



KINSHIP OF UNIVERSE AND SOUL WITH GOD AS REFLECTED IN THE POETIC REALM OF ROBERT BROWNING: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to project Robert Browning as the universally acknowledged poet with Vedantic thought gifted with the power of seeing the universe as the creation of God bringing home the point that the souls of human beings and others are nothing but the offspring of God and nothing else. It attests to the fact that even the soul of a minute thing in the universe is eternal and immortal so designed to make one realise the power of God who has created the earth and the materials that are needed for the life of His creatures. It neatly picturizes how Robert Browning has cherished the thought of Vedanta about the manifestation of the universe visualizing the presence of God in the universe and in all the beings both human and non-human in the world and revealing the secret that God is in man and inward search is essential for the profound realization of the Almighty attesting to the fact that while God is in Heaven, All is right with the world, thus nourishing kinship of universe and soul with God.

Key Words: Kinship, Universe, Soul, Almighty, God, Heaven, the World, Eternal, Vedanta, Inward Search, Off Spring.

Robert Browning is the universally acknowledged poet with Vedantic thought who sees the universe as the creation of God bringing home the point that the souls of human beings and others are nothing but the offspring of God. The God being immune to any change, so is the offspring of Him. This is purely the thought present in most of the Upanishads and Bhagavat Geetha. In Bhagavat Geetha, Lord Krishna preaches that Athman is not at all affected by any senses or by any action of the mind like desire, hatred, anger etc. The forces fire, water, and earth are seen by our eyes whereas Agasa is not perceived by us. Similarly Atman is unaffected by any change. According to Vedantic thought process, Atman is birth less, deathless and everlasting and this gets beautifully reflected in the poetical works of Browning. The upliftment or growth of the worldly beings is the gift of Heaven; this universe is created so that the ego of the souls can find a meaning of life. Even the smallest thing is made in the universe as a mortal and this concept of the universe is found in Brownian's poem "One word more".

According to Robert Browning, wherever earthly things are in need, there appears the gift of Heaven. God has created the earth and the materials that are needed for the life of His creatures. Even the soul of a minute thing in the universe is eternal and seems to be so designed to make one realize the Truth. The Bhagavat Geetha states that where there is no water, the importance of the well is felt and where there is full of water everywhere, nobody is mindful of the well. Similarly, the Vedantic thoughts are very essential for the ignorant mind of the people. Brahman is Bliss. To realize Him is Ananda. This Ananda includes all others. All others are the enjoyments we feel in dream. God has created us to realize the truth and live happily understanding each other. The word 'the Heaven's gift' refers the saints of the world. Earth's abatement is our shortfall in our wisdom. Many saints are sent to the world to make us realise the truth. Thus, one can find the similarity between Bhagavat Geetha and Browning. Bagavat Geetha wants us to obey the universal law to obtain Ananda. Browning says that God bids us to drink and live as a society and is in tune with what is stated here:

"The Truth is one and is in All
All is in one" (Ramacharaka 170)

Such is the report of the highest reason on man given by the illumined persons. Thus, the universe is viewed by Browning in the Vedantic pattern in lines that follow:

1. Universe is the manifestation of God.
2. The Universe stands for the happiness of mankind.
3. Each being in the universe is to help the other and there should be interaction among all beings.
4. The upliftment of worldly things is the gift of Heaven.

Robert Browning is said to have cherished the thought of Vedanta about the manifestation of the universe. He has seen God's presence in the universe and in all the beings in the world. One can find this concept in the following lines of the poem "Soul":



“ God is seen
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh,
in the soul and the clod”

God is present on the heavenly Bodies like stars, moon, sun. He is present in human beings as well as in the animals. God's presence is felt in the soul of every being. He is present even in the materialistic things like stone, water, sand etc. According to Isavasya Upanishad, the whole universe is born of the Omnipotent and Absolute God. Parabrahman is the basis and source of everything. In the words of Swami Sivananda Saraswati,

“Taking the whole from the whole,
What remains is the whole” (P 3)

In the poem “One Word More”, Browning gives out his concept of the universe that one being is meant to help the other in the universe, for example, the moon is there to inspire the human beings to turn towards God and get the highest attainment. As all the beings are relative in nature in the universe, and are so designed that one being is assisting the other, starting from the heavenly bodies. The higher beings naturally look after the welfare of the lower ones. This relationship is meant for the upliftment of even the lower beings. Browning has given the example of moon inspiring the human mind.

The Maya or ignorance of the soul about Truth is dealt with in Browning's poems. In the poem, “Karshish An Epistle”, Browning says that God has created man on earth without any blemish. The material belief and concept affects the man as soon as he is born in this world, though the aim of life is to reach Heaven. The man becomes ignorant of his aim, his rightful inheritance of Divine identity. Being ignorant of the inherent value of all the things in the world, he becomes ignorant of the totality of his life. Browning says that the ignorance covers ones' mental eyes not allowing him to see the reality behind the worldly actions and happenings. It is this spectacle that makes one keep away from Truth viewing the material things as permanent and become blind to seeing the reality of soul, universe and God, and as a result, man views the sensual pleasures as the most important aspect of life. The vanishing things are not real so Browning writes:

“ The man is witless of the size, the sum,
The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much”.

Browning says that the man is very obstinate of his ignorance and he never likes to please God. He abruptly calls the truth as a lie and he never goes nearer to the truth;

“ Ardent he is,
Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old
“Be it us God please”, reassureth him” (Karshish 29)

This may be taken as similar to the concept of Maya. Maya never allows us to understand the Reality. Right is looked as wrong and the vice-versa when we look through the spectacle of Maya. In the poem, “Caliban upon Setabos”, Browning points out the agonies of ignorance that man is experiencing in this world. Browning's anger upon the manner the world goes, is seen very plainly. He is averse to the ignorance of man. Though God has created us and the world, in the blissful mould, what are we doing here? is the question he asks. We do not go in line with His wish. One has done against His will and is an eye sore to God and not worthy of His blessings. We normally engage in listless sports or activities that are vain. We are weak or ignorant in many aspects. Only in a few points man is strong but in all others, he is ignorant. He thinks rather ignorantly that God admires his actions. While He is mocking, the man is engaged in the world as playing with his playthings. The man is

“Weaker in most points
Stronger in a few worthy and yet mere
playthings all the while
Things He admires and mocks too....”

According to Vedantic thought, Maya makes the soul view itself as separate from Brahman and because of Maya, the soul is looked as embodiment subjected to birth and death, hunger and thirst and so on. The Vedanta doctrine of Sri Sankaracharya implies that because of Maya, the Highest self, the Paramathman appears as external, reflected as it were in a mirror. Through Maya, Brahman appears to be associated with attributes and “it becomes Saguna Brahman who is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the Universe” (Nikhilanda 122). In the poem, “Rabbi Ben Ezra”, Browning puts forth his view on Karma. He says



that all the events that are happening are nothing but the affect of past action. The totality of Karma is for ever continued in the future unless a man realizes God. Though time goes on and we have a new life, the wheel of time runs back to bring the effect of our Karma. The potter and clay example is given to understand karma. This is the truth and this is the answer for various unlikely events in life coming on the way:

“ All that is at all
Last ever, past recall...
Time’s wheel runs back or stops
Potter and clay endure” (58)

In the poem, “one word more” also Browning writes about karma saying that the reason for the earthly happenings in our life is the gift of the heaven, which in turn, is the reward for our past deeds or karma. Here God is personified as potter and man is personified as clay. The machine is compared to the ‘time’ which is ever revolving as a result of the past actions of the man. Heaven is rewarding or punishing the man according to his action in the past life. So he says:

“Heaven’s gift takes earth’s abatement”. The effects of the good and bad actions return to man again. This is beautifully reflected in the poem “Soul” where it is said, God will approve good action or punish the bad. Each action has its judgement.

“ . . . The rest of his hand work returned him again
His creations approval and censure” and
I lay down the judgship ... “(Soul)

Are the lines that reveal the concept of karma. In the poem “Fra Lippo Lippi”, Browning writes that all actions are judged and the reward or punishment is given and they are realised as karma in the future. God has created us in such a way that the beauty, power, shape, colour, light and shade change. The crimes and virtues are counted. The pious people have understood this truth of karma thereby easing, their way of life by offering prayers to find the present karma as a rewarding one. According to Munkata Upanished, there are three kinds of man’s action, Good, bad and mixed. When good action prevails, he obtains a god’s body, I rather to say Deva and he dwells in heaven. If bad action prevails, he obtains an animal body or still a lower body and suffers in his next birth. If mixed action prevails he is born in a human body. He reaps the result of his own action in one of these bodies. Swami Nikhilananda observes:

“From heaven or from a subhuman place,
He again returns to earth, as a human
Being and takes up the thread of
His higher evolution” (P 298).

The very preaching of Brihadarayaka Upanishad is that by the means of work, a man goes to the Heaven or Hell or earth. Man is the architect of his own fate and he is the builder of his own future destiny. This is known as karma. He is responsible for his present sufferings. Then, there is a possibility that by a hatritual right conduct; he can build up a happy future. By understanding the concept of karma, one’s action is to be arranged in a good way for the expectation of the reward or happiness. The great majority of the race is engaged in this pursuit of happiness, as the philosophy teaches that the end of all human endeavour and life is to allow the soul to unfold until it reaches the oneness with God. This is the true happiness of the soul. In the poem, “Rabbi Ben Ezra”, Browning states that men are engaged in the poor vaunt of life to get joy. There sole aim in life is to get food for them and if that is not found, the life meets the end. They are ignorant of God and fail to go nearer to God. This is because of ignorance of man. It is evident from these poetic lines of Browning in “Rabbi Ben Ezra:

“Poor vaunt of life indeed
Were men but formed to feed.
On joy, the solely seek and find and feast”

Once God is found in our bliss, the happiness is out and out boundless making us seek and find God in us and take shelter in His thought and blessings and there is real birth of happiness which Browning wishes to impress rather significantly and honestly in the poetry.

There is a certain relationship between one matter and another matter, one soul and another, soul, one soul and another matter, between heavenly bodies such as sun, moon stars and earthly lives such as plants, animals, human beings and between one



orders of life to another. Finally there is the relationship of one universe to another one is left wondering how the various planets move without any collision with one another. Similarly, the lift on earth has some relationship with moulders, other things and heavenly bodies. The prayer and Yoga we offer in the temple is an example in that we send our need to the other world thereby acknowledging the relationship between this world and the heaven. God has manifested the universe and in the universe there are many worlds. The five basic elements (Bhutas) the earth, air, fire, water and agasa are fundamental in all materials and beings in the world. Man is born with a special reasoning power so that he may recognize the creator. So he is kept above all. That is why some of the eminent people are found controlling all other factors in the world. In his poem, "Panline", the life of Paracelsus becomes a vehicle for Robert Browning to voice his thought. The character of Paracelsus is such that it stands as an example of how man's mind develops stage by stage and finally realises that knowledge of God is essential. Browning picturizes the character as there is a desire to see God in human beings Roy E. Gridhey observes:

"Paracelsus is filled with his zeal and fierce energy to exercise his God like potential, to know the secrets of the universe and the Absolute" (P 27).

Brownings' view is that all in the universe are under the command of God and God himself is present in all beings in the universe. The greatest concept is the intercourse of God with the human mind, as human mind alone has the ability to realize God and His Greatness. The relationship of God with the universe may be taken as a point to state that all beings are the manifestation of God Himself created by His cosmic mind and matter and the magnifying nature of human mind is related to God's intercourse or manifestation. The Mukunda Upanishad acknowledges the truth of manifestation of Brahman. Swami Sivananda writes:

"As from a blazing fire sparks, like unto
Five, issued forth by thousands. So
Various Jeeves are produced from the
Indestructible Brahman" (P 97).

From Him, proceeds the oceans, all mountains and rivers of every kind; from Him emanate the annual herbs and the juice by which the inner self (subtle body) exists encircled by the gross elements (Bhutas). He who knows that he himself is Brahman, attains immortality and is placed in the hearts of all beings. Thus one can find the similarity between Browning's poetry and Upanishad's in revealing the relationship of the universe with God. Browning finds that earthly beings are given the facilities in the world so that they may move towards divinity, that is the relationship of all beings in the world with Heaven. Man, in the world enjoys various pleasures like sex, wealth, power etc., whenever he attains the pleasure there is a longing in him to go further and see what is next to what is enjoyed. But none of the pleasures gives him satisfaction. Then his mind revolves on the pleasure that will give him satisfaction and comfort. He finds the Bliss of God, as the only happiness that gives him satisfaction and comfort. Thus, the worldly pleasures are there to lead man to his right path. Even the sensual pleasures are a thing of the Heavenly happiness but with an unsatisfactory note. In the poem "The statue and the Bust", Browning expresses his concept of worldly happiness as:

"The earthly gift to an end divine
A lady of day is as good (69).

Thus, it is found and understood that "All roads leads to Rome, "all worldly happiness, even the happiness of making a lady of day is for a purpose that is to realize the Truth. In the poem, "Caliban upon Setebos", Browning puts forward the thought that God has created the universe because of His will and Bliss. In Him, right and wrong, kindness and cruelty are not present. Only the human souls, though created by the Almighty, have right and wrong, kindness and cruelty. This is the difference between God and man. God is unaffected by any bliss or scolding whereas man is bounded between both the sides:

"Making and marrying day at will
So He thinketh such shows nor right nor wrong in Him.
Not kind or cruel. He is strong and Lord"

This is similar to the Vedanta thought in Upanishads and Bagavat Geetha. The Vedanta preaching is that the human beings are evolved in accordance with the Great plan of God. The principle of love is the binding force in the universe. Browning uses love in many places as the needed factor to make life a meaningful one in the universe. There is love of God on all its creations. The atom has affinity with another atom and they unite to form a material within the atom, there are abstractions or love between protons and electrons. Thus, the binding force prevails in the universe and above it. In the poem, "The statue



and the best”, Browning writes of the story of a Duke and a lady. He looked at her in the pattern of a lover and she looked at him as though she was awakened from sleep. Browning comments that love is so established for the sake of all the involved. It makes all involved as benefiteres. There is no loser in the affair of love and on the other hand, love enhances their happiness double fold:

“ Love so ordered for both their sakes”

In the poem “Saul” which is a religious poem dealing with human love to the Divine and manifestation of love of God. Here Browning explains that the love on others makes us understand the Almighty:

“ They love is discovered almighty
. A man o’er take
God’s own speed in the way of love
I abstain for love’s sake”.

Here we find the love of man and love of God. For love’s sake, the world is moving on smoothly. Then he writes that the world is filled with love and love is the God’s gift. In “Rabbi Ben Ezra”, also Browning writes that love is the perfect plan of God and it is the best principle that a soul can adopt:

“ Love perfect too perfect I call thy plan”

The Vedanta thought regarding the binding force of love is that the whole universe is viewed as one united life, the unity of universal life attesting to the fact. “All Life is me” (Ramacharaka 110). Being in the one life, all are but a part of the great universal life, which itself is but an emanation of the Absolute:

“Take away love and our earth is a tomb”

(Fra Lippo Lippi)

Thus, Robert Browning brings out his thought of love. Love enhances the happiness of both involved in it. Love makes us understand the Almighty which is the only happiest way. It is the speedy way to realise God and it is the gift of God. It is the perfect plan of God to enrich the human beings. Love is the mutual and total binding forces that relates the God and universe, Beings with God, Being with Beings and self within self. Yogi Ramacharaka says that “love is the reason for the manifestation of the universe and all beings in it”. The freedom of the individual beings is the relationship that one finds in the universe. Freedom of thought, desire, activity and aim is in every being and each is free to act of its own. This is the thought found in Browning’s poems. In “Karshish – An Epistle”, he writes that Heaven has opened the freedom to a soul while it is in earth to act on its wishes. Bagavat Geetha also preaches that the human mind is free to think and act according to its will. Thus, Robert Browning is found to be identically thinking with the Vedantic thought that gives the relation of the individual souls to the Almighty as its manifestation and the universe is thought to be the visualization of the Omnipotent.

To conclude, Robert Browning reveals the secret that God is in man and inward search is essential to realize the Almighty and love is the binding force that attributes all the bliss of life. Thus, Browning is one of the English poets who have revealed the high philosophy of life cherishing kinship of universe and soul with God, attesting to the fact that while God is in Heaven, All is right with the world.

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