

Concept of Love in the Poetry of Bhitai and Browning

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Abstract

This paper investigates theme of love in the poetry of Sindhi poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai and Victorian poet Robert Browning. It is a comparative study for which qualitative method and Inter textual analysis technique is used. In their love poetry, they do share some similar concepts such as optimism, self-denial, hope, consistency and intensity. Furthermore, their different concepts about love are also presented.

Keywords: *Women, Love, Separation, Confession, Poetry*

1. Introduction

1.1. Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai

Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai is a mystic Sindhi poet, who belonged to late 17th and early 18th century, his '*verses are incomparable in the world of poetry*', (Akram Ansari: 2003) He was born at Hala Haveli, exact date of birth and death is controversial but most scholars agree that he was born in 1689 and died in 1752. His great grandfather Shah Abdul Karim of Bulri is also a renowned Sindhi poet Syed Habib Shah lived in Hala but when Shah Latif was born so he moved to Kotri and this is the place where Shah Bhitai fell in love with Mirza Mughal's daughter. He could not get out of this infatuation and started his journey. He wandered for three years, and after that went Thatta and met Makhdoom Mohemmed Moen and under his influence became a Sufi. When he came back got married to Bibi Sayyada; the same lady he was deeply in love with. Later he retired to Bhit and spent his last years there. In the year 1752, he called his disciples and asked them to sing Raga Sohni; he wrapped himself in a white cloth and went to his Hujra only to be found dead after 3 days.

1.2. Robert Browning

Robert Browning is a well-known Victorian poet; who is famous for his robust optimism and skillful use of dramatic monologue. He was born in London in 1812, and died in 1889 at the age of 77 in Italy. Since childhood he was an ardent lover of Greek poetry. Till age of fourteen he went to a school later he studied under the supervision of a private tutor. At the age of 17 he attended Greek class at University College and finally decides to be a poet. He was immensely influenced by the poetic works of Byron and Shelley. Browning was very much interested in the poetry of Elizabeth Barret, their friendship started and ripened into a deep love. *“Actually, she was the permanent shower of inspiration for Browning’s spiritual and intellectual strength. She was the real and only thundering force behind the full-ripe and mature genius of Browning”*. Writes (Shrivastava: 1974 p.1). They eloped and lived an ideal life in Florence. Browning has a son as well. But his happiness vanished soon with the death of his mother and later wife. He managed to raise his only son and got a good reputation as a poet. He died at his son’s home and buried in Poet’s corner in Westminster Abbey.

Both literary luminaries lived in a different age, have different culture, religion, lifestyle; yet when it comes to the concept of love in poetry they do walk on similar road. This paper will highlight meeting points of these two poets particularly on the treatment of love theme. Apart from that it will focus on various aspects of love that one can find in the poetic works of Bhitai and Browning.

2. Methodology

The paper is qualitative in nature, inter textual analysis technique is used to find out the similar as well as dissimilar poetic ideas. The first part discusses the meeting points of both writers on the concept of love, whereas the second part depicts miscellaneous love concepts in their poetry.

3. Analysis

On theme of love both writers have similar concepts. The style of each is distinct but the thought and idea is same.

3.1. Optimism and Hope

In Shah Bhitai's poetry there is always a strong sense of hope and optimism. Come may what one should never be hopeless. This bright side of life is the key note of Bhitai's poetry. Life is full of tragedies, but Bhitai has never given darker side of the picture. In Sur Umer Maarui, when Maarui is forcibly separated from her people so not for a minute she loses her hope, although she is in the shackles of Umer, yet she has hope. *Latif is a poet of Hope and his Heroines never surrender at the altar of despondency.* Her hope is further elevated when she thinks that if in case she does not go to her place back so her dead body will surely reach there. *“she is all alone in the prison in shackles and chains and there is no one to help her; even then she is optimistic and hope that this dry season will pass...we will meet O! Beloved.”* (Agha Saleem: 2005)

م ڪي روءِ، م رڙ ڪي، هنجون هڏ م هار،
 تو تان بندُ بدا ٿيو، پڙيون نئي پار،
 پهچنديءَ، پنو هار! سگهي سنگهارن ڪي.

Weep not, cry not, shed no tears,

You have been set free, burn all your chains,

O herdsman, you will reach your kinsman very soon. (p.338)

In the same way hope is the key note of Browning's poetry, almost in all his poems he has given the concept of optimism. He is aware of the fact that life is not perfect there are always ups and downs in the life but it is hope that one should always hold. In this regard Shrivastava says,

“In many of Browning's poems the element of hope finds its full play. In many cases, the lovers are rejected by their beloved but as a result they do not lose their heart, rather they act much forcefully. In dejection, they do not surrender themselves completely to frustration on the contrary by such failure they store food for their future success.”

In poem *The Last Ride Together*, Browning has given the concept of hope as life is the name of struggle, everyone works hard to achieve what he wants to get but

it's only a few who truly reaches to their goal. So one should never lose hope, optimistic attitude towards life will open all locked doors. Success and failure are indivisible parts of human life but one should never stop struggling.

Fail, I alone, In words and deeds?

Why, all men strive and who succeeds?

3.2. Self-denial

Love is the name of self-denial, true love means to negate ones ego. It is only beloved that matters. Shah Latif's Sur Sorath gives concept of trance-like love. "*Strings evoked love*" (p.193) in Deaach's heart, he has no choice then to give the Bard what he has asked him i.e. his head. Deaach is so ecstatic that he thinks of nothing but the pleasure and trance like feeling he has been experiencing so for that he is ready to sacrifice himself as well. Concept of self-denial is given when he says; "*the real existence is non-existence.*" "*it seems beheading of the king is not physical but symbolic. It symbolizes obliteration of ego. The king achieves the state of self-denial through music and thus exists in non-existence.*" (Agha Saleem: 2005)

In Shah Latif's poetry, concept of self-denial is very much there. Time and again it is said by him that a lover and beloved are not two separate beings but one. Through self-denial lovers do get a perfect communion. Both are inseparable from each other there is no any "I" but "We".

ڪشي ڪان ڪمان ما، ميان مار م مون،

مون ۾ آهين تون، متان تنهنجو ئي تو کي لڳي (p.164)

Don't withdraw your sword and don't point to murder me, my
dear,

You reside in me, so you may hit yourself. (Mubarak Ali
Lashari: 2014)

The same concept of self-denial is given in Browning's poem "*A woman's last word*", where a husband and wife are so exhausted after arguments and wife finally surrenders herself spiritually and physically to him. Through self-denial, one can reach to the attainment of true love. If there is a fight of "I" then true love

can never exist, it is through curbing the very self, one can reach to the highest level of love.

*Teach me, only teach, Love
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think they thought---
Meet, if thou require it,
Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands. (L 21-28)*

So it is only love that she wants to experience, she is ready to own the very thought and speech of her beloved, she has entirely surrendered herself for the sake of true love.

3.3. Consistency in Love

Bhitai and Browning both has given the concept of consistent love. As Shakespeare says, the course of true love never did run smooth. So the road of love is full of disappointments, pangs of separation, agonies, sleepless nights, long lasting wait, despair, obstacles and so on. A true lover must be consistent in his love. He should not step back once he is into the premises of love. In Sur Umer Maarui, it is Maarui's consistency of love for her native people that forced Umer to give up; she is shown all strong in her will power, she is ready to die even but not to surrender. That consistency is the very essence of true love. (Elsa Qazi: 1996)

جنڪر اينڪچجا، ورساھيڙ يونسي!
اتاڪندياھيان، منهنماروھجي،
پڪنسينن ٿپاڙيان، ھنڌ ھتيجاھي
(p.237). اھلاباٽڪي، مريشالمھايين

*Blessed are my mates, who wear glass bangles on their wrists,
I yearn for the hut of my beloved,*

I cannot equate these palaces with our cottages,

I want to keep up the ancestral tradition unto death.

Again in Sur Leela Chanesar, Bhitai is asking Leela to be constant in Love. He asks her not to lose hope and continuously remain hopeful; she will surely get her love back one day.

جي ليلائي نه لهين، ته پڻ لپلاج،

آسر ۾ لاهيج سڄڻ پاڄهندڙ گهڻو. (p.56)

If he is not moved by your entreaties,

Persisit in your entreaties,

Do not give up hope,

The Beloved is immensely merciful.

Browning also believes love to be consistent. As in the poem *Life in a Love*, a lover is there who is rejected by his beloved yet he is shown all consistent; he is least careful about the refusal of the beloved he has hope that she will accept him as her soul mate one day. He is not ready to leave her and says that he will love her as long as he lives.

Escape me?

Never-

Beloved!

While I am I, and you are you,

So long as the world contains us both,

Me the loving and you the loath. (L-1-6)

So lover is willing to give unconditional love to his beloved. Shrivastava writes, “Browning puts forth the thought that the true and sincere love never goes in vain or unrewarded. If the love of the lovers is really sincere and true, their unsuccesses do not matter at all, they will get their reward in the other world of heaven.”

Again in the poem *The Last Ride Together* we can see the concept of consistent love. Although it is their last ride yet his love and hope of reunion gives feeling of consistent love. It would be right to rephrase this poem as *Ever last Ride Together*, because the way Browning uses the words and thoughts in this poem they all talk about the everlasting hope of being together come may what. In the first line when poet calls her “*dearest*” this is a superlative term; normally people end their relationship with fights, verbal missiles and blame game but here the word *dearest* shows the unending love that is breeding in the heart of poet. He is blessing his beloved,

My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness! (Ibid L 6-7)

So he will respect her and will be proud of her throughout his life, furthermore, he is of the opinion that may be here in this world they can not materialize their love, but in here after they will have an everlasting communion. For him heaven is life at its best, so in heaven he hopes they will be together and share eternal union.

What if we still ride on, we two,
With life forever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity,-
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, forever ride? (Ibid L 105-110)

3.4. Love knows no boundaries

Love is such a feeling that can never be bound by caste, creed, religion, race, status or any such trivial thing. Because they are all worldly things where as love is an internal, emotional and spiritual force that hit hard to blow away all such ordinary things.

Same thing we can see in Shah Bhitai's Sur Kamoad, when king Jam Tamachi is deeply in love with a poor fisherman's daughter named Noori. It is love that makes Tamachi forget all the pleasures of his palace, he is least careful about status difference whereas Noori does know this fact and says,

تونسمونائونگندري، مون ۾ عينجو،

(p.11) !پسيراٿينرو، متانماگر مٿئين

You are sama king, I am a Gandri fisher maid, the embodiment

Of all imperfections,

*Perceiving the beautiful faces of your queens see that you
do not turn away from me.*

But Noori's all insecurities are removed when Jam Tamachi choses her as her chief queen and rejects all other queens for in the love of Noori there is humbleness, simplicity, submissiveness.

ڪو ۽ سميون! ٻن سومريون! جياچناو چيڳاٽ،

ورسيڪنج هر جايون! جنتماچيجينيات،

(p.23) راڻينملانرات، ماڻڪميرايو

Fie on Samma and Soomra queens who walk about haughtily,

*Blessed are the Keenjhar born girls who all the time remember
Tamachi.*

In one night the fisher girl won the Jam over all the queens.

So Jam does not care about the status of Noori that she is poor and wears stinky clothes he can only see love in her eyes and that is more than anything else in this world.

Moving on to Browning's poem Evelyn Hope, he has presented one sided love story of 16 years beloved and 48 years old lover. 'This poem enshrines the highest expression of Browning's faith and philosophy in the power of love.' (Shrivastava:1947 p.1).

When the poem opens the girl is dead and the man is sad and he shares his feeling with readers. He himself is aware of the huge age difference as he says,

Sixteen years old, when she died...

It was not her time to love.

And our paths in the world diverged so wide.(L 9-11-22)

He knows this very fact that they can never be one; yet his love for that teen age girl is all unconditional. Age can never get hold on the bursting emotions that he is feeling. She is younger than the lover yet he loves her intensely and makes his love everlasting by placing a leaf in her hand that when she wakes up in hereafter she will “remember, and understand.” Browning does believe that love knows no boundaries. (L 56)

3.5. Miscellaneous love concepts of Bhitai and Browning

There are so many concepts that one can find in the poetic works of Bhitai and Browning.

a) Intensity of Love

When it comes to love, Shah Latif speaks of it as all powerful, if you have love you don't need any other thing but if you don't have it then you may have all worldly pleasures nothing can please you. Absence of beloved is such an incurable pang that lover only longs for beloved to be one. In Sur Moomal Ranu, Moomal shows her desperation as;

یتہ جو جیول! کاتیار یکا کری!

آئو ناگھینا ہیان، بدیتہن جیبول

تو کیسار یسپرین! رنمنج ہر تول،

تکاتا ٺول، وس ٺمونو ہٹیا.

Go not to Dhatt, disgrace not Kaak.

I am bound to you by your word of love since creation,

Thinking of you I shed tears of blood in the palace,

Believe me, everything is a poison for me without you. (p.129)

Intensity of love creates restlessness, it is in the very nature of love to be restless. It is a heart to heart, soul to soul connection; that has nothing to do with worldly bonds. Physically lovers may remain miles apart but their soul and heart is always connected with the same cord. As Latif puts it,

راڻي سندن روح ۾، پسو! پڳه پيوم،
 پيڙيءَ جنن ٻڌي ويو، سوڀو ساھ سندنوم،
 وهڻ وه ٿيوم، جاڳيو ٿي، جر هاريان.

Look the cord of Ranoo's love is fastened to my soul,

As boat is fastened with rope to shore,

So has he fastened my heart to himself,

Rest is impossible, I remain awake and shed tears. (p.136)

b) Love leads towards Perfection

Lover covers up all our mistakes. As no one is perfect but it is a lover that gives us the feeling of being perfect. He takes all our shortcomings as if they are his own. It is he, who polishes us by showing us our worth, encouraging us and covering our all faults before world. This very fact is known by Shah Bhitai in Sur Moomal Rano as he puts it,

راڻا! هيس ريءَ، تو سائينءَ مون سون ڪيو،
 منهنجي مداين جو، هال اٿئي هيءَ،
 ڊوليا! ڍڪڻ ٿيءَ، ڪامل! ڪچاين جو.

I was like a raw metal, you made gold of me,

All my shortcomings are there for you to see,

O my love, be kind and cover all my blemishes,

I bound myself to you lest you may confront me with my faults.

(p.142)

c) Love is Relative

As John Keats says that beauty lies in the eyes of beholder similarly Deaach praising Bard's music is astounded that he says, the music that enchanted him so deeply, it makes no effect on the bard himself, so, love or admiration towards anything is relative, one thing that attracts one person so deeply may be so mediocre for the other.

چارڻ! تنهنجي چنگ جو، عجب آھم اي،
 ھڻي اڀو ھڻن سين، جنرو رکيو جي،
 رات منهنجو ريءُ، کائيو تو ڪماچ سين.

There is something wondrous about your fiddle,

You play it with your hands and remain unscathed,

But when you played it last night, it pierced my heart. (p.195)

d) Carpe Diem

Browning in the poem *The Last Ride Together* gives the concept of carpe diem that is to live the very moment. He does not want to waste his time in thinking of past that what had happened, or in the future that what might happen, it is the very moment that he want to live fully .He is only focused in present movement; gives least importance to past. For him the present moment is all to live and feel joy for; as he says;

Here we are riding, she and I.

He has repeatedly uttered such words as “here we ride”, “and here we are riding”, “we began to ride”, “we rode.” (Peena Thankay: 2014 p. 173)

The emphasis on this very ride shows concept of carpediem. That means seize the day because future is not known why to waste time in spoiling the present moment with negative thoughts of past and future. It is the end that matters, for Browning he has been given an extraordinary end because he is with his beloved. For him others' ends are as trivial as their means. As he says;

My riding is better, by their leave.

Conclusion

The above discussion shows Shah Bhitai and Robert Browning does have their differences when it comes to the era they belonged to, the place they live, the culture and life style they adopt. Yet, when it comes to love theme there are many concepts in which they do have similarities. Such as consistency in love, self-denial, kill ones ego, love needs no boundaries and so on. Apart from that that their love themes are so vast, almost all the areas of love they have discussed in their poetry. It can be concluded that one can find love at its best in the poetry of Shah Bhitai and Robert Browning.

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