

## Metaphorical Metamorphosis: A Critical Reading of Select Stories, Poems and Plays

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One moral, at least, may be drawn,  
to wit, that all.  
our school text-books lie.  
What they call History  
is nothing to vaunt of,  
being made, as it is,  
by the criminal in us:  
goodness is timeless.

—Auden, “From Archaeology” 60-67

The inexplicable is termed as redundant in human history, while literature serves one with the chance of restoring it, as we question what lies in the world beyond. The word ‘Rose’ automatically creates visual imagery of a red flower signifying beauty and love; whereas ‘night’ shall always form a dark, terrible image of crime and danger. The word ‘archaeology’ is symbolic of the dead, the archaic. However, the paper is an attempt to explore its different nuances, of how any structure can be much more than the literal, or become a vantage point for the elevated feeling, the efficacy of tragic gaiety through the past, present and for the generations to come.

We indeed live in a world of facts that may not believe in envisioning the colours of music or hearing the music of colours, but a metaphor serves as a tool in conceiving such concepts that lead us to these inexplicables. It becomes monumental when it pushes itself to abstraction in pursuit of the inexperienced, the unattained, and the sublime. Auden, in his poem “Archaeology”, conveys the same idea of how all that one has read about history and monuments of archaeology holds no significance if one does not learn anything from its past. Man shall continue to bear the mundane, untouched by the superior forces of sublimity and least aware of living life in a manner which Yeats terms as “tragic gaiety.”

Sublimity is always veiled in abstraction, and any monument/monumental structure is sustained by its ‘*jaali* work’ (carved geometric patterns on perforated stone usually found in Indo-Islamic architecture) that works as a veil in the path of sublimity. It perfuses the message that this veil of obscurity and abstraction

is lifted in the very moment, when one enters into a dialogue through perforation contours of beautifully engraved ‘*jaalis*’ (intricate yet airy patterns), and renders himself to the understanding of tragic gaiety. The monument of metaphor remains unaltered, indoctrinated by human experience leading itself to a further destination, into an array of infinite expressions.

Metaphor becomes an autonomous entity that evolves with time, and should not be restricted as a secondary use of language. Embarking the topological transformations of words and sentences into an enduring state of the journey, metaphors of love in the empathetic narrative amidst the inevitable tragic times mark the core of the essential and eternal journey of metaphors that make them monument, rather monumental. The literal metaphor is supposed to focus on the discourse of human life, where the discourse evolves the human to celebrate his tragic being. The paper aims to explore these metaphors of love and tragedy that are beyond the artifice of eternity and surpass their verbal manifestations.

### **Monument and Movement**

Any comprehensive approach needs a complex absorption praxis to respond to the multivariate architectonics, spectrums, echoes, and to put it more simply, abstractions. Metaphors of love and tragedy are abstract figures buried in the explorable layers of literature. They urge one to celebrate the uncelebrated, the tragic, and the appalling. Shakespeare’s “The lunatic, the lover and the poet are of imagination all compact” in the fleeting world of reality is a revisit to the eternal longing of decrypting the encrypted message of love adorned by the touch of tragedy. In the play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Theseus says,

THESEUS. Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact. (Shakespeare 5.1 5-8)

Like a lover soaked in mourning melodies of life, the monument of metaphor is never static; it is a unifying structural design that is in an eternal state of movement, a *Raahro* (passer-by) to guide not only a selected few but everybody around. It becomes a directional note for the unknown path. Metaphor, along with its inexhaustibility, carries within the historical sense that coalesces unified memory in the abstract perspective. Because of its incapacity to be the expression in concrete form, the metaphor becomes the symbolic self for the modus of abstraction. The historical sense of a metaphor becomes a monument when the memory becomes a receptacle of significant moments of life. The acceptance of nothingness, a meaningless modern world, was acknowledged and anticipated by the modern poets as well.

Yeats, in his poems, *Sailing to Byzantium* and *Byzantium*, talked about a journey to the mythical city of Byzantium, one that emerges out as a response to the chaotic world. At the same time, it implies the upsurging requirement of a new golden age. Conjured by the poet in the mythical land of Byzantium, the “golden bird” in the utopian land of ‘Byzantium’, embroidered and flushed in gold work, beholds within the power to absorb one into its chasm of sublimity.

It epitomises the creation of artwork as a union of art in eternity. Just like the ‘Grecian Urn’, it becomes a timeless and immortal metaphorical manifestation. In the poem, Keats immortalised the wedding procession of the Grecian Urn and hence the idea of love. Therefore, the metaphor becomes the living force of celebration of the unrequited love of the lovers, “the foster-child of silence and slow time” (Keats, line 2) stretches the historicity of the Grecian Urn and re-establishes it as a monumental entity. The moving procession moves metaphorically and yet remains immortalised on the urn. The verse of Keats gives it a movement and therefore, the energised space of urn shows an unseen progression.

### **Artifice of Eternity**

Hamlet typifies to be a tragic hero, and his tragedy becomes an essential expression of life; as it questions what really is eternal. Art in various forms is perceived to be eternal; however, the ‘artifice’ of eternity is an essential expression of life, that becomes a thread of the past. The concept of thread as a metaphor is very interesting to be understood.

Each thread in itself is a monument, a unit of interlocked expressions of the past. Formed by continuous spinning and twisting of a filament, the thread is as eternal as the monument; for it never really loses its essence, even after being snapped or left stranded. It further makes one wonder about what thread did the artisans put in the making of the monument that it stands tall till date as an eternal body? When Kabir or any Sufi Saint fabricates his argument about the body as a fine piece of cloth, he does not solely indicate our physical body, but the very ‘being’ of existence in the life granted to one. Subtly performed to perfection in its mastery of the warp and weft, the cloth is interlaced with intricate work and craftsmanship. It has been worn by the sages, the saints and the common man, but each one of them has been able to defile it by misuse of what can be put as; ‘thought, word, and deed’. The cloth, just like the monument, beholds a message to be learnt, that of love and humanity. It is only in the participation of humanity as a collective being that one shall be able to reach closer in the attainment of the spiritually sublime.

The warp and weft of the monument have been weaved with subtle messages in the innumerable stories that each stone upholds, in the mourning

melodies that serve to be incantations that can rejuvenate the dead. In the contemporary times, and even for generations to come, it is for one and all to understand that what really is eternal, is not the physical cloth, the tangible body, the beauty and grandeur of the majestic monument; but is the essence of each. "Goodness is timeless" (Auden, line 70), and one ought to not fall prey to their own world of illusions by forgetting the very essence of our existence.

Love as a metaphor is a symbolic dimension to life that has no singular approach to be constrained by the given set of words. When Chandradhar Sharma 'Guleri' narrated his short story "Usne Kaha Tha", he consolidated the different strings of tragedy in his writing. A soldier's plight when the nation was at war, the fragmented stories of individuals at that time, a scenario exhibiting the chaos and the violent time of the country, yet possessing a tale of love that survives in such extremities. He deliberately weaves in his story, a character like Lehna Singh, who is portrayed sheltering Subedar and his son for reasons unknown to the readers. Initially, it occurs to be a tale of the nation at war; however, it is only at the end that we realise the tragedy of his life. For each time he asked the little girl "*teri kudmai ho gayi?*" (Guleri, 11), he would expect a "*dhat*" in return; only for his little world to be later on shattered by learning that she had been engaged. For now, just like love, as we know is never for the self; it always has an external referent, which the girl became for him. Lehna Singh devoted his life to an encounter of childhood that cast an impression so deep, that in the very moment his time travel collapsed inward. Such metaphors of love and tragedy stay frozen in space and time.

The monument of metaphor is not the apprehension of information retained, rather, it is the felt experience; a representation not of the literal, but an emphatic blend of reality amidst the tragic times that narrates the essence of the unheard, the unsung, and the unseen passages of life. For generations to come, the notion of tragic gaiety shall be redefined from time to time, but its efficacy shall always be deemed as a sublime experience in the face of tragedy. The message to pass on to the future generation is the legacy that has been surviving in the howling storms of lamentation through the different eras. We are shown the channels through which we mitigate what Yeats encrypts as the essential "melody" of the contemporary human race.

### **Tragic Gaiety and Monument**

Hamlet's inaction, his power play of words and language, along with his ability to introspect, contemplate, and understand his internal philosophical banter, should not be taken as a tragedy. Yeats understands the complex notion of tragedy and the existence of gaiety in his character, that he brings out the concept of tragic gaiety. But tragedy as a non-enclosed entity does not limit

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itself to the mere process of lamentation. It evolves, “All things fall and are built again, and those that build them again are gay” (Yeats, “Lapis Lazuli” 34-35).

The metaphorical renditioning of a structure is essentially what makes it a monument. The physical entity or space of any structure employs metaphorical devices such as colours, composition, symmetry, patterns etc., in order to become a monument of substance where there lies more reality than meets the eye. The study of the shape and form of a monument becomes synonymous in deciphering the architectonics of a metaphor. The semi-precious stones embedded in the inlay work of a monument do not embellish the deathbed of the ruler, rather, the sombre, subtle, pastel, yet mesmerising beauty of the colours and texture speak volume about the history, and what one needs to learn from the past.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire  
And fastened it to a dying animal  
It knows not what it is; and gather me  
Into the artifice of eternity. (Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium” lines 21-24)

The gathering of one’s heart into the “artifice of eternity” is itself a journey that one embarks through multivariate domains. The participation in the dialogic play between the visitor and any monumental structure becomes a stochastic process, for it knows not what fate has in store for the participant. It imparts the eternal tunes of mourning melodies blended with the joyous confluence of gaiety in tragedy. The entry gate of the monument is a determinable point, but the embarked journey from there on is not.

One knows not how the participation shall result in a changed being, a changed personality. Rather, the whole experience profuses the dissipation of the material self. Bulleh Shah conveys the same idea of losing oneself in something so profound that eventually only the divine knows about the real self, the truth.

*Avval aakhir aap nu jaana*  
*Na koi dooja hor pehchaana*  
*Maethon hor na koi siyaana*  
*Bulla! shah khadda hai kaun*  
*Bulla! ki jaana mai kaun* (Shah, lines 7-11)

The non-linear verse of Bulleh Shah portrays the complexity of the known yet unknown self of one which negotiates with the immersed state of one’s being. In the discord of time, there lies an essential need to maintain the accord of

humanity. It is in the process of questioning our own existence, our identity; that we break free from the social clutches of the society. An interaction with the monumental allows one to witness the same. It is to be believed that there indeed lies an endpoint to this journey of romance, but that point of arrival is nothing to vaunt of, or look forward to. It is unattainable. This nothingness may as well be everything, wherein the seamless void; the presence of the sublime can be felt. The metaphorical metamorphosis arrives at no given point; it flows into a chasm evolving human and its sensibilities. The shift is temporal as influenced by the spatio-temporal turbulences, but it pushes the metaphor into an array of expressions, leaving behind a residue from the abstract to concrete form. These metaphors shall be dug in and extrapolated in historical narratives, in musical renditions, in poetic harmony, and in the architectonics of any monumental art form. It is also to be observed that the metamorphosis of metaphors is perpetually in a state of 'becoming' rather than forming a singular entity of 'being'. It evolves.

As Locke's understanding of the *tabula rasa* conveys, the human mind runs passively; that a child is born in a blank state, with no preconceived notions on which the empirical realities and experiences of an individual carve impressions throughout one's life. If this philosophical extension is to be believed, the role of fine arts becomes all the more important in the development of any character in human life. The acceptance of form over shape, irrationality of rationality, coexistence of gaiety and tragedy decipher sublimity in the poetic harmony and inherent music that resides in these eternal metaphors of love and tragedy that reflect, contemplate, and explore into oneself the impact of such a sublime encounter.

The trembling forces of stress and violence have been prevailing in humankind for eras, a glimpse of which is evident in the chaos, war phobia, and the violence embedded in society. However, it has been felt that fine arts like music, paintings, and poetry have been bestowing solace on the clouds of tragedy banking over the horizon. It becomes an impending reaction to seek solace through these mediums in the imminent times of tragedy. The device employed to hold on to the essence of human civilisation, is that of a metaphor and its manifestations. The monumental metaphors become a harmonic expression in the heterogeneous world, and waver between the world of the possible and the potential, serving to be a matrix in understanding the complex nuances of life.

Artifice, when technically defined, can signify skills that produce an uninterrupted imaginary experience that is meant to appropriate reality. It becomes the point of *imaginaire* (elevated imagination), the gap between the concept and the fact. What really is eternal in the garb of artwork is the tradition of love and empathy. The metaphors of love and tragedy fused in these mediums surpass

their verbal manifestation and become a metaphysical modification of human sensibilities, which seem to perfuse the message of love and humanity with an element of inexhaustibility. What a monument is to architecture, the metaphor becomes for literature.

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