

## **Chapter - 4**

### **The Influence of Hinduism in Yeats's Poetry**

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Mohini Chatterjee's Influence
- 4.3 Transmigration / Reincarnation of the Soul and Moksha
- 4.4 The Concept of Karma, Self and Soul
- 4.5 Yeats, the Upanishads and the Tantric Philosophy
- 4.6 Yeats's Concept of Love and Spirituality
- 4.7 Kabir's Influence on Yeats's Poetry
- 4.8 Indian Yoga System and Mysticism in Yeats's Poems
- 4.9 Conclusion

## CHAPTER IV

### THE INFLUENCE OF HINDUISM IN YEATS'S POETRY

#### 4.1 Introduction

Yeats was continuously in search of metaphors for his poetry which took him to a wide variety of sources including Irish folklore, spiritism, Romantic poetry, Theosophy, Caballah, the occult and magic Buddhism, the Noh theatre to name just a few. He went so far as attending séances, taking Hashish with the followers of St. Martin<sup>1</sup> and even undergoing the unusual glandular operation for this purpose. In this mixture of influences, Hinduism is one of the major influence and many of the poems which we will discuss now, are highly influenced by Hinduism. Yeats himself had thought of writing such a work:

**“With the idea of inventing for Chuchullain some youthful sojourn and writing for him many poems like those Indian poets have put into the mouth of Krishna, but addressed not to girls who heard the cows but girls who heard the swine.”<sup>2</sup>**

Yeats's image of India was a highly romantic one. He was not aware of the real India; perhaps he did not want to know the real India at all. His image of India never changed. It was essential for him to believe in India as a spiritual land just as it was useful for him to believe that the Irish peasants were in contact with the ancient gods. He did not allow anyone or anything to change his belief.

**His naïve remarks about India such as Indians should write in Bengali or Urdu only, No Indians knows English, or his support to the caste system in India were based on this image.<sup>3</sup>**

Indians respond very warmly to Yeats and see a great deal of Indianness in him due to some quality in his works that accommodates and fuses apparently contradictory ideologies.

#### 4.2 Mohini Chatterjee's Influence

Mohini Chatterjee is generally cited out by critics as an example of Yeats's poems where he uses Indian theme quite effectively. Mohini Chatterjee was the only Indian whose name was used by Yeats as the title of a poem. The poem has two clear parts: the first part where Yeats tells us how he asked the Brahmin if he should pray and then presents Mohini Chatterjee's answer:

**Pray for nothing, say  
Every night in bed, I have been a king,  
I have been a slave,  
Nor is there anything, Fool, rascal,  
knave,  
That I have been \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
And yet upon my breast  
A myriad heads have lain.<sup>4</sup>**

In "The Way of Wisdom" Yeats narrates the same incident. Someone asked him if we should pray, but even prayer was too dull of hopes of desire, of life to have any part in that compliance that was beginning of wisdom, and he answered that one should say before sleeping,

**"I have lived many lives. I have been a  
slave and a prince. Many a beloved has  
set upon the knees of many a beloved.  
Everything that has been shall be  
again". Beautiful words that I spoilt  
once by turning them into clumsy  
verse.'<sup>5</sup>**

This last sentence refers to the poem 'Kanva on Himself' which appeared in *The Wandering of Oisín & Other Poems* (London, 1889) but was not included in later collections. Yeats rewrote the poem and added the second part which is his own commentary:

**That he might set at rest  
A boy's turbulent days  
Mohini Chatterjee  
Spoke these, or words like these.**

**I add in commentary  
Old lovers yet may have  
All that time denied-  
Grave is heaped upon grave  
That they be satisfied-  
Over the Blackened earth  
The old troops parade,  
Birth is heaped upon birth  
That such cannonade  
May thunder time away,  
Birth-hour and death-hour meet,  
Or, as great sages say,  
Men dance on deathless feet.<sup>6</sup>**

Yeats met Mohini Chatterjee in 1885. The first poem based on his teaching was published in 1885. Yeats mentioned this incident in “The Way of Wisdom”-1900, then again with some changes in “The Pathway”-1908 and the poem ‘Mohini Chatterjee’ which is really the final draft of ‘Kanva on Himself’ was completed in 1928. Chatterjee’s impact is obvious but the most interesting thing is the way Yeats uses the Indian concept of reincarnation preached by Chatterjee.

#### **4.3 Transmigration/Reincarnation of the soul and Moksha**

In A New Commentary on the poems of W. B. Yeats, A. Norman Jeffers comments about the poem and puts forward the concept that one should give up all one’s desire. The poem clearly presents an exposition of the Indian theory of transmigration of the soul. In Bhagwad Gita Krishna explains to Arjuna that the soul puts off one body and put on another just as a man takes off an old dress and puts a new one. **“Many are my lives that are past and thine also, O Arjuna-----“.**<sup>7</sup> The same concept is also found in the Katha Upanishad in the dialogue between Yama and Nachiketa,

**“Nachiketa! I will tell you the secret of undying spirit and what happens after death. Some enter the womb, waiting for a moving body, some pass into**

**unmoving things: according to deed  
and knowledge”<sup>8</sup>**

Yeats’s commentary implies that lovers who have been denied satisfaction may find satisfaction in another birth. In Indian philosophy re-birth or entering the cycle of birth-death-rebirth is a punishment and the ascetic’s aim is to escape the cycle and attain ‘Moksha’. However, Yeats the poet prefers to return to the cycle. ‘Kanva on Himself’ did not bear this aspect of reincarnation. The commentary does not advocate suppression of desire but a joyful acceptance of reincarnation which will ultimately lead to a state when birth hour and death hour will meet and the soul will be beyond birth and death, dancing on deathless feet.

The theme of reincarnation of soul is found in many other poems such as ‘Death’, ‘Ephemera’, ‘Fergus and Druid’, ‘Broken Dreams’ and ‘He Mourns for the Change’. In ‘Ephemera’ the lover says,

**Ah, do not mourn... That we are tired  
for other loves await us;  
.....  
.....Before us lies eternity ...<sup>9</sup>**

In ‘Broken Dreams’ the poet is certain that

**“In the grave all, all shall be renewed”  
and about his beloved who is old, he is  
certain “that I shall see that lady  
leaving, standing or walking in the first  
loveliness of womanhood”<sup>10</sup>.**

He fears that his beloved who had small hands will become a swan in the next birth and "paddle to the wrist in that mysterious, always brimming lake where those that have obeyed the holy Law and are perfect”. The Hindu belief is that a person is reborn as any creature according to one’s karma and “the Swan” is a traditional Indian symbol for the soul. ‘Fergus and Druid’ echoes this concept where the Druid has “changed and flowed from shape to shape,” – first as a raven, then a weasel and now a human form and Fergus the king who sees his life drifting like a river says,

**I have been many things-  
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of  
light  
Upon a sword, a fir tree on a hill,  
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern  
A king sitting upon a chair of gold-<sup>11</sup>**

Fergus would rather learn the dreaming wisdom of the Druid than become a king. This reminds one of king Janaka of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad who imparts wisdom to Yajnavalkya, a sage. The poem 'Death' repeats the same idea of rebirth,

**“Many times he died, Many times he rose  
again.”<sup>12</sup>**

The soul in 'Vacillation' asks the heart to seek out reality and leave the worldly things, the physical body with all its desires but the Heart makes the choice for the world, counter asking

**“What be a singer born and lack a  
theme?”<sup>13</sup>**

Yeats the poet prefers the world of physical senses, heroism not renunciation. Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespeare on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1932,

**“I feel that this is the choice of the saint  
(St. Theresa's ecstasy, Gandhiji's  
smiling face)...and the heroic choice:  
Tragedy.  
(Dante, Don Quixote)-”<sup>14</sup>**

The Indian themes of reincarnation and karma find an effective expression in an otherwise non-Indian poem 'Under Ben Bulbin'. Yeats attributes this belief of reincarnation to Ireland:

**Many times man lives and dies  
Between his two extremities,  
That of race and that of soul  
And ancient Ireland knew it all.<sup>15</sup>**

When a man dies he leaves this world only for a short while after which he comes back:

**Whether man die in his bed  
Or the rifle knocks him dead,  
A brief parting from those dear  
Is the worst man has to fear  
Though grave-diggers' toil is long  
Sharp their spades, their muscle  
strong,  
They but thrust their buried men  
Back in human mind again.<sup>16</sup>**

#### **4.4 The Concept of Karma, Self and Soul**

The phrase 'profane perfection of mankind' refers to the concept of karma,

**..... there's a purpose set  
Before the secret working mind:  
Profane perfection of mankind.<sup>17</sup>**

In his introduction to 'The Mandukya Upanishad' Yeats explains the concept of karma,

**To seek God too soon is not less sinful  
than to seek God too late; we must love,  
man, woman or child, we must exhaust  
ambition, intellect, desire, dedicating all  
things as they pass, or we come to God  
with empty hands.<sup>18</sup>**

This exhaustion of karma is the profane perfection of mankind. He says in the same essay,

**Personality is first of all man as he has  
been made by his Karma; Even though  
initiation be complete, his nature so  
gathered up into itself that he can  
create no new Karma, he must await  
the exhaustion of the old.<sup>19</sup>**

Reincarnation and destruction of the world are common themes in poetry. According to Puranic mythology, at the end of a cycle, the creator and the preserver (Brahma & Vishnu) manifest the destructive aspect taking on a human or animal form, to destroy the evil and establish a new cycle. The

terrible beast to be born in 'The Second Coming' can be understood as this destructive aspect of the divine. In Vishnu Purana the destroyer is the boar who establishes the Varaha Kalpa (the Boar Cycle). Yeats himself has written a long note on the history of this pig symbol in 'The Wind Among the Reeds'.

MacCulloch compares the Indian belief with the Irish belief in rebirth:

**The dead Celt continued to be the person he had been and it may have been that not a new body but the old body glorified was tenanted by his soul beyond the grave. This bodily immortality in a region where life went on as on this earth, but under happier conditions, would then be like the Vedic teaching that the soul, after burning of the body, went to the heaven of Yama and there received its body completely glorified. The two conceptions, Hindu and Celtic may have sprung from 'Aryan' belief.<sup>20</sup>**

The Katha Upanishad presents a dialogue between the God of death Yama and Nachiketa where Nachiketa repeatedly asks Yama, what happens to the soul after death. 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul' also deals with the same theme. In the first part of the poem there is dichotomy between escape from moral life. Here again the poet has no desire to be delivered from "The crime of death and birth" but he is "content to live it all again." To be content in the sense that Yeats means here is not renunciation of activity as suggested by Norman Friedman in the article "Permanence and Change",

**What must be given up is not passion for life but passion for result.<sup>21</sup>**

In the Upanishads the self and the soul are identical. Yeats himself used the two terms as the synonyms in the introduction to Patanjali's The Aphorism of Yoga translated by Shri Purohit Swami,

**“.....the soul itself is truth; it is that self  
praised by Yajnavalkya which is all  
selves.”<sup>22</sup>**

However, in some poems Yeats dramatizes the dialogue between the self and the soul. In the west and even in popular belief in India the soul is generally associated with the other higher world and asceticism.

In the poem ‘Vacillation’ Yeats replaced the self by the Heart, perhaps because he had learnt from his translation of the Upanishads that the

**“Self stays in heart.”<sup>23</sup>**

In this poem the Heart denounces mere spirituality as

**“the simplicity of fire.”<sup>24</sup>**

The Upanishads also use the same term,

**“Man can kindle that fire, that spirit....”<sup>25</sup>**

Yeats shared Tagore’s view that there was a conflict of contraries in the world. Tagore asserts in ‘Sadhana’ that

**“the world in essence is just the  
reconciliation of these forces.”<sup>26</sup>**

**For Yeats however the opposite forces  
must remain and keep the wheel of life  
turning. The dancing girl between the  
Sphinx (perfection of nature-objective  
consciousness) and Buddha (perfection  
of the spirit-subjective consciousness) in  
‘The Double Vision of Michael  
Robartes’ is a symbol of unity which is  
highly desirable but for Yeats the  
Sphinx and the Buddha must also be  
present.<sup>27</sup>**

In Tagore’s play Chitra, the heroine is granted beauty for a year by the god of love. She wants to know if the hero loves her beauty which is not real or her real self which is not beautiful.

**Yeats used the concept of real self in  
‘The Hero, the Girl and the Fool’. In  
this poem the girl laments the hero’s**

**praise for her body and the hero rages against his strength because she loved his strength and not his self. When the girl suggests that it is better to be nun because a nun at least has the reverence of men, he replies that men revere not the real self but the holiness of the nuns. The girl concludes that only god can love us for ourselves.<sup>28</sup>**

Yeats repeats the same attitude in another poem, 'For Anne Gregory',

**Only God my dear,  
Could love you for yourself alone  
And not your yellow hair.<sup>29</sup>**

#### **4.5 Yeats, the Upanishad and the Tantric Philosophy**

The Swan is the traditional Indian symbol of the universal self or the universal spirit. The swans in Tagore's poems take the poet from the waking world to the inner world of thought and reflection. Waking and dreaming are the first two states of the four mentioned in the Upanishads, the other two are dreamless sleep (Susupti) and Samadhi. Yeats in 'The Wild Swans at Coole' also moves from the outer world of 'Still Sky', 'The woodland path' and 'brimming water' of the first verse to the inner state in the later lines,

**All's changed since I,  
Hearing at twilight,  
The first time on this shore,  
The bell- beat of their wings above my  
head,  
Trode with a lighter tread.<sup>30</sup>**

**Yeats's swan is a combination of the Upanishadic swan and the swan of the European tradition. In primitive Western tradition the swan has supernatural qualities. Zeus the Greek god takes the form of a swan and rapes Leda to give birth to a new civilization.**

**The Greeks considered the swan a symbol of wisdom and prophecy. It is companion and even a representative of gods.<sup>31</sup>**

As Sankaran has pointed out,

**Tagore moves from waking state to the dreaming state as the initial steps to further go into the states of ‘Susupti’ and ‘Samadhi’, which are sought by a saint, a mystic. Yeats on the other hand wants to come back to the physical world and “wake someday again.”<sup>32</sup>**

Yeats was aware of the mystical use of sex in the Tantric philosophy,

**“... there is another method that of the Tantric philosophy, where a man and a woman, when in a sexual union transfigure each other’s images into the masculine and feminine characters of God...”<sup>33</sup>**

As Bachchan informs us,

**In Yeats’s personal library a book called The Literature of Bengal was found and on the page of the contents Yeats has written a sentence about the Indian Medieval mystic poet Vidyapati who used the boldest erotic imagery celebrating the love between Radha and Krishna. This mysticism must have attracted Yeats who himself used erotic imagery in the ‘Supernatural songs’ and the Crazy Jane poems.<sup>34</sup>**

Yeats was familiar with the Irish mythological figures Aengus and Edain representing the paradoxical principles at war in the world which must be combined to create totality. One was incomplete without the other. In

Indian Puranic tradition these principles are represented by Shiva and Shakti, Krishna and Radha, Vishnu and Sree. The harmonized form of the two is half male- half female form known as the Ardhanarishwara. Yeats was highly impressed by the love lyrics celebrating the love of Radha and Krishna and he himself wanted to write such poems for Chuchullain.

Arthur Avalon's books on Tantra were found in Yeats's personal library. Tantra eliminates the difference between the spiritual and the physical. Yeats seems to be influenced by this philosophy in many of his poems, particularly the Crazy Jane Poems, when the Bishop asks Crazy Jane to give up the foul sty of sensuality and live in a fair heavenly mansion, she replies,

**Fair and foul are near of kin,  
And fair needs foul.<sup>35</sup>**

She further asserts,

**A woman can be proud and stiff  
When on love intent;  
But love has pitched his mansion in  
The place of excrement;  
For nothing can be sole or whole  
That has not been rent.<sup>36</sup>**

#### **4.6 Yeats's Concept of Love and Spirituality**

Unlike Christianity where the body is regarded as evil and the supremacy of the soul is overemphasized, Hinduism, particularly Tantrism gives equal status to body and soul. Crazy Jane on the Day of Judgment' declares:

**Love is all  
Unsatisfied  
That cannot take the whole  
Body and soul.<sup>37</sup>**

The lady in 'The Three Bushes' who loves a man 'with her soul', asks her chambermaid to go to her lover in the night, allowing him to think that it is the lady herself because as she says,

**I know the I must drop down dead  
If he stops loving me,  
Yet what could I but drop down dead**

**If I lost my chastity.<sup>38</sup>**

The chambermaid does what she is told and soon the lover dies seeing which, the lady also dies. The chambermaid takes charge of their graves where the two rose bushes seem to be one. When she is dying, she makes a confession to the priest and the priest not only **“understood her case”** but asked the people to take and bury her **“Beside her lady’s man, \ And set a rose tree on her grave,”**.<sup>39</sup> The third bush becomes one with the other two bushes.

Physical love and sexuality are boldly admitted in ‘The Lady’s First Song’:

**I am in love  
And that is my shame.  
What hurts the soul  
My soul adores,  
No better than a beast  
Upon all fours.<sup>40</sup>**

In the next poem ‘The Lady’s Second Song,’ the lady insists,

**Soul must learn the love that is  
Proper to my breast,  
Limbs a love in common  
With every noble beast.  
If soul may look and body touch  
Which is the more blest?<sup>41</sup>**

In ‘All Soul’s Night’ the poet tells us,

**Two thoughts were so mixed up I could  
not tell  
Whether of her or God he thought the  
most.<sup>42</sup>**

The use of sex as a spiritual act is also found in other poems like ‘The Lady’s Third Song’, ‘The Chambermaid’s First Song’, ‘The Chambermaid’s Second Song’ and ‘The Lover’s Song’. Yeats accepted the Tantric idea that the ecstasy of union with the highest self can be experienced through sexual intercourse.

The last poem in the Supernatural Songs is ‘Meru’. Though the persona in these songs is the Irish Ribh, he is an ascetic with a difference. Yeats believed that early Irish Christianity had certain things in common with

India. Ribh, the representative of the Irish Christianity is pitted against St. Patrick, the symbol of orthodox Catholic faith. Ribh does not accept the asexual and male god that Patrick preaches. Ribh's trinity includes the feminine principle (man, woman, child). Ribh also rejects Patrick's asexual God and asserts that

**“As man, as beast, as an ephemeral fly  
begets,  
God-head begets God-head”.**<sup>43</sup>

Indian deities always have their female counterparts and in fact Brahma the creator is powerless without “Shakti” the mother goddess without whose help, He cannot create. ‘Ribh denounces Patrick’, the second of the Supernatural songs also presents the Indian concept that the Universal Self and the Individual Self are one,

**“Natural and Supernatural with the  
self-same ring are wed”.**<sup>44</sup>

Benjamin Walker explains the Tantric attitude to sex:

**The Gods themselves are the great  
exemplars and instigators of sexual  
indulgence. The greatest of the Tantric  
deities Shiva and Shakti established  
sexuality and wished to be  
perpetuated.**<sup>45</sup>

The idea of copulating with female is also found in the Caballah,

**“... In the union of the God with the  
female whom he fructifies, after the  
manner of the union of male and  
female”.**<sup>46</sup>

However, Yeats seems to have been drawn to this concept more through Tantrism than Caballah.

In ‘Ribh at the Tomb of Baile and Aillin’, it is suggested that the consummation of love liberated the lovers from incarnation and transformed them into pure light:

**“For the intercourse of the angels is a  
light where for its moment both seem  
lost, consumed”.**<sup>47</sup>

And it is by this light created by the union of the lovers that the hermit reads his holy book.

In ‘Ribh Considers Christian Love Insufficient’ the soul is projected as the bride. Yeats was aware of the Indian tradition where God is

**“Sung as the soul’s husband, bride,  
child and friend”.**<sup>48</sup> In ‘What Magic  
Drum?’ the soul takes the form of a  
child and God is the Primordial  
Motherhood.<sup>49</sup>

In the poem ‘He and She’, He and She stand for the Universal Self and the Individual Self. Just as a man and a woman ( Sun and Moon) play the game of love, as the moon-woman now approaches and now retreats from the sun-man until the light of the sun finally overpowers Moon, so also the Individual Self keep away from the Universal Self, until all the desires are spent up. The ultimate union of the Individual Soul and the Universal Soul is portrayed in the poem ‘There’ which is called Yeats’s “Eschatological epigram” by Helen Vendler in her article “New Wine in Old Bottles : Yeats’s Supernatural Songs”. There all the barrel-hoops are knit:

**There all the Serpent-tails are bit,  
There all the Gyres converge in one,  
There all the planets drop in the sun.**<sup>50</sup>

When the soul sings, “I am I, I am I,” it is the same state of realization when a person says, “I am Brahma”. Once this realization of God’s presence within oneself is attained the soul can confidently say,

**“The greater grows my light,  
The further that I fly”.**<sup>51</sup>

The converging gyres are similar to the converging triangles of Tantra and the serpent biting its tail has an Indian echo about it as a symbol of Infinity, eternity.

In 'The Wandering of Oisín' we find Yeats's first attempt to apply Indian ideas for the interpretations of Irish legends. According to Naresh Guha,

**The subject matter of this strange narrative poem is undoubtedly Irish but Yeats's interpretation of the symbolic import of the three islands visited by Oisín is tinged with the Indian conception of the three Gunas which constitute the very substance of the universe and life.<sup>52</sup>**

#### **4.7 Kabir's influence on Yeats's Poetry**

Yeats had read Kabir's poems in Tagore's translation. He had worked on Tagore's Gitanjali and Tagore himself was influenced by Kabir. Thus Kabir's influence came to Yeats through both these sources. Kabir was a mystic poet who combined the Sufi and the Bhakti traditions in his songs. Yeats was influenced by the Upanishads and Kabir's bhajans also reflect many ideas and images from the Upanishads.

**In the Mundaka Upanishad the Personal Self and the Impersonal Self are symbolized by two birds sitting on the same tree and while one bird is pecking at the fruit, the other stares at it.<sup>53</sup> In Kabir's Bhajan 'Taruvar Ek Mool Bin' two birds are perched on a tree, one is the Guru and the other is the disciple. "The disciple chooses the manifold fruits of life and tastes them while the Guru beholds him in joy".<sup>54</sup>**

The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagwad Gita and the poetry in the Bhakti tradition are all related to each other and share many ideas and images. Since Yeats was familiar with these sources, had also read books on Indian philosophy by writers like S. Radhakrishnan and Arthur Avalon's books on Tantric philosophy, it is difficult to trace with certainty the original sources of

the Indian element in Yeats. However some images clearly look derived from Kabir.

Kathleen Raine has pointed out that Kabir's bhajans were the sources of some of Yeats's images. Shiro Naito in his book on Yeats and Zen records that

**when he met Kathleen Raine, he was given some important suggestions for his study and one of them was that the chest-nut tree of the poem 'Among School Children' might have been derived from one of Kabir's poem which Yeats read in Tagore's translation.<sup>55</sup> Raine herself records this suggestion in her book Kabir's poem makes an effective use of the tree symbol<sup>56</sup>:**

**The unconditioned is the seed,  
The conditioned is the flower and the fruit.  
Knowledge is the branch, and the Name is the root,  
Look and see where the root is:  
Happiness shall be yours when you come to the root,  
The root will lead you to the branch  
The leaf, the flower and the fruit.<sup>57</sup>**

Yeats's poem also emphasizes the root:

**O chest-nut tree, great rooted  
blossomer  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the  
bole?<sup>58</sup>**

In both Kabir and Yeats the tree symbolizes unity. Just as the triad of 'flower-fruit-shade' is unified and present in the seed and the similar triad of 'leaf-flower-fruit' can be reached through root, likewise Yeats's 'chest-nut

tree, great rooted blossomer' presents the unified triad of 'leaf-blossom-bole'. In Kabir's poem the seed stands for the unconditioned and the conditioned is symbolized by the flower and the fruit. The image of the tree as the poem itself represents the reconciliation of the conditioned and the unconditioned. While Yeats's poem is about the Unity of Being (which is strengthened by the final image of the dancer who cannot be separated from the dance), it does not rule out the possibility that Yeats derived the tree image from Kabir.

Yeats's famous epitaph from his poem 'Under Ben Bulben', as Raine has pointed out has been perhaps derived from one of Kabir's poems.<sup>59</sup>

**Cast a cold eye**

**On life, on death**

**Horseman, pass by!**<sup>60</sup>

Kabir's poem says,

**"Look upon life and death; there is no  
separation between them,**

**The right hand and the left hand are  
the same."**<sup>61</sup>

Kabir's poem 'Jan Chet Achet Khambh Dou' uses the image of the swing:

**Between the pole of the conscious**

**And the unconscious, there has the  
mind made a swing:**

**Thereon hang all beings and all worlds,  
and the swing never ceases its sway.**<sup>62</sup>

Yeats's poem 'Vacillation' opens with the lines:

**BEWEEN extremities**

**Man runs his course;**

**A brand, or flaming breath,**

**Comes to destroy**

**All these antinomies**

**Of day and night;**

**The body calls it death,**

**The heart's remorse.**

**But if these be right**

**What is joy?**<sup>63</sup>

In another poem Kabir sings,

**“Hang up the swing of love today! Hang the body, and the mind between the arms of the beloved, in the ecstasy of joy.”<sup>64</sup> Kabir’s ‘the body and the mind’ is changed in Yeats’s poem to the body and the heart and ‘the ecstasy of love’s joy’ is also echoed in Yeats’s rhetorical question, “what is joy?”**

Kabir asks his heart to dance, being mad with joy in the song

**“Nacho re Mero Man Matta Hoi” and adds that “life and death dance to the rhythm of this music.”<sup>65</sup>**

When the murmurous music of the harp is played,

**“The dance goes on without hands and feet”.<sup>66</sup>**

One is reminded here of ‘Mohini Chatterjee’ which ends with the lines:

**Birth-hour and death-hour meet,  
Or as great sages say,  
Men dance on deathless feet.<sup>67</sup>**

It has been suggested that

**Kabir’s concept of ‘Madhi’ (the middle point of the swing between the poles of ‘Chet’ and ‘Achet’) is the same as what Yeats refers to as ‘Buddha’s emptiness’<sup>68</sup> in the poem ‘The Statues’ and as ‘dark nothing’<sup>69</sup> in the poem ‘The Gyres’.<sup>70</sup>**

This state in Kabir allows neither day nor night, neither the sun nor its shadows. It resembles the state when the poet experiences union with the divine and he are “immersed in that one great bliss which transcends all pleasure and pain”.

Kabir’s eclecticism was so encompassing that it includes a variety of philosophies and a wide range of mystical emotions. In his own poetry there

are echoes of Buddhism. It is impossible to say whether a particular Yeatsian image has been derived from the Upanishads, from Tagore or from Kabir. Both Tagore and Kabir borrowed many images from the Upanishads. The image of God as Bridegroom for example is common in Kabir as also in many Sufi saints and Bhakti poets. Yeats also portrays God and the soul as He and She, the bridegroom and the bride.

What attracted Yeats to Kabir is the fact that Kabir was not an ascetic but a married man with a family. The real Sadhu according to Kabir is one

**Who does not make you close the doors, and hold your breath, and renounce the world...He keeps the spirit of union in the midst of all enjoyments".<sup>71</sup> Kabir longs to experience God with all his senses. He says that he has seen Brahma without eyes, tasted the nectar, felt the touch of Reality and smelt the fragrance of heavenly flowers.<sup>72</sup>**

For him God is love that pervades in all the things of the world.

One of the major concerns of Yeats was to remove the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, between the physical and the spiritual, between man and God. Though Yeats was attracted to asceticism in the beginning, his later poetry shows complete acceptance of senses and desires which is clearly expressed in his Supernatural Songs and the Crazy Jane Poems. Acceptance of one's desires and the physical world, a perspective to see the natural and the supernatural as one, resentment of organized religion and rituals, an emphasis on a personal relationship with God and the image of the tree, the swing, the bridegroom, the swan and a few others are some of the things that both Yeats and Kabir shared.

That Yeats derived images from the books *An Indian Monk* and the *Holy Mountain* and the play *The Herne's Egg* is also closely related to the poems 'Vacillation', 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul' and the 'Supernatural Songs' in the use of the Indian ideas of Karma, transmigration of the soul and reincarnation.

#### 4.8 Indian Yoga System and Mysticism in Yeats's Poetry

**Yeats was considerably influenced by the Yoga system in some of his own concepts particularly A Vision. Zimmer has explained that personality in the Indian system is regarded as a mask which must be put off to achieve one's real identity.<sup>73</sup>**

Raj Yoga is the discipline to shed this mask and attain unity with the Absolute Self and release from the illusion of matter. Yeats took great interest in Yoga, he read the Yoga system of Patanjali and he used the concept of the Tattwas as the Faculties and Principles in A Vision.

A Vision has many references to India. (Some of the references are found on page nos.188, 202,205,206,208,214,220,222,223,239-40,252,257, 260,270,277 in the second edition). Yeats wrote the introductions to Gitanjali, The Indian Monk, The Holy Mountain, The Aphorisms of Patanjali and The Mandukya Upanishad. In these essays he wrote at length about many complex Indian philosophical ideas with great accuracy. He also referred to India and its tradition in his introduction to the complete edition of his works which was never published. Though A Vision is known to be his personal philosophy based on his wife's many sessions of automatic writing, many of the ideas have been borrowed from Indian sources, particularly from Patanjali's Yoga System.

The interesting gyres are similar to the intersecting triangles of the Yantra, an instrument of worship used in Tantra on which the initiates mediate. Madame Blavatsky explains Yantra as

**“The junction and blending together of pure spirit and matter, of Arupa and Rupa, of which the triangles are symbol.”<sup>74</sup>**

Yeats assigns the diagram to Kusta Ben Luka, an altogether imaginary character. Madame Blavatsky had introduced the terms Faculties and Principles in The Secret Doctrine. Patanjali divides human psyche into four Faculties: Manas (Discursive Mind), Buddhi (Discriminative Mind or intellect), Chitta (Mind Material) and Ahamkara (Personality or egoism).

**The four Faculties in A Vision are Will- the first mater of the personality, Mask- the image of what one wishes to become, Body of Fate- the physical and mental environment, the changing human body and Creative Mind- the mind that is consciously constructive.<sup>75</sup>**

Yeats's 'Body of Fate' is much like 'Chitta', his Creative Mind is similar to Buddhi, the 'Mask' is comparable to 'Ahamkara' and 'Will' corresponds with 'Manas'.

**Yeats himself acknowledges that in the Dark Fortnight and Bright Fortnight of Brahmanism he had found, "the first distinction between primary and antithetical civilization."<sup>76</sup>**

According to Upanishads those who live in the Bright Fortnight are the subjective people who seek God within the Self and find liberation from the cycle of reincarnation.

**Those who live in the Dark Fortnight are of objective temperament and according to Yeats in A Vision "can find what peace can be found between death and birth" but they remain in the cycle of rebirth.<sup>77</sup>**

The Indian poems in 'Crossways' are no doubt Indian in terms of titles and themes. 'Anashuya and Vijaya' says Jeffers in A New Commentary on the Poems of W.B. Yeats, is based on a translation from Sanskrit. Its original title was 'Jealousy'. It is quite likely that Yeats borrowed the name Anashuya from Kalidasa's Shankuntala which he had read in Monier William's translation. Yeats's own note to the poem describes it as,

**"a little dramatic scene (which) was meant to be the first scene of a play about a man loved by two women, who had the one soul between them, the one**

woman waking when the other slept,  
and knowing but daylight as the other  
only night’.<sup>78</sup>

Naresh Guha suggests,

**This is a slight modification of the Indian conception of the higher and the lower selves expressed through the images of two birds sitting on the same branch, one bird eating the fruit while the other watches from The Mundaka Upanishad.<sup>79</sup> The Personal Self weary of pecking here and there, sinks into dejection but when he understands through meditation that he other- the Impersonal Self-is indeed spirit, dejection disappears.<sup>80</sup>**

Anashuya is the lower Self, the night whereas Amrita as the name suggests is the eternal, the daylight the Higher Self, the Impersonal Self. Vijaya’s Vacillation between the two is very effectively portrayed by Yeats by making the two women antiselves to each other. Yeats brings in many references to Indian Myths such as Brahma, Kama (Whom Yeats calls Indian Cupid in the notes to ‘The Wandering of Oisin’ and later calls him Eros in the notes to ‘Poems-1895’) and the golden peaks of Himalayas (Hermakuta) where the parents of the gods live.

**The phrase ‘parents of gods’ according to Ellmann Tibetan adepts Koot Hoomi and Morya, masters of Madame Blavatsky.<sup>81</sup>**

Since Yeats was familiar with Indian mythology, it is more likely that this is a reference to Kasyapa and Aditi, the parents of Agni, the son of Heaven and Earth.

The poem opens with a prayer for the well-being of the world which is similar to Vedic prayer. Anashuya’s love for Vijaya and for God seems to be mingled. This blending of asceticism and sensuality is in the spirit of Indian

tradition. The conflict though is Yeatsian, as Yeats faced the conflict during this period between asceticism and fulfillment of desires.

‘The Indian Upon God’ beautifully reveals the Indian belief that God is one with His creation and that the different creatures, animate and inanimate are all made in the image of god -the moorfowl, the lotus, the roebuck and the picture God’s image, each in its own image. The original title of the poem was ‘From the Book of Kauri the Indian-Section V, On the Nature of God’. Yeats later shortened it in ‘The Wandering of Oisin’ to ‘Kanva the Indian on God’. The poem reflects the Rig Veda’s notion of God which deifies nature, animals and human beings too. It expresses the idea that God is the perfect or the ideal form of every living thing on this earth, bird, animal or flower. The same concept is echoed in Yeats’s another poem ‘The Dancer at Cruachan and Cro-Patrick’,

**I PROCLAIMING that there is  
Among birds or beasts or men  
One that is perfect or at peace.<sup>82</sup>**

‘The Indian to His Love’ is the third Indian poem in his first collection ‘Cross Ways’. These three poems are

**“A witness of the spell of the Hindu  
thought, cast over him by the Brahmin  
Mohini Chatterjee” according to A.G.  
Stock.<sup>83</sup>**

Mary Catherine Flannery also says that the vague and mystical longings of Yeats were transformed into specific Indian philosophical ideas.

**She considers ‘An Indian Song’ and  
‘Quatrains and Aphorisms’ as two of  
Yeats’s explicitly Indian poems which  
incorporate these ideas of reincarnation  
and total acceptance.<sup>84</sup>**

‘An Indian Song’ (Dublin University Review of December 1886) was the earlier title which was changed to ‘The Indian to His Love’. In this poem the Indian narrator desires to escape with his sweet heart to a lonely island. Various references in the poem like the peahens, the parrot swaying on a tree create an Indian atmosphere.

Pagan Ireland believed in many gods and reincarnation. Christianity challenged these ideas and preached mono-theism and the end of the soul in heaven or hell. Ireland embraced Christianity but did not fully abandon its pagan pre-Christian beliefs and practices. Hinduism accommodated both the pagan as well as the Christian ideas. Yeats being Irish was naturally attracted to Hinduism. In the early part of his career he saw the similarities between Indian and Irish ideas about the soul, reincarnation and spiritual wisdom. The aesthetic doctrine Art for art's sake and the strong opposition to Philistinism in the 1880s and the emphasis on self-culture created condition suitable for a favorable response to Indian philosophy and its asceticism.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

Yeats was interested in Indian philosophy for a particular purpose and that was the poetic purpose. His interest in India was not that of a philosopher but that of a poet. Therefore he accepted only those ideas and symbols which were useful to him for his artistic purpose. He also modified and subverted some of these concepts. Whenever he borrowed or liked an Indian idea he tried to find an equivalent or a parallel for it with some Irish or European ideas. He was of course more receptive to Hinduism and Indian elements in the Irish tradition.

Thus, it is clear that there is a great deal of Hinduism impact on Yeats's poetry. Some of this influence came to him through his favorite poets like Shelley and Blake, some of it came through the Irish mythology, some of it came through theosophy and some of it through Indian personalities and books on Indian literature, philosophy and religion.

## References

1. Yeats, W.B., *Autobiographies*, London: Macmillan, 1966, p.347.
2. *The Variorum Edition of the plays of W.B.Yeats*. Ed. Peter Allt and Russell K.Alspach. London and New York: Macmillan, 1966, p.137.
3. *Letters on Poetry from W.B.Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*. New York: Oxford Uni. Press, Allan Walden. London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1964, p.834.
4. *The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.279.
5. Yeats, W.B. "The Way of Wisdom" *Quest*.62 July-Sept, 1969, pp. 77-79.
6. *The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, pp.279-80.
7. *The Bhagwad Gita*. Trans. Ed. S.Radhakrishnan. Bombay: Blackie and Son Ltd., 1975, p.153.
8. *The Ten Principle Upanishads*. Trans. Shri Purohit Swam and W.B.Yeats. Calcutta: Rupa & co., 1992, p.35.
9. *The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.17.
10. *Ibid.*, p.173.
11. *Ibid.*, p.37.
12. *Ibid.*, p.264.
13. *Ibid.*, p.285.
14. *Letters on Poetry from W.B.Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, New York: Oxford Uni. Press, Allan Walde. London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1964, p.790.
15. *The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.398.
16. *Ibid.*, p.398.
17. *Ibid.*, p.399.
18. Yeats, W.B., *Essays and Introductions*, London: Macmillan, 1961, p.483.
19. *Ibid.*, pp.482-83.
20. Mac Culloch, J.A., *The Religion of the Ancient Celt*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911, p.335.
21. Friedman, Norman, "Permanence and Change in Yeats." *Yeats-Eliot Review*.5, 2 (1978):p.28.
22. Patanjali, *The Aphorism of Yoga*, Trans. Shri Purohit Swami. London: Faber and Faber, 1838, p.15.
23. *The Ten Principle Upanishads*, Trans. Shri Purohit Swami and W.B.Yeats. Calcutta: Rupa & co., 1992, p.109.

24. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.285.
25. *The Ten Principle Upanishads*, Trans. Shri Purohit Swami and W.B. Yeats. Calcutta: Rupa & co., 1992.p.34.
26. Tagore, Rabindranath, *Sadhana*, New York: Te Macmillan Co., 1915, p.96.
27. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.192.
28. *The Variorum Edition of the poems of W.B. Yeats*. Ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach. London and New York: Macmillan, 1966, p.447.
29. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.277.
30. Ibid., p.147.
31. Frey, A.L., *The Swan –Knight Legend: Its Background and Treatment in German Poems*. Nashville, Tennessee: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1931, p.12.
32. Sankaran, Ravindran, *W.B. Yeats and the Indian Tradition*, Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1990, p.72.
33. Yeats, W.B., *Essays and Introductions*, London: Macmillan, 1961, p.484.
34. Bachchan, Harivanshrai, *W.B. Yeats and the Occult*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 1974, 76.f.n.
35. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933,p.294.
36. Ibid., p.295.
37. Ibid., p.292.
38. Ibid., p.341.
39. Ibid., p.343.
40. Ibid. p.344.
41. Ibid. p.344.
42. Ibid., p.256.
43. Ibid., p.328.
44. Ibid. p.328.
45. Walker, Benjamin, *Tantrism: Its Secret Principles and Practices*, Welling borough, Northampton shire: The Aquarian Press, 1982, p.59.
46. Fuller, J.F.C., *The Secret Wisdom of Kabalah*, Rider and Company, n.d. p.103.
47. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.328.
48. Yeats, W.B., *Essays and Introductions*, London: Macmillan, 1961, p.434.
49. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.331.
50. Ibid., p.329.
51. Ibid., p.331.

52. Guha, Naresh, *W.B.Yeats: An Indian Approach*, Calcutta: Jadavpur University, 1968, p.49.
53. *The Ten Principle Upanishads*, Trans. Shri Purohit Swami and W.B.Yeats. Calcutta: Rupa & co., 1992, p.54.
54. Jeffares, Norman A., *One Hundred Poems of Kabir Trans. Rabindranath Tagore*. London: Macmillan, 1915, pp.53-54.
55. Naito, Shiro, *Yeats and Zen: A Study of the Transformation of His Mask*, Kyoto: Yamaguchi Publishing House, 1990, p.17.
56. Raine, Kathleen, *Yeats the Initiate: Essays on certain themes in the works of W.B.Yeats*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1986, p.350.
57. Jeffares, Norman A., *One Hundred Poems of Kabir Trans. Rabindranath Tagore*. London: Macmillan, 1915, p.86.
58. *The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.245.
59. Raine, Kathleen, *Yeats the Initiate: Essays on certain themes in the works of W.B.Yeats*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1986, p.339.
60. *The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.401.
61. Jeffares, Norman A., *One Hundred Poems of Kabir Trans. Rabindranath Tagore*. London: Macmillan, 1915, p.20.
62. *Ibid.*, p.16.
63. *The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.282.
64. Jeffares, Norman A., *One Hundred Poems of Kabir Trans. Rabindranath Tagore*. London: Macmillan, 1915, p.105.
65. *Ibid.*, pp.38-39.
66. *Ibid.*, p.90.
67. *The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.280.
68. *Ibid.*, p.375.
69. *Ibid.*, p.337.
70. Naito, Shiro, *Yeats and Zen: A Study of the Transformation of His Mask*, Kyoto: Yamaguchi Publishing House, 1990, p.47.
71. Jeffares, Norman A., *One Hundred Poems of Kabir Trans. Rabindranath Tagore*. London: Macmillan, 1915, p.61.
72. *Ibid.*, p.34.
73. Zimmer, Heinerich, *Philosophies of India. Bollinger Series xxvi*, New York, 1951, p.234.

74. Blavatsky, H.P., *The Secret Doctrine* 6 Vols. Illinois: Wheaton, 1945,p.175.
75. Yeats, W.B., *A Vision*. London: Macmillan, 1937, p.15.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
77. Yeats, W.B, *Essays and Introductions*, London: Macmillan, 1961, p.469.
78. *The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.523.
79. Guha, Naresh, *W.B.Yeats: An Indian Approach*, Calcutta: Jadavpur University, 1968, p.41.
80. *The Ten Principle Upanishads*, Trans. Shri Purohit Swami and W.B.Yeats. Calcutta: Rupa & co., 1992, p.50.
81. Ellmann, Richard, *W.B.Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, London: Faber and Faber, 1948, p.71.
82. *The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933, p.304.
83. Stock, A.G., *W.B.Yeats: His Poetry and Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961, p.11.
84. Flannery, Mary Catherine, *Yeats and Magic: The Earlier works*, Garden Cross: Colin Smythe, 1971, p.28.