

Waris Shah and William Shakespeare-the Poets of Passion

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Abstract:

A poet is a person who more often than not looks beyond the barriers of time and space. The hallmark of pure poetry is the height of imagination; imagination which generates vision. Vision is the insight to see beyond the concrete, the physical. The journey from physical to metaphysical shapes the focus of the poets to say the unsaid and unsay able with quite ease. This marks the universality in art. The suppression of art is not a new phenomenon. The powerful and civilized have always used the tools of civilization to colonize the ever sounding universal thought on one hand whereas erected barriers between the vision and universal art to mark the superiority of their self on the other.

The present paper will explore the thematic unity, similarities and dissimilarities in approach of two great writers; Waris Shah and William Shakespeare. Despite their social, cultural geographical and religious differences, there is much which they share as common because of the universality in literature. In this research the critical comparison of the two writers has been tried in order to find out the outweighing genius of the one over the other. This study makes use of socio-cultural, literary and theoretical perspectives to unveil the matter. It is a text based literary research with thematic approach also using secondary sources (criticism) with analytical research design

Keywords: Waris Shah, Willam Shakespeare, Poets of Passion, Thematic Comparison

Introduction

Poetry is initially a matter of self expression. There is no room for doubt that poetry is a sheer product of poet's inner vision. Intangible process of reticent emotions takes root in the inner "Utopia" of a soul. Soul confines this mime trait of entity to the deep recesses of mind. Whence it gushes out like an unchecked flow of words but in sequence and eventually this outburst of words and feelings takes the shape of poetry. Everyone deals with poetry with different idiosyncrasies of nature. This divine frenzy is purely an instinctive process. Therefore, words differentiate themselves and pace forth at different stages of thought.

Literature Review

Comparative literature is the most significant and universal tradition of postmodernism which involves inter-textuality on one hand whereas bringing together different cultures and nations together on account of universality in themes such as life and death, love, hatred, tyranny and injustice. Goethe terms this universality in literature as: "WELTLITERATUR." Goethe attempted to be in connection with foreign readings of literary masterpieces and stressed upon the same to his readers. Even in sub-continent Allama Iqbal's "Piam-e-Mashriq is the apt example that can be compared to Goethe's "Der Dewan." Many of the English novelists and poets imbibed influences and said to be compared with writers other than English. These writers not only acknowledged their debt to these alien sources but also their works manifested similarities with these. Many English novelists learnt from the nineteenth century Russian writers so these can be compared as James Joyce borrowed from Italo Svevo. Influence of Dante's "Divinia Comedia" on T.S Eliot which he has quoted in The Wasteland.

Comparative Analysis of the two Poets:

Poetry is purely the art of an introvert plummeting the depths of human psyche and exploring the frontiers and wastelands of the reality of "being". The question of form in poetry is not limited to the kind of meter and stanza pattern used. With pure poetry it means the inner structure of a piece of poetry; the underlying thematic thread. Poetry is a kinship between the felt experience and the resources of language whatever language it might be. Every language of the world is rich and fertile enough to entertain a literary enterprise either it is a Shakespearean poetic tragedy or a folk-lore verse of Waris Shah who is often called the Shakespeare of Punjabi literature. Having been mentally colonized we feel elated in ranking our legends like Waris Shah with western legends like Shakespeare. This Euro-centric approach, on one hand, is nothing short of inferiority complex while on the other hand it hampers the true spirit of criticism. Underestimation of one's own self always stems out of the overestimation of the other. Universality in poetry lies in level of profundity in imagination. Poetry exposes fully how possessed the soul of the poet is. Waris Shah writes in Heer:

*"Manter keel na janiyay doomnay da aiwain sutray nag na chairay ni Waris Shah jay pias na howay
ander sheeshay sharbatan de nahin bhairiay ni*

(don't fondle with the serpent of poetic imagination if you can't handle it

fully.If you have no thirst for knowledge in your soul, the wine of intuition is useless for you.)

No doubt, the subject matter in the poetry of Shakespeare and Waris Shah are almost the same, however, the art in handling the themes is totally different. One may say with assertion on close study that the poetic insight of Waris Shah is too deeper than Shakespeare. The former very

often tends to dwell upon intuition whereas the later commonly deals with mere imagination. Waris Shah was a well read person and the glimpses of his vast interdisciplinary knowledge can be seen from his verse. Serebryakov writes about Waris Shah:

"We can conjuncture that he was well acquainted with Persian literature. He mentioned Gulistan and Bostan by Sadi, Halikbari by Amir Khusro, Hikayat, Anwar-ul-Haq and other books. Hindu literature was also familiar to him....."1

The major theme of the two poets is the reality of life and death. Stronger than any other subject matter in poetry is this very theme that even the vicissitudes of literary taste and temper in the postmodern age have not weakened the appeal of it. Shakespeare altogether negates the physical importance of soul by saying that:

"O that this too, too sullied flesh would melt.

Thaw and resolve itself into dew."(Hamlet: 11.111)

The matter, however, is not the same with Waris Shah. With him life does not come to an end with resolving into dew. Man is not merely meant for melting after death. There is something more than this; some greater reality lurking behind the scene which Shakespeare completely fails to grasp. Waris Shah says about life; about body and soul in his famous epic Heer:

"Heer ruh te chak qalboot janou, Balnath aih pir banaya ee

punj pir hawas aih punj tairay, aithay ahlina kisay na paya ee."

(Heer has been portrayed in the story allegorically as soul whereas Ranjha as body.who part with each other temporarily and eventually unite after death. Your five senses are depicted in the epic as five saints who guide you about the life here and after.)

Again, he writes on the death of Heer and Ranjha:

"Dowain dar-e-fana thee wida huay, ja rupay ni dar-e-baqa mian."

(both Heer and Ranjha left this temporary world and reached in the eternal concrete world where they will never part with each other.

Waris Shah's treatment of the issue of life and death never tends to dwell upon nothingness.

The true art of a poet lies not in the thing that mere a surface reading would suffice to get in connection with his poetic genius; it lies in the fact that the genius of a poet should be multi-dimensional in its art and craft. Narang writes about Waris Shah:

" Not only the description of daily routine of the farmers , Waris Shah has given details of the different natural Phenomena. Different types of snakes, fruits, trees and natural remedies are also

mentioned by Waris Shah in his verse. It will not be an exaggeration if I say that the composition of Waris Shah is a mere ocean of the vast nature. Readers can get the few drops while jumping into the unending and measureless depth of Waris' poetry." 2

The poet is a person who very often does not say openly what he means to say. A poet is often in a state of fluctuation; a fluctuation between 'what is' and 'what is not.' This dilemma is quite essential for the beautification of a poetic fancy. A poet always takes great pains to form a balance between the 'things felt' and the 'things expressed'. It is quite clear from the mighty works of Shakespeare that he feels himself perplexed about some greater realities while handled in verse. He writes:

*"To be or not to be----- that is the question
whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
the slings and sorrows of outrageous fortune
or to take arms against the sea of troubles." (Hamlet: 111.11)*

Quite contrary is the matter with Waris Shah. He conceives his subject matter fully and is never disturbed about the expression. The beauty of his art lies in the simplicity of his style which often envelops some very somber and grave statements. He gives universal statements quite easily;

*"Ranjha akhda khiyal na pawu mairay, sup, sheenh, faqir da dais kiha
koonjan wang mamolian dais chaday, asan zat, qabeelra, khaish kiha
Watan daman de nal te zat jogi, sanun sak qabeelra khaish kiha
Jaihra watan te zat wal dhiyan rakhay, dunia dar he oh darwaish kiha."*

(Ranjha says, don't disturb me as I have no identity to tell you about me. I have just like birds, wild animals or gypsies who have no native place. I am a saint and saints neither have any identity nor do they make homes.")

The universality of art lies in its appeal to common man irrespective of culture, region and even religion. Waris Shah's Heer is the story of passions which are common in all. He shows the real picture of Punjab which was the abode of men living like human lot irrespective of the difference in their religions and creeds.

"For instance Ranjha, a muslim peasant, is shown to have been prevailed upon by Heer (also a muslim) to join the Hindu order of yogis, which he actually does. A Muslim Qazi hands over a Muslim married girl to a Hindu Jogi, disregarding disparity of their religious faiths." 3

Waris Shah's Heer is the criticism on the social evils of his time. "Waris Shah's Heer symbolized expression of man by man. She struggled to wrest her rights from a male-dominated society and corrupt state institutions." 4

A poet is a person who feels deeper than others; whose life is drenched in passions. A person who is devoid of passions and deeper feelings is never a great poet. It is not always necessary that every passionate statement should be the self experience of the poet meaning by that if a poet fully grasps the theme of love; it is not always the case that he himself be in love with someone. A poet is a person who merges himself in the feelings of others and makes every experience within his soul. Love is the supreme passion of love and a person cannot be considered a great poet if he fails to handle the very ideology of this universal theme. Waris Shah made his love epic Heer an enterprise of mysticism and followed the footsteps of Ibn-ul-Arbi about whom Reynold A. Nicolson, a professor of Arabic at Cambridge University writes:

*"Ibn-ul-Arbi went so far as to say that the most perfect vision of God is enjoyed by those who contemplate Him in woman."*5

On a close comparison of Heer Waris Shah with Romeo and Juliet as love tragedies there is no room left for doubt that Shakespeare completely fails to reach that zenith of art in handling the theme of love which Waris Shah easily attained. Waris Shah universalized the theme of love by making Heer a tale of Divine love; he used his characters as allegorical mouthpieces to vocalize Divinities whereas Romeo and Juliet is only an ordinary story of two lovers from common lot. No divine implication of celestial love is seen anywhere in the tale. It is merely a work of superficial ideas and flowery diction. Shakespeare writes in Romeo and Juliet:

" My bounty is as boundless as the sea

My love as deep: the more I give to thee

The more I have, for both are infinite."(11.11.133-5)

It is startling here that how can a universally acknowledged poet claims the infinity in love with a clear claim of " the more I give, the more I have." It is the mockery of divine status of love. Waris Shah's treatment of the theme of love encompasses the whole universe by infusing divine spirit in love of Heer and Ranjga. He writes:

" Ishq karn te taigh di dhar kapan nhin kam aih bhukhiyan nangian da jaihray maran so faqr theen hon waqif, nhin kam aih faqr theen sangiyan da

aithay thanun nhin arangiyan bangiyan da, faqr kam he saran tun langian da

Shoq, mehr te sidq yaqeen bahjhun, kaiha faida tukriyan mangiyan da

Waris Shah jo ishq de rang ratay, kandi ap he rangdian rangiyan da."

(To love and wield the sword are not vocation of lowly; those who die over a hundred anxieties cannot die lovers' death. This is not the work of mendicants and sophisters but that of saints who have lost their self and dyed themselves in the hues of love.)

Again Waris Shah writes:

"Ishq pir, faqeer da martaba he, mard ishq da bhala ranjool mian

Khilay tinhan de bagh qaloob ander jinhan kita he ishq qabool mian."

(Love is the status of selected ones ; saints and sufies. The heart of a lover is like a garden, those who embrace love are blessed with it.)

Moreover, Waris Shah's Heer is a document which celebrates the triumph of right over wrong. "Waris Shah transforms a love story into a saga of supreme resistance against tyranny."6

Conclusion:

Shakespeare used a broader canvas ; stories about far off lands and about mighty figures but even then he failed to universalize his themes as his treatment deals with surface and not the kernel of reality. On the contrary Waris Shah's art is local ; rural Punjab of his own time but he infused such a universal spirit in his themes that those became the very manifestation of greater realities and divine status. He used his poetry as a medium on one hand to teach the moral values to his people while on the other to unfold the mysteries of the universe through his mystic vision. Waris Shah is no doubt the great legend of art; the universal art. Serebryakov acknowledges Waris Shah's universality and truthfulness in these words.

*"Waris Shah paints a truthful picture of the Punjabi people and local scenery. Actual contemporary life is the fount from which he derived his aesthetic imagery and devices. His characters are generalizations of his contemporaries; the background is the events of his time."*7

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