



CONCEPT OF NATURE IN SRI AUROBINDO'S AND SAROJINI NAIDU'S POETRY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between man and nature has been an intimate one ever since the beginning of life. In the primitive age, his aesthetic pleasures and physical needs were gratified by nature. In this paper the researcher has tried to depict the theme of nature by comparing the Sri Aurobindo's and Sarojini's Naidu's poems, endeavored to reflect as to how nature in its human context, and man in his natural context are integrated into a simple unity in these two great writers poems. Sri Aurobindo's realization of the Infinite makes him a mystic. His philosophy involves three main factors: Evolution, Yoga and the nature of Reality. Indian philosophy conceives the highest reality as Atman or the Self. Sri Aurobindo looks at the whole world from the stand point of the highest consciousness. The scenery of nature is used only to illumine their inner world, and they seem to be emanating out of their own native tradition. Sarojini Naidu unlike Sri Aurobindo show any constituent view of the world in which the role of man and nature in the cosmic scheme may be defined. Their poetry is based on a philosophy, which presents God, Man and Nature in their integral relationships. Sarojini Naidu's conception of nature lacks philosophical foundation but her poems reveal a spontaneous understanding of the Indian point of view. Sri Aurobindo appeared to be influenced by the Western Romanticism, but the stress in their poetry was always on the resonance of their souls. Of all the Indian English poets, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo were beautifully recaptured the autochthonous response to natural environment.

Introduction

The poetry in the initial period was inevitably incompetent in nature. Most nature poetry, by the use of words descriptive of plants, animals, oceans, mountains, deserts, woods, and all the other endlessly varied features of our surroundings, really deals with love, patriotism, religion, and what-not, expressed in such a way as to appeal to the emotions. Indian poetry in English articulates the complexity of Indian experience. It exhibits its regional consciousness and international affiliations.

Nature never expresses itself in its complete form. It has surprised every thinker,

philosopher and even layman with its varying shades. In nutshell, one can say that Nature has concealed many secrets within its heart. Man like nature also conceals many hidden secrets. The term 'mysticism,' comes from the Greek $\mu\upsilon\omega$, meaning "to conceal." India is a land of mystics. In India God is seen in numerous forms but in America, Christianity has influenced the majority. The objective of this paper is to compare mysticism in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Emily Dickinson and Thomas Merton and to show how their significant works were inspired by the spiritual revelation and struggles.

In the classical Indian poetry nature was treated as a background, and never an automatic force by itself. Poets like Henry Derozio, Kashi Prasad Ghosh and others could just become derivative romantics. It was for the first time, in the poetry of Toru Dutt and Manmohan Ghosh that the genuine native tone could be heard. Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo appeared to be influenced by the Western Romanticism, but the stress in their poetry was always on the resonance of their souls.

Sri Aurobindo / Aurobindo Ghose alias Aurobindo Ghosh was an Indian nationalist, philosopher, yogi, guru, and poet. He was imprisoned by the British for writing articles against British rule in India. During his stay in the jail, he had mystical and spiritual experiences, after which he moved to Pondicherry, leaving politics for spiritual work. In the book *Indian Literature in English: Critical Views*, Satish Burbuddhe has observed that the central theme of all the chief works including the short lyrics of Sri Aurobindo is mysticism which is richly influenced by our great Vedas and Upnishads, Vedantas and Puranas. Similarly, Dr. T. Suneeti in her paper, "Reflections on the Mysticism and Philosophy in Sri Aurobindo's Poems" has found the elements of mysticism in his poems *Baji Prabhou*, *The Fear of Death*, *The Sea*, *A Vision of Science* and *The Rishi* and his monumental epic, *Savitri*.

The charismatic figures like Tagore and Sri Aurobindo employed English with vigour and patriotic zeal. They expressed their subjectivity and total aspiration of India through their poetry. The pioneer women poets, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu emerged out of new awareness but they were confined to the imitation of British Romantic tradition and dealt with the themes such as love, nature, and aesthetic beauty. Sarojini Naidu, too, started as a poet, but later got involved in politics, playing a central role in Gandhian Era. Her mastery over verse forms made her write the flawless lyrics such as 'To a Buddha seated on a Lotus', and 'The Flute-Player of Brindavan'. As a true lyricist, she spoke of her 'private voice' and didn't mention the burning problems of her day. Sarojini Naidu's poetry is remarkable for her hunger for God in this land of religion and spirit. Though she has written poems on religion, country, women's freedom, etc., her poems on nature occupy the first place in her poetry. Even in sorrow, her nature poems glow with a touch of

her suffering. To strengthen this idea, a detailed discussion is undertaken in this work. The following analysis takes into account the poetry of Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu in their expressions of mystic experience.

Discussion

This paper made a comparison on two important figures in our recent history, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu poetry. Though we are studying them as poets, they may both much more than that, as I shall show in the brief life sketches that are a part of this paper. Both were, really speaking, leaders of modern India. Here we will try to appreciate their overall contribution to the country and to our literature before focusing on individual poems though 'nature' as theme. When considering a multi-faceted genius like Sri Aurobindo, it is useful to have an introduction to his works and to the central issues in his poetry. After that, we will read few poems, *A Tree*, *Life and Death*, *Bride of Fire*, and *The Golden Light*. With Sarojini Naidu too, we will start with a brief life-sketch, followed by an overview of her poetry, before going on to discuss her famous poetry "Indian Dancers," "Love and Death," and "The Old Woman."

Sri Aurobindo's poetic career is spread out from 1890 to 1950, and during these sixty years, he wrote an impressive volume of verse of various kinds. His early poems included in Short Poems (1890-1900) had elements of the decadent mode then in fashion in contemporary English poetry, and dealt with romantic themes of Nature, love, death, liberty, and sadness etc, in an equally romantic style. Sri Aurobindo's complete works were collected and edited in the thirty volume Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (or SABCL for short). The bibliography of primary works in Vol. 30 lists 101 books by Sri Aurobindo in English, published during his lifetime and afterwards¹.

Since more than half of the sonnets of Sri Aurobindo reveal intense spiritual experiences of a personal nature, it is appropriate to study them as spiritual autobiography. Also, the abstract concepts of his evolutionary philosophy found suitable vehicles from elements of Nature in the sonnets, more consistently than in any other work of Sri Aurobindo, with the exception of *Savitri*. It will be appropriate to say that the sonnets of Sri Aurobindo are stylistic precursors to *Savitri*, especially with

regard to the uses of elements of Nature to convey spiritual experiences. Makarand R. Paranjape expresses this eloquently when he says:

In a sense, all of Sri Aurobindo's poetry points to "Savitri" : the chief elements of the mystical experiences such as the denial of death, the experience of universal consciousness, the loss of an individual identity, the paradoxical questing after finding, etc., are developed more fully there².

A Tree is one of Sri Aurobindo's early poems. It is only six lines long, with two stanzas. The first is a quatrain, with the rhyme scheme Abab, followed by a couplet. Though deceptively simple, I believe that this poem contains the quintessence of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. The poem says that a tree, beside a sandy bank, stretches its branches heaven-wards. It is "Earth-bound, heaven-amorous" that is though it is fixed to the ground, with its roots in the soil, it actually reaches upwards, towards the skies. The couplet drives home the significance of the image : the human soul is just like this tree. Our body and brain are so grounded, so earthy, that they detain our heavenly flight. Notice the slight difference in the manner in which the tree and the human being are portrayed, while the tree is seen in positive terms, in terms of its aspiration, the human being is seen somewhat negatively, his body and brain detaining his upward rise. Unlike the tree, the human being is almost being blamed for this urge to remain bound and limited. I said earlier that this poem contains the seed of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Sri Aurobindo sees us as divided beings, one part of us happy with our present attainments, another thirsting for higher things.

Sri Aurobindo's poetic activities at Baroda reveal a much deeper inspiration at work. He felt spiritually familiar with Indian philosophical works, especially the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, and such influences worked to transform his outlook on Nature - a transformation highlighted in many of his lyrics from the Baroda years and even later. The transformation was not a negation of the physical or sensuous aspects of Nature that was a familiar theme in his lyrics written in England. It was effectively an 'outgrowing' of that aspect - an assimilation with something radically different and not necessarily a rejection of his approach to Nature

of the early days. It is this assimilation of the old and the new approaches to Nature that makes Sri Aurobindo's narrative poems evolved versions of his lyrics and sonnets.

Most of the sonnets of Sri Aurobindo are suffused with what Srinivasa Iyengar calls 'a philosophical or mystical glow'³. The issue of mysticism in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and indeed, in his poetry has been a debate among commentators on Sri Aurobindo for long. S. K. Maitra, in his *The Meeting of the East and the West* in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy argues that the word 'mystic' cannot be applied to Sri Aurobindo because 'the mystic, in fact, is a psychological aristocrat' and that since Sri Aurobindo's Integral yoga is for humanity as a whole, 'mysticism' cannot be an adequate description of Sri Aurobindo's vision of man and Nature⁴. Though the basis of mysticism is intuition, a non-sensuous, direct experience, Maitra argues that Sri Aurobindo's classification of the grades of intuitive consciousness from the Illumined Mind to the Supermind, reveals that though all the grades are intuitive in nature, they are clearly not of the same importance in the context of the evolutionary nature of human consciousness. Following Nolini Kanta Gupta's advice of approaching mystic truth 'through the heart' we may approach the term 'mysticism' as a form of 'intuition' without going into the comparative aspects of the various levels of intuition⁵. Read in this light Sri Aurobindo's sonnets, at least an overwhelming majority of them, can be classed as 'mystic'. In the sonnets, Sri Aurobindo deals with some of the serious spiritual issues which characterize his later poetry. Invariably, most of the vehicles for the communication of mystic experiences in his sonnets are elements of Nature. In the sonnet *The Pilgrim of the Night*, Sri Aurobindo uses the imagery of the sea and the shore as vehicles for conveying his status as a man with a quest for the mysteries of the world and existence. Again, in *The Hidden Plan*, he uses 'night' as a temporary phenomenon that shall 'burst out from the limit traced by Mind' and reveal 'even this inert blind/Nature.' Two sonnets on evolution stand out as the first and most explicit poetic statement on evolutionary Nature. In the sonnets, Sri Aurobindo refers to the 'crude beginnings of the lifeless earth' and goes on to prophesy the attainment of the

'mirac'l'd summits still unwon' - clearly implying the ascension of the human race and Nature to the level of Gnosis.

Sarojini Naidu was a gifted artist having ornamental and highly sophisticated style. Her poetry reflected that she was a superb artist in the use of words. It contained the language, which burnt with feeling and passion and was as sweet as a bird's song. Sarojini Naidu was amongst the pioneer poets of Indo-Anglian literature. She began writing poetry in the last decade of the nineteenth century but was highly influenced by the Romantic poets due to her intense reading of Romantic poetry. Naidu was the illustrious writer of English verse having refined diction, whose work was admired not only by the great Indian poets like Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo but also by the renowned English critics like Edmond Gosse and Arthur Symonds⁶.

Nature is a relief from the conflicts of the worldly life. In "Summer Woods", the poet says:

"O, I am tired of painted roofs and soft and silken floors

And long for wind-blown canopies of crimson Gulmohar"⁷

She expresses her longing to fly where cassia-woods are breaking into flame, and koels call from flowery glade and glen. She wishes to lie beneath the boughs of Tamarind, and Molsari and Neem. She wants to bind their brows with jasmine sprays and play on carven flute; to roam along the river's bank and bathe in the water-lily pools.³⁰ For Sarojini Naidu, Nature is a 'Sanctuary of Peace.'

'The Magic of Spring' sends Sarojini Naidu into raptures and the individual manifestation of nature's beauty attracts her imagination. 'The June Sunset' makes the reader soar and deeply immersed in the world of nature.

"Here shall my soul find its true repose
under a sunset sky of dreams"⁸

The poet here seeks repose in a peaceful countryside under the colours of a June sunset. The sight and sounds of the country side, both those of wild nature and of human life are described, till the stars begin to gleam.

'In Praise of Gulmohar Blossoms' the poet discovers Gulmohar blossoms as 'Gorgeous boon of the spring'. They are so lovely that nothing can rival them in their rich hue neither 'The glimmering red of a bridal of a bridal robe' nor 'the rich red of wild

bird's wings'. Perhaps 'the mystic blaze of the gem that burns on the brow of a serpent king' can measure up her beauty or perhaps only

"The limpid clouds of the lustrous dawn

That colour the ocean's mien?

Or the blood that poured from a thousand breasts

To succour a Rajput Queen?"⁹

The time bird's song in 'The Bird of Time' represents the song of nature as well as of human life. Time fleets and never fluctuates. Change and fluctuation is the theme of the time-bird, as also of human life.

The poem beautifully reveals the destructive aspect of nature by describing Hyacinth's strange trade of death and destruction.

"Is your loveliness displayed

Death in Beauty masquerade"¹⁰

Conclusion

In conclusion, Sri Aurobindo was desperately searching for legends to highlight his own thesis of evolutionary Nature can be understood from the fact that all the narrative poems he wrote during his early years at Pondicherry were taken from Indian myths dealing with the issue of death and immortality. Sri Aurobindo seems to have been exploring the symbolic potential in the legends he treats in his narrative poems. Sarojini Naidu's conception of nature is neither completely Wordsworthian nor exclusively classical Indian. For her, nature is a sacred, solitary retreat from the struggle and strife and conflicts of human life, a sinless Eden. Nature is the external environment of Man, and the manifestation of beauty, harmony and continuity. It is a symbol of mysterious forces breaking into the emotional life of the individual as well as the race. It is a retreat from strife and conflict, encouraging solitary contemplation, and renewing man's connection with the world. Sarojini Naidu's nature poetry rests on a less ambitious plane. The impression of novelty and freshness her poems created on their appearance was pronouncedly due to the new romantic sensibility. In Sarojini Naidu's treatment of the theme of love, as in her treatment of nature, we find nothing but superficialities.

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