

# **Wordsworth, a Mystic-cum-Environmentalism:**

## **Ecological Concerns in His Poetry**

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Ecology is the branch of biology that involves study of an ecosystem and deals with the relations between different components of the environment with each other and with the environment as a whole. It is the study of interdependence and interrelation of living and non-living components of the universe. Man is a great extraordinary entity of the universe. A body of flesh and blood, he breathes air, consumes food and satisfies basic needs of life through nature. The nature being part and parcel of his existence he has an inseparable bond with it. The study of nature includes all creations of the universe-- living and non-living, from air to earth, and space to scenes. All the geographical features of the earth evince the meaning of nature.

Undeniably man is a product of his environment. Since the cradle of civilization came to swing, his material needs intensified his greed and he started exhausting natural resources mindlessly. In the blind race of industrial progress and individual development, the nature, the Creator has been relegated to the background. Time and again, the conscious poets and writers have expressed their concern for protection and preservation of different aspects of ecology through their works. In the canon of writer-cum-environmentalists, the name of the romantic mystic and aesthetic poet, William Wordsworth is the first and the foremost.

Wordsworth had enjoyed his contact with nature and forgot his sorrows there, but during this proximity he counted the heartbeats of the nature. The nature was a guide, philosopher and the supreme master for him. He had gone to the woods, mountains, deserts and plains, no doubt to collect matter and material for his poetry, but side by side to realize the importance of all the

atoms of the universe. He found solace in the company of nature-- the solace, the ecstasy, the joy and moral and spiritual upliftment which he had never experienced in the fret and fever of the material life in the society around him. His extreme concern for nature somewhere reveals his inherent love for it. The present paper aims at a humble investigation of the ecological threads in the selected poems of this great disciple and worshipper of nature, William Wordsworth.

Wordsworth was a poet of high ideals and real figures. In his youth, he was attracted towards the ideals and ideas of the French Revolution. He saw the vision of an ideal state, beyond the pain and panic of differences, discrimination, poverty and unemployment, which were the aching problems of the day in France of that time. The revolutionary fervor and humanistic zeal for a happy life unleashed a new kind of energy and valor in the young mind of the poet.

*The Prelude* rightly called by the poet himself the record of the growth of the his mind is actually a trajectory of the poet's mind from Revolutionary phase to the rediscovery of self. From his youth Wordsworth was infatuated with nature. In the first phase of his poetry, nature appears as a wild, uncontrollable force, akin to the forces of the great revolution, which he accepted with open arms. At that point, Wordsworth says:

O pleasant exercise of hope and joy!  
For great were the auxiliars which then stood  
Upon our side, we who were strong in love!  
Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very Heaven! (*The Prelude*, X 690-4)

Despite the frenzied hostility of the English ruling class, the events in France aroused the most enthusiastic spirit in the artists and intellectuals and Wordsworth was no exception. His mind favoured the Right wing of the noble society, but his heart favoured the Jacobins more. But the awe and terror, spread with the coming of Maximilam Robespire, disheartened the noble and liberal mind of the poet. His hopes and beliefs associated with the Revolution got crushed completely. With the crowning of Napoleon Bonaparte as a new dictator of the state who crushed the most radical elements, Wordsworth became disillusioned with the ideals of French Revolution and moved back to the Right. He visited France during the armed truce of 1802 to meet Anne, his friend and beloved. But he had to quit early due to Napoleonic terror and fear. He had left his pregnant beloved and carried the burden in the walls of his heart. Along with this, he noted the changed atmosphere in the country of his ideals and vision. His ailing heart and aching head

retreated in the Lake District. His sister Dorothy's love for nature and his friend Coleridge's strong belief in Catholicism led him to the rejuvenating lap of nature ultimately.

Wordsworth did not hanker after ideal realms present in the hanky-panky world of his imagination nor did he adhere to one particular image or one particular theme related to the nature. He presented a much serious and solemn view of nature, the significant role and contribution of nature in human life. He tried to show through his works how to maintain equilibrium, a balance in the existence of human life through sensitivity towards life in the various entities of nature. His description of trees, fruits, seeds, water, air, mountain peaks, valleys, rivers, earth, birds and clouds reveals his anxiety to save and preserve them. His everlasting message is that the company of nature gives us permanent joy, and takes away the effect of transient sorrows. To him, the joy offered by it is beyond the pleasures given by material possessions. And it is for this treasure of joy and solace that we need to protect nature as the most precious aspect of our lives:

Coming in revelation, I conversed  
 With things that really are, I at this time  
 Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.  
 Thus did my days pass on and now at length  
 From Nature and her overflowing soul  
 I had received so much that all my thoughts  
 Were steeped in feeling. I was only then  
 Contented when with bliss ineffable  
 I felt the sentiment of being spread  
 O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still, (The Prelude, bk. II 393-400)

Wordsworth's poems though sometimes reflect an echo of things dimly remembered, loosely structured, but are experimental and intelligent experiences of childhood and adult life of the poet. Passing through different phases of his life, he developed a sense of strong inclination towards nature, which resulted in a strong bond, when he was disillusioned with the capacity of the so called industrialized and civilized world to give happiness and solace to man. In nature, he found a remedy to heal all the psychic wounds and injuries inflicted by the selfishness, artificiality and hollowness of worldly life. For him, the nature had the power to console the suffering

humanity. He did not ever turn his back to nature even for a moment, because it consoled him when he needed it the most, and he very well knew: “nature never betrays the heart that loves her.” Wordsworth’s concern for and concept of nature is somewhat different from other environmentally conscious writers in that his concern was not for the ethereal beauty and sensual manifestations, but the sound of music and the heavenly pleasure, the presence of the divine lying beneath the sights and sounds of the nature. His uniqueness and greatness as a poet of nature lies in the fact that he presented in his poetry an impressive and emotionally satisfying account of man’s relation to nature. As Alexander Pope is unanimously considered the poet of town life exposing its vapidness and artificiality, Wordsworth is rightly considered the greatest poet of the countryside recommending highly the life lived in lap of nature with all its physical and spiritual aspects.

Poets of different ages have depicted the nature in several ways in their poetry. The predecessors of Wordsworth like Burns, Cowper, Crabbe and Goldsmith exhibited a fine appreciation for the beauties of nature’. (Madhulika 19) Even his contemporaries like Coleridge, Byron, Keats and Shelly used different forms of nature, in different aspects of their literary works. But Wordsworth’s love for nature in his poems sprinkles the sentiment of aesthetic, beauty, charm and enthusiastic sentience which causes the possession of faculty of sensation and perception, and even ‘emotions recollected in tranquillity’. Therefore, Wordsworth’s love for nature has the most conspicuous magnitude in the poetic field that no poet but Wordsworth can ever produce.

In all the stages of his life, he realized his love for nature. He felt the presence of a soul, the power of God, in every image or object of nature. The nature became a source of divine grace to console him, and it embraced him unconditionally. He took things from nature, modified them and infused a new sensibility to bring life to it. He used his imagination to thrust something new, a new spirit, to draw attention of his readers even to the black and dim shades of nature. He glorified it to the level of the supreme power, which runs and regulates the cyclic movement of stars and planets. There is a feeling of concern and care, and a bond of love and affection, even with the smallest things of nature. In his poems, he gives nature a particular loveliness, life and soul. He is the most important interpreter of mysticism and spiritualism to discover the new trend of beauty and grandeur of God.

He described nature through metaphors and similes by the images like that of nightingale and the cuckoo. In his poem ‘Tintern Abbey’, Wordsworth portrays the setting of the ocean, and the green earth vividly. Most of his poems proclaim the loveliness, sublimity and the living soul of Nature.

His *The Prelude* records candidly and beautifully his evolution as a lover of nature from his early childhood to maturing adulthood. He passed through four stages of life in his love for nature i.e. from childhood to youth, and youth to old age. The first stage is the age of young blood and happiness. In this carefree life, the poet has spent his years in the midst of the beautiful surroundings for angling, hunting and enjoying the lovely spectacles of nature. It is about a healthy boy's delight in freedom and the open air. The second stage is the age of senses and sensations. The scenes and sounds of nature enchanted and thrilled him. The physical aspects of nature appealed him more and more. He loved beautiful landscapes, waterfalls and dark green woods more passionately and deeply as he records in *Tintern Abbey*:

The sounding cataract  
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock  
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
Their colours and their forms, were then to me  
An appetite; a feeling and a love. (Wordsworth 98)

In the third phase of his life, Wordsworth faced several sorrows and sufferings around 1790. His sister, Dorothy propelled him towards the sights and sounds of nature. He spent his solitude in its lap and experienced the presence of a divine spirit to console him. After passing the turmoil of the French Revolution, he espied the nature's teaching- the human morality. His love of nature became both-- divinized and humanized. The love of nature became indivisible from his love of mankind. The music of woods silenced his inner turmoil. The eternal entities of nature reminded him of the decay of the human body, but the permanence of human goodness.

This stage of his life is a stage of transformation or the stage of intellect wherein Wordsworth begins to rationalize why he should feel for the sufferings of his fellow human beings. When he begins to rationalize, he discovers that the same principle which lies in him is present in all other beings. In other words, there is 'one underlying principle' which is pervasive in all beings:

And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns  
And the round ocean and the living air,

And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:

A motion and a spirit, that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

And rolls through all things (Tintern Abbey 93-101)**93---?L: 2223-9553, ISSN: 2223-994**

During the fourth stage, a strong relationship developed between Wordsworth and the nature. He started to love it too deeply, that care and concern for it became his automatic and ultimate concern. In his poem ‘Nutting’, Wordsworth says: ‘there is a spirit in the woods’. The poet feels happy on gathering nuts and at the same time, feels unhappy for culling the hazel nut trees when he ponders over the bare tree sans fruits and drooping and devastated branches hanging helplessly from the trunk:

I felt a sense of pain when I beheld

The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky-

Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades

In gentleness of heart: with gentle hand,

Touch- for there is a spirit in the woods (Nutting 53-56)

Wordsworth is commonly described as a poet of Nature. It does not mean that he is a poet of Nature’s appearances or her landscapes only; in his most inspired moments he saw them as symbols of the Divine consciousness, of what he calls the wisdom and spirit of the universe, and the Soul “that art the eternity of thought,” or the central peace that subsists at the heart of endless agitation, or the sentiment of Being spread over all things, as he admits in “Immortality Ode” “The meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.” He has even taken the Biblical truths of nature.

To her fair works did Nature link

The human soul that through me ran;

And much it grieved my heart to think

What man has made of man. (Wordsworth 79)

The study of nature through the poetry is an essential exigency for the earnest entity in the literary world. Nature study is the combination of truth, beauty, and wisdom gifted from God to human beings. Wordsworth used his gift of art express which nature could not say. He tried to fill the bright colours of his imagination in the brazen world of the nature. As his love for it was not a passing affair, it had the velocity and validity of permanence. He wanted to make it universal, but without the loss of the particular. He gave it the colour of his imagination, but did not try to take

away its natural charm and glow. He used the desires of his mind in a simple way, without producing chimaeras; he became poetical, without a loss of natural, and natural, without becoming mean or insipid. Jayaraju K rightly observes:

‘Love of nature has been fused with the life of Man and God. He found music in the woods and the flowing waters. During the stage of suffering, the objects and forces of nature reminded Wordsworth of the fact of human decay and human morality’ (94).

Wordsworth finds the presence of God in the mind of man and thereby feels a kind of harmony between the mind of man and the spirit of nature. The mind of man allows him to communicate with nature, and the human heart expresses such communication in the form of feelings and passions towards nature. This relationship takes a strong form in the presence of nature. The nature has the power to solace and console in this time of great intimacy and shapes his belief that it has educational significance as well. Only nature has the ability to alleviate the damaged mind of man. It is the only source of joy and permanent love, the unconditional and unparalleled love, away from the clouds of cynicism and suffocation. It has a capacity to eliminate the burden of desolation, anxiety and suffocation.

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;  
 Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,  
 And, even with something of a Mother’s mind,  
 And no unworthy aim,  
 The homely Nurse doth all she can  
 To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,  
 Forget the glories he hath known,  
 And that imperial palace whence he came. (Immortality Ode)

Identifying himself with the forms and movements of nature Wordsworth selected things from nature and gave them a new shape and form in his poetry. He had a strong sense of the inevitability of the deeper life that he shared with the universe. And his concern for changing sensibility of people towards nature brought him to despair and depression. This concern allowed him to share his personal doubts and faiths, in the lap of nature. His love for nature is beyond the daily affairs of human life, but is an essential part of the man’s daily needs and necessities. He allowed the particular to pass through him, to generate universal and general in him. His love and affection for nature, reflects his deep concern for ecological perspectives in his poems.

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