



ECO FEMINISM AND ROBERT FROST'S POETRY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Introduction:

We cannot ignore the fact that since the inception of civilization, both women as well as Nature are the integral parts of any society or culture. The reason is that it is a woman who is the pillar of a home because of being the creator of the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the human beings on earth, the same woman makes a family and these families lay the base of a nation. Like woman, Nature too gives her offerings to the 'man-made society and never demand anything for that. In this way, we can say that though the maker of a nation is undoubtedly women yet the role of Nature cannot be underestimated. The reason is that since the birth of a child, it is both mother as well as Nature who polish the personality of a person—mother as a social teacher and Nature as a moral one. Thus, their role cannot be overlooked. But despite this, they both have been marginalized from ancient times. The so-called patriarchal society always negated women and Nature and treat them as their own property. The male-oriented society regards women and Nature as subservient who are created by God for their comfort. On the one hand, women are regarded as weak and palpable; Nature too is crushed by man and used as a stair to the way of development. But the worst fact is that this patriarchal society regard that the whole burden of the journey of life is on the strong shoulders of men because women do not have the capacity to do so and in order to live an ultra-comfortable, luxurious materialistic life, man did not stumble even on the path of deforestation. But one must keep in mind the fact that these two inseparable parts of our society which are considered to be the inferior parts in the eyes of the patriarchal society, are the wheels on which this earth depends on account of the fact that women give existence to men in this world physically and Nature controlled that existence throughout our lives since we depend on Nature for food, air and other life-giving objects. In fact, the same patriarchal society never gave chance to women to come forward and to go shoulder to shoulder with men. It is one of the barest facts that though we have reached on Moon and Mars in this modern era and still moving forward day by day, yet in the case of women; our thoughts are still circumscribed to the primeval times. In most of the parts; not only of India but of the world, women are still subjugated on the name of culture, family, tradition and many others. The same can be noted in case of Nature. Though there was an eco-friendly relationship between Nature and men in ancient times as men's life is merely confined to Nature those days but with the progress of the time, men esteemed Nature and women merely as 'objects' who must have to yield to the wishes of men. In fact, since the birth of a daughter, she is trained to various roles into which she will have to fit. It is our society which teaches how a girl should behave, talk, walk and think, just as we compress Nature according to our own wishes. Moreover, Rousseau's saying that "man is born free; but is everywhere in chains" is applicable mostly in case of women and Nature as well. The same negligible condition of the two gave rise to the movement Eco-Feminism (1970s) with the intention of dismantling the chains which women and Nature are bound with and to give equal rights to both. The Eco Feminists are of the opinion that "patriarchal society's values and beliefs have resulted in the oppression of both women and nature. It ignores women's work, knowledge and 'situatedness' (her immediate location in nature, where the relationship with the environment is far more intimate than that of a man's)" (Nayar 88). The Chipko movement is nothing but the outcome of the colonization of Nature, the chief exponent of which is a woman Vandana Shiva as the two—women and Nature bears semblance with each other and in the same way as Nature is crushed by man-made society, women too never got any chance to come forward or to express their views. Women were merely confined to their domestic works. In their view both Nature and women are debased on the basis of caste and class. In the view of Vandana Shiva, "National colonization brought with it a colonization of living natural resources such as the forests, and then a mental colonization in its prescription of technological and market-oriented responses to farming and environment" (Young 100).

In fact, this marginalization has its roots in heaven. Being a 'man' God himself is patriarchal in His attitude as He produced 'man' first and thereafter created 'woman' out of the ribs of man. Meaning that woman is represented even by God as the second fiddle despite the fact that it is woman who is the maker of the human beings on earth because of genetic force. God's patriarchy can be defined through the fact that "the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man called every living creature, that was the name thereof" (Nagarajan 209). In

connection to this, God reserves the same attitude for Nature as well. Because of being the supreme power and mainly a 'male', God adopted the tyrannical attitude and kept the 'Tree of Knowledge' for His own. Furthermore, it is not only in Greek Mythology that women are negated as they were not even considered as a parent at all; even the poetry of Milton is not left untouched from this mentality. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton stated, "He for God only: she (Eve) for God in him" (Nagarajan207). These lines leave the impression that women have always been maltreated, subjugated and underestimated in all the ages.

Thus, the proposed methodology that has been used to define how nature and women both are trapped in this patriarchal society is Eco-Feminism through which Robert Frost has tried to demonstrate that both nature and women are earth's essential parts, in the absence of which our lives will come to an end.

Robert Frost's poetry tries to contribute to the same efforts of Eco Feminists much before them. He deals with the rural life and in this regard Nature always provides the background. Frost's best poetry shows man's activities in Nature. His attitude towards Nature is one of armed and amicable truce and mutual respect interspersed with crossing of the boundaries, separating the two principle forces of the world and individual. But if we delve deep into his poems, we come across the fact that nature is the replica of women and by dictating the dreadful activities of man towards Nature, Frost tries to bring into limelight the all-pervading lamentable condition of women. In the same way as the patriarchal society is deaf to the sighs of women and tries to press it down with the utmost power, when Nature shows her outrage towards men because of their interference with the natural surroundings in the form of snowfalls, storms, melting of the glaciers and other natural disasters, human beings try to overpower them by cutting down the trees because they opine that both women and Nature have their existence just to offer their services to men. Like Eco Feminists, Robert Frost "gives women in his poetry enormous vocal presence and power: they speak for themselves. Few modern poets give women as much vocal prominence as Frost in lyrics, dramatic narratives, and dramatic monologues in which we find the speakers struggling against the entanglements of social and sexual domination of their own voice and sanity" (Faggen 92). The reason is that when commercial gain tempted the local men and they tried to subjugate the voice of women connected with the movement, women crossing the old erected boundaries of custom and culture and put their view that they will not be mesmerized by the short term advantages. As women are the source of food production and fetching fuels at homes; our ecology is the source of our vegetation, supply of water, fresh air and soil. In fact, "the women challenged the principles of the whole system, charging that the men had been ideologically colonized by the short-term commercial values of the market place, trying to take control of nature just as patriarchy tries to control women" (Young102). In addition to this, Frost's poetry delineates the aftermath of the over indulgence of man in the deeds of Nature in the form of scenes of draughts, battles over public land use, protests over nuclear waste dumps and many others which make our lives inhospitable to live. But it is a well-known fact that there are layers of meanings wrapped in a single word in Frost's poetry. The exploitation of Nature as represented by Frost resembles the pathetic condition of women.

His poem "A Servant to Servants" is "a voice for a woman trapped in the daily cycle of drudgery and a family cycle of madness and sexual trauma" (Tuten and Zubizarreta324). It is a dramatic monologue where a woman stated the trauma of life imposed on her by the patriarchal society. As suggested by the title, the woman of the poem is available all the time in the service of her husband and his hired persons but the indifferent attitude of the male society makes her exhausted from her own life. Even the serene and mesmerizing atmosphere of Nature brings desolation to her as it reminds of her own situation and here Frost has put the ground of the Eco Feminist theory. The lines:

I look and look at it.
I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water.
I stand and make myself repeat out loud
The advantages it has, so long and narrow,
Like a deep piece of some old running river
Cut short off at both ends. (Lathem63, lines 16-21)

The image of the lake resembles with that of the woman. Just as the lake has been shrunken from both the sides because of human activities for developing themselves socially and technologically, women too have always been dominated, first at their father's homes, thereafter by their in-laws. Moreover, as Nature took revenge from man by overpowering man through his harsh and grating forms; the woman in the present poem too cast aside the traditional role attributed to her and utters: "Is'pose I've got to the road I'm going:/ Other folks have to, and why shouldn't I?" (Lathem67, lines 159-160)

The same idea has been put before the readers in the poem "On Going Unnoticed" where Frost renders the complex life of a woman who has been capitulated from all cores in the man-made society. Mention can be made of the lines:

As vain to raise a voice as a sigh
In the tumult of free leaves on high.
What are you, in the shadow of trees
Engaged up there with the light and breeze.

(Lathem224, lines 1-4)

As Louis Untermeyer utters, “the poem itself places humankind in the realm of nature, where nature finds for a human being some place of relative standing” (Tuten and Zubizarreta 250). The above lines of the poem clearly suggest the notion that like Nature, women too are held to be the property of man, created by God, whom man treats the way he likes. Here, the word ‘free leaves’ can be understood as the image of men who are free from the shackles of traditional roles as imposed on women. Unfortunately, though the woman of the poem tries to raise his voice against the oppressions of men but her sigh does not even get noticed by the gender-biased male society as they regard that to rule over women and Nature is the God given task to men and to be ruled is of the former two.

The poem “The Hill Wife” can also be placed among the best examples of it. The five poetic sequences build up this fantastic poem on a woman’s inner feelings. As the first part ‘Loneliness’ describes the alienated mood of the wife because the patriarchal husband does not feel any kind of emotion for her, the same is the condition with Nature. In the same way as a fruitless tree has been treated by mankind as merely vague; women who are unable to give life to a new plant are maltreated by the society and the same wretched condition of women has been put before the readers through the childless woman of the present poem. Human beings do not feel any connection with it. The patriarchal husband of the poem has engrossed so much in money making that he does not pay any attention to his wife or in other words, the husband has made himself busy with his vocation in such a way which reminds the wife of the loneliness of her life. Just like Nature, a woman just needs her husband’s love and attention but the situation is quite paradoxical in their case as has been represented through the lines, “The truth being we are as much/ too glad for the one thing” (Lathem126, lines 7-8).

Mention can be made of the poem “Fireflies in the Garden” where women are put side by side with fireflies metaphorically. Though in the modern era, women got a position of their own yet they are always devalued by the males who thought himself to be the stars with whom this society is surrounded: “Here come real stars to fill the upper skies/ And here on earth come emulating flies/ That, though never equal stars in size” (Lathem246, lines 1-3).

Another poem of Frost entitled “The Subverted Flower” deserves a special mention here. The Eco-Feminist approach of Frost clearly visible here the moment a reader reads the title. Frost has mingled the image of a subjugated woman with that of the flower as the two shares the same role in the man-made society. In the modern world, Nature’s role has been confined merely as a pleasure giving object which soothes the sight of its watcher. The same can be commented about the pathetic condition of the female class in this world. Frost started the poem with the rejection of the girl towards the unnatural sexual drive of the lover. The word “lashed” in the opening lines of the poem arrests the attention of the readers. The reason is that through lashing, the lover who has also been brought up in the same patriarchal atmosphere, tried to overpower the girl just as man crushes the beauty of nature for their self-concerning pleasure. Like a flower, a girl also tries to blossom in the patriarchal society at her own demands but the cruel society pluck both from their roots so that they can make use of them according to their own will. In the same way as a flower attracts the eyes of the bees to it and the bee desires to have it for their own, the beauty of a girl aroused the same emotions within the sex-maniac heart of most men.

The same idea again has been articulated in the poem “Misgiving” where the birds expresses their desire to go along with the sweet breeze of spring season or in other words, to the primeval time when man had an eco-friendly relation with Nature. It is because of the all pervaded suffocating scientific air that all the inhabitants of the earth whether human beings, animals or birds are migrating to some other country where they can have the bliss of sweet and serene air. But symbolically it represents the female class who has been tired of being suppressed and now wants to live their lives as their own. They want to escape to a land where they can have freedom and power that women like Razia Sultana in History, Kunti in Mahabharata, Sarojini Naidu in Literature experienced:

Conclusion:

To conclude, we must say that Frost’s plea for women is undoubtedly co-related with the theory of eco-feminism. It must be commented here that in the opinion of the eco-feminists, both women and Nature are oppressed by patriarchal society. Nature too is seen as Mother Nature whose only task is to reproduce and offer her services for male-dominated society. The services of both women and Nature are not valued by men. In fact, men avail of the labour done by women and Nature. But we cannot ignore the fact that whereas without the contribution of women in domestic affairs, such as food preparation, nourishment of the children and taking the proper care of the old and sick persons as well as the contribution of Nature such as giving us fresh air, fruits to eat, trees for shade and water, our life is unimaginable as these factors create a healthy society; Nature too shares an inseparable bond with human beings as our lives are unimaginable in its absence. The Eco-Feminists tries to express their defiance to “centralization, corruption, exploitation, deprivation, hunger” (Young 104). In this way, we can say that Frost here tries to highlight the fact that male-dominated society always tries to suppress women and Nature from all sides. But if we wish to lead better lives, we must remember that it is not

possible without the contribution of women in society and the purification of Nature is also an essential need of the time and Frost's poetry makes us aware about the same.

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