

TAGORE'S POETRY AND SONGS : AN APPROACH THROUGH SRI AUROBINDO

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Sri Aurobindo began writing the *Future Poetry* in 1917 at the end of his great prose series, *The Life Divine*, *Essays on the Gita*, the *Human Cycle* and the *Synthesis of Yoga*, as if to offer his final statement of knowledge. Sisirkurnar Ghose rightly observes : "Sri Aurobindo, places poetry, fairly and firmly, at the centre of human knowledge and activities, as the leader of our inner progress, the divine *Agni*, the sacred fire in our creative evolution". (SKG:51:1969). Ghose was certainly thinking of Sri Aurobindo's own words from *The Future Poetry*, where he was focusing again and again on Tagore as a pioneer of a new poetry. Sri Aurobindo writes :

Poetry and art most of all our powers can help to bring this truth home to the mind of man with an illumining and catholic force, for while philosophy may lose itself in abstractions and religion turn to an intolerant otherworldliness and asceticism, poetry and art are born mediators between the material and the concrete, the spirit and life (F P 1994:199)

The passage is something like an introduction to Tagore's achievement as a poet-singer, who seems to have been quite deliberate in reviving the upanishadic spirit of poetry in his newly created Bengali language.

By 1917, Sri Aurobindo had known the Bengali language sufficiently enough to go deep into the texture of Tagore's poetry and songs. Although Sri Aurobindo rated *Gitanjali* as a masterpiece in a letter written to K.D.Sethna on the 11th of July, 1931, his eyes and ears were on the original Bengali songs and lyrics.

Sri Aurobindo was talking of the new possibilities in the English poetry, which poets like Whitman, Carpenter, A.E. and Yeats had opened up. The inclusion of a Bengali poet in that cluster, repeated focus on him and highlights on his exact achievement, show he was taking Tagore very seriously as a modern *mantric* poet. While talking of the return of the *rishi*, the *Kavi*, Sri Aurobindo uses the compound word "poet-singer" too frequently, which is a significant clue to the fact that he is drawing our attention to the musical atmosphere of *mantric* poetry.

I shall just cite one passage on Tagore to explain what Sri Aurobindo has exactly found in his songs and poetry.

The poetry of Tagore owes its sudden and universal success to this advantage that he gives us more of this discovery and fusion for which the mind of our age is in quest than any other creative writer of the time. His work is a constant overpassing of the borders, a chant-filled realm in which

the subtle sounds and lights of the truth of the spirit give new meanings to the finer subtleties of life (SABCL 9:1972:229).

By “chant-filled realm”, Sri Aurobindo is meaning the incantatory musical world of Tagore. By the word ‘discovery’, he means Tagore’s ability to discover the *Word*, that rhythmic speech, which rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the Truth. However, the word ‘fusion’ is curious. Most probably Sri Aurobindo is meaning here Tagore’s absolute mastery of fusing words with music, which come to him as an automatic fusion, as incantatory music, which goes beyond all analysis. Even in transcreations at times, the rhythmic speech is transferred to the English language.

That gleaming look from the dark came upon me like a breeze that sends a shiver through the rippling water and sweeps away to the shadowy shore (Das 1994:94).

or

A flutter of a flitting touch brushed me and vanished in a moment like a torn flower petal blown in the breeze (Das: 1994:95).

Sisir Kumar Das has spoken adversely against the translations in the *Gardener* (Das: 1994-24). But these two instances from the *Gardener* catch something of the Infinite in miracled moments of discovery. The poet discovers a secret vibration in his soul and we cannot really analyse it with the intellect. If Sri Aurobindo selects Whitman and Carpenter for their vast rhythmic sweep of large-heartedness, he finds in Tagore another variety in the elements of sweetness of the All-Beautiful manifested on earth. The mystic soul of Tagore finds its echo everywhere before his eyes, the far-away stars of his beloved “Thou”, the joyful rivulet dancing down the hills through the plains, the smell of flowers, the glowworm in bushes, the boatman ferrying him across the river, the flock of birds moving across the infinite azure and so many things before our eyes which had made Emerson record that wonderful apophthegm in “The American Scholar”: “This shadow of the soul or Other me”. The sudden outburst of enthusiasm around Tagore’s poetry and songs in the millennium indicates man’s secret yearning for a poetry that had sought to refine human consciousness in the past.

Works Cited

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