



The Achievement and Greatness of Robert Frost

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Robert Frost is one of the greatest of American poets, one whose name is well-familiar in India because his poetry was a source of comfort and inspiration to no less a person than Jawaharlal Nehru, the idol of the people.

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep”

The above lines from the poem *Stopping By Woods On a Snowy evening* by Robert Frost served as an inspiration to one of the greatest men of India, and reminded him of the service of humanity and of his people to whom he had dedicated himself.

Frost is a great lover of nature and his love, too like that of Wordsworth is local and regional. It is the region that lies to the north of Boston, which forms the background to his poetry. It is the hills and dales, rivers and forests, trees, flowers and plants, animals, birds and insects, season and seasonal changes, of this particular region, which have been described in one poem after another and his descriptions are characterized by accuracy and minuteness. As Isidor Schneider says the descriptive power of Mr. Frost is to me the most wonderful thing in his poetry. A snowfall, a spring thaw, a bending tree, a valley mist, a brook, these are brought not to, but into, the experience of the reader.

Frost's love of nature is more comprehensive, many sided and all inclusive than that of Wordsworth. Wordsworth loved to paint only the spring-time beauty of Nature or what Coleridge called, “Nature in the grove”, but Frost has an equally keen eye for the sensuous and the beautiful in nature as well as for the harsher and the unpleasant. A Boundless- Moment, gives us one of those fresh glimpses of beauty which have made Frost's nature poetry so popular:-

“Oh, that is the paradise- in – bloom, I said,
And truly it was fair enough for flowers.”

Frost poetry is entirely free from such conventional and artificial elements. He has succeeded in capturing the simplicity and naturalness of the earliest Greek masters of this form. The greatness of Frost as a pastoral poet has been universally recognised. The bulk of his poetry deals with rural life and his pastoral poetry provide the centre, the basis from which to study even that part of his poetry which is not strictly pastoral. One has simply to glance through Frost's *Collected Poems* to form an idea of the importance of rural life in the poetry of Frost. Frost has succeeded in imparting universal validity and significance to pastoral art.

Frost is a great regional poet. The region north of Boston forms the background to his poetry. Its people, its scenes and sights appear and reappear in successive poems and impart a rare continuity and unity to his works. It is this particular region that Frost has made his own. He loved it and knew it intimately. Above all Frost is the poet of rural New England. He knew every part of this limited world and he renders it in words with a brilliant. His characters are all New Englanders, and he has succeeded in capturing the very tone, diction, idiom and rhythm of Yankee speech. He writes of a particular region, but from the particular he constantly rises to the universal and the general. He writes of joys and sorrows, loves and hatreds of the simple Yankees, but he also shows that such joys and sorrows, loves and hatreds are common to all humanity. Regionalism in his hands acquires a universal appeal.

Frost pictures man as a stranger indifferent, if not actually hostile, world. Isolated and alienated people around in his books, especially in his book of people, North of Boston. Unsurmountable barriers separate man from nature, from God and from his fellow men, and the result is emotional loneliness and isolation, resulting in severe stress and strain, neurosis and mental agitations verging on insanity. “Home Burial, ‘The Death of the Hired man, Hill Wife” etc, are all studies in alienated and maladjusted individuals. Emotional and physical alienation is a major theme in his poetry.

Though Frost has left behind him a number of excellent philosophical and narrative poems, his genius was essentially lyrical.

Lawrence Thompson rightly points out his primary artistic achievement, which is an enviable one, inspite of short comings, rests on his blending of thought and emotion and symbolic imagery within the confines of the lyric. His lyrics have the simplicity,



brevity and intensity which characterize the lyric at its best. The lyric in “*The Boys Will*” are, subjective and personal and in them the young poets’ moods find a spontaneous expression.

What at his best, Frost is able to combine a serious philosophical theme with a light hearted humorous manner, often his lyrics begin with a simple idea or situation the full implications of which are revealed as the lyric develops, often by the use of rich and varied symbols. The lyrical magic of such lyrics as, *Stopping by Woods*, *Neither out far, Nor in Deep*, *The Peaceful Shepherd* etc, has been noted nor admired by all readers of Frost.

Frost is a traditionalist and a classicist. His conservatism is seen in his suspicion of new ideas and innovations. He uses the Iambic Metre, because most English poetry has been cast in this measure. Though, his metres are varied, they are at first glance quite orthodox. He uses the speech of New England, but not so as to jolt the reader. He is the country man, with the country man’s apparent conservatism; for rural life, with its heavy seasonal rhythm of growth and decay imposes its own continuity on those who live amongst it. Frost is a classicist in his habit of understatement and self-restraint.

He says what he has to say in the fewest possible words, and the result is classic terseness and concentration. He is a classicist in the formal finish and perfection of his verse, as well as in his simplicity and austerity. He is a classicist in his reticent manner proverbial wisdom, and his habit of reflecting and moralizing.

There is no doubt that Frost takes a rather bleak and gloomy view of man’s earthly existence, but he can’t be condemned as a pessimist merely for this reason. In fact, he is a realist, and an ameliorist. He is realistic enough to recognize the ills to which flesh is heir to. He does not shut his eyes to the evil, sorrow, and suffering which beset man’s life on this earth. His approach is never cynical and nihilistic; he does never suggest that the life is not worth living or that, it would have been better not to have been born at all. He loves the world as it is, *Birches* expresses his attitude nicely, He would like to get away from earth a while.

But then he must return to earth, for ...earth is the right place for love
I do not know where it is likely to go better,.

His approach to life and its problem is same and healthy, his philosophy is ripe mature.”

Though Frost is a great nature poet, he is still greater as a poet of man. As Untermeyer tells us, Robert Frost has written on almost every subject He has illuminated things as common as a wood pile and as uncommon as a pre-historic people, as natural as a bird singing in its sleep and as mechanistic as the revolt of a factory worker. His central subject is humanity. His poetry lives with a particular aliveness because it expresses living people. Other poets have written about people. But Frost’s poems are the people; they work and walk about and converse, and tell their stories with the freedom of common speech.

People in Frost’s books are all rural New Englanders. He knew them intimately and his portrayal of them is realistic and vivid. Frost’s range or characters are beyond his range and he shows great artistic self restraint in staying within his range. But working within his range, he achieves great vividness, diversity and subtlety

The first thing which strikes the eye is the extreme simplicity of his poetry. He writes of the simplest subjects, and he says what he has to say in the most lucid and simple manner. It is this simplicity of Frost which has endeared him to ordinary readers.

He makes extensive use of symbols to convey profound truths, and in this respect he is one of with such modern poets as Eliot, Yeats Pound and Auden. As he himself tells us he is by intention a symbolist who takes his symbols from the public domain.

His complexity is seen in his habit of bringing together the opposites of life in the manner of the metaphysical poet. He is highly conscious artist who is constantly landing impulse a penetrating thinker who is afraid of being discovered in the act of thought a countryman who conceals behind his feeling for the land a sophisticated attitude towards men and their motives.

His poetry appeals to all classes of people, for one reason or the other. A skillful combination of an outer lightness with an inner gravity is one of his major poetic achievements.

Robert Frost has been called the finest American poet of the 20th century. The purest classical poet of American to-day, the one great American poet of our times and, a New Englander in the great tradition, fit to be placed beside Emerson, Hawthorne and Thoreau.

He has been called *the voice of America* and more honours have been showered upon him than any other American poet of the century. He has certainly earned a place of distinction at Home and abroad, as a major American poet.



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