meaning of the statement is that on the one hand, man is biologically associated to Nature as well as he is an integral part of Nature on the other. As a matter of fact, the all over life cycle of man – birth, development, health, and death are affected and controlled by environment in the same way as the other living creatures of Nature. But due to the physical and mental superiority in comparison to other creatures, man is capable to change it according to his own wishes. During the primeval times, the primitive man's basic need was limited to the food and that was the reason why there was an eco-friendly relationship between the two as both were dependent on each other. But unfortunately, as the time progressed and man uplifted socially and culturally along with the development of skills, mental status and technology, he turned out from an integral part of Nature to a destroyer of Nature. As an outcome of this natural haphazard, it is crystal clear that though the 'modern man' held high technologically and sociologically, yet he is lowered culturally and from the perspective of moral values.

The repercussion of the advancement in technology comes before us in the form of oil spills, toxic waste contamination, and battles over public land use, protests over nuclear waste dumps, predictions of global warming and many others which are making our earth inhospitable for life. As a result, to aware mankind of the interdependency of the two is needed and for the same purpose, as literature is the mirror of society, it originated a new kind of theory that is known as the "Eco critical Theory".

Eco criticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of Nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards 'Nature' and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of

cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environment, while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself ( and literary texts ) with other ecological sciences and approaches. (Nayar 242)

From the above mentioned definition, it is quite clear that Eco criticism explores nature-oriented texts to literary studies as well as an environmental awareness through the same texts. Needless to say that Eco criticism deals with the attitude of the human beings towards Nature and vice-versa not only in modern time but through all the ages. Apart from dealing with the interdependency of the two, it focuses our attention on the fact that though there should be a give and take relationship between the two but as time progresses, man tries just to get from Nature as much as he can because of his greed and does not pay her back anything for her services towards mankind. In other words, Eco critical theory focuses on Nature representation in literary texts and to recover nature-oriented texts and thereby to establish a link between man and Nature and to make aware mankind of environmental hazard is the creed of such a theory. It was William Reuckert who in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978 coined this term. “By ecocriticism Reuckert meant “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (Glotfelty xx).

The poetry of Robert Frost also tries to fulfil the same creed. Though because of opting various shades of nature within its rural background, critics have crowned him as a pastoralist. Pastoralists do not get affected by nature but with the rural life within the natural background. Doubtlessly Frost emerges as a pastoral poet at once through his poems as he too painted the rural characters and their problems through his poetic canvas but he has not enchained himself merely within this particular aspect. In this regard, Faggen has well commented that “In the pastoral dramas Frost will depict a close ecological relationship between man and nature” (Faggen TCIRF 110). Other than this, some critics compare him to Wordsworth because of his inclination towards Romantic poetry but if we delve deep into his poems, we will find that though he has adopted “Nature” as the subject matter of most of his poems yet he, unlike Wordsworth, does not relate any divine spirit with that of nature. Bearing a similarity with Wordsworth, Frost’s poems too begin in delight but unlike Wordsworth, his poems end with wisdom or a moral message. A tree is merely a tree to him and how the over exploitation of natural resources bring our lives under stress has been beautifully delineated by him. Contrasting

the nature poets, there is a kind of awareness in his poems as he himself said in an interview, “Some have called me a nature poet, because of the background, but I’m not a nature poet. There’s always something else in my poetry” (Faggen TCIRF 109). And this “something else” is nothing but the intention to excite awareness towards the earth’s supporting system which men try to overcome. Hence, “Eco criticism originates in a bio-social context of unrestrained capitalism, excessive exploitation of nature, worrying definitions and shapes of ‘development’ and environmental hazard...Eco criticism focuses on the material contexts of industrialization, development, pollution and ecocide while developing a frame for reading” (Nayar 241-242).

Taking into consideration one of the poems of Frost entitled “Fire and Ice”; we can say that one could find the great complexity of meaning in it. Frost here seems to emphasize on the idea that the passion of the materialistic growth has enchained human beings in such a way that the ‘world’ will definitely burn to ashes into the pyre of passion. Thus:

In nine short lines Frost posits the possibility of two different versions of the same catastrophe. Like as we know it may end because of an excess of sensual appetites, of lust, longing, “desire”; or existence may come to a close due to a surplus of malevolence, rancor, “hate”. The speaker of the poem presents the two alternatives as equally plausible scenarios. The fact that the world will end is not questioned; merely the manner of its devastation is deliberated as something yet to be determined (Tuten 113).

We can purport the incident of Second World War in which the scientific invention can create havoc to what extent is quite clear. The Atom Bomb, dropped by America on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of August in 1945, changed their lives completely. In this way, we can say that man has become so indifferent towards environment that he just wants to avail of his natural resources and does not want to pay anything back to it. To quote a few lines of the poem for a better comprehension:

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
For what I have tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favour fire. (Latham 220, 1-4)

Here, Frost has the touch of Tennyson. Like Frost, Tennyson did not shut his eyes to the aftermath of scientific discoveries. Tennyson too was aware of both the manifestations of nature—soft as well as harsh. Unlike Wordsworth and Shelley, Tennyson’s nature, like Frost is also violent, outrageous and dangerous. Whereas Wordsworth’s “nature never did betray the heart that loved her” (Dwivedi 65, 125-126). Tennyson’s nature is “red in tooth and claw”. It is unresponsive to the human suffering. John F. Lynen has commented in this regard:

This contrast between man and nature is the central theme of Frost’s nature poetry. Whereas Wordsworth sees in nature a mystical kinship with the human mind, Frost views nature as essentially alien. Instead of exploring the margin where emotions and appearances blend, he looks at nature across an impassable gulf. What he sees on the other side is an image of a hard, impersonal reality. Man’s physical needs, the dangers facing him, the realities of birth and death, the limits of his ability to know and to act are shown in stark outline by the indifference and inaccessibility of the physical world in which he must live. (Lynen 145-146)

His most well-known poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”, emphasises on the Marxist Eco critical Theory. The last stanza of the poem makes us consider over the fact that here Frost tries to lay emphasis over the notion of man-made natural disasters. Though the woods seems to the speaker as the replica of beauty yet he will have to make it of his own use as he has the responsibility to fulfil the materialistic desires of his family, for which he has become totally disinclined towards Nature. Though he has to fulfil the materialistic needs of his family, still he must not forget his responsibility towards environment. If he is cautious in using environmental resources, he will show responsibility towards environment and coming generations. To quote some lines:

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.  
(Lathem 224-225, 13-16)

Considering the poem entitled “After Apple Picking”, we come across the fact that the apple picker of the present poem is quite indifferent in his attitude towards Nature. Nature serves as merely a sort of earning livelihood to him. In fact, through the apple-picker, the basic purpose of Robert Frost is to describe that the attitude of the modern man has become apathetic towards Nature in such a way that even the smell of an object of Nature seems to him rotten and intoxicating. Having done his job of picking apples, he wants to keep himself aloof from this so called environment as he took refuge to Nature not for the sake of any mental solace, but for his own benefit. And for the same purpose the modern man does not even hesitate to crush it from all cores. It would be better to quote some lines of the poem:

For all  
That struck the earth,  
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,  
Went surely to the cider-apple heap  
As of no worth. (Lathem 69, 32-36)

Mention can be made of the poem “The Road Not Taken”. It deals with the apocalyptic approach of Eco criticism. In other words, to deal with the “end-of-the-world scenarios sets the ground of such approach. The stanza:

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference. (Lathem 105, 16-20)

too can be related with human evolution, development of science, flourishing of industries, decreasing human values. For a better understanding, it must be noted that with the development of science, no doubt our life has become easy and luxurious but it cannot be negated that it has also introduced the world to Atom Bomb that took lives of thousands of human beings in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, another example we can take from our contemporary society, even within India. One part of India is suffering through flood disaster while another part is facing the havoc of draught. Mention can be made of the 2005 Mumbai flood which ended the life of lots of people whereas in 2006, China faced the condition of draught which affected millions of

inhabitants from the shortage of water. But we cannot negate that these types of natural disasters are the result of the destructive changes in environment/ atmosphere as done by man. Harold Fromm in “From Transcendence to Obsolescence: a Route Map” throw light on the fact that

How the Industrial Revolution affected humanity’s conception of its relationship to nature, warning that technology has created the false illusion that we control nature, allowing us to forget that our “unconquerable minds” are vitally dependent upon natural support systems. (Glotfelty xxvii)

The poem “Birches” too deals with the world of bio-disaster, full of polluted air in which we are living. In this poem “Frost makes an analogy between trees and people as he shows the way “ice storms”, the blunt reality of environment, bends the unyielding trees down to stay. Only the flexibility of a boy’s play with birches can “take the stiffness” out of trees as he represents a limited and temporary creation of form amidst terrifying chaos.” (Faggen TCCRF 65) The speaker sees the birches tossing in the air from left to right and imagines that they are tossing and are bent because of the birch swinger boys. He knows that they are bent due to ice storm but he prefers to live in his imagination. The reason is the bridge that has been formed between the two. The heavy burden of earthly life has captivated human beings in such a way that man has isolated himself from nature and does not pay attention to it. The theme deals with the thought of earth and heaven, truth and imagination, flight and return. Through his imaginative eyes, the speaker tries to “get away from earth awhile” and to take flight in the world of nature and leave behind the anguishes of human life. Keats’ spirit of rolling back to the realistic world is applied by Frost as well as he opines that human beings are bound to return to the realistic world to execute the worldly duties. Men in the modern age have secluded themselves completely from nature which Frost does not favour. But, Frost, unlike the Romantics, does not escape to the world of imagination leaving all the things behind. He advocates “a momentary stay against confusion” thereafter to come back to the world of reality:

So was I myself a swinger of birches.  
And so I dream of going back to be.  
It’s when I’m weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood

Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
 Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
 From a twig's having lashed across it open.  
 I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
 And then come back to it and begin over.  
 May no fate willfully misunderstand me  
 And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
 Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
 I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
 (Lathem 122, 41-53)

In other words, we should be realistic in our attitude. To remain inactive is not favoured by Frost. To maintain a proper balance between give and take is what Frost favours. There should be an Eco-oriented relationship between the two otherwise the improper balance will bring calamities to the world. As was the Tohoku earthquake of Japan in the year 2011. It affected several portions of Japan and destroyed the houses of million peoples but we cannot forget that the cause of such a natural hazard was the nuclear energy, left in our atmosphere which directly became the cause of such a disaster.

“The Cow in Apple Time” is written considering Third World Environmentalism of Ecology which suggests how the use of fertilizers, mining, engineered seeds bring exploitation in environment. This poem depicts how the use of vaccines in order to swell fruits and vegetables before time is making us unhealthy. After getting progress in the field of science, the use of fertilizers for the crops has been started but it can be said that though it helps in the production of crops yet the fact is unignorable that it snatches away all its healthiness from it. The same is the reason of getting unhealthy at an early age in the present era. The impact of the use of fertilizers and vaccines can be seen not only in human beings but the other living creatures of the earth are also getting infected by it. The same plays the role of disinterestedness of the cow towards her own food—crops as mentioned with the help of the lines: “Having tasted fruit/ she scorns a pasture withering to the root” (Lathem 124-125, 5-6). Having tasted the crops, she left it uneaten which resulted in her weakness and making her udder dry: “She leaves them bitten when she has to fly/ She bellows on a knoll against the sky/ Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry” (Lathem

125, 9-11). The same thing can be applicable in case of the human beings. Through the advancement in technology, human beings propagate the production of crops, fruits, vegetables or in other words the eatables for economic benefit and try to ignore the fact that how much they are making our lives futile. The repercussion of it comes before us in the form of several diseases which human beings are facing in this scientific era. Even the younger generation of this age is suffering from diseases like gout, cataract, diabetes and many others which are just the effect of technical progress.

### **Conclusion:**

In this way, Robert Frost is the poet who is known for his realistic depiction of the natural surroundings. Being an environmentalist, Frost too tries to spread awareness among the human beings towards our environment and this message he conveyed beautifully through the medium of his poetry. Frost dictates that nature is harsh and indifferent towards men. "Nature for this poet is neither friend nor foe, nor is it the backdrop for human drama; it is this poet's terrifying self-portrait" (Brodsky 8). He opines that men should accept troubles thrown by nature. His perspective becomes prominent as he says that men are to survive by being courageous and fearless in the face of natural barriers, but he never meant that men should cross all limits. Whatever we do individually or in a group, it becomes a collective part in building our environment. We take from nature in abundance and return to it very little. So he makes us aware that we must be Eco friendly and must be aware of what is hidden in the lap of nature which our eyes are unable to perceive but we can comprehend through our common sense.

But unfortunately, despite of many movements like Chipko Movement, Maitri Movement, World Wide Life Fund, which were organized for the betterment of our environment, it's still going on polluted. In fact, the Green House Gases are chief cause in making our environment disastrous. We should not ignore the fact that for the overall development of the human race, the purification of Nature is an essential need and therefore the Ecocritics try to make us aware towards the very abode of human beings i.e. Nature, as it focuses on the Eco-oriented industrialization, development. Ecology also provide a theory that how it should be implemented in the contemporary world, for example it tells that we should try to avoid using things that is made of plastic and which is harmful to the environment. Thus, ecology accentuates, on the environmental study and the poems of Robert Frost accomplish it a lot.

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