

Man's position in the universe. An insight in Frost's poetry

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Abstract - The present paper intends to focus realistic nature of Robert Frost's poetry as the man's position in the universe. Robert Frost, as a poet, may appear to be an escapist when we read his nature poetry but this is not true. He was not an escapist but a realist. This is why he has been considered a modern poet, as modern as W.H. Auden and T.S. Eliot were. Frost was as sensitive as a poet as other great poets have been and he also could not shut his eyes to the grim realities of life about which we read in his poetry again and again. The appeal of his poetry rests on so many things one of which is his awareness about the stark realities of life, the life that many appears to be unbearable. Man's environment is not merely out of understanding and impossible to reach. It also expresses great power in him because its sources are mysterious. This mysterious way of environment can be full of risk to man.

Index Terms - Universe, position, escapist, conception, limitation.

INTRODUCTION

Chaucer was considered the father of English poetry chiefly because he wrote realistic poetry in an age in which the poets were busy in writing dreamy poetry and allegories. And it must be accepted without discussion that a poet's duty towards the society is that of a prophet who talks of things as they are. Robert Frost understood this truth and as such he wrote poetry that is realistic in colour. He was not unconcerned with what was happening around him. He was also not unconcerned with the story of human misery and its causes. Similarly, he took time to understand the predicament of human life, man's agnosticism and the necessity of faith for peace.

Robert Frost, as a poet, may appear to be an escapist when we read his nature poetry, but this is not true. He was not an escapist but a realist. This is why he has been considered a modern poet, as modern as W.H. Auden and T.S. Eliot were. Frost was as sensitive as a

poet as other great poets have been and he also could not shut his eyes to the grim realities of life about which we read in his poetry again and again. The appeal of his poetry rests on so many things one of which is his awareness about the stark realities of life, the life that many appears to be unbearable. And this theme of the agony of human life, of the conflict between faith and doubt has been again and again dealt with in a large number of his poems contained in the different volumes. It has been accepted by the latest researchers who have worked on Frost he has written realistically and that his realistic poetry is of a very high standard. In this respect, Robert Frost can be compared with T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

His other poem 'Brown's Descent' describes the experience of a man who is contrasted with the character in his other poem 'The Mountain'. Brown is a happy fellow who takes pleasure in sliding down mountains with arms. He is not harmed because he manages to control himself. After reaching his destination, he does not give up the hope of getting home again. He is determined to return his home. He takes long way home by road. This poem deals with the firm resolve of Brown and his dignity. Through this poem Robert Frost made a complimentary comment on the firmness of man. It reflects Frost's faith in certain basic human values.

DISCUSSION

Robert Frost has given his conception of poetry. He has told about nature's independence. This is more than true that human beings cannot understand clearly the real circumstance in which they exist. It is out of their approach. Man believes that he is a passenger on a train in heaven as in his best poem 'Passing Glimpses' from the volume 'West Running Brook', Frost has said, "Was something brushed across my mind

That no one earth will ever find?
Heaven gives its glimpses only to those
Not in position to look two closes”?

Man's environment is not merely out of understanding and impossible to reach. It also expresses great power in him because its sources are mysterious. This mysterious way of environment can be full of risk to man. This power is a striking feature of many poems of Robert Frost like 'The Draft Horse', 'Storm Fear' and 'Peril of Hope'. Sometimes Robert Frost emphasises upon the power of natural forces as uncontrollable destructiveness. So Robert Frost always stresses on the changeable conditions under which man exists. In changeable conditions man may feel himself satisfied in spite of several difficulties in life.

Robert Frost sees the universe, as the most problematic environment. When Robert Frost feels that the universe is really inimical to man, he usually sees it as the instrument of harsh God, or worse as in his best poem 'Design' and 'The Lovely Shall be Chooser', Robert Frost tries to make man's situation lightly as in 'The Lesson for Today' and 'Not All There'.

“I hold your doctrine of Memento Mori,
And were an epitaph to be my story
I'd have a short one ready for my own
I would have written of me on my stone.
I had a lover's quarrel with the world.”

Robert Frost suggests in these lines that these are the conditions of conflict which man has to face in his life. In several poems Robert Frost indicates that man is unable to understand the reality of nature, and its relationship with him. Robert Frost was intensely preoccupied with man, his problems, his basic achievements and his situations. He has represented the bewildered man who is determined to do something in this fearful universe. He feels that man has it in him to enjoy his world and his life. But he may not be able to exercise complete control over his natural forces and natural environment. He may not be able to solve the mysteries of the universe. Robert Frost has pointed out the basic values for living in a satisfactory manner.

Robert Frost says in one of the poems 'Neither Out Far nor In Deep', if one chooses between land and sea, the finite and infinite, the sea has to be the infinite. It is out of human being's reach. Robert Frost was never tired in his search for truth. He wanted to know the reality.

“They cannot look out far.

They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep?”

Robert Frost considers man's rational limitations at length in 'A Masque of Reason'. It is a short verse play. It deals with the Biblical story of Job. Robert Frost is in some way like John Milton. As John Milton's aim is to justify God's ways to man in 'Paradise Lost', Robert Frost's aim is also to justify God's ways to man. Man cannot go beyond his limitations. He must submit to the mysterious force.

Robert Frost's belief in the limitations of man has profound implications. He says that there are not only difficulties with the nature and universe but also with man's infinite mind. It may be impossible to measure. According to Robert Frost's the vision of man's limitations is something reasonable. Man finds himself amid confusion beyond his control. His position is precarious in this universe. And in front of the power of the universe man feels himself isolated. He faces difficulties due to alienation in this vast universe.

Man is commonly in difficulties. His capabilities are limited, The universe is largely incomprehensible and uncontrollable, Man's position is equally unfortunate in this universe which is incomprehensible. How does man then behave? What stance does he take? What attitude does he adopt? How does he feel due to his unfortunate condition? The picture of these conditions of man Robert Frost creates in much of poetry is certainly discouraging. Sometimes he finds way to control these conditions. But often he shows man to be pitiable at best and at worst. They are self-centred. As Robert H. Swenness says in 'Dialogue of Contraries' "When Robert Frost depicts men and women in makes an apparently Godless universe, he often shows them trying to be so independent of their surrounding and of other people that they lose their human understanding and sympathy, and even verge of escapism. They often deny, or fail to achieve real content with others or with the natural world. Their behaviour reflects a pride that inevitably given an indifferent universe, them lonely and fearful."

Home Burial presents clearly and tragically a couple. They cannot understand each other's emotions. Each of the two speakers believes that only his or her attitude and behaviour is good. Actually, they reveal a failure to understand each other's feelings. The wife considers that her husband is brutal because he can

speak so casually about his dead child. He could actually dig the little grave for his dead child. She feels that her husband can never understand her emotions. The man wants to understand her feelings. He has also deep feelings about the death of his child. But he is unable to express his sensitiveness towards his child because he deals with practical and physical world. This attitude of the life makes it impossible for him fully to comprehend his wife's despair, her feeling towards her dead child. We find that this is a common male reaction in Robert Frost's work. Like many other characters in Robert Frost's poetry this man feels too much pride in his own nature as a man.

We find a different clearance of man's limitation in 'The Bear'. In this poem man is represented as prisoned in cage in universe. He is alone and almost completely absorbed with himself. Robert Frost says that he seems to be a ridiculous figure who is trapped within the limits of his existence and truth. a

“The bear puts both arms around the tree above her
And draws it down as if it were a lover
And its choke cherries lips to kiss good by
Then lets it shape back upright in the sky.

In one of the poems 'The Star Splitter' the farmer hopes to search more about 'Man's place among the infinities' with his telescope. He is not interested in farming. He has fixed his mind on buying a telescope. He wants to sell his farm but he finds no customer. He gets an idea. He burns his house for the fire insurance. He buys a telescope from the money of fire insurance. But was the farmer a fool because to buy a telescope he burnt his house? Certainly not. He satisfied his curiosity of mind by star gazing which is a great thing for man to struggle with the universe and his unpleasant situation. Robert Frost considers the activity futile. It was entertaining but it was doomed to fail.

“You know Orion always comes up sideways
Throwing a leg up over our fence of mountains,
And rising on his hands, he looks in on me
Busy outdoors by lantern with something.”

He felt in many of his earlier poems like 'The Trial by Existence' and 'A Steeple on the House' that there is God who is concerned with human affairs. He watches his devotees and human beings. But in the role of prudential man, he tries to create his world. Because of isolation man is dissatisfied with the world as God has left the universe. Due to this, many men in Robert Frost's poems seem to feel the cruelty of the world. Robert Frost does not consider life as chaos. In his

later poetry he emphasises on human limitations rather than human potentialities. To Robert Frost, the world is meaningless and mindless. It lacks completeness. Man was created so that he might try to make the world complete by his efforts and struggles. According to Nitchie -

“Individualism is one form of man's reaction to the evil world.”

Robert Frost emphasises on the acceptance of bitter truth and the principle of struggle. Man will have to accept this bitter truth that the universe is unpleasant and not very satisfactorily. But for making the universe pleasant, man will have to struggle with the universe. He will have to find his position in this fearsome universe. For this, Robert Frost emphasises the principle of struggle. He distrusts human intelligence and emphasises human will. Difficulties can be won by an exercise of will. But he finds one difficulty in it. He finds the difficulty of maintaining the will in a world which is meaningless. Human will be his strength that he did not fall into a state of despair in spite of so many bad episodes in his life. Man will have to enhance the power of his will, so that he can struggle with unpleasant situation in his life. Robert Frost also emphasised upon the principle of love and need'. He suggested that life is guided the principle of love. A Human being should act in accordance to the facts and needs of limited human life. His great poem 'Mowing' is evidence of this attitude of love and need. “The fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.”

A Human being should act with an unselfish love in the created world. He should create a feeling of love which is far from this materialistic world. He should not create the attitude of selfish love. If he accepts this attitude, he may struggle with the world to some extent. His all actions are surcharged with a feeling of love with other human beings and it brings joy in the life of a human being in his daily life. Robert Frost's first poem 'The Pasture' reveals this attitude and feeling of love most clearly. This poem evokes the sense of Frost's love of the created world. While he is showing sympathy for natural objects, he makes a link between man and nature. So, man can accept the bitter truth of this vast universe. Robert Frost thinks that by a feeling of love he can struggle with this fearsome universe.

Robert Frost's poetic attitude is often passive in depicting the universe. Man accommodates himself to

the condition of his existence. He should accept the reality of the vast universe. Robert Frost thinks that there is often considerable courage in human beings. There is often considerable patience and tolerance in human beings to struggle with the world. Courage in human being is necessary to struggle with the world. In the poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', the speaker resists the temptation of death. It is because of his determination. His determination is that he has to fulfil his duties in life that belong to his family and society. It is because of his attitude of forbearance and patience that in spite of many difficulties in life he avoids to go into the dark forest because he has to complete his responsibilities towards his family before he sleeps, before he dies. Nature could not tempt the speaker due to his attitude of patience and courage.

The basic element of Robert Frost's acceptance of bitter truth is determination to maintain a faith. He reveals in many of his poems, the uncertainty about the existence of God and benevolence of God. But later he made the assumption that God exists and there is a purpose of man's existence. The perfect example of this is formed only in his poem 'The Trial by Existence' and also in his later Masques, 'A Masque of Reason' and 'A Masque of Mercy'. One may feel the existence of God in this universe. In 'A Masque of Mercy' "Nothing can make injustice just but mercy".

Robert Frost often reveals doubt about the nature of reality. He reveals doubt about man's ability to struggle with this universe. But in 'All Revelation', he assumes that nature of reality depends somewhat on man's own understanding. It is the understanding of human being which gives him courage to struggle with this fearsome universe. In the other words, Robert Frost says that as if reality had a partly independent existence, it is partly created by man's own understanding. This attitude is revealed in the poems 'The Mountain' and 'Two Look at Two'.

"The mountain held the town as in a shadow.

I saw so much before I slept there once;

I noticed that I missed stars in the west,

Where its black body cut into sky"

Man has to learn his limitations in order to survive in this world. This poem has the various sources from where man can learn more about himself and his relationship with nature. Man should learn to compromise. He should learn to recognise his limitations. In 'The Mountain', the mountain is a

malevolent force of nature and enemy of the villagers. This mountain occupied all the space they had. Robert Frost says whether one likes it or not, that one has to accept his predicament. He will have to accept the reality of nature.

Robert Frost's poetic stance represents one solution to resist the confusion of existence. He suggests one solution which is to escape. But it is clear that he did not generally accept the idea of escape. He always seeks solutions to the problem of man's confusion about existence. Man is facing the confusion of modern existence. Further, Robert Frost suggested the way to salvation. In the 'A Masque of Mercy' the keeper is finally convinced that man is saved only by God's mercy. It is concerned with fear. Robert Frost represents the feeling of fear throughout his poetry. He always interpreted fear in many ways. He saw it as a dominating nature. It dominates human feelings. We find that fear is the only factor which governs the universe whether it is the fear of God or any another kind of fear as in the poem 'The Fear'. It seems that Robert Frost was uncertain about the existence of God and about whether the universe is fundamentally manageable or not. And this uncertainty is a reflection of the obscurity that he believed to be inherent in this vast universe. Robert Frost is rarely of single mind because he is conscious of the complexity of man and his universe. His works indicate a mixture of faith and confidence in the world. On the one hand he is uncertain or even fearful about man's position and on the other hand, he reflects upon a confidence in the poem 'It Bids Pretty Fair'.

"The play seems out for an almost infinite run.

Don's mind a little thing like the actors fighting.

The only thing I worry about is the sun".

CONCLUSION

Robert Frost was uncertain about the existence of God and about whether the universe is fundamentally manageable or not. And this uncertainty is a reflection of the obscurity that he believed to be inherent in this vast universe. Robert Frost is rarely of single mind because he is conscious of the complexity of man and his universe. Thus Robert Frost's poems indicate a mixture of certain and uncertain about the position of human beings in the universe.

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