

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF EUROPEAN
ROMANTICISM IN ABANINDRANATH: A STUDY OF
HIS IDEAS AND WORKS**

Thesis submitted to Jadavpur University for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF EUROPEAN ROMANTICISM IN ABANINDRANATH: A STUDY OF HIS IDEAS AND WORKS submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of SUCHETA BHATTACHARYA, PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE, JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY, KOLKATA and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/ elsewhere.

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Introduction

*The artistic world which is not alive with imagination is fallacious. It is unreal and fragile like the reflection of the world on a bubble. Its whole existence rests on the mirror, but it lacks the mirror's life flowing in the glass, the mercury or the water bubble. Creation is an art only when it is indebted to the memories and imagination of the creator.*¹ Such an aesthetic formulation, where art refuses to act as reflector, derives its essence from specific notions about imagination, originality and a certain quality of thought that Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) considers as major determinants of an artistic as well as literary creation. This deliberation, on the functionality of specific aesthetic principles, demands an assessment of the painter-author's choice of working along these principles. In evaluating the creative principle, adopted by the author (the identity particularly to be explored), we find that it clearly resembles what we term as 'romantic'. This thesis attempts a study of such 'romantic' bent in Abanindranath's writings.

If we take into consideration the fact that the concept of 'romantic' has its origin in post-Enlightenment Europe we need to have a purview of what the romantic tradition in Europe signified. Leaving the task of defining romanticism to philosophers, it seems safer to speak of a romantic tradition in terms of certain recurrent themes and ideations. A.O. Lovejoy, in his 'On the Discriminations of Romanticism', has located a number of widely varying definitions of romanticism. Lovejoy, irritated by the 'confusion of terminology' concludes that the word 'romantic' has "come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign."² He recommends the term 'romanticism' in its plural. Advocating the need for discriminations, Lovejoy compares and distinguishes between Joseph

¹ "যে শিল্পজগৎ সত্য কল্পনার দ্বারা সজীব নয়, সে বুদ্ধবুদ্ধের উপরে প্রতিবিম্বিত জগৎ-চিত্রটির মত মিথ্যা ও ভঙ্গুর; দর্পণের উপরেই তার সমস্তখানি কিন্তু দর্পণের কাঁচ ও পারার এবং বুদ্ধবুদ্ধের জলবিন্দুটির যতটুকু সত্ত্বা- তাও তার নেই। রচনা যেখানে রচয়িতার স্মৃতি ও কল্পনার কাছে ঋণী, সেখানেই সে আর্ট।" Tagore, Abanindranath. *Bagiswari Shiplpa Prabandhabali*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2008. p. 93

² Lovejoy A.O. *Essays in the History of Ideas*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1952. p. 232

Warton's *The Enthusiast* (1740) and the notion of 'romantische poesie' formulated by Freidrich Schlegel. While admitting that there exist some common elements in Warton's romanticism and the German brand of romanticism, Lovejoy nevertheless finds the former being based upon a naturalism which prefers simplicity and a superiority of nature over conscious art.³ The German brand of romanticism, based on Schiller's focus on 'Naïve and Sentimental Poetry', as the cornerstone of romanticism, is founded on a bias for diversity, complexity and aesthetic subtlety and posits conscious art over nature. Lovejoy's attempt in discriminating romanticism appears as an attempt to compartmentalise literary history. However, his attempt enables us to study romanticism differently in the context of colonial Bengal. Bankim, Rabindranath or Abanindranath's handling of the romantic provides a case in point. Let us step aside and look at how romanticism appears to René Wellek. In *History of Modern Criticism (Romantic Age)*, Wellek defines romanticism in two different senses: "in a wider sense it was a revolt against neo-classicism which meant a rejection of the Latin tradition and the adoption of the view of poetry centered on the expression and communication of emotion. It arose in 18th century and forms a wide stream flooding all countries of the west. In a narrower sense we can speak of romantic criticism as the establishment of dialectical and symbolistic view of poetry. It...proceeds to a view of poetry as a union of opposites, a system of symbols...in the Schlegels and a few critics around them a satisfying theory of poetry was developed which guarded its fences against emotionalism, naturalism and mysticism a successfully combined symbolism with a profound grasp of literary history. This view seems to me valuable and substantially true even today."⁴ In 'The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History', Wellek posits 'symbol and myth' as the basis of unity of European Romanticism.⁵ Wellek's terms for the Romantic

³ Ibid. p.241

⁴ Wellek, René. *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950 II. The Romantic age*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1959. p.3

⁵ 'The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History' II. *The Unity of European Romanticism, Comparative Literature*, vol. 1 1949

Movement in the narrow sense seem to fit Lovejoy's German brand of romanticism. The problem of periodisation being his chief interest, Wellek's passion for a neat division of literary movements is understandable.

The concept of a unified romanticism throughout Europe is still a matter of debate. Lilian Furst, in her attempt to achieve a more balanced picture of the Romantic Movement, has made meaningful assertions against what she calls 'family likeness approach'. As she points out, this method has the dangers of over-simplification when similarities between certain features are stressed at the cost of attendant differences.⁶ To begin with, much of the trouble arises from the term Romantic itself because it never meant the same thing in Germany, France and England. The word rarely occurs in the works of Blake, Coleridge or Wordsworth as it does so frequently in German or French theoretical writings. The English critics of the period were not preoccupied with the philosophical basis of the movement as were the Germans. The distinction between the classical and the romantic interests them as much as it did the French. Furst asks— "How can Novalis' esoteric delving into the mysterious depth of human existence in the *Hymen an die Nacht* be related to Wordsworth's sensible account of his development in *The Prelude*?"⁷ Because of a native sense of belonging, the poets of the English Romantic Movement were far less revolutionary than their French and German counterparts. In case of the French and the German movement there exists a close relationship between the two. As Furst has shown, the true heirs of the German romanticism of 1800-1850 were the French symbolist poets of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Essentially metaphysical, the Jena Romantics anticipate the symbolic aesthetic of Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Rimbaud. The French

⁶ Furst, Lilian R. *Romanticism in Perspective: A comparative study of aspects of the Romantic movements in England, France and Germany*. London: Macmillan, 1969. p.14

⁷ Ibid p.16

Romanticism of 1790-1820, on the other hand, is related to the German ‘storm and stress’ movement.

But in spite of the differences, Furst writes, “the family likeness approach would seem in the long run more promising, of fruitful, worthwhile results than the fragmentary investigation of influences”.⁸ Furst herself selects three salient features, namely, individualism, imagination and feeling, inherent in every Romantic Movement.

Without entering into controversies on the agreement or differences of the European romantic movements, we may profitably talk of romanticism in terms of some recurring themes because the term ‘romantic’ “is useful as long as it is understood as a special attitude towards man and nature, without any reference to the Romantic movement in European literature since there was no such movement in our literature” as Sisir Kumar Das contends⁹.

Calling attention to the ‘romantic’ in the author will be particularly useful if we strive to gauge Abanindranath’s writings through the study of certain themes. While locating the romantic principles in Abanindranath, we will have to take into account the particular facets of romanticism at work in nineteenth-twentieth century Bengal. Abanindranath’s meticulous formulations on aesthetics, in his *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*, will provide the framework through which a thematic study can be approached. In my quest for comprehending Abanindranath as a creative artist with many facets, I have focused on Abanindranath the writer, a much less explored area, in evaluating his aesthetic order, because “...as a wielder of the brush, he has few equals in India...as a wielder of the pen he has no equal” as Ardhendupraksh Gangopadhyay finds.¹⁰

⁸ *Romanticism in Perspective* p.14

⁹ Das, Sisir Kumar. *A History of Indian Literature 1800-1910: Western Impact: Indian Response*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995. p 160

¹⁰ *Visva-Bhrati Quarterly* V 1942

Dionýz Ďurišin, in his *Theory of Interliterary Process* characterises literariness as the “basic and essential quality”¹¹ “...of all literature embodying all relations within the literature, their intensity, amount and manner of their conditionality within the framework of various individual literatures. If this intensity, variability, mutual relations, or affinities transcend the boundaries of individual literatures, then literariness transforms itself automatically into interliterariness. Ďurišin notes, “... The (basic) methodical point of departure... in interliterary ... in literary research... (the) basic principle involved is the relation between the giving and the recipient phenomenon, both are cases of relative creative or non-creative transformation of literary value within the aesthetic system of the recipient phenomenon and in both cases there exist in the course of this process active factors which are connected with the concrete rendering of the work in the recipient structure. This fact determines the aim of the individual methodic procedures”¹² To Ďurišin, each element that is accepted in the recipient structure is accepted because the receiving structure is ‘hospitable’ to this element. Ďurišin quotes Veselovsky’s poetical rendition of this phenomenon– “...a moment of welcome, a trend of thought, analogical images of fantasy”¹³ We are trying to understand the contactual relations between two literatures where both internal and external contacts can be explored.

In the study of the ‘romantic’ in Abanindranath, interliterariness and relations of contact become the spheres of my study. While locating interliterariness, “we must first of all abandon the exclusivist model of literature and think in terms of interaction”.¹⁴ The exploration of interliterariness takes us into the comparative conception of literary history. This history tries to locate a literary work in the historical context where the nature of reception depends on broader aesthetic conventions. It also conveys an understanding of what Ďurišin terms the

¹¹ Dionýz Ďurišin. *Theory of Interliterary Process*, trans. J. Kocmanova. Bratislava: Veda, 1989. p.21

¹² Dionýz Ďurišin. *Literary Comparatistics*, trans. J.Kocmanova, Bratislava: Veda, 1984. p.57

¹³ Ibid p.35

¹⁴ Chanda, Ipsita. *Reception of the Received*. Kolkata: Jadavpur University, 2006. p.22

“mutual polarity between the individual and the series which entails the necessity of examining similarities and differences in literary phenomena” as well as the ‘mutual dialectic conditioning between the specific and the general’¹⁵. In trying to evaluate Abanindranath’s romantic orientation in the context of literary history, we can point out the concepts forming the framework of ‘romantic’ aesthetics to start with, and study how Abanindranath deployed these ideas.

The pre-Enlightenment world of Europe had relied on God as the mediator between Man and the Universe. At the end of the Eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) expands Descartes’ idea of ‘I think’ to describe subjective consciousness as the base of objective knowledge without recourse to divinity. For Kant, the only certainty we can posit our knowledge on is ourselves and not the external world. In this formulation, Kant brings in the question of what makes us appreciate beauty. The decline of a theologically legitimate authority, as the regulator of the world order, led to the birth of an aesthetic order that derived its essence from a subjective consciousness, as ascertained by Kant. The German Romantics derived from this subjective essence to redefine empirical reason in terms of a creative rather than constructive quality. Here, one is immediately reminded of Abanindranath who asserts that the joy in expressing oneself becomes creative while the desire for fulfilling needs is constructive. (He uses the examples of the ant and the bee to distinguish the creative from the constructive)¹⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who is said to have been influenced by German Idealism for much of his ideas, theorised the notion of Ideas as imagination. To him the poet is one who embodies imaginative power and creates art out of nothing. The poet, with his Secondary Imagination, organises the categories of time and space with his sensory perceptions

¹⁵ *Literary Comparatistics* p.45-47

¹⁶ *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2008. p. 161

combined with the associative power of memory¹⁷. Abanindranath talks of the associative powers of the mind in terms of feelings, '*bhava*': *Feelings developed, I wrote poems, wrote paintings, sang songs, danced; pen, brush, hands and feet all were dancing to the charm of feeling*¹⁸

In the *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, Kant writes "I is nothing more than the feeling of an existence...and only a representation of that to which all thinking relates".¹⁹ The word 'feeling' injects life into philosophy and makes it a concern of human beings. With Abanindranath, on the Indian side, feeling turns into *bhava*. It is '*bhabonmadona*'²⁰, a madness of the spirit, that Abanindranath considers the foundational principle of aesthetic activity. The lexicon of Romanticism thus provides a medium of expression to the Indian creative artist to use it in the context of his social and cultural realm²¹. Abanindranath employs it for discerning an idea of truth as an equivalent of beauty, the generation of which lies in the hands of the artist. This thesis tries to explore how Abanindranath's manoeuvring of these aesthetic principles creates the space for the ushering of 'modernity' in colonial Bengal and India. This in turn gets impacted by the literary and cultural ethos of the coloniser and how he expresses these influences by conjoining these with his own literary and aesthetic heritage, as well as his individualistic use. It aims at depicting how the author-artist's usage of certain romantic notions of creativity (extracted from his own ancient culture and European philosophies of Romanticism) aids the reader in perceiving an 'Indian-ness' in his sensibility.

¹⁷ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "Biographia Literaria" in *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Edited by W.G.T. Shedd, Harper and Brothers, 1884. p.363

¹⁸ "...ভাব উদয় হল, কবিতা লিখলেম, ছবি লিখলেম, গান গাইলেম, নৃত্য করলেম; ভাবের বশে কলম চলল তুলি চলল হাত চলল পা চলল" *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*. p.270

¹⁹ Andrew Bowie. *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*. p.23; Bowie notes that in relation to the Critique of Judgement, this invocation of 'feeling', which probably has its source in Rousseau's '*Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar*', will come to have very significant ramifications

²⁰ Chanda, Rani. *Silpiguru Abanindranath*. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1999. p. 97

²¹ Abanindranath was acquainted with the works of Kant; Mohanlal Gangopadhyay. Gangopadhyay, Mohanlal. *Dakshiner Baranda*. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2007. p.139

The nineteenth century encounter of the Bengali educated class with the ideals of European Romantic philosophy has been a significant issue concerning literary reception. Having been acquainted with a rich literary tradition of their own, the Bengalis could critically engage in a dialoguing with the received literary constituents of Romanticism. The discourse of Romanticism provided the Bengalis with the impetus of disregarding the classification that essentialised them as ‘colonised’. It had also enabled them to seek the establishment of an individual identity. Romanticism’s emphasis on the musings of the ‘self’, as the medium of expression, had worked to validate the functioning of the colonised’s subjective consciousness thus also paving the way for a ‘modernity’ never experienced before. In *The Neo-Romantic Movement in Literature*, Brajendranath Seal has shown how “individual consciousness” became “the standard in questions of truth and falsehood, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness” in the realm of nineteenth century Bengal.²² These questions had significant relevance in the colonial context of Bengal, and Abanindranath’s conscious deliberations on the nature of these questions get infused with a romantic essence. Romanticism’s appeal to the ideal of universal harmony provides Abanindranath with the stimulus with which to respond to his colonial predicament. The Romantic Movement in Europe had its origin in a domain of protest against the sterile conventions of a post-Enlightenment world that required the treatment of an individual as an archetype of the Ben Johnson’s ‘*Every Man*’²³, experiencing the world in terms of some universal standards of judgement. It was also a response to the mechanical world of Newton who “had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colours”, according to Keats²⁴ as well as to an imperialistic stand of political domination

²² Cited from ‘*The Neo-Romantic Movement in Bengali Literature*’, Bhattacharya, Malini, Anusuya Ghosh ed. *Romanticism in Bengal 1881-1922*. Kolkata: Papyrus, 2003.

²³ In *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), every major character is dominated by a humour (the four fluids of the body that were thought to determine a person’s temperament). Johnson wants to “show an image of the times” through his work.

²⁴ Haydon, Benjamin Rober. *The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Haydon*. Montana: Literary Licensing LLC, 2011 p.269.

especially in Germany and England. The colonial situation in India was also subject to a similar state of being, with the coloniser treating the colonised as an Enlightenment product, servile to the ‘civilising forces’ of the former. With Abanindranath’s effort to see ‘modernity’ as a bridging force between the traditional past and the changing present, the principle of universalism on which his aesthetics rest on, is grounded in a conversation between the Romantic fervour of the East and the West. It is as such that Abanindranath forged the influence of Romanticism, prevalent in nineteenth century Bengal, into an aesthetic and philosophical ideal and transformed the initial state of this raw influence to a praxis that blends the received constituents from a literary contact with that of indigenous materials, in a balancing mode of harmonious concordance.

In setting up such harmony Abanindranath relies on the Upanishadic notion of ‘*abheda*’ that concretises his understanding of ‘*akhandā*’.²⁵ It is because of this that the superficialities of divisions between beautiful and non-beautiful, art and non-art lose significance in Abanindranath’s evaluative judgement. Andrew Bowie, in reformulating the Idealist Philosopher’s ideation on the detrimental nature of science in the context of modernity, writes: “Nothing in sciences can provide a sense of the existential meaning nature can have for the individual subject”.²⁶ Condemning the role of science in regarding nature in terms of profit, Bowie notes that the new aesthetics of Romanticism is “precisely that what makes the object beautiful has nothing to do with its usefulness or its exchange value”. Abanindranath appears to be equally contemptuous of a materialistic approach when he says: *This materialistic vision of men is always entwined with their self-interest*²⁷ Differentiating man’s power of determining beauty from that of an animal, Abanindranath quotes Goethe to affirm that man creates his own

²⁵ Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali p.17

²⁶ Bowie, Andrew. *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2003. p. 4

²⁷ “মানুষের এই বস্তুগত দৃষ্টি চিরদিন তার স্বার্থ বুদ্ধির সঙ্গেই জড়ানো থাকে” Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali. p.23

personality through rearing up his own physical senses in accordance to his own willpower. Through a manipulation of his sensory realm, man enters the region of creativity— an area conditioned by an excess— *When rasa overflowed, it could not be contained even in this extensive vessel.*²⁸ This is how the author-artist disregards the utilitarian discourse of an imperial power and replaces ‘profit’ with surplus.²⁹

In setting aside the Kantian dilemma of how to recognise the rules determining art, Abanindranath writes— *Beauty sustains itself.*³⁰ Kant claims that “Beauty is the form of finality in an object”, while for Abanindranath it becomes something that is created through the mind’s power to associate with the external world. The Kantian categorisation of art fails to move beyond ‘feeling’ without a ‘concept’ leaving the questions of certain experience and knowledge unanswered. Abanindranath reformulates these unresolved Kantian questions with a definition of reality that creates art through unanswered ‘*leela*’. By variously responding to the forces of nature, Abanindranath notes, the creative artist engages in a play with reality as a playmate. Rhythm, a constitutive principle of the play,³¹ hence gets prioritised. It is Abanindranath’s ‘*leela*’ that creates the reality around us for a multiple number of times, gives it meaning in different ways, and moves beyond time and space to the terrain of the Infinite. Imagination, as the regulator of the soul and hence knowledge, gives rise not to Kantian ‘moral rules’ but to an ‘aesthetic morality’ that places the creator as a part of a universal nature of being. It is this universalism of being which Abanindranath regards as the expression of the Infinite. To him individual minds become reflective of a universal mind and conjoin the material world of the finite with the infinite. In *Ghoroa* Abanindranath says that the edifice of art is a three-storied

²⁸ “যখন রস ভরে উঠল তখন এতখানি বিস্তীর্ণ পাত্রের রস ধরল না” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*. p. 79

²⁹ *Aesthetics and Subjectivity* p.4

³⁰ “রূপ সে নিজেতে নিজে স্বপ্রতিষ্ঠিত।” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*. p. 193

³¹ *Shilpiguru Abanindranath* p.138

building in which craft has been accommodated in the ground floor.³² The first floor is the rendezvous of artists and art lovers. This is where the communion happens. There the artist and the connoisseur meet and the artwork is reviewed. Herein we find a true expression of art—an expression of the artist’s inner images, brought forth and wrought on external medium. The top floor is exclusive to the artist, there he is in his sequestered vale. Where art is a finished product and awaits appreciation, the artist must admit the appreciator. Absolute subjectivity on the artist’s part makes him obscure. That is why the artist comes down from his ivory tower of pure subjectivity to the first floor where people share the artist’s joy through a successful process of desubjectification. Hence Abanindranath prescribes the liquidation of individualistic tendencies in the field of art by the ‘sledge-hammering of a universalist outlook’.³³ This is how Abanindranath’s response to the reception of Romanticism gets mediated by his own practice of Indian Upanishadic philosophy.

The response of nineteenth century Bengal and India to European Romanticism was conditioned by the romantic formulation of the poet as a ‘man speaking to man’. This aspect was precisely what influenced the arrival of ‘modernity’ in India. Rabindranath defines this modernity thus: “The classical literature of the ancient time was only peopled by saints and kings and heroes. It threw no light upon the men who loved and suffered in obscurity. But as illumination of man’s Personality throws light upon a wide space penetrating into hidden corners, the world of art also crosses its frontiers and extends its boundaries into unexplored regions. Thus art signalling man’s conquest of the world by its symbols of beauty, springing up in spots which were barren of all voice and colours...the one effort of man’s Personality is to transform everything with which he has any true concern into the human.”³⁴ Rabindranath’s universalism sprouts from this ‘concern’ and forms the part of the growing general concern for

³² Ghoroa, Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.I, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2010. p.73

³³ *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.71

³⁴ Tagore, Rabindranath, *Personality*. Kolkata: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2019. pp. 26-27

a universal humanity. When Abanindranath takes into account the idea of universal subjectivity, he has in mind this very objective of uniting humanity through a creative zest. Abanindranath's expression of a 'national' art and literature thus sets out to define 'Indian-ness' in terms of an amalgamation of cultural essences. Set in the context of a colonial reality, his call for a '*milan*' (alliance)³⁵ echoes Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur*, which too was conceived as a voicing against the Napoleonic imperial aggression. Unlike Wordsworth's nightingale who sings in his 'own solitude', Abanindranath's creative artist becomes someone who conjoins humanity through the powers of the creative mind. His apprehension of the Infinite and humanity, exchanging the spirit of creation between themselves, thereby gets attuned to the mode of exchanges of aesthetics between nations and undermines narrow parochialism.

One of the significant features marking the end of rationalism of Enlightenment was the replacement of the language of philosophy with a poetic language. It was Schiller (1759-1805) who tried to define Kant's 'unobjectifiable' using the categories of the naive and the sentimental. Schiller makes the non-objective nature comprehensible through a spontaneity (of naive poetry), that is to be achieved through life practices. The Romantics sought to understand the language of poetry not as a philosophical language but in relation to it. It was the genre of the lyric that became the medium of expressing the non-objectifiable, captured through insanity, dreams, fantasies, mysterious, grotesque or the irrational constituting naive poetry. As the primordial mode of expression of human beings, the lyric, without trying to objectify the unobjectifiable, became a conveyor of a philosophy of life. Abanindranath's oeuvre, in its entirety, expresses a philosophical intonation facilitated by a lyricism that makes the world a metaphor for existence. This existence entails the immensity of the forces of nature, in response

³⁵ Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali. p.156

to which the artist strives to reach endless zeniths of creation. Here the creative soul, who is a separate personality, merges with the infinite. Abanindranath exposes the philosophy of the reflection of the whole in part, of seeing “a World” in a “Grain of Sand” (William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*), a philosophy that pervades Upanishadic and Sufi metaphysics. In *Alor Phulki*, he makes the cockerel ruminate on this very aspect. This finds an equivalence in Blake, and here the spirit of the European Romantic poets gets infused with a philosophic turn that is reminiscent of Indian philosophy. The realisation of a philosophical metaphor is enabled through the agency of a subjective mind that severs itself from an objective distance, characterising the formal and sterile conventions of the preceding tradition of Bengali poetry. The insipidness that Abanindranath finds in the writings of Ishwar Gupta³⁶ leads him to substitute it with a subjectivity in theme and tone characterising Romanticism. The foregrounding of the innermost feelings in literature by the European Romantics had been a protest against French Neoclassical rigidities of form and structure, guided by empirical proof provided by the senses. Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1782) provided a ground for the formation of knowledge that pertained to a spontaneous perception of the soul. With feelings becoming a legitimate source of knowledge, the manifestation of it required an expression that is direct and spontaneous in itself. The lyric, as such, became the Romantic poet’s vehicle for expressing the intensity of passionate deliberations. As with the Romantic poets, Abanindranath too propounds the need for a break from artistic conventions and opts for a lyricism, emitting the voice of the individual and hence entering into modernity.

The medieval *Vaishnava* or *Shakta* poets of Bengal had also embraced a lyrical mode of expression in revealing their overflow of emotions. Garbed in religious sentiment, these lyrics, however, would encapsulate individual feelings in terms of a general articulation of a

³⁶ Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali p.278

community. The devotee, in the '*bhakt*' poet, heralded the peculiarities of a particular sect, while expressing himself. The nineteenth century Bengali writers were not limited by such considerations. They were trying to do away with these conventions and express a subjectivity within the purview of literature defined by feeling. The classical tradition of the *Vaishnava* poets saw the depiction of a lover as someone restricted to the areas of desire—the longing and the satiation—in the context of a spiritual discourse. Such depiction was categorised with a set of formulae drawn from the domain of Sanskrit poetics. With the reception of Romantic aesthetics from Europe, the creative artist was, in fact, striving to achieve a freedom that would guarantee a free flow of his poetic genius, unrestricted by customs and conventions. The 'Indian Romantic' writers of the nineteenth century sought to employ this freedom in constructing knowledge as something emotionally felt. When Abanindranath takes up the course of representing this aspect of an emotional realm, he chooses from the very tradition of '*padavali*' literature only to interpret it with an emotional excess. His *nayika* Radha, in the paintings of the *Krishna Leela* Series, gets animated by the divine power of creation and becomes the metaphor for nature connecting the living world of humans with that of the divine. Here, unlike the European Romantic "who is compelled to honour a God he cannot see"

³⁷Abanindranath's 'divine' is present everywhere and can be perceived in nature and even in sensuous forms. It is as such that '*dhyān*' happens to signify, to the author-artist, a mode of contemplation, in which the meditative mind connects with the world around and ascends to a higher order of creativity. The creative artist, in this state, becomes a second creator for Abanindranath. One is immediately reminded of Coleridge in this regard. On defining imagination Coleridge writes-the secondary imagination is thus the imagination of the poet

³⁷ *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*. p.171. An example can be found in Alfred de Musset's (1810-1857) longing for a faith; "Oh, why does loneliness exist for us? Where is God" (*Hope is God*)

guided by conscious will. For Abanindranath too craft requires control and artistry as major benchmarks.

The inner vision of the creative artist, according to Abanindranath, renders a liveliness to the *rohstoff* of the everyday with the mediation of *rasa*. Abanindranath uses *rasa* as the inherent quality in all arts that is capable of evoking an emotional response or *bhava*, by embodying in itself, which manifests the ability to feel that which lies dormant in the human heart. According to the Indian classical aesthetic theory of Bharata, *rasa*, in art, and as an innate quality of the artist, implies the ability of art to awaken the latent emotion in the connoisseur. This classical notion of *rasa*, however, in Abanindranath is cast in the mould of a Romantic philosophy. He writes, Existent and non-existent events and hypothetical imagination – the progression of art follows these two trends. However, both these streams flow towards the ocean of *rasa*.³⁸ It is with the mediation of *rasa* that the artist elevates the quotidian elements to aesthetically meaningful ones. *Rasa* thus functions in the formulation of secondary imagination, an idea Abanindranath considers a creative power.

In executing his creative impulse, the ‘second creator’ thus legitimises imagination as the sole determinant of the conscious act of creation. Imagination undermines art’s imitating nature and lends to it the attributes of originality and spontaneity. The nature of an artistic reality meant to Abanindranath the very opposite of copying nature. He gives an interesting explanation of how reality is transformed with the mediation of an artistic agency. Set rules demanding a complete surrender to objectivity do not exist for the artist. To Aristotle and his neo-Platonic followers, an ideal imitation of reality meant that the artist is expected to represent a selected truth, raised above all that is local and accidental, purged from all that is abnormal

³⁸ “বিদ্যমান এবং অবিদ্যমান ঘটনা এবং অঘটন কল্পনা এই দুই খাত রেখে চলেছে শিল্পের ধারা-কিন্তু এই দুইয়েরই গতি কোন দিকে-রসসমুদ্রের দিকে” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.86

and eccentric so as to be, in the highest sense, representative. The artist, in representing experience, holds up a mirror to nature. While real experience presents life as an irrational tangle, the artist's mirror makes sense of this tangle. Hence, in drama, the story is universal. The presence of '*Every Man*' in the play ensures that the incidents must be so selected as to bind them in a strict sequence of cause and effect. The logical structure enables the audience to delight in finding realistic representations-this delight being theoretical and not aesthetic. Abanindranath opposes this very mimetic theory by fortifying belief in the finality of aesthetic judgment by the judging 'I'. No wonder then that he considers imitation as 'quicksand'.

For Abanindranath, artistic intuition, through imagination, gives birth to an aesthetic process that gets formulated in a language replete with imagery and analogies. Sudhir Nandi equates this style with Rabindranath's and defines this as one that "has been feeling oriented, somewhat romantic in character. No logical structure was consciously sought to be built up".³⁹ In repudiating a logical symmetry, Abanindranath tries to foreground an aesthetics of joy and freedom, '*ananda*' and '*mukti*'⁴⁰ as he calls them, to arrive at the notions of synthesis and harmony. Resembling Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) in showcasing the spirit of aesthetic ecstasy, he thus concretises the idea of '*akhanda rasa*' that gets realised through experiencing '*ananda*'. This means that the artist infuses form and content which induce a realism to his creation. However, this realism greatly differs from the British academic realism as well as the one introduced by Ishwar Gupta-this realism is a realism of form that can hardly be distinguished from content. What Abanindranath strives to create is an organic realism that blends intuition and expression.

³⁹ Nandi, Sudhir Kumar. *Art and Aesthetics of Abanindranath Tagore*. Kolkata: Rabindra Bharati University, 2000. p.3

⁴⁰ *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* pp.56, 124, 134

In propounding such organicism, through the pursuit of spontaneous expression of intense feelings, Abanindranath, like the European Romantics, brings about a revolution of taking the aesthetic to the level of the philosophical. However, while in Europe Romanticism remained confined to these very zones of the aesthetic and the philosophic, in India it coincided with the period of a political struggle for freedom. No wonder then that Abanindranath's philosophy of the Romantic aesthetic gets transformed to redefine an 'Indian-ness' necessary to combat the essentialising tendencies on the part of the imperial rulers. It is a synthetic philosophy, comprised of both foreign and indigenous influences, and can only be studied as a "correlation of literary phenomena on the basis of a definite objective common factor".⁴¹

In this context of inter-literary study, Tapati Guhathakurata's assertions that nineteenth century aesthetic 'formulations drew on Romantic theories of art which defined art through certain exalted concepts of beauty, sublimity'⁴² and that Abanindranath, 'upholding his Romantic self-image of an artist', 'remained committed to the creativity and freedom of artistic expression' are areas wherein I have tried to explore the 'romantic' in Abanindranath. His *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* has been used as a theoretical framework for having an insight into the 'romantic' in the author-artist, a quality that Leela Majumdar sees as 'surpassing that of Wordsworth'.⁴³

Trying to read Abanindranath along these lines, I have divided my thesis into -1. Introduction 2. The reception of 'Romanticism' in nineteenth century Bengal, 3. The search for the Romantic' in the literary works of Abanindranath, 4. Abanindranath's Romantic nationalism, 5. The Romantic in the paintings and *Kutum-Katam* of Abanindranath 6. Conclusion.

⁴¹ *Literary Comparatistics* p.51

⁴² *Emotion and idealism, The Making of New Indian Art* p.190

⁴³ Majumdar, Leela. *Abanindranath*. Kolkata: Visva-Bharti, 1995. p.47

Chapter 1 tries to understand the ethos of reception of ‘romanticism’ in major representative writings of nineteenth century literary veterans Biharilal Chakroborty (1835-1894), Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894), Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824-1873) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). In 1885 the Calcutta Review wrote—“Like Wordsworth, we make to love nature and extract a philosophy out of it. Like Shelley, we invest it with mystic metaphysics. Like Byron, we make it the cure for pouring forth passionate rhapsodies.”⁴⁴ This very pronouncement explicates the functioning of ‘Romanticism’ in 19th century Bengal. I have tried to trace the literary scenario of the nineteenth-early twentieth century Bengal, its gradual severance from a traditional literary past that include the *Charyapada*, Vaishnavite and Shakta literature, *Mangal Kabya* and the writings of Ishwar Gupta (1812-1859). I have shown how Abanindranath’s attempt to associate art with a ‘romanticised’ notion of *shokh*(fancy) as opposed to *shikkha*(training)⁴⁵ gets depicted when he says *I compose songs, rhymes, songs of folk theatre - and Rabi uncle composes songs of education, songs of movement.*⁴⁶ A foray into the cultural ambience of Thakurbari and *Dakshiner Baranda* helps to understand how Abanindranath interpreted the European elements of Romanticism. I have used this insight to contextualise Abanindranath’s reception of Goethe, Victor Hugo, Coleridge, Thomas Moore, Corot, Rodin, Beethoven among the many other European creative artists, along with the Indian ones especially Kalidas, Kabir and Bharat.

Centring my evaluation on the books mentioned, I have singled out the ‘romantic’ categories of i) Imagination, ii) Vision and childhood, iii) Truth and Beauty, iv) Self and the Universe. By placing European romantic ideals simultaneously with Abanindranath’s cogitations on these categories, I have tried to explore the functioning of these categories in

⁴⁴ Majumder, Ujjalkumar. *Bangla Kabye Pashchatya Prabhab*. Kolkata: Dey’s Publishing, 2000. p.297

⁴⁵ *Ghoroa*

⁴⁶ “আমি গান বাঁধি, ছড়ার গান, যাত্রার গান,- আর রবিকা বাঁধেন পড়ার গান, নড়ার গান” Thakur, Probodhendunath. *Abanindra Charitam*. Kolkata: Rupa and Company, 1987. p. 124

Khiner Putul (1895), *Rajkahini* (1909), *Bhutpatrir Desh* (1915), *Nalak* (1916), *Banglar Brata* (1919), *Khatanchir Khata* (1921), *Buro Angla* (1941), *Alor Phulki* (1947), and the ‘pala’. My thesis includes extracts from these texts in their Bangla originals as well as my English translations of them.

I have begun the third chapter, dealing with Abanindranath’s idea of ‘nationalism’ by referring to Sisir Kumar Das’s notion of the coalescence of ‘nationalism’ and ‘romanticism’ in India.⁴⁷ By trying to evaluate Abanindranath’s idea of ‘home’ and the ‘world’, in *Buro Angla*, *Nalak Alor Phulki* and the like, I have tried to show that his rendition of home is something one feels nostalgic about. I have examined how each of these texts becomes narratives of ‘return’ and concretises the idea of home as the smallest unit of a nation. Here I have focused on Abanindranath’s bent on conceiving the ‘nation as mother’.⁴⁸ I have tried to understand Abanindranath’s undermining of the colonial construct of ‘nation’ through his disapproval of ‘maps’ and ‘newspapers’: things that Benedict Anderson considers the agencies for the European construct of ‘nationalism’. While dealing with *Rajkahini*, I have disagreed with what Brajendranath Seal has to say of nineteenth⁴⁹ century Bengal as a domain of the rise of a ‘Neo-Hinduism’.⁵⁰ Abnegating the essence of a Hindu-Muslim divide in James Tod’s (1782-1835)

⁴⁷ ‘Both the phases, (‘romantic’ and ‘nationalistic’) however, coalesced in most of the languages and quite often indistinguishable History of Indian Literature. Das, Sisir Kumar. *A History of Indian Literature 1911-1956: Struggle for Freedom*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995. p. 183

⁴⁸ “When Abanindranath painted Bharatmata, he had in mind his daughter’s face. It was the coming together of human intimacy and divine inspiration that gave us not just the picture but the idea of the nation as mother its overpowering appeal”. Bose, Sugata. *The Nation as Mother: and Other Visions of Nationhood*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd., 2017. p. 9.

⁴⁹ Benedict Anderson notes that for the European colonisers in South-East Asia, the necessity to reconstruct their property-history of their new possessions became an area of major concern. “Hence the appearance, late in the nineteenth century especially, of ‘historical maps,’ designed to demonstrate, in the new cartographic discourse, the antiquity of specific, tightly bound territorial units. Through chronologically arranged sequences of such maps, a sort of political-biographical narrative of the realm came into being, sometimes with vast historical depth”. Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2015. p.175

⁵⁰ ‘The Neo-Romantic Movement in Bengali Literature’ in Dasgupta, Subha Chakraborty. *Romantic Texts in Bengali Periodicals’ in Romanticism in Bengal Essays and Studies XII* ed. Malini Bhattacharya. Kolkata: Jadavpur University, 1998.

Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, Abanindranath chooses to acknowledge a world of harmonious coexistence.

This acknowledgement of coexistence also manifests itself through a plurality of voices brought in by ‘individuals’ like Chacha and Mair, in *Rajkahini*, who question the ‘grand narrative’ for its role in muting the ‘small voice of history’⁵¹. I have referred to Ashin Dasgupta’s theory of the threefold dimension of time—one that is ‘big’ (the societal realm), another ‘small’ (the realm of localised manifestations of social diversities), and the other an ‘individual’ one (the personal space of experiencing)⁵² in understanding history in *Rajkahini* as anecdotes of individual voices.

The space for multiple voices can also be found in Abanindranath’s ‘*pala*’, the ‘*rohstoff*’ of which the author-artist derives from *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. As Leela Majumdar notes, in these ‘*pala*’ characters from ‘lower ranks’ occupy a much larger domain with the epical Ram having less to speak: *Ogres and Ogresses only were the heroes and heroines of the books of Chnaiburo, Sri Ramachandra did not interfere much in that.*⁵³ Besides looking into the strategies of the representation of the ‘subaltern’, through the employment of a ‘*heteroglossia*’, the section on Abanindranath’s handling of the ‘*pala*’, originally a native form, as a means to look back at tradition also discusses his ‘nationalistic’ spirit of conversing with the traditional past and the modern present. *The Past and the Present will unite to create newness, the past will progress with the rhythm of the present towards the*

⁵¹ Guha, Ranajit *The Small Voice of History*, Partha Chatterjee ed. Kolkata: Orient Blackswan, 2010.

⁵² Dasgupta, Ashin. *Prabandha Samagra*, Uma Dasgupta ed. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2016. p.57.

⁵³ “রাক্ষস- রাক্ষসীরাই চাঁইবুড়োর পুঁথির নায়ক-নায়িকা, শ্রীরামচন্দ্র এর মধ্যে খুব বেশি মাথা গলান না” *Abanindranath*.

success of the future –anything else is dangerous)⁵⁴ in a culture-specific mode which Partha Chattopadhyay talks of in his seminal essay ‘*Amader Adhunikata*’.⁵⁵

The discussion of Abanindranath’s art and sculpture, in the next chapter, begins with the notion of the universal nature of all arts. Abanindranath, in his search for a ‘common language’ of aesthetics, rejects the division of art into forms, and echoes Picasso (1881-1973) who said, “After all, the arts are all the same; you can write a picture in words just as you can paint sensations in a poem”.⁵⁶ Abstract art, becomes to him, as absurd as ‘milk of magnesia’ as the abstract of ‘milk’, ‘surrealism’ becomes *It’s like a turtle’s dream of flying*.⁵⁷ In doing away with the Renaissance emphasis on ‘perspective’ as an equivalent of the ‘laws of existence’, Abanindranath’s romantic approach in defining art, becomes a ‘modernist one’ with its depiction of a ‘non-existence’ and a ‘void’.

At the end of my thesis, I have tried to comprehend Abanindranath’s use of the romantic imagery of the Japanese *ukiyo-e*, ‘floating world pictures’, (the wash technique too) to depict a ‘contact zone’ in a colony that gives rise to a ‘creole’, the language that is ‘commonly regarded as chaotic, barbarous, lacking in structure’.⁵⁸ The possibility of interpreting the ‘romantic ‘*kalpanar hystiria*’, (a hysteria of imagination)⁵⁹ of Abanindranath as the language of a ‘literature of contact’, in the conclusion, opens up roads to future researches on the author-artist. In considering Abanindranath’s employment of ‘romantic’ aesthetics as an avenue to a

⁵⁴ সেকাল একালের মধ্যে মিলে নবীনতার সৃজন করবে সেকাল এগিয়ে চলবে একালের ক্রিয়ার ছন্দ ধরে ভবিষ্যৎকালের সফলতার দিকে, -এ না হলেই বিপদ’ *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p121

⁵⁵ Chatterjee, Partha. *Itihasar Uttarahikar*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2000.

⁵⁶ Dore, Ashton. *Picasso on Art*. Thames and Hudson, London: 1972., p.131

⁵⁷ ‘কচ্ছপের ওড়ার কল্পনা করার মত’ *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p. 85

⁵⁸ Louise, Mary. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge, 2008.p. 7

⁵⁹ It is to be noted here that Edmund Gosse found in Joseph Warton’s *The Enthusiast* (1740) the first clear sign of “the great romantic movement...for the first time we find unwaveringly emphasised and repeated what was entirely new literature, the essence of romantic hysteria”. Cited from ‘Two Pioneers of Romanticism’ in *Proceedings of British Academy*, Lovejoy, 1915 p.237

number of other aspects, I have tried to reaffirm Northrop Frye's observation—"Our art has passed beyond Romanticism, but our criticism is still largely in it".⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Northrop Frye. *Fearful Symmetries*. p.412

Chapter -I

The Reception of Romanticism in Nineteenth Century Bengal

The Socio-Cultural Scenario

No reader of the socio-cultural and literary scenario of nineteenth century Bengal can perhaps choose to eschew the issue of ‘fragmentation’ that affected the ‘consciousness’ of the eclectic Bengali. One has certainly to deal with the alterations in the cognitive faculties of the Bengalis, conditioned by a set of argumentative orientations. The colonial reality had resulted in a paradigm shift of perspectives. It was this very reality that had given birth to an inevitable psychological dilemma and finally led the colonised to search for a ‘self’. In effect the ‘self’ was actually made to hover over the zones of societal traditions, following the Vedas and Upanishads, and the newly introduced wave of a European rationality. It was essential for the ‘colonised’ self to come to terms with both and look forward to a rebuilding of its own identity. Therefore, while Ram Mohan Roy’s (1772-1833) project of introducing the ‘Society for the acquisition of General Knowledge’ found a set of admirers, Vidyasagar’s (1820-1891) revitalisation of a Sanskrit hegemony was equally welcomed. Both these pioneers of the nineteenth century sought to bring about a mobilisation of the masses with reformatory measures drawn from either the traditional or the newly introduced set of ‘modern’ values. Such measures healed the disillusioned Indian, placed between the choices of adaptation and rejection. A reconciliation of opposites was on what the natives had to rely for augmenting an altered praxis.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was hinting at this very state of affairs while dealing with the principle of cultural harmonisation as a ‘prescription’ for the individual, situated in an ambiguous space of ‘in-between-ness’. In his Introduction to the *Kena Upanishad*, Ram Mohan wrote: “when we look to the traditions of ancient nations, we often find them at variance with

each other; and when we appeal to reason as a surer guide, we soon find how incompetent it is alone, to conduct us to the object of pursuit...it only serves to generate a universal doubt, incompatible with principles on which our comfort and happiness mainly depend. The best method perhaps is neither to give ourselves up to the guidance of the one or the other; but by a proper use of the lights furnished by both, endeavour to improve our intellectual and moral faculties.”⁶¹ Ram Mohan, here, was talking of a set of ‘presences’ and ‘absences’ and thereby trying to address the socio-cultural anxieties of the milieu. The medium of moderation that he was pioneering had been a method practised by the doyens of the Bengali intelligentsia. While tendencies towards alignment with a cultural heritage of the past gained pace, the spirit of foreign assimilation was also welcomed.

The Old and the New Aesthetics

Ram Mohan’s notion of ‘light’ had, in effect, become the cementing principle, uniting the East and the West, in the literary realm of nineteenth century Bengal. For many a century Bengali literature had delighted its readers with a religious sentiment. The *Charyapada* composers metaphorically depicted an esoteric way of worship through the medium of an oblique verse. Garbed in the obscurity of a connotative language, the ‘*sandhya-bhasa*’, the ‘*padas*’ depicted religious salvation, obtainable through corporal practices. The verses had, to a certain extent, an inherent lyricism voicing the stereotypical demands of the community. The ‘*padas*’ spoke of commoners, their habitats, life practices, struggles for survival and so on. An overarching essence of the Buddhist *tantric* philosophy encapsulated the whole gamut of the ‘*padas*’ of daily chores. For the *Vaishnava* poets too, religious order reigned over the individual voices of poets and their verses got actuated through the characters of Radha and Krishna. It is true that to Sri Chaitanya, Radha and Krishna were characters who, instead of being the unseen Divine,

⁶¹ Quoted in Sarkar, Susobhan. *On the Bengal Renaissance*. Kolkata: Papyrus, 2002. p87

appeared as flesh and blood characters. Chaitanya's cult of a personal worship, without the mediation of any hierarchical agency, had channelled in an essence of individual liberation. Chaitanya and his ilk— Dwija Chandidas, Gobindadas, Naraharidas and others had succeeded in removing from Bengali literature the sexual intonations that characterised Boru Chandidas's *Srikrishnakirtana*, a text replete with enticing eroticism. In contrast to this, the *Vaishnava-Padavali* introduced, to its readers, a domain where the devotee poet and the worshiped Divine shared a mutual feeling of love and compassion. But the construct of such space also conformed to the act of prefiguring a spiritual formulae. The performances of the *Vaishnavapadas*, usually in the form of '*kirtans*', catered to a target audience who belonged to a community, well acquainted with the theories and practices of a religion. The inclusion of a community as readers/participants was therefore something to be prioritised by the poet-seers. The *Kirtanas* were as such mostly performed at public events and places restraining the entry into a private space of readership.

The *Shakta* orientation of a theistic literary domain in eighteenth-nineteenth century Bengal also yielded the overtones of a higher spiritual order. Its thematic zones nurtured the role of a functional elemental energy pervading the universe. This divine driving force, operative everywhere, was perceived as quintessentially 'maternal'—Goddess Kali here being the supreme of all beings. Ramprasad, the devotee, had brought in a corpus of musical verses that attempted to posit the poet in a relational realm with the universe. He celebrated his 'self' as the offspring of Kali, the divine creator, establishing a communion with the earthly order. Ramprasad's lyrics, though individualistic in tone were, however, not devoid of Hindu theological essences.

Kabigaan and *Tappa* failed to materialise as mature genres in early nineteenth century Bengal because of the obscenity of the former and the hackneyed love theme of the latter. Except for the absence of a religious bent these poetic mediums had nothing fresh to contribute.

The nineteenth century stalwart Ishwar Gupta did explore individualism of a certain kind. In the *Sambad Prabhakar* he began experimenting with a newer style of poetic diction and explored the lived literary conventions to intensify a morphed mechanism of writing. What barred Ishwar Gupta from attaining the status of a ‘modern’ author was his usage of a satirical style and oblique articulations. His writing lacked the refined literariness that was dear to the contemporary readers. Crude laughter and sordidness characterised his lyrics, appearing too earthly to appeal to connoisseurs of literature. The ‘individual’, in his oeuvre, could not stand apart from a collective consciousness of the community. While focusing too much on rationality, Ishwar Gupta had disregarded the originality of imagination in creative writing. If the prose of Bharatchandra’s *Vidyasundar* could be accused of being sexually explicit, Ishwar Guptas’s lyricism could be labelled as acutely rational.

Such being the literary scenario of erstwhile Bengal, the infiltration of European aesthetic components did not suffer a setback. The social and political exigency of the colonial context was demanding some ‘original’ magnum opus on the part of the countrymen. Literature needed to become the platform from where the native could vent out his individualistic voice. Therefore, literature needed to be freed from religious shackles and ludicrous elements. The European connection had channelled in what Ram Mohan Roy called ‘light’. To the Bengalis and to almost all Indians this ‘light’ meant a synthesis of traditions and the imported scientific rationalism. ‘Modernity’ was thus to be generated through an ongoing process of communication between the past and the present. Sisir Kumar Das in *History of Indian Literature* has aptly described the process of the literary reformulation. He notes that had not western poetry penetrated deep into the Indian literary scenario, the iconoclastic phase of ‘modern Indian poetry’ would not have emerged: “...all Indian literatures, in whichever stage of development they were, responded to the forces of change and converged to one direction, namely towards the appropriation of modern English poetry in particular and the Western

poetry in general”.⁶² Das’s emphasis on poetry draws attention to the fact that the ‘lyrical’ medium of the genre could become the most viable space for an aesthetic experimentation. The Bengalis were already familiar with the generic attributes of lyric and the discovery of a semblance with the western form facilitated an enormous reception. And it was the lyrical ‘self’ depicted by the European Romantic poets that won over the hearts of the ‘identity-less’ Bengalis as Indians.

The ‘Bengali Renaissance Man’, had on him, a greater burden than his Western counterpart. The discourses of Science, Philosophy, Religion, History or Literature were not analogous to the traditional Oriental methodologies of the knowledge system. It was not quite clear to the Indians if the principles of Western Enlightenment would correspond to or clash with the existing domains of social prototypes. The dilemma of the nineteenth century Indian minds was not reinforced through a mere conflict of the ‘theocentric’ and ‘anthropocentric’ propositions of European Renaissance. It arose rather from the stupendous task of choosing a ‘middle path’ with solutions from both the indigenous reserves and the foreignness of the ‘other’. The other major burden was the label of the ‘colonised’, already attached by the English masters to the natives. There lay constrictions, as such, in the act of ‘choosing’. The Indians had to derive from only the selective reading materials, tactfully imported by the rulers. Depending on the availability of resources, the Indians had to bring in ‘new’ thoughts that could fit in their land, leading to a historical ‘crisis’. The spirit of the western Romantic authors was highly appreciated at this juncture. The aesthetics of the Romantic writers introduced, to the Indians, the potency of ‘self’ voicing and the precedence of ‘I,’ particularly through the robust lyrics. The tricky and demeaning nomenclature of ‘colonised’, used by the colonisers, could be done away with this voicing of the self. The ‘identity’ of the self, as discussed above,

⁶² Das, Sisir Kumar. *A History of Indian Literature 1911-1956: Struggle for Freedom*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995. p.180

could be formulated with the constitutive elements of individual ‘freedom’ and ‘rebellion’ of Romantic aesthetics. In addition to this, the too stark rationalism, introduced by the Europeans, could be countered by the role of ‘imagination’ that the romantic centred on. A balancing of the East and the West could thus be pioneered through the strategy of a literary revolution. This holistic agenda, from its inception, bore the very seeds of what can be termed as romantic nationalism.

The establishment of the Fort William College (1800) by the British was targeted at teaching Indian languages and customs to the colonisers, but it resulted in igniting a spark in the literary ambience of Bengal. With the undertakings of a wide range of translations and introducing a gamut of foreign literary works to the Indian soil, the college would inculcate a spirit of the reception of literature in the Indians. In 1813, the British Parliament issued the Charter Act in order to inspire the Indian intelligentsia develop their knowledge in various fields allowing an expenditure of ten thousand pounds. And it was with the effort of Ram Mohan Roy that the ‘Revival of Literature’ and ‘Introduction and Promotion of a Knowledge of the Sciences’ sections of the Charter Act could be rendered in English. On Ram Mohan Roy’s request, the missionary Alexander Duff initiated the usage of English language for the promotion of the educational system. The language of the ‘other’ thus got integrated, unsettling the primacy of ancient Indian languages.

The Hindu College established in 1817 had brought the other strain of scholarly attributes in the cultural life of Bengal. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was a harbinger of an academic association (1828) and a proponent of ideological reformations at the Hindu College. On the nature of English citations made by Derozio, Alexander Duff commented, ‘...the sentiments delivered were fortified by oral questions from English authors...The whole was frequently interspersed and enlivened by passages cited from some of our most popular English

poets, particularly Byron and Sir Walter Scott.’⁶³ The freedom of expression that Derozio propagated helped in the formulation of a ‘self’ consciousness. Haramohan Chatterjee, a Derozian contemporary, wrote– “...on the other hand he fostered their taste in literature, taught the evil effects of idolatry and superstition: and so far formed their moral conceptions and feelings as to make them completely above the antiquated ideas and aspirations of the age”⁶⁴. Derozio was an avowed lover of Romantic poetry. It was quite obvious that his disciples (Madhusudan Dutt, ranked above all) would want to lend ears to Romantic musings.

As the distinctive ideals of the Western paradigm rattled the Indian belief system, the parallel trajectory of retrieving tradition was also at work. While Vidyasagar took the arduous task of renovating the Sanskrit literary ethos (he being the principal of the Sanskrit College during that time), Ram Mohan’s Brahmo Samaj awakened the native spirit with the monotheistic notion of the *Upanishads*. The ‘Oneness of Being’ that the European Romantics were talking of, was a prevalent ‘stoff’ in the philosophical doctrine of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. The Brahmo Samaj tried to function with the theme of Oneness when handling the issues of One Supreme God. A vital quest of the Romantics lay in the search for the unseen ‘Supernatural’. It generated an ambivalent attitude, in the masses, towards the divisions between the finite versus infinite and subjective man versus the objective universe. The Western philosophical approaches failed to arrive at a unanimous decision regarding the assertion of an affirmative category. The earliest System Programme of German Idealism by Schelling and Hegel derived their roots from the Kantian philosophical idiom. The Romantic Movement in Europe began its journey from the unanswered realm of Kantian thoughts. Although Coleridge began his enterprise of ‘reconciling opposites’, while trying to harmonise the external and the internal, he could not finish the task. As for ‘atheist’ Shelley the search for

⁶³ Das, Sisir Kumar. *A History of Indian Literature 1911-1956: Struggle for Freedom*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995. p 25

⁶⁴ Quoted in Majumder, Ujjalkumar. *Bangla Kabye Pashchatya Prabhab*. Kolkata: Dey’s Publishing, 2000. p26

a rational 'religion' could not find a readymade answer. When the Indians received European Romanticism, these very problematic zones did not remain unheard of by the readers. But it was much easier for the recipients to resolve the dubious issue of achieving a holistic subjectivity in creative art. The Indians found an answer to it in the Vedantic principle, especially in that of the theory of *Pramaan*. The principle of mutual accommodation amidst proportionate divisions was what the Sankhya school of philosophy relied upon. Hence the ideals of the Romantic unity in the homogenous creative process were found to be authenticated by the *Adwaitya Vedanta*. Ram Mohan's Brahmo Samaj was concerned with the foundational ethos of this very essential nature of Vedantic Unity. Its reliance on One Supreme Being was the resultant product of the unison of 'external' Reason and 'internal' Truth. The wide acceptability of European Romanticism was also, therefore, backed by the schooling of the socially active Brahmo Samaj. After Ram Mohan's death, it was his follower Debendranath Thakur who carried forward the rationale of Truth. The 'Tatwabodhini Sabha' (1839) went on to disseminate the credo of 'selfhood' along the lines of Kant, Rousseau and Wordsworth.

The Initial Phase of Reception – Biharilal and His Ilk

All these correspondences between the East and the west finally led to the formation of a nascent Romanticism in nineteenth century Bengal. It was Biharilal Chakraborty (1835-1890) who began to tilt the virgin thematic field of the 'internal' individual vis-à-vis the 'external' mechanisms of nature. *Bangasundari* (1870) and *Saradamangal* (1879) were texts free from superfluous restraints of religiosity and archetypical sentimental exaggerations. Religion had, in fact, been supplemented with a 'romantic' mysticism closely related to the poetic vision of universalism. Biharilal was hinting at the Infinite while projecting his personal deity– the creator Saraswati. He begins *Saradamangal* with an invocation of the Creator goddess, as the creator of Truth and Beauty. The poet's adherence to European Romanticism becomes crystal clear when he refers to Shelley in another of his major works–*Nisargasandarshan* (1870). The

prologue to the text quoted: “Alas! I have nor hope nor health/ Nor peace within nor calm around’ (*Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples*). A reader of nineteenth century historiography can perhaps find no better instance than this to understand the zeal of reception. The other poet to focus on the Romantic thrust was Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay (1838-1903). An example from his poem *Chatak Pokhhir Proti* bears testimony to the fact: *Who are thou O, Bird/ Painted as you are in gold/ Up there in the sky/Singing the song of Happiness to us?*⁶⁵ One can surely not escape the echoes of *To a Skylark*– “Hail to thee Blithe Spirit! / Bird thou never wert/ That from heaven, or near it, / Pourest thy full heart/ In profuse strains of unpremeditated art”. Nabinchandra Sen (1847-1909), Debendranath Sen (1858-1920) and Akshay Kumar Baral (1865-1918) were among the other major poets who worked on the sustenance of the Romantic flavour in Bengali literature. Akshay Boral had in fact imported the idea of a Romantic melancholia to Bengal. The constant conflict of his ‘real’ physical existence with a bodiless beloved spirit had paved the way for the entry of ‘ennui’– an idea which the European Romantics were obsessed with.

Bankim and Romantic Aesthetics

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay’s (1838-1894) Romantic mission was targeted chiefly at the purposive agenda of a national integration. Sisir Kumar Das, in *History of Indian Literature*, has examined the cross-section of ‘Romanticism’ and ‘Nationalism’ in nineteenth century colonial India. The intersection between the two, Das shows, evolved out of the trope of ‘unification’ that both these ‘movements’ harboured. The Romantic ‘movement’ in Europe had the inherent ideology of uniting man with his milieu so as to concretise the abstract category of ‘nation’. In his creations Bankim was employing an analogous romantic formula. He notes that the aim of teaching poetry is to purify the heart through exalted thoughts. This ‘*chitta*’, the

⁶⁵ “কে তুমি রে বল পাখি,/ সোনার বরণ মাখি,/ গগণে উধাও হয়ে,/ এত সুখসুধা মাখা সংগীত শুনাও”.

soul, can essentially be defined as the nineteenth century individual mind that needed a 'change'.

Bankim's revaluation of the literary history of Bengal aimed at shaping a consciousness that ought to have been oriented towards examining the functionality of literature as a cultural, social and political tool to actuate such 'change'. His experimentations with generic and thematic categories therefore emerged out of an 'aesthetics of reformation', if not from an explicatory urge to foreground the essences of a '*Bildungsroman*'. Bankim's project of fusing the cultural ethos of a traditional past with a tumultuous present lay in accepting the role of the 'other' in constituting the markers of a young 'educated' community as 'new' readers. With the intention of constructing a readership in the nineteenth century colonial Bengal, Bankim set out to establish the parallelism between expressive theories of Indian and European philosophical discourses. The academic praxis had turned out, to Bankim, the critical idiom through which to engage in a dialogic relationship between two distinct modes of practice. With the publication of *Bangadarshan*, the literary milieu of Bengal began to experience the tastes of a logical speculation on heterogeneous modes of elocution. Bankim himself began fathering the 'novel', a genre which Indians were quite unfamiliar with. It is not without reason, therefore, that the *Calcutta Review* wrote that Bankim's *Bishabriksha* presented 'men and women as they are, and life as it is'. Bankim used the importation of ideals from the colonial masters, in the introduction of 'modernity', as an equivalent of the ideal of 'liberation'.

In effect, what Bankim wanted was the introduction of a paradigmatic shift in every hackneyed field of discourse. For a reformist like him, this meant an advancement of liberty while conceiving the significations of all cultural and literary forms. This required a critical surveillance of the existing knowledge system. An understanding of this knowledge system also featured the utilisation of an 'external' referential ground. The West thereby stood for Bankim as the reference point while he attempted a critique of his homeland's methodology of

analytical understanding. Bankim's survey of European literature had been a cautious attempt at choosing the essentials of a scientific knowledge to arrive at a psychological rendition of the requirements of his colonial reality. Through a series of comparative analyses he thereafter opened up the space for reasoning and understanding and thereby an area of post-colonial 'hybridity'.

His lecture at the Bengal Social Science Association (1870) clearly brings out polarities of 'presence' and 'absence' in European and Bengal literature: "Another great impediment to the formation of a respectable readable popular literature for Bengal is the extremely low idea some people entertain of the capacities of the Bengali-reading public. It is assumed that books intended for them must contain childish stories and information suited to children only and treated in a childish style, or they will not suit the understanding of the adult reading population of Bengal. No kind of literary excellence-no sentiments of a manly and elevating character must be permitted to creep into such books; no glimpse of that wondrous world of scientific knowledge which European research has revealed; nothing but its dry details and naked skeleton can be allowed to the Bengali reader. This idea is a great mistake..."⁶⁶ The abundance of the naive in Bengali literature necessitated an immediate remedy of 'reconstructing' the past literary schooling of the natives. In an article titled 'Bengali literature', published in the Calcutta Review (vol.104) Bankim comes up with a criticism of Harimohan Mukhopadhyay's book 'Lives of Bengali Poets'. This was an elaborate attempt to re-examine Bengali literary tradition, beginning with the Vaishnava poets and poetic translations and continuing with the re-assessment of Mukundaram's *Chandimangal*; Bharatchandra's *Vidyasundar* and *Annadamangal*; Kaviyal Ram Basu, Haru Thakur and an in-depth study of Ishwar Gupta in particular. Bankim herein emerges with his categorisation of the group of 'third-class' writers

⁶⁶ Majumder, Ujjalkumar. *Bangla Kabye Pashchatya Prabhab*. Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 2000. p 107

of the pre-modern era. Even though Ishwar Gupta appears as a literary father-figure to Bankim, the deficit of a literary refinement in the former's work does not escape the negative scrutiny of Bankim's qualitative judgment.

This conjunction of the social and cultural lay in Bankim's emphatic categorisation of a 'lucid' language in Bengali literature. The Scot poet Robert Burns becomes a referential point in discussing the worth of variants of language usage. The essentials of a 'good essay', said Bankim, derived its strength from the very features of 'aesthetics, clarity and beauty'. It is Shakespeare who inspires Bankim in his articulation of the phenomenon of the construct of simple yet strenuous language⁶⁷. Bankim's dislike for the Sanskrit Alamkariks lay in the promotion of a lyrical language standardised by poets who sought to 'refine nature'. This refinement was meant to be done by sorting beauty out of the general available resources. A close study of this formulation fortifies nothing but the reception of Romantic principles. For him 'refinement' therefore becomes synonymous with 'Beauty' that has been constituted by a 'natural supernaturalism'. In his criticism of Nabinchandra Sen's *Abakashranjini*, Bankim frequently refers to the language of Byron, Madhusudan Dutt and Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay. To these poets he owes the power of 'refining' poetry because they are the ones who sought to arrive at a descriptive clarity for choosing the 'particular' out of the 'general'. Bankim's bent toward an expressive language in literature gets reflected in his description of "*Geetikabya*". He contends that lyric is the genre which aims to establish the expression of the orator's mind. A reflection on individual freedom of expression appears to Bankim as the only determinant of literary quality. This expressive mode gets best manifested in the application of speech that ushers from the lyrical intonations of the 'self'. For him *Kapalkundala* exceeds as novel in its execution of a poetic quality. With regard to

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 210

Kapalkundala, Bankim eulogises Walter Scott. In fact, Bankim's reception of European aesthetics finds its most explicit reflection while he acknowledges his reading of Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale* and Byron's *Don Juan*. While *Kapalkundala*'s first, second, third, fourth, fifth and eighth episodes have citations from Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, the second and eighth episodes excel in citations from Byron's *Manfred* and Wordsworth's *Laodamia*. The fourth chapter of the first edition of *Kapalkundala* (which was later removed) shows traces of Scott and Goethe as well. While formulating this novel, Bankim also receives Madhusudan, Madhusudan, whom he considers a respectable predecessor. Madhusudan's *Meghnadbadh Kavya* and *Birangana Kavya* earn Bankim's appreciation because of their poetic vocabulary and lyrical rendition of speeches. In his criticism of Indian drama too Bankim looks for poetic language. Citing his references from Goethe's *Faust* and *Manfred*, he goes on to explicate the presence of poetic categories in Kalidas and Bhababhuti. Bankim's travelogue "*Megh*" too resonates with citations from Shelley. In his discussion of John Stuart Mill's life, Bankim demonstrates that poetry can stimulate the evocation of heartfelt pleasures. Bankim foregrounds Mill's transformation when the latter felt that the power of analysis at times needed to be supplemented by a poetic insight into life.

While understanding the necessity of an expressive theory of aesthetics, Bankim deals with an idea of 'totality of knowledge' resulting out of a 'presence' and 'absence' as pointed out earlier. Deriving his aesthetic totality from 'parts united into a whole' through the logical sanctity of *prama* and the 'Sankhya' school of Philosophy (Bankim's essay *Sankhayadarshan* in *Bangadarshan*), Bankim does re-evaluate his philosophical stances in literature as in *Kamalakanter Will*. In *Basanter Kokil* he thereafter talks of a union with a universal nature of

being—*O mate, let us together sing jubilantly.*⁶⁸ His poem ‘*JalePhul*’⁶⁹ talks of such a union: *We shall float away, dear flower/ none will stop you, none will stop me/in the end you will meet the eternal sea /let us go together towards the infinite.*⁷⁰ Bankim’s take on ‘wholeness’ and his answer to the Kantian idea of the ‘void’ thus gets blended together. The romantic ideal of ‘reconciliation of opposites’ finds a mature representation as Bankim formulates the ideal of Beauty, with its inclusive nature of a harmonious unity. Bankim foregrounds the role of ‘melancholy’ while conceiving the affirmative functionality of happiness in the perpetual order of existence. Love, ideally represented by Shakespeare or Valmiki, in Bankim’s consideration rests on the very principle of self-immolation: it is only through suffering that one realises the potency of ideal Beauty in love. His ‘*Sakuntala Miranda and Desdemona*’ features the variants of nature functioning differently in accordance with ‘time’ and ‘space’ and yet ascertains the principle of ‘wholeness’ with its generic culmination in tragedy and comedy. Through Bankim’s revocation of his own native tradition, the ‘absence’ in the European claim for a creative principle of ‘knowledge’ thus culminates in an assertion of ‘presence’.

When it comes to the revival of his country’s tradition Bankim advocates a re-evaluation of existing values of social and cultural ethos. The West becomes again for Bankim the quintessential agency of bringing in a reformation. He wants English as the language of domination through which the whole of diversified India can unite for an emancipated future. Not only does Bankim’s reception of Crabbe, Milton (*Britrosanhar* compared to *Iliad*)⁷¹, Sheridan, Johnson, Cervantes or Samuel Butler (*Hudibras*) intensify the zealousness for Western values; the constant urge to ‘refine’ the ‘residual’ value-system emerges out of a

⁶⁸ “আয় ভাই তোতে আমাতে মিলে পঞ্চম গাই”

⁶⁹ Bhattacharya, Amitrasudan. *Bankim Chandra Jibani*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2014 p. 297

⁷⁰ “তুই যাবি ভেসে ফুল, আমি শেষে/ কেহ না ধরিবে তোরে, কেহ না ধরিবে মোরে, / অনন্ত সাগরে তুই, মিশাইবি শেষে/ চল যাই দুজনে অনন্ত উদ্দেশ্যে।”

⁷¹ Bhattacharya, Amitrasudan. *Bankim Chandra Jibani*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2014. p. 357-339

strong reverence for a ‘experimentation’ in art and culture introduced by the British in India. Bankim’s change in approach towards aesthetics is targeted at the development of an inquisitive spirit, in his fellow countrymen, who are to develop a new historical discourse as well. *Banglar Itihas (Bangadarshan)* depicts the author’s urge to rewrite a ‘mature’ history of Bengal. The historical narratives of *Durgeshnandini* or *Kapalkundala* thereby become documentations of Bankim’s view on strength, needed to structure a new era of Indian history. *Banglar Itihas* notes— *Bengalis require history. Otherwise they won’t progress...The countrymen themselves will have to unearth the glorious past of the nation.*⁷² *Anandamath* thereafter becomes the celebratory locale of an ‘imagined nation’, a sphere of perfect utopian fulfilment. The idea of ‘development’ in such nations, according to Bankim, could only be realised through employing the formulae of the French Revolution. To him the idea of prosperity rested in the construct of what can be termed a ‘romantic nationalism’.

When Bankim attempted to differentiate between the ‘Ideal’ of Indian and the ‘Real’ of European ‘modern’ aesthetics (he advocated receiving from the latter) (*Balmikir Joy, Bangadarshan* 1288)⁷³ he was amalgamating the two in his conceptualisation of a renovated art and culture. His literary oeuvre thus inaugurated the aura of the unseen and the unheard. As one of his contemporary critics wrote, “Our taste, our literature, is undergoing a great change. The classical Sanscrit taste is giving place the European. From the stories of Gods and Goddesses, Kings and Queens, princes and princesses, we are learning to descend with alacrity to the humble walks of life, to sympathise with the woes of a common citizen or to admire the feelings, when they are noble, even of a common peasant...we are descending to an appreciation of the strength and freedom of individuality...We for one hail as the dawn of a

⁷² “বাঙালীর ইতিহাস চাই, নহিলে বাঙালী কখনো মানুষ হইবেনা... দেশের গৌরবের কথা তার কীর্তিকথা দেশের মানুষকেই ঘোষণা করতে হবে” Ibid. p..537

⁷³ Quoted in *Bankim Chandra Jibani*. p. 559

better future and we take Babu Bankim Chandra Chatterjee as leader and representative of this healthy change in literature. That he may live long in the mind of every Bengali a love for freedom and individuality is our sincere and cherished hope.”⁷⁴

Michael Madhusudan Dutt and his Romantic Notion

Of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's (1824-1873) characteristically 'romantic' orientation, Sisir Kumar Das writes: *Madhusudan was the hero of the Romantic movement in Bengal. His work reflected the disequilibrium and unrest which had destabilised the heart of the nation. The conflict between the self and the society was expressed in the contemporary literary thoughts, philosophy and social outlook. The trend continues in the modern era. That self looked for beauty, mystery, and an elemental strength like Ravana's*⁷⁵. With the emergent 'individual' in his literary corpus, Madhusudan had been the one who chose to declare an end to the era of Bharat Chandra and his ilk. The lyrical expression of thought in Michael's writings saw a sharp bent from his Bengali predecessors in its deliberate experimentations with generic and thematic categories. Michael's introduction of a renovated classical order, wherein the 'self' outweighed the vagaries of an imposed external order, had resulted in triggering a conversation between the 'old' 'known' and the 'new' untrammelled. This conversation ushered in what Das terms '*asthirota*', '*chanchalya*' ('disequilibrium', 'unrest') and turned down an existing literary order through Michael's cynicism towards an outmoded past. The 'freshness' of order that he was to introduce relied on principles of the mind, a mind that hovered between an age of classics and the 'modern' one, pertaining to the reality of a colonial order. It was Michael's representation of self-dilemma and the search of his mind for the 'eternal' that could label him as a 'romantic

⁷⁴ *Criticism of Bishabriksha*, Hindu Patriot 1873 p 263

⁷⁵ “বাংলাদেশের রোমান্টিক আন্দোলনের নায়ক মধুসূদন। যে অস্থিরতা ও চাঞ্চল্য জাতির চিত্তকে আচ্ছন্ন করেছিল, তারই প্রকাশ সেখানে। সমাজের সঙ্গে ব্যক্তিত্বের দ্বন্দ্ব সেদিনের সাহিত্য চিন্তায়, দর্শনে, সমাজভঙ্গীতে দেখা দিয়েছিল- আধুনিক কাল পর্যন্ত সে ধরাই চলেছে। সেই ব্যক্তিত্ব খুঁজেছে সুন্দরকে, রহস্যময়কে, রাবণের মত এলিমেন্টাল শক্তিকে” Das, Sisir Kumar. *Madhusudaner Kabimanas*. Kolkata: Pustak Bipani, 1989.

rebel' of nineteenth century Bengal. His *Meghnadbadh Kabya* therefore could emanate the essence of a 'modernity' that 'romanticism' in Bengal had featured. Tagore's pronouncement (*Sahityarup in SahityerPathe*) *Modern Bengali Poetic Literature has started with Madhusudan Dutt*,⁷⁶ had actually found its valid manifestation in *Meghnadbadh Kabya*.

The biographical sketch of Michael shows that the author's course of life was in complete compliance with the innovations that he set to introduce in his works. The Hindu College had enabled him to understand Derozio's new line of thought. Derozio's introduction of literature and philosophy to the Indian students was carried forward by his devoted follower David Richardson. But while Derozio's area of interest lay more in teaching Locke, Hume and Paine, for Richardson the major area of academic activity centred around imparting knowledge on literature. Dharendra Nath Ghosh wrote that Byron, Keats and Shelley occupied the most important place in Richardson's curriculum at the Hindu College⁷⁷. In 1840 Richardson had compiled a literary collection entitled *Selections from the British Poets*. This contained pieces from Goethe and Schiller along with Homer, Dante, Tasso, Virgil and a number of Italian, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese poets. The book was an eye-opener for Michael, who was to receive European literature with great admiration. It was the Romantic poet who attracted Michael the most during this time. Byron was his favourite and he gradually started developing a veneration for Keats, Moore and Spenser. That his love for *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, by Thomas Moore, (a book that he bought in 1838) was earnest, becomes explicit in his letter to Gourdas Basak⁷⁸. The set of lyrics that Michael sent for publication in *Blackwood Magazine* was dedicated to Wordsworth, a name he deliberately chose while replacing Gourdas Basak's name with it. What is relevant here is Michael's pronouncement on

⁷⁶ "আধুনিক বাংলা কাব্য সাহিত্য শুরু হয়েছে মধুসূদন দত্ত থেকে"

⁷⁷ Murshid, Golam. *Ashar Chhalane Bhuli*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Private Limited, 2008. p. 32

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.44

Rangalal Bandyopadhyay. In 1860 he wrote, *Rangalal's domain is restricted by Byron, Scott and Moore... I prefer Wordsworth over anyone else.*⁷⁹

The attraction for European Romantic poetry had such a hold on young Michael that the poet could proudly acclaim – ‘I sigh for distant Albion’s shore’. Europe was always considered superior to the native land in cultural and literary achievements in Michael’s psychological realm. The racial supremacy, of the Anglo-Saxon, appealed to Michael’s mind and he would feel proud of it. “The Hindu! Alas! Centuries of servitude and oppression; the predominance of a superstition, dismal and blasting; a fatal adherence to institutions to whose cruel tendency ever it is to curb and to restrain the onward march of man as a social, as an intellectual pilgrim, tracing around him a wizard ring, solemnly believed to be impassable-and violently repressing every inborn longing to be free; these alas!...”, wrote Michael in *The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu* (1854) while condemning worn-out customs of an ancient past. Michael reveres the Anglo-Saxon to such an extent that he wanted them to reinvigorate the Indian Hindu-centric past: “...it is the Solemn Mission of the Anglo-Saxons to renovate, to regenerate, to civilise, or in one word, to Christianise the Hindu!” It was not without reason that Michael became a Christian to embrace the West, which was for him a tool with which to introduce ‘modernity’ to his own country. He reworked the Indian classical tradition for redefining the past and defining categories of a ‘modern self’.

Therefore, even though his translation of *Ratnabali* of Ramnarayan Tarkaratna adhered to the Sanskrit content, Michael did not hesitate to recreate it by adapting European structural elements. In undertaking such a project of literary amalgamation we find Michael validating his mission by referring to Moore, Byron or Carlyle– *Does anyone criticise the eastern*

⁷⁹ “রঙ্গলালের দৌড় বড় জোর বাইরন, স্কট, আর মুর পর্যন্ত... আমি ওয়ার্ডসওয়ার্থ কে তার চেয়ে বেশি পছন্দ করি” *Ashar Chhalane Bhuli*.p.78

*elements in Moore's poetry, the Asian influence in Byron's poetry, or the ascendancy of German literature in Carlyle's work?*⁸⁰ This receptive consciousness was highly active when *Padmabati* was crafted. That he was doing away with tradition, in an urge to create something new, becomes explicit when he declares: *I will rather leave out Biswanath's Sahityadarpan ; if I have to idolise some literature, I will take inspiration from the greatest litterateurs of Europe, not from anyone of Sanskrit literature.*⁸¹

When denying the shackles of Sanskrit *Alamkarshastra*, Michael had started devising what he thought to be 'new'. His had been a rebellious stand against Bharatchandra's literary tradition. He opines: *I had started the poem rather casually, but now I can observe that I have achieved such a task which will gain further ground for our poetry. At least the poets who will compose poetry in the future will learn from this to write in a style different from the one of that man from Krishnanagar who is regarded as the father of Bengali poetry. Even though the man is talented, his poetry is abominable!*⁸² Thereafter he terms his *Tilottamasambhab* as such— *This is the first poetic composition in Bengali.*⁸³ In epitomising his literary work as 'the first poetic composition in Bengali' Michael was not boasting. It was indeed for the first time that the Bengali readers experienced a 'new' literary flavour in the representation of the conflict of gods and the '*asuras*'. Michael drew its theme from the *Puranas* because it appeared to him then that an addition of imagination would render a literary value to the *Puranas*: *Hindu Puran*

⁸⁰ "মুরের কবিতায় প্রাচ্যের উপাদান, বাইরনের কবিতায় এশিয়ার ভাবধারা, কারলাইল- এর রচনায় জার্মানবাদ দেখে কেউ কি তার নিন্দা করে?"

⁸¹ "বিশ্বনাথের সাহিত্যদর্পণকে আমি কদলি দেখাবো, কোনো আদর্শ নিতে হলে আমি তা নেবো ইউরোপের শ্রেষ্ঠ সাহিত্যিকদের কাছ থেকে- সংস্কৃত সাহিত্য থেকে নয়" *Ashar Chhalane Bhuli*.p.185

⁸² "কাব্যটা গুরু করেছিলাম ঠাট্টার মধ্যে দিয়ে, কিন্তু এখন দেখতে পাচ্ছি, আমি আসলে এমন একটা কাজ করে ফেলেছি, যা আমাদের কাব্যকে বেশ এগিয়ে দেবে। অন্তত ভবিষ্যতে যাঁরা বাংলায় কবিতা লিখবেন, তাঁরা এ থেকে এটুকু শিখতে পারবেন যে, কৃষ্ণনগরের সেই লোকটা, যাকে বলা হয় কাব্যের জনক, তাঁর থেকে ভিন্ন ভঙ্গীতে কবিতা লিখতে হবে। লোকটা নিজে প্রতিভাবান হলেও কি জঘন্য তার কবিতা!" *Ibid*.p.180

⁸³ "এ কাব্য হল বাংলা ভাষার প্রথম কাব্য" *Ibid*.p.176

*is so beautiful! With a little imaginative power, one can bring out a lot from it.*⁸⁴ To prioritise the thematic fervour derived from ‘imagination’, Michael had also, for the first time, empowered his text with rhythmic effect of the ‘blank verse’. Both his theme and form stood in stark contrast to what he called the hackneyed style of ‘*buro Ishwar Gupta*’⁸⁵. Like Wordsworth, the spontaneity of language mattered to him the most. In one of his letters he expressed his thought that like the way Chinese girls are made to wear iron shoes to restrict growth, the usage of a Bengali traditional rhythm would hamper the expression of spontaneity and beauty. Michael intended to introduce changes that would cater to both content and form.

What mattered to Michael the most was the reinforcement of the classical essence of both Indian and European traditions to arrive at something that Golam Murshid, his biographer, terms nineteenth century Renaissance ‘humanism’. Rather than retaining the characteristic ‘larger than life’ characters of the epics, Michael consciously transforms those into individuals oscillating between the choices of individual freedom and the constrictions of fate or sometimes social crises. The nineteenth century reader of his texts was thereby posited in a zone of self-interrogation and made to participate in a debate on the role of customary social values and individual constructs of morality. This pertained to Michael’s own life. Caught in the swirl of European ideals and a simultaneous love for his country, he could not escape from a self-dilemma, when searching for an ‘identity’ compatible with his time. His notion of ‘humanism’ was derived essentially from the nineteenth century thoughts on how to categorise the real ‘hero’. Michael’s formulation of a ‘hero’ (something which he himself strove to become) was centred on the foundational principles of individual longings and self-exploration as fundamental categories in process of ‘becoming’. His despise for ‘Mr. Ram and his rabble’ in *Meghnadbadh Kabya* arose from his moving away from something ‘pre-given’ in the strategy

⁸⁴ “হিন্দু পুরাণ এত সুন্দর! যা সামান্য কল্পনাশক্তি আছে, সেই একে মোচড় দিয়ে অনেক রস বার করতে পারবে”

⁸⁵ *Ashar Chhalane Bhuli*.p.174

of survival. The epical essences of the characters of Rama or Ravan of *The Ramayana* hence get supplemented with virtues derived from the quotidian elements of life of the individual. This characteristic feature of *Meghnadbadh* also stood metaphor for Michael's own poetic self, looking for solace, by venting out his longings and ambitions. The heroic sentiment, the 'birrasa', of the original epic thereafter mattered less to Michael. He wrote to Rajnarayan Basu— *I will not pursue veer rasa anymore. Romantic and Lyrical poetry have huge prospects in our literature. I shall proceed from there henceforth.*⁸⁶ To the poet who wanted to codify his own life in his literary oeuvre, it was natural that the 'romantic' essence would surpass any other ideal in literature.

Therefore, even though he set out to write *Meghnadbadh* in terms of a Homeric or Virgilian epic, ("I shall not borrow Greek stories, but write, rather try to write, as a Greek would have done") he ended up in making it a lyric. Ravana, the 'hero' in the text is made to express himself through a lyrical mode of speech. Ravana's self-regret finds vent in: *By what sin did I lose a treasure like you? /...how do I endure the pain? / ...like a tree in a forest is killed gradually by getting its branches severed from it, Oh Lord, see how this terrible guilt is weakening me consistently!*⁸⁷ (1st swarga) or *Who can avoid the ordinance of fate...what is the use of futile mourning?*⁸⁸ This immediately reminds one of Michael's sonnet *Atmabilap* where a similar conjoining of individual power and destiny, an idea he drew from Greek mythology, leads to a working of a dualism in existence as the individual searches for an eternal Truth in life. Like Ravana's solitude reflected in his regret, *Atmabilap* too expresses the poet's own

⁸⁶ "আর বীররস নয়। রোমান্টিক এবং লিরিক কাব্যের বিরাট সম্ভাবনা আছে আমাদের সাহিত্যে। অতঃপর সেদিকে পা বাড়ানো।" *Ashar chhalane bhuli*

⁸⁷ "কী পাপে হারানু আমি তোমা হেন ধনে?/ ... হয় রে কেমনে সহি এ যাতনা আমি?/ ... বনের মাঝারে যেথা শাখাদল কাটি, অবশেষে নাশে বৃক্ষে, হে বিধাত, এ দুরন্ত রিপু তেমতি দুর্বল, দেখো, করিছে আমারে নিরন্তর!" Michael Madhusudan Dutta. *Meghnadbadh Kabya*, 1861

⁸⁸ "বিধির বিধি কে পারে খন্ডাতে... কি কাজ কিন্তু বৃথা বিলাপে?" *Meghnadbadh Kabya*

struggle in his search for a stable existential order – *Like a moth chases the light, you trailed imprudently! Neither seeing nor hearing, now the heart laments!*⁸⁹ This lamentation of soul reverberates through the whole of *Meghnadbhadh Kabya*. And the external world is made to resonate with this inner voice of the heart when the individual either struggles with reality or desperately tries to extinguish the deep anguish of his soul. Images in the ‘epic’, therefore, get drawn from external nature and in turn add to the naturalness of language in *Meghnadbhadh Kabya*. The external derives its essence from the internal and vice versa, to depict the ‘romantic’ fervour of harmony. This becomes explicit when Ravana laments on Birbahu’s death: *Thus the omnipotent demon Ravana glanced at the ocean far away...rocks floating on both sides of it...foamy waves rising with an endless roar, like the hood of the snake around the neck of Shiva.*⁹⁰(1st swarga) That nature always corresponds to human emotions is made clear when Michael describes heaven– The starry night sky reflects the light of the abode of God⁹¹ or the venomous aftermath of Meghnad’s slaying as– *The smoke is engulfing the Sun oft / brightening the sky with a dreadful light...the sea is welling up to raise a storm across the world.*⁹²(7thswarga) or *Howls are being heard everywhere in the dismal house/ the earth and the sea are trembling like a thundercloud in anger/ creating wildfire.*⁹³(8th Swarga)

Such delineation of the juxtaposed terrain of the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ also characterises *Brajangana Kabya* or even *Birangana Kabya*, two of Michael’s lyrical masterpieces. Taking his cue from the Vaishnava poets, Michael once again turns Radha, the divine companion of Krishna, into Mrs. Radha, an ordinary wife. Radha becomes an individual pining for her

⁸⁹ ‘পতঙ্গ যে রঙ্গে ধায়, ধাইলি অবোধ হয়! / না দেখিলি না শুনিলি, এবে এ পরাণ কাঁদে!’

⁹⁰ “এইরূপে আক্ষেপিয়া রাক্ষস-ঈশ্বর রাবণ, ফিরায়ে আঁখি, দেখিলেন দূরে সাগর... ভাসিছে জলে শিলাকূল... দুই পাশে তরঙ্গ-নিচয়, / ফেনাময় যথা ফণীবর/ উঠকিছে নিরন্তর গভীর নির্ঘোষে” *Meghnadbhadh Kabya*.

⁹¹ “হাসে নিশি তারাময়ে ত্রিদশ আলয়ে” Ibid.

⁹² “ধূমপুঞ্জ উড়ি/ আবরিছে দীননাথে ঘনঘন রূপে/ উজলিছে নভস্থল ভয়ঙ্করী বিভা... জলধি যেন উথলিছে দূরে। লয়িতে প্রলয়ে বিশ্ব” Ibid.

⁹³ “অন্ধকারমত পুরি, উঠিছে চৌদিকে। আতর্নাদ; ভূকম্পনে কাঁপিছে সঘনে/ জল, স্থল; মেঘাবলী উগ্রিছে রোষে/ কালাগ্নি” Ibid.

beloved; her pining gets attuned to the musings of nature. She internalises the organic nature of ‘being’ and entwines it with her soulful, passionate longing. The set of lyrics in *Brajangana* is conceived in terms of elements of nature— with birds, river, dawn, dusk, seasons responding to human emotions. While external nature serves the backdrop in the representational realm of the celestial love of Radha and Krishna in the Vaishnava texts, the fusion of nature and the self, works to implement the functionality of the a priori order of existence. In these formulations Michael does contemplate the creative powers of the mind and goes against Locke’s notion of the mind as a passive entity in perceiving sensations. In structuring *Birangana Kabya* along the lines of Ovid’s *Epistles*, Michael had once chosen feminine subjectivity as the overarching theme of the work. The characters of Tara, Draupadi, Shakuntala, Surpanakha and the like in *Birangana Kabya*, turn out to be individuals rather than any epic heroines or ‘biranganas’. As we hear Shakuntala lamenting in *Dushyanter proti Shakuntala— Why did you abandon me in my youth, dear husband?/ what are my faults, dear beloved/ I, Guilty Shakuntala, submit myself at your feet*,⁹⁴ we are made aware of the sufferings of individuals, caught in the snare of societal realm. The solitude of *Birangana Kabya*’s female characters fortifies the thematic structure of the text with the sentiments of alienation and dejection that an individual suffers from.

Michael’s sonnets too celebrate self-reflections on life and existence. The expression of love and veneration for the homeland becomes the distinguishing feature of these sonnets. Michael had dedicated two of his sonnets to Victor Hugo and Tennyson. Byron, as a symbol of glorious rebel, inspired him as he decided to express his love for his own country in the sonnets. *Bangabhumir Proti*, dedicated to his homeland, hence begins with a quote from Byron—‘My Native Land! Good-Night!’ Michael’s reception of fables from La Fontaine and turning those fables to didactic poems, hint at his imaginative faculty at work when he was

⁹⁴ “এ নব যৌবনে এবে ত্যাজিলা কী ভূমি, প্রাণপতি? কোন দোষে, কহ, কান্ত, গুনি/ দাসী শকুন্তলা দোষী ও চরণ-যুগে?” Ibid.

nurturing the idea of reviving fables and popular tales, in the construct of national history. This was similar to what he had done while recreating history through imagination in *Krishnakumari Natak* (drawn from Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*).

The admiration for romantic aesthetics that Michael developed during his days in Hindu College, therefore, continued to exist even when he ventured to project his nationalistic sentiment through his works. In fact, it was romantic imagination that aided the poverty-stricken Michael in challenging the oddities of life. Hence, he did not hesitate to acknowledge the role of imagination in renewing his poetic spirit: *...I am still a romantic, as you know that is my nature; besides, I am a poet too! On top of that, the overflowing power of imagination has made me unfit for the real world...*⁹⁵

The Culmination of the Romantic in the Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore

"I am a born Romantic"— claimed Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in 'Anashuya', *Sanai* (1940) In identifying himself as a Romantic, Tagore was referring to the influence of Romanticism in the formulation of his poetic self. The fact that this declaration was made at a time when Tagore was moving towards the '*kothin*' the difficult (*Rupnaraner Kule*) establishes the fact that he was using Romanticism to suit his own idiom. Tagore drew elements from a tradition that had already been widely received in Bengal and morphed it to give it a new meaning and form. Born in a Brahmo family and influenced by the idea of *Adwaita*, Tagore perhaps began from where Kant left his readers – the unanswered realm of defining aesthetic beauty through his 'categorical imperative'. Tagore's understanding of Beauty derived its values from the Upanishadic principle of 'totality'— an area that the European Romantics always sought to explore. It is here where we find Tagore as an earnest receiver of Shelley or

⁹⁵ ... আমি এখনো রোমান্টিকই আছি, কারণ তুমি তো জানোই, এটা হল আমার প্রকৃতি; তা ছাড়া আমি তো খানিকটা কবিও! এর ওপর ব্যাপক পরিমাণে কল্পনাশক্তি আমাকে বাস্তব জগতের জন্যে বেশ অনুপযুক্ত করে তৈরি করেছে... *Ashar Chhalane bhuli* p. 209

Keats and one who employed their aesthetic thoughts to arrive at his own understanding of the intertwined space of human consciousness and creativity.

It was during his boyhood when Tagore's got acquainted with Biharilal Chakraborty, the pioneer of 'romanticism' in Bengal. Biharilal's *Saradamangal* had deeply influenced Tagore and left a lasting impact on him. It generated, in him, the spirit of pantheism and a notion of the universal order of 'being'. Tagore wanted to blindly follow Biharilal. In *Jeebansmriti* he mentions his young self's desire of composing poetry like Bihari Babu. As he announced Biharilal's pronouncement on the nature of universal love as an epitome of sublime beauty, it was clear that the young poet too yearned to write something that would emanate a similar essence. Kalidas's and the Vaishnava poet's deliberations, on the coalescence of nature and man, had been other factors that had impacted Tagorean philosophy on art and life. Dwijendranath Thakur's *Swapnaprayan* stood another pivotal work that accelerated Tagore's 'romantic' sensibility. Armed with the traditional aesthetic tools of his own culture, and a sentiment shaped by those, Tagore was capable of forming an aesthetic order by including the literary elements of the 'other'.

Tagore's idea of reality, as depicted through art and beauty, stands in stark opposition to what Kant calls art. For Kant the purposiveness of Art must appear as free from all rules and simply as 'a product of nature'. It is 'genius' that according to Kant gives rule to art. Therefore, in the Kantian line of thought 'Beauty is the form of finality in an object, so far as perceived in it apart from the representation of an end' (*Critique of Judgement*). Kant is dealing simply with an 'idea', a feeling of which there is no concept. Tagore's notion of beauty draws meaning from his ideation on Imagination and refigures Kant's reasoning by drawing his ideas from especially Shelley and the Vedanta to ascertain that-'it is almost a truism to say that the world is what we perceive it to be. We imagine that our mind is a mirror that it is more or less accurately reflecting what is happening outside us. On the contrary our mind itself is the

principal object of creation. The world while I am perceiving it is being incessantly created for myself in time and space'⁹⁶. Kant allowed subjectivity to impose upon what was separated from it as objective reality. Tagore demolishes the difference of these categories through the evocation of an inner 'Spirit', the 'Personality' in man. He therefore writes that the material world is a world of finite time and space, which the infinite uses as a medium of his self-expression– "Our individual minds are the strings which catch the rhythmic vibrations of this universal mind and respond in music of time and space",⁹⁷ thus providing an insight into the entwined zone of reality and individual power of the 'mind'.

In *Jeebansmriti* Tagore talks of his ruminations on love as a vital force that connects the individual with the universe. On the twofold nature of love he mentions that his yearning for love is philosophical and alienated, heading towards an incorporeal homelessness. On the other hand, love is worldly and tangible. Tagore compares one facet of love with the Skylark of Shelley, entreating endless elixir and the other with the Skylark of Wordsworth. He attaches the characteristic of integrity to Shelley's Skylark and insufficiency to Wordsworth's. To Tagore it is this variety in love that helps in the formulation of an undivided consciousness of being. Tagore's idea of totality, as discussed, draws its essence from this very notion of 'reconciliation of opposites'. The poet's picturing a universal principle, encircling creative man and his world, derives its strength from this very poetic cult of weaving a harmonious whole that unites diversified categories of time and space. Tagore finds two opposite forces at work in the process of creativity. He writes that the beauty of poetry is expressed through the unison of the Real and the complete Ideal of imagination. The centrifugal force of imagination drives the Real towards the Ideal while the centripetal force of affinity navigates the Ideal towards the Real. Here Tagore seems to provide art with a real organic form thereby positing it betwixt

⁹⁶ Tagore, Rabindranath, *Personality*. Kolkata: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2019. p. 42

⁹⁷ *Personality*. p. 50

sensory perception and imagination. The Coleridgean notion of the dualities of the ‘absent’ and the ‘present’, in the functioning of reality, gets echoed in Tagore. The latter draws his strength from the Upanishadic ethos of bringing together the various aspects of existence into a concrete whole. This idea of the ‘big’ and the ‘small’ strung together brings Tagore closer to Shelley. In *Jeebansmriti* he writes— *By then some people had started referring to me as Shelley*.⁹⁸ Tagore’s comes close to Shelley when he talks of the co-existence of the parts in a universal accord. The idealist poet Shelley preferred a motion toward which every earthly being moves in search of an Ideal. His preference for the wind, the river, the sea or the skies of Italy, as the supreme forces of nature, catered to such an admiration for motion. To Shelley the inherent quality of motion in these natural entities stood in opposition to discordance. The upward movement of his skylark therefore signified the search for an ‘ideal’ embodied in a ‘real’. Tagore has a similar predilection for motion. During his ride in a boat on the Padma, he sensed a harmony in the movements of his boat and immediately started celebrating the iridescent hues, music, and dance performances in nature. It is through this celebration that he becomes like Shelley’s ‘Aeolian lyre’, in whom the tune of a piano resonates with the vibrancy of external world— *I am like a living piano. The invisible inner self has several strings and apparatuses. I don’t know when someone comes and plays a tune. I cannot fully fathom why I play along*.⁹⁹ Here Tagore once again focuses on the idea of a composite whole. Therefore, in *Nirjharer Swapnabhanga* we find him coming out of a dreamlike state of being and entering into the domain of ecstasy, by being united with nature. The eighteenth century European Enlightenment virtue of looking at things with the eyes of a mechanic gets abnegated when Tagore celebrates an ethereal beauty of the world— *I think fragmented time and space is a*

⁹⁸ “আমাকে তখন কেহ কেহ শেলি বলিয়া ডাকিতে আরম্ভ করিয়াছিলেন” Rabindranath Tagore. *Jeebansmriti* Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1976. p.148

⁹⁹ “আমি একটা সজীব পিয়ানো যন্ত্রের মত। ভিতরে অন্ধকারের মধ্যে অনেকগুলো তার এবং কলবল আছে, কখন যে এসে বাজায় কিছুই জানিনে, কেন বাজে তাও সম্পূর্ণ বোঝা শক্ত” ___. *Chhinnapatra*. Kolkata: Biswabharati, 2004.

*fallacy. Every particle is boundless and every second is infinite.*¹⁰⁰ One is here immediately reminded of Blake and also Shelley's Adonais. Tagore's poetic self, like that of Shelley's music, searches for an undivided reality. This search leads him to undertake a journey, which is devoid of a destination, a '*niruddeshjatra*'. Bikash Chakravarty names this 'romantic voyage' an 'Orphic enquiry'¹⁰¹: "Following Elizabeth Sewell, we shall call the last of these categories (love, knowledge, poetry) the Orphic enquiry. It is a search for poetry which is a form of power. Miss Sewell, in *The Orphic Voice*, has studied this natural power as symbolised by the myth of Orpheus in the works of major western writers from Bacon to Shakespeare to Erasmus Darwin and Goethe to Wordsworth and Rilke. Considered from a conceptual point of view, all romantic poets undertake this Orphic exploration whether they use the myth of Orpheus or not. That is how Tagore enters into the fray. As we shall see, few poets have spoken as much as Tagore about the place and power of poetry in the living universe." The search for the unknown takes him to a zone of silence— *There is a beautiful, unmoved, generous and expansive peace in this passive, quiet and unperturbed nature devoid of a destination.*¹⁰² Herein Tagore's predilection for motion gradually gets replaced with a stasis: *I love the earth when it is motionless in silence.*¹⁰³ As he enters the zone of a silence, Tagore's inner Supreme Being, his '*jeebandebata*', of *Sonar Tori*, ascends to get united with the Universal God, the '*biswadebata*'. *Barshaseshe* in *Kalpna* features this *Biswadebata* of Tagore. Here we find a close resemblance with Shelley. Pramathanath Bishi writes— *This poem can be compared to Shelley's Ode to the West Wind. Each reminds me of the other; the poet himself has agreed that*

¹⁰⁰ "আমার মনে হয় খণ্ড কাল এবং খন্ড আকাশ আমাদের মনের ভ্রম। প্রত্যেক পরমাণু অসীম এবং প্রত্যেক মুহূর্তই অনন্ত" Ibid. p.210

¹⁰¹ Chakravarty, Bikash. *Rabindranath Tagore and European Romanticism: An Essay in Thematics*. Kolkata: Punascha Publishers, 2010. p. 73

¹⁰² "এই নিশ্চেষ্ট, নিস্তব্ধ, নিশ্চিন্ত নিরুদ্দেশ প্রকৃতির মধ্যে এমন একটি বৃহৎ সৌন্দর্যপূর্ণ নির্বিকার, উদার শান্তি দেখতে পাওয়া যায়।" Rabindranath Tagore. *Chinnapatra*. p. 70

¹⁰³ -"এই যে সমস্ত পৃথিবীটা চুপ করে পড়ে রয়েছে ওটাকে এমন ভালোবাসি" __. *Chinnapatra* p.52.

*Shelley's poetry was in his conscious thoughts while composing this poem... both of the poems have a similar theme: retreating monsoon and an unforeseen violent storm.*¹⁰⁴

The poetic move towards stasis and tranquillity gives rise to a 'romantic melancholia', the *miserable melancholy*¹⁰⁵ in Tagore. The Orphic search leads to an enquiry into a self-consciousness-a search for the Tagorean smaller 'self'. In his pursuit of embracing the Ultimate, the poet faces a conflict with his own self and fails to grasp the exquisiteness of nature: *These beautiful days and nights are drifting away from my life before I can grasp them completely.*¹⁰⁶ The smaller self the tries embrace a totality but gets landed up in a dilemma— *No matter how much my knowledge expands, it cannot experience the whole world, most of it still remains unknown, mysterious and outlandish.*¹⁰⁷ *The void created by the inner conflict finally gives vent to a poetic creativity— What is the name of this aimless indifference, what is its meaning – the tune arising from the core of the heart will be able to convey its true music.*¹⁰⁸ The reader is once again reminded of Shelley's 'pourest thou fullest' when looking at Tagore's 'bidirno sur' (splintered melody). The poet, like that of Shelley's, becomes for Tagore one who stands in isolation while singing the sad tunes of humanity. Thereafter he (the poet) seems to stand in a zone of all pervading darkness and Tagore urges him not to stop creating— *Yet, bird, O my bird, listen to me, do not close your wings*¹⁰⁹ Tagore's poet becomes one who is on the

¹⁰⁴ "এই কবিতাটি শেলির *Ode to the West Wind* কবিতার সহিত তুলনীয়। একটি আর একটির কথা মনে করাইয়া দেয়; কবি স্বয়ং স্বীকার করিয়াছেন ইহা লিখিবার সময়ে শেলির কবিতাটির সংস্কার তাহার মনে সচেতন ভাবে ছিল... দুটি কবিতারই উপলক্ষ অনুরূপ, বর্ষা শেষ ও অকস্মাৎ প্রবল ঝটিকা" Bishi, Pramathanath. *Rabindra Kabya Prabaha*. Kolkata: University of Calcutta, 1939. p. 161

¹⁰⁵ "অসীম করুণাপূর্ণ বিষাদ" *Chinnapatra* p. 89

¹⁰⁶ "এমন সুন্দর দিনরাত্রিগুলি আমার জীবন থেকে প্রতিদিন চলে যাচ্ছে, এর সমস্তটা গ্রহণ করতে পারছি না" Ibid. p.118

¹⁰⁷ "আমার কাছে আমি যতই বড় হই আমাকে দিয়ে সমস্ত বিশ্ব পরিপূর্ণ করতে পারিনে, অধিকাংশ জগৎই আমার অজ্ঞাত, অনাদ্বীয়, অমাহীন" Ibid. p.126

¹⁰⁸ "এই নিরুদ্দেশ নিরাকুলতার নাম কী, অর্থ কী- হৃদয়ের ঠিক মাঝখানটা করে করে সেই সুর বেরোবে যার দ্বারা এর সঙ্গীত ঠিক ব্যক্ত হবে". Ibid. p.97

¹⁰⁹ "ওরে বিহঙ্গ মোর/ এখুনি অন্ধ বন্ধ করোনা পাখা" Translated by Tagore himself in *The Gardener*. Poem 67

verge of being blind and yet having the strength of creative potential. From the numbness with which Tagore characterises the figure of the poet emanates a Keatsian tone. The true poet, according to him, is doomed to a burden of pain because poetry gives a vision which is quite Keatsian in its representation of ‘joy of grief’, like in the *Ode on Melancholy*. Thus the romantic imagination of the poet reaches the zone of an existential anguish. This is what Buddhadeb Bose means when he says that the poems of Gitanjali are-‘lined on the edge, on the frontier between two worlds as it were; they move and change places without being secure at any one point’¹¹⁰.

The feeling of a ‘veiled melancholy’ leads Tagore towards a meditation on the silence of death. His preoccupation with death leads to a linking of death with space. Death evolves as a pure space to the poet and creates a doorway to eternity. It stands as the final fulfilment of human life towards which human love moves. Tagore treads on Goethe’s path to conclude—*The dying wish of Goethe was: More light. If I ever have the scope of expressing such a wish, I would say: More space*¹¹¹ The spacious nature of his native land gets equated with the ‘excess’, the romantic idea of a surplus. The idea of space becomes so vivid to Tagore that he concludes that a detachment becomes a deterrent to human being’s progress to eternity.

Tagore’s romantic ideal considers the mind to be a playhouse that does not abide by the rules of social customs. Its progression towards an aimlessness surpasses a pre-given societal confinement: *Designing a framework of happiness is like playing with dolls... it has no other aim or benefit than simple pleasure*¹¹² Such categorisation of pleasure, in Tagore’s view, stands in contrast to Kantian moral laws which deny the existence of an a priori surface reality—*I wish*

¹¹⁰ Bose, Buddhadeb. *Tagore: Portrait of a Poet*. Bombay: University of Bombay, 1962. p.105

¹¹¹ “গ্যেটে মরবার সময়ে বলেছিলেনঃ *More light*. আমার যদি সে সময় কোনো ইচ্ছে প্রকাশ করবার থাকে তো আমি বলিঃ *More space*” *Chinnapatra* p.243

¹¹² “আনন্দের আয়োজন মাত্রই পুতুলখেলা- অর্থাৎ তাতে আনন্দ ছাড়া আর কোনো উদ্দেশ্য নেই লাভ নেই” *Chinnapatra*. p.247

*to experience immense pleasure by living a carefree and vibrant life instead of letting my body and mind wilt at a tender age, shackled by outdated customs, continuously driven by unnecessary worries and an archaic knowledge system.*¹¹³ The ‘belief system’ of an individual therefore rests on an imaginative realm of individual reality— *Those who fail to realise the true essence of beauty, contemptuously regards it as a sensuous possession.*¹¹⁴ Beauty, thus achieved, takes into account the presence of an external, conceived in terms of the internal reality of the mind. Tagore quotes Goethe to unravel the relationship of the two—‘Thou must do without’ and explains the conversation of the inner with the outer. Such mutual relationship produces a correspondence with nature and accords a set of ‘seasonal changes’ of contentment to the mind. *“The heart enjoys fifty two seasons”* writes the poet. During his boat ride on the Padma, the poet equipped himself with pieces of literature that would aid him in understanding the desires of the mind—*I have to keep an endless number of things at hand. Hence, I have innumerable books ranging from Nepalese Buddhist literature to the plays of Shakespeare*¹¹⁵. He would then voraciously read the works of Shelley, Byron, Moore, Goethe, Tennyson, and Keats. His readings of these writers would enable Tagore to contemplate the ideals of Beauty and Truth. It was during this time when Tagore considered poetry to be the most convenient genre for expressing his thoughts on truth and beauty— *I have never lied in my poetry. They are the safe havens of all my truth.*¹¹⁶ Keats’ poetic creations had then become Tagore’s source of inspiration. The reception of Keats brings Tagore close to the English poet in his depiction of a pensive manifestation of truth. In *Chinnapatrabali* Tagore mentions— *In between writing and leisure, I read portions from a brief autobiography of the poet Keats...Among all the English*

¹¹³ ‘ইচ্ছা করে, দিন-রাত্রি বিচার-আচার বিবেক-বুদ্ধি নিয়ে কতগুলো বহুকেলে জীর্ণতার মধ্যে শরীর-মনকে অকালে জরাগ্রস্ত না করে, একটা দ্বিধাহীন চিন্তাহীন প্রাণ নিয়ে খুব একটা প্রবল জীবনের আনন্দ লাভ করি’ Rabindranath Tagore. Ibid. p.116

¹¹⁴ “যারা সৌন্দর্যের মধ্যে সত্যি সত্যি নিমগ্ন হতে অক্ষম তারাই সৌন্দর্যকে কেবলমাত্র ইন্দ্রিয়ের ধন বলে অবজ্ঞা করে” Ibid. p.119

¹¹⁵ “কতরকমের কত-কী যে হাতে রাখতে হয় তার ঠিক নেই। সেইজন্যেই আমার সঙ্গে নেপালিজ, বুদ্ধিস্টিক লিটারেচার থেকে আরম্ভ করে শেকসপীয়ার পর্যন্ত, কত রকমেরই যে বই আছে তার ঠিকানা নেই’ . *Chinnapatra* p.153

¹¹⁶ “কবিতায় কখনো মিথ্যে কথা বলিনে- সেই আমার সমস্ত সত্যের একমাত্র আশ্রয়স্থল” Ibid. p.162

*poets I know, I can relate to Keats the most. There might be greater poets than him, but none has his poignant spirit.*¹¹⁷ Pramathanath Bishi, while commenting on the reception of Keats by Tagore, notes that a sublimity in the picturesque quality of *Manasi* and *Kalpana* has a nature that is Keatsean (*Keats' poetry is no less responsible for this*).¹¹⁸

While contemplating all these facets of the aesthetics of creation Tagore brings together the East and the West with his reception of romantic ideals. He notes, in a letter to Pramatha Choudhuri in 1891, *Sometimes I can sense a conflict of two forces within me: my tranquil Indian nature is constantly wounded by the European restlessness...therefore there is pain on one side and detachment on the other...there is poetry on one hand and philosophy on the other...*¹¹⁹ The intertwining of poetry with philosophy, in the hands of Tagore, thus enhances the fervour of romantic consciousness.

The tenets of European Romanticism had so enthusiastically been received in nineteenth-twentieth century Bengal that it had become a custom for writers to extract something out of it for using these as 'stoff' of their creations. It is quite evident from the aesthetic articulations of the above-mentioned writers that certain norms, tendencies and pragmatic factors were taken into consideration by them while they chose to receive and reinterpret European romantic ideals. The urge for removal of an overarching religious content, in Bengali literature, and a detachment from the *Gita Govinda* School, on the part of writers of the nineteenth century, made them explore an aesthetic of self-expression. The infiltration of romantic ideals also accelerated the development of the ideas of universalism and self-

¹¹⁷ "আজকাল আমি আমার লেখা এবং আলস্যের মাঝে মাঝে কবি কিটস-এর একটি ক্ষুদ্র জীবনচরিত অল্প অল্প করে পাঠ করি...আমি যত ইংরাজি কবি জানি সবচেয়ে কিটস-এর আমার আত্মীয়তা আমি বেশি করে অনুভব করি, তার চেয়ে অনেক বড় কবি থাকতে পারে, অমন মনের মত কবি আর নেই" Tagore, Rabindranath. *Chhinnapatrabali*. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2004. p. 348

¹¹⁸ 'কিটস-এর কাব্যও ইহার জন্য কম দায়ী নহে' *Rabindra Kabya Prabaha*. p. 38

¹¹⁹ "এখন একেকবার মনে হয় আমার মধ্যে দুটো বিপরীত শক্তির দ্বন্দ্ব চলছে...আমার ভারতবর্ষীয় শাস্ত্র প্রকৃতিকে ইউরোপের চাঞ্চল্য সর্বদা আঘাত করছে- সেইজন্য একদিকে বেদনা আর আরেকদিকে বৈরাগ্য...একদিকে কবিতা আর একদিকে ফিলোসফি..."

determination, which served as tools for empowering the colonised's mind with the idea of freedom. Juxtaposing romantic fervor with existing literary and cultural tradition therefore became a practice of time. The Indian classical tradition that was instrumental in linking the poet and the sage found equivalence in the romantic notion of considering the poet/author as a 'seer'. The colonised writer attempted to become a sort of a seer who needed to inculcate in his countrymen a spirit of deep sense of urgency for some kind of 'action'. Therefore, the valorisation of individual will-power, a characteristically romantic feature, became so important for the nineteenth century authors. Thus while Byron and Shelley's ideals on liberty and Wordsworth's concept of sanity were largely accepted, 'mal du siecle', Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta observes, 'a source of pride and probably the most common feature of European Romanticism, is rejected'.¹²⁰ The social scenario then significantly conditioned the reception of Romantic texts.

The Nineteenth Century, Jorasanko Household and Abanindranath

The reception of Romanticism was thus firmly grounded in nineteenth-twentieth century Bengal. Situated in a time when attempting a 'new' mode of writing was an established practice, it was not unnatural for Abanindranath Tagore to cogitate on a romantic aesthetics in his oeuvre.

Born in the family of the Tagores, Abanindranath sought to define aesthetics along the lines of his predecessors. The Jorasanko house had been a place marked by cultural contacts, with Abanindranath's father importing European artefacts to embellish his house. The Tagores were, in fact, important contributors to the formation of the cultural identity of the *bhadralok* (gentleman) having a Pirali identity and enjoying heterodox traditions. Debendranath Tagore's

¹²⁰ Dasgupta, Subha Chakraborty. *'Romantic Texts in Bengali Periodicals' in Romanticism in Bengal Essays and Studies XII* ed. Malini Bhattacharya. Kolkata: Jadavpur University, 1998. p.93

second son, Satyendranath, who was often stationed out of town, also rented accommodations in the white quarters of Calcutta and provided a forum for interchanges between the white and the *bhadrolok* society. Satyendranath's wife, Gyanadanandini Debi took an active part in encouraging the members of the Jorasanko household to form liaisons with the foreign harbingers of modernity. It was she who encouraged Abanindranath to pursue art as a form of self-expression and set up the meeting between him and Havell.¹²¹

The erudite family of the Tagores had thus led Abanindranath to grow up in an ambience where he would encounter the aesthetics of both the East and the West. Abanindranath's training in art had begun under the guidance of the Italian artist Gilhardi and later it was C.L. Palmer who taught him the technique of oil painting. It was one of the family members of Thakurbari (Abanindranath's brother-in-law Seshendra) who introduced Abanindranath to Persian paintings. The amalgamation of aesthetics that the author-artist was to focus on, in his future years, began from such an acquaintance with the native and the foreign. Abanindranath talks of this in *Jorasankor Dhare: My compositions were twofold: some were in the tradition of European art and others followed the tradition of native Indian Paintings*.¹²² The two aesthetic traditions were thus operative, through mutual inclusiveness and harmony, in Abanindranath's oeuvre. It is because of this that Goethe and Victor Hugo appealed to the author-artist as did the Upanishads, Kalidas, Kabir, and Bharat. In *Jorasankor Dhare* and *Ghoroa*, Abanindranath talks of Bankim Chandra's and Ishwar Gupta's visit to his house¹²³. His aunt's room fascinated young Abanindranath and it appeared to him as the one of Suryamukhi's in Bankim's novel. He was also familiar with the performances of

¹²¹ In *JorasankorDhare* (Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.I, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban 1974) p. 272 Abanindranath talks of the plague in Calcutta (1896) which made the family move out of Jorasanko to rented quarters in Chowringhee, the 'white part' of the town. He is likely to have met Havell during this time or in 1897 at Gyanadanandini's home.

¹²² একদিকে আমার পুরাতন ইউরোপিয়ান আর্টের নিদর্শন ও আর-একদিকে এ দেশের পুরাতন চিত্রেরনিদর্শন *Jorasankor Dhare*. p 269

¹²³ Abanindranath Tagore. *Ghoroa* (*Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.I) p75, 120

Nidhubabu's *tappa*, *kirtans* and *kathakata*¹²⁴ and Michael Madhusudan Dutt's works, and would take part in Michael's plays (Abanindranath mentions the staging of *Krishnakumari* in *Ghoroa*) that were enacted at the Jorasanko house.

All these factors along with the Orientalist interests of Havell; the pan-Asian interests of Okakura; the regional tradition of Vaishnavism; the neo-transcendental Brahmo tradition of Debendranath and Rabindranath; the mark of Islam on the family history of the Tagores the social and cultural essences of colonial Calcutta' an emerging 'modernity' of nineteenth century Bengal as a coalition of the past and the present; lead to the formation of a certain kind of heterogeneity in Abanindranath's aesthetic consciousness. One of the dominant features of this multifaceted identity is that it gets ordered with romantic sensibility which the author-artist uses for a purposive end.

With the presence of a romantic consciousness in the creative artists of nineteenth century Bengal, Abanindranath's romantic orientation had been directed to achieve particular ends. The author-artist aimed at rescuing art and literature from the shackles of an imitative impulse. In a search for originality, in a creative work, Abanindranath's deliberate move towards receiving Romanticism meant an effort to formulate a new 'Indian' aesthetics, comprising both the native and the foreign. If we take into consideration the emergence of Romanticism as a European phenomenon, we ought to look, at the same time, at how Abanindranath re-orders it to suit it to his own chronotopic demands. In her notes on "Shareable Narratives? Intersubjectivity, Life Stories and Reinterpreting the Past", Luisa Paserini introduces the idea of an "accumulated subjectivity"- "...the area of accumulated subjectivity, where the inherited is innovated, in a constant intertwining of inventive and repetitive and sometimes in a conflictual way. An example of this is the relationship between the imagination

¹²⁴ Abanindranath Tagore. *Jorasankor Dhare* p215

and the imaginary, which are both forms of accumulated collected subjectivities. The imagination is the creative process. The imaginary is more the inherited, in fact, what you inherit. There is some more creativeness in imagination and some more repetitiveness in the imaginary, although they mix. It is the field of identities, where subjectivity can be intertwined with the political”¹²⁵. Abanindranath’s reception of Romanticism can be read as the terrain of this “accumulated subjectivity”, where his ‘imagination’ amalgamates with the ‘imaginary’. In attempting to understand the nature of reception by Abanindranath then, the ‘historicity of literature’ comes to light at the ‘intersections of diachrony and synchrony’ which helps us in deciphering literary history as a process of aesthetic reception and production that takes place in “the realisation of literary texts on the part of the receptive reader, the reflective critic, and the author in his continuing productivity”¹²⁶.

¹²⁵ Bacraft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/education/docs/shareablenarratives.doc

¹²⁶ Jauss, Hans Robert, Timothy, Bahti Trans. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982. p. 21

Chapter II

The Search for the Romantic in the Literary Works of Abanindranath

A number of aesthetic traditions converges in Abanindranath's creative soul. With his reception of Romanticism along with other aesthetic ideas, he becomes a syncretic, absorbing all these influences and make them his own and in turn overgrows them. The present chapter will focus on Abanindranath's take on certain romantic thoughts as appears in his theory of aesthetics and its manifestation in his major works.

Given his position in the latter half of the nineteenth century it is almost a *sin qua non* for Abanindranath to contemplate some pre-existing aesthetic ideals for the foundation of aesthetics. The colonial predicament in Bengal had necessitated the manifestation of originality as a requisite in the emerging aesthetics. It is as such that we find Abanindranath focusing primarily on liberating art and aesthetics from the shackles of imitation. The author-artist, therefore, develops a disregard for Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) because the realistic mode of painting of the latter stands in stark contrast to an 'artistic reality'¹²⁷ that he propounds. Abanindranath writes— *An immature actor will follow realism and melodramatically overact to enforce the play's theme on the audience while trying to follow realism, whereas a skilled actor enacts the same subject with the control of a true artist and the latter influences the spectator more.*¹²⁸ Abanindranath's take on "reality" versus "ideality"¹²⁹ derives its essence from his understanding of art as an expression of spontaneity: *Composition of art has a pleasure as a component that rises above every action. This spontaneous energy touches every good*

¹²⁷ Tagore, Abanindranath. *Bagiswari Shiplpa Prabandhabali*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2008. p.55

¹²⁸ “কাঁচা অভিনেতা রিয়্যালিজমের পথে গেয়ে নাটকের বিষয়টাকে তর্জন-গর্জন করে যেন দর্শকের নাকের উপরে ছুঁড়ে ফেলে দিতে চলে, আর পাকা অভিনেতা শিল্পীর সংযম নিয়ে সেই বিষয়টাই দিয়ে যায় অথচ ফল হয় তাতে বেশি দর্শকের উপরে।” Ibid. p. 56

¹²⁹ Ibid 55

*composition, which then calibrates with the music of our heart.*¹³⁰ Such spontaneity becomes, for the author-artist, a close ally of ‘simplicity’, *Art is characteristically devoid of splendour.*¹³¹ It is the quality of simplicity with which sets Abanindranath apart from Rabindranath. Rabindranath’s ‘*kothin*’ has less to do with Abanindranath’s quest for the simple in the manifestation of his aesthetic need. Abanindranath says, *Rabi Uncle is an expert in spoiling the boys with new ideas.*¹³² The creative artist is, for Abanindranath, one who frees himself from the shackles of societal impositions, while asserting simplicity in his creations, and one who chooses nature as a confidante. In *Jorasnakor Dhare* Abanindranath contemplates the essence of the alliance of man and nature in the creative psyche of an artist— *We are all outlandish; darlings of Mother nature, close to her lap. We are wild. We really don’t match with everyone. Grief and joy affect us more, we can enjoy life better as well. Nature has gifted us everything in excess.*¹³³ When Abanindranath theorises the idea of the coalescence of nature and the individual, Wordsworth’s “theodicy of landscape”¹³⁴, gets replaced by the presence of nature as a benign mother. This mother gets animated by the divine power of creation and this becomes a sport of love between the divine and his creation. Abanindranath calls this sport a ‘*leela*’. The leela thus mirrors the way in which the human being is animated with the divine touch. Here Abanindranath’s view differs from Schiller’s idea of play. According to Abanindranath, ‘*khela*’ or sport is not the true characterisation of art, as men take to different types of sports at different age-levels. Sport has a reference to age-group and a fondness for a

¹³⁰ “আর্টের রচনায় এই স্ফূর্তি বলে একটা জিনিস থাকে যেটা ক্রিয়া-প্রক্রিয়াকে ছাড়িয়ে দেখা দেয়। এই স্বতঃস্ফূর্ত যে চেতনা তাই পৌঁছয় সমস্ত ভালো রচনায়, তবেই তার সঙ্গে আমাদের হৃদয়তন্ত্রী সুর মেলে।” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.146

¹³¹ “আর্টের একটা লক্ষণ আড়ম্বরশূন্যতা।” *Ibid.* p. 11.

¹³² . “ছেলেগুলোর মাথা মুড়োতে রবিকার হাত একেবারে ফুরসিদ্ধ” Thakur, Probodhendunath. *Abanindra Charitam*. Kolkata: Rupa and Company, 1987. p.93

¹³³ “আমরা সব সৃষ্টিছাড়া; প্রকৃতি-মায়ের আদুরে, কোলের কাছাকাছি ছেলে। একটা বুনো ভাব আছে। সবার সঙ্গে মেলেনা- সত্যি তাই। সুখদুঃখ আমাদের বেশি করে বাজে, জীবন উপভোগ করবার ক্ষমতাও আমাদের বেশি। প্রকৃতি আমাদের বেশি করে দিয়েছে সবই” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.224

¹³⁴ Abrams, M. H. *Natural Supernaturalism –Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. Delhi: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002 (Indian edition). P..97

particular sport at an early age is overcome at a later age. So, while self-transcendence is the character of sport, *leela*, in Abanindranath's view has a stability through changes and a universal appeal. The characteristic of '*besi*', in this universal appeal, the excess as the denominator of creation finds an echo in the romantic idea of art as the overflow of emotions. For Abanindranath such overflow means a plethora of aesthetic '*rasa*' ramifying itself in the whole universe. He notes that with the overflow of '*rasa*', the air gets fragrant, the eyes get filled with colours, the begging bowl of the one searching for nectar gets so inundated with *rasa* that the seeking of the knowledge of '*rasa*' becomes the equivalent of the claim for seeking truth. '*Rasa*', as featured in the *Natyashastra*, henceforth gets used by Abanindranath to depict the European Romantic idea of art as overflow. It is used as a category reflecting a Truth, real to the artist and the connoisseur of art as well. Abanindranath, here, focuses on the idea of '*sahridaya*' and employs it to depict his romantic sensibility. Such truth functions like a lamp¹³⁵ that illuminates the artistic soul (Abanindranath has Rodin as the point of reference) with its brilliance. Seen thus, art does not act like a mirror. It ceases to be an imitator of mundane reality and its creator becomes one who succeeds in extracting something extraordinary out of the regularities of existence.

In conceptualising aesthetics as the manifestation of a spontaneous ('*swatosfurto*') human consciousness ('*chetana*')¹³⁶, Abanindranath magnifies the romantic spirit of the creative artists who expressed a 'language' of 'freedom' also pertaining to their idea of political freedom in nineteenth-twentieth century Bengal. This spirit of freedom (*mukti*) tries to capture the 'inexpressible' emotion of the creative artist through the medium of art: *Art embodies an*

¹³⁵ In his essay 'On Poetry in General' (1818) Hazlitt talks of the lamp to define the non-mimetic nature of aesthetics. He writes, "The light of poetry is not only a direct but also a reflected light, that while it shews us the object, throws a sparkling radiance on all around it...". Cited by M.H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp – romantic and the critical tradition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1953 (Indian edition). p.52

¹³⁶ *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.146

element of the inexpressible.¹³⁷ Abanindranath, here, orients the reader's attention towards the artist and places him in the relational realm of the elements of his work and his state of mind thus showing that the dynamism of overflow defines the creative artist. The medieval Bengali writers had little autonomy in their works because these were meant for a community of connoisseurs who were united through a shared subjectivity, forged especially by religious discourses. The concept of such aesthetics that confines the creative artist with the dictates of some pre-given categories of deliberation therefore fails to impress Abanindranath. So while Kant tries to speculate on the rules of art. Abanindranath does the exact opposite by freeing art from the constrictions of any a priori formulae— *I have detected the reason behind the failure of art schools in creating artists –their students keep labouring in a fixed pattern*.¹³⁸ In repudiating the confines of rules of any kind Abanindranath chose to follow the romantic virtuosity of art as an idiom of uncontrolled exhilaration, '*aniyantrito ananda*' as he calls it.¹³⁹

In nineteenth-twentieth century Bengal, the trend was to follow romantic aesthetics and this provides Abanindranath with the ideas of subjectivity and individualism. The author-artist reformulates these very romantic ideals to suit his own artistic sensibility. Romantic art begins to achieve a new dimension in his hands. When writing— *In the realm of art, one has to mingle traditional forms with modern ones to develop new creation and thus advance further*.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ “আর্টের মধ্যে একটা অনির্বচনীয়তা আছে” Ibid p124. The early German Romantics credit art with the power of representing the unrepresentable, in other words, to intimate the absolute that eluded all reason. *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism* p.10 Abanindranath echoes this very thought in his deliberation on ‘anirbachaniya’.

¹³⁸ “আর্ট স্কুল থেকে যে একেবারেই আর্টিস্ট বার হয়না তার কারণ আমি দেখেছি- সেখানে ছেলেগুলো খেটেই চলে বাঁধা নিয়মে।” Novalis (1772-1801) contended that genuine philosophical thought called for the introduction of systemlessness into a system. Only such an interpretation could address the flaws of the system while avoiding the anarchy of systemlessness. ‘What is Romanticism, and where did it come from?’ Saul, Nicholas ed. *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

¹³⁹ Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali p.124

¹⁴⁰ “শিল্পে পূর্বতন ধারার সঙ্গে নতুন ধারাকে মিলিয়ে নতুন নতুন সৌন্দর্য সৃষ্টির মুখে অগ্রসর হতে হয় আর্টের জগতে।” Ibid p.71

Abanindranath *puts* theory into practice by amalgamating the old and the new. We will discuss these very categories that render a characteristic specialty to Abanindranath's art.

Imagination and Individuality

A discussion of Abanindranath's romantic inclination can begin with Schiller's seminal essay '*On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*'. According to Schiller the naïve poet breathes nature, the sentimental poet seeks her. Discussing the nature of the polarity of the two Schiller notes—"Naïve poetry is the child of life and unto life it returns"...the naïve genius must do everything through his nature: he can do little through his freedom; he will accomplish his idea only when Nature works in him as an inner necessity". On the other hand the sentimental poet is "always involved with two opposing presentations and sensations, with reality as a finite boundary and with his idea as an infinite". In *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* Abanindranath contemplates a similar vision and relates art to what in Schillerean terms means the sentimental. He writes—*Art is composed of the artist's inherent infinity and his individuality. It becomes just a copy of the original if the craft is influenced by another artist or even built on our divine Creator's framework.*¹⁴¹ The infinity that Abanindranath talks of, denounces even the laws of the divine creator ('*bidhata*') in its progression towards creation. One immediately finds, in such declaration, the opposite of a Kantian 'subjective universality'.¹⁴² Throughout the whole of *Bagiswaree Shilpa Prabandhabali* Abanindranath's notion on art and aesthetics derives its strength from the idea of a cautious withdrawal of oneself from pre-given formulae to arrive at what he calls '*swatantrata*' (individuality). He finds that the success of art begins at the expense of discarding rules: *The spirit of human beings, confined by rules, embarks on an endless*

¹⁴¹ “আর্টিস্টের অন্তর্নিহিত অপরিমিত (বা ইনফিনিটি), আর্টিস্টের স্বতন্ত্রতা (ইন্ডিভিজুয়ালিটি) - এই সমস্ত নির্মিতি নিয়ে যেটি এল সেইটেই আর্ট। অন্যের নির্মিতির ছাপ, এমনকি বিধাতার নির্মিতির ছাঁচে ঢালাই হয়ে যা বার হল তাতো আসলের নকল বৈ আর তো কিছুই হলনা” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.12

¹⁴² Hammermeister, Kai. *The German Aesthetic Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p.29

*journey following new patterns, in a new cadence, beyond right or wrong. This craft has been Man's only gift to the world – what was restricted within the folds of the finite has been released towards an infinite rasa.*¹⁴³ To transcend the a priori order of existence thereby becomes for Abanindranath the equivalent of the march towards the endless, in the search for 'rasa'. The sense of individuality, perceived through the realisation of the infinite, Abanindranath records, produces imagination as its resultant. It is imagination alone that differentiates literature from a newspaper– *It's not enough to tell a story using correct grammar and accurate expressions. If it was so, literature would have been confined within newspaper articles.*¹⁴⁴ Imagination therefore appears to deviate from conforming to a pattern of pre-given structures. Its task lies in transporting man to a creative domain. Abanindranath writes– *Every piece of art and every artist have an unbounded attraction for the non-existent, for imagination, for the unknown. The one who fails to understand that can never grasp the meaning of either reality or fantasy.*¹⁴⁵ Elsewhere, in this essay, the author considers imagination as an indispensable part of living. *The imaginative flair is natural for a human being, because it has been his companion since childhood.*¹⁴⁶ In regarding imagination as the locus of a creative zeal, Abanindranath posits it as a contrast to reality. It is imagination alone that designates the artist as a 'second creator' ('*dwitiyo srosta*') entrusting him with the power of transforming an objective reality: *Armed with this worldview...man became more innovative with his creations. The spectator then*

¹⁴³ “নিয়মের মধ্যে ধরা মানুষের চেষ্টা, নতুন বর্ণে, নতুন নতুন ছন্দে বয়ে চলল নিয়মের সীমানা ছাড়িয়ে ঠিক-ঠিকানার বাইরে। পৃথিবীতে মানুষ যা কিছু দিতে পেরেছে সে তার এই নির্মিতি- যেটা পরিমিতির মধ্যে ধরা ছিল তাকে অপরিমিতি দিয়ে ছেড়ে দিল অপরিমিত রসের দিকে” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p. 18

¹⁴⁴ “নির্ভুল ব্যাকরণ ও পরিভাষা দিয়ে যেমনটি-তাই ঘটনাকে বলে যাওয়া হলেই যে বলা হল তা নয়, তা যদি হত তো সাহিত্য খবরের কাগজেই বন্ধ থাকত।” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.83.

¹⁴⁵ “অবিদ্যমানের দিকে, কল্পনার দিকে, অগোচরের দিকে, যে চিরন্তন টান রয়েছে সমস্ত শিল্পের সমস্ত শিল্পীর, এটা যে না বোঝে চিত্রের বিচিত্র রহস্য সে বোঝেনা, তার কাছে বাস্তব ও কাল্পনিক দুয়েরই অর্থ অজ্ঞাত থেকে যায়” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.84

¹⁴⁶ “কল্পনাপ্রবণতা হল মানুষের পক্ষে স্বাভাবিক অবস্থা, কেননা দেখি কল্পনা তার অশেষব সহচারী।” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p. 88

*became the impresario, the viewer then became the second creator.*¹⁴⁷ We are here immediately reminded of Coleridge's notion of poetic imagination as 'secondary', a category that bestows a second meaning to visible objects through the power of an imaginative mediation.

Maurice Bowra, in his *The Romantic Imagination*, notes that for the English Romantics imagination meant a metaphysics of ascent towards 'becoming'. He writes, "Indeed imagination and insight are in fact inseparable and form for all practical purposes a single faculty. Insight both awakes the imagination to work and is in turn sharpened by it when it is at work".¹⁴⁸ Abanindranath's rumination on the role of imagination, in aesthetic activity, serves a similar essence and comes close to Franz Schubert (1797-1828) who exclaims: "Oh imagination, thou supreme jewel of mankind, thou in-exhaustible source from which artists and scholars drink! Oh, rest with us!"¹⁴⁹

In *Buro Angla* Abanindranath projects the role of imagination as conceived through an in-between zone of the real and the non-real, being and non-being-the medium of dream. It is through the daydreaming of Ridoy the protagonist that the readers get transported to a reality wherein the boundary lines between nature and human, childhood and manhood and freedom and attachment get blurred with the writer's ambition of activating the imaginative potency of the readers. Throughout *Buro Angla*, the 'known' is turned down. Ridoy's journey into an unknown terrain facilitates a transgression of his as well as the reader's everyday world to acknowledge the worth of one's own 'space' in the construct of a quintessential life. The constant mobility, as depicted in the text, evokes in one, a momentum of poetic creativity that refutes stagnation of a mental acuity.

¹⁴⁷ “এই দৃষ্টিবলে... মানুষ নতুন নতুন সৃষ্টি বার করে আনতে লাগল। যে এতদিন দর্শক ছিল সে হল প্রদর্শক, দ্রষ্টা হয়ে বসল দ্বিতীয় স্রষ্টা।”
Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali p.36

¹⁴⁸ Bowra, Maurice. *The Romantic Imagination*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000 (Indian edition). p.7

¹⁴⁹ Cited in *The Mind of the European Romantics* by H.G. Schenk, Oxford University Press 1979 p.5

Usually viewed as a narrative of a child's coming to terms with a new meaning of existence, *Buro Angla* captures a much deeper understanding of life that corresponds to acquiring 'knowledge' through an individualistic mode. The text lets its readers perceive the topography of one's place of belonging. This is foregrounded with a self-awakening that culminates in a mode of self-questioning as well as the need for recognising an individual's milieu. Abanindranath chooses to depict the worth of knowing one's own land. This knowing gets generated, not through a discourse of Geography but through a geography of imagination, a geography that seeks to establish a communion with the individual who gets defined in terms of the characteristic of his habitat. He adapts from Selma Lagerlöf's *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (1907) and acquaints his readers with a real map of his country through a non-real, anti-curricular formula.

In his text, Abanindranath shows that for internalising the contours of geographical maps one needs, at the foremost, to undergo a cerebral visualisation of those entities that makes such conceptualisations. Without the capability of thinking beyond the lines of mere political boundaries, one fails to have a holistic vision of one's own land. The reader of *Buro Angla* is hence made to undertake a non-mechanical imaginative journey, along the lines of Ridoy, and thereby understand that the effectuation of geography begins at the very moment when one conceives it on one's own terms. Only a series of individual conversations with all those objects, leading to the construct of geography, enables one to approve of a geographical denotation. Ridoy's understanding of the geography of his land therefore surfaces through a continuous communication with birds and animals, while discovering alleys, lanes, water bodies, mountains, plantations, and weather conditions—factors that contribute to the idea of geography. Such ideation of a totality in geography evolves only through a free play of imagination.

Placing a person in a vast geographic terrain is only possible through the aid of an imaginative acumen, as physically this is impossible. Ridoy's dream in *Buro Angla* becomes the equivalent of his wish-fulfillment,¹⁵⁰ the actualisation of his wish to come out of his small ambit of a mundane existence, his *locked room*.¹⁵¹ Ridoy's imaginative capacity facilitates his dreaming of visiting the space outside his home, where he emerges as a hero by learning to combat the oddities of survival. Underneath his dream as Hangpal, the protector of geese, lies Ridoy's imagination of considering himself a hero. Abanindranath here hints at the human propensity of imagining oneself as distinct from others in possession of certain individualistic markers.

The interesting point in *Buro Angla* lies in the fact that here Abanindranath amalgamates a real geography of his country with the imaginative features of a dream. Ridoy's journey to Manas Sorobar becomes a real mapping of India through Abanindranath's eyes. Like *Ramchhagal*, the goat, he asserts his 'lecture' on 'geography' with his magnified map—*Seeing a stranger, the teacher scrambled to teach geography to the boys while scribbling with his horns on the big black board with a huge map drawn on it.*¹⁵² The process of mapping gets actualised through an act of imagining a reality in terms of magic, where humans play no part. Abanindranath's or Ridoy's world becomes one where the language of humans and animals becomes essentially the same, where the sign system of the human world undergoes a complete alteration, where meanings derive their strength from a state of apparent meaninglessness.

This meaninglessness finds expression in Ridoy's words— '*matha*' and '*mundu*' (incomprehensible), the end of *Buro Angla*. The words indicate the very state of absurdity that

¹⁵⁰ To Pre-Romantics thinkers like Hamann and Herder, dream signified 'a journey to the Inferno of self-knowledge'. At the height of the Romantic period itself, Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert, physician and exponent of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, brought out his Dream Symbolism which to some extent foreshadows Freud's interpretation of dreams.

¹⁵¹ "কুলুপ দেওয়া ঘর।" *Buro Angla* Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.III, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2010. p.137

¹⁵² ("অচেনা লোক দেখে মাষ্টারমশাই তাড়াতাড়ি গা ঝাড়া দিয়ে মস্ত ম্যাপ আঁকা প্রকান্ড কালো সেলেটখানায় শিং বুলিয়ে বুলিয়ে ছেলেদের জিওগ্রাফির লেকচার শুরু করলেন।") *Buro Angla* p.191

we traverse through the imaginative realm of Abanindranath's work. They point to the essential understanding that our unfulfilled aspirations, in real life, get realised through dreams.

Similarly in *Nalak* the picturesque depiction of the chronicles of Buddha's life evokes an imaginative order that corresponds to light, sound, and colours while awakening the sensory organs. Just as Ridoy, *Nalak* too is presented as the visualiser of a reality, modified by an individual imagination. This reality marks the mature progression of *Nalak*, and the readers as well, towards the philosophical facet of a mortal existence. *Nalak* is conceived as a person capable of imagining the eventful life of someone whom he has not met in person. This very capacity of imagining turns *Nalak* into someone who unravels the epistemological order of existence. It brings the boy close to the very truth of valuing the worth of an earthly existence. It also validates the purpose of 'being' as a human being on earth as opposed to the heavenly habitat of Buddha.

The whole of *Nalak* is grounded on the principle of an imaginative capability. As *Nalak* imagines a world of his own through the window of his *pathshala*, the readers too are made to travel to a space of what M.H. Abrams calls 'natural supernaturalism'. However, while T. E. Hulme recognised this natural supernaturalism by stating that "Romanticism, then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is split religion"¹⁵³ Abanindranath turns down the idea of religion while reflecting on romantic aesthetics. The allusion to a spiritual world gets meticulously interpolated with a reality, as it appears in the young *Nalak*'s thought process. *Nalak* is made to travel through those very zones which his imagination chooses to construct. Unlike *Buro Angla*'s Ridoy, who had a compulsion to travel, *Nalak* chooses his own voyage. *Nalak stared in that direction and wondered – Could mother have locked me up in the room if*

¹⁵³ M. H. Abrams *Natural Supernaturalism* p.68

*I had wings like them? I would definitely have made a dash for the forest.*¹⁵⁴ The mobility of his journey, therefore reinforces, an uninterrupted momentum in the text and the readers too enter a spontaneous realm of imagination. Nalak's imagination ushers in a speedy emancipation that provides a route to an escape from a mundane reality: *Nalak imagined a storm that would destroy their whole village and blow away the thatched roof of the school. That would make them go away and stay in the forest where no one would be able to lock him up in a room. During the night, when the wind howled outside, the sparks of lightings lit everything up, Nalak prayed for storm and rain. He wished for the mud walls to melt and the door-latch to break.*¹⁵⁵ Through his urge to break open the doors Nalak in turn gives vent to the readers' celebration of an exuberant imagination. The readers proceed to develop a wish, like Nalak's, to enter a zone where— *The birds are flying happily, the deer are galloping in a playful mood. All are rejoicing to their heart's desire, unfettered in the open field, under the tree where the wind blows.*¹⁵⁶ Abanindranath's idea of art as a truant boy becomes explicit here.

In delineating the working of two parallel worlds in *Nalak*, Abanindranath denies a linear functionality of time. Nalak moves beyond his 'real' time and space to enter a past, a history, which he tries to internalise. The oscillation between time and space ascertains the validity of an individual experience that rationality fails to define. Through a set of myths and symbols Abanindranath validates the functioning of time and space as individual constructs. Nalak's dream fantasy thus emerges from his wish to situate himself within a particular time

¹⁵⁴ “নালক সেই দিকে চেয়ে থাকে আর ভাবে- আহা, ওদের মত যদি ডানা পেতাম তবে কি আর মা আমায় ঘরে বন্ধ করে রাখতে পারতেন? এক দৌড়ে বনে চলে যেতাম।” *Nalak* Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.II, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2009. p.236

¹⁵⁵ “নালক মনে-মনে ভাবে আজ যদি এমন একটা ঝড় ওঠে যে আমাদের গ্রামখানা এই পাঠশালার খোড়োচালটা শুদ্ধ একেবারে ভেঙে-চুরে উড়িয়ে নিয়ে যায়, তবে বনে গিয়ে আমাদের থাকতেই হয়, তখন আর আমাকে ঘরে বন্ধ করবার উপায় থাকে। রাতের বেলা ঘরের বাইরে বাতাস শনশন করে বইতে থাকে, বিদ্যুতের আলো যতই বিকমিক চমকতে থাকে, নালক ততই মনে মনে ডাকতে থাকে, ঝড় আসুক, আসুক বৃষ্টি! মাটির দেওয়াল গলে যাক, কপাটের খিল ভেঙে যাক” Ibid. p.237

¹⁵⁶ “পাখিরা আনন্দে উড়ে বেড়ায়, হরিণ আনন্দে খেলে বেড়ায়, গাছের তলায় মাঠের বাতাসে যেখানে ধরে রাখবার কেউ নেই- সবাই ইচ্ছেমত খেলে বেড়াচ্ছে, উড়ে বেড়াচ্ছে” *Nalak* 237

frame, just as it happened with Ridoy. Thus, the categories of temporality and spatial order cease to function as external ones and become those that derive meanings from an individual agency of mediation. Siddhartha's and Nalak's stories of life get juxtaposed into a single time frame as such: *Siddhartha is on one side of the golden wall and Nalak is on this side— like the bird in the cage and that in the forest.*¹⁵⁷ With Abanindranath's craft, the wall seems transparent to the readers, displaying the essential similarities and differences between the two worlds. The barriers between times thereafter gets eroded in order to posit the readers in a double-frame of belonging.

Buddha's life is shown as centred around a habitat similar to that of Nalak's. Kapilabastu and Nalak's village are described in the same fashion. For Abanindranath, Buddha's world is not different from Nalak's. Divinity gets conceived in terms of a mortal world as if to facilitate imagination. So when the author describes Buddha experiencing the stress of human existence, he places him in a space similar to Nalak's. The description thus takes into account the characteristic features of Bengal, a locale to which both Nalak and the supposed readers of Abanindranath belong— *Oil lamps burning on the temple porch under the sacred basil plant shone for everyone who worked or studied or played... even the beggar played the welcoming tune of Goddess Durga on his one-stringed ektara and sang happily.*¹⁵⁸ *'Mother Uma has come home'.* Here once more we find the contours of space getting blurred. The episodes of Sujata and Punna in Buddha's life are also featured as regular occurrences in the lives of ordinary human beings of Bengal. The union of the divine with mortals and hence of the two worlds of *Nalak* are depicted in human terms— *Sujata went to the riverbank and saw that the saffron colour of the robe of the sage, sitting under the banyan tree, had coloured half*

¹⁵⁷ “সোনার দেওয়ালের ওপরে রয়েছেন সিদ্ধার্থ আর এপারে রয়েছে নালক- যেন খাঁচার পাখি আর বনের পাখি।” *Nalak* p.240

¹⁵⁸ “তুলসিতলায় দুগগো-পিদিম- যারা কাজে ছিল, কর্মে ছিল, যারা পড়া পড়ছিল, খেলা খেলছিল, তাদের জন্য আলো ধরেছে...ভিখারি যে সেও আজ মনের আনন্দের একতরায় আগমনী বাজিয়ে গেয়ে চলেছে 'এল মা উমা ঘরে এল মা'” *Nalak* p.244

of the sky over the forest with a morning hue.¹⁵⁹ The romantic reaffirmation of divinity thus expresses itself through a fancy of the human mind and finds meaning in a sublimity that Abanindranath uses in his work.

As for the actions of Buddha's life, Abanindranath creates a heightened form of dramatic expression to arouse the working of imagination. As Buddha comes by the fatalities of human existence the description of it emerges as follows: *Siddhartha sensed fear spread everywhere like an enormous web: fear in his heart, fear in his eyes, fear roaring like thunder above his head, fear rocking the earth beneath his feet like an earthquake. The entire world shuddered in trepidation...the wind carried cries for help: Save me! Rescue me!*¹⁶⁰ The description of 'Mara', the mythological evil spirit, emerges as— *The destroyer spirits have come alive everywhere today! They are scattering all sins, grief, darkness, pain and hurt like garlands and dust in the ground and on the sky while rushing forward to us.*¹⁶¹ The vividness of such descriptive passages fabricates an animated reality for the readers.

The visual imagery in *Nalak* fortifies the realm of imagination that helps the readers to experience a specific way of understanding the meaning of life. This understanding is very individualistic in nature and merges the abstract and the concrete. Its meaning can only be understood through a philosophy that gets shaped by the powers of fantasy and imagination.

A heightened form of imaginative expression permeates *Bhutpatir Desh*. With a melange of tales from the *Arabian Nights* and the history of Mughals in India, Abanindranath

¹⁵⁹ “নদীর পারে গিয়ে সুজাতা দেখছেন- বটগাছের নিচে যিনি বসে রয়েছেন- তাঁর গেরুয়া কাপড়ের আভা বনের মাথায় আধখানা আকাশ কালো করে দিয়েছে সকালের রঙে।” Ibid. p.256

¹⁶⁰ “সিদ্ধার্থ মনের ভিতর দেখছেন ভয়, চোখের উপর দেখছেন ভয়, মাথার উপর বজ্রঘাতের মত ডেকে চলেছে ভয়, পায়ের তলায় ভূমিকম্পের মত পৃথিবী ধরে নাড়া দিচ্ছে ভয়, প্রকাণ্ড জালের মত চারিদিক ঘিরে নিয়েছে ভয়। ...বাতাসে কেবলি শব্দ শব্দ উঠছে, রক্ষা করো! নিস্তার করো!” Ibid. p.247

¹⁶¹ “চারিদিকে আজ ‘মার’এর দলবল জেগে উঠছে! তারা ছুটে আসছে, যত পাপ, যত দুঃখ, যত কালি, যত জ্বালা-যন্ত্রণা, মালা আর ধুলো-জল-স্থল-আকাশের দিকে-বিদিকে ছড়িয়ে ছড়িয়ে।” *Nalak* p.257

attempts to portray a magical scene—an imaginary space of the absurd couched in a nonsensical connotation. The journey of Aban to the abode of his ‘*pisi*’, after having met ‘*masi*’, becomes an adventure that rejects real time and space. It encompasses non-human worlds including those of ghosts and thereby ratifies the readers’ entry into the ‘*desh*’, the nation of imagination.

In *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* Abanindranath writes that art is not obliged to become a primer for alphabets, a didactic book or one on moral laws. The author’s art in *Bhutpatrir Desh* hence becomes the art of storytelling, a technique that turns things upside down as happens in the homeland of ‘*pisi*’.

The agencies for transportation into such world are the ghosts. These supernatural creatures are benign; Aban and they appear to understand each other’s language. The sign system in the supernatural world, operates in the same way as in the world of humans. The ghosts thus take up the role of the palanquin bearers and enable admittance into the world of fantasy and illusion. The rational position of a living human being suffers a setback and Aban is made to hear the stories of the ghosts.

It is through the dismissal of differences then that the category of imagination is made to work in its best possible way. The illogical, as such, arises out of an evocation of the readers’ ability to repudiate a scientific handling of the available reality. The white lattice of the ‘*manasa*’ tree thus becomes ‘*buror rakta*’, the milk-like blood of the wretched old man. It startles the readers as it does Aban— *I too get stunned seeing white blood every time.*¹⁶² This gaze makes the readers, along with Aban, curious about the end of a story, a genre Abanindranath loves to experiment with. That his world of stories stand in contradiction to any sort of educational discourse becomes clear when we find the ‘*buro manasa*’ advising Aban to

¹⁶² “আমিও সাদা রক্ত দেখে অবাক হয়ে চেয়ে আছি” *Bhutpatrir Desh*, Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.II, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2009. p.179

look for authentic answers to the school teacher's questions. Logic therefore appears to begin with the illogical endings, in the oeuvre of stories, which Abanindranath crafts with the free play of imagination.

In *Bhutpatrir Desh*, 'desh' gets constituted with those very entities which exist in reality, but the essences take on a different note. We are presented with the picture of the rotating moon as being the habitat of 'mama' and 'mami'. With the spinning motion of 'mami's' 'charka', the spinning wheel, Aban turns topsy-turvy and so do the readers. They are made to travel with Aban in his 'palki' and take interest in the gradual unraveling of mysteries of events and stories. The journey posits the readers on various levels of an experiential order of imagined chronotopes. A rhythmic motion in the text, especially in its lyrical section, enables the readers to think in terms of a hyperbolic abstraction.

In this random process of nullifying reality *Bhutpatrir Desh* brings in the context of Haroun-ul-Rashid. Abanindranath asserts that imagination can only be stimulated in a dim zone of the mindscape. It is because of such predication that he writes, *Harunde got furious when the light was turned on...*¹⁶³ The execution of a fanciful reality, according to Abanindranath, begins at the expense of the clear daylight of a scientific/rational world, which must fade into a twilight of imagination. Such realm of fancy sometimes retains a modest relation with the knowledge of reality. It, in effect, presents the 'known' in terms of an unknown, within the framework of mental associations that defies time and space. So, we find Abanindranath presenting episodes of Shahjahan, Jahangir or Aurangzeb's lives with a historicity but here too, like other writings, history becomes a 'hysteria of imagination'. It is with this hysteria that Ranjit Singh is made to lie on a cot when Aurangzeb's turban falls on his eyes¹⁶⁴ or Akbar appears to be a childhood friend of Haroun-ul-Rashid. The associations or dissociations that

¹⁶³ “আলো জ্বলতে হারুন্দের ভরি রেগে গেছে ...” *Bhutpatrir Desh* p.191

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p.198

Abanindranath consciously crafts are purposively targeted at enabling the readers to differentiate between the worth of the subjective and objective interpretations of history. The author-artist's contention that the connoisseur of art perceives art as '*sakh*', gets manifested in *Bhutpatrir Desh*, where the reader establishes a relationship with history in a playful mood. Such playing with history, as represented by Abanindranath, facilitates the readers' understanding of a factual real through a series of non-real abstractions. The 'past' of institutionalised text books as such becomes as comic as the '*bhut*' (in Bengali meaning both ghost and past) and becomes afraid of losing its 'present' because human beings go on continuously modifying and changing it: *to see that the ghosts were scared, some amount of courage got restored*.¹⁶⁵ The imaginative past gives way to the functioning of a more powerful lived-in/present state of the human mind.

With the presentation of the past and the present like this, Abanindranath intends to laugh at the automatism of the human mind/consciousness. He shows that the human mind tends to function like a 'madman', when overburdened with a practice of discourses. It is with the abnegation of normal human practices that the 'abnormal', the imagined, starts to function. Harunde's story, in *Bhutpatrir Desh*, thus becomes '*pagoler katha*' (utterances of the insane)¹⁶⁶ His identity as a mad story-teller is apparent when he exhausts all commonly practised art of learning-'*Prithibir itihās*' (the history of the world)¹⁶⁷ Here, Abanindranath subtly mocks the state of newspapers of his time. The readers are made to laugh when the author hints at the 'cheap' presentation of events in newspapers that robs the imaginative capability of readers (*His brain is like a Bengali newspaper*)¹⁶⁸. The art of storytelling, points out the author, is successful only when one masters the skill of imagination, only when one tries to become an

¹⁶⁵ “ভূতগুলো ভয় পেয়েছে দেখে সাহস হল” *Bhutpatrir Desh* p.184

¹⁶⁶ Ibid p.204

¹⁶⁷ Ibid p.204

¹⁶⁸ ‘মাথা যেন বাংলা খবরের কাগজ’ Ibid. p.204

active participant in the events he is representing. As a matter of fact, therefore, Harunde takes the readers into a terrain of Baghdad while Kich-Kinde completes the cycle by transpoting them into yugas of *Satya*, *Treta*, and *Kali*, the phases of Hindu conception of time.

Abanindranath ends *Bhutpatrir Desh* with the absurd implemented amid a state of dreams. His story attempts a conciliation of dream and reality by bringing Aban, the protagonist, back to real time and space (his home) and at the same time keeping intact in him the urge to travel beyond time and space. *Bhutpatrir Desh* thus ends with Aban's wish to enter a conversational space with his readers with the aid of imagination that will unite one with the other.

Abanindranath's *Khiner Putul* celebrates imagination by conjoining it with the atmosphere of a fairy-tale. With the presence of a doll, a '*putul*', at its centre, it drives the readers to a world of mystery and beauty; to a land where dreams reign *It's a new land, that of a dream world.*¹⁶⁹

Khiner Putul begins with a set of binaries—the good and the evil. With the portrayal of good Duorani and bad Suorani Abanindranath follows an oversimplification of strategies as represented in a simple, '*sahaj*' way in the archetypical lore of Bengal. The binaries do finally feature the succession of good over evil, with love and greed respectively representing the two. It is with the aid of goodness, Abanindranath shows, that an illusion gets transformed into a truth. This truth in turn establishes a happy kingdom or an ideal state. The human mind always imagines and craves for a smooth progression of events from bad to good. The propensity towards imagining a positive state of a happy being overarches the human mind when it tries to do away with adversaries. In *Khiner Putul* Abanindranath tries to address such an aspired

¹⁶⁹ “সে এক নতুন দেশ, স্বপ্নের রাজ্য সেখানে” *Khiner Putul* Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.II, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban,2009. p.45

state of happy living by telling the tale of an imagined kingdom that guarantees a reward for the good.

The voyage of the nameless king (representing every sovereign body) becomes an instrument for enabling the ruler's acquisition of knowledge of the 'good'. In Abanindranath's worldview, the abstract category of goodness and the imaginary locales of beauteous plentitude are placed simultaneously. The lands to which the king journeys are therefore characterised by prosperity and mirth. The king's ship is made to arrive at a land of jewels, a land brimming with dazzling precious stones—*Everything, in the land of treasure, is made of gems.*¹⁷⁰ and then to another land of pearls where pigeons lay pearl eggs. With the depiction of such lands Abanindranath takes the readers into a land of illusions, the kingdom of magic, '*maya rajya*'¹⁷¹ This kingdom finally gets manifested as a happy kingdom in *Khiner Putul*.

The achievement of such a happy state of living is made possible in the story with the mediation of the divine. Abanindranath appears once more to fuse the human and the godly worlds and these categories therefore become characteristic of a fluidity that appears as 'truth', like that of the one crafted by Banar in *Khiner Putul*. Truth becomes reflective of an imagination that is validated through a 'willing suspension of disbelief'. Sleep provides, in *Khiner Putul*, the conveyance of such suspension: *The aunts obeyed Sasthithakuran and cast a spell on the people of the land.*¹⁷²

Like Ganesh in *Buro Angla*, goddess Sasthi in *Khiner Putul* descends to a human world and surrenders herself to the pangs of hunger and greed. It is because of her misdeed of eating up the doll that the monkey, Banar, obliges her to indulge him by transporting him to a dreamland inhabited by children. The apology of Sasthi, the divine protector of children, finally

¹⁷⁰ “মানিকের দেশে সকলি মানিক...” *Khiner Putul* p.29

¹⁷¹ Ibid p.32

¹⁷² “ষষ্ঠীঠাকরুণের কথায় মাসি-পিসি মায়া করলেন” Ibid p.44

renders a happy closure to *Khiner Putul*. With the agency of a non-human ‘hero’ Abanindranath takes the readers, through imaginative domain, to a romanticised utopic state.

Vision and Creative Power

Abanindranath asserts that the thirst for ‘*rasa*’ would never have been satiated had the human sensory organs been tasked with surveilling the senses alone: *Man experienced the taste of rasa. Had he employed all the sensory organs as doormen and ministers guarding the gates of the realm of wisdom, this would never have been possible*¹⁷³. The presence of a third-eye, an inner one, Abanindranath believes, surpasses all physical senses to reach an order of metaphysical speculation from which the creative energy draws its strength. With this inner vision, man embarks on a journey crossing all boundaries of the world. Having transcended the physical senses through a special vision, man ends up in becoming a creator himself. Abanindranath seems to echo the vision of Schiller’s sentimental poet, who learns to create after observing nature and interpreting it on his own terms. By becoming a creator himself, man learns to master his senses and train them to feel the sublimity of creation. In describing the special vision, the ‘*dhyanshakti*’ (the meditative power) Abanindranath brings in Goethe as a point of reference. The essay *Dristi O Sristi* begins with quoting the German writer– “Those organs which guide an animal are under man’s guidance and control”.¹⁷⁴

Abanindranath’s Nalak is shown to have acquired a vision through which he contemplates a spiritual order. This, however, is unlike the one described by the German and English Romantic writers who were steeped in Biblical literature and exegesis. As such this spirituality does not yield a vision with which Wordsworth, Blake and a number of other

¹⁷³ “...রসের স্বাদ অনুভব করলে মানুষ, যেটা কিছুতে পেতে পারত না যদি সে ইন্দ্রিয় সমস্তকে কেবলি প্রহরী ও মন্ত্রী কাজ দিয়ে বসিয়ে রাখত বুদ্ধির কোঠার দেউরিতে।” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.35

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid* p.19

contemporaries hoped to create “an earthly paradise” to do away with the Apocalypse.¹⁷⁵ Thus we find *Nalak*’s chronicle getting presented through a series of images. *Nalak* echoes what Abanindranath talks of in *Bagiswari*— *Unless we attain abiding calm through contemplation, the conscious gaze and the meditative vision cannot merge. Hence, to understand poetry, music or art, we have to disrupt our normal sensory perceptions through training and practice.*¹⁷⁶ Here Abanindranath’s reception of Rabindranath gets foregrounded as the author quotes the latter—“The scene which the light brings before our eyes is inexpressively great, but our seeing has not been as great as the scene presented to us; we have not fully seen! We have seen mere happening, but not the deeper truth which is measureless joy.”¹⁷⁷ *Nalak*’s search for this ‘measureless joy’ takes him beyond his available reality to a higher understanding of the mortal and superhuman existential cycles. Abanindranath makes *Nalak* evaluate the heterogeneous nature of joy which the child protagonist conceives through a double set of visions. It is this set of binaries of vision that enables *Nalak* unravel a philosophy of the joy of life. The different levels of seeing that *Nalak* undergoes, enables *Nalak*’s passage from boyhood to adulthood, with his changing perspectives of understanding. The power of visualisation thus cements the two opposites of the divine on one side; and the human, the child and the ‘grown up’ on the other.

Abanindranath’s aesthetic formulation sees vision as a correlate of creative power. He writes— *It is believed that meditation requires the eyes to be shut and the breathing to be controlled. However, the pursuit of art is different – the eyes need to be kept open, the heart*

¹⁷⁵ Theology had been Schiller’s favourite study in his early youth. Fichte and Schelling had both been to university of theology. For Novalis, as for Blake, the Bible was the great code of art. Wordsworth had been given religious training at Hawkshead and Mary Shelley notes that the Bible was Shelley’s constant study. *Natural Supernaturalism* pp.33, 34

¹⁷⁶ “...জেগে দেখার দৃষ্টি ধ্যানে দেখার দৃষ্টির সঙ্গে মিলতে তো পারেনা, যতক্ষণ না ধ্যানশক্তি লাভ করাই নিজেকে। এই জন্যই কবিতা সঙ্গীত ছবি এসবকে বুঝতে হলে আমাদের চোখ কানের সাধারণ দেখাশোনার চাল-চলনের বিপর্যয় কতকটা অভ্যাস ও শিক্ষার দ্বারা ঘটাতে হয়।” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.19

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid* p.20

*needs to be conscious, the mind needs to be liberated like a free bird to happily meander through the realm of fancy and the world of reality.*¹⁷⁸ It is with this take on ‘*shilpasadhana*’, the practice of art, that Abanindranath makes Nalak a ‘*shilpi*’, a practitioner of art, as he sees life as a conglomerate of ‘*kalpanalok*’ (imaginative realm) and ‘*bastab*’ (reality). In perceiving life thus, Nalak undergoes a ‘*mukti*’ (a term also corresponding to the freedom of the soul in Buddhist philosophy)– a freedom through which he brings before the readers the notion of beauty as an individualistic construct,¹⁷⁹ independent of a scientific temper–*One does not need to study science to know that the faraway mountains, trees and houses immersed in mist can change colours , the eyes are enough to perceive that.*¹⁸⁰ Abanindranath endows Nalak with such an eye (*chokh*). As this meditative eye begins to function: *Nalak sat under the banyan tree in quiet contemplation as images started appearing one after the other.*¹⁸¹ The readers too get transported to a ‘silent’ and beautiful terrain of self-reflection on the beauty of existence. Abanindranath thus awakens in his readers, along with Nalak, a consciousness of liberation as an essential requirement for appreciating art and life as well. It is this liberation that Abanindranath talks of when asserting the value of vision as quintessential in creative writing. No wonder then that he writes– ‘*dekho ar lekho*’ (write while you watch)¹⁸²

Nalak’s ‘*dekha*’ culminates in the depiction of episodic anecdotes. It functions as a framer of tales from Budhha’s life that are to be apprehended in terms of poignant chronicles of everyday life. Abanindranath makes Nalak that very poet of Shelley who ends up in being a ‘seer’ while penetrating the veiled nature of reality. The protagonist endows Nalak with an

¹⁷⁸ “যোগসাধন করতে হয় শুনেছি চোখ বুঝে, শ্বাসপ্রশ্বাস দমন করে, কিন্তু শিল্পসাধনার প্রকার অন্য প্রকার- চোখ খুলেই রাখতে হয়, প্রাণকে জাগ্রত রাখতে হয়, মনকে পিঞ্জর-খোলা পাখির মত মুক্তি দিতে হয়- কল্পনালোকে ও বাস্তব জগতে সুখে বিচারণ করতে” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.1

¹⁷⁹ *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.188

¹⁸⁰ “বাতাসে ডোবা দূরের গাছ পর্বত ঘরবাড়ি রঙ ফেরায়, এটা জানতে সাইন্স পড়তে হয়না, চোখ থাকলেই দেখা যা” *Ibid* p.299

¹⁸¹ “নালক চুপটি করে বটতলায় ধ্যানে বসে দেখতে লাগল- একটির পর একটি ছবি” *Nalak* p.233

¹⁸² *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.1

inner vision that stands in perfect harmony with the joy borne by the boy in his picturing of an eventful life of Budhha, the supreme one. In *Nalak* we find the following line: *Nalak saw images floating by as he went on narrating stories.*¹⁸³ ‘*Dekha*’(seeing) and ‘*bola*’(narrating) thus become synchronous in their being associated with creation.

In *Nalak*, the protagonist’s vision conforms to Abanindranath’s artistic vision. By bestowing on Nalak, the power to see, Abanindranath depicts his own seeing of the world through the eyes of an artist. Nalak thus becomes that creative artist for Abanindranath who conjoins the vision of the eye as an external sensory category and the vision of the mind as opposed to the Lockean notion of the latter as *tabula rasa*. He writes: *When the artist combines the visible world and the illusory world together with his corporal vision and inner perspective, the laws of destiny takes a reversing turn.*¹⁸⁴ Equipped with such thought on vision, Abanindranath makes Nalak one who is placed amid a palate of colours with each colour corresponding to the narrative’s setting. The following is one of the many examples: *Sidhartha can see himself as well as everyone else in the whole world on the snow wall over the thick mist. It was like seeing one’s own reflection in a mirror or visualising different sketches on a white piece of paper.*¹⁸⁵ As Abanindranath describes the landscape that both Budhha and Nalak visualise, *In the faint light, all the colours appear to be engulfed in a mist or washed with dewdrops!*¹⁸⁶ a surrealist essence is immediately evoked with the blurring of the divine and human spatial lines, something that *Nalak* intends to present. In effect Abanindranath’s plot of merging of the above two takes its course from nothing but his

¹⁸³ “নালকের চোখের সামনে ছবি আসছে আর সে বলে যাচ্ছে” *Nalak* p.238

¹⁸⁴ “চোখের দেখা ও মনের দেখা দিয়ে শিল্পী যখন মিললেন চোখের সামনে বিদ্যমান যা এবং চোখের বাইরে অবিদ্যমান যা তার সঙ্গে, তখন নিয়তির নিয়ম উলটে গেল অনেকখানি” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.83

¹⁸⁵ “আয়নায় নিজের ছায়া দেখার মত, সাদা কাগজের উপরে নানা রকমের ছবি দেখার মত, সাদা কাগজের উপরে নানা রকমের ছবি দেখার মত সেই ঘন কুয়াশার উপরে সেই জমাট বরফের দেওয়ালে সিদ্ধার্থ নিজেকে আর জগত-সংসারের সবাইকে দেখতে পাচ্ছেন.” *Nalak* p.247

¹⁸⁶ “ঝাপসা আলোতে সব রঙ বোধ হচ্ছে যেন ধোঁয়া দিয়ে ঢাকা, শিশির দিয়ে মোছা!” *Nalak* p.246

sensibility on vision. Nalak is enabled to view the divine so meticulously, on human terms, because his creator, Abanindranath, assesses that— *It is not possible to show the divine if you cannot capture the visions with your eyes wide open.*¹⁸⁷

Nalak's willingness to see liberates his creative soul. This gets expressed in the text thus: *Crying and rolling on the floor Nalak said— Let go of me mother, let me see what happens next! Please allow me once, leave me, let me be!*¹⁸⁸ Abanindranath thus works on intermingling artistic vision and freedom of the soul. By wanting to be liberated Nalak wants to turn down the chores of daily life, the institutional authority of the '*pathsala*' and express a disregard for the regularities of a discourse of routine life. Abanindranath initially situates his protagonist on the periphery of ordinary life to let him finally earn that very power of visualizing, an attribute that rejects the materialistic approach to life. The author's contempt for such materialistic orientation gets expressed as— *This materialistic perspective of man is an integral part of his self-serving nature.*¹⁸⁹ It is through the negation of a narrow materialism that Nalak is able to perceive the worth of life, in its ordinariness, and learn to venerate it. The agency of vision in *Nalak* thereby serves a two-fold-purpose, one enabling Nalak to move beyond a known world and the other reuniting his ties with this very world, after having been freed from the shackles of a '*bostugato drishti*' (materialistic vision).

The essay *Shilpe Anadhikar* postulates Abanindranath's conception of himself as a traveller seeking his own path: *I am also a traveller who has embarked on a journey of self-discovery.*¹⁹⁰ This notion of a 'romantic journey' of self-discovery and 'becoming' is possibly best executed in *Buro Angla*. With the use of vision as the most important trope, Abanindranath

¹⁸⁷ “অনেক খানি চোখের দেখার মধ্যে না ধরলে দেবতাকে দেখানোই সম্ভব হয়না” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.109

¹⁸⁸ “নালক মাটিতে লুটোপুটি খেয়ে বলতে লাগল-‘ছেড়ে দাও মা, তারপর কী হল দেখি! একটিবার ছাড়। মাগো, ছেড়ে দে, ছেড়ে দে’” *Nalak* p.236

¹⁸⁹ “মানুষের এই বস্তুগত দৃষ্টি চিরদিন তার স্বার্থবুদ্ধির সঙ্গেই জড়ানো থাকে।” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.24

¹⁹⁰ “...আমিও একজন যাত্রী যে চলেছে আপনার পথ আপনি খুঁজতে খুঁজতে” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.2

presents to his readers a journey that is accomplished through perception of the known in terms of the unknown, a journey executed through developing a ‘new’ way of looking at things. Ridoy’s experience of a world of fantasy, a magical world of non-humans, is made possible through a vision that oscillates between the actual and aspired terrains of existence and thereby brings before the readers the worth of being able to see beyond the everyday order of things.

Buro Angla is all about Ridoy’s expedition to a zone that stands in stark contrast to his ‘small’ house. It is this smallness of space and his own physicality that enables Ridoy’s grand transformation, a transformation that turns out to be a ‘big’ eye-opener for the thumb-sized protagonist. Abanindanath makes Ridoy learn to look beyond the apparent smallness of his available reality and discover a beauty of things around. Size, therefore, becomes a significant determinant in the whole scheme of journey in *Buro Angla*. It is the portrayal of the differences in sizes that characterises the construct of a vision with a multifarious functionality. *Buro Angla* begins with Ridoy’s considering his own human prowess superior in comparison to the ‘small’ world that he grows up in. The boy nurtures a disregard for almost everything in the geographically insignificant Amtali, the small village to which he belongs. His is a world that amounts to the size of what can only be ‘seen’ through the small window of his poor parents’ hut; the constituents of this world remaining unreachable to him: *Through the small skylight, Ridoy clearly saw the mother cow running away with her calf towards the field, almost jumping like she was on a trampoline.*¹⁹¹ *A pomegranate tree stood outside the skylight. A small bird, coloured like a peacock, sat on one of its fruits and started chirping... Ridoy put out his shoulders through the skylight but barely managed to touch the pomegranate with his finger.*¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ “গোয়াল ঘরের কাপলে গাই তার নেয়াল বাছুরটাকে নিয়ে ল্যাজ তুলে টেকির মত লাফাতে লাফাতে মাঠের দিকে দৌড় দিলে, ঘুলঘুলি দিয়ে সেটা রিদয় স্পষ্ট দেখলে।” *Buro Angla* p.137,

¹⁹² “ঘুলঘুলিটার বাইরে একটা ডালিম গাছ। ডালিমের উপরে ময়ূরের মত রঙ একটা ছোটো কী পাখি এসে শিষ দিতে লাগল... রিদয় ঘুলঘুলির ফাঁক দিয়ে কাঁধ পর্যন্ত বাড়িয়ে দিয়েও মাঝের আঙুলের ডগাটি দিয়ে ডালিমটাকে ছোঁয়া ছাড়া আর কিছু করতে পারলেনা।” *Buro Angla* p.138

As such his vision does neither correspond to his senses or succumb to perceiving the brimming world around. Ridoy's seeing begins only when he is made to come out of the regularities of life. He develops a vision once when he is being forced to accept the very fact that every single object that adds up beauty to existence, emanates a certain beauty in its own way. This beauty has to be discovered through a process of self-understanding and freedom. With delineating the Ridoy's habitual freedom getting seized by Ganesh, the God, Abanindranath deploys another type of freedom for him—a freedom of eyes and the soul. Thereby Ridoy's previous position of neither seeing nor hearing the world— *However, Ridoy neither noticed nor any of these.*¹⁹³

It is with his viewing Ganesh playing his 'dhol' with his trunk dangling over a fat belly— *Ridoy could clearly Ganesha getting down from the throne with his paunch to sit on the alcove and play the dhol...*¹⁹⁴ that Ridoy renounces the larger than life stories about gods, stories he has been familiar with, and reaches the locale of individual vision— *Ridoy had seen many mice before, he had heard stories of Ganesha too, but had never seen a living Ganesha ! He finds that Ganesha is as tiny as a thumb!*¹⁹⁵ Ganesh ceases to be that divine entity with an unimaginably great stature, once Ridoy begins to 'see' him. Ridoy's vision thus begins to take up the role of discarding established discursive practices. It is this very vision which marks his entry into a world of reversed sizes which happens to be the world of altered 'truths' as well. This is depicted in the text as— *Initially Ridoy thought he was dreaming, but after rapidly*

¹⁹³ "...রিদয় কিন্তু এসব দেখছেননা, শুনেও না।" *Buro Angla* p.137

¹⁹⁴ "রিদয় স্পষ্ট দেখতে পেলে গণেশ মোটা পেটটি নিয়ে শুঁড় দোলাতে দোলাতে সিংহাসন থেকে নেমে কুলুঙ্গির ধারে পা ঝুলিয়ে বসে ঢোল বাজাতে থাকলেন।..." *Buro Angla* p.138

¹⁹⁵ "রিদয় ইঁদুর অনেক দেখেছে, গণেশের গল্লও অনেক শুনেছে, কিন্তু জ্যান্ত গণেশ সে কখনো দেখেনি! এই বুড়ো-আঙুল যতটুকু, গণেশ ঠিক ততটুকু!" *Buro Angla* p.139

*blinking three – four times and pinching himself hard when he realised it is not a dream but reality. Then he was at his wit’s end and started ruminating.*¹⁹⁶

The blank state of mind of Ridoy, the *tabula-rasa*, in *Buro Angla* serves as the acquirer of experiences, experiences that emerge out of individual vision, experiences that also add to the mind’s power to create, in Abanindranath’s formulation. Ridoy swerves from being an ‘Every Man’. The state of ‘*kee kora jaay*’ (what to do), the almost empty mental state, lets him decide his course of gaining experiences in a way that suits his individual purpose. His effort to undertake the journey to the Manassorobar thereafter acquaints him with things or events never seen or heard before. The activation of the sense of vision thus asserts a mobilisation of the other sensory organs too. Experiencing becomes the equivalent of individual perception of senses.

As soon as Ridoy begins ‘seeing’ the world on his own physically reduced terms, he learns to sometimes bear the natural orders of the extremities of heat or cold– *The wretched boy did not get to eat anything the whole day. Tears welled up in his eyes.*¹⁹⁷ With developing a ‘refinement’ of senses, thus, Ridoy succeeds in discovering the meticulous beauty of the world, adorned with its own hues. He has then his vision renewed: *Then Ridoy’s started to see. He understood that the green squares were paddy fields covered with new grains! The yellow squares were mustard fields covered with golden flowers! The brown squares were empty land where no crops have been sown yet. The red squares were hay and jute. The brown squares*

¹⁹⁶ “রিদয় প্রথমটা ভাবলো সে স্বপ্ন দেখছে, কিন্তু তিন-চারবার চোখ বুজে, খুলে, নিজের গায়ে চিমটি কেটে যখন সে বুঝল সব সত্যি- একটুও নয়, তখন রিদয় মাথায় হাত দিয়ে ভাবতে লাগল- কী করা যায় এখন?” *Buro Angla* p.141

¹⁹⁷ “বেচারি সমস্ত দিন খেতে পায়নি। তার কেবল কান্না আসতে লাগল।” *Buro Angla* p.160

*with green borders were bare land with trees around the fringes. The big green patches in between were all forests...*¹⁹⁸

In opening up Ridoy's 'eyes' Abanindranath sets him as the representative of human beings and differentiates him from other animals, with the power of vision. He thus makes 'khonra hans' (the lame goose) say—*Students, what your teacher said is true, nothing should be believed without a visual evidence...Among men, the ones who are saints or poets, not just see with their external eyes, but also through their impressions. If you read their writings, you will learn that...*¹⁹⁹ The creator, the poet is thus accorded by Abanindranath a status of a seer, someone who has the special power to see beyond the veiled reality of things. He speaks through the mouth of the goose as—*The Himalayas was submerged under the sea at first! Suddenly once the inner force of the earth propelled all the water out from beneath to the sky and thus the mountain was formed! The mountain was formed. No one saw how the mountain came to be, but men found the answers through meditation and researches and wrote realistic accounts of the mountain, as if they had personally witnessed the phenomenon!*²⁰⁰ Abanindranath here makes the creative artist one whose reciprocity to the creation of earthly landscape gets attuned to his visionary powers. Ridoy is thus made a poet who learns to visualise and hence comprehend an externally unseen and undiscovered world, exhibiting a universal communion of the natural order.

¹⁹⁸ “তখন রিদয়ের চোখ ফুটল। সে বুঝলে, সবুজ ছক গুলো ধানক্ষেত- নতুন শিশে ভরে রয়েছে! হলদে ছকগুলো সর্ষে ক্ষেত- সোনার ফুলে ভরে গিয়েছে! মেটে ছকগুলো খালি জমি- এখনো সেখানে ফসল গজায়নি। রাঙা ছকগুলো শন আর পাট। সবুজ পাড় দেওয়া মেটে-মেটে ছকগুলো খালি খালি জমির ধারে ধারে গাছের সার। মাঝে মাঝে বড় বড় সবুজ দাগগুলো সব বন।” *Buro Agla* p.154

¹⁹⁹ “ছাত্রগণ, তোমাদের মাস্টার যা বললেন, ঠিক, চোখে না দেখলে কোনো জিনিসে বিশ্বাস করা শক্ত। ...মানুষের মধ্যে যারা ঋষি, যারা কবি, তাঁরা শুধু দুই চোখে দেখলেন না, তাঁরা ধ্যানের চোখে যা দেখতে পেয়েছেন সেইগুলো ধ্যান করে কেতাবে লিখেছেন, তা পড়লে তোমরা জানতে পারবে...” *Ibid.* pp. 203,204

²⁰⁰ “এই হিমালয় প্রথমে সমুদ্রের তলায় ছিল! হঠাৎ একসময় পৃথিবীর মধ্যকার তেজ মহাবেগে জল থেকে আকাশের দিকে ছুটে বার হল আর তাতেই হল সব পর্বত! যে সময়ে পাহাড় হয়েছিল, সে সময়ে কেউ দেখেনি কেমন করে হল, কিন্তু মানুষ ধ্যান করে অনুসন্ধান করে এই পাহাড়ের জন্ম যেন চোখে দেখে কেতাব লিখেছে।” *Ibid.* p.204

Vision, a distinguishing quality in *Buro Angla* as well, gets conceptualised through the medium of a dream. Ridoy's entry into the world of the apparently non-existent is actuated with the aid of a dream-vision that seems to reflect Ridoy's subconscious. It is perhaps the unfolding of hidden desire of Ridoy of overcoming the smallness of his habitat that makes him undertake the extensive journey in his dream. Ridoy has been able to see 'into' the order of the known because he desires to do so. The dream, perceived in a state of sleep, thus becomes an 'eye-opener' for Ridoy. By situating Ridoy in the 'in-between' zone of the world of dream and the real world, Abanindranath apprehends the dream as a connector between a lived reality and a reality that one fantasises about. It is not without reason, therefore, that Ridoy sees himself as a 'hero' in the journey to his world of his discovery. In his dreams he constructs a world that is in absolute synchrony with his fantasies. His dream vision thus lets him visualise an identity that is born of his own imagined perfection, a perfection that betrays a generalised notion of size and might (he being the thumbnailed). Ridoy thus rejoices in establishing himself as '*hangpal*', the leader of the geese. Perceiving the world like this, Ridoy develops a new ability of establishing an intimate connection between it and himself. He, in the course of the journey, also builds in himself the ability of forming kinship with the beings of a non-human world. Interestingly, his communication with them is enabled through a verbal order that is characteristic of a human system of communication. Abanindranth seems to apply a language code that is universal and hence undivided. With the aid of this commonness Ridoy begins nurturing in himself a sensibility of appreciating things around him with an unexhausted energy of developing a vision, that gets renewed at each bent of his journey. The curiosity developing in the boy leads to a continual unraveling of meanings associated with every act of seeing and

caters to Abanindranath's notion that— *This curiosity, the habit of seeing everything emotionally*²⁰¹ stands as the cornerstone of creativity.

A trope of dream had always been a favourite of the German Romantics. Friedrich Schlegel's close collaborator and friend Novalis notes that knowledge cannot be limited to pure forms of perception and verifiable experience. Poetic imagination calls upon images, dreams and memory to endlessly expand the human capacity for understanding.²⁰² Abanindrath uses dream not only as an alternative to reality but also to depict a colonial reality. Through picturing Ridoy's idealizing himself as the hero, in his dream, Abanindranath brings in the issue of the dream of the colonised subject. The author-artist shows Ridoy using his own formulae for the construct of the category of 'hero'. At the end of *Buro Angla*, Ridoy's dream of becoming a hero gets shattered as he returns to the 'real' world. Abanindranath uses this as a metaphor for the colonised's dream of a utopic existence which is obliterated soon after he returns to his 'real' colonial domain.

In discerning the category of vision as a constituent of imagination, Abanindranath, in both *Nalak* and *Buro Angla*, valorises childhood as the phase that facilitates the functioning of the power of visualisation. Abanindranath views childhood as a phase of life endowed with a freshness that happens to discover newer possibilities of existence and understanding. It is through deferring the rational that the child's vision introduces an order of cognition, which otherwise appears insignificant. Nalak is able to 'see' because he wants to indulge himself in an active mediation between that which is readily available and that which is not. This mediation arises out of the wonder and Nalak's childhood provides him with. No wonder then that Budhha appears to him in that very image which he likes to see Him in. The same applies to Ridoy when he finds Ganesh unmasking Himself as an ordinary human being, devoid of any

²⁰¹ “এই যে কৌতুহল প্রবণতা, দরদ দিয়ে সবকিছু দেখার অভ্যাস” *Bagiswari Shiplpa Prabandhabali* p. 26

²⁰² *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism* p.11

supernatural grandeur. The pristine vision of boy Ridoy thus entitles him to think of the divine in terms of the human. Ridoy is able to construct god in his own terms because of his wonderful imagination resulting out of avenues of a reorganised belief system. It is this building up of new meanings that Abanindranath cherishes throughout his analysis of childhood and its associated faculty of unfolding meanings. He writes, *To young eyes, the ingredients of creation seem to be full of mystery and verve. As we grow older we move into larger realms of work and profession, gradually losing this youthful vision on the way. Then we leave almost all art and poetry behind and choose mundane work instead.*²⁰³ Childhood stands as the upholder of a potency that challenges everything associated with the hackneyed meanings of routine labour. The child thereafter gets equated with the poet, the creative individual who turns down the linearity of any mechanical order: *The clutches of an earthly life and constant work overwhelm our visual and auditory senses to such an extent that this seems to be the natural way of life forever; but the ones who are naïve and unworldly flip this idea like the poets or the artists. Yet, we ignore those very people as childish, insane and foolish and try to claim our intellectual superiority.*²⁰⁴

In *Khatanchir Khata* (1921) Abanindranath makes Putu the representative of an imperishable childhood that exists in human dreams of innocence and freedom. Inspired by Matthew Barrie's Peter Pan, Abanindranath's makes his Putu emerges as one who refuses to grow up and in turn earns a perennial existence in the minds of children. Abanindranath creates Putu as the immortal entity, the metaphor for an eternal childhood that every mortal human

²⁰³ “তরুণ দৃষ্টিতে সৃষ্টির সামগ্রী কৌতুকে রহস্যে ভরা দেখায়, কাজের সংস্পর্শে বড় হতে হতে মানুষ যতই এগোতে থাকে ততই এই দৃষ্টির তারুণ্য সে হারাতে থাকে... আর ছবি কবিতা প্রায় সবই কাজের কথায় ফেলে দিয়ে চলে মানুষ” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.25

²⁰⁴ “কাজের জগতে চলাচল করতে করতে এই অত্যন্ত কাজের পরকলা এত শক্ত হয়ে আমাদের চোখে-দেখা, শুনে-দেখা ছুঁয়ে দেখার উপরে বসে যায় যে মনে হয় চিরদিন এইভাবে দেখে চলাই বুঝি সব মানুষের কাজ; কিন্তু অত্যন্ত ছেলেমানুষ যারা তারা আমাদের এই ধারণা উলটে দিয়ে যায়, কবিতা উলটে দিয়ে যায়, শিল্পীরা উলটে দিয়ে যায়, আর ঠিক সেই মানুষগুলিকেই আমরা বালক, পাগল, নিরুদ্ভি বলে উড়িয়ে দিয়ে নিজেদের বুদ্ধিমত্তার দাবি স্বপ্রমাণ করে চলি।” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.25

cherishes throughout his existence. In his being allocated a permanence in the human sub-conscious, symbolic Putu becomes that very 'child' of Wordsworth who is projected as 'the Father of Man'.

Abanindranath places Putu in stark contrast to Khatanchi, who is obsessed with his copy of expenditure and makes a strict surveillance of accounts to restrict expenses that he considers amounting to an extra, something more than bare necessities. On the other hand Putu gets associated with the 'green' '*khelar khata*' (the notebook of play)²⁰⁵ that every child treasures. This copy gets stored in the casket of the mind ('*moner sinduk*') of children and has, as its contents, innumerable details of their daily achievements and losses, hidden wishful desires and even nocturnal dreams of ecstasy. Precisely it is constituted of contents that defy routine chores, which have less to do with the unrestricted thought-process of a child. Abanindranath makes the evergreen treasure trove a repository an endless evergreen childhood in adults too. In this context he brings in the issue of the individual capacity of having an insight into the freshness of spirit that empowers one to celebrate the child inside. He differentiates those men who have been deprived of such insights from those who, even at a tender age, develop an alliance with those meticulously arranged set of spontaneous activisms that define the virtuosity of childhood.

It is through the avenue of dreams, laid down in the copy talked of, that enables children to come by Putu. Anguti-Panguti and Sona's mother find the image of human-like Putu in these very copies. Sona describes Putu's being a forever child to her mother. The free flow of imagination that Abanindranath attaches to the child's mind finds its expression in Putu's ability to fly off to faraway lands of fantasy. With a restricted growth of mind and body Putu becomes superior to other boys: *Do you want to see the Swetdip and the Jambudwip? Sorry, those*

²⁰⁵ *Khatanchir Khata* Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.III, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2009. p. 89

*without wings can't go to that side! I, Putu, am the only one among all the boys and girls born so far, who could go there. Do you know why? It's because I never wanted to grow old.*²⁰⁶ The deferment of the passage from childhood to adulthood is enabled with the use of the power of a passage to the make-believe world, a world that Abanindranath tries to justify by bringing in his own being in the schemata of imagination. He assures the readers of his possessing the evergreen copy, gifted to him by his mother: *One day my mother found me drawing and gave me the green notebook. Little did I know that it was phenomenal! I was almost about to exchange it with the photo I saw in an English newspaper!*²⁰⁷ The mother thus becomes, for Abanindranath, the custodian of the notebook, the 'real' figure bestowed with the task of evincing the imaginary in children. It is she who is shown as the arranger of those spontaneous renditions of the child's mind that lie unorganised in their immature and crude forms. In undertaking such a task, the mother too becomes child-like. She gets pictured, by Abanindranath, as one who has one of her foot set in sphere of fanciful abstractions.

The mother, as such, in *Khatanchir Khata*, can see the half human, half-bird like Putu as she enters the sphere of sleep along with her children. Her world thus gets aligned to the world of the child. She does not find Putu unfamiliar, instead feels that she has been related to Putu since time immemorial: *Sona's mother didn't feel strange about all it, it seemed as if she had known Putu for a long time.*²⁰⁸ When Sona's mother remembers the word 'Put', (son) from her childhood, Abanindranath establishes a uniformity that define the nature of childhood as experienced by every human being. It is because of this sameness that the mother of Sona fails to find, in the notebook that Putu leaves behind, any indication of his identity as Putu seems to

²⁰⁶ “শ্বেতদীপ আর জম্বুদ্বীপ দেখতে চাচ্ছে? কিন্তু ওদিকে যার ডানা নেই সে তো যেতে পারবেনা! এ পর্যন্ত যত ছেলে-মেয়ে জন্মেছে, তার মধ্যে কেবল আমি পুটুই সেখানে যেতে পেরেছি। কেন জানো? আমি বুড়ো হয়ে উঠতে চাইনি বলে।” *Khatanchir Khata* p.101

²⁰⁷ “আমাকে ছবি আঁকতে দেখে আমার মা আমাকে একদিন সবুজ খাতাখানি দিয়েছিলেন। আমি কি জানি তখন সে খাতার গুণ। আর একটু হলেই একটা বিলিতি খবরের কাগজের ছবির সঙ্গে সেটা বদল করেছিলুম আরকি!” *Ibid* p.90

²⁰⁸ “এ সব সোনার মায়ের কাছে কিছু আশ্চর্য বোধ হলনা, মনে হল পুটু যেন কতদিনের চেনা” *Ibid* p.95

embody the lost child in every human being. Abanindranath features an inherent characteristic of the wish to abandon social ties, typical of childhood, and then proceeds to single out the figure of the mother as one who carries such childhood wish forward even on to her mature years and thus be in complete unison with the world of the child. This is depicted in Sona's mother's reminiscing about her childhood *In that sun-kissed golden afternoon, Sona's mother went back to her childhood... as if her parental house with its simple pathways and trees was calling her from outside: come here! Come here!*²⁰⁹ and her fleeing away to watch the Urejatra at Chakkoti's place by disregarding her husband Khantanchi's objections. While she wants to indulge herself in the fantastic world of the '*jatrapala*' and deny daily chores, Sona and Anguti-Panguti enter the same world with the aid of Putu, the representative of the non-real world. Abanindranath here locates the mother and children in the same territory of the comical and the absurd, of imaginary and the non-serious thus opting for an equation. Sona as such reveals to her mother that they too have been spectators of the '*jatra*'. The visions of the mother and the child hence are made to experience the same cerebral sensations. It is seeing this connection between the mother and the child that Putu, while undertaking his adventures to unknown lands, at times craves for a return to his mother, *...Therefore I am still a human. The moment I realised this, I was reminded of my mother. Still afraid, I whispered to the crow, 'I want go to my mother.'*²¹⁰

Khatanchir Khata thus collaterally places the mind of the child and the vision of the child as categories that enable a flight into a fictional world of mystery, a world of non-humans and a world of freedom, represented by Putu. Abanindranath presents the special vision of a child when he says that Sona, like many other children, could look inside the realm of the

²⁰⁹ :“সোনার মা সে সোনার-রোদে-মাথা বিকেলবেলায় আবার যেন নিজের ছেলোবেলার মধ্যে গিয়ে পড়লেন...যেন বাইরে থেকে বাপের বাড়ি, সোনার মাকে আজ ডাকছে, সরল পথে তরল গাছের হাতছানি দিয়ে, এসো এসো।” *Khatanchir Khata* p.117

²¹⁰ “...তবে তো আমি এখনো মানুষ আছি। যেমন এই কথা মনে হওয়া, অমনি আমার মাকে মনে পড়ে গেল। আমি ভয়ে ভয়ে কাককে বললুম, ‘আমি মায়ের কাছে যাবো’” Ibid p.104

Dark. The power to see beyond the ordinary, the insight of children gets essentialised as a universal phenomenon. Such configuration of the child's mind and vision is placed as diametrically opposite to the world of reason. While the former gets circumscribed by the figure of the caring mother, it is the father representing the latter. Khatanchhi, as the father, as such emerges in the following description: *Sona, Anguti, and Panguti popped up in Khatanchi's room and were startled to find Khatanchi there. Then Sona said, 'Father! How did you come here?' Khatanchi lifted his spectacles to his forehead and remarked, 'I am where I am supposed to be. Why are you flabbergasted?' They were flabbergasted indeed...that their father had appeared in person was a shocking discovery and they were shaken out of their stupor.*²¹¹

Abanindranath thus denotes '*bastab*' (reality) as a terrible truth ('*bhoyonkor sotyi*'), unlike the 'truth' to be perceived in individual terms.

Truth and Beauty

Abanindranath expounds that beauty perennially works as the denominator of truth. To Abanindranath truth functions in its entirety when represented by a small 't' and discards the idea of universality or commonality. The author-artist redefines the established notion of the equivalence of art and beauty with a special emphasis on the nature of truth. For Abanindranath, truth operates at individual levels, varies from one person to the other and in turn becomes a determinant of beauty, the latter being an outcome of self-reflection. In *Soundaryer Sandhan* he writes— *We all have our individual and exclusive familiarity with the concept of beauty. An outsider's perspective does not fit in there.*²¹² Abanindranath takes his cue from the contention

²¹¹ "...সোনা আঙ্গুটি পাঙ্গুটি একেবারে খাতাধীর ঘরে উপস্থিত। এসেই খাতাধীকে দেখে তিনজনেই থমকে দাঁড়ালো। তারপর সোনা বললে, 'বাবা! তুমি এখানে এলে কেমন করে?' খাতাধী চশমাটা কপালে তুলে বললেন, 'আমি যেখানকার সেইখানেই আছি, তোরা আকাশ থেকে পড়লি নাকি?' বাস্তবিকই তারা আকাশ থেকে পড়লো...ভয়ঙ্কর সত্যি হয়ে আবার এসে উপস্থিত হলেন দেখেই তাদের চটকা ভেঙে গেল।'" *Khatanchir Khata* p.133

²¹² "সুন্দরকে নিয়ে আমাদের প্রত্যেকেরই স্বতন্ত্র স্বতন্ত্র ঘরকন্না তাই সেখানে অন্যের মনমতকে নিয়ে থাকাই চলেনা।" *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.59.

of art as the version of beauty and truth but eventually proceeds to disregard ‘*bhaan*’ as unfair and false. He frees ‘*bhaan*’ of any sort of ignoble status ascribed to it and confers on it a quality that is characteristic of art. ‘*Bhaan*’, in his opinion, heralds a world of illusion, a magic-play of reality and often contests the idea of any universal discourse of ‘Truth’: *the primary identity of the world of art lies in the creation of a magical realm.*²¹³

In 1816, Wordsworth wrote “Throughout, objects...derive their influence not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects.”²¹⁴ On a similar note Abanindranath contends that the nature of beauty acts as the interface between the observer and the thing observed. His ideation on it emerges as the following: *The heart of the observer merging with the inseparable blend of the body and mind of the observed, culminate in a beautiful present...reflected in the mirror of the eye.*²¹⁵ Beauty, in being thus conceived, becomes a mystery (‘*rup o rahasya*’), a realm of magic and charm. In accrediting the particularity of a magical facet to art, Abanindranath goes on to claim that art transcends the constrictions of time and space in its experimentations with beauty— *New avenues were explored in art so as to cross the boundaries of time, place, and the object.*²¹⁶ It thus becomes a thing in itself, a feature that forms the central idea German Romanticism. It realises itself in an aesthetic refinement of the sublime, ‘*madhuri*’ in Abanindranath’s words. To Wordsworth the sublime is “vast, wild, tumultuous and awful, is associated with pain and ambivalent feelings of terror and admiration”.²¹⁷ Abanindranath considers joy in creation as a touch of the divine in the mortal life of men and associates sublimity with this joy and not with terror. The

²¹³ “আর্টের জগতের গোঁড়ার কথা হল...মায়াপুরী সৃজন করে চলেছে”

²¹⁴ *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years*, ed. E. de Selincourt, Oxford, 1937 p.705

²¹⁵ “যে দেখেছে তার মন আর যাকে দেখেছে তার বহিরঙ্গ যা তার সঙ্গে অন্তরঙ্গের অবিচ্ছেদ্য মিলন ঘটিয়ে সুন্দর বর্তমান হল... চোখের ভিতরে যে মণিদর্পণ।...” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.163

²¹⁶ “রচনাতে স্থান-কাল-পাত্রের সীমা অতিক্রম করার জন্য নতুন নতুন উপায়ের সৃষ্টি হয়েই চললও ...” *Ibid* p.159

²¹⁷ *Natural Supernaturalism* P.98

resultant of such sublime vivacity is joy, the order of being which pertains to an enchantment of the soul. *The ones who are real experts in forms* Abanindranath says, *Their happiness knows no bounds; they have been exploring forms in unique and innovative ways with their eyes, heart and mind – it's new forever.*²¹⁸

Truth, thus produced, culminates in representing beauty in its heightened form. The perceiver artist, in standing apart from ordinary men, does not exhaust himself through a mere expression of surprise. In Abanindranath's words, the artist blends an external beauty, readily available to him, with his imaginative power to the secondary imagination which becomes art. Art, thus, takes into cognition truth and beauty. In its being constituted of truth and beauty, art acknowledges even those entities that happen to be otherwise unattractive to any non-artist, any non-creative being. Abanindranath brings to the forefront the idea that any discriminative principle that defines the binaries of the beautiful and non-beautiful are nothing, but vague interpolations superficially attached to any object by a non-perceiver of beauty. He notes: *Those who identify an object in the binaries of form and formlessness, cannot appreciate the beautiful form of a river of rasa.*²¹⁹ To Abanindranath every object reflects an innate quality of beauty and continues to do so until it stops emanating a 'mystery', a characteristic marker of its beauty. Like Rabindranath, Abanindranath too finds the presence of a mechanism of mystery at work: *If there is something without any enigma, if there is something which is not constantly transforming in novel ways, if such a thing exists somewhere, it is unattractive.*²²⁰

²¹⁸ “যাঁরা সত্যি রূপদক্ষ” “তাদের আনন্দের শেষ নেই, চোখ মন সব দিয়ে একটি রূপকে তাঁরা বিচিত্রভাবে দেখে যাচ্ছেন নতুন নতুন-চিরকাল ধরে নতুন.” Ibidp.184

²¹⁹ “.....রূপের এক প্রস্থ অরূপের আরেক প্রস্থ ভাগ করে নিয়ে যারা দুটো দেখে, তারা রসের এক নদীর চমৎকারী রূপ দেখতে পায়না’, ‘প্রত্যক্ষ রূপকে অপ্রত্যক্ষ রূপের সঙ্গে পৃথক করেও দেখা চলেনা।” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* pp.191-92)

²²⁰ “যার মধ্যে দিয়ে কোনো রহস্য গতাগতি করছেন, যার মধ্যে কোনো বৈচিত্র্য পলকে পলকে বদল ঘটচ্ছেনা এমন জিনিস যদি কোথাও থাকে তো সেইটাই অসুন্দর” Ibid p.167

Since mystery's mobility keeps on regulating the nature of beauty of any object, the latter goes on to evoke, in its perceiver, an appreciation for the varied facets of beauty. The more the object reveals its mystery the more is the charm offered to its observer. It is in the search for such gradual ascent of the nature of beauty that lands the connoisseur on to a plane of unsatiated desire for beauty. The search for beauty thereafter becomes a journey, the destination of which remains unknown. The inability to find beauty in its entirety thus evolves not from failure to grasp the idea beauty but from an unending journey of the human mind towards capturing the absolute essence of beauty. Abanindranath writes—*Only the one who is not at all an artist can find perfect beauty in an isolated and fragmented idea.*²²¹ In this context he refers to Leonardo Da Vinci's saying that it is impossible to realise beauty's absoluteness—*He said – absolute beauty and amazing ugliness, both are rare*²²² or quotes Kabir's *If you take away the part, the whole remains unattainable.*²²³ Abanindranath infers that an absence of 'ideal' beauty never disrupts the functioning of aesthetics. On the contrary a meaningless and magnified search for an ideal beauty defers the development of an artistic sensibility. The category of ideal, itself being unstable in nature, its employment in determining beauty will give rise to multiple significations of beauty. *Beauty cannot exist perfectly in the dynamic exterior.*²²⁴ Here we find Abanindranath departing from the enlightenment pronouncement of art as a mirror of a sensory reality. In analysing the idea of beauty as something incomplete and hence unattainable, he mentions that when a human being tries to perceive a beautiful object he always enters a zone of incomprehensibility. Rather than concentrating on a search for the factor of 'presence', Abanindranath sets to define an 'absence' that crops up when human senses try to define the absolute. He validates his argument in the following way: *Everything that can be perceived*

²²¹ “যে একেবারেই আর্টিস্ট নয় শুধু তারই বিচ্ছিন্ন ও খণ্ড ভাবের একটা আদর্শ সৌন্দর্যকে কল্পনা করে নেওয়া সম্ভব” Ibid p.67

²²² “তিনি বলেছেন- পরম সুন্দর ও চমৎকার অসুন্দর দুইই দুর্লভ” Ibid p.62

²²³ “বিচ্ছুরি নাহি মিলিহ”. *Bagiswari Shilpa prabandhabali* p.67

²²⁴ “পরিবর্তনশীল বাইরেটার মধ্যে সুন্দর আদর্শভাবে থাকেনা” Ibid p.67

*through the senses is transient. Its warmth, discipline, quality, and quantity: all are ephemeral. Only beauty is permanent. It is absolutely impossible for a man to have a direct encounter with it.*²²⁵ While conceptualizing art as something that defies time, Abanindranath places it as an opposite of the discourse of Physics.

Abanindranath's take on beauty surfaces from his theory on the *beauteous* and the non-beauteous in *Buro Angla*. With Ridoy's understanding of a new world, old familiar things too undergo changes in his 'acquired' consciousness, a consciousness that is made to develop along the lines of acknowledging the worth of all things around. Through developing love for everything that he comes by in his journey, Ridoy learns to unveil the inner beauty of every entity and disregards the superficial markers that impose a distinction between the beautiful and the non-beautiful. Abanindranath brings in the issue of perspective through his depiction of the changing gazes of Ridoy. Interestingly it is the smallness of the protagonist that the author employs to feature the realisation of beauty in a holistic sense. The more Ridoy comes to terms with his state of being small, the more is he able to unravel beauty. Beauty manifests itself on the plane of a contrast in sizes, a difference in positioning that pertains to shifting perspectives. The category of beauty, instead of being a static one, gets invested with a characteristic mobility that maintains a synchrony with the momentum of Ridoy's expedition.

Buro Angla begins with a description of the beauty of 'insignificant' Amtali. While describing Ridoy's habitat, Abanindranath posits the boy as a mere outsider who fails to understand the worth of a vibrant and beautiful world. As Ridoy tries to see this world through the small window of his hut, he fails to establish a connection with it. It is only after he becomes small when his perspective changes. In his state of being the thumbnailed he frees himself from

²²⁵ “ইন্দ্রিয়গ্রাহ্য যা কিছু তা অনিত্য, তার সুখ শৃঙ্খলা মান পরিমাণ সমস্তই অনিত্য, সুতরাং সুন্দর যা নিত্য। সাক্ষাৎ সম্বন্ধে তার সঙ্গে মেলা মানুষের পক্ষে একেবারেই অসম্ভব বলা যেতে পারে” Ibid p.66

his confined state and reshapes his identity as a human being. The small stature starts functioning as the magnifier of beauty and this beauty contributes towards a self-awakening. As the journey proceeds, we find Ridoy enjoying his stature without any regrets for losing his normal form. In fact, he begins enjoying his smallness. While he starts to love his otherwise ‘inferior’ form, Ridoy realises that the facets of beauty are relative and individualistic. The readers are once more reminded of what Abanindranath has to say on the revelation of beauty before one free from the shackles of constrictions: *For whom the world stretches beyond the iron coffer into the stretches of dust and mud, to the sky and the wind, beauty will no doubt arrive both in grand and insignificant shapes.*²²⁶ The idea that beauty finds meaning in an individualistic realisation of a harmonious sublimity is depicted in the rooster’s understanding of beauty in *Alor Phulki*. Through Kukro’s acknowledgement of the worth of beauty present in ordinary entities, in the text, Abanindranath contemplates a kinetic energy, which beauty endows on the regularities of life-forces. The unfading nature of beauty, according to Abanindranath, springs from the spirit of a motion that runs through the gamut of life: *No day is a dull day on this earth, nothing wears out. Every day I want to see anew my small corner of the world,*²²⁷ says Kukro as such. The rooster asserts that it is the sun, which regulates the changing beauty of things. Although having a fixity of its own, the sun too, appears to Kukro as associating itself with the earth to render a beauty, that in turn undergoes a renewal with the passage of the day. The mobility, born out of such renewal, prevents beauty from being a monolithic one and impregnates it with multifarious meanings. Here is how Kukro relates sunlight to changing hues and describes its beauty to Sonalia: *Look here, said Kukro. Then he showed me a hibiscus mutabilis plant and remarked: With the light of the day, the colour of*

²²⁶ “জগৎ যার কাছে লোহার সিন্দূকের বাইরেও অনেকখানি বিএজ্জত ধুলোর মধ্যে কাদার মধ্যে আকাশের মধ্যে বাতাসের মধ্যে, তাদের দুজনের কাছে সুন্দর ছোটো বড় হয়ে দেখা দেয় তার সন্দেহ নেই” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.68

²²⁷ “...পৃথিবীতে একঘেয়ে দিন নেই, পুরোনো কিছু হয়না। আমি এইটুকু জায়গাকেই প্রতিদিন নতুন নতুন ভাবে দেখতে চাই” *Alor Phulki* Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.III, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2010 p.21

*this flower will change to a darker red. See how these strands of hay and the ploughshare are lit up in a riot of colours. Look at the bamboo ladder in that corner. Doesn't it look like someone standing and sleeping there and dreaming of the paddy fields? Again and again the things here will take new forms and appear in new shades of light. And I, Kukro, am standing in my own corner like that bamboo ladder, looking at so many interesting things every day.*²²⁸

Kukro's sense of astonishment emerges from his unsatiated thirst for beauty. Such thirst enables him to discover the grace of even small things around. He becomes that '*rupdokkho*' of Abanindranath who delights himself with continuous birth of new beauty from a single available form. He gets empowered with a sentiment that finds a motion, evolving gradually, even in the simplest of form around. His keenness for the search for beauty thus hinders the possibility of the existence of anything called ugly. The perception of beauty opens, before Kukro, an avenue for appreciating the life-spirit at work. Abanindranath describes this in the following way: *I have seen so much and yet I am not satisfied. I keep observing the continuous stream of fresh images, the endless splendour of small things, the exquisite glory of the insignificant, and my horizon widens every day: replete with immense wonder, amplifying, unfolding.*²²⁹

Self and the Universe

In his deliberations on beauty and truth as categories of understanding the phenomenal world, Abanindranath also ideates the principle of beauty as something that the self and the universe

²²⁸ “দেখো সে। বলে কুকরো একটি স্থলপদ্মের গাছ দেখিয়ে বললেন, ‘দিনের আলোর সঙ্গে এই ফুলের রঙ ফিকে থেকে গাঢ় লাল হবে দেখবে। এই খরের কুটিগুলো আর এই লাঙলের ফলাটা আলো পেয়ে দেখো কত রকমী রঙ ধরেছে। ওই কোণে মইখানার দিকে চেয়ে দেখো ঠিক মনে হচ্ছে নাকি এটা যেমন দাঁড়িয়ে ঘুমোচ্ছে আর ধানক্ষেতের স্বপ্ন দেখছে। পলকে পলকে এখানকার সব জিনিসই নতুন নতুন ভাব নিয়ে দেখা দিচ্ছে নতুন আলোতে। আর আমি কুকরো ওই মইখানার মত আপনার কোণটিতে দাঁড়িয়ে রোজ রোজ কত আশ্চর্য ব্যাপারই দেখছি’”. *Alor Phulki* pp.21,22

²²⁹ “দেখে দেখে চোখ আর তৃপ্তি মানছেন; চোখের দৃষ্টি আমার নতুনের পর নতুন, ছোটো এই গোটাকতক জিনিসের অফুরন্ত শোভা, এই কটা সামান্য জিনিসের অসামান্য রূপ দেখতে দেখতে দিন দিন খুলেই যাচ্ছে, বেড়েই চলেছে, ডাগর হয়ে উঠছে মহা বিদ্যে।” *Alor Phulki* p.22

together construct. The holistic nature of this beauty takes cognizance of the self as a constituent force of the universe. The self, in thus being situated in a relational realm, ceases to operate as a fragmented entity. Its functioning pertains to an individual consciousness which responds to the harmony of a universal concord: *This heart of mine wants to watch, hear, experience, and touch newer impressions, and be one with the universe.*²³⁰ Such formulation transforms the subjective egotism of human beings, into a soul which mingles with the spirit of the universe. Rabindranath's *choto ami* (the individual) and *boro ami* (the universal self) gets echoed in such formulation of Abanindranath's. Abanindranath views the ascent of the soul towards an expansive zone of 'being' as a movement that allows the mind and to overcome spatial boundaries. The *bhabuk manush* (the contemplative man), as such, can undertake a journey to unknown lands. According to Abanindranath such mobility, characterising this endless journey, reveals beauty's grandeur before its seeker— *Life wants to merge with the ocean of infinite completeness which doesn't have a beginning or an end.*²³¹ The vastness of the ocean that Abanindranath talks of immediately makes his readers impinge on Shelley's contention on the course of the movement of life.

It is Abanindranath's Kukro, in *Alor Phulki*, who is able to valorise his insignificant being on earth as a mere pet rooster, living in an enclosed habitat. By being able to philosophise on the worth of his contribution to the functioning of the universe, Kukro learns to love his world. He finds for himself a space within the network of universal occurrences and ends up in establishing a kinship with the world on his own terms. He knows that he has been gifted with the special quality of a melodious voice and this requires him to employ it for the sake of facilitating the movement of the universe. In thinking that he has his own role to play in

²³⁰ “এ যে হৃদয় এসে মিলতে চাইলো নতুনতর দেখা শোনা ছোঁয়া দিয়ে বিশ্বচরাচরের সঙ্গে।” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.35

²³¹ “আদি নেই অন্ত নেই অপরিসীম পরিপূর্ণতার সমুদ্র তারই সঙ্গে মিলতে চায় জীবন” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.224

awaking the earth with his sonorous crowing, the rooster derives the pleasure of being an integral part of the mechanism of sunrise. He enters an ephemeral sphere with each new beginning, with each new morning of which, he believes, to be the introducer himself. His role remains unchanged as he continues to carry out his duty of dispelling darkness. In accomplishing his duty of announcing daybreak, Kukro does transcend the barriers of time and space to which he belongs. He considers his relationship with time as an eternal, pre-given one and considers his small space of belonging as one having an alliance with the universe. Thereafter Kukro wants his beloved Sonalia to understand this philosophy of life. He tries to evoke, in Sonalia, the sentiment with which the latter can become a connoisseur of a sublimity. The bond between the two emerges at that very moment when Sonalia is able to respond to the beauty of nature: *Sonali was surprised to realise that she could watch everything on a grand scale even when sitting quietly in her own small corner.*²³² Having understood the laws of the universe thus, Kukro becomes one who sees the world “in a grain of sand”. Thereafter he contends: *Watch how the lifespan of a small insect reflects the life and death of the world. So many worlds are twinkling in the cycle of life and death in such a tiny blue sky.*²³³ Kukro imagines that the earth and the self are actively engaged in an act of mutual transaction between themselves. Here is what Kukro says, *The world inhales me deeply and plays me like a beautiful conch shell. Then I no longer feel like a bird. I feel like an amazing flute, through which the cries of the earth reverberate in the heart of the sky.*²³⁴ He infers that he gets his soul refined when his song tends to merge with the prayers of all human creatures— *When I feel that the world is crying in unison in a prayer for light, I cease to be a small bird; I feel more significant,*

²³² “আপনার ছোটো কোণটিতে চুপচাপ বসেও যে সবই খুব বড় করে দেখা যায় আজ সোনালি সেটী বুঝে অবাক হল” *Alor Phulki* p.22

²³³ “...ছোটো একটি পোকের জন্ম মরণের মধ্যে পৃথিবীর জীবন আর মৃত্যু ধরা রয়েছে দেখো, একটুখানি নীল আকাশ ওরই মধ্যে কত কত পৃথিবী জ্বলছে নিভছে” *Ibid* p.22

²³⁴ “...পৃথিবী আমাকে সুন্দর শাঁখের মত নিজের নিঃশ্বাসে পরিপূর্ণ করে বাজতে থাকে, আমার মনে হয় তখন আমি যেন আর পাখি নই, আমি যেন একটি আশ্চর্য বাঁশি, যার মধ্যে দিয়ে পৃথিবীর কান্না আকাশের বুকে গিয়ে বেজেছে” *Ibid* p.

and I hear the music of a glorious light playing there. Then my heart explodes and music blooms like a flower of light.²³⁵ The ‘*prokando*’ (vastness of the universe) thus gets infused with the ‘*chhoto*’ (the smallness of earthly entities) and the self, as a fragment, marches towards the universe.

In evaluating himself as a musician, empowered with the task of awakening human souls, Kukro becomes an artiste (‘*sakaler shilpi*’).²³⁶ Such consciousness is derived from the belief that an a-priori specific space is allocated to every creature to carry out its role—*I sing only for illuminating these foothills, and I believe that exactly like me there is someone for that other hill too. There is a Kukro on every hill, lighting it up every day.*²³⁷ Kukro knows that there are other roosters acting as harbingers of light and yet nurtures the firm belief that he needs to function in his own way to unite his very own space with the space of others. In this Kukro reflects Abanindranath’s saying, *Individuality must be broken with universality.*²³⁸ The uniqueness and sameness both makes Kukro a creative individual who shares the commonness of language of art. In this state of being Kukro perceives the ‘truth’ of the universe through an individualistic approach. The universal laws of nature do not deter him from believing that he himself is an artist who paints the earth with the hues of light. He disregards his companion sparrow as it fails to feel the spirit of his creativity, in trying to judge truth with its sly nature (‘*otyonto chalak pakhi*’—A sly bird).²³⁹ When the sparrow tries to demean Kukro by rejecting Kukro’s claim of awaking the sun, the latter refuses to accept a mechanistic truth that rules out the working of an individual belief-system. The conversation of the two gets expressed in the

²³⁵ “এই জগৎসুন্দর সবার কান্না আলোর প্রার্থনা হয়ে যখন আমার কাছে আসে তখন আমি আর ছোটো পাখিটি থাকিনে, বুক আমার বেড়ে যায়, সেখানে প্রকান্ড আলোর বাজনা বাজছে শুনি, আমার দুই পাঁজর কাঁপিয়ে তারপর গান ফোটে, আলোর ফুল” *Alor Phulki* p.36

²³⁶ *Alor Phulki* p.40.

²³⁷ “... আমি কেবল এই পাহাড়তলিটির আলোর জন্য গেয়ে থাকি, আর আমার এই বিশ্বাস যে, এ পাহাড়ে যেমন আমি ও পাহাড়ে তেমনি সে, এমনি এক-এক পাহাড়তলিতে এক-এক কুকরো রোজ রোজ আলোকে জাগিয়ে দিচ্ছে” *Ibid* 37

²³⁸ “individuality কে universality দিয়ে ভাঙতে হবে”. *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.71

²³⁹ *Ibid* p.45

following way: *The sparrow took a few steps back and said, 'Do you really not know that the phenomenon of day and night is nothing but a law of nature?'²⁴⁰* In identifying himself as a connector of the sun and the earth and as a discoverer of an internal linkage between these and himself, Kukro, does also proceed to nullify utilitarian purposes of life. He states that— *He is not trained from any music school. He doesn't know or have faith in any ordinary teacher. He keeps singing spontaneously, just like roses bloom, and he knows this much.*²⁴¹ Kukro derives his creative energy from laws that do not conform to any institutionalised practices, from laws of an eternal order. This eternal manifests itself through universal love, the loss of which disheartens Kukro— *There is no trace of love anywhere. Everybody looks horrible in their lust for envy and bloodbath. Kukro sighed.*²⁴² His lamentation sounds similar to what Wordsworth means in *Lines Written in Early Spring* when he says, “Much it grieved my heart to think/ What man has made of man.”

Burdened with such anguish, Kukro also becomes a skeptical about the mechanism of life. The thought of a loss of corporeal qualities gives rise, in Kukro, to a corresponding fear of being stripped of the power of celebrating the self. While nurturing the belief that his song renders a stability to the universal order, Kukro faces an existential crisis. The feeling gives rise to a melancholy, akin to Rabindranath's '*karunapurno bishad*' (miserable pain). In venerating the greatness of the mighty universe, Kukro ends up thinking that he and his creations are susceptible to the immense power of nature. His small self then suffers from a sense of loneliness and dejection. This gets expressed by Kukro as: *So small, I am so small, and this morning light swathing the universe is extraordinary in its span. How boundless is its*

²⁴⁰ “চড়াই দু-পা পিছিয়ে গিয়ে বললে, ‘আচ্ছা, সত্যি কি তুমি জানোনা যে দিন-রাত যে আসে সেটা একটা প্রকৃতির নিয়ম ছাড়া আর কিছু নয়? কুকরো বললে, ‘তুমি জানতে পারো আমি জানিনে’” *Alor Phulki* p.45

²⁴¹ “তিনি কোনো গানের ইঙ্কুলে গান শেখেননি, সস্তার মাস্টার তিনি জানেনওনা মানেওনা, গোলাপ যেমন ফুল ফুটিয়ে চলেছে, তিনি তেমনি গান গেয়ে চলেছেন, এইটুকুই তিনি জানেন” *Ibid* p.55

²⁴² “কোথাও একটু ভালোবাসা নেই- হিংসে আর খুনের নেশায় সবার মুখ বিকট দেখাচ্ছে। কুকরো একটি নিঃশ্বাস ফেললেন” *Ibid* p.56

*expanse! Each morning when I'm done with spreading light, I feel like a pauper. I lose all hope of spreading any light ever.*²⁴³ A fear of loss baffles Kukro as he tries to judge himself. He gets ensnared in a pessimism, which in turn becomes the equivalent of death of the soul. He says, *How can I express the agony of my heart always swinging between hope and despair? I have to sing, I have to illuminate; but tomorrow when I shall stand here, pulling one string after another from the depth of the earth and looking around for the rhythm of hope, shall I find my lost melody? Or, shall I realise that I have lost the song, the voice, the light, you, myself, in fact everything?*²⁴⁴ The restlessness of the artiste Kukro gets ameliorated by the comforting words of Sonali who foresees the future of being on earth as an ecstatic one. Love, becomes, for Sonali, the pacifier of every kind of mundane sufferings and pain: *You'll certainly get back your music and your voice soon. The melody of light and the love of the soil will bloom in your heart again.*²⁴⁵ The evocation of connectedness with the universe alleviates the existential pain of Kukro. There is a restoration of the liveliness of the spirit and which makes him ruminate on life as a journey in which one gains eminence by overcoming all imposed negativities on the 'smallness' of being—*Life becomes meaningless unless I strive for something. The urge for expansion is the essence of life.*²⁴⁶

Abanindranath's Kukro thus voices its creator's theorisation of the doctrine of oneness. In its disposition of the virtue of oneness and integrity of living, Kukro mirrors Abanindranath's

²⁴³ “কত ছোট, কত ছোট আমি, আর এই জগৎজোড়া সকালের আলো সে কি আশ্চর্য রকমের বড়, কী অপার তার বিস্তার, প্রতিদিন সকালে আলো বিলিয়ে যখন দাঁড়াই তখন মনে হয়, একেবারে ফকির হয়ে গেছি। আমি যে আর কোনোদিন এতটুকুও আলো দিতে পারবো তার আশাটুকুও থাকেনা” *Alor Phulki* p. 77

²⁴⁴ “...যে আশা নিরাশার মধ্যে আমার বুক নিয়ত দুলছে তার যে কি জ্বালা কেমন করে বলি। গান গাইতে হবে, আলো জ্বালাতে হবে, কিন্তু কাল যখন আবার এইখানে দাঁড়িয়ে দশ আঙুলে আশার রাগিনী খুঁজে খুঁজে কেবলই মাটির বুকুর তারে তারে টান দিতে থাকবো, তখন হারানো সুর কি আবার ফিরে পাবো, না দেখবো, গান নেই গলা নেই আলো নেই তুমি নেই আমি নেই কিছু নেই?” *Ibid* p.42

²⁴⁵ “নিশ্চই কাল তুমি গান ফিরে পাবে গলা ফিরে পাবে, আলোর সুর মাটির ভালোবাসা আবার সারা দেবে তোমার বুকুর মধ্যে” *Ibid* p.43

²⁴⁶ “কিছুর জন্য যদি চেষ্টা না করবো তবে বেঁচেই থাকা বৃথা, বড় হবার চেষ্টাই হচ্ছে জীবনের মূল কথা...” *Ibid* p.46

thoughts. Abanindranath seems to feature the Upanishadic dictum of parts joining the whole to render a unity of formative reality.

Underneath its humourous depiction of the absurd, the episode of *Tung-Sonata-Ghum* in *Buro Angla* encompasses the idea of the Indivisible, the Upanishadic ‘*Abheda*’. Hence we find the lama of Buro Angla interpreting a philosophy through a lyrical mode of expression—*Divisible and Indivisible is in a conflict today/ without knowing who is angry on whom / the misguided one wrangles without knowing a resolution / each tries to find more evil in the other one / I advise both the souls / quarrel can only lead to distress / some wise men had this proven / the five elements of the body are found in all men.*²⁴⁷ It is the discourse of logical argumentation, mentioned here, that Kukro, in *Alor Phulki*, outrightly rejects. As such Charai or Sonali fail to make Kukro believe that his singing is purposeless. Their stereotypical way of teaching him logic, which categorises Kukro’s song to be devoid of any constructive meaning, does not become fruitful.

Abanindranath’s reflection on the predominance of an essential unity, in the structural pattern of every entity, also entails his understanding of how this unity functions. Abanindranath defines the nature of a holistic existence through the construct of binaries. He features an ontological framework of ‘being’ by referring to a metaphysics of co-ordination. This principle of coordination comes into play in a realm where the categories of ‘absence’ and ‘presence’ exist simultaneously. Abanindranath’s *Nalak* features this very mechanism of life forces. In *Alor Phulki*, Abanindranath places the ‘smallness’ of Kukro, his false belief in considering himself the messenger of the sun and its small habitat as opposites of the green expanse of Sonalia’s forest, the grandeur of sunrise and the towering hills only to highlight a

²⁴⁷ “অভেদ হইলো ভেদ-এ বড় বিরোধ/ কি জানি কাহারে আজি কার হয় ক্রোধ!/ ভ্রান্তজীব অন্ত না বুঝিয়ে কর দ্বন্দ্ব,/ কারো কিছু ঠিক নাই কেবল কহ মন্দ;/ উভয়ের মন তোরে মন্ত্রণা আমি কই,/ তর্কে নাহি মেলে কিছু গন্ডগোল বই;/ শুনো বাক্য গুরুবাক্য করেছে গ্রামাণ্য;/ একে পঞ্চ পাঁচে এক, নাই কিছু অন্য!” *Buro Angla* p.205

dialectic approach. When Kukro is made to understand that the laws of the universe work to reconcile opposites and as such decides to continue singing. He begins to realise that his progress towards eternity, with the 'presence' of the 'light' of his song, will help him in doing away with 'absence' of all kinds. He feels contented in being able to communicate with the vast universe. He becomes like Abanindranath who rejoices in celebrating 'the festival of nature',²⁴⁸ not as the mere romantic '*reverdie*' of the regreening earth in springtime.²⁴⁹ but as a perennial spirit of the universe. Similarly, in *Nalak*, Abanindranath does not make Nalak meet Budhha. Nalak and Budhha, get placed by Abanindranath, in a space comprising absences and presences. Therefore, he uses the metaphors of a caged and a free bird to depict Nalak's and Buddha's plights. The usage of the metaphor of bird, enables Abanindranath to describe the creative impulse in terms of '*mukti*'. Budhha achieves this liberation through understanding the miseries of life and confronting them. Nalak perceives the same through coming back to his mother. The union with his mother enables Nalak to renew his connection with the universe. Wordsworth's *Prelude* is grounded on this very notion of the child's comprehending the universe, while resting in his mother's arms. Seeing a world irradiated by her sense of love, the infant comes to feel at home in the universe: "...Along his infant veins are interfused/The gravitation and the filial bond/Of nature that connect him with the world." The depiction of Nalak's union, not with Budhha, but with his mother, foregrounds the idea that each creature perceives the spirit of Life by adhering to some organic rules, formulated by the soul itself. Nalak's offering the flower to the Lord, through the flowing stream, the metaphor for the flow of life, does in no way become meaningless. It becomes suggestive of the fact that the flower is destined to reach Budhha and reconcile Budhha's physical 'absence' with Nalak's wordly 'presence' in order to stabilise a chaotic order. Both Kukro and Nalak realise the principle of

²⁴⁸ Chanda, Rani. *Silpiguru Abanindranath*. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1999. p.40

²⁴⁹ One of the most characteristic Romantic motifs is the reverdie, the celebration of regreening earth in springtime. Abrams notes that the most exuberant of Romantic reverdies occur at the moment of imaginative apocalypse in Blake's *Four Zoas*. *Natural Supernaturalism* pp. 437,439

integration through their abilities to imagine a higher order of being. Nalak sends his offering to Budhha by imagining that it will reach Budhha; Kukro offers its voice to the sun by imagining that the latter will accept it. Their imaginations reveal themselves, according to Coleridge, “in the balance or reconciliation of opposites or discordant qualities”.²⁵⁰ Abanindranath contemplates the implications of these imaginations, in life, by supplementing ‘opposites’ and ‘discordant qualities’ with ‘absences’ and ‘balance’ and ‘reconciliation’ with ‘presence’.

²⁵⁰ Coleridge BL 374 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. ‘Biographia Literaria’ in *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Edited by W.G.T. Shedd, Harper and Brothers, 1884.

Chapter-III

Abanindranath and his Romantic Nationalism

Home and the World

For Abanindranath, the nineteenth century liberal enthusiast who sought to reevaluate aesthetics, the notion of nation was closely associated with the signification of home. India had been to him a home whose cultural potentials needed to be explored for a holistic understanding of a ‘nationalistic’ order. The exploration of his homeland had been effective in creating an admiration of native aesthetics that would finally shape up the Bengal school of art. In *Jorasankor Dhare*, Abanindranath speaks of his coming to terms with his homeland—*my father had said, ‘Mejda is in England, let Gagan stay in England too. Satish is in Germany; Samar will go there... let him (Aban) stay here. He will travel with me, see India, learn more about it... Babamashai’s wish of making me ‘see and know India’ has been fulfilled. He would have been happy to know with what I have seen and learnt about India’*²⁵¹ The home was, for the author-artist, a space from where to build a kinship with the world. It would come to denote a transgression of spatiality through the creation of a sense of unity with the ‘other’: *As a child, I would dream of visiting different countries as an adult and travelling round the world. But as an adult, when the time to go out and travelling came, I stayed home to offer you a conversation carrying the flavour of home. But believe me, I have studied the art of the whole world sitting at home.*²⁵² To be united with his own country and with the world at the same

²⁵¹ মেজদা আছেন বিলেতে, গগন বিলেতে থাক। সতীশ জার্মানিতে, সমর সেখানে যাবে... ও থাকুক এখানেই। আমার সঙ্গে ঘুরবে, ইন্ডিয়া দেখবে, জানবে... তবে বাবামশায় যে বলেছিলেন, ‘ইন্ডিয়া দেখবে জানবে’, তা হয়েছে। ভারতবর্ষ যা দেখছি চিনেছি তিনি থাকলে খুশি হতেন দেখে’। *Jorasankor Dhare*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.I, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2010. p.201

²⁵² “ছেলেবেলায় কল্পনা করতুম বড় হয়ে কত দেশ বিদেশ বেড়াবো, ইচ্ছেমত এখানে ওখানে যাবো। কিন্তু বড় হয়ে যখন বেরোবার বেড়ার সেই সময়টি এলো হাতে, তখন বাড়িতে বসে রইলেম একেবারে ঘোরো বাবুটি বনে, তোমার জন্য ঘরোয়া কথার মালমশলা সংগ্রহ করতে। তবে ঘরে বসেই সারা পৃথিবীর মানুষের আঁট আমি চর্চা করেছি, কথা বিশ্বাস করো” Ibid p.230

time required Abanindranath to view ‘nationalism’ as a romantic ideal of connectedness and congruity. For him, the artist was the one who was essentially connected to the people of his nation, ‘*jaati*’ (race) as he calls them, through a linkage resembling the relationship between the awake and the asleep— *The connection of an artist or a poet with people is like the connection between the awake and the asleep. People sleep, artists do not. They stay awake alone, play alone, weave garlands alone, play the veena, and sing – what was hidden inside the darkness of the heart/ has emerged in the light of the world.*²⁵³ The artist and the poet build their relationships with the nation on their own unique terms. They become, for Abanindranath, the ones who keep their creative spirits perpetually alive in a celebratory mode of acquaintance with their home, the nation, even when the sensory and aesthetic consciousness of their community stagnate.

The metaphors of being ‘awake’ in the domain of an artistic celebration are substantiated in Ridoy’s experience of his home in *Buro Angla*. In making Ridoy see his country with a new eye, Abanindranath makes Ridoy a ‘*shilpi*’, an artiste set to discover new meanings of attachment to his home while travelling across a wide world. It is Ridoy’s dream through which Abanindranath opens up the avenue to an understanding of geography with a cerebral faculty. *Buro Angla* embodies Abanindranath’s opposition to the perception of home from within a framework of territorial representation as we discussed earlier. The geography that the author-artist presents in the text therefore escapes the confines of maps— *The pages of a geography book abound with so many rivers and mountains; studying them could have meant seeing the whole world*²⁵⁴ and pertains to a wisdom of exploring and seeing the world on one’s

²⁵³ “জাতির সঙ্গে শিল্পী কবি এদের যোগ জাতির সঙ্গে ঘুমন্তের যোগ. জাতির চোখে ঘুম আসে, এদের চোখে ঘুম নেই, জেগে থাকে এরা একলা, একলা বসে খেলে এরা, একলা মালা গেঁথে চলে, বীণা বাজায়, গান গেয়ে বলে- ছিল যে পরানের অঙ্ককারে/ এলো সে ভুবনের আলোক পারে” Tagore, Abanindranath. *Bagiswari Shiplpa Prabandhabali* . Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2008. p. 182

²⁵⁴ “ভূগোলের এক একটা পাতায় কত নদ নদী পর্বত সেইগুলো পড়েই তো পৃথিবী দেখার কাজ হয়ে যেতে পারতো.” *Buro Angla* Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.III, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban,2010. p.192

own terms. Ridoy's act of seeing his country thus emerges from feeling the pulse of a vivacious 'play' (*khela*), as he calls it, of those natural entities of 'nad nadi parbat' (rivers and mountains). The country henceforth becomes a 'chess-board'— *Seeing the country from the sky, Ridoy felt as if a huge chess board was laid on the ground*²⁵⁵ transforming his experience and transporting him to the playground of fantasy and mirth— *Ridoy had never led such a happy life. He did not have to study, a long vacation lay before him until he reached Kailash*.²⁵⁶ Abanindranath ensures that the development of a filial bond with one's own country is shown only when one 'frees' oneself from a routine of regularities by surrendering to a voluntary spirit of 'chhuti' (vacation). 'Ananda' (joy) and freedom thereby become indispensable qualities of one's love of the motherland. Ridoy perceives his country in such a light and ends up in considering it as superior to others: *The best nation – the golden nation – the green nation – the fertile land of Bengal!*²⁵⁷ Abanindranath makes Ridoy and his readers cognise this 'seradesh' (a superior nation) through the narrative of a native rhyme (*chhora*). Regional details are validated through a lyrical meticulousness. The worth of representing the local, in consolidating the wider idea of nation, becomes meaningful here as it does in Abanindranath's portrayal of *Bharatmata*. Abanindranath also envisions the individual identity as an inevitable constituent in the construct of the nation. By mentioning his name in the course of describing the land, he explains that it is only at that particular point of learning to situate oneself in the locale of geographical contours when one develops the sense of being at 'home'.

Whenever one leaves home for the broader world, the feeling of comfort associated with the idea of a home fuels the sentiment of returning. This is evident when Ridoy's nostalgia for Amtali, which once seemed insignificant to the boy, overwhelms him only after he sees the

²⁵⁵ রিদয় দেশটা দেখে ভাবলে প্রকান্ড একটা যেন শতরঞ্জ খেলার ছক নীচের জমিতে পাতা রয়েছে" Ibid. p.175

²⁵⁶ "এমন আনন্দে রিদয় জন্মে কাটায়নি। পড়াশোনা সব বন্ধ, একেবারে কৈলাশ পর্যন্ত লম্বা ছুটি আর ছুটি"

²⁵⁷ "সেরা দেশ- সোনার দেশ- সবুজ দেশ- ফলন্ত-ফুলন্ত-বাংলাদেশ!" Ibid p.154

bigger world around. Ridoy's long journey leads him to experience a longing for his small home and an affection for his mother— a figure that essentially connotes the nurturer of home. This is how Ridoy recollects the image of his homeland: *Ridoy felt unmindful after listening to Chaka. He kept on taking trips down the memory lane to those few houses in Amtali, that ghat at Tentultala, the fields, the muddy water of the ponds where the ducks swam and the lilies floated, the creeper next to the house and the purple sunbird on it, the holy basil temple at the corner of the courtyard, the black mud walls of the house decorated by the motifs that his mother had painted on the floor during Goddess Lakshmi's worship, his father's pleated shawl hanging on the rope wardrobe, the old plank with a shitalpati (the traditional mat) to sleep on it and the hand fan made of palm leaves with red fringes. Ridoy had a clear vision of everything today and he yearned to return home.*²⁵⁸ In depicting the awakening of Ridoy's subconscious attachment to his home, Abanindranath draws the detailed picture of an archetypical household of rural Bengal. *Buro Angla* thereby gets overarched with an essence of Bengal, a feature that Abanindranath was keen on exploring in his 'nationalistic' approach.

A similar nature of the wish to return home gets affirmed in *Alor Phulki*. In refusing to accept the 'freedom' of the woods offered by Sonalia, the rooster in *Alor Phulki* intensifies the idea that freedom of the self is best felt in being associated with home. By sticking to his small 'home', the rooster in *Alor Phulki* succeeds in venerating it, making it plain that the journey from home to the world proves to be meaningful only through a circular return to home. The circular pattern of Kukro's home-world-home journey indicates the nature of liberty that channelises itself through experiencing the 'smaller' and 'bigger' facets of life. For Kukro such

²⁵⁸ “চকার কথা শুনে রিদয় কেমন আনমনা হয়ে গেল। সারাদিন ধরে আজ তার কেবলি মনে পড়তে লাগলো- আমতলির সে ঘর ক'খানি, সেই তেঁতুলতলার ঘাট, তেপান্তর মাঠ, হাঁসপুকুরের কাদাজল, তাতে শালুক ফুল, বাড়ির ধারে ঝুমকো লতার মাচা, তার উপরে দুগুগা টুনটুনি পাখিটি, উঠোনের কোণে তুলসীমঞ্চটি, কালো মাটি লেপা ঘরের দেওয়াল তার উপরে মায়ের হাতে লেখা লক্ষ্মীপূজোর আলপনা, দড়ির আলনায় বাপের কোঁচানো চাদর, পুরোনো সবার তক্তা তার উপরে শীতলপাটি আর লাল ঝালর দেওয়া তালপাতার পাখাখানি। সব আজ পরিস্কার যেন রিদয় দেখতে লাগলো, আর থেকে থেকে মন তার ঘরে যেতে আকুলি-বিকুলি করতে থাকলো”
Buro Angla pp.245-46

liberty stands synonymous to love— ...*The heart is where the home is.*²⁵⁹ He essentialises home as the space evolving out of the love of fellow dwellers and operating with a collective consciousness of attachment. With such realisation Kukro considers himself a contributor to the mutual space of integrity and love. He knows that his small space still has the potential of nurturing a fruitful produce. All that he needs to do is cultivate this space to actualise its capability. He asserts: *I must stay where destiny has kept me. I know we have much work to do even in this small plot of farmland. Moreover, everyone loves me here.*²⁶⁰ Through the philosophising of Kukro, Abanindranath talks about one's space of belonging as something pre-given in the schemata of life. He argues that the 'home' can claim its worth in the 'world' with the aid of its inhabitant's willpower to prove it productive. He also sets the home as a place different from anyone else's and a terrain enabling one to execute his potency of a characteristic quality without any toil. The home, for Abanindranath, then turns out to be the space where one grows self-respect and understands the purposiveness of living. This accelerates the free flow of an individual's creative energy which in turn contributes to a development of the nation as well. The contention of the author appears thus in Kukro's words: *I think if I leave this country, then my music will wither away in the foreign land. Ah, this sky, this day – I'll again revive it tomorrow with light and song, I will not let it die.*²⁶¹ The life of the nation is thus shown to be resting on the liveliness of the creative spirit of its dutiful and committed citizens.

Nalak too is a story of coming back. It talks of a balance, a harmony of the home and the world, with the young Nalak and Lord Buddha representing each respectively.

²⁵⁹ যেখানে যার বাসা, সেখানেই তার ভালোবাসা” *Alor Phulki* Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.III, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2010 p.64

²⁶⁰ “বিধাতা যেখানে রেখেছেন সেখানেই আমাকে থাকতে হবে। আমি জানি এই আবাদটুকুর মধ্যেও করবার মত কাজ আমাদের অনেক রয়েছে, আর, সবার ভালোবাসাও এখানে পাচ্ছিতো.” *Ibid* p.52

²⁶¹ “মনে হচ্ছে এদেশ ছাড়লে বিদেশে বিভুঁইয়ে গান আমার শুকিয়ে মরবে। আহ, এই আকাশ, এই দিন - একে আবার আমি গান গেয়ে আলো দিয়ে কাল জাগিয়ে তুলবো, মরতে দেবোনা.” *Alor Phulki* p.60

Abanindranath represents this balance through Nalak's return to his mother. As in *Alor Phulki*, here too he argues that every being on earth is meant to undertake a specific duty within a specific territory as assigned by a priori laws of existence. The worlds of Buddha and Nalak are therefore set as different. Buddha's concern is the deliverance of the world and he journeys through a wide stretch of space and time to find fulfillment as the saviour. Nalak, the boy, proceeds with his journey by seeing the world through Buddha's eyes until he ends up in seeing it on his own terms and the two visions coalesce. A study of both Buddha's and Nalak's visualisations of attachment to home will testify this. Buddha experiences the exuberant joy all around when someone returns home and it is expressed as follows: *Wherever the day is ending, the sun light is growing dimmer. Everyone is leaving the sunset behind and returning home. The chattering birds are returning to their nests amidst the branches, hidden among the leaves. All the cows and calves, bathed in the golden twilight dust, are returning along the side of the fields and the riverbanks at their own pace. The shepherd boys are playing flutes and coming back to their mothers' laps in the mud huts. Everyone is returning from the faraway village markets after a long day of trading. Everyone is returning – the ones who were far as well as the ones who were near... even the beggar is happily playing his monochord and singing the welcoming song for the goddess 'Mother Uma is coming home'.*²⁶² Nalak's rumination on a return to home reads as– *Today, the overflowing monsoon river has been tugging at Nalak's heart all along – taking him back to that village of theirs, by the side of the Bardhan woods. Nalak's mind is racing back and forth to his mother's mud hut in the shade of the tamarind*

²⁶² যেদিকে দিন শেষ হচ্ছে, যেদিকে সূর্যের আলো অস্ত যাচ্ছে। সেদিক থেকে সবাই মুখ ফিরিয়ে চলে আসছে নিজের নিজের ঘরের দিকে। পাখিরা ফিরে আসছে কলরব করে নিজের বাসায়- গাছের ডালে, পাতার আড়ালে। গাই-বাছুর সব ফিরে আসছে মাঠের ধার দিয়ে নদীর পাড় দিয়ে নিজের গতে, গোখুলির সোনার ধুলো মেখে। রাখাল ছেলেরা ফিরে আসছে গাঁয়ের পথে বেনু বাজিয়ে মাটির ঘরে মায়ের কোলে। সবাই ফিরে আসছে ভিন গাঁয়ের হাট সেরে দূর পাটানে বিকিকিনির পরে। সবাই ঘরে আসছে- যারা দূরে ছিল তারা, যারা কাছে ছিল তারাও...ভিখারি যে সেও আজ মনের আনন্দে একতরায় আগমণি বাজিয়ে গেয়ে চলেছে 'এলো মা উমা ঘরে এলো মা' " *Nalak* Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.II, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban,2009. p.244

*tree.*²⁶³ For both Siddhartha and Nalak the figure of the mother essentially becomes the signifier of home... *In his little boat, Nalak sailed towards his village to see his mother.*²⁶⁴ One is reminded of Ridoy's desire for coming back to Amtali. Abanindranath's contention of the nation as mother once more seems to find voice in *Nalak*. He thus ends *Nalak* as— *Nalak can see his house, and he can also see his mother sitting in the yard...*²⁶⁵

In *Nalak*, the balance is restored through Nalak's understanding of the worth of home. Abanindranath places a simultaneous order of a peaceful contentment, one represented by Buddha's victory over Mara and the other by Nalak's meeting his mother. While one speaks of an overflowing universal peace encapsulating life in the whole world— the other foregrounds the overflowing comfort of resting in one's small world of the home— *It was the season of heavy monsoonal rains when the boat dropped Nalak at his village pier... water lashed everywhere*²⁶⁶. *Nalak* centers itself on the idea of conjoining the two. It is for this that Abanindranath makes Buddha's world and Nalak's home connect with each other through the flower that Nalak offers to the all-encompassing Buddha. Nalak, in effect, becomes the flower itself by offering himself to the world as well as to the home: *Today, after so many years, floating like that flower, he has returned to his village ghat and settled in his mother's lap. May be someday Lord Buddha will visit this countryside and pick him up like the flower that had been stuck to the flight of steps and drop him off in the river of pleasure.*²⁶⁷

²⁶³ “বর্ষাকালের একটানা নদী আজ সারাদিন ধরে নালকের মনটিকে টানছে- সেই বর্ষনের বনের ধারে, তাদের সেই গাঁয়ের দিকে। সেই তেঁতুলগাছে ছায়া-কড়া মাটির ঘরে তার মায়ের কাছে নালকের মন একবার ছুটে যাচ্ছে, আবার ফিরে আসছে” Ibid p.261

²⁶⁴ “...ছোট নৌকায় নালক তার মাকে দেখতে দেশের দিকে চলে গেল” Ibid p.261

²⁶⁵ “নালক তাদের ঘরখানি দেখতে পাচ্ছে, আর দেখতে পাচ্ছে ঘরের দাওয়ায় তার মা বসে রয়েছেন ...” Ibid p.262

²⁶⁶ “নৌকো যখন নালককে দেশের ঘাটে নামিয়ে দিয়েছে তখন ভরা শ্রাবণ মাস... থই থই করছে জল” Ibid. p.262

²⁶⁷ “আজ এতকাল পরে সে আবার ওই ফুলটির মতই ভাসতে ভাসতে তার দেশের ঘাটে, মায়ের কোলের কাছে ফিরে এসে আটকা পড়লো। আবার সেদিন কবে আসবে, যেদিন বুদ্ধদেব এই দেশে এসে ঘাটের ধারে আটকা পড়া ফুলটির মত তাকে তুলে নিয়ে আনন্দের মাঝগঙ্গায় ভাসিয়ে দিয়ে যাবেন।” *Nalak* p.262

‘History’ of the ‘Individual’ and the ‘Social’

The signification of ‘home’, in Abanindranath’s works, rests on the virtues of solidarity and consolidation which its inhabitants develop through a collective consciousness of being, because he believes that “the history of the growth of freedom is the history of the perfection of human relationship”.²⁶⁸ In *Rajkahini*, by narrating stories of Rajasthan to children, Abanindranath creates an ambience of a traditional community-living where tales get orally transmitted and stories survive through collective memories of hearers. The tales in *Rajkahini* are tales from Indian history. Abanindranath collects them from *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* and uses a native way of narrating history through tales, as a counter-mode, to place it parallel to the colonial interpretation. He channels in history, as an anti-curricular mode, by making *Rajkahini* a narrative of individuals more than that of Rajput kings and their might. The text centres on anecdotes of individual struggles for establishing identity, internal conspiracies that decide the fate of kings, the ruler’s compassion for its subjects, stories of love affairs of kings, their confidantes and the like. The tales of individual plights function in the production of a history that is social. One is immediately reminded of Ashin Dasgupta’s assertion that “History is all about interpreting social lives of men”²⁶⁹ and that History fails to touch the loneliness of an isolated being. In Dasgupta’s theory of understanding history the historian talks of the working of a threefold dimension of time— one that is ‘big’ (the societal realm) another ‘small’ (the realm of localised manifestations of social diversities) and the other an ‘individual’ one (the personal space of experiencing).²⁷⁰ He aligns History with the ‘big’ and ‘small’ facets of time and considers literature as the primary medium of unravelling the individual mind.

²⁶⁸ Tagore, Rabindranath. *The Religion of Man*. Kolkata: Rupa Publishers Pvt. Lmt, 2005. p170

²⁶⁹ Dasgupta, Ashin. *Prabandha Samagra*, Uma Dasgupta ed. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2016. p. 35

²⁷⁰ Ibid. 57

Abanindranath, in *Rajkahini*, narrates history through episodes of ‘personal spaces’ enriching them with literary qualities. Eventually, all these episodes move towards picturing a national unity and it is this very factor that conjoins them through the evocation of a sense of unification. The latter thus connects the stories and its readers as well by rendering what Benedict Anderson terms ‘imagined communities’. Once the stories are resplendent with hues of ‘*kalpanar hysteria*’, ‘a hysteria of imagination’, they also ascertain that this helps the reader to position himself within the context of the historical realm. It is through such participation of the readers of history that, in all probability, Abanindranath intends to ‘bring back men to his own milieu’ like the European Romantics.

The Ideal State as Home

Tod’s *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* had been a text that inspired Abanindranath because it represented Indian history somehow differently from the other ones. He selected stories from the section on Mebar since these tales suited his purpose of recounting journeys of the evolution of an individual from an ordinary being to a royal one. The journey includes incidents of conquests, but unlike those described in the *Annals of Rajasthan*, these conquests emerge as necessities meant for building up an ideal sovereign state, a perennially active one, under the aegis of a benevolent king. Abanindranath’s demonstration of an ideal state starts with the tale of Shiladitya, the originator of the Suryavansha, *Gayeb travelled around the world in that carriage drawn by seven horses... He took the name Shiladitya, sat on the throne, crowned his friends as ministers and commanders, and fired all the lazy old officers.*²⁷¹ and he carries it forward through recounting the histories of Shiladitya’s descendents. The ideal state brought in by Goho reads “...during the famine, king Goho had kept his huge palace and brimful

²⁷¹ “গায়েব সেই সপ্তশ্বরথে পৃথিবী ঘুরে...শিলাদিত্য নাম নিয়ে, রাজসিংহাসনে বসে, পাঠশালের সঙ্গীদের কাউকে মন্ত্রী কাউকে বা সেনাপতি করে, যত নিকর্মা বুড়ো কর্মচারীদের তাড়িয়ে...” *Rajkahini* p.56

*granary of rice open for the homeless and helpless Bheel people of his kingdom throughout the year... During a war, emperor Goho would take care of them like a brother, protect them like a mother and walk ahead of everyone like a hero.*²⁷² In such description the identity of the individual Goho, as a maker of the ideal state, surfaces. *Bappaditya* too brings out the image of an ideal state initiated by teenager Bappa: “...*Bappa, a lad of fifteen years... came back like the crown of Rajasthan to Chittorgarh, the capital of Rajputana amidst cheers and applause on an auspicious day and time. It was a day of joy and celebration for entire Rajasthan.*”²⁷³ The description of Hambir’s accession to the throne of Chitor again hints at the continuation of the ideal state— *The day Hambir sat on Chitor’s throne holding the scimitar of goddess Bhavani, all of Rajasthan was exhilarated.*²⁷⁴ This approach of presenting kings as individuals, acting as agents of establishing an ideal state, continues throughout *Rajkahini*. Abanindranath romanticises such a state in the following manner— “...*there in the daylight, budding amla flowers bloomed all over the field like flowers of gold,*”²⁷⁵ when a utopic essence of peace to the state is restored.

Rajkahini’s *Shiladitya* encompasses the story of the first Rajput king who happens to be the Sun god’s heir. Rather than beginning with the exploits of the king, *Shiladitya* introduces the king as born of a lonely widow in seclusion. Abanindranath thus narrates history with those very descriptions of incidents usually left out by official discourses. In a similar vein the stories of *Goho*, *Bappaditya*, *Hambir* and *Chanda* mirror everyday experiences of individuals. *Goho*’s

²⁷²—“...দুর্ভিক্ষের দিনে রাজা গোহ তাঁর প্রচণ্ড রাজবাড়ি, পরিপূর্ণ ধানের গোলা আশ্রয়হীন দীনদুঃখী ভীল প্রজাদের জন্য সারা বৎসর খুলে রেখেছিলেন...মহারাজ গোহ ছিলেন, যিনি যুদ্ধের সময় ভাইয়ের মত তাদের যত্ন করতেন, মায়ের মত তাদের রক্ষা করতেন, বীরের মত সকলের আগে চলতেন”. Ibid p.67

²⁷³—“পনেরো বৎসরের সেই সেই বালক বাপ্পা...জয়-জয়কারের মধ্যে একদিন শুভ দিনে শুভক্ষণে সমস্ত রাজস্থানের রাজমুকুটের সমান রাজপুত্রের রাজধানী চিতোর নগরে ফিরে এলেন। সেদিন সমস্ত রাজস্থান বেড়ে কি আনন্দ, কি উৎসাহ” Ibid p.77

²⁷⁴ “হাঙ্গীর ভবানীর খাঁড়া হাতে যেদিন চিতোরের রাজসিংহাসনে উঠে বসলেন, সেদিন সমস্ত রাজস্থানে জয়-জয়কার পড়লো” *Rajkahini* p.127

²⁷⁵—“সেখানে সকালের আলোতে সমস্ত মাঠ জুড়ে সোনার ফুলের মত আঙলার কচি ফুল ফুটে উঠেছে... “এই আঙলার ফুলই যেন শান্তির ফুল হয়” Ibid p.145

description as an individual reads as follows *Goho, the son of a hero, didn't like studying. Some days he would roam like a Bheel child with the Bheel tribe in the hills and the forests, some days he would hunt lions on a horseback in the desert, and some days he would scout the forests for deer with a net on his back.*²⁷⁶ As Bappa, in *Bappaditya*, is reminded of his childhood, he feels lonely while searching for his roots as an individual— *Resting his hand on his queen's shoulder, Bappa smiled and said – this is my native land, I used to play so much here! ... I still recall that in my dreams.*²⁷⁷ In *Hambir*, the prince jests with his mother and this intimate scene does not display the characteristics of a mighty king, unlike later historical discourses about the king. Abanindranath's Alauddin (*Padmini*) is more of a flesh and blood character than a royal figure. Like any other mortal being, the mighty Alauddin too is shown to have been overwhelmed by fear—*No ordinary hero himself, Alauddin had conquered kingdoms mightier than Mewar with far bigger armies than his, but today, as he witnessed the bravery of the Rajputs in the battlefield, he was scared.*²⁷⁸ Individual experiences of heroic characters, conceived through imagination, thus form the fulcrum of history in *Rajkahini*.

All the stories of *Rajkahini* end with the return of the kings to their homes, just as Shiladitya returned to his once-forgotten birthplace. Goho returns to Birnagar; Bappa comes back to Ballabhipur, the place of origin of Suryabansha; Padmini and Samarsingha manage to return to Chitor from Alauddin's snare; Hambir wins over Munjo to return to Mebar and later to the place of his ancestors, Chitor; Chanda returns to Mebar and the like. The image of the return to homeland is highlighted in Lachhmira's retreat to the place of her birth— *After*

²⁷⁶“...বীরের সন্তান গোহের লেখাপড়া পছন্দ হত না, তিনি বনে-বনে, পাহারে-পাহারে, কোন দিন ভিলদের সঙ্গে ভিলবালকের মত, কোনো দিন বা সেই রাজপুত-বীরদের সঙ্গে আজার মত, কখনো ঘোড়ায় চরে মরুভূমির উপর সিংহ শিকার করে, কখনো বা জাল ঘাড়ে বনে-বনে হরিণের” Ibid p.62

²⁷⁷“বাপ্পা হাসিমুখে রানির কাঁধে হাত রেখে বললেন-এই আমার ছেলেবেলার দেশ, এইখানে কত খেলা খেলেছি! স্বপ্নের মত আমার এখনও মনে আসে”

²⁷⁸“আলাউদ্দিন নিজে একজন সামান্য বীরপুরুষ ছিলেন না; এর চেয়ে ঢের কম সৈন্য নিয়ে তিনি মেবারের চেয়ে অনেক বড়ো বড়ো হিন্দু রাজত্ব অনায়েসে জয় করেছেন, কিন্তু আজ যুদ্ধে রাজপুতের বীরত্ব দেখে তাঁকে ভয় পেতে হলো” *Rajkahini* p.104

*crowning Hambir to the throne, Lachhmirani went back to the rivers and farmlands of Ujla village, to her parental house where she had spent her childhood.*²⁷⁹ The tie with home and lineage thus remains unaffected for all kings described in *Rajkahini*. Like the ideal state that the rulers establish, the familial home too gets strengthened with the elements of brotherhood being restored (Chanda's reunion with Mukul), forgiveness uniting foes (Surajmal, being forgiven by Prithwiraj) and kindness being held as the essence of friendship. Like the subjects of kingdoms unitedly empowering the states with their support in *Bappaditya—Generations of trustworthy Bhil rulers were full of faith and devotion towards the king.*²⁸⁰, in *Padmini* the subjects say: *Rana's danger is our danger, his insult is our insult.*²⁸¹, *Hambir— Then the villagers started cleaning the fort meticulously and decorating the rooms...the villagers left in the evening after seeing their smiling king, queen and prince,*²⁸² the homes of rulers also encompass love and compassion.

The Ethos of Unity

Departing from Tod's way of highlighting the Hindu-Muslim conflict (a strategy reflecting the British divide and rule policy) Abanindranath attempts to feature a unity instead. He projects Alauddin as an outsider who is receptive of India's cultural ethos. In *Padmini* the Pathan portrays the zeal of assimilation *It was a moonlit night. Piyari Begum sat next to the emperor with a glass of drink in her hand. Her new maid was sitting at her feet and singing to the melody of a sarangi. Suddenly, the emperor remarked, "What rubbish is this Arabic ghazal! Sing a*

²⁷⁹ “লছ্মীরানি হাছীরকে সিংহাসনে বসিয়ে উজলাগ্রামে তাঁর বাপের বাড়ি চলে গেলেন তাঁর সেই ছেলেবেলার ঘরে নদীর পারে ক্ষেতের ধারে।” Ibid p.127

²⁸⁰ “বিশ্বাসী ভিলপ্রজাদের সরল প্রাণ আট-পুরুষ পর্যন্ত বিশ্বাসে, রাজভক্তিতে পরিপূর্ণ ছিলো” *Rajkahini* p.87

²⁸¹ “রানার বিপদে আমাদের বিপদ, রানার অপমানে আমাদের অপমানে” Ibid. p.87.

²⁸² “গ্রামবাসীরা তখনই যত্ন করে কেজ্জা পরিষ্কার করতে লাগলো, ঘর সাজাতে লাগলো...সন্ধ্যার সময় গ্রামবাসী তাদের রাজার মুখে, রানীর মুখে, দুই রাজ-পুত্রের মুখে হাসি দেখে বিদায় হলো” Ibid. p. 108

song from India".²⁸³ An exquisite example of Abanindranath visualizing Hindu-Muslim unity is found in Bappaditya. The description of Bappaditya's death-rites highlights the desire for a coalescence. Abanindranath takes his cue from the description of scattered roses (symbolising Muslim Iran) in *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* and goes a step forward to include the presence of roses, symbolising the Hindu essence of Chitor— *Bappa died at the age of a hundred... then nothing else was seen there, only hundreds of lotuses and roses. The empress of Chittorgarh kept those lotuses in the water of Manas Sarovar at the temple of Baanmataji. His Irani Begum planted a single lotus in her favourite rose garden, at the center of khasmahal, next to the fountain of rose water ; and that day at the confluence of India and Iran on a peak of the Hindukush, a sannyasin put the diamond and jewel adorned corpse of a king on the pyre and started whirling and singing round it —today is a day of joy.*²⁸⁴

The Small Voice of History

As he goes on to glorify instances of unification, Abanindranath also introduces the issue of uniformity in 'national' history, a history that allows a voicing of not only rulers but subjects as well. Through contextualising the notion of plurality in the representation of history, Abanindranath once more calls for a space of mutual understanding, something India badly needed during the colonial rule. In *Rana Kumbha*, Chacha and Mair happen to be the ones whose voices remain unheard in history because of their comparatively low social status (their mother being a woodcutter's daughter). As they get killed by Rana Kumbha, Abanindranath

²⁸³ “আকাশে চাঁদ উঠেছিলো, পাশে শরবতের পেয়ালা-হাতে পিয়ারী বেগম বসেছিলেন, পায়ের কাছে বেগমের এক নতুন বাঁদি সারাদির সুরে গান গাইছিলো। বাদশা হঠাৎ বলে উঠলেন, ‘কি ছাই, আরবি গজল. হিন্দুস্থানের গান গাও’” Ibid p.84

²⁸⁴ “একশত বৎসর বয়সে বাপ্পার মৃত্যু হলো...তখন সেখানে আর কিছুই দেখা গেলো না-কেবল রাশিরাশি পদ্মফুল আর গোলাপফুল. চিতোরের মহারানি সেই পদ্মফুল বানমাতাজির মন্দিরে মানস-সরবরের জলে রেখে দিলেন। ইরানী বেগম একটি পদ্মফুল শখের গুলবাগে খাসমহলের মাঝে গোলাপ জলের ফোয়ারার ধারে পুঁতে দিলেন; আর সেইদিন হিন্দুস্থান ও ইরানীস্থানের মধ্যস্থলে/হিন্দুকুশ পর্বতের শিখরে হীরে-জহরতে মোড়া এক রাজার শরীর চিতার উপরে তুলে দিয়ে এক সম্ম্যাসিনী ঘিরে ঘিরে গাইতে লাগলো-আজ কি আনন্দ” *Rajkahini* p.82

begins speaking for them, *They didn't know why the king punished them! And the girl didn't know who brought her to the sergeant's room and left her for the night...Why? Why?*²⁸⁵ With this question Abanindranath appears to create an alternate version of future history, one which accommodates the voice of the oppressed subject with that of the powerful ruler. Meera's voice appears more as the voice of a devotee, an individual, than the voice of the queen of Kumbha. This also calls for a creation of history in terms of the oppressed. Abanindranath therefore tries to validate the worth of history as a document of voices from all classes, emphasising on the worth of a 'history from below'. He contemplates that very history of oppression which Partha Chattopadhyay terms as 'critical' and 'oppositional'.²⁸⁶ The author-artist explores this facet through native myths and the supernatural (for example, the local myth of a rishi blessing Bappaditya with his mighty sword meant for conquering the world, Hambir's story of entering the mysterious crematorium to claim Bhabani's sword, the ferocious Devi of Chitor uttering—'*Main bhukha hun*'), and presents this as one that is to be remembered through memory passed down from generation to generation (minstrels singing of Samarsingha in *Padmini*, the conviction that the Rajputs never forget kings like Khoman).²⁸⁷ Because it is in such a version that he foresees a nationalist project of a peaceful and harmonious accommodation.

'Nation' in Strategic Manifestation of *Pala*

With a nationalistic consciousness, through which he characterises the nature of home, Abanindranath reworks traditions by portraying characteristics that define the regionality of Bengal, his own home. He takes up the regional tradition of '*pala*' (with the usage of the *dhua*, and sometimes the *mukhot* dance) and makes it his own by adding a contemporaneity that suits

²⁸⁵“তাঁরাই জানলেন না, কেনো রানা তাঁদের শাস্তি দিলেন! আর সেই মেয়েটি জানলে না দফাদারের ঘরে রাতারাতি কারাই বা তাকে রেখে গেলো...কেনো? কেনো?” Ibid p.154

²⁸⁶ Bhadra, Goutam and Chatopadhyay, Partha. *Nimnabarger Itihas*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Private Limited, 2012. p. 14

²⁸⁷ *Rajkahini* p.83

his purpose of projecting a chronotopic context. The author-artist places his '*jatrapala*' in stark contrast to a play and re-introduces a performative spirit lost under the western 'play'. He consciously differentiates his '*jatrapala*' from the superficialities of theatre in the performative mode— ... *How can a jatra continue if a gap comes in between? Hello sir, hello sir – please announce an interval. Soul – That's not possible, this is not a theatre.*²⁸⁸ On being questioned about the absence of plot in the *palas*, Abanindranath's reply was— *Where will I get a plot? Did I write with a plot in mind? Young boys and girls will sing and dance energetically, that's enough. Why do I need a plot?*²⁸⁹ In discarding the constraints of plot, Abanindranath was also freeing himself from any prescribed format and experimenting with the mobility and free play of imagination. He consciously set children as the target audience for the *palas* because they had been the ones with whom he could engage while recovering an art form that was organic in terms of emotion and free from artifice of any sort. '*Palas*' had been to Abanindranath a performative art that could be altered and modified because of the flexible nature of its form and narrative structure. A passivity clouded Abanindranath's creative vivacity following the painting of the *Arabian Night series*. The vibrancy of the folk form helped him in regaining the rush of creative energy albeit in a new way. A romantic urge of Abanindranath to revisit childhood, the phase of life that sees the active creative mind at its best, through his engagement with innocent souls thus coincided with the inclination to go back to the roots and reclaim the connection with home. That the author-artist had been experiencing such insights becomes clear when one finds Abanindranath speaking, in *Jorasankor Dhare*, the following words: *I didn't paint for over ten-eleven years. When I finished the sketches for the sets of the Arabian*

²⁸⁸ "... মাঝে গ্যাপ পড়লো, যাত্রা চলে কেমন করে- ও হর্তা? হর্তা- একটা ইন্টারবেল দিয়ে দাও। আত্মা- তা হয়না, এ তো থিয়েটার নয়" *Espar Ospar*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhawan, 2012. p. 223

²⁸⁹ "প্লট পাবে কোথথেকে? আমি কি প্লট ভেবে লিখেছি? ছোটো ছেলেরা মেয়েরা স্কুতির সঙ্গে নাচবে গাইবে, এই তো যথেষ্ট। প্লট দিয়ে আমার কী দরকার?" Chanda, Rani. *Silpiguru Abanindranath*. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1999. p. 69

*novels, I told my students; 'Here, observe, you'll find all my life experiences here'. And there ended my painting journey. I don't know why I couldn't concentrate on painting. I wrote scripts for folk theatres, had the boys play in them, dressed them up, presented myself as the proprietor and played a leaked drum. The days were going just fine.*²⁹⁰

The stagnation of the mind thus got channelised into a sportive activity that sought to find success in touching the generation of the 'new'. The 'meaninglessness' of the *palas* was therefore actually meant to generate in boys and girls a creative energy, an apparently meaningless but significant artistic practice from a non-western aesthetic point of view, thereby building a pool of resources for the future population of a new and imagined nation.

Abanindranath's handling of the *palas* showcases his energetic engagement in rewriting original incidents. The changes he made suggest a rejection of the characteristics of 'drama' so as to introduce the original essence of the *pala*. In *Dakshiner Baranda* Mohanlal Gangopahyay writes in the context of the enactment of *Espar Ospar*:... *We spent the whole afternoon in scribbling in the notebook... My grandfather said, 'I have expunged the theatricality and moulded it as a pure folk theatre this time. See how it turns out. Continue the rehearsals' ... Now, the script of the folk theatre kept changing in every copy... we could not keep up with grandfather. He kept changing every new copy that we wrote...Our grandmother would also come to Jorasanko every evening from Benepukur, but each time she would find new characters and new songs. The script changed continuously.*²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ “দশ-এগারো বছর ছবি আঁকিনি। আরব্য-উপন্যাসের ছবির সেট আঁকা হলে ছেলেদের বললুম, এই ধরে দিয়ে গেলুম। আমার জীবনের সব কিছু অভিজ্ঞতা এতেই পাবে। ব্যাস, তার পর থেকেই ছবি আঁকা বন্ধ। কী জানি, কেন মন বসতো না ছবি আঁকতে। নতুন নতুন যাত্রার পালা লিখতুম; ছেলেদের নিয়ে যাত্রা করতুম, তাদের সাজাতুম, নিজে অধিকারী সাজতুম, ফুটো ঢোল বাজাতুম। বেশ দিন যায়।” *Jorasankor Dhare*. p 292

²⁹¹ “...সারা দুপুর খাতা নিয়ে কাটাকুটি চললো...দাদামশাই বললেন, নাটুকে ভাবটা উড়িয়ে দিলাম। খাঁটি যাত্রার ছাঁচে ঢেলে দিয়েছি এবার। দেখিস কেমন হয়। চালা রিহাসাল...এদিকে পাতার পর পাতা যাত্রা প্রায়ই বদলে যাচ্ছে... দাদামশায়ের সঙ্গে পেরে উঠছি না। যত কপি করছি, তত বদলাচ্ছেন... বেনেপুকুরের দিদিমাও রোজই সন্ধ্যাবেলা জোড়াসাঁকোয় চলে আসতেন। কিন্তু প্রত্যেক দিনই এসে

The adaptation of *palas* thus required Abanindranath to experiment with the form so that it stayed loyal to its native nature. Such experimentation would lead him to work continuously with the stagecraft too. He even ventured to blur the gap between the stage and the audience (as happens in the traditional performance) and create the essence of what in modern times we call the ‘third theatre’: *We had tried to separate the audience seats and the stage by tying a rope between the two doors of the auditorium; no sooner did grandfather come than he removed the rope. He said, ‘Let all the spectators join the team, only then will the folk theatre become more fun to watch.’*²⁹² The visual aspect of the *pala* was also one with which Abanindranath proceeded to appeal to the imagination of his audience, an imagination that required one to leave behind their previous understanding of widely read texts and enter into a ‘newness’ of envisioning the *sahaj*, the simple.

That the process of simplification was dear to Abanindranath becomes explicit when we see his attempts at turning down the grand narrative of *The Ramayana* more than once in the various *palas* drawn from episodes of the epic. In this context we hear him say: *Since 1933, for a span of ten years, I have been filling notebook after notebook with scripts of folk theatre based on the Ramayana stories. I wonder how I could write so much! I discarded so many copies and made so many fair ones. Many notebooks were stolen too...I wrote such abundantly. Now I pick up a few of the copies that the boys had retained and read them sometimes– they are enjoyable indeed.*²⁹³

দেখতেন নতুন পাঠ, নতুন গান। রোজই বদলে যাচ্ছে” Gangopadhyay, Mohanlal. *Dakshiner Baranda*. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2007.p.88.

²⁹² “হল-ঘরের এক দরজা থেকে আরেক দরজা পর্যন্ত একখানা দড়ি টেনে দর্শকদের জায়গা আর অভিনেতাদের এলাকা আমরা আলাদা করে দিতে গিয়েছিলুম; দাদামশায় এসেই দড়ি তুলে ফেলে দিলেন। বললেন, যারা আসবে তাদেরও দলে টেনে নে, তবে তো জমবে যাত্রা *Dakshiner Baranda* p. 94

²⁹³ , “...১৯৩৩ সাল থেকে পুরো দশটি বছর ধরে রামায়ণের যাত্রার পালাই লিখেছি খাতার পর খাতা। কী করে যে এত লিখতে পারলুম তাই ভাবি! কত কাটাকুটি, কত ফেয়ার-কপি করতুম বসে বসে। কত খাতাপত্র চুরিও হয়ে গেল...কত কী লিখে যেতুম। এখন দু-চারটে যা ছেলেদের কাছে ছিল, মাঝে মাঝে কাগজে বের করে দেখি- বেশ রস আছে তাতে” *Silpiguuru Abanindranath* p.69

This new ‘ras’ that Abanindranath speaks of takes its cue from ‘adirasa’ of *The Ramayana* but soon drifts into a world of humour and comical representation. In *Krouncho Krounchi Pala* Abanindranath declares his own method of handling the epic in the native Indian tradition of the ‘bhanita’. He talks of his reception in this way: *On the advice of Narada, sage Valmiki/published the seven books of the Ramayana/ Krittivas attained wisdom by worshipping Valmiki/ and retold the seven books in simple words/ Tulsidas composed the Ramayana in Devnagri/and portrayed the greatness of Raghunandan Rama/With a fusion of words and rhythm/Abanindra is composing Ramleela to his heart’s desire.*²⁹⁴

Jatragaane Ramayan, Khuddur Jatra, Aranyakanda Pala become testimonies of this mirthful (*abhilash*) expression. The author-artist also takes up the Ramayana stories in Bengali from Parasuram— *Rishi Jatra* has been adapted from the story of Jabali written by Parashuram²⁹⁵. By attempting to recreate *The Ramayana*, Abanindranath revokes the grandness of Indian literature for the colonised Indians who often sought to discard their own literature while looking up to European literature with an exaggerated admiration. The reversal of the point of view has a deeper political significance: it elevates the marginalised and brings it into focus, but it also imagines in aesthetic terms a future India of heterogeneity where differences would co-exist in harmony. He consciously tries to embark upon a collective memory, trusting his readers to have read *The Ramayana* previously, by hinting at episodes from the source text. To do this he brings in the agency of Balmiki, acting like a father-figure, to retrace anecdotes from the Sanskrit epic. As Abanindranath’s *Ram-Lakhkhan* appear in their boyish selves, we find his Balmiki trying to find a synchrony with his own depiction of the two

²⁹⁴ “নারদের উপদেশে বাল্মিকী তপধান/ প্রকাশ করিল সপ্ত কাণ্ড রামায়ণ।/ বাল্মিকী বন্দিয়া কৃত্তিবাস বিচক্ষণ। সরল ভাষায় সাত কাণ্ড রামায়ণ কন।/ দেবনাগরি রামায়ণ রচেন তুলসিদাস/ রঘুনন্দন রাম-রসায়ন করেন প্রকাশ/ রামলীলা কথাকলি ছন্দের বিলাসে/ অবনীন্দ্র যান বলি গীত অভিলাষে” *Krouncho Krounchi Pala*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012. p.308

²⁹⁵ “ঋষি যাত্রাঃ পরশুরাম লিখিত জাবালি গল্প হইতে যাত্রায় ভাঙা” *Rishi Jatra*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012. p. 153

characters: *Valmiki: O Father of Parashuram, I can't find much similarity between these two naive boys and the Rama-Lakshmana I described in the seven books of my Ramayana...this will not do. Ramayana states that the boys have to endure a lot of hardship in the forest. Now look, my dear Rama and Lakshmana, if I had seen you two before, I would have written the book on Ayodhya differently. I made a mistake by writing the Ramayana before Rama was born.*²⁹⁶

Similarly, Abanindranath presumes that his readers are familiar with the Indian literary tradition when he focuses on *The Mahabharata*. He makes the character of Ganesh say, *Please search in the Mahabharata, it's there my dear*, on being questioned by Narad about the fate of Lakhmi's elder sister—Narad – *Hey all, can anyone say what happened to Lakshmi's elder sister who emerged during the churning of the ocean? Where did she go?*²⁹⁷. Here Abanindranath establishes the 'adhikari' (the owner-director of the *jatra*) as the real store-house of knowledge of *The Mahabharata* (Abanindranath hints at the survival of epics through the liveliness of their performances)—*Ganesha – Have I read the Mahabharata so that I can answer this? Ask this proprietor. He is the mite of the Mahabharata. Nothings is unknown to him. Adhikari – What is not there in the Mahabharata, is not there in entire India.*)²⁹⁸

Besides idealising India as a country with an abundance of different kinds of heritage, Abanindranath also sets out to portray Bengal in his 'palas'. In the context of *The Ramayana*, he talks about its specific nature in Bengal—*My name is Krittibas/ I live under the banyan tree/*

²⁹⁶“বাল্মিকী। ভো জমদগ্নি। এই দুটি সুকুমার বালকের সঙ্গে তো আমার সপ্তকান্ড রামায়ণে বর্ণিত রামলক্ষণের তো সাদৃশ্য বড় একটা দেখছিলা... তা হলে তো চলবেনা। বনে গিয়ে যে বহু কষ্ট সহিতে হবে- লেখা আছে রামায়ণে। দেখো বাপু রামলক্ষণ, আমি যদি আগে দেখতাম তোমাদের দুটিকে, তবে অযোধ্যাকাণ্ডটা অমন করে লিখতাম না। রাম না জন্মাতোই রামায়ণ লেখা- কাজেই ভুল হয়েছে” *Rishi Jatra*. p.156

²⁹⁷ “মহাভারতে আছে খুঁজে দেখো গা” ... “নারদ- ওহে তোমরা কেউ বলতে পারো সমুদ্র মন্থনের কালে লক্ষ্মীর একজন বড়দাদি উঠেছিলেন তিনি কোথায় গেলেন, কি বা হল তাঁর?” *Duhsaha Pala. Rishi Jatra*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012. p. 421

²⁹⁸ “গণেশ- মহাভারত কি আমার জানা আছে যে বলবো? শুধাও এই অধিকারীকে। উনি হলেন অহাভারতের ঘূণ। তাঁর অজানিত কিছুই নেই। অধিকারী- যা নাই মহাভারতে তা নাই ভূভারতে” *Duhsaha Pala*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012p.421

at Nityalal Sil's shop / Bengal is enthralled by the songs I wrote for the Ramayana.²⁹⁹ His own home too is described as a space providing peace and comfort of living. In *Uranchandir Pala* we find such an expression— *I was saved even after falling from the sky only because I landed on the soft soil of Bengal....*³⁰⁰ A picture of contemporary Bengal also evolves as Abanindranath talks of football clubs of Bengal and mentions newspapers circulated during his time... *Nagen— Let's see what Anandabazar has written on East Bengal and Mohunbagan.*³⁰¹ As the author-artist goes on to describe Bengal, he associates his homeland with Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar *In the forty ninth page of Kathamala, Vidyasagar mentioned the man bitten by a dog.*³⁰² and once again revokes the presence of a literary tradition which also incorporates the prevalence of *Aesop's Fables* in the Bengali literary circle: *Proprietor — This isn't Vidyasagar's Kathamala, this is Aesop's Fable.*³⁰³ He thus builds an image of Bengal centered on particularly identifiable features, features that tend to glorify his home. Whilst venturing to do so, he also romanticises the occidental 'other' in a humourous fantasy. Thus, the imagined 'Occident' becomes like the 'imagined' Orient in the following lines of *Uranchandi Pala*: *Let's go to the Occident. People there devour everything. They put crow feathers on their hats and drink mock turtle soup*³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ “কৃতিবাস- নাম আমার কৃতিবাস/ বটতলায় নিতিবাস/ নিত্যলাল শীলের দোকানে-/ বাংলাদেশ মন্ত আমার রামনাম গানে” *Aranyakanda Pala*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012. p.412

³⁰⁰ “বাংলাদেশের নরম মাটি বলেই এবারে আকাশ থেকে পড়ে রক্ষা পেয়ে গেলাম...” *Uranchandir Pala*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012. p.39

³⁰¹ “নগেন- ইস্ট বেঙ্গল, মোহনবাগান- কি লিখেছে আনন্দবাজার দেখি” *Lambakarna Pala*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012. p.140

³⁰² “কথামালার উপপঞ্চাশ পৃষ্ঠায় বিদ্যাসাগর লিখেছেন- কুকুরদষ্ট মনুষ্য...” *Ghora-Haater Pala*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012. p.327

³⁰³ “অধিকারী- এ তো বিদ্যাসাগরের কথামালা নয়, এ হল এশপ ফেবুল” *Brik o Mesh Pala*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012. p.236

³⁰⁴ “... অক্সিজেনে গিয়ে পড়ি চল সেখানে সর্বভুক তারা আছে কাকের পালাক তারা টুপিতে গজে, মস্টারটল সুপ খায়” *Uranchandir Pala*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012. p.18

In his *palas* Abanindranath also points out some foundational principles of his ‘nation’. It is mostly through the words of Jabali that he lays down a set of prescriptive statements meant for the establishment of a utopic homeland– *Jabali, Wake up! Free men from the clutches of set patterns!*³⁰⁵, or as Jabali says, *Those who relinquish the pursuit of sensory trajectories and remain true only to religion, worry me a lot... they perish in this mortal world*³⁰⁶ In *Uranchandi Pala* the song, *To hell with slumber, wake up brother/ Listen to the song of awakening intently/Let all the sleepy beings live/ The thief breaks into the room/ and steals the necklace’, or commits a murder/ He wears the strong one out/ Those who are awake and do not lead a disgraceful life/ They live longer than the somnolent ones*³⁰⁷ sounds like a motivational anthem for the audience, his countrymen. The same happens as the kurmo demands ‘action’– *Meditation won’t help. We need action.*³⁰⁸

Underneath the humour and absurdities of the *palas*, lies Abanindranath’s emphasis on the Indian ‘baul’ philosophy of the corporeal and the spiritual. When he chooses to work with a native tradition of performance, Abanindranath simultaneously incorporates in it the grave musings of a philosophical doctrine popularised by Bengal in India. He chooses to valorise the *baul* philosophy as Tagore would say “coming from men who are unsophisticated, living a simple life in obscurity, it gives clue to the inner meaning of all religions. For it suggests that these religions are never about a God of cosmic force, but rather about the God of human personality”.³⁰⁹ The inherent humour in the *palas* thus conjoins with the metaphysics of being

³⁰⁵ “জাবালে! জাগ্রত হও, সংস্কারের নাগপাশ হতে মানবমনকে মুক্ত কর” *Jabalir Pala*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012 p265

³⁰⁶ “জাবালি- যাহারা প্রত্যক্ষসিদ্ধ পুরুষার্থ পরিত্যাগ করিয়া কেবল ধর্ম লইয়া থাকে তাহাদের জন্য আমার চিন্তার অন্ত নাই... তাহারা ইহলোকে মহাবিনাশ প্রাপ্ত হয়।” *Rishi Jatra* p.161

³⁰⁷ “নিদ্রায় মুখে আগুন, জাগো ভাই/ জাগরণের গান শ্রাবণ করহ কর্ণকূহরে/ নিদ্রায়ুক্ত প্রাণিসব বেঁচে থাকে যেন সব/ সিঁধ কেটে চোর প্রবেশ করে ঘরে।/ হাত দিয়ে লয় গলার হার,’ অথবা করে সংহার/ বলবানকে দুর্বল করে যায়/ জাগ্রত জীবের ভাই ফৈজৎ বালাই নাই/ নিদ্রাতুর জীবপেক্ষা বাঁচে চতুর্গুণ” *Uranchandi Pala* p.23

³⁰⁸ - “ধ্যান করে বসে কিছু হবেনা। অ্যাকশন চাই Ibid p.28

³⁰⁹ Tagore, Rabindranath. *The Religion of Man*. Kolkata: Rupa Publishers Pvt. Lmt, 2005. p6

and renders to these a novelty, hitherto unknown in early twentieth century. The ‘*sahaj*’ nature of Abanindranath’s *palas* draws from the ‘sahajiya’ of the bauls and romanticises on an independent India, to be achieved in simplicity and freshness of tradition and modernity as well.

We have seen Abanindranath’s disregard for the Hindu-Muslim divide, which characterises Tod’s *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, in *Rajkahini*. That the glorification of a Hindu identity, which associates itself with an Aryan essence, did not mean much to Abanindranath becomes conspicuous in *Banglar Brata*. What matters to him, as we see in this text, is the creative practice of a community which he identifies as non-Aryan and hence non-Brahmanical.

The Departure from ‘Neo-Hinduism’

In *Europe Punardarshan*, Tapan Roychowdhury writes that the colonisers made the Indians feel inferior and this had given rise to multifaceted reactions of the colonised. A major amongst these was the colonised’s wish to get Hinduism approved by the Europeans, the masters. Such desires were growing in strength as a result of the lack of a complete reliance on their own indigenous traditions. Roychowdhury writes that with popularisation of Maxmuller’s intellectual theory on the origin of Aryan language races on the basis of Linguistics, an unbelievable excitement was created.³¹⁰ In an attempt to see themselves as kin to the foreign ruler, the elite, in the valorisation of their self-esteem, rejoiced in the accoutrement of an Aryan identity. This phase of national history has been conceived by many as a phase of Hindu revivalism, but it would be wiser to perceive this phenomenon as a ‘Neo-Hinduism’ functioning in a realm where the issue of religiosity became synonymous with the construct of

³¹⁰ Roychowdhury, Tapan. *Europe Punardarshan*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Lmt., 2015 p.23

‘nation’. However, it so happened that this construct began to be marked as an essentially Hindu one. In this extremist tendency to establish Hindu supremacy lay the dangers of an exclusionist policy—the motive behind defaming the Muslim rule in India.³¹¹ The British too had contributed to the expanding view of the Muslims as ‘outsiders’.

But as the new waves of nationalist ethos swept through the country during the sixties-seventies of the nineteenth century, the attitude to the Hindu-Muslim relation underwent a major change. In 1861 Rajnarayan Bose established an association to ‘evoke the feeling of nationalism in the native educated Bengalis’. The establishment of Surendranath Banerjee’s Indian Association, in 1876 was meant to instil the feelings of brotherhood between the Hindu and the Muslims. Bringing various ethnic communities into the fold of the nationalist project, while uniting the Hindus and the Muslims, had also been a major area of concern for the nationalists.³¹² Abanindranath’s prioritisation of ethnic religious practices in *Banglar Brata* appears to be at par with the idealist nationalist spirit of inclusion. Rather than glorifying a Hindu past like the Orientalist approaches of Havell, Ananada Coomaraswamy or Sister Nivedita, Abanindranath explores a non-Brahmanical source of tradition and aesthetics. With the focus on a non-Aryan originality of the aesthetically rich *brata*, Abanindranath criticises the propensity of the Hindu pundits to bring it under the umbrella term of Hinduism: *If we carefully look at how the Brahmins are trying to capture the space of folk rituals and impose their own new rituals and scriptural gods and goddesses, we shall need to write an elaborate history.*³¹³ He classifies the rituals of the ‘*anya-brata*’ (the natives)³¹⁴ as essentially related to nature worship, and differentiates them from the ‘*jatil*’ (complex) Hindu ‘*brata*’ of the Sastras

³¹¹ *Europe Punardarshan* p. 26

³¹² *Ibid.* p.27

³¹³ “ব্রাহ্মনেরা লৌকিক ব্রতের স্থান কেমন করে দখল করতে চাচ্ছে নতুন নতুন ব্রত এবং নিজেদের শাস্ত্রের দেবদেবীকে এনে, সেটাকে খুঁটিয়ে দেখতে হলে আরেকটা প্রকাণ্ড ইতিহাস লিখতে হয়.” *Banglar Brata* Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol. VI, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2012. p. 19

³¹⁴ *Ibid* p.11

which aim at propagating the project of inclusion under Hinduism. This is why he grades the ritualistic performances of women as ‘*khanti brata*’,³¹⁵ uncontaminated and original. Abanindranath finds in these true essences of Indian aesthetics.³¹⁶ By referring to the worship of Satyapir, he comments on how the politicising nature of Hinduism tends to do away with the Muslim cult of worshipping Satyapir. To Abanindranath the rituals, rather than glorifying a particular sect, become testimonials of the cultural history of Bengal.³¹⁷

It is interesting to note that when Abanindrath chose to write his ‘*pala*’, he was frequenting Mechhuabazar, the market of Islamic ‘*punthi*’ in Calcutta. In *Thakurbarir Anginay* Jasimuddin reminisces about Abanindranath’s ardent enthusiasm in collecting such ‘*punthi*’s: *I had a copy of Shaheed-e-Karbala and I gave him this book to read. Not only did he finish reading the book, he also marked the parts that he liked... Then he wanted to read more. He said, "Dear Mr. Jasim let's go to your Islamic bookstore in Mechhua Bazar.*³¹⁸

Another episode from *Thakurbarir Anginay* presents Abanindranath as one free from religious prejudices of any kind. During his stay at Puri, Abanindranath had to meet a group of elite men who sought to restrict the employment of Muslims in public sectors so as to ensure the interest of the unemployed Hindu youth. As they demanded Abanindranath’s support in the matter, the unbiased artist’s reply was— *What do I care if the Muslims get more? ... Look mister, I spend my days with paint and brushes. What do I understand of politics? Ask Rabi uncle. He understands that better.*³¹⁹

³¹⁵ Ibid p.10

³¹⁶ Ibid p.16

³¹⁷ Ibid p.36

³¹⁸ “আমার কাছে ছিল একখান শহিদে-কারবালার পুঁথি। তাঁকে পড়িতে দিলাম। সে বই তিনি শুধু পড়িলেন না, যে জায়গা তাঁর ভাল লাগিল দাগ দিয়া রাখিলেন ...তারপর খেয়াল চাপিল, আরও পুঁথি পড়িবেন। আমাকে বলিলেন, “ওহে জশিমিঞা, চল তোমাদের মুসলমানী পুঁথির দোকানে মেছুয়াবাজারে Uddin, Jasim. *Thakur Barir Anginaye*. Kolkata: Granthaprakash, 1969., pp.64-65

³¹⁹ “মুসলমানেরা যদি বেশি পায়, তাতে আমার কি...মশায়, আমি রঙ আর তুলি নিয়ে সময় কাটাই, রাজনীতির কি বুঝি। রবিকাকার কাছে জান তিনি ওসব ভাল বোঝেন.” pp 65, 72 *Thakurbarir Anginay* pp.65,72a

Abanindranath's withdrawal from nationalist politics also becomes conspicuous from his growing loss of faith in the extremist facet of the Swadeshi movement. He taught his grandson how to make salt at home³²⁰ and this can also be read as his idea of liberty as something feasible achievable even in the familiar domain of the home. Thus, we find the author-artist talking of the hollowness of a patriotic enterprise that legitimised a façade of nationalism.

As we have seen, the New-Orientalist approach to the revival of a Hindu/Aryan past was insignificant for Abanindranath. Therefore, even if Havell and Nivedita could foresee the image of a Hindu-revivalist in Abanindranath, such compartmentalisation does not do him justice. E. B. Havell's view of the development of Indian painting was conceived through an idea of the decline of art since the eighteenth century 'under the successive blight of Mohameddan bigotry'.³²¹ To him 'Hindu' became synonymous with being genuinely Indian. "To confirm the purely 'Indian' pedigree of the Taj, Havell had not only to highlight the genius of the Mughal architects and designers who conceived of it-he had also to reveal the strong underlayer of Hindu influences to which they were indebted."³²² It was for this reason that Benares, to Havell, became the microcosm of India. Havell's interest in Hindu metaphysics and Hindu past became the dominant trait in his approach to Indian art. In this respect he found an ally in Nivedita, who had similar interest in the revival of a majestic Hindu past. Nivedita read about the resurgence of the ancient Hindu civilisation of India in Okakura's *The Ideals of the East*. She considered the 'awakening' of Japan as the essential sphere for linking 'Indian ideals' with Japanese culture.³²³ To Nivedita, the spread of Buddhism to China and Japan meant the transference of the philosophy of Hinduism, the mother-religion. In Okakura's book Nivedita identified the possibility of the unification of Asia under the aegis of Hinduism.

³²⁰ *Dakshiner Baranda* p.70

³²¹ Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal c.1850-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. p.156

³²² Ibid p.157

³²³ Kazuko, Okakura. *The Ideals of the East*. London: John Murray 1903. p.xviii

“Nationalism to her, was primarily a matter of mobilizing Hindu spirituality to inculcate a new vigour, robustness and ‘masculinity’ in Indians, and to initiate a powerful sense of nationhood”.³²⁴ Nivedita’s imagining the nation as ‘Kali’ had also been grounded on her rendition of the Hindu Indian nation with a powerful mother image. Bankim’s idealisation of Kali as the mother of strong children bore a similar essence. The ‘spiritual idealism’ that Coomaraswamy longed to achieve through the Swadeshi movement in Bengal was not different from what Havell and Nivedita considered to be the antidote to the effeminate identity attached to the Indians, especially the Bengali ‘*bhadrolok*’.

Towards a ‘New Mythology’

Abanindranath’s deliberate departure from the project of unifying the nation through a religious classification realises itself in letting the ‘small voice of history’ function through fragments, stratifications and a layered alterity. With his own status of *bhadrolok*, Abanindranath does not attempt to swerve from this identity but rather uses it as the ‘hybrid’ site of conjoining a nativity with the emerging ‘structure of feelings’ in the nineteenth century. His project of unification rests on a reworking of folk traditions from Bengal as well as Europe, along the lines of the Grimm Brothers and the romantic notion of ‘new mythology’,³²⁵ making it compliant with the ‘in-between’ nature of ‘modernity’. The domain of the ‘*adhunik didima*’ (as Rabindranath calls it in the introduction to *Thakurmar Jhuli* ³²⁶while hinting at the educated middle class oscillating between the ‘traditional’ mode of imparting knowledge and the ‘modern’ impact of

³²⁴ *The Making of New Indian Art* p.172

³²⁵ The literary-historical acumen of dealing with folklores was an important factor in the early German Romantics’ reevaluation and restoration of underestimated or forgotten literary traditions that did not necessarily conform to cherished classical standards. The recovery of fairy tales, troubadour songs, literature of the European Middle ages and of ancient India and the Dante, Boccaccio, Cervantes, Calderon and Shakespeare marked a new appreciation of the diversity of literary forms, histories and mythologies. The early Romantics’ notion of a ‘new mythology’ rested on a vision that strove to synthesise diverse literary traditions to create the most artistic form of all arts, art to the highest power Saul, Nicholas ed. *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. p.13 2009

³²⁶ Mitra Mojumdar, Dakhinaramanjan. *Thakurmar Jhuli: Banglar Rupkatha*. Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1966.1420

Western education), the traditional notion of grandmother and its decadence is found in *Hutum Pyanchar Naksha*: *At bedtime every night, our old grandmother would tell us so many fairytales about 'byangoma and byangomi'; 'the pigeon king'; 'the four friends – the prince, the minister's son, the merchant's son, and the soldier's son'; 'the golden wand and the silver wand'; the story of the palm leaf scimitar and the Pokkhiraj horse waking up' etc. She would fluently narrate poems of Kabikankan and Kashiram Das. We fell asleep listening to them. Alas! Those were the blissful days of childhood! I will not forget them even at my death bed.*³²⁷

On the other hand Abanindranath's Swadeshi project of unification acknowledges a coexistence of classes, in their heterogeneity and differences, within the framework of a 'national' identity because once more to reiterate Tagore's view which Abanindranath clearly echoes, "it is true that in the human world only a perfect arrangement of interdependence gives rise to freedom" and because "Only those may attain freedom from the segregation of an eclipsed life who have the power to cultivate mutual understanding and co-operation".³²⁸ For Abanindranath, this outlook alone makes it possible to construct a 'home' that harmoniously unifies its dwellers and simultaneously builds up a communication with the 'world'. Thereafter, in *Banglar Brata* he seeks to present a universal picture of human yearnings in the brata—*Same ideas, same creations, same thoughts have independently emerged in different regions of the world – it's an ordinary phenomenon in the history of mankind.*³²⁹ He finds an essential unity in the ritualistic performances of Rome, Greece (the *shankhalata* pattern), America

³²⁷ আমাদের বুড়ো ঠাকুরমা রোজ রাতিরে শোবার সময় "বেঙ্গমাবেঙ্গুমি" "পায়রা রাজা" "রাজ পুত্রের পাত্তরের পুত্রের সওদাগরের পুত্রের অ কোটালের পুত্রের চার বন্ধু" "তালপাতার খাঁড়া জাগে, ও পক্ষিরাজ ঘোড়া জাগে" ও "সোনার কাটি রূপের কাঠি" প্রভৃতি কত রকম উপকথা কইতেন। কবিকঙ্কণ ও কাশিদাসের পয়ার মুখস্থ আওরাতেন- আমরা শুনতে শুনতে ঘুমিয়ে পরতুম! - হায়! বাল্যকালের সে সুখসময় মরণকালেও স্মরণ থাকবে Sinha, Kaliprasanna. *Hutum Pnchar Naksha*, Arun Nag ed. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2012. p.92

³²⁸ *The Religion of Man* p.170

³²⁹ : "একি চিন্তা একি শিল্প একি মণ্ডন পৃথিবীর ভিন্ন ভিন্ন অংশে স্বাধীনভাবে উৎপত্তি লাভ করেছে - এটা মানুষের ইতিহাসে একটা সাধারণ ঘটনা" *Banglar Brata* p.79

(Abanindranath refers to the practice of the *huichal* race)³³⁰, Peru (Abanindranath cites from *Myths of Mexico and Peru*)³³¹ and India. Such romantic universalism erodes parochialism³³², being a derivate of *akhanda* and validates Abanindranath's claim that raucous mechanical patriotic proclamations become puerile once they fail to appeal to a harmonious being of existence: *Hordes of leaders kept calling the mother nation and the mother Bengal in diverse bizarre tunes, the response was mellow.*³³³

³³⁰ Ibid p. 14

³³¹ Ibid p.28

³³² It is to be noted here that the idea of 'viswashakti' in the twentieth century was explicitly a type of nationalism. To Benoy Sarkar internationalism signified a vision of exploration and appropriation. He wrote, "It should be...our life's creed boldly to venture out into the world, discover which of the inventions, experiments, ideals, politics and laws of different nations are worth having, and introduce them to the Indian world through the Indian intermediaries". In an essay titled *Greater India*, Sarkar cited Radhakumud Mukherjee to express his ideas on 'Indian Asianism'. The notion of *Greater India* appealed to Sarkar not only because it took Indians out into the world under their own agency, reversed the racist politics of Asian exclusion, and supported his own vision of a healthy population, but also because it brought home to India what was most competitive in Asian culture, feeding his determination to reclaim the world as India's oyster. Satadru Sen Benoy Kumar Sarkar pp.114-15 Routledge, New Delhi 2015 Though Rabindranath did not share Sarkar's enthusiasm of uniting Japan and China with India through the evocation of a Hinduistic essence, he, in *Brihattoro Bharat (Kalantar 1937)* talks of the common cultural heritages of these countries by depicting India as the country from where these cultural traditions originated. In *Ras O Rachanar Dhara*, Abanindranath too talks of the Indian origin of the art of China and Japan, replicating the idea of Indian Asianism. *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali p.141*

³³³ "...দেশমাতা বঙ্গমাতাকে পালে পালে নেতা বিচিত্র সুর করে ডেকে চলল, সাড়া বেশিদূর পৌঁছতে পারল না" Ibid. p.145

Chapter- IV

The Romantic in the Paintings and *Kutum-Katam* of Abanindranath

While construing the aesthetics of a creative accomplishment, Abanindranath had also been interlinking the varied modes of artistic orientation. The exploration of homogeneity was targeted at augmenting a universal language of artistry that renders a holistic approach to creation. In *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* Abanindranath wrote: *Men have been using varied forms of expression in his work like that of art, words, acting and music till now... tune and form, speech and observation, all work together in a beautiful harmony*³³⁴ In setting apart all modes of art from a reality of the ‘photograph’, Abanindranath took up ‘*ananda*’, mirth, as the sole determinant in the expression of a creative acuity. The category of mirth, according to Abanindranath, ensures its uniform functionality in all art forms thereby conjoining these under the umbrella term of creation. Abanindranath thus unified art by demarcating it as a reflex of ‘*ananda*’, an equivalent of spontaneity. There is no doubt that the specificity of a spontaneous paradigm, which manifests itself in Abanindranath’s literary works, will have a similar essence in the art and sculpture of the artist-author. It is this very attribute that Abanindranath employs to define various arts as close allies. Every mode of art, Abanindranath contended, realises its meaning through the generation of ‘*rasa*’ as its end product. Abanindranath analogised ‘*rasa*’ as a principle of wholesomeness that operates as parts in the actualisation of a creative pronouncement. The Vedantic notion of Oneness is thus realised. In the expression of a multifaceted whole, art serves the purpose of bringing together the mundane and the eternal.

³³⁴ “ছবির ভাষা, কথার ভাষা, অভিনয়ের ভাষা ও সঙ্গীতের ভাষা এই রকম নানা ভাষা এ পর্যন্ত মানুষ কাজে খাটিয়ে আসছে...সুর আর রূপ, বলা ও দেখা, এরা সব কেমন মিলে জুলে কাজ করে...”, Tagore, Abanindranath. *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2008. p. 40

Abanindranath conceived the artistic self's journey towards eternity, '*ananta*', through an association of the real world and the ephemeral world of art as '*bhaba*'.

In expounding an allied world of artistic expressions of the eternal, Abanindranath mentions that the qualitative worth of language evolves from an internal passion of the human heart. This passion acts as a driving force and provides a continual momentum to the language of every creative force. He writes: *It's important to see whether the expression is effective, be it pictures, poetry or acting... The innate strength of a seed pushes it forward to grow towards light against the pull of the endless abyss. Similarly our natural qualities and potential act as the driving force behind the development of language*³³⁵ Abanindranath assigns a spirit of life force to the language of art that enlivens the varied forms of artistic expression— *Just like a charioteer rides his horse carriage in a spontaneous movement, similarly every minute manifestation of our expression moves through a flow of spontaneous language, be it that of a poet, an actor, a singer or a dancer*³³⁶ It is this characteristic spirit of a living entity that Abanindranath considers the fundamental and permanent principle of non-imitative art. By the means of a perennial mind, art differentiates itself from a photograph—*A photograph can turn a blind eye to the dark complexion of a woman, but a painting cannot do so. The heart must be truthful to create art*³³⁷ The idea of motion, in Abanindranath's aesthetic consideration, gets related to the notion of a vegetative growth where the seed takes its course of journeying on the earth. This organic idea of creativity immediately reminds one of the Keatsian formulations of the growth of a plant as an equivalent of spontaneous creation. The naturalness of artistic

³³⁵ “ছবি কবিতা অভিনয় যাই বলো সেটা চলল কিনা এই নিয়ে কথা...অন্তরের শক্তি বীজকে ঠেলে নিয়ে চলে আলোর অভিমুখে রসাতল ভেদ করে, ভাষাকেও গতি দেয় পরিপুষ্টতার দিকে মানুষের অন্তর বা মনের গুণ” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*. p.50

³³⁶ “সারথির মানস রসের মধ্য দিয়ে যেমন ঘোরাতে গিয়ে পৌঁছায় তেমনি মনের ভাবনার সামান্য ইঙ্গিতও ভাষার মধ্যে দিয়ে চলাচল করে, তা সে ছবির ভাষা কবির ভাষা বা অভিনেতার কি গায়কের বা নর্তকের ভাষা, যে ভাষাই হোক” *Ibid* p. 54

³³⁷ ফটোগ্রাফ মেয়ের কালো রঙটার বেলায় ফাঁকি দিয়ে চলে যেতে পারে, ছবি কিন্তু পারে না। সত্যি বলতেই হয় মনকে ছবিতে ধরবার বেলায়” *Ibid*. p. 54

forms that Abanindranath talks of, bears semblance to this very idea of organicism. To him it is the life force, lying embedded in a pre-natal stage of creativity that ultimately decides the course of creative forms. In *Shilpa o Dehatatwa*, we therefore find Abanindranath writing—*When we get hold of a seed, circular or flat, it retains its natural shape and features attributed to it at the time of its origin. But the moment it drops from the sack to the ground, it feels the release of rasas within itself and immediately starts transforming its shape and features*³³⁸.

With the fortifying idea of an endless motion characterising all art forms, Abanindranath sets to establish an essential connection among the forms of creativity across the world. As mentioned, the author-artist begins with talking of a unifying thread that binds varied artistic forms. The idea of a sameness gets depicted by Abanindranath in his attempt to view art as something to be realised in terms of transactions and exchanges. In entering into a mutual communion of cultural expressions, art, in Abanindranath's opinion, defies stagnation and enables a free flow of the living force within. The romantic idea of a 'language common to all men' finds meaning when Abanindranath tries to understand Indian art as a part of the artistic expressions of the world while defining its uniqueness and specificities. This is stated as—*Indian art is similar to, as well as different from, the art of the world.*³³⁹ In this act of defining the essence of Indian art, Abanindranath thus begins his discourse on an art-history. Here too, his contemplation of the category of 'rasa' functions as the primary indicator of the history of art: *The creator of the history of art is not a connoisseur of history but that of rasa.*³⁴⁰ The personages who contribute to the making of history, therefore, become to Abanindranath, artists themselves. No wonder then that Napoleon and Caesar become, to him, the makers of

³³⁸ একটা গাছের বীজ, সে তার নিজের আকৃতি ও প্রকৃতি যেমনটি পেয়েছে সেইভাবেই যখন হাতে পড়লো, তখন সে গোলাকার কি চ্যাপ্টা ইত্যাদি, কিন্তু সে খলি থেকে মাটিতে পড়েই রসের সঞ্চয় নিজের মধ্যে যেমনি অনুভব করলে অমনি বদলে চললো নিজের আকৃতি প্রকৃতি সমস্তই..." *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*.p. 72

³³⁹ "ভারত-শিল্প বিশ্বের শিল্পের সঙ্গে এক এবং পৃথক" *Ibid* p. 90

³⁴⁰ "আর্ট-এর ইতিহাস তার রচয়িতা ইতিহাসবেত্তা নয় রসবেত্তা" *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*. p. 72

world art. *Napoleon is an artist of the Vir Rasa*.³⁴¹ In identifying them as creators Abanindranath also marks them as explorers standing in compatibility with the seekers of art, who use their imagination to enter into the world of the unknown in search of aesthetic beauty. The world then becomes a storehouse of the wealth of beauty, the key to the discovery of which lies in the hands of artists. We are once more brought back to the theme of a romantic journey, the journey that circumscribes the literary texts of Abanindranath. Such quest for the yet to be discovered beauty outlaws the boundaries of countries— *On the opposite track of the measured opinions*³⁴² and chooses the means of reconciling with the ‘other’. Art-history, in documenting chronicles of cross-cultural contacts, thus becomes the means of articulating the vivacious, living nature of art. Abanindranath situates Indian art within such a frame of the history of art and contextualises the phases of reception that Indian art went through and has been undergoing till the present.

Abanindranath brings in the category of time as the major determinant in the evolution of art as a continuous process. He views art as something that undergoes a renewal with every new turn of history and learns to accomplish the task of a necessary assimilation. He mentions, *Art is not stagnant, like the earth, it too is ancient and youthful at the same time*,³⁴³ thereby formulating the receptive nature of art. This ‘youthful’ characteristic of art emerges from its abandonment of specificities of any ideal. For Abanindranath, any sort of inclination to embrace a particular ‘ideal’ prevents art from its free flow in the quest for beauty. Any ‘ideal’, according to him, poses as a hindrance to art in its organic nature of ‘becoming’— *Ideology is such a fleeting concept that one can’t work with it forever... what was a tuft of hair is now a*

³⁴¹ “নেপোলিয়ন বীররসের আর্টিস্ট” Ibid. p. 72

³⁴² “মাপে দাগা মতামতের উল্টো পথে” Ibid p. 99

³⁴³ “শিল্পের স্থবিরতা নেই, এই পৃথিবীর মতই সে প্রাচীনা অথচ চিরযৌবনা” Ibid p. 157

*tie, what was a wooden sandal is now a boot, and what not.*³⁴⁴ The replacement of the old by the new thus becomes an imperative in understanding the changing nature of aesthetics. Abanindranath, henceforth, comes up with his idea of amalgamation: *Thus art tries to synthesise traditional style with modern style*³⁴⁵. It is within this scheme of amalgamation that the author-artist sets to situate Indian art. Talking of the factor of temporality as influential in marking different strata of Indian art, Abanindranath refers to Kandinsky's statement that—"It is impossible for us to live and feel as did the ancient Greeks..."³⁴⁶. He magnifies the outstanding nature of Indian art in its eagerness to incorporate elements of world civilisations: *This is a great aspect of Indian civilisation – it has direct acquaintance with different art forms.*³⁴⁷ The process of amalgamation that Abanindranath talks of gets reflected in *Artistic inclination*³⁴⁸. Here he refers to the synthesis of Indian art with the art of the Mughals and the Turkish— *We can see this clearly in the art form of Emperor Akbar's time ; Indian art was about to merge with the great king of Delhi.*³⁴⁹ Citing the examples of the Qutub Minar and the mosque of Ajmer; the graves of Alauddin Khilji, Tughlaq Shah, and Abutorab; Abanindranath highlights the aesthetic conglomerate of cultures. He writes: *When observed, the union between Indian architecture and Turkish Architecture is clearly perceptible.*³⁵⁰ India's contact with Europe also does not remain unrecognised by Abanindranath. Mentioning the cross cultural exchanges between Greece and India he appreciates the worth of reception in the making of Indian aesthetics, *Indian art was not remotely afraid to come in contact with Greek art.*³⁵¹ He

³⁴⁴ “আদর্শতা এমনই আস্থায়ী জিনিস যে তাকে নিয়ে চিরকাল কারবার করা মুশকিল...ছিলো টিকি এলো টিয়ে, ছিলো খড়ম এলো বুট, এমন কত কি!” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*. p. 68

³⁴⁵ “এইজন্য শিল্পে পূর্বতন ধারার সঙ্গে নতুন ধারাকে মিলিয়ে ...” *Ibid*. p. 71

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*. p. 96

³⁴⁷ “ভারত সভ্যতার এই বড় দিক-নানা শিল্পের জিনিসের সঙ্গে সাক্ষাতভাবে পরিচয়” *Ibid*. p. 138

³⁴⁸ “শিল্পবৃত্তি” *Ibid*. p. 153

³⁴⁹ “আকবর-বাদশাহের সময়কার শিল্পে এর সুস্পষ্ট আভাস দেখা যায়; ভারতশিল্প মিলতে চলেছে...দিল্লিস্বরের পাশে” *Ibid*. p. 153

³⁵⁰ “...দেখলেই বোঝা যায় যে ভারতের স্থাপত্যের সঙ্গে তুরস্কের স্থাপত্যের পরিণয় ...” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali..* p. 154

³⁵¹ “... একটুও ভয় পায়নি ভারত-শিল্প গ্রীসের স্পর্শে আসতে” *Ibid*. p. 132

also refers to the common pattern of line-drawing in ancient Egypt and Indian ‘*talpatar puthi*’ (manuscript inscribed on palm leaves).³⁵² The Far East becomes a zone of regard for Abanindranath. His keenness of unifying the eastern world with the artistic lineage of India arises out of the zeal of equating the two in terms of a commonness of heritage— *The art of China, Japan, and the Indian subcontinent borrowed some elements from The Mughal style and some from the indigenous Indian style to finally embody an extraordinary form.*³⁵³ In embarking on the vitality of a cross-cultural transaction, Abanindranath insists on the necessity of understanding those received components of art and aesthetics that are functional in the construct of a homogeneous Indian identity. His contemplation of this factor goes as follows: *There is hardly anything that we didn't get from our ancestors in terms of poetry, literature or music...we have conquered, collected and even borrowed from different countries.*³⁵⁴

In his surveillance of the world of art and aesthetics, as unified through a process of mutual communication and understanding, Abanindranath bases his theory on the fact that every kind of art originates from an urge to discover a holistic and undivided nature of beauty that is experienced through stratified individual consciousness, a parole. A search for ‘*rup*’ (beauty), Abanindranath opines, drives the animated creative force of every artist. This ‘*rup*’ gets realised in a spirited playfulness, i.e. ‘*leela*’. He places the artist in a zone of this ‘*leela*’, in a space where he rejoices in engaging himself in his own ‘*leela*’ and the ‘*leela*’ of the world as well, *It expresses a dalliance between the self and the world at large.*³⁵⁵ The artist and his art henceforth are made to appear in an active conversation with the whole world. The evolution of art, in universe. Abanindranath’s theorisation thus happens to be a continuous process of the

³⁵² Ibid. p.214

³⁵³ “চীন ও জাপান এবং ভারতের উপনিবেশ সমস্তের শিল্প কতক মঘল কতক ভারত-শিল্পের রাস্তা ধরে বিচিত্র রূপ ধরলে ...” Ibid. p.141

³⁵⁴ “আমরা উত্তরাধিকারসূত্রে পাইনি এমন কিছু নেই বললেই চলে-কাব্যে সাহিত্যে সঙ্গীত...দেশ-দেশান্তর থেকে জয় করে সংগ্রহ করে ধার এমনকি চেয়ে আনা টাও!” Ibid. p.203

³⁵⁵ “নিজের ও বিশ্বের লীলার পরিচয় ধরেছে” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*. p.199

artist's coming to terms with beauty having time and place as principal formatives. He views the history of art as the documentation of the common search for beauty through ages. Taking up the example of how the beauty of the human figures gets depicted from different angles in different ages, Abanindranath refers to its handling by the Spaniards (their line-drawing during the three phases of Aurignacian, Solutrian and Magdalenian ages) and the Australian Bushmen. He connects cultures thus by magnifying the varied manifestations of a same object of artistic inspiration. The acknowledgement of the different phases of artistic representations becomes to him the prerogative of understanding beauty and truth and feeling as its close associates. It is in this context that he venerates the European ethos of handling art-history. Appreciating Europe's emphasis on '*rupbidya*' (the study of beauty), Abanindranath reminds his fellow Indians to delve into the search for a chronotopic analysis of the 'beautiful': *This is how Europeans are working. With lumps of clay they are recreating every page of every chapter of the evolution of this world till today— it's as engrossing as a novel, as mesmerising as a fairytale.*³⁵⁶ With this theory of the origin of artistic beauty (*sristitatwa*) he moves on to conjoin Bengal's folk-painting of the '*shankhalata*' with that of the spiral motifs of ancient Greece.³⁵⁷ Similarly, in *Arya o Anarya Shilpa* of *Bagiswari*, the stance of an artistic unity is brought out by drawing close similarities between the pictorial depictions of the Garo and Khasi tribes and the Red Indians; and between the patterns of nature worship by the Indian Buddhists and Vaishnavites and the Maoris of New Zealand.

Abanindranath's consideration of art as a common expression of mankind bars him from according any specific nomenclature to any particular form of art. Any compartmentalisation, for him, prevents the connoisseur of art from extracting 'beauty', the

³⁵⁶ "...ইউরোপের মানুষ-তারা তো চলেছে এইভাবে, তারা তো মাটির তলা থেকে পৃথিবীর সৃষ্টিতত্ত্বের এক-এখানি পাতা এক-এক অধ্যায় উঠিয়ে নিয়ে সম্পূর্ণ করেছে পৃথিবীর জন্ম থেকে আজ পর্যন্ত তার রূপের নানা পরিবর্তনের ইতিহাস-উপান্যাসের মতই বা মনহার, রূপকথার মতই যা অদ্ভুত" Ibid p.203

³⁵⁷ *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali..* p. 201

sole feature of all art. Therefore the demarcations between ‘fine art’ and ‘industrial art’ become vague categories to the author-artist. He notes— *The world of art is to evaluate creation: it's not about social or moral hierarchy, it's not about identifying gods, people or animals; the only rule is to judge everything from the perspective of artistry. Art for art is the only truth for an artist.*³⁵⁸ Abanindranath perceives the co-mingling of ‘*rup*’ and ‘*ras*’, as perceived by the mind, in terms of a spousal union, much like Wordsworth.³⁵⁹ As opposed to Kant, he subordinates the sensory organs to that of the mind and attests the activism of the latter to the production of beauty. This is described as: *It became visible, it could be heard, then it disappeared in the air—it didn't reach the heart, touch the soul.*³⁶⁰ The beauty of art then becomes for Abanindranath a ‘*maya*’ (magic) that is to render meaning to the ‘*kaya*’ (the body) and stand as the denominator of what he terms ‘artistic anatomy’³⁶¹. In adhering to the idea of a mystic union of the form and the content of art, Abanindranath speculates on the various forms of painting, as the representation of beauty in its heterogenic identities. ‘Landscape’, ‘portrait’ or ‘caricature’ thus appear to him as having their uniform origin from merger of the ‘*rong*’ (colour) and ‘*rekha*’ (lines).³⁶² For him, the classifications of art forms work on the principle of sameness in diversities. We are once more brought back to the fact that Abanindranath refrains from the construct of the binaries of the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘ugly’ because ‘*rup*’, to him, stands quintessentially as ‘*akhanda*’, the undivided concrete. To him ‘*rup*’ reveals itself in a two-way form—either through a vivid visibility or through a hidden connotative indicator. Abanindranath sees the discriminations between the ‘Idealist’ and ‘Realist’ approaches to art as merely these

³⁵⁸ “আর্টের জগত শিল্প কি শিল্প নয় এই নিয়ে,—উচ্চ-নীচ ভালো মন্দ ভেদাভেদ, দেবতা কি মানুষ কি বানর এ নিয়ে দেখা নয়,—আর্ট কি আর্ট নয় এই নিয়ে সব জিনিসকে পরীক্ষা করা হলো অকাট্য নিয়ম। আর্ট ফর আর্ট এই কথাই হলো আর্টিস্ট এর...” Ibid. p. 105

³⁵⁹ Wordsworth talks of a prothalamion celebrating the marriage of the mind and nature in *The Recluse*

³⁶⁰ “...জিনিসটা চোখের উপরে এলো, কানের কাছে এলো, বাতাসে ভেসে গেল-মনে পৌঁছলোনা, প্রাণেও বাজলোনা কিছু।” Ibid. p.137

³⁶¹ Ibid. p. 79

³⁶² *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali*. p. 114

two facets of the same coin. He has little regards, therefore, for the compartmentalisation of art as Futurist, Cubist, Impressionist and mystic.³⁶³ The presence of ‘rasa’ induced by ‘rup’, gets considered by Abanindranath, as the integral principle of all art. It is this principle that provides the basic integrity to art of individual countries. The art of India, Europe, China, and Japan owe their differences to the mere variations in techniques and tradition. In Abanindranath’s coinage, these ‘nations’ otherwise establish a kinship through the medium of uniformity, brought in by ‘rasa’: *A study of art from the perspective of the distinction among artists based on origin—time—subject is similar to a very casual acquaintance with art through history and archaeology. The other form of acquaintance with art can be from the perspective of rasa where one doesn't need any classification or an understanding of the enigmas of history. It is how men from one country are unique yet similar to men from other countries.*³⁶⁴

In opening up a ‘new’ perspective in understanding/defining ‘Indian’ art, Abanindranath uses this very philosophy of the ‘swatantra’ (individuality) and the ‘ek’ (uniformity) while elaborating on ‘rup’ and ‘ras’. His ‘shilpacharcha’ rests on the principle of discarding an obsession with the past thereby ensuring an unhampered functioning of the present. The amalgamation is executed through Abanindranath’s reliance on the Upanishads and the Indian treatises on beauty (Hemchandra, Kalidas); and a reception of art techniques from across the world in formulating an aesthetics of imagination and soulful rendition. The ‘unity’ in art that he tries to evoke is expounded by the spirit in his paintings and sculpture that emit ‘romantic’ essences.

³⁶³ Ibid. p. 190

³⁶⁴ “এই যে শিল্পের শিল্পের মোটামুটি জাতি বিভাগ দেশ-কাল-পাত্র ভেদে ঘটেছে, সেই দিক দিয়ে শিল্পচর্চা করে দেখার মানে হলো শিল্পের সঙ্গে ইতিহাস পুরাত্ন ইত্যাদি নিয়ে একেবারে বাইরে বাইরে পরিচয়। আরেক দিক দিয়ে পরিচয়-সে হলো রসের দিক দিয়ে, সেখানে জাতি বিভাগ ঐতিহাসিক রহস্য ইত্যাদি না হলেও কাজ চলে যায়। এক দেশের মানুষ অন্য দেশের মানুষে যেমন একদিক দিয়ে স্বতন্ত্র, তেমনি অন্য দিক দিয়ে এক” Ibid. p.171

With prioritising the spontaneity of beauty as the defining factor of aesthetics, Abanindranath had set himself to reclaim a new space for Indian art. The pre-given paintings of Ajanta then appeared too ‘conventional’ to him. In the Mughal approaches to painting Abanindranath felt the absence of imagination. The ‘toy-like’ figures in the Mughal paintings failed to appeal to his sense of ‘*rasa*’. In upholding the passionate feeling of an artist in the creative zest, Abanindranath mentions his own concern (*darad*) in understanding what he terms Indian art: *Because of this concern, I have not stopped exploring the art of different countries.*³⁶⁵ The glimpses of world art revealed to him the true nature of the creative impulse—the journey into the unexplored. He contends that this journey of the soul (he calls it ‘instinct’) landed him in the search for an individual path with its idiosyncrasies of establishing a balance with the world. It is this very realm of understanding the artistic self in relation to the up and running universe that induces a sense of incompleteness, a feeling of an unfulfilled attainment in art. The continuous desire for reaching the ‘absent’ defers the arrival of a finality and accelerates the search for the ideal. The more the generation of the ideal the more intense gets the attachment to it. As Abanindranath writes: *If a painting reaches completeness it becomes futile – a painting must always seek something.*³⁶⁶ These are the very formative principles that Abanindranath tries to incorporate in his idea of Indian art. He found the existing art of his country as lacking in these necessary prerogatives. He found it impoverished and incomplete: *Indian art had come to me like a poor beggar-woman – I devoted myself to its service.*³⁶⁷ Refining it meant to Abanindranath a repudiation of the vestiges of old verisimilitudes to attain a glory through a renewed association of the artist with his art.

³⁶⁵ “এই দরদের জন্যই দেশবিদেশের শিল্প ঘেঁটে দেখতে বাকি রাখিনি” Chanda, Rani. *Silpigu Abanindranath*. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1999. p.53

³⁶⁶ “ছবিতে পরিপূর্ণতা এসে গেলেই মাটি-ছবিতে সব সময়ই কিছু চাইবে” *Shilpigu Abanindranath*. p. 15

³⁶⁷ “ইন্ডিয়ান আর্ট আমার কাছে ভিখারিনীর মত এসেছিল-লেগে গেলুম তার সেবায়” *Ibid*. p. 49

In his conception of Indian art Abanindranath considers nature to be the source of all arts. He finds in nature the abundant presence of a sublimity that appeals to the human mind. In the act of exploring beauty, the artist as the creator, begins to work like a ‘collaborator’ between art and nature. He tends to take up objects of compositions from nature as they exist to be and then in turn adds a tint of his own version of beauty to it thus endowing it with a second order of signification. The ‘crudities’ of the storehouse of nature, therefore, become things to be furnished with the artist’s attachment of beauty to it. In setting up such a kinship between nature and its interpreter, Abanindranath appears once again to highlight the overlap of the observer and the observed. The pantheistic overview that he articulates, sets to relate nature and the artist in terms of a benign association, where both nature and the artist are meant to celebrate the festivities of their souls: *Keep your heart festive— nature around you is celebrating*³⁶⁸, as he contends. An activism of the artist’s soul concordant with nature’s musings is what Abanindranath views as the way to artistic appropriation. It is in this context that he reminds the connoisseurs of his aesthetics that Gauguin’s attempts to find ‘crudities’ in African culture failed. Abanindranath concludes that the futile search for an unadorned reality lands one up in a vagueness of artistic accomplishments. To him beauty rests in a concreteness of forms that generates a magnified order of perception in its seeker. Abanindranath finds the abstraction in art insignificant because of its dearth of ability to associate with the elemental energies of nature that lends the beauteous primacy to art. No abstractions thus supplement the inspirations that nature, as a mentor, seems to offer. *There is no greater teacher than nature*³⁶⁹. Abstract art therefore emerges as meaningless to Abanindranath. He expresses his distaste for it in the following way: *Everyone is creating abstract art now. Is Milk of magnesia the abstract of*

³⁶⁸ “মনে উৎসব রাখো-উৎসব চলছে প্রকৃতিতে” Ibid. p.40

³⁶⁹ “নেচারের মত বড় মাস্টার আর নেই” *Shilpiguru Abanindranath* p. 100

milk.³⁷⁰ It is the same dislike for the absence of a holistic feature in art that underlies his objection to surrealist art. His remark obliquely degrades the surrealist approach— *Screaming in the name of surrealism is like a turtle dreaming of flying*.³⁷¹ What is vital for Abanindranath is then the simultaneous existence of ‘*bhava*’, (the emotional state) in both nature and the artist, a phenomenon that surrealist art fails to capture. It is out of this virtuosity that Van Gogh gets identified by Abanindranath as ‘*bhabonmad*’ (someone fervid with emotion). He infers that the specific kind of style people attach to Van Gogh’s painting is a falsifier because that is not a style at all— *That is not style... it's about the ardour of emotions*.³⁷² Finding a nomenclature for art is thus as purposeless for Abanindranath (who perceives ‘styles’ as representations of nature in its varied manifestations) as different facets of ‘*bhava*’. In such speculation he allows for a liberation of art from institutional denominations and advocates a naturalness of expression.

The paintings of *Swapnaprayan*

Abanindranath’s career as an artist evolves through his paintings for *Sadhana*, the magazine that published his illustration for Dwijendranath Tagore’s *Swapnaprayan* (1981). With Gilhardi as his mentor, his was attracted to an imitative art, copying things as accurately as possible to enter into a photographic reality. While a student at the Sanskrit college he began to make portraits of his servants, hawkers and people who surrounded him at Jorasanko. His father Gunendranath’s house was decorated with Western artefacts, oil-paintings as well as Kalighat ‘*pats*’, paintings in the Jaipur style, and toys from Krishnanagar. Abanindranath mentions that his journey to the world of art began at his aunt Kumudini’s house where he came by varied artistic objects. The painting for *Sadhana* was followed by his paintings for Rabindranath’s *Chitrangada* (1892). Abanindranath’s paintings of Arjuna and Chitrangada

³⁷⁰ “আজকাল অ্যাবস্ট্রাক্ট আর্ট করে সব, দুধের অ্যাবস্ট্রাক্ট কি মিল্ক অফ ম্যাগ্নেসিয়া” Ibid. p. 85

³⁷¹ “সুরিয়ালিস্ম কি জানো-সুরিয়ালিস্ম বলে চৈঁচানো ঠিক কচ্ছপের ওড়ার কল্পনা করা” Ibid. p. 85

³⁷² “ও স্টাইল নয়...ভাবোন্মাদনার কথা” Ibid. p. 97

along with his painting of *Bimbabati* (1892) mark his emphasis on maintaining a symmetrical correspondence with the text. In trying to place the text and the image on the same surface area of the page, there is a conscious attempt, on the part of the artist, to prioritise the intensity of lines that mark the separation of the text and the image. The romantic image of Chitrangada, which Siva Kumar terms ‘languid romantic’, emerges from Abanindranath’s attempt to highlight the sublimity of beauty and spontaneity through which the character of Chitrangada undermines gender constructs. Abanindranath’s Chitrangada, much like Abanindranath’s Sakuntala, derives her strength not from what Siva Kumar thinks to be a ‘radical spirit’ but from a reconciliation of dignity and femininity that corresponds to a universal harmony in nature itself. Chitrangada, is placed by Abanindranath amidst a bower with small blooming flowers around her where she weaves a flower garland. It appears that Abanindranath visualises Rabindranath’s character as an evolving self who responds to the gradual growth and flowering of nature. Chitrangada’s evolution has been placed in the ambience of an organic growth of nature and the individual.

During his initial years as an artist Abanindranath was drawn towards the paintings of Ravi Varma and Michelangelo. His chief interest lay in copying these artists and advocating a European academic realism. With developing a gradual repulsion towards oil-painting, Abanindranath began using the medium of water-colour to paint landscapes and portraits. The lighter medium seems to have provided him with a freedom of expression, a quality that the author-artist would nurture throughout his life. Abanindranath was also, at this stage of his career, starting to develop his own individual mode of painting. He had been introduced to a set of Irish melodies as well as a set of Indian miniatures—a combination of which would become a constitutive element of his oeuvre.

The Krishnaleela Series

Abanindranath's *Krishna Leela* series, in effect, becomes the domain where the artist attempts to reconcile the Indian and the European through the employment of text drawn from traditional Bengali literature. Taking his cue from Mughal miniature paintings, Abanindranath sets the characters of his *Krishna Leela* series in the style of the former within the idiom of feelings, 'bhava'. It is with a heightened 'bhava', emerging from his own imagination, that he draws juvenile Krishna.³⁷³ With a European mode of exhibiting the external features of Radha, Krishna and the group of people surrounding them, Abanindranath uses Persian calligraphy to inscribe the verses from the Vaishnava text. He constructs a heterogeneous space where various forms of art merge to create a homogeneity of expressions and thereby a universal nature of art. The text of *Vaishnava Padavali* renders a space for communitarian engagement because they are primarily meant to be sung together in the form of 'kirtanas'. It appears that Abanindranath chooses this very text, meant for communitarian practice, to depict the nature of self-experience vis-à-vis society. Here the individual emerges as a part of his community, retaining at the same time his own identity as an individual self, trying to come to terms with the universe around. Abanindranath explores the double states of the interiority of the individual mind and the exteriority of the outdoor world through his employment of both the Eastern and the Western aesthetics. He uses an abundance of blue to depict Radha's desire to escape from a mundane world of the 'samsara' to enter the wide open world of dreams, the utopia, represented by the blue colour of Krishna. Radha is placed in-between the two worlds—a material one constituted by the family, the other being a spiritual one embodying Krishna. Abanindranath delineates Radha's journey of being to becoming by constantly positing her against the blue sky. This becomes specifically evident in *Nau-Vihar* where Radha has one of

³⁷³ In *Jorasankor Dhare* Abanindranath mentions of his painting Krishna on a lotus by listening to the description of Krishna by Khetranath kathak. *Jorasankor Dhare*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.I, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2010.p. 216

her feet set in the boat with a sail and the other on the ground, with stones scattered over it. Using a mellow flesh-tone colour Abanindranath tries to capture Radha's being caught in the spiritual world of Krishna's sailing boat and in a human world where women head towards home with water pitchers, implying their daily chores. In effect it is Radha rather than Krishna who occupies a larger space in the *Krishna Leela* series. The dynamism of Radha's character is what finds a place of worth in *Sakhi-Samvad*, where it is the exterior represented by the 'sakhi' and the blooming tree that gets highlighted. Radha, in this painting, is made to occupy a meagre space, one from which she seeks liberation. It is as if the outdoors invite Radha to respond to the orchestration of nature. Here Abanindranath brings out the relational realm of the self and the universe by conjoining Radha's 'smaller' self with vast world around. This conjoining gets explicated in *Abhisar*, the meeting, where Radha's drape takes up Krishna's blue hue. The entwined space of Radha and Krishna unites the external and the internal in *Maan*, where Abanindranath's paintings of divine beings become the anecdotes of individuals. It is as such that in *Maan*, the artist paints a heavy curtain from behind which a woman tries to peep. The painting becomes the metaphor for an interior space of the mind, the celebratory space of spontaneous sentiments, which restricts the intrusion of a social order. The whole of *Krishna Leela* series is structured on the notions of individuality and the journey of the self, in search of a union with the universe. Interestingly Abanindranath begins this series with people of all age groups gathering to rejoice at the birth of Krishna (*Nandotsava*). This painting, picturing the enormity of community, (an aspect already discussed) is set in a multiplicity of bright colours indicating a heterogeneity in its content and form. *Krishna Leela* then gradually moves on to the depiction of a contracted space in *Hori*, for instance: a space of intimacy shared by lovers in the company of fellow-mates. Hence the usage of colours too, in this painting, gets narrowed down to capture this space of kinship. Abanindranath uses green as the dominant colour in *Hori*. Green depicts the youthful nature of love celebrated by all those allies, who

unite through sharing a bond. It also implies the embracing of the whole of nature by these allies. Nature and the selves thus gets united through the celebration of festivity—*Prakriti Utsab* (festival of nature) as Abanindranath terms it. It is through these modes of painting that the artist features the communitarian element in *Krishna Leela*. However, it is important to note that this series ends with the loneliness of Radha. *Viraha* becomes the reflector of a lonely and pensive bride, clad in a red saree and adorned with heavy jewellery, awaiting her lover's return. The construct of Radha along the lines of European realistic paintings makes her more of a breathing character than any divine entity. Here again the 'individual' returns from 'community' to an isolated space of 'being', where the externalities of ornaments become less significant than 'feelings'.

Abhisarika, Buddha and Sujata, and The Traveller and the Lotus

After he finished the *Krishna Leela* series, Abanindranath met E. V. Havell in 1896. Havell's interest in restoring indigenous art made Abanindranath use Pahari paintings, especially the Kangra paintings, as his inspiration. R. Siva Kumar notes that this usage "...introduces an interplay of order and asymmetry" into his pictures of this phase and "renders irregular what initially looks regular; in doing so slyly transforms appropriation into innovation".³⁷⁴ Abanindranath employs the style of Kangra in painting *Abhisarika* (1901), *Buddha and Sujata* (1901). In *Buddha and Sujata* the artist places Lord Buddha and his devotee Sujata against the backdrop of a banyan tree, the rendition of which has got "Pre-Raphaelite influences".³⁷⁵ The plants, in their full bloom, on the other hand resemble Mughal paintings. In this coalesced space of the Indian and the European, we discern Abanindranath's effort of focusing on '*bhava*'. With the old banyan tree being symbolic of the primordial crudities of life (the irregular patterns of the trunk leading to the formation of depths), a feature expressed through the density

³⁷⁴ Kumar, R Siva. *Paintings of Abanindranath Tagore*. Kolkata: Pratikshan, 2008. p.68

³⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 68

of the prop-roots, Abanindranath demarcates Buddha's domain of '*mukti*' and Sujata's realm of the earthly '*samsar*'. The banyan tree stands to separate the two worlds of renunciation and attachment represented by a sky-blue tone and a brown one respectively. The painting embodies the lyrical rendition of the story of Buddha and Punna in *Nalak* albeit in a modality of patterns. The reconciliation of opposites of the two zones of 'being' provides a uniformity of both form and theme, in the picture. The theme of two different realms forms the crux of *Abhisarika* too. The dainty figure of *abhisarika*, like Radha, has been placed amidst these two worlds. The female figure is shown to be yearning for an escapade from her familiar terrain but at the same time she has been pictured in a way that shows her somewhat hesitant state of mind, with her looking backward to reality. She celebrates her 'self' when longing for her lover and this is brought forth through the serenity of the whiteness of her garment. This sublimity of the white contrasts the darkness of black which depicts the *abhisarika*'s disregard for the societal order. She transcends her known world and commences her journey of exploration of the self and moves towards a truth keeping behind a dense dark world of transience. The *abhisarika*'s transparent green veil thus becomes a signifier of the transparency of a world of love, which the *abhisarika* foresees through the power of her romantic vision. The character's realm then culminates in a reality that "is essentially subjective and pictorial".³⁷⁶ If the journey of *abhisarika* speaks of a motion, the traveller embodies a spirit of stasis in *The Traveller and the Lotus* (1900). Abanindranath balances the changing movements during a travel with that of a fixity of love, symbolised by the white lotus. The painting stands to delineate the acknowledgement of the powers of love and beauty in the course of 'experiencing' the world. Experiencing thus becomes an aesthetic act in which beauty becomes an equivalent of truth. Abanindranath uses saffron, in his painting, to signify a sense of detachment from the familial world. The white lotus, as it appears, reminds the traveller of his beloved and associates it with

³⁷⁶ *Paintings of Abanindranath Tagore*. P. 68

his beloved. This aspect of the associative power of the human mind is set against a flat brownish tinge foregrounding a tranquil vision that evokes the agency of memory in the act of aesthetic contemplation. The traveller thus becomes Abanindranath's creative artist, the second creator in a tranquil moment of solitude and nostalgia.

The Building of the Taj and The Passing of Shah Jahan

The Building of the Taj (1901) and *The Passing of Shah Jahan* stand as two of Abanindranath's famous paintings representing the 'small narratives' of history. Abanindranath borrows the themes of these paintings from Mughal history but uses Western modes of painting in illustrating these.³⁷⁷ In *The Building of the Taj* has in it three figures of an architect sitting with an image of the Taj in his hands, an attendant and the carver surrounding Shah Jahan, who has his gaze fixed on the unfinished Taj and pays little attention to these men around. In such a dramatic space Abanindranath focuses on the interiority of the emperor's mind that contemplates a journey. This journey, conceived through a childlike vision that foresees the evolution of the beautiful, is again an aesthetic one, letting the *a priori* order of beauty function very differently from the Kantian formulation. The vision, very similar to that of *Nalak*, is set in a terrain of a stormy sky with a half-built Taj flickering against it. The Tajmahal has been portrayed as having a veiled appearance which Shah Jahan intends to unveil so as to enter into a world of Ideas. The objectification of beauty that Shah Jahan foresees in the Taj, is achieved through his very subjective categorisation of intense thoughts with which the emperor remains preoccupied. Hence the externalities of the accompanying men cannot draw the mighty emperor's attention. Shah Jahan perceives the Taj as mightier than him even if it appears small and distant from his viewing position. He sees it with the vision of a seer who is oblivious of

³⁷⁷ *Paintings of Abanindranath Tagore*, p. 70

his majestic power in an effort to think of a utopic world beyond death in the Taj, to be built in memory of his dead wife. Death thus becomes a herald of life and continues to ‘become’ like the Taj. Abanindranath’s abundant usage of green, in *The Building of the Taj*, emits the essence of his romanticising death as a constructive principle of a continuing phenomenon called life. The representation of death achieves another form in *The Passing of Shah Jahan*. In this painting Abanindranath deals with a two-fold dimension of time—one of transience brought in with the image of the dying emperor, the other with the images of youth symbolised by the Taj and the emperor’s daughter. The painting is a visual depiction of history that exists through continuity of remembrances as does the grand memorial Taj. It captures the interiority of Shah Jahan’s life and defines death as an organic force that supersedes worldly acquirements. Hence, Shah Jahan emerges, in the picture, not as a mighty being but as a mortal father who has his daughter as his sole companion at a moment of solitude and silence (the imagery of the clouded moon) in contrast to the group of men surrounding him in *The Building of the Taj*. It is to be noted here that Abanindranath was reminiscent of his own daughter’s death while painting *The Passing of Shah Jahan*. So with his positing the Taj, in both *The Building of the Taj* and *The Passing of Shah Jahan*, at the background, the artist was focusing on the variety of human feeling that gets evoked through the associative principle of the mind that renders meaning to objects. It is because of this generative subjectivity that Abanindranath sets to equate the whiteness of the Taj with the white robe of Shahjahan, to unite both in terms of a pristine virtuosity. The beauty of this coalesced space of the subject and the object thus stands in synchrony with the beauty of the ornamental Mughal patterns that define the architectural setting of *The Passing of Shah Jahan*. Abanindranath works on the intricate floral patterns on the marble structure as splendidly as he does to describe the intricate network of sentiments that define human life.

Bharat Mata

If *The Passing of Shah Jahan* magnifies the image of the father, *Bharat Mata* (1905) becomes the celebratory space of motherhood, conceived in terms of the bestower of cloth, food, education and a spiritual sensibility. The focus on the contours in *The Passing of Shah Jahan* gets replaced with the wash technique, one that Abanindranath develops out of his appropriation of Japanese modes of painting. Initially drawn as *Banga Mata* or the mother of Bengal, this painting was turned into a representative figure of India by nationalists like Nivedita. But contrary to Nivedita's idealising of the mother nation as Kali, the powerful goddess, as discussed in the previous chapter, Abanindranath refrains from taking up any ideological stand. He chooses to paint his *Bharat Mata* with the likeness of his own daughter's face. With its interblending of colours under the effect of the wash, this painting rather becomes a dreamscape of an 'imagined community', manifesting itself through cultural expressions. In its featuring of the floating white lotuses and a luminous background, *Bharat Mata* comes close to *Saraswati* that Hishida painted in 1903. The colours of the elemental forces of nature, air, water and earth, in the painting, merge to accentuate a light blue tone inside the halo that stands for the sky: the domain of 'mukti'. The conjoining of the forces of nature to ensure a harmonious stability entails a spirit of Sarada in Biharilal Chakraborty's *Saradamangal* albeit in a concretised order of imagined vivacity.

Ganesh Janani

That Abanindranath was not a propagandist, with an Orientalist propensity to glorify a Hindu spiritualism, especially in his *Bharat Mata*, becomes explicit if one deciphers his notion of motherhood in *Ganesh Janani* (1905). Abanindranath secularises the religious, in this painting, by showing the mother of infant Ganesha letting him break a twig from a bent tree. Abanindranath, here, contemplates the non-intervention of a mother rejoicing in her child's

exploration of nature. Using a monochromatic setting, the artist chooses to categorise the bond that a mother shares with her child. The crux of the painting being the elective affinity, Abanindranath declines from using the medium of colours so as to celebrate the spontaneity of a bond that is primordial in its essence and that continues to exist across time and space. The mother, with her stillness, becomes the symbol of an unchanging order which establishes the relational realm between the signifier and the signified to generate meaning. She becomes like the mother of Wordsworth, resting on whose lap the infant establishes a bond with nature and hence universe as well. *Ganesh Janani* thus becomes synchronous with the mother of Anguti-Panguti in *Khatanchir Khata*, who shares, with her children, the proclivity to enter a world of the make-believe. ‘*Mukti*’, once more becomes a defining motif in the painting and Ganesh far from being a God as in *Buro Angla*, emerges as one who too delights in experiencing ‘*mukti*’. Abanindranath’s notion of ‘*dhyān*’, meditation and freedom, as non-religious categories, here achieves another secularised facet.

Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam Series

In *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1906-1910) and the *Arabian Nights* series, the ‘unbiased’ Abanindranath chooses contents from ‘Islamic’ texts to articulate his poetic imagination. Interestingly the artist takes up Fitzgerald’s translation of the *Rubaiyat* as his source text. Abanindranath uses Fitzgerald’s Orientalist construct of the *Rubaiyat* to give it new meanings and pictorial vivacity. Fitzgerald’s introduction of a subjective order to the quatrains of the original text had implanted, in his translation, “...an allusion to the progress of the day, a thematic programme altogether alien to the original in which individual quatrains were alphabetically arranged according to the end letter of the rhyming word”.³⁷⁸ Abanindranath

³⁷⁸ Fitzgerald’s Orientalist approach in reworking of the Persian text included a change in the order of verses. In a letter to Edward Cowell in 1951 he wrote, ‘It is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians, who were not poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little Art to shape them.’ This is quoted from Tejaswini Niranjana, ‘*Colonialism and the Aesthetics of Translation*’,

adopted this aspect of the translation, and though he essentially related each painting to a single quatrain, certain iconographic aspects of his images become clear only when the concerned quatrain is read in conjunction with adjacent verses. The artist concentrates on relating the thematic and stylistic elements in an imaginative manner. In verse 50, for instance, Abanindranath takes the liberty of interpreting the text in his own unique way of replacing the ball that “no question makes of Ayes and Noes/ But Right or Left as the Player goes” with an image of an old man, riding on a boat with a book, an empty bottle of wine and a playful kitten. He uses the wash technique to paint a greenish darkness brought in by the pale moon. The romantic notion of the play-drive of life, urging the creative artist to undertake an endless journey for seeking beauty, becomes explicit in the metaphor of the self’s journey without destination. Abanindranath uses an old man to feature an unextinguished thirst of the self for ‘becoming’, a desire that continues throughout the whole of life. The old man thus becomes the ‘player’, who having drunk the pleasures of life to the fullest, sails in search for newer meanings of life, the course of which gets steered by him in his own individual way. His experiencing once more turns out to be an aesthetic one, being renewed with each new course of life that he chooses to take up. The symbol of the cat, considered to have an enormity of nine lives, hence, stands as the virgin courses of life as it gets renewed through the agency of an individual. Through a darkness, which is at the same time virgin (the green tone), defining the painting, Abanindranath depicts the unexplored “deep romantic chasm”³⁷⁹ of life.

The desire to look for meanings in life receives another dimension in the painting corresponding to verse 29. Once again Abanindranath answers the ontological questions of ‘why’, ‘whence’ and ‘wither’, expressed in the verse, through a hazy surfacing of green. The protagonist of this painting holds a bowl and has a book by his side, depicting an individual’s

Interrogating Modernity. Tejaswini, Niranjana. *Colonialism and the Aesthetics of Translation*, *Interrogating Modernity*. Kolkata: Seagull Books, 1993. p. 319

³⁷⁹ *Kubla Khan*. Taylor, Samuel Coleridge.

thirst and appetite for knowledge. This search for knowledge, Abanindranath contends, becomes a magical search, a ‘willy-nilly’ one without an end. Hence he places the protagonist in the domain where earth, air and water coalesce to create a maze of meanings. The self thus realises itself in its communion with the elementary forces of the universe and the journey for a mystical search for significations that appear floating in the picture. Abanindranath makes his protagonist bear the likeness of a seer who tends to give form to Ideas and capture the transient nature of life in its concreteness.

Abanindranath continues to deal with the meaning of life, as experienced by the self, in his painting of verse 37. Here we find a man and a woman inside a tent, the man holds a glass of wine while the woman embraces him tenderly. If the previous painting dealt with the spatial issues of existence, this is the one that focuses on the aspect of temporality of life. The tent becomes the indicator of the nomadic nature of life; the dying fire outside becomes the end of time. Through the embracing woman Abanindranath illustrates the momentary happiness of life to which one wants to cling to through the whole of existence. His painting tries to celebrate these very fragmentary moments despite their transience. Thus the spirit of a Keatsean drunkenness emerges in the verse that notes—“Ah, fill the Cup:-what boots it to repeat/ How Time is slipping underneath our feet: / Unborn TO-MORROW and dead YESTERDAY, / Why fret about them if TO-DAY be sweet!” The cactus that Abanindranath foregrounds in the painting, becomes the pictorial rendition of “...barren Reason’ which the romantic artist abnegates to take “...the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse”.³⁸⁰

Abanindranath referred to Fitzgerald’s arrangement of the verses, when taking up a number of verses together to paint a single picture in his *Rubaiyat* series. And though he referred only to the first edition of Fitzgerald’s translated work, he took liberties with the text and painted

³⁸⁰ Fitzgerald, Edward. *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Kolkata: Rupa Publications India, 2002. Verse 40

alternate images or versions inspired by the same verse. Inspired by the second quatrain, for example, he painted, according to Benodebehari, no less than seven different versions.³⁸¹ In the final version Abanindranath paints an Indianised domestic atmosphere, an appropriation that makes the series an original and imaginative one which celebrates the interrelatedness of literature and painting, an area dear to Abanindranath. It is the dominance of an imaginative excess and animated characterisation that differentiates Abanindranath's series from that of Edmund Dulac with which the Rubaiyat gets usually associated.

In the *Omar Khayyam* series we find Abanindranath bringing together style and content together with a sensibility that disregards realism. To Abanindranath, realism had its appeal only when it pertained to a sensibility of the mind. It is because of this very factor that the focus on individualistic art, which Shiv Kumar terms 'asocial', becomes important for the artist, as he began to deal with 'nationalist' art. Instead of viewing the nationalist project of emphasising formalism in art, Abanindranath chose to depict an idiosyncratic view of reality, very different from a photographic one. *Devadasi* (1910-1911), painted immediately after the *Omar Khayyam*, bears testimony to the fact that Abanindranath chose to employ form in an aesthetics of imagination. The artist painted *Devadasi* by basing it on the dance of the '*devadasi*' he saw at a temple of Jagannath in Puri. Abanindranath creates a structural semblance between the pillar of the *natya-mandapa*, where the *devadasi* dances, and the physiognomy and elongation of a dancing woman. The form of the thin figure is elaborately defined with an elongation in the gestures of her hand, the curves of her body, and the contours of her drapery. Set in an ambiguous dark space, Abanindranath actually drew the figure by recollecting the dance that he saw through the darkness of early hours.³⁸² The pristine white flowers, the dark grey background and the rhythm evoked by the woman's body, in the painting, work together to

³⁸¹ *Paintings of Abanindranath Tagore*. p. 88

³⁸² *Jorasankor Dhare*. p.287

create an illusory reality where objects derive their meaning from the feelings of the subjective eye.

Buddha Paintings for the Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists

Abanindranath's notion of the presence of an individualistic ethos of 'nationalist' art finds its expression in the paintings of Buddha, in *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists* by Coomaraswamy and Nivedita. Here too, instead of trying to evoke a nationalism based on the revival of a glorious Hindu past, Abanindranath chooses to paint Buddha in the context of a spirituality that is sublime and far from having a supernatural essence. The artist tried to give his images of Buddha a visionary unity by transgressing mere stylistic qualities. In the image of the *Departure of Prince Siddhartha*, the regal image of Siddhartha, placed beside the streaming mane of the horse and the raging clouds, presents the opposites of the stable world and the instability of the anxiousness which Siddhartha suffers from. The form and linearism used animate the emotional upsurge that Siddhartha undergoes. On the other hand in *Buddha as Mendicant* and the *Victory of Buddha*, the blending of surface colours and loosely defined contours act to magnify serenity, calmness and renunciation symbolised by Buddha. As in *Nalak*, where Abanindranath talks of an abundance of light, 'alor-alo', the series of Buddha paintings too get bathed in an overflow of bright light, also a metaphor in *Alor Phulki*.

The Bengal Actor Series

To return to Abanindranath's handling of realism it has to be noted that his realism was flooded with the hysteria of imagination. When he was painting the *Bengal Actor* (1912) series, Abanindranath had, in his mind, the picture of the contemporary theatres of nineteenth century Bengal. Abanindranath's *Rati* and *Kama* are weighty and garishly painted characters who evoke laughter, a quintessential constituent of Abanindranath's oeuvre. The divine *Mahadeva* becomes "like the Shiva of popular prints, a droll cross between Ravi Varma and Kalighat

pat".³⁸³ Through painting these characters, in an exaggerated idiom of a gaudy unnaturalness, Abanindranath satirically represents the reality of nineteenth century Bengali theatre, especially the Chitpur '*jatra*'. He laughs at the hyperbolic setting of these theatres and does not hesitate in making his *Rati* wear a large wrist watch, which was a fashion accessory among European women in the 1880s, making *Narada* stand on a European carpet and having the *King* sit on one of the first mass-produced chairs designed by Michael Thonet in mid-nineteenth century Europe. Abanindranath's depiction of realism becomes explicit in projecting the *Bengal Actor* series in terms of Hootum's description of popular culture in Calcutta.³⁸⁴ Thus his *Mahadeva* becomes identical to a Calcutta '*babu*', in its depiction of a voluptuousness as well as a hollowness. It is Shiva from the folk tradition of Bengal that attracts Abanindranath in this context. He moves away from a canonical description of the divine and stands far apart from Bankim who conceived such secularisation of the religious as "the desecration of the Hindus by lower orders".³⁸⁵ Abanindranath uses his imaginative virtuosity to paint the divine realm in a brightly hued medium of the fantastic and supernatural. His 'lower orders' thus become an alternate heaven, secularised through the portrayal of a reality 'contaminated' through the reception of a hierarchical 'other'. The aspect of manifesting a cultural expression in terms of the popular and not the traditional speaks of a nationalistic spirit, very different from a Swadeshi parochialism or an Oriental attestation of spiritualism.

The Landscape Paintings

The landscape paintings that follow the *Bengal Actors* series entail a silence and inaction in contrast to the heightened gaudiness of the latter. As we have seen, Abanindranath favoured the import of European landscape paintings because of its absence in the scenario of Indian art.

³⁸³ *Paintings of Abanindranath Tagore*. p. 116

³⁸⁴ Kaliprasanna Sinha, *Hootum Pnchar Naksha*

³⁸⁵ Quoted in *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*. Calcutta Seagull Books, 1989, Sumanta Banerjee p 162

Abanindranath was appropriating the landscape paintings of the British Romantic painters and that of the Pre-Raphaelites³⁸⁶ to create his series of painting nature, as he captured it with the aid of memory and a ‘secondary imagination’. In *Saranga*, the artist talks of suggestiveness as the defining trait of representation. The *Landscape* series becomes the space emanating this suggestiveness with a symbolism borrowed from the Far East. For the author-artist landscape becomes a void and invites the intervening mind to give meanings to it. The delineation of a horizontal extensiveness in the *Swargadwar to Konarak* paintings become romantic imageries of tranquil calmness that “cannot be conveyed save in symbols of time and space”.³⁸⁷ Like Rabindranath, Abanindranath seems to be enthralled by the idea of space, unlike Goethe who had a penchant for light. Abanindranath’s depiction of nature is embedded in a darkness, a poetic metaphor for the mysterious symbols that appeal to the human mind to get deciphered. The paintings of *Storm in Puri* or the *Waterfall* bear evidence to Abanindranath’s perceiving nature as the storehouse of magic and mysticism. In their tonalities of the blending colours as in the wash, these come close to Romantic painters like William Turner (1775-1851), Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) or John Constable (1776-1837) However, Abanindranath refrains from using spirituality as a coordinate of the sublime. He differs from Friedrich’s idea of the landscape as the amalgam of God and nature. His landscapes become something that appeal to the senses, like nature did to Keats’ senses and corporeal being. The ‘religious overtones of Western Romantic tradition being “alien to Abanindranath’s temperament”³⁸⁸ it was the human relation to nature that mattered to the artist. His paintings stand to evoke a mood much in the ‘*moro*’ style of Japan— a hazy colouristic blend of amorphous tonalities that rendered the functioning of an impression. *The Misting Morning* thus becomes similar to the description of a misty serenity in *Nalak*. For both Abanindranath and Rabindranath, Shahjampur, a location

³⁸⁶ Journals like *Modern Review*, dealing with nationalist art carried illustrations of the Pre-Raphaelite artists

³⁸⁷ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. “Biographia Literaria” in *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Edited by W.G.T. Shedd, Harper and Brothers, 1884. *The Friend*

³⁸⁸ *Paintings of Abanindranath Tagore*. p 152

of their family estates, was a place that amplified their senses and imagination. It brought them close to nature and people as well. Abanindranath's *Shahjadpur* series (1925-1927) thus becomes the intertwined space of people and nature. *The Village Music*, through its lyrical nature, thus places three men (painted as figurines of small sizes) in a vast span of nature. It appears as if the song of the human soul merges with that of the aquatic hue, representing a reverie in the picture. The moment suggests an epiphany of soul orchestrating with the 'music' of nature along with the sound of the rows used by the boatmen. In *The Grave of Mokhdum Saheb* too, the silence of the grave merges with that the visitor on a horseback and here the ancient tree, as the backdrop, serves to depict the age-old reality of death that transcends time and space. Abanindranath thus tends to focus on the juxtaposed domain of silence and kinesis in life. The train in *Ullapara Station*, quiet contrary to the European Romantic's ideation on it as an offshoot of the industrial revolution, becomes in Abanindranath's hands a trope for romanticising on silence and motion.

The Mask Series

The engagement with human beings, in art, becomes pronounced in the paintings of the *Mask* (1929) series. Here, the mature artist gets driven to philosophise on a 'being' that reveals itself through a multiplicity of concrete forms. Abanindranath cogitates on the concreteness of feelings in his *Mask* paintings. His masks try to unearth those very structures of feelings that lie underneath the surface of a 'real' being. Many of these mask paintings were based on Rabindranath's play *Tapati* and the artist talks of the homogenous nature of dual identities characterising actors and ordinary human beings. When Abanindranath started painting portraits, he ascribed social roles to his models by painting them in masks. Like the characters that are the subject of his *Portrait* series, the masks too turn out to be characters whose real

identities lie in the masks.³⁸⁹ The masks of *Durmukh* or *Raghupati* (the role played by Dinendranath Tagore) thus stand, not as means of deception, but as means of connoting Ideal worlds of being. Abanindranath establishes a communication with these worlds and narrates it through story, a genre bringing together the worlds of fantasy and facts.

Arabian Nights Series

The art of story-telling, an age-old narrative mode in Indian literary tradition, gets deployed by Abanindranath in presenting the *Arabian Nights* series as well. Abanindranath enters the fictional world of the *Arabian Nights* to give an animated form to its characters in a brightly coloured atmosphere of the fantastic. The author-artist's conscious choice of preferring the art of story-telling to anything else, during his later years, had, in fact, taken its course from the spirit of a spontaneous narrative that sprouted in the paintings of the *Arabian Nights*. In *The Vizier and Sheherazade* Abanindranath emphasises on a detailed image of the daughter. With her charm and a sharpness of physical features, she becomes the representative female entailing beauty and erudition. Abanindranath shows her in contrast to her old father, a metaphor for a hackneyed aesthetic domain, whom she wants to convince of the 'power' of story-telling. Sheherazade, clad in a green costume, becomes the symbol of the virgin terrain of the genre and a harbinger of a future that endorses the idea of a 'willing suspension of disbelief' while being characteristically fragmented in nature, like stories. The book that Sheherazade carries thus stands as the new discourse of experience, combining aesthetic beauty and knowledge. The illustration of *The Vizier and Sheherazade* also presents Sheherazade's younger sister Duniyazade at the bottom of the main frame. She too carries a book in her hand and appears to represent a future generation that is to venerate the art of story-telling. Through ideating on a future that is to be built up with tradition (story-telling) and a present that abnegates the working

³⁸⁹ Gangopadhyay, Mohanlal. *Dakshiner Baranda*. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2007. p. 63

of a monolithic perception of reality, Abanindranath once more sets to define modernity, in the colonial context of the nineteenth century, as a dynamic force operating between the past and the present.

The formalist concept of modern art criticism, favoured by Roger Fry (1866-1934)³⁹⁰ or Clement Greenberg (1909-1994)³⁹¹ was directed towards preventing art from being polluted by other mediums. The coalescence of art and literature was thus considered anti-modern. As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, Abanindranath's view on the union of various creative expressions stands in direct contrast to this Western idea of modern art. Using imagination as the agency to blend the literary content of the *Arabian Nights* with art, Abanindranath was actually opening up a novel paradigm of the amalgam of the modern and the romantic aesthetics, in the context of nineteenth century Bengal and India as well. Being located in a colonial reality, where the issue of amalgamation could not ever be put aside, the Western notion of purity in art signified nothing to Abanindranath. The preference for an intertextuality meant for the author-artist an ability to express ideas through images to which he accorded a second order of signification. In getting transformed into a pictorial form, the literary text thus becomes a site that opens up multiple ways for newer interpretations. Therefore, Abanindranath's rendition of *Arabian Nights* into paintings led to his imparting a contemporaneity to it. The interiority in the paintings thus depicts nineteenth century Calcutta, in the portrayal of characters who resemble the '*babus*' in *Peeping into the Harem*. It is as such that Abanindranath's Aladdin becomes one who keeps a lamp shop (a completely new invention of Abanindranath) and resembles the sellers of the Chitpur market. The artist infuses

³⁹⁰ The core of Roger Fry's formalist aesthetics is the conviction that the viewer is capable of experiencing aesthetic emotion in front of paintings when doing so to relations of pure form, rather than to whatever dramatic expressiveness the work in question may be held to possess. Roger Fry 'Essay in Aesthetics, New Quarterly (1909); reprinted in Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* London: Chatto and Windus Lmt, 1920

³⁹¹ In his essay 'Towards the Newer Laocoon' (1940), Greenberg expresses his concern with the impurity of certain art forms, in particular painting, caused by imitation of the dominating art forms, literature and poetry. Clement Greenberg 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' *Partisan Review*, 7, 1940, pp. 296-310

the *Arabian Nights* with a local reality which he presents through prismatic order of hues. The nineteenth century Calcutta scenario thus emerges as a lived-in space and of the imagined as well. This defines the essence of *Hunchback of the Fishbone*, where these two spaces get juxtaposed. Here we get to see that the story of the tailor and his wife (where they are trying to shake the hunchback back to life as a fishbone gets stuck in his throat) is set against the background of a dining space, on a terrace, where a European man and woman are being served wine seemingly after dinner. The picture depicts a signboard on the terrace's palisade, bearing the name of Kerr Tagore and Co.; a hanging portrait of an aristocrat that resembles Dwarakanath Tagore; a Muslim craftsman; a tradesman wearing a Gandhi cap, in a warehouse stacked with a hoard of goods; and the host of the dinner, identical to Abanindranath himself. This painting is structured from the bottom up and moves back in space in its ascending mode. Here Abanindranath paints a picture of his colonised. Like the *Arabian Nights*, the *Hunchback of the Fishbone* too becomes a narrative that tries to capture reality in fragments and defers the construct of a homologous essentialism. As in his *pala*, here too Abanindranath begins his journey to portray this narrative from a *nichutala* (the lower stratum of society) and moves to the open space of 'freedom', represented by a skyline that is significantly marked by a flag of British India. The skull-capped Muslim craftsman, with a grave facial expression, becomes the metaphor for the lowest stratum of class division, and at the same time becomes the representative of a class, utilising art as a means of livelihood. The narrow-grilled window, symbolising a constricted space of individual and social freedom, is placed in stark contrast to the sky at the top of the image. Above this spatial domain lies the image of the merchant, who appears contented with his hoarded stacks and represents the second layer of the fragmented nature of class hierarchy. He, unlike the Muslim worker, represents inaction and sloth as he enjoys the sight of a cat, resting on the roof. His is a freedom that has been gained through hoarding and depriving a class of people who lack adequate means to save for

future. The third fragment depicts a reality where freedom gets granted to the hunchback by shaking him, involving movement and action as opposites to the inaction of the merchant featuring the superficiality of 'freedom' wearing his Gandhi cap, a prevalent trend of the national movement. The old tailor and his wife turn out, in this image, to be the hosts, on whose mercy the life of the guest depends. They become, in Abanindranath's hand, those agencies of social order who have been bestowed with the power of mending their own realities. The sewing machine placed above the tailor and his wife signifies the mechanism of human willpower and freedom to balance the opposites of laughter and despair in life's crudities as marked by the bare fishbone lying below. The last image turns down the guest-host relationship of the *Hunchback of the Fishbone* with Abanindranath pointing at 'guest' colonisers who decide the fate of their host colonised. Here the artist posits the European guests on the top of the class structure and subtly presents the tradition of the Tagore family of treating the British as allies, in an effort to maintain a trade-relation with them. Abanindranath, in presenting an interiority of his familial realm, also offers a critique of nineteenth century Bengal, where the guest-host relationship between the coloniser and the colonised was to function as a complex network of compliance and resistance. The forks on the dining table at the terrace thus are placed in the cactus planter-a metaphor of aridness, and a sombre force that disturbs the stable fulcrum of the dining table. The cooling fan, meant for comforting the guests, thus finds its opposite in the cactus planter. Abanindranath's usage of dim colours in the painting helps to enhance the ambivalence (depicted through brown at the bottom and white at the top) that defined the context of colonial India. Hence the sky is dark in the painting; it becomes one where the ambiguous future (depicted by the flag) struggles to give coherence to the meaning of freedom. Abanindranath's effort to feature his nation thus begins with his trying to project the 'interiority' of a social order and a larger 'outside' of a terrace, defined by an amalgam of native and foreign powers. The metaphor of food, as the means of survival, becomes the

recurrent motif of the narrative structure. Thus, while the Muslim worker painstakingly attempts to be a bread earner, the merchant, without breaking a sweat, manages to stack enough wealth to feast on in future. While food turns out to be a medium of amusement for the tailor and his wife, it becomes a means of welcoming the ‘other’ to the nineteenth century aristocratic family of the Tagores and the like.

The crux of the oral narrative, that structures the *Arabian Nights*, is supposed to have originated in India and travelled to the Middle East and after being interpolated with stories from various sources, it found its written form in tenth century Persia. Between the tenth and twelfth and fourteenth centuries new stories were added to the corpus of the text in Bagdad and Cairo. The text was introduced to Europe through the translation of Antoine Galland (1704-17). It enters India through the publication of its first printed Arabic version under the patronage of the East India Company. This version serves the source text for Burton’s (1885-88) translation, one which Abanindranath referred to. The author-artist was also using popular editions of the text, including an Urdu translation and a *Bat-tala* version. The cross-cultural element of the *Arabian Nights* seems to have a special appeal to Abanindranath, who appropriated it to paint urban Calcutta of the nineteenth century. He chooses an Oriental text (Burton’s) as the langue of painting while making the localised versions the parole of it. In presenting this parole, Abanindranath intermingles Japanese, Mughal and Western art, as in *The Decapitation of the Bride*, with Bengali inscriptions in Persian calligraphy (in *Story of the Cock and the Merchant* for instance) trying to keep intact the cross-cultural essence of the text. As a ‘nationalist’ in his very own way Abanindranath does take up the Orientalists’ idea of classifying the East as a realm of the supernatural, wonder and magic and uses this very notion to present, to the Orientalists, a picture of his real Calcutta through a set of allegorical imageries. In doing so, Abanindranath, at the same time, becomes the Sindbad of his painting, who keeps alive a communitarian existence by gathering around him connoisseurs of his

stories, who render the functioning of history of people and society through orality, memory and myths as counter-voices to hegemonies of institutionalised curriculum.

Krishnamangal and Kavikankan Chandi series

Robert Irwin, while commenting on the *Arabian Nights*, wrote-“The stories of the *Nights* are urban stories, written for the most part by people in cities about people in the cities for the people in the cities.”³⁹² If in painting the series of the *Arabian Nights* Abanindranath chose to portray this aspect of urbanity, in his final paintings based on the *Krishnamangal* and the *Kavikankan Chandi*, the artist took up the rural essence of the ‘*pat*’ to depict a conglomerate of the traditional and the popular. It was at the request of Mukul Dey that Abanindranath began painting this series towards the end of 1938, after a lapse of several years.³⁹³ This was also a period when the author-artist was focusing on creating his *pala*, basing on a folk form of rural Bengal. The target audience of the *pala*, being children, the elements of the wondrous and the fantastic of the *Arabian Nights* was carried forward by Abanindranath in crafting the dramatic form. The content of the *Krishnamangal* series too highlights the exploits of child Krishna, in contrast to the *Krishnaleela* series. Like in the *pala*, here too, Abanindranath blends the world of the child with that of a mature creative artist. The *Krishnamangal* series depicts a world resembling the one of old Sindbad sitting beside a child and symbolising the convergence of the child’s and the adult’s worlds, where wisdom of the old gets employed to depict an innocence of the child’s world.

The series begins with the image of Vasudeva carrying a minuscule Krishna through rain and darkness with the snake hood to protect them. The bearded Vasudeva’s proportion, with his coloured robe defies seriousness and rather renders a comical flavour to the image.

³⁹² Irwin, Robert. *Arabian Nights. A Companion*. London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks. 2004 p.121

³⁹³ *Dakshiner Baranda*. p.152

However, the less highlighted figures of the tortoise and the fish, as avatars of Krishna, immediately touch upon the painting's mythical content. The painting of the boy Krishna knocking down the giant wrestler is brought out through a comic exaggeration of laughter. In the *Invocation of Ganesha* and *Invocation of Chandi*, the folk-narrative mode of presenting divine omnipotence with a tinge of humour is used to highlight the might of human heroes. The *Slaying of Kangsa* emits a similar essence with its characters painted like actors of the 'jatra' with an imagined narrative of Krishna trying to pluck a feather from Kangsa's crown. Abanindranath's blending of laughter, in his *Krishnamangal* series, with popular culture becomes explicit in the image of Krishna straightening Kubja's hunchback, for instance. He takes up the episode from the traditional text but paints in a line similar to the Kalighat *pat*'s depiction of the *babu* toying with women. Such conscious initiative of taking up popular culture as the constituent of art can be read as an alternative to the nationalist project of glorifying a traditional culture. Abanindranath's view of the superficiality of differentiations of art and non-art thus gets realised in his usage of *pat*—a form considered as non-art by the Oriental enthusiasts.

Kutum-Katam

For Abanindranath the element of beauty in art is something that gets conceived out of the artist's exploration of an innate truth as a characteristic feature of the object. In discovering this qualitative aesthetic truth the artist develops a special vision, borne by the child. Abanindranath's delving into a child's world in the *Krishnamangal* series pertained to this very ideation on aesthetic activity as an art of evoking a creative vision. It is the extension of this deliberation on art and childhood that defines Abanindranath's sculpture of *kutum-katam*. With the loss of a liveliness of spirit that he suffered during his mature years, Abanindranath had

found a ‘life’ and ‘soul’ in the wooden sculptures of the *kutum-katam*.³⁹⁴ In providing Abanindranath with a storehouse of wealth, the ‘daughters of mother nature’ (*kutum-katam*) stood to the author-artist as something more precious than the Kohinoor diamond. *In my quests, I hoped to find the Kohinoor diamond someday. I never found it, but these days the sculptures that I call Kutum-katam, composed from driftwood, discarded tree branches and the like, mean much more to me. The Kohinoor diamond is no match for them.*³⁹⁵

In the sculpting of *Noar Nouka* (Noah’s ark), Nataraj or Narmada Nurse³⁹⁶ the author-artist sought to communicate with the inanimate world because he too, like the romantic writers, painters, orators or poets had the motive : “of exciting in the reader, hearer or spectator, a tone of feeling similar to that which existed in his own bosom, ere it was bodied forth by his pencil, tongue, or pen...in short to communicate...the same sublime sensations which had dictated his own composition”.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ *Shilpiguru Abanindranath* pp.103,105

³⁹⁵ “ভেবেছিলুম খুঁজতে খুঁজতে কোহিনুর- টোহিনুর পেয়ে যাবো হয়তো একদিন। পেলুম না। কিন্তু তার চেয়ে ও বেশি আজকাল আমার এই কাঠকুটো কুটুমকাটাম –কোথায় লাগে এর কাছে কোহিনুর মণি” *Shilpiguru Abanindranath* p. 105

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 103-105

³⁹⁷ Scott, Walter. ‘Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and the Drama’, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott Vol. VI* Edinburgh and London: Robert Cadell, Whittaker and Co., 1834. p. 310

Conclusion

The Romantic Vision in a Colonial Context

In *Jorasankor Dhare* Abanindranath writes—*Since childhood I have been fascinated by the inner world.*³⁹⁸ It is this very act of seeing into the nature of things that forms the driving force behind the aesthetic foundation of Abanindranath's works. Be it his *Nalak's* or *Buro Angla's* act of learning to see or his own method of seeing nature: (*Observe nature.*)³⁹⁹, the act of seeing, for Abanindranath, is an equivalent of deciphering an inherent essence of 'being' that constitutes the elemental spirit of everything around. The author-artist associates the act of seeing with an activated sensory order at work. Seeing induces an impulsive entry into the terrain of beauty, functioning as an integrator of vision and sounds. Abanindranath evaluates the sensory realms of eyesight and sound as the essential contributors to the framing of his creative consciousness: *As if word and form are coming from afar to introduce themselves to me.*⁴⁰⁰ The characteristic exteriority of this 'Dur'(distant), thus gets internalised through a communion of the senses and the soul. Hence '*chokher dekha*' (seeing through the eye) and '*moner dekha*' (seeing through the soul) become synonymous for Abanindranath, in the context of the perception of beauty. In thus conceptualising the agency of the observer as creator, Abanindranath reinforces the issue of a subjective mediation.

The romantic orientation of the essence of seeing, in Abanindranath's aesthetics, has therefore been directed towards the necessity of a habitual subjectivity. With the third-eye as the mediator between senses and the imaginative faculty, the subjective consciousness becomes the prime force of all creative manifestations. However, it would be unwise to avoid the other

³⁹⁸ “ভিতর দিকটা দেখবার কৌতূহল আমার ছোটবেলা থেকে আছে” *Jorasankor Dhare*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.I, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2010. p. 172

³⁹⁹ নেচার কে দেখো *Ibid.* p. 76

⁴⁰⁰ “শব্দ আর রূপ একসঙ্গে যেন দূর থেকে এসে আমার সঙ্গে পরিচয় করে নিতে চলেছে” *Apan Katha*. Tagore, Abanindranath. *Abanindra Rachanabali* Vol.I, Kolkata: Prakash Bhaban, 2010. p. 38

dimensions of the trope employed by an artist who happens to be a colonial subject and belongs to a time when ‘seeing’ entails further significations. The colonial predicament of Abanindranath’s time (latter nineteenth-early twentieth century Bengal) can be analysed along the lines of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1873), a prominent contributor to the construct of the Orient. Seeing becomes, for Bentham, an essential category in the ideological foundation of colonialism. Bentham’s idea of the ‘panopticon’, the ideal correctional home, rested on the presupposition that an ideal state could be constructed through evoking, in its citizens, the idea of the presence of a surveillant eye invigilating their adherence to moral ethics⁴⁰¹. To Bentham, the thought of constantly being watched and judged prevented a repudiation of social codes of conduct by the inhabitants of the state and thereby regulated the occurrence of crimes and vices. The convicts of a ‘panopticon’, according to Bentham, are imprisoned by the snares of light—each individual convict is differentially identified and labeled. The individual, in Bentham’s formulation, is not a corporeal being, it signifies a measurable entity which also constitutes the yardstick for comparing individuals on the grounds of morality. Bentham’s ‘science’ lays down the laws for the structural ascent-descent of morality. The captives of ‘panopticon’ appear to him as theoretical objects: they get observed, are always ‘seen’ and provide constituents to theoretical productions. They, however, cannot claim their authority in this theoretical discourse, to which they become the resource. They are made aware of their subservience to the perennial presence of a dominant power but are denied access to such mechanism of power and hierarchy. The more the inhabitants of the ‘panopticon’ internalise this dominance of power, where they succumb to the vigil of the powerful but invisible eye, the more does power execute itself on a grandiose scale. An outward exhibition of power is no more required by the state under the scheme of the ‘panopticon’ because the convict turns out to be his own guard.

⁴⁰¹ Tait, William. *The Works of Jeremy Bentham Vol.I-VI*. Edinburg and London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1968.

This construct of the convict as his own guard, as his own regulator of vices, guarantees the free-play of power manifestation albeit in a novel way. The decentralisation of power with its apparent absence of any centre paved the way for the ‘panopticon’ to be accepted by the majority of Bentham’s ‘citizens’ of a nation-state. Bentham could foresee the success of the simple architecture of the ‘panopticon’ in his conception of it as the correctional space for the lunatic, the diseased, the criminals, the labourer and the children. For Bentham, these categories of people constituted a homogenous structure united by an inherent similarity. In *Discipline and Punishment* (1975), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), terms this very notion of societal control over the consciousness of citizens as discipline. The Benthamian implication of the panopticon’s power legacy, the idea of punishment and discipline meted out to individuals, can be easily extended to include the colonised Indians. To the colonial observer, India seemed to be lacking in developmental ethos embodying a ‘scientific’ spirit. It is with this presupposition that James Mill, Bentham’s disciple in his evaluation of British India, writes *The History of British India* (1818)⁴⁰² by trying to ‘see’ India with a ‘new’ and ‘scientific’ gaze. Thomas Babington Macaulay’s (1800-1859) effort to see the colonised and uncivilised Indians developing a literary sensibility supplemented this scientific gaze in a short time. Macaulay chose to see Indians getting educated through the agency of language. Colonialism was to exert its influence through its initiative of judging the potency of those colonised subjects who would act as mediators between the ruler and the ruled after having learnt the language of the ruler. The vigil of power was thus bestowed with a ‘new’ role.

Situated in the realm of such impositional order of being, where the colonial subject was always watched, Abanindranath’s occupation with the trope of seeing had a purposive denotation. It appears to be in stark contrast to the counter-gaze of the ‘panopticon’ as the modal point of invigilation and evaluation. Almost all of Abanindranath’s characters are made

⁴⁰² Mill, James. *The History of British India, Vol. 1 and 2*. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826.

to see the world around and develop an individual vision worthy of formulating experiences. Ridoy, Nalak, Kukro— some of Abanindranath's numerous characters—set on an ontological journey in which 'to see' becomes the close equivalent of 'to experience' the meaning of life. Their seeing is enabled through the functionality of an altered order of being, wherein dreams, meditation or love function as the mediums of self-understanding and contemplation. Interestingly, these very protagonists of Abanindranath get situated in a zone of the in-between. Such positioning validates Abanindranath's take on the propensity to judge the categories of experience from a state of 'being' as well as a 'non-being'. If the view of Mill and Bentham can be read as a coloniser's pronouncement on the idea of British India without any lived experience whatsoever, Abanindranath's take can be seen as its antithesis. Abanindranath rejects Kant's idea of apriori experience.⁴⁰³ The romantic journey that his characters undergo—the journey of 'being' to 'becoming'—happens to articulate experiencing as an ongoing process, with the new supplementing or sometimes complementing the old. The journey from 'being' to 'becoming' that Abanindranath depicts in *Buro Angla*, *Nalak*, *Alor Phulki* or *Bhutpatirir Desh* appears to replicate the Nietzschean (1844-1900) idea of describing something about the world we inhabit and know. Nietzsche's idea of 'becoming', the process of knowing, relies on the Heraclitun (c.535-c.475B.C.) wisdom of repudiating 'what does not become'. Nietzsche writes— "But Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that being is an empty form"⁴⁰⁴. As such 'becoming', for Nietzsche "is not moral but an aesthetic phenomenon"⁴⁰⁵. In these texts the process of 'becoming' that Abanindranath's protagonists go through, is also achieved through the realisation of an aestheticism. But this aesthetic of understanding also

⁴⁰³ To Kant the working principles of time and space cannot be derived from experience because "...experience could not impart to them absolute universality nor apodictic certainty. We should only be able to say that common experience teaches us that it is so, but not that it must be so. These principles are valid as rules under which alone experience is possible; they teach us before experience, not by means of experience" Kant, Immanuel. *Basic Writings of Kant*, Allen W. Wood ed. Unites States of America: Modern Library, 2001.

⁴⁰⁴ 'Reason'. Kaufmann, Walter. *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: The Viking Press, 1968. p. 2

⁴⁰⁵ Cox, Christoph. *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*. California: University of California Press, 1999. p. 113

cognises the role of the moral element in the formation of a subjective consciousness that tries to reconcile opposites and transgress the chaos. Abanindranath's initial introduction of these opposites can be read in terms of Derrida's (1930-2004) 'différance'. He seems to probe into the space where Derrida and Nietzsche converge, where the experience of 'becoming' gets comprehended with the sets of opposites. Christoph Cox writes that Derrida's "neologism is perhaps a better name for the complex notion of becoming"⁴⁰⁶. It captures both senses of becoming we find in Heraclitus and Nietzsche. In effect Derrida's 'différance' is an assemblage of differences and opposites, as a productive conflictual movement, the active moving discord of different forces and differences of forces. Abanindranath deals with the aesthetic phenomenon of becoming by making his protagonists understand the differences of the big and the small (the two sets of worlds which *Buro Angla*, *Nalak*, *Alor Phulki*, *Khatanchir Khata* or *Bhutpatrir Desh* inhabit), the politics of dualisms in existence. He places his protagonist in an 'aporia' (a puzzle) as Derrida calls it and undermines Husserl's (1859-1938) apprehension of temporality. As we try to decipher Abanindranath's portrayal of the self, employing Derrida's concepts, we find that it closely resembles Derrida's idea that "what is really going on in things, what is happening is always to come"⁴⁰⁷. It is this very state of the unpredictability of a future with a pre-ordained meaning that makes the protagonists reassess the categories of the big and the small realms of experience.

The categories of the big and the small, in fact, do not tend to operate as binaries in Abanindranath's oeuvre. As he declares in *Bagiswari*, '*arup*' (non-beauteous), in the author-artist's formulation does not become the binary of '*rup*' (beautiful). Abanindranath cautiously avoids any clear-cut divisions of the bad and the good in describing aesthetic experience. As such children, in his works, nullify essentialisms of any kind as their qualifiers. Such

⁴⁰⁶ Nietzsche: *Naturalism and Interpretation*. p. 203

⁴⁰⁷ Caputo, I. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997. p. 31

deliberations on doing away with labeling children as good or bad defies the presence of such markers in ‘children’s literature’ produced during the colonial period. The colonial regime of nineteenth-twentieth century Bengal required that the s system of educating children should aim at producing a ‘class’ which would act as mediators between the colonisers and the native. Such propagandist project assured that there were fewer disparities between being taught and being ‘tamed’. The fifth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica (1818) contained Mill’s conceptualisation of education as an equivalent of a ‘political education’.⁴⁰⁸ It is assumed that the East India Company’s despatch on the education of the natives sent to its Calcutta office in 1828, had Mill as its formulator. This educative mission was grounded on the target of creating an almost muted and submissive colonial subject who would never strive to be a decision-maker. The production of this non-interfering subject would be the outcome of what Mill thought to be a sovereign control. To Mill, therefore, education once more became tantamount to vigil, the resultant of the control ensured by the ‘panopticon’. Mill’s pursuit of imposing a hegemonic control was to be carried forward by Macaulay, in a more constrictive perception of education. The imperialist Macaulay proudly declared that without having the least knowledge of the classical languages he could presume (here again resembling Bentham’s presumption), through a mere reliance on the Orientalist discourse, that Sanskrit or Arabic could never have the potency to get compared to the civilised languages of Europe. The wealth of traditional European languages would in every way outshine the paucity of the Eastern world. To this Macaulay would add that even the whole gamut of Sanskrit literature could never match even elementary English textbooks used for basic entrance examinations. The Orient, Macaulay assumed, lacked in History because to it history meant chronicles of emperors; it lacked in Geography because of its propensity to feature milky oceans of sweet savour, stories of absurd imagination. Having ‘seen’ the Orient thus, Macaulay held that the

⁴⁰⁸ Mill, James. *James Mill on Education*, W. H. Burston ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

East India Company needed to revise article 43 of its legislative law which contained the idea of a 'revival of literature', in order to prevent the colonised from being influenced by this purposeless manifestation of history, geography, philosophy and science. Macaulay thought that the issue of a literary revival was incongruous with the poor state of the colony that was devoid of literature with a 'lively spirit' of any kind. He thereafter took a keen interest in reconsidering and re-framing the process of 'literary revival' in terms of educating the colonised. Macaulay assumed that his predecessors, in their effort to ascertain a literary revival, meant that English would act as the tool of mediation in the process of enlivening Indian literature. To inspire the educated Indian henceforth meant, in Macaulay's consideration, instilling in them a refinement of thought, brought in by the introduction of the medium of English. So, only those Indians familiar with Milton's poetry, Locke's philosophy and Newton's physics would be eligible to be considered erudite. Such propaganda implied that the 'juvenile' Indians required the parentage of the English colonial rulers in order to have a 'progressive' future. Macaulay's project made it clear that opinions of students do not matter when men from 'civilised' nations undertake the mission of educating the 'barbaric'. The 'insanity' of Indian educators lay in this very fact of not abiding by this functional mode, thus leading to a lack of 'refined' sensibilities and a 'healthy' equilibrium. These could only be eradicated through the construct of a 'sanatorium', the device of control.

Macaulay's agenda found its supporters mostly in the Young Bengal group of nineteenth century Bengal. *Shibnath Shastri notes in Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkaleen Samaj* that while parents ran after David Hare to have mercy on them by teaching them English⁴⁰⁹, (*Krishnamohan Bandopadhyay, Rasikkrishna Mallik, Ramgopal Ghosh, Tarachand Chakraborty, Shivachandra Ghosh, Peary Chand Mitra and Ramtanu Lahiri wholeheartedly*

⁴⁰⁹ Shastri, Shibnath. *Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkaleen Bangasamaj*. Kolkata: New age Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2009. p. 30

became disciples of Macaulay along with the young graduates of Hindu College. They were taught by the three pioneers of New Bengal: David Hare, Derozio and Macaulay, in that order.⁴¹⁰ The kaleidoscope magazine, edited by Derozio, published an essay entitled ‘On the colonisation of India by Europeans’ (1829). This essay contained an earnest prayer to the Europeans to become benevolent sponsors to the English-educated natives. The motive of such prayer entailed the acceptance of the coloniser as the guardian of the newly educated colonised. In 1978, ‘rastraguru’ (the mentor of the state) Surendranath Bandyopadhyay (1878-1925) delivered a speech with the title, ‘Lord Macaulay and high education in India’. The crux of the speech was directed at seeking the merciful guidance of the British in mending the knowledge of the natives and using the ‘masculinity’ of the coloniser to strengthen the frail Indians. Ram Mohan Roy, in his letter to Lord Amherst, had also pleaded for an education that would pass muster without any concrete knowledge in the Vedantas and pave the way for the promotion of scientific knowledge.

The Britishers’ project of ‘seeing’ and constructing the Indians as a race lacking in developmental knowledge and scientific wisdom and its admittance by the nineteenth century Bengali English-educated ‘liberal’ enthusiasts⁴¹¹, yielding to the impositions of their ‘parent’ ruler, was thus concretised with the essentialist labeling of the colonised as ‘children’ in dire need of a ‘discipline’. Having accepted the ruler’s ‘edifying’ educational enterprise under what Antonio Gramsci would later call ‘cultural hegemony’⁴¹², these children would be ready to

⁴¹⁰ “কৃষ্ণমোহন বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, রসিককৃষ্ণ মল্লিক, রামগোপাল ঘোষ, তারাকাঁদ চক্রবর্তী, শিবচন্দ্র ঘোষ, প্যারি চাঁদমিত্র, রামতনু লাহিড়ী হিন্দু কলেজ হইতে নবমী যুবকদল সর্বান্তকরণের সহিত মেকলে এর শিষ্যত্ব গ্রহণ করিলেন...নব্যবঙ্গের তিন প্রধান দীক্ষাগুরু হস্তে তাঁহাদের দীক্ষা হইয়াছিল। প্রথম দীক্ষাগুরু ডেভিড হেয়ার দ্বিতীয় দীক্ষাগুরু ডিরোজিও তৃতীয় দীক্ষাগুরু মেকলে” *Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkaleen Banga Samaj*. p. 102

⁴¹¹ These nineteenth century liberal enthusiasts had Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar as their chief figurehead. Madanmohan Tarkalankar, Akshaykumar Dutta, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay along with many others had been his followers in the promotion of teaching Bengali, modeled on the method of ‘liberal’ English teaching in England. *Unish Shataker Bangalijeebon o Sanskriti*. p. 238

⁴¹² Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and tr. by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.

accept an interminable restraint and subject themselves to the gaze of the ‘panopticon’. As docile learners, they would learn to abide by hierarchical codes of conduct in a mode of being disciplined without contesting any view of the tutor. As ‘good’ pupils they were to become the perfect examples of what Macaulay dreamt of in his ‘didactic’ mission of rearing the juvenile ‘other’. With such scenario of a muted subjugation, where adults deliberately attempted to foreground their nascence in learning, children of nineteenth-twentieth century Bengal were ‘doubly marginalised’. As Sibaji Bandyopadhyay points out, they were to become, ‘children + colonised’= ‘colonised children’⁴¹³. They ought to be ‘taught’ in a specified way besides being ‘watched’. Therefore, to be ‘good’, children required to succumb to certain pre-ordained criteria set for a habitual domestication. They were to be indoctrinated with ‘values’ that would strengthen the balanced functioning of a totalitarian regime. The primary unit to depict a structure based on power-relation, which children needed to understand, was the family. With the father figure as the one whom children were required to serve, it was obvious that anyone showing a reluctance to approve the ‘qualities’ of being ‘good’, set by the father, would be condemned to a punishment appropriate for the ‘bad’ categories of conduct. Almost all the stories of *Thakurmar Jhuli* execute the interplay of the ‘binary opposites’ of the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’, in their effort to reveal the smooth functioning of a codified power structure. It is no wonder then that the chronicles of ‘*Buddhu Bhutum*’, ‘*Laalkamal Neelkamal*’, etc. end up with portraying the anti-hero’s evolution as a ‘good’ one through his reconciliation with the pre-given power structure. The ‘hero’, on the other hand, restores the balance of the structural setup of an organisational order by strictly conforming to ‘moral’ laws comprising obedience and an absolute dedication to the schooled principles of submission to authority. By his virtues of fighting back the ‘evils’ of society, and in most cases saving the kingdom from an anarchy, the hero becomes, in Sibaji Bandyopadhyay’s words, Gopal, the god-like being, in opposition to

⁴¹³ Bandyopadhyay, Sibaji. *Gopal-Rakhal Dvandasamas*. Kolkata: Karigar, 2015. p. 121

‘Rakhal’, a mere cowherd. In being trained with a set of prescriptive codes, Gopal, turns out to be a listener without having the least freedom of judgment and selection. He is made to accept ‘discipline’ at the cost of being silenced. Rabindranath shows the perils of such a mode of education when he depicts, in *Tota Kahini*, the tragic end of the parrot that is forced to learn normative duties. The ‘*tota*’ (parrot) in his narrative becomes the metaphor of ‘Gopal’, in being caged and made to accept the superficialities of a courtly education. For the author of *Tota Kahini*, attempting to transform the parrot to a ‘good’ one equates to strangling a spontaneity called life. While we try to grasp Abanindranath’s take on ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and the decisive role of education in self-development, we should take into account the fact that it was he who had illustrated Rabindranath’s ‘*Tota Kahini*’.

As we have seen, almost all of Abanindranath’s characters devise idiosyncratic ways of learning through experiences. The author-artist sets his characters in a romantic journey of self-discovery and development. Unlike Mill’s, Bentham’s or Macaulay’s ambiguous assumptions of India and the resultant theoretical abstractions, Abanindranath concentrates on real experiences that determine knowledge. Orienting towards a lived-in experience, his works align themselves with the ‘*bildungsroman*’, becoming testimonials of self-learning and conduct. The spontaneous mode of learning and experiencing also enables a self-valorisation by granting to the characters an individual space of belonging in the schemata of life. It generates the essential wonder born out of the association of the self and universe and becomes synchronous to Rabindranath’s pronouncement of *My heart sings at the wonder of my place...at the wonder of my place...at the feel in my pulse of the rhythm of creation*. Tagore’s own translation of poem 67, Gitanjali ⁴¹⁴ Abanindranath, in fact, foregrounds this formative principle of self-recognition in his ideation on ‘national education’. Abanindranath’s children,

⁴¹⁴ “...বিশ্বভরা প্রান তাহারি মাঝখানে আমি পেয়েছি মোর স্থান বিশ্বয়ে তাই জাগে আমার গান”

Ridoy and Nalak opt for a learning that does in no way conform to the rules of an academia of prescriptive training and escape its fetters. Thus, while Ridoy ties crackers to his ‘*gurumoshai*’s’ tuft of hair, Nalak dreams of an escape from his ‘*pathshala*’ as his teacher goes on uttering prosaic verses of the institutionalised curriculum. Ridoy and Nalak opt to choose the wide and free spaces of the sky and the forest as the alternate domains of learning freedom. Abanindranath recommends a world of letters where colour becomes the conveyor of ideas essential to ease the child’s entry to the realm of education.

In his preference for an inclusive policy of education, where every pupil can accommodate himself on his/her own terms, Abanindranath makes sure that the credo of harmony allows an unbiased functioning of the value-system. As mentioned, Abanindranath chooses not to essentialise ‘qualities’ that act as coordinates of a value-judgment. He refrains from defining the markers of the precepts of any specific behavioural doctrine. It is no wonder then that his Ridoy, in *Buro Angla*, is made to become a ‘*bhalo manus*’ (a virtuous human being) rather than a ‘*bhalo chhele*’ (a good boy, boy here being gender specific). To the humanitarian Abanindranath, humanity becomes the coordinating force for the consolidation of a necessary harmony, one that also purports to bring back his own colonised countryman “back into his own milieu”⁴¹⁵. Abanindranath ensures that every child, even the ‘colonised child’ learns to venerate his worth in the dynamism of a united notion of existence. This is what encourages Ridoy to consider himself as the hero as he combats the enemy of the geese. Unlike the ‘heroes’ of *Thakurmar Jhuli*, Ridoy is not shown to be conquering kingdoms and winning over enemy demons to claim his position as a future king. The ‘mischievous’ boy turns out to be a ‘hero’ by befriending animals (unlike the ‘*gopal*’ of Bengali folktales, who happens to be potentially ‘good’ from the very beginning), and he can be evaluated by the yardsticks of his

⁴¹⁵ Abrams, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp – romantic and the critical tradition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1953 (Indian edition). p. 65

own formulation. It is interesting to note that Abanindranath, in doing away with the concept of hero, chooses a monkey as the harbinger of happiness in *Khiner Putul*. The process of an individualistic 'becoming' thus equals to 'experiencing' and undermines any presupposed future. Abanindranath skilfully encapsulates an uncertain future or a predictable end in *Buro Angla*, *Nalak*, *Bhutpatrir Deshe* or *Alor Phulki*. The characters of all these works experience a change in the courses of their journeys towards becoming. They think they are destined to go somewhere, but it is not so. Ridoy does not reach Manassarabor, Nalak chooses not to go to Sarnath, Kukro does not finally consider the forest as his final destination and Abu settles down finally at his own home by putting an end to his seaward journey. The romantic journeys then become like '*Niruddesh Jatra*'—these emerge as unending processes of the search for an ideal, making the explorers "nomads to nowhere"⁴¹⁶. Since these journeys end up in the discovery of new paths, the stories encompassing these, deviate from being centered on a stable equilibrium that allows the exercise of any hierarchical order. With the abolition of the concept of the hero with a societal significance, Abanindranath sets out to turn down the regular sign system by placing the signifier and the signified in a state of flux. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay points out the presence of an architectural structure, the pillar in the court of the kings, as the sign of an established power structure that determines the binaries of the codes of conducts. Abanindranath chooses to sway this balance by situating his characters in the twofold space of the real and the non-real worlds. Dreams and visions therefore become vital tropes in his literary oeuvre. *Buro Angla* ends with the question of being and non-being, the dream world of a sought-after ideal and the lived-in reality. As Ridoy returns from his reverie to find himself back to the cot of his hut or as Abu is brought back to his known world of Jorasanko, meaning and meaninglessness work together to create a parallel world of mystery and wonder forged by

⁴¹⁶ Rousseau and Irvin Babbitt look upon the romantics as 'nomads to nowhere'. Babbitt quotes Rousseau's letter to Baili de Mirabeau (1767) while featuring the latter as an 'Arcadian dreamer': "I love to dream, but freely, allowing my mind to wander...alone ceaselessly among the trees and rocks about my dwelling". Irvin Babbitt *Rousseau and Romanticism*. p. 76

an alternate mode of the signification. The natural thus allows for a supernatural, a super real or a surreal order of individual understanding wherein both Beauty and Truth are realised. This reverberates with the Schillerean interpretations of Kant's 'moral laws'. Ridoy, Nalak and Kukro choose the beauty of their own homes over anything else in realising the truths of life. While Abanindranath unravels before Ridoy, the moral nature of beauty by placing him in the kingdom of non-human beings and letting him discover the prosperous nature of enchanting Bengal, Nalak is made to understand moral laws through his cognition of the schemata of life forces where the saviour figure acts as the redeemer of every human being and accords to the latter a place of worth necessary for a balanced functioning of the mundane world. By projecting them as returnees to homes after having seen the wide world around, Abanindranath intertwines moral laws with a patriotic fervour. The home becomes the celebratory space of love and belongingness, also validating the roles of time and space in the construct of a conscious individuality.

It is necessary to note that Abanindranath, here, once more, demurs the presence of a 'father figure' usually functioning as the *prima facie* of power-relations in nineteenth century children's literature. When he evokes the home and the family as primary units of nation-building via self-learning, Abanindranath does not assign a hierarchical supremacy to the father in the organisational pattern of the family. There is again an overturning of balance, of a monolithic meaning in the author's portrayal of the mother as the corner-stone of the signification called home. For an author-artist who romanticises the idea of a nation with the image of *Bharat Mata*—a sovereign mother unadorned with any apparatus of repressive power—it is natural to endow, on the mother, the supreme agency for representing the feeling of attachment with home. Abu's, Ridoy's and Nalak's desires to return to their homes thus coalesce with their mothers' presence as the tool for concretising an idealistic abstraction called home. Even when Abanindranath captures the essence of a native folk-tale in *Khiner Putul*, the

qualifiers of ‘good’ Duorani get constituted with her identity as a mother. Her journey begins with her willing to be the mother of the non-human ‘*banar*’ and ends with her becoming a mother to a charming boy, destined to be the future prince. The efficacy of the mother-figure is vividly brought out in *Khatanchir Khata*. While the materialist father, Khatanchi, is denied admittance to the world of the immortal child Putu, it is Sona’s mother who is overpowered with the alternate tool of dreaming. She becomes the metaphor for a never-ending childhood and acts as a celebrated female figure in Abanindranath’s cogitation on the romantic idea of the child as ‘the father (mother?) of man’. She is also the one who is empowered with a voice against the vigilant father, Khatanchi. The dominating Khatanchi thus fails to restrict her entry into the world of imagination and the shared space of communication, the ‘*jatra*’. The paintings of the *Arabian Nights* series, where Sheherzada becomes the prime force of storytelling, also elucidate Abanindranath’s strategy of doing away with a phallogentric world. Sheherzada thwarts her execution by the Badshah of Persia through her agency of story-telling and enters into an engagement with the official narratives. Representing female agency, she contests the authoritative supremacy of Shahriar who symbolises an imperial/colonial power viewing the colony as an object of fantasy and desire and objectifies it while repeatedly attempting to ‘kill’ it. Sheherzada becomes the feminine power who goes on deferring the authoritative finality of a ruling power. In *Banglar Brata* too Abanindranath projects the domestic world of females (their wishes of preservation and well-being of families) as an alternate societal order against the masculine (Aryan) domain of agriculture or conquests. ‘The Nation as Mother’, in Abanindranath’s oeuvre, thus intersects with his opinions on a societal order that does not overpower the male.

As Abanindranath depicts the child’s world through his repudiation of any perfect ‘balance’, his narrative tool too destabilises any stable flow of structural symmetry, deployed to facilitate such engagement. In his writings, the absurdist path to a world of fantasy and

imagination generates a polysemy and ‘defers’ the rendition of a rationale for any authoritative claims. Abanindranath’s literary works, especially his ‘*jatra-pala*’, in their portrayal of ‘differences’ pave way for a plurality of voices, a ‘heteroglossia’ of representational phenomenon. The Ramayana-based *palas* are structured in a way to ensure that all characters play equally effective roles in the contextualisation of the plot. Deriving thematic elements from canonical epics, the *palas* thus serve the purpose of presenting a parallel narrative grounded on laughter. This laughter can be read along the lines of Bakhtin’s ‘carnavalesque’. Bakhtin talks of the presence of two lives—one being the official and the other being the opposite of the official, running parallel in the Middle Ages⁴¹⁷. Abanindranath appears to have taken recourse to such spirit of the Middle Ages that was employed to counter the Neoclassical. With every character trying to establish his/her validity of accounts as authentic, the absurd in Abanindranath’s literary work gives impetus to new meanings that become individualistic and hence segmented. Interestingly Abanindranath’s way of depicting a set of opposites and polarities in his absurdist mode of representation appears to reflect what Coleridge terms ‘opposite and discordant qualities’⁴¹⁸. The qualities of Abanindranath’s oeuvre manifest themselves in featuring experience as fragmented sets of significations where meanings tend to function as ‘aesthetics of incomprehensibility’. The Coleridgean notion of polarities, as conceived by Kathleen M. Wheeler, holds true for Abanindranath, who had been far ahead of his time, possibly anticipating the work of later thinkers: ‘Coleridge’s concept of polarity, of opposition, is in many ways anticipatory of Derrida’s concept of difference...for Coleridge, as for Derrida, relations and oppositions form the substances of experience’.⁴¹⁹ “Wheeler also

⁴¹⁷ It could be said (with certain reservations, of course) that a person of the Middle Ages lived, as it were, two lives: one that was the official life, monolithically serious and gloomy, subjugated to a strict hierarchical order...the other was the life of the carnival square, free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter...Both these lives were legitimate, but separated by strict temporal boundaries M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans Caryl Emerson, Minneapolis, 1984, University of Minneapolis Press, pp 129-30

⁴¹⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Biographia Literaria*. p. 374

⁴¹⁹ Kathleen M. Wheeler Essay Date 1989 Nineteenth-Century Literary Criticism

suggests that the work of several German Romanticists, whose writings were well known to Coleridge, is also directly related to Derridian deconstruction”⁴²⁰. ‘These ironists (Ludwick Tieck, Karl Solger, Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Jean Paul, and others) developed concepts of criticism as play, destructive creativity (deconstruction), language as essentially about itself...the reader as creative author, ideas about the unity of poetry and philosophy, literature and criticism, and criticism as art’⁴²¹. One is here immediately reminded of Abanindranath’s consideration of art as ‘*leela*’.

While Abanindranath disseminates a realm of meanings through contraries and discordant qualities, he also ensures a valid conclusion through a reconciliatory arrangement. His method of connecting the parts to the whole of his work stems from a necessary arrangement of means to a purposive end. The texts can be decoded using the same method Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) used for interpreting Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*: “The inherent drive of this thoroughly organised and organising work to form itself into one whole expresses itself in the larger as in the smaller combinations. No pause is fortuitous and insignificant, and...everything is at the same means and end”⁴²². The interiority of homes and the exteriority of the world outside in *Nalak*, *Buro Angla*, *Alor Phulki* or the immensity of the dream world of an unending childhood vis-à-vis the mechanistic essence of a calculative reality reach the state of an organic unity at the end of the stories. Abanindranath’s understanding of ‘*akhanda*’ and its manifestation in his works thus take the reader through an array of organisational properties that help to designate the works as ‘readerly’ rather than ‘writerly’. Therefore, his literary work,

⁴²⁰ <https://www.enotes.com/topics/romantic-literary-criticism>

⁴²¹ Kathleen, M. *Wheeler Essay Date 1989 Nineteenth-Century Literary Criticism*. <[/enotes.com/topics/romantic-literary-criticism/critical-essays/romantic-literary-criticism](https://www.enotes.com/topics/romantic-literary-criticism/critical-essays/romantic-literary-criticism)>

⁴²² *The Mirror and the Lamp*. p. 208

with its abundant significations, has an immense potential to be read along the lines of modern criticism.

The journey of Abanindranath's Romanticism to Modernity and Post-modernity

The concept of New Romanticism, in the West, emerged from the conjunction of two movements—Modernism and Postmodernism. Neo Romanticism is a response to both modernity and Post modernity, just as Romanticism was a reaction to Enlightenment. The category of 'everyday' becomes the determinant of both modern and postmodern sensibilities. While modernity tries to reconstruct the everyday on the terms of a universalism of some kind, post-modernity's neurosis (Abanindranath's 'hysteria') tries to deconstruct it along heterogeneous categories of thoughts. The New Romantic approach of Abanindranath operates like an intermediary—it neither reconstructs nor deconstructs the commonplace. It strives to come to terms with the commonplace as it is and simultaneously imagines how it could be but never will be. It becomes the manifestation of an impossible possibility of another here-and-now. The universalism of existence and 'being' that Nalak, Ridoy or Kukro enters into, through the passages of the 'everyday', therefore also leaves all of them in a zone of an impossible possibility. It is because of this that *Buro Angla* concludes with Ridoy's waking up from slumber in a state of utter amazement, *Nalak* with the protagonist's unfulfilled wish to meet Budhha and *Alor Phulki* with Kukro's failure to find solace in the wide woods. The 'commonplace' in these texts is thus infused with a second order of significations and starts functioning as symbols. Abanindranath's employment of such symbols operates through a plethora of significations, or sometimes through the journey to silence (as in *Buro Angla Nalak* or *Alor Phulki*) and leaves the readers to decipher the meanings of possibilities/impossibilities albeit with the apprehension "What is important in a work is what it does not say. This is not the same as the careless notation "what it refuses to say", although that would in itself be interesting: a method might be built on it, with the task of measuring silences, whether

acknowledged or unacknowledged. But rather this, what the work cannot say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey to silence”⁴²³.

The textual materialisation of silence steers the reader’s attention to another facet of silence—the phenomenal presence of which had much to do with Abanindranath’s philosophising in his later years. Silence, in fact, has a profound effect on Abanindranath and hence on his aesthetics of mature years. As discussed in the previous chapters, Abanindranath withdrew from painting or writing after completing his series on the *Arabian Nights*. He was also ruminating on death and its resultant loneliness. For the creative artist who considered the creative attribute as a unique possession of the seers, a romantic sense of alienation was sure to cast its spell. We find Abanindranath responding thus to Rabindranath’s question: *Aban, why aren’t you painting anymore? I am no longer satisfied, nothing seems new to me*⁴²⁴. This sense of dissatisfaction culminates in a melancholy that his mother’s death seems to accelerate. Here Abanindranath once more develops, in himself, the vision we referred to at the beginning. The romantic alienation prepares the road to a second order of vision as Frank Kermode notes, “To be cut off from life and action, in one way or another, is necessary as a preparation for the ‘vision’⁴²⁵. A special power of ‘seeing’ (*bhitorta dekha*) gives the artist an enormous privilege to access joy (*notuner ananda*). However, as Kermode infers, ‘the power of joy being possible only to a profound ‘organic sensibility’, a man who experiences it will also suffer exceptionally—he is exempt from the normal human orientation towards action and to intuit those images which are truth, in defiance of the triumphant claim of merely intellectual disciplines’⁴²⁶. Kermode sees the development of these images (romantic images as he terms these) at the same time as the modern industrial state and modern middle classes. He writes,

⁴²³ <https://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sj6/Spivak%20CanTheSubalternSpeak.pdf>

⁴²⁴ অবন আঁকছ না কেন? মন ভরে না আর...নতুনের আনন্দ পাইনে *Shilpiguru Abanindranath*. p. 106

⁴²⁵ *The Romantic Image*. p. 9

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 9

“The Image, for all its concretion, precision and oneness, is difficult to communicate, and has for that reason alone as much to do with the alienation of the seer”⁴²⁷. The ‘seer’ in Abanindranath, located in the realm of a ‘middle-class’, the *Bhadrolok*, a colonial byproduct, was also perhaps suffering from ‘a sense of difference and precarious communication’. It is to be remembered here that the status of Pirali Brahmin attached to the family of the Tagores was itself a factor accentuating the sense of difference. Debashish Banerjee notes a pervasive sense of alienation in Abanindranath’s painting, *Tear Drop on Lotus Leaf* (1912 or 1913). The fluidity of water and the fragility of life in the painting express a sense of the flow of time and unpredictable mortality. Banerjee writes, ‘The painting...is perhaps the clearest statement of the pain of subjection to colonialism and modernity as an alienated order of time and the transcendence of this pain’⁴²⁸. Thereafter Abanindranath ‘transcended this pain’, like Yeats (the self-declared last-romantic *Coole Park And Ballylee*, 1931)), ‘had surrendered to the chief temptation of the artist, creation without toil’⁴²⁹. The art of the ‘*jatra-palas*’ of his later years was ‘not an escape’ but what he ‘tried to escape from’ by aligning himself with the world of the naiveté of children. Much alike the Japanese *Nō* plays which provided Yeats with mythological-religious themes, Abanindranath’s ‘*palas*’ were structured with masks, rhythm, balance, patterns, images and musical involvement that in Kermodean terms can be called ‘the symbolic order of art’.

Abanindranath’s romanticising thus progresses to words, speeches and silences between words through a kind of sublime symbolism. His symbolising endorses the very process that the Britannica uses to define Symbolism in literature—“All set phrases had to be broken up, unusual words revived or common ones used in archaic or etymological senses; syntax had to be bent to permit fresh juxtapositions from which new meanings might emerge;

⁴²⁷ *The Romantic Image*. p. 7

⁴²⁸ *The Alternate Nation of Abanindranath Tagore*. p. 44

⁴²⁹ *The Romantic Image*. p. 24

above all the familiar rhetoric and rhythms had to be avoided, until the literary work, poetry or prose, created the desired “new world”. It is a world of exploring, all its tangible parts being the symbols of a radiant reality beyond-in short, the antithesis of a newspaper editorial.” Abanindranath orients himself towards such ‘antithesis of a newspaper editorial’ when he remarks like Mallarme, (*Retelling an event in fluent grammar and arranging it in a structured framework isn't enough. Else literature would have stayed restricted to newspapers.*)⁴³⁰ “The symbolic manifestation in his works makes him a ‘modern’ Bengali poet, the epithet which Buddhadeb Bose uses to characterise him in his *Adhunik Bangla Kobita*. He thus gets placed simultaneously with the other doyen of ‘modern’ Bengali poetry, Jibanananda Das.

This chapter began with Abanindranath’s association with sights and sounds. This description is quoted by R. Siva Kumar in his article on *Arabian Nights* Series to compare Abanindranath to the Baudelairean *flaneur* of late nineteenth century Paris⁴³¹. The *flaneur* was a vicarious witness and interpreter of fleeting moments of modern metropolitan life, a role adopted by a number of French modernist aesthetes, writers and artists, including the Impressionists Manet and Degas. The quotidian spectatorship as enjoyment of modernity’s passing show of the infinite variety included stationary witnessing-perches, such as balconies, viewing galleries at theatres or tables at cafes. These become the viewing of paintings by Impressionists like Manet, Renoir and Pissaro and Post-Impressionists such as Van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec. These painters celebrated the ephemeral pleasures of urban life, what in Japanese is called *ukiyo-e*, ‘floating world pictures’. The floating pictures were categorised as passing things that tried to capture eternity. This immanent eternity in modern time and the ability to enjoy it is what

⁴³⁰ নির্ভুল ব্যাকরণ ও পরিভাষা ইত্যাদি দিয়ে যেমনটি তাই ঘটনাকে বলে যাওয়া হলেই যে বলা হল তা নয়, তা যদি হত তো সাহিত্য খবরের কাগজেই বদ্ধ থাকত” *Bagiswari Shilpa Prabandhabali* p.83, To the charge of obscurity Mallarme replied, with sufficient disdain, that there are many who do not know how to read-except the newspaper, he adds, in one of those disconcerting, oddly printed parentheses, which make his work, to those who rightly apprehend it, so full of wise limitations, so safe from hasty or seemingly final conclusions. Arthur Symons

⁴³¹ Kumar, R Siva. *Paintings of Abanindranath Tagore*. Kolkata: Pratikshan, 2008. p. 155

defines the *flaneur* of Baudelaire⁴³². Michel Foucault finds this very essence of the *flaneur* as the manifestation of autonomy in the discursive realm of modernity⁴³³. The domain of self-creation as a resultant product of the act of seeing provides the fragmented modern self with an impetus to look for eternity in the passing things. Abanindranath, with his knowledge of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings as well as French Symbolist literature replicated the *flaneur* both in his constructs of the ontological self and in his quotidian practices of seeing. The ‘*dakshiner baranda*’ (the south veranda) was for him the platform for seeing— *This is my special place of viewing, my observatory.*⁴³⁴

The cityscape of Calcutta provided him with the gaze through which he could romanticise the scenic manifestations of modern urban life. He says— *Wow! This urban cityscape is so wonderful! As the sunlight melts through the morning mist on the houses, it looks like a flowing cascade of light and shadow on the mountain! From time to time, I can see chimneys emitting smoke. It is as if people are enjoying a picnic in a forest.*⁴³⁵ Also the ‘floating world pictures’ correspond to the boat-rides he took and became the motif in symbolist stories in *Pathe-Bipathe* (1918), as R Shiv Kumar points out⁴³⁶.

Arthur Symons writes that in Verlaine the sense of hearing and the sense of sight are almost interchangeable when it comes to the representation of symbols in terms of what a majority of symbolists call magic. On ‘alchemist’ Mallarme, Symons notes: “To evoke, by some elaborate, instantaneous magic of language, without the formality of an after all

⁴³² Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life”, trans and ed. Jonathan Mayne, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. p. 9

⁴³³ Michel Foucault “*What is Enlightenment?*” trans. By Catherine Porter from an unpublished French original, in *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 40-42

⁴³⁴ “এটা আমার দেখবার খাস জায়গা, অবজারভেটরি” *Abanindra Charitam*. p. 121

⁴³⁵ “আহা, এই শহরের বাড়ী-ঘেরা দৃশ্য কি চমৎকার! সকালের একটু একটু কুয়াসার মধ্যে দিয়ে বাড়ীগুলোর উপর দেখছি রোদ আর ছায়া পড়েছে, দেখাচ্ছে ঠিক যেন পর্বতের গায়ে আলোছায়ার বরণা ঝরছে! মাঝে মাঝে একটা চিমনি ধূয়া ছাড়ে আর মনে হয় যেন বনের মধ্যে কারা চড়ুইভাতি খেতে বসেছে” *Abanindranath Charitam* p49

⁴³⁶ R. Siva Kumar *Abanindranath's Arabian Nights : Native Flanerie and Anti-colonial Narration*. p. 59

impossible description; to be, rather than to express: that is what Mallarme has consistently, and from the first, sought in verse and prose”⁴³⁷. The modern conception of the work, according to Kermode is a ‘sort of complex image, autotelic, liberated from discourse with coincident form and meaning’ that evolved from ‘the symbolic aesthetic of approachment between poet and occultist’. In this context he notes that ‘magic came in an age of science, to the defence of poetry’. Yeats too contends with the functionality of a magical representation in modern times. Abanindranath’s employment of magic in *Buro Angla* (Ridoy’s magical transformation to the thumb-nailed one) and especially in *Bhutpatrir Desh* (the thematic constituents of which were derived from the scientific descriptions of Faber and Maeterlinck) where the whole marine adventure is set in magical terms (the magic, ‘*ajib*’⁴³⁸ of the *Arabian Nights* being used as a leitmotif), can be read on similar terms by deciphering its symbols as emblematic of nineteenth-twentieth century Indian modernity, swaying between an occultism (expressed in terms of divinity) of the past and the scientific orientation of the present introduced by the colonisers. Even when Abanindranath was suffering from a romantic angst of alienation (as talked of earlier) *Never in my life have I cried, now I feel like crying. My days are almost over*⁴³⁹ with all his students gone, his brother Gaganendranath rendered dysfunctional through paralysis in 1930, the gradual indebtedness of the Jorasanko house, we see the power of magic manifesting in the incommunicable sense of a dejected artist’s loneliness: *The dreams and despair of a withered tree-it’s monsoon dreams of exuberant flowers, even a dead tree has it all. It recollects*

⁴³⁷ Arthur Symons. *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* E. P. Dutton and Company New York

⁴³⁸ Rabindranath also talks of this ‘ajib’ as the principle of unity of man and his universe: “When that one mind of ours which wanders in search of things in the outer region of the varied, and the other which seeks the inward vision of unity, are no longer in conflict, they help us to realise the *ajab*, the *anirvachaniya*, the ineffable *The Religion of Man*. p. 168

⁴³⁹ জীবনে আমি কাঁদিনি এখন মনে হয় কাঁদছি...ফুরিয়ে এল আমারও দিন *Shilpiguru Abanindranath*. pp. 139-140

*the visits of so many birds and remembers their farewell. Shadows, fondly remembered, complete its picture. If an expert artist fails to capture the web of this illusion, what remains?*⁴⁴⁰

Abanindranath's cultural-text of 'brata' (brata as a magical wish fulfilment, as a "central recurrent cycle of sleeping and waking life"⁴⁴¹) can be read as a form of magical representation of symbols in which—"The relation between the artist and the art object (as in another way, between the viewer of art and art object) thus becomes recognised as one of a co-creation through participatory disclosure, a willed openness to the alterity of the process which pushes the boundaries of artistic creation to one akin to the awakening of sleeping things, which is the provenance of magic".⁴⁴²

It is with this 'awakening' and 'alterity' that Abanindranath aims to depict his 'modernity' in terms of habitual communitarian realm of magic, one with which the Oriental notion of his country gets essentialised. Abanindranath's art takes form in the 'ajib' of his *Arabian Nights* series, in the inconsistencies of speeches in the 'pala', in the absurdities of the blurred worlds of the human and the supernatural, and in a language that discredits the teleological enthusiasm of a colonising discourse and distrusts its belief in Reason. The destabilising 'hysteria' of a romantic articulation, in his oeuvre, translates to irony and deconstruction; it relishes chaos and ambiguity, and revels in fragmentation. It ushers in a space of hybridity and communicates through a creole, not 'coherent' but 'conflictual' in nature.⁴⁴³ In Homi Bhabha's analysis of hybridity, this conflicted quality of Orientalism arises from the construct of an 'otherness' of its object according to its desire. In this, the Orient is seen through

⁴⁴⁰ "শুকনো গাছের আশা নিরাশা – কত বর্ষায় তার পাতায় পাতায় ভরে ওঠার স্বপ্ন, কত শীতে তার পাতা ঝরানোর গান, কত বসন্তে তার ফুলদোলের স্মৃতি সব কথা জড়িয়ে থাকে মরা গাছেও, কত পাখির আসা যাওয়ার খবর কত ছায়ার মায়া দিয়ে গড়া তার পরিপূর্ণ রূপ- তাই যদি না ধরা পড়ল রূপদম্ভের মায়াজালে তবে কি হল?" *Bagiswari* 252

⁴⁴¹ Northrop Frye. *Anatomy of Criticism*. p. 105

⁴⁴² *The Romantic Image*. p. 70

⁴⁴³ Homi K. Bhabha, "Differences, Discriminations and the Discourse of Colonialism", in *The Politics of Theory*, eds Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Inverson, and Dianna Loxley Colchester: University of Essex, 1983, 199-200

an acquisition of knowledge for its mastery while on the other hand as paranoia or fantasy in its alterity. While trying to find a replica of its own, in the colony and the colonised, the coloniser gets haunted by anxiety in its otherness. Thus, the act of imitation or mimicry, on the part of the colonised, becomes a destabilising agent for the coloniser. Bhabha sees this pathology of Orientalism as an anti-colonial mode of resistance. The emergence of a hybridity features the source of subversion by estranging identity through the sunken or denied aspects of the other. According to Bhabha, the destabilisation of identity is inherent in colonialism and amplified through the strategic usage by the colonised. Mikhail Bakhtin, in contrast to Homi Bhabha's notion of an 'intentional' hybridity, talks of another category-the 'organic' hybrid⁴⁴⁴. To Bakhtin, 'organic' hybridity is the unconscious basis of change in languages, a natural process of transmission between cultures. These changes can have cultural implications—"they are pregnant with potentials for new world views, with new internal forms' for perceiving the world in words". In Abanindranath, we find the author-artist's perception of 'the world in words', intentional or organic or both, conceived as a necessary condition for an emerging 'nation'. As discussed in one of the earlier chapters, his painting of the *Hunchback of the Fishbone* embodies a stratified dialogic domain of a social and cultural structure, where an indigenous space is utilised to portray a hybridity through the metaphor of savouring. Abanindranath's cultural borrowings and appropriations too become like his savouring of the cultural flavours of Asia, Africa, Europe and America, of Havell's Orientalism, Okakura's pan-Asianism, indigenous folk-tradition and the modes of inter-cultural exchanges of the Thakurbari itself. Then he transforms these into cultural ontologies. His '*paglamir karubhasha*' (the artistry of madness)⁴⁴⁵ thus crafts, with the romantic excess of madness, a network of

⁴⁴⁴ M. M. Bakhtin *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, 358-59

⁴⁴⁵ Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) describes poetry as 'the abrupt, insulated, capricious and...non-sequacious'. For John Keble (1792-1866), poetry is a release of the affects in words, affording relief from the threatening inner pressures. Keble introduces the analogy of the 'safety-valve, preserving men from actual madness. *The Mirror and the Lamp*. p. 147

significations where like the *ukiyo e* the signifier and signified float in a whirl of meanings and open up possibilities for future interpretations.

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