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Prof. Dr. Gurbuxani's Ph.D. thesis: Mysticism in the early Nineteenth Century Poetry of England

Abstract:

The misconceptions about nature and method of Mysticism have been clarified by evolving an accurate and overarching definition of Mysticism via a comparative study of the early Nineteenth Century mystic English poets known as the great Romantics, from Blake to Shelley. The parallel poets are the mystic poets or the Orient, particularly the Vedantic Hindu and Sufistic Persian. The analytical paradigm and guiding methodology is essentially that of ontological quantitative research adopting the epistemological tool of comparative inquiry. Mystical experience is a universal phenomenon as it comprises the cardinal principle of all true religions, its basic conclusion epitomizes: God is the eternal verity of religious experience, an Immanent Being pervading all of His creation, yet transcending them all. The human soul is quintessentially imperishable and ultimately realizes oneness with God.

Introduction:

This research article presents the thematic analysis of Dr. Gurbuxani's deliberations for Ph.D.; the first of its kind in Sindhi academia. The landmark historical book is essentially the Ph.D. thesis of the legendary Sindhi scholar Dr. H. M. Gurbuxani submitted to University of London in June 1928 resulting in the award of the prestigious degree- the first in comparative English literature. The research paradigm is indubitably predicated on Qualitative Research methodology as it meticulously meets the imperatives of the basic philosophic framework and responds adequately to the pre-requisites of fundamental questions that all researchers invariably encounter: What is reality (Ontology) and What is knowledge (Epistemology).⁽¹⁾ Dr. Gurbuxani is thus the first organized and methodical Qualitative researcher of Sindh who has followed a non-linear and iterative modus operandi and has collected his data, analysis and interpretation

simultaneously. He makes his methodological premise perspicuously transparent at the very outset and informs that he has endeavoured to clear up some prevailing misconceptions regarding the nature and method of Mysticism, and to give a more exact and comprehensive definition of Mysticism than those hitherto given and finally tends to draw out the mystical element in each poet and subject it to a critical analysis, indicating how the poets mystical consciousness functioned and causes by which it was advanced or retarded. The research tools are Narrative Inquiry substantiated by intellectual cross-cultural in depth argumentative deliberations and conclusions.⁽²⁾

The unique manifestation of this pioneering dissertation is an inquisitive comparative study of the mystical poets of England with those of oriental India and exotic Persia, steeped in the Sufistic mystique and inscrutable arcane phenomenology. The great researcher enunciates that his method of treatment has been necessarily comparative. He, however, has a caveat for his readers when he stipulates that if he has a different interpretation from the commonly accepted on some of the teachings of the English poets, then that he has not read his meanings into them, in other words he has not foisted his pre - conceived notions or pet ideas onto the narrative or attributed things but rather this comparative study has elicited the true sense intended by the poets themselves.⁽³⁾

Comparative Vision of the Ages:

Apropos to a query by a lay scholar -Why there is such a striking similarity or remarkable intellectual kinship, nay, an uncanny mental bond between the Eastern and the Western mystic poets unknown to one another? Dr. Gurbuxani proffers a Vedantic explanation based on his sustained readings of the Upanishads. He says: "Truth is one, sages name it differently. The mystical way of approaching Reality is based on a sure foundation since it leads to the same goal."⁽⁴⁾ "Why such a seminal work has eluded the attention of the Sindhian literati, even his very col-

leagues seem to be absolutely oblivious of this path blazing book and its collateral academic impact. Same is the quizzical eerie case of Mirza Kalich Beg's famous English work on the life and poetry of Shah Abdul Latif, which remained hidden for about one hundred years, only to be discovered in 1997. The first authentic English chronicle of literary evaluation and academic criticism published in India after partition is 'History of Sindhi Literature' by Prof. L.H. Ajwani, and strangely enough it does not mention this Ph.D. thesis by the learned scholar Dr. Gurbuxani, though it waxes eloquent about his classical heritage of Shah jo Risalo.⁽⁵⁾ Ajwani says with the publication in 1923 of the first edition of Shah jo Risalo, Dr. Gurbuxani burst upon the literary horizon of Sindh as the editor of the sumptuous (sic) work, with an amazing introduction the like of which were found only in the finest editions of European classics. Consequently the vastly indisputable research prowess of Dr. Gurbuxani was duly acknowledged by his contemporaries excepting a few ultra Sanskritized Sindhi writers like Bherumal Mehrchand Advani who accused him of a heavy duty Persianized hard to digest vocabulary, and an Arabi-cised diction in the now memorable introduction and commentary but then later held that this was excusable due to his deep rooted moorings into the Talpur era Farsi language and literature and his associated research and collaboration with Dr. Daudpoto, who later on claimed his palpable contribution in this joint venture: their labour of love.⁽⁶⁾ The medieval Persian studies were the first obsession of Dr. Gurbuxani, though he was an inveterate scholar of the classic Sanskrit, Vedanta and English literature as is evident from the perusal of this dissertation of invaluable worth and significance.⁽⁷⁾ The book comprises five chapters, with a plethora of enlightening and a series of academically overwhelming foot notes, updated with an exhaustively wide ranging bibliography, referring to a vast array of disciplines as divergent as Philosophy, Religion, Christian Mysticism, Hindu Mysticism and Persian Mysticism. The eminent Nineteenth century Mystic poets discussed at length and threadbare here are William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Again mysteriously a great mystic Romantic poet John

Keats does not find a place in this pantheon though his immortal poetry is invariably epitomized by his one line: Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty.⁽⁸⁾ The cross-cultural insightful narration of facts and the quality of delineation of data is immensely rewarding for its time and so is the choice of logical positive line of sequential reasoning. The Abstract is a literal paragon of Shakespearean maxim: Brevity is the soul of wit. Ghalib calls it so aptly as the ultimate encapsulation of River Dajla in a drop, that is 'Qatre mey Dajlay ko bund karna'. The final summation by the learned scholar says that fundamental tenets of Mysticism are: God pervades all things through and through and yet transcends them all. The Universe and Man are an emanation from Him. The human soul having had a personal existence, does not perish but survives bodily death and will continue its progress until it is fit enough to be united with the primal fountain of Being.

Conclusion:

Regarding the English mystic poets in the conclusion, he says that he selected three, Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge as typifying each in his own way three different aspects of mystical poetry. He states: Blake gained his glimpse of Reality by giving free rein to his wonderful Imagination, Wordsworth through his contemplation of external Nature, Coleridge through plumbing the recesses of his own soul. Of these three, Blake occupies the foremost rank. He was a born mystic; he resembles the Hebrew prophets of old. Shelley was no mystic. There is no evidence of his having attained to illumination, nor any record in his life which points to trance or ecstasy. He had in him, however, the potentialities of true mysticism, to which his philosophy of life is in the main akin. Love is the predominant note of his life and character. A glossary should have been appended at the end by Sindhi Language Authority for the uninitiated who may find Mysticism's jargon a bit arcane or esoteric. The book is worth its weight in gold as the veritable heritage heirloom from the Iconic master of early twentieth century Sindh of Sadhus and Saints. Now we are researching on more pragmatic fields in the Humani-

ties, esp. Applied Linguistics and Literature has come to play second fiddle.

British mysticism of the Nineteenth century Romantic poets may have been an obscure area of study confined only to the deans of London University in 1928 as is indicated by this seminal dissertation, hitherto unfortunately distant to us due to its unavailability. However, it was an other great Sindhi Amil and a connoisseur of Sindhi linguistics in the then bustling academic hub of pre-industrial Sindh, the classical capital city of Hyderabad, who entered the polemical arena. He was none other than a firebrand freedom fighter and a radical Sufi journalist Jethmal Parsram, a long standing strident critic of the controversial Persianized diction of Shah jo Risalo edited by the iconic Dr. Gurbuxan. Parsram had performed a significant role in the Anglo-Sindh intellectual renaissance by writing on Shah's linguistics and etymology and on Goethe's Faust. Parsram being a conscientious purist in the primordial and pristine native lexicography of Shah Latif and had censured profusely Dr. Gurbuxani's Shah jo Risalo for its innovative proclivity towards the Arbo-Persian diction, preferential semantic Semitic derivatives.⁽⁹⁾ Parsram, nevertheless, later on inspired the scholarly collector of District Hyderabad, Mr. Sorley to take seriously to the Latifian poetic compendium called the 'Ganj' or the original Risalo. Eventually, Sorley would come to pursue his interest with a Ph.D. from the University of London on Shah Latif's poetry. Mysticism as seen by Sorley is not different from the vision presented by Dr. Gurbuxani's thesis, which commences with an exquisitely elaborate discussion of the meaning of Mysticism and shows that far from being some thing foggy or misty and inscrutably mysterious, it is the most scientific form of approach to the ultimate reality of Existence. The mystic claims to be able to see God or the Absolute Truth and divine things with an inner faculty higher than the senses and the cognate mechanism of our ever-beguiling intellect. Prof. Gurbuxani states that mystics' method is contemplative and there are three main paths by which he claims to reach spiritual apprehension, viz., intellectual inquiry, disinterested action, and selfless love.

The true mystic is neither an idle visionary nor an antinomian believing that Christians or Muslims, or Hindus need not believe the moral laws, but having realized his oneness with universe (wahdatul- ul- wujud/Pantheism) bases his morals and his conduct on the surest foundation of God as the eternal substratum of all things. Substratum means the underlying layer or basic substance. This is the pith and marrow of the Mystical vision enunciated by the thesis premised on a unique comparative study by Dr. Gurbuxani. He was an epitome of Sindh's Sufi 'saqafat' as mentioned by Boivin without particularly naming him.⁽¹⁰⁾ It is a complex of cultural and artistic expressions that is embedded in Sufism. This term cultural Sufism provides the main lexicon of Sindh's rich tradition of multi-faceted phenomenon. The main feature is the open mindedness and the conviction that the ultimate reality of all religion is beyond the formal practice and ideology. This conviction, which was mainly an offspring of the Wahadat-tul- wujud, allows non-Muslims not only to follow the Sufi path, but also to be Sufi masters who initiate Muslims to the Sufi path.

References:

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Religion and mysticism also find a place in the work of some poets of the twentieth century. Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson, who wrote religious poetry towards the end of the preceding century, seem to have inspired a number of poets in this century. The name of Mrs. Alice Meynell deserves to be mentioned. In the poetry of the Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins, too, we have something religious now and then. Ralph Hodgson's *The Song of Honour* is a notable poem pulsating with religious feelings. The reaction against the earlier naivete of poetry was initiated by Eliot and Ezra Pound in the second decade of the present century. The publication of Hopkins's work in 1918 was also a force in the new direction.