

Similarities of thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore with some English Classical Poets

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore, who was born in the late half of the 19th century was brought up with a cultural heritage which was something novel in the Jorasanko Tagore family of Calcutta. Though Rabindranath did not go in for conventional learning because he had a tremendous dislike for it, he developed profound knowledge on both eastern and western philosophy, science, literature and music by his own initiative and endeavour. Tagore was a man who could blend the ideas of East and West in a perfect harmony. England was all along rich in her literary pursuits and her cultural stage was ornamented with some great poets who can be described as Classical poets. The reign of Queen Elizabeth I is known as the Elizabethan period (1553-1603) in England and in this period poets like William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Milton stood at the pinnacle of fame. The Elizabethan period was followed by the Victorian period, which started with the reign of Queen Victoria and this period lasted from 1837-1901. The Victorian period was fortunate enough to produce a bunch of well-known romantic poets like Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892), P.B. Shelley (1792-1822), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), John Keats (1795-1821), Robert Browning and others. They are much well-known as Romantic poets. Those who directly fell under the Victorian period were William Wordsworth and Alfred Tennyson. Rabindranath, one of the pioneering personalities of Bengal Renaissance had an immense reading of English literature; but he reached the zenith of his fame through his own creative virtues which were purely his own. All these poets – the English poets and the Bengali poet shared some wonderful values which were really unique in their character. In this article an attempt has been made to explore some common findings among these poets which have helped to establish a glamorous bonding between the Orient and the Occident.

KEYWORDS: Elizabethan, Victorian, Romantic, Classical, agonized, aesthetic, philosophy, ecstasy.

Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore, who was a poet, philosopher, anaesthetic and social and a nationalist thinker decorated the Indian cultural platform for pretty long years and he is still

remembered in our everyday life as a carrier of cultural heritage. The Elizabethan poets like William Shakespeare and Romantic poets like P.B. Shelley, William Wordsworth, Alfred Tennyson, John Keats, Browning and others expressed similar kind of aesthetic, romantic and divine thoughts like that of Rabindranath in some of their memorable poetic pieces. In this article an earnest effort has been attempted to explore this wonderful pattern of harmony among these poets.

I

Both William Shakespeare and Rabindranath Tagore have portrayed the image of a true good friend in their literature who stands by the side of poet in all moments of misery and joy in life. This friend never becomes a life partner, but this friend is the sharer of all deep thoughts of both poets. This is a kind of platonic love which is depicted both by Shakespeare and Rabindranath. In the words of Shakespeare in his poem '**Remembrance**' the message is like this:

*“When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail
My dear time’s waste;
.... But if the while I think on
Thee, dear friend
All losses are restored and sorrows end.”¹*

In the same way Rabindranath expresses his deep feelings for his dear friend in this song:

*“Tumi robe nirabehridaye mama
nibirnibhritapurnimanishithini-sama
.... Mama dukhshyabedana
Tumibharibe gourabe”²*

An aesthetic and philosophic appeal can be detected from the poetic pieces of both these poets at the backdrop of different language and different upbringing. The poetic pieces leave in

the readers' mind a sweet melody of love and friendship which is a rare specimen in this world of hard reality.

II

Some similar waves of thoughts can be discerned in the poetic rhythm, life-breadth and rays of optimism in life between Alfred Tennyson and Rabindranath Tagore. The poem '**The Brook**' by Lord Tennyson runs like this:

*"... I chatter over stony ways,
In little sharps and trebles,
I bubble into eddying bays,
I babble on the pebbles."*

Rabindranath unleashes the rhythm of life in this way in his '**NirjharerSwapnabhanga**' in '**Prabhatsangeet**':

*"Thar tharkarikapichhebhudhar.
Shilarashirashiparichhekhase,
Phuliaphuliafenilsalil
Garajiuthichhedarunroshe."*

Again Tennyson is vibrant in his call for nature and its dynamic force:

*"I wind about, and in and out,
With here a blossom sailing,
And here and there a lusty trout,
And here and there a grayling.*

*And here and there a foamy flake
Upon me, as I travel
With many a silvery waterbreak
Above the golden gravel."³*

Rabindranath's voice echoes in the same mood of life-breadth when he says:

*“Ami dhalibkarunadhara
Ami bhangibpashankara,
Ami jagatplabiaberabgahia
Akulpagal para
Kesh elayiaphoolkuraiya
Ramdhanuankapakhauraiya
Rabirkiranehasicharaiyadiba re paran dhali.”*⁴

In these two poems of Tennyson and Rabindranath a tune for love for life and the dynamic force for the living world is displayed with full of vivacity.

Just on the contrary, Tennyson is in a pensive mood when he feels that life is only full of tears and this woe knows no bound when he says:

*“Tears idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes.”*⁵

Tagore is known to be an agonized poet of all times. His in-depth agony reaches a level of ecstasy when his soul murmurs:

*“Bedanaybharegiyechhepeyala
Hridaybidarihoyegelodhala, piyo he piyo.
Bhara se patra buke kareberanubahiasararatidhare,
Lou tulelouajinishibhorepriyo he priyo.”*⁶

Another song of Tagore carries almost same message:

*“O chandchokherjalerlaglojoardukherparabare
Holokanaykanaykanakaniei pare oi pare.”*⁷

The vessels of pain are full in both the poets when life offers no radiance, it becomes a vacuum, from where again one has to climb the robust path of optimism.

III

Rabindranath Tagore and P.B. Shelley are both known as romantic poets and they are also poets who could uncover the pains of life mingled with beauty. P.B. Shelley's romantic voice is mingled with beauty and love when he says:

*"I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low
And the stars are shining bright."*⁸

Rabindranath's voice resembles in the same mood when he sings:

*"Swapneamarmoneholo
Ami jaginai go....
Tumimilaleandhakare, hai
Achetan mono majhetakhanrimijhimidhwanibaje
Kapil banerchhayajhillijhankare."*⁹

The dream – lady comes in the minds of the poets in soft and elegant steps and leaves behind fragrant blossom of love.

Love is immortal, but life is mortal. The saga of love ends, when the beloved parts, probably the fragrance of memory and the tears of pain remain eternally. Shelley's pain is endless when he unravels this melody of love in his poem '**To a Skylark.**'

*"We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that
Tell of saddest thought."*¹⁰

Almost the same symphony of love's immortality and the truth of life are deciphered in the

famous poem 'Shahjahan' by Tagore in his 'Balaka.'

*“Dakshiner mantra gunjarane
Tabakunjabane
Basantermadhabimanjari
Jeikhanedeibhari
Malancherchanchalanchal
Bidaygodhuliashidhulaychharaychhinadal
Samay je nai;
Abarsisirratretainikunje
Photayetolonabakundaraji
SajaiteHemanterasrubharaanander saji.”¹¹*

The ecstasy of love is definitely boundless. The waves of love vary with the variation of nature. Still love lasts and life ends. Tagore believed in the famous philosophy that the existence of divine spirit can be visualized and felt both in God and in the beloved. That is why, he could utter the famous saying, “Devatarepriyokaripriyeredevata.” It was this love for divinity and beloved which persuaded Tagore to write such a beautiful song painted with aesthetics.

*“Amare karotomarveenalo ho go lohotule
Uthibebajitantrirajimohanangule.”¹²*

P.B. Shelley reverberated the same tune in these words:

*“Make my thy lyre as the forest is.
What if my leaves are falling like its own,
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies.”¹³*

The sacred and serene symphony of love and purity are unfolded in the messages of both the poets.

IV

William Wordsworth is famed as a poet of nature and as a poet of love. Nature and love

are blended together in many verses of William Wordsworth. A similar trend is found in many songs and poems of Rabindranath. God and love, nature and love are themes that are woven in a string of pearls in Tagore's literature. One such song, where love and nature and love and sublimity are woven together is like this, where also a platonic feeling comes into limelight.

*“Sunil Sagarershyamalkinare
Dekhechhipathejetetulanahinare*

The verses of Wordsworth run like this:

*“She was a phantom of delight
When first she gleaned upon my sight;
A lovely apparition sent
To be a moments' ornament.”*

This ornamental beauty of a moment is uncovered in Tagore in different tunes of Ragas and Raginis in the same song:

*“Chakitekhanekhanepaba je tahare
ImaneKedarayBehage Bahare.”¹⁴*

The lady of Wordsworth is a lady of angelic beauty, probably with classical touches:

*“A perfect woman nobly planned
To warm, to comfort and command;
And yet a Spirit still and bright
With something of angelic light.”¹⁵*

The description of death is something soft and serene in the romantic and tragic poet John Keats. Tagore's thoughts are akin to that of Keats; the closeness to death is felt by Keats in the famous poem '**Ode to a Nightingale**' in a ceremonious way:

*..... “And for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,*

*To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy.”¹⁶*

Rabindranath, in the same way regards death as his soulmate, who is even equated with Madhava or Lord Krishna in one of the famous songs of ‘**BhanuSingherPadavali.**’

*“Marnare, tuhu mama Shyamasaman
Meghabarantujha, meghajatajuta,
Raktakamalakararaktaadharaputa
Tapabimochanakarunkorataba
Mrityu amrita kare dan.”¹⁷*

To love death and to treat death with so much ease and comfort is something unique in the literature of both Keats and Rabindranath. The emotions with which death is garlanded in a high pedestal of divine spirit focused through the verses will remain immortal for all times.

Conclusion: Rabindranath Tagore was a famous Renaissance thinker of 19th century Bengal. The Tagore family itself was a well-cultured family and the scions of this family were men like Jyotirindranath Tagore, Satyendranath Tagore and others. At the head of the family stood Devendranath Tagore, the well-known Bramho thinker and a social reformer. This was the age when there was a flow of Modernist thinkers in the Bengal cultural platform, like Raja Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Michel Madhusudan Dutta, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and others who were well equipped with both the ideas of Orient and Occident

There was really never any perfect admixture between the two cults. Still, Tagore’s works could reach the European minds to a satisfying extent. “The awakening of Bengal incurred the awakening of the whole of India. Western poets, philosophers and scientists showed the path of a bolder intellectual dawn in the history of India. The assimilation of thoughts between the East and the West erected a new bridge of cultural affinity, which had its deep impact on the future generation.”¹⁸

Rabindranath was the right offshoot of this period and he could absorb the vast arena of literature fully and was surely enlightened with the essence of this literature, which was marked by the spirit of progressiveness on the one hand and humanism on the other.

Rabindranath read a vast proportion of Oriental literature, including Vaishnava Padavali, MangalKavyas, Aul, Baul and other assets of Bengali lyrics. He was attracted by Buddhist philosophy, at the same time he was enchanted with the ideas of Christian gospels. Tagore had an in-depth reading of Herbert Spencer, J.J. Rousseau, Bertrand Russell, Kipling and all other well-known philosophers, novelists and educationists. The poet picked up the precious gems from English Classical literature and could penetrate deep into its philosophy.

Tagore was an agonized poet of all times. Most of his poems and songs carry the essence of agony and ecstasy. In personal sphere, the poet was anguished with tears from his early life. Series of deaths and separations from his very near and dear ones did not turn him immune to life. Instead, he loved life, he tried to bring out the nectar from life and felt anguished to leave life and he found peace in the main chore of life, that is music. The poet Rabindranath played his Veena(lyre) in a dew- wet dawn of his life and his soul bloomed in a new way every day in this beautiful earth. At the end of his day, he left his lyre in a forlorn mood, but he filled his mind with every layer of beauty which he explored in this earth. That is why, it is believed he could write such poems enriched with the tune of pain and pleasure in **Balaka**:

“Eikhaneeksisirbheja prate

Melechhilempran.

EikhaneekVeenaniye hate

Sedhechhilem tan.

Etakaler se morVeenakhani

Eikhaneteiphelejajobani,

Kintu ore hiyarmadhyebhari

Nebo je tar gan.19

The humanist, romantic and the aesthetic poet Rabindranath reached his highest level of ecstasy in spite of waves of pain which he accepted in everyday life. The philosophic messages of William Shakespeare, Alfred Tennyson, P.B. Shelley, William Wordsworth and John Keats were

no less gorgeous than Rabindranath Tagore. The grandeur which the Classical English poets have left in their literature remain universal for all times.

The similar tunes of joy and tears, the similar versions of divine self, the similar conceptions of divine love and human love and the similar notes of appreciation of nature and its beauty are present in the Bengali poet Rabindranath and the English poets.. The present author has chosen a few such similarities; there are of course plenty such trends, which can be analyzed by many more researchers in present and future times.

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