



Influence of Ghalib's Poetry on Premchand's Short-Story Kafan (Shroud)

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Abstract— “When pain exceeds limits, it becomes itself a cure”, a remarkable verse by the Legendary Urdu poet Ghalib holds its grounds even today. The fact that much of the literature reflects the influence of the theory behind this verse and even in post modern times, it feels so relevant, itself speaks for the immortality and timelessness of Ghalib's art. Much has been written about Ghalib's poetry and his aesthetic and mystic theories. In this paper, I aim to reflect the influence of Ghalib's poetry and his theory of two worlds (his mystic bent) on Premchand's short- story Kafan (Shroud).

Keywords— Ghalib, Maya, Mysticism, Premchand, Shroud.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ghalib, Assadullah Khan ; the stalwart of Urdu Ghazal writing (poetry) remains a popular figure not only in the Indian Subcontinent but also among the South Asian diaspora around the world. His writings carry a mystic essence. Though his poetry has a multidimensional facade attached to it, mysticism and religious bigotry are one of the centralised themes of his poetry. Ghalib laid emphasis on seeking God rather than following ritualistic religious practices. In one of his poem, Ghalib states: “The God whom I worship lies beyond the boundaries of Intellect; For men who've got vision, the Kaaba is mere compass, not God's dwelling” Like many other Hindustani poets, Ghalib was skeptical of religious bias and ritualistic order. He staunchly ridiculed the practices of certain Molvis (religious clerics), who in his opinion stood for narrow-mindedness and hypocrisy. In one of his couplets, Ghalib while criticising the ulemas writes: “Retrospect within yourself, it is you who alone cannot listen the melody of His secrets”.

Dhanpat Rai Sahai, popularly known by his pen name, Munshi Premchand is regarded as one of the foremost Hindi writers of modern hindustani literature. Premchand has extensively wrote about Dalit predicament in his writings. In stories like “Thakur ka Kuan”(The Thakur's

well), Kafan (Shroud) and countless others; he debunks the social and religious order which pushes the lower caste Dalits to the extent that they are not at all perceived as humans by their upper caste masters. Premchand through his writings lays bare the hierarchy and shows how in the garb of religious order lower caste people are being subjugated and exploited at economic, social and political fronts. In his story Kafan, Premchand portrays the helplessness and social exploitation of Dalits through the characters of Ghisu and Madhav. The powerlessness in the face of social conditions has left them vulnerable to the extent that they seek validation in the metaphysical world. They think of this mortal world as a cage in which they have been imprisoned and long for the dawn of freedom which only death can grant them. Death stands as a gateway to freedom from the miseries and hardships of this world.

II. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN GHALIB'S POETRY AND PREMCHAND'S SHORT-STORY KAFAN (SHROUD)

“Listen! two worlds exist out there”, states Ghalib in one of his letters, written during the last phase of his life; one is transcendental world, the world of souls and spirits, the other; the mortal world; the physical world of earth and

water... The universally accepted rule is that those guilty in this physical world have the punishment due to them meted out in the world of metaphysics, but it so happens as well that those guilty in the world of spirits are sent down to the earth for punishment. So I was summoned before the court here on the eighth of Rajab, 1212. For thirteen years I was in judicial custody. Then, on the seventh Rajab, 1225 (1810), sentence of life imprisonment was passed on me, fetters were put on my feet, Delhi was fixed upon as my prison and I was brought and imprisoned here. Creative writing in prose and verse was the hard labor imposed on me. Many years later, I escaped from jail and wandered about in the eastern cities for three years. Eventually, I was apprehended at Calcutta and caged in the jail again. When it was found that I was a prisoner prone to be carried away by his feet, handcuffs were put around my hands. With feet torn by fetters and hands bruised by handcuffs, the prescribed hard labour became more difficult to perform. All my strength was drained away. But I am shameless. Last year, leaving the fetters behind in a corner of the jail, I escaped away, and passing through Meerut and Moradabad, reached Rampur. I was there for around two months, and was then caught again and brought back. Now I have vowed never to run away again. And how could I do even if I wanted to? I haven't even the strength to run. I wonder when the orders for my release will come. I have an unlikely hope that it may be towards the end of this year. In any case, if released, I shall proceed straight to the world of Spirits, for where else does a prisoner go to but to his home whenever he has been set free." This is an example of Mystic bent/ Spirituality which is one of the delightful characteristics of Ghalib. Towards the end of the story, the same traces of mysticism are observed in characters of Ghisu and Madhav when Ghisu consoles his grief-stricken son and tells him to be happy that she (Budhia) has broken the fetters of maya so soon. Budhia's escape from this maya and her passage to heaven is the manifestation of this mysticism which Ghalib talks about in his letters and poetry. Also, their callousness in the face of Budhia's death and the remarkable blend of sorrow and despair which they later display doesn't just reflect their helplessness but if observed profoundly It depicts their acceptance of the fact that this world is just a maya, a cage, a transitory place of punishment and we all have to left sooner or later into the world of eternity. This callousness and acceptance of reality on part of the father-son duo is reminiscent of one of the Ghalib's verses:

“Bazeechai atfaal hai duniya ye mere aage;
hota hai shab-o-roz tamasha ye mere aage”

Trans.: The world is just a child's play before me
The farce goes on night and day before me

Here, Ghalib defines world as a child's playground, an entity of least importance and further the poet says that he has become so used to this mockery and worthlessness of the world that it doesn't now bother him to think anymore about the pompous and glamour of the world. It's pretence and appearances don't charm him at all. Ghisu's angry outburst, If she doesn't go to heaven who will? These fat, bloodsuckers of the poor who go for a darshan of the Ganga to wash their sins and offer prayers in temples" reminds us of the words of Ghalib:

“Kaha mai-khane ka darwaza Ghalib, aur Kaha wayiz

Bas itna jaante hai Kal wo jaata tha ki hum nikle”

Trans: Far be it for us, O Ghalib, to see the preacher at the tavern

However, we know we saw him as we left the gate or his question, “What good would it have done if we'd brought the shroud? It'd only be burnt to ashes” express the utterances of Ghalib:

“hue mar k Jo ruswa, huwe kyun na garqe dariya,

Na kabhi janaza uthta, na kahi mazhar hota”

Trans: In death I was abhorrent; I should have perished in a torrent

Nay funeral rite, Not burial site, my infamy to exhibit

These statements of Ghisu are nothing but echoes of the critique of narrow minded, hypocritic, unjust and ritualistic religious system by Ghalib, who believed in the freedom of soul. Ghalib's idea of religion resembles to that of Sufi Saints. “His religion was ‘suleh kul’ (peace with all)”, as his dear disciple from Panipat, Khawja Altaf Hussain Hali records. Ghalib was indeed one who hadn't belief in religious rituals and never practiced them as such. His couplet:

“Hum mawahhid hein hamara kesh hai tark-e-rasoom

Millatein jab mit gayi, ajza-e-iman ho gayeen”

Trans: Unitarian we are in spirit, Utilitarian we are in practice

Civilisations are indistinct, when they become extinct to ferment stands testimony to this disbelief of his in ritualistic order. Ghisu and Madhav have no money and their pain has crossed all thresholds. They have become so used to pain that it (pain) has become itself the medicine. They are no more entangled in maya (world and worldly pursuits), it has no power over them anymore. The situation, they are caged in reminds us of famous verse-sayings of the Asad (Ghalib):

“Dard ka hadh se guzarna, hai dawa hojana”

Tans: When pain exceeds limits, it becomes itself a cure

“Dardh minnat-kash dawah naa hua, mai na acha hua bura na hua”

Trans: No healing for illness with medication, No ill-feeling for my mortification

The verse befits the situation of Ghisu and Madhav as their pain is incurable in the hands of the cruel, exploitative and predatory feudal order where back-breaking labour yields only starvation and enables men of leisure to enjoy the fruits of this toil. Death is the only escape and solace for the duo as the great poet reminds us :

“Gham-e-hasti ka Asad kis se ho juz Marg ilaaj”

trans:O Asad, none but death...can cure the sorrows of this life

Or “Qaid-e hayaat-o-band-e-gham.; asal mein donon ek hai

Mout sai pehle aadmi gham se najaat paye kyun”

trans: The prisoner of life and the fetters of grief...Are one and the same;

Until death, why should one hope to be free from clutches of sorrow?

Their celebration of Budhia’s death and the concluding song, they start singing in state of utter anguish “Deceiver, why do you cast such enchanting glances, O Deceiver!” depicts them illuminated. They are no longer, worthless, lazy , callous drunkards but misery and sorrow has lead them to the similar state where the poet realized that this world is nothing but the world of imprisonment and punishments and a mere fragment of fancy. This brings to our mind the famous lines of the poet as he himself conveys beautifully:

“Hasti ke mat fareb mein aajayeo Asad

Aalam tmatmaam halqa-e-daam-e khayal hai”

Trans: O Asad, be not deceived

By this existence;

The whole universe is nothing

But a noose of the snare of the thought

Ghalib while making the remarkable comment on his helpless condition, ironically states:

“Ye masaile tasawuf, ye Tera bayan Ghalib

Tuje hum wali samajte, jo yu na bada-khawar hota”

Trans: O Ghalib! Except your drink addiction, we accept your benediction

Mystic rules with full conviction, how well you postulate

In these lines, the poet says that he too would have been the great mystic/ saint, had he not his shortcomings, much

like Ghisu and Madhav who owing to their misery have conditioned themselves as such that due to their detachment, self-restraint and patience in the face of baser needs they have been elevated to the position of sainthood, except for their limitations as Premchand states, “Had the father-son duo been sadhus, they wouldn’t have been required to practice self-restraint for attaining contentment. It was second nature to them.”

III. CONCLUSION

Premchand came to Hindi via Urdu, although he wrote extensively in Hindi. The influence of Urdu literature on his writings is evident. Even after standing centuries apart, a kind of synchronization can be drawn between some aspects of Premchand’s write-ups and Ghalib’s poetry. Though, Kafan overtly reflects Dalit predicament and plot seemingly revolves around the Dalit characters but the story has multi-layered meanings and is still not understood in all its ramifications. On analyzing deeply, we realize that there is some sort of mystic essence associated with both the characters and the instances of the story.

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