

AN ESTIMATE OF NATURE IN ROBERT BROWNING'S POETRY

RUSHANA PARVEEN
DHAMPUR (BIJNOR)

ABSTRACT

Robert Browning, popularly known as the 'Victorian Donne,' was a major Victorian poet. The world of leaves and flowers rarely reflects human thoughts and emotions in Browning's poetry as it reflects in other poets like Tennyson. According to Browning God created Nature for the joy as he is interested in creativity, but before Man was born, God and Nature were alone together. In Browning's poetry there is thoroughly and completely apartness of Nature from us. As far as Nature is concerned, she is all alive; not dead. But she has her own distinct, her own separate joy and sorrows. Browning also applies nature as a store – house of images like other poets to illustrate the thinking, the doing, and character of man. Browning's love of nature is cosmopolitan. Browning's love of color is absolutely surprising, greater than that of any other English poet. Browning does not write; he paints what he has actually seen drawing directly from Nature. As a result, his landscapes are remarkable for accuracy and minuteness. Robert Browning is predominantly a poet of man, and his landscapes have been by now and then landscapes with human figures. Like his entire genius, Browning's treatment of nature underwent a slow process of evolution. He paints originally and in his own way from the beginning rather than imitate. The decay of Browning's love of Nature, is the decay of his poetry as well. The present paper attempts to find out treatment of nature in Browning's poetry. It also highlights his love for colours, his landscapes as miniature painting, his love for animal life, evolution of his nature-treatment and his love for nature decaying and decaying his poetry.

KEYWORDS: nature, landscape, humanity and illustration.

Robert Browning, popularly known as the 'Victorian Donne,' was a major Victorian poet. He was a pioneer in the field of dramatic monologues, a writing, which acquired the position of a distinct genre in his hands. He is an extremely difficult and learned poet and a forerunner of psycho analysis and the stream of consciousness technique. Browning's treatment of Nature is obviously original and distinctive. His observation of nature, his love of colors, his breadth and freshness of his landscapes, their gorgeous Italian splendor, his love of colorful flowers, birds and animals, his eye for grotesque and fantastic details, his splendid way of description and his attitude towards nature are all entirely his original without any sort of imitations except a little bit influences of earlier poets. He is, however, distinct from other nature poets of the 19th century particularly in his treatment of nature.

The world of leaves and flowers rarely reflects human thoughts and emotions in Browning's poetry as it reflects in other poets like Tennyson. Nature exists independently in her own right as a separate entity. Nature teaches us not herself but what is beyond herself. Nature unveils her glory and grandeur to us not to keep us with herself, but to make us aspire to rise upwards to the Infinite, God, who has been the source both of Nature and Man. To Browning, the beauty of nature is an expression of the glory and splendor of God. Nature is a window to God for Browning. The different objects of nature are an expression of the creative joy of God, the delight which He finds in the act of creation. Nature is one Kind of this creative joy, and man another. Browning does not imagine of any pre-conceived harmony between Man and Nature. "It is, therefore, rarely that he humanizes nature, i.e. speak of nature in human terms. The use of what Ruskin calls, "Pathetic Fallacy," is rare in Browning. Even when it does occur, even when he speaks of nature in human terms, he takes care to make it plain that Nature is quite distinct from us. The smile of Nature is a, "gigantic smile," different from human smile : Browning separates us altogether from the elemental life of those gigantic beings. He uses, "pathetic fallacy" only to emphasize this separate-ness."¹

According to Browning God created Nature for the joy as he is interested in creativity, but before Man was born, God and Nature were alone together. Man is the close of all to God. Man is not Nature; Nature is a separate inhuman form of God. Nature exists isolated, but God in her speaks sometimes to the God in us. Nature may sometimes take a little interest in us, but it is not the interest of a man for man. "It is a sort of inhuman interest, like that of Ariel in Prospero and Miranda. It is an elemental interest, quite different from human interest. Occasionally, when we are loving and on the verge of joy, she takes a deeper interest in us, actually works for us, and helps us to achieve the fullness of joy. But even in such moments, the interest is inhuman, like that of Puck and Oberon, the fairy king, in the loves of Helena and Hermia. Thus in the poem 'By the fireside,' the lovers are brought together in a fullness of love by nature. But even in such moments Browning takes care to emphasize the separateness of Nature:

It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes, But that is its own affair."²

It is assuredly true that in Browning's poem, Nature and the poet's observing eye do not interpenetrate as they do in "Lines Composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey," or "Mont Blanc." "Perhaps Browning's poetry reflects a larger sense of growing separation between man and Nature, but Browning, at least in his own voice, does not seem to lament that disjunction in the same way that Arnold does. For when we speak of Browning's attitude towards Nature –indeed; of his attitude toward anything – namely that in many if not most instances in Browning's poetry we are viewing a particular landscape, or human relationship, through the consciousness of a dramatic character."³

Browning had a great love of nature and his descriptions of nature have essentially Italian inspirations. His landscapes are brilliant with flashing colours "fierce and flashing splendor." He has a special trend for sunrise and sunset and the advent of spring, and for sharp edges and irregular outlines.

His landscapes are real and actual and they are always landscapes with human figures. Browning cannot keep his human interests out of his poetry for any length of time. Nature serves as an appropriate background for human thought and emotion, as in the Grammarian's Funeral. Browning has his own philosophy, his own theory of the relationship of Man, God and Nature. Both Man and Nature emanate from God, yet, "No common spirit breathes through them both; they are two entities, and though for a moment they may come together as in the Fireside. In this respect, Browning differs from Wordsworth, Shelley and other romantic poets. According to Browning Nature has no vital sympathy for man, no message. His philosophy of life is

characterized by optimism. The Universe, the beauty of Nature, is an expression of the creative joy of God and so he finds the principle of joy at the very centre of Creation. We are out of harmony both with love and joy, or engrossed in worldly activities, and then nature thoroughly unsympathetic, mocks and plays with us like a fawn.

In Browning's poetry there is thoroughly and completely apartness of Nature from us. Nature mocking, surprising us; watching us from a distance, even pleased to see us going to our destruction. In Browning Nature may be alive, but it is never humanized, and never atone with us. In this matter, Browning remains distinct from other poets of the century. Browning makes it clear that Nature has no human attributes, she merely seems to us to have such attributes, because man, throws back his soul and his souls' life on all the grades of inferior life which preceded him. Actually human attributes of nature are not her own; they result from the imagination of man.

As far as Nature is concerned, she is all alive; not dead. But she has her own distinct, her own separate joy and sorrows. Browning conceives of nature, as a distinct being, he describes her vividly and accurately and without clouding the description with the mist of human emotion and sentiments like Tennyson. But this does not mean that human feelings are absent from the nature description in Browning's poetry. In his poetry, the human element is not in nature, but in him, in what he thinks and feels, in what nature awakens in him. It is nature which influences man and his feelings and not vice versa. Browning does not care much for nature divorced from human life; nature has value for him only as a background to human action and passion. Thus in, 'A Lover's Quarrel,' Nature is beautiful, but the poet finds even "the blue, grey, because his love is away." You may find there excellent nature - description, but it is only scenery, for the real passion is in the poet's mind. 'By the fireside' is an excellent piece of nature - description illustrating the same point. Browning loves man, and he finds no joy in Nature, for her own sake.

Browning also applies nature as a store - house of images like other poets to illustrate the thinking, the doing, and character of man. He has done so in his 'Sordello' with remarkable success. The rich poetic soul of 'Sordello' is compared to the luxuriant vegetation of Italy, and we get the famous line, "And still more labyrinthine tends the rose." The whole essence of a great artist's nature is brought forth in this way. "In countless such other comparisons, minute and accurate, and of great charm, the poet conveys the close seeming resemblance between man and nature. The resemblance is only seeming and not real, Nature may be human-like, but it is not human. The only human passion which he finds existing in nature, is the passion of joy, the result of the Creative joy of God. The poet is conscious of the joyful rush of life in nature, and, "no poet ever felt this ecstasy of mere living in nature more deeply than Browning."⁴ The note of joy strikes the poet frequently, and at this moment, he becomes a living part of Nature herself, rejoicing in the mightier life of the world of leaves and flowers.

Browning's love of nature is cosmopolitan. He does not describe nature of his own country but also of many countries. It is more of Italy than of England. Nevertheless, an English landscape is painted in his poetry only twice or thrice. He has always been under the impression of gorgeous and splendid beauty of nature in Italy. Some of them are clear riots of color. Thus in Pippa Passes we may find a glorious outburst of light, color and splendor:

Day! Faster and more fast,

O'er night brim, day boils at last! Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud cup's
 brim, Where spurling and suppressed it lay, For not a froth flake touched
 the rim Of yonder gap in the solid gray Of the

eastern cloud, an hour away; But forth one wavelet, then
another, curled, Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast Flickered in bounds, grew
old, then overflowed the world.

The passage illustrates Browning's trend for beginning - the beginning of the day, the beginning of spring, etc. The passage illustrates a glorious and colorful sunrise, but he is similarly painting at home a crimson sunset:

That autumn eve was stilled A last remains of sunset dimly
burned O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned By the wind back
upon its bearers hand In one long flare of crimson; as a brand The woods
beneath lay black. A single eye From all Verona cared for the soft sky.

Browning's love of color is absolutely surprising, greater than that of any other English poet. Whatever and whenever, the color may be, in a flower at the edge of a cloud, over the forest, flare of crimson or verona for the soft sky or on a back of a lizard, Browning is sure to observe it and convey his own pleasure in it to his readers. He draws as well as paints. He observes things in color, and his color - impressions are conveyed vividly and surprisingly to his readers. Browning does not write; he paints what he has actually seen drawing directly from Nature. As a result, his landscapes are remarkable for accuracy and minute-ness. The landscape in 'Pauline' and 'Sordello' are reflections and recollections of what he had observed and noted in his memory. He was keenly observant, with a retentive memory. He has that surprising quality to convey the exact atmosphere, the exact feel of things, the exact impressions he had formed years **earlier**. **For example, in The** grammarian's Funeral, with a wonderful power, "Browning makes us feel the air grow keener, fresher, brighter, more soundless and love-lier." It is a nature-painting well conveyed by the verse. The poem also illustrates the poet's quality of ability to make his readers see and enjoy the widening and expanding of a landscape. In the Christmas Eve, we are acquainted with the description of the rainbow, as clear, vivid and natural as can be. Browning's inclination for skyscapes is accounted for by his sojourn in Italy, for the scenery of the sky is more superb and gorgeous than that of the earth. In By the fireside, each verse stands as a picture by itself. It is one of Browning's favourite ways of description, to walk slowly through the landscape, describing step by step those parts of it which strike him, and leaving us to combine the parts into the whole. But his way of combination is to touch the last thing he describes with human

CONCLUSION:

To sum up, it may be concluded that in Browning's poetry human elements are not in nature but in the poet, in what he thinks and feels, in what nature awakens in him. It is nature which influences man and his feelings and not vice versa. Actually he does not care much for nature, nature has value for him only as a background to human action and passion. We find beautiful nature and excellent nature description in his poetry, but it is only scenery because the real passion is in the poet's mind. Browning loves man, and he finds no joy in Nature for her own sake. He wrote his best poetry when nature and humanity were so interfused and that nature suggested to him humanity and humanity Nature. When his love for humanity increased and his love for nature decreased, his poetry degenerated into mere prose. The decay of his treatment of Nature in his poetry is the result of the decay of his poetry as well.

REFERENCES:

1. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. (1988) Robert Browning: Studies In Poets, Rama Brothers, New Delhi, p.56
2. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. (1988) Robert Browning: Studies In Poets, Rama Brothers, New Delhi, p.57
3. <https://books.google.co.in>
4. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. (1988) Robert Browning: Studies In Poets, Rama Brothers, New Delhi, p.59
5. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. (1988) Robert Browning: Studies In Poets, Rama Brothers, New Delhi, p.60
6. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. (1988) Robert Browning: Studies In Poets, Rama Brothers, New Delhi, p.62