

QUEST FOR SELF IN THE WORKS OF HABBA KHATOON AND EMILY BRONTE

Dr. Asma Shaw

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Islamia College of Science and Commerce,
(University of Kashmir), Srinagar. (J & K), India, asmashaw@ymail.com

Abstract: The paper aims at revealing how the first person singular is in essence a shield to give expression to the pre-existing structures in the literary traditions of the two languages, viz., Kashmiri and English. Lyrical poetry, is governed by various literary constructs that are the lyrical mode itself and the archetypes in the linguistic community. In Habba Khatoon the collective myths of birth, youth, old-age and death are the re-phrasing of the centuries' old myths that are handed down from generation to generation. These myths are the stock themes of mystic poetry also which relates man's position in the universe to the seemingly individual lives. The cycle of birth-childhood-youth-age- death in an individual human life are envisioned as the representation of the cosmic phenomena. The paper attempts to show how we can understand Habba Khatoon's poetry in terms of the mystic leitmotifs that have currency through the oral tradition of Sufi poetry. As the historical accounts support, Habba Khatoon was trained in classical music in the tradition of the *Hafiza* tradition in Kashmir, her poetry can best be understood in comparison to the eroto-mystic themes of this legacy.

Emily Bronte, too, studied music and at the same time was fully conversant with romantic poetry of the time. She wrote in consonance with the romantic trend and used all those metaphors and similes that were popular among the poets. Her novelty lies in associating her intellectual transgression against the feminine surrender and her resolution to withstand all odds to unravel the truth and attain enlightenment.

Since Habba Khatoon and Emily Bronte were primarily lyrical poets, they saw reflection of their subjective moods in the objective reality. But the tradition and the customs of lyricism do not allow them to space out the subject, as modern poets are expected to do. The texture of their poetry is determined by music, collective myth and mystic notions. Being rooted in oral culture, lyrical poetry follows all the principles of oral poetry in using stock characters, stock themes and stock situations. It is therefore futile to seek any sort of the representation of the real self of the two poets in their poems. The semblance of self in their poetry is to be enjoyed for its skill and art of creating novelty, not as an insight into their private lives.

Keywords: Subjectivity, Lyricism, Freedom.

Introduction: The first person point of view in Habba Khatoon and Emily Bronte is the pre occupation with the legacy of eroto-mystic romanticism in the two languages. The surface subjectivity produced by the use of the grammatical speaker is only a mirage as it constantly leads the readers' attention from the person of the poet to the archetypal speaker produced by lyricism.

Subjectivity in Habba Khatoon's poetry is surfaced by the presence of a speaking subject who is often confused with the self of the poet. In every lyric, the driving force is a chosen-rhyme and an assumed mood, and the verses go on adding up. Since her poetry has remained preserved in oral medium, there is likelihood of many interpolations by various singers and even later poets. The semblance of a speaking subject is therefore much alluding. Any of her lyrics can be extended to any extent by a person having the skill of using rhymes. One of the most popular songs of Habba Khatoon is 'Why this aversion for me?', which has been sung by all the major singers of Kashmir. The lyric is marked for its intense subjectivity that it has been related to the biography of the poet. The semblance of subjectivity runs through the verses as:

Who is my rival to have seduced you?
Why this aversion for me?

Give up your sulking, and hate;
Doesn't your heart feel inclined?
Why this aversion for me?
.....

I, Habba Khatoon, am remorseful now,
all in your love I forgot to worship;
sorrowfully I remember the youth I lost.
Why this aversion for me? (Shauq 2012 , 67-8)

The lyric is a succession of spontaneous complaints of a woebegone girl who is passionately waiting for her callous nonchalant lover. The speaker, though conscious of her own charms, has a suspicion in her mind that some other charming dame has seduced her amorous beau. She implores her in every possible way to give up his grudge and value her true love. But the beau, being a conceited dandy, ignores all her beseeching and remains unmoved. The speaker is an innocent young lady who, going against all restrictions of modesty, is ready to surrender her body to please her indifferent lover.

Music is the essence and guiding principle of all such lyrics. *Habba Khatoon*, so far as the legend goes, was well-versed in music. It is said that she contrived her own symphony known as '*maqaam-i raast*'. The legend seems to be cogent because most of the musicians and singers of the time were women who were called 'Hafizas'. The centers of music and dance managed by Hafizas were the centers of culture besides being the rendezvous of the pleasure mongers. The songsters were greatly respected and singing was considered a mark of modesty and gentility. The song quoted above, though superficial in its translated form, is one of the most melodious lyrics in Kashmiri.

Emily Bronte, for belonging to a much advanced culture, was trained in music. She also had the opportunity to hear Beethoven's symphonies during her nine-month stay in Brussels, a city rich in chamber music and piano recitals. In 1844 she acquired an eight-volume anthology of sheet-music. In England, serious commitment of women to music was a part of gentility in culture. Women virtuosos enjoyed high esteem in society. Stevie Davies wrote:

Emily was interested solely in playing, rather than in accompanying herself in singing: none of the vocal music in the new anthology shows any markings. Fine ladies were trained songsters, and might have some arty showpieces up their sleeves. (41)

Emily's pencil markings on the pages of the folios of eight-volume anthology of German music indicate that she possessed a keen interest in acquitting mastery in symphonic music. All her acquaintance with Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony is evidenced by the music in her lyrics. Stevie Davies wrote further:

... Emily Bronte was essentially a lyric poet, whose inspiration found expression in concise distillations of emotion. Music is a language, a sign system with its own unfolding logic and laws; Emily Bronte thought musically. But her earlier work had not been symphonic in compass. Emily Bronte's lyric poetry shows from the first a musical ear attuned to phrasings and cadences of an expressive but restrained reverie: (41)

Her musical aspirations become more ardent in such poems as combine lyricism with desire for liberty. Here is her famous poem, titled "And Like Myself lone, wholly lone" in which liberty is attained through lyrical excellence and eternity of music.

Give we the hills our equal prayer;
Earth's breezy hills and heaven's blue sea;
We ask for nothing further here
But our own hearts and liberty.
.....

But let me think that if to-day
It pines in cold captivity,
To-morrow both shall soar away,
Eternally, entirely free. (WH&P 327)

In the first stanza, the poet, in the voice of the caged bird, gives an image of the glorious vastness of nature, verdant hills which are always refreshed by breeze, and the blue ocean under the blue sky. The sight of the expanses of free nature eventually evokes an ardent desire in the heart of the caged bird to encompass the whole cosmos or merge into its elemental presence.

The bird is the infinite soul in the finite physique which keeps it captive till it breathes its last. The poet, in the voice of the caged bird, longs to have the option to set the soul free. Being inseparable from the body, the soul can vainly long to see itself soaring high in the immensity of nature. The limitation makes the soul only a prayer which is broadcast in 'earth's breezy hills and heaven's blue sea'. Liberty of the soul being the speaker's ardent desire, the escape of the caged bird would not cause her regret.

The poem ends up with an ardently childlike hope that the day is sure to come when the soul shall have its freedom and the cage shall mingle with the elements through dissolution. Both the cage and the captive shall have their freedom, not on parole, but for all times to come. The words 'eternally, entirely free' foreground the metaphysical implications of the poem. The poet yearns for getting transformed into an 'eternal music' that like Echo remains resounding through breezy hills, dales, oceans and the sky. The munificence of nature's charms evokes an irresistible longing in the soul to transgress the physical existence of body and have intimate communion with every constituent of nature's immensity. Music, divested of lexical associations, has the scope of this perfect harmony. If meaning of words is the prime end of the poet, the music is sullied and it loses its evanescence. In rustic folk lays we have numerous songs which have their sway only because of their dissociation from meaning and thought. Pure music, an end in itself, is the soul of lyrical poetry.

Freedom attained through perfect blending with nature has also the objective of achieving perfect oblivion or harmony that enables us to get rid of all worldly considerations. The Gnostics in all languages know the secret of this swaying potential of music and use it to produce delirious states of mind. The dithyrambs of the ancient Greeks were the most perfect examples of this autonomous music in the shape of songs.

Freedom through lyrical poetry has yet another manifestation, that is to liberate the meditative mind from the mundane values of good and bad, pain and sorrow, loss and gain, and now and then. The sway of music makes all artificial boundaries of reason meaningless. It attains the power of such a frenzy that breaks the barriers between the imagining mind and the imagined reality. The poet, the singer, and the devoted lovers of music seek complete freedom, though momentarily, from the arbitrary codes of the here and now and help them have some sort of epiphany of the desired experience. It is not, therefore, amazing that many religious and social institutions, consider music a bane to reason. The lyricists, who aim at producing symphonies through words and images are in perfect agreement in using music to counter arbitrary logic imposed on the freedom loving soul. Music to them is a means to transcendence. Music and spirituality are, therefore, inalienable in many religions and cultures. It reflects the very essence of a culture and is regarded as the most enduring element of the identity of a community. According to Walker

...musical meaning is the product of a learned belief system about particular sounds and not intrinsic to sounds themselves. It is, therefore, important to study the belief system itself, and not to analyse reaction to the sounds used.
(1990:4)

The lyrical poets, conscious of the spiritual import of musical sounds and sound patterns, avail themselves of the repertoire of musical phrases available in their language in creating supernal effects

for the liberty of the soul. Emily Bronte's lyrical poem 'Often Rebuked, Yet Always Back Returning' (The Poem appeared for the first time in *Wuthering Heights*.) reveals how she desires to use her lyricism to achieve communion with the supernal realms. Life is brief and available only once to every human being, yet ignorance and greed fill it with vexations, fears, frets and delusions. The poet wants to liberate her soul from this quagmire and use her lyrical competence to retain the primeval bliss.

To-day, I will seek not the shadowy region;
Its un-sustaining, vastness waxes drear;
And visions rising, legion after legion,
Bring the unreal world too strangely near. (313)

Contrary to the worldly norms of strife and achievements, the poet aspires to lead a simple pastoral way of life in which there is no place for the anxiety and dread caused by man's vain struggle to possess. Her natural and instinctual drives make her prefer to live with other animate things that are free from the fear and fret caused by the notions of uncertainties of imaginary tomorrow. It is only the present that is the real time because the senses and the surrounding reality are in direct contact. It is not, however, an animalistic way of life that the poet wants to lead. She abhors mere enjoyment of having physical vigorous health and physical appetites. While living side by side with the sheep grazing in 'ferny glens' and 'the wild wind blows on the mountainside', she longs for a meditative life. She wants to take lessons from 'lonely mountains' because their language is more communicative. They reveal the permanence of nature and the transience of life. It is a philosophy that reveals to the reflecting mind the meaning of Heaven and Hell:

What have those lonely mountains worth revealing?
More glory and more grief than I can tell:
The earth that wakes one human heart to feeling
Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell. (313)

We do not come across such profound lyrics in Habba Khatoon's poetry; nevertheless, her rustic lyrics suggest the same kind of abhorrence for the mundane materialist world and longing for the origin. Her grudge against the torments at the house of the in-laws is a metaphor of her spiritual alienation in the material world. The stereotype of obnoxious, overbearing and cruel mother-in law in her poetry is a metaphor of the abomination for the worldly life. It is in tune with those numerous lyrics of Indian classical music that complain of the cruelties of the in-laws and longing for return to the 'baabul' (parental house). Habba Khatoon in "Not well I am at the house of my in-laws", expresses her ardent appeal to her parents.

The song, recalling to the mind the pathetic story of Biblical Ruth and Orpah, expresses an ardent desire to leave the world of falsehood and return to the world of ultimate truth, the original abode. However, like a true subjective poet, Habba Khatoon does not make any overt statement about the mystic import of the suggestions in the lyric. It is the tale of a typical Kashmiri girl of the feudal ages who shows complete forbearance in bearing the torments at the house of her in-laws. In running errands, she often commits mistakes and bears the brunt of her mother-in-law. She goes to the waterhole to fetch water for the family, but her ill luck, or her being engrossed in memories of the parental home, per chance, drops her earthen pitcher which breaks into pieces. She remains spinning wool or cotton on the spinning wheel till late night, and the fatigue overpowers her, has a short douse, and the weight of her body breaks the axle of the spinning wheel. She desires that his father arranges for the wood and the carpenter to mend the spinning wheel. Similarly all in other routine chores in the house, she reveals her inexperience and haplessness.

Subjectivity in lyrical poetry of the two female poets under discussion assumes many other forms of desire for freedom and the speaker remains invariably a female. But we must not forget that this type of lyrical subjectivity is not the foregrounding of the real self of a feeling and thinking person, it is rather a sort of semantic skill. It is a kind of word-game that produces the semblance of a real experiencing

subject. The internal semantic suggestions make it clear the semblance is not real. Lyric poetry, as the poststructuralist analysis reveals, works to the contrary of subjectivity. The more we read this kind of lyrical poetry across languages, the more we come to realise that composers of lyrics have the prowess of producing new combinations of the stereotyped structure; it is only the poet's wit and linguistic competence that produces ever-new symphonies out of the given raw material. Therein lies the novelty or difference of the text of a lyric. In the words of Derrida, "there is nothing outside the text". (1967: 158-9) It means that the traditional subject of Wordsworth's aesthetic does not exist; it is the reading habit of the reader or listener that generates meaning in the text. In the words of Terry Eagleton:

... meaning is scattered or dispersed along the whole chain of signifiers...it is never fully present in any one sign alone, but is rather a kind of constant flickering of presence and absence together. (128)

The theme of freedom through literary exuberance is, therefore, not to be restricted to any particular sign or set of signs; it is to be perceived through the reading of the entire text and in the possibilities of its extension. The two lyrics quoted above are a clear illustration how the reader or listener can add new stanzas to the poems without doing any harm to them. The reason is that the readers have a habit of connoting different words in their traditional meanings. Words like, cage, bird, home, parental home, in-laws' home, lover, love, beloved, and so on and so forth have a free play in lyrical poetry because the tradition in the languages has already determined their 'meaning' or 'semantic equivalents'. The theory of representation of Aristotle is hardly applicable to lyrical poetry. In a lyric we do not find a spaced out subject, it is a game in which signifiers point to 'signifieds', and 'signifieds' are changed into signifiers. There is no such thing as a final signified in the shape of the self of the poet; it is in itself a signifier. Thus meaning of a lyric becomes an endless play of signification.

The poet's self, the reader's self, the self inbuilt in the language, and the self governed by the moment and the milieu constitute an interesting play of never-ending signification. We can never speak of 'Truth'. Rivkin and Ryan write:

Without signification, without those processes of substitution (of a signifier for a signified) and differentiation (of the signifier from the signified and from other signifiers) and repetition (of an original differentiation in an opposition that situates it as the subordinate and devalued term) and non-identity (of the original truth with itself because its "self" is entirely other than itself, being difference) that are "essential" to the making of meaning in a language. (341)

The foregrounding of self becomes all the more impossible in lyrical poetry as it is essentially the voice of the community which the poet carries forward. Musical contrivances, in spite of the individual innovations by a poet, are a part of the phonetic structure of a language and are handed over from one generation to the other. Lyrical music relies on the nature of consonants and vowels, accent, intonation, stress and tone of the language. The poets exploit all these features of their mother tongue in agreement with the community. They may get influenced from the poetry of other languages, or even borrow some of the prosodic norms from them, but they cannot graft the music of any non-native language on to their mother tongue. Every language has its natural potential to reject or accept such musical experimentation. Thus the lyrical poet has to remain subservient to the domineering intrinsic music of their language that has been established as a lyrical mode by their precedents. It becomes a literary tradition from which there is no escape.

The lyrical language being essentially verbal music remains cryptic, only hinting to the expository nuances, delicacies of emotions, and beauties of expression. They are bound to remain abstractions; any attempt to expound these abstractions through rational analysis is bound to reduce them into a jumble of words. The deconstructive analysis is not applicable to lyrical poetry; Derrida himself knew the hazards of this analysis and therefore stressed that "Deconstruction is not a method, and cannot be transformed into one." (1967:543). Deconstruction is not a mechanical operation or an arbitrary system of reducing a literary text into fragments. Derrida warned against considering deconstruction a mechanical

operation when he stated that “It is true that in certain circles (university or cultural) the technical and methodological “metaphor” that seems necessarily attached to the very word “deconstruction” has been able to seduce or lead astray.” Richard Beardsworth explains that

Derrida is careful to avoid this term [method] because it carries connotations of a procedural form of judgement. A thinker with a method has already decided *how* to proceed, is unable to give him or herself up to the matter of thought in hand, is a functionary of the criteria which structure his or her conceptual gestures. For Derrida this is irresponsibility itself. Thus, to talk of a method in relation to deconstruction, especially regarding its ethico-political implications, would appear to go directly against the current of Derrida's philosophical adventure. (41)

Habba Khatoon likewise, though in her own rustic way, celebrates life and expresses her passionate desire to continue her earthly pleasures. Habba Khatoon's expresses her view that the components of the highest pleasure are tranquility and freedom from fear. This goal can be achieved by living in the moment, neither in the past nor in future. It is obtained by knowledge, friendship and living a virtuous and temperate life. She lauds the enjoyment of simple pleasures like relishing simple rustic food, adorning the body with flowers, roaming free from the dread of death, and valuing every moment of life. The images of lover as a guest, the guest relishing such plain food as rice, curd and pumpkin, welcoming the guest with garlands of briers, garnishing hair by narcissus, washing body in sandalwood water and the like suggest innocence and piety in love. All the erotic suggestions are deliberately curtailed.

To conclude lyricism of Habba Khatoon of the sixteenth century and Emily Bronte of the nineteenth century is an attempt to use language to create a semblance of personal freedom in giving vent to suppressed feelings of woman. Being rooted in the oral tradition lyrical poetry follows various universal patterns that are uniform across ages and cultures. It is open ended and does not follow the rigours of classical structure. It has to be read, and enjoyed in totality and not through critical scrutiny. Taking various examples from the two poets, it was observed how lyrical poetry is conservative, mnemonic and part of collective memory of a people. The poet's individual personality and talent does not play much role in the choice of words, metaphors, similes and allusions, the texture is rather determined by the lyrical conventions in language. Lyrical form of poetry is not sectarian, parochial, and encompasses wide range of human passions that cannot be categorized and appreciated in terms of a particular faith. It remains unaffected by the changes in social and economic patterns of society, nevertheless conforms to these changes in terms of lexical items.

Lyricism with its basic principle of freedom from reason, faith, and milieu, uses stock characters, stock situations and stock responses; analysis of some songs of the two poets illustrates this generalization. In the light of various aesthetic theories from Longinus to contemporary critics, like Derrida, it was seen how the basic motive of lyricism is to seek transport through ecstasy.

Structuralism explains lyrical style as a free play of readymade building blocks in a language and the semblance of the subject is its beauty. A lyric cannot be understood and appreciated in relation to the actual life experiences of its author. The best lyrics are those in which this free play seems to be spontaneous in creating semblance of subjectivity.

Some common themes of the two poets are: intense feeling of captivity, transience of life, craving for full abandon, sado-masochistic pleasure, obsession with death and return to the origin and vanquishing death through music. The element of 'transgression' and radicalism in the poetry of Emily Bronte and Habba Khatoon produces the power of the sublime which is male gendered aesthetics. The semblance of subjectivity in the poetry of the two poets is in conformity with the lyrical traditions governed essentially by male aesthetics.

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