

ROBERT BROWNING AS A LOVE – POET

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Abstract:-

Browning initiated composing love-poetry early in his career and continued to write it till his death. In 'A Pearl' and 'By The fireside,' the poet expresses strong, earthly and sensuous love as well as spiritual love of the woman opening the infinite world of love for the lover. Browning does not write about obstacles or about ideals and generalizations, he deals with window-panes and gloves and garden walls - objects and places associated with the beloved or with a moment of love. Browning's love poems do not deal with love of truth or love of mankind or of one's motherland. His love is purely a passion which draws a man to a woman or woman to a man. Browning, in his love poems, does not describe the beauty of woman. There is a little bit of physical charm of a woman. He concentrates on the power which a woman can exert in her relationship with a man. So love is not an end in itself. It is a means towards the attainment of heavenly bliss. Browning has the unique distinction of being the only English poet who has dealt with love in all its multitudinous complexities; very wide is the variety of love situations taken up by the poet. Browning does not hesitate to describe love which convention disliked. He is also a poet of abnormal lovers and their love. Browning whole life achievement rests on his love which served him as a stepping stone to success and which ultimately became a mile-stone of his success in both the fields personal or literary. Browning's love-poems deal with the various phases and varieties of love in all classes of society. The present paper attempts to analyze love theme in Browning's poetry. It also throws light on his treatment of physical and spiritual love, his realism, the power of love, love situations and abnormal unconventional love.

Keywords: - Robert Browning, passionate, morality, religion, true lovers, heavenly bliss.

In 1846 Browning married the poetess Elizabeth Barrett and eloped with her to Italy. After Elizabeth's death he returned to England and continued to publish a great number of poems and plays. This best poetry was written, however, in the years that he spent in Italy with his wife. Browning's period was quite different from today's culture and social behavior; this is obviously reflected in his poems. The relationship between a male and a female were much more formal. The male brought money into the house, he would work and socialize. For the wealthy men, it

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was often they had a pretty girls beside them. “She would act as a pleasant book over, covering the intelligent dominant man.”¹ In Browning’s poems, however, the characters are often men and women caught at moments of anxiety and obsession. Since, they appear to expose more than they actually intend, the interest of the poems lies in discovering what lies beneath the words that are actually spoken. This relates to Robert Browning’s description as ‘a love poet who was actually aware of how men and women can be separated by jealously or passing of time.’

Browning initiated composing love-poetry early in his career and continued to write it till his death. His last work ‘Asolando,’ published on the very day of his death, contains a number of love-poems which describe the passion of sexual love with surprising intensity. Other poets have treated of passionate, sexual-love in their youth; Browning is unique in his successful treatment of it even in old age. Sexual love considered as a passion has two aspects - it is spiritual as well as physical. Browning does not frown upon the physical aspect of love. Nevertheless, when at his best, the physical and the spiritual meet in his love poetry, each in its pre-eminence. “For him, the brightest truth, the purest truth in the universe, often lies “in the kiss of a girl.” In one poem after another, he celebrates the earthly love as well as the spiritual one.”² In ‘A Pearl’ and ‘By The fireside,’ the poet expresses strong, earthly and sensuous love as well as spiritual love of the woman opening the infinite world of love for the lover. For a moment with the beloved, the lover is prepared to surrender all - Heaven, Nature, Man, Art and life itself. Momentariness is the very essence of some of the best love poems of Browning. In his treatment of love, Browning differs from the other Victorian poets who disapproved the flesh and looked upon it as an obstacle in the way of the development of the human soul. He does not disregard the claims of the body; rather he regards physical passion as essential for a happy married life, and as a means to spiritual development. His concern is with the harmonious development of human personality. However, this can be done only through love which is both sensuous and physical.

Browning does not write about obstacles or about ideals and generalizations, he deals with window-panes and gloves and garden walls - objects and places associated with the beloved or with a moment of love. Other poets refer to beloved’s auburn hair or about her red mouth or lips, but Browning never talks of love or the beauty of beloved. Rather, he writes of, “the celestial time when a man does not think about Heaven, but about a parasol.” His poetry awakens in every man the memories of those immortal moments with the beloved. It is the dress of the beloved in ‘A Lover Quarrel’ which takes hold of the spirit. Browning is more concerned with the psychology of love than with the passion of love which comes natural to youth and love. The lover in the Last Ride Together thinks less of his beloved than of his own success and failure in love and derives consolation from the fact that success is rare in life. He intellectualizes love: the emotion of love is always entwined with grave questions of life and conduct. He is more concerned with the consequences of love than with love itself. He brings out in his best love lyrics the power of love to elevate the lover to a higher and nobler level and give him new strength, as in ‘By the fireside’ or sink him to the lower level of sensuous slavery, as in ‘Andrea

Del Sarto.' Love is the essential thing for the fulfillment of life; without love even power and knowledge have no significance. Paracelsus and Sordello fail because they ignore love. Browning considered that love is not only man's chief happiness, but his chief ordeal.

Browning's love poems do not deal with love of truth or love of mankind or of one's motherland. His love is purely a passion which draws a man to a woman or woman to a man. For him love unites not only man and woman, it unites God and man and it is the supreme principle both of morality and religion. He places his lovers in various situations and examines their psychological implications. A study of his major love poems reveals the nature and quality of his art as a love-poet. Broadly speaking Browning has written two kinds of love poems - personal and dramatic. His personal poems are few as his bent of mind was fundamentally dramatic. "He was interested more in looking at others with an objective eye than in indulging in self analysis. So his genius was not suited to personal love poetry which essentially requires a lyrical bent of mind on the part of the writer. Still, as we have stated Browning under the influence of the inspiring love relationship with his wife, wrote a few brilliant poems of personal love."³

Browning, in his love poems, does not describe the beauty of woman. There is a little bit of physical charm of a woman. He concentrates on the power which a woman can exert in her relationship with a man. That man may be her husband or her lover. In poems like *Porphyria's Lover* and *The Bust* -- there is no reference to the outward beauty which attracts a lover. Browning has tried to understand the wide and varied phases of love. His love poems are an attempt to give expression to all kinds of physical love. It may vary from animal passion as in 'Pippa Passes' to the romantic love in 'The Last Ride Together.' He has given mystic significance to his love poetry by talking of love and God, as two co-related realities. His love is not confined to the body or to this world alone. It is his faith that true lover meet in the next world after their death.

So love is not an end in itself. It is a means towards the attainment of heavenly bliss. Even if he portrays failure in love he has a word of hope for them. His love is both complex and comprehensive. His poems deal with not only successful but also unsuccessful love. He considered love to be the basic principle of the universe. True love will be achieved if not in this world, certainly in the next. Browning deals with passionate love, but it is devotional and full of tenderness. The poems of personal love are the result of Browning's passionate love for his wife, Elizabeth and the happy married life he spent with her. The poems testify to the inspiring influence of true and sincere love over the genius of a poet. 'By The Fireside,' is one of the finest poems of married love in the English language. Sitting silently with his wife by the fireside, the poet muses on their married life and on the blessings which her love has bestowed upon him. It is remarkably beautiful picture of a peaceful and satisfied married life, full of sweet memories and images of his wife. 'Prospice,' written after the death of Elizabeth Browning, tell us what she has made of him, reveals his steadfastness in love, and his resolve to be a fighter upto the very end. The poem ends with the poet's optimistic faith in the certainty of his meeting her in the life after death.

Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul, I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest.

A large majority of Browning's love-poems are impersonal or dramatic poems. In these poems Browning deals vitally critical love situations, and gives the reaction of the men and women concerned. Thus, he deals with love in all its manifold variety, in all its changing moods, vagaries, certainties, failures and conquests.

"Browning has the unique distinction of being the only English poet who has dealt with love in all its multitudinous complexities; very wide is the variety of love situations taken up by the poet."⁴ His own love was successful; but even then he has dealt with the tragedy in love, the frustrated and unfulfilled love, with equal insight and penetration. In point of variety, Browning beats all other lyrists of love. Browning treats actual passions and he stays at whatever moment in its course promises to distil its richest significance. He seems almost the first to realize that these moments are not necessarily those of the rapture of possession and enjoyment, or the fierce bitterness of rejection, but may be any one of the scores of episodes in the long chronicle. Hence the novelty of the situations is his love poetry. Browning portrays failure in love as in *Cristina* or in *The Last Ride Together* or in his other poems. According to Browning failure in love is not an occasion of pessimism or grief, but rather an event by which the strength of manliness is proved, and a step to resolve for new adventure for a man to undertake and to strive for success. According to T. S. Young the tragedies of love are for Browning's women, rather than for his men. Browning is not always the poet of love faltering or baffled. "He can pipe as melodiously as any Elizabethan a song in praise of beauty. He can find words, too, for the splendid glow of youthful passion as in the opening of *In a Gondola*. But the triumphs of love are sung in poems of wifhood and motherhood."⁵

Browning does not hesitate to describe love which convention disliked. He is also a poet of abnormal lovers and their love. Many love-situations in his love-poetry is conventionally looked down upon. *Evelyne Hope* embodies the love of middle aged man of forty eight for a child of mere sixteen. The aged lover does not open his lips as long as the beloved lives, but when she dies, he comes to her bedside, speaks of his love of her, and places a geranium petal in her hand as a symbol of their love in the hope that she will, "wake, and remember, and understand." In, *Porphyria's Lover*, the abnormal lover strangulates the girl with her own silken hair, and then sits calmly with her head on his shoulders. The lover has made her his own forever. In *Statue* and *The Bust*, the lovers fail and they are scolded for their failure, because they do not run away, even though the woman is married. *Paracelsus* and *sordello* fail in love because of their own timidity and cowardice. In such poems, Browning's attitude seems to be, "find your mate and deuce take the rest. Nothing else matters." *My Last Duchess*, *The Glove*, *The flight of the Duchess*, etc; are the poems of revolt in love and it is always the woman who revolts and breaks conventions, and insults proprieties. True love is bound to be triumphant, for, 'God creates the love to grant the love.' It is the responsibility of the lovers to act boldly, like the *Duchess*, who elopes with her gipsy lover and thus attains freedoms and true love. In

confessions, the dying lover careless of all traditions and religious proprieties, cares for nothing but the memory of his early passion for a girl one happy June.

Browning whole life achievement rests on his love which served him as a stepping stone to success and which ultimately became a mile-stone of his success in both the fields personal or literary. Love is not only a success bringer for Browning rather everyone, who loves truly and passionately, becomes successful in almost all the corners of life. It is said that behind every successful man there is a woman, and here is the lady, Elizabeth, who works as an energetic force behind the potentiality of this love poetry and thus with the help of this loving inspiration, this man succeeds in life. The heart of woman can rest with peace and happiness in the strong arms of her lover, as a bond of security, help and shelter with the sweet fragrance of love. Thus, love is the way to success for everyone and in everything, that brings aspired success in each field, as one of the functions of love as success bringer and it is the experience in our own life too. Browning's subject was neither happy nor unhappy love but love as an experience a love that includes both the ends of ideal, spiritual and physical love, whose reality was bound up with its permanence; his greatest love poetry is quite reflective of idealism in love as well as the physical charm of love. In many of Browning's poems the element of hope finds its full play. In some cases, the lovers are rejected by their beloved but as a result, they do not loose their heart, rather they act much forcefully. In dejection, they do not surrender themselves completely to frustration, on the contrary, by such failure they store energy for future success in their endeavors.

Browning's love-poems deal with the various phases and varieties of love in all classes of society. They represent Browning's journey through the world and his observation to catch such incidents by storing them and by reproducing a crowd of motive for poetry. It was all held by his memory and shaped by his imagination. According to Browning love is the central principle of the universe. It is the highest attribute both of God and Man. The triumph and immortality of love even for a moment is never clouded with doubts and uncertainties. Love is for him the conqueror, and God; true lover and beloved are definitely bound to meet if not in this world, certainly in the world to come. A true lover need not frustrate and disappoint because love is its own reward and "God is mighty to create and mighty to grant." He creates love to grant the love. In the poem, 'Love Among The Ruins, he states that Empires decay, but love abides, for 'Love is best.' Browning has profound faith in love. Hence, the multiplicity and variety of his love-poems make him the greatest love poet in the English language.

Conclusion :-

At the end it is to be concluded that Browning's love-poems do not deal with love of mankind or truth or motherland. His love is purely passionate which draws a man to a woman or woman to a man. His love unites not only man and woman, it unites God and man and it is the supreme principle both of morality and religion. He does not reveal the beauty of woman, he concentrates on the power which a woman can exert in her relationship with a man. His love is

not confined to the body alone, but beyond the physical limitations. True lovers meet, if not in this world, but definitely in the next world after their death. Love is not an end in itself but it is a means towards the attainment of heavenly bliss. Love is the way to success for everyone that brings aspired success in each field, as of the functions of love as a bringer of success.

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