

**JOHN DONNE AND HIS PHILOSOPHICAL PERCEPTION OF
PHYSICAL VS. SPIRITUAL LOVE: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION WITH
ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE POEMS, THE SUNNE RISING AND
GOE AND CATCHE A FALLING STARRE**

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is a careful inquiry into the poetry of John Donne with especial reference of his two notable poems, The Sunne Rising and Goe and Catche a Falling Starre. In order to bring in light the elements of platonic and physical love substances, the papers explores and contextualizes Donneian views regarding physical, spiritual and cynical love contents with the help of textual lines and critics' valuable opinions on the mentioned topic. In The Sunne Rising, we find Donne dramatising his pent up passion in order to mirror his endless love for his beloved and intends to exhibit the universal significance and value of true love whereas in Goe and Catche a Falling Starre, deeply cynical, mock-serious and antifeminist poem, he declares that there exsits no true love in this world. John donne's woman as introduced in the present poem becomes an instrument of criticism through which he satirizes and condemns all women's faithlessness.

Keywords: Physical and Spiritual love, metaphysical poetry, conceits, philosophy.

Born in 1572 and studied at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, John Donne is regarded as one of the most leading and outstanding metaphysical poets, particularly in the 17th century. A close look at Donne's biography reveals that as a love poet, he has derived love themes from personal experiences which have been underlined in his poetic cosmos and other compositions. In fact, we find Donne's love poems as a remarkable conglomeration of spirituality and sensuality, and he has explored the association between the two. His poetry explicitly expresses his different views towards each angle of life. John Donne's poetry, T.S. Eliot notes, is Unification of Sensibility¹ and he is prominently known as a great love poet. Donne boasts that love surpasses earthly relation and is not merely limited to it. In his

masterpiece poem, *The Extaise*, he has effectively deals with spiritual love between two souls. John Donne's popular poems such *The Flea*, *The Canonization*, *The Sunne Rising* and *Goe and Catche a Falling Starre* reveal different strains of love like platonic, spiritual and cynical love. His philosophical approach throws light on his age where dissatisfaction was felt in every prospect of life.

Unlike his contemporaries, John Donne's vision of love centers on each aspect of it as we notice that in his works of art, he maintains conjugal, spiritual and cynical segments of love. Thus his attitude is quite different from his contemporaries. His love philosophy is pleasingly interpreted in his poems. Donne defines love as the union of body and soul i.e. mixture of both spiritual and physical. He has meticulously defined physical love to be pure as that of spiritual. Donne's love poetry can be classified into three strains: cynical, conjugal and platonic love poetry.

The poem, *Goe and Catche a Falling Starre*, is a satire on women's inconsistency. The poem starts with various impossible tasks to be assigned to the readers like that of 'catching a falling starre', getting child with a mandark root, etc. By doing this, the poet claims that like these impossible tasks there lives no woman who is 'faire and true.' According to him, if someone finds a woman who is true and faire at the same time such a place would be a shrine to visit. The poet further exposes that yet he would not go to meet her because a woman's consistency is short lived and she shall become inconsistent in no time. The poem is a satirical-cynical piece which shows Donne's cynical views towards womanhood.

Through his dramatic monologue, *The Sunne Rising*, the poet displays his endless disrespect to the personified sun that is constantly disturbing the true couples. The poet begins the poem by addressing the sun as a 'busie and old fool' who does not possess any authority to disturb the poet and his beloved by peeping through the curtains and windows while they are making love with each other. Donne abuses the sun for his false move and calls him 'saucy pendantique wretch'. The poet glorifies his love with the help of hyperbolic language. He compares the robust power of the sun to that of his beloved's dazzling beauty. With the help of a fine literary device, an extended metaphor, the poet hyperbolizes the significance of his beloved and writes that – 'she is all states, and all princes, I.'

The poet claims his beloved is an embodiment of all states and regards himself as rulers of these states. At the end, the poet declares that the whole world has shrunk in his bedroom and by sending light in his bedroom the sun is warming the whole world. Donne beautifies love with the help of wit, conceits and evocating imageries in the poem, *The Sunne Rising*. John Donne's love concept is based on intense emotional feeling. Donne's distinct love philosophy is noticed in each of his poem. In the poem, *The Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*, he enlightens spiritual love by depicting relationship of souls.

"Our two souls, therefore, which are one,
Though I must goe, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to avery thinnesse beate."

On the other side, in the poem, *The canonization*, the poet shows his positive attitude towards physical love by comparing his love to a mythical bird Phoenix whereas the poem, *Goe and Catche a Falling Starre* shows his cynical views towards women. The poet claim that- "No where lives a woman true and faire." Expressing his views on Donne's poetry Richard Crashaw writes:

“His feelings is expressed in verse of great sensuousness; and we find the poet whose secular ‘love poems’ were of an essentially idealistic nature, unrelated to any real amorous experience, frequently using the language of erotic poetry to express religious emotions.”²

As noticed in the poem, *The Flea*, the poet expresses his emotions to his beloved who denies her lover for loved making. The poet wisely tries to convince his beloved by asking her not to kill the flea which has sucked hers and the poet’s blood as by doing so she will kill their love as the poet states-“oh stay, three lives in one flea spare, If it is viewed spiritually, love in the view of Donne, is a source of divinity. Donne’s firm belief in spiritual love is seen in the poem, *Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*. In this poem, the poet advises his beloved not to feel sad on their physical separation. He goes on adding that their souls are inseparable even if they are physically away from each other. The poet magnifies love by stating that love is divine and it surpasses death. He immortalizes the relationship of souls.

To conclude, it is explored here on the basis of above mentioned observation that Donne’s love poetry differs from physical love to spiritual and spiritual to cynicism. His love poetry is based on his intense emotional feeling and personal experiences of love in his life. Donne justifies physical love as holy as spiritual love. Donne reveals his distinct love concept with the help of wit and conceits in his writings. Here A.J. Smith remarks are very illuminating as he notes that “Neither sensual passion nor gay and cynical wit, nor scorn and anger is the dominant note in Donne’s love.”³

Undoubtedly, John Donne looks upon the association of love between man and woman from both sensuous and sensible viewpoints. In investigating the realistic sides of love, Donne support the inevitability of both the body and the soul. This opinion is another characteristic that differentiates Donne as a love poet. In fact, In his poems Donne seeks to maintain the connection between the body and the soul. He believes that physical interaction without spiritual unification cannot be assumed as true love. Thus real love is stimulated by the mating of both the body and soul, and such a love is eternal and everlasting.

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