

Hemchandra Goswami's Beloved's Letter and William Shakespeare's Sonnet 116: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract:

Hemchandra Goswami (1872-1928), representing a vibrant voice- being one amongst the Romantic-trio of Jonaki Era of Assamese literary world establishing a new spirit and William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the greatest dramatist and poet of the Elizabethan Age of British literary world predicate ample scope to investigate exploring various literary aspects though belonging to diverse world spatially and temporally. So, here in this research paper it is endeavoured to make a comparative analysis of the two poets considering chiefly the dominant thematic aspect of love along with stylistic aspects characterizing the poetic world of both the poets like style and form with reference to the two specific poems Hemchandra Goswami's Priyotomar chithi translated as The Beloved's Letter and Shakespeare's Sonnet 116. The passion of love emanates from human heart as spontaneous expression and therefore its literary manifestation is very obvious in any genre of literature-whether it is poetry, novel, drama, short story or any other. The theme of love has a universal appeal- from temporal point of view, this theme is found in the creations of any age as well as its prominence in the creations of all literary manifestations irrespective of space such as in British, American, Indian, Assamese etc. Moreover, Hemchandra Goswami's The Beloved's Letter is regarded as the first Assamese sonnet and Shakespeare's sonnets have always been widely acclaimed and acknowledged as the classic creation. So, understanding of the two sonnets belonging to diverse space and time would be an impelling force to negotiate the ideas impartially and scientifically which may have a substantial bearing on the existing knowledge. Thus, this paper is an attempt to make a comparative analysis of these two literary stalwarts exploring the literary realm of Hemchandra Goswami and William Shakespeare particularly taking into account The Beloved's Letter by Hemchandra Goswami and Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare.

Keywords: Thematic Aspect, Comparative Analysis, Stylistic Aspect, Sonnet

INTRODUCTION

“Without the support of humanities, Area Studies can still only transgress frontiers, in the name of crossing borders; and, without a transformed Area Studies, Comparative Literature remains imprisoned within the borders it will not cross.” (Spivak,7)

So said by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak while talking about interdisciplinarity of Comparative Literature in her significant work *Death of a Discipline*. This paper is intended to open up the ‘borders’ rather than ‘imprisoning’ taking within its purview the sonnets of two literary stalwarts from diverse background. So,

in this research paper it is endeavoured to make a comparative analysis of the two poets considering chiefly the dominant thematic aspect of love along with stylistic aspects characterizing the poetic world of both the poets like style and form with reference to the two specific poems Hemchandra Goswami's *Priyotomar chithi* translated as *The Beloved's Letter* and William Shakespeare's *Sonnet 116*. Hemchandra Goswami (1872-1928) was one of the foremost literary luminaries of twentieth century Assam representing a vibrant voice. Being one amongst the Romantic-trio- of Jonaki Era of Assamese literary world, he was one of the progenitors of establishing a new literary spirit in Assamese literature. With his only anthology *Fulor Chaki*, he marks a brilliant imprint in the poetic world of Assam with his powerful expression and versatility. On the other hand, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was the greatest dramatist and poet of the world. His dramas numbering thirty-seven in all including tragedies, comedies and historical plays offer us an infinite variety of characters. His sonnets numbering Hundred and fifty-four in all published originally in his 'quarto' in the year 1609 represent his unique lyric grace. Thus, the present study would be a comparative analysis of Hemchandra Goswami's *The Beloved's Letter* and William Shakespeare's *Sonnet 116*.

Objective

This paper aims to explore the dominant thematic aspect of love along with stylistic aspects characterizing the poetic world of Hemchandra Goswami and William Shakespeare with reference to the two specific sonnets Goswami's *The Beloved's Letter* and Shakespeare's *Sonnet 116*. The passion of love emanates from human heart as spontaneous expression and therefore its literary manifestation is very obvious in any genre of literature-whether it is poetry, novel, drama, short story or any other. The theme of love has a universal appeal- from temporal point of view this theme is found in the creations of any age as well as its prominence is observed in most of the literary manifestations irrespective of space such as British, American, Indian, Assamese etc. Moreover, Hemchandra Goswami's *The Beloved's Letter* is regarded as the first Assamese sonnet and Shakespeare's sonnets have always been widely acclaimed and acknowledged as the classic creation. So, understanding of the two sonnets belonging to diverse space and time would be an impelling force to negotiate the ideas impartially and scientifically which may have a substantial bearing on the existing knowledge. Thus, the basic objective of this paper is to make a comparative analysis of these two literary stalwarts exploring the literary realm of Hemchandra Goswami and William Shakespeare particularly taking into account *The Beloved's Letter* by Hemchandra Goswami and *Sonnet 116* by William Shakespeare.

Hypothesis: This research paper would work on the hypothetical statement that Sonnets of both the poets though from distant land would represent the universal appeal of love thereby hinging its thematic concern. Beyond its affinity, it is also postulated and observed that structurally the sonnet *The Beloved's Letter* is written in Petrarchan rhyme scheme and *Sonnet 116* is purely Shakespearean or Elizaethan.

Relevance of the Study: At this moment of globalization to thrive in a globalized world Comparative analysis is the need of the hour. Because, universal appeal of literature is instrumental to create a world of universal brotherhood through the literary fraternity born out of literary expression and analysis. So, it is significant and substantial to study Hemchandra Goswami's *Priyotomar chithi* translated as *The Beloved's Letter* and Shakespeare's *Sonnet 116* using the strategy of comparative analysis considering chiefly the dominant thematic aspect of love along with stylistic aspects characterizing the poetic world.

It posits ample scope to illuminate the 'local' comparing with the global and here lies the relevance of the study.

Methodology: While interpreting, Comparative method is adopted. For this purpose, both similarities and differences are taken into consideration regarding thematic and other technical aspects:

"...comparative literature, by extension, constructs metaphors of reading, models of how to interpret texts and cultures between languages and nations. Such metaphors may provisionally be broken into groups: those indicating connection or similarity, and those indicating disconnection or difference." (Hutchinson, P7)

Moreover, besides analyzing the primary texts, some relevant secondary texts are also consulted for proceeding towards a meaningful outcome.

DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS: Hemchandra Goswami was an ardent patriot and he devoted his life for the cause of Assamese literature and history. His motto was to make countryman realize their past greatness as he regards heritage- literary or cultural as the stepping stone to the revival of country's consciousness. He was a versatile genius. While dedicating all his life towards fostering Assamese literature and language, sparing only a few moments in writing poetry, but with a handful of powerful poetry, he leaves his lasting impression. *The Beloved's Letter* first published in Jonaki is a powerful expression of love.:

Loosening the covers off beauty's breast
At nature's private chamber I gaze enquiringly,

Thus, the beginning of the poem sets the tone of a Romantic poem covering off 'beauty's breast' in the bosom of nature thus exposing and establishing Nature as primary concern. The theme of the poem is expressed in the third line of the poem with a powerful metaphor:

In these letters misshapen as chick's legs
The honey there is there is none better.

Here, the poet compares the handwriting of the beloved's letter to chick's legs bearing tremendous impact on the insight of the poem with this metaphorical expression which is magnificently reflected in the lines to come with the indication of the sweetest 'love' carried by the beloved's letter. Thus, the theme of love is established and it takes its momentum and intensity in the following lines:

Many a verse in the poet's bower may loom,
And waft about on earth in the vernal breeze'
But the songs that in your letter loom
No poetry can ever claim it ever sees.

Empathetically declaring the magical power of the beloved's letter, the poet sings the glory of love:

Your letter, honey, what miracle works,

And gradually, the poet illuminates the eternal, ever fresh nature of the letter:

The letter never goes stale, but fresh flower invokes.

The passionate love of the speaker is indicated by the intimacy felt and expressed sniffing, kissing the letter finally harboring him towards a desired world. Thus, love has a power of upward mobility:

I sniff it and kiss it, but will never tire
Instead in my heart glows the star of desire.

The centrality of the poem is rest entirely on the Beloved's Letter and it brings out the impulse of eternal as well as sensual love distinctively focusing on Romantic love appearing as an ennobling inspiration.

On the other hand, William Shakespeare was the greatest playwright and poet of the world and his Sonnets too represent his versatility like that of plays. Love, friendship, beauty, time, mortality and complexities of human relationships are the prominent themes of Shakespeare's Sonnets. The sonnets give astonishingly potent expression to the theme of death and time. These significant thematic concerns pronounce Shakespeare's vehement effort to check devastating impact of time and death on human being through his writings. Sonnet 116 presents the theme of love defining love as unchangeable entity which never fades away and it outlasts death and admits no flaw:

Let me not to the marriage of two minds
Admit impediment; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or ends with the remover to remove,

Gradually, love is established in the sonnet as an 'ever-fixed mark' signifying its permanence in this transient world. Love takes a different turn while talking about the devastating impact of time who cannot touch love rather it will continue till doom's day.:

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks
But bears it out even to the edge of doom:

The permanence of love is also established in the sonnet while hinging his argument for timeless love beyond the destructive rage of time:

Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come.

Thus, introducing the idea of immortality in love, the poet speaks out that love resists death and assumes immortality. He highlights the idea that love remains constant and unwavering and not touched by change and external circumstances.

Finally in the conclusion in an argumentative way the speaker brought forth establishing the sanctity of love:

If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Thus, true love is a constant and infallible guide to a person and this is perceived in this sonnet with lyric grace through some beautiful images like 'star to every Wand'ring bark', 'love's not time's fool' etc.

Both the sonnets are based on the theme of love. Goswami's *Beloved's Letter* epitomized and celebrated his love for the beloved through the magical power of love enmeshed in the letter of the beloved. Shakespeare's *Sonnet 116* also addresses the nature of true love with its everlasting force portraying the enduring nature of love. The affinity of the poems is also discernible in its use of imageries from the world of nature to highlight the cardinal theme of the poem. As Goswami talks about the 'Nature's private chamber' Shakespeare ponders over 'tempests', 'wandering bark', 'Star' etc from the world of nature. Besides similarity, from structural point of view differences also mark the poems as *Beloved's letter* follows the Petrarchan Rhyme Scheme with the pattern abba;abba; cde cde whereas the *Sonnet 116* is Shakespearean or Elizabethan following the pattern ab ab ;cd cd;ef ef; gg. As a Petrarchan sonnet

Beloved's Letter has two distinct sections- an octave- a group of eight lines and a sestet-a group of six lines. In spite of divergences both the sonnet work on a common trajectory i.e.love

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion and analysis, it is discernible that both the poems are based on the speaker's enormous faith in the power of true, perfect love. Both the poems are subjective and written in fourteen lines. The concerned poems are also enriched with imagery from the natural world. In both the poems the speaker tries to ratiocinate love for the beloved. However, this paper argues the basic statement with fundamental principle of comparative analysis encompassing the theme of love contextualizing Hemchandra Goswami of Assam and William Shakespeare from Elizabethan world. From the above discussion it may be asserted that charged with love, with a balance between thought and emotion coupled with enormous power of language and above all by handling the form Sonnet with immense dexterity, both the poets from diverse and far distant land continued the spell of respective domain even in present generation.

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