

John Keats and Mirza: Ghalib A Comparison

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Compression between the personalities and creatures èk poem of poets of different languages has always been a popular area of research in Indian literature. This brief study is a compression between English poet John Keats and Indian poet Mirza Ghalib. It bring out some new facts about path.

Key words:- John Keats, Mirza Ghalib

Bdul Rehman Bijnori, an eminent critic of Ghalib, compared his thought and art with that of the number of philosophers and poets of the West like Shakespeare, Hegel and Wordsworth.¹ Majnoon Gorakhpuri, another critic of Ghalib, compared his with Goethe, Wordsworth, Shelley, Browning and other.² For myself, I found much similarity between the young Keats and the great Ghazal Ghalib.

Comparative study, I understand, has its won merits and demerits. Much can be said in its favour. I positively heightens a reader's aesthetic pleasure. Literature is studied not because it pleases or instructs but because, as Longinus wrote, It lifts us out of over selves: it moves us and brings us face to face with the aspirations, dreams, hopes and fears and joys and sorrows of our own life.³ And when two poets of the stature of Keats and Ghalib are put together, the aesthetic pleasure is naturally greatly increased. Moreover, their observation, interpretation and presentation of life put the reader in a better position to understand life and all its mystery. It broadens his outlook on life and death and all that the two contain within and puts before him certain issues from beyond life and death.

Keats and Ghalib were born poets. Poetry was in their blood. No power on earth could deter them from adopting this divinely ordained task. Keats, an apprentice to an apothecary, suddenly shifted his attention to the composition of poems. He won't mind burning all the efforts of his nights in the morning but write he wil.⁴ Reviews, favourable or unfavourable, pecuniary problems and his own ill-health could not drag him from the Bower of the Muse of Poetry. Ghalib, proud of his ancestral profession of the sword, shaped his sword into mighty pen. His early failures in 'mushairas'- poetic gatherings, pressing monetary problems and political upheavals could not drag him from the bewitching veils of ghazals.

The Industrial Revolution and the political upheavals of the times had no appreciable influence on Keats while most of his contemporary poets were enthused by the political uprisings in France. Ghalib suffered greatly due to the decline of Mughal suzerainty: it only added to his suffering and privations which resulted in the flowering of his poetic genius.

Keats was found Classics. He went to the Greeks, loved Shakespeare and tried to adopt the best of English literary tradition. Aileen Ward rightly noted, "Keats's special originality was his sense of dedication to the tradition of English poetry and his attempt to recover it for the use of poetry in his time. ... Keats earned his place in the tradition of English poetry by his courage to accept failure and move beyond it, his patience in learning his craft from those who could teach him."⁵ At the same time he could derive much from his talents and exhibit originality and thus endow the recurring themes of poetry with a light that radiates only from his should and sound that will find an echoe in the hearts of young and old for all the times to come.

Ghalib loved Persian poets like Bedil, Zahoori, Sa'di and about half a dozen others and he learned much from them. Among Urdu poets, he was indebted to Meer.⁶ But the truth is that he did not believe in blind adherence to tradition. He exhibited his originality in every word, every sentence and in every act and thought. He surpased most of his predecessors in his innovative skill and technical perfection. The two great poets learned much from the past masters, remained ever indebted to them, frankly confessed their debt and yet had a way of their own, created a world of their own and peopled it with their branched thoughts and sublime imaginings.

Ghalib loved and, as he confessed in a letter, killed his beloved with a kiss and then wrote a very poignant poem on her death.⁷ Keats too loved and did his love kill him? It was towards the end of his life that the 'Bright Star' really shone bright at the head of his sick bed. He was too weak to read her letters. Severn, his painter friend who nursed him till death, was asked to place Fanny Brawne's letters on his breast in the grave.⁸ Ghalib imagined a similar situation when he wrote 'rah gaya khat meri chaati par khula.'

Severe monetary problems were there with both the poets. They had to fight an almost losing battle for their inheritance. They led a poor life and drank well with borrowed money. Ghalib was even arrested but then they had good friends to stand them in good stead.

Keats had a very short span of life - 25 years 4 months and 22 days only. Ghalib lived longer - 71 years 1 month and 18 days. The Urdu poet definitely suffered longer at the hands of time. As result, his experiences, observations, intellectual moorings and questioning spirit have deeper probe and a wider sweep.

The two poets wrote letters with are a unique treasure in the history of their respective literatures. The letters may be read for the sheer pleasure that they impart to the reader. The letters of Keats contain much that is biographical and reveal his critical acumen also. His views on life and death, love and literature, sin and salvation are there but there is no comment on the socio-political situation. Keats comes up before us as a great romantic poet in his poetical works but when we read his letters we feel, as Lionel Trilling pointed out that 'Keats is nothing if not a man of ideas.'⁹ The letters of Ghalib have added quality-they provide us an account of the literary and socio-political scene. The vital issues of life and death, of poetic faculty and literary criticism have been well dealt with by both.

Love, Beauty and Truth are the themes that haunt poets, philosophers and mystics alike. Keats thought and wrote of these and produced a magnum opus that will ever fascinate, move, transport and tease us out of thought. He disclosed the secret of Beauty and Truth through his own sufferings. Through his questioning spirit he understood his own sufferings and thereby the sufferings of the whole mankind:

'None can usurp his height,' returned that shade,
'But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.'

To Keats suffering is creative, it is the only reality. A close study of the ghazals and letters of Ghalib proves almost the same thing. Ghalib suffered and concluded that 'Mushkilain itni paren mujh par ki asaan ho gaen.'

His sufferings allowed him a time for deep and sustained thinking. He saw the setting sun of the Mughal empire and of his own ancestry along with it and the rising one of the British empire. He could think of the glory that was departing and the western wave that was encroaching upon the eastern horizon. He saw life as a 'vale of unending tears' and noted that the poor candle must burn and melt the whole night to remove darkness around and spread light all around - that is what suffering does. That is what Ghalib did.

In fine, what is it that makes Keats so dear to his readers? So fresh to his critics? And what is it that will make generations read and admire him? Why do the ghazals of Ghalib attract more and more readers and listeners day by day? Why Ghalib is so tantalizingly fresh to his critics and dear to his listeners? They touch the chord of the very heart of Everyman. Everyman will see his joys and sorrows, his dreams and ambitions and the sweetest and saddest of his life reflected in the pages of the two poets.

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