

2

Endangered Environment and the Graveyard-Bound Humankind: Romantic Ideals at Savior's Desk

Bhima Charan Nayak

Abstract

A healthy and harmonious relationship between humankind and the environment is of supreme existential interest to both stakeholders. But sadly enough, for some centuries now, there is least in sight the prevalence of any such relationship between the two. There has been witnessed rather a continuous negative attitude of humans towards nature. This negative attitude is manifest in the ongoing large-scale infringement of Nature by the human community. A couple of blinding passions, greed and power-hungriness, have completely taken over the human conscience. Under their effect, human beings have suffered moral decadence and spiritual bankruptcy. Rather than being grateful to Nature and Mother Earth for their origin and upbringing, the members of this supra-intellectual species have gone mad and morally blind. They have turned ruthless ravishers and rapacious plunderers of both Nature and Mother Earth. Their limitless infringements have resulted in serious damage to the environment and an alarming ecological imbalance. Unprecedented climate change, massive-scale melting of ice deposits in the polar regions, menacing rise in the sea level, persistent increase in global warming, and frequent recurrence of devastating natural calamities are the symptoms of the imminence of Doom's Day. Humankind is conspicuously graveyard-bound now and facing a serious existential crisis. At this critical juncture, the Romantic ideals and agenda appear to be of enormous remedial significance for the sustenance of humankind on this planet. With its pronounced spiritual fervour and pantheistic ideals, the quintessential principles of Romanticism plead pertinaciously for maintaining a healthy and harmonious relationship between Nature and the human community for the endearing and enduring survival of the latter on this paradisiac planet. The prime focus of this write-up is on the imperative need for reaffirming and reposing faith in the Romantic ideals for the greater existential interest of humankind.

Keywords: humankind, Nature, environment, infringement, and Romantic ideals

Introduction

The Paradisiac Planet & the Errant Humankind

Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge....

----- William Wordsworth

Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

----- P.B. Shelley

The world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body.

----- William Blake

In the entire universe, the Earth happens to be the most wonderful and unique planet. She owes her unique features to the locational slot and advantages to which she alone has been privileged. It is presumably the only planet which has put up a rare and gaudy display of rich biodiversity. The wide encyclopedia of human knowledge and the most advanced supersonic scientific gadgets of the day fail to ascertain if there's any other planet in the entire multiverse which has any living organism. It is by her unique situational berth and advantages, that she has emerged to be the most vibrant and pulsating one in the entire planetary system. Our earth has been exquisitely lively, accommodative and hospitable. It has been the planet of plenty and splendour. Its outer surface is as much spectacular in colours and contours as its inner womb fertile and bounteous in life-supporting resources. Here her air is immensely animating. It is amusingly aromatic and ceaselessly resonant with the soul-soothing music too. Here gushes out nectar-like sweet and nourishing water from her innermost realm through innumerable fountains. Streams keep flowing here with a pleasant murmuring sound. Her sprawling landscapes are lush, productive, and strewn with a wide myriad of flora and fauna. Her waterscapes are awe-inspiringly deep and thronged with innumerable aquatic animals, both big and small. Here the day sky is flooded brilliantly with golden sunrays and the night sky is gorgeously strewn with countless twinkling stars, and bathed with silvery and soothing moonlights. The night sky is also beautifully embroidered with prolonged and flakelike milky-ways. Day in and day out, the air here is endlessly resonant with the sonorous twitters of multifarious birds

and the sweet chirping of innumerable insects. Life is nothing short of the Edenic one depicted in the holy scriptures. If there's at all in existence any such heavenly abode, it is only here on this Edenic Earth. Its two other sites, our imagination and the pages of the sacred narratives are virtual in nature and form. On that count, those two are little inhabitable by our corporeal beings. But the very physical version of such a wonderful and eternal abode has been kept at our easy and free-of-cost disposal for our blissful dwelling here on this paradisiac planet. We have been extremely privileged to live in such an amazing world here on the felicitous premises of our terrestrial home. Our planetary home of plenty, beauty, splendour and infinite treasure has indeed remained the Paradise on the earth. Talking in pragmatic terms and reasoned manner, it won't be unwarranted to say that this earthly idyllic home of ours has indeed been the womb of all our notions of heaven. It has been the foundational scaffolding of or corollary to, all our concepts of heaven and hell as well. Among the myriad classes, categories and forms of living organisms inhabiting the earth, we the human beings happen to be the most fortunate and privileged ones. We happen to be the most fortunate and privileged ones being created to rule over this wonderful orb.

If we go by the accounts of Western Biblical mythology, God created man in His image. That is why, human beings happen to be the dearest of God's all creations. Accordingly, they are made the most powerful and privileged of all creatures. The members of the human community are endowed with extraordinary intellectual faculties. They are made unsurpassable intelligent. They are empowered with superb agility, enormous energy, unwavering determination and inordinate willpower. They are infused with an astounding inquisitiveness. In terms of ability and adroitness, humans are second only to the Almighty God. As the book of Genesis of the Holy Bible depicts, after making man "in His image," God wished him, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (The New King James Version 1). In addition to this good wish, He also bade humans to abide by the Ten Commandments. Among different things to do and not to do, the Commandments tell categorically not to steal, not to covet, and not to kill. While pronouncing His good wishes and the

Commandments, He had expected that the humans would carry out each one of His decrees in letter and spirit without any discrimination. At that original point in human history, God had perhaps never imagined that in the furtherance of their journey of life, humans would turn so abominably sinful and so wholesomely offensive.

A review of human performances reveals that the performers have been very selective and discriminatory in their commitments to the divine biddings. While they have overworked day in and day out in carrying out the divine bid telling them to “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth,” they have taken the stand and approach of damn care about the ten Commandments. As a result of their overenthusiastic implementation of the first instruction, the world today is overcrowded with the human population; it is completely occupied, overtaken by exorbitantly greedy and rapacious humans. Human beings have grabbed the homelands of the fish, flesh and fowl. They have rendered their fellow cohabitants either homeless or extinct. But with regard to the implementation of the Ten Commandments, they have shown utter disregard for them (Commandments) by their impassionate indulging in stealing, killing and coveting. In this regard, they have fully yielded themselves to boundless greed, rapacity, and wanton power-hungriness. In the mythological phase of their journey, their defiance of the divine order is manifest in the commission of the Original Sin. In the subsequent nonmythological phase, their wanton lust for power is prominently manifest in the monarchical setup of power exercise and human management. It needs no explanation to understand that monarchy is the supreme form of dominance over both humans and nonhumans. It is worth the mention that this extremely dictatorial and oppressive form of dispensation continued for the longest period in the recorded history of human power-play. It continued in varying degrees and under different names or nomenclatures such as monarchy, imperialism, kingdom and many other analogous nomenclatures denoting despotic power and unquestionable position. The regime implying power dominance, or power play, is still in vogue even today. In the present phase of human history, it is practised in

different forms and manners. Mostly democratic political setup is in currency today. In this new setup, the power centre has shifted from the singular individual to the plural state machinery, to the nation-state, to other corporal bodies like the MNCs. While the nation-state exercises both military and economic power, the MNCs exercise economic/capital as well as knowledge power. To rule supreme has always remained and invariably the common agenda or *mantra*. The chapter on human history dealing with the colonial regime in the past centuries is another glaring example of human beings' innate nature to dominate and rule, their hegemonic habits, power-hungriness, expansionist outlook and lust for wealth. It is an example moreover, of the aggressive nature of humans, of human exploitation and oppression. The point here this presentation seeks to underline is that down the ages, the humans have remained abysmally lusty for dictatorial power. They have been further, extremely rapacious, greedy and covetous to an alarming degree. We the humans have left no stone unturned in our act of being fruitful. We have worked unceasingly and relentlessly in multiplying our race. We have left no ways and means unutilized in filling the earth and subduing it. We have unfurled the flag of our supreme dominance over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. In our mad and desperate pursuits of power and material prosperity, we have left our mother earth shamefully denuded, utterly mutilated and irreparably defaced. That is not the whole story about human greed and covetous temperament. Not satisfied with their plundering the treasures of the paradisiac planet, of late, we have cast our covetous eyes on the other planets and satellites. Had God been aware that His replica, the human beings, would go to this extent in their mad pursuit of power and wealth, He certainly would not have created them in His image. He most probably would have created them differently in a different mould.

There's no doubt that we, human beings, have caused serious damage to our paradisiac planet. We have vitiated its erstwhile immaculate, scenic, serene, and sublime ambience. We have polluted its air. We have poisoned its water. We have brought out extensive deforestation and thereby caused serious damage to this planet's lush and green covers. We have dug deep into the innermost realms of our mother earth. Consequent to our prolonged and intermittent pursuit

of supreme power and materialistic well-being, the environment stands today dreadfully defaced. The erstwhile benign eco-system stands alarmingly affected and imbalanced. The disastrous consequences of wanton human greed, rapacity and lustfulness for power and wealth have already been felt. Many a species of wide biodiversity is already out of existence once and for all. The mighty and rare species of dinosaurs, to cite just one example, has been out of existence for a long. Jonathan Bate, an eminent literary critic of the ecocriticism school, has offered a succinct account of the repercussions of human wrongdoings. In his insightful work titled *The Song of the Earth*, Bate has written,

Carbon dioxide produced by the burning of fossil fuels is trapping the heat of the sun, causing the planet to become warmer. Glaciers and permafrost are melting, sea levels rising, rainfall patterns changing, and winds growing stronger. Meanwhile, the oceans are overfished, deserts are spreading, forests shrinking, and freshwater becoming scarcer. The diversity of the species on the planet is diminishing (Roe 199).

These are the minuscule clips of a trailer only. The full movie of human villainy and its tragic fallouts is going to take place soon unless we undertake some drastic remedial measures immediately. In the mythical era of humans, we have already lost paradise once in the persons of our first-ever ancestors for committing the Original Sin. In the present phase of our existence, there's no doubt, that we are very close to suffering a total racial extinction, which the gigantic species, the dinosaurs, has already undergone earlier. The Doom's Day, the nightmarish mythological prophecy, it appears, isn't far off.

Graveyard Bound Humankind

We, human beings, are undoubtedly the luckiest to be born as the dearest offspring of our divine Father. We have been graced by being accorded a special slot in the great chain of beings. As the dearest children of our divine Father, we have been gifted with intelligence, ingenuity, skill, creativity and inordinate willpower. Even though size-wise we have been made smaller than many other cohabitants on this planet, we overpower and rule over them by the strength of our intelligence and adroitness. In certain cases, we have taken them as hostages by confining them within the narrow cells of our zoological gardens. We, the homo-sapiens, should have been extremely grateful

to God, the Supreme Father, for empowering us with extraordinary intellectual weaponry, and for making our species what and how it is. But the sad part of the journey of our race is that instead of being very much grateful for and contented with being empowered in astounding ways, as the story of our deeds and mindset holds testimony, we have been extremely ungrateful and exceedingly insatiable. An exorbitant power-hungriness and unappeasable greed have evidentially taken control over us. Unappeasable greed, monstrous rapacity, lofty dreams and disquieting desires have taken over us and eclipsed our conscience and rational faculty. As a result, we have gone mad and blind, and we are unable to think in prudent and positive ways. We continue to indulge in negative investments of our talent, our inborn intellectual capital. In quest of infinite progress and prosperity, we have in reality, set out on the path of self-annihilation. In the early part of the Biblical mythological era, when we were given the privileges of a sojourn in paradise, we were allured to temptation, became disobedient and committed the Original Sin. In consequence, brought upon ourselves diseases, decay and death. We lost permanently the precious bliss of eternal youth. The worst of all, eventually, we had to undergo the loss of Paradise. Yet we could not learn a lesson from our past wrongdoings. Despite the exemplary irreversible loss of the unageing youth, of immortality and our heavenly abode, we continue to be under the illusion that we are immortal and invincible. In the modern phase of the journey of our racial life, we continue to pledge ourselves to wanton greed and rapacity. We continue to engage ourselves in the mad pursuit of supreme power and unlimited material affluence. This imprudent yielding to monstrous greed and insatiable lust for power has impelled us to undertake certain measures, which in the long run have proven to be extremely disastrous and made our journey of life graveyard-bound.

As a result of our yielding to monstrous greed and insatiable lust for power, we have indulged in, for instance, grabbing more and more territory, more and more wealth. Following this obnoxious mission, we have stepped out of our habitats and encroached unjustly upon other's territory. We have grabbed the living spaces of our cohabitants and rendered them homeless. There are no creatures of size both big or small, of category fish, flesh and fowl, which have

not been affected by our expansionist attitude and power-hungry passion. In the process, we have pushed many permanently to their graveyards. The most deplorable part of our rapacious tendency and wanton lifestyle is that we have caused a serious imbalance in the ecosystem. We have kept infringing on the precious natural environment. We have gone against the divine scheme and orders of things. We have brought about extensive destruction to the natural ambience and forest lands. We have vitiated incurably the life-supporting systems as well as the natural cycles and mechanisms of resource management. Besides taking illegal occupancy of other habitats, we have also polluted dangerously the entire environment comprising all three domains: air, water, and land. In our ways with Mother Earth, we have wholesomely plundered her, defaced and denuded her in every imaginable way. Our ruthless ravishment of both the earth and the surrounding environment has proven true Frank Buchman's observation, "There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed" (Ratcliffe 126). It's no wonder, that unjust and unethical human actions have not remained inconsequential. Offences committed so long, so sinfully, and on so massive scale, cannot help being counterproductive. It is no wonder, in the circumstances, the gravely ransacked Mother Earth and the grossly vitiated environment have reacted in the most insurgent and outrageous manner.

The repercussions have started to be alarmingly grave and grim. They have turned out to be very expensive as well. The most pathetic and unjust part of our misdeeds is that, for none of their faults, many innocent and poor cohabitants have been made to pay a heavy price. And in some cases, the price has been too heavy to be borne by the poor cohabitants. Many have failed to adapt to the rapidly changing scenario. They have fallen prey to the adverse consequences arising out of the human wrongdoings. In course of the time, many a species of rich bio-diversity has suffered, to repeat it, complete racial extinction. We have already cited earlier the cases of the dinosaurs. This mighty and rare species is no longer in existence today. Their remnants present in the reduced minuscule form of the fossils have emerged to be a new subject matter for human research. Or at best, we look at and reimagine today those gigantic creatures only on the virtual spaces of the silver screen, or on the monitor screens of our

electronic gadgets not in their actual videography but only in their animated versions recreated artificially. They are in existence today precisely in their fake inanimate state, in the form of mere dummies or picture models. But there was a time at the remote end of animal history when the dinosaurs happened to be one among a few monstrous dwellers on this globe. As the cause of their extinction from the earth, the unbearable climate change is stated to be the principal one (cause). The saddest part of their life story is that, like many other creatures, both big and small, the dinosaurs could not cope with the changing environment. Thus, they disappeared from this planet once and for all. Dinosaurs are not the only creatures to suffer complete racial extinction. Many others are cutting across the diverse spectrum of species who have suffered the same fate as that of the dinosaurs in the still-elongating span of the reign of human invasion, terror and torture. The nonhuman beings suffer casualties because it is their bad luck that they have to cohabit with mankind. They lack the intelligence, resources, know-how and adaptability of the humans. That way, we humans do have an edge over all other creatures being amply gifted with superior faculty, prowess, skill, knowledge and expertise. These superior tools with which we are well armed help us in big ways in our defence mechanism. By then, we can protect ourselves from the menaces of the environmental disorders. Precisely, it is a question of our superb managerial skills and adaptability. But the poor and dullard creatures have fallen easy victims to the toxic external environment solely due to their lower IQ. The predicament of their fate is that we the humans commit crimes and they are made to suffer punishment. We, the real culprits, manage to pick up a safe route and avoid suffering the punishment of our misdeeds by our superior prowess and faculties. Nonetheless, it would be foolish on our part to assume ourselves fully-proofed against all odds and eventualities. No matter, how strong, how well off and well-sealed we are, the stark reality is that we are not all invincible. We are very much prone to danger. As such, mortality has remained the greatest human shortcoming. The unprecedented casualty, that humankind suffered recently from the pandemic known as COVID-19, tells in loud and clear terms, how protected we are and how invincible we tend to be! The alien CORONA virus, the root cause of this fatal pandemic, has disillusioned us with our sense

of vanity, of our false sense of being full-proofed and safe. Notwithstanding our superior prowess, our uncommon strength, our commendable managerial skills, and our incredible advancements in the field of medical sciences, we could not protect millions of our kith and kin from the fatal clutches of the deadly virus under reference. In this context, it is again worth the mention that, this deadly virus is apprehended to be one disastrous outcome of the negative investments we have made in our exclusive and uncommon capital, supra-intelligence, and talent. More often than not, mankind suffers from the problem of plenty – the surfeit of knowledge and extraordinary intellectual faculty and property. Perhaps not knowing what to do with this God-given invaluable gift (human intelligence), we go for investing it in the negative ways. Another example of the negative investment of our intellectual capital is manifest in the so-called defence sector. The mountains of sophisticated, mass-destructive weapons we have produced and preserved are meant certainly not to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, or various fatal diseases. We have produced and preserved those dreadful weapons to fight against any wild predatory animals either. Those are harvests of our intellectual property aimed at wiping out our kindred intellectual foes, the very humans. The extensive casualties they are meant to perpetrate will not remain confined to the human species alone. It will include the myriad species of biodiversity from the terrain of this vibrant and pulsating planet. The trailer of the nightmarish tragedy they aimed to enact on the stage has already been screened during World War II in the two Japanese cities named Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After the complete decimation of these two cities, no longer remained unknown, unimaginable or enigmatic, the extent and the severity of disasters such weapons (particularly the nuclear and atomic bombs) shall writ or bring about on the earth!

These destructive weapons produced willfully by spending a lot of our resources in terms of money, time, energy and intelligence are the undoubted indicators of our monstrous nature and superbly devilish mindset. They moreover, corroborate our innate, insatiable, brutish propensity too. They manifest the human tendency to oppress and intimidate others; to rule supreme over others including over fellow human beings. What is most absurd, appalling and confounding about us is that in the face of this imminent, grim and

critical situation, at ease and very conveniently we pretend to be ignorant of the imminence of the D' Day. We fail to realize that we the humans alongside the nonhumans, are on a voyage being boarded in the same ill-fated sinking Titanic. Unless some divine power has grace on us, or, unless some good sense prevails upon us and urges us to undertake some immediate robust rescue measures, we, one and all, are going to have the common watery grave soon once and forever. With no hold on the divine power to turn it in our favour, at all costs, we have to put a break on our graveyard-bound journey by resorting to instant concrete preventive measures.

The Ancillary and Unacknowledged Literary Preoccupations

The hand of humans has remained discernibly instrumental to the history of apocalypse. As already outlined in brief in the preceding sections, right since their genesis, the members of this superior species called humans have remained at the helm of all affairs. They have taken a keen interest in making negative investments of their extraordinary inborn intellectual capital. By such investments, they have made a hell of heaven. The negative investment in human intelligence has reached its highest peak in recent times. Consequentially, the situation they have created today is extremely grim. It is grim but certainly not beyond repair or rectification. It is high time for the community to wake up from the state of its hibernation. The need of the hour is to wake up, explore and undertake prompt and highly effective measures to protect their species alongside the environment on this planet.

The remedial measures are many in number and type. Two out of many appear to be of utmost importance and optimal efficacy. Of the optimally important two measures, one is a religious one and another a literary one. Insofar as the first one (religious) is concerned, it cannot be recommended now in its present state of fanatic high tide. As a matter of fact, at the present juncture, religion is dangerously divided into so many mutually warring and irreconcilable faiths and factions. Under the banner of religion, mankind is more divided now than ever. It is increasingly indulged in coercive irreligious activities. The fundamentalist and fanatic followers of various religious faiths such as the Hindus, the Christians, the Mohammedans, the Jews and many others are now

at/logged horns with one another. In the name of religion, fanaticism and bigotry have taken complete control over the religious arena. In certain cases, it has taken the dreaded turn of terrorism. Being swept blindly by a stubborn and belligerent religious passion, the fanatic factions today fight with one another. Because of its divisive tendency and colours of bigotry, the religious measure cannot prove to be a productive option now. In the absence of a truly redemptive religious approach, we are left with no other but the second (literary) one. The literary one tends to have an edge over all other approaches for many reasons. It is the least partisan. It has no caste, creed, colour and religion. It has mass appeal and it has taken entire humankind into its amusing edifice. Notwithstanding the fact, its credential has never been taken seriously beyond its disciplinary boundaries, by its strong and genuinely humanitarian pose and approach, it has always enamoured the whole of mankind. With its exquisitely artistic visage and empathetic outlook, literary artifice has remained always and everywhere an exceedingly felicitous and astoundingly popular premise. The most important aspect of its enchanting premise is that it operates outrightly on the plane of the heart. It does so for the simple reason that the medium of its operation, words, does have its epicentre in the heart. In other words, the language of literature happens predominately to be the language of heart. The simple reason is that what springs from the heart pierces into the heart. Words in general are the common tool of verbal communication. Discourses of different provinces are constitutive of the common stuff, words. Depending upon the disciplinary nature and content which words deal with and intend to deliver, the discourses tend to be tedious, stark, arid, factual, dispassionate, serious, brain-cracking, insular and resistant. But that way, literary discourses tend to be steeped in high tides of feelings and delicate nuances. In the majority of cases, the heart being the fountainhead of literary discourses, they (discourses) brew and bubble with heartstrings. They are impregnated with the tidings coming from hearts. They have therefore the very feels of hearts. Another most important reason for their powerful appeasement of both the mind and heart is that they (words) are least churned, refined, inhibitory, and spurious or fake and artificial even though they have long been stigmatized to be quintessentially unreal, exaggeratory, falsifying, imaginary and

untruthful. In reality, literature offers a free and un-inhibitory passage and opportunity for pronouncing the unspeakable and expressing the inexpressible. In other words, it always offers a vantage ground for the silent but implosive ideas, for socio-culturally repressed nuances, feelings, emotions and ideas. It is indeed an aesthetic anaesthesia developed to numb bodies, minds, hearts as well and souls. It absorbs all aching elements and sickening pressures from the burdened bodies, hearts, minds and souls. It refreshes the burdened limbs by providing fresh and reinvigorating air. Precisely, literary artworks as a liberating force. Notwithstanding the age-old aspersions on its credentials, it has all along engaged itself selflessly in the service of mankind. Prolonged denial of intellectual approbation has never refrained it from playing the role of the pioneer. Despite long-standing adverse perceptions about its locus standi and role, it has continued to display an exemplary commitment to societal well-being and psychic health. The noted British Romantic poet, P.B. Shelley, is right to observe, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (1962). Literary artists happen to be the conscious points, the conscience keepers, the moral police and the mirror or barometers of the human society. As and when human society has either gone astray or suffered serious setbacks, it is literary art which has voluntarily come forward with definite remedial measures. It has provided the right direction to the human community and steered it out of the decadent situations.

In the era of the European Renaissance, for instance, English literature highlighted vividly the pitfalls of the contemporary individual's obsessively materialistic outlook and mad pursuits of inordinate ambition. The dramatic portrayals of Dr Faustus and the Macbeth couple respectively in the hands of Marlow and Shakespeare, are the befitting examples. The message to human society then and afterwards was loud and clear: the pursuit of disproportionate ambition is counterproductive. To cite another example, the great tragedy, *Justice*, by the modern British dramatist, John Galsworthy, impelled the British political dispensation of the time to bring out important reforms in the matter related to divorce and corresponding judicial provisions. The Victorian fiction, *Hard Times*, by Charles Dickens, to cite another example, powerfully narrativizes the disastrous consequences of the extreme form of

rational thoughts and the insensitive utilitarian philosophy. Moreover, modern novels like *Nostromo* by Joseph Conrad and *Women in Love* by D.H. Lawrence best depict, to use F.R. Leavis's phrase, "the malady of the individual psyche" which turns out to be the malady also of an individual civilization as well as industrial civilization (Leavis, 1955). To come to another province of literature i.e. American literature, Nathaniel Hawthorne, the nineteenth-century American novelist, has exposed human hypocrisy underlying the façade of puritanism in his famous novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. Whether overtly or otherwise, literary art has always and everywhere served human society as a strong dose of antidote to nullify the existing social ills, ailments and evils.

The Rise of British Romanticism

In the eighteenth century, Europe underwent a lot of socio-political upheaval. On a political plane, it was a period of war and revolution. On the socio-economic front, the period witnessed unprecedented economic growth and the rise of capitalism. In his book titled *Romanticism*, David Stevens mentioned such historical changes and the contextual significance of Romanticism. As he has presented it,

War and revolution are essentially dramatic examples of historical change, but other less dramatic contextual factors were also at work during this period, effecting profound and lasting social and economic changes in both British and Europe. Romanticism played its part here too, both as a symptom and as a factor in instigating these deep-seated changes. Crucially, the broadly Romantic period saw both economic expansion *and* hardship through the development of capitalism (Stevens 24).

Such historical changes have brought about significant changes in human behaviour, attitude and action. The changes in human behaviour, attitude and action were not necessarily all along positive lines even though the democratic temper and values received a boost following the French Revolution. Spiritualism in particular suffered certain casualties in the hands of rising capitalism. The era marked certain moral as well as spiritual decadence. About the paradoxical tendency and effects of the historical changes of the Romantic period, Stevens again has observed in the same book, "at the very time when material comfort and security were gaining ground, so too was dissatisfaction with their limitations." The art of the time was

likewise at the crossroads. Marilyn Butler, another scholar preoccupied with the contemporary socio-cultural milieu of the Western world, has observed, “The most obvious feature common to all the arts of Western nations after 1750 was the refusal to validate the contemporary social world” (1981). At this critical juncture, when European society was passing through a difficult and confounded phase of a moral dilemma - whether to go with the wind of capitalism and pursue the material goal or to shun such materialistic outlook and allurements, the Romantic literary art, particularly poetry, intervened in the matter pronouncedly with a rebellious or reactionary tone. The leading British poets of the Romantic school deplored the growing social trends of the time. By their profound poetic vision, they could foresee the negative impacts of the current social trends. William Wordsworth, the principal founder of the British Romantic School, for instance, has expressed his deep dissatisfaction with the mood of the age in the following lines.

The World is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! (Wu 274).

It is well-known a fact that the British Romantic poets were the fostered children of Nature. Their poetic imagination was profoundly nurtured by, in Wordsworth’s terms, “nature and the language of the sense” (1974). The poetic sensibility, particularly of Wordsworth, was predominately moulded by the solemn and sublime presence of Nature. The serene and scenic natural environment of his native province, the Lake District, had cast a lasting and decisive impact on the making of his mind and imagination. In his famous poem titled “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey,” the poet has recorded this fact with a deep note of obligation. The following lines hold testimony to this fact.

... well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being (Green 77).

The poet has “felt” in Nature “A presence” that has disturbed him “with the joy/ Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime/Of

something far more deeply interfused." Moreover, Nature has induced "in the mind of man/A motion and a spirit." According to him, that spirit "impels/All thinking things, all objects of all thought;/And rolls through all things." It is because of the pervading presence of that spirit, admittedly he has turned "A lover of the meadows, and the woods,/ And mountains . . ." In tracing the key Romantic feature i.e. the presence of this divine force and spirit in Nature in the poetry of the poets preceding the great Romantic masters, the noted scholar, Aidan Day, has aptly observed, "Nature is understood as an expression of a divine force" (Day 47).

It is the sublime presence of the divine force in Nature that has been to Wordsworth "The anchor" of his "purest thoughts", "the nurse,/The guide, the guardian" of his "heart, and soul," and of all his "moral being." As an individual being, the poet has avowedly experienced Nature and also poignantly illustrated her in several of his verses as a mother spirit. Nature all along has remained a nodal point of reference as well as a reflection of self – a point galvanized with a moral, spiritual and intellectual aura and order. Thus, Nature does not exist in isolation from an individual being. She stands rather interconnected with the beings in an intricate weblike manner. She communes with as well as affects individual humans in the manner of a magnetic force. It is again the same noted scholar, Aidan Day, who has underlined the Romantic trait, as an inner and interrelated relationship between Nature and human beings. He thinks that,

. . . nature is structured according to the inward motions and transitions of the observing consciousness. The thoughts, reflections and memories of the individual mind are the subject and theme of this verse and nature becomes a token of - is assimilated to the representation of - those thoughts, reflections and memories. Individual subjectivity and nature are, moreover, transcendentalized: they are attributed to a spiritual dimension that is greater than the mere individual and the material. Nature is important insofar as it manifests the same transcendental energy that informs the human mind and at the same time provides an objective, material barrier which allows the individual subject to recognize transcendence without being overwhelmed by it (Day 45).

In those days of increasing materialism, there was a historical necessity for a strong remedial measure. Romanticism came up as an effective remedial measure. Coming under the strong wind of

materialism, the human society of the period had become too materialistic and blind to the greater transcendental force couched in Nature. Romanticism, particularly its poetic block, came up with a bang. It came up not simply to record the individual poets' obligation to Nature for her formidable contribution in nurturing their sense and sensibility but to undertake a much-needed social mission as well – a mission to reform the misguided society of the time. To put it slightly differently, the poets of the time initiated a drive to reorient the European human society towards the greater transcendental force and spirit embedded in Nature. It was a drive undertaken to counter the growing materialistic mindset and gross apathy for Nature.

William Wordsworth is not the one and only Romantic poet who has brought to the fore the spiritual dimension of Nature and the environment. His great friend and to some extent, his mentor as well, S.T. Coleridge, has also taken cognizance of an analogous intercourse between external Nature and human nature. In his famous poem, "Dejection: An Ode", for example, Coleridge has emphatically stated,

... we receive but what we give,
 And in our life alone does Nature live:
 Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud! (Green, 1974)

Unfortunately, the then society was very much oblivious of and insensitive to this seminal correspondence existent between Nature and humans. Wordsworth counted this attitude of the contemporary humans as "a sordid boon." He deplored, "We have given our hearts away." Individually he was well aware of the august and awe-inspiring presence of Nature. But he found society very much insensitive to this powerful and persuasive presence. The poet in him, therefore, lamented, "For this, for everything, we are out of tune,/It moves us not...." Being engrossed in the mad pursuit of material wealth and happiness, the society had alienated itself from the august and awe-inspiring Nature. The consciousness of this alienation in nineteenth-century men had deeply saddened his poetic self. One chief motive and key concern with his verses has been how to restore the lost link between humans and Nature. It has been to bring human society back to the tune and spirit of the reverent Nature. Jonathan Bate is right, "The business of literature is to work upon consciousness" (Roe 200). As a matter of fact, to a fair extent, the Romantic project, especially its poetic quarters, is hinged upon the

motif of consciousness. Consciousness as such has always remained the hallmark or the distinguishing feature of the human species. It is the hallmark which differentiates humans from the nonhumans. The Romantic poets were the poets of Nature. Nature constituted their central poetic motif. To put it in another way, Nature remained the very foundation of their poetic sensibility. To these poets, Nature has been as Aidan Day has aptly spelt out, “the same transcendental energy as informs the human mind.” Romantic imagination in which the entire Romantic project originated and thrived, is likewise very much broad and encompassing in its scope. The world both conceived and captured by this broad and all-encompassing lens is far from being simple and one-dimensional. It is constitutive of a multilayered reality extremely intricate and interlaced. To be specific, the spectrum of the worldview that has emanated from this multicoloured lens of the Romantic mind and imagination is veneered with a prominent streak of spiritualism. Besides, it has a streak of pantheism itself too. It moreover, has a certain transcendental core to itself as well. Nature thus has remained a wide vista of conglomeration of a multiple number of illuminating streaks. The opaque corporeal screen of Nature is radiant with these diverse phosphorescent coatings. In his insightful work titled *The Romantic Imagination*, Professor Sir Maurice Bowra has accordingly written,

The great Romantics, then, agreed that their task was to find through the imagination some transcendental order which explains the world of appearances and accounts not merely for the existence of visible things but for the effect which they have on us, for the sudden, unpredictable beating of the heart in the presence of beauty, for the conviction that what then moves us cannot be a cheat or an illusion, but must derive its authority from the power which moves the universe. For them, this reality could not but be spiritual, and they provide an independent illustration of Hegel’s doctrine that nothing is real but spirit (Bowra, 22).

The great Romantics had the intimations of the persuasive presence of ‘some transcendental order’ behind Nature. They had discerned in Nature the presence of ‘the power which moves the universe’ and they had the realization that ‘nothing is real but spirit’ – the spirit which operationally underlies Nature. In firmly recommending that humans live a life in complete unison with Nature, they had in a sense wished human society to tread on the

spiritual path, to abide by the transcendental order which explains the world, and to honour the power which moves the universe. The divine dimension of Nature is what most of the Romantic writers have underlined. The Romantic imagination is thus very much steeped in the idea of the divine being. It is well pronounced in the following excerpt from *A Vision of the Last Judgment* by William Blake:

The world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite and Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Everything which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination (Bowra 3).

By the logic of Blake, the human imagination is equivalent to “the divine body of the Saviour.” The point is reiterated in the pronouncement, “The world of Imagination is the world of Eternity.” The “Vegetable Glass of Nature” bears the reflection of the “Eternal.” The vast, sprawling Vegetable Glass of Nature thus turns into a limited sphere though, an arena for pantheism. Nature is precisely the Saviour in His vegetable form and incarnation. By recommending human society to live in harmony with nature, the Romantic legislators sought to protect mankind from its injurious addiction to gross materialism.

Revindication of the Romantic Agenda in the Ecocritical Discourses

For some time now, the world has been witnessing a euphoria of debates, discussions, and critical discourses occurring in academia and other intellectual forums under the banner of ecocriticism and environmental studies. The thrust of these intellectual preoccupations is, by and large, on the necessity for maintaining a healthy and harmonious relationship between human and nonhuman worlds, especially the environmental one. The Romantic agenda has refigured at these intellectual avenues. It's indeed a welcome initiative and the connoisseurs of these programmes have endeavoured to spread ripples of awareness among participants about the supreme importance of ecological order or equilibrium. To a considerable extent, the ongoing ecocritical and environmental

engagements are nothing but corollary to the Romantic agenda. Romanticism in general and the British Romantic Movement in particular has remained so to say, the launch pad of such ecological and environmental studies of recent time. James C. McKusick, the renowned ecocritical scholar, for instance, strongly pleads for “a human community dwelling in harmonious coexistence with nature” (Roe 203). This ideal mode of harmonious coexistence with nature has indeed formed the central argument with so many other ecocritical analyses of the present time. Most of the analyses are at one with the view that human society and Nature, or for that matter, the environment, are “complementary rather than mutually exclusive” (201). In the context, Lawrence Buell, another prominent exponent of Ecocriticism, sounds convincing when he states in his *The Environmental Imagination*, “the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (Roe 200). Keeping in mind this imperative implicated status of human history in natural history, Buell has termed human imagination as “environmental imagination.” Further, by the same logic, he has termed the texts which owe their origin to “environmental imagination” as “environmental text.” We have discussed in the earlier section of this presentation how William Wordsworth has attributed Nature to be “The anchor” of his “purest thoughts.” He has acknowledged Nature to be “the nurse,/The guide, the guardian” of his “heart, and soul” and his all “moral being.” Both ecocriticism and environment studies thus have been the revival of the Romantic agenda. Both Romanticism and the present-day critical programmes of study consider the natural environment to be the sole foundation of all the states of individual human beings: physical, spiritual, emotional, mental or psychic, ideational or intellectual.

Conclusion

The recent revival of interest in the Romantic line of thinking in the academic spheres and intellectual forums is a positive development. But such initiatives are too little and too late. The ripples of eco-consciousness spread by the conduct of such intellectual programmes are too fragile and limited. Such tiny and small-scale measures cannot save humankind from its imminent extinction. They cannot

browse the devastating wildfire in the gutting grip of which our environment is caught and smouldering today. What is needed is a strong mass movement. To counter the existing general apathy and callousness towards the grave environmental hazards, a powerful electrical shock of an urgent and imperative nature is most needed. To save the human species from its extinction, intellectual deliberations must be conjoined with certain concrete and result-insured actions on the ground. Translation of ideas into action is the call of the day. Literary revolution specifically of Romantic nature and objective appears to be of immense importance to the present context. With its discourse being the unmistakable statement of the heart, its spell being mighty, massive and mesmerizing, its innate temper being bouts of emotion, its music and nuances being the heartstrings, its courtship being amorous, endearing and maddening, literary legislation does have a definite edge over all other human undertakings. This is why the great Victorian humanist, Matthew Arnold, has strong ground to harbour hope and confidence in his important essay titled "The Study of Poetry" that in poetry "our race ... will find an ever surer and surer stay" (Enright & Chickera 260). That way, Romantic poetry in particular does score an additional point here for the simple reason that its core issue and foregrounded arguments are very much topical, focused and persuasive to the global crisis of the present time. The project aims to inculcate a culture which prioritizes an unmaterialistic outlook, spiritual values, and love and reverence for nature. Serious and sincere application of its pronounced pantheistic ideas as well as eco-centric ideals in the praxis and patterns of human living will bring back our deeply infringed earth to her originary Edenic state. The seeds of such a beautiful and benevolent culture are in the granary of the Romantic revivals. The sooner the decadent societal and cerebral fields of humankind are tended and the high-yielding literary seeds developed in the fecund Romantic farmhouse are sown the better for the perpetuation of both the species and the planet under reference. By cultivating the Romantic precepts we can make heaven of the ugly and horrendous hell which we have dismally degraded our otherwise paradisiac planet to by our evildoings in the recent time.

Works Cited

- Arnold, Matthew. "The Study of Poetry" in *English Critical Texts: 16th Century to 20th Century*. Ed. Enright, D.J. and Chickera, Ernst De. Delhi: OUP, 1962. 6th impression 1982. Print.
- Bate, Jonathan. *The Song of the Earth*. Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 2000. Print.
- Blake, William. *A Vision of the Last Judgment*. In *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Vol. I. Ed. Keynes, Geoffrey. London: The Nonesuch Press, 1939. 4th Edition. Print.
- Bowra, C.M. *The Romantic Imagination*. New Delhi: OUP, 1950. 17th Impression 2022. Print.
- Buchman, Frank. *Oxford Quotations and Proverbs*. Ed. Ratcliffe, Susan. Oxford: OUP, 1998. Reprinted 2009.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1995. Print.
- Butler, Marilyn. *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830*. London: OUP, 1981. Print.
- Coleridge, S.T. "Dejection: An Ode" in *The Winged Word*. Ed. Green, David. Madras: Macmillan India Ltd., 1974. Last reprinted in 1982.
- Day, Aidan. *Romanticism*. London & New York, 1996. Print.
- Enright, D.J. and Chickera, Ernst De. Eds. *English Critical Texts: 16th Century to 20th Century*. Delhi: OUP, 1962. 6th impression 1982. Print.
- Green, David. Ed. *The Winged Word*. Madras: Macmillan India Ltd., 1974. Last reprinted in 1982.
- The Holy Bible: The New King James Version. New York: American Bible Society; 1982. Print.
- Kermode, Frank. *Romantic Image*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Leavis, F.R. *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1955. Reprinted 1981. Print.
- McKusick, James C. "Ecology" in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*. Ed. Roe, Nicholas. New Delhi: OUP, 2007. 2nd Imp.2008. Print.
- Ratcliffe, Susan. Ed. *Oxford Quotations and Proverbs*. Oxford: OUP, 1998. Reprinted 2009.
- Roe, Nicholas. Ed. *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*. New Delhi: OUP, 2007. 2nd Imp.2008. Print.
- Shelley, P.B. "A Defence of Poetry" in *English Critical Texts: 16th Century to 20th Century*. Ed. Enright, D.J. and Chickera, Ernst De. Delhi: OUP, 1962. 6th impression 1982. Print.
- Stevens, David. *Romanticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 5th printing 2009.

Wordsworth, William. "Lines Written A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" in *The Winged Word*. Ed. Green, David. Madras: Macmillan India Ltd., 1974. Last reprinted in 1982.

Wordsworth, William. "The World is too much with us; late and soon" in *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Ed. Wu, Duncan. Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Basil Blackwells Ltd., 1994. Reprinted 1995.

Wu, Duncan. Ed. *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Basil Blackwells Ltd., 1994. Reprinted 1995.