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ROMANTICISM AND BEYOND:
JOURNEY FROM WILLIAM WORDSWORTH TO ROBERT FROST

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ABSTRACT

The romantic spirit is explicit in the expression of resistance against tyranny that connected the mass to a sense of nation, their own history and tradition leading to the revival of folk culture and regional knowledge. This association of literature to folk culture is universal. It is true not only to English Ballades but also discernible in Haryanvi folk or sub-continental poetry. The romantic aspiration prevails in the romantic school of poetry—in Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley—and continued in the predecessors with some corrections and modifications. Robert Browning maintained the spirit in his poetry. Fed up by too much idealistic vision, G. B. Shaw and Gustav Flaubert presented a critique of romanticism. American literatures were equally fascinated by the romantic spirit. Emerson and Thoreau labelled as Brahmins followed the romantic transcendental ideals. Whitman blended the transcendental and real world in his works. Equally, Emily Dickinson was purely romantic. Robert Frost, on the other hand, believes that romanticism cannot be the only resort from the real, harsh world. He swings between both the worlds. He may go heavenwards for a while but returns to the earth for reality. The present paper analyses various aspects of romanticism and presents anti-thesis of romanticism in the modern age.

Key Words: Romantic spirit, ballads, sentiments, pantheism, Nature.

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The origin of Romanticism is difficult to discern. Romanticism known generally is an offshoot from the revolutionary spirit that is perceivable in America in 1774 and France in 1789. The suppressed and suffocated people revolted against the established regimes sloganeering Equality, Liberty, Justice and Fraternity. It was a strange Interregnum: everything merged in to the colour of revolution. Wordsworth declares:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven.

The common man rose to their Rights
As Faiz put it later:

*Hum Ahl-e- Safa, Mardood-e-hram
Masnad pe bithaye Jayenge,
Sab Taj Uchhale Jayenge
Sab Takht giraye jayenge.*

We the sacred people, we the common people
Would be elevated to the pedestal,
All the crowns will be thrown away
All the thrones would be gone to the wind.

It was this spirit of protest to root out all that was old, outdated, stereotypical, suppressing and suffocating. The movement gave vent to free and full throated voice to touch the horizon and beyond. With the rise of the common man, common identities were sought that lead to the concept of a common nation. The pride of the nation emerged making way to pride of one's own language, one's own heritage. The Romantics sought their own tradition and history to find wisdom in their folk songs and tales. Wordsworth and Coleridge titled their anthology as *Lyrical Ballades* which were print archives of Folk Ballades that preserve local tales in the original vernacular rather than poetic diction. Romantics found that the civilise world has destroyed the folk culture and its traditional oral ways of handing down knowledge. The romantics felt the need for revival of rich national folk culture, local knowledge and history.

So this manifesto of Romanticism, *Lyrical Ballades* does not include Ballades in generic sense, but shows the change in the landscape and augurs how dangerous this change would be. Lyrics became the medium of expressing personal feelings and strong emotions in the folk form, ballade. This association to folk literature is a universal phenomenon. There is a lyrical ballade "I wandered lonely as a cloud", the poet mentions wandering clouds, golden daffodils fluttering and dancing with breeze along with twinkling stars. The flowers are tossing and dancing in tune with the dancing waves and so is poet feels like dancing as everything in the universe is in dancing mode. Dancing, singing, working, wandering, moving, running, are the different modes that are part of the romantic songs. Dancing gives happiness, it is a glorified action and there is no flaw in Dancing. Pandit Lakhmi Chand, a pioneer of Haryanvi folk, in one of his folksong claims:

*Jeev jantu aur pshu pakheru
Ya nachei dunia saari
K naachan mein eib bta ya akal ki hushiari*

Living Beings, animals and birds,
Dancing this entire Universe
No flaw can one find in Dancing
It is all the game of mind.
" Sab te pahlam Vishnu naachya
First of all, danced Lord Vishnu
Amrit chhakhya lya ke,
Tasted nectar from the sea
Duji baar bhasmasur naachya
Then danced Bhasmasur
Marya naach nacha kei
Killed by dance while dancing
Gora aagei shivji naachya
Lord shiva danced befor gora
Lyaya parvati byah kei
Succeeded in marrying parvati

Baat baat mein yun firey naachta
Brhma went on dancing
 Ya rachi srishti saari
 And created this universe
K naachan m eib....
Hawa chalei jab darkhat naachei,
 When blows air, trees dance,
Paat paat halei sei,
 Moves every leaflet
Lori de de maata naachei,
 Making child sleep, mothers dance
Baalak nei paalei se
 Nurtures thus baby
Runn mei yun talwar naachti
 In war so swords dance
Nahi ghat ghalei se
 Matchless they are
Sir k ooper kaal naachta
 Hovering over heads, Death dance
Sahi haath ghalei se
 Entraps the right choice
Is maya nei re naach nacha diya
This matter has made to dance
Rishi muni brihmchaari,
Even the saints, wise or penitents

K naachan m eib btaya.....
 How can there be any flaw in dance....

So, romanticism was a revolt against the urban sophistication nurturing artificiality and hypocrisy. William Cowper declared, God made the country and manmade the town. He found all the malaise in the city life and abhorred the mechanicality of the city people and preferred to the simple, rustic life of the country. They reacted against the mechanical, routinised, fossilised and fixed form of the neo classicists who believed literature as a mirror of the society. Advancing the mimetic theory, they wrote with a purpose to correct and improve the society. Satire, Comedy, Irony and paradox became their main weapon. Confined to the drawing room politics and stigmatising, scandal mongering and assassination of characters became their *leit motif*.

The paradigm shift is visible in romantics, the focus changed from epic to lyric, reality to romance, prose to poetry, objective to subjective, satire to sympathy, physical to metaphysical, momentary to transcendental, phenomenon to noumena, finite to infinite, rational to holistic, imitation to imagination, tuition to intuition, concrete to abstract, irritating facts to mystery, visible to invisible, ordinary to extraordinary. Romanticism freed the individual from the chains of oppression, leading to subjectivity progressing to Marxism and then Deconstructionism.

Thus, Common man overthrew the heroic warrior making way to the common man's language in place of literary language. Wordsworth and Coleridge agreed on the issue that the former would transform the ordinary to extraordinary and latter would make mysterious and strange to look ordinary and disagreed on the concept of diction, while Wordsworth believed that the diction of the new poetry should be comprehensible to the common folk, Coleridge was sure that literary language is by default has the trait of defamiliarisation.

One issue that all romantics agreed, they were not confined to find fault in human nature but came out of the drawing room politics to the open field of nature. Worshippers of nature, Romantics saw reflection of

transcendental power even in a grain of sand. Whenever they visit and revisit nature, they found themselves transformed personalities. It was a journey from sensual pleasure to sensuous appeasement and from sensuous satisfaction to spiritual ecstasy. They realised some infinite power manifested in nature that controls all the objects of our thought. If one has faith, trust and respect for nature, one would not be perturbed by the deception and vanity, betrayal and ingratitude of the world. One would not be disturbed by the selfish, judgemental attitude of this world. "Nature never did betray the hearts that loved her", while people may be. Nature is his guide and it would chasten his heart and elevate his thoughts. These lofty thoughts would make any admirer of nature sublime and humble who could hear "the still sad music of humanity". Nature with all its grandeur and beauty deified as omniscient and omnipotent was foregrounded by the romantics, As an Urdu poet puts it in his words,

Har Zarra Chamkata hai, anwar-e-elahi se,
Hr sans ye kahti hai, main hun to khuda bhi h.
(Every grain of sand has the reflection of God,
Every breath declares, one survives not without God)

Association with nature integrates Wordsworth or other romantics to people suffering from the curse of poverty, misery, exploitation and domination.

With his close associate Coleridge, Wordsworth propounded the idea that poetry should be about simple innocent rustics and language of poetry should be akin to common man's dialect. Rejecting earlier epic or mock epic grand poetry, the romantics write lyrical ballades that were full of emotion and empathy. Expression of personal observations, poems were to explore the folk and primitive songs sung by people who worship nature. The poems were simple and musical like folk ballades of ancient times.

Away from the din and noise of the city, far from the madding crowd, money and matter, artificiality and hypocrisy of the world, the romantics sought solace in pastoral, rural setting. Instead of being critical to find follies and mistakes of human nature, the romantic poets come out of drawing rooms allying themselves to nature to find "spirit in the woods" and to listen to "the still sad music of humanity". One is reminded of Bashir Badra who condemns the urban style of living:

Hai azab shahr ki zindgi na sfar rha n makam h
Strange is the life of city, neither having journey or destination
Kanhi karobar si dopahar, kanhi badmizaz si shaam h
Afternoon is meant for business, evening has gone crazy,
Yun hi roz milne ki aarzu, barri rakhrkhao ki guftgu
The desire to meet daily, this formal dreary discourse
Ye shraften nhi begarz, inhe aapse koi kaam h

This humbleness is not so simple; it has some purpose to resolve.

This flight from urban crowd to seek resort in the peace of natural setting is similar to Wordsworth's expression:

Oh! How oft—
In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—

Poetry for them was not to be learnt by tuition but it was the awakening of intuition. It was not a presupposed proportion but a "spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions". Poetry negates the mechanical imitation of the world. It is a magical touch of imagination to fill colours even in ordinary objects. Literature is

not just a mirror of the society with a purpose to improve it rather it is a process of creativity wherein the poet enlightens the humanity by burning within like a lamp. It was Wordsworth conviction that he was in another world which was more real than that of senses, a world not of sight but of vision, not merely empirical but passing beyond sensuous presentation. His entry into this world is closely connected with his creative and imaginative faculties and had moments of visionary clairvoyance. (Faculty of perceiving things or events in future.

Romantic aspirations inspired Indian continent also. *Chhayavaad* is akin to Romanticism and attributed to those who seize *chhaya*, abstract not concrete or real. Four wheels of *chhayavaad* school were Jaishankar Prasad, Suryakant Tripathi nirala, Sumitranandan Pant and Mahadevi Verma. Ramdhari singh dinkar, Harivanshrai Bachchan and Makhan Lal Chaturvedi are other exponents of *Chhayavad*.

Romantics glorify nature and are in awe with it. In his pantheistic perspective Wordsworth perceives "spirit in the woods", sound in stillness, sweet murmur in the cataracts, and divinity in the meanest flower that blows and meanest creature that exists. Man and nature are inseparable for them. Survival of man is not possible without the survival of nature. He "Finds tongue in trees, books in the running brooks/ sermons in stones and good in everything." The so called Civilised world is destroying nature. Development has lead to destruction. They glorify the serenity and purity of nature and find themselves akin to a primitive man who was away from the complexity of life. Nature is a guide, friend, philosopher and mentor for them. That's why they glorify child declaring child a father of man, as child being closer to god and immortality. As a child grows, he or she is soiled by the ways of the world

Mere dil k kisi kone mein ek masoom sa bachha
An innocent child entrapped in some corner of my heart
Badon ki dekh k dunia bada hone se drtaa h
Viewing the world of adults is afraid of growing

Coleridge has a unique quality of transforming mysterious and remote into simple and concrete. The miracle is perceivable in *Kubla Khan* wherein Coleridge creates a heavenly abode on the earth.

Keats is an aesthete. His well wrought Odes are magnificent examples of poetic beauty. Despite being labelled as an escapist, his poems are the dialectics of romance and reality. Tongue-in-cheek remarks-"fancy cannot cheat us so well" and deceiving romantic woman in "*La Belle dame Sans Merci*" are enough to show the reality of dream. As Galib also affirms,

Hum ko maaluum h zannat ki haquiquat lekin
We are well verse of the reality of heaven
Dil k kkhush rakhne ko Galib ye khyal achcha h
But to keep oneself happy, the illusion is not bad.

Shelley was another romantic revolutionary hoping that the injustice, inequality, misery and wretchedness will be removed from the world one day, some day, as "if winter comes, can spring be far behind."

Robert Browning maintains the optimistic spirit in a pessimistic Victorian age otherwise, and tried to check the withdrawing, retreating sea of faith. Some swam with the current, like Tennyson, some turned pessimistic like Arnold.

This world which seem
To lie before us like a land of dreams
So various, so beautiful, so new
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,
...
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Optimist must be romantic, so Browning has the streak of Romantic aspirations. He has firm faith in the life beyond. What cannot be achieved now may be within reach at some other stage as one has to traverse many worlds; one has to live many lives. His strong belief in God and Love shows that some aspects of romance always survive.

In American Literature, R. W. Emerson and Thoreau were the followers of the Romantic tradition. They were the transcendentalist who had firm faith in metaphysical existence. They could associate the physical world with the transcendental spirit. Nature for them was the manifest of the invisible power. They were Brahmins of the West for being spiritualist. Whitman has a vision that can blend ordinary with the extraordinary. He is a poet of integration—he integrates living with the non living, animate with inanimate, life with death, mortality with immortality and physical with metaphysical. He is a great democrat, a transcendental poet who can encompass the entire universe dismantling all the barriers. But a realist too, he can capture even a minute detail cataloguing each and everything. So a Brooklyn Ferry becomes a symbolic journey from this world to another world, to cross the sea of life, Passage to India is a passage to globalisation. Emily Dickenson deals purely with metaphysics who finds it hard to communicate with this world. Her poems are cracking telegram from God and “the imperial thunderbolt that scalps your naked soul”. A revolutionary like a romantic she has no tribunal subverting all conventions. She finds death as her comrade, a gentleman caller with whom she would like to have a ride to immortality similar to Whitman who affirms “death is the outlet song of life”. Whitman is conscious of how to escape the prison of self and cultivate simultaneously self consciousness and sympathy using self identity as a means of identifying others.

With the descendens of the modern age, the anti-romantic tendency emerged. Nietzsche declared death of God for spiritual atrophy to prevail. How could the romantic ideals and ecstasy be maintained in the age? Death of renaissance spirit led to the caesura of the romantic aspirations. The beauteous evening, calm and quiet as nun turned all polluted and foggy like “a patient etherised upon the table”. G B Shaw wanted people to shun away from the illusions of romance, while Gustav Flaubert wanted to cure the “disease of romanticism” which his heroine Emma Bovary suffers from. Hardy finds no hope in the world and deems it quite hostile and incompatible for human beings. As in Tess, “President of Immortals” seems to be playing sport with human beings as they are like flies to wanton boys. Mark Twain or Henry James also is in the category of Realist leaving the romantic escapade aside.

Thus in the modern age, two currents in the ideology are perceivable. Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot propound complex sensibility for complex age while Robert Frost, a rustic Yankee and New Englander renders in colloquial dialect maintaining traditional form. But he takes a leap from the Romantics and modifies his poetry according to the new age. His form is old but contents are new. His poetry begins in delight but ends in wisdom. His poetry is romantic in the beginning but ends in anti romantic stance. He presents a critique of romanticism in his poetry. Woods are tempting, Nature is fascinating but one has to take care of impending danger. He can see a subtle design—a terrifying streak in nature—white spider and white moth on a white flower. How nature can form such a dreadful design, Frost wonders. He refers to Shelley’s “Dome of Heaven” but that is broken like the heaps of broken glasses.

Frost understands the dialectics between romance and reality. He is “a swinger of the birches” who wants to go to heaven but only for a while as he finds “earth is the right place for love”. He tries to maintain balance between romance and reality, vocation and avocation, earth and heaven. A Synecdochist, his poems have a great representative value. He is fond of apple-picking but finds it boring in the end also. He is capable of “walking in walking out” of the boundary wall. He appears to claim that one should know the reality but there is no harm in being bit romantic. Though the glory of the romantic age is gone but one can always have a momentary stay against confusion and leap into arena of romance.

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