

Alice Oswald's 'Space' for the Environment

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Received: May 10, 2018

Accepted: June 19, 2018

ABSTRACT

The problems of environment are discussed so much in the present times. This paper aims at how a poet deals with the environmental issues. Theory and practice of solving problems are different but if one takes it as simply as getting joy from nature it becomes so easy to practice those theoretical things. More over it becomes one's medium to understand the self and nature. Alice Oswald has beautifully put a woman's feelings to nature. The poem (Horace) is having wonderful narration and bears excellent creativity.

Keywords: Alice Oswald, Woman in a Mustard Field, Environment, attitude to nature, coming to 'sense'

A day turns and a new talk is in the air to save the environment. Since long efforts have been made for the same purpose and still are being carried out. Though things have been told and done at the root of all the environmental problems mankind is there. The very thing hasn't been understood or realised. This is the time when environmental crisis is deep and is it has become a medium for menace to mankind. Man also has learnt his mistake and hence he has become aware to such a terrible issue. In reality if Mankind becomes sensible to himself automatically he would get sense to take care of nature and environment.

Alice Oswald is considered one of the greatest living English poets. She has also many honours that give its proof. She has won many acclaimed awards and prizes for her collections. She is not a merely a traditional Romantic poet but a poet with the environmental perspectives and they remain at the core of her works. She has till now brought out seven collection of poems. Her poetry is based on places and her surroundings.

The first one 'The Thing in the Gap-Stone stile' is a collection of rustic pictures. The second one 'Dart' is a long poem based on the river Dart. It is a great river epic. The 'Woods etc.', is again a picture of the natural world. 'Weeds and Wild Flowers' and 'A Sleepwalk on the Severn' have elements of flora and fauna and her sensibilities towards them. 'Memorial', is a recreation of the Homeric poem 'Iliad', and 'Falling Awake' is her latest collection.

Alice has an open eye to the objects of nature. We find frost and field, sea and moon, village and valley, stones and flowers, rain and clouds, countryside and wood and so on. The way she looks at them these objects find different existence. Rather her attitude to them is revealed differently. Her purpose isn't just to describe them. Her concern for her surrounding is seen. That concern can be named as environmental awareness. Things are out in such a way that hardly that concern is seen but if we look deeply it is revealed. Her purpose is melted down in such a way that only artistic creation comes before us. The whole collection is having a touch of this attitude. She has been recognised as 'a distinctive new voice.' (Faber and Faber)

This concern is expressed in one of Alice Oswald poems, 'Woman in a Mustard Field'. How simple is the matter! But mankind has confused it. What words and lectures and so many things can't do, is done by a very simple poem. Here's the piece:

From love to light my element
 was altered when I fled
 out of your house to meet the space
 that blows about my head.
 The sun was rude and sensible,
 the rivers ran for hours
 and whoops I found a mustard field
 exploding into flowers;
 and I slowly came to sense again
 the thousand forms that move
 all summer through a living world
 that grows without your love. (Oswald 16)

The poem begins with a paradox. She is altered 'from love to light'. The term love and light don't stand in contradiction but they are placed here in that manner. Love is good but for the narrator light is better and more important. Love stands for heart and 'light' stands for knowledge. It means she pays attention to understanding rather than the matter of emotions. But what was that she changed? The answer is found in two phrases which explain her process – 'your house' and 'my head'.

When a man lives in his own home there's no problem but sometimes he dwells into some other person's home. Then it is but natural that he would house that person's ideas, or he may be influenced by him. He loses his reason. His head does not remain his head. One needs to come out of it. The narrator has understood this very thing so she needs her own space to occupy. A critic A. Karhio says that is human to comeback to one's belief.

The narrator had certain beliefs and she lived accordingly. But her attitude is changed when she comes across a mustard field. A small object of nature is enough to change oneself. The narrator remarks, 'and whoops I found a mustard field/ exploding into flowers'. One enjoys the reality when one realises the truth. Her language of that joy is expressed in her utterance. In an article of Jesuit Organisation the narrator's change is described as "The experience of unceasing flux is one of those truths whose power has been diminished by the cliché we have formed around it: 'change is the only constant'. Good poetry shreds that dead chrysalis of language and gives the truth new words with which to clothe itself."

Again there's paradox regarding the sun. It is 'rude and sensible'. If one thinks about himself than the hot sun may look rude, according to our attitude but it is sensible. It is the mankind that has changed the world scenario. The sun has always illumined the world. It has always given life to the universe. It has always its extended warmth. Similarly look at the rivers. They have their natural rhythm and run for hours as usual without stopping. The rivers have changed their course or gone dry because Man has disturbed them.

The joy of returning to one's own self – is beyond anything. The narrator's joy also knows no boundary. The word 'whoop' indicates that condition. Through a small natural scene she returns to her 'space' and 'head'. She found before her mustard field that exploded into flowers. The poem brings a new experience in a different way: "The experience of unceasing flux is one of those truths whose power has been diminished by the cliché we have formed around it: 'change is the only constant'. Good poetry shreds that dead chrysalis of language and gives the truth new words with which to clothe itself..." (Koblitz)

The last stanza elevates the poem. The narrator's learning is conveyed very simply. She comes to the 'sense' - the sense of being herself, the sense of her own space. The adverbial 'again' is very strong to convey this message. Like the mustard field there are thousands of forms around us and beyond us. For a while it may confuse the reader that she is talking of summer forms and things are limited to that season only but that is not the case at all. What one finds in the summer is the same for all the forms and all the other seasons as well. The phrase 'a living world' then clarifies this confusion. Things grow without man's love. The words 'your love' stand for the person where she lived or the ideas she had housed. But they stand for mankind as it is concern of the mankind to come out of the narrow ideas of 'loving' the nature. In reality the nature doesn't need such feelings or concern. What man has to do is to let the things remain as they were. Surely they will grow undisturbed on their own.

How many movements and how much funds have been spent to preserve the environment! But the solution is simple. Through a small piece she could do it. There are only three stanzas each of a quatrain and each quatrain running into an 'abab' rhyme scheme.

The poem is exemplary of the poet's attitude towards the nature. She hasn't adored it simply like the romantic poets. She is aware of the world and poetic ways and that she has brought for the humanity. Poetry should be 'at once delighting and teaching' than here is such a piece.(Horace 178).

Works Cited

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