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Comparative Literature

PASSIONATE LOVE IN THE LYRICS OF ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING AND MEERA DEV BURMAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Nineteenth-century English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning expresses how human life relies intensely upon love in her poems, and the famous twentieth-century Bengali lyricist Meera Dev Burman wrote several iconic Bengali lyrics on love as the central theme. The passionate love expressions in the poems and lyrics of these two female writers can be compared from various angles considering their uniqueness of style in the compositions. This study takes an in-depth look into the selected works of these two famous writers of different ages and cultures to explore the elements of love and passion in their lyrical poetic compositions and attempts to present a comparative analysis of the two selected writers of the study in terms of passionate romance.

Keywords: Love, Lyrics, Culture, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Meera Dev Burman

1. Introduction

Love and passion have often been the noticeable themes in literature of all ages and spaces. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), one of the celebrated poets of England in the 19th-century, wife of the famous English poet Robert Browning, shows her deep attachment to love and passion which are coined together as the main subject of her poems. On the other hand, Meera Dev Burman (Meera Dasgupta, 1923-2007), wife of the legendary Indian music director Sachin Dev Burman, composes lyrics for her husband in several Bengali films, focusing on love as the prominent subject of almost all her lyrics. Being the representatives of two different centuries and cultures, these two poets/lyricists have presented a common interest in passionate love as the theme of their writings. The present study explores the elements of love and passion in the lyrical poems of Browning and Burman from two different languages and cultures. While conducting the study through critical observation and content analysis, four lyrics by each of the poets were selected as the primary sources, while literary articles, critical essays and lyrical translations in different journals and websites were the secondary sources.

2. Review of related studies

This paper is influenced by the ideas and information through various online sources regarding Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Meera Dev Burman. On the *ThoughtCo* website, Lombardi (2019) discussed the love shared between Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning and a short

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history of their relationship. The *Poem Analysis* website conducts a thorough analysis of E. B. Browning's *Sonnet 14 and 43,* and her life history has been discussed on *Lideranca & Gestao Responsavel* (Jenson, n.d.). On the *Owlcation* website, Grimes (2021) has analyzed E. B. Browning's *Sonnet 44* and Spacey (2020) has analyzed her poem *How Do I Love Thee?* The *Interesting Literature* website contains a short analysis of E. B. Browning's *Beloved Thou Hast Brough Me Many Flowers* (A Short Analysis, n.d.).

Translations of Meera dev Burman's songs through different online sources have also been supportive to the present study to explain the expressions in her lyrics. The *Amarkobita4u* website contains the translation of the lyric *Borne gondhe chhonde gitite,* and the translation with an explanation of the lyric *Shono go dokhino hawa* has been found on the website *The Song Pedia* (Deepa, 2018). A brief biography on Sachin Dev Burman published on the Business Standard website and some insight on Meera Dev Burman's life in the news article on her death published in *The Daily Star* have also been considered for further information for this study (Dasgupta, 2013). However, all the sources were supportive for this comparative.

Other than the article *Erotic Love Reflected in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's How Do I Love Thee?* by Satriyo and Ariya (2015), any academic writing or discussion on her poetic works has not been found. Almost nothing critical or analytical regarding the lyrics of Meera Dev Burman has been found as a formal or semiformal publication. Considering these as the research gap, the present study examines the common elements of passionate love, with a comparative approach, in the lyrics of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Meera Dev Barman.

3. Love and passion in the poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning

E. B. Browning's poem *Love* explains how love makes living so beautiful. Love is the magnet that keeps the universe together. The love between two people connects them, purifies their conscience. This poem reflects on the simplicity of spontaneous living that love enables. Passionate love keeps the complications of overthinking away. Love creates fresh life that soothes the universe. The message of this poem can be interpreted as an urge to choose to love to live life for the sake of its freshness and innocence, without the complexities.

If thou must love me (Sonnet 14) is addressed to Robert Browning as a request by poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning to love her for the value of love that is unchangeable, not for anything else that is everchanging. She does not want him to love her only for her smile, way of speaking, or anything superficial like that. Appearance can trick people, and she does not want his love for her as a result of a trick that can change and deceive. She also does not want him to love her out of pity to dry her tears. Love with pity decreases the value of the loved one by the lover. It remains a one-sided expression of pity only, not love that can be genuinely felt by both the lover and the loved. She is also concerned that if the basis of his love is only the necessity to cure her weeping, and if she stops weeping one day, the necessity of his love will be gone, she will lose him. So, she does not want that. She wants him to love her for the sake of love, with the mighty value of love, for the eternity as love stays for the eternity. This poem presents the wish for security and comfort as the passion coming out of a lover's love. When the lovers feel secure in love free from conditions, passion thrives.

How do I love thee (Sonnet 43) portrays durable and unceasing romance. This poem depicts love as an integral entity in life and also something that rises above life and death. In this poem, love gives divine comfort similar to the love of God. Though the sonnet is most commonly read historically as a discourse from Elizabeth Barret Browning to Robert Browning, its image of endless and all-encompassing love might equally be applied towards any personal connection. The beginning of the poem insinuates holiness on a religious level, with the mention of love that is mighty enough to extend the soul, like the love for God. The writer emphasizes the blessing of God on her love for the dedicated person. She loves her beloved with the equal sincerity and purity of the religious faith the writer has had from childhood. Her love is so powerful that it even strengthens her usual religious values and love for God, which might have faded away while growing up. The writer expresses that her love for her beloved is connected to her breath and smiles and tears, and it lies even beyond substantial reality for perpetuity. Not only in this life, but the author also wants to love her beloved even more and better after death, with the power of God's blessings. Her love is her salvation of

paradise. Her love for her beloved is her passion, and her love for God is her responsibility. However, her love for her beloved signifies pious religious love for her. Her beloved's love gets her closer to God's love, and both are meant to remain forever like a heaven full of love.

Beloved, thou hast brought me many flowers (Sonnet 44) is the final sonnet from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's collection *Sonnets from the Portuguese.* This is a sonnet about the poet's romance with her associated artist Robert Browning. The speaker of the poem is contemplating the blossoms of the flowers that her beloved brought to her, which is making her blossom too. The flowers symbolize her connection with her sweetheart. The symbolic relationship between the loving gifts of real roses and the emblematic flowers of the poet's heart becomes a never-ending proposal of love between herself and her lover. The flowers of their love blooming in their intimate close room did not miss the sun and rain of the outside. The flowers are both poets' gifts to each other. The speaker of this poem also grows flowers of love and creativity in her heart and gifts them to her lover urging her to appreciate and reciprocate her dedication. She is requesting her beloved to accept more blooming colors of her love and preserve and protect the colours, not letting them fade even if the real flowers fade away one day. She requests her beloved to remember about her in the roots of the flowers even if they fade. The flowers represent the poet's passion for love and creativity gifted to her loved one. The poem requests her loved one to cherish the essence of these gifts and sustain her passion despite the possibility of the substantial gifts withering.

4. Passionate love in the lyrics of Meera Dev Burman

Shono go dokhino hawa is a complete love song written by Meera Dev Burman, indicating her love for Sachin Dev Burman. The song is filled with her interaction with the beauty of nature that represents the sensation of joyful love. The writer begins the song by conversing with the wind to confess that she is intoxicated in love. The song continues to get intimate and personal. A desire for love has always been hidden in her heart. Now the love has exploded, and she is embracing it. This explosion of emotions increases her passionate desires and makes her restless. She also enjoys restlessness, happily drowning in the ocean of love. The writer uses the different states of nature in other seasons as metaphors for her states of love. In love, she burns like the sun; love makes her feel like playing in the rain and dancing in the moonlight; the mystery of love engulfs her like the mystical autumn and slightly saddens her like the cold winter; the vibrant spring rekindles her desires to meet the person of love. Her love changes shapes but remains eternal through seasons. This song is filled with passion. The love that the speaker is feeling is new and fresh. It is unadulterated and raw, full of uncontrolled passion. The writer's raw and intense love resonates with the intensity of nature. This love makes her burn and also soothes her as nature does with numerous changes through seasons. The strong claim of the eternity of love despite its changing experiences also indicates passion refusing to dwell on logic.

Borne gondhe chhonde gitite, written by Meera Dev Burman, is also dedicated to her husband Sachin Dev Burman who also composed and sang this song. This whole song is a series of praises to the writer's lover with intense love and admiration. The writer, Meera Dev, is mesmerized by her love Sachin Dev. His beauty, his fragrance, his voice, all keep mesmerizing her. She finds him as vibrant as all the seasons exuding various bright colours and playing Holi. Her beloved's colourful elegance distracts her senses. She compares her love for her beloved with the purity of fire. Her beloved's reciprocation of her love makes her as pure as the metal burnt in a fire. Her beloved makes her heart flutter like a firefly sparkling with light, and she wants to lose herself in his love. She finally submits herself to her beloved. She desires him. She acknowledges his longing for her. And she wants to be united with him. She harmonizes her heartbeats with his melody of being. She concludes the song with the confession that every drop of love in her heart is filled with her beloved only. There are exaggerations of praises in this song, which is also appropriate as this song is brimming with passionate love. The writer's passion and admiration for her beloved are evident with all her praises for her beloved describing how engulfed she is by him.

Biroho boro bhalo lage is a song about the writer's separation from her beloved. But the separation makes her love even stronger, because the separation reminds her of her lover more and more, and

makes her love him more and more. The separation causes pain. But she also enjoys it. The separation increases her care and admiration for her beloved. She wants him with her even more because of the separation; she is enjoying the separation because it is deepening the love. This song represents the passion that comes with pain. The writer explores how the pain of separation intensifies passion.

Na amare shoshi cheyona is also a presentation of Meera Dev Burman's passionate love mixed with fantasy. Her beloved is far away from her in this song, personified by the moon. She is enamoured by the moon. But she also acknowledges that the moon is out of her reach, so she cannot be held even if the moon wants to touch. The moon's love seduces her, but she also denies being his beloved. As the moon is far away, the love with the moon can only be enjoyed in imaginations. However, her increasing desires for the moon's love are troubling her, so she is begging to save herself from the fire of desire. Despite being intensely attracted to her beloved (the moon), and deeply wanting to embrace his callings of love, she deliberately stays away, as if holding onto bliss in the pain. In this song also, passion and pain are intertwined. The speaker herself chooses the pain. She knows that her beloved, represented by the moon, is unreachable, just like the moon. The lover wants to reach out, the moon wants to break free from the unreachable status. But she is denying the freedom and sustaining the distance, keeping the pain of an unfulfilled desire alive, causing more intense desire and passion for the same wish that she is deliberately pushing away. This song is a combination of both helplessness and control. The speaker does not have power over the limitations. By embracing the limitations and willingly rejecting the opportunity to get rid of the limitation, she is acquiring the control and the empowering passion. The empowerment lies in the self-proclaimed enjoyment of pain.

5. Conclusion

Both Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Meera Dev Burman have described their culture and rituals through their lyrical composition of the west and the east. The two female lyricists have considered 'love' as the common theme of their poetic creations, with specific female perspectives in different cultures and centuries. Regional and contemporary cultures played a great role in their writings. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's bold presentation attempting passionate love as the prime theme of her writing have been observed in the selected texts; she has used a wide range of figurative dialects to support the passionate thoughts of love and has attempted to express passionate desire and intimate relation between couples in her poems. On the other hand, similar passionate features have been found in the love-lyrics of Meera Dev Burman. E. B. Browning's genius has been observed mostly in her sonnets and the rhymes she used were in heroic couplets, while the writing style of Meera Dev Burman has been observed to be lyrical, simple and in such a straightforward way that the lines and expressions can easily be understood. Yet, such variations in the style of poetic structure and lyrical composition cannot be said to reflect an immense contrast between E. B. Browning and Meera Dev Burman. At the same time, it is also remarkable that while E. B. Browning's poems express comfort and protection through love, Meera Dev Burman's lyrics contain the anguish of passionate love and the enjoyment even in pain caused by love.

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