

## Romantic ideals: A Solution for Ecological Crisis

<sup>a</sup>Shilpa Shetty, <sup>b</sup>Diwakar Prahaladaiah

<sup>a</sup>St. Joseph's Evening College, Autonomous, Bengaluru, India

<sup>b</sup>HOD- English, St. Joseph's Evening College, Autonomous, Bengaluru, India

### Abstract

The romantic era emphasised more on the emotions as well as individualism that enriched the nature and past. Poets have expressed their feelings and experiences in their writings and stressed on nature's preservation. They have written to give feelings of each individual to save humanity from the robotic way of living. Writers also helped the whole humanity to renew their lives with nature and to find the source of life in nature as 'Mother'. From my reading, I have realised that romantic writers presented their views and experiences in different ways, however, their motive was same. In the present modern world, we see everyone busy with their own life, in the bargain people have forgotten to appreciate the beauty that exists around us, in fact, knowingly or unknowingly we are destroying the beauty for one's own personal benefit. Thus, the current research paper focuses issues and ideas of romantic writers and how they touch the humanity to be productive positively than to be destructive. The researcher adopts qualitative research method i.e., a content analyses based on the readings from the books on Romanticism, articles and lecture on ecological crisis.

**KEYWORDS:** Romantic, Nature, Crisis, Humanity and Individualism

### Introduction:

Romanticism, also known as the Romantic Era, is a literary movement, which involved Musical, artistic and intellectual ideas, which originated in Europe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This movement emphasized on emotions and individualism, which glorified the past and nature. The Romantic Era is partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution. Romantic poetry is highly subjective, which means the poets expressed their own feelings as well as their experiences in their writings and they did so in a lyric form.

Ecological Crisis is caused when the change to the environment damages the survival of species or population, the reasons being over-population, the ecological factors like increase in temperature, less rainfall, etc.

The main concern of Romantics is nature, they wanted to escape from the evils of social system. It is when nature lost its vitality in the preceding ages that Romantics focused on writing about nature. Romantics strived hard to reconnect the lost relationship of man with nature. The theme of Romanticism was "sensibility" which focused mainly on women and children, and "respect for nature", where the writers divert towards writing about nature, while others focused on destroying it through industrial revolution, which exploited nature.

"Major English writers of the period, in addition to Wordsworth and Coleridge, were the poets Robert Burns, William Blake, Lord Byron, Percy By she Shelley, John Keats and Walter Savage Landor; the prose writers Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Leigh Hunt and the novelists Jane Austen, Sir Walter Scott, and Mary Shelley. The span between 1786

and the close of the eighteenth century was that of the Gothic romances by William Beckford, Matthew Gregory Lewis, William Godwin, and, above all, Ann Radcliffe.”<sup>1</sup>

William Wordsworth wrote at the beginning of ‘The Prelude’:

“OH there is blessing in this gentle breeze,  
A visitant that while it fans my cheek  
Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings  
From the green fields, and from yon azure sky.  
Whate’er its mission, the soft breeze can come  
To none more grateful than to me; escaped  
From the vast city, where I long had pined  
A discontented sojourner: now free,  
Free as a bird to settle where I will.  
What dwelling shall receive me? in what vale  
Shall be my harbour? underneath what grove  
Shall I take up my home? and what clear stream  
Shall with its murmur lull me into rest?  
The earth is all before me. With a heart  
Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty,  
I look about; and should the chosen guide  
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud,  
I cannot miss my way. I breathe again!”

These lines show the ecstatic state of mind that the writer portrays when he is amidst nature. The breeze is like a holy visitor who caresses his cheeks and it brings him joy to some extent. He has escaped from the unhappy city life and is content with the green fields around him. He feels that he is now free as a bird and can settle down wherever he wants to. He then says that, even if he chooses a sailing cloud as a guide, he would not miss his way and once again he is free to breathe. ‘The Prelude’ is largely made up of Wordsworth’s doctrine of nature, which is found in his other poems as well – especially in Lucy’s education of nature, Tintern Abbey and Ode: Intimations of Immortality.

As per Petru Golban’s research, “M H Abrams is more drastic and considers that the Romantic writers are to be viewed as ‘political and social poets’, that “to a degree without parallel, even among major Victorian poets, these writers [Romantics] were obsessed with the realities of their era”, and that it is, a peculiar injustice that Romanticism is often described as a mode of escapism, an evasion of the shocking changes, violence, and ugliness attending the emergence of the modern industrial and political world” (Abrams, 1970, p.101).<sup>2</sup>

The Literary theories and new philosophy in Germany were produced, “by poets like Goethe and Schiller, by journal-critics like Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel (especially in their journal, the *Athenaeum*), and by academic philosophers like Kant, Schelling, Schopenhauer and Hegel. The last group was especially significant, in that the advent of German idealist philosophy impacted very directly upon Romantic literary theory” (Harland, 1999, p.61)<sup>2</sup>.

German Romantic artist, Caspar David Friedrich’s, “Wanderer above a sea of fog”, an oil painting (c.1818), is considered as one of the masterpieces and representative works of Romanticism.

The need for the study is that, the essence of nature is lost due to several reasons, where industrial revolution plays a role which may not be a major one but is one of the reasons. All civilizations to some extent have caused damage to the

environment. This study shows how romantic writers stressed on nature's importance to reduce its exploitation, love towards nature being the major theme of their writings.

What are the basic causes for the degradation of the environment in the present scenario?

There are various causes which degrades or exploits the nature, few are

**I. Global Warming:** It is a change in Earth's climate system, due to rise in average temperature.

As per the climate NASA website (news section),

a) "NASA finds Asian Glaciers slowed by iceloss: Asia's high mountain glaciers

are flowing more slowly as they melt, affecting the water supply of the arid plains below the peaks." (13 December 2018)<sup>4</sup>

b) "International team, NASA make unexpected discovery under Greenland ice:

Researchers have discovered a large meteorite impact crater hiding beneath more than half-mile of Greenland ice. Large impacts can profoundly affect Earth's climate, with major consequences for life on Earth at the time." (15 November 2018)<sup>4</sup>

**II. Use of products which are not eco-friendly, or which cannot be re-used:**

The article, The importance of eco-friendly products says, "There are many factors of something that might be harmful to the environment. So many things can negatively influence the environment, such as not using proper procedures when disposing of products. However, there are many benefits to using eco-friendly products that are not simply centered around the health and well-being of the Earth, but also the health and well-being of your family." (Blog - 9 January 2017)<sup>5</sup>

**III. Less rainfall and increase in temperature which are caused by deforestation:**

The moisture balance in the soils is what matters for agriculture. Drought can be a potential consequence if there is an increase in rainfall and also increase in temperature.

"Published in *Geophysical Research Letters*, Liepert et al. show findings suggesting that solar radiation is being both reflected and trapped in the clouds and aerosol layer, thereby decreasing the amount of radiation that would ordinarily hit the Earth's surface. It is widely agreed that greenhouse gas trapping is causing the Earth's surface temperatures to rise. What has not been understood until now is that temperatures would be rising faster or higher if the aerosol layer and cloud cover were not reflecting some of the radiation away. Further, the researchers conclude that the imbalance of less solar radiation with warming surface temperatures will lead to weaker turbulent heat fluxes resulting in reduction in evaporation and precipitation, which will lead to a dryer world." <sup>6</sup>

The research on rise in temperature identifies how man-made air borne aerosols form small cloud droplets by condensing water, the result of which thickens the Earth's cloud cover. The droplets formed are small and cannot sink through the air in the form of rain. Thus, we have less rain due to longer period of cloud cover.

During the lecture held at St. Joseph's evening college, it was a pleasure to witness the speakers talk about eco-criticism that, "today human beings treat nature as a commodity. All civilizations to some extent have caused damage to the environment. There are two kinds of imperialism that human beings exert in nature.

- a) **Species Imperialism:** We behave like we are the only species and do not care what happens to other species.
- b) **Temporal Imperialism:** This is related to time. The way our modern industries are structured with heavy industries, the side effects of destruction are major. Here we do not care for tomorrow or next generation.

'We have not inherited this planet from our ancestors, but we have taken it from our children.' The result is we are hoarding hostage."<sup>3</sup>

### 1. How did Romantic writers view nature?

Any writing is classified into a category based on the themes and characteristic traits. The themes of romantic poetry include individualism, love, nature, idealization of childhood, imagination and the past, the outstanding and most important quality being 'Love for Nature'.

William Wordsworth's motto was, "Return to Nature". Wordsworth saw, "little distinction between the soul of Nature, and the uncorrupted, unsophisticated soul of man, Nature, as existing in the heart of man, was an object of his close attention."<sup>7</sup>

William Wordsworth describes the beauty of nature in an extract from the ODE: Intimations of immortality,  
"The Rainbow comes and goes,  
And lovely is the Rose,  
And lovely is the Rose,  
The moon doth with delight  
Look round her when the heavens are bare,  
Waters on a starry night  
Are beautiful and fair;  
The sunshine is a glorious birth;  
But yet I know, where'er I go,  
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

These lines depict the picture formation of a rainbow and how quickly it fades away in the sky. Rose is beautiful to the poet's eyes and the moon shines in the cloudless sky, looking joyfully around her. The rivers and lakes look fascinating under the star-lit sky. The sunshine is like a birth of the day to the poet and he talks about how the light has departed from the earth. The words like delight, beautiful and fair, glorious birth, glory from the earth, are all description of natural scenes that shows intensity of poet's affection.

We have another poetry of Wordsworth, Daffodils, in which he describes the beauty of nature, where he seemed to be seized with an ecstasy of delight and was sensitive to the natural beauty,  
"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."

The poet was alone beside a lake, when he spotted many daffodils. They were of golden colour and countless in number, which spread along the side of the lake in a

long line. They looked like stars shining bright in the sky. At one glance, the poet saw them wave their heads as if they danced out of joy. The waves of the lake danced along with them but was no match for the joy of the flowers.

We can find similar approach by another romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who showed his affection towards nature through poetry. As per the book, S.T. Coleridge selected poems, “Coleridge is a typical representative of the true romantic spirit which is marked by a fondness for that beauty which has strangeness added to it and naturally flies away from the familiar daylight realities of our common existence into the regions remote, exotic and mysteriously unfamiliar”<sup>8</sup>

Coleridge has also visualised the landscape of the palace in the poem ‘Kubla Khan’ with clarity:

“And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills  
Where blossomed many an incense bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.”

These lines from ‘Kubla Khan’, describes the surrounding of the palace. He writes about fine gardens and the sparkling streams that flows in zig-zag courses. Part of the ground is covered with forests which are as old as the hills. These are too beautiful for words. Coleridge is stepping away from history and is transforming the place, to his own creation.

### **Conclusion:**

Most of the romantic poets were inspired by the past, they wanted to escape from the oppressive realities of the present. All romantic poets except Keats see – spiritual, moral or ethical meaning in nature. For Wordsworth, Nature is a Mother, a nurse, and an educating influence. He finds God being present everywhere and considers nature as a living spirit. Shelley, finds nature as an intellectual beauty. When Shelley intellectualises nature, Wordsworth spiritualises it, but Keats expresses nature through the senses; the touch, the pulsing music, the colour, the scent; these were the things which mattered to him and made him write in depth; and he loved every mood of earth and all the seasons brought him cheer and inspired him.

Undoubtedly, awakening of the nature’s mystery is the main characteristic feature of the Romantic Movement, which was a reaction partly due to the industrial revolution. Romantic poets not just love nature for her grandeur and beauty, but also sight deeper truths underlying her physical manifestations. The writers focused on writing about nature while others were busy with its exploitation. The emotional reactions to nature are also described in their writings. Hence, each romantic poet has their own conception of nature. Wordsworth once said, “Every great poet is a teacher. I wish either to be considered as a teacher, or as nothing.”, which means his poetry was written to teach by presenting before the world a new vision of life.

### **Reference:**

1. A Glossary of Literary Terms – M H Abrams – Eleventh Edition (Page 284)
2. The Romantic Critical Thinking: Theoretical Incoherence of a Unitary Movement – p.127
3. [Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences – Vol.3 [(1) January 2012]
4. Reference from Lecture on ‘Ecological Inspirations from Literature – A Discourse on
5. Ecocriticism and Environmental Justice’ (28 November 2018)

6. <https://climate.nasa.gov/news>
7. <https://www.kangovou.com/the-importance-of-eco-friendly-products/>
8. <https://www.ldeo.columbia.edu/news-events/could-global-warming-mean-less-sunshine-and-less-rainfall>
9. William Wordsworth Selected Poems (A critical evaluation by DR.S.SEN) (Page9 – Introduction to William Wordsworth)
10. S.T. Coleridge Selected Poems (A critical evaluation by DR.S. SEN) (Page 4 – Introduction to Samuel Taylor Coleridge)