



ECO- FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE OF ROBERT FROST POEM: BIRCHES

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Abstract:

The main purpose of this paper is to bring out an eco-feminist perspective of the poem *Birches* by Robert Frost. Robert Frost is an ecological writer but there is always a hidden meaning that has eco-feminist perspective, connecting nature with women. Robert Frost, through the poem, *Birches* is emphasizing that it is fault of the patriarchal society to dominate women and it is a woman's fault to keep accepting all the boundaries given by the society. The fault is more on the patriarchal society for considering themselves as superior over both women and nature. The author is waiting for the day when women would bear no more and revolt against the patriarchal society and fight for their rights.

Key Words: Robert Frost, Ecofeminism, Nature, Women

Ecology, a science dealing with the interrelationship between all the forms of life. Its main purpose is to harmonize nature, human and non-human. In the age of fragmentation and specialization, it is an integrated science. Ecology also takes a critical perspective as it also critiques the existing society. It is a reconstructive science as it gives directions on constructing a human society with natural environment.

The human society is conceived to be patriarchal, male-oriented and it is constructed in such a way that it subordinates women to men in all domains of the world. Women themselves are taught to consciously and unconsciously accept male domination and conditioned to derogate their own sex. They are expected to cooperate in their own subordination.

Being male or female is based on the autonomy but the concepts such as masculinity and femininity is based on how a person behaves in the society. An accepting male in the society must be active, dominating, adventurous, rational and creative. An accepting female must be passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional.

The ecology movement aims to speak for nature that has no voice. Feminism is about the refusal of the other gender in the patriarchal society and they are forced to be silent. Women are the "others" in the human society, and they are expected to be silent but when they voice out their perspective, then it is called Feminism.

The religion of old goddess, paganism and animal belief systems have perished for so many generations. The present millennium is influenced to believe that Men are allowed to dominate nature in order to fulfill all their needs. One has always believed that science has control over the nature and it has an ability to solve the problem. It is not true, with the scientific exploration and technological exploration, the problem in regard to nature have gotten worst. "Nuclear power plants are built without provisions for waste disposal, and satellites are sent into the space without provisions for retrieval" (King 21).

Nature is often dominated, objectified, subordinated and since women are identified with nature, they have similarly been objectified and subordinated in the patriarchal society. Women gives birth to the next generation and nurtures them whereas nature sacrifices itself for the betterment of the society. Despite the fact that they are an important part of a nature as a whole, both women and nature are marginalized by the human society.

These two parts, women and nature are considered as inferior parts in the eyes of a patriarchal society, but these are parts on which earth depends on. A woman is reason for the Man's existence in the earth and then he is nurtured well through nature as nature consists of food, air and other life-giving objects.

In this modern era, where human generation has reached to Moon and Mars, but this human society still has primatial thoughts when it comes to women. Women are always judged and restricted in the name of the society, culture, family, tradition and many other things. Men and nature shared an eco-friendly relationship during the ancient times but as time went, men started to identify nature as an object, to just fulfill their demands and wishes.

The society in which one lives, only a man is free-willed, rest everything must take place according to the needs of a man. Women are always compressed to be fit in, into the narrative as a man would love them to be and this thought applies to nature as well. Oppression of nature and society has given rise to Eco-feminism movement.

Eco-feminism started with the work of Annette Kolodny where she states ecofeminism as an analysis of the role attributed to the women in fantasies of the natural environment by the male authors. Robert Frost has

tried to demonstrate eco-feminist perspectives much before the movement began. The poems of Robert Frost consist of nature as his background and the activities of a man in nature.

When one reads his poem, it first showcases an amicable relationship with man and nature but as one dwells deep into it, one would figure out that Frost is trying to represent women through nature. Through his poems, Frost gives women a power to speak for themselves and to represent their situation.

In Frost's poem, *A Servant to Servant*, Frost portrays a woman whose voice is being dissipated in the noises of the dull works, madness and sexual trauma. A woman, in this dramatic monologue states that she has faced trauma of life because of the patriarchal society. The title of the poem reflects that situation of a woman who is always expected to serve her husband and his hired men. She becomes so exhausted that even nature is not able to bring solace in her.

In this poem, the image of the lake resembles with that of a woman. The lake has been shrunken from both the side due to the human activities. A woman is first seen dominated by her father and then her in-laws. The nature takes revenge from the man by different forms and so even a woman can seek revenge from a man for being treated as an object rather than a human.

The poem, *On Going Unnoticed*, talks about the life of women being surrounded by the hurdles that are made for her, in this man-made society. Women are not been identified as a human but rather as a property just like nature, with which he can treat the way he likes. In this poem, women try raising voices, but their sighs are been unnoticed by the male dominating society. Man considers the rule over women and Nature is God given task.

The poem "The Hill Wife", the author talks about a woman's inner feelings. She is a childless woman; she feels alone because her husband has no emotional connection with her and has discarded her, the same is done with trees when they are fruitless and serve no purpose to the mankind. Just like nature, women also need care and attention from their husbands.

In the poem "*Fireflies in the Garden*", portrays an ideology that how much ever a woman might achieve, she will always be considered less than a man. In this poem, that stars symbolize the male society who are actually filling the void in the sky whereas women are metaphors for flies, always expected to wander just little above the surface of the earth.

The poem, "*The Subverted flower*", the situation of the flower has been compared to the situation of the women in the society. In the modern world, nature has been deduced into an object that is supposed to give pleasure and even a woman is expected to please men through her beauty. In the poem, the lover is trying to overpower the girl, he is in love with. It is very famous line that if a man likes a flower, he would pluck it, but he loves the flower, then he would water and nurture it.

In the poem "*Misgiving*", the birds desire to go back to the spring season, in other words, the birds want to get back to the time when a man had an eco-friendly relationship with nature. The poem symbolically represents the female society, who are tired of being suppressed and now they want a life of their own. They want to escape in the land where they have freedom and power

In the poem *Birches*, the author starts by talking about the Birches trees that are bent, across the straight darker trees. The birches tree represents the female society, and the tree being bent compared to other straight darker trees represent subordination of the female society. When the birches trees are being bent, the author tries to imagine as if a boy is swinging it. The boy represents the patriarchal society and him swinging the tree symbolizes the female society being dominated by the patriarchal community.

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But the swinging doesn't bend them down to stay (1-4)

The domination of the patriarchal society doesn't bend the female for the longer time, as the surrendering of the female society itself to the patriarchy does. The ice-storms represents the restrictions that have put forth by the male biased society and female society's surrendering to it. The birches trees are burdened by the ice which reflects that the women society is burdened by the restriction. Soon there would be a sunny day, when the ice would melt, and noise would be so loud that it would feel as if the dome of the inner heaven had fallen. The author is conveying a message here that soon there would come a time, when all these restrictions would dissipate, and the voices of the women society would be so loud that it would feel as though the inner dome of the heaven has fallen down.

Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow crust-
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen. (11-14)

Until the sunny morning, the birches trees are bent with the load, but they don't break. The author is emphasizing on the strength of the women by saying that they might be dominated for the time being but that doesn't mean that they are hopeless. There would be a time when the women society would be as free willed as

the male society. "They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load, / And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed." (15-16)

For a longer time, the women society never dared to raise their voice, to fight for their rights. Years afterwards the women society is so frustrated of the domination and restrictions that their calm is wearing off, like the leaves falling from the trees during the autumn. The author makes the direct connection of trees with the girls who are sitting with their hands and knees, their hair before their heads to dry their hair. The girls sitting on hands and knees, this position is taken when someone is upset, which reflects that the female society is upset of the patriarchal domination and restriction.

So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun. (17-21)

The author wants to profess the truth, though the female society is accepted the domination, he still thinks that it was the patriarchal society because of which the women community is burdened. The author states that he wants to believe that it was initially the fault of patriarchal society for the situation of the women.

But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storms
I should prefer to have some boy bent them. (22-24)

The author also states a reason, as why would a male dominate a female. The author states the reason that a male would dominate a woman because he feels bored and because he finds a pleasure, supremacy by dominating women. No matter what the season would be, a man would always find pleasure in dominating a woman.

Frost, in the line 29 uses the phrase "father's tree" which denotes these trees to be his father's property which would be soon inherited by the boy. Father also means the almighty, a man one by one is muting and dominating women, until the stiffness inside women has faded who are also the creation of the almighty.

In the end of the poem author, confesses that he was a swinger of the birch tree too, and that he is tempted to climb the birch tree again. This statement refers that he was a dominating male too and he is tempted to dominate again. The author is wishing for rebirth, to be born again and climb the birches tree but this time, the tree will not bend but set him down. Author is manifesting that he wants to be born again into the world where a woman would not take up dominance, would voice out against it. In the last line the author warns the tendencies of male to do something worse than dominating a woman

I'd like to be climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Towards heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped in top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches. (56-61)

Robert Frost, through the poem, *Birches* is saying that it is fault of the patriarchal society to dominate women and it is a woman's fault to keep accepting all the boundaries given by the society. The fault is more on the patriarchal society for considering themselves as superior over both women and nature. The author is waiting for the day when women would bear no more and revolt against the patriarchal society and fight for their rights.

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