

## Ecology in Philip Larkin's Poetry

### 1. Dr. Kavita Tiwade,

Associate Professor,  
Head, Department of English,  
Vivekanand College,  
Kolhapur (Autonomous)

### 2. Dr. Salama Isak Maner

Assistant Professor,  
Department of English,  
Vivekanand College,  
Kolhapur (Autonomous)

### Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to study the contribution of Philip Larkin's poetry to understand ecological consciousness of man. Larkin's poetry is studied in the light of Eco-criticism and natural resources. This paper analyses Larkin's poetry, by paying specific attention to the poet's precognition of a looming disorder that eco-critics and environmentalists later came to conceptualize as the ecological crisis. The poems in the volumes *North Ship* to 'High Window' have proved to be very provocative and disturbing to many people in England, not only because of their style and technique. The present paper is about Philip Larkin's nature poems.

**Keywords:** Eco-criticism, Environment, Ecology, Ecological crisis

---

Eco-criticism is simply defined as the interrelation between nature and literature. The term 'Eco' is derived from 'oikos' which means 'home or house' and in eco-criticism, home means environment. Eco-criticism or environmental consciousness in his seminal work is "The Environmental Imagination Thoreau, Nature Writing, the formation of American Culture". It includes-

"whether the non-human nature is a mere framing device or facade. Environment is a process, not a static condition. Human interest is not the legitimistic interest. The text shows humans as accountable to nature". (Nayar 252)

Eco-criticism is one of the important aspects of the study over the last decades. It is about the relationship between man and nature. The twentieth century has threatened by ecological, imbalance.

Philip Larkin is one of the leading poets of the post – war period in England. He was identified in the fifties with The Movement. The Movement is regarded as a reaction to the excesses of modernist

poetry and fiction of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Larkin was influenced by Dylan Thomas. In 1946, Larkin developed his poetic vision through images from the nature.

Nature is one of the important themes of the collection *The North ship* because it shows his philosophy of life. To Larkin, Nature does not inspire nor does it offer any respite from the tedium and loneliness of life. His landscapes are half lit, lazy and featureless. His nature is cold, alienation and powerful motion. The flower, the trees, branches fade and rot and face the passing and final destruction. The poet's mind picks the gloomy aspect of everything, the cold and soul chilling winter, the wind and gales, dirt and dust, decayed leaves and tree branches grey stormy scenes.

The depiction of nature indeed, evokes sad visions. Nature lies heavily on his soul like a sodden blanket.

In 'Blizzard', he describes a snow storm. In "Blizzard",

Suddenly clouds of snow  
Begin assaulting the air,  
As falling, as tangled  
As a girl's thick hair  
Some see a flock of swans  
Some a fleet of ships  
Or a spread winding sheet  
But the snow touches – my lips

(75 N Blizzard, P. 46 TNS)

The clouds of snow 'assault the air'. They are likened to the tangled thick hair of a girl, a flock of swans, a fleet of ships or winding sheet. There is a dreamlike fantastic quality which makes him deliberately difficult. The dreams are nightmarish and are in keeping with his vision.

The images of clouds, shadows, nights find fitting emotional parallels in silence solitude, darkness. It is also be seen in the following poem.

.....sleep is made cold  
By a recurrent dream  
Where all things seem  
Sickeningly to poise  
On emptiness, on stars  
Drifting under the world

(Songs 65 N P. 45 TNS)

In Songs 65 N, the sequence develops in a mysterious way as it seeks, to make associations gathering round the voyage of the North ship. It is structured around the images of coldness and erotic love filled with fear. From the stylistic point of view, the poem shows Larkin's indulgence in self – conscious poeticism. The nature images are shift his observation and diction shows an excessive dependence on similes and metaphors.

In the North Ship, Larkin experiments with that poetry which is seen by the untutored mind as truly poetic, a representative of a mystical, Neo- Gothic world, where melancholy and must roll together over half lit landscapes, winding at same deep, inner meaning but which if we experience them closely, have nothing below the surface of interest.

Larkin sees his own bleak sensibility in terms of the panorama of nature. The effect of nature's power and occasional malevolence on the poet is not addressed in many of these poems through it creates an appropriate setting for their descriptions of disillusionment.

There are often trees and wind  
And sand as in Night music  
At one, the wind roe  
And with it, the noise  
Of the black popular

The star imagery in Night – Marie brings out the rich background of the stars in their blazing solitude. They are the fixed points of light and contrasted with the moving object the earth with its blowing winds and the black poplars.

There are bleak fields on every side, Larkin's landscapes are assailed by blowing winds, wastes of plants.

And in their blazing solitude  
The stars sang in their sockets  
Through the night  
Blow bright, blow bring  
The coal of this unquickened world. (TNS p.11)

In the last stanza, its twofold contrast and circular is enacted briefly as the poet glances at the sky to measure its creative potential, lost in contemplating. The stars sang in their hallow place, he makes a feeble effort to lose himself in the world of the divine and in their blazing solitude, but his earthly time limitation immediately assert themselves and to give this attempt unfruitful. So he has been drawn back to earth and to this unquickened world. It is an unquickened world because it is held in its captive, he feels the slow passage of hive.

The seasonal process and night and day cycle are recurrent them in Larkin is poetry. Larkin's approach to nature is unromantic. He seems on the verge of being romantic, but suddenly takes a different turn, gloomy and changes the whole approach.

As Donald Daine says, We recognize in Larkin's poems the season a present day England, but we recognize also the seasons on English soul the moods he expresses our moods too through we may deal with them differently (1973 P.66)

In 'One man walking a Deserted Platform '

One Man walking a Deserted Platform,

Dawn coming and rain driving

Across a darkening autumn

One man restlessly waiting a train

(CP P.289)

This poem begins a narrative mode, accommodating a descriptive strain which is sustained in the first seating but snaps in the second, where it yields place, quite characteristically to semi symbolist speculations. Dawn is approaching and rain is driving across a darkening autumn.

The speaker is a lonely man, walking a deserted platform and then restless waiting for a train, the rain.

"Beating each shuttered cause that seems folded, full of the dark silk of dreams. A shell of sheep cradling a wife or child".

(CP P.289)

The images of 'the dark silk of dreams' enfolding the people in the closed houses of a 'Shell of sheep', walking the near and dear once into a seemingly abiding state of coziness are all suggesting of a vast but meaningless world of illusions that love creates 'sleep were becomes a symbol of delusion, while the image of the shell reinforces its hard and impregnable nature.'

Ruby quotes, the poem may be said to contain the seeds of Larkin's mature poetry in two respects- first, in the vivid realistic setting and secondly in the speaker's sympathetic, identification with another individual.

There is an attempt here at evoking an atmospheric effect with the help of some minute details like a lonely man, deserted platform, someone waiting for a train, a day dawning, stars selling, locks crowing etc.

Larkin's approach to nature is obviously unromantic. He seems on the verge of being romantic, but suddenly takes a different turn, gloomy and changes the whole approach. As Donald Daine says, We

recognize in Larkin's poems the season of present day England, but we recognize also the seasons on English soul, the moods, he expresses are our moods too though we may deal with them differently (Donald David, 1973. P. 60)

The spring, Larkin describes people, who are resting on the grass as green shadowed people.

On the other hand the children 'Fringler the fresh born grass. 'Weather is calm, a single cloud which is static in the sky and only one bird singing somewhere. The speaker describes his own childhood to feel its pathos. The pleasantness of the Nature does not make the speaker happy –

.....and me  
Threading my pursed – up away  
Across the park  
And indigestible sterility  
There is a grateful even greedy,  
Appreciation (CP P.84)

The poet shares the radiance of Spring, through he walks in 'indigestible sterility'. He carefully observes and reacts to the spring as a season. When confers on man and nature, then he relates himself to it weariness which overtakes him. It seems that Larkin's vision is more prone to catch at sorrow and regret nature for Larkin is allegorical. He reads in it human future.

Larkin's another poem 'Dry point' describes the destruction of things in the nature. The struggle is between the man and the nature. The ultimate power of the world is nature. Man is struggling for his existence. But he realizes that everything is going to transform into ashes Larkin says,

Endless time honoured  
A bubble is restively forming at your tip  
Burst it as fast as we can  
It will grow again, until we begin dying

Man is a silent observer. He accepts his debate. The poem 'Absences' is about the poet's fascination with how the familiar place would look like without him. There are no ships, no coasts, only a horizon and a sky.

Yet more shore less. (cp, P. 49)

In which clouds are gathered. This poem express a desire to escape from time and place in order to experience the truth. There is an interlink between 'wants', 'here' and 'high windows'. In all these poems Larkin shows such a desire for release, they celebrate a condition of vacancy. These poems end up

with a vision of release and fulfillment symbolized through images of sky, water and rain. Here, sea, water is important. Rain patters on a seat that tilts and sighs,

The poem ends with a cleansing joy such attics, cleared for me! Such absences!

Water is one of the important parts of nature. The sea stands for life. Water is a symbol of life and death. The sea is an unending source of rain. The clouds form and fall again as rain, goes into the sea. The movement of time and water in nature is completed.

Larkin has observed the life of common human beings. They are engaged from morning to evening in their daily routines. The evening and shade of darkness and night makes them restless. They come to know the meaninglessness of life and the emptiness of the activities life is an empty dream.

Larkin shows his capacity for experiencing epiphany visions mystique beauty of life. In two other poems of the Witsunweddings that may be called 'journey poems', 'Here' is the inaugural poem of this volume and the other one is the title poem. 'Here' records a journey by train (as the word 'halt' indicates) up through England towards Hull.

Rich industrial shadows  
And traffic all night north

We are taken one along graphically through landscapes of gradually increasing solitude one scene dissolving into another and the camera sweeping over 'the widening river's' slow presence towards and sudden surprise of large town. The second and third stanzas give a vivid and closely observed depiction of the town and its inhabitants. The speaker lingers for sometime over the commercial activities of the 'cut prince crowd' in a busy town –

“This is an area where  
Silent stands  
Like heat, Here leaves unnoticed thicken  
Hidden weed's flower, neglected waters quicken  
Luminously peopled are ascends. ” (cp.. p 136)

The isolated villages too are full of activities but of a very different kind as they only enlase a sense of their hidden life of nature. The final lines take us further still to a beach and beyond it, to the sea.

And past the poppies bluish neutral distance  
Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach  
Of shapes and single.  
Here is unfenced evilness.

Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach (cp. P 136-37)

In 'Afternoons', Philip Larkin presents nature as being intertwined with the life of the people who live in the surroundings of nature.. The poem does not remove the people from their surroundings; instead it beautifully integrates their life with the elements of nature around them.

The leaves falling on the ground in the afternoons along the roads, where mothers come to free their children at the end of a hard day at school. It is not something pleasurable that the mothers want to do. They are caught in the routine of everyday life and this job in the afternoons is something that they do on an everyday basis. The day progresses as nature intends it to be, and husbands meet their wives at specified intervals at the same places.

The present paper an attempt to examine the selected poems by Philip Larkin from an ecological perspective in order to establish a logical relationship between nature and Philip Larkin's poems. The technological outburst and its impact on environment is the approach of the study .Philip Larkin is considered as a significant nature poet. The poems of Philip Larkin have proved to be very provocative and disturbing to many people in England, not only because of their content but also because of their style and technique .Nature plays a vital role in Larkin's poetry .Nature takes the place of religion .It gives a feeling of continuity overcoming the fear of morality . Larkin's nature poems takes on vivid colour. His poems are about nature and its status in life. His nature appeals to common man as it deals with what is common in man .Nature is for Larkin is not beauty or spirituality but it symbolizes of life and death. Larkin has described his poems through ecological point of view. The theme of nature in his poetry has described the loss and regret ,the past and his countryside ,are typical features of the Movement .The theme of nature and life interwoven in his poems .Larkin writes truthfully about nature .

#### Reference:

1. Anthony, Thwaite. 'Collected Poems of Philip Larkin, London: Faber and Faber, 1964'
2. Glotfelty, Cheryll. 'Introduction,' The Eco-criticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology, eds. Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm. Athens and London. The university of Georgia Press, 1996. Print
3. High windows, London: Faber and Faber, 1974.
4. Motion, Andrew. 'A Writer's Life, London: Faber and Faber, 1993
5. Volkman, Laurenz Nancy Grimm, Ines Detmers and Katrin Thomson (Eds.) Amsterdam/ New York, NY, 2010, XVIII, P.370. ANSEL Papers 15.
6. Pramod K. Nayar, Contemporary Literary And Cultural Theory: From Structuralism To Ecocriticism, Pearson, Page No. 252