
Robert Browning as a Poet of Man

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to reveal Robert Browning's approach and views towards human being that make him the poet of man. Browning is widely acclaimed as the best dramatic monologue poet and great observer of nature of man. He tries to explore the depth of mind and soul of man. In this paper it is tried to critically examine Browning as a poet of man by emphasizing on representation of the human traits, his emotions, struggle, conflict, moral concern and uniqueness of his characters. Some of significant poems of Browning as *My Last Duchess*, *Andrea del Sarto*, *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *The Last Ride Together* are studied. The text is examined analytically to reach the goal of the paper. The study of the poems reveal that Browning goes through the deep study of the inner feelings, mind and the soul of character. Man, while leading spiritual life gives better shape to his life and thus lives in happiness.

Keywords: Isolation, Man, Optimism, Soul, Spirituality.**Introduction:**

Robert Browning can be compared to Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Tennyson for portraying psychoanalytically the human characters in his poems. However, Browning's characters are from several countries as Italy, Germany, France, Spain. His characters bear individual identity. He paints human minds of his characters. He portrayed several types of characters as: saints, lovers, musicians, painters, kings, beggars, priests, jews, princess, street girls, dancers, cavaliers, tyrants, various others. Psychoanalytical outlook of Browning is reflected in his characters. He goes deep in the inner side of the human beings, their mental condition. The story of his poetry does not move rapidly towards peak moments rather characters are found in critical situation. The characters are chosen by Browning from rural and urban areas. No particular type of person is portrayed by Browning, but all types of human beings are portrayed in his poetry. Specifically, he delves into the soul of the poets, scholars, sculptures, artists and others. Painters, artists, musicians are represented skillfully in his poems.

Robert Browning is one of the greatest Victorians poets. His optimistic views of life reveal his inner personality and his outlook towards the human beings. Humanism, optimism psychological insight, spiritual concern, individualism, struggle and relation of soul and body are seen particularly in his poems and in other works. While portraying human psychology Browning has gone through several fields of life and different kinds of characters in his works. His poems represent a man who possesses distinct traits.

Krishna Kumar Sharma comments in his article entitled *Robert Browning as an Optimist Poet* that the characters of Robert Browning when falls in the sufferings and lastly when the situation touches the climax, the issue is seen to be resolved and the poem ends with optimism. Krishna Kumar Sharma says about Robert Browning as, “He portrays his characters in his works either in crisis or in some critical situation and when this crisis reaches the climax, it is resolved ultimately and the poet concludes his works on a note of optimism” (Krishna Kumar Sharma, p. 154.) Dr. Madhusudan P.N comments in his article that the complexities of human existence and inner world of man is presented by Browning in his poems. Dr. Devender Singh presents his thoughts about the characters of Browning in his article and considers that the poems of Browning as *My Last Duchess*, *Porphyria’s Lover* and *The Last Ride Together* are best example of Psychoanalysis of a human character. He goes on to say that subconscious as well as unconscious are dominating the characters of Duke in *My Last Duchess* and lover in *Porphyria’s Lover*.

In the poem *My Last Duchess*, Duke of Ferrara is shown arrogant and possessive nobleman. In the poem *Porphyria’s Lover*, the lover is a man who strangles his beloved for preserving the perfect moment, Andrea del Sarto is a character from the poem *Andrea del Sarto* who is a painter who thinks that he lacks in having the soul and motivation of the greatest artists. Childe Roland from the poem *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* is seen as a lone knight on a symbolic quest. The Grammarian in the poem *A Grammarian’s Funeral* is shown to be a scholar after death for his complete devotion to the learning. Johannes Agricola from the poem *Johannes Agricola in Meditation* is portrayed as a religious fanatic who considers himself to be predestined for heaven. The Pied Piper in the poem *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, is a legendary figure. Bishop in the poem *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed’s Church* associated with material legacy. Mr. Sludge from the poem *Mr. Sludge, “The Medium”* is shown to a fraudulent spiritualist.

As it is seen that Browning deeply delves into the soul and mind of his characters. He explores human mind, human struggle, characters’ moral choices. In *My Last Duchess* the poet shows jealousy, pride and control of the characters. He explores here that how ego and thinking of man leads him to the cruelty. In the poem *Andrea del Sarto* emphasis is given on inner conflict, self-doubt and lacking in use of proper potential. A painter is presented as to be feeling failure. Emotional conflict between capacity and ordinariness. In the poem *Fra Lippo Lippi*, a monk is presented. In this poem he presents significance and value of the painting of real people. The poem *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* is a kind of journey into a man’s mind and bravery in the face of hopelessness. In the poem *Rabbi Ben*

Ezra spiritual growth, life experience is highlighted. However, it represents human development though soul and body. The poem *Caliban upon Setebos* studies the mind of a primitive creature who thinks about God. The poem reflects human fear and brooding.

In the poem *Fra Lippo Lippi* Browning reveals that how human life is meaningful. A monk is a man who loves life and art and wants to paint the real human beauty. The poem explores that the monk believes in painting the reality of life. He asserts for giving outlet to the human experience in its fullness as body and soul. He presents his views on realism, art and human life. In this poem Browning says,

“And then add soul and heighten them threefold?

Or say there’s beauty with no soul at all—

(I never saw it—put the case the same—)

If you get simple beauty and nought else,

You get about the best thing God invents:

That’s somewhat: and you’ll find the soul you have missed

Within yourself, when you return him thanks.” (Pp. 310-311)

In the poem *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, an old man reflects on life, looks at age as a spiritual journey. Life is represented as challenging but imperfections and the challenges of the life teach new experience. Thus, the speaker gives importance to the faith and the experience. Faith in Divine makes the life meaningful. As per the views of Browning death is not the end of the life but it is a transition. In the poem entitled *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* Browning explores the battle of psychology as the madness and obsession. Individuality of the speaker is presented here. The quest by Roland is highlighted here. His journey to the dark tower explores diverse psychological traits. Battling against the internal struggles with perseverance leads him to the gate of dark tower. Though the quest for the tower comes to the fulfillment by reaching the tower but the purpose of such quest is yet not revealed. However, the poem is shown to be the symbolic of inner quest of human mind. The poem represents the struggle of human against desperation and victory is shown in persistence.

Robert Browning’s poetry reveals that his characters are lonely and solitary in nature. They are seen indulging within themselves and mostly not in action. It is visible that he is the poet of individual character in loneliness. Frederick Ryland finds in the characters of Browning the quality of making the readers read the reasons and results of the previous actions of the character. In the poem *The Last Ride Together*, the patience and acceptance of the life’s failure by the speaker is laid down beautifully by Robert Browning. The rejection of the love by the beloved does not discourage thoroughly to the lover rather he skillfully comes out from melancholic situation. But, still the hope and belief of lover is also presented as the lover puts his demand for the last ride with the beloved.

In the poem *Andrea del Sarto*, Browning portrays Andrea del Sarto who is seen lamenting lack of greatness in his craftsmanship. There is battle in his mind between his talent and emotional traits, conflict between artistic distinctness and human imperfection. Robert Browning considers the progressive nature of man to be the significant characteristic of the

man. However, Browning emphasizes on depiction of man as individual. W. R. Goodman says,

Browning shows his persistent belief that an understanding of the nature of man and of human existence is the main object of the activities of life. In his philosophy he begins with man as the highest known manifestation of creative essence. In this light man appears as an ascending phase of the manifestation of creativities of energy moving between lower life forms to the divine life of the spirit. It is man's upward movement within this human sphere that always secures the poet's attention." (Goodman, p. 264)

Individualistic traits are found in the philosophy of Browning. Browning presents human nature with realistic views.

Conclusion:

Robert Browning appears not merely as a poet of dramatic monologues or one of the best craftsmen of psychological poems, but a chasmic and devoted observer of the human mind, situation and human condition. His poetry is a big gallery of human mind and human soul. Browning does not try to idealize a man but engages him in several conditions and depths. Browning's world of characterization shows the human's efforts, mistakes, aspirations, belief, optimism, and complexities. The characters of Browning come from all walks of life and each discloses unique frame of mind and perspective. Thus, his poems make Browning a universal poet of the mankind.

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