

SELF IN SOME POEMS OF TORU DUTT, AUROBINDO GHOSH AND SAROJINI NAIDU

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Abstract

India has the longest and the richest tradition in poetry. During the age of the Vedic Aryans, poetry was written in a simple way. Different episodes from the myths were cited. It depicts different situations relating to men good, evil and indifferent, and gives courage, amusement, happiness and advice to all. Identity, individualism, psychoanalysis, symbolism, visualization and other term are used in literature. The term visualisation implies all means of different media interpretations of literature from recorded storytelling, popular movie stars children's literature reading, video session, important aspects and interpretations of Literature. Visualization term is related to new, writing techniques summarized in two words: "Show, don't tell". My objective in this paper is to expose Toru Dutt's intentions in the use of self, identity and individualism in her poems and argue that it was in her use of these genres that she was trying to stand out and be heard from within the confines of her reclusive life. She uses these to express her own experiences and her visualisation that went beyond the established boundaries of writing in the acceptance or rejection. Toru Dutt constituted a definitive position. When her work is read in contrast to these definitions it demonstrates a unique form of reinvention and creativeness and this in itself makes possible a more rebellious reading established at that time. This paper will explore the states of mind – responses, attitudes and emotions – that the aesthetic of the Indian woman inspired in Sarojini Naidu's poetry. Her work for the rights of Indian women (particularly in terms of suffrage) was also tireless; her feminism and nationalism deeply intertwined. This paper will focus specifically on Naidu's experiences and reception and will contribute to existing scholarship by arguing for the inseparability of her poetic work. This paper will also expose Aurobindo Ghosh's desire to be visualised in his followers. It will highlight Aurobindo's divinity, reflection of inner -light and the spirit of deathless sun in his disciples.

Keywords:- Identity, individualism, psychoanalysis, symbolism, visualization

INTRODUCTION

Indian literature after the hegemony of Sanskrit and the Persian literature came to be known as Indo-Anglian literature. Writers have come forth to prove the certain valid reasons to enable Indian English literature, legitimate and praiseworthy. We know English is an international language whose power and use is increasing day by day. All kinds of people in all walks of life make use of English with the help of internet. Even countries like Japan and Germany have taken up cudgel to teach and use English in their countries in order to keep pace with IT revolution. In our country presence and dominance of English is the outcome of several factors like historical, social, political, ethical, moral, cultural and economical.

IDENTITY OR EXPLORING SELF

Identity means sameness of essential or generic character in different instances. The philosophy of self seeks to describe essential qualities that constitute a person's uniqueness or essential being. There have been various approaches to define these qualities. The self can be considered that being which is the source of consciousness, external influences may be the source of consciousness and the person may or may not be responsible for "sharing" in the mind's process. There have been different approaches to explore self within Indian philosophical, religious and spiritual traditions: the Vedic approach was dynamic with focus on things outside the self such as rituals, as it celebrated man's relationship with nature, cosmos, earth, sky, etc. The Upanishad approach was more inward and introspective. Another approach was devotional which hypothesize itself in relation to God and then to humankind. The search for self in Indian religious and philosophical tradition becomes a major concern for the sages through meditation. For ordinary mortals, it progresses as a dialectic in terms of various relationships of man, woman and God. The women poets of the Bhakti movement like Mirabai and Akkamahadevi set examples of search for women identity within Indian spiritual tradition like: "mere to Girdhar Gopal dusra na koi, jaake sir mor mukut mero pati soi" and ⁱ "heri mai to prem divani mera dard na jaane koi". Aye mere Juhi ke phool jaise ishwar, mangwavo mujhse bheekh or kuchh aisa karo ki bhul jaun apna ghar"ⁱⁱⁱ. Their devotion to God oftentimes took the motif of lover and the loved and thus brought in intimate relations between man and woman as part of the identity process.

Toru Dutt (1856–1877) was a natural linguist, proficient in Bengali, English, French, and later on Sanskrit. Her four year visit to France and England left her with strong attachments to the language and literature of both countries.

The search for identity among the Indian women poets who wrote poetry employing English as their medium of expression, Toru Dutt the first Indian women to write poetry in English, women have come a long way. They stand apart from Indian men who write poetry in English, by emphasizing their feminine identities in so many creative ways. Apart from the expression of a uniquely and powerfully realized feminine sensibility and quest for self and identity, what distinguishes these women writers from the contemporary male poet is their realistic attitude to life, sex and lust, and their frank autobiographical, vivid, candid and bold expression of such issues. The poetic self in such poetry concerns itself with capturing the moments of intense experience of the private life with all its uniqueness and immediacy.

The sensitive contemporary woman poet, today, is affected not only by the complete metamorphosis of transformation of her existence but by the very concept of her century's long suppressed feminine personality. As a result she has traversed the long journey eventually to find a distinctive voice of selfhood. The indigenous contributing factors of such women poets have

been the legacy of equality of sexes inherited from the western civilisation developments, the Indian freedom struggle, and Indian constitutional rights of women, spread of education and the consequent new awareness among women. Indian women were caught in the flux of tradition and modernity saddled with the burden of the past. So, to overcome the traditional barriers to express freely in all walks of life constitutes the crux of feminism in Indian literature. In literary terms, this pursuit precipitates a search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self.

Beauty and tragedy and fatality criss-crossed in the life of Toru Dutt and it is difficult, when talking about her poetry to make any nice distinction between poetry and what CS Lewis would call poetolatry. The poetry is the reality, no doubt, but the poet to compel attention. We find that Toru Dutt's mother was steeped in the Hindu Myths and was a woman of loving and sweet disposition. Like other Youngman of the time, the Dutt's too were attracted by the glamour of the west. Toru Dutt's father named Govin Chandra Dutt writes about his wife indifferent behaviour in an addressed to his wife:

“Nay, part not so- one moment stay,
 Repel me not with scorn.
 Like others, wilt thou turn away
 And leave me quite forlorn?
 Wilt thou too join the scoffing crowd,
 The cold, the heartless, and the proud,
 Who curse the hallowed mourn.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Govin Chandra Dutt describes about his children. He writes about Abju :

“Most loving is my eldest, and I love him most,
 Almost a man in seeming, yet a child.”^{iv}

He writes about Aru:

“My next, the beauty of our home, is meek
 Not so deep loving haply, but less wild
 then her dear brother- brow and blushing cheek
 Her nature shows serene and pure, and mild
 As evenings early star.”^v

About Toru he writes:

“Puny and elf like, with dishevelled tresses
 Self willed and shy, never heeding that I call
 Intend to pay her tenderest addresses
 To bird and cat, but most intelligent”^{vi}

In the poem, ‘Our Casuarina Tree’ we come across the “Like a huge python winding round and round.....

“When first my casement is wide open thrown
 At dawn my eyes delighted on it rest
 Sometimes, and most in winter, on its crest
 A grey baboon sits statue like alone
 Watching the sunrise, while on lower boughs
 His puny offspring leap about the play.”^{vii}

The question here is who the symbol of python and tree are if puny offspring is the symbol of Toru. Who is Grey Baboon? Why is he sitting alone? What is he waiting for? Who does not give him warmth? Why is he looking for sun in winter? All these questions are

answered by Toru herself in her poems. Why casuarina tree is dear to her? For whom she will lay a consecrate? These entire questions are related to her self expression.

“But not because of its magnificence
 Dear is the casuarina to my soul
 Beneath it we have played, though years may roll...
 Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
 Unto thy honour”^{viii}

In the poem ‘Our Casuarina Tree’ we come across the tree which represents the very essence of the poet’s self, and anchor to her subjectivity, something which stabilises her notion of who she is when she is far away. The poet wants the tree to be eternal because she wants her own experiences to save from the ravages of time. KR Srinivasa Iyengar says about this poem, “I myself have called it a poem about memory, imagination and transcendence, in which the tree becomes a symbol not only of the poet’s joyous childhood but also through an extension in time and space of the poet’s longing for permanence and eternity.”^{ix}

The first stanza is an objective description of the tree, the second relates the tree to Toru’s own impressions of it at different times, the third links up the tree with Toru’s memories of her lost brother and sister, the fourth humanises the tree, for its lament is a human recordation of pain and regret and the last stanza wills as it were the immortality of the tree.

In another poem “Sita” of Toru we come across not Sita of Ramayan but her mother

“Three happy children in a darkened room!
 What do they gaze on with wide open eyes
 A dense, dense forest, where no sun beam pries”^x

Who are these happy children? What is their relation with the title Sita? Sita of the Ramayana is not there. Who is banished and why? Why are they in the darkened room?

“Tall trees, there, in a quite lucid lake
 The White swan glides, there,”^{xi}

Here, the question arises who is white swan? And the poet herself asked a question, “who is this fair lady?” why tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amen. The reason for these tears and the fair lady’s plight is getting married of a young girl with an aged man in the Tripura and Bengali tradition is pointed out. The grey baboon is referred for the same objective the inclination of a twenty year old girl is like “Maya” of Anita Desai and Manjari” of Shashi Despande. Another poem, “The Lotus” is fancy free and exemplifies her delicate talent for building up a poem. Here, Toru Dutt has expressed her personal life of “self” in a mystic way.

“Love came to Flora asking for a flower
 That would of flowers be undisputed queen
 The lily and the rose long, long had been”^{xii}

The lotus is perfectly crafted poem with profound cultural implications. It has been admired for its sensitive handling of language, sound, and balance of ideas. I would like to stress that Toru Dutt exemplifies in the context of the rise of Indian nationalism a search for cultural identity. Her Indian themes forge a new Indian identity which can withstand and resist colonial aggression. Her poems, Sita, the lotus, Our Casuarina tree are poems of memory, cultural, affiliation and the power of imagination to heal sorrow. Her poetry is superbly crafted in the way she organises individual stanzas, phrases, rhythm and music all juxtaposing with her ideas.

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on 15 August 1872. He was expired on 05 December 1950. He wrote Transformation, a tree, life and death bride of fire and Golden light etc. The quintessence of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is the duality of the self- the body, the mind duality that

he highlight, the physical urges of the body to remain bound and limited and the other being thirsting for higher things- “ earth bound, heaven amorous”. Further Sri Aurobindo reconciles life and death in his profound utterance “Life only is, or Death is life disguised”. What this line hints at is that that death is another kind of life and death the after life is much vaster and greater than the before life on earth. The epitome of Aurobindo’s poetry is the manta or the poetic chant. Indeed Aurobindo’s poetry both in form and content is like a prayer. In the poem “Transformation” we can see feel the same expression:

“My breath runs in a subtle rhythmic stream”

On 29 march 1914 Madame Mirra Richard now known as the mother, who was herself on a spiritual quest, met shri aurobindo and made the following note, “ it matters not if there are hundreds of beings plunged in the densest ignorance. Her whom we saw yesterday is on earth: his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, when thy reign shall be indeed established on earth.” Aurobindo emphasise i the transformation.

“I am no more a vessel of flesh....
My body is god’s happy living tool
My senses might divine.
I have deathless sun”

We notice that an airy colourfulness drops with a winged burst of revelatory light into a hidden depth in order to bring up from the depth some life-nourishing secret. We have the poetic intuition falling into the poet's inner being and capturing its contents for the poet's self-expression. And just remember that a darkling pool closely resembles an eye waiting with in-drawn expectant stillness for a shining disclosure from above which will lay bare to that receptivity what lies within the dreamer's own vigilant soul, what hides there to feed with its mysterious life the light that fell from on high. This consciousness is ordinarily like a dream-region, but the poet undergoes a novel "wakening" there by which he reinterprets in a different and deeper light the earth-experience. His reinterpretation involves the experience of new things in the soul's depths, things which are as if earthly objects "transposed" into them but which in reality exist in their own right, native to those depths and constituting the originals whose copies or representatives are earthly objects. The specific quality of the experience of these originals is to be gauged from the use of the word "soul" and no other. Poetry is primarily not the exclamation of the mind and its concepts, not the cry of the life-force and its desires, not the appeal of the body and its instincts. All of them are audible in it, but in tune with a central note beyond them which -as Longinus recognised centuries ago - strangely transports us, a note charged with some ecstatic idealistic, a magical intimacy, a mysterious presence, which we can specify only as the Divine.

The poet is primarily a seer, but his instrument for seizing his vision and communicating it is the word: it is by the inspired sound that he creates a form for his intuitive sight. The inspired sound is implicit in the poetic act—and, just as the poet's vision must ultimately have behind it the working of some eternal eye, the poet's word must ultimately have behind it the working of some eternal ear. The ultimate home of the poetic process is the spiritual the Self-space of the Spirit, the Divine Consciousness's infinity of self-extension. And this infinity has its creative vibrations that are at the basis of all cosmos. These vibrations are to be caught, however distantly or indirectly, by the sound of poetry.

SAROJINI NAIDU

In 1895, at age 16, Sarojini Chattopadhyaya (later Naidu) travelled to London to study at King's College London and was soon feted as the 'Indian princess' of the literary circles. After advice from Edmund Gosse to write poetry which would reveal the 'heart of India' to the West, she went on to publish three collections of poetry with Heinemann "The Golden Threshold" (1905), "The Bird of Time" (1912) and "The Broken Wing" (1917)). This body of work is generally read as a familiar kind of colonial performance, which gave way to her commitment to Indian nationalism. Her poetic voice was replaced with the voice of the political activist and speechmaker. Naidu was at the forefront of Indian independence, working with Gokhale, Gandhi, and Nehru and becoming President of the Indian National Congress in 1925. Her work for the rights of Indian women (particularly in terms of suffrage) was also tireless; her feminism and nationalism deeply intertwined.

While Sarojini Naidu exposes her personal experience, under the influence of the English Romantics, Naidu traces her identity in Nature, writing about its beautiful forms. She attempts to explore the quest for self and identity, the stark realities within and around her. Her poetry exhibits the self in relation to society, self in relation to history with family as the core unit, and self in relation to itself, its own self propelled emotions and feelings. The poet displays a different open attitude. The subjects which were taboo earlier now are openly expressed in her poem. She does not emulate, she expresses her thoughts, her feelings, her fears and insecurities. The reflections and deliberations come from within and they are the end product of how life has treated her, trials, struggles and ultimate victories. As she writes in her poem *If You Call Me*:

Sarojini Naidu's reputation spreads wider than just her poetic wisdom, being one of the vanguards of women who fought in the forefront of the national struggle against British imperialism. At a time when the presence and involvement of women in the national movement and the Congress were miniscule, she was a venerated and active nationalist. Though majority of Indians know her as a nationalist Naidu's acumen as a prolific poet is little known apart from the epithet bestowed upon her by Gandhi of being the – 'Nightingale of India'. Just as nationalistic fervour underlines her poetry so also does love. Deeply influenced by many strands ranging from British Romanticism to Persian and Urdu poetry, Sarojini Naidu's Love poetry mirrors her intensity and her subdued and submissive expression of love. Love in her hands is ethereal, incorporeal and spiritual.

Love has been a primary subject in women's poetry. Its meaning, significance, mode of expression and nuances has been different in every age and has changed with the passage of time. Who can forget the sustained passion of a woman's address of love? Love reminds one of the observations made about love as being just a part of a man's life, while it encompasses the entire existence of a woman. Love, in Naidu, is thus, an unnamed and unfathomed force which alone has the power to act as the bridge which crosses over the barriers of distance and worldly separation and thus the beloved yearns for her lover and wishes him to take other, often even inanimate, forms which will disguise him from the world but unite them without the looming shadows of separation.

It is thus very rare in Sarojini Naidu's poems to come across the shedding of inhibitions about the body and sex, which are an integral part of the feeling called love. Though descriptions of sex and the male and female body abound in her poetry, she has categorically denounced lust as the end of her search as a woman and believed that love is a much deeper thing which in her own mythopoeia of love is 'fashioned after the love of Radha – Krishna. There is something very beautiful about love. Sarojini writes about Govind Rajalu Naidu:

“If you call me I will come swifter o my love
Like a trembling forest deer or a painted dove”

She demonstrates her love for the intensely personal confessional mode. With certain amount of attraction for the feminist views, she actively wrote poetry. However, her attempt is to explore the “self” and identity in depth. She is a natural poet, a semi-skilled craftsman trying to construct poetic artefacts. She is an investigator of the impulses. One who is obsessed with the flow of inner experience? The poet had succeeded in writing delightful poetry and has gained the applause of the people who once showered on her the venom of negative criticism. It is with extreme sincerity that she yearns for her quest for identity. It appears in the songs of a heart that longs for satisfaction in the recollections of the purity and playfulness of the childhood. Her quest for identity makes her a confessional poet, many of her poems express deep sympathy for the suffering; her poems initiate the fusion of herself with the surrounding.

“Lightly o lightly she sways like a pearl”

The disengagement had also led to the disastrous dissociation with the self to the extent of becoming strangers to themselves with the attendant crisis of identity. One finds relationship between men and women described in so many ways: love that men and women are subjected to, sensibility characteristic of the feminine world, inner quest or self search and identity, memories and experience of loneliness, loss and the pain etc.

In quest for self and identity, poets joined after a few hesitations a whole generation of younger poets to establish an image of woman totally unencumbered by the conventional falsifying colours. This was not a personal matter but whole generation’s pangs of birth, not an individualistic attitudinizing, but a painful transformation coming over feminine consciousness. To fight for the dignity and true emancipation of women is the most difficult task especially because it involves values and attitudes that are deep-rooted not only in the minds of men but also in the consciousness of women. The concept of freedom of women in practice is grossly vulgarized throwing up extremely grotesque and distorted forms of freedom in a transitional society combining the worst of both worlds. Poems on love, marriage, family life and society are noticeable for freshness, irony, wit and satire, but most of all, for her feminist concerns impresses us by their sharp intellectual quality and imparts autobiographical flavour to their poetry. Her expression of female sexuality might be feminist, the lives of women, gender conflict and the relations between the sexes are not central to her work. Domains may be broadly identified as: gender and female sexuality. Dissatisfied desires, the frustrations of living in a male dominated world, sex, and, of course, love are common themes. Contemporary situations find more frequent mention in her poems.

CONCLUSION

The identity of Indian English verse has changed today as new themes of intimate experiences of love, marriage, sexuality and family relationships as well as the larger social experiences related to the world they live in have been ushered. Women are confessional, disclosing their feelings, emotions and intimate experiences quite boldly and candidly. Women value not only love, beauty, relationships, emotion, devotion and tender feelings but want to cross the patriarchal threshold in order to define themselves. Modern Indian women poets in English seem to have found a catharsis or mental satisfaction through their literary expression. In poetry women finds some kind of emancipation from their inner turmoil. Thus, poetry-writing becomes a weapon in the hands of Indian women writers to fight against oppression.

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