

Nishikanta – The Brahmputra of Inspiration

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Abstract

The Aurobindonian group has played a very significant role to continue the tradition of their Master. Not only they have maintained the tradition but some of them have touched new heights of art. Besides writing poetry, some of them have formed their own critical thoughts. In this way they have also enriched and contributed to literary criticism. Nishikanta, the moon poet, is an original voice in poetry and contemporary poets have showered much praise upon him for his critical acumen. The paper endeavours to study the poetic craftsmanship of Nishikanta, the eminent Bengali disciple poet of Aurobindo by analyzing sundry themes of his poems

The position of the poet among Aurobindonians and other poets is unquestionably and indisputably eminent. He originally wrote in Bangla, his mother tongue. The English translation of his poems is rendered by Satdal, another devotee of Sri Aurobindo. The poet, though for a transient period, did persevere to compose verses in English. These poems, along with translations of his other Bengali poems into English by Dilip Kumar Roy, were published under the title of 'Dream Cadences' in 1946.

In his foreword to 'Dream Cadences', Kishor Gandhi has written: 'These poems have a value to those who are interested in the process of poetic creation in as much as whatever poetic merit they have is solely due to the poet's innate sense of rhythm and word-music.....Nishikanta's success in the field of English poetry would appear to suggest that it is not impossible for an exceptionally gifted and powerful poet to surmount altogether the need of knowing the metrical technique by sheer force of his inborn and intimate sense of the spirit of rhythm and subtle word-music; the invisible Spirit of Word-Beauty with which he is in direct contact would itself provide him with its intrinsic body-forms, its shapes and structures of visible embodiment.'

In the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, surrender has a connotation of piousness and sanctity. He asks for a complete surrender to the Mother in order to realize one's divinity. No other poet evinces tremendous feeling of surrender and dedication as Nishikanta.

Not for the sake of poetry do I compose poems
Not for the sake of giving shape that I create forms;
O Wonderful, O Unique, O Beloved
O king of kings let my humble offerings
Be accepted. (33)

And the height of the devotion is-

Let thy clasp be very tight in this life of mine.
Let my death have the refuge supreme in Thy bosom divine. (70)

Long before following the path of faith, the poet, like everybody has his period of doubts and arguments. He was sceptical about the spiritual realization. But it is the atheist who turns out to be a great advocate and believer of the Divine after having gone through some deep experiences. The case of swami Vivekanand is the instance here. Every genuine seeker has his or her period of scepticism.

A lot have I heard about the divine truth,

Drew in the net of arguments a lot;
 Suffered a lot of hesitant hours
 Scattered many a seed of doubt;
 Now the lamp of my realization (40)

Nishikanta is a mystical poet and such poetry is, almost by definition, ineffable. The poet himself faces insuperable difficulties in describing his mystical experiences, for such experiences are essentially otherworldly.

In the poem The Modern, the poet celebrates the union of Purush and Prakriti whose creative power of integration shapes within him the veena of new creation bringing manifestation of a new awakening. Purush alone implies the non-dual consciousness of the stagnant immortal. The splendid feminine beauty of Prakriti imparts the true colour and vigorous festivity to creation. Sri Aurobindo is Purush consciousness and the Mother represents Prakriti.

Both of you have descended at the same time in the secret grove of this earth! (65)

Nishikanta is a sadhak poet and falls in the tradition of great devotees like Meera, Raidas and Surdas. Every poet expresses love and devotion for the Mother in his characteristic manner. Here the poet is addressing the Mother, calling her a maiden Ever-Young. It is by her grace the poet's spirituality has progressed and realized the immortality of the soul. Consequently, he is in a state of perpetual ananda. He is overwhelmed with the gratitude for the mother. The poet uses such soul-stirring adjectives for her-

O White –Bodied O Ever-graceful, Luminous one! O my Lotus of light,
 She who is my Eternal-Queen, I am Her son. (68)

The poet visualizes himself both as a son and a lover of her.

O Mother, in Thy lap of the sky
 Smiling like the baby Moon I shall stay
 Swinging in the waves of Thy Light
 Like the stars of the Milky Way; (9)

Nishikanta writes in "aureat" or highly rhetorical language. Such high refined language often defies apt translation.

The poem Tri –birth is significant and expressive of his intense poetic imagination. In the fashion of William Blake, the poet imagines his animal- birth as a lion or tiger at the wish of the Mother. The poet gives a different imagery-a fierce picture in fiery and awesome style, unusual of his delicate and sensitive one. The mother is visualized riding on the lion. He as lion wishes to lie at her feet in submission, giving all his violent beastly force.

Givest sharp curved nails a sharp set of teeth
 Huge manes, eyes with bright pupils, lightning-speed; (68)
 And Thou carriest the world, and I carry the world-sustainer Goddess. (69)

The second birth he assumes is of titan, he wants to capture the forces of heaven –the moon and the sun. He wants to shake the seat of Brahma, to break the drowse of Vishnu and calls for the advent of Shiva as Rudra.

The third birth is the human-birth and in it the poet forsakes all his turbulent and rajasic fervour of activity and surrenders totally at the feet of the Mother requesting-

Makest of me a child dependent for ever,
 Keepest me covered under the fringe of affection of Thy saree,
 Let Thy kisses of protection shower all over my body. (70)

The tireless is a prayer almost in the style of Rabindranath Tagore. He aspires to move on the path of sadhana resisting all the worldly temptations, the net of Maya and wants to go to the very source of creation.-

Till I recognize in this earthly life and body
In each and every, limb Thy spiritual entity
Let me move on and on. (62)

The poem White –cloud is written in the style of Shelley. The lyrical impulse is worth noticing.

Whose breath floated your raft,
O White-cloud of the noon?
Whose fancied swan is your play,
O White-cloud of the noon?
Like a flower in a streame afloat
Wherefrom you came, at last where will
Stop your boat? (24)

Like Wordsworth, he is a poet of joy and never mentions his grievances. Going by his personal account of life, he suffers from many diseases and has never enjoyed physical health. But spiritualists like Nishikant live more in spirit rather than in physical.

The poet expresses his utter disgust for the orthodox shackles of the society and he has come out of the bondage of religion. He loves the earth and seeks the riches of the mines of gems within the soil of this mortal- birth. He has no ambition to reach the moon and the stars in the sky. He is a child of light and prays to the gurus to kindle it forever. He uses beautiful epithets in Keatsian manner like lotus-buds of my consciousness -

In the duality of yours, o Lord, o Dual Divine!
Your child of light is awake in the receptacle of mine. (74)

The poet is not oblivious of the sorrows of the real world. Living in the Ashram, his devotion has not made him the escapist. The poem Mahamaya proves that he is not blind to the tragedies of life.

Suddenly the widow wailed\
Sweetly laughs the new-born child;
Noisy moves the crowd following the dead;
Menacingly shouts with an iron-bite
The giant of a machine on move;
The murmur of the falling horsinghars
Filled the air of the grove. (26)

With the arrival of divine manifestation, will come the reign of love and peace. By means of an enthralling imagery, the poet explains the inertia or tamas which has encircled the soul like a python.

Move on, cut each round of the night of inertia, that twist like a python
Its coil around you, with your sharp illumination-
Establish your right and like a sculptor proceed: (71)

The sculptor goes on chiselling the hard and formless bulky rock indeed in the hope of bringing a dawn cherished

The dawn is imminent, ardent is its experience,
In your words vocal is its message, its radiance.
That dawn is approaching, the feeling is ardent,
Its message in your voice becomes radiant. (72)

Under the tutelage, love and guidance of the Mother and Aurobindo, Nishikanto's work scaled new heights. In his creations we find not only an expression of the intuitive faculty, but also a clarity of vision, a harmony of thoughts, feelings of strength, and an inherent gracefulness. [27]

Nishikanto composed new songs based on the tunes of existing songs which were later published in the book *Geetashri* co-written with Dilip Kumar and thus created a new genre of poetry. Aurobindo himself while in conversation with Nirod Baran commented and eulogised the acumen of the poet.

Nishikanta has a fine channel and with a very poetic turn in it—he offers no resistance to the flow of the force, no interference of his mental ego, only the convenience of his mental individuality.

[Nishikanta] has a strong individuality of his own as a poet and at the same time a great assimilative power.

Mother rightly pronounced Nishikanto as a visionary who could foresee visions beyond the ken of mortal beings. His last work ‘*Lilyaanwich*’ a ballad also often called a ‘devotional idyll on krishna’ of about thousand lines was composed after visualizing the image of Vasudev

Dhiraj Banerjee observes: “*It may be noted that Nishikanto’s poetry doesn’t owe its status to the spiritual alone. His output was of a diverse character, and had many technical qualities. There are ornamentation, aestheticism and symbolism. He is known for his penchant for symbolist poetry. We find that thought, image and dream elements are reflected through symbols in the light of his vision. His poetry achieved quality not only because of these experiences as a spiritual seeker, but also because they are combined with his subtle sensibility proper to an artist and his literary technique. This imagist has seen the world and life through the eyes of a mystic, a visionary.*” [30]

He is indeed a true ‘Brahmaputra of inspiration’ not only for his fellow Aurobindonians but for the present poets at Auroville as well. It wont be an exaggeration to say that he was blessed with certain majestic innate potential which under the fruitful custodianship helped him to create an important niche among the mystical poets of all times.

References

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- 4) Dilip Kumar Roy and Indira Devi, *Pilgrims of the Stars*, pp. 80-81
- 5) *Selected Essays and Talks of Nirodbaran*, pp. 169-170
- 6) Dhiraj Banerjee, *Nishikanto: The Mystic Poet and Artist, Mother India*, February 1994
- 7) *Dream Cadences*, pp. 3-5 (Translated by Dilip Kumar Roy)