

Swami Vivekananda- As the Pioneer of Saints Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, Indian English Drama has walked a gruelling path to the present, where it has received a breath of fresh air and life from emerging dramatists such as Asif Currimbhoy, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, and others. Girish Karnad is a name that many people regard among this new generation of playwrights. He is a well-known playwright as well as a critically acclaimed film actor. Karnad began his writing career with *Yayati* and has since written a number of thought-provoking and symbolist plays steeped in myth and local culture. *Nagamandala* (1988) is a play that takes its inspiration from popular myth and oral stories centred on the King Cobra, 'Naga,' but raises issues that are as relevant today as they were in the past. It discusses the man-woman relationship, a woman's position and identity, psychology, and the impact of social and cultural modes on the feminine psyche. This paper is a modest attempt to mark the metamorphosis in Rani, a character in Karnad's *Nagamandala*.

Keywords: *Indian English Drama, cultural hypocrisy, socio-cultural identity, Gender discrimination, repression and alienation.*

The tradition of Saint Poetry commences from the hoary ages of the *Vedas*, the *Upnishads* and the great epics- the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which were composed by the Rishis embodying the rich spiritual heritage of India. Their inspiring words, suffused with radiant wisdom, have been influencing Indian Literature through the ages. The composers of the *Vedas* and the *Upnishadas*, Ved Vyas and Valmiki were the founders of Saints Poetry.

The glorious tradition of mystical and spiritual saint poetry exercised predominant influence on Indian Literature. Indian Saint Poetry is spiritual, devotional and mystical. In commensurate with the spiritual and mystical genius of India, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ramtirtha, the two illustrious saints, who were well versed with the use of English, composed beautiful poems. (A Survey of Indian English Poetry 45)

Indian Literature, unlike other literature of the world has been fortunate enough to possess the magnificent bliss and blessings of the saints and their poetry that have enriched the tradition of saint poetry. Indian Literature in English is also blessed by poets cum saints like Swami Vivekanand 1863-1902, Swami Ramtirtha 1873-1906, Sri Aurobindo 15th Aug. 1872 and Paramhansa Yogananda 1893-1952. Prof. Satish Kumar considered Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ramtirtha as the founder of 19th century saint poetry in Indian English Literature

Swami Vivekananda is a pioneer of spiritual poetry and tradition of saint-poetry that commences from the hoary ages of the *Vedas*, the *Upnishadas* and the great epics- the Ramayana, the Mahabharata which were composed by Rishis, the rich spiritual heritage of India. Their inspiring words suffused with radiant wisdom have been influencing Indian literature through the ages. The composers of the *Vedas* and the *Upnishadas*- Ved Vyasa and Valmiki were founders of saint-poetry.

Indian literature in English is also no less rich in possessing the wealth of spirituality which has been enriched more and more by the Saint poets. As they are Indian first then poet, their poems are replete with the themes of spirituality and mysticism. Prof Satish Kumar observes:

Vivekananda is the pioneer of saint-poetry which is characterized by spirituality and mysticism. As a poet he belongs to the category of Indian poets- Kabir, Sur, Tulsidas, Meera, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Tukaram, Nanaka etc.

Contrary to this K.R.S.Iyenger believes Vivekananda is communicator more than a prophet poet:

We cannot list Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ranade, Vivekananda and Aurobindo, Tilak and Gokhle, Tagore and Gandhi in the calendar of our prophets and poets, and yet cultivate a blind antipathy towards the language they used as a forceful medium of communicating their longing and message to India and the world. These stalwarts were among the makers of modern India and what they said and wrote must therefore be cherished as our national literature. (Indian Writing in English, 15)

Despite all such discussions, one cannot underestimate or overlook the importance and saint-poetry. In the developments and modern English literature which not only flourished itself in the communion of these saint poets but also surged and dived deep into ocean of imagination, Philosophy and poetic sensibility and Swami Vivekananda was the true precursor of such poetry who torch bore the path and saint poets by way of composing poems originally in English and by his translation from Sanskrit and Bengali. This poetry may be classified into two groups-

(1) Original English compositions

(2) Translation from Sanskrit and Bengali.

(1) Original English compositions- 'My play is done', 'The Benediction', 'The Cup', 'An Interesting Correspondence', 'Light', 'Thou Blessed Dream', 'The Living God', 'To my own

Soul,' 'To Sri Krishna', 'No one to Blame', 'Song of Sanyasin', 'To the Awakened India', 'Kali-The Mother', 'Peace',

(2) Translations-'On the Sea's Bosom', 'The Hymn of Creation', Six Sanskrit Modos', 'Dance of Shiva', 'Nirvana Shatak or Six Stanzas of Nirvana', 'A Hymn to Divine Mother', 'A Hymn to Samadhi', 'To a Friend', 'Song I sing thee' and 'Hymn to divinity Sri Ramakrishna'.

The songs and lyrics of Swami Vivekananda are rich in Vedantic philosophy of India which is as old as the Vedas. It was Vivekananda who alone appeared on the global platform with the placard of Hinduism in his hand and enthralled the whole world. What the world had needed was firm faith that had no fear of truth. It was found in the words, poems and writings of Swami Vivekananda alone. As he was a great mystic, yogi and saint who heralded the birth of renaissance in India took us back to the fundamental values of our Hindu culture and appealed to find the truth in the *Upnishadas* and the *Bhagwad Gita*. His poems are soaked in doctrines of Hinduism in India and deep Advaita Vedanta, the practical and dynamic vision of philosophy which was capable of conquering the whole world. His poems, songs and hymns are infused with quality of mysticism, spiritual yearnings, and artistic expressions, and prayers, longings to peace, love, meditation, yoga, Brahma, Shiva, Goddess Kali and liberation of the soul. His emphasis and love from human to the divine can be marked out as:

Love-Love chest wife-Anusua, Sita- / Not as hard dry duty but as ever pleasing / Love-Sita worship / Madness of love-God intoxicated man / The allegory of Radha-misunderstood / The restriction more increase / Lust is the death of love / Self is the death of love. (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 5, 426)

About love he himself says:

Love may not be symbolized by a triangle. (The first angle is) Love questions not. If is not beggar...Beggar's love is no love at all. First sign of love is, when love asks nothing, (when it) gives everything. This is spiritual worship, worship through love. Whether God is merciful is no longer questioned. He is God, He is my love, All other attributes vanish except that one-infinite love.

In his famous poem 'LOVING GOD' he assumes the form of mystic and says:

He who is in you and outside you / Who works through all hands / Who walks on all feet / Whose body are all ye, / Him worship, and break all other idols. (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 6, 70)

His poems exhort his countrymen to redeem this from lethargy and inactivity and motivate the man to adhere to the path of Nishkam Karma (desireless action) so that she/he may attain Nirvana:

Awake, arise and dream no more! / This is the land of dreams, where karma / Weaves unthreaded garlands
with our thoughts / Of flowers sweet or noxious, and none / Has root or stem, being born in naught,
which / The softest breath of Truth drives back to / Primal nothingness, Be bold, and face / The Truth!
Be one with it! Let vision cease, / Or, if you cannot, dream but truer dreams, / Which are eternal Love
and Service free. (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 8, 389)

It is none but 'Kali' the mother who can confer the eternal peace and love and unshackle. It is
none but 'merciful' mother who can unshackle the desire ridden soul and take the soul 'to those
shores where strifes forever cease'. One can mark out Swami ji's urge to the mother Kali to
rescue from bonds of desires, delusion and Maya. He prays:

Save me from this fire! / Rescue me, merciful Mother, from floating with desire! / Turn not to me Thy
awful face, / 'tis more than I can bear / Be merciful and kind to me, / O chide my faults forbear.

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Let never more delusive dreams / Veil off Thy face from me / My play is done, O Mother / Break my
chains and make me free. (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 6, 177)

He again urges the Lord to guide and bless the life of man so that man may feel himself bathed
in the divine light:

More on, O Lord, in thy resistless path! / Till thy high noon o'erspreads the world / Till every land reflects
thy light, / Till men and women, with uplifted head, / Behold their shackles broken, and

Know, / In springing joy, their life renewed!' (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 5, 440)

'To a Friend' is a poem rendered from Bengali poem composed by Swami Vivekananda in
which he puts up a series questions to his friend:

Where darkness is interpreted as light, / Where misery passes for happiness, / Where disease is pretended
to be health, / Where the new-born's cry but shows tis alive; / Dost thou, O wise, expect happiness here?
(The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 5, 494)

To him life is 'a glaring mixture of heaven and hell' and nobody can 'fly from this Sansar of
Maya fastened in the neck with Karma's fetters.' It is only a cup of Tantalus' but in this selfish
world after a futility of long Tapasya's weight, he could not find anything in life. Eventually
he says:

Listen, friend, I will speak my heart to thee; / I have found in my life this truth supreme- / Buffeted by
waves, in this whirls of life, / There's one ferry that takes across the sea. / Formulas of worship, control
of breath, / Science, philosophy, systems varied, / Relinquishment, possession, and the like, / All these

are but delusions of the mind- / Love, Love- that's the one thing, the sole treasure (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 5, 494)

The theme of spirituality remains present in almost all his poems where the traits of mysticism and deep meditation can be easily glanced, and his mysticism is perhaps the finest one of its own kin. Dr. Anupama Bansal observes:

In Indian English poetry Swami Vivekananda, was the first poet to compose mystical poems, His songs, poems and hymns are the artistic expression of his unfathomed spiritual urge.

The poem 'The Hymn of Creation' is translation of Naradiya-Sukta, Rigveda X.129 projects his love towards mysticism when he writes:

This projection whence arose, / Whether held or whether not, / He the ruler in the supreme sky, of this / He, O Sharman! Knows, or knows not / He perchance. (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 6, 179)

Some other poems like 'A Hymn to Shri Kamakrishna', 'Nirvan Shatkam' or 'Six Stanzas of Nirvana' (translation of the poem of Shankeracharya) and 'On the Sea's Bosom, (his translated poem from Bengali) are the evidence of his excellent translation work which also establish him as a refined translator. Swami Vivekananda is an advocate of self-realization like Swami Paramhans Yogananda. According to him, Meditation is the only remedy to dissolve the mist of Maya. It is none but God who is behind the ever-changing phenomena of the world which is nothing but a figment of creation only. God is the supreme reality in the world of unreality. This idea is revealed in his poem 'Misunderstood':

This world's a dream / Though true it seem. / And only truth is he the living! / The real me is none but He / And never never mother changing! (In Search of Gods & Other Poems, 4)

As Swami Vivekananda was deeply influenced with the Gita and the Vedas that are the replicas of mysticism and spiritualism, his poems are marked with the quality of mysticism. He believes in one God that is omnipresent, omnipotent, eternal, all pervading and beyond all the limits of human mind. The wheel of Maya does not let us realize the presence of God who can be felt in each whit of universe. Prof. Satish Kumar says:

All poems of Vivekananda are imbued with mysticism of a very high order. In this respect they reveal the influence of the Gita. It eloquently elucidates the doctrine that God is eternal and all pervading and as long as we are so swayed by Maya we fail to realize the presence of the supreme within us. When true knowledge dawns on man he sheds false ego, all delusions, all material attachments and possesses great

peace, joy and equipoise. He sees the Supreme, the on indivisible in all the fleeting manifestations of life, in all animate and inanimate objects. (A Survey of Indian English Poetry 28-29)

His poems are the revelation of the divine wisdom of Gita which propounds there yogas of Bhakti, Gyana, and Karma and his emphasis on the Karma Yoga impart joy, absolute bliss and absolute peace to the avid readers and even drench them in the Rasa of Bhakti. After a rigorous penance and Tapasya attained that celestial and eternal light which made him one with God:

In rapture all my soul was hushed, / Entranced, enthralled in bliss. / A flash illumined all my soul; / The heart of my heart opened wide, / O joy, O bliss, what do I find! / My love, My love, you are here, / And you are here, my love, my all! / And I was searching thee! / From all eternity you were there / Enthroned in majesty. (In Search of Gods & Other Poems, 3-4)

A believer in the Gita considers soul as immortal and body as mortal and this admittance of soul as invisible, immortal and impenetrable, makes him love his own self, see the same self in all other objects. His poem 'To My Own Soul' reflects his observation about his own self:

Reflector true-Thy pulse so timed to mine, / Thou perfect note of thoughts, however fine- / Shall we now part, Recorder, say? / In thee is friendship, faith, / For thou didst warn when evil thoughts were brewing- / And though, alas, thy warning thrown away / Went on the same as ever-good and true. (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 8, 170)

The vision of Swami Vivekananda was spiritual in toto whatever he touched. It was with spirituality. He wrote in a letter to Miss Macleod on 26 Dec, 1900 giving the fittest reply to Shelley's 'To a Skylark' which says:

We look before and after / And pine for what is not / Our sincerest laughter / With same pain is fraught.

And he wrote in a reply to the above:

Look behind and after / And find that all is right, / In my deepest sorrow / There is a soul of light. (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 8, 168)

The poems of Vivekananda are rich in pictorial quality. Especially his description of nature is marvellous for it is also mingled with divine ecstasy, intensity of feelings and spontaneity. A powerful undercurrent of mysticism and spiritualism flows through all his poems i.e.

Before the sun, the moon, the earth, / Before the stars or comets free, / Before e'en time has had its birth, / I was, I am, and I will be. / The beauteous earth, the glorious sun, / The calm sweet moon, the sponged sky, / Causation's laws do make them run; / They live in bonds, in bonds they die. (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 8, 163)

Nature is the projection of God's grace and there is a mystic kinship of man with nature. In the lap of nature man finds the eternal peace and joy which are rare and intractable in the life of man. The manifestation of divinity can be realized in the nature also.

The moon's soft light, the stars so bright, / The glorious orb of day, / He shines in them; His beauty-
might- / Reflected light are they. / The majestic morn, the melting eve, / The boundless billowy sea, / In
nature's beauty, dongs of birds / I see through them it is He. (In Search of Gods & Other Poems, 9)

The poems of Vivekananda are rich in lyrical quality as the ancient epics of Hinduism were perfect in the subtleties of style and diction and carry the qualities of spontaneity, lucidity, symbols, images, metaphors and similes which enhance the poetic beauty of his poems. Imagery of light water, fire and other elements are frequently used in his poems. His lyrics are musically perfect: All these be yours, and many more / No ancient soul could dream before- / Be thou to India's future son / The mistress, servant, friend in one. (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 6, 178) The symbols and imagery of Swami Vivekananda are Indianized like light which is the symbol of illuminous; and sleep as lethargy and idleness. Light is also symbolized as hope and redemption from darkness. Water is used as fleeting and even changing material existence, God as the blessed dream or the soul of souls; time as all destroyer; Kali the mother as terror, breathing death and dream and darkness are the symbols of ignorance and diligence.

To sum up, it is indisputably clear that the poetry of Swami Vivekananda is full of simplicity, genuineness, blissfulness, picturesqueness, harmony, music and sublimity as well as it abounds in the noble teachings of the Vedas, the Gita, the Ramayana, the Mahabharat, the Upanishadas and the Puranas. His in-depth study of Eastern and Western philosophy and command over language and literature which not only establish him in the Chicago conference as the global platform but also established him in the field of Indo-Anglian literature where he is considered as the precursor of saint poetry of modern era. As he was a soul puissance, illumination, inspiration and divinity, his place among Indo-Anglian poets is on the highest rank. Here it is relevant to end the paper with the remark of Professor Satish Kumar:

“As a pioneer of saint poetry his place is really the highest in the entire gamut of Indian English poetry. Vivekananda anticipated Swami Ramatirtha, Sri Aurobindo and Paramhansa Yogananda, the renowned Indian saints' poets of the twentieth century”.

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