==========
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 20:7 July 2020**
==========

'Friendship' – A Dominating Feature of the Middle English and Tamil Elegies

Dr. S. Chelliah, M.A., Ph.D.
Professor, Head & Chairperson
School of English & Foreign Languages
Department of English & Comparative Literature
Madurai Kamaraj University
Madurai – 625 021
Cell :9442621106 / 7339129324
aschelliah@yahoo.com

==========

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to interpret a fact that Friendship is one of the prevailing facets of the Middle English and Tamil Elegies. Elegy is a sad poem usually written to praise and express sorrow for high positioned person who is dead. Though, this paper projects the elegies of two different cultures and traditions, it neatly delineates the fine illustrations of friendship which is common in both the elegies. This paper focuses not only the common facets of elegies but also in the contrast fact that is friend in Tamil elegies between the king and the poet, the patron and the poet, which is sincere and natural, but in English it is the friendship between friends, which is insincere and artificial.

Keywords: Elegy in English, Elegy in Tamil, Friendship, Elegy, sad, praise, sorrow, tradition, culture, illustrations, insincere, natural, sincere, artificial.

Friendship is the dominating feature of the Middle English and Tamil elegies, though they belong to two different tradition and culture. There are some fine instances of friendship in Sankam Literature, which can be compared with Milton's 'Lycidas', Shelley's 'Adonais' Arnold's 'Thyrsis' and Whitman's 'Lilacs'. But the friendship in Tamil elegies is intimate and sincere and it is not so with the English elegies. For instance, in Shelley's ***Adonais***, Shelley attacking the critics responsible for the death of Keats is a digression and for Milton attacking the clergies is germane to his theme. Yet they stand supreme. And the friendship in Tamil elegies is between the king and the poet, the patron and the poet, but in English it is the friendship between friends and one exception is Whitman's 'Lilacs', where he mourns the death of Lincoln, the leader.

The friendship between patron and poet can be exemplified by citing scores of instances, but one might feel that the relationship between them may not be described as pure friendship. The patron may be actuated by a feeling of appreciation for the poetry and the attitude of the poet may be considerably influenced by the fact that the patron is his pay-master. And in English, Shelley and Milton won recognition and fame by writing the pastoral elegies on Keats and Edward King, though they had never been intimate friends. Of the various aspects of the lives of minstrels seen in Tamil poetry, the one that clearly emerges is "the close tie that existed between the bards and their patrons – be the kings or chieftains" (Kailasapathy 112). The fact that this poetry is, by definition, bardic poetry would enable us to understand to some extent the tie that bound them together. But it remains to be shown that something special and unique about the bards is portrayed in the literature of that age.

Sivaraja Pillai is said to have exaggerated the panegyric and eulogistic aspects of their poems to prove the dependence of the early minstrels on kings and chieftains. A brief reminiscence of Greek poems shows the intimate relationship between the king and minstrel. "In the ***Odyssey***, it is told that when he left for Troy, King Agamenon had left his wife Clytaemnestra in the care of a minstrel and had instructed him to watch over her" (Bowra 4). It has been rightly observed that such a person in whose care a king left behind his queen must have had an honoured place in the court, a fact which would suggest that he was more than a mere court minstrel. Close friendship which led some bards to identify themselves with their patrons are seen elsewhere too Celtic traditions have preserved stories of bards who killed themselves on the death of their patrons. Some lost their wits in such situations. As an instance of this, one may quote the story preserved in Welsh poetic tradition of the poet and prophet Myrddin who became in sane when his lord Gwenddoleu was slain and subsequently lived the life of a wild man in the Forest of Celyddon in Scotland. From some poems, in Purananuru, it is learnt that two bards by name Picirantaiyar and Pottiyar took their lives at the death of their patron and friend Kopperuncozhan.

A very familiar scene in Tamil poetry is the court feasting in which "the poet has a prominent place. When a minstrel goes to a new court, he is always feted. He is perhaps allowed to wash, and then new clothes are given to him". (Chadwick 7) The descriptions of the rich and fine garments given to him are themselves clear proof of his intimacy and equality with the others in the court. Once well clothed he is offered mead or wine. Thereafter the minstrel entertains the court with his songs. This courtly feast seems to have been so regular that most bards have sung of them in detail. In fact, it is a popular theme in Tamil bardic poetry. Nothing of this tradition is entertained in English elegies. The mutual regard cherished by the bards and princes developed in a few cases to develop lasting friendship. The most classical instance of friendship in the Sankam Age is that of King Pari and Kapilar. Their friendship was a bye word in the Tamil country. The ordinary relationship of the pay-master and the payee did not subsist at

all between them. They were bound by the holiest ties of unsullied friendship. During the lifetime of Pari, "the poet composed glorious Panegyrics in praise of the king" (Subramanian 82). Pari's hill was besieged and Pari was killed in the battle. Kapilar shouldered the responsibility of getting the daughters of Pari married off to suitable young men.

Overcoming the grief that welling up in his bosom, he took leave of the beloved Parambu Hill and taking the two young girls with him, he approached Prince after prince, in a vain effort to persuade them to marry the beautiful and accomplished girls; but they remembered the enmity of the three great kings towards Pari and refused to be drawn into any alliance with the house of Pari. The vain search broke the heart of the noble poet. He could not bear for long the separation from Pari and longed to join him. Taking therefore, the girls with him, he approached some high-minded friends of his and bade them to look after them and give them in marriage to suitable young man. He then sought death by starvation and when death came, he found it most welcome and met it eagerly.

"I look that lofty fate shell join us once again
And I shall see thee yet, nor lose the vision of ever more." (Pillai 179)

For the misery of separation was over now, he could join Pari in those far off regions where good friends live forever. On the other hand, the English are given pastoral colouring. Pastoral is classical and neoclassical, and it is a mode with conventional prescriptions about setting, characters and diction. In drama, poetry or prose, it employs stylized properties and idealized Arcadian situations from rural life – 'Purling streams', 'embowering shades', Singing contests, mourning processions – as a deliberate disguise for the preoccupations of urban, sophisticated people. It is more often tinged with melancholy and satire, because of its dimension of reference to contemporary society, pastoral invites allegory and symbolism. In ***Adonais***, Shelley mourns the death of Keats. The friendship between Shelley and Keats was not so intimate as that of Pari and Kapilar. "Keats did not take to Shelley as kindly as Shelley did to him" (Bloom 161). Still they saw enough of one another in the spring of 1817. In July 1820, Shelley knowing of Keats' illness, asked him to come to Italy, to avoid the English winter. The invitation was for Keats to take up his residence with the Shelleys. Yet the same generous letter contains criticism of Keats' poetry 'Endymion', which he was not likely to accept. The poets did not meet again, for Keats came to Italy only to die, at Rome, on Feb 23, 1982. Shelley then changed his estimate of Keats' poetry when he read his 'Hyperion'. Shelley close to believe, for his poetic purposes, that Keats was slain by the adverse criticism upon 'Endymion', particularly the one made in ***the Quarterly Review and Blackwoods Magazine***. Though not a good friend, Shelley was taken up by the death of Keats and he wanted the critics to consume fire. So, he dipped his pen and wrote 'Adonais'.

Adonais is actually based on two Greek poems in the pastoral tradition of Theocritus. The first is the elegy for Adonais attributed to Bion, when Shelley copies closely at times, particularly its opening:

> "Woe, woe, for Adonis he hath perished,
> The beauteous Adonis,
> Dead is the beauteous Adonis,
> The loves join in the lament" (Lang 171).

The second Greek poem is the elegy for Bion attributed to Moschus, in which Bion is alleged to have been cruelly poisoned by an unknown land.

'Adonis' or Keats is dead as the poem opens, and the Hour of Death mourns him, and is to call the other hours to similar mourning. The dead poet was the youngest and dearest son of the Muse Urania, patroness of his poems. 'Endymion' and 'Hyperion', who was slumbering in her paradise when the murder occurred. She is called upon to weep, the poet's creations, mountain Shepherds, the surviving poets, Nature. Nature joined her. But in the latter half of the elegy, there was a hope of reconciliation. For Keats is not dead, he and Nature have become one and the same and he is now part of the Energising Beauty of the universe. Critics accused 'Adonais' as in sincere because of the pastoral mode and Shelley "who in another's fate now wept his own" (Carlos 199). He also was not recognized in the literary world. The poet in the end now returned to himself and asked why he should hesitate to follow his dead friend whom he missed so much. The spirit of the universe, which pervades, all being, and of which, the soul of Adonais, is a part, depends upon him and bears him far away from the hard of uninspired men.

Another instance of friendship can be cited from Sankam literature. Andaiyar who was a celebrated poet from Pisir, a village in the Pandiya Kingdom, had come to know of the great qualities of Cozha King. The king in a similar way had heard of the poetic gifts of Andaiyar and of his noble qualities. But tried as they might, they could never meet, though they were passionately eager to see each other. "The poet sent swans as messengers to the king as a loving lady would" (Desikan 32). Several years went by in this manner. The sons of the Cozha king, who had not inherited the good qualities of their father, began to get impatient at the king's longevity. The king was so selfless that if only his sons had made known their feelings he could have abdicated his throne in their favour. But this was not to be; the sons rose in revolt against their royal father.

The king was beside himself with wrath and he resolved to wipe out his recalcitrant sons, making an example of them. But a poet of his court, intervened and advised the king not to fight with his sons, who are his flesh of flesh and blood of blood. "The battle was fraught only with

evil" (P 33). The king accepted the advice of the poet and decided to court death by fasting. Andaiyar heart the account and was deeply distressed; he hurried to the court of the King. The two friends were at last able to see each other and great was the joy they felt. The poet Andaiyar decided that he could not continue to live in the world from where the king had departed. Hence the poet and the patron became united in their resolve to leave the world. Such were the ties of friendship, who had not received any presents from him, and who did not even belong to his realm. The great story of their friendship is celebrated in the poems of Pottiyar, one of the court poets of the Cozha king. Though not strong the tie of friendship as that of Andaiyar and the Cozha King, yet there always existed between Edward King and Milton, "a particular friendship and intimacy," according to Milton's nephew. Milton's ***Lycidas***, the pastoral elegy on Edward opens with an echo of the lament:

"Yet once, O ye laurels, and once more
Yet myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your barriers harsh and crude,

And with forc'd fingers rude,
Shelter your leaves before the mellowing year"
(Milton 22)

Johnson could not believe that a man who was genuinely grieving for a friend would produce a poem in such a stale and conventional form as the pastoral elegy. It was a means of objectifying the emotions expressed and of preventing the personal feeling from swaping the poetry. Whether Milton was a close friend a king or not is irrelevant, partly because "a funeral elegy requires a certain detachment" (Munir 44). It is public, formal, ceremonial and partly because king is merely the nominal subject of the poem. The climax of the first part of the poem is when Milton recalls the inability of the muse to save Orphans,

"When, by the rout made the hideous roar
His goary visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore" (P 24)

To be a poet does not protect once against premature death; and Milton asks if the austerity of his dedication and of his thirty year's apprenticeship was not a waste of time:

"Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
or with the tangles of Nerera's hair?"
(Philips 25)

He is comforted by Phoebus, who tells him that unfulfilled, promise does not preclude "fame in heaven". But Milton's doubts return. The shipwreck took place in a calm sea; and king's death seemed unfair and wasteful, for St. Peter himself admits that the dead man was a devoted cleric, in contrast to the 'corrupted clergy', then in their height. In the final section, Milton resolves the problems which had obsessed him. He is consoled for his fear of early death, by the prospect of immortality; his fears for the church are compensated by the 'solemn troops and sweet societies', of the saints in heaven; and his agonizing desire for fame is succeeded by trust in God. Dr. Tillyard even suggests that Milton renounces earthly fame and that there is "an abnegation of self by the great egotist and the spiritual purgation of gaining one's life after losing it" (P 78). Lycidas however bears a marked likeness to Adonais – a likeness which can hardly be held accidental. Both poems are built on the same general plan, opening in grief for the dead, proceeding to stern denunciation of the living, and closing in strains of solemn joy. In both, the loss regretted is that of a life intrinsically valuable, rather3 than that of an intimate personal friend.

'Lycidas' is a lament for the death of a young man who promised to have a distinguished and useful career. But the central figure in 'Adonais' is hardly a man at all. He is a spirit, and not even such a spirit as Christian literature has made us familiar with. Although in places, it suits the poet's need to speak of Adonais with Chatterton, Sidney and Lucan, as an individual soul, retaining identity and consciousness in a real world beyond the grave, this is not Shelley's normal attitude. During the Sankam age, it was expected that the king should reign his kingdom, fully understanding the meaning of the term 'Pankatan' or 'duty'. The bard Kantarattanar compares the protection enjoyed under the rule of a king who knows duty, to the cool shades of a tree which shelters travelers. In Sankam Age, there was a powerful warrior and a liberal patron of poets and minstrels called Perunjeaththan the chief of Ollayur. When he died, Kutavayil Kiraththanair recollected the olden days which the people enjoyed under his rule, and he expressed his deep sense of sorrow. The brave youths and fair damsels forget to dress themselves in gay attire. The bards forget to twine their lyres and for Sathan was dead, there was dullest strains. In utter despair, the poet cries,

"O jasmine! dost thou flourish still
In Ollaiyur now Saththan's gone?"

(Sanjeevi 13).

In ***Thyrsis*** – A Monody, the oxford days of clough and Arnold are linked with pastoral and mythic Greece as a world of untroubled unity of soul and harmony, with nature. The poem begins with the 'refresher' visit, Arnold makes to the countryside, he and his friend had known of old. "Thyrsis and I: We still had Thyrsis then" (Bush 25). This is the first of the many expression of controlled grief that are scattered through the poem. Very soon there is a reference

to the elm tree, that had meant so much to the youth poets". The signal elm that looks on Ilrley Down" (27). Thyrsis is not mourned like Lycidas or Adonais. He is gone, yet he is there and there too is still the dewy dim and fragrant nature, the evening and the prevailing softness of the clouds – "one tree yet crowns the hill, one scholar travels yet the loved hillside" (Duffin 133). ***Thyrsis*** is the lightest – hearted of the four elegies as ***In Memoriam*** is the saddest. There was every reason, why of these two elegies arising out of personal friendship, Tennyson's should betray the deeper grief. It is death in youth that rightly rouses pain and bitterness. Clough had had nearly twice Hallam's span of life. The pathos of ***In Memoriam*** is lacerating, that of Thyrsis adult and judicious. But the root of the difference lies in the approach of the two elegies. Finally there is the elegy by Adduthurai maseththanar, lamenting the death of King, Solan Kulamurraththuth Thunjcia Killivalavan. He addresses death itself and scorns it:

> "Death! Right silly art thou, ruthless one;
> Through lack of sense thou eat'st thine own seed corn!
> Though yet shall see the truth of what I say
> Warriors with gleaming swords and elephant and horse,
> Fell on the battle – plain that followed with blood
> Daily he was insatiate, slew his foes,
> And fed thine hunger!
> . . . . . .
> Whose flowery garland swarmed with humming bees,
> Since thou hast borne away – who shall appease thy
> hunger now?" (15)

Death is being abused by the poet for having taken the life of Valavan, the theme of the ancient Tamil poetry. But Death is considered as a liberatress by some other poets.

Whitman's ***Lilacs*** is an elegy and several writers have compared it in a general way to others such as ***Lycidas, Adonais*** and Emerson's ***Threnody***. Out of seventeen devices commonly used in pastoral elegies of Western Literature, seven appear in Lilacs. They announce that the speaker's friend or alter ego is dead and is to be mourned; the sympathetic mourning of nature with the use of so-called pathetic fallacy; the placing of flowers on the bier; a notice of the irony of nature's revival of life in the spring, when the dead man must remain dead, the funeral procession with other mourners, the eulogy of the dead man; and the resolution of the poem in some formula of comfort or reconciliation. ***When Lilacs Lost in the Dooryard Bloom'd*** is a poem in which the poet gives an eternal voice to the loss of America in the death of America. It is also a poem in which Whitman voices his final faith in man's fate. The suffering is intimate and personal. It is sometimes called the 'carol of death' and that is really is:

"Come lovely and soothing and
delicate death" (Lilacs 391)

Two sorrows go into the making of the poem. The sorrow at the death of Lincoln; and sorrow occasioned by the death of Whitman's own brother. Apparently, the death of Lincoln is the chief thing, but the other's death is no less important in giving the poem the peculiar intensity – the two combining in the metaphor of brotherhood, a tragic revelation of all human relation and identity:

"Come lovely and delicate death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later dedicate death" (Fisher 391)

This rather sensuous approach to death can be expected of Whitman, who approaches everything sensuously. Earlier it was the self then love, now it is death. Tagore, the modern poet of India, in his ***Gitanjali*** uses terminology similar to that used by Whitman, in his addresses to death:

"O thou, the last fulfillment of life, Death
my death, come and Whisper to me!
. . . . . .
The flowers have been woven and the
garland is ready for the bridegroom.
After the wedding the bride shall leave
her home and meet her lord alone
in the solitude of night" (Gitanjali 60)

It seems Whitman's acceptance of death is the first step towards his realization of immortality. There are some remarkably specific resemblances in thought and imagery between ***Lilacs*** and some of the pastoral elegies notably ***Adonais***. In the words of E.R. Wasserman the dominant symbols of 'Adonais' are light, which is embodied in a star and which represents life and moisture, which appears as a mist or cloud and which represents death. Whitman associates a star with the living Lincoln and a cloud with Lincoln's death. The star is the same in both poems, Venus – the evening and also the morning star. Venus may be the 'day – star' of Lycidas; it is certainly the 'Hesper – phosphor' which is Tennyson's final symbol of immortality in ***In Memoriam***. In order to express his grief, and the grief of millions of his fellow countrymen, the lyric poet creates a wealth of other images which deepen the sense of irredeemable loss. The poem is an immensely, expressive requiem for Abraham Lincoln. In

'Lilacs', Whitman made out of death and sorrow and suffering one of the greatest works of literary art thus far produced in America, and by so doing, he made himself immortal.

To conclude, the age neither old, or modern had its own peculiarities. But the influence of Greece is seen, and it is in full swing. Almost all the elegies written during that time are rendered pastoral colouring, which is not seen in Tamil elegies. This pastoralism has spread its wings in America too. The poem of Whitman has a close similarity to that of Milton, Shelley and Arnold. The customs, true attitude towards life are highlighted by the pastoral setting. Moreover, the English elegies are accused of artificiality and insincerity; the friendship is between two friends in English elegies but in Tamil, we see the close and sincere friendship between kings and bards. The famous instances like the friendship between Kapilar and Pari, Avvai and Adiyaman may be taken into account.

==========

Works Cited

1. Bloom, Harold. "The Two Spirits – Adonais and the Triumph of Life" ***Shelley: A Collection of Critical Essays.*** (ed.) George M. Ridenour. New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1980, P.161.
2. Bowra, C.M. ***Heroic Poetry***. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1966.
3. Carlos, Baker. "The Evening Star: Adonais" ***Shelley: Modern Judgements,*** ed. R.B. Woodings. London: Macmillan Co, Ltd, 1968, P.199.
4. Chadwick, H.M. ***The Heroic Age***. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1912.
5. Desikan, R.S. ***The Sankam Age***. Calcutta: Bharathi Tamil Sankam, 1908.
6. Fisher, William. J. ***American Literature of the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology***. New Delhi: Eurasia Publishing House, 1955.
7. Kailasapathy, K. ***Tamil Heroic Poetry***. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963.
8. Lang, A. ***Lang's Translation***. London: Macmillan, 1989.
9. Muir, Kenneth. "Early Poems" ***John Milton***. London: Longman, 1955.
10. Philips, Ann (ed.). ***Milton's Minor Poems***. London: Longman's Green & Co, Ltd, 1955.

==========

11. Pillai, J.M. Somasundaram, A History of Tamil Literature,
With Texts and Translations.
Annamalai Nagar: Annamalai University Press, 1968.
12. Subramanian, A.V. ***Sips from the Sankam Cup***.
Tirunelveli: The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1968.
13. Tagore, Rabindranath. ***Gitanjali***.
Delhi: Macmillan India, 1913.
14. Tillyard, E.M.V. "Later Horton Period and Lycidas"
Milton. London: Chatto and Windows, 1930.

==========