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THE ROLE OF NATURE IN THE LIVES OF BALKAVI AND P. B. SHELLEY: A COMPARISON



Research by



Dr. Arun Murlidhar Jadhav

Dr. Arun Murlidhar Jadhav

Associate Professor, Y.C. College, Islampur, Tal.-Waiwa, Dist. - Sangli (M.S.India)

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THE ROLE OF NATURE IN THE LIVES OF BALKAVI AND P. B. SHELLEY: A COMPARISON

Dr. Arun Murlidhar Jadhav

Associate Professor, Y. C. College, Islampur, Tal.-Walwa, Dist. – Sangli (M.S.India)

ABSTRACT :

Comparative literature implies the study of literature which uses comparison as its main instrument. It would be the comparison of two or more similar or even dissimilar areas or forms or trends within literature. It would also cut across the national boundaries and points out the similarities and parallels regarding the forms or trends in the works of romanticism. Both Balkavi and Shelley suffered severely during their short span of life. However, Nature provided them love and sympathy, solace and comfort which they could not find in the human world.



the writers of two different countries. In this research article, I propose to compare the role of Nature in the life, personality and worldview of T. B. Thombare alias Balkavi and P. B. Shelley, well-known nature poets in Marathi and English romantic poetry. They were born and bred in different ages and in different national traditions, but both shared the same literary tradition viz.

KEY WORDS: Balkavi, Shelley, Comparison, Nature, romantic.

INTRODUCTION:

T. B. Thombare alias Balkavi and P. B. Shelley are well-known nature poets in Marathi and English literature respectively. They were born and bred in different ages and in different national traditions, but both shared the same literary tradition viz. romanticism. Both Balkavi and Shelley suffered severely during their short span of life. However, Nature provided them love and sympathy, solace and comfort which they could not find in the human world. In this research article, I propose to compare the role of Nature in the lives and poetic works of Balkavi and Shelley in brief.

I. Balkavi:

Tryambak Bapuji Thombare, later to become famous as Balkavi, was born in a religious Brahmin family on August 13, 1890, at Dharangaon in Khandesh. He was the third child of Bapurao Thombare, a police inspector, and Godutai, a virtuous woman, who taught the child Balkavi stories in the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata' and the poetry of the great Indian saints. As he was born in a religious family, Balkavi became devout and virtuous by nature' (Potdar, 5). He received his early education in different villages due to the frequent transfers of his father there. However, he got education in the lap of nature rather than the formal education in schools. While in the school of Erandole, he used to get up early in the morning and go into the garden to collect beautiful and fragrant flowers. While describing Balkavi's love and attraction for Nature, B. I. Patankar quotes Sou. Sushilatai Saptarshi:-

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Balkavi has great attraction for the beauty of Nature. While at Erandole, he always went to the streams to listen the gentle song of it. He could often see the beauty of the sunset. He got his early education in the lap of Nature like Wordsworth's Lucy (1962, 6).

After some schooling at Erandole, Balkavi went to Dhule for education in English (1902-03) but he soon came back and joined in the school of Erandole as a teacher (1903). During the same year he wrote his first poem on the beauty of the garden which is entitled as 'वनमुकुंद' (Vanamukunda). However, his poetic career really began when he was honoured with the title 'BALKAVI' in the 'First Maharashtra Conference on poetry' held in Jalgaon in 1907 (Nadkarni, 1). A few months later his father died and all the responsibilities of the family fell on his shoulders. Soon he was persuaded by his mother to get married as early as possible and then, his marriage took place with Parvatibai, the daughter of V. B. Joshi, in 1908. Although married, he wanted to continue his education. He went to Nashik and then to Baroda and received higher education there.

In 1910, Rev V. N. Tilak, the great Nature poet contemporary to Keshavasuta, requested Balkavi to stay at his own home at Ahmednagar to continue his further study there. Balkavi stayed there and after completing his studies, he was employed in the service of a teacher at "union Training School" where he taught Sanskrit and Marathi languages to Englishmen. The Englishmen, whom Balkavi taught Marathi language, took him to Mahabaleshwar, a scenic place, in every summer vacation. As a result of this, Balkavi came in a close proximity of Nature, enjoyed her beauty and wrote several poems based on the various objects of Nature. In the biography of Balkavi, K. B. Marathe has expressed that Nature was the main source of inspiration to Balkavi. He was accompanied by Nature till the end of his life. There was a perfect unity between Nature and Balkavi. Every object of Nature had provided him love and joy. His love for Nature can be well seen in the following argument with his friends:-

सृष्टीची सौंदर्य उकलून दाखविण्यासाठी माझा जन्म आहे. तारकांचे संगीत मला नेहमी ऐकू येते. आकाशाची शोभा आणि जलाशयाची गतीस्थिती यातून मला सारखे संदेश येतात (Potdar, 10)

(I am born for the expression of the beauty of Nature. All the time I listen to the notes of music sung out of the stars. I often listen to the messages coming from the blue sky and from the movements of the waves in the lakes)

Balkavi suffered severely in his life time due to poverty, incessant wandering for services and unhappy married life. His life was filled with sadness and despair. He always thought over the meaning of life. But whenever he came into close contact with Nature, he forgot sadness and got indulged in the beauty of Nature. Sometimes he expressed his sadness and despair through the medium of Nature. He developed a sense of deep attachment with Nature and wrote a number of poems in her lap. He also received love from some of his friend. It is out of this love he was going to friend, Sonalkar. However, while crossing the railway, he was died in a railway accident on 5th July 1918, and thus he became a victim of death at an early age of life (Patankar, 46-47).

Balkavi, the great devotee of Nature, composed 'one hundred and sixty three poems' on various subjects among which Nature is predominant. He loved Nature for the glory and loveliness which he found in the various objects of Nature. No other modern poem has ever been as nearer to the poetry of the earth and the sky as Balkavi was. He looks at Nature as the source of beauty and joy. His famous Nature poems such as; 'Phulrani', 'Shravanmas', 'Sandhyarajani', 'Nirzaras', 'Arun', 'Paaus', 'Meghancha Kapus', 'Balvihag', 'Audumbar', etc. contain a variety of Nature pictures and Nature imagery. In short, Balkavi has composed poems on various subjected. However, Nature is predominant in these poems. So he is rightly called a devotee of Nature.

II. P. B. Shelley:

Percy Bysshe Shelley, the well renowned Nature poet of England, was born on August 4, 1792, at Field Place, Horsham in Sussex. He was the eldest child of Timothy Shelley, a wealthy landowner who

subsequently succeeded to baronetcy, and Elizabeth Pilford. Being the son of a landlord, the child Shelley had all that one could desire by ways of amenities and comforts. There was apparently no material cause for that divine discontent from which he suffered all his life.

The most important influences that shaped the character of Shelley lie hidden in his early relationships with his family, neighbours and teachers. As a boy, he had no great interest in games and sports, but he was romantic in every nerve which made him the greatest romantic poet of England. During his childhood he invented wonderful stories made up from the explorations in the garden, wood and round the lake for the delight of his admiring sisters. He was very fond of walks in the open countryside. This incessant wandering in the countryside brought him too close to Nature. Indeed, he had become a great devotee of Nature.

Shelley was educated at Eton and Oxford, and even as a school boy he was marked for the independence of his thought and his carelessness of convention. He was early interested in philosophy and while as undergraduate he published a pamphlet 'The Necessity of Atheism' which led to his expulsion from the university. Soon after, going to London companioned by his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg, he met sixteen-year-old Harriet Westbrook and urged by compassion rather than passion, made a runaway marriage with her at Edinburgh in August 1811. Leading a financially harassed life, they stayed in York, in Westmorland, Ireland and Wales. However in a few years, he outgrew Harriet and abandoned her. Later he found a more sympathetic soul in Mary Godwin, the daughter of William Godwin, eloped with her and married her after Harriet too committed suicide by drawn. As a result of this, a popular indignation against him rose high and the custody of his children from Harriet was taken away from him, as he was considered an unsuitable guardian for them.

Rejected by his relatives and branded as corrupt and depraved, Shelley left England for Italy in 1818 where he remained for the rest of his life. Disgusted with human indifference, he turned towards Nature and got solace and comfort in her lap. Another reason of his turning towards Nature was that by the end 1817 his health visibly declined and when it further worsened, his doctor advised him to look for a warmer climate. He, then, turned towards Nature and established a deep kinship with her because Nature provided him both love and sympathy which he could not find in the human world. While in Italy he passed life in boating, wandering among hills and dales, as well as in the forest, in writing poetry and friendship. As he was rebellious by Nature, he took interest in majestic and splendid aspects of Nature and made them reflection on his hopes and passions. He often visited a number of places and enjoyed the beauty and power of the various objects of Nature there. By making the use of the forces of Nature as symbols in his poetry he produced the greatest Nature poetry of the world. Having discarded logic in the relationship between poetry and reason, Shelley then proceeded on to identify himself with Nature (C. K. Narayan, 1986).

In 1822, he was living a quiet and studious life at Pissa. On July 8, 1822, he along with his friend Williams went to welcome Leigh Hunt at Leghorn who had arrived at Shelley's invitation but Shelley did not wish to stay there. When they were returning by sea their boat was overtaken by a squall and sank, and both Shelley and Williams were drowned. It was his untimely death at a very young stage of life (C. K. Narayan, 1986, vi).

Shelley was a versatile genius. He composed a number of longer and smaller poems. The main theme of his poetry is a passionate devotion to Nature in the best tradition of his era, but going beyond the tradition we get his keen interest in science, a radical egalitarian approach to religion favoured by Platonism and pantheism, and admiration for ancient Greece. His longer poems such as 'Queen Mab', 'The Revolt of Islam', 'Julian and Maddola', 'Prometheus Unbound', 'Alastor or the spirit of solitude', 'Adonais', 'The Triumph of Life' etc, deal with all the serious problems of religion, politics, philosophy and life. There are in these poems, however, certain characteristic features which mark Shelley as a keen observer and faithful recorder of various objects of Nature. These poems show Shelley's love of Nature in its changing rather than static phases. This is well in accord with his constant preoccupation with mutability. The various objects of Nature, such as, the clouds, storms, dawns, sunsets, even the trees and flowers are seen in these poems in whirling motion.

Besides these longer poems, Shelley has composed several lyrics based on Nature, personality and liberty. His major Nature poems have been divided into three major groups. The first group of Nature poetry such as – 'Mont Blanc', 'Lines written Among Euganean Hills', 'The Alps at Down', 'To the Moon', 'The World's Wanderers', 'Stanzas written in Naples', 'A fragment', 'The forest at Evening', 'Italy and Sorrow', 'The Zucca', 'To a skylark', 'To the Nightingale', 'The Woodman and the Nightingale', 'The Towers of Famine', 'When Soft Wind' and others deal with the relationship between Nature and man. The second group of the poems viz. 'Passage of the Apennines', 'The cloud', 'The Dawn', 'Dawn and Desire', 'Twilight and Desire', 'All Sustaining Love', 'Song of Spirits', 'Hymn to Asia', 'Echo Song to Asia', 'The Spirits of the Earth and the Moon', 'The Moon and the Earth', 'The Music of the Woods', 'A Dream of the Unknown', 'Ode to the West Wind', 'A Widow Bird Sate Morning' etc are of pure Nature (Furtado, 9). In the third group of Nature poetry we have the classic poems of Nature, such as 'Hymn to Apollo', 'Hymn to pan', 'The Birth of Pleasure', 'Arethusa', 'Song of Prosrepine' etc. (Furtado, 9). In these poems we get Shelley's love of Nature, his interest in changeable in Nature, his belief in the power of Nature to soothe the human heart, and pantheism, and his Nature myths.

Shelley's love of indefinite and changeable in Nature made him enjoy and describe better than any other English poets. When he wrote of the cloud, or of the moon, or the earth as distinct existences, he was not led away from their solitary personality by any universal existence in which they were merged or by the necessity of adding to these any tinge of humanity, any element of thought or love, such as the pantheist is almost sure to add. Lastly, on this subject, the vagueness and changefulness of Shelley's feelings and view of Nature, except in the instances mentioned, the dreams and shadows of it in his poetry that incessantly form and dissolve like the upper clouds of the sky, each floating while its successor is being born, and few living long enough to be outlined, are the only images we possess in art, save perhaps in music, of the many hours we ourselves pass with Nature when we neither think nor feel, but drift and dream incessantly from one impression to another, enjoying but, never defining our enjoyment, receiving moment by moment, but never caring to say to any single impression, 'Stay and keep me company' (Furtado, 7-8).

A Note of Subjectivity in the Expression of Nature:

Both Balkavi and Shelley have mingled their own personality in the object of Nature. In his poem 'Parava', Balkavi compares his personal life with the life of the bird, Parava, and says that his own personal life is worse and more desperate than the sadness of the Parava:

‘दुःखः निद्रा ती आज तुला नागे,
तुझे जगही निद्रिस्त तुझ्या संगे
फिरे माझ्या जगतात उष्ण वारे,
तुला त्याचे भानही नसे बारे !’

The description of the barren land, darkness and fear in 'Khedyatil Ratra' also suggest lonely and sad life of Balkavi. Like Balkavi, Shelley, too, has expressed his personal life in the poem 'Ode to the West Wind'. In the fourth stanza of the poem, he discovers an affinity between himself and the west wind and says that, as a boy, he possessed the same qualities as the West Wind possess. But now misfortunes have crushed him and he is in a pitiable condition. He appeals to the west wind to come to his help and to lift him as, a leaf, a cloud:

"Oh lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud,
I fall upon the thorns of life"

The lines are characterized by an intensity of emotion, and show a complete abandonment of self on the part of the poet. We have here the forlorn wail of the poet. However, in the last lines of the poem he expresses his vision of future that this period of misery and suffering will surely come to an end through the objects of Nature, such as winter and spring season: "If winter comes can spring be far behind?" (Raine, 189-190). In short, both Balkavi and Shelley have expressed their feelings, emotions and personalities through the objects of Nature.

CONCLUSION:

A parallel study of the role of Nature in the life of both Balkavi and Shelley enables us to note the similarities and differences in them. This research paper shows when and why these poets turned towards Nature and established deep kinship with her. Both Balkavi and Shelley have expressed their feelings, emotions and personalities through the objects of Nature. Here we can conclude that Nature plays an important role to mould the life, personality and worldview of both Balkavi and Shelley.

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Dr. Arun Murlidhar Jadhav

Associate Professor , Y. C. College, Islampur , Tal.-Walwa, Dist. – Sangli (M.S.India)

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Website: www.lbp.world

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S.P. Rajguru'.

S.P. Rajguru
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