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**Women and Beauty Aspects in the Selected Later Poems of
Rabindranath Tagore**

Harish Shukla, Ph.D.

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Tagore's Description of Beauty Aspects as Divine Truth

This essay focuses on Rabindranath Tagore's description of the beauty aspects of women and his concern for women in general terms.

The poems of Tagore create a romantic vision of the divine truth. Some poems are tales in verse with a rare delicacy of feelings. The recurring images - the crossing of the river, the call of the boatman, a singing mendicant, dark clouds gathering in the sky, the lover waiting for the beloved, all spring from familiar situations but with cosmic dimensions.

Description of Women and Nature: Abode of Divine Light

The later poems of Rabindranath Tagore not only describe the beauty aspects of woman but also the beauty aspects of nature and other things. In the poem entitled 'Woman', Tagore describes that the combination of joy and nectar is found in a woman. She has the power even to subdue the restless waves.

“Nectar and joy taking form in woman.

Have lifted restless waves to subdue.”

(Lines 1-2, p.100. *Later Poems of Rabindranath Tagore*,
Translated by Aurobindo Bose)

Here the poet makes use of the image of waves (turbulence) that adds beauty to the description. The restless waves are lifted away and subdued because of the beauty – nectar and joy – of woman. He finds ephemeral beauty in woman. Tagore depicted the beauty of women through songs, canvas, stones etc. He says that this beauty is held in the dreams of the artist.

In an unnamed poem Tagore says that a woman may be a goddess or only woman, but there is an illumination of divine light in her.

“Be she a goddess, or only woman,
The rays scattered from your heart
Surround her with divine light.” (Lines 7-10, p 101 *ibid*)

Tagore describes the tenderness of a woman through her eyes in an unnamed poem when he says,

“It seemed I saw tenderness
Glistening in thine eyes” (Lines 6-7 p 121 *ibid*)

Beauty of Nature

Tagore describes the beauty of not only woman but also the beauty of nature. In the lines below from an unnamed poem he describes the beauty of spring through personification.

When spring departs
She leaves with a smile
The touch of flowers
On forest’s brow. (Lines 1-4, p 121 *ibid*)

Tagore’s use of personification reflects his creativity and his in-depth love for the beauty of nature.

We find another example of his description of different aspects of nature through his masterful art of personification in the following lines from an unnamed poem.

In autumn's noon
On tremulous grass,
The wind's soliloquy
Played on my flute
All worry, all care,
That twine round life,
Are swept away. (Lines 49-55, p 125 ibid)

Frost and Tagore

Such a beautiful description of nature reminds one of Robert Frost's poetry in which Frost also describes different aspects of nature through different imagery.

The relationship between works of Robert Frost and Rabindranath Tagore has not so far received the attention it deserves. There is some overlap between the lives and works of Robert Frost and Rabindranath Tagore. Yearning and determination for a lonely journey is one such theme. The beckoning of the woods and the Himalayas (in the case of Tagore) offer yet another comparison and contrast.

Beauty in Old Age

Tagore excelled himself by extending his canvas by describing beauty aspects of various things besides woman and nature. In the poem 'Jarati' that means a very old lady we find different type of beauty aspect in this poem

O Jarati
I have seen your picture in the heart.

The steady flame of the lamp
Bathes your brows, lips, white hair. (Lines 1-5, p 98 ibid)

In the poem 'The Wayfarer', Tagore has nicely depicted the beauty aspects of life. He optimistically tells that the river of life flows before him. It carries light, good and evil, gain and loss. In the poetic description he has merged the beauty aspects of life with the beauty aspects of nature as he says,

“Before me flows the river of life-
Bearing on her stream
Light and shadow, good and evil,
Gain and loss, tears and laughter,
Things that melt away
And are forgotten!
On her waters
The dawn comes with deepening hues,
The sunset spreads her crimson veil,
And moonbeams fall like mother's gentle touch.”
(Lines 6-15, p 88 ibid)

Success with Free Verse

Tagore describes different aspects of beauty: natural objects such as river, sea, meadows, flowers, fields, seasons, scenery, dawn, evening, and other things such as birds, moon, sky, dreams, flute etc. He describes beauty aspects of other personal and intimate things such as silence, death, dreams, tears, laughter, etc.

The use of free verse provides him literary freedom to experiment with his thoughts and language. Tagore has great versatility and immense depth in describing beauty. By his poetic excellence he takes the readers to the enchanting sky of fantasy and imagination and makes them feel riding on the wings of high imagination. His

beautiful description of beauty reminds and solidifies the great lines of Keats, 'Beauty is truth and truth beauty.'

Tagore's Concern for Women

Tagore's concern for women comes out in many ways in his works, including his short stories and novels. He focuses on pregnancy, family tradition, and woman's duty to preserve the honor of the family, and see these both as a barrier for the emancipation of women and as the given and inevitable virtues of women. *Strir Patra (The Letter from the Wife)* is good example of his concerns in this area. *Haimanti* is another significant work of Tagore, which argues for infusing life back to Hindu marriages through a powerful depiction of Haimanti, the heroine of the novel. In *Darpaharan* Tagore brings out the discomfiture that a husband feels when his wife's talents are highly admired, leaving him to a secondary position in this dialogue. Man as husband needs to humble himself and accepts his wife's accomplishments.

As a poet Tagore looks toward a future where women will not only have an equal role but even a role much greater than what men have played so far. So, he indulges in prophetic writing:

Therefore although in the present stage of history man is asserting his masculine supremacy and building his civilization with stone blocks, ignoring the living principle of growth, he can not altogether crush woman's nature into dust or into his dead building materials. Woman's home may have been shattered, but woman is not, and cannot, herself be killed. It is not that woman is merely seeking her freedom of livelihood, struggling against man's monopoly of business, but against man's monopoly of civilization where he is breaking her heart every day and desolating her life. She must restore the lost social balance by putting the

full weight of the woman into the creation of the human world. The monster car of organization is creaking and growling alone life's highway, spreading misery and mutilation, for it must have speed before everything else in the world. Therefore woman must come into the bruised and maimed world of the individual; she must claim each one of them as her own, the useless and the insignificant. She must protect with her care all the beautiful flowers of sentiment from the scorching laughter of the science of proficiency. The growing impurities, born of the deprivation of its normal conditions imposed upon life by the organized power of greed, she must sweep away. The time has come when woman's responsibility has become greater than ever before, when her field of work has far transcended the domestic sphere of life. The world with its insulted individuals has sent its appeal to her. These individuals must find their true value, raise their heads once again in the sun, and renew their faith in God's love through her love.

<http://evansexperientialism.freewebspace.com/tagore.htm>

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