

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LAMENTATION BETWEEN 'ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD' AND 'KOBOR'

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### Abstract

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*The present comparative study deals with the major aspects of Thomas Gray and Jasimuddin. Both poets deal with rural people with their pains and gains, emotions and passions, occupations and professions, problems and prospects in their respective poems. Both of them were deeply concerned with the unavoidable ill fate of the commoners who are deprived of modern amenities. Both the poems 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' by Thomas Gray and 'Kobor' by Jasimuddin are in the forms of elegy where the speakers lament for the death of near and dear ones. Gray laments over the death of common fellows in general whereas Jasimuddin here presents an old grandfather who cries out before his grandson with heartrending tears because of the premature demises of his family members. Gray repines that the dead rural fellows may achieve name and fame if they were given opportunities but Jasimuddin's poem is just saturated with ceaseless pathos for the loss of kin. In the current paper, there is an attempt to make a comparative study between 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' and 'Kobor (Graves)' following the methods of literary research.*

**Keywords:** Lamentation, death, graves, grief, consolation

### 1. Introduction

Jasimuddin (January 01, 1903–March 13, 1976), one of the leading Bengali poets of modern era is well-known as a songwriter, prose writer, folklore collector and radio personality. He is mostly known in Bangladesh as Polli Kobi (The Rural Poet). On the other hand, Thomas Gray (26 December 1716 – 30 July 1771) is a poet of English nationality. He achieved name and fame also as a classical scholar, letter-writer, and professor at Pembroke College, Cambridge. He is mostly known for his unparalleled creation 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' published in 1751. Basically an elegy is a sad poem which is written to praise and express sorrow for someone who is dead. Thomas Gray wrote this poem just after the death of his close friend named Richard West. But here the poem mourns the death not of great or famous person, but of common men whereas Jasimuddin's poem 'Kobor' is about a painful life of a rural elderly person. He elucidates the death of his wife, son, daughter in-law, granddaughter and daughter with very painful tune. Now he recalls the sad memories of their unexpected tragic deaths showing their graves to his grandson. Thus, both the poems have thematic resemblance. Again, as the two poets are from two different countries and ages, there will have some point of differences between them.

### 2. Objectives

This paper is an attempt to naturalize the writing of the two different authors of different ages but dealing with the same theme of lamentation. Therefore, the primary purpose of this paper is to find out the vivid picture of lamentation depicted in Jasimuddin's Poem 'Kobor (Graves)' and

to detect the exact nature of lamentation in Thomas Gray's Poem 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'. This paper also aims at making comparison between Thomas Gray's Poem 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' and Jasimuddin's Poem 'Kobor (Graves)' from thematic as well as linguistic point of view.

### 3. Review of Literature

Thomas Gray's Poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is one of the greatest masterpieces in his poetic career. Jasimuddin's poem "*Kobor (Graves)*" is also considered one of his best works. Though there is a great deal of works on Thomas Gray's Poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", there is little works on Jasimuddin's Poem "*Kobor (Graves)*". Though a lot of works were done on the individual poets before, there are very few comparative writings between Gray and Jasimuddin together. Rehman (2012), Garvey (2013), Miyashita (2015) and Shrestha (2014) showed great interest in Thomas Gray's elegy from different linguistic, literary, philosophical and stylistic perspectives which were really supportive for the study.

Few articles were also collected on Jasimuddin along with the translated version of *Kobor*. But there is hardly any work previously done on the comparative study between Thomas Gray's Poem 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' and Jasimuddin's poem *Kobor* (Graves). So, this study may open a new dimension which will contribute a lot to the field of comparative literature.

### 4. Methodology

In this research there are two categories of sources i.e. (i) primary and (ii) secondary. Thomas Gray's Poem 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' published in Norton Anthology, Third edition. W.W. Norton and Company, USA (2012). and Jasimuddin's Poem *Kobor* (Graves) in a books of poetry entitled *Rakhali* (রাখালী) published in 1927, India and its translation by Barbara Painter and Yann Lovelock with illustrations by Hashem Khan, are considered the primary sources and all criticisms, reviews, interviews, articles etc. regarding the poems are considered secondary sources. The research will be carried out through extensive searches of materials in the library book shops, fairs, internet sources, independent analysis and scholarly arguments.

### 5. Discussion and Findings

#### 5.1. Thematic analysis of Jasimuddin's poem

Jasimuddin is the poet of eternal Bengal. Despite being a modern poet, he is not influenced by European culture rather he has focused his attention on the rural people. The unique manifestation of their personal pathos is evident in this wondrous poem 'Kobor (Graves)'. This poem encompasses heartwarming emotion i.e. love, separation, pleasure, pain, loss of heart etc. Through this poem, the poet has revealed himself as a sympathizer and a compassionate candidate. Excellent mourning has been versified with the pangs of series deaths. The old man has begun praying to the most gracious Lord together with his grandson. The expression of each of the lines bears deep sorrow with good wishes. The expression for love and compassion of the near and dear ones is going to be homogeneous as in Shelley's 'Adonais', Tennyson's 'In Memoriam', Milton's 'Lycidas' etc. Actually, the poem 'Kabar', first published in 1929 in *Rakhali* (Pastoral Poems), was as a text for the Matriculation Examination of Calcutta University while Jasim Uddin was still a student of I. A. class. Alam (1993) reminiscences the event as following-

*I was surprised when in 1929 I read Jasimuddin's poem 'Kobor' in Calcutta University's selection of Bengali texts for the Matriculation examination. A poem by a Muslim writer in the Matriculation selections! And that too under the auspices of the University of Calcutta? ... A teacher of mine told me a story about this. There was forceful opposition in [the University's] Syndicate to the inclusion of by a student. But Dr. Dinesh Sen was the number one advocate for Jasimuddin. Apparently, he countered the opposition by saying, "All right, please be patient and just listen to me recite the poem." He had a*

*passionate voice and could recite poetry well. He read the poem with such wonderful effect that the eyes of many members of the Syndicate were glistening with tears.*

The poem begins dramatically addressing to the grandson of an old farmer whose wife died 30 years ago. The old man shows him the grave under the pomegranate tree and cries out in heartrending tears. The speaker starts reminiscing his past happy conjugal life with his wife who was very childlike. She was very beautiful and married to him in her early age. Therefore, she was indulged in playthings like puppets rather than serious issues of household. Then, the old man gives an account of the daily activities which represent the common dealings of the rural farmers with their simple emotion and passion, job and profession etc. He urges the grandson to pray to the Almighty Lord so that her departed soul may rest in peace. The old farmer then bursts out into tears saying that other members of his family received unexpected deaths one after another. Thus, his life becomes loaded with unbearable pain. The old farmer now pathetically draws the concern to the graves of the father and mother of his grandson and visualizes their death scenes in very pathetic tunes. The old man recollects that while carrying the death body of his son he was dumfounded by the question of the little grandson that where they are carrying his father. The effect of pathos reaches its peak when he tearfully narrates the endless wailing of his daughter in law touching the tools used by her husband. This continuous grief leads her to the death and the speech of the dying mother before her little son makes everyone full of tears. The old man now turns his grandson's attention to the newly married granddaughter. He successfully versifies the mental tortures and verbal abuses imposed upon his granddaughter by her in-laws. This inhuman torture makes her physically feeble and leads her to the premature tragic death. Finally, the speaker diverts our thoughts towards his only daughter who was with the visage of her own mother. But she too found dead by the snake biting just at seven. The old man has only consolation, his grandson standing before him. The sun is going down into the western horizon marking the demarcation of the day, hereby, finding the same tune the old man also dreams of his own death. The poem ends with a great pathetic appeal to the Almighty so that every departed soul of far and near may rest in peace.

The story narrator- old grandfather / old farmer

Audience- grandson

Death- a total of 5 people

**Death Sequence: 1-** Grandmother > Father > Mother > Sister > Paternal Aunt  
(Considering relations with the grandson)

**Death Sequence: 2-** Wife > Son > Daughter in Law > Grand Daughter > Sister  
(Considering relationship with the grandfather / old farmer)

#### ***Causes of Deaths***

Wife/Grandmother--Not mentioned

Son/Father--Sudden Death (Possibly by Heart Attack)

Daughter in Law/Mother- Died from grief

Granddaughter /sister -- dies of fever (feeble by the tortures of in-Laws)

The paternal aunt/ daughter-- dies from snakes bite at the age of seven

## **5.2. Thematic analysis of Gray's poem**

The poem contains some of the most striking lines of English poetry. It starts with a meditative mood in a particular place upon the graves of the poor but moves to a reflection on the eternal mortality of humanity. The speaker, at first starts lamenting for the insignificant life-spans and deaths of the rural villagers but sympathizes himself with some of the benefits of being constrained by poverty. Gray's elegy focuses on the undeveloped and unacknowledged humans of the country side who are or have been marginalized from the main stream of the society. The abject poverty which keeps them underdeveloped or undeveloped like weeds beneath the tall trees is the result of unequal distribution of wealth and un-acceptance of their due rights as humans (Mushtaqur, 2012).

The poem opens with a description of the late-afternoon activities which serve as the befitting environment for moaning. The speaker selects a setting of a rural churchyard far away from the city. The time is at the twilight when the sights and sounds of this rural world of men and beasts fade away. The termination of the day is very usual with tiredness marking by the homeward weary plods of the plowmen. The poet is alone and the only disturbing things are the tinkling of the cattle, the drone of the beetle and the sound of an owl from the church tower. Thus, with these descriptions Gray masterfully creates the backdrop for his melancholic reflections. Then, the speaker tries to bring our concerns towards the common fellow underneath the humble graves beside him. He goes on just with the simple narration of their life-time activities. The deaths of these humble fellows imply the demarcations of simple pleasures of their lives: waking up to the songs of birds, sharing lives with their wives and children, and enjoying hard and productive work. Gray reflects on the death that comes after a normal life span. Now the poet critically suggests the proud fellows with harder voice that they should never mock at the simple life-span of the commoners.

*Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor* (Norton Anthology, 2012)

The poet then starts glorifying the poor fellows saying that the poor are born with natural abilities as same as the members of the upper classes but for want of adequate opportunities, they failed to flourish their latent talents. To him, their conditions and their innate powers had been frozen by “Chill Penury.” Gray implies that the innocence and beauty of these souls could have flourished in better circumstances. It seems to him that their geniuses are wasted in their isolated rural environments and he finds the resemblance of wasting the glorious gems in the deep ocean and fragrance of colorful flowers in the mid of the deserts. He moans;

*Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air’* (Norton Anthology, 2012)

Gray repines for the ill-fated commoners who are sleeping beneath the churchyard graves that someone here might have the ability to become a great scholar, a generous national leader, or a man having the sagacity of a great poet. He terms the unfortunate fellows as “mute inglorious Milton.” However, the poet consoles himself saying that poverty may have prevented them from doing not only good deeds but also sinful evils. Unlike Oliver Cromwell, death has made them “guiltless” of shedding blood, neither they will be entitled as slaughter. In that conditions, they are lucky enough not to refuse mercy, to lie, or to wallow in luxury and pride. They are always far away from the “ignoble strife” of the great world rather the village people have led “sober” and “noiseless” lives. Though the simple dead villagers have accomplished nothing important in this world, Gray declares the superiority of the commoners over the men with name and fames in these regards.

Gray, then, describes the humble graves with their badly spelled inscriptions, names, and dates as well as unpolished verses or consoling biblical texts. He defines them as ‘shapeless sculpture’ and thereby, heightens the effects of ignorance and simplicity. The eternal lesson of mortality is spread even by those humble graves. Gary wondrously versifies in the following way-

*That teach the rustic moralist to die.* (Norton Anthology, 2012)

Gray terminates the poem attaching an epitaph for his own grave. He idealizes his own body resting ‘upon the lap of Earth’ and justifies his humble nature as being generous and sincere for which he considers himself to be graced though not being with worldly ‘fortune and fame’. The epitaph ends suggesting the reader not to ask any more about his ‘merits’ and ‘frailties’ but to leave him to God, the Father.

## 6. Comparative Analysis

Both the poems lament on the crisis of human life with highly pessimistic tone finding no solution. Thomas Gray repines for death of the common mass deprived of opportunities which could have made them great whereas Jasimuddin's poem laments for the demises of the close family members one after another. Gray's setting is from 18<sup>th</sup> century rural England beside a churchyard whereas Jasimuddin is a Bangali poet who takes the setting of modern Bengal in the remote pastoral area. The tone of Jasimuddin is heart-rending but Gray's tone is more universal than personal.

Thematically, the poem '*Kobor* (Graves)' is the dramatic presentation of the life of an old man with pathetic utterance. He wanted to be happy by tapping the nail-loving nest. He tied his nipples; he got the touch of happiness. But when he got the power of lightning, he was shocked by extreme sadness in his life. His lovely wife, the right son, innocent daughter-in-law, his granddaughter and own daughter. He had the painful experiences of their deaths in front of his eyes. Just reminding him of his affection, the only grandson of the surviving family is likely to be remembered. His nest is broken, life becomes nightmare. He survived by carrying his existence in an unbearable pain. The desire for death in the night was to lose all his ideas. Gray's '*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*' is a poem of lamentation by a rural common man who is mourning sitting alone beside a pastoral churchyard. The occasion of his lamentation is the deaths of his humble villagers. To him the dead commoners were deprived of adequate chances for want of which their talents remain dormant as gems in the ocean and flowers in the desert. He consoles himself immediately saying that opportunities may corrupt them also. Thus, the commoners are very lucky to be so. In this way, Gray's theme is generalized but Jasimuddin's poem just accounts the note of personal grief. Gray surpasses personal boundary whereas Jasimuddin's poem is encircled within the limit of individuality.

Jasimuddin visualizes a minute life of a typical rural individual in very tiny canvass. The happy family life with wife, son and daughters, their natural love, relations with in-laws, simply hopeful expectation, passion, the professions of common rural fellow all are painted with very little inks. But everything is shattered into pieces by the cruel clutches of death. But still the pangs of the living one expect a blissful abode to the bosom of Lord. On the contrary, Gray does not go on with the details of individuals, nor does he minutely account the lives and livings of the village commoners. He only divides his portrayal into their deprivations and possibilities, losses and recoveries, pains and gains, lamentations and consolations from an angle which is highly generalized.

Gray in his poem first creates the background appropriate for moaning. He chooses the time just after twilight bringing stillness and undisturbed silence. His setting is a graveyard of the remote village where he is completely alone. Then, he strikes the key point with a gradual progress but Jasimuddin does not make any delay rather directly hits the main theme just at the very outset. He takes several turns which are used only to magnify the intensity of grief. Thus, Jasimuddin's poem surpasses the poem of Gray in the degree of pathetic disposition.

Like the poets of neo-classicism, Gray here plays the part of a moralizer whose purpose is didactic with a belief of 'art for life's sake'. He directly hits the power monger and strongly suggests them not to mock at the simplified life of the humble villagers. Here being a religious preacher, he further sermonizes the futility of worldly pomp and grandeurs in very scornful tunes-

*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.*

*The paths of glory lead but to the grave.* (Norton Anthology, 2012)

But unlike the poets of classicism and neo-classicism, Jasimuddin just simply pours forth the pathos of heart in a wailing tune. He, here with the belief of 'art for art's sake' never tries to erect any monument of morality. Avoiding didactic attitude, he seems to follow the footprint of the romantics.

Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' is written in the form of an elegy. An elegy is 'a poem of sorrow or mourning for death; also a reflective poem in a solemn or sorrowful mood' (Katheleen & Rausch, 2004). Actually, Gray here seems to follow an especial type of elegy known as pastoral elegy. 'An important subtype of the elegy is the pastoral elegy, which represents both the poet and the one he mourns—who is usually also a poet—as shepherds (the Latin word for shepherd is "pastor" (M.H,1999)). H M Abrahm suggests some more elements for a successful pastoral elegy which includes invocation to the muses, all nature joining to the shepherd's death, a procession of appropriate mourner, raising questions about the justice of fate and a closing consolation. We find that gray's poem fulfils almost all the criteria except the invocation which he misses at the very outset. Thus, 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' becomes one of the best specimens of pastoral elegy in English tradition. Whereas, Jasimuddin's poem begins dramatically following the tradition of a dramatic monologue and it is 'a poem in which there is one imaginary speaker addressing an imaginary audience' (Cuddon, 1998). The listener or listeners remain silent throughout the poem but we can infer the presence of the listener just by addressing speech of the speaker. The speaker speaks in a critical situation by which the personality of the character becomes evident. In the poem 'Kobor', the speaker is an old farmer who is speaking before his grandson. The grandson maintains silence but the random appealing of the old man to his grandson makes the poem lively and conversational. The speaker is at the verge of life. He lost almost all the family members except the grandson before whom he is recollecting their past. Thus, the situation is very critical but the speech concerns more on personal grief than the character analysis of a dramatic monologue. Thus, the poem becomes one of the finest examples of an elegy in world literature.

Finally, in Gray's poem it would not be wrong to define the poet himself as the speaker of the poem but in Jasimuddin's poem 'Kobor' the poet is not the speaker rather he creates an old man who speaks before his grandson in a dramatic situation.

Linguistically, the mournful poem 'Kobor (Graves)' by Jasimuddin has been presented through the sad memories, appropriate words, analogy, and incomparable painting of an old man in the inevitable reality of life and death. The speaker, here in the background of happiness and sorrow, unveils the painful heart of losing near and dear ones standing at the last boundary of his life. In each of the lines of the poem, the picture of the death of the loved ones is heart-bleeding. Poet has expressed this emotion with a very lively language in a befitting manner. As the passage has become alive through a suitable vocabulary and incomparable painting, it has also become a figure through words, parables and imagery. The simplicity of the versification has been unique in the poem. The sound word is chosen in every way. The best combination of linguistics has been adjusted. There is a wonderful combination of sound, analogy and infinitely beautiful imagery. Thus, the poem "Kobor" follows the tradition which we find in the poems of English romantics like Keats, Wordsworth and Shelley etc. The poem is highly lyrical in quality and this lyrical lilt is produced by soft sounding lucid words, rhyme and rhythm together. It is in a form of narrative. It narrates a pathetic story of an old man. The poem consists of 118 lines divided in several irregular stanza patterns. The rhyme scheme of the original poem seems to be somewhat like English tradition of heroic couplet rhyming together at the end i.e. aa, bb, cc, dd, ee ff gg.

Whereas, 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' comprises 128 lines cast in regular four-line stanzas which is termed as quatrains. The last three stanzas are separately entitled as 'THE EPITAPH' and italicized. Here the first line rhymes with the third, the second with the fourth that means the rhyme scheme here is 'abab' suggesting an appropriate stately pace suiting best to the elegiac poetry. The poem mostly follows iambic pentameter but in a rough manner of loose type. Again, exceptions are also brought here very frequently. The stresses are heavy and rhymes are also haphazard. The diction though somewhat is lucid but there are also random uses of breath-taking bombastic words. Thus, Thomas Gary can be identified here as the mix-product of both romantic and neoclassical mode.

The iambic pentameter of the poem is largely appropriate to its themes. Yet the numerous instances of counterpoint and substitution of equivalent meters of trochee, spondee and pyrrhic

signify a celebration and a relief from any ambience of mourning that might otherwise be imposed by a strict, unvarying iambic pentameter. This deviation counteracts the gloom, and also supports all the other meanings of the poem (Bassey, (2013).

## 7. Conclusion

The study may come to an end saying that both the poems ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ and ‘Kobor’ successfully deal with the common theme of lamentation. While Gray laments for the insignificant deaths of the rural commoners, Jasimuddin dramatizes the unbearable pains of separations of a rural older. Gray repines for their latent talents which did not find due opportunities to be bloomed. He consoles himself thinking that they are blessed by their ill-fates which also prevent them from committing murderous crimes whereas, Jasimuddin only issues forth the heart-rending grief caused by the unavoidable law of human mortality from very personal perspective. Jasimuddin’s common theme, sonorous rhyme-rhythm, simple imagery and lucid dictions uphold him to the level of the pure romantics. On the contrary, Gray here becomes a stern neo-classical agent in his didactic purpose, utilitarian attitude, unnatural rhymes, powerful imagery and breath taking dictions etc.

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