



Robert Lee Frost: A Real Revolutionist With High Political Insight and Nationalism

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the philosophy of politics, nationalism and other notable but rarely recognised themes of the world class American poet Robert Lee Frost. In order to identify these themes some of the poems of Robert Frost have been taken under consideration from his vast areas of poetry collection. The poetry of Robert Frost dealt not only with the pastoral and common elements of life and nature but also the awareness of the problems of man living in the modern world dominated by the philosophy of politics. His poetry portrays the actual values of human being which can be brought through the real thinking of the real politicians. People are living in the state of regret, frustration and disillusionment that are expected to be solved and overcome by the dedication and determination of the democratic minded political persons reflected in the poetry of Frost. In this paper the data are based on the secondary sources. Frost's masterly genius is well reflected in his poetry where he portrays the concrete details that constitute the scenes and action from which his poems spring. He also had a life full of struggle, hardship and sorrow which made him realize the actual problems of human being.

Key words: Political view; Nationalism; Pastoral elements; Human sufferings; Human rights

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INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost was born in 1874 in San Francisco, California. He was a very dominating figure in the field of American literature till his death in 1964. Having all sorts of poetic and scholarly qualities, he was, at the same time, considered as a mentor and guide for the American people. His poetic genius shows his deep knowledge of literary, scientific and historical ideas. Though most of his poetry deal with social and philosophical issues, a good number of his poetry is also connected with the theme of nationalism and political implication. His later poems are the reflection of the reality of life, death, humanity and other aspects of human life. His realistic approach towards nature is the result of his own working experience as a farmer.

Frost has a very distinctive place in American letters. He stands at the cross roads of 19th century tendencies and traditions as well as parallels to the works of his 20th century contemporaries. Smythe (1964) says "Robert Frost gained some renown as a world traveller for the cause of poetry ... he was the best selling poet of this century" (p.14). The first place of his publication was in England and later on in the United State of America. He is highly appreciated by critics and readers in all over the words as a poet who has portrait the real scene of the countryside and rustic people. In this regard his poem *Build Soil* is the best example. Frost believes, "poetry begins in Delight and ends in Wisdom." Untermeyer (1975) says:

If we probe into Frost's statement that a poem begins in delight and end in wisdom, we find the assertion is more an expressive than a pragmatic theory of poetry. It is to be sure, a description of his concept of creative process. (p.136)

Frost is a winner of Pulitzer prize for four times that also show him as a poet of common people and common language. He is a conservative writer who supports traditional form in writing poetry. So he used simple style and language. This way of writing differentiated him

from his contemporaries writers like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound who believe in complex and difficult style. Later on they criticised Frost's style of writing. He responded to this through his letter to Thomas Mosher (1913) as mentioned by Pritchard "you are not going to make the mistake that Pound makes of assuming that my simplicity is that of the untutored child. I am not understanding" (1984, pp.69-70). He was a special guest at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration which is the result of his high political thought and a great spirit of nationalism. Bloom (2009) writes "Frost had been the first poet ever to deliver a poem at an American presidential inauguration" (p.56). The greatest of all modern poets, T. S. Eliot and many other notable modern poets are intensely influenced by the techniques and themes of Robert Frost. He also created an illusion of a new England Farmer-poet by writing the poetry of opinion, the woods, since Frost strove hard towards pastoral poetry of the woods that are lovely, dark deep and Frosty. Frost's poetry shows different metres. For example, in his famous poem "Build Soil, a Political Pastoral", Frost has shown how his visionary thinking works for national interest. This poem is the reminder of Browning's monologue. "He (Frost) is primarily a subjective lyric poet, at his best in his apparently contradictory moods of response to experience and in his figurative ways of defining difference." (Thompson, 1942, p.13).

Human beings and their rights, status and dignity are the pivotal themes of Frost's poetry. The pivotal themes of his poetry are men and women and their rights as human beings. His poetry shows his inner-feelings to the people of his country with a tone of patriotism, symbolism and modernity. Spirit of patriotism is claimed to be the sense of nationalism. A nationalist man must be a patriotic man. Persons who always contemplate the overall development of a nation, country and other factors related to the development of a country. Nationalism refers to the real spirit of political involvement. Ideal politicians hold the sense of nationalism. Gellner (1983) found that "nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political one ... it follows that a territorial political unit can only become ethnically homogenous" (p.1).

Robert Lee Frost, a man with high thinking power dedicated for the sake of overall humanity specially for the Americans, wrote a numerous number of poems throughout his life. His poetry deals with an untraceable number of direct or indirect themes. He was a poet of humanity, a poet of average people. To focus on the love and responsibility for human being, Frost draws the theme of nationalism and politics in many of his poems. Hoffman (2001) remarks "Frost is led to this correspondence not only by his early literary political interest in the 'primitive' but also by his nationalism" (p.189). Frost believed the real politicians to be attached with the high spirit of

nationalism. Qualities of real politician are nothing but another side of nationalism.

1. METHODOLOGY

The job of this paper has been carried out from the personal interest of the writer. Since very few works on the theme of nationalism and political vision of Robert Frost have been found, so just the ideas have been gathered from different recognised journals, magazines, scholarly articles and various sources from the internet on Frost have been taken under consideration to write this paper. Most of the notions are the author's own innovation.

2. THE THEME OF POLITICAL IMPLICATION AND NATIONALISM IN HIS POETRY

Robert Frost occupies an eminent place not only among the American poets, but also among the greatest and renowned poets of the whole world. Robert Graves (1962) regards him as "The first American who could be honestly reckoned a master poet by world standard." (Introduction to *in The Cleaning*, pp.7-10). He has enriched American literature by writing different types of poetry and imparted to it a new tone and dignity. Apart from many other themes, his most dominating themes are humanity, homeliness, isolation and nature. He selected events and the subject matters from ordinary life. It is said that a much number of his writing has picked up from the peasants life. To trace out the actual scenery of the common people, common lives and their fundamental rights, he wrote so many poems that show his national interest and political insight. In this regard, the best poems are *Mending Wall*, *The Lesson for Today*, *Build Soil: A Political Pastoral* and *The Death of the Hired Man*. Apart from these poems, there are also a good number of poems which indirectly express the tone of nationalism and political vision.

The poem, *Mending Wall*, is the first creation of his second book *North of Boston*. Throughout the poem the poet tries to explain the importance of mending wall. It conveys some political and nationalism messages. Hoffman (2001) says "moments of vocal indecision shape other dramatic narratives in *North of Boston* as well and compound the (political) meanings that they convey. One such poem is *Mending Wall* (108).

The poem depicts that there are two distinguished persons who are living side by side in a society and they are having a very good relationship with each other. Despite having good terms, every year these two neighbours mend the stone wall that separate their farmland. The narrator is very much cynical of this

situation. He cannot understand the necessity of mending wall as there is no such plants that can be eaten or destroyed by animals, even though there is no livestock at wall. He also does not mean that there should have a wall only for the sake of existing. He believes that the natural world also dislikes the mending wall as he does. But another neighbour always asserts his firm stand in favour of mending wall by telling that to maintain a harmonious relationship between the society there is no other alternatives of making fence; as he says boldly, / Good fences make good neighbours./(27) Over the course of making the fence as their boundary wall, the narrator attempts to convince his neighbour by accusing him as a man with the thinking of old-fashioned. Though he is being accused, he never stops making the boundary wall as he has a strong belief in his mind that only: "Good fences make good neighbours."(27)

Frost's "Mending Wall" shows his nationalism and political vision and his strong patriotic zeal for the Americans. The poem opens with a line / Something there is that doesn't love a wall,/ (1) that shows a contradictory ideas about the existence of a wall, one is with a wall but the other isn't. The wall is not necessarily represent just a physical wall but it might represent a relationship between people, parties, neighbours or countries. The poem shows Frost future vision. The current president of the United State, Donald Trump, declares the need for the wall to be built between America and Mexico. Trump believes the last line of the poem "Good fences make good neighbours" (45). Trump made his political decision for the interest of his nation to protect them from crime, drugs and illegal migration. Belle (2017) says "you may find certain correlations between Frost's poem and the current political situation in the US" (para.2). Allegorically the wall between the property of two neighbours stands for nothing but the geographical boundary of a country. If there is no geographical boundary among the countries of the world, there must have been political chaos, war, unrest and many other chaotic situations. From the perspective of twenty first century interpretation, we see that those countries are living very peacefully which have their strong boundary wall that shows them as a separate entity. On the contrary those countries are passing the worst time which don't have a definite boundary wall; like Palestine and Israel, India and Pakistan, India and China and so many. They are always in war situation that hinders their overall development. Most of their national income is being spent for this reason.

Actually, the poem Mending Wall shows the visionary thinking of the poet. He could predict that a good fence of the American people with its neighbouring countries will be the result of their eternal peace and happiness in their future endeavour. The theme of the poem can be interpreted from another point of view that is, in this global and virtual arena a wall can be an obstacle in terms of universal brotherhood, harmonious relationship that

may deteriorate the bonding among human being and may create distance, but Frost's futuristic talents are beyond of our imagination which proves this thinking incorrect. In whatever global village we live, we cannot deny our geographical identity.

In each and every country of the world, the first and foremost issue of a real political leader is to retain the sovereignty and the best way of showing respect to sovereignty is to protect its geographical boundary from the invader. Therefore, Frost's famous poem "Mending Wall" illustrate the kind of reviving spirit among American people that present him as a writer with high political and nationalism thought as he writes:

*Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors.*

(39-45)

The Death of the Hired Man is another best example of Frost's poetry that unfolds the sophisticated themes of Robert Frost's poetry such as the theme of political vision and nationalism. Stanlis (2003) says "Frost's conservative religious, moral, and political convictions are most evident in his poems *The Death of the Hired Man*, *A Masque of Reason*, and *A Masque of Mercy*, which explore the complex issues". A man with real political spirit and sense of nationalism should possess some unique attributes that make him distinguished from other ordinary people. He should have patriotic zeal, sympathy for the average people, impartial eyes for all, respect to the status of all classes of people and so forth. *The Death of the Hired Man* is like the poem *Mending Wall* where two speakers are talking in an argumentative manner on a certain issue of a hired man.

The poem, *The Death of the Hired Man*, is a typical one that portrait a very slow but philosophical worthy discussion between a common man and his wife. . From portrayal of the characters, Frost's nationalism and political vision have been accounted. He could select the characters from high class family. Rather he has chosen the characters from ordinary people that prove him as a voice of common people with common thinking power.

The two main characters portrayed in this poem are Warren, the husband and Mary, the wife. The issue of their debate is Silas who is a very poor labourer working for the people as a hired man. It is such a poem that denotes the real identity, the basic rights and the dignity of a man in the society. Mary, the wife, represents love, respect, imagination and emotion for the sake of overall humanity disregard to cast, race and religion. On the

contrary, Warren, the husband is such a man who seems not to have any love, respect and emotion for the poor, destitute, working class and grief-stricken people. He shows his love and respect to the people in terms of their work, worth and contribution for the society or for the employers.

As like as a real politician whose primary concern is the development of the life style of the working-class people, Frost represents himself in the guise of the wife. As Frost's *The Death of the Hired Man* opens with lines,

*Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table
Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,
She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage
To meet him in the doorway with the news
And put him on his guard. "Silas is back."
She pushed him outward with her through the door
And shut it after her. "Be kind," she said.
She took the market things from Warren's arms
And set them on the porch, then drew him down
To sit beside her on the wooden steps. (1-10)*

As Mary is the mouth piece of the poet, so from above lines we, the readers can easily understand the apathy of the poet for a lower and working-class person namely, Silas which is the indication of his love, respect, sympathy, feeling and emotion to the lower class struggling people. It is the evidence of his being a man with high spirit of nationalism. Working class people neither have any hope or ambition for the future nor have anything to feel proud in the past. As the poet says,

*Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,
And nothing to look backward to with pride,
And nothing to look forward to with hope,
So now and never any different. (102-105)*

Through the above lines, the poet tries to draw the attention of high class people regarding the life style of the working-class people. The struggling people are always happy whatever they have in their current time. They are the real citizen of a country who are trying their level best for developing the economic status of a country. So, here we see the visionary eyes of the poet towards the common people which we claim to be the prime concern of a political leader. Finally, the death of the hired man is a metonymic reference that is very much alarming for old, aged and sick working people who cannot satisfy their employers. As a part of the society every individual should have a separate entity whether he or she is young or aged, rich or poor, male or female, moderate or conservative. In the last lines of the poem, *The Death of the Hired Man*, Frost declares the death of Silas which is undesirable:

*It hit the moon.
Then there were three there, making a dim row,
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she.
Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her,*

*Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.
"Warren," she questioned.
"Dead," was all he answered. (169-175)*

Through his futuristic vision, the poet conveys a message to the politicians that if such incident happens in the society or in the country at large, the dignity, love, respect will collapse from the American people. This shows Frost as a person with high sense of nationalism.

Frost's poem *On Our Sympathy With the Under Dog* consists only four lines which first appeared in *Witness Tree* (1942). This poem has a political message for politicians. The poet encourages politicians to try again and again to achieve their goals. The politicians may fall in their initial efforts but they must not frustrate and give up because one day they will succeed. The poet used words like "up", "under", and "down" to indicate that life and politics is changeable. Fagan (2007) writes "the game of politics is depicted as a circus. We watch "revolving dog", political leaders who transition as quickly as door. politics and politicians are sometimes volatile" (399). As the poet says,

*First under up and then again down under,
We watch a circus of revolving dogs
No senator dares in to kick asunder,
Lest both should bite him in the toga-togs. (1-4)*

Unveiling the theme of political vision and sense of nationalism, Frost's another notable poem is *The Lesson for Today* which is very famous as a long poem. Young (2012, pp.1-4), Editor of *Modern Age*, says that *A Lesson for Today* includes a "political" passage that has escaped its context and become a favorite quip among conservatives: "A liberal is a man who won't take his own side in a quarrel."

This long poem was written after 1930's. Through this poem the poet discloses his unbearable grief and agony of his mind since he was passing the most miserable moment of his life. He lost his daughter, wife and his son respectively in the year 1934, 1938 and 1940. This poem is the reflection of Frost's personal life. It was first recited in a gorgeous event at Harvard's Phi Beta Kappa Society on June 20, 1941 and then it was published in 1942 in a collection of poems, *A Witness Tree*, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1943.

In his book *Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher*, Peter J. Stanlis says, "As Frost ties his rural New England political dialogue to a classical 'political pastoral,' so here he establishes 'The Lesson for Today' offered by a modern academic on a consideration of the situation of a medieval 'pedagogue'." (Stanlis, 2007, pp.1-2)

Since the poem was written at the beginning of World War II, the poet starts the poem with a note of depression, despair and frustration and shows his concern for the common people. This type of concern should be the prime concern of the political leaders and of those having a high

sense of nationalism. So, the initial lines of “The Lesson for Today” prove him as a person with political vision and sense of nationalism:

*If this uncertain age in which we dwell
Were really as dark as I hear sages tell,
And I convinced that they were really sages,
I should not curse myself with it to hell,
But leaving not the chair I long have sat in,
I should betake me back ten thousand pages
To the world’s undebatably dark ages,
And getting up my medieval Latin. (1-8)*

Through this poem, *The Lesson for Today*, the poet also shows that all people should be liberal, democratic and moderate. He emphasizes on universal brotherhood too. Liberalism and democratic zeal can make people great. As he says,

*Seek converse common cause and brotherhood
(By all that’s liberal—I should, I should)
With the poets who could calmly take the fate
Of being born at once too early and late,
And for those reasons kept from being great,
Yet singing but Dione in the wood (9-14)*

Frost pays full attention to equality, justice and liberty. Everyone should have equal eyes for all even though he himself becomes the alleged. In terms of justice and equality, there is no distinction of aristocratic or average, rich or poor, upper class or lower class. Everyone should be treated equally with the eyes of law. If it happens, peace and tranquillity will prevail in the state. As the poet says,

*With equal darkness, yours as dark as mine,
I’m liberal. You, you aristocrat,
Won’t know exactly what I mean by that.
I mean so altruistically moral
I never take my own side in a quarrel. (119-123)*

Through this poem, the poet shows his concern for the development of state. He explains that a state can be a developed one if there is political stability and everything can be put under the proper control of the country. He also predicts the development of science and technology is the result of a country’s overall development:

*One man had lived one hundred years and eight.
But though we all may be inclined to wait
And follow some development of state,
Or see what comes of science and invention,
There is a limit to our time extension. (140-144)*

The final lines of the poem *The Lesson for Today* have the most important note of consolation. Here the poet has used a phrase as *Memento Mori* (157) which is a Latin expression referring to “remember your mortality,” or commonly as, “remember you will die.” Through this the poet reminds that everyone in this earth is mortal

human being. None can prevent or escape from death. So, we all should do something for the betterment of the collective interest which may remain us alive forever. Though the poem starts with a tone of despair, finally it ends with a high tone of optimism using the phrase “lover’s quarrel”. It means that God loves all the human beings and, therefore, sometimes He has to quarrel with them when they seem to be away from the right track. The same is true for human lovers. This should be the attribute of the real political leaders. They will live us and rule us if we violate the doctrine. We all must be driven by the optimising behaviour. As the poet says,

*I hold your doctrine of Memento Mori.
And were an epitaph to be my story
I’d have a short one ready for my own.
I would have written of me on my stone:
I had a lover’s quarrel with the world. (157-161)*

The most remarkable poem of Robert Frost, *Build Soil: A Political Pastoral* holds a uniqueness for its length. Frost’s political vision and sense of nationalism has been directly found in this poem as the word ‘politics’ has been used in the title of the poem.

When, during the Thirties, poetry discovered a whole new reality in the political liberalism of the time ... and the New Deal, sounding in “Build Soil” (1932) like member of the Republican Party, and directing more and more Yankee wit against socialism in government. (Cox, 1962, p.5)

At the very outset of “Build Soil: a Political Pastoral”, the poet is talking about the soil, farm and shepherd which show him as a with common thinking and working for the development of the rural people like a real politician. As the poet says,

*I’ve had to give my interval farm up
For interest, and I’ve bought a mountain farm
For nothing down, all-out-doors of a place,
All woods and pasture only fit for sheep. (6-9)*

Through this poem, the poet has tried to draw a very good relationship between poetry and politics. He compares poetry with grief and politics with grievance. In the following lines the word politics has been used twice that proves his political vision:

*Oh Meliboeus, I have half a mind
To take a writing hand in politics.
Before now poetry has taken notice
Of wars, and what are wars but politics
Transformed from chronic to acute and bloody?
(26-30)*

The poet talks about socialism instead of capitalism. Since he has noticed that, in America, capitalism creates social distance and class conflict and it also makes the rich people richer and poor people poorer. Though he talks about socialism, it doesn’t mean that he is in favour of

Monarchic socialism, rather he is in favour of democratic socialism. Through this view he condemns Russian Socialism. This shows his visionary eyes in the field of politics. When Frost takes into consideration political conditions, it is poems like *Build Soil—A Political Pastoral* and *The Lesson for Today* that take place in mind. Apparently, it is *Build Soil* that makes the writer appears as “a member of the Republican Party,” perhaps for lines like these:

Is socialism needed, do you think?
We have it now. For socialism is
An element in any government.
There's no such thing as socialism pure
Except as an abstraction of the mind.
There's only democratic socialism
Monarchic socialism oligarchic,
The last being what they seem to have in Russia.
(67-74)

Universal love and good bonding among all disregarding their gender, age and relationship has been drawn in an extraordinary manner by the visionary poet Robert Frost. Equally with love for overall humanity, love for poetry has been depicted through his poem. He considers love for poetry can arise a passion for love for humanity. A real politician should have an impartial love equally for all the citizens of the country. As in *Build Soil—A Political Pastoral* the poet illustrates,

There's only love of men and women, love
Of children, love of friends, of men, of God,
Divine love, human love, parental love,
Roughly discriminated for the rough.
Poetry, itself once more, is back in love. (85-89)

Frost was always in favour of real democratic practice. Democracy means freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of choosing one's own career, freedom of choosing the leader, freedom of doing business, freedom of press and many more. The poet's political vision, democratic feeling and sense of nationalism have been notable through the following verses. As he says,

Everyone asks for freedom for himself,
The man free love, the business man free trade,
The writer and talker free speech and free press.
Political ambition has been taught, (112-115)

It is very clear that Frost's poetry has a keen sense and strong feeling for nationalism. He urges the people of America merely to love their own country eliminating all sorts of limitation from their mind. Metaphorically he compares the dignity of the United States with the dignity of a man's own family to him. None of these statuses can be debased. As he says,

Don't join too many gangs. Join few if any.
Join the United States and join the family

But not much in between unless a college.
Is it a bargain, Shepherd Meliboeus? (181-184)

Finally, the poem ends with a high tone of unity of the Americans. He regards America as a big company and all the people are doing the job under that. By this he tries to mean that the people of America are under one umbrella and they must work together for the greater interest of the country. As the poem ends,

What I was thinking when you interrupted
My life-train logic. I agree with you
We're too unseparate. And going home
From company means coming to our senses.
(190-193)

CONCLUSION

Holding a very unique personality and unparalleled status, Robert Frost is considered as the glittering star in the field of not only American literature, but also in World literature. He wrote many poems throughout his life of which most of his poetry deal with the themes of love, respect, dignity, status, right, freedom, equality, nationalism and political vision. He is a poet of common people, common language, common thoughts and feelings. His prime concern was always for the overall development of the country and its nation. As his idea has been illustrated in the poem *Stopping by Wood on a Snowy Evening* with the verse, “*And miles to go before I sleep / And miles to go before I sleep*” (15-16). He is a man high integrity and intellectual power whose thinking, planning always centres round the American people. Though he was not directly involved with politics, he depicted his idea for the greater interest of the Americans more than a politician. So, it can be said that Frost is a poet of esteemed political vision and high national spirit.

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