

Seasonal reflections in Tagore Songs : A canvas of diversity



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1.

Rabindranath Tagore's book of songs "*Gitabitan*" begins with the song "*Kanna Hasir dol dolano Poush Faguner pala, tari modhye chirojiban boibo ganer dala*" (কান্না হাসির দোলদোলানো পৌষ ফাগুনের পালা, তারি মধ্যে চির জীবন বইব গানের ডালা), where he wishes to continue his song offerings lifelong amidst the tears and smiles of the seasons. These verses signify how nature has been a part of Rabindranath Tagore's life and creativity. Tagore's association with nature is manifold and can be portrayed in three phases according to his childhood memories expressed in *Jeevansmriti*:

a. In his childhood Nature was visible to Rabi only from behind the window panes, as he was kept confined in a room, where a circle was drawn around the window seal by a servant, who cautioned him not to cross the line, lest he will also be abducted like Sita by demon king Ravana. The naive mind believed the Ramayana stories and obeyed to watch Nature from a distance, without any direct contact.

b. Sometime later, when there was outbreak of an epidemic in Kolkata, the entire Tagore family shifted to a farmhouse in *Peneti* (Panihati) where for the first time child Rabi saw and felt Nature without any barrier. The farmhouse being located next to Ganges, the child felt it like a warm open armed welcome by Nature herself.

c. After his *Poite* (a ritual to induct a boy into Brahminhood) around the age of 11-12, young Rabi got a golden opportunity to accompany his father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore to the Himalayas, where he stayed for quite a long time. From being in a cage like life to being immersed into the serene hilly beauty, Rabi actually became ecstatic, because in this phase for the first time he felt Nature to be a living entity, and not just a collection of flora, fauna and geographical features. That it has a soul, is the biggest understanding that Rabi had in

his days in Himalayas, a conviction which remained in his psyche forever and had an indelible influence on his creativity as well.

2.

Rabindranath started writing verses / songs from a very young age of 14 when on a rainy day he wrote on a slate with a chalk "*Gahan Kusum Kunja Majhe*" (গহন কুসুম কুঞ্জ মাঝে) depicting Radha's yearning after hearing Krishna's flute from a dense floral bush. This and few other songs from his "*Bhanusingher Padabali*" also portrayed the celestial love of Radha and Krishna in the backdrop of Nature.

He continued writing and composing songs throughout his life and among his 2000 + Bengali songs he had given a substantial space to songs on nature and environment, which capture diversities of each season and the changing environmental reflections thereby.

Amongst those 2000+ creations about 300 odd songs are termed as "Nature songs" (*Prakriti Parjay*) which depict 6 seasons of the year, namely Summer (*Grishma* / April -June), Monsoon (*Barsha*/ July - August), Autumn (*Sharat* /September -October), PreWinter and Winter (*Hemanta and Seet* /November - January), Spring (*Basanta* / February March). In each subsection depicting one particular season, the poet has portrayed how the environment changes with each season. The verses, reflecting such changes, reveal the mastery of the bard through 16 songs of Summer, 113 songs of Monsoon, 30 songs of Autumn, 17 songs of winter and 95 songs of Spring. In this discussion, selected songs from each season will be explored to view the diversity of nature as portrayed by Tagore.

3.

Tagore begins his seasonal exploration with summer in "*Nai rasa nai, darun dahan bela*" (নাই রস নাই, দারুণ দহনবেলা). The song portrays a sultry, scorching day where the roads are empty because of the heat. He refers to summer as *Bhairab*, the slayer, who is as if playing a cruel game. The grass is covered with dry dust, which also creates a whirlwind rising to the sky. Life in summer replicates a barren desert. The torment continues in "*Darun agni bane re*" (দারুণ অগ্নিবানে রে) with the heart aching in thirst because of the atmosphere, which according to the poet feels like fire-arrows. A tired dove croones sitting in the dried up branch of a tree. But he asks us not to be afraid because he knows Nature will give a temporary respite by bringing in nor-wester storms and the much awaited drizzle. His assurance resonates in "*Oi bujhi kalbaishakhi*" (ওই বুঝি কালবৈশাখী), the nor-wester covering the evening sky with dark clouds. The rain will wash away whatever is not to stay. But this is only for a few evenings. So the "pain" persists in "*Chokkhe amar Trishna*" (চক্কে আমার তৃষ্ণা). In this song we find a rain-starved *Baishakhi* (summer) day which expresses agony about its unquenched thirst. It also expresses pain of seeing a flower being scorched black, even the fountains are not flowing as they are obstructed by the cruel hearted summer.

So the sultry day and the poet together beckon monsoon in "*Eso shyamal sundar*" (এসো শ্যামল সুন্দর). Here Tagore visualises Nature as the forlorn lover who has been waiting for her beloved, the green beauty who will be the nectar of life with his heat-reducing & thirst-quenching company. Imagery of Krishna and Radha is manifested deeply in this song when Tagore depicts Nature as Radha, waiting pensively for Rain as Krishna in the

shades of the *Tamal* bush. Her *Bokul* garland is ready, flute plays the sweet song of coalescence for them to unite. With the first pouring, Nature will dance, the world will play tunes and rhythms of happiness.

4

Finally comes Monsoon with "*Gahan ghano chhailo, gagan ghonaia*" (গহন ঘন ছাইল গগন ঘনাইয়া). The sky now is overcast with clouds, and in the pitch-dark Earth waits with bated breath. The sky lightens up with intermittent flashes of lightning awaking and scaring the sleeping villages. Suddenly a gust of fierce wind arises and ear-defeating thunder roars across the sky. The temperature finally will dip with the pourings in "*Taper taaper bandhan katuk raser barshane*" (তপের তাপের বাঁধন কাটুক রসের বর্ষণে). The poet wishes that the earth will be happy as she will finally meet her beloved Sky, who will join her in the form of rain. In many monsoon songs of Tagore, image of Fertility Cult is reiterated, which comprises of ancient folkloric religious rituals that are intended to stimulate reproduction in humans or in the natural world.

But now he welcomes monsoon in "*Oi ase oi oti bhairaba harase*" (ওই আসে ওই অতি ভৈরব হরষে) and "*Ashar kotha hote aj peli chhara*" (আষাঢ় কোথা হতে আজ পেলি ছাড়া). The first song announces the arrival of the much-awaited monsoon with the cloud laden sky where the cloud is addressed as "*Oti/অতি*", the *Humongous* which pours down to drench the earth. This song is like an invocation of the monsoon which is being portrayed as "*Naba Joubona /নব যৌবনা*" / The poet urges everyone to send out a warm welcome by blowing conch shell, ululating and also by playing *Mridanga* and Flute and women dancing to the joy of finally having the relief and reliance in life. The invocation of rains through dance takes us to the aforementioned Fertility Cult belief which is found in *Hudumdeo* dance of North Bengal where naked women dance in open at night to invite Rain God to inseminate Mother Earth.

In the second song in a lighter tone a beautiful description of the dancing winds and the showers show how the coltish monsoon is reigning the sky, the overcast clouds symbolising its royal baton.

Manifestation of an all encompassing monsoon is portrayed beautifully in "*Nil Anjana Ghano punjo chhayay*" (নীল অঞ্জন ঘন পুঞ্জ ছায়ায়) and "*Aj bari jhore jhawro jhawro*" (আজ বারি বারে বারো বারো). Sky is overcast with dark clouds shadowing the vision marking the arrival of the long awaited monsoon who is addressed as "*Gambhir*" (the persona). The thirsty earth which was lying hapless in summer, receives the message of the nectar of life, the rains. With the downpour (the male insemination) hard barren soil gets the necessary nourishment and new saplings start protruding through the cracks like flags announcing the victory of life over death. Now the Earth has broken shackles and freed herself to indulge in the joyous unification with *Gambhir*. In the second song monsoon is intensified, the sky seems to have completely melted to create the unstoppable pourings. The storm rides through the *Shaal* forest, water speedily shoots through the fields, the clouds dance wildly. It seems the heart now wants to break free from the body and roam about crazily relishing every moment of this drenched scenario. The tumultuous landscape is but an apt portrayal of the monsoon at its peak.

On a romantic note "*Badol diner prothom kadam phool*" (বাদল দিনের প্রথম কদম ফুল) is dedicated to *kadam* flower which blooms in monsoon. Next "*Jharo jharo borishe*" (ঝর ঝর বরষে) and "*Nil naba ghone*" (নীল নব ঘনে) express the flipside of monsoon. With the excessive pouring the roads become muddy and inaccessible. The poet laments for those who have lost their way in the rains or who are homeless without a shelter to protect them in such inclement weather. The roads are desolate, the night is pitch black the in absence of moon and stars in the sky, Yamuna river is also overflowing both her banks, air is howling loudly and thunder crashes the sky with lightning sparkling

fear.. In the 2nd song the poet's concern is for the farmers and the cattle rearers who are out in the open for their daily chores. Night is approaching fast, so he anxiously wants to know whether they could return home with the cattle. The *Aush* (rice) field is submerged in water, riverbanks are overflowing, ferry is also suspended in the river in fear of accident. He urges everyone not to go out in this situation.

But after the sweltering heat, this season has come as a blessing to quench the thirst of the Earth in “*Trishnar Shanti*” (তৃষ্ণার শান্তি). Tagore feels as if the Earth estranged from her beloved, the Sky, was tormenting in the absence. This downpour from Sky not only will soften the heart, this unison of Earth and Sky will also create new dreams. The unison will be celebrated with the togetherness of *Bokul* orchard and the honeybees, soft kisses of the wind on the bamboo plants, dance of the new leaves and creepers embracing the *Ashok* tree.

This unison finds the best manifestation in “*Dharanir Gaganer milaner chhande*” (ধরণীর গগনের মিলনের ছন্দে). The Earth unites with the sky following the belief of Fertility Cult, and she (Earth) starts trembling in the unison, replicating a very sensuous bodily feeling. Now the Earth will bear the green fields, the blooms, the crops, all symbolising offsprings born from that unison. The sense of fulfillment rings loud in the songs of monsoon.

5.

After monsoon takes leave with “*Badol dhara holo sara*” (বাদল ধারা হল সারা), the clouds cradle the sunlight ushering in Autumn, the festive season. In “*Megher kole rod heseche*” (মেঘের কোলে রোদ হেসেছে), holiday or ছুটি becomes the central theme with all kinds of juvenile plans, where one can make a paper boat laden with flowers and let it sail in *Taal dighi* (the local pond), or can play the flute and tend the cattle with the

herdsman, can even sleep in the plumeria garden and wake up covered with pollens. All around the world there is jubilation. In “*Aj Dhaaner khete roudro chhayay*” (আজ ধানের ক্ষেতে রৌদ্র ছায়ায়) sun and shadow play hide n seek in the golden paddy fields. The clear blue sky above looks like a river where white clouds seem floating like boats. This beautiful season is manifested in many other songs as well.... in “*Amra bendhechhi kasher guccho*” (আমরা বেঁধেছি কাশের গুচ্ছ) there is an invocation for Goddess of Autumn (*Sharad lakshmi* / শারদলক্ষ্মী). The worshippers urge her to arrive riding in her chariot of white cloud through the azure, the pure blue path of the sky. To welcome her, bouquet of white *Kash* (কাশ) flowers, garland of *Siuli* flowers are prepared, depicting the seasonal blossoms of autumn. An entire song is dedicated to *Shiuli* flower where Tagore emphasises the delicateness and the sweet scent of the tiny flower which symbolises Autumn specifically like the *Kash*.

Autumn holds the biggest festival for Bengalis, the *Durga Puja* when in traditional belief Goddess Durga comes to her *Baaper bari* (father's house) from Kailash with her four children for just 5 days. Tagore has written songs in the glory of the Goddess as a part of his portrayal of Autumn in “*Sharate aj kon atithi elo*” (শরতে আজ কোন অতিথি এল) and “*Amar Nayan bhulano ele*” (আমার নয়ন ভুলানো এলো). In both the songs the poet expresses his joy of welcoming a special guest in Autumn who mesmerises with her beauty. The heart is singing the unspoken lyrics of the blue sky and the dew-moisted grass. The fields are golden with harvest because of the autumn harvest of *Aman* (আমন) rice. The beauty of Autumn is manifested in the *Siuli* grove and the land below is carpeted in orange and white with the fallen flowers from it. The forest deities are blowing conch shell to welcome the Supreme Goddess who will arrive leaving red painted (আলতা) footmarks on those flowers.

Autumn bids farewell with "*Amar raat pohalo sharad pratey*" (আমার রাত পোহালো শারদপ্রাতে), expressing the pain of departure through the last blooms of *Shiuli*.

6.

Now it is time for winter. From end of October the temperature starts to dip, there is a slight nip in the air, when the cold season slowly starts approaching through "*Hemanta*" (হেমন্ত)। As this preparatory phase is very short lived, songs in this genre are also few. In "*Sedin amay bolechile*" (সেদিন আমায় বলেছিলে) Tagore describes *Hemanta* as foggy and almost barren as most blooms of Autumn, the *Siuli*, the *Kash* are no more visible. The term "*Vushanbihin*" (ভূষণবিহীন) in this song aptly describes the advancing winter when all trees will become blank due to the absence of leaves which are like ornaments decorating the branches. But yet another Bengali festival symbolises *Hemanta*.... *Deepavali* or the festival of lights. Hence in "*Himer raater oi gaganer dip guli re*" (হিমের রাতের ওই গগনের দীপগুলি রে) poet urges everyone to light lamps in all the houses, to destroy the darkness that is not just outside but also in human minds. The song transcends nature in illuminating the inner light of the people to overcome all shadows of the mind. Winter arrives in full galore in "*Elo j seet er bela*" (এলো যে শীতের বেলা).....the poet expresses the urgency to reap the harvest from paddy fields as time is slowly slipping away. Days are getting shorter, nights longer. Darkness is taking over the previously blue sky. In yet another song "*Seeter haway laglo nachon*" (শীতের হাওয়ায় লাগল নাচন), trees are shedding leaves in the rhythm of the cold winter breeze which gives shivers in their branches.

Nature aware that it is time to lose all its beauties. Hence the gusty winds make her "poor", bereft of all flora and fauna. But she will wait for the magic "touch" of the Omnipotent who not only takes away but also fills up the loss with change of season.

7.

With that inevitability, the poet now beckons *Basanta* (Spring) in "*Eso eso Basanta dhoratole*" (এসো এসো বসন্ত ধরাতলে) to bring with her new life to the barren nature of winter. In "*Ore bhai fagun legeche*" (ওরে ভাই ফাগুন লেগেছে) and "*Neel Digante*" (নীল দিগন্তে) wonderful imageries are created by the poet by describing *Fagun* or the month of spring as a magic wand touching the branches, flowers, fruits, leaves and making these alive. The Sky was in stupor but by mischievously spreading riots of spring colours, the Earth awakens the sky and makes it smile again. The breeze visits every bush to meet the unknown flowers. In the 2nd song the best imagery is created by the expression "*fuler agun*" (ফুলের আগুন) where all the red, orange and yellow blooms are visualised as fiery colours which have ignited the blue sky. Below the sprawling mustard field looks like a golden river with its tiny yellow flowers. The contrasting image of the colours upon the blue, and the golden below paints a perfect canvas of colourful Spring, such is the mastery of Tagore. The golden hue baffles the Sky as it wonders mistakenly if sunlight is bathing the golden "sky" below. The Sky feels that Sun has united with the Earth and expresses itself as the small golden flowers of the field. Even the breeze is confused and blows through the golden azure of the earth mistaking it to be the new sky.

Spring brings with it the festival of colours, *Dol or Holi*. In a very popular song "*Ore grihobasi*" (ওরে গৃহবাসী) the poet invites everyone to open doors and immerse in the beauty all around manifested through flowers like *ashok madhabi*, *palash*, green leaves, butterflies, and honey bees. The word "*ranga*" (রাঙা) is frequently repeated in this song as sign of love and happiness through *ranga hasi* (smile) *ranga nesha* (mesmerism), *ranga hillol* (wave). And the entire song holds fragrance of the spring through her flowers.

The sense of fulfillment is further portrayed through moonlight which illuminates the spring evening with a soft radiance. In the song "*O amar chander alo*" (ও আমার চাঁদের আলো), all the trees are bathed in moonlight, all the buds open up with that tender touch and all the flowers fill nature with their fragrance, turning the southern breeze ecstatic again. Thus on a full moon night when "*Chander hasir bandh vengeche*" (চাঁদের হাসির বাঁধ ভেঙেছে) the poet asks *rajanigandha* flower to cascade her fragrance amidst the all encompassing abundance of moonlight. A celestial atmosphere is also created when *parijat*, the heavenly flower is mentioned. The dominant imagery here is of a marriage when the bride in heaven (*Indrapuri*) is waiting to meet her beloved for the very first time by lighting a lamp in their private room. The earth also is joining in this 'union'.... The sky is decorated with white clouds in the form of bridal makeup made with sandalwood.

The swan-couple also are afloat in the joy of their union. Thus Spring becomes unanimous with love and togetherness. But with the ongoing cycle of season, spring will depart in "*Chole jaay mori haay, basanter din*" (চলে যায় মরি হায় বসন্তের দিন), much to the sadness of the peacocks, mango orchards, honey bees and the heart plays a pensive tune of the breakup with Spring.

8.

This journey of seasons gives Tagore a renewed conviction of considering Nature as a living entity. He ends this journey by chiming "*Amare tumi asesh korecho*" (আমারে তুমি অশেষ করেছে). Here he praises "*tumi*", the Omnipotent, the master painter, who sometimes leaves a blank canvas only to paint new pictures in every season. This eternal cycle of the seasons, a natural phenomenon of the world environment, finds its beautiful and perfect expression through the 300 odd songs of Rabindranath Tagore collated as "*Prakriti Parjay*" (প্রকৃতি পর্যায়) in *Gitanitan*. Tagore, our finest poet ever, through his observation and artistic mastery has captured the ever-changing scenario of each season infusing not only environmental aspects but life philosophy and folkloric elements as well. Nature with all its diversity enchants us, and these songs add to our enchantment and awe towards the magic that Nature creates through the year.

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