ROMANTICISM AND NATURE (contd.)

James Thomson:

Representation of the natural environment in literature is as old as the literature is. In regards to recorded literature, it was also prominent in the account of Garden of Eden in the Hebrew Bible. Writing on nature on the eve of the Romanticism however got a shot in arms with James Thomson’s long poem in blank verse: ‘The Seasons’ (1726-30).

The nostalgic view of a return to unspoiled nature in order to restore the lost simplicity and concord remained evident in this long poem of Thomson.

The poem was systematically revised and reshaped over the years by the poet. Thomson for his poem adopted a poetic design which could be expressive enough of seasonal progression. It also proved effective of expressing about the grandness and all inclusiveness of the natural order. The first part of the poem was titled *Winter*. *Summer* was the most substantial of the parts. The third is titled as *Spring*. The poem as it was updated, finally contained as many as 5,541 lines. Hugely popular, it was having numerous translations. It was highly influential on other European literature. In the poem, Thomson was particularly responsive to the effects of light and the centrality of agriculture upon the landscape. He sensitively expressed his wonders of the divine order which he felt being implicit in nature. He made a detailed observation of the workings of nature and imaginatively expressed his feelings over the diverse climates, contours and tropics. He referred to the harmony, which he felt being there in the exploitation of land by human (he felt it was part of a divine plan for creation being implicit in nature).

* Throughout the poem great emphasis was laid on the interrelationship between the country and the town. He wrote the poem with the conviction that national prosperity was tied to the agricultural wellbeing of the villages.
* Nature, according to him, is a great theatre of education. He suggested the therapeutic effects of the happy rustic environs on the denizens of London.
* Referring to nature, he insists on the cooperative functioning of civilization.
* In the poem mercantile enterprise is confidently interpreted as the crowning achievement of the harmonious interaction of man and nature. It is in this context that ‘The Spring’ concludes with a picture of a happy family.

The poem was conceived upon the hypothesis of an ordering principle behind the cosmic scheme (which he observes as the mainstay of Life). Through the poem, he attempted at reflecting upon the working of this vital force. From ‘Spring’ to ‘Winter’ it serves as an extended metaphor. The poem offers a broad view of the ultimate rightness of things by exploring the images of the vastness, the delicacy, and the multifariousness of the cosmos.

William Wordsworth:

* William Wordsworth (1770-1850) in his poetics affirms the greatness of nature in terms of the heights of woods, blasts of waterfalls, unbridled clouds, torrents of rain, and raving streams:

“…all like workings of the mind, the features/Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree, Characters of the great Apocalypse,/The types and symbols of eternity,/Of first and last and midst and without end.”

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin”.

* In Wordsworth’s landscape of nature, objects and places are nexuses of memory and desire, hope or nostalgia. To Wordsworth, nature and humanity have an affinity. For the Romantics, natural objects could be symbols, in the sense: meanings are flashed transparently through them.
* In his ‘Lyrical Ballads’(1798), he says he has chosen to describe ‘humble and rustic life’ because in that condition ‘the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity” and because they “speak a plainer and more empathic language”. The humble and rustic life is more nearer to the nature and hence the expressions of passions and values of people from such life stand apart from those of an exclusively aristocratic or urban civilization.
* His birth and early education in the mountainous north-western counties of England which contain the Lake District, gave him, he believed, a particularly acute sensitivity to wild nature and to the cooperative workings of humankind and nature. His political and social ideas too grew in accordance with the patterns of mutual responsibility he observed in rural contexts.
* His emotion was uniquely stimulated by nature and it roused in him many moral and social questionings. He witnessed how the urban industrialization was compounding the divisions in the human society. And the social questionings presented by the French Revolution and the integrity found in the world of nature made him to be deeply concerned with the acute class division of the human society.
* His long autobiographical poem: ‘The Prelude’ insists on the morally educative value of nature, and on the interrelationship of a love of nature and a love of humanity. The poem records the ‘growth of a poet’s mind’. It records certain crucial incidents of the poet’s life that had contributed substantially to the shaping of the poet’s mind. His experiences both amidst nature (when he was a child) and amidst the teeming confusion of London (as an adolescent) had enough of influences in the destiny of him as a poet.
* Wordsworth’s ‘Lyrical Ballads’ has been taken generally to mark the beginning of the Romantic Movement.
* His ‘Tintern Abbey’ is important in giving one of the most succinct of Wordsworth’s accounts of the development of his attitude to nature (moving from the animal pleasure of childhood through adolescent passion for the wild and gloomy to adult awareness of the relation of our perception of the natural world to our sense of the human and moral world).
* In his ‘Preface’ he records the moments of perception and emotion in context of poetic expressions. He states a special joy arises in his mind out of his recognition of the principle of correspondences between the mind of man and external nature( man and nature are essentially adapted to each other and the mind of man is naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature. Nature, the individual, and human life in general are related).

The following excerpt from the Preface of *The Excursion* is reflective of all the above:

“On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life,/Musing in solitude, I oft perceive/ Fair trains of imagery before me rise,/Accompanied by feelings of delight/ Pure, or with no unpleasing sadness mixed; And I am conscious of affecting thoughts/ And dear remembrances, whose presence soothes/ Or elevates the Mind, intent to weigh/The good and evil of our mortal state./--To these emotions, whencesoever’s they come,/Whether from breath of outward circumstance,/Or from the Soul—an impulse to herself--/I would give utterance in numerous verse.”