

## Gender metaphysics in John Donne

Nasir Ahmed<sup>1</sup>, Abdul Wahab<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Teacher, Department of English, Adhikari Krishnakanta High School, Darjeeling, West Bengal, India

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of English, Samsi College, Malda, West Bengal, India

### Abstract

John Done is a great metaphysical poet. He tries to portray the love theme in his poetry. Gender discrimination is obliterated in his poetry. Donne uses metaphysical style and technique. His poetry is full of intellectualism and conceit. We also find surprising or striking beginning.

**Keywords:** no gender discrimination, equal power of both male and female

### Introduction

The late Elizabethan poetry decaded in its dull imitation of the earlier tradition and so it lost its original charm and beauty. A group of the 17th Century poets headed by John Donne (1572-1631) revolted against this morbid state and outdated Elizabethan poetry. The name of this school of poets came from Dryden's harsh criticism of Donne's poetry - "He affects the metaphysics not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy when he should engage their hearts and entertain them with the softnesses of love" Dr. Johnson extended the term 'metaphysics', peculiarities of his poetry and his deviation from the Elizabethan poetic tradition.

Donne is metaphysical by virtue of his reflective mode and mood. "A thought to Donne was an experience" as T.S. Eliot comments. He imports the new psychological curiosity of love and religion in poetry. Religious and love themes were given new perspectives and interpretations. His love theme is metaphysical in the sense that he believes in the eternal and transcendental existence of soul and love. The universal aspect of love is reflected in his poems. He states how all things grow old, as time rolls on and hasten to their end. His purpose is to assert the constant, perpetual character of true love.

John Donne, though Christian priest, did not count the Christian belief of original sin committed first by woman. Very secular, his attitude to woman is, based on humanism. I shall discuss with reference to 'The Good Morrow' and 'The Anniversarie'.

Whatever difference may be in a male body and a female body, he believes that the essential identity of male and female has nothing to do with sex and gender. He writes in 'The Good Morrow';

"And now good morrow to our walking souls  
which watch not one another out of feare."

Soul or self is the fundamental identity of the individual irrespective of caste and gender. Any communion between

two individuals of opposite sex should be based on reciprocal understanding. Sex prejudice should not interfere this relationship.

Love should not be possessive. Neither the male nor the female should be dominating at the cost of another's loss of identity. They must have their personal world of freedom.

'Let us possess our world, each hath one and by one'

The freedom of a husband or a wife is compared with two hemispheres which are separated yet united with the firequick of love and mutual understanding.

"Where can we find two better hemispheres  
Without sharp North, without declining West?"

Any divorce between a pair of couples means lack of mutual trust or means suppression on gender lives:

"Whatever dyes, was not mixt equally  
If our two love be one, or thou and I  
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die".

In "The Anniversarie", Donne demolishes gender discrimination on the basis of male body and female body on biological or psychological basis. Each body is composed of the same natural elements and after death is decomposed into the same natural elements. So where lies the male ego or male pride having a male body?

Two metaphors namely 'Prince' and 'King' John has used are very crucial in the understanding of Donne's gender metaphysics. 'Prince' and 'King' are symbolic words for power, administration and subjugation.

In Valediction: forbidding mourning, Donne compares a couple with the two legs of a compass. Feminists critics may object that Donne makes the woman being kept at home while the man wondering about the world although for necessity. But we must take into consideration that it is the woman who is at the centre of his world who gives importance to his world

enabling him and also reminding him to be faithful to her. And both are joined by mutual trust and necessity. Donne, thus, gives both the same importance:

"If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two  
Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if the other doe".

Donne's style of treatment shows that he exploited the knowledge explosion of the time. He dissects a feeling, throws new light upon it and views it from new and unexpected angles. He employs images, metaphors and symbols from all branches of knowledge like theology, philosophy, astrology, chemistry, geography, political science etc. This intellectuality is found in each of his poetry.

Donne's unique power to blend and harmonize, the abstract and concrete, the remote and the near, the sublime and the common place constitute the novelty of metaphysical technical style. His language is very much colloquial. Besides, he presents the realistic and dramatic situations too. Such characteristics made the metaphysical poetry the harbinger of Browning's dramatic monologues and guide to modern poetry. In the traditional concept of Patriarchal male dominated society, the husband is 'Swami' or 'Lord' or 'King'; but the wife is a 'Stri', a subject, very loyal and obedient.

But John Donne considers a couple as a pair of two autonomous identities or princes or kings with equal power and prestige, yet inter-personally united. Donne does not regard the female counterpart as a queen who is otherwise a mere wife of king without power. So he considers both the individuals as kings and at the same time subjects of each other. Thus they have equal power having equal rights and duties. Gender discrimination is obliterated in Donne's gender metaphysics.

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