

Research Paper—English



March, 2010

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO



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The two heroes of the modern scene stayed close without knowing each other. Both were writing poetry from their childhood ; both were bent on creating language ; both were under the spell of the romantic poets who had just preceded them. Educated on an alien soil, Sri Aurobindo was back in India in 1893, in the crucial moments of resurgence. Tagore was then about to take up the mantle of the “Culture Hero” from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Tagore was born in Calcutta, eleven years before Sri Aurobindo’s birth, in 1861, when the nation was waking up in the heat of New Thinking. He was known more as a poet than as a nationalist, although he was by then directly involved in Svadeshi. Sri Aurobindo was simply known then as an ‘extremist’ with an outstanding command over the English language. For practical reasons one suspects, Sri Aurobindo wished to leave the “final verdict” in the hands of the future. Tagore was his contemporary, a Bengali poet, immensely popular, and his school was also popular.

Today much of the poetry of Tagore is the sign of such a Sadhana, a long inheritance of an assured spiritual discovery and experience. Sri Aurobindo was bound to curb his usual straight forwardness. And yet on another day, at another time, he spoke boldly in defence of Tagore’s English Gitanjali : “Tagore’s Gitanjali is not in Verse, but the place it has taken has some significance. For, the obstacles from the other side are that the English mind is apt to look on poetry by an Indian as a curiosity, something exotic whether it really is or not, the suggestion will be there, and to stress the distance at which the English temperament stands from the Indian temperament. But Tagore’s

Gitanjali is most Un-English, yet it overcome this obstacle.” In Vedic Sanskrit, the word Kavi meant the person who simply saw the inspired word and song. Rhythm or music used to be born out of the inmost being of the poet or from the higher sources of inspiration. Vision is the keyword in Sri Aurobindo’s theory of mantric poetry, vision was the essential gift in the ancient seer poets of India. The prophet intellectualises ; the true poet sees straight the living face of Truth. The inspired word comes, as said of the old Vedic seers, from the home of Truth, Sadanad Rtasya, the high and native level of a superior self which holds the light of a reality and is hidden by the lesser truth of the normal scene and intelligence. It is rare, however, that it comes direct and unaltered, ready embodied and perfect and absolute.....”

Tagore was the first Bengali poet to revive the true spirit of poetry with a deliberate memory of the Upanishads : he was a spontaneous singer. It is this element in him that instantly relates him to the sanskrit poets of the past. Sri Aurobindo words shed illuminating light on his poetic or musical achievement. A balanced harmony maintained by a system of subtle recurrences is the foundation of immortality in created things, and material movement is simply creative sound grown conscious of this secret of its own powers.” Like Sri Aurobindo, Tagore wishes to see life as a whole. They are infinitely optimistic because of their steady faith in the Divine. They know that the change of the individual is a condition for the change of the earth-consciousness. Both have a strong aspiration for Beauty. Nolini Kanta Gupta believes that central motive in Tagore’s poetry is an aspiration for

Beauty. The creation of beauty is the inner law of his nature, his Svadharma. The inner Tagore has appeared from the land of Beauty “Knowledge and power have occupied a lower place in his consciousness,” Says Nolini Kanta Gupta, they have remained there as the obedient servant of Beauty”. This sense of beauty is the basic concept of love, truth and goodness.

Beauty is also a guiding force in Sri Aurobindo life and works. There is the some equation of Beauty and love that we see in Tagore. Sri Aurobindo has harmonised with them the element of knowledge and power, austerity and the discipline of yoga. The following lines from Sri Aurobindo will speak of the combined effect of love, knowledge and beauty. “Our hidden centres of celestial force open like flowers to a heavenly atmosphere ‘ Mind pauses thrilled with the supernal Ray, And even the transient body then can feel Ideal love and flawless happiness and laughter of the hearts sweetness and delight freed from the rude and tragic hold of time, And beauty and the rhythmic feet of the hours.” Tagore has his own sweet ways to describe things of beauty as follows :- “I filled my tray whatever I had, and gave it to you, what shall I bring to your feet tomorrow, I wonder I am like the tree. that, at the end of flowering summer, gazes at the sky with its lifted branches bare of their blossoms.” Tagore and Sri Aurobindo on Modern poetry seem to have suspected the terms “Modern” “Modernism” and “Modernity”. Both of them expressed their views in the 1930s, when post - modernistic qualities were already creeping into the world of poetry and putting a kind of pressure on them. For Tagore, any twist or turn in literature is modern. He recollects that th pre-Romantics and the Romantics like Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge and Byron were known as modern poets in his boyhood.

An individual’s measure of delight was, in those days, the sign of modernism. Wordsworth expressed in his own style the spirit of delight that he had realized in Nature. Shelley’s was a Platonic contemplation to which he had added a spirit of revolt against every kind of obstacle, political, religious or otherwise. Keats’ poetry was wrought out of the meditation and creation of beauty. In that age, the stream of poetry took a turn from outwardness to the inwardness. Both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo were aware of the quality of restraint and economy in the poetry of the post-1920s.

Sri Aurobindo’s opinion virtually supports the views of Tagore expressed in his *Modern Poetry*. Just a year before the publication of Tagore’s essay, Sri Aurobindo had observed and cautioned in a letter : I admit I have not read as much of “modern” (contemporary) poetry as I should have - but the little I have is mostly of the same fundamental quality. It is very carefully written and versified, often recherche in thought and expression ; it lacks only two things, the inspired phrase and inevitable word and the rhythm that keeps a poem forever alive. Speech carefully studied and made as perfect as it can be without reaching to inspiration, verse as good as verse can be without rising to inspired rhythm - there seem to be an extraordinary number of poets writing like this in England now It is not the irregular verses or rhymes that matter, one can make perfection out of irregularity - it is that they write their poetry from the cultured striving mind, not from the elemental soul-power within. Not a principle to accept or a method to imitate! Tagore’s tone is different from Sri Aurobindo’s. As the makers of modern Indian tradition, the two culture heroes seem to have been quick to feel the limitations of modern poetry. Tagore was more sarcastic.

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