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The Spiritual as the Virtual: A Comparative Analysis of Spiritualism in Three Indian Poets

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Abstract

The present paper is an analytical scrutiny into the spiritual. The theoretical lens is Deleuze's concept of the virtual; the paper takes the spiritual as the virtual which is actualized through the processes of individuation and plane of consistency. On the plane of consistency, the virtual becomes actual, or individualized, based on degree of power and speed; hence asymmetrical relation.

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The Spiritual as the Virtual: A Comparative Analysis of Spiritualism in Three Indian Poets

The paper comparatively analyzes the spiritual as poeticized by three major Indian poets at the two extremes of a century. The temporal gap is of significance here as it sharpens the points of contrast. Therefore, the paper starts with an analysis of the spiritual in Tagore's *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)* (1912) and then as its postmodern counterparts shifts to the far end of a century and concerns itself with Madan Gandhi's *Planet in Peril: Poet's Lament* (2004) and Anand's *Burning Bright* (2013). This comparison reveals that the spiritual depicted in Gandhi's and Anand's poems is de-spiritual which is the outcome of the asymmetrical relations determined and imposed on the plane of consistency due to the conditioning circumstances of the time.

Key words: Deleuze, Tagore, Gandhi, Anand, spiritual

Introduction

India has always been regarded as the land of mysticism and the spiritual. While the materialist West has always looked down upon the spiritual, for India it still holds its healing powers. This fascinating force has been one of the major charms, having attracted the West to "other" as a source of mysteries and wonders. Politically, such a stereotypical image of India has been deployed in its long-term history of colonization. Defining the "other" as the dark mysterious entity accentuates the alterity of other from self. The sweeping wave of Romanticism in the nineteenth century highlights the spiritual trends and in a way, politically speaking, legitimates the alterity of the East from the West.

Modernity defines spiritualism of the East as an escapade from the absurdity of modern life and its dehumanizing ethos; hence T. S. Eliot's helpless resort to Indian culture in his *Wasteland*. Colonization, however, has not left the East impervious to its devastating legacies, one of them being materialism. Western Technology brings with itself the industrial creeds of exploitation and morality of (re)production. De-definition of humanity based on the demands of the (post)modern conditions renders the Eastern milieu marketized. This along with the force of Europeanization, or Westernization, puts the East in a drastic process of cultural estrangement and deculturation in an attempt to help the East "resemble" the West. This is what Homi K. Bhabha welcomes as "mimicry" for its de-totalizing effect. Such U-turn status quo redefines the spiritual in a way completely different from how the Romantics did.

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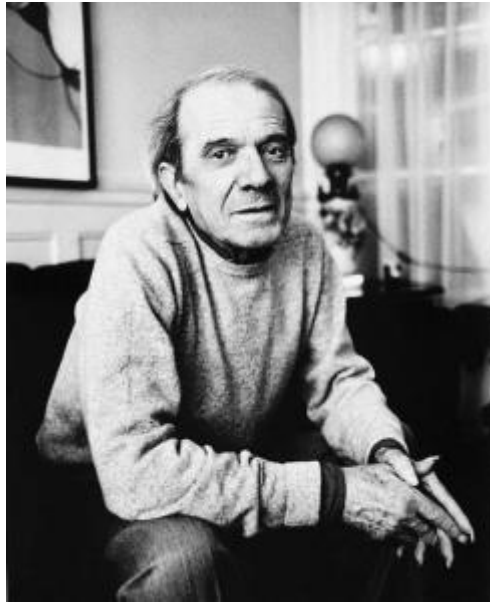
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The Spiritual as the Virtual: A Comparative Analysis of Spiritualism in Three Indian Poets

The present paper investigates such changes in the spiritual as poeticized by Indian poets in an endeavor to show the virtuality of the spiritual through its different actualizations. Tagore's spiritual poetry which won him as the first Easterner the Nobel Prize lies at one end of the century impressed by its Romantic urges, while Madan's and Anand's poetic enterprises lie at the far end of the century with its postmodern, globalizing demands.

Theoretical Framework



Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995)

Courtesy: <http://ipnagogicosentire.wordpress.com/2011/07/21/the-logic-of-sensation/>

The theoretical lens adopted by the present comparative study is Deleuze's notion of the virtual. Gilles Deleuze, the French postmodern philosopher, adopted and developed the idea of the virtual initiated by Bergson. Deleuze, like Bergson, believes in the ruling opposition between the virtual and the actual. The virtual is immanent within the actual. The actual is a possibility which has found the chance to be actualized, while the virtual encompasses all possibilities which have not yet been actualized but exist with every actual, hence immanence. It is due to the virtual that all actualized possibilities have the chance or potential for change or metamorphosis into some other, at times contradictory, form of actuality. While the actual is dependent upon the virtual for its existence as it emerges from the virtual, the virtual is self-dependent and neutral. The actual is fixed and stable, whereas the virtual is the metastable realm of fluidity and flux. As defined by Bogue, metastable state is "a state in which energy is

unevenly distributed and available for metamorphic activity” (2010, p. 22), hence asymmetry. As opposed to the actual, the virtual is multiple since the metastable states constitute a “more-than-one”, an excess of being capable of multiple differentiation (Bogue, 2010, p. 22). Based on these points, Deleuze defines reality as both the actual and the virtual, hence their interdependence (Williams, 2003, p. 7-8; Aldea, 2011, p.19). Lecercle rightly accentuates the duality of the real (2002, p. 106, p. 115). By the same token, Williams ascribes duality to any process or synthesis, “parallel but asymmetrical syntheses spread out on either side for any event and for any series” (2008, p. 27).

In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze speaks of the virtual as “an impersonal and pre-individual transcendental field, which does not resemble the corresponding empirical field, and which nevertheless is not confused with an undifferentiated depth” (1990, p. 102; Bogue, 2010, p. 21). As the transcendental condition of all possibilities in the corporeal world, the virtual lies between the two extremes of amorphous chaos and the clearly demarcated world of the real. In Colebrook’s apt words, “The virtual would be an extension of the actual *and . . .* just the way in which one substance not only exists in terms of its spatial connections but also creates a non-material feel of what lies beyond its own body” (2010, p. 84).

The virtual is the site, or metastable, of all possibilities which can be actualized based on three models. Individuation is the first model which Deleuze borrows from Gilbert Simondon, the philosopher. Focusing on the metastability of the virtual and its inherent multiplicity, Simondon argues for the pre-individuality of actual individuals. In Deleuze’s terms, each metastable site is capable of self-differentiation. Deleuze further calls the metastable site as a singular point which is a “line of continuous variation”. In simpler register, the singular point or the metastable site, as the second model, is capable of self-differentiation based on the stimulus that instigates individuation or actualization.

The notion of “line of continuous variation” accounts for the many variations that one encounters in language due to its elements. According to Deleuze, this line of variation remains immanent within each actualization.

Based on this, the present study contends that spiritualism has been actualized in so many different variations due to the circumstances; while one form of spiritualism has been

individualized at a certain time, all other various forms remain immanent within each actualized form.

Accordingly, it can be argued that in de-spirituality poeticized by Gandhi and Anand the Romantic spiritualism of Tagore is already immanent just as in the Romanticism of Tagore there lies immanently de-spirituality which Gandhi and Anand lament. Besides, the singular point in the discourse of spiritualism is spirit itself which is virtual and whose position cannot be known before it is actualized in a given situation; in Deleuzian key tone, the spiritual is a site of coexisting possibilities which are determined by spirit as its singular point. The spiritual is a site of continuous variation, both spatially, as a continuum of possibilities, and temporally, as a timeline of that continuum, “the entire continuum being always immanent within every one of its sequential actualizations” (Bogue, 2010, p. 24).

This last model justifies the focus of the present study on the temporal gap between the two points of comparison, Tagore at one end of the century and Gandhi and Anand at the far other end. The study deals with spiritualism not in philosophy but in poetry. This is of significance and it can be accounted for based on Deleuze’s distinction between philosophy and his predilections which lie with art. As Bogue deftly explains, “the arts are capable of engaging the virtual and giving it a new embodiment as a ‘monument’ of sensation”, whereas philosophy attempts at formulating the virtual in concepts (2010, p. 25).

In the tenth section of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explicate in details on becoming and discuss that the virtual is characterized by a “plane of consistency” in contrast to the “plane of organization” belonging to the actual. On this plane, which is the third model, there exists no distinction between the animate and the inanimate, the natural and the artificial. It is a plane on which “things are distinguished from one another only by speed and slowness” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 254; Bogue, 2010, p. 25) and by their corresponding “degree of power” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 256; Bogue, 2010, p. 26). In Bogue’s apt clarification, a degree of power is “determined by an entity’s affect – its power of affecting and being affected – and ‘Affects are becomings’” (2010, p. 26). In Lampert’s analysis, an “effect” is “an abstract sequence of possibilities, which becomes actual whenever certain conditions and driving forces come into place (2006, p. 3). For Deleuze, becomings take place on the plane of consistency.

While the actual is the realm of being, the virtual is the realm of becoming. In this view, spirit as the singular point of spiritualism is the virtual, or metastable site, which is individuated or actualized on the plane of consistency according to speed, slowness and degree of power; accordingly, spirit is the site of affects or becomings. Poetry engages these becomings and accords it a new embodiment. It is the medium through which the artist expresses his ideas and sensations in his particular way. This individuating factor helps the poet touch on the virtual (Williams, 2003, p. 9).

The present paper takes the spirit as the singular point which is individuated as love: Tagore's Divine love, Gandhi's collective love, and Anand's individual love. All three kinds of love are three actualizations of the spirit and in each individuation the other two are immanent, hence virtual. The virtuality of the spirit allows the poets maneuver over its different actualizations and experiment on it. It should be noted, however, that each actualization is the result of the inevitable reduction of the virtual and this "leads us to make mistakes in the way we see and describe this world" (Aldea, 2011, p.20). Tagore's poetry suffers its own limitations in presenting the spiritual just as Gandhi's and Anand's do. However, what interlinks the three poets together is their shared ethics; all three strive for the counter-actualization of the spiritual (mis)interpreted by their time, each in his own way.

Romantic Spirituality: Rabindranath Tagore



Although Tagore witnessed the twentieth century, he was highly influenced by the Romantic urges of the late nineteenth century which was sweeping the East as the aftermath of its rise and development in Europe. Therefore, his poetry marks the Romantic facet of spirituality. *Gitanjali* or *Song Offerings* won him the Nobel Prize of literature in 1913. *Gitanjali*

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is a collection of prose translations made by Tagore from Bengali. However, as a translator Tagore has not remained faithful to the original Bengali collection as he at times comingles different poems together and makes variations in the concourse of some poems. These points, nevertheless, cannot be counted as the weak points of the work as they show the creativity of the poet in the colonial language which stands as secondary to his context. The other concrete feature of *Gitanjali* is its lack of any title; the poems run without being distinguished by any title so the whole collection reads like a continuous prose poem, a vast canvas of spirituality.

In most parts of *Gitanjali*, the speaker addresses his thoughts and emotions to an audience who, albeit absent in the poem, is ever present in all aspects of the speaker's life; in soul: "This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life" (1913, p. 20); in body: "Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs" (p. 22); in mind: "I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind" (pp. 22-23); in the heart: "I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart . . . knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart" (p. 23); and in action: "And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act" (p. 23). The addressee could be no one other than God variously portrayed as the immortal, the infinite, the eternal, the holy, the master, and the lord. From the very outset, the speaker highlights the significance of his role as a singer, an artist, stating: "I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence" (p. 21). When he describes himself as "This little flute of a reed [which] thou has carried over hills and dales, and has breathed through it melodies eternally new" (p. 20), Tagore reminds us of Plato's view of poet as a mad frenzied man inspired by the Muse. This state of inspiration is further accentuated when he joyfully expresses, "I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach" (p. 21). The platonic state of frenzy is described by Tagore as "Drunk with the joy of singing" (p. 21). What is of significance here is that Tagore mostly depicts God as an artist and calls Him "O master poet" (p. 25); God is a musician like himself: "The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on" (p. 22). Such a comparison implies the Godly status of the poet for Tagore.

In love with the Divine, the speaker's voice utters nothing but dedication to His holy presence; thus he offers Him his art: "Now it is time to sit quite {sic}, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of live {sic} in this silent and overflowing leisure" (p. 24). Such Romantic elements as solitude, tranquility, loneliness, and silence pervade Tagore's poem, reminding us of Wordsworth's Romantic ethos of poetry. Like Wordsworth to whom form is super-added and therefore not essential, the singer in *Gitanjali* comments, "My song has put off her ornaments. She has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union; they would come between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers" (p. 25). The speaker metaphorically views ornaments as mere obstacles in the free play of the mind: "The child who is decked with prince's robes and who has jewelled chains round his neck loses all pleasure in his play; his dress hampers him at every step" (p. 25).

Like Wordsworth who votes for the simple and commonplace, Tagore also goes for "the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost" (p. 27). While for Wordsworth this Romantic step might be interpreted as his anti-classicist move, for the Indian poet it signifies his postcolonial attempt which destabilizes the totalizing agendas of racism and classicism. Not only does Tagore bring the ignored, the lost and the silenced on stage, but he also takes God among them and even identifies Him with them. Such a great endeavor on the part of the poet is a drastic denouncement of all religion-based institutions which thrive on classist and racist discourses. In an anti-religious gesture, Tagore brings God down to the earth and renders Him as one of the poorest and the lowest:

Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. (p. 28)

In such a context, there is a shift in the addressee who is now the religious man having confined himself to the temple: "Come out of thy meditations . . . Meet him in toil and in sweat of thy brow" (p. 28).

In some other parts of the collection, Tagore implicitly portrays the addressee as the beloved who is coy: “I awaken and hurry in search of my goal; but cruelly thou hidest thyself from before me” (p. 32); thus love is the other Romantic feature of *Gitanjali*: “I am waiting only for love to give myself up at last into his hands” (p. 34). The lover is heard complaining the throes of unreciprocated love: “Oh my only friend, my best beloved, the gates are open in my house—do not pass by like a dream” (p. 38). Nature is the other important element in Tagore’s poetry so that the collection abounds in natural elements as various as wind, tree, birds, river, seas, shores, etc. All seasons appear and reappear in the collection.

At times the speaker sees himself a son waiting for his father to come to his rescue, “I know thee as my father and bow before thy feet” (p.94). In a narrative he tells of having waited for a long time for His arrival and laments why He has not presented Himself to him so far; then upon contemplation, he realizes that He has always been with him. The omnipresence of God is acknowledged when the speaker states, “Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes” (p.58). In another narrative he speaks of the arrival of the King of all kings at their village and their lack of belief in the incident; instead of preparing themselves for Him, they go and sleep (pp.66-67). They find themselves in utter shame in His presence (p.67). The King instead of giving them love offers his wrath symbolized in his “dreadful sword” (p. 68). The narrative implies they themselves have procured God’s anger, hence their plights.

The speaker finds himself united with the whole universe, “The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures” (p.87). Such harmony between man and the world is a key Romantic element which colors Tagore’s collection and is coveted by Gandhi and Anand. Tagore goes so far as to view all poetry having a gesture toward Him: “From the words of the poet men take what meanings please them; yet their last meaning points to thee” (p.93).

Gitanjali comes to an end by death that is welcome and loved by the speaker in the same way that he loves his lord; in an apostrophe to death, he states, “Day after day I have kept watch for thee; for thee have I borne the joys and pangs of life” (p.108). In his last moments, he goes back to God and dedicates all his life to Him: “let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee” (p.119).

Postmodern Era: The De-spiritual

Madan Gandhi: Collective Spiritualism



Madan Gandhi

A century later, Madan G. Gandhi, fulfilling a prophetic mission, laments the de-spirituality which has stricken his generation in his collection, *Planet in Peril: Poet's Lament* (2004). His poems stand in sharp contrast to Tagore's in their perspectives; while Tagore's is a Romantic vision, Gandhi's has a pessimistic tone, hence Tagore's postmodern counterpart. Thematically, *Planet in Peril* can be divided into three sets of poems. In almost half of the poems the speaker adopts a third-person point of view while in the other half he speaks in first-person; the ending is marked with some poems containing solutions, suggestions, and hope. Gandhi finds the earth no more the place in which one can have tranquility and contemplation; nor does it hold the manifestations of a Godly presence. The very first poem, "Self's Orchestra", views the Romantic scene disturbed by the intrusion of the snake which puts an end to all these beauties and disturbs his peace (p.1).

While violence is mitigated and at times avoided in *Gitanjali*, Gandhi gives horrible portraits of violence in the postmodern era. His collection is fraught with nuclear bombs, doomsday, weapons, wars, explosions, and nightmarish scenes. "The Holocaust Rehearsals" nakedly depicts man's helplessness in the violence-ridden atmosphere. His age is one of technology and the competition of superpowers over nuclear power. In such a highly tensed atmosphere, the poet can no longer forget himself in the Romantic trance of a Divine love which for him has lost its favor. This poem quite aptly shows that the postmodern man breathes violence: "Daggers at our neck,/cannons at our back,/rockets on our head" (p.3). He puts under

question the wisdom of ancient ancestors and their Romantic mission as they “could not persuade/those puffed with powered greed/the consequences of clashes/can spell a permanent nuclear doom” (p.3).

“The Cancerous War” deals with the octopus of nuclear war devastating the beauties of nature and all its elements: “A nuclear blast,/all-killing its sweep,/turns earth into cinders/singeing the very roots of life” (p.21). Nuclear blasts turn the earth into a “burnt-out planet” (p. 41), hence annihilation of the whole universe (p.31). In an Owen-like manner, the nauseating scenes of war of which one can never get rid of are depicted and the poet sees no hope for the return of the lost splendor to the earth (pp.37-38). The destructive interference of man in nature has changed its visage, hence “the sun blackened”, “The skin of space singed, /the heavens charred,/the earth-mother defaced” (p.28). “A Flaming Heath” laments violence having turned the garden into a heath and the sky into field for star wars (p.5). The hole created in the ozone layer due to man’s industrial-technological activities is the other concern of the poet in “The Luminous Web”: “Who shall weave the luminous web,/who shall spin creations;/will the sun rise again,/will life revive on the earth?” (p.39). Instead, he finds, “nuclear blast,/blisters of radiation,/yellow smoke of explosion” (p.69).

Tagore sees and worships his beloved God in beauties of all seasons, while for Gandhi a year is nothing other than “A year of crises,/firefighting throughout,/. . ./A year of defeat/ for the brokers of peace,/. . ./A year of depression,/of ethnic strife,/of statist suppression/. . ./of betrayals and blackmails,/of diplomatic cant and deceit,/of coup d’états and insurrections,/disguised as revolutions” (p.34). Unlike Tagore who remains detached from the on-goings of his age, Gandhi brings to his poem “the explosions in the gulf/the depredations in Iraq” (p.4).

“Crashing Heavens” laments man’s violence reaching the stars and disturbing their peaceful balance. While for Tagore stars stand for God’s eyes watching him and blinking at him, for Gandhi they become zones of wars and battlefields. This poem condemns and rejects space explorations and scientific discoveries which have brought destruction on man’s peace: “Navigating the globe,/voyaging in space,/what has he brought—/star wars and nuclear winters” (p.4).

For Gandhi's generation, war has become the religion of the age. "The Perennial Sermon" bemoans loss of love and peace: "We now hear/gun's ceaseless roar,/ear-splitting explosions/ and cannon's thunder" (p.14). He puts in sharp contrast the sacred fires set up for religious purposes to "giant flares/that will swallow/the entire" (p.18). Gandhi detects the roots of all wars in man's greed and competition for power. He comments on "cut-throat competition" (p.55) as the legacy of colonial civilization which brings man's annihilation under the rubric of liberation calling it "a no-win game/with stakes so heavy" (p.12). In "National Pride", Gandhi gives a deconstructive view of nationalism which has become a peg on which men hang their ambitions, hence destruction of the whole nation:

These warring hordes,

mouthing prayers for peace,

hiding weapons in their sleeves,

opt for hell

for good reasons:

to safeguard honour,

dignity and freedom,

enduring justice and self defence

all that goes with national pride. (p. 20)

Elsewhere, he speaks of the futility of fighting for nationalistic ethos realized in the tattered bodies of sons: "Their twisted bones,/their battered limbs,/give a lie to their claims,/their alibis and no-win games" (p.33).

"Mines All the Way" portrays de-humanization: "Slit throat of valiant sons,/bombard hospitals/and hovels of the poor,/maim and kill children/strike at the mother's womb/in the never-ending war" (p.23). Gandhi sees future as nothing other than "The blasted future/jeering at/man's bloated pride,/inching his way/to quick disposal" (p.27). Later on, the poet predicts the

dead outnumbering the alive as the aftermath of war, stating there will not be enough land for burying the dead nor will the funeral rites be observed (p. 40).

“My Assault” voices a father, or maybe a seer, who is shown to be lacking the coveted wisdom and therefore turns into an agent of destruction on the earth. The speaker is a man who greedily destroys his ecosystem and “turn(s) beautiful earth into a wasteland”: “So, I am complacent/to deforestation, ecocide/wholesale pollution,/death of the ocean” (p.9). In contrast, the speaker of “Catastrophic Flood” warns man against his own destruction and his rue which will not be heeded by anybody: “One day,/you will rue the dreadful deed/when gloom shall overcast the sky/yellow smog clamp the black out/. . ./none there to hear your lament” (p.11). The moment of resurrection of the guilty man on doomsday is well depicted in “The Invisible Jury”; the first-person speaker of this poem finds himself in a state of praying which is disturbed by an invisible jury sentencing him to eternal damnation for all the devastating deeds he had done to his race and nature. For the first time, the speaker is heard pleading to his God, “O God! I am ruined’,” (p.48). In such a predicament, nobody can help him out: “I suffer brain hemorrhage,/go into a coma,/but they will not let me die;/in an instant they revive./Again I am before the jury,/dumbfounded,/pleading guilty, unable to defend” (p.49). “Wailing Bangles” aptly enters into the heart and mind of the guilt-stricken man inflicting him with nightmarish scenes of his greed-ridden deeds, “I drink ale and blood/and suffer from my part of the sin/how I dragged down the heaven” (p.53).

In contrast to Tagore’s speaker who enjoys peaceful sleep, Gandhi’s just wishes for a moment’s respite: “Shall my restless soul/ever have respite/from the cannon fire,/blasts and holocausts –/after or before I fall asleep?” (p.32). Elsewhere, he complains, “In dread we sleep/In dread we wake up/to be lullabied/into a dazed sleep/Now no lazing under a tree,/no carefree dip in flowing waters” (p.42). On Gandhi’s planet, God is nowhere to be seen, nor is he awaited: “the earth is deathlike, cold” (p.24). Tagore’s God is with the lowest, the poor, and the ignored; whereas Gandhi suspects: “Is God a global super-cop/ whose writ runs on the weak,/ who wields his baton on the meek,/who sides with the power-puffed proud?” (p.32). Tagore finds God among the poor and the common, while Gandhi gives priority to “common man” (p.64). For Gandhi, the “real man” is the “Unfed, unclothed,/unhoused, uncared,/he moves unseen,/unwanted, unloved/. . ./to him belongs the earth;/. . ./On his bones has risen/sky-kissing towers of

civilization/. . ./Unseen, he is always there,/unsettling every plan,/occupying the centre-stage/with floodlights on” (p.76). Unlike Tagore who seeks God, Gandhi gives no value to “otherworldly things,/neither the treasures of heaven/nor the terrors of hell”; instead, he votes for “honest toil in service of fellowmen” (p.64).

While in the first half of Gandhi’s collection, the poet gives an objective view of war, technology, and man’s greed for power, in the second half, he re-approaches the same themes through a first-person speaker revealing their sordid effects on a person’s psyche. He bemoans his paralytic state, “A part of me paralyzed” (p.44) and finds himself in a frozen state (p.51); he has “No word, no gesture” (p.52); his sleep is disturbed, “I sleep in constant dread”; he is in a futile and mean search, “I slog through mire/in search of elixir” (p.44), while he finds “[No]Where to hide/all roads lead to suicide” (p.7). In horrible scenes of war, he looks for dignity and honor, but finds “my barbarity,/my murderer’s face” (p.46). Even his dream is assaulted by the war-striking greed: “In the debris lie/splinters of my dream” (p.50). Seeing no brake on his destructive force, “All efforts to contain me,/fail”, he explodes in his shell (p.17).

The song-writer of Tagore changes to a dying man writing his declaration while he is “bleached,/asphyxiated;/dumb” (p.52) sipping his sadness (p.51). For Tagore, peace is a blessed state whereas in Gandhi’s age it marks man’s indifference to others’ predicaments; thus he is a “barren soul/ dead to human suffering,/to ugliness all around” (p.54). In such a mournful situation, his poet-speaker expresses his inability to “bear/this drama of mortal strife/blasts and explosions/this burning amphitheatre on wheels” (p.55); thus he justifies his attempt at poeticization: “The fire that burns within/moves my heart to sing/a song of peace/for the war-ravaged world” (p.54). This view of poetry is in contrast to Tagore’s whose poet-speaker dedicates his poetry to God.

Against all such plights, the poet-speaker prescribes love as the salvaging bond, calling it “the alchemy” (p.58). A spiritualist, Gandhi still holds hope in the spirit: “The deathless spirit smiles/in all-enveloping night,/holds its head high/in nihilism and despair./Never lets die/ the ember of hope/even on the cross./Wear the martyr’s crown” (p.61). Elsewhere, the poet gives mother and motherly love the lead: “She wants peace,/for sure, peace;/no war, not even a scuffle./Let mother show the way/ when mankind has strayed away” (p.62). In “Sadist Maestro”,

Gandhi rejects religion and its priests for having treated men as “beasts”: “Stop drugging man with soul-killing poison,/no more dopes, no more delusions” (p.74); the poet sees God created by the discourse of religion as “the sadist maestro of the zero-sum game” and bids him let man free, let him be on his own “work out his own salvation,/freeing himself from all parochial darkness,/ . . ./eliminating all weapons of mass destruction” (p.75). When the speaker argues “Only love, compassion, and service/will bring his release” (p. 75) he is implicitly delegitimizing religion for not having nurtured redeeming love, despite its many gestures.

In “The Poet” Gandhi aptly talks of the end of colonialism and the rise of new modes of oppression; it is the poet who is fully awake when everybody else resides in oblivion; thus for Gandhi the poet is more than a seer. In an age when there is “No leader. No prophet” (p. 67), the poet becomes a prophet who brings hope and change in the world: “When everyone sleeps,/the poet is/forging new words./To rouse . . ./A new man,/a new order,/a new language” (p. 73); the new man is an “Earth Citizen” (p.91) and the new culture, “Earthen Citizenry” (p.92). A poet is “bard for the crestfallen”, who targets his anger “to overthrow tyrants and empires” by forging his own bones into weapons, continuing “the fight/for the wretched of the earth” (p.80). In “Can a Poet Ever Die?” Gandhi views the seer poet and his poetry as the phoenix who martyr-like arises out of his own ashes (p.95), “The capsule that I bury this day,/the truthful record of an ill-fated play,/the climax and denouncement of epic dimension/caused by a fatal flaw in psyche of man./ . . ./At the same spot I shall bury/ . . ./the blue-print of a new civilization/yet to arise on ruins of the existing one” (p.95). Calling poets sons of Ganga, Gandhi seeks the confraternity of all poets and bards over the globe, to “to usher in/ the citizenship of the earth” (p.87). This unification is urged against “collective homicide” of people who are beguiled into “an imagined wrong” by different discourses of society (p. 71).

In his prophetic voice, he reminds us of “The Same Essence” which binds all humans across spatio-temporal borders (p.77); borders and territories are arbitrary and the whole earth belongs to everybody (p.81). The emphasis on shared commonalities is furthered in the collection through the poem titled “Cosmic Red” which tells the killer and the killed both have the same red blood and mother mourns for both. Gandhi aptly argues that both killer and the killed are victims of the clashes between “isms” (p.82) and thus explicitly blames the ambition-ridden discourses of the society for destroying human peace and love bonds.

The poet calls for the unity of all men against evil, “Why not raise our arms to the One/who shall order our redemption?” (p.83). In “A Mission to Redeem”, the prophetic voice of the postmodern bard hails to humanity and freedom: “The world calls you again/to come out of your narrow shell/and speak of abiding concerns/for the entire human race” (p.85) and arouses man’s urges for redemption: “you are friend to every man/ fired with a mission to redeem” (p.86). Elsewhere, the poet seeks distributing happiness to every one on the earth (p.90). Although man inherits the earth “pillaged by marauders,/laid waste by bandits”, he is admonished to nourish universal love and, like Ganga, bring all cultures and beliefs to a confluence (p.88). Contra responsive to Internet, only a universal love can shrink the world to a village, hence “The Global Village?” with its deconstructive question mark (p.89). While “Mirage” views the total redemption of man as only a mirage, the poet-speaker looks forward to “The archetypal earth citizen” to “evolve a design of living” (p.96). *Planet in Peril* comes to an end with “My Epoch” in which his age, despite all calamities, is “the noblest of all”. Yet the poet sees hopes of liberation not in the noble but in “the commoner . . ./guided by light of conscience and reason”. The future that he predicts for the earth and its people is a promising one sans-violence: “A global Gandhi on the world horizon/a world free of nuclear terror,/sans trauma of ecological doom,/a new creativity flowing from the wholeness of Self” (p.97).

J. S. Anand: Individual (Psychic) Spiritualism



Dr. J. S. Anand

The other living Indian poet is J. S. Anand who laments the de-spiritualism of his age from a different viewpoint. His recently published collection of poetry is *Burning Bright* which is the other pivot of this study. A spiritual leader in the postmodern age, Anand proves to be more individual-oriented than Gandhi; thus while Gandhi outspeaks the collective need for the

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spiritual, Anand investigates the psycho-individual canvas of the postmodern era. While Gandhi arouses fear and dread in the reader through his recurrent anxiety over mass extermination and the coming nuclear and star wars, Anand is perturbed by sense of fear and uncertainty, hence the first poem starts by: “So much fear!/So much uncertainty! So much hesitation!” (2013, p. 1). The speaker is mostly a robot with a “chip inside” who is “fresh to this world” without an inkling of his past “Sans any certainty [. . .] without any confidence”; he is a thinking robot who knows there must be some essence, “But it was a perfect wash/in the river of forgetfulness” (p.1).

While for Tagore, life is a Divine blessing, for Gandhi and Anand it is nothing other than suffering and imprisonment, “We have been sentenced to life/Rigorous imprisonment” (p.2). What connects men together is suffering, “suffering is a glass/through which/everyone has to look/and see his face/blackened/so that all look alike” (p.65). For Anand life is “a lie/Stuck in Death’s mouth;/Flesh covers the soul/Coffin hides the hide” (p.76). Or, it is a whirl heading forward “caught in time/Arrested in space” (p.2) and controlled by a powerful Unknown that maliciously enslaves man and dooms him to suffering, “All the while on earth/Caught in a whirl/The whole generation/Is suffering and slaving/ To an Unknown writ/Of an Order Unknown” (pp.82-83). Only in dreams, one can have some joys but “Who can keep the eye shut/And stay in the dreamy state?/For ever?” (p.83).

Anand’s people are bees in their beehives, “they gather their honey/oblivious of their destiny” (p.5). For Anand also, “sleeping is a gone affair/so is peace” (p.6). In “Death” the speaker is a ghost who is to identify his tattered body in an accident among other dead bodies but could not: “same the bodies/roasted in lust/anger and greed/same the faces/carved in ambition/etched in grief” (p.8). Saying that “I was a liar/I am still alive”, the speaker implies that evil has not perished and is still alive “out to do some mischief” (p.9). When “Fear” rejects the notion of suicide as running against divine command, the speaker views movement upward: “everything grows up/life itself grows into death” (p.34). Viewing death in a higher position than life is a postmodernist symptom. Thus the speaker regards men as “candles /which were never/ put to the match sticks” (p.35); this description implies that man is “out of joint” in this universe. Unlike Gandhi, Anand blames not man but the Divine will. Although like Tagore, Anand can find some moments for contemplation, “Reflecting over the days/ When I saw the glamour of the

bathing beauties” (p.18), what such moments lead him to are not the Divine, but his own death, “In the moveless state/One day/ I shall cease to be” (p.19).

Anand’s people are either foolish men busy with “nonsense” (p.70) of life living in cities “a noisy debris” and behaving “like ghosts” (p.69), or as depicted in “Lost and Not Found”, they are mentally disturbed men caught in the maze of the age, “I find myself /in a lunatic asylum/gathering pebbles/on the shores of a sea” (p.59). In “Song of the Lost Generation”, the poet presents the lost generation of the postmodern era who are not only lost to their parents and nature, but also to themselves; thus no longer served by natural elements, the speaker finds himself drained of creativity and love, “I sang a rocking song/and broke the charts;/I knew it was all noise;/. . ./ I have left all frivolities./so have my parents” (p.61). In “Me, Who Has Ceased to Be..”, the speaker bemoans being smashed by his desires, “riding the motorbike of desires/I crashed against myself/ and broke into pieces” (p.62). The de-spiritualized man tries to escape the grave; he rises from the grave for a fresh start yet finds himself tumble into the grave, “I fear: whether I really walk?/and if all my journey is fruitless?/and my life absolutely meaningless?” (p.63).

“Not an Ode to Night” is the words uttered by a psychically smashed postmodern man who dares not to be great or even think of being such a one; thus he goes for seclusion and avoids anyone’s company: “I love to be small;/I love to be petty;/leave me alone;/. . ./I hate/things which immerse me/be it the mother earth;/be it you,/ her cousin,/my co-mum” (p.53). Stuck in the “Ruins” bequeathed by the oppressors, Anand’s man knows he is no longer alone, but besieged by the debris of the oppressors, “by small doses/they drank off my/oblivious infancy” (p.54). In his fatal end, “what is left of me/are a few wishes/scattered among the flowers/growing in the cremation ground” (p.54); he is a living man who, unlike the dead, is left homeless, “in the vast world afloat/ where is my home?” (p.71), hence “dispossessed/and dishonoured” (p.72).

In “Separation”, the speaker puts in contrast man and animal, the former granted “mother-wit” and the latter “animal wisdom”. He goes on to say, “While the animals/had everything right;/the right went wrong for/man” (p.26). The poem calls animals’ kingdom as God’s which opposes “the kingdom of man/ where mixing is a /taboo”, hence sexuality and

sexism (p.26). The violence-ridden kingdom of man is replete with “corruption, jealousies,/all the maladies that Pandora’s box had” (p.27). Therefore, the speaker asks, “when shall men grow/into the wisdom/which animals have/even without growing” (p.27). The same contrast runs through “Patient Fate” where the patient-speaker suffers from the way humans treat him. Catching their game, animals of prey, led by their mother-wit, know when to “stop/where they ought to”; arrested by doctors, the patient complains, “for them,/a patient man/is more than dead;/and they are doing/more than animals to me;/grinding my bones too” (p.67) and contends, “these mortals/lack that mother wit/which told animals/to stop” (p.66).

In “A Million Destinies”, the seer speaker contends, “I saw the formations/it was man outside/and the elements inside”; then he goes on to say that everything in the universe belongs to God, except man, calling him a self-created “superstructure”: “Only man departed /from the immortal face/ and created a hell/out of Heaven” (p.68). Unlike Tagore who takes this world belonging to God, Anand explicitly argues, “God has nothing to do/with what we are doing/and how/This world belongs to us/We are its makers and breakers” (p.39). Maya for Tagore is coveted; yet for Anand it is “an illusion”; thus success for Anand is nothing other than “a succession of /crises unbroken” (p.39); for Anand success “derails /Human mind; and turns man into/An unlistening passion/Is a self-sought, self-imposed curse/. . ./Success in this world/Is a failure in fact” (p.40).

Success as defined by man’s greed and civilization turns the earth into the “darkling planet” (p.37). Thus the speaker complains, “Lacking that Promethean light/These eyes are burning blind/ And we are groping/ In this jungle of knowledge/Where the Oracle/Has lost his way” (p.38). Like Gandhi’s guilty man, the speaker in “Wonder” sees himself a colonizing man “Out to imperialise the estates of nature/And run over them/My own caravan of ambitions and omissions” (p.20); and like Gandhi’s man he is aware of his own doom: “All that I have raised/ On the heart of this earth divine/Is sacrilegious enough/To pull me down” (p.21).

Man’s self-made hell is the outcome of civilization and technology. In “Afraid”, Anand assaults on civilization and its destructive force not only on nature but also on man; the speaker expresses his dread in seeing nature manipulated by civilization for the mere sake of entertainment. He laments in a Kafkaesque manner,

the gardeners
have set a cage after me too;
I see in their hands
cutters
to give me the shape
of a man;
and to shear off
all the humanity
that clings to me;
drain out all the dreams
from my blood
and turn me into a
hide of a man alone
hung on an ironic cage;
I am afraid. (p.45)

“A Face” starts with man’s dread of bullets in a violence-ridden atmosphere; yet the poem does not prescribe being an individual with a face, since an identity is more dangerous than “a faceless mass” (p.30). The speaker prefers to be lost in the mass than to own an identity of himself, “better to be/a faceless mass/ heaving behind the doors/than sticking out the face” (p.30) and concludes, “No faces. No bullets./only music autumnal/leading straight to/the collective grave” (p.31). The same theme runs through “Smooth Surface” where the individual bemoans the discourses of society wanting him to be headless “like the flock/they raised bushes /around me/. . ./and I looked/like a bush, about which/they believe in beating” (p.32). Then the speaker

talks of violence manipulating nature by bulldozers and grazing machines, “where all is fake/only fake is safe” (p.32).

Like Gandhi and Tagore, Anand believes in the healing power of love for its strong sense of belonging, albeit his is a more personal one (p.15). “Not for Nothing” resembles Gandhi’s faith in the power of the society where despite differences some commonalities interlink people together (p.48-9). “Sharing” draws common points between Gandhi, Anand and Tagore as here the speaker states, “Life is all about sharing” (p.10). For Anand, differences of all sorts entail love bonds among people, “alienation was the /essential condition of love” (p.12). Such a view of differences countersigns the racist, sexist or classist agendas that exploit people for their mere differences. In “You and Me”, the lover views his whole existence in the presence of the beloved, the other who has become part of him: “I exist but in you, /Out of you/it is a lie;/a phantom-existence/impossible to justify” (pp.50-51).

Like Gandhi, Anand speaks of mother, here mother-earth, who bestows her love to all without any discrimination despite man’s indifference to her: “So much indifference/So much injustice/So many cries/So much violence/ Still she stays still/Without any malice/Without ill-will” (p.36). Anand’s man is a grief-stricken soul, “look into my eyes/peep into my heart/find sorrow/seated on the throne”; yet this lost soul can be revived only by love, “that is you, O friend,/which lights the lamp/. . ./this languishing heart/dimming visions/wait for a knock/to wake into life,/ or permanently fall” (p.78-9). “Bricks” recalls and encourages the force of holding together, “I and you together/mean a lot/while alone we lose/in meaning and stature/. . ./I stand famished/ and You languish/without each other/ and they do not bother” (p.81).

Like Tagore and Gandhi who prioritize the common, “Weak” celebrates the weakness of leaves over the power of stems; the poet deconstructively accords the highest credit to the leaves as they prove to be of more use despite their apparent fragility. It is the leaf-plants that give light to the fire of the kitchen; the leaves are food for the cattle; shelter for birds; romance for the child when the wind blows through and makes its music; women gather under their shades, sing songs of joy and “fang out their pains” (p.47). This philosophy is of great political significance as the weak is shown to be more powerful than the strong, “stems alone/do not pass for the forests” (p.47).

Conclusion

Deleuze calls artists as “cultural physicians” who correctly diagnose the symptoms of social illness and cure them (Bogue, 2010, p. 5). Tagore, Gandhi, and Anand all perform the same role; while for Tagore, the immediacy of remedy is not felt, Gandhi and Anand find the emergency of their contexts which needs not only more direct action, but also entails a more imperative tone. Their age is a postmodern one stricken by de-humanizing and de-spiritualizing hold of market under the rubric of globalization. Against man’s competitive greed for nuclear power, Gandhi arouses universal love; while Anand touches on the more delicate harms done to man’s psyche inflicted by colonization and civilization. This comparative study has been an attempt to bring the three different perspectives of spiritualism together to indicate that the spiritual is the virtual; it is individuated along a continuous line of variation and thereby it includes the standard, mutant, deviant and regional versions of the spiritual. The spiritual is an experiment; it is a means of exploring, extending, modifying and transforming ideas by setting them in resonance within a conceptual scheme; in Tagore’s case the scheme is a Romantic one, in Anand’s and Gandhi’s cases it is a postmodern scheme. Such experimentation of the spiritual has resulted in different versions of spiritualism.

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