

Romantics : Earlier Voices for Environment Protection

Kuldip Kumar

Assistant Professor of English,
Govt Ranbir College, Sangrur (PB)

Dr. Rajiv Kumar

Assistant Professor of English,
C.R.A. College, Sonipat

ABSTRACT

Global warming and climate change are, indeed, perceived as biggest threats to human existence in our times. Men have inadvertently jumped into confrontation with nature which is powerful enough to exterminate his existence with a blink of eye. However, the response to these cataclysmic events varies from country to country yet, to our satisfaction, all disciplines of human learning have evolved a minimum consensus on the issue that situation must be dealt earnestly and sustainable solutions are required at various levels to effectively address the quagmire in which we have landed. Literature is no exception in this regard. Literary writers, we must proudly concede, were first among whistleblowers to cough up this impending disaster. A simple glance at the history of English literature demonstrates how there have been a medley of poets who were much ahead of their times and were quick to realize the gravity of situation. In this paper, an effort has been made to encapsulate some English poets of the Romantic Period who played a sacrosanct role in shaping our consciousness towards these issues.

Key words : Global Warming, Climate Change, Romantic Poets

History of the Crisis and Scientific Response:

From time immemorial man has been consistently grappling with the issue of bread, clothing as well as shelter. On the one hand, he was fortunate enough to inherit a wonderful planet endowed with natural resources and mesmerizing beauty, but on the other hand, he found his existence to be mired by a couple of obstructions and challenges. There were certain bottlenecks to be taken care of. Left with no choice, man embarked on voyage of discoveries and innovations which made us usher in a brave new world of scientific revolution. We witnessed unprecedented growth in the field of science heralding industrial revolution. From this very point we miscalculated everything and landed ourselves in a soup. The growth fuelled by scientific discoveries brought us at verge of extinction. Pollution from factories augured a new era of doubt and fear. All this had a detrimental impact upon our mother Earth and conducive environment which is so quintessential for our existence. When too much harm was done, science came under fire. Scientific discoveries were looked upon as trigger to a mammoth crisis. It was concluded that it is a man-made disaster which, if not addressed, at the earliest could jeopardize our whole planet. In the realms of science and World Governments, a lot is being done to control the damage. Various summits take place every year to produce some tangible results to rein in the escalating crisis. However, larger chunk of our intelligentsia feel that bereft of any behavioral changes, no lasting solution is in sight. It was the same feeling echoed by our poets much earlier. Now their voices stand like prophecies in deciding what needs to be done in future. Literature has always projected more humane side of things which are sadly ignored most of times.

Romantic Poets and their Contribution:

Moving into the corridors of history, one becomes alive to the fact that it was during 1760 to 1820, the first industrial revolution started spreading in the Great Britain mired by poverty and unemployment. The new discoveries were seen as the only hope left with whole of Europe to give a befitting reply to prevailing poverty. It is the same period which is hailed in literature as great "Romantic Period," the period which left permanent imprints on the minds of readers. Moreover, the Romantics took up their arms against those trends which were going to devastate mankind in near future. They had no sympathy with these developments and threw their tantrums on erstwhile political establishments for embarking on a perilous voyage. It is in their poetry that we hear first warning against these horrendous changes. Therefore, it can be reasonably assessed, without any exaggeration, that they were the early crusaders against industrial monster and if they had not paid any heed, we could have circumvented the catastrophe which we are witnessing now.

Some Landmark Poets and their Poems:

Though all of the Romantics deserve our commendation for giving a Clarion call to humanity against industrial monster, but the contribution and prescience of William Wordsworth, S.T Coleridge and John Keats deserve lengthy mention here. William Wordsworth, born in Cumberland, had a natural inclination for nature. His formative impressions of nature fuelled his fertile imagination and rendered him most sought-after nature poet of the world. Inimical to all scientific development, he was a die-hard votary of natural and primitive life or of those "Golden Days" for which humans invariably clamored for. Throughout his poetry, he denounced the

cacophony and consumerism of modern age. The study of his remarkable poem *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* goes a long way in establishing the fact how he warned humanity about impending cataclysm of industrial revolution. It is here, he rues the ongoing development and his disappointment with the emerging lifestyle. Life , in city, was abominable to him which was compelling man to be wayward and erratic:

*These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart.*

Apart from this poem, *The Daffodils* and *The Solitary Reaper* will also quickly realize what kind of fellow Wordsworth was and what kind of lifestyle was there before the advent of factories. The smoke from factories was perilous to natural life. Even William Blake, another transitional poet was quite vocal regarding industrial abuse. He reprimanded all capitalists of his time for pushing children and general public into that hell which was going to perpetuate itself for centuries to come. His well known poem *The Chimney Sweeper* is a heart-rending account of lives of those children who were gradually moving to their graves due to their employment.

Again it is Samuel Taylor Coleridge, another Stalwart of the Romantic age, who prophesied about the future course of mankind. The poetry of Coleridge

is impeccable voicing vociferously the horrors of deviating from natural life. In his celebrated magnum opus *The Rime of Ancient Mariner*, he was candid enough to make us visualize the consequences of our wrongdoings. Published in much acclaimed *Lyrical Ballad*, he presents a Mariner who is convicted by nature for his reprehensible behaviour. He indulges in a "motiveless butchery" which makes nature hostile to mankind. In a fit of rage, he unleashes his fury against albatross, a representative of natural world. From this point onwards, his trial commences. Nature takes a stringent note of Mariner and decides to punish him for his inhuman act and approach. A series of complications begins and he is made to realize his blunder of intruding into the world of nature thereby ending long bonhomie between man and nature. In the last part of this poem, the poet wrap up himself with this passionate appeal for the ages to come :

*He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.*

John Keats and his Rejection of Anti-nature Stance:

Among all the Romantics, Keats was the most sensitive to take notice of the transforming process which was gradually but steadily taking place in the contemporary society. He was an avowed naturalist having least tolerance for mechanical world. Keats was out and out a sensualist who could decipher well the lurking sordidness behind apparent beauty. It made him an escapist who found solace in mythological world as compared to present England which was never a place of his heart's desire. He was comfortable with

Grecian beauty and earned reputation as a poet of transience in his *Ode to a Nightingale*, he ventilates his dismay on the existing conditions:

*And with thee fade away into the forest dim:
Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.*

What was happening in those days is evident in the above lines. This way, we can see how Keats felt dissipated by new industrial movement eating the very vitals of mankind. A crestfallen poet disappointed both by his times and his personal circumstances could not live more and died a premature death.

Promiximity with Ecocriticism:

In recent times, one is naturally tempted to put all such endeavours in the sphere of Ecocriticism, but there is little difference which we need to understand here. A careful study of Ecocriticism brings it to the fore that it is more explicit and some sort of committed agenda on part of the writer or critic to present things in a definite context but it is not the case with romantic poets. They never adhered to theory of “Art for Life's Sake”. What they believed in inner conviction, allegiance to one's own conscience. That

was precisely the reason their poetry was inevitably humane and expressed concerns of larger mankind. They were so overwhelmed by these developments that their poetry unconsciously reflected all these concerns. Since they were utterly incapable of fitting themselves in such an ignominious set-up, they became pessimist and lamented over our deviation from nature. What added fuel to fire was unmindful application of new discoveries for greed of a few. Nature was put on back burner. Today, we can surely find new meaning and concealed voices in their poetry without attributing it to some conscious designs or what we call as “ideology” in our times.

Conclusion:

To conclude the findings, one can see how English Literature has invariably smelled the growing resentment and antipathy for industrial revolution which was still in its nascent stage, but capable of castigating our spiritual and human side. Our writers have not only stressed on aesthetic side of men and matter, but also fought against contemporary issues which are capable of gradually destroying mankind. But, alas, we missed those sagacious voices and realized when havoc is done. The Romantics deserve to be recorded in our history as early champions of nature and environment protection. It would be travesty of Justice if we keep on projecting merely as a poet of beauty emphasizing just upon sensuous aspect of nature. It is high time when we are required to bring a paradigm shift in our attitude towards them and hail them as great reformers. Though, any reform in crudest sense of word, was never on their agenda but they were fighting for something which we can now comprehend better. It is really regrettable that their voices are not seriously recorded in the world history, yet we must admit that these voices do matter and remained ignored for so long.

References:

Abrams, M.H., *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. Oxford, 1971.

Paperbacks) Book Online at Low ...the Romantic Imagination from www.amazon.in

The Romantic Imagination (Oxford Paperbacks) Paperback – Import, 1 June 1961. ...

Graver, Bruce and Ronald Tetreault. *Editing Lyrical Ballads for the Electronic Environment*. Romanticism on the Net 9,1998.

William,R. *The Romantic Artist*. Culture and Society: New York: Harper and Row,1958.

Porter,Jake. *Coleridge, Shelley,Keats, and God: The Romantic Poets of Doubt*. Valley Humanities Review Spring(2016).

Perry, Seamus. *Romanticism: The Brief History of a Concept*. Blackwell Publishers Ltd.,1999.

Dickinson,H.T. *British Radicalism and the French Revolution 1780-1815*. Oxford Blackwell,1985.

Christie,Ian. *War and Revolution,1760-1815*. London: Edward England, 1982.