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DEPICTION OF TIME: A STUDY OF P. B. SHELLEY'S OZYMANDIAZ AND
GHALIB'S "BAGEECHA-E-ITFAL HAI DUNIYA MERAY AAGE"

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ABSTRACT

Throughout ages, many deliberations were conducted on implication of Time and the existence of God. Atheists and theists raised and countered arguments supporting their views all over the world. In both East and West, many poets have composed great works on these two immortal themes whose significance exists in the present day as well.

The present article is an effort to study the significance of Time, God's existence and creation in P B Shelley's (1792 - 1822) *Ozymandias* and Mirza Asadulla Khan Ghalib's (1796 -1869) *Bageecha-e-itfal hai duniya meray aage*. The article attempts to bring out the significance of timelessness of metaphors in the above mentioned sonnet and ghazal composed by poets belonging to the East and West in a contemporary time period.

Moreover, as both the poets were considered to be atheists by a major section of critics and readers, the implicit reference to the Creator becomes interesting. The article also tries to study the form of poetry, poetical thinking, beliefs, wit and creativity of both the poets as demonstrated in the poems considered for study.

Keywords: Time in poetry and timelessness of metaphors

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Shelley's "Ozymandias"

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away." ^[1]

Bazeecha-e-afal hain duniya mere aage

Bazeecha-e-afal hain duniya mere aage
Hota hain shab-o-roz tamasha mere aage

Ek khel hain auran-e-sulemaan mere nazdeek
Ek baat hain ijaz-e-masiah mere aage

Juz naam naheen soorat-e-aalam mujhe manzoor
Juz waham naheen hastee-e-ashiya mere aage

Hota hain niha gard mein, sehra mere hote
Ghista hain jabi khah pe dariya mere aage

Mat pooch ki kya haal hai mera tere peeche
Tu dekh ke kya rang tera mere aage

sach kahte ho, KHudbeen-o-KHud_aaraa na kyoN hooN ?
baiTha hai but-e-aainaa_seemaa mere aage

fir dekhiye andaaz-e-gul_afshaani-e-guftaar
rakh de koe paimanaa-o-sahba mere aage

nafrat ka gumaaN guzare hai, maiN rashk se guzaraa
kyoN kar kahooN, lo naam na uska mere aage

Imaan mujhe ruke hai jo kheeche hain mujhe kufr
Kaaba mere peeche kalisa mere aage

aashiq hooN, pe maashooq_farebee hai mera kaam
majnooN ko bura kehti hai laila mere aage

KHush hote haiN par wasl meiN yoN mar naheen jaate
aayee shab-e-hijaraaN ki tamanna mere aage

hai mauj_zan ik qulzum-e-KHooN, kaash, yahee ho
aata hai abhee dekhiye kya-kya mere aage

Go haat ko jumbish nahi, aakhon mein to dum hain
Rehne do abhi sagar-o-meena mere aage

ham_pesha-o-ham_masharb-o-ham_raaz hai mera
'Ghalib' ko bura kyon kaho achchaa mere aage! [2]

Translation:

I consider the world as a child's play
The drama enfolds night and day in my presence

The flying throne of Suleiman is nothing but a play to me
The miracles of Christ are just words

The existence of the universe is just a name to me
The happenings in the universe are nothing but an illusion

The deserts disappear in the dust in front of me
The rivers grovel at my feet

Do not enquire about my condition in your absence
Watch out for the impression you made on me

You are right, I appear as proud and narcissistic
But an idol in front of me is reflecting my image

Witness the floral language that I utter
After placing red wine before me

Hatred and distrust left me, I turned away from jealousy
Why would I stop people from talking about you

Faith is holding me from the hold of disbelief
I turned away from you and am looking towards the church

I am a lover, I inveigle people into believing me
The faithful Laila disparages her beloved Majnun before me

Contentment reigns, but union does not herald death
The death wish on the night of separation has come true

If the disturbance were only the sea of blood
Alas, wait and see the unknown fates that befall me

My hands are weak but my eyes are still alert
Let the wine be placed in my presence

He is my colleague, companion, and confidant
Ghalib is good in front of me, do not speak ill of him¹

¹ Translation of the ghazal "Bazeecha-e-afal hain duniya meray aage" was done by the author of the paper. The author would like to acknowledge the constant encouragement and insights she received from Prof. Khalid Saeed – Department of Urdu, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, India.

A sonnet consisting of fourteen lines and interlinking an octave and a sestet, *Ozymandias* was written in 1817 and is different from the usual themes of Shelley like beauty, love and romanticism. In spite of being different from Shelley's regular themes, this sonnet became quite famous for its unique theme and was included in many of his anthologies like *Rosalind and Helen, A Modern Eclogue; with Other Poems*, the posthumous compilation of his poems and was frequently included in anthologies [1]. Shelley lived against societal conventions and was a poet much ahead of his times and his poems often reflected his enlightened and timeless thoughts.

The sonnet is devoted to a single metaphor, the shattered statue in the vast and endless desert sands. The poem which was actually a result of a challenge between P. B. Shelley and Horace Smith has the theme of greatness and failure with passing time. Both P. B. Shelley and Horace Smith wrote sonnets with the same title on the huge broken sculpture of Ramesses II (thirteenth century) which was acquired by the British Museum. The metaphors of the sonnets are almost similar and talk about the triumph of time over man and art. Horace Smith also includes the fate of the present times in his sonnet. For the present study, only P. B. Shelley's sonnet "*Ozymandias*" is considered as the sonnet's theme reflects one of the interpretations of Ghalib's ghazal "*Bageecha-e-itfal hai duniya meray aage.*"

Through this sonnet, Shelley evokes visuals of the rise and fall of empires and the transient nature of man's greatness and power. The sonnet begins with the imagery of a traveller narrating a captivating story and is a description of what the traveller witnessed in the desert. It is a sheer treat of visuals and imagery brought about by the description of the traveller. Shelley adroitly uses the image of a huge and broken sculpture to conjure the image of man's greatness and fall simultaneously. The poet's creativity is witnessed in his use of a single metaphor to depict two contrasting ideas of rise and fall of power. The immensity of the sculpture proves that the Pharaoh who ordered for the statue was definitely powerful but again at the same time the remains of the sculpture which are nothing but the trunkless legs and broken face confirm the fleeting nature of man's power and greatness. In the sixth line Shelley talks about the survival of art through probably centuries. This brings to mind the transitory nature of life when compared to the life of art which remains eternal. Or does it? The mention of the ruins in the previous lines also indicates the future of the ruins. A day definitely arrives when the ruins also disappear. The last six lines confirm this thought. However great a King might be and however impressive his works are they are just ephemeral in the passage of time.

The metaphors used are everlasting as they effortlessly bring the poetic ideas of the poet and imagery of futility to the fore for the present day's generation who exist in harmony with concrete jungles and who are unaware of the concept of tangible emptiness. The image of desert sands and ruins of the statues stand witness for the passing time. In the eighth line *Ozymandias* also talks about the eternalness of the artist's art and the permanence of the Pharaoh's feelings through the sculpture's work. Though he is considered as an atheist, some of his poems like "*Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*," "*Mont Blanc*" and "*Prometheus Unbound*" express his belief in a supernatural power. It is not external but an internal facility of a man to respond to nature's beauty. The tenth and eleventh lines remind the readers about the past grandeur and the next line immediately recalls the barrenness and worthlessness of the present when compared to the past magnificence. The last two lines bring out the ravages of time and emphasize the significance of time when compared to the mightiness of mankind. Man can revel in his glory for only a short period compared to the everlasting time. Mankind's prominence existed only till men of that period are alive to keep the memory alive. Art when compared to mankind enjoys much longer life. It exists for an extended time but the period obviously has to come to an end. The implied reference is that life or art has to heel in front of time. There is an implicit reference to something extremely powerful beyond the control of mankind that questions his supremacy in relation to the universe. The underlying inference to a supernatural power becomes interesting due to Shelley's atheism.

Shelley gradually builds up the description from the words of the traveller. He first describes the statue and leads us to the formidable nature of the Pharaoh and finally reveals the futility of ego and hubris of man [1]. The greatness of man lies bare in front of the vast desert sands and acts as a lesson for the future generations. The sonnet is awe-inspiring and alludes to the hollowness of man's claim to everlasting power.

It is interesting to note the uncanny resemblance of Indian and European thinking in the contemporary period of Shelley (1792 - 1822) and Ghalib (1796 -1869) who excelled in poetry albeit in different languages and

cultures across the oceans. Both the poets were renowned for their disregard for social and religious norms and yet at the same time were overwhelmed by nature and the creator. In the poems discussed in this article, both the poets use time as a metaphor to emphasize the futility of power and ego.

Urdu literary canon is remarkable for creativity and innovative narrative techniques. The beauty and inimitability of Ghalib's ghazal "Bageecha-e-itfal hai duniya meray aage" lies in the many versions that can be interpreted on reading the ghazal. Basically, there is no unity of theme in many ghazals and many themes are addressed in a ghazal. The present ghazal consists of fourteen couplets and contains a single theme - the futility of power or the spin of destiny with reference to the passage of time. The ghazal can be interpreted as the voice of Ghalib, man, time and the Almighty simultaneously.

Many readers and critics have interpreted Ghalib's voice as arrogance or as the voice of power. However, on reading the ghazal, taking into account Ghalib's life circumstances, one can clearly understand that it is the voice of indifference not of arrogance. Ghalib faced untold sufferings throughout his life. He was an unfortunate father who lost all his seven children in his lifetime. He was in a loveless marriage and his love for another woman was unrequited. He suffered financial problems as well. Fortunately, these problems could not make a dent on his creativity. Nevertheless, Ghalib's totally shaken faith remains apparent in his poetry forever. His verses scorn at false clerics, pious men, religious mores and the Almighty himself. Though he disdains traditions, several times he turns to the Almighty for succor. This ghazal can be interpreted as Ghalib's indifference to the Almighty and his creation. Ghalib's indifference evolves from absolute desperation and hopelessness. The fifth couplet in Ghalib's ghazal confirms this interpretation as Ghalib tells the Almighty not to display concern about Ghalib's condition in his absence rather the Almighty should worry about his impression in Ghalib's mind. This could be because Ghalib considers that the Almighty is the sole reason behind his miseries and distress. Yet, in the last two lines, Ghalib is seen pleading for the Almighty's compassion.

In the second interpretation, the voice of the poem could be a man's voice. Ghalib could be describing the greatness of mankind that surpasses even the Almighty's creations and miracles. The poetic technique, pathetic fallacy was used effectively in this ghazal to ridicule the endless intricate exchanges in mankind's daily life. The ghazal reminds the readers that this world is just an illusion in the grand scheme of the Almighty. The voice of man decries the so-called miracles of the Almighty and expounds the mightiness of man and his power to surmount seemingly impossible situations. In this interpretation, the voice of man may be attributed to the entire ghazal.

In the third interpretation, the poem can be considered as the voice of God, who is trying to point out the limitations of mankind by reminding him that the deeds man consider great or actually of no importance to him and are just commonplace things. The voice of God says that he is aware of the true picture of people who put up a façade of faith, belief or loyalty. This voice also accepts that Ghalib is his colleague, companion and confidant and that it trusts Ghalib. The voice further urges others not to speak ill of Ghalib.

The fourth voice is that of time, which I would consider for comparison with Shelley's "Ozymandias." The interpretation of this ghazal with this viewpoint is that with the passage of time, everything which was considered great in its time loses its significance. The arrogance of time clearly comes out from the first line of this ghazal which says that the whole world is a child's play and the stage is set for action every day and night. The spectacles of grandeur like the throne of Emperor Solomon and miracles of Jesus Christ are nothing more than idle conversation. The deserts and rivers are at the mercy of time. They exist and disappear with passage of time. The voice of time also tells that the impression people make on it is more important than the condition of time. It further accepts that there is a tinge of pride in its voice but that should be expected as it is only reflecting the image of the Universe.

Time can bring about change in the feelings of people as well. Nights of separations can culminate into nights of unions and again these nights can turn into nights of separation. This voice also talks about the fate of time with the passage of time. The tenth couplet which speaks about the change in the feelings of the faithful Laila regarding her beloved, Majnun is a classical example of the change in feelings with respect to times. Similarly the good times can turn into bad times and bad times into worse times. The metaphors used in this ghazal are complex and intricate and speak volumes about the creativity of the poet. In the last four lines, time accepts that there is a chance that its end is nearing but it would go on living till the last drop. Again this could be an implicit reference to

the Almighty. Moreover, it urges the world not to judge Ghalib as time would prove that people's perceptions change and they would realize the true literary worth of Ghalib.

The above sonnet and ghazals are powerful statements that resonate the conquest of time over the strength and wealth of mankind. Written by two great poets from two different countries and belonging to different cultures in the same era these poems bring to the fore similar thoughts on time. The sonnet and ghazal also emphasize that creativity outlasts man's hegemony. On analysis of the sonnet and the ghazal, it is understood that the metaphors used to indicate the unpredictability of destiny are significant in the present and retain their everlasting excellence as long as mankind lasts. Shelley's sonnet reflects the theme of the rise and fall of power and triumph of time over wealth and art as well. Ghalib's ghazal portrays the unique features of Urdu poetic traditions and depicts chiefly Ghalib's voice of indifference, God's voice of supremacy, man's voice postulating the mightiness of man and the ultimate truth about existentialism in the voice of time. Urdu poetry is renowned for the use of literary technique, pathetic fallacy, to bestow elegance and unparalleled imagery.

The objective of the paper is to focus on the thought processes involved in the primary texts, their similarities despite the differences in culture and distance, and the similarity of themes and timelessness of the metaphors used by the poets. Comparative studies like these would definitely assist in drawing connections between the different cultures and serve mankind to rise above petty differences. In conclusion, it can be said that whether the tone is that of arrogance or indifference or awe, all the interpretations point out to the grand finale of the absolute annihilation of pride and power. Despite the several differences between the poets and the culture it is remarkable that the sonnet and ghazal advocate humility in the presence of time.

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