Ideology In Frost’s Poetry

Dr. Suchitra Vashisth

ABSTRACT: Every poet worth the name conveys some world-view or philosophy of life in his poetry. He may not be a professional philosopher; but he has certain views that are embodied in his poems. Thus, Milton, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Eliot, and others, have conveyed their philosophy of life in their poetry. Robert Frost is no exception to this. He is not a philosopher in the academic sense of the term. He has written about simple rustic life and common occurrences of that life in an apparently simple manner. His poems seem to depict simple life, and common actions and events occurring in the countryside. However, on a closer look, his poetry is found to contain a deeper meaning, often conveyed through the use of symbols, than their apparently simple diction and style seem to hint at. Through the simplest texture and expression of his poems, he voices his views, beliefs and concerns that can be proceed together to form his philosophy of life, or world-view as expressed in his poetry. "A large par, of his poetic pleasure, remarks Lawrence Thompson, "would seem to be derived from his finding verse not only an end in itself but also a means to the end of making each poem a 'clarification of life', at last a clarification of his own attitude toward life." Thus, Frosts poetry may be said to embody his philosophical outlook on life which grew as he grew in age. From the conventional views of his young age, he proceeded towards novel views that were based on his own inner conflicts, as well as on his conflicts or differences with the external world around him. His poetry contains an expression of the tension or conflict, both inner and outer, that he experienced in his life.

Keywords: Frost, Poetry,

IS FROST A THINKER?
Frost has been an extremely popular poet, and his popularity tends to create doubts about the depth of his thinking or philosophy. Great serious poets like Dante, Milton and T.S. Eliot were profound thinkers, and their poetry has a profundity of thought that allows only the intelligent few to understand it. They are not popular among the masses. Since Frost is very
popular even among common readers, he is thought to be a shallow thinker, a conventional moralist and a homespun philosopher who has no deep philosophical thinking to provide intellectual stimulus to the reader. He is said to often have no original views or fresh opinions on various issues. Nor is he thought to have a novel approach to life and its problems. He seems to be orthodox in his opinions like the woman in The Black Cottage who holds orthodox opinions too, and believes in the truthfulness of conventional beliefs –

“Why abandon a belief,
Merely because it ceases to be true,
Cling to it long enough, and not a doubt
It will turn true again.”

The simplicity of Frost’s diction and style belies the depth of his thinking or of the views expressed by him in his poems. As Geoffrey Moore remarks, “Frost’s poetry is deeper, and tougher than it seems. The simple language, the conversational manner, and the near-whimsy of some of his observations tend to obscure the fact that he was no pantheistic romantic.” The element of occasional lightness and humour in Frost’s poetry also tends to prove him a superficial thinker. But behind this humour is hidden much serious thought. According to Randall Jarrell, “The very humour which endured him to a wide audience masks a pessimism which is akin to Robinson’s. Like so many other New Englanders, he saw the skull beneath the skin, and his mind turned easily to metaphysics and symbolism. In this respect he was of the company of Emerson, Thoreau and Emily Dickinson, a true Yankee, gnarled, aphoristic and-for all the seeming directress of his manner-essentially oblique in his comments. Local in reference, he is universal in application.” Frost himself acknowledges the importance of intellect or of the element of thinking in poetry; he writes: “If a writer were to say he planned a long poem, dealing with Darwin and evolution, we would be tempted to say it’s going to be terrible. And yet your remember Lucretius. He admired Epicurus as I admired, let’s say, Darwin. And he wrote a great poem. It’s in and out, sometimes it’s poetry, sometimes intelligent doggerel, sometimes quaint. But a great poem. Yes, the poet can use the mind in fear and trembling. But he must use it.”

Frost's own poetry is not devoid of this element of thinking, and it bounds in a rich and ripe wisdom which can hardly be appreciated if we go merely by the outward simplicity
and lightness of his poetry. He can lightly be recorded as a poet thinker or thinker-poet, even though not a philosopher in a technical sense of the term. He is rightly called by Lionel Trilling "a poet who could make plain the terrible things."

**FROST AS A METAPHYSICAL POET**

Frost observes and depicts facts and phenomena. But his vision goes deeper than more physical or external reality, and discovers metaphysical reality. Through the statement of common discovered or manifest fads, he brings out deeper implications related to life and the world. As Willard Thorp points out, "Frost is a metaphysical poet in the tradition of Emerson and Emily Dickinson, with all that term implies of the poet's desire to 50beyond the seen to the unseen, but his imagery is less involved than that of the older metaphysical. Most of his poems fix on the mysterious moment when the two planes cross. Hasty readers, noting only the quiet beginning in what appears to be a simple anecdote about a person, event, or object commonly enough observed, fail to see how the commonness gradually disappears or, better, how it becomes transfigured. As in all great metaphysical poetry, the tension increases between the sample fact and the mystery which surrounds it, until the total meaning flashes in the final words.... The most dramatic moment in a Frost poem is the kind of anagnorisis or denouement when the mundane fact achieves its full metaphysical significance.”

A special feature of Frost’s philosophical or metaphysical thinking is that it is embodied in his poetry in a simple and un-assumed mode of expression. Often this mode varies according to the standard of the reader intelligent he unfolds a different meaning, and to the highly intellectual, he conveys a still deeper core. Thus, he meets all readers on their respective levels, and each one of them discovers a meaning in his poems in accordance with his mental development.” (S.C. Dubey : The Poetry of Robert Frost).

**FROST NOT A MYSTICAL OR RELIGIOUS POET**

Frost is not a revolutionary poet like Shelley, a religious poet like Donne or a mystical poet like William Blake. He does not have much concern with the various social, political, religious and moral issues of his time. Perhaps he was not a thinker on these
matters in a narrow sense, and tended to have a wider approach to the whole set of issues related to humanity. So he was concerned with serious human problems, and not merely with narrow contemporary affairs. As Willard Thorp points out, “Politics he shunned, except to have his fun with the political poets of the thirties who reproached him for retreating from the problems of the day. He is no. a religious poet, not even a nature mystic, in spite of all that nature meant to him.............. He is a learned poet but, as in Houseman's poetry, his learning is muted to an echoic beauty.” Frost is concerned with the life on this earth as he finds it, and not with the spiritual life as Wordsworth was, or with a mystic vision as Blake was. Frost does not attach a spiritual or mystical significance to nature, but treats it as a background for the actions and struggles of man.

**DISMAL AND GLOOMY VIEW OF LIFE**

The vision embodied in Frost's poetry is dismal and gloomy. He finds and paints the life of rustic people with all its unhappiness, pain and depression caused by several social and economic factors that are at work around him in the contemporary world. He depicts the unhappy lot of farmers, laborers, servants etc. He shows old men like the one in A Man's Winter Night', as alienated from society. He points out the loneliness and isolation of people. In fact, his view of man consists of a "re of man as a lonely figure living in isolation from other men. Nature and God, and feeling helpless in a hostile universe. Frost presents a dismal view of the universe with its wide desert places, immense wilderness and vast stretches of stubborn land on which Man has to work hard for the purpose of cultivation. His bleak world-views is quite depressing.

**FROST NOT A PESSIMIST**

Despite his dismal view of life and the world, Frost cannot be called a pessimist like Matthew Arnold. He favours and advocates an acceptance of the facts of life as in ‘Mowing’ (fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows) and finds this earth to be ‘the right place for love’ (as in ‘Birches’). He remains unruffled by the imperfection or faults in life, and accepts them with a sense of stoic calm, in “The Lesson For To-Day’ wherein he says –

"There's always something to be sorry for,
A sordid peace or an outrageous war"
Like Keats, Frost accepts life as it is, with all its joys and sorrows, perfections and limitations, comedy and tragedy. As Randall Jarrell remarks, “Frost’s view of life is austere and tragic; yet his capacity for finding joy is poignantly ever ready. His spirit is torn by dubieties; his best poems offer queries, not affirmations. The salvation he seeks seems hard to come by. It demands great renunciations. His sensibility is deeply marked by the puritan heritage of his ancestors. In many ways he is the counter part of T S. Eliot.” Elizabeth Jennings holds the view that "What is most noticeable in a Frost's reflective poems is an almost total absence of despair or pessimism. If is not that he shuns darkness or difficulties- quite the reverse-but rather that something in his own mind and imagination makes them eager to accept, to examine, and sometimes to reconcile, opposite. He realizes that without darkness there would be no light, without evil there would be no possibility of a freely choosing good, without death, no life as we know it.” Thus, Frost depicts life in its light and dark shades, its hopes and despair, its gloom an light. He cannot therefore, be regarded as a pessimist.

CONCLUSION

Frost is a thinker as well as a poet. He has often presented in his poems his world view or philosophy of life. He depicts human condition in general, and portrays man in relation to his fellow men, Nature, God and Universe. His thinking may not be very deep or his philosophy very original, but it forms an important part of his poetry. His philosophy is an integral part of his poetry. His poetry contains a fine blend of thought, emotion and symbolic imagery. It would not be proper to call him merely d pod of impulse or of bare facts of life. His simplicity and popularity should not be mistaken as a sign of a lack of thinking in him. The element of thinking or philosophy is very much there; but it is hardly ever able to overshadow his poetry.

References:
2. https://neoenglish.wordpress.com
3. https://rrjournals.com