



A Counter-Orientalistic Approach: Comparative Exploration Of Thematic Universality In English Poet John Keats And Pashto Poet Ghani Khan

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Abstract

Western literary schools mostly relegate oriental literature, especially that which is in local oriental languages, as regional, communal and/or lacking universality in its appeal – and thus not to be regarded as mainstream. The Indian sub-continent, though having a profoundly rich literary legacy in its local languages, is no exception from such marginalizing treatment. Adopting a counter-orientalistic approach, this study, however, argues similarities between the profundity and complexities of sensibilities and perceptions of the famous English poet John Keats and Pashto poet Ghani Khan. The poets represent diverse cultures with diverse ideologies, but it is hypothesized that they have straits of resemblance in their poetry; affection, loveliness, nature and eternity represent to the both of them strikingly similar meanings of life. This assumption contradicts the traditional colonialist and the neo-imperialist discourse that considers eastern literary works as secondary to the mainstream between the two transcend the stereotypically drawn boundary of binary polarity that privileges ‘us’ over ‘them’.

Keywords: counter-orientalism, thematic Affinity, cultural diversity, Johan Keats, Ghani Khan

Introduction

Since centuries, west's orientalist norms of the east have been a way of identifying itself as superior and of forwarding its hegemonic ideologies (Said, 1979). Literary works from oriental cultures, especially the ones in language/s other than English, are considered as secondary to the supposedly mainstream literature. However, writing back to the center (Aschroft, Tiffin & Griffith, 2002), this study attempts to contradict such assumptions of the west through thematic comparison of the selected poems of English poet John Keats and Pashto (a local language in the northwest of Pakistan) poet Ghani Khan. Cultural aspects in poetry work as binding force among people living in the boundaries of the same culture. National and cultural identity plays a vital role in literature. Most literatures of the world have their first focus on their respective local cultures. For instance, *Gulliver's Travel*, *Animal Form*, or Chaucer's *Canterbury tales* or Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, all have focused on their own cultures and societies. They have depicted the vices, shortcomings, hypocrisy and virtues in their societies. It is the handling of their themes and the greatness of their genius which has won a universal status for their work. One such example is the work of the African novelist Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* which has celebrated a universal status because it deals with universal themes and extends its appeal beyond the boundaries of the African culture.

The same is also true about Pashto poetry. As I have mentioned that writers always write for their people and society but it is the theme which extends its appeal beyond the existing culture to the world and nations. Such work leaves being culture- specific and becomes rather universal.

Pashto culture has a very rich literature which truly represents Pakhtoon identity. As an instance some of the culture -rooted work of Pashto poetry has been given in the following lines.

Hamza Baba has shown his love for his mother tongue (Pashto Language) in these words:

اغيار خو وائي ده دوزخ ژبه ده
خه به جنت ته د پښتو سره خم

Let them (the rival) say that Pashto is the language of hell
But I will go into paradise with the Pashto.

The theme of the Pakhtun love has been portrayed in the following lines, that the beloved is ready to embrace any fortune in love as she has a Pakhtoon blood.

2627 | Dr. Arshad Ali Khan A Counter-Orientalistic Approach: Comparative
Exploration Of Thematic Universality In English Poet John Keats And Pashto
Poet Ghani Khan

په سپين ميدان به در سره خم
خه پختنه ده تورو نه تخته مینه

I will go along with you at any field
I am pakhtoon and I have no terror from weapons.

Nang (to support something because of honor), a very important feature of Pakhtoon ideology has been depicted in the lines below in these words that a father would never yearn for a son who have no 'Nang'.

خدایا به ننگه زو به رامه کره
که په دیدن پسی ئی روند په سترگو شمه

I would not desire for a disgrace son
No matter even if I lose my vision in order to see a prevue of him

ده ملاکنده بازاره روان شوی
تاکبئی خرسیگی ده رامداده کور شالونه

I wish that the bazaar of Malakand should be devastated into bits
Because there is a bargain over the shawl of Ramdad's home

Here the poet has depicted the true picture of the local pakhtun culture, where to meet one's beloved is equal to face death.

دیدن ده سر پر په بدله ده
سرچی ساتی خوری به اوکری دیدنونه

The sight of one's darling is on the charge of one's life
If one cares his life, he will have only distress

In *Ode Intimations of Immortality* from *Recollections of Early Childhood*, Wordsworth yearns for his childhood, for the joy and freedom which he enjoyed in childhood, this theme is linked with the entire of humankind, and it has given this poem a universal status. The same is true about Amir Muhammad Khan (1990) who has depicted a very vivid picture of different games and past time pleasure in this cultural heritage poem *Arman che Za Mashoom wy*. I have quoted a few lines from that poem which presents the past games, which he has enjoyed in his childhood. Now with many
2628 | Dr. Arshad Ali Khan A Counter-Orientalistic Approach: Comparative
Exploration Of Thematic Universality In English Poet John Keats And Pashto
Poet Ghani Khan

responsibilities and hard realities of life he is yearning for and recalls these games which are ingrained only in Pashto culture. This poetry is no less universal in its appeal. Such poetry preserved the cultural norms and their customs and that is why it is regarded as integral part of that culture. In these lines the poet (Khan, 1990) has depicted the games which in this modern age have become obsolete and have lost their charm among children.

چى انجوگى تلے جوگے شاپينده ده پيندو وے
موسئى چى مى په جيب کښى ده شنډک او چيندرو وے
چى اين چينه پر مين چينه نمبر مى د سورو وے
ارمان چى زه ماشوم وے

Such poetry stirs the thoughts and feelings of only Pashto speech community, only they can enjoy the taste and the vitality of these lines. The above three lines are not possible to translate into target language, because the imagery which has been used is purely embedded in Pakhtoon culture. Its word to word translation is impossible, even sense to sense translation will jolt the translator. The same is true about the Wordsworth's sonnet *Upon Westminster Bridge* which has all the aesthetic quality and literary techniques, but perhaps, only a native of London can enjoy the true beauty of the sonnet. This sonnet portrays a vivid picture of England in morning time as may be seen in the following lines:

The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky,
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
(Wordsworth)

If theme is universal, then it extends its appeal across national to universal; that is how Wordsworth has expressed his great love and appreciation for nature.

To me the meanest flower that blows can
give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Ghani has expressed the same thoughts:

**2629 | Dr. Arshad Ali Khan A Counter-Orientalistic Approach: Comparative
Exploration Of Thematic Universality In English Poet John Keats And Pashto
Poet Ghani Khan**

يوډه د گلاب مخ کښی چی ښکاره کم ځوابونه دی
نشته یو هم نشته ده منطق په کتابونو کښی
(شپه وه ده شیرلی)

The response that you get from staring into a rose
Are not to be instigate in the volumes of rationalities.

Khan (2007) has also expressed the same feelings for nature:

کائناتو ته هم ستا گوته په خله یم
پکی سترگی می تونبلے دی خاوند

I am vanished in the sights of the creation
That is why I am intensely absorbed in it, O God

It is the theme of nature, beauty and love dealt with the perspective of a general human being, which has earned a universal status to the literature of diverse cultures, different time periods and languages. The focus of this article is on the recurring pattern of universal themes in the works of the 19th century English romantic poet Keats and the 20th century Pashto poet Ghani Khan. This study supposes that the two poets, though belonging to the cultures that are oceans-apart and that are further divided in the politically conceived binary terms of the superior and the inferior, share ideas concerning communion with nature, beauty, love, mortality and spirituality. For this thematic analysis, three poems of Keats: *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode to a Nightingale* and *Ode to Autumn*, and four poems of Khan: *World and Heaven*, *Sparli Shapa*, *Chalice* and *Saz* are selected. Khan's poems are originally in Pashto; however, its English translation is available on internet (<https://allpoetry.com/Entreaty-with-English-translation>). On the basis of finding similarities in intellectual and perceptive faculties of the two poets, this study argues to contradict the stereotypical suppositions of the west and to negotiate a place for eastern literary genius of non-English languages in the literary discourse.

Analysis and Discussion

In spite of Ghani's reverence and love for his Pashto culture, his genius has earned him a universal status of a poet of all times. The same is the case with Keats, whose fellow poets were highly absorbed in the French revolution but Keats remained

untouched and mostly imbibed in romanticism. The recurring themes which are the hall mark of not only the great poet but also that of the romantic age are nature, beauty, love and immortality. In spite of Ghani's love for his own culture and social norms, he has written in the same stratum as the romantic poets.

Both poets have realized that the vitality in life is in its transition. If life remains permanent and unchanged it would be monotonous. Ghani Khan has depicted a very brave picture of that life which is immortal. In his "جنت او دنيا" (*World and Heaven*), Ghani is requesting God that human by nature is inquisitive and fond of expedition. Even in heaven conferred with all blessings, he would yearn for the life of this world. However, he does not appreciate immortality in this world, because he thinks that the vitality of life is in its transition. He does not welcome eternity in any form even if it is in heaven or in this world; rather he likes expedition, transition and a challenging life. He admits that eternity and permanency are the characteristics of God. Only God knows all. The poem *World and Heaven* is a good example of Ghani Khan's philosophy about life and its decay. He is very much optimistic in his approach to life and happy with its transition and decay.

چه مستی وی او جوانی وی او جانان وی او دک جام
دیر گلونه، لبر یاران، او غمگین غوندے ماہنام

(Would there be ecstasy and adolescence, the treasured and the goblet full
Numerous flowers and a few friends in a soft twilight)

چه زه ټول عمر زلمے یم، زلمے توب به یو عذاب شی
خکه اوس راباندے گران دے، چه ئے خیشت شی زر تمام

(If I treasure everlasting youth, it would become an expletive;
I appreciate it now as its exquisiteness is soon disbursed)

تل سپوږمې د خوارلسمے، تل جانان د شپاړسمے
تل جوانی، سیند د شرابو، دا دوزخ دے که انعام

(A ceaselessly complete moon, an everlasting sweet sixteen,
Perpetual youth, a canal of wine, is it an incentive or hell?)

بنده نوے رنگ محل کنبے ، نوے نوے جانان غواہی
بیابان کنبے سرہ گلونہ، تورہ شپہ، چراغان غواہی
تل تیارہ کنبے دے روکیزی، تل رنپا کنبے ہم ږندیزی
دے بچے د تغیر دے، یو حالت کنبے نہ ټینگیزی

(Man pursues in each novel dwelling a new beloved;
Pursues rubicund flowers in a wilderness, seeks illumination at darkness;
He's vanished in eternal dusk, and blinded by everlasting light;
He is the kid of change and cannot stay the same.)

تنگ د حورو وفادارو، بے وفا جانان به غواہم
ستا آدم په ذات بنکاری دے، د بنکار خوند کوی هر گام

(Bizarre of faithful houris, I'd pursue a capricious adored
Man is a hunter by nature, and revels in shooting.)

دے دنیا پسے به ژاړم، دا تیاره هلال به غواہم
هره ورځ به یادومه، نرټے لږه د ماینام

(I'd exude after this sphere, and desire for the night's arced,
And recall everyday, the tinny haze of eventide)

هر یو شے چه ابدی شی، یو افت شی یو عذاب شی
بس یو تاسره مزه کا دا ازل، ابد، دوام

(Anything everlasting becomes an obscenity and a disaster;
It ensembles only you, this everlasting start and conclusion).

The same philosophy has also been portrayed by Keats in his many poems, especially in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. He yearns for eternity and appreciates the life on the Urn, but, soon after that he realizes that the life on the Urn is like "Cold pastoral", as the pursuit of the lover will be forever and he will never achieve the taste of catching his beloved. When he realized that it is life which is full of merry making and warm, he started to solace the lover on the Urn. In the final lines, he has tried to answer the conflict between mortality and immortality, between life and the life on the Grecian Urn.

Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,

In the above lines when Keats has tried to solace the lover on the Grecian Urn in the words that he will remain forever and will always remain as lover chasing his beloved. These lines are in reply to when he says that life on the Urn is "Cold pastoral" and life in the world is worm and full of sweetness and even one can touch and love his beloved.

In the most famous lines below again he has realized and confessed that ultimate beauty is life in this world, and that is truth and truth is beauty. These lines are full of irony; at the end, the whole tension between mortality and immortality, between art and human life is resolved in the following way:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," -that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Beauty and nature play a vital role in the development of thoughts and imagination in the poetry of both Keats and Ghani Khan. It is nature which has unlimited appeal to their imagination and has elevated their poetry. The approach of the two poets is near to worship the beauty. They see and enjoy beauty in music, wine, woman, and even a single tiny flower. Ghani's love for beauty is spiritual and he is unable to differentiate between God and Janan. Ghani goes beyond physical beauty towards spiritual beauty. It is the case with his poem the *Sparli Shapa*:

حسن دے بس حسن چي هم خدائے او هم جانان دے
دے فانی مکان کبھی بل مشال ده لامکان دے
یوده دگلاب مخ کبھی چي بنکاره کم خوابونه دی
نشته یو هم نشته ده منطق په کتابونو کبھی
(شپه وه ده شپرلی)

Beauty is but exquisiteness, which is God and Janan
In this mortal world it is an example of immortality

2633 | Dr. Arshad Ali Khan A Counter-Orientalistic Approach: Comparative
Exploration Of Thematic Universality In English Poet John Keats And Pashto
Poet Ghani Khan

The answer that you get from gazing into a rose
Are not to be found in the books of logics.
And in another poem he says:

کله مخ زه په کعبه کرم کله مخ کرمه جانان ته
هیڅ په فرق ئی پوه نه شوم ربه خیر می کړی ایمان ته

Occasionally I faced in the direction of Kaba and occasionally towards Janan
But I was incapable to distinguish between the two, O God take care of my Faith!

Keats has expressed the same thoughts:

A thing of beauty is joy forever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness...

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know

Spring season to Ghani Khan is the messenger of hope, prosperity and joy. Following
is how Ghani celebrates the arrival of the spring season:

اوگرا جانانه ده تیاری نه رنرا جوړه شوه
نوی سپرله راغی ده گولونه دنیا جوړه شوه
زمکه لکه شاره ای بوره روکه سپوره وه
چرتنه مروره مستی تلی ده خپل کوره وه
پانری غوتی نه وی په هر بوتی ده مرگ سوریه وو
شرنگ ده ژوند غلے میخانه ئی تشه توره وو
یا ساندی او اوخکی یا تری سپینه خنده جوړه شوه
اوگره جانان ده تیاری نه رنرا جوړه شوه
یا ژوندون ارمان وو یا رنگین نشه رنگونه شو
مینه رو مسکئی شووپه خنده ورته گلونه شوو
(سپرله)

(Come and look my beloved, the darkness has been changed into light. A new spring has arrived in our world, flower has been created. Before, the earth was barren and dry, it seemed as if its merry making had got lost. The leaves were not large, and it seemed as if death had touched each plant. Life was empty and silent. Now, the trees have been transformed laughter. Look! the darkness has been changed into light. The desire to live is stronger, and beauty intoxicates one. When love smiled, the flowers laughed at her.)

Similarly, Keats's appreciation for autumn season is a unique example of its own. In *Ode to autumn*, he has depicted the course of nature which is at work all times and pays unforgettable service to mankind. The poem presents a glowing picture of the autumn season where nature is busy in different duties. Each stanza has its own contribution to the role of nature during the autumn season. Following is how the "maturing sun" connives with the autumn season in order to ripen fruits.

....how to load and bless

With fruit the vines that round the hatch-eves run;

To bend with apples, the moss cottage-trees,

And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

To swell the ground, and plump the hazel shells

With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,

And still more, later flowers for the bees,

Until they think warm days will never cease,

For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells?

Wine, music and love are those elements which can not be separated from each other. They are the integral part of a lover's life. Usually, a poet is also a lover of nature, fond of music and that of wine. Similarly, the two romantic poets Ghani and Keats have shown their great interest in music and wine. Music and wine to them are the sources which not only help them to take refuge from the hard realities of life but at the same time they appreciate them for their being essential for life. Love to both these poets was something with the help of which they can achieve the eternal glory and spiritual love. In one of his poems, as quoted by Baber (2005), Ghani behaves like a "traditional love poet singing the praises and, at the same time, appealing to his beloved."

ستا فراق په ما قیامت که
یاره څه به وی قیامت اوس
ستا په عشق کښی رسوا خوښ یم
یارا څه به وی عزت اوس
ستا خو یو خوگ نظر دلبری
ستا یو دوا پستی خبری
ماته ملک جنت جنت کره
گوره څه به وی جنت اوس
یارا درون جلیل غم
ستا ده دوه سترگو په تمه
خوار غنی لوړ غرن پروت دی
ستا به څوک کوی سفت اوس
(ستا فراق)

(Your separation has made my life hell. My friend, hell will be more troublesome than this estrangement. In your love, I have been disgraced and dishonored but I like to be so; what would be my honor now? Your sweet looks and your soft conversation has turned my life into heaven. Now what will heaven say? Poor grieved Ghani lying on the ground waiting to catch a glimpse of your eyes. If he is not there who will praise you.)

Wine is very essential to accelerate the glowing effect of love. That is why, both poets longed for wine and both feel comfort in its use. Wine plays a vital role in Ghani's life. It not only stirs his imagination but also provides soothing effect to his aching heart. He is no more gloomy and worried in the company of wine, rather it gives him pleasure and elevates his thoughts to such a level where he can touch the seventh sky on his wings of imagination.

چی نشه شم ده خپل خانه اوغم
لکه اوخی چه تنزری ده پینجری نه
ستا زرگه ده غم دارنگی اوچت شی
لکه پورته پرکری گل ده ادیری نه
درون وجود مجبوره تن مکان کبئی پریگدم
او ده خیال په خاپیری بانندی شم سور
ده اووم اسمان په سیل تی کریم روان
لکه ووم ده ژوند چینه ده رنرا کور

(خمار)

(When I am intoxicated, (my spirit) leave my physical body just like birds who leave the confinement of their cage. My crazy heart lifts my grief just as a flower lifts its head over the graveyard. I leave my physical body and this world, and on the wings of my imagination, enter the seventh sky to roam around. Here, I search for the spring of life and the house of light)

In *Ode to Nightingale*, Keats has the same experiences, and he longs to have a draught of wine which must have the true taste of intoxication, and he wishes to dissolve with the nightingale and enjoy the world of nightingale and forget the fret and fever of this world. In this poem, what a picture he has in his mind when he describes the taste, quality, color and warmness of the wine as with beaded bubbles winking at the brim!

O, for a draught of vintage! That hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburn mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warmth south,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

The theme of music is no less important than the theme of love and beauty. Almost all great poetry has appreciated music. That is what the great Shakespeare has admitted that music is the food of love.

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.

(Twelfth Night: Act 1, Scene 1)

In these lines from *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, Keats is amazed with the power of appealing of those unheard melodies. It is more spiritual in nature and sweet than the heard melodies. He urged not to stop and play on so that he should enjoy and remain in ecstasy with those unheard notes.

What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?
Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone

Ghani Khan sees music in each event and moment that is taking place in the universe. In his famous poem *Music*, he has portrayed a lively picture of the natural rhythm which exists in nature and solaces his soul. In nature, he experiences a harmony, sweetness and candor which gives him the same peace as music does. At each and every step, he enjoys the music of nature because whatever he sees, feels and touches can lull his soul as music does. This poem has all colors of life. Nature is itself music which has put the poet into such an ecstasy where he sees rhythm and harmony even in the sigh of a lover and even in yes and no of the beloved.

د نرگس د لونگ	پوزے له بونین
مستی او ارمان	زره له امید او
شنرار او شرنگ	غورله سرود او
جمدون او نور	ماله سرور او
د ژوند د رنگ	دا خو آواز
تپ تپ د باران	تپ تپ د اور
اف اف دارمان	اخ د وصال
وخ وخ د صنم	وی وی د جنون
هر وخ د صنم	نانا، او او
پرق پرق د مستی	قتی قتی د خندا
شغ شغ د نسیم	شر شر د اویو
بې بې د غلیم	بس بس د دلبر
شنگ شنگ د گولنی	هیس هیس د هنر
پر پر د لولنی	قې قې د چلم
تنگ تنگ د ریاب	دم دم د دوپرے
سخ سخ د کباب	غر غر د پیالنی
پس پس د دلبر	چپ چپ د کوکنی
گوگو د کمر	چر چر د تارو
بد بد د روان	بس بس د آشنا

ایش ایش د قلم
هان هان د بیان

حیدرآباد جیل 1948ع

Zest for lips,
Tint for eyes,
Scent for the nose,
Of narcissus and segment.
Hope for the heart,
Soul and yearning;
Sarod for the ear,
Clinking and thrum.
For me verve,
Life and sunny;
A few voices
Of life's tints.
Crack-a-crackle of fire,

Pitter-patter of shower,
Ach, ach of desire,
Oh, oh of yearning,
Shish, shish of desire,
Ooh, ooh of tender,
The everlasting no, no
And yes, yes of a precious.
Giggle-gaggle of happiness,
Crack-a-cackle of merriment,
Tin-tinkle of bangles,
Babble-bubble of a rill,
Swash n' guzzle of water,
Murmuring shrill of breeze,
'Halt, halt,' of a beloved,
Froth n' foam of the enemy,
Classy, swanky of hits,
Wizard, whiz of shots,
Crack-a-crackle of chillum,
A butterfly's color,
Boom-boom of the barrel,
Twang-twang of the rabab,
Gurgle-gargle of the mug,
Sputter, sizzle of the kebab,
Guzzle, slurp of the mouth,
Moan! Moan! of the darling,
Chuck-a-chuckle of a chukar,
Coo-coo of a dupe,
'Stop, stop!' of the mistress,
'Fie, fie,' she drives on;
Screech, squeak of the coop
On and on, this address.

(Hyderabad Jail – 1948)

This poem is a wonderful example of the colors of life. John Keats and Ghani Khan have resemblance in so many respects in their love for nature, beauty, love and music. These are the themes which are not confined to any one culture or society or time period; they have transcended cultural, spatial and temporal boundaries to become

universal. If one sees nature as maturing sun conspiring with the autumn, the other sees it as music which is everywhere in the coo-coo of pigeon, boom boom of the rabab and sizzle sizzle of the Kebab. Ghani sees beauty as God and beloved so as Keats sees it as “truth is beauty, beauty truth”. Both these poets have shown profound love and taste for beauty, love, music and wine. They have regarded them as great sources of inspiration to understand the philosophy of this worldly life.

Conclusion

It seems very appropriate to conclude this study in Baber’s words:

It is true that a century separates these two poets. Keats died young while Ghani lived to ripe old age of eighty-two. Both belonged to two separate cultures – one occidental and the other oriental. They wrote, spoke, and communicated in different languages. They lived in societies of different levels of morality. Ghani had visited Keats homeland --- but Keats I think had never even heard of the Pukhtoons. All these differences cannot be denied. Yet it is so intriguing that these poets belonged to diverse cultures and times were alike in so many ways. The central idea of their poetry is one and the same. Both were Romantics and obsessed by beauty. (2005)

Regardless of the diverse cultures and different languages, there are certain themes that will always be found common in literatures because they have a lasting significance for humanity. In Keats’ and Ghani’s poetry several of these themes are portrayed. The roles enforced on people by society, the influential power of language, and the treatment of different problems did not affect their work and that is how both have expanded their themes to the universe. Ghani wrote in the 20th century and Keats wrote in the 19th century, due to the difference of time periods and cultures their use of imagery may have been strikingly varied, but both have depicted the same themes with almost the same thoughts. The commonalities in the masterly treatment of the themes and the inner message by both the poets contradict the west’s assumed approach to read literary works of the orient. Many literary works in non-English orient languages too are abundantly rich vis-à-vis their literary diction, subject and style portraying their respective societies. In addition to being rooted in the local, they express such sensibilities that, if not seen through the lenses of the binary polarity, relate to all humankind irrespective of any national, cultural, spatial or temporal divide.

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