

Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress" and Devkota's "In Falgun Blooms the Entire World": Western vs Eastern Treatment to Nature

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Abstract— Western view of human and nature relationship is anthropocentric. It takes human being as the center of value and nature as an object created for human benefit. One may wonder how may be the eastern view of human and nature relationship. This article studies how the east takes nature. This has been done by studying mainly two love poems: one English poet Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress" and another Nepali poet Devkota's "In Falgun Blooms the Entire World". They are representative poems of the western anthropocentric and eastern non-anthropocentric relationship with nature.

Keywords— Anthropocentrism, Brindaban, ecocriticism, nature, purusa, sustainable development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Western approach to nature is basically anthropocentric. It works mainly with two assumptions: that human being is the master of nature and human capabilities can overcome environmental problems. So the anthropocentric axiom is that the more humans use nature the more they develop. Judeo-Christian beliefs are the roots of such a view on nature. In the *Holy Bible*, the origin of human being has been written as "And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth" (1-2). Such scriptures not only offered human beings a license for the exploitation of nature, but also originated the western dualistic philosophy that functions through dichotomies like human being /nature, male/female, rich/poor, civilized west/rustic east, and so on. As one of its consequences, anthropocentric notion of human and nature relationship emerged.

One may wonder, if western treatment to nature is anthropocentric, how the east treats it. The objective of this research is to seek answer of this question. For this, I first present western treatment to nature by taking Andrew Marvell's love poem "To his Coy Mistress" as the text. I have chosen this to study how western view on nature is reflected even in such an ordinary and short love poem. I have taken Nepali poet Laxmi Prasad Devkot's love poem "In Falgun Blooms the Entire World" to present eastern concept of nature. Conclusion has been drawn from these.

II. ANTHROPOCENTRIC TREATMENT TO NATURE IN MARVELL'S "TO HIS COY MISTRESS"

Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress" is a classic love poem written in 1650s. Even in such a poem fully dedicated to love, western concept of nature can be discerned. It is a poem in which a courtier is persuading his coy mistress for

relationship. The hero takes nature as an antagonistic to their desire of relaxed love affair. So he tells his beloved that if they had enough world and time, he would have no problem with her delay in approving him. He says, "Had we but world enough and time,/ This coyness, lady, were no crime" (1-2). These introductory lines indicate that the lover has taken time as a hindrance to their love affair.

Time is natural and hence death is also natural. But the lover has not taken it normally. He is terrified by time. He knows that being mortal they cannot win time. Even then he wants to have at least a sense of winning it. So he proposes his mistress to win it by utilizing their limited time very fast. He says, "Let us roll all our strength and all/ Our sweetness up into one ball" (41-42). Of course the courtier has used his concept of time to persuade his beloved. Even then there is conscious or unconscious undercurrent of his antagonistic view to time. The courtier says, "Thus, though we cannot make our sun/ Stand still, yet we will make him run" (45-46). The last sentence gives him the sense of winning even the sun by making it run. If he had taken time or death normally as a process of life, he would not have had such a terror or ego to win time. He could persuade his lover differently. As time is natural, the lover's being opposite to time is his being opposite to nature. It is Marvell's deep rooted desire to win and exploit nature. This is a representative anthropocentric view of the western concept of nature.

Before the Romantic Movement, western literary artists would present nature as a very much antagonist or demonic force. For instance, in the Old English epic *Beowulf*, a monster of the forest destroys crops of the villagers of Geats. King of Geats hires Beowulf, a war hero of neighboring nation, to kill it. There are series of fighting between the fire breathing monster and Beowulf. The monster is killed by the knight taking help of one another fighter: "They felled the foe, courage drove his life out, and they had destroyed him together, the two noble kinsmen" (*Beowulf* 75). Likewise in Edmund Spencer's *Faerie Queen*, a dragon of a forest is killed by a knight: "Taking advantage of his open jaw,/ Ran through his mouth with so importune might,/ ... So downe he fell, and forth his life did breath," (674-678). Though the dragon is a non-existent wild beast, it indicates that people of Spencer's time would take nature opposite and antagonistic of human beings and hence suppress or exploit it at any cost.

It is with the start of the Romantic Movement nature got some importance. Even then, the romanticists' turn to nature was to get something from it, no matter entertainment, recreation or some knowledge. Nature got special focus in the west after 1970s. There emerged nature oriented approach of literary criticism called ecocriticism in 1980s and '90s. It holds non-anthropocentric or ecocentric approach. It diminishes any kind of hierarchy between human being and nature. It questions and challenges anthropocentric notion of relationship with nature and views that "all organisms and entities in the ecosphere, as part of the interrelated whole, are equal in intrinsic worth" (Devall & Sessions 202). The aim of ecocriticism is to "overcome anthropocentrism" (Greg Garrard 176). Overcoming anthropocentrism means replacing it with non-anthropocentrism. However, it has been only an ideal of ecocriticism. It has not been applied in the actual field. Sustainable development is the prevailing mode of human and nature relationship. Its slogan is sustainable development for human benefit, which has some element of anthropocentrism.

III. NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC TREATMENT TO NATURE IN DEVKOTA'S "IN FALGUN BLOOMS THE ENTIRE WORLD"

Unlike the western human centered concept of nature, eastern treatment to nature not only takes human beings one of its parts but also assimilates them with it. Laxmi Prasad Devkota's "In Falgun Blooms the Entire World" is one of its best examples. Devkota is the nationally declared Mahakabi i.e. greatest poet of Nepal. The poem is a short but one of his representative love poems. In it the poet presents a natural scene full with blossoms of the early spring. He waves a pair of a courtier and his maiden in it by personifying rose flower, wind, fragrance, juice, lemon.

From the Nepali month of Falgun starts the intoxicating season called Basanta rihu, spring. With the very title, the poet gives the sense that the poem is about spring in which the entire world including human being bloom and romance in it. In the first line itself the poet makes clear that the poem is about the spring and it has the universal appeal. He gives the reader a sort of surprise and far more curiosity by inserting a "pleasure mansion," a "nymph-queen" and a courtier in it: "Whose pleasure mansion might it be?/ 'Tis that of youth, the nymph-queen"

(3-4). It symbolizes that nature is the "pleasure mansion" of the whole creatures including human being, and hence it is to play with, not to destroy.

The poet starts fulfilling his intent of assimilating human beings with nature and romanticizing them by personifying the rose flower as an ashamed red-faced maiden being unable to cover her breast with her sari of petals when the wind as the courtier comes to her. According to Hindu mythology, wind is *purusa*, male agent. The personified pair does not play with the flowers and fruits by plucking them. Instead, like other creatures remaining busy in reproductive works in the spring season, the hero is busy in courting his maiden. The youth lifts the sleeves of the maiden's sari by keeping her in a sort of spell with his fragrance. The rose like maiden says "no, no" (13). But the courtier does not abandon her. He sprays colors at her with his pump from which reproduction becomes possible.

In other two stanzas the poet makes it clear that the male figure personified as the "wind" is not necessarily an indistinct object –*purusa* or *atma* –but a distinct male, symbolically the narrator or poet himself. For this job he uses the symbol of lemon as love plant and its juice that come as dew drops. The poet asks, "For whom are the grains of dew?/ For the moon? The sky-flowers?" (19-20). "The grains of dew" is the symbol of sperm. The speaker indicates that it is not for moon or sky-flower –stars, but for someone in the earth, distinctly the personified maiden. The speaker takes the maiden as his chosen bird. He notices her affirmative symbol from the smile of her red lips symbolized by "red barriers," and praises her breast symbolized by yellow "peaches." He says that there is no necessary to quarrel as he is a male and she is a female.

The lover tries to persuade his beloved for relationship by saying that day is the day to beak on the oily smooth curtain. "Beak" is the symbol of male genital organ, and "oily smooth curtain" is that of female's. The lover says that she should not be afraid when pollen grains fall. "Pollen grains" are the symbols of sperm. He consoles her by saying that theirs will be a new story in the old practice familiar all over the world and as a youthful maiden her desire must also slip out from her heart. As an eastern male courtier, the speaker asks the maiden to know that theirs is the history of life. As a frequent user of myth, the poet inserts mythical note to his courting affair by using the allusion of Brindaban in which Lord Krishna played with Radhika and other

Gopinis, whose stories can never be completed by telling as the courtier or poetic persona believes. With this the speaker wants to give the maiden knowledge that they are the representatives of Lord Krishna and Radhika and hence they should also lead life romantically like them by knowing the essence of life. Devkota is against of modernity as he does not find harmony in it. For him it is "Lost in the labyrinthine darkness/ Of unawakened mind, the people run/ Buffeted by the passing wars" ("The Mirror of Life" 134-136). He takes that Krishna mode of life is the correct way of life. He believes that people will follow this truth as he is convinced that "Man is and was and will be after the pursuit of truth" ("On the Principles of the True, the Good and the Beautiful" 78). Sarbagyaraj Kaphle writes, "To cope with this mire and malaise of modernity, Devkota goes back to "tradition" and mythic consciousness which is going to emulate from the ancient sages" (43). Similarly, Binod Kumar Achary writes, "In Hindu myths the beautiful, charming and attractive natural phenomena are regarded as the shades of Lord Krishna's grandeur" (67).

The courtier personified from the wind is the epitome of Lord Krishna, who is the epitome of the *Vishowrupa*, the universal male figure, *purusa*. Similarly, the maiden personified from the rose flower is like Radhika, the epitome of *prakirti* –nature. From this allusion what the poet is indicating is that every male and female are the contraction of the *vishowrupa* and nature respectively. So every male and female have the potentiality of being Lord Krishna and Radhika. What they have to do for this is that they should understand the matrix of their link with the *Vishowrupa* and *prakirti* and apply in life by assimilating themselves with the matrix of nature just as done by the poet's pair romanticizing in nature, not destroying or exploiting it.

In this way, unlike Marvell, Devkota not only assimilates humans with nature but also romanticizes it. The human pair is visualized in the nature of spring not to dominate it but to pay the main purpose of life as other species do in the nature. In the deeper sense, the poet himself is courting with his visualized maiden just as other creatures do in the spring. The images of nature made it possible for him. The poem represents eastern non-anthropocentric treatment to nature. Instead of making dominant relationship with nature, the pair appears to be playing as a part of nature by assimilating themselves in it. The youth's courting his maiden symbolizes that spring is not only the nature's

fertility time, humans, as a part of nature, should also be fertile and creative as the nature as reproduction is the most important part of life since only it keeps the whole earth moving. The poem also symbolizes that when human being as a part of nature is in the company of nature, it has absolute chance of being in the happy state.

Such assimilation with nature and receiving romantic pleasure from it is true with the whole eastern treatment of nature. It must have been difficult for Ram, Sita, and Laxman of the epic *Ramayana* to live in the jungle for fourteen years, but they spent it pleasantly in the lap of nature by coping themselves with it. They never came into conflict with nature. Instead they got great support from it. Hanuman's support to Ram in releasing his wife Sita from the abduction of Rawan is its one of the examples. So did five Pandav brothers and their single wife Draupadi of another epic *Mahabharata* one way other.

Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is one of the representative works that presents eastern treatment of nature. It is a play that shows oneness of human being and nature. Sakuntala, heroine of the play, would never drink water without watering a plant. While going to her husband's home after getting married, a motherless dear pulls her cloth. Sakuntala remarks that she treated them like her sisters and brothers. As she moves on, animals and birds follow her. Flowers fall upon her from the trees and creepers as their farewell to her. Towards the end of the play a woman says that all living beings are like their children. In *Skandapurana*, Ashoka tree is worshiped as the son adopted by Parvati, wife of Lord Shiva. When sage Valmiki sees cry of a bird in the killing of its partner, he curses the hunter that he should never get peace in life. As a scholar of Sanskrit literature Natavar Joshi writes, "The creative writer in Sanskrit never seems to suggest that the eco-system should be exploited or even disturbed. Even the slightest harm done to the eco-system would lead to the loss of peace of mind" (111). Similarly, Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, one of the Nepali practitioner of ecocriticism, writes, "The Vedic society ... upheld egalitarian principles where discriminatory lines were not drawn between even non-human natural things and humans" (12).

IV. CONCLUSION

In Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress," a lover is persuading his beloved to win their limited time by rolling

themselves into one ball as soon as possible. Time is nature. The lover's desire to win the time is his desire to win nature. This human and nature antagonism is still true in the western treatment of nature. Anthropocentrism has been the dominating world view of human and nature relationship. Sustainable development is the latest mode of human relationship with nature. It tends to keep natural equilibrium for human benefit. Ecocriticism is the latest approach of human and nature relationship. It does not take human being superior to nature. But it has not reached to the level of assimilating human being with nature. This is where eastern treatment to nature differs from the western one.

If the west separates human being from nature one way or other, the east assimilates them. Devkota's "In Falgun Blooms the Entire World" is one of its best examples. In it also there is a lover persuading his beloved. It is different from that of Marvell's in the sense that whereas his courtier intends to win time or nature in the process of persuading his maiden, Devkot's courtier and maiden assimilate themselves with nature. In the eastern mode, nature always becomes a matter of friendship, support, intoxication, happiness, romance and ecstasy. The poet's linking their romance with Brindaban indicates that Krishna's mode of life is the perfect way of human life. Lord Krishna is the representation of the whole elements of the universe. It implies that if Krishna as a human being is so, all human beings are also so. It is only that one has to explore one's potentiality. The poem well reflects Devkota's not only high craftsmanship but also in-depth knowledge of nature coping ecocentric eastern philosophy.

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