

## The Poetry of Robert Frost: A Treasure of Thoughts

Santosh Kumar ✉

Research Scholar, Department of English, J. P. University, Chapra (Bihar), India.

The poetry of Robert Frost is a golden treasury of thoughts and morals of common day to day life. The thoughts expressed in the poetry are not direct and straight-forward, rather a combination of beautiful images and symbols, technique and style. Each poem of Robert Frost contains some universal idea or message which is the demand of the day. The beauty of his poetry lies in his deep and profound exploration of some events specially in and around nature and rural surroundings. We all human being are often interacted with various activities of Nature, but the credit goes to Robert Frost who observes the things very minutely and dives deep into the natural objects or events and churns out the truth. As a matter of fact, every object of Nature has something to say, but it all depends upon our observation. As the milk contains the oil or ghee, but we don't see it. But when it is churned by a milkman, both milk and ghee are separated. In the same way, Robert Frost, like a milkman churns the poems and takes out its essence in the form of ideas and messages which are very relevant today. This research paper is devoted to a critical study of some well-known poems of Robert Frost and examines and elucidates the various thought and ideas hidden in the poetry.

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Today Robert Frost is known to the whole world as one the most widely read poets of the world. His deep interest in Nature and rural surroundings are very interesting and thoughtful. Frost never expresses the ideas and messages in a direct and philosophical manner, rather he uses natural objects and rural settings for deep and profound ideas. Because of this special features, his poetry lite that of Shakespeare appeal to both the rough and the refined, villagers and city dwellers, illiterate and highly qualified persons. A special feature of the poetry of Robert Frost is that he gazes at natural things like fields, trees, seasons and the activities of the workmen with great care and subtlety and in this process, he takes out universal thoughts. Let us see his famous poem, "The Road Not Taken" which begins:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I couldn't travel both  
And be one traveller, long stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the under growth.  
(Frost, 21)

The theme of the poem is not hidden: the poet is in a solitary trip; when he comes to a crossroads, he cannot decide what road to take, and this inability makes him start the process of self-reflection. He throws away the more congested path in favor of the less congested one after a long period of mental mentalization; a move which changes everything in his path in the end. Louis Untermeyer remarks about this theme by noting that Robert has gone his own way. He could not help it; his goal--his fate, perhaps, also, guided him with the spirit of the man behind him. Frost himself narrates that on a point of decision, where he was at a crossroads, he chose the one branch which appeared to be the less travelled, though the passing had dug them literally at the same point. Even at this moment he fancied that the outcome of the choice might be no trivial matter, that he would in due time suffer the decision to have been the making of the choice.

The poet is an individual that is demonstrated at the very beginning, even before he starts his career. The way Frost took

was not just an alternate one, or even the right one that he could have taken, but the only one that he could have taken.

'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' is one of the most well known and most popular works collected by Frost. The poem follows lyrical form, and the tone is brood as well as slow tempo. The setting of the piece is pastoral thus placing it in the context of nature. Although the poem seems to be about a silent winter landscape, there is a deeper meaning to the verse, in fact quite a wide one. In this gentle lyric Frost pours the masterful art to the culmination of responsibility--to the attestation of the commitments to be observed, to the duties to be performed.

The action in the poem is initiated in middle of a situation, towards its climax. However, on rather indirect grounds, the story shifts to personal to the universal and spreads out of the individual realm. This change of focus indicates the change in the focus on the personal experience to the universal resonance as the poem progresses. The particular therefore becomes the general, the intimate the expansive, by the changes in emphasis, the rhythm, the meter, the rhyme, the technique in general. Finally, both the form and content of the poem cannot be separated, and each relies on the other to obtain its efficacy.

Frost is not a mystic poet like Blake. He does not see in nature the source of union with God. There is nothing platonic in his view of life; everything is good in itself not because of its association with something else. When Frost says, "All revelation has been ours", he really means what he says. He tells no little of

the life hereafter. He is not a visionary poet, as Coleridge or Wordsworth or Shelley was. For him, the earth has plenty of wonders to show to man. One does not require superhuman faculties to reach them.

Frost's philosophy of life was bleak and gloomy. The New England of Frost's youth was in the process of declining prosperity. The area was quickly becoming urbanized and industrialized. This was causing stress and strain in the relations of people. Families were also disintegrating. The struggle for existence was becoming grim and future looked so insecure. In such a background it was natural that Frost should think of man as solitary and lonely and isolated from Nature, isolated from God and isolated from his fellow-being. In the poem, "The Lesson for Today" Frost says that man had always to suffer frustration and indignity.

The probably used example of Frost craft was called Mending Wall, it is located in his collection of works, published in 1914, called North of Boston. The poem can only be seen as a dramatic monologue, where the first-person narrator, a young man who was the same with poet himself, discusses his philosophy of the world. His counterpart is a silent and old-fashioned farmer who never says anything; however, his speaker provides an insight into the conservatism and orthodoxy of the farmer. Although the story is mainly descriptive and anecdotal, it is rather challenging to the reader as it creates the impression that the purpose of a poet is not completely clear.

The poet meets his neighbour annually in the spring to fix the stone wall which cuts

through their neighbouring lots. The older farmer of New England, face in a long-standing belief on the virtue of walls, does not develop his belief, but repeats the maxim of his father, Good fences make good neighbours. However, the speaker takes the opposite standpoint because he makes it clear that he feels a different way compared to that of the farmer:

There where it is we do not need the wall.  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

Overall, the poem reflects two diametrically opposite approaches to life: one is the belief about the power of nature which unites people, and the other one is conservatism as one of the ways to maintain clear boundaries. Two stereotypical characters, a young, liberal voice and elderly, conservative voice are the embodiment of these roles.

The stylistic touches of Frost are not foreign to this piece: the words are familiar and can be easily colored, but sharp; and the dramatic monologue structure gives the speaker an opportunity to ask questions and then give his answers to them.

“Into My Own” (p.5) is the opening poem of *A Boy’s Will*. Evidently, the persona here is a rural boy who expresses his desire to escape. Rather than choosing the highway, “where the slow wheel pours the sand”, he would like to escape into Nature—The dark woods; which stretch away “into the edge of doom”, where he can fully realize his identity. He also says that he would like to meet some of his friends there who pursue him into the forest and is sure that they would find him unchanged in his views and ideas. It is a poem

of wish fulfilment. Nature is treated as benevolent. In the words of Robert M. Rechnitts, Nature is depicted as, “just, serene and noble”, a demanding teacher yet willing to reward decent human endeavour. She may wear a “mask of gloom”, yet she is solid dependable and aligned with life.

The persona announces his quest for meaning in life and rejects the social role to retreat into the forest. In the words of Roger Ekins “the poem illustrates the desire to extend the limits of home space. While Frost avoids the transcendentalism of Emerson, he nevertheless ‘establishes an original relationship’ with the outside world. He extends the metaphor of home to include both ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ weather...Just as building a house is a method of creating a sacred space out of chaos, so is “stealing away into the woods – that is as long as one is at home in the woods”.<sup>3</sup> The language of the poem is figurative, conventional and straight forward, easily understandable by the reader. It is exclusively a poem of Nature, much like one of Wordsworth.

The “Death of the Hired man” (p.34), is touching poem which narrates a simple episode containing the plight of the ‘hired’ men, whose services are utilized by the mechanized American Society. At the same time the poem tells us how the ‘hired’ men sometimes exploit the sentiments of their masters. The hired man of the poem is Silas, who leaves his master during the peak harvesting scene when his services are badly required. But Silas comes back to the home of the master in his absence. The master’s wife, Mary, takes pity on old Silas and requests her

husband to “be kind” to the servant. To this the husband’s rejoinder is:

When was I ever anything but kind to him?  
But I’ll not have the fellow back”, he said  
I told him so last haying, didn’t I?  
If he left then, I said, that ended it.  
What good is he? Who else will harbor him  
At his age for the little he can do?  
What help he is there’s no depending on.  
Off he goes always when I need him most. p.34

While Warren is making his argument, his wife requests him not to speak loudly lest Silas should hear as he is “the poor old man” who has come to them “to save his self-respect”. However, the husband makes several arguments against the hired man, but his wife Mary goes on taking pity on Silas. The wife succeeds in half preparing the husband to take Silas back into his service. She says:

Go, look, see for yourself.  
But, Warren, please remember how it is  
He’s come to help you ditch the meadow  
He has a plan. You mustn’t laugh at him  
He may not speak of it, and then he may  
I’ll sit and see if that small sailing cloud  
Will hit or miss the moon (p.40)

Warren goes to the niche where Silas was made by Mary to sit, but she soon returns to tell her that Silas is “Dead”. The poem tragically concludes with the following symbolic expression of the speaker:

It hit the moon.  
Then there were three there, making a dim row,  
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she. (p.40)

This fascinating narrative of “The Death of the Hired Man” calls for multifarious interpretations of the poem. If we look at the central episode of the poem from the point of

view of husband-wife relationship, we shall be impelled to say that woman by heart is a manifestation of Christian virtues of Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love. And the name ‘Mary’ being the name of Christ’s mother makes our interpretation authentic.

Warren is a prototype of the twentieth century result oriented American farmer, who in pursuit of his results often forgets delicate human emotions and sentiments. Silas stands for all those petty working-class people who do not care for love and affection of their bread givers and do often ditch them particularly when their services are required most.

The mutual interdependence of man and nature is a significant topic in the poetry of Frost, which does not imply that both aspects are independent of each other. He imagines nature as a medium of facilitation, which brings the variety of its beauty, adoration, and even cruelty intelligibly to the reader. All the lines of the poems end up facing the inherent issues of human life, and provide, with a psychological insight, a possible solution. That is why abstraction, the ‘old story of philosophers becomes a ‘new toy’ with Frost. The poems of Frost are like ripples in a pool of water which cannot be exactly counted. A carefree lover of nature, might find simplicity in his descriptions of nature but a discerning reader with whom poetry is a work of special appeal will find in his poems of nature concerns of modern Man. V.B. Sharma observes:

The poems of Frost in which, he takes up, the theme of contraries have a universal import. In these poems, the persona poet is not an individual but a type of all human beings who are obliged to live life in the midst of nature to

earn their livelihood but livelihood is not their only aim. May be, they are farmers but they are educated farmers, thinking human beings with whom finding a solution to their problems is as important as their living. Since they think intensively and extensively to find a solution of their problems, thinking becomes with them an infinite process. The more they think, the more they learn until they feel that learning is an endless process. (Sharma, V.B. p.109)

Frost has left behind him a huge body lyric works that are essentially philosophical. When philosophical poetry is referred to, it is understood as the poetry which poses the fundamental questions of being, death, and human fate in the universe.

Whether this poetry also answers such questions, and whether these answers, in case they are given, fulfil the conditions of intellectual rigor, is a separate question of analysis.

Admittedly, Frost does ask serious philosophical questions, but his responses are inclined to specificity and ambivalence. This tendency towards vagueness is since there is no system or logical philosophical structure in which he attempts to express himself.

In this connection therefore it is impossible to condense the philosophical reflections of Frost into a diagrammatic accuracy.

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