

A Study Of Robert Browning's Poetry And The Philosophy Of Suffering, Pain, And Evil

Dr. Shital Vipulkumar Chandak

Junior lecturer, Dept of English
R.D.G College Akola, Maharashtra, India

Abstract- *The poetry of Robert Browning displays the elegance of philosophical ideas, artistic fictional characters, and excellent, fit, and amazing creations and creatures on the flawless techniques that gave it a lifelike experience of the good and terrible persona. A monk, a priest, a painter, a doctor, a duke, a scholar, a musician—all of these characters are found with the belonging to the form of suffering, painful, and bad into the bad situations and conditions with the common subjects aesthetically in his most poems where the poet leads one thing to another by his own mental association—were chosen by Browning from the different lands, from the different periods of time, and from the different spheres of activity. His poetry serve as some of the best illustrations of how best practises in literary philosophy and theory may be used to create fiction that is true to life. All of the aforementioned arguments serve to demonstrate that this essay is a thoroughly researched analysis of the philosophy of pain, suffering, and evil as they relate to the recurrent themes in Robert Browning's poetry.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to examine the role of Robert Browning's dramatic monologue language in the poetry, which enables an imaginative and sympathetic identification of the philosophy of aesthetics, psychoanalysis of the characters, and common themes of contemporary societies. The creative approach and ethnographic poetic qualitative research methodology are being applied to investigate the role of Browning's dramatic monologue language in the poetry. The major goals of the research for the philosophical bad, painful, and suffering aspects that have been mentioned in the poem are to analyse the evidence that how and why support and strive to acquire its consequences as goodness in the favour of truth. As a result, the research approach used in this article is the systematic theoretical examination of the techniques used in the field of the longitudinal ethnographic case study of the evil and suffering for the common socio-cultural concerns and historical facts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Robert Browning (1812-1889) was an English Victorian poet, playwright whose mastery of dramatic verse

rank distinctively and especially dramatic monologues. The most time of his life, he spent with his wife, well-known poetess, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in Italy residing Florence at Casa Guidi which is now a museum to their memory that the poet called it his university. He was influenced and inspired a lot by Shelley; but he much liked also Byron. Victorian age was one of the most glorious eras and epochs in the history of England that was filled with the emotions of warm appreciation, commendation, and resentment for its both states- likes and dislikes that were forcefully followed by the order, decorum and decay, and influenced by art, knowledge and science to its enrichment in the literary opium outputs fruitfully.

Browning's poetry has manifold common psychoanalytical tones and themes of the different categorized egoist and dignified characters that present various philosophical viewpoints and cultural outlooks of the same story. *"Like other forms of literature, poetry may seek to tell a story, enacts a drama, conveys ideas, offers vivid and unique descriptions or expresses our inward spiritual, emotional, or psychological states"* (Yadav, M. K., 2018, p.80). The thoughts, feelings, and motivations of a depicted character not only provide a sense of sympathy to the readers but also suggest them to understand the variety of perceptions that creates up the common truth. His poems demonstrate that how the persons with different charismas respond contrarily to akin circumstances, as well as dye and depict how to a time, place, action, and picture that can cause persons with similar personalities to develop or changing quite dramatically. *Different enough, in order to produce imaginative writings of highest value, they could utilize the material picked from their surroundings and situations in the most skilled manner* (Yadav, M. K. & Yadav M. S., (2018), p.1358). Browning wrote many poems about artists, lovers, scholars, dukes, and poets in the forms of dramatic monologues that are equally in the presentation of art and love where he badly admired or disliked by the readers. This, his artistic philosophy leads painting idealized beauty of his characters because his characterization is to be pondered on the purposes of art that is an architectural relationship between the art of characters and imaginative creation, and the morality of judgment.

Most poems of Browning are voiced with the wicked, malicious, evil, and criminal people who were murderer, failed and flopped lovers, and eccentric characters in the dramatic monologue manner that were allowed the poet to sustain and maintain a balanced distance between him and the voice of an evil character. His characters identify themselves the personalities and personae to tell the stories and happening about the favorable and adverse situations in the almost of his poems. While ordinarily it looks that the characters in his poetry are often crafty, intelligent, argumentative, and capable of lying. Definitely, they usually consent a more story than they actually wish to speak here, ordinary readers may be ambiguous and confused to understand the speakers and their attitude and psychology, so a perfect reader needs to be more conscious and careful to learn better them skillfully, therefore, he ought to carefully pay attention to the ejaculated diction, challenged structure, high quality imaginary, beautiful metaphors, confusing allegory, black humor, common-complex and private symbolism, and a much more themes on the using of figures of speech cautiously and carefully to the logical progression.

His poetry has mainly two categorized private and common symbols – taste and evil. Symbol of taste has been applied in the form of interest in culture that includes art and architecture which present the philosophical depictions of the characters' aesthetic interest in art, music, love-making, lofty imagination, fairy-dream, arguments, beauty, seduction, lust and eternal feelings, scholar, wickedness, scarification, mythology, and the paintings that reveal the perfect clues and witnesses about their nature and moral values that prove itself the characters of evil, pain, suffering, and violent nature abounded with throughout in his poetry. His characters belong to the all the strata of society inside the boundaries of the aristocracy and the very poor. The diction, subject-matters, imaginations, and structures are loftily based on religious splendor and idealized passion, murder, hatred, and madness extravagantly that consequently show also their sufferings, pains, violence, wicked and evil thoughts, as well as indicate their evil and painful natures in all the poems, Porphyria's Lover, Prospice, Andrea Del Sarto, My Last Duchess, Fra Lippo Lippi, The Bishop Orders His Tomb, Rabbi ben Ezra, Evelyn Hope, Paracelsus, Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister, Meeting at Night, Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came, The Last Ride Together, and A Grammarian's Funeral which were set in the medieval and renaissance Europe, mostly in Italy, where he drew on his extensive knowledge of art, architecture, philosophical and psychological wits, history to fictionalized actual events including contemporary issues without fear of alienation that seems to didactic and moralizing from the centuries. Unlike other Victorian poets and writers- William Tennyson, John Ruskin, George

Meredith, G. M. Hopkins, Thomas Hardy, he used the symbols of suffering, pain, evil and violence in the poetry which explore all silent characteristics and traits of human common psychology on the basis of evil, painful and violent aspects that appear abnormally into the speakers/characters in the way of dramatic monologues which filled with images of ugliness, violence, and the inexplicable, like well-known, leading and great Victorian novelist, Charles Dickens's novels present.

III. DISCUSSION

According to Browning's literary work, lyrical poetry in the form of dramatic monologues that depict how nature is treated and how philosophy and attitude towards human life are infused into them, as well as real-life-like views and outlooks, are all fabulously fabricated into lofty fictional frames of incredible verse compositions, a string of ejaculated words in diction, and the glory of imaginary, which have earned him a high reputation. His poetry of art is belonged to the love poetry, religious and ethical thoughts. Broadly speaking, the poet has a threefold appeal - first he is a psychological poet, secondly he is a passionate singer of love, and thirdly he is a strong believer in philosophy of optimism. He is known symbolically a poet of poetry and thought and singing and sermonizing because he is the study of human mind and soul where his poems are called the soul studies; therefore, he is a great analyst of human mind. This paper aims to focus on the philosophy of pain, suffering, and evil in the poetry of Robert Browning that how do the subject matters and symbols function and follow in the forms to explore objectives of the research to its perfect and complete results successfully. Robert Browning was one of those Victorian popular poets who had certain very clearly laid down and firmly grounded view on some of the fundamental problems of life. All his views put together may be given the name of philosophy. But there a lity is that Browning does not seem to propound any philosophy in any moral or ethical sense but he offers a "*distinct theory of the relation of man to universe and of evil to good and exhibits their theory by means of imaginary characters and senses in his dramatic monologues and other poems*" (J. H. Buckley, 114). Browning may not appear to be a profound thinker but he is definitely a consistent one. He has unchanging views on human destiny. He does not challenge the old theological and metaphysical principles but accepts the consistorial view of God, the immortality of the soul and the Christian belief in the incarnation. He is original in the sense that his robust optimism is in a sharp contrast with the growing pessimism of the Victorian age: "He is one of those who rolled back, as far as England is concerned, the morbid pessimism, the sickly disdain of active life which has infected so much of European Literature during the present century" (F.

R. G. Duckworth, p.69). Browning does not mean to say that the world is without evil, pain, and suffering; he means that divine governance is just and benevolent and what appears to the world as evil or suffering has its own purpose in the scheme and design of events. Browning, like the other eighteenth century thinkers, does not accept a theoretical and abstract attitude towards evil, pain and misery, nor does he accept it as a philosophical counterpart of good. Browning however considers evil as a practical instrument of human advancement. Browning adopts a pragmatic and practical approach based on the experiences of life. His emphasis is laid on practical experience and he tries and tests every theory on this touchstone and criterion: "Whatever enriches the experiences, favors aspiration, gives strengths to heart and mind is good and is to be used by us whether conventionally sanctioned or not. That which enervates, paralyzes, deadens is bad and must be put aside" (G. K. Chesterton, 1967 p.62).

Browning's optimism includes the knowledge of evil, pain and misery – a part of man's struggle to achieve the ideal or goal. Imperfection implies the possibility of perfection. Life is a progress in two senses– first is the steady enrichment of the ideal; the second is successive nobler achievements of man. Life is a determined tireless struggle towards an ideal that is never completely attained and never can be completely attained. Browning's optimism is founded on the imperfection of man. He derives hope from human deficiency. "The worth and work of life for Browning lay in the effect to become perfect, not in accomplishment, but in the strife and struggle to accomplish" (W. T. Young, 1936, p.11). Evil is man's enemy and without foe, no success can be achieved. Thus, God offers the opportunity of evil to man for his spiritual betterment. So, evil is a condition of man's moral progress. Browning is not daunted by and afraid of evil, because evil to him is not the enemy of good. It is in a sense essential for the attainment of good as the poet says: "Evil—the scheme by which thro' Ignorance Good labours to exist" (Abt Vogler, IX, p.66-67).

The struggle against evil pushes man in his excellent pursuit of putting things right. Man has always been a fighter. Evil and good are permanently parked and placed in the life of man. He has to face adventures brave and new: Strive and thrive: cry 'speed'

– fight on, fare ever, There as here (Epilogue to Asolando, 19-20). The experiences of young age help a person in his spiritual progress in his later life. Browning thinks that it is the intention and not the accomplishment, the inward purpose, not the outward result is the real test of the merit of man. The pitcher in the poem, Rabbi Ben Ezra, shaped on the wheel is ready for future, a life beyond this life. Thus, the present life is a preparation for the life to come. Man should

welcome evil, pain, suffering and failure in this life and through them; he can enjoy the pleasures of Heaven. The lover in the poem, Evelyn Hope, instead of becoming disappointed, seeks solace and satisfaction in the optimistic faith that God creates love to reward the love (Evelyn Hope, IV, 26). Browning thus seems to lay stress on the need of failure in the life of man:

„And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonized? Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence? Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized? Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,

Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe: But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear; The rest may reason and welcome; 'tis we musicians know.' (Abt Vogler, XI, 86-92)

All that man does, builds up the perfect humanity and flows into the perfection of God in whom lies the perfection of man. This love, grounded on this faith brings joy in life. Love opens Heaven while Earth closes man round:

„Others mistrust and say—"But time escapes! Live now or never!"

He said, "What's time? leave Now for dogs and apes! Man has Forever."

(A Grammarian's Funeral, 72-75)

Browning was not only a philosopher but also he tried to make a study of man psychologically in relation to the entire universe. His concern was with the inner man, the human soul. He portrayed painters, lovers, bishops, artists, dukes, criminals, and various other human characters. These characters have emotions and feelings. They are hopeful about the fate and future of man. They believe in the immortality of human soul and its salvation. The poem Porphyria's Lover has a word of hope and consolation though the lover strangles his beloved Porphyria to death. He kills her for the possessive instinct of deep love for her. There is no other way of making her his own as social barriers stood in his way. He kills her with the conviction psychoanalytically that his faith in human salvation is firm and unflinching. Browning's faith in the salvation of the human soul springs from his faith in the goodness of God.

In the view of Hudson, Browning was an uncompromising foe of materialism. His concept that all is right with the world explains Browning's elementary view of

man's relation with the universe. In cosmic sense, all must be right under an omnipotent and essentially benevolent God. This fundamental principle gives birth to Browning's belief about evil and imperfection. Browning does not mean that there is no pain, suffering, misery or evil in the world. He means that the divine governance is benevolent and the divine scheme. In a way, Browning tries to establish that evil is essential for the attainment of Good as Brooke rightly remarks: "The foundation of Browning's theory is a kind of Original Sin in us, a natural defectiveness deliberately imposed on us by God, which prevents us attaining any absolute success on earth." (Stopford A. Brooke, 2001, p.86)

Evil, thus, becomes a moral condition in the progress of man. Man cannot achieve victory without a foe. In the opinion of the poet, consciousness of evil and man's imperfection help him in his advance towards perfection. Evil has its own place in the design of events and happenings. In Browning's view, nothing can be accomplished without personal enterprise. Once a man has learnt to struggle, there is no goal or gain which is beyond his reach though there may be many impediments and obstacles in his path. Browning is teaching defiance of death and a challenge to battle. The poem, *Prospice*, inspires man together courage and have dogged determination, as a critic comments: *Prospice* is concentrated in the strength of a great soul and the courage of one who is prepared for the worst, with eyes unbandaged (E Baroda, *The Browning Cyclopaedia*, 1892, p.107). Browning's another popular poem, *Andrea Del Sarto*, lays emphasis on the role of human struggle. Man cannot achieve perfection yet the poet advocates that man should keep before himself perfection as the goal so that he may reach near perfection. *Andrea del Sarto* is grieved as his own perfection is only technical. His paintings do not appeal to the aesthetic taste of man. He knows it very well that he can remove the flaw, but at the same time, he is aware that he does not have the soul of *Rafael*:

That arm is wrongly put—and there again—A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines, Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,

He means right—that, a child may understand. Still, what an arm! and I could alter it: But all the play, the insight and the stretch—(Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?)

Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul, We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!' (Andrea del Sarto, 111-119)

Andrea would have been equal to *Rafael*. He had killed the conscience of his soul. He had been treacherous and perfidious with his parents and with the king of France:

*,I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.'
(Andrea del Sarto, 248-49)*

Failure in life is essential for success; doubt is equally indispensable for the existence of faith. It is doubt which distinguishes man from the lower animals and the act of men is a test of his faith as the poet says:

*,With me faith means perpetual unbelief Kept quiet like the snake'neath Michael's foot Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.'
(Bishop Brougham's Apology, 691-693)*

When reason is not successful in guiding a man, he decides to move forward under the instructions of his emotions and feelings. Intellect alone does not qualify sufficiently in realization of religious experience. Intuition and imagination are also of immense help and great significance as the poet says:

*,You own your instincts – why, what else do I Who want, am made for, and must have a God Ere I can be aught, do aught?'
(Bishop Brougham's Apology, 431-433)*

Browning takes a view of life, as it was, as it might have been, and as it possibly may be. He takes stock of life's uncertainties, observations, hopes, aspirations, ambitions, failures and ideals. Compacted into a rigid form of a formula, Browning's expression of life cannot be simplified into a theory. Browning broke away from the thought and the conventions of the Victorian poetry. He was not touched by the pessimistic thought and theme of the Victorian age as found in other writers. Instead, he brought out his own wisdom of optimism as David Daiches aptly observes: "Browning, unlike Tennyson, made no real attempt to come to terms with his age; he brushed aside its doubts and problems, to contemplate intriguing Renaissance figures in Italy. His optimism was not Victorian, no other Victorian poet of any significance was optimistic. The typical Victorian literary man was either a prophet, a worrier or a doubter, and none of these are optimistic type." (David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature*, 425) There are several optimistic observations and statements in Browning's poetry. He seems to be proclaiming afresh the sublime resolution of the dichotomy of the Victorian world:

,One who never turned his back but marched breast
forward, never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong
would triumph, Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.'
(Epilogue to Asolando, 11-15)

Browning does not make the error of believing in the total absence of evil, pain and suffering at a certain time. He perceives man's progress towards good through evil. Evil is a scheme; it is a kind of ignorance through which good tries to move and exist. Good is fundamental and evil is its foil. In other words, it can be said that evil is an aid to good itself. For Browning, evil is a negative entity, whereas good is a positive force. Therefore, reality is to be linked with good, as best as possible. Browning's conception of good leads some critics to link the ideal with the real. Man has his aspirations and ambitions, aims and ideals. It is the nobility of the aim that is meaningfully significant.

According to Browning, pain and doubt indicate kinship to God, closer than that of the brutes which are undisturbed by them. The Poet knows that human struggle leads to final success. The disparity between ideals and actual achievement should not cause despair to man (Robert Browning: A Reassessment in the Light of Hindu Vision by Arti Gupta), as the poet says:

,Better have failed in the high aim as I, Than vulgarly in
the low aim succeed. As, God be thanked, I do not!'
(The Inn Album, 31-33)

In another poem, A Grammarian's Funeral, the ideal is not necessarily to involve asceticism. Browning knows that hermit-like detachment from the lures and luxuries of the life does not prove fruitful and rewarding. Action in the present life is therefore necessary. The importance of the present is stressed and the instant is changed into the eternity. In Rabbi Ben Ezra, the future is visualized but the poet feels that the past, present and future cannot be separated as the poet says:

,So, still within this life, Though lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last, This ragewas
right I'themain, That acquiescence vain:
The Future I may face now I have proved the past.'
(Rabbi Ben Ezra, 17, 97-102)

In the relation to faith and hope, the solution lies in actual action without which faith would be rendered useless and hope will dim, dwindle and disappear. As "Indeed, these perceptions provide raw material to the poet when he transforms the grass into a fine poetic product" (Yadav M. K.,

Yadav M. S., (2018) p. 1352). Thus, Browning lays emphasis on human efforts and human actions. The poet is, however, aware of the infinite aspirations of man and his desire to achieve the unattainable. Browning makes a plea for the properly planned action, keeping in view the totality of situations and circumstances, as he presents this proper plan of life with the help of the imagery of a building construction:

,Imagethewhole, then executetheparts-
Fancythefabric Quite, ere you build,
ere steel strike fire from quartz, Ere mortar drab brick!'
(A Grammarian's Funeral, 69-72)

The poet thinks that a low aim may be achieved quickly, but a high ideal may not be achieved even after a hard striving and struggle throughout the whole life. A lofty ideal achieved may not be brought within the compass of worldly success as the poet says:

,This high man, with a great thing to
pursue, Dies ere he knows it. That low man goes on adding one to
one, His hundred's soon hit: This high man, aiming at a
million, Misses an unit.
(A Grammarian's Funeral, 115-120)

Browning finds that failure is a stepping stone to success, as the critic Ralph rightly remarks: "This is not to say that Browning deliberately wrote poetry to serve only as a vehicle for ideas. Artistic creation does not come about in this manner. For Browning, the poet does not deal solely with abstractions" (Ralph Ronald, The Poetry of Robert Browning, 51). Browning takes a clear and comprehensive view of life, which includes the good and the bad, the fair and the foul, the lovely and the ugly, the high and the low, the human and the inhuman, the consummation and the catastrophe. He knows that defeatism is of no avail to human beings. Browning does not neglect reality in preference to optimism; rather he faces reality with hope, like the American poetess, Emily Dickenson:

,Hope' is the thing with feathers -That perches in the
soul -And sings the tune without the words -And never stops- at all-
(Emily Dickenson, Hope is the Thing with Feathers, 1-4)

Therefore, Robert Browning's poems are undoubtedly the best-known for the irony, characterization, dark humor, social commentary, historical settings, ejaculated and challenging vocabulary, and syntax. He is regarded and honored as a sage and philosopher-scholar-poet who employs literary terms and techniques, style, or forms and structure to discover subjects and themes of common life to the pitch of

philosophy and psychoanalysis where it proves that something reasoned questions and issues related to the ordinary life, principles of wit, knowledge, facts and science, and the aspects of the existence of God among us are applied and presented perfectly in his poetry that contributed completely to the Victorian society and political discourse fruitfully.

IV. CONCLUSION

Robert Browning's poetry is an appearance of the beauty of philosophical issues, aesthetic imaginary, artful fictional characters with their fine, fit, and fantastic creations and creatures on the perfect techniques that made it life-like experience of the good and the bad persona. Browning selected his characters from the different lands, from the different periods of times, and from the different spheres of activity, which are – a monk, a priest, a painter, a physician, a duke, a scholar, a musician that all are found with the belonging to the form of suffering, painful, and bad into the bad situations and conditions with the common subjects aesthetically in his most poems in which the poet leads one thing to another by his own mental associations entirely Different kind. His poems are the best examples of the truth of the fiction that was developed through the best techniques and tools of the literary philosophy and theories. All above mentioned views support to prove that this paper is made a complete investigated study of the philosophy of pain, suffering, and evil on the common subjects in the poetry of Robert Browning.

REFERENCES

- [1] Berdoe, E. *The Browning Cyclopeadia*, 1872.
- [2] Brook, Stopford A. *The Poetry of Robert Browning*, New Delhi; Atlantic Publishers, 2001. Browning, Robert, *Complete Poems of Robert Browning*, London: OUP, 1937.
- [3] Buckeley, J. B. *The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literature and Art*, 1952. Chesterton, G. K. *Robert Browning*, London: MacMillan & Company, 1967. Daiches,
- [4] D. (1994). *A critical history of English literature*. London: Mandarin. Duckworth, F.R.G. *Browning: Background and Conflict*, 1031.
- [5] Yadav, M. (2018), *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies*, 5(4), 79-85, Retrieved from
- [6] Yadav, M. K., & Yadav, M. K. (2018). *An Analytical Study of Catholic Sufferings in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney*. *International Journal of Research*, 5(7), 1350-1361.
- [7] Retrieved from

<https://journals.pen2print.org/index.php/ijr/article/view/13289/12536>

- [8] Yadav, M. K., & Yadav, M. K. (2018). *An Analytical Study of Catholic Sufferings in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, EduPub, <https://www.edupediapublications.org/2019/02/an-analytical-study-of-catholic.html>
- [9] Young, G. M. *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age*. London: Oxford University Press, 1936.
- [10] Young, W. T. *Browning: A Selection of Poems*.