

A Comparative Analysis of Shelley's "I would not be a King" with Ghani Khan's "Bacha"/ King: A Romantic Perspective of Revolt

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Abstract :

Several researches have been accomplished in the domain of comparative study but comparing P. B. Shelley's poetry with Pashto poet Ghani Khan with the perspective of romantic revolt has not yet been conducted. The Romantic Revival that was initiated in 1798 with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge was a reaction against rules and customs of eighteenth century poetry. It was emerged as a reactionary movement against "The Age of Enlightenment" which was based on reason and logic. Salient traits of romanticism are the superiority of imagination, revolt against authority, return to Nature, remoteness, subjectivity, search for the Golden Age, liberty, equality, and fraternity, etc. A comparative study of P.B. Shelley's poetry with Ghani Khan, a romantic Pashto poet, has not merely opened up new areas but also brought the local or marginalized poets into centre. In this study, the researchers employing the research method of textual analysis have explored the romantic trait of revolt against authority from Ghani Khan's poem "Bacha"/ King, and Shelley's "I would not be a king".

Key words: Romanticism; Revolt; Authority; King; Ghani Khan; Shelley.

1. Introduction

A comparative study of a literary text or the writer of another language, country, or category has progressively been conducted since last few decades. An awareness of studying one piece of literature as compared with another has continuously been increased among the research analysts of this era. Research analysts of comparative study have accomplished their comparative analyses with the perspective of post-colonialism, feminism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism etc. Several researches have been accomplished in the domain of comparative study but comparing P. B. Shelley's poetry with Pashto poet Ghani Khan in the frame of reference to romantic revolt has not yet been conducted.

Different researchers i.e. (Bacha and Bibi, 2010); (Khattak, 2011); (Iqbal et al., 2014) have conducted their researches on Ghani Khan in the domain of romanticism and modernism but a lot is still required for comparing Shelley's poetry with Ghani Khan. As differed from the prior studies, this research argues that Shelley's poem "I would not be a King" and Ghani Khan's "Bacha" reflect the revolt against the

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authority of the king. The present study using the research methodology of comparative analysis will open up new horizons of knowledge with the perspective of romanticism and comparative study as well.

A comparative study of P.B. Shelley's poetry with Ghani Khan, a romantic Pashto poet, has not merely opened up new areas but also brought the local or marginalized poets into centre. This study will explore a comparison between the selected two poems of Shelley and Ghani Khan in the light of romanticism, especially revolt against authority of the king. The objectives of the present study are: i. to bring Pashto poet Ghani Khan under the umbrella of romanticism; ii. to give an international audience to this local and marginalized poet. The following research questions guide this study:

Q.1 How does Shelley's poem, "I would not be a king" reflect revolt against authority?

Q.2 How does Ghani Khan's poem, "Bacha", likewise Shelley's poem, present a romantic perspective of revolt against authority of the king?

2. Literature Review

At the core of the current study, it is argued that Shelley and Ghani Khan revolt against authority of the king in romantic perspective as reflected in their selected poems. In the context of the prior studies, it was found that different researchers (Bacha and Bibi, 2010); (Khattak, 2011); (Iqbal et al., 2014) have accomplished their researches with the perspective of romanticism, a comparison between Shelley and Ghani Khan, Keats and Ghani Khan but Ghani Khan's poetry as compared with Shelley in the context of romanticism especially revolt against authority has not yet been conducted.

Previous studies (Bacha and Bibi, 2010); (Khattak, 2011); (Iqbal et al., 2014); and (Bezar and Tareen, 2018) have explored a comparison between Keats and Ghani Khan, reflection of social reality in Khan's poetry, and the elements of modern poetry from Ghani Khan's selected poems. Bacha and Bibi (2010) have explored a similarity between the poetry of Ghani Khan and John Keats with the perspective of romanticism. Khattak (2011) has investigated reflection of social reality in Ghani Khan's poetry. Iqbal et al. (2014) discern the modernist characteristics of rejection of authority, fragmented narrative, and scattered images from Ghani Khan's poetry. Bezar and Tareen (2018) have compared Ghani Khan's free verse with Walt Whitman. This study will explore often neglected area of a comparison between P.B. Shelley and Ghani Khan with the perspective of romantic revolt.

3. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework of romanticism, traits of romanticism, and revolt against authority was used for conducting this study. Romanticism as a reactionary movement emerged as a reaction against "The Age of Enlightenment" which was based on reason and logic. The Romantic Revival was emerged as reaction against the Industrial Revolution and disillusionment of the French Revolution. Theoretical framework of this study plays a significant role in providing background to

romanticism which will facilitate in discerning the elements of romantic revolt from Shelley's "I would not be a king" and Ghani Khan's "Bacha".

3.1 understanding Romanticism

The word 'romantic' has been derived from the Old French *romanz* that means the vernacular 'romances' languages. Medieval *romance* came to mean as fanciful, heroic, and extravagant tales of chivalry written in romance languages, usually in verse, written in vernacular language. Chivalric notions of honour, gallantry, and devotion to women are predominant in these tales of romances (Heath & Boreham, 1999). The term 'romantic' had been used in negative connotation in England to suggest free expression of imagination in arts since the Renaissance. According to Peckham (1961), "romanticism is a sharp break with the rationalizing and sentimentalizing enlightenment" (p.1). Kluckhohn (1970) presents the salient trait of meeting the contraries in German romanticism: "the striving to synthesize antinomies, to experience life in terms of polarities that are to be resolved in a high unity" (p.34). According to Watts-Dunton (1903), romanticism is the Renaissance of wonder.

3.2 Traits of Romanticism

The period of the intellectuals from 1798 to about 1837 was named the Romantic Age until much later in the 1800s. It was the period of social, political, and economic upheaval. Glencoe *English and Western Literature* (1987) quotes William Hazlitt, "there was a mighty ferment in the heads of statesmen and poets, kings and people... It was a time of promise, a renewal of the world— and of letters" (p. 319). The Romantic Revival was emerged as reaction against the Age of Reason or Enlightenment. The characteristics of Neo-classicism are different from romanticism. The salient traits of Neo-classicism are focus on sense, order, discipline, symmetry, decorum, authority, importance of social life, etc.

3.2.1 Superiority of imagination and emotions

Superiority of imagination and emotions is the hallmark of romanticism that makes it different from enlightenment. Imagination is the mental faculty which forms images of external objects not present to the senses. In fact, the act of reading (and writing) literature is an imaginative act. For Coleridge, imagination is a 'synthetic and magical power'; it is the power of creativity; and it donates the mind's artistic creative faculty. Coleridge (1817) describes the poetic imagination: "it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify" (p. 97). According to him, imagination creates harmonious whole (poems) out of disparate experience: "this power.... reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness with difference; of the general, with concrete; the idea with the image" (p.100). Abrams (1953) using the metaphors of the mirror and the lamp distinguishes fancy and imagination respectively: in fancy like mirror objects are seen as they are; imagination is like the lamp in which size of objects is magnified.

3.2.2. Revolt against set rules

The Romantic Revival that was started in 1798 with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge was a reaction against rules and customs of eighteenth century poetry. Singh (2005) quotes William J. Long, “the romantic movement was marked, and is always marked, by a strong reaction and protest against the bondage of rule and custom which in science and theology as well as literature, generally tend to fetter the free human spirit” (p.342). The romantics revolted against the literary traditions of Dryden and Pope. They looked for inspiration and guidance to Spenser and Milton. Like neoclassicists, romantics also breaking away from the traditions existing immediately before them, respected a more ancient tradition.

3.2.3. Return to rural life

Return to Nature or rural life means to return to natural simplicity. Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798; 1909) glorifies the rustic life, “humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language” (p.3). Peckham (1961) quotes professor Tuveson, “Nature, through the exercise of the imagination, redeemed man” (p. 4).

3.2.4. Presentation of common life

Color of imagination is mixed with the common life in the Romantic Revival. Wordsworth (1798: 1909) manifests the purpose of presenting common life in *Lyrical Ballads*, “the principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination” (pp.2-3). As per Singh (2005), “Rousseau’s slogan ‘Return to Nature’ was necessarily a political and philosophical dictum intended to revive the concept of the ‘noble savage’ and to glorify primitivism in living and behaving” (p. 354).

3.2.5. Remoteness

Remoteness is another salient trait of romanticism. Remoteness is itself a kind of revolt against authority and bitterness of socio-political and economic aspects of life. Romantics’ interest in the Middle Ages and Hellenism was a hallmark of the Romantic Movement. Some romantics who love the Middle Ages (Coleridge) and Hellenism (Keats) not merely try to escape from the real world but also glorify the splendour and chivalry of the Middle Ages and love for beauty and pastoral life of Hellenism.

3.2.6. Subjectivity

Another important trait of the romantic poets is subjectivity— when the poet gets inspiration from his/ her own experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Subjectivism is turn of romanticism to look for truth inwardly. Rousseau, Wordsworth, Keats, etc. rely on subjectivity. According to Rousseau (1996: 1782), human self is the main source of creating truth: “all this sets my soul free, gives me greater boldness of

thought, throws me, so to speak, into the immensity of things, so that I can combine, select, and appropriate them at pleasure without fear of restraint” (p.157).

3.2.7. Melancholy

Melancholy is an inevitable product of the typical romantic temper. Romantic melancholy is the product of moments of depression inherent in almost every optimistic philosophy or attitude of life. Wordsworth’s political disillusionment was also responsible for some utterances of melancholy. The French Revolution’s turning from the slogan “liberty, fraternity, and equality” to the Reign of Terror became the cause of melancholy of the romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, etc. (Singh, 2005).

3.2.8. Love for Lyricism

Romantic poets’ love for liberty and Nature is reflected in their way of composing poetry. Lyricism is the salient trait of romantic poetry. Lyricism is an artist’s expression of emotions in an imaginative, beautiful, and unrestrained way. It is an emotional and enthusiastic outpouring of passions and thought. Natural flow found in Nature is reflected in romantic lyrics and lyrical ballads. Spontaneity is one of the hallmarks of lyricism. According to Wordsworth, “all good poetry is the spontaneous over flow of powerful feelings” (2006, p. 265).

3.2.9. Search for the Golden Age

All romantics were in search of the Golden Age because the world of bitter reality was not worth to live. It was an era when things were at their best; it was the epoch of fullness, bounty and prosperity. Wordsworth’s glorification of the period of childhood, happiness and freedom in Blake’s songs of innocence and his search for the Golden clime (Ah Sun-flower!), bounty and fullness in Keats’ odes, etc. are the romantics’ search for the Golden Age that is a source of escape from actuality.

3.2.10. Mysticism

Mysticism and wonder are the salient traits of romanticism. It is also known for “Renaissance of wonder”. It is so because the romantics looked at everything with the eyes of the imagination (Singh, 2005). Mystics are absent-minded reactionaries; they accept indifferently everything in the world except the barriers that physical existence presents to the soul’s inner quest. Like other romanticists, Blake also was a great mystic poet. All romantics have seeing eyes or the eye of imagination. That eye of imagination takes Coleridge in the medievalism and takes Keats in Hellenism.

3.2.11. Liberty, equality, and fraternity

The romantics of 18th century were very much appealed by the French Revolution (1789)’s slogan of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” because they wanted to enjoy freedom from socio-political, economic, and religious tyranny and longed for equality and fraternity in the world. Those sensitive souls like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey became upset by the Revolution’s turning into the Reign of terror. As per Brown (2006), “liberal democracy failed and the French Revolution came to an end only after prolonged violence had generated a public sentiment

willing to accept exceptional justice and brutal repression as the price of restoring order” (p.349).

3.2.12. Totality or Contraries Meet

Romanticism is not based on *either, or* but *both*. Extremes meet in romanticism because it embraces *totality*. Contraries meet in romanticism. Blake also believes in fusion of contraries. He says in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence” (n.p).

4. Revolt against Authority in Romanticism

Most of the romantics kept radical views about politics. They were crusaders for the emancipation of the individual. The revolt against authority did not merely mean the condemnation of political tyranny and support for democracy but it also opened rebellion against social taboos on free love. They supported to break the tyrannic chains of authority which had kept in human bondage the human spirit for so long. Like other romantics, Shelley also was an arch rebel against all restrictions. In *The Revolt of Islam* he revolts against tyranny and social authority alike. On account of his rebellious notions, he like other romantics proved misfit in society. Singh (2005) quotes Samuel C. Chew and T.E. Hulme, for the former romanticism emphasizes the abnormal and less conscious impulses of the mind and for the latter romanticism is a “sickly” movement.

5. Research Methodology

In the perspective of comparative study, research method of literary close reading is employed in this study. In the process of data collection, the secondary data were collected from the published books and articles. In the first step of the procedure of analysis, Ghani Khan’s poem “Bacha” was read and marked out the words and phrases in which revolted against authority is reflected. In the second step, Shelley’s poem “I would not be a king” was read and analyzed with the perspective of revolt against authority. In the third step, both poems were comparatively analyzed in order to uncover romantic perspective of revolt from both poems for seeking the findings of the present study.

6. Findings and Discussion

A comparative study opens up new horizons of knowledge because one literary text or writer of one category, language, or country is compared with another. This study manifests that romanticism especially its trait of revolt against authority is not fixed with romantic poets i.e. Shelley, Byron, etc. but Pashto poets like Ghani Khan also wrote poetry in this strain. The researchers of the present study have explored the romantic characteristic of revolt against authority from Ghani Khan’s poem, “Bacha” and Shelley’s “I would not be a king”.

At the outset of the poem “Bacha”/ King, Ghani Khan in rhetorical questions presents the hardship and troubles of the throne. Kingship is useless for him because it “makes you weep night and day” (Khan, 2018, p.22). He says that the king is a leader of mules; he is a beast because his kingdom is created “when half men starve

and half die/ when one man feeds the flesh/ of another to dogs at home” (p.22). The poet asked God if He granted him kingship, he would hurl it out from his home “like dung on a dunghill” (ibid.). He cannot spend his life in brawls. He begs some flowers, a lovely sweetheart, a little garden, and the bank of river where he might sit under the shade of “a weeping willow” and write down some pleasing *ghazals* in order to plead to his beloved and taunt the Mullah. The poet implores God to give kingship to those who can endure its force: who have the hand of a butcher; who have character of a snake; who can shed the blood of their brothers; and “who can both eat and digest/ the flesh of the poor” (p.23). According to the poet, a king “is the one that kills like a plague/ that roars and tears like a panther/ and frightens like a ghost” (ibid.). The poet requests God to keep him away from the calamity of kingship and find a great ass for it.

In this poem “Bacha”, Ghani Khan revolts against authority of the king with the perspective of romanticism. Like other romantics i.e. Shelley, Byron etc., Khan also is against social, political, and economic injustices. He also wants to see the world free from the tyranny of the tyrants. In this poem, he exposes the ugly face of the king in satirical tone. A king is not more than a curse for him. Like other romantics, Khan’s rebellious spirit against authority is reflected in this poem. He vocalizes against the tyranny of the king and kingship:

“A great king is a great curse
Who thrives on the curse of blood.
Kingship is like fire
And thrives on burning” (Khan, p.23).

Ghani Khan’s revolt against tyranny of the authority is reflected in the poem “Bacha” because he presents negative characteristics of the king. He presents ugly traits of the king: he is hard to weigh justice, beast-like qualities in him; king’s kingdom is based on starvation of his subject; he spends the life of brawls and cruelty; he keeps authority and force; he has butcher-like hand; cuts flesh of the poor; he roars and tears like a panther; and he is a great curse. All these negative features of the king show the ugly face of the tyrants.

Ugly traits of the king have been presented by twenty five negative nouns used for the king in English translation of the poem, “Bacha”. Negative nouns used for the king are ‘cares’, ‘worries’, ‘troubles’, ‘mules’, ‘beasts’, ‘dog’s tail’, ‘black cat’s body’, ‘dung’, ‘dunghill’, ‘brawls’, ‘cruelty’, ‘sighs’, ‘force’, ‘butcher’, ‘snake’, ‘blood’, ‘flesh of the poor’, ‘plague’, ‘panther’, ‘ghost’, ‘sword’, ‘hangman’, ‘curse’, ‘fire’, and ‘calamity’. These negative nouns present the negative traits of the king.

Besides romantic trait of revolt against authority, another salient romantic feature of love of beauty is reflected in Ghani Khan’s “Bacha”. In this poem, Khan begs God to bestow him natural beauty like some flowers, a little garden on the river side, the cool shade of weeping willow, and a sweetheart. It is also a kind of revolt against social and political life of cares, worries, and brawls. The poet wants to escape from

the urban life and wants to loose in the company of nature with his sweetheart. He requests God:

“Just give me some flowers
And a lovely sweetheart;
A little garden
On the riverside;
So I may sit on the bank
In the cool shade of a weeping willow
And write with cheer
Some pleasing *ghazals*—” (p.22).

Percy Bysshe Shelley also in his poem, “I would not be a king” manifests his desire of not becoming a king because the kingship is “enough of woe” and “the path of power is steep and rough,/ and tempests reign above” (2005:1839, p.25). He does not want to “clime the imperial throne” because it is built on “ice which fortune’s sun/ thaws in the height of noon” (p.25). He bids farewell to the king and longs for escaping to Himalay for keeping flocks.

Both romantic poets Ghani Khan and Shelley present the hardships of kingship. If for Khan, kingship has “enough worries” and “the world’s troubles”, for Shelley also it is “enough/ of woe” and its path is “steep and rough/ and tempests reign above”. Both poets revolt against the authority of the king that becomes the cause of pain and plight of the subject. Both poets reject authority i.e. authority of the king, Mullah or priest, etc. Iqbal et al. (2014) highlight the salient thematic concerns of Ghani Khan which contain “mistrust of dogma and rejection of any sort of authority” (p. 509).

Shelley and Ghani Khan as well use appropriate metaphors and similes in order to present kingship. Shelley in his poem, “I would not be a king” employs six apt metaphors to present the hardships and troubles of the kingship. He uses the metaphors of steepness, roughness, and tempests in order to present the difficulties in the path of power: “the path to power is steep and rough,/ and tempests reign above” (p.25). Further, the poet uses the metaphors of ice, sun, and noon in order to manifest transitoriness of imperial throne:

“I would not climb the imperial throne;
‘Tis built on ice which fortune’s sun
Thaws in the height of noon” (Shelley, 2005: 1839, p.25).

Shelley’s desire of escaping far away on Himalay and Ghani Khan’s longing for a little on the bank of river reflect their revolt against authority. Both romantic poets want to lose in the lap of mother Nature. She is the only source of solace for both poets. According to Mitten (2009), “nature can heal and improve many physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and behavioral health conditions” (p.8). Both poets bidding farewell to the kings and revolting against their authority, want to lose in the company of Nature. Shelley says:

“Then farewell, king, yet were I one,
Care would not come so soon.

Would he and I were far away
Keeping flocks on Himalay” (2005: 1839, p.25).

7. Conclusion

This study has attempted to bring Pashto poet Ghani Khan under the umbrella of romanticism and to give an international audience to this local poet comparing his poetry with P.B. Shelley. The present qualitative research employing the comparative methodology investigated Ghani Khan and Shelley’s rejecting the authority of the king and their losing in the lap of mother Nature. This research was an initiative in opening up new domains in the realm of comparative study and romanticism. The research scholars of future might explore Ghani Khan’s revolt against authority compared with William Blake’s poetry.

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