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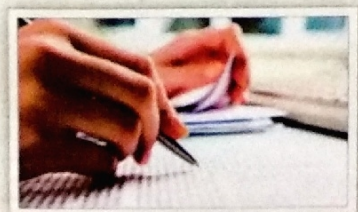
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प्रस्तुत अंकात डॉ. चंद्रहास सोनपेठकर यांच्या संस्कृत काव्यरचनेवरील लेख समाविष्ट असल्याने त्यांनी प्रस्तुत अंकासाठी मुख्य संपादक पदाची जबाबदारी घेतली नाही. म्हणून संपादकीय दायित्व डॉ. अतुल झरकर यांनी सांभाळले आहे. अॅड. शैलेश कागदे, संचालक



## 1. TAGORE AND THE ROMANTIC BELIEFS

**Dr. Vinay Bhogle**

Asst. Prof in English

Degloor College, Degloor

[vinaybhogle2@gmail.com](mailto:vinaybhogle2@gmail.com)

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Whenever the word 'Romanticism' has to be used with any precision it has to be qualified because few words in criticism have led to such persistent controversy. The necessary of hazarding one's own definition, despite the impatience one feels, while doing so, is best illustrated in the remark of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch: "All things considered, I advise that it may help our minds to earn our honest living if we discuss the terms 'classic' and 'romantic' out of our vocabulary for a while".

The word 'Romanticism' emerged from the spontaneous identification of the movement with its most noticeable formal feature, and thereby became its first definition. That the cultural florescence in Bengal during the nineteenth century was a direct consequence of Western education is universally acknowledge and so also is the fact that of all its golden harvest Rabindranath was the finest fruit. There can be many reasons for this, first, there is the overwhelming quality of his genius; he created single handed a new idiom not only in all the forms of literature but also in the music and education of his race.

In the early decades of the twentieth century all Indian savants proclaimed with genuine conviction that although the West was materially their superior at the time, spiritually it had to learn from the East. During the period when Rabindranath was being internationally glorified, he spoke as a seer-poet from the East offering the enlightenment of an ancient civilization to the West humbled by the spiritual debacle of the First World War. The contribution of Rabindranath Tagore is phenomenal in many cultural spheres, his most important role may still be the formulation of a comprehensive and consistent *weltan-schauung* for the new educated Indian. He was born into a home where formalised rituals which originated thousands of years ago were still diligently practised, and he was taught in school, mainly through the medium of a foreign language, the ideals of an industrial civilization. To make such a twain meet calls for the highest intellectual and

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artistic resources. In fact, English education had modified the attitude of his generation in every aspect of life, and their outlook needed crystallization to form new collective ideals. It was this new orientation in Indian culture, which Rabindranath affected and consolidated through an unparalleled variety of artistic media. For a study of this kind the talent of a writer is relevant to the extent it leads to an authentic representation of a collective viewpoint. The subject of this present research article, therefore, by juxtaposing Rabindranath's viewpoint on a subject with the traditional approach to it, and to whatever extent possible supported with the reasons which made the transition from the one to the other imperative. In the Romanticist's pursuit of the strange, the exotic, and the ideal, the common denominator is the avoidance of the matter of fact and the conventional.

In the field of literature the most notable feature was the gradual transformation of taste from the extreme formalism of Bengali poetry at the end of the eighteenth century to a fairly orthodox romanticism by the middle of the nineteenth. This was not, however, a slavish imitation of the English revival but was the natural outcome of the vigorous aspirations of a nascent sensibility born out of the sudden collapse of old traditions. In such a situation some form of Romanticism was inevitable; the accessibility of the English example only made it the most convenient example to follow. The Tagores of the later half of the nineteenth century could serve as a measure of the Bengali renaissance in all its manifestations in literature, drama, music, and manners. The Tagores were the Florentines of Bengal, who had imbibed the spirit of a new learning which blossomed in full glory in the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. In such an environment it is difficult to isolate any distinct threads of European influence. The family was devoted to the cultivation of Bengali literature but the subjects of their literary discussions were usually Shakespeare, Moliere, Goethe and Browning. In this atmosphere, highly charged with new concepts, Rabindranath was born that nearly dates the beginning of modern Bengali literature. In his *Reminiscences* Rabindranath narrates the evolution of his sensibility in relation to this environment. His first literary memories are a folk-poem with the image of a flooded river and the readings from the *Kritibas Ramayana*. His study of the English language started almost along with that of Bengali. His study of English literature, although sporadic, was extensive. There is little of



importance in English literature which he did not read at some time or other. Most of his biographers maintain that he was very well read in Shakespeare. The one Romantic poet who overwhelmed Rabindranath was Shelley, whom he seems to have read extensively. He was particularly fond of *Epipsychidion* from he often quoted, and he translated sixty-one lines from it into Bengali. The translations published in *Sharps and Flats* include a rendering of the *Stanzas Written in Dejection*. He also translated *Love's Philosophy* and *The Wanderers*. Among the lesser Romantics Moore interested him the most. Therefore, the translations of Moore appearing in the *Bharati* of 1784 Magh are considered to be by Rabindranath. Of the later nineteenth-century poets he used superlative terms of admiration for Robert Buchanan. He translated pieces from Christiana Rossetti, Mrs. Browning, Swinburne, Edwin and Matthew Arnold. Tennyson comes in for serious study, particularly his philosophic poems like *In Memoriam*. *De Profundis* is analysed in a separate essay in the *Bharati*.

There were a host of lesser poets now forgotten, like Myers, Webster, Hood, and Marston, whose verses were gleaned by him for the readers of *Bharati*.

The wider reading public discovered Rabindranath after the award of the Nobel Prize, during the *Gitanjali* and *Gitamalaya* phase of his writing. The deep humanity and the biblical simplicity of their diction made them the voice of an Eastern holy man evoking the spiritual resurrection of a war-torn world. It is with considerable mental effort that one travels back along the path which one had followed from the opposite end when, about a century earlier, we were at the receiving end of a similar message from the West. The mind of the entire Indian intelligentsia had turned a complete half circle. It was more like a grafted branch of an old tree, which yields a new flower without other visible change in the tree. The awareness of this basic intellectual problem of the renaissance is evident even in his adolescent writings. The soundness of his judgement in selecting the right elements from the two contending cultures and welding them into a pattern at once modern and Indian, has been a significant aspect of his greatness.

The writings of Rabindranath which appeared in the *Bharati* in 1881 are of immense importance to any study of the formation of his outlook. During this year produced his first musical drama, wrote his first complete novel, and made his first public speech. Three-fourths of the *Bharati* of the year was filled with his writings. These



contained his views on a wide range of subjects and we see the emergence of a coherent *weltanschuuang*, which seemed deeply influenced by the West in all its aspects. In the Jaeisth issue appears 'The True Spouse' expounding his concept of love, which directly draws on English poetry with extensive extracts from Shelley, Arnold, Rossetti and O'Shaughnessy. The views, expressed when Rabindranath was at the threshold of his creative career, have a serious earing on his outlook. We can locate in the pages of these *Bharatis* the embryo of each important concept of his maturity. Despite the overstatement and imbalance natural to juvenile opinions their relevance to the formulation of his final outlook cannot be questioned.

Rabindranath introduced into Bengali the modern commentative criticism, which more or less exclusively drew on the personal response of the critic, and which can be defined in the words of Coomarswamy as 'realistic and hedonistic, and perhaps for the first time illustrative, personal and sentimental'. The critical canons that guided Rabindranath are that in good literature imagination plays the most significant role; that its imaginative effectiveness is more important than its realism or formal perfection; that excellence in literature is better described in terms of 'beauty' and 'truth' than in terms of the equally esoteric *rasas*. The romantic antecedents of this critical outlook are easily recognisable. Rabindranath will remain, despite the contemporary recession of literary taste away from it, a youthful adventure of the human spirit because it has always demanded some emotional significance from life. According to it, experience was valid to the extent that it retained its impact on the sensibility. It, therefore, rebelled against everything that tended to make life a dead routine of habit whether it concerned religion, society or at. Romanticism was heralded into England with the solemn vow to impart 'the charm of novelty to the things of everyday'. The quest of Shelley, the most quixotic of its knight-errants, was to 'strip the veil of familiarity and lay bare the veiled and sleepless beauty which is the spirit of forms.' Different poetic means were used to achieve this end, varying according to the aptitude of the exponent concerned. Coleridge used supernaturalism; Wordsworth, his intense naturalism; Shelley, his platonic idealism; Keats, his paganism; to elevate everyday experience above the commonplace and the humdrum. The prime consideration in each case was to keep 'their soul un-subdued by habit, unshackled by custom', so that it could contemplate 'all things with the freshness



and wonder of a child'. At the end of the century, even a classicist like Arnold said about the Restorations poets. 'Their poetry is conceived in their wits, whereas all genuine poetry is composed and conceived in the soul'.

The criterion of judgement is implicit throughout Rabindranath's writings on literature. One of his earliest critical essays deals with the subject at length. In the Subjective and Objective poet, he explains that poetry is the vehicle of feeling (bhava) and prose that of logic (yukti). Prose is the language of argument, its aim is to convince us: Poetry that of suggestion. 'Conviction rests in the head, inspiration in the heart', hence the difference between the means used by the logician and the orator to attain the same end.

The same theme treated with logic and wit produces one kind of poetry, and when described with feeling, quite another; the former is prosaic and inferior verse, the latter genuine poetry. Thus a touching subject like tears produces entirely different effects under two different poetic treatments. He quotes:

**Tears, idle tears:**

**I knew not, what they mean**

**O, Death in life, the days that are no more.**

This according to Rabindranath was an example of subjective, and therefore genuine, poetry, and in contrast to it he quoted Bengali extract, which in translation would read somewhat as follows:

When this steeled heart did melt

And flow through the eyes in a myriad stream

Did it fail to show even then

The fiery hell which my heart endures?

The effect of good poetry is to transport one beyond the merely factual, 'subjective poetry is nothing but poetry that carries us beyond the senses (*atindriya*)', that is how it acted as the elixir that restored the life of the mind, deadened by its daily commerce with the commonplace.

In his maturity Rabindranath expressed the same view with the aid of a simile when he said:

**Our mind has in it both the man, the wanderer and the lover of experience and adventure, and the woman, the stay-at-home, enclosed by the walls of custom and**



**belief, inseparably bound to each other. The one is the bird of forest and the other of the cage. It is the bird of the forest in us who usually sings.**

The first thing that strikes the modern reader of old Bengali love poetry is the implicit acceptance of the corporal aspect of love in contrast to the romantic infatuation which was almost abstract. The poet admired, often with aid of exuberant imagery, the physical charms of the beloved. Rabindranath, who had been deeply affected by Vaisnav verse in his youth and retained a life-long admiration for it, also realised the need to break new ground. He declared his position on this subject in *Why the Bengali is not a poet?* which can be treated as a manifesto of his literary outlook.

The defeat of emotion inherent in love, which Rabindranath describes here was something that all Romanticists had to face because they all set out in search of a holy spirit, the image of a fated companion. Even Byron, the most earthly of lovers amongst the English romanticists, yearned for an ideal woman he never found. The large numbers of Rabindranath's love poems are addressed to imaginary personifications. Most of the love poems in *Chitra* follow this romantic apparition and it is no wonder that so much expense of spirit on unreal objects of love leaves him frustrated at the core.

The subject of this work has been presented, therefore, by juxtaposing Rabindranath's viewpoint on a subject with the traditional approach to it, and to whatever extent possible supported with the reasons which made the transition from the one to the other imperative.

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