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Love as Divine Power and Spiritual Gratification: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

This research paper is based on the study of the work of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), John Donne (1572-1631), Michael Drayton (15163-1631), and Kamala Das (1934-2009). Shakespeare, John Donne, and Michael Drayton were contemporary poets. All the four poets mentioned herein have presented very strong views about love in their literary works. Analysis of their literary works establishes love as divine power and source of spiritual gratification. This research paper focuses on various aspects of love-its strength, its purity, its need, and above all its genuineness.

Love is an inevitable emotion common to all living beings. It is the path a human being can take to reach out to another and to connect to nature, and to the universe. Love is like a waterfall which flows naturally and unhindered. Simultaneously love flows spontaneously from our heart. Thus we should let it flow uninterrupted.

Shakespeare's famous poem 'True Love' which ranks among the finest products of the lyrical genius of Shakespeare, Donne's one of the masterpieces 'Present in Absence' which is a protest in favour of absence (absence of beloved), and Drayton's 'Since There is no Help' which is a realization of power of love, are focused herein. Kamala Das is the queen of love poems. Love is the soul of her poems; thus her various poems are discussed herein to present her viewpoint about love in her life.

Keywords: True love, divine, strength, undying, obstacles, heart, sacrifice, time, place, unchanged.

William Shakespeare

Shakespeare was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon". His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright. Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were mainly comedies and histories and these works have been regarded

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as some of the best works produced in these genres. He wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, which are considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights.

Shakespeare has a firm conviction that true love is undying, and it remains unchanged in all circumstances, places and times. It overcomes all obstacles of class, colour, caste, status, and religion. It remains unaffected of all worldly problems. His famous poem 'True Love' is regarded as a perfect sonnet. It is one of the greatest sonnets in English poetry. This poem exposes the divine quality of true love. In this poem the poet writes:

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments. Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove.
> ("True Love", Lines 1-4)

The poet here tells his friend that no hurdles stand in the way of the spiritual union of true lovers. Their love remains unchanged in all circumstances, places and times. Love dwells in hearts. It is an internal feeling which is not affected by external forces. If love changes in the face of adverse weather; if it alters at anybody's instigation, and if it fluctuates with the passage of time, it is not true love at all. True lovers have divine courage to face all impediments in the way of love. In spite of great sufferings, they never surrender before worldly powers. They don't care even for life and sacrifice it for the sake of their true love. Not only this, he further elaborates:

> O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
> It is the star to every wandering bark,
> Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
> ("True Love", Lines 5-8)

The poet here illustrates with the help of metaphors how true love is unchanging, undying, and sacred. He compares it with a light-house on the sea-shore, which shines constantly in the midst of violent storms. He further compares it with the Pole-star which always rises in the North, remains in the constant position, and guides the ships and sailors misled in the unchartered sea in the thick darkness of the night. Just as the height of the Pole-star from the earth can be measured but its influence on mankind cannot be calculated, similarly the value and impact of love cannot be described in words. Selfless love leads a person from darkness to light, from falsehood to truth, and from death to immortality. To establish his concept of immortality of love he writes:

> Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
> Within his bending sickle's compass come;
> Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
> But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
> ("True Love", Lines 9-12)

The poet depicts with the help of personifications and Greek mythological allusions the holy, unchanging and undying nature of true love. True love is not the subject of 'Time' as it is far beyond the reach of 'Time'. Physical charms, being skin-deep are within the range of 'Time' and also the laughing stock of 'Time'. The ravages of 'Time' leave their mark on rosy lips and cheeks but they cannot touch even the circumstances of selfless love. Physical love fades away with the passage of time but true love continues unaffected. The true minds united in love remain united till the Day of judgement. His conviction about the nature of true love is so firm that he speaks with conviction that nobody can disprove his views about true love. He writes:

> If this be error and upon me proved,
> I never writ, nor no man ever loved.
> ("True Love", Lines 13-14)

He emphatically claims that if all that he has said about the nature of true love is incorrect, and if it is proved against him that he has not lived upto the definition of selfless love, he would gladly accept that he is not a poet at all, and none has ever loved truly in this world.

Ultimately Shakespeare says that true love is everlasting. He speaks with conviction that nobody can disprove his views about true love. As none can say that Shakespeare did not write this poem, nobody can say that true love is transient.

John Donne

John Donne is considered the pre-eminent representative of the metaphysical poets. His works are noted for their strong, sensual style and include sonnets, love poems, religious poems, Latin translations, epigrams, elegies, songs, satires and sermons. His poetry is noted for its vibrancy of language and inventiveness of metaphor, especially compared to that of his contemporaries. Donne's style is characterized by abrupt openings and various paradoxes, ironies and dislocations. He is particularly famous for his mastery of metaphysical conceits.

He has expressed his conviction about true love in one of his greatest amorous poems 'Present in Absence'. This poem is a protest made in favour of 'absence'. John Donne's firm belief about true love is like that of Shakespeare. He says that time and absence cannot destroy true love. The true love for the beloved is reinforced in her absence. The strength, distance and length of physical absence of the beloved cannot change his love for her because their love is beyond time, place and death. He writes in the poem:

> Absence, hear thou my protestation
> Against thy strength,
> Distance, and length;
> Do what thou canst for alteration:
> For hearts of truest mettle
> Absence doth join, and Time doth settle.
> ("Present in Absence", Lines 1-6)

Here, in these lines, the lover feels separated from his beloved due to her physical absence caused by death. But he firmly believes that the strength, distance and length of her physical absence cannot change their love because it is true and strong and above time, place and death. Her physical absence rather intensifies their love, and time has no effect on it. The lover makes a protest against absence which has no power to change his love for his beloved. Asserting how her physical absence rather intensifies their love, the poet further writes:

Who loves a mistress of such quality,
His mind hath found
Affection's ground
Beyond time, place, and all mortality.
To hearts that cannot vary
Absence is present, Time doth tarry.
("Present In Absence", Lines 7-12)

These lines expose Donne's conviction that a person who loves his beloved from the depth of his heart, he feels her presence in spite of her absence. For true lovers, time stops and death becomes powerless. Since love sprouts and blossoms in hearts, and the hearts of true lovers never change, thus their love, in fact, is metaphysical; it is timeless and deathless / immortal. How the lover feels presence of his beloved in her absence, and decodes her secret gesture can best be seen in the following lines:

My senses want their outward motion
……..…….
Redoubled by her secret notion:
Like rich men that take pleasure
In hiding more than handling treasure.
("Present In Absence", Lines 13-18)

Here the poet wants to express his heart-felt emotions about his departed beloved through his outward senses but his thinking power and the secret gesture of his beloved living in the high heaven do not allow him to do so. The urge to conceal his emotions becomes stronger when he thinks of the secret gesture of his beloved. Just as the rich take more pleasure in hiding their wealth than in showing it, likewise the secret gesture of his beloved touches him so deeply that he takes more delight in concealing his heart-felt emotions than in revealing them in public. Though his beloved is absent (dead) but their love is alive yet and will always be that's why he is able to see a distinct vision of hers. This strength of true love, he claims in the following lines:

By absence this good means I gain,
That I can catch her,
Where none can watch her,
In some close corner of my brain:
There I embrace and kiss her;
And so enjoy her and none miss her.
("Present In Absence", Lines 19-24)

Further at the end of the poem the poet firmly speaks that absence of his beloved has not affected their love at all. Instead the physical absence and separation of his beloved has proved good for her lover because he can see her presence in his mind's eye any time. She exists there where nobody except him can reach, watch, catch her, embrace and kiss her. His beloved lives, after her death, in some close corner of his brain where nobody except him can enter. Thus he enjoys her presence in the bottom of his heart in spite of her physical absence and separation. Hence celebrating the immortality of metaphysical love, he establishes the truth that true love is beyond place, time and death.

Michael Drayton

In 1591 Drayton produced his first book 'The Harmony of the Church', a volume of spiritual poems dedicated to Lady Devereux. It is notable for a version of the Song of Solomon, executed with considerable richness of expression. He made his real beginning with 'Idea, The Shepherd's Garland' in 1593. In 1594 he published his first sonnet under the title of 'Idea's Mirror'. In 1596 he turned to historical poetry and wrote 'The Baron's War'. After the great sonneteers like Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare, it is Michael Drayton who bears reading best. His collection 'Idea' opposed from 1594 to 1619. Its every edition was augmented so much so that it became a sort of encyclopaedia in which all the familiar themes recurred. His poem 'Since There's No Help' is his one of the best sonnets ever written and it appears in the same collection of sonnets 'Idea'. This sonnet is addressed to a woman with whom the lover does not have good relations. Their relations are so bad that they want to part their ways from each other. The poet writes in 'Since There's No Help':

> SINCE there's no help, come let us kiss and part;
> Nay, I have done, you get no more of me,
> And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart
> That thus so cleanly I myself can free; (Lines 1-4)

The lover says that since there is no other option except to part from each other, they should kiss each other and part for ever. The lover has already made up his mind to do so. He tells his beloved that she would not be able to enjoy his company from that day. He is glad from the bottom of his heart that he could get rid of her so easily and cleanly.

Drayton's philosophy of love is very practical, it is not platonic. The young lovers often quarrel and try to get rid of each other and live like strangers in future. They come to realize the power of love when they get old and have no company. The lover who is on his death bed realizes that one breath of love from his beloved could recover him from death to life. He writes:

> Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
> When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
> When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
> And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
> Now if thou would'st, when all have given him over,
> From death to life thou might'st him yet recover.
> ("Since There's No Help" Lines 9-14)

Here the poet expresses his strong belief that true love has the power to recover a dying lover. The lover who is separated from his beloved is on his death bed. He is speechless and his pulse is failing. His faith and innocence are about to leave him forever. Nobody is with him. He is all alone and is about to leave his world for ever. If there is anything in this world, that can recover him from death, it the love of his beloved for him. One breath of her love could give him life.

Kamala Das

Kamala Das, who was also known by her one time pen name Madhavi kutty, was one of the most distinctive and original of Indian poets writing in English. She was also a leading Malayalam author from Kerala (India). The credit of her popularity in Kerala goes mainly to her short stories and autobiography. Most of her poems deal with the theme of unfulfilled love and yearning for true love. Through her poetry, Das reveals her concern for woman and search for genuine love. Love is the central theme of her poetry. Her greatness as a love poet arises from the fact that her love poetry comes out of her own personal experience. Though Das's concept of love and her own experience about it is different from that of Shakespeare, John Donne and Michael Drayton but like them she too believes in the strength of love that's why throughout her life she longed for love. Her yearning for love can best be seen in her poem 'Love' (*Summer in Calcutta*). She writes:

> Until I found you,
> I wrote verse, drew pictures,
> And, went out with friends
> For walks…
> Now that I love you,
> Curled like an old mongrel
> My life lies, content,
> In you…. (Lines 1-8)

Here in these lines the poet reveals her feelings that before she met her lover, her life was totally different. She was engaged in activities like writing verses, drawing pictures and whiled away the time in worthless activities. Her life changed after she met her lover. Now her focus shifted from her past to present. She attempted to get contentment in her man's love. Das's earnest desire to attain love can best be seen in her honest attempt, to her:

> The only truth that matters is
> That all this love is mine to give
> It does not matter that I seek
> For it a container, as alms
> Seek a begging bowl, a human
> Shape to envelope its wealth.
> ("A Phantom Lotus", Lines 1-6)

The poet is so desperate to get genuine love that she is ready to shower all her love and looks out for a suitable container that can hold her uncontrolled emotions. She wants

to love her man from the bottom of her heart and wants to be loved with the same depth. She just longs for an unconditional and ideal love, nothing else.

The poet seeks love so intensely that life for her is meaningless without love. She says that she would prefer death to life if she can't have love in her life. She writes:

> O sea, i am fed up
> 1 want to be simple
> I want to be loved
> And
> If love is not to be had,
> I want to be dead, just dead.
> ("The Suicide", Lines 50-55)

Let's have a look at her another poem 'Morning at Apollo Pier' and see her plea for love:

> But, hold me, hold me once again,
> Kiss the words to death in my mouth, plunder
> Memories. I hide my defeat in your
> Wearying blood, and all my fears and shame.
> Your flawed beauty is my only refuge
> O love me, love, love me till I die. (Lines 23-28)

Her yearning for love is so intense that she clings to her lover and pleads him to hold her once again. She seeks her ultimate place in her lover where she wishes to take refuse. She wishes to submerge all her "defeat", "fear", "shame" and wishes to be loved till her death.

In her poem 'The Gulmohur'the poet celebrates her emotion of love and its strong impact on her. She compares her present condition with that of the past and explains how her life has changed after she met her lover:

> My hands before I met him were cold as though they had reached
> Out and touched a corpse I was so uneasy with them but in his room
> Against his body summered my hands grew warm.……(Lines 1-3)

The poet here says that before she met her lover, her hands were as cold as dead body. She felt uneasy with her hands but after she met her lover, the love rejuvenated her life. In her man's love she felt the warmth of pleasant summer. All her feelings of uneasiness and her corpse-like feeling disappeared with the warm and loving touch of her lover.

This analytical study of the work of foreign as well as Indian writers, finally establishes the fact that love has divine power, its strength is infinite and it has the power to provide spiritual gratification to lovers. True love continues till the day of judgement. It is timeless and deathless. True love has the power to save a man (lover) from death. Lovers, if can't have love in their life, prefer death to life without love.

Conclusion

The most beautiful flower that can blossom on this earth is that of love. Just as a beautiful flower blossoms naturally, even from a small plant, likewise love sprouts in

our hearts, blossoms and expands. We should just allow this flowering from within. Is there anything more profound than the strength and beauty of two hearts that love each other? Love has the cool freshness of the full moon and brilliance of the sun's rays. Just as cool and fresh breeze, and brilliance the sun's rays will not enter into our room unless we keep our doors/windows open, the same way this flower of love will not blossom unless we permit this flowering from within. Love is not something to be imagined or faked, but lived. It is life itself. It is a state of being active. If we just stand by a clear river and look, will our thirst be quenched? Certainly not; to quench our thirst, we must bend down and drink water. All we have to do to fill ourselves with the crystalline waters of love is to surrender. Though many relationships suffered, are suffering, and will suffer but still we have not lost love forever, because if love dies, universe will die. The eternal ember of love is in everyone. We simply need to blow on it and it will be fanned into flames. We all are observing that many species of animals, birds, and plants have become extinct or are on the verge of extinct. Are we going to allow love to become extinct as well? To prevent extinction of love, we must return to respecting, worshipping and having faith in a divine power. That power is not outside, it is inside, and to explore it we need to adjust our perspective. And it can be done only when we expand our vision and make it sharper.

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