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## “Element of Modernity in the Poetry of Robert Frost”

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### **Abstract :**

*Frost had fears from other poets of his period including Amy Lowell and Edgar Lee Masters but, with the passage of time, these fears were over as there was none to block the road of Frost's success and popularity as a poet. Frost's ultimate decision to dedicate himself to the service of Poetry was correct although he had to undergo a very painful struggle finally to establish himself as a great poet of America. There were complexes with in him, various types of apprehensions and the feeling of despair and depression which were the results of his past life in which he saw little happiness for himself. The man who had no permanent source of income adopted Poetry in very uncertain and uncongenial conditions but the confidence of the poet in his poetic capabilities and the exemplary co-operation that he received from his wife ultimately were gave him the desired results. The success of Frost as a poet is the success of his determination. When his mother failed as a school mistress in Salem and when she was forced to resign, Frost told his mother.*

**Key Word-** *Modernity, co-operation, widely, contemporary, determination.*

Modernity has become a very controversial word and no literary critic or thinker has, so far, been able to define modernity in a way that may be acceptable to all. Those who refuse to accept Frost as a modern poet may be asked- Why Chaucer, inspite of his medievalism, has been accepted as the first modern poet in English? John Milton was also nit a modern poet but his Paradise Lost establishes him as a modern poet because the epic tells us about the conflict between the good and the bad which is a universal subject true for all times. Shelley's. The necessity of Atheism was modern in its contents and it was on account of his progressive, modern ideas that the great Romantic poet was expelled from the college. Thomas Hardy lived in the conservation Victorian age but his novel Tess contains modernity. Hardy certainly did not agree with the traditional and conservative concept of morality of his age and so he has shown his sympathy with his heroine who had to suffer chiefly because of the extremely narrow approach of the Victorian people towards sex and morality. Frost's first volume of poems was published in 1913 and the last in 1947. He left this world in the year 1963. As such, in point of time, he is the contemporary of such modern poets as T.S.Eliot, Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats and W.H.Auden. During his stay in England, Frost had a meeting with several poets and critics who have been considered modern and Frost never spoke against their modernity. Why, then, should Frost be discarded as a traditional nineteenth century poet and denied modernity? Those who do not consider him a modern poet say that Frost's poetry has a disarming simplicity while modern poetry is characterised by complexity and intricacy. There is a lot of complexity and intricacy in the poetry of John Donne but he is not considered a modern poet. Similarly, the poetry of Emily Dickinson is also very much obscure, even unintelligible but she has not been considered a modern poet. The great Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib, although he has written in the traditional manner, has been, by scholarly critics called a modern Urdu poet. Although there is little common between Firaq Gorakhpuri and Ahmed Faiz who re removed modern poets but Ghalib has also been listed as a great modern poet by as eminent a critic as Gopi Chand Narang. There is no cut and dried definition of modernity through which we can decide the traditionalism or modernity of a poet. David Ayers has rightly pointed out that "Modernism presents a bewildering plurality of material, so that some have preferred to speak of modernism in the plural "(i) And, there is little doubt that there is plurality of material in the poetry of Robert Frost that goes to make him a modern poet.

To be traditional is not bad it is not always praiseworthy to be modern. Traditionalism teaches us the importance of Faith while Modernism warns us against superstitions and myths which normally mislead us. An old person may be modern in his approach to things while, on the contrary, a young man may be narrow and conservative in his approach. One may ask, what after all, is the yardstick of modernity? Should a poet's modernity be judged by the contents of his poetry? Should it be judged by his style? In Frost poetry, we do not find irregular verse forms, fragmentary sentences, learned allusions and references nor erudite and abstruse symbolism that we find in the poetry of Walt Whitman. Is this so called limitation in the poetry of Robert Frost sufficient to banish him from the line of modern poets? If this is so, two hundred years hence, Eliot and Ezra Pound may also not be accepted as modern poets and just possible, with the change in the taste of the people, Browning and Tennyson may, for future generations, be accepted as more modern than Eliot and Pound. What is relevant today may become irrelevant tomorrow because nothing is final and irrevocable in the world of literature and Politics. The truth is that the detractors of Robert Frost have looked at his poetry with a prejudice. They have tried to find in him what they found in Eliot and Pound but it shall be wrong to conclude that only Eliot and Pound represent modernity and the poets who do not write like these two poets can not be modern. Such a hasty and impulsive conclusion can not be accepted as criticism worth the value. Goethe was an old poet but almost all modern poets have taken inspiration from him.

Homer and Virgil, the poets of antiquity, shall always be read and admired as most modern in their outlook so far as the fundamental issues of life are concerned. William Shakespeare lived in the sixteenth century and he wrote Romantic comedies and Tragedies but he is as fresh and memorable today as he was in his own age. There is a lot of modernity in the plays of Shakespeare, more modernity than we can find in the plays of George Bernard Shaw. Frost may not be having all the salient features of modernity but he is certainly a modern poet. He is a modern in spite of the fact that he has not been able to write like the distinguished modern poets of England and America.

**Modernity is also widely linked with Universality.**

It is in this sense that Robert Frost is modern. He had the sense of the zeit-geist. Complexity, Uncertainty and anxiety are as much the hallmark of his rural poems



as these are of the urban and so-called modern poems of poets like Auden and Eliot. Although he lived in the lap of nature in New Hampshire, Frost did not keep himself in the ivory tower. He looked at the grim realities of life around him. The poems like Design, Into My Own, Waiting, The Trial by Existence, Mending Wall, The Death of the Hired Man, Home Burial, The Road Not Taken, An Old Man's Winter Night, Birches and Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening have an unmistakable mark of modernity. Robert Frost has written poems that represent the terrible actualities of life and Frost has done this in a distinctive manner. With the publication of 'A Boy's Will' (1917) and North of Boston (1914) Frost became the first American poet to be widely read since Longfellow and Whittier. He has written most effectively about the actions of ordinary men and his wonderful monologues of dramatic scenes show an exceptionally wide and deep knowledge of people and things. As a poet Frost is honest and serious. He accepts, with a bare sorrow, things as they are without exaggerating them or explaining them away. Many are the poems in which Frost gives us real people with their real speech and real thoughts and real emotions. There is much subtlety and exactness in his poetry which is also characterised by understatement and restraint. As a poet, Frost always aimed at the truth which was his central passion. Slogans or facile solutions could not mislead him. Frost knew humanity and he had studied it in stony pastures and academics of art and Science. He preferred the reality of experience to a fanciful dream world. Ezra Pound, when he reviewed his first book A Boy's Will admired him for the realistic nature of his poetry. There is ambivalence in the poetry of Frost and it appears in his taste for contraries. The simplicity of his poetry is misleading. The following lines demonstrate the modernity of Robert Frost "And yet she knows obstruction is in vain we will not be put off the final goal we have it hidden in us to attain not though we have to seize earth by the pole and tired of aimless circling in one place Steer straight off after something into space."

As a poet, Frost adopted the indirect method and his evaluation of the everyday urban world is implied rather than stated. This indirect method of poetry is most obvious in the pastoral form and to appreciate Frost's modernity, we must realise the special advantage the pastoral vision offers. It is true that in Frost's poetry, there is withdrawal from the modern city to an agrarian world which belongs to the past but Frost does not turn his back on the world of today nor does he advocate a return to the soil. Regional New England is for him a medium for examining the complex

world of his day. What others try to say through a comparison has been said by Frost through a contrast. The poet who could write "The fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows" is certainly modern enough to look at the most concrete reality of life.

After his return to America, he started a new phase of campaigning among strangers, When he went to Boston, he was acclaimed in print as "Boston's literary sensation of the day" and "as a most agreeable personality". His theory and practice of poetry were accepted as being down to earth. During the next few years, Robert Frost became the best known and the best loved poet in America. Frost had reason to be elated, and after one exceptionally successful public performance, he walked offstage triumphantly singing:

"I wish my mother could see me now what a Fance-post under my arm"

If his mother who also wrote poetry had lived to share the excitement of the triumphs of Frost as a poet, she might have understood, even better than Frost some of the complicated relationships between his earliest humiliations and his consequent craving for glory. Frost had fears from other poets of his period including Amy Lowell and Edgar Lee Masters but, with the passage of time, these fears were over as there was none to block the road of Frost's success and popularity as a poet. Frost's ultimate decision to dedicate himself to the service of Poetry was correct although he had to undergo a very painful struggle finally to establish himself as a great poet of America. There were complexes within him, various types of apprehensions and the feeling of despair and depression which were the results of his past life in which he saw little happiness for himself. The man who had no permanent source of income adopted Poetry in very uncertain and uncongenial conditions but the confidence of the poet in his poetic capabilities and the exemplary co-operation that he received from his wife ultimately were gave him the desired results. The success of Frost as a poet is the success of his determination. When his mother failed as a school mistress in Salem and when she was forced to resign, Frost told his mother. "You wait, Some day I'll come back..... and show them"<sup>20</sup>

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