

Exploring Sonnet as a major literary form : with reference to the comparison between Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 and 'Amhi Kon ?' of Keshavsut

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Abstract

Sonnet is the major and also one of the most popular form of poetry. That is why it has gone through many changes in its structure in the course of time. Even it got many variations when it reached in different parts of the world. Shakespeare and Keshavsut are supposed to be the most leading reformers in this genre in English and Marathi literature respectively. The structural and the thematic comparison between the sonnets of above sonneteers definitely focuses light on various aspects, innovated by successive poets. Although the form has been experimented by many poets there is certain link among all these types.

"Nor Marble nor the Gilded Monuments" by William Shakespeare and "Amhi Kon?" by Keshavsut will definitely help to find out that certainly and innovations in the reforming journey of sonnets.

Introduction :

Sonnet is the most popular form of English Poetry, since the day of Chaucer. Especially the Elizabethan poets heavily experimented, as none else, on the form and the content of the sonnet to its possible perfection. They modulate its tune in diverse ways; and assayed the elasticity of its form; and thus they shaped. The Sonnet as a very perfect format of expressing a broad spectrum of emotions. This perfection of sonnet occurred at the hand of Edmund Spenser, who perfected it with his musicality, so Shakespeare sharpened it with his ingenious artistry.

We find the origin of Sonnet in 13th century in Italy, Sicily from the work of Gaicomo da Lentini. Later the genre continued to flower and flourish there through the poetic work of Francesco Petrarch in the beginning of 14th century. The dedication of Petrarch popularized this form; and that is why Italian sonnets are interchangeable called as 'Petrarchan Sonnets'. The importance of Italian poets in the creation and use of sonnets was vital for its later spread to other parts of the world. Sonnet come in England in the first half of 16th century through the work of Wyatt and Surrey. England was then being flushed with the spirit of the Renaissance humanism. Sonnet became the most favorite literary device for the poets to express human emotions. The definition of man

brought into light the most potent and excellent quality of man, the universal element of humanity: Love, particularly the love between man and woman. And this love found its most fitting expression in the sonnet. William Shakespeare, the prominent sonneteer of Elizabethan era, became successful to use this form to express his emotion and made it popular in new generation. He even set a new structure of sonnet and is known as Elizabethan or Shakespearean sonnet. In India Keshavsut, an unorthodox poet, brought this form in Marathi Language in the beginning of 20th Century. This new reform not only gave a new dimension to Marathi poetry but also set a new precedent to explore the world literature. Thus the comparison becomes inevitable to find out the similarities and differences between English sonnet and Marathi sonnet i.e. 'Sunit'.¹ Efforts have been made to analysis and differentiate the form and theme of sonnets in two different languages with the help of a Shakespearean sonnet and 'Marathi Sunit' of Keshavsut.

Sonnet : A Major Literary form :

Basically sonnet is a typical poem with 14 lines written in iambic pentameter. The term sonnet is derived from an Italian word 'Sonnetto' which means the little sound or little song. In the beginning the term sonnet was used for any short poem in Italy; but in the course of time it was gradually restricted to a

particular form of poem, which is fairly short revolving around a single core emotion.

The formal structural elements of sonnets become standardized as the sonnet became popular. But the new poets found their own ways to write sonnets. As it has been loved world wide. The poets have experimented with the form and structure of the sonnet emerging new types like early Petrarchan sonnets, Spenserian sonnets. Shakespearean sonnets, Marathi Sunits etc. Traditionally we can experience the theme of love in sonnets. However, like with the form and structure themselves, the portrayed themes have also been expanded to include topics like politics, nature, religion, spirituality and social issues.

Broadly we can divide a sonnet into two parts to understand the theme of the poem. Normally the first part introduces a problem or a question, which is developed in the octave or the first three quatrains. There is a change in direction, thought or emotion called a 'Volta' or 'tum' in the sunset or the final couplet in the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnets respectively.

Shakespeare and Keshvsut : The reforming sonneteers in their respective language

William Shakespeare was the most famous poet and dramatist of Elizabethan era. His 154 sonnets, contributed in English literature make him the first rang sonneteer of the era. Among his 154 sonnets the first 126 sonnets seem to be addressed to an unnamed noble man and his friend. The later 26 sonnets are addressed to a mysterious woman i.e. 'The Dark Lady'. The last 2 sonnets seem generally unconnected to the rest of the sequence.

Actually Shakespeare was an innovatory poet. Keeping 14 lines he brought reformation in stanza structure and rhyme scheme of the traditional sonnet. Shakespearean sonnet has three quatrains and one couplet instead of an active and sestet of the Petrarchan sonnet Shakespeare also follows a 'question and answer' format but the difference in structure and rhyme scheme affects the flow of emotion in the sonnet. In Shakespearean sonnet volta happens right in the couplet instead of in the sestet. First three quatrains offers the poet more space to ask his question elaborately and built curiosity.

Krushnaji Keshav Damle, popularly known as Keshavsut was also an innovatory poet of Marathi literature. The trend of devotional poetry had been

widely set in Marathi literature till the end of 19th Century. Keshavsut became successful to establish new form of poetry and added a new and glorious dimension to Marathe Literature. That is why he is known as 'The Pioneer of Modern Marathi Poetry'. Initially he tried his hand to write Sanskrit impacted Marathi poetry, but they were short lived and remained ineffective. Later he devoted himself to write new type of poetry with new subject matter. However, he got inspiration from the romantic poetry of P. B. Shelley, William Wordsworth, John Keats and William Shakespeare. Keshavsut wrote an autobiographical poetry and some sonnets that gave Marathi poetry a new revolutionary twist. In his poetry there was an invention of feelings and experiences on various topics such as personal relationships, love between man and women, nature, social relationship, mystical feelings, poet and poetry etc. Some of his poems like 'Tutari', 'Navin Shipai' reflects his own principles of social ideology of liberty, equality, fraternity and broad humanism in a sense this was the invention of romanticism in various forms. The invention of his attitude was certainly revolutionary. Hence each type of his poetry, especially sunit could enjoy a separate tradition in the contemporary and upcoming era. Later many poets of 'Ravikiran Mandal' started to try their hands to write sonnets. Keshavsut follows Petrarchan format and divides his sonnets in octave and sestet, but develops his personalized rhyme scheme of 'ABBA ABBA CDCDCD'.

<p>Sonnet 55 - William Shakespeare</p> <p>Not marble, nor the gilded monuments Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme; But you shall shine more bright in these contents Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time. When wasteful war shall statues overturn, And broils root out the work of masonry, Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn The living record of your memory. 'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room Even in the eyes of all posterity That wear this world out to the ending doom. So, till the judgment that yourself arise, You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.</p>	<p>आम्ही कोण? - केशवसूत</p> <p>आम्ही कोण म्हणुनि काय पुरस्सी? आम्ही असू लाडके देवाचे दिवले असे जग तसे आम्हांच खेळावया विश्वी या प्रतिभावले विचरतो चोहीकडे लीलया दिवकालांतुनि आरचार अमुची दृष्टी पहाया शके सारेही बडिवार येथिल पहा! आम्हांपुढे ते फिके पाणिस्पर्शच आमुचा शक्तसे वस्तूप्रती धावया सौंदर्यातिशया, अशी वसतसे जादु करंमजि या फोले पाखडिता तुम्ही, निवडितो ते सत्व आम्ही निके! शून्यामाजि वसाहती वसविल्या कोणी सुरांच्या बरे? पृथ्वीला सुरलोक साम्य झटती आणावया कोण ते? ते आम्हीच, सुधा कूर्तीमधुनिया ज्यांच्या सदा पाझरे ते आम्हीच शरण्य, मंगल तुम्हां ज्यांपासुनी लाभते! आम्हांला वाळा-गतप्रभ झणी होतील तारांगणे आम्हांला वाळा-विकेल कवडीमोलावरी हे जिणे!</p>
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Not marble, nor the Gilded Monuments by Shakespeare is 55th of his 159 sonnets. It is written in blank verse and has a musical quality that is heightened still further by the use of alliteration. Of course, it is written in iambic pentameter as every sonnet of Shakespeare. 'ABAB CDCD EFEF GG' is the rhyme scheme of the sonnet.

No doubt the theme of love and time is artistically depicted in the poem. The poet expresses not only his eternal love for his beloved friend but the greatness of his verse also. He terms the verse as a 'powerful rime' that can preserve his affection and emotions for a long time. Here, marble refers to the tombs of kings and princes that appear weak and pale before the power of poetry. The destruction caused by wars and broils, where the material objects including the finest work of art are vandalized and every statue and work of masonry are turned to dust, the supposed beauty of his sonnet would on the other hand outlive them. The sonnet conveys the message that great and noble souls leave an indelible impact on the fellow being and they are remembered through a literary work for a long time. Monuments and statues howsoever ornate and rich, fail to immortalize the rich and the powerful that an emotional verse can do.

'Amhi Kon?' (Who are we?) is one the most famous poems of Keshavsut. It is written in Shardulvikreedit² which has 19 characters and 7 Gana.³ The poem has typical Shakespearean & petrarchan rhyme scheme of 'ABBA ABBA CDCD EE'.

The poem starts with a rhetorical question referring to critics who consider poets and artists are futile or useless. The poet affirms that the artists, writers and creative people are god's blessed ones with the potential to create beautiful world of emotions with power of lyrics. Keshavsut gives a perfect answer to that traditional rigidity and advocates the importance of the poets who wants to glorify the human relationship, social issues and terrestrial themes in their verse.

The Comparison :

Both the sonnets selected for comparison and analysis are recognized as the milestone in the history at literature of their respective languages. The subject matter presented in the poem was rather new for the world of poetry that made them profoundly popular

among the masses. Shakespeare glorifies the eternity of the poem itself; where as Keshavsut glorifies the importance of existence of poets in the world. Shakespeare expresses his love emotion for his beloved friend but the question remains whether he wants to stress the importance of eternity of his verse or dignifies his love emotion. On the other hand Keshavsut denotes the extraordinary ability of the poets who, with their imaginative constructivism, make the world a lovely place to live in. Shakespeare developed his own format of three quatrains and a couplet containing his innovative rhyme scheme of ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. His quatrains seem separated structurally. Each line contains iambic pentameter having ten syllables in it. Generally Keshavsut followed Petrarchan format of octave and sestet but specially for this sonnet he uses Shakespearean format of three quatrains and a couplet having rhyme scheme of ABBA ABBA CDCD EE. Keshavsut makes variations in the rhyme scheme in many of his sonnets. His quatrains are often interlinked. The lines are rather longer than the Shakespearean ones as it contains 'Shardulvikreedit' having 19 letters. Thus we find considerable differences and typical similarities in these sonnets, although they are in different languages.

Conclusion :

The innovation in any literary genre gives the society a new approach to see towards life. Although Shakespeare and Keshavsut both got inspiration from their previous sonneteers they applied their creativity to write sonnets to add a new glory in its popularity. Keshavsut's deep study of English poetry promotes him to write Marathi poetry in a new style and format, that introduced a new way to explore the world. He became inspiration for the poets and writer of Marathi literature and remained the same till today. Thus the logical comparison always promotes construction.

References :

- 1.Sunit : Sonnet written in Marathi language.
- 2.Shardulvikreedit - a type of Marathi poetic meter.
3. Gana - a group of three syllables
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