

## 7. Keats' Attitude Towards Nature

Q. Comment on the role of nature in the Odes by Keats.  
(PU-2018)

Keats is one of the greatest lovers and admirers of nature. In his poetry, we come across **exquisitely beautiful descriptions** of wonderful sights and scenes of nature. He looks at the objects of nature with child-like delight and his whole being is thrilled by what he sees and hears. As Stopford Brook says.

"He had a way of fluttering in butterfly fashion from one object to another, touching for the moment the momentary charm of each thing. Everything in nature for him is full of wonder and mystery, the rising sun, the moving cloud, the growing bud and the swimming fish".

His early poems are the witness of his sensuousness and keenness for the colours, beauty, smell, and sounds of the objects of nature around him.

Keats is not only the poet of nature; in fact, all the romantics love and appreciate nature with an equal ardour. The difference is that Keats' love for nature is **purely sensuous**, he loves the beautiful sights and scenes of nature for their own sake, "**with him no considerations of theology, humanity or metaphysics mingle with nature**", while all the other romantics see ethical, moral or spiritual meanings in nature. For example, Wordsworth sees the spirit of God behind nature, a guide and universal mentor, similarly, Coleridge adds strangeness to the beauty of nature by giving supernatural touch. On the other hand, Shelley intellectualizes nature and sees spirit of love and liberty behind it. Byron is interested in the vigorous aspects of nature and he uses nature for the purpose of satire on the society.

So, the attitude of all other romantics towards nature is complex, but **Keats' attitude towards nature is simple**. He derives unalloyed and pure pleasure in nature. He does not seek



any spiritual, moral or mystical meaning in it. He loves nature for its own sake, not for the sake of anything else rather he describes it as he sees it. He loves flowers because of their sweet fragrance and beautiful colour; he loves the streams because of the music they create; he loves all objects of nature because of their inherent loveliness. According to Arther Compton Rickett:

**"the colour scene, the touch, the pulsing music;  
These are the things that stir him to his depth."**

He indulges in the world of natural beauty to **forget his personal sorrows**. As in the "Ode to Nightingale", Nightingale and the poet become one, the soul of the poet sings in the bird which is the symbol of joy. The song of the birds transfers him into the world of imagination and he forgets his personal sorrows in the happy world of the nightingale, he says:

**"Fade for away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leave hast never known,  
The weariness the fever, and the fret."**

Similarly, in "Ode to Autumn" he loses himself in the loveliness of autumn. He lives wholly in the present and does not look back to the past or forward into the future. In that state of mind, he asks:

**"Where are the song of spring? Ay where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too".**

Keats' observation of Nature is very keen and minute. His nature pictures are vivid, detailed and elaborated. There are some inspired moments, when the present beauty of nature with all its sensuous appeal gives him a mystical experience of deeper reality. In "Ode to Nightingale" he, like a mystic, has glimpses and says:

**"Thou was not born for death, immortal Bird,  
No hungry generations tread thee down".**

He loves the calm repose in nature. Shelly loves the dynamic, changing aspects of nature in the flux, but Keats loves the "seeming sleep of Nature". Keats' description of nature is very beautiful and he, in fact, paints the pictures with



his words. Like Spencer, he has great pictorial quality. Keats describes things with beautiful images and it seems as if he touches them, taste them, hear them and even smells them, in "Ode to Nightingale", he says:

Fast fading violets covered up in leaves  
And mid May's eldest child  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy, wine  
The murmurous hunts of flies on summer eves.

Another quality of Keats, as a poet of nature, is that he often presents the objects of nature as living beings, with a life of their own, he **personifies the objects of nature**. He looks at nature like the Greeks, e.g., he never sees an oak without beholding the Dryad; the forests are haunted by Pans and Satyrs; and sea is hunted by the Naiads. For him, the moon is Cynthia, and the sun is Apollo. In 'Ode to Autumn', he says,

"Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor?  
The hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;"

To **sum up**, we can say that Keats is basically a sensuous poet and he loves nature for her own sake, he seeks to live in nature and to be incorporated with one beautiful thing after another. For Keats, nature remains a perennial source of poetry and joy.

### Points to remember:

1. Introduction.
2. Keeness of colours.
3. Other romantics.
4. Simple attitude towards nature.
5. Compton Rickett's views.
6. Ode to Nightingale.
7. Ode to Autumn.
8. He loves the calm repose in Nature.
9. He personifies nature.
10. Conclusion.

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