

TAGORE'S TREATMENT OF NATURE

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Abstract:

Rabindranath Tagore has always been a great lover of Nature. His love of Nature differs from that of the other poets not in kind but in degree. **Complete identification with Nature and self – effacement** in the presence of Nature are the distinctive qualities of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry. Tagore feels that he is one with nature in the beginning of creation. The joy and wonder of that unity with Nature still is seen in abundance in his treatment of Nature in his poetry. He has mentioned this in some of his works also. Thus, we find that Tagore regards the nature as a primal store house of life, out of which humanity has evolved through countless ages and births. He feels sad at the thought that his human birth has cut him off from the vaster life of nature. He wants to merge himself again into this universal life. The poet longs to return to this pre- human cosmic existence to which he belongs. It is because of this closeness with nature he feels joy in the beauty of nature. This is the reason that makes Tagore's treatment of Nature more beautiful, joyful and graceful.

Keywords: complete identification, self effacement etc

As a poet of Nature, Rabindranath Tagore has often been compared with Shelley. There are indeed some affinities between these two poets. The dynamic and horrifying aspects of Nature are specially praised by P. B. Shelley. Shelley develops his dynamism in full dimensions without any restraint. The result is that he gives rise to an abstract idealism, which refuses to recognize the limitations of real life. This is not the position of Rabindranath Tagore. Shelley places the "ideal" before the "real". But Tagore has a full view of the "real" without losing sight of the "ideal". Despite his idealism, and imaginative flights, Tagore's descriptions of Nature are realistic. His pictures reveal a close and detailed observation of Nature and in this respect, he has greater affinity with Keats and Tennyson than with Shelley.

In the poetry of Tagore, there is an abundance of word – pictures of the quiet and the gentle side of Nature. Splendid pen – pictures of Nature in all her splendor and glory are scattered all

over his poetry. The subject matter is trivial but it is transfigured by his poetic imagination. Here, we quote one such piece of description of Nature from "The Gardener".

"Over the green and yellow rice fields sweep the shadows of the autumn clouds followed by the swift chasing sun.

The bees forget to sip their honey; drunken with light they foolishly hover and hum.
The ducks in the islands of the river clamor in joy for mere nothing
Let none go back home, brothers, this morning let none go to work.
Let us take the blue sky by storm and plunder space as we run.
Laughter floats in the air like foam on the flood.
Brothers, let us squander our morning in futile joys".

In this context, we remember that Tagore is not only a poet of the softer side of Nature but also a poet of the harsher side of it. He is conscious of all that is harsh, ugly and cruel in Nature. Picturesque descriptions of Nature in her terrible mood abound in the poetry of Tagore. "Barsha Shesh" (1898) translated into English as the "New Year" and "Sea- Waves" in "Manasi" (Translated by Edward Thompson) are regarded by Edward Thompson and other competent critics as the greatest land storm and the greatest sea storm ever depicted by any poet.

Here is Tagore's description of a terrible land storm.

"Like fruit, shaken free by an impatient wind from the veils of its mother flower,
thou comest, New Year, whirling in a frantic dance amid the stamped de of the wind
– lashed clouds and infuriate showers,
While trampled by thy turbulence are scattered away the faded and the frail
In an eddying agony of death.
Thou art no dreamer afloat on a langurus breeze lingering among the hesitant whisper
and hum of an uncertain season.
Thine is a majestic march, O terrible stranger, thundering forth an ominous incantation,
Driving the days onto the perils of a pathless dark,
Where thou carriest a dumb signal in thy banner,
A decree of destiny undeciphered."

Thus, we find that Tagore has described Nature in all her different aspects. His treatment of Nature is both realistic and comprehensive. The rare combination of the musical and pictorial qualities is another great characteristic of his poetry of Nature. Tagore's love of nature is a fundamental characteristic of his works in the Pre - Gitanjali period.

Another distinguishing feature of Tagore's treatment of Nature is that Nature and Human life are closely inter linked in his works. Tagore portrays humanity as the background of Nature. In Tagore's thematic plan, Nature is an essential part of human life. Like all mystics, Tagore is a firm believer in the essential unity of man and the external universe. As Tagore once writes in "Sadhana", "It is the very characteristic of Life that it is not complete within itself, it must come out". Meditation on Nature or an aspect of Nature leads to the realization of God according to Tagore. He is a mystic for whom all Nature is suffused with the presence of the Divine.

The greatest romantic poets William Wordsworth, John Keats, P. B. Shelley, etc., worship the spirit of Nature. But Tagore differs from these romantic poets in this fact that he worships and loves Nature as a whole both the spirit and the matter. For Tagore, Nature is a vast store house of images, similes and metaphors and he is constantly drawing upon her to illustrate his mystical concepts.

There is a suprising wealth and abundance of Nature imagery in "The Gitanjali" alone. Tagore's works especially "The Gitanjali" has such a universal appeal because of its open air atmosphere and its affinity with the fundamental things of Life.

Tagore's philosophy of life is expressed through a number of symbols drawn from the commonplace objects of Nature such as flowers and fruits, rivers and ferries, clouds and rains, the sky and its stars, boatmen and beggars, travelers on the road and shepherds with their flutes. His Nature Imagery is visual, graphic and pictorial. In this respect, as a poet, Tagore remains unsurpassed and unmatched. The lines from "The Gitanjali":

"One day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my wind was straying and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded. Only now and again a sadness fell upon me and I started up from my dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the South wind. The vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to me that it was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion. I knew not then that it was so near, that it was mine and that this perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart."

In this poem, Tagore conveys to his readers the mystic truth that God lives in our own hearts. The poet seeks to convey this through the use of vivid and graphic images taken from the world of Nature such as the Lotus, the musk deer, and the empty flower basket, etc.,. The Lotus is nothing but the seat of the Divine and the empty basket represents the poet's heart and the musk deer symbolizes the poet's quest for the Divine. Again, the last, but not the least of the lyrics of "The Gitanjali", the poet conveys a sense of his final and absolute surrender through a number of graphic images of Nature.

“In one salutation, to thee my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet. Like a rain cloud of July, hung low with its burden of unshed showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day, back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation thee.”

Through the use of the images of Nature, such as the rain cloud which is ready to shower, the diverse streams flowing into a single current and also the flock of home sick rains flying to their mountain nests, the poet rightly brings home to his readers his total offering of himself and of all that he has, at the feet of the Supreme.

In this way, this lyric serves as a fitting conclusion to the poet's “Song – Offering”. For Tagore, the meaning of life lies in a universal inter – relatedness and he has not merely shown the secret affinity between one object in nature and another, but looked upon the commonest physical things as symbols of man's passions, longings and ideals.

“The Post Office”, which is regarded as the most profound symbolic play of Tagore is successful because the naturalistic level is maintained throughout. The beauty and charm of this play depends upon the sweet description of the beauty of Nature contained in it. There is a conversation between Amal and Madhav which gives us a hint that the call from the beyond is an invitation to the feast spread by Nature.

The conversation is as follows:

Amal: See that far away hill from our window. I often long to go beyond those hills and right away. Madhav: Oh, you silly ! As if there's nothing more to be done but just get up to the top of that hill and away ! Eh ! You don't talk sense, my boy. Now listen, since that hill stands there upright, as a barrier, it means you can't get beyond it. Else, what was the use in heaping up so many large stones to make such a big affair of it, eh!

Amal: Uncle, do you think it is meant to prevent us crossing over? It seems to me because the earth can't speak it raises its hands into the sky and beckons. And those who live far off and sit alone by their windows can see the signal. But, I suppose the learned people. . . .

This conversation clearly shows that people like Madhav who are guided by prosaic values can never understand the language of Nature. But, Amal, who is possessed of an intense imagination coupled with an intense love of the concrete reality feels that the hills are the raised hands of the earth inviting human beings to go beyond them. In Amal's longing for the far –

off regions is symbolized, our poet's quest for "the beyond" which is reflected in most of Tagore's works. Amal's love for Nature is illustrated in "The Post Office" in many passages.

Why is Tagore's love for such a trivial objects of Nature? Why is his limitless hunger to steal the everlasting treasure of Nature's store house? Before giving answers we see the Poet with great wonder who goes on saying:

"For I am like a child that calls its mother an hundred times, glad that it can say "Mother" (Fruit Gathering). Even in the very first poem of his "Fruit Gathering", the poet is eager to set sail on the river. He offers his fruits in full baskets to his Master. See, how beautifully Tagore makes use of the Nature Imagery to make his idea clear to his readers in the following lines.

"Bid me and I shall gather my fruits to bring them in full baskets into your courtyard, though some are lost and some not ripe. For the season grows heavy with its fullness and there is a plaintive shepherd's pipe in the shade.

Bid me and I shall set sail on the river.

The March wind is fretful, fretting the languid waves into murmurs.

The garden has yielded it's all and in the weary hour of evening the call comes from your house on the shore in the sunset".

Tagore's originality lies in the images of Nature which he uses drawn from the common objects of Nature. His nature imagery is highly expressive, suggestive and original. Tagore discovers a deep human significance in the objects and phenomena of nature. This deep sense of affinity with nature imparts a peculiar breadth and largeness to his poetry. Because of this, essential oneness of Man and Nature, Tagore believes in the moral influence of Nature. Tagore is a practical idealist or a romantic realist in his vision of Nature. .

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