

# Only Western influence? The birth of literary Romantic aesthetics in Bengal

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**Abstract.** Much has been said about how fruitfully European aesthetics worked on the minds of Indian writers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), even before he turned twenty, in the eyes of some of his compatriots was already a Romanticist—‘the Shelley of Bengal’. Of course, he could not be Shelley because of the very different historical circumstances of India and England (in India at that time historically could not be born aesthetic rebels like Shelley). But what was implied in this assertion remains: in Bengali writing about Tagore and his embarkation upon new aesthetic approaches, almost always the view is expressed that this happened only because of foreign influences. The task of this paper is to show very summarily that such a conclusion may not be correct.

It is obvious that literary movements did not spread like contagious diseases. France always had close cultural links with two of its neighbours—Germany and England—regardless of conflicts and rivalry between them, and at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century France was by no means politically, economically or culturally backward either. Even more—Rousseau’s philosophy and the French Revolution of 1789 was an important factor in the birth of German, and partially English, Romanticism. Yet this movement in France started more than a quarter of century after Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis published their first manifestoes and Wordsworth and Coleridge issued their ‘Lyrical Ballads’.

Concerning India, the situation there was different from any European country, even if we forget about its unique religious, social and philosophical background—the Middle Ages (if we may call them so) continued almost till the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; man could not rely on himself and God had to be the source of his strength at a time when people in Europe, often at the cost of their life, were trying to implement the great, entirely secular principles put forward by French enlighteners: freedom, equality and brotherhood. In India all culture remained religious. In Europe beginning in the second part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the intellectual elite started radically breaking with all canons and revolting against any orthodoxy. Bengal became enriched with all kinds of novelties, being largely the result of the freshly acquired knowledge coming from the West. To those few who could attend the newly estab-

lished colleges, English poetry, novels, essays, and philosophical works and European art and theatre from after the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became almost like ideals. Not in vain there was a vogue to write in English. Even the very talented poet Madhusūdan Datta (1824–1873) started writing in English. British rule was thought by many to be conducive to the regeneration of India.

What happened then has quite a few features similar to European Enlightenment if only one takes into account, of course, that unlike France or England we can speak of an uncertain and rather weak new light that did not influence the lives of many people and left the Muslims, that is the majority of Bengalis, almost untouched. However, on the side of those who were able to read, the interest in particular trends of European thought—at first rationalistic, then Romantic and positivist—was great. Rationalist, even materialist, ideas accompanied the development of science and economic relations. It became clear that even people's souls were experiencing a thirst for a new kind of idealism and spirituality, as the functioning of the Brāhmo Samāj—a society that introduced a new religious trend and was established by Rāmmohun Ray (1772–1833)—shows.

The first Europeans with whom educated Bengalis got acquainted were Locke, Hume, Diderot, Rousseau, Jefferson, Adams, and Voltaire. Their influence can be seen best of all in Derosio and his followers at the 'Academic Association' (Maitra 1965, 11). About the year 1830, Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* became particularly famous. Its entire American edition of 1000 copies was shipped to Calcutta, partly translated into Bengali, and published in the journal *Prabhākar*. But some Bengali intellectuals wanted to read some contemporary European philosophical writing. It is well-known that the very authoritative essayist and novelist Bankimchandra Chattapādhyāy (1838–1844) took great pains to interpret in his early essays the basic ideas of Mill and Comte. Comte was eagerly read by the poet Bihārīlāl Chakrabartī (1835–1894). Rabindranāth Tagore in his young years was also under the spell of the positivists.

It is important to note that the Renaissance thinkers, like Erasmus, Montaigne, Francis Bacon, Thomas Moore, and Descartes—father of the European cult of reason—must have come to the attention of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengalis, yet there was little interest in them. Those who speak of the Bengali Renaissance as comparable to the European Renaissance would be very much welcome to explain this fact. It also can be asked: how this undeniable and very convincing development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in most spheres was rebirth? The author of this paper is rather satisfied to see that in West Bengal the voices of those who prefer to do without the term *Renaissance* in the history of their province have become much louder, as recent publications in the magazine *Deś* show.

For Rāmmohan Rāy—the genuine morning star of so many novel thoughts and undertakings, the universe was reasonably ordered. He taught that India needed in-

struction in mathematics, natural philosophy and chemistry, and therefore schools in Sanskrit with Hindu pundits as teachers had to be replaced by education in English. He also wrote textbooks in Bengali on astronomy, geometry, geography and grammar; founded schools; and tried to spread knowledge in all possible ways. This very famous Bengali was friendly to Christianity and Islam. He strongly attacked superstition, polytheism, and idol worship and called on people to return to the most basic sources of Hinduism. He stressed: 'It is now generally admitted that not religion only, but unbiased common sense as well as the accurate deductions of scientific research lead to the conclusion that all mankind are one great family of which numerous nations and tribes existing are only various branches' (Sen 1967, 447–8). Of course one can assume that behind this view is also the Upanishadic doctrine of the unity of all life. But what Suśil Kumar De says about Rāmmohun is also correct: 'He ultimately arrived at the conclusion that theism lies at the core of every religion, but that it found different expression in different people accordingly as their religious genius gave a shape and colour' (De 1962, 548).

Anyway Rāmmohan Rāy's activity explains to us why there was such a demand for European Enlightenment literature, and what followed later was very much in tune with 18<sup>th</sup> century Western European thinking: the publishing of *Encyclopedia Bengalensis* or *Vidyā-Kalpadrūm* in 1846 to 1851 by Krishnamohan Bandyopādhyāy, the appearance of plays like *Nildarpan* (*The Indigo Mirror*, 1860) by Dīnabandhu Mitra (1829–1873), and novels like *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* (*Wealthy Family's Darling*, 1858) by Pyārichad Mitra. The latter two belles-lettres works correspond to what a writer should do according to the great novelist of the English Enlightenment—Henry Fielding, who stressed that the writer should 'flatter no man, but to guide his pen throughout by the directions of truth'. Outer reality and real life were also the main object of interest to Iśvarchandra Gupta (1812–1859)—a journalist and the best poet of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. 'One can find agreement between his mind and that of Bhāratchandra Rāy (1707–1760) and Pope-Dryden' (Datta 1962, 107). In other words, those poets to a great extent remained within the tradition of 18<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, being in some way similar also to late European neo-classicism due to their didacticism (Bandyopādhyāya 1977, 399).

Yet among Iśvarchandra's very numerous poems appear lines, usually unnoticed by literary historians, but indicative of the coming of a completely new aesthetic mentality:

Cherish the pūjā of nature, make a pronām in delight  
At the feet of the loving earth.

or

We can see a godlike sport in what the poet paints. (Gupta [1901], 331; 332)

This is a kind of return to two very ancient Indian ideas: to the deification of nature and the poet.

A rationalistic world outlook goes well together with an attempt to depict everyday life and its problems in literature, as Tāraknāth Gangopādhyāy (1843–1891) in his first and widely read novel, *Sarnalatā* (1874), shows. Yet even though readers seemed to like such an aesthetic approach very much, Tāraknāth's further works were much humbler and he practically had no following among other Bengali writers (Ghosh 1979, 9). And let us not forget: this was a time when a realistic manner of writing had reached full maturity and even passed its greatest heights in English and French literature, when there were no genuine Romanticists worth the name left in English literature. One should not doubt that the Indian intellectual elite was fully aware of what was happening in contemporary European writing and knew well enough Dickens, Thackeray or George Eliot. Yet of realism we can speak in a very limited sense only in some of Rabindranāth's short stories in the early 1890s and his novel *The Eyesore* (*Cakher bāli*, 1903). Is this not the best proof of our thesis that literary movements in all countries are more indigenous developments than foreign influences and that those influences need a prepared native soil to grow?

The first poet who went far enough to introduce the new epoch in Bengali literature was the very talented Michael Madhusūdan Datta. He can be called a pre-Romanticist. In his epic poem *Tilottamāsambhad kāvya* (*The Birth of Tilottāma*, 1860), he broke the chains of traditional rhyme and introduced blank verse, but in *The Killing of Meghnād* (*Meghnādbadh kābbo*, 1861) the poet turns the characters and events upside down by depriving Rāma of any divine halo and turning the demon king Rāvana and his son Meghnād into heroes. His individualistic and subjective approach and his brilliancy of imagination and delicate sense of beauty proved to those who could appreciate what this religious and aesthetic rebel did that one can write poetry as powerful in Bengali as in English.

In good writing, he was followed by a very great authority in imaginative prose, essayistic writing, and social thought: Bankimchandra Chattopādya. In 1865 *The Captain's Daughter* (*Durgeshnandini*)—the first Bengali novel in modern European fashion and the first prose work of really creative imagination perhaps in all Indian literature—was published. Its author is sometimes called a Romanticist. Indeed he brings imagination to bear upon what can be called the depiction of life, but his historical novels are only romances, including even the last one, *Rājasingh* (1892). That many important issues in them and in his social novels depend on dreams, visions, or astrological predictions or that his plots often violate laws of naturalness and probability are hardly enough to call one a Romanticist.

More important in this respect is the stress on everything Bengali. ‘We want the history of Bengal, otherwise Bengalis will not become men’, demanded the writer (Bagal 1969, 183). The place of action in his later novels shifts from Rājputana or Mahārāshtra to Bengal. One can assert that perhaps the main task of his rightly praised magazine, *Bangadarśan*, was to cultivate the native Bengali language and literature. We can also see a conscientious effort to move personality to the central place instead of society, to give prominence to nature and mundane, but idealised, love. Yet all that also may not be enough to call him a Romanticist, because he still keeps to social conventions and by far is not a non-conformist in religious matters. His female characters are the best example of this. One also notices a certain didactic approach, a clearly expressed wish to teach, except in *Records of Kamalākānta* (*Kamalākānter daptar*, 1875). Still, discussing the tasks of poets, Bankimchandra says that ‘They, by creating the highest beauty, prescribe to the world the purification of mind. The highest beauty created is the main aim of literature’ (Chakravarty 1900, 179). This idea may have roots in Indian traditional aesthetics, but still it sounds Romantic.

From the point of view of changes in the sensibility of Bengali intellectuals, Bankimchandra by far was not alone. The talented poets Rangalāl Bandyopādhyāy and Hemchandra Bandyopādhyāy each in their own way also represented the new age, of which a limited individualism, aesthetic non-traditionalism, locally patriotic motives, and a return to India’s history was characteristic.

Now it is a trite assertion that Biharilāl Chakravarty was, in the words of Bishnupad Pānda ‘the crown-gem of those very few poets in Bengali literature, whom the critics have treated as entirely unconventional’ (Pāndā, 1981). Practically by every researcher he is also called the first genuinely modern lyricist. Yet one cannot say that he has ever been widely read regardless of Rabindranath’s praises of him and the statement after Biharilāl’s death in 1894 that to those who knew him he was ‘the greatest poet of Bengal’. Saying so, Rabindranāth Tagore may not have meant only or mainly the poetic talent of Biharilāl Chakravarty, but his fully liberated, highly imaginative sensibility, which marks a clear break with the writing of all his predecessors. Nature and love—the two main themes around which much else in Biharilāl’s writing revolves—are not new at all. Yet for the first time in Bengali, a poet from his heart addresses the reader’s heart, by-passing religious factors or moralistic maxims. Beyond doubt, Biharilāl also teaches as even art-for-art’s sake prophets like Oscar Wilde teach. But his teachings are genuinely novel and centre around undeclared yet unmistakable stress on full artistic freedom, which also means ideological and social freedom as far as Indian conditions permitted them. The poet was a very mild person and extremely kind to all those who happened to know him personally. He usu-

ally protests indirectly. Yet Biharilāl Chakravarty is also capable of expressions that Bankimchandra Chattapadhyāy could not put even in the mouth of his irresponsible character Kamalākānta:

The Bible, the Koran, the Vedas  
Do not remove the mind's grief.  
Piling up philosophies  
Only aggravates confusion. (Chakravarty 1900, 180)

This leads us to the most fundamental question discussed in the present paper: 'Is it correct to say that Romanticism in Bengali literature appeared only as the influence of what poets or novelists were doing in Europe or the USA?'

It is difficult to mention a source in which this question would have been answered in the negative. It seems so obvious that Wordsworth or Shelley lived much earlier than Biharilāl Chakravarty, let alone Tagore, that the treatment of nature or love, or woman, or poetic beauty and beauty in general underwent great changes after the 1870s in Bengal, followed by what took place in Germany and England at the very end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is also beyond questioning that the main authorities for Bengali poets and writers in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were English and American Romanticists.

Still the question arises why the same European influences did not create a similar reaction in other parts of India. Even in Mumbai a comparable development took place much later than in Kolkātā, let alone Hindī literature, which became 'Romanticised' only in the 1920s. One more interesting puzzle is what Aśitkumār Bandyopādhyāy writes about Biharilāl Chakravarty: 'With the help of a friend he studied fragments of English literature, namely Shakespeare's plays and Scott, Byron and Moore's poetry. One can doubt whether he was very deeply in touch with the Romanticists—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and others to whom his creative faculty is mostly related' (Bandyopādhyāya 1977, 515). This well-known historian of Bengali literature concludes that not mainly English literature but a 'lyric turn of mind since birth' made Biharilāl so much like the Lake School poets. That is, at least in his case the critic is ready to admit that English influences were not deciding. But can we not go deeper than the 'lyric turn of mind since birth'?

Romanticism, if this term is used in its concrete historical context, but not as a very vague notion used in everyday speech, could be born only at a certain stage of cultural development and only after certain preconditions were met. For its initiators, the Germans, the disillusionment in the results of the 1789 French Revolution mattered very much, resulting in the aesthetically rebellious 'Sturm und Drang' movement, Kant's and Fichte's philosophy in which the great significance of every single individual was stressed, and the powerful influence of recently discovered Sanskrit

literature. Most leading German intellectuals at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century found in *Śākuntalā* a rich store of thoughts very close to the originating new aesthetics: the close unity of man and nature; the unity of life, mythology, religion, philosophy and literature; and the unity of several kinds of literary writing. They were so enraptured by the freshly translated *Śākuntalā* and ancient Indian ideas that there are authoritative scholars, like Raymond Schwab, who doubt whether Romanticism would have been born at all without those influences.

Ideas available so profusely in Sanskrit literature perhaps more than anything else contributed to the view that people should exchange the accessible 18<sup>th</sup> century goals, imitative view of art, formal harmony, and belief in the possibility of a rational comprehension of the universe for infinite aims and the view that the creative process was irrational, even divine. German, as well as other Romanticists, called for a deeper truth than that proclaimed by scientism. This truth, it was believed, could be arrived at by use of imagination and the visionary faculty of the poet. The infinite was particularly sought in unorthodox religion; within the stream of nature; and in love, history and the far-away.

If one looks closely at what was happening in Bengal beginning approximately 1870, it becomes clear that neither Biharilāl Chakravarty, nor Rabindranāth Tagore, nor other poets, among whom the talented Akśaykumār Borāl (1860–1919) should be specifically pointed out, were sheer echoes of European or American Romanticists. Ísvarchandra Gupta could not set before him the aim to express the unknowable or even in a way create poetic beauty for beauty's sake as Biharilāl Chakravarty did, because he was a child of another epoch. But Chakravarty, perhaps being no less rational in his own everyday life than Gupta, creates the mysterious goddess Sāradā, the quintessence of which might be the poetic impossibility to look at man and the world that surrounds him in no other way than with eyes full of wonders and insoluble dilemmas. In Biharilāl's poems, we meet with almost ceaseless questioning, he often uses the word *ananta* (boundless), even discussing the lyrical hero's sleep. For the poet

Mystery is life in the world,  
 Mystery its manifestation,  
 In mystery is clad the existent universe.  
 Mysterious are also brothers and friends, love and tenderness.  
 Mysterious and fascinating  
 Is the world's grace and beauty. (Chakravarty 1900, 180)

Such a mystery the early German Romanticist Novalis tried to create in his work (usually but questionably called a novel) *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. A really mysterious Indian East also appears in it.

In our view, the change in poetic sensibility should be examined together with the historical developments that have much to do with it. The optimism of the 'enlighten-

ers' was gradually shattered by continuing poverty, and superstitions and disillusionment in life had to appear. Politically it was accompanied by the merciless suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny and several peasant unrests in Bengal. The spread of education and the growing awareness of the country's greatness in the past also strengthened the positions of those who were seeking a viable myth of national identity. This development inevitably led to the intellectual defence of Hinduism and the birth of a genuine Indian (Bengali) nationalism, as we see very well in Bankimchandra's writing. But turning to national values is a very characteristic feature of Romanticism in every European culture.

It is curious enough to observe that when in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, economically, politically and even culturally India was moving closer to mundane Europe, ideologically it seemed that a new kind of irrationalism appeared, favourable for the birth of Romanticism. It looked as if the wheel of history had started turning back to the past, when religious and spiritual values predominated. Most associations that were established to propagate scientific knowledge and secularism, like the society for Acquisition of General Knowledge or Academic Association, to a great extent started defending traditionalism. The main leaders of religiously rather rebellious Brāhmo Samāj—Debendranāth Tagore, Keshab Sen and Bijoy Kriśna—each in their own way brought the society closer to religion as it existed in times past. One also cannot neglect the role the great religious figures Rāmakrishna and Vivekānanda were playing in Bengal. According to Dushan Zbavitel's findings, as late as in 1879 contemporary subjects appeared in only 16 per cent of published dramas, but mythological themes (a darling for European Romanticists—VI.) occupied 70 per cent of the entire dramatic production (Zbavitel 1976, 229).

Very much in tune with the epoch's development at the turn of the century, even Tagore became an ardent enough defender of ancient orthodox social and religious values. This infatuation left him fully only by 1907, as self-criticism in the novel *Gorā* shows. In it the ideal leader of all Indians in the political struggle against foreign domination is a person like the main hero Gora after he finds out that his mother was European; Gora—the ardent defender of rather orthodox Hindu values, a proud Brahmin—loses his family roots and even religion, but feels that such a man could really become a leader of all Indians.

Buddhadev Bose notes: 'Tagore grew up in the period of Romantic nationalism. The age was for self-discovery and self-expression, both as individuals and as people. There was a reaching to the past and to the hidden resources of rejuvenation; translations were made from Sanskrit; collections of folk-poetry and fairy-tales were published; history, philology and archaeology became charged with enthusiasm thanks to the labours of inspired amateurs' (Bose 1962, 28–9). Biharilāl Chakravarty found it



necessary to publish twenty Baul songs, and he was followed by Tagore, sometimes even imitating the Bauls, collecting other folk-songs and publishing long essays on folk literature. Turning to history, which convincingly appears in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyāy's novels and essays and which becomes a full-blooded Romantic historicism in much of Tagore's poetry at the turn of the century, is another hallmark of the new sensibility brought about by the age. How this all looks like what happened in Germany at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century!

Tagore was both the product of history, of what was going on around him in intellectual circles, and thanks to his genius the one who was contributing to the creation of 20<sup>th</sup> century India. His initially rebellious Brāhmo Samāj family background; his devotion to freedom in all its aspects; and life-long non-conformism in social, religious, political and aesthetic matters essentially contributed to his becoming a rather convincing Romanticist. Of course, he is an Indian foremost, an heir of a splendid and unique civilisation, and a person in whose mental make-up the Upanishadic, Vishnuist, Buddhist, and other specific views are present. Yet Tagore above all was himself, a genuinely forward-looking man. If much in his aesthetics is reminiscent of Schelling—the philosophical law-giver of German Romanticism whose works the Bengali poet hardly knew—that only means that both of them belong to the same school of thought that sooner or later flourished in many countries.

Although it is difficult to believe that the powerful poet and thinker Rabindranāth Tagore tried to imitate the way Shelley or Wordsworth were thinking as poets, his model of what life should be like instead of what it is may partly have been taken from Western idealists, well represented by the Romanticists. Certainly the notion of full freedom of the mind or unlimited aesthetic freedom could not have originated in India in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; it is much more characteristic of the West and it appeared in Europe together with the birth of Romanticism or a little earlier. But aesthetically, in our view, the only undeniable direct Western influence on Rabindranāth is the adoption of literary genres and literary criteria whose primary origin is in Aristotle rather than in traditionally Indian aesthetics.

Biharilāl's writing can hardly be regarded as comparable to Tagore's mighty heritage. Yet there is so much in common between them; in addition to what has already been said, both depicted love as a highly poeticized and universal feeling, because at least in the ideal the unity among people could be stressed. Woman in turn in their belles-lettres acquired an unheard of mundane dignity, because her emancipation was the call of the day.

In Biharilāl's poetry there are strong enough indications that he was close to Vedānta, which indirectly presupposes to depict nature as very close to man. Yet in this

philosophical school, nature is hardly capable of reacting to man's joys and sufferings, and in Vishnuist poetry it is only a background of action. Therefore only the Vedāntic approach to nature could not lead the Indians closer to European Romanticists. To do this, they had to remember even earlier times—to make the most ancient ideas become contemporary, to do what the Germans tried to do—to 'go beyond Greece'. For them that was studying very ancient Indian sources. Rabindranath Tagore rightly wrote about the antiquity of his country: 'At that time faith was paramount. As a result of it, there was no split between man and nature. Then we would not think of dawn, the sky, the moon and the sun as distinct from us... Then human imagination made everything humanlike. That's why it was so easy for literature to become literature' (Thākur 1961–, 8: 482). The notion of nature as alive and existing for its own sake in the long Indian Middle Ages was lost to such an extent that the young Rabindranāth in his famous essay 'Why are Bengalis not poets?' appealed to his compatriots to follow the way Shelley treated nature. Indeed, discussing his views on nature as a purely Indian phenomenon, we should not judge from what it was like in the poetry of intermediate centuries before he was born, but look at how nature was depicted by Kālidāsa and even older works.

Romanticists, especially Wordsworth, added to his conception of nature the idea that it was a person's mighty and great friend who reacts to his/her joys. From the collection of poems *Citrā* (1894) until *The Forest's Speech (Banabāni)* 36 years later, in Tagore's writing nature is treated as alive and man's unity with it is based on a relationship between souls. As if to strengthen his attitude towards it, time and again we meet with poetic references to the Hindu reincarnation theory, which enables a person to look upon an animal or a tree as man's equal in the eternal circling of life-stream.

Indeed, can one forget that some rivers, animals, trees, plants are still sacred to so many people in India? Hinduism in general is the only religion that has brought so much of the very ancient world view to our times, and that was the main reason for the Romanticists to become enraptured with India. They after all were those who wanted to master mentally the utmost of space and time and to find out what was happening in by-gone epochs and very remote places, hoping that in India an embodied social ideal existed or at least had existed.

Attributing the mission of god to the poet and supernatural power in one form or another to artistic imagination is characteristic of almost all bigger European and North American literatures during the climax of Romanticism. In English literature, Shelley thought poets were the legislators of the world, but Keats was sure poems were dictated to him by a higher being. This idea is even more radically revealed by early German Romanticists, then hardly knowing that in India Śiva is a master dancer, Krishna and Brahmā play musical instruments, Sarasvatī (also Sārādā) (very popular

in Bengal) is the deity of poets and all writers, and most important arts and ancient literary classics like *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* have a divine origin or at least serve religious purposes.

We see something of it Bihārīlāl Chakravarty's *Sāradāmangal* (1879). Imagination running wild in his long poem *Sāradāmangal* can also be likened to the mythmaking for which Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis stood so strongly. Sāradā, in this poem only in name, is a well-known Hindu goddess. In Bihārīlāl's creation it is not worshipped. The poet does not know what it really is. Instead he asks who the one is which possesses the features of mother, father, daughter, wife and friend on the one hand and love, devotion, tenderness, charm, and nobleness on the other. 'Where are you goddess?' 'Why do you smilingly strike my breast with cruel thunderbolts?' She, unlike her Hindu image, is the embodiment of love and beauty, including the beauty of nature, from stars and the sea to humble grass.

Tagore's really mysterious *jīvan-devata* (the deity of life) is a convincing deification of the artist's (poet's) vocation, which we find in Indian and other most ancient sources. The superhuman force commands what the poet does and he feels like its vehicle. We see its description in many poems and letters, but never in prose, which supposedly deals with very mundane matters. In the poem 'On the Seashore', *jīvan-devatā*, perhaps being poetic imagination, marries the lyrical *I* after having frightened him first. 'The deity of life' is outside one's heart as a male or female god and within it as something reminiscent of Ātman; it is like the 'man of the heart' in Baul songs and the later god in the Religion of Man. It is present in poems like 'The Golden Boat' and 'On the Seashore' of the mid 1890s, in the dramatic poem 'The Voyage of Time' (*Kāler jātrā*, 1932), and in the image of *līlā-sanginī* (the partner in play) in the poetry of approximately the same period. It is the all-powerful poet who is supposed to get the Chariot of Time moving when others have failed to do it.

'The deity of life' may be and may be not identified by this name, but all the same it has something to do with the supernatural power of the one who creates. If one treats it as Romantic glorification, even deification of beauty and artistic creation, it had already originated in the early 1880s in Tagore's short essays. In one of them, Rabindranāth says that poets sing songs of beauty (which is also the expression of freedom) and sets other hearts free from bondage. Their task is not to instruct. 'Poets are immortal, because their subject is immortal; they sing songs resorting to immortality. Flowers will always bloom, winds will always blow, birds will always sing, and in those flowers the poet will be revealed, the poet will be carried along by those winds, in the birds' song the poet will sing' (Thākur 1961-, 2: 33).

One wonders how it can happen so that among many smaller and bigger books and numberless articles in which Rabindranāth's ties with ancient Indian sources, especial-

ly the Upanishads, are discussed, one can find hardly a single source about the strong Indian roots of his or Bihārīlāl's Romanticism and, indeed, Bengali Romanticism in general—roots which ought to have been no less important than Western influences. Even if Tagore's very respectful attitude to Kālidāsa is analyzed at length, *Śākuntalā* is never presented as an inspiration for him in connection with Romanticism, which has not been denied.

To summarise, it is hardly possible to discuss 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengali literature without employing terms which originated in Europe. Using them, one can say that the century began with a struggle between the newly born rationalist (Enlightenment) tendencies and the traditional religious irrationalism, but beginning in approximately the 1870s new approaches could be seen. Opposition between the free flow of ideas and orthodoxy of all kinds, attempts at social and religious reformation and keeping to the old ways, scientific knowledge and intuitive knowledge, European-type education and traditional instruction, and cosmopolitan tendencies and national values were serious enough commotions for limited artistic inner freedom to be born in the minds of at least a small number of intellectuals and that became the basis for aesthetically rebellious Romanticism. Of course, the key role of individuality in human progress, which was so important for European writing and belonged to the same literary movement, could not fully develop in a society traditionally dominated by strict varna/caste and other rules. Also because of that, fully convincing realism could appear only in the 1930s.

Even powerful outside influences alone do not make one a Romanticist or realist or modernist. We maintain that both Bihārīlāl Chakravarty and Rabindranāth Tagore and a few other less known poets became Romanticists due to historic circumstances of mainly indigenous character. Their imagination must have been unconsciously fed by traditional, very ancient Indian ideas on the status of art and the artist, on nature and a person's unity with it, and the unity of arts and of mythology, religion and philosophy. The rich national past also provided the necessary force of attraction for the great interest in history and folklore. One can add to those ingredients the emotionality and rich imagination of Bengalis, as well as subjective factors—above all the family background of Rabindranāth Tagore. European Romanticism provided tools of work and a perspective.

On the whole, Bengali belles-lettres shows that in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century one should speak more of aesthetic revolution than evolution. We meet with a new view of nature, love and beauty, in a limited way but unmistakably—with human personality as a value in itself, with woman as the embodiment of all virtue, with Baul and other folklore heritage as great art, with very great interest in real history, and with the appearance of true nationalism.

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