

# Portrayal of Women in Poetry of Browning

Dr. Aruna Sharma

Associate Professor (English Department), A. K. P. G. College, Hapur, India

The world of character delineation is for Browning in Keat's phrase "the valley of soul making" and every act, thought and feeling of life is of concern only as it hinders or determines the soul on its course. To him love is the supreme experience and function of the soul, testing its temper and revealing its probable fate Wordsworth and Tennyson were also great painters of characters but their characters are all English, while Browning goes to Italy, France, Germany and Spain in search of dramatic personal. Most of the time he has talked about men and women who live and move in the new world of his creation. They are as varied as life. Most of the poems are monologues where women are virtuous, innocent, beautiful but also secondary character. In his poems street girls, princess duchess, dancers, devoted wives and joyous liberal girls are the gems of Browning's characterization. He has given is a number of penetrated studies of painting, queens, Duchess their characters and their aspiration.

Neither Browning has ignored the seamy side of life as does Wordsworth nor has Browning overlooked womanhood. His poetry is a well stoked picture gallery of faithful and irtal representation of feminine nature. Praising Browning treatment of women Arthur Symons writes:

"I don't hesitate to put his portraits of women on the equal level of men and far beyond those of any other English poet of the last three centuries. In some of them notably in pompilia, there is something. I can hardly describe it which always seems to me almost incredible in a man: an instinct that one would have thought only a woman can possess. His women good or bad are always real women and they are represented without fias."

Browning is one of the very few poets who can paint women without idealization or degradation, not from the men's side but from their own; as living equals, not as goddess or as toys. The loveliest of them have a very rare gulish charm about them. His women live, act and suffer, even think, not assertively or mannishly but with natural volition on equal rights with men. Anyone who has thought at all on the matter will acknowledge that this is the highest praise that could be given-the highest and rarest. Browning's women are not indeed as various as his men but from Ottemia to Pomplia-from the great while queen, magnificent in sin to the "Lily of a maiden, while with intact leaf"-what a range and gradation of character. These are the two extremes between them as earth has between the heaven and hell are stationed all the others, from the faint and delicate dawn in Pauline to Michal and Palma on through Pippa and Mildred and Colombe and constance to Balustion, Elvire and Clara and the heroine of Inn Album.

Browning could verify a character through a few debt touches. Not only the main or central figure but also, the

secondary characters are living, breathing reality. But his interest was, "in the incidents in the development of a soul and he does not define the physical charms of even his female characters. We know of their beauty only by the passion which they excite. His method of drawing character is dramatic. He does not sketch a character directly but allows the character to soliloquies and thus himself reveal his own real self. The speaker, as he speaks not only reveals his own real inner self, but also the character of the interlocutor or the listener or even of some other figures who stand in the background. Thus in "Andrea Dal Sarto" Andrea reveals not only his own character but also that of his wife Lucrezia. In "My Last Duchess" the duke reveals his own sordid nature, as well as the generous and gracious nature of the Duchess who is dead.

Browning is not always the poet of love faltering and baffled. He can pipe as melodiously as any Elizabethan a song in praise of beauty. He can find words, too for the splendid glow of youthful passion as in the opening of "In a Gondola." But the triumph of love are sung in poems of wifehood and motherhood. The heroine of "Inn Album" says

"Womanliness means only motherhood: All love begins and ends there roams enough But having run the circle, rest at home."

Pompilia with piercing and over powering tenderness is the masterpiece in the Browning tenderness is the masterpiece in the Browning's gallery of women character.

In such poems his own love story and marriage enriched both imagination and emotion.

In "My Last Duchess" possessive jealous lover Duke tells that Duchess was very childish and of foolish nature. Having the innocence but no sense of dignity and decorum. She used to smile at everybody without any distinction. The poet tells that the result of this jealousy was that "Duchess all the smiles were stopped" forever and she was murdered at the command of her brutal stone hearted husband. Just as Elizabeth suffered from the tyranny of her unsympathetic father so did the duchess suffered from her proud arrogant husband.

The "Last ride together" illustrates the truth that in Browning's poetry the tragedy of love is only for the women while her lover has his own supple optimism. The beloved shows the indifference of lady in this poem. In "Andrea Dal Sarto" Lucrezia is portrayed as lady of rare beauty but frivolous and faithless. But as Andrea has fallen in love with her that's why after the death of her husband Andrea married her and continued to love her even though, he knew that she was unfaithful to him. For her sake, he played false to the

king of France, Francis I, embezzled his money as well as neglected his parents and allowed them to die of starvation. The faithless woman even then deserted him and after death of Andrea Lucrezia married a third time. While the other monologues of the poet deal with the exalted and ennobling influence of love and women this monologues tells us of the degradation and disintegrated effect of love on the great painter's soul. Lucrezia is portrayed not merely unprincipled, but heartless and shallow quite incapable of appreciating any, but the lowest and most medieval aspects of life if Lucrezia had loved and inspired him, he would have attained to Rafael's heights.

especially of women as great mystery and her unpredictable behavior.

For him, the brightest truth the purest truth in the Universe, often in kiss of a girl. In one poem after another he celebrates feminine importance. By the Fireside express strong earthly and sensuous love as well as love of the spirit, when one look, one word, from the women opens the infinite world of love for the lover. For a moment with the beloved the lover is prepared to surrender all-Heaven, nature, man, art and life itself.

Browning does not talk about ideals and generalization. He talks about the objects and places associated with the beloved or with a moment of love. Though Evelyn Hope's lover refers to her auburn hair and her geranium red mouth it is seldom that Browning talk of beauty of the beloved. Rather he writes of the celestial time when a man does not think about heaven but about parasol. That is why his poetry awakens in every man the memories of those immortal moments with the beloved where common and dead things acquire a meaning. It is the dress of the beloved in "A Lover's quarrel" which takes hold of the spirit.

In "Prophelia's Lover" Prophelia is simple, beautiful, faithful submissive who surrenders herself before lover. In excessive love, her lover has strangled her, tied a rope of her own golden hair around her neck. Even then she raised no voice and felt contented at her lot.

In "Evenlyn Hope" Evelyn is a girl of 16 years innocent, virtuous, noble, beautiful but entirely unaware about love which a middle aged man was having for her for last so many years. Evenlyn Hope represented the start of that society who are totally unaware of the crooked ways of the life.

In the "Flight of Duchess" Duchess is who elopes with her gipsy lover and thus attains freedom and true love. Such a revolting and bold character is also the creation of Browning.

In his best love poems he brings out the effect of lady's love to lift the lover to a higher and nobler level and gives him new strength as in "By the Fireside" or sinks him to the lower level of sensuous slavery as in "Andrea Dal Sarto". "Sordello" fails because he ignored love.

Finally, women in Browning's poems seemingly not very important but occupy a very important place in relation of a lover. She is portrayed as entire world in herself, having immense possibilities much to explore, much to miss, much to get. So Browning excelled in his art of characterization