
The Romantic Concepts of Nature in the poetry of Derozio

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ABSTRACT:

The term 'Nature' more or less has always been used in each domain of knowledge from ancient to present time with its specific connotations. In literature, Nature, in fact, does not restrain to a particular meaning. It is open for multiple interpretations. Most of the poets and authors rendered Nature as a non-artificial world which is existed as a whole including Man and other things as parts of it. It is contradictory when it includes description of artificial world of Man. Such descriptions of Nature assure not only its particular meaning but also various aspects related. Even great poets of English have hardly neglected Nature in their art of poesy. It has been at an apex in the debate when comes to the Romantics.

In India, the description of Nature in poetry is no exceptional. H L V Derozio, the first poetic genius of India, portrays Nature in his utmost poetry in Romantic veins. His passions and gist are not only clearly represented Nature but Nature has also supplemented them. With the chef d'oeuvre, Fakeer of Jungheera, his poems The Harp of India, Evening in August, Morning after a Storm, A Walk by Moonlight, Night, Ada, To the Moon, To the Rising Moon and so on mark an inception in Indian poetry in English and so does Nature. This paper endeavours to study and explore these poems to highlight the influence of Romantics on the concepts of Nature.

Nature – A Course:
Every place is under the stars.
Every place is the center of the world.
- **John Burroughs**

It has globally been admitted that one of the most used vocabularies which acclaims to be used in most of domains of knowledge is 'nature'. Everyone claims to use it: be it Social Sciences, Humanities or any other course of human studies. This term is highly perplexed in its usages in various contexts –context affecting its meaning and vis-à-vis meaning affecting its context. Ascertaining, it can be observed when Greeks and Latin claimed that their social system of classes of master and slave was based on nature; further, the Christians appeal to nature to proclaim equality of all men before God; Nature has been abundantly used by the philosophers discussing Romanticism in philosophy, art, and literature; in literature, the Classics, Boileau, Racine, Fenelon in France and Shaftsbury, Dryden, Pope in England appeal to Nature constantly saying that reason and Nature are one to command and discipline human passions. The battle cry of Romanticism against Classicism is Nature; then, come the Realists who drive out the Romantics in the name of Nature; later Realism and Naturalism including Impressionists, Futurists, Cubists who favour to the right of Nature: accordingly, the term 'nature' has its own course of usage and meanings in various domains of knowledge.

In Western literature, especially in the poetry, the description of Nature has been an inseparable realm. From Chaucer to Milton, Neo-Classical to pre-Romantic poets and Romantics to present poets, Nature has been described in various ways; some used it to enhance their poetic expressions and some used it to supplement their universal themes. During eighteenth century when debate on Nature was intensely concentrated in philosophy and literature, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), a Geneva philosopher's writings highlighted some of the concepts of 'Nature', and its influences on subsequent English writers. However, Rousseau's concepts of 'Nature' were paradoxical owing varied perspectives in his writings. For instances, in his autobiographical work 'Confessions', at many places he asks not to follow Nature when Nature tells that the road to happiness is found in yielding to passion; in such sensation, he suggests to follow the moral nature which opposes Nature. On the other hand, he immediately also suggests to follow Nature when it does not forbid and favours the enjoyment of life. It can be unstated that Rousseau discussed not 'the state of nature of man' but 'nature of man' along with 'Nature', henceforth, when he said 'Back to Nature' he did not only mean world of plants, animals and other living creatures but he also did mean moral nature of Man. In fact, Rousseau's writings: 1. Speak a good deal of himself as – Rousseau, the man of Romantic; and 2. Drop a philosophical message of moral nature – in which Rousseau semblance more like an anti-Romantic. Hence, it is illustrious that Nature has multiple meanings when it applies to certain phases of human life.

Nature and the Romantics:
That spirit of religious love in which
I walked with Nature

- *William Wordsworth*

If Rousseau ignited the torch to write with a tendency for Back to Nature (phrase – which was developed by Rousseau) then the Romantic poets were truly torch-bearers. This conflux of Nature and the Romantic poets is immediate predecessor of Henry Derozio (1809-1831) – an exceptional Indian poet writing in English.

William Wordsworth, the author of hallmark Romantic Movement, viz. Lyrical Ballads, has been considered 'the highest priest of Nature' and 'worshiper of Nature'. His poems such as 'Written in Very Early Youth' wherein he considers Nature as source of tranquillity and energy when he says 'Calm is all nature as a resting wheel'. In 'Daffodils', whereas, he used the rich natural imageries full of serenity. Poems such as 'Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', 'How Beautiful the Queen of Night', 'A Solitary Reaper' and so on represent his love acquaintances with Nature since his childhood days. The concept of Nature is, broadly, captured in his poetry as: Ordinary Nature and Extra-ordinary Nature. For instance, in 'Daffodils', he narrates: 'I wandered lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o'er vales and hills. / When all at once I saw a crowd, / A host, of golden daffodils; / Beside the lake, beneath the trees, / Fluttering and dancing in the breeze'. (303)

In his poem Tintern Abbey he calls Nature a guardian of his heart and soul of his 'moral being'. The poem mentions at a point that he can see 'wreaths of smoke' rising up from the cottage chimneys which indicates human activities in the lap of Nature which can further be interpreted

as human interference for his self. In many of his poems, Wordsworth depicted Nature spiritually. A cry for pantheism is, often, heard in his treatment of natural objects through which he tries to attain God. Samuel Taylor Coleridge categorises the earthly and unearthly elements as

1. Natural which is within the reach of human understanding, and
2. Supernatural which is beyond human reach and understanding.

As he narrates, it can be further noted that the former Nature is visible and the latter is invisible which can only be felt or realised. He also speaks about Man's moral nature and confronts it as a biased one in his 'The Rime of Ancient Mariner' and on the other hand he describes Nature as an unbiased which is not infected in his 'Frost at Midnight'. While Byron does not worship Nature like the lake poets. To him Nature was the growth of men, women and society – the civilization. His poems narrate Nature structurally which is destructive in its functions. P B Shelley, a friend of Byron, was influenced by him. He mostly in his poems stressed the human nature and Nature-Culture which transform society. His concept was probably more intellectual among other members of Romantic Movement. While John Keats, developed his idea of Nature with his compassions with: 1. External Nature and 2. Internal Nature which is Sensual Experiences. He focuses on organic Nature in his poetry. For him, Nature is what a man wants to be.

Nature, Romantics and poetry of H L V Derozio:

Henry Derozio, the forgotten bard of India, is the first Indian poet to spark the flame of Indian poetry in English. He, under the Western influences, especially of Romantic poets, pioneers Indian poetry in English with his poems of varied range. He wrote narrative poems such as 'Fakeer of Jungheera', 'The Golden Vase', 'Ada', 'The Enchantress of the Cave: A Tale'; nationalistic sonnets like 'The Harp of India', 'The Broken Harp' which occupied a good place in the Indian school textbooks because of their patriotic favour, and he also translated the odes of Persian Hafiz among others. There are poems like 'Evening in August', 'Morning after a Storm', 'Dust', 'Night', 'To Night', 'The Golden Vase', 'To the Moon', 'To the Rising Moon', 'Poetic Haunts', 'A Dramatic Sketch', 'Dust', 'A Walk by Moonlight', 'Leaves' which lucidly signify the concept of Nature in his poetic creations.

However, these poems semblance the influence of the Romantic Movement which was highly attended by Derozio. This influence can be owing to two major plausible reasons: first, Derozio's education at Drummond's Academy where he studied English. Many of his poems reflect the effects of learning English language, Science, Logic and English literature. Second, Derozio's own habit of extensive reading of English specially literature. Thomas Edwards notes that 'his library had all the latest books published from Britain.' (14) It included reading of poets like L.E.L.(later known as Mrs. Maclean), Thomas Campbell, Robert Southey and Thomas Moore among the major poets like William Wordsworth, S T Coleridge, Lord Byron, P B Shelley, John Keats.

Derozio's idea of Nature can broadly be explored in his poems exclusively on Nature such as 'Evening in August', 'Morning after a storm', 'A Walk by Moonlight', 'To the Dog Star' and poems with the descriptions of Nature such as 'The Fakeer', 'The Golden Vase', 'The New

Atlantis' which were written under the spell of the Romantics. Derozio appreciated the detailed presentation of Nature. He imitates Nature as described by first and second generation Romantic poets and strives to experience Nature as they experienced. H. M. Prasad rightly remarks 'like the nineteenth century romantic poets, he sings in poetry a process of recollect, a wild tour of imagination, an enchanting, look at the past, a passionate love for nature and a powerful invocation of the Muse.' Derozio's interest in Nature of India must have been moulded by his reading of the Romantic poets of Lake District which includes Robert Southey, William Wordsworth and S T Coleridge. But his interest and fascination for native Nature stems from his direct and close contact with it when he was sent to his uncle Arthur Johnson at Bhagulpore who was in the business of indigo-planting. Bradley-Birt informs of his formative and creative period of Derozio's life: 'The months he spent there, however, were destined to be of momentous import in his career. The solitude gave him time thoroughly to rasp and assimilate all that he had so rapidly learned, and opportunity for deep and serious thought.' (Bradley-Birt XXV)

For Derozio, India, his country remains a harp – a defrauded harp because of colonisation. In 'The Harp of India', Natural imagery represents the lost glories of this colonised country in the past, for instances, 'withered bough', 'breeze', 'silence', 'ruined monument' and 'desert plain'. These images remind us Byron's destructive Nature which create the desolate, deserted context of the country. The images have been woven with such dexterity and precision that they construct the hapless condition of the country under the British rule. In the poem entitled 'To India – My Native Land' not only harps on Derozio's unalloyed allegiance to his native land but also convincingly registers the poet's concern over the loss of his country's freedom. The native land is perceived first as a 'deity' and next as an 'eagle' whose pinions have been chained to force it to the 'lowly dust'.

'Evening in August' depicts the bounties of Nature generated by the river Ganga. The poem unfolds the scenes of an afternoon leading to night's darkness on the river bank. The following lines create a scene of angelic beauty and glamour depicting the sunset as: 'The sun sets on a bank, whose yellow sand / And brightly glows; as if an angel's hand / Had scattered gold there, heedless of the worth / That gold hath gained among the sons of earth.' With the arrival of the night, 'shadows' start descending, the dew drops start falling like 'a blessing', and the stars start twinkling. The poem concludes with the fascinating images of fairies, as if the Nature was an agent that connects the two worlds, the material and the spiritual, the real with the imagined echoing the Wordsworthian and Coleridgian Nature:

Now spirits are abroad, and on the green
Dance the light fairies round their playful queen:
They dance, but leave no foot prints on the grass,
And when 'tis morn, like thoughts, away they pass;
And then each hies to her elfin bower,
A shrub's green leaf, or petal of a flower. (Chaudhuri Derozio 117)

Coleridge in 'The Rime of Ancient Mariner' connected natural and supernatural worlds through the intervention of human activities which Rousseau termed moral nature of human. Derozio

carrying the same effusion of Nature in the last few lines of the poem says that it is replete with activities which are human and with such activities only the human world of materiality gets connected to the ethereal world of non-materiality governed by fairies. Derozio, here, adopts the concepts of Nature from Coleridge and Wordsworth.

‘Morning After a Storm’ was written in two parts and both the parts portray Nature in two various effusions of Romantic. In the first part Derozio observes the havoc created by the storm and takes cognizance of Nature’s power. The havoc caused by Nature is minutely detailed:

To mark the havoc that the storm had made
I wandered forth, and saw great Nature’s power.
The hamlet was in desolation laid
 By the strong spirits of the storm; there lay
Around me many a branch of giant trees,
Scattered as leaves are by the southern breeze
Upon a brook, on an autumnal day;
Cloud piled on cloud was there... (Chaudhuri Derozio 149)

Derozio seems here to be following structurally destructive Nature of Byron. However, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, he being a lover of Nature appreciates Nature’s beauty in the second part:

Oh! Nature, how I love thy face! And now
That there was freshness on thy placid brow
White I looked on thee with extreme delight,
How leapt my young heart at the lovely sight!
Heaven breathed upon me sweetly, and its breath
Was like the fragrance of a rosy wreath. (ibid 150)

The poem ends with a Rousseauesque or Wordsworthian attitude of Derozio who after viewing the wreck-strewn river’s waves came to the conclusion: ‘...but Oh! There / I learned a moral lesson, which I’ll store / Within my bosom’s deepest, in most core!’ (ibid 150)

‘A Walk by Moonlight’ is written exclusively on Nature. The poet portrays a night which was the best of all nights. In the poem, the speaker was out the previous night to meet his friends. All three friends went for a walk. Wherein Derozio captures the grand connection of the moon’s governing of Nature: ‘The moon stood silent in the sky, / And looked upon our earth; / The clouds divided, passing by, / In homage to her worth.’ (ibid 374) His picturesque description of supreme influence of Moon, felt by the elements of Nature, creates mysteries when he writes: ‘There was a dance among the leaves / Rejoicing at her power, / Who robes for them of silver weaves / Within one mystic hour.’ (ibid 374) Derozio mystifies Nature in the last lines. Further he says ‘There was a song among the winds / Hymning her influence– / That low-breathed minstrelsy which binds / The soul to thought intense.’ (ibid 375) Derozio uses the word ‘mystic’ twice and ‘mysteries’ once in the poem and highlights the mysterious activities of Nature’s

elements. His observations like ‘a dance among the leaves’, ‘a song among the winds’, ‘And there was something in the night / That with its magic wound us’, ‘the mystic melody’ and ‘the silken language of the stars’ mystify Nature in general and Moon in particular. This is possibly because of his excessive readings of Romantics and their mystical approach to Nature. He also narrates the spiritualness in the lines: ‘When, like a thing that is not ours, / This earthliness goes by, / And we behold the spiritualness / Of all that cannot die.’ (ibid 375)

Like Wordsworth, realisation of spirituality makes the poet aware of the connection between the human world and the world of Nature: ‘The silken language of the stars / Becomes the tongue we speak,’ and the later lines ‘The inward eye is open then / The glories, which in dreams / Visit the sleeper’s couch, in robes / Woven of the rainbow’s beams.’ (ibid 375)

Derozio’s concept of Nature differs with the following lines reminding Derozio’s reading of Rousseau who talked about Man’s moral nature: ‘I bless my nature that I am / Allied to all the bliss,’ (ibid 375) In the poem the speaker is happy that he could see the other worlds in the activities of Nature: ‘Which other worlds we’re told afford, / But which I find in this.’ (ibid 376) The poem ends with the lines wherein Derozio personifies Nature and experiences it like the Romantics: ‘Oh! in such moments can I crush / The grass beneath my feet? / Ah no; the grass has then a voice, / Its heart – I hear it beat.’ (ibid 376)

He writes for the concept of mysterious wandering of moon as: ‘Lonely thou wander’st through wide heaven, like one / That has some fearful deed of darkness done’ (ibid 265) in ‘To the Moon’ and ‘And there though wander’st sorrowful, and weak, / And heedless where thou’rt straying, sad, and pale’ (ibid 269) in ‘To the Rising Moon’ both echoing Shelley’s ‘To the Moon’. It is affirmed when Derozio takes the first line of Shelley’s poem as a source of his description of moon. Derozio’s principal biographer, Thomas Edwards, thinks that his sonnet trio, i.e., Night, To the Moon, and To the Rising Moon, are modelled on and indebted to Shelley’s To the Moon:

Art thou pale for weariness
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,
Wandering companionless
Among the stars that have a different birth, -
And ever changing, like a joyless eye
That finds no object worth its constancy? (Percy Bysshe Shelley Poems 58)

In his ‘Night’ the imaginary of moon is ‘pallid, and weary, wandering slowly on’ and about the constancy of moon Derozio writes ‘Her trusting love’s and hapless frailty’s tale’ in ‘To the Rising Moon’ which are imitations of Shelley. Chakrabarti noting one influence of Shelley says:

The hope-induced prophetic vision of Shelley expressed in the first lines of Ode to the West Wind:

“O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”

is also Derozio's [of course, in a different context, i.e., in the context of Bentinck's banning of the practice of Satee by law]:

“morning herald star
Comes trembling into day: O! can the Sun be far ?
INDIA.”
[On the Abolition of Satee] (35)

His poems which show his veracity in the various aspects of native Nature. Often, also, with contradictory presentations when he describes how Nature is wonderful in creating the atmosphere of tranquillity echoing Wordsworth and how Nature can create havoc echoing Byron. Furthermore, he narrates ordinary things of Nature like 'leaves', 'flowers', 'rivers', 'trees' etc. which are creating an acute sense of ordinary Nature sounding like Wordsworth and brings out the spiritual aspect. Henceforth, his concept of Nature is not confined to a particular thought but it is a combination of ordinary, spiritual, supernatural, mystical, transcendental and intellectual presentations of Romantic poets. Identifying such traces or influences of English Romanticism on Derozio or on his concept of Nature does not, however, minimize the excellence, the richness and the greatness of Derozio as a gifted poet.

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