

An observation of love tradition in Vidyapati and British Poets

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ABSTRACT

Although the word Love looks very simple but it is not an easy task to write on this subject. It encompasses different mental and emotional states ranging from pleasure to varying interpersonal affections. The very first understanding of love can be personal attraction or strong attachment. Different scholars have also agreed that it can also be a kind of virtue which is the embodiment of human kindness, affection or compassion. Greek philosophers have classified Love in different forms like divine love, romantic love, friendly love and familial love. As the age advanced the concept of Love also broadened like courtly love, self love, infatuated love came into prominence. Apart from such concepts spiritual or religious love were kept in different category. To make and strengthen inter personal relationships Love is very necessary and it has a psychological importance too which will be dealt further. To keep the human beings united and continue different forms of life Love plays a very key and functional role. The essence or nature of Love is a matter of debate as it is very tough for the scholars to agree on a single point of view. Different people have different concepts on a single topic. The generalized view of love can be felt as an outlet of positive sentiment but a stronger form of dislike or hate also gives the idea of a neutral apathy.

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It is very interesting to see that the physical intimacy or bodily attachment related to Love is also connected to lust. It is also correct that love and lust are quiet opposite to each other yet they are connected. The love as an abstract form is nothing but individual experience which a person feels for other. It can also be love for the self or narcissism. With the passage of time understanding of Love and ideas associated with it have also changed drastically. The ancient love poetries flourished even in the middle ages and after it Courtly love rose into prominence. The impersonal theory of love says that there can be love for some objects, animals, goal or principle which can be of great value. The bonding or love between human beings can be referred as interpersonal love. This kind of love is unique form of relationship and it can be seen between members of a family, couples or friends. Psychologically Love can be referred as a social characteristic. Robert Sternberg a very famous psychologist has formulated a special theory of Love which is triangular in nature. He has argued that there are three components of Love Passion, commitment and intimacy. He has defined intimacy as a segment of love in which two individual every minute details of their lives. It can be seen in romantic love affairs or some close friendship. In such kind of relationships commitment acts like a driver which can drive the relationship permanently. Now coming back to the love tradition we will find that Petrarch was a mile stone for special kind of love and in his sonnets we can also find that Neo platonic love has been redefined. The primary source from which we can start the love convention is *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* which is the collection of poems. In 1327 Petrarch began to write and collect poems of his interest. In the whole series we can find that there are love poems which are addressed to a beautiful lady whose name was Laura. She was so beautiful that the poet was infatuated with her it will not be wrong saying this that the lady was actually a kind of inspiration for the poet. Several scholars doubt whether she was real or just an imagination of the poet because she has been described beautifully. The poems end in the form of a hymn to the Blessed virgin as we are informed that Laura dies. In the words of Robert W. Durling-

“Petrarch's lover completes three times a cycle that takes him through falling in love, hoping and wooing, being rejected and rebuked and finally lamenting and writing poetry.”¹

We are reminded by Durling that there were traditional themes in the writings of Petrarch. In the love conventions mentioned by Durling it is clear that the chief concern of this poet was the ideally beautiful lady who is not only beautiful but virtuous also. It is very interesting to see that the frustration, love sickness of

the lover and obsessive yearning parallels to the feudal system where there is a master and a slave. The kind of relationship between the lover and the beloved is not exactly like the relationship between a master and a slave but it is also not less than that. The lover thinks that it is his duty to admire and follow his beloved. He takes delight while doing so because it amuses both his mind as well as his soul. For Petrarch his beloved Laura is the paragon of perfection such kind of qualities can also be seen later in the sonnets of Shakespeare. Although the style of writing is different in Shakespeare but still he has tried to write on such beautiful subject matter. Here it seems that the perfection of Laura is inseparable with her beauty. Kenelm Foster says that-

“The idea of a supreme source of beauty which though transcendent fills all things with its omnipresence, which cannot be escaped by any flight, mirrors...the relation of God to the universe and to the human soul, as described in the speak of Dante in the opening lines of the *Paradiso*.”²

We have already stated that apart from being beautiful Laura is also virtuous so she is the reflection of divinity for Petrarch. This divinity is a notion which is connected with the Neo Platonic love. Peter Hainsworth has beautifully studied that there was something parallel between Renaissance Neo Platonists and Petrarch. Both of them associates beauty and virtue with the image of light

“In general terms Laura's beauty takes on positive associations through being evoked in images which suggest light or brightness. Characteristically she enlightens, clarifies, illumines. She is a star, though the second of the two sestina ... is exceptional in that it associates her with the moon. Much more frequently she is like the sun, or is the sun, or is brighter than the sun”³

Laura's eyes have also been compared to stars and later the comparison becomes more allusive in nature. It is noteworthy to find that Vidyapati has also compared the beauty of Radha with farfetched imagery. Thus there is a sense of similarities between these two poets. Shakespeare has also written on the same subject matter but his sense of comparison is a little bit different. According to Vidyapati, Krishna is elder than Radha . The beauty of Radha also signifies that she is no more a child and thus she has become an epitome of beauty. Her smile is sweet and her lips are also described as coral lips. Her steps are very gentle and whenever she touches the ground with her feet water lilies spring up. No doubt it is an exaggeration but the beauty of the poem lies in the heightened form of poetic imagination. It is also very interesting to see that she is conscious about her womanly charm and thus she is unable to hide it as nobody can suppress beauty. This dawn of blissful youth has been described well in *Vayasandhi*. Coming back to Petrarch we have already seen that he expresses his gratitude towards Laura by praising her eyes which are the guiding stars for him. Aldo S. Bernado has beautifully remarked that-

“The irreproachable conduct of Laura inspired him to superimpose a Christian view of the woman on his beloved. He thus began to endow his image of Laura with the characteristics necessary to convert her into a lady-guide to the Christian heaven.”⁴

To the celestial realm she becomes a guide after her death but she was a source of inspiration for the poet all the time. Even after her death Petrarch has made her immortal describing her virtues and beauty. There is a kind of interrelationship between the beloved's virtues, beauty and the lover's state of approach to seek her every minute glaze has been stated by Nicholas Kilmer who says that-

“Petrarch had adopted the Courtly Love tradition literally and sincerely. That tradition required his amorous attachment to a woman who, because she was already married and was irrevocably chaste, was unattainable; but who at the same time, since she was above all virtuous and beautiful, should lead the poet to the contemplation of still higher beauty--the Perfect Beauty. This, being divine, was incorporeal; and being incorporeal was both absolutely beautiful and invisible. Perfect Beauty was none other than God Himself, and the virtuous life His love and care demanded.”⁵

This is also true that the beloved is not attainable is the central theme in many of the love poems written by different poets in different ages. Laura was already married and thus she was not attainable for the poet. In Padavali the poet Vidyapati has written various songs of different moods we have already discussed it yet his sensuousness related to feminine beauty is marvelous. He has tried to define almost every aspect of beauty. In the western world Platonism is the most influential traditions of love. It flourished through the great writers like Aristotle and Plotinus. During the age of neo Platonism it was revived. In the middle ages

the courtly love and the nineteenth century witnessed Romanticism. These forms of love are deep rooted in Platonic love. In modern times it is interpreted as non physical relationship between heterosexual individuals. Aristophanes the great playwright had explained this form of love through comical and colorful truth that love is nothing but it is a kind of quest for the alter ego. It is a kind of remedy against the wound which has been given to the mankind by Gods. Socrates too affirms the theory of Aristophanes but adds a little that love is our search for goodness. According to him the only object of love is goodness. Here Plato has given the definition of love he says that it is a kind of desire which always looks ahead for possessing good. In his own words “Love is desire for the perpetual possession of the good.”⁶ it becomes clear from this definition that love is first of all a kind of desire but this desire is for the objects which is good in life. Thus goodness has been objectified but goodness is never an object. For every individual the definition of goodness is not same. Plato also believes in the fact that it is not only the human beings who are in search of goodness but the entire universe is approaching towards doing good and searching good. Thus the whole world or universe is in love and it can also be one reason that the whole world is round or united to each other. Without love existence of anything can be doubted. Thus all things are in love and we human beings are conscious enough to search beauty and goodness. According to this theory everybody is ignorant and they are incapable to love as goodness keeps on changing towards perfection. Nothing is permanent so our quest for goodness is also not fixed. The hunt for goodness is always on. If it is right then why do men and women marry? Can marriage guarantee the permanent goodness of our partner? Thus this love is a question that if the quest for goodness is love that love is certainly not attainable. The matter becomes more complex when we say that goodness which has been attained can never be love itself as the quest for goodness is changing continuously in search of perfection. This perfection is a kind of object like goodness which can never be attained. We cannot leave the topic in between as the goodness lies in searching the answer of this question which is a kind of analysis of Platonic love. Scholars have argued that the goodness is the desire to live forever to cherish the life. Thus there is a desire for immortality. This is one of the reasons that love is the key cause for reproduction of the species that is to say that any individual may cease to alive but his offspring’s continue to live. Thus the life never ends but it becomes immortal. In the *Republic* the author Plato has mentioned that –

“He contemplates a world of unchanging and harmonious order, where reason governs and nothing can do or suffer wrong; and like one who imitates an admired companion, he cannot fail to fashion himself in its likeness. So the philosopher, in constant companionship with the divine order of the world, will reproduce that order in his soul and, so far as man can, become godlike; though here, as elsewhere, there will be scope for detraction.”⁷

According to Plato human nature is of dualistic view that is to say that body can be mortal but the soul is always immortal. Before possessing a body soul lived with God but when a physical body is granted to a soul then the soul forgets its divinity. It is not so simple to understand but we may think that there must be a path of love. Love is never blind a lover first of all contemplates the physical presence of the beloved. There are several problems and difficulties. There are contradictions in his point of views towards homosexuality. His views are also not genuine at some points when we study his attitude towards women. I am not going to discuss all those points in detail as the present topic covers only the love traditions an observation but this kind of tradition was certainly not applicable everywhere that is why there are various modifications in his theory. Our understanding of Plato is not finished as there are several other issues also but as the age advanced Petrarchan culture of love once again rose into prominence. Applying all the known love traditions to Petrarch he says continuously that Laura is the brightest star. He keeps on praising his beloved as if he is going to attain some spirituality by praising his lady love. In this context Bernado has beautifully mentioned that-

“Laura emerge[s] as that inspiration that is at the heart of all true poetry. She is, in short, the inspiration that moves poets and men of letters to literary expression, an image of beauty and truth. It was for this reason that Petrarch was able to retain Laura as a beautiful, vibrant woman whose spirit remained with him on this earth even after death. She is as a Christian Daphne to a Christian Apollo.”⁸

Now coming to another tradition of love we can see that there flourished courtly love tradition which has influenced several poets to write on the love affairs and love themes. In 1883 Gaston Paris has coined this term Courtly love in one of the very famous journal of the age entitled *Romania*. In middle ages this kind of

concept was very new so it attracted the poets as well as the readers. Some scholars believed that it evolved from Southern France. It has a new structure which was very different from feudalism and the Christian beliefs. In terms of diction or the use of words there are some similarities between the Church languages and courtly form of love. It is not like the chivalric romance or the kind of love which we can notice knightly heroism but rather it was very sophisticated and refined. There is hardly any form of violence or bloodshed. There is respect and admiration for the beloved which the lover shows. It is courtly because it followed the courtly culture. The close reading of courtly love tradition certainly gives us an idea that it was an extension of Petrarchan love tradition. It heightens the status of the beloved or the women. It is a kind of code of conduct which was very popular in the aristocracies of Western Europe. It was a kind of vassal-lord relationship where a knight was considered as an obedient servant of his beloved. There is no violence yet the knight could go to any extent to win the favor of his lady love. It was often secret and outside wedlock. Here also it was almost impossible for the lover to attain or possess his beloved. Some scholars argue that it was a kind of dignified form of adultery. It was well defined in the French and English royal courts presided generally by the crown. Throughout Europe it was very popular which influenced several young writers to write on this convention. Before approaching to the next love convention we should give a close analysis of the origination of Sonnet. Several historians have pointed out that Sir Thomas Wyatt has borrowed this form of writing from Italians. During that period of time this form of writing was a kind of vehicle for expressing the personal feelings and emotions. It conveyed the message of a lover to his beloved which can be personal in tone. It is interesting to see that it was the most popular form of writing during the early sixteenth century. Wyatt himself has not written any kind of Sonnets which is popular or memorable but he has started the tradition of writing Sonnets. He has started imitating Petrarch and thus he initiated bold images and new ideas to be written into English. The name of Surrey is as important to be mentioned as Thomas Wyatt. Both of them are jointly remembered to popularize this form of writing into English. Moving forward we can notice that English sonneteers introduced several changes while writing Sonnets. The Sonnet length was not altered but its content and form was changed. We are already aware of *Astrophel and Stella* written by Sir Philip Sidney. It was largely autobiographical in nature and the subject matter is again a kind of love where the lover finds his lady love not attainable. Sidney was himself in love with a girl of nineteen who was married to another man and thus his love was unattainable. These sonnets are magical as it covers the sensual and passionate desire of the lover. Spenser has written a Sonnet sequence entitled *Amoretti*. In this sequence we can find eighty eight Sonnets and it was published in 1595. I am writing about Sonnets because they were very popular and it became a traditional form of writing which is specially remembered for conventional love. They were no doubt conventional yet fresh because it appealed to the readers. The Sonnets written by Spenser are also autobiographical in tone. Spenser was in love with a woman whose name was Elizabeth Boyle whom he got married. These Sonnets are very frank and melancholic and we feel a sensitive delight while reading such poems. Later we can find that Shakespeare has also written 154 Sonnets and these Sonnets are written with a different form these sonnets are addressed to a friend and a dark lady. Elizabethan Sonnets are incomplete without mentioning the name of Shakespeare. The close reading of Shakespearean sonnets gives us another idea of love tradition which is really very unique in itself.

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