

Asceticism and Aestheticism in verses of Chhayawad - Sumitranandan Pant's *Parivartan Pallav*

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Abstract

Asceticism and Aestheticism are two important aspects of Romanticism. In the context of Hindi literature there have been basically four literary eras out of which Chhayawad is regarded as the new era of mysticism and spirituality that reflected deep association and love between man and nature. Its main aim was to interpret the most delicate and sensitive corners of the human feelings and experiences that convey the idea that man is an integral part of nature and not isolated from it. The paper focuses upon the poetry *Parivartan* in the work *Pallav Praves* by Sumitranandan Pant who is regarded as one of the four pillars of Chhayawad. The paper studies the poetry and the ascetic and aesthetic aspects in the light of Chhayawad

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Asceticism in Greek means 'to exercise and train' which comprises of total denial of physical and psychological desires to attain spiritualism. The concept of asceticism is in strong connection with human desires and goals that one wishes to attain for which he needs to train and exercise. In the process he has to renounce all those that are hurdles in his path of attainment and lead his life as an ascetic to attain the ultimate. Almost in all the disciplines the desire to attain perfection is the resting upon the path of training and exercising which in fact demands sacrifice and renunciation of the practices that may obstruct the path. Romantic asceticism reflects the sacred, purified, sanctified and divine aspects of poetry in terms of ascetic performances that help to better understand the Romantic isolation of the poets which in turn is not isolation but connection as the Romantic poet isolates himself from the society striving for purification of the corrupt community. The theory deals with a critical view of the eminent romantic poets of the 19th century and explores their afterlives whose literary recognition has transcended far beyond their existence in the living world.

Aestheticism on the other hand in Romanticism is not something dealing only with beauty and art as the term's literal meaning may signify but it has deeper concerns. According to Aesthetics beauty and art are one aspect of human life but the main aim of aesthetics is to shape and penetrate deep into all aspects of human life which in other words is the romantic ideal of aesthetics. Friedrich Schlegel, one of the eminent figures of Early German Romanticism defines the idea as under :

: “The Romantic imperative demands [that] all nature and science should become art [and] art should become nature and science” (FLP: #586); “poetry and philosophy should be united” (CF: #115), and “life and society [should be made] poetic” (AF: #16).

The Romantic poetries reflect that art and aesthetics both are closely connected to each other as far as their epistemological and metaphysical aspects are concerned. The Romantic poets attributed a superior thought to the romantic poetries to explain the function of aesthetics as the role "that art and beauty can play in the pursuit of epistemic and metaphysical goals, which according to Coleridge one such goal was das Absolute. The idea expresses that how romantics were concerned with the Absolute which according to them was unconditioned totality of all conditions. According to the Romantics the unconditioned totality is inaccessible and unknown to all humans, but the way reason drives towards the Absolute is quite significant and valuable. In the Indian context of Hindi literary eras, Chhayawad or Shadowism refers to the rise of romanticism in poetry in which main emphasis was laid on aestheticism and romantic subject matters with the remarkable beauty of expressions and flow of intense emotions. Sumitranandan Pant was one of the eminent poets of this romantic upsurge in the era of Hindi literature. Romanticism that was deeply related to love of man for nature and his surrounding was one of the ruling themes of Chhayawad poetries and just like the romantic upsurge in poetry was Chhayawad, Romanticism in literature also signified spirituality, love, enlightenment and conceptual visions of new reality in the spiritual world. Just like the poetries of William Wordsworth experienced spirituality, love of nature and beauty but could not reflect the ideas in the light of consciousness, in the same way the poetries of Pant, who is the torch bearer of Chhayawad in Hindi poetry the poetries had a mandatory aspect of mystery. *Pallav Pravesh* (1926) by Pant is a classic of Chhayawad clearly defines the purpose and mission of poetry in social build up.

According to Acharya Hazariprasad Dwivedi *Pallav* emerged in the context of Hindi literature with entirely unique and different poetic qualities, and this can be very well noticed from its diction, synthesis of the couplets and their transition. The poetic flow is very powerful and at the same time the curiosities of the poet just like an innocent child evoking multiple questions to know the beauty of nature and human is extremely engaging. *Pallav* generated a mixed impact on the sensitive and highly sensitive literary figures as the ones who were less sensitive expressed their displeasure over Pant's work whereas the hyper sensitive poets were pleased at Pant's poetic art and composition. In *Pallav* one can find simplicity and an honest expression of the poetic passions. In order to critique the set traditional and orthodoxy in society, he does not make use of satire or criticism, but keeping aside the outer influence of such traditions he focuses upon their simple aesthetics in the intervals.

Pant was much elated at the time of publication of his work *Pallav* and just like a child he was excited on its publication, so he did not believe in showing so called maturity by behaving decent at this time and in fact very honestly expressed his joy openly through few lines in *Pallav* that say :

These are not mere *Patram Pushpam* or just the leaves of flowers but *Pallav* is neither the murmuring song of the bustling leaves nor the sweet raga of a flower's sweet smelling nectar

A unique feature of Chhayawad is the poetic effort to understand the broad spirit of the ancient culture. In the poetic collection *Pallav* a poem *Parivartan* has been regarded as the grand epic by many scholars due to its unique expression on change. Written in 1924, *Parivartan* is a long poem of the collection which according to the poet Pant is a representative of the *Pallav* era. In this poem *Parivartan* or change has been accepted by the poet as the absolute truth, as no one can stop the change or reverse it.

The poem deals with the positive as well as cruel aspects of the change. In the poem the poet cherishes the ancient times when nature's beauty was all naked, uncovered and natural. It was lacking all kinds of artificiality and plastic touch, and this was the time when its beauty was blooming just like a new soft leaf or pallav. The majestic beauty of the nature in the past which was relishing, cheering and ecstatic is the true aestheticism of Pallav through this poem.

The poet recalls the golden age when nature's bounty was abundant and the whole planet was flourishing and rich with natural beauty. It was the time when nature was a blooming youth with all its energy and positive vibes. The poet regards the primeval beauty of nature as naked beauty because it was uncovered, and untouched by any kind of artificial adornments. The poet also explores the human life of those times when the humans were away from any kind of sins, poverty and crime and they were the seekers of truth and spirituality. There was no fear of death and death was considered just a doorway leading to a new rejuvenated life.

The poet in this poem talks about change as inevitable and taking in context the life of vedic age he recalls humans as the seekers of truth, who easily accepted the cycle of birth and death as an inevitable change. The poet here points to the traditional life and values ruling the vedic society at that time, and rather than critiquing its orthodoxy he focuses more on the core values which taught life just as short journey on the planet and death as a doorway leading to the new life, hence there was peace and prosperity everywhere and the society was not chained but liberated from all evils. Rather than depicting aesthetics as art centric Pant enunciates, manifests and disperses it in life.

Keats. one of the great romantic poets has associated aesthetics with beauty and thereby says "beauty is truth, truth us beauty". In the Indian context "Satyam Shivam Sundaram" correlates the concept of beauty with truth thereby signifying truth as the experience of divine. According to the aesthetics art does not need to solve any purpose, it should be just beautiful to provide sensuous pleasure rather than didactic. The experience of beauty itself was regarded as the experience of truth and divine whose beauty was beyond expression of words.

However the Pre Raphaelite concept of aesthetics was also regarded as Escapism from the realities of the world, but Pant breaks all the concepts and set laws of Romanticism in his poetry as he not only discusses of the golden age of nature's bounty but also brings his readers to the realistic phase when earth is facing threat due to nature's destruction. He talks about the beauty, spirituality and sanctity of the golden age thereby taking the imaginative faculty of his readers to the magnificent times on the earth, but also drags them down to the reality which in fact is due to man made progress and destruction of nature. In this respect the poetry *Parivartan* is his honest interpretation of the inevitable change in which he talks both soft and harsh aspects of the change, the enjoyment as well as the suffering of the humans and nature both.

Pant recalls the golden age and the painful expression of the loss of that age when he asks, "*Kahan aaj woh purna puratan?*" which itself reflects his aestheticism in the absolute or totality of life which was nothing but truth itself. Truth is absolute as it has no other face, aspect or perspective but it is always the one and only one, hence the use of word "*purna puratan*" itself describes how Pant looked upon the absolute and completeness of life in the past ancient years of the earth when life existed with truth and totality. Pant's aestheticism is ascetic in nature as it has reflections of spirituality and renunciation, nirvana or liberty from the birth death cycle which is describes through an easy acceptance of death during the ancient times as death did not arouse fear of losing attachments of life, the moksha was attained with the acceptance of truth that death is inevitable, hence this absolute truth also directed the life of the humans who led a simple life without evils of jealousy, greed, amassing of wealth and property that became root cause of all evils and crime in the later halves of the life.

Pant talks about the impermanency of human life and regards it as a momentary travel as he narrates in following lines about the worthlessness of life when he says, : "*Jala degi sandhya k jwal, akhil youvan k ang ubhar/ Haddiyon k hilte kankaal/...Goonjte hain sabhi k din chaar , fir hahakaar!*" - In these line *sandhya ka jwal* refers to the cremation fire that is lighted in the evening time as per the Hindu tradition, before sunset the cremation fire is lighted that burns all the human aspirations, expectations, dreams along with the body reducing it to ashes. Pant narrates the harsh aspect of change here which during the birth calls for celebration and happiness but during death leads to sorrow and deep sadness. Death in Pant's poem has an ascetic significance, one death is natural death and the other form of death that one can embrace while living is asceticism as it is the renunciation of all worldly pleasures. Guru Nanank Dev has defined the true significance of asceticism as :

Asceticism doesn't lie in ascetic robes, or in walking staff, nor in the ashes. Asceticism doesn't lie in the earring, nor in the shaven head, nor blowing a conch. Asceticism lies in remaining pure amidst impurities. Asceticism doesn't lie in mere words; He is an ascetic who treats everyone alike. Asceticism doesn't lie in visiting burial places, It lies not in wandering about, nor in bathing at places of pilgrimage. Asceticism is to remain pure amidst impurities

Pant's Parivartan talks about the ways of world and the human life amidst it, however it does not favour the concept of escapism as enunciated in *art for art's sake*, but presents a picture of absolute truth that life is just a short journey and one can be an ascetic even living amidst the world and people. The change and transformation from childhood and youth to old age has been juxtaposed with the change of seasons from spring to winter and autumn when the trees shed their leaves. Poet emphasizes here also the idea of change which is unavoidable for all the beings on the earth and is an intrinsic quality of all existing beings.

The concept of asceticism emerged from the philosophy of Pythagoras who was the founder of the ascetic way of life by exercising control upon diet, silence and religious rituals that led to the purity of soul after death when the body is left behind. Thus the ascetic philosophers have always laid emphasis on the sanctity, purity and enlightenment of the soul that exists in the afterlife, even when the bodily form is lost. The elements of asceticism are fasting, poverty, silence, sufferings and celibacy.

Pant's *Parivartan* lays focus upon the acceptance of body and material things existing in the world as mere illusion or *maya* and by reflecting the concept of change which is inevitable in the world, he talks about the human life span and the deeds performed in that span. Along with the worldly duties that surround a individual's life he also tries to generate an awareness on the life as something short-lived. Through *Parivartan* Pant has presented a fresh and unique approach acting as an inspiration for Hindi literature.

Weber has signified asceticism as a determining factor for social change by exploring its power to transform in the context of monasticism. Weber has contrasted and compared asceticism with mysticism and has talked about various reform movements that have deeply impacted the society and individual leading to their transformation.

The ascetic values expressed in Pant's *Parivartan* point significantly to the idea of change and social and individual transformation. Laying emphasis upon the transformation of the self Pant has reflected the cycle of birth and death as absolute realities of the world. He has reflected the transformations and changes taking place during the life cycle that are mandatory and uncontrolled.

The strong idea of change and transformation in his poetry reflect the concept that life is very generous and is always offering innumerable chances to the individual to change and transform himself as a better person till the last breath of his life through the experiences he has gained throughout he life. The same principle applies to the seasons and other life forms also. Growth, maturity and development is a change and the things once lost, the moments once lived do not come back however they can be recalled and cherished at times , but the time and moments once gone do not come back, therefore Pant's idea of change and transformation in life points to lead and live each and every moment of the life to the fullest so that one has no guilt for the time once gone.

Weber has reflected asceticism as the key element to understand the social changes and in other words individual changes as individuals make a society. Pant's asceticism reflected in the poem talks about changes right from the beginning till the end of the poem , thus change and transformations act as the supreme ruling values and extended idea of the poem.

Reflections on the momentary happiness and sadness has been depicted with great detail by Pant wherein he encompasses the absolute truth that nothing is static, stable and forever in the world. Even if an individual has moments of happiness and rejoice in his life it is just like some borrowed moments for short time which soon vanishes and sadness again persists in life that leads humans to struggle, strive and learn lessons from failures to again wait for some short moments of happiness.

Therefore the idea of boasting on the happy moments of life or success is not a joy forever and in fact Romanticism in words of Keats when says *A thing of beauty is a joy forever*, then in this context happiness or sadness, success or failure are not the joys forever, but the mental preparation to accept the absolute truth that both the moments are short-lived, momentary and not forever , is the thing of beauty to be accepted and rejoiced forever. Thus the Aesthetic aspect in these moments is to accept the beauty of the truth that nothing is everlasting in this world makes a person happy and rejoice each and every moment of his life. It is also pointing to the

major changes in life or *Parivartan* as Pant calls are the determining factors of life leading every time to a new turn on the path of life.

Transcendence defined as the integral part of life in the poetries of Chhayawad find its representation at the best in *Parivartan*. The ascetic aspects of Chhayawad have been deeply dealt in the poetry representing the view that life always transcends and this process of transcending always includes and excludes something, it can exist in completeness or totality. The transcendence of life at times excludes large number of human instincts as well as desires and walks its own way of change.

Nietzsche observes asceticism as an acceptance of willingness towards nothingness. The basic philosophy in Pant's poetry is a deep feeling of asceticism that talks about Shunya, void or in other words nothingness when he expresses that all things are reduced to zero after a change. This idea reflects the disastrous and negative impact of change as it brings down an emptiness, a void and a feeling of nothingness, also on account of the concept that nothing is stable or everlasting in this world.

However there can be two aspects of nothingness in which one aspect sees it to be totally empty and on the other hand it can point as a time before something new is to be created. It can be negative like emptiness, death and silence. In the west the concept of nothingness arouses fear and this is the reason why they never see their Gods and goddesses as nothing as it is observed in Indian context.

In the Indian perspective nothingness is the point of creation and the end of creation as well, it is thought that before creating new, the old must be empty and void.

As Buddha says, "*Only in emptiness, only in nothingness, does godliness happens.*" hence Pant's concept of creation is based upon the Indian perspective of emptiness which does not see the negativity in it but the strength of positivity as it says that all things come from nothing and go to nothing. The disappearance of the things to nothingness is leaving behind pure consciousness which acts as a mirror empty of any kind of reflection, it is crystal clear and stable. Consciousness becomes empty of content and this is the point where one is able to see oneself, the consciousness is overflowing, the ultimate goal of meditation which is to create nothingness is achieved. Thus at the same time it is empty but also abundantly full.

Pant establishes a strong connection between the world and nature through the aspect of changes. He says that on one hand during the process of creation nature seems to be very happy and this is indicated by the gestures of sun, moon, stars and the nature surrounding that seems to be full of energy and vibrancy, this can be experienced during the spring and its onset, thus during creation the nature and its elements seem to favour the process, however during destruction, even nature shed tears and cries over the catastrophe, the trees and the world around seems to be dipped in great sorrow. This happens because human beings and their living conditions are not aloof from nature, but an integral part of it. Any change in the human world is affecting the nature also as it cannot remain solitary. Neil Degrasse Tyson a renowned astrophysicist said,

"We are all connected to each other biologically, to the earth chemically and to the rest of universe atomically...I actually feel quite large at the end of that ..It's not that we are better than the universe, we are the part of the universe, we are in the universe and the universe is within us"

Recent studies in this field have also attributed to the phenomenon established in which a paper published in *Frontiers in Physics* by Prof. Franco Vazza and Alberto Feletti who are an astrophysicist and neuroscientist respectively identified the similarities between the structural morphological memory and network properties and the Cosmic web of the Universe showing close affinity with the neuronal cell network of the human brain. Their studies establish the idea that lot of similarities are visible between neuronal and galaxy networks. Thus the poetry of Pant is far ahead of its time as the poetry *Parivartan* reflects the sensitive aspects of nature correlating it with the sensitive aspects of nature directly impacting the human life.

Being one of the four pillars of Chhayawad Pant has extraordinary contribution in composing the poetries appealing more to realism and world around. The works of Chhayawad have presented a novel sense of expressing the thoughts and feelings of self. It was more of personal experiences and their honest expression in literary forms. In his poetry *Parivartan* Pant has reflected the idea of change that not only shows strong connection to human life but also touches the life of each and every living being existing in the world, including the nature also that has also not remained untouched by change. He describes in his poetic lines the most sensitive aspects of change and its impact on the life of humans and nature. As change is inevitable and no one can avoid it, he reflects change as the biggest and absolute truth on the earth along with birth and death.

The Chhayawad movement in the poetry is a transition of the Hindi literature from the traditional Hindi Urdu poetry. The main aim of Chhayawad was to present the delicate emotions in the most sensitive way. The term Chhaya or shadow refers to the trail of emotional shadow trails after an event. The trail of emotions can be clearly noticed in *Parivartan*, from the collection *Pallav* by Pant. The poetry strongly leans towards the themes of nature and love as a renewed form of mysticism.

Citations

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