CHAPTER 1

THE BENGALI MIND AND ITS AFFILIATIONS

The Distinctiveness of the Bengali Mind

The poetic personality of Rabindranath, varied and engaging as it is, tends to lure us away from the past phases of Bengali literature. His own art, has, as a consequence, made itself misunderstood to the ever-increasing number of his readers. Their complacency has, at times, given the whole credit to the West for shaping the genius of Tagore. We cannot, of course, ignore the Western influence on his creative mind. But that is not enough. One has to adopt a historically balanced point of view. It would be inadvisable to insist on the term Orient because the Orient does not denote a rigidly unalloyed idea, but connotes a vast receptacle of divergent traditions. One must not see only the Upanisadic legacy in either the Ananda concept of Rabindranath or his idea of the 'Inner Man'. It is time to look for the elements of indigenous traditions which were so marvellously transmuted by Rabindranath to greater dimensions. So his name comes at the very outset of this discussion simply because he represents all that is essential in Indian culture, both classical and indigenous.

The Bengali Mind, ab ovo, shone in a sharp, though synthetic contrast to the Aryan Mind. While attempting to des-
cribe the Pan-Indian Mind, even some of our eminent scholars of penetrating intuition start, at times, with the axiom that Indian culture is primarily a Sanskrit culture. Without explicitly denying, they somehow underrate the wholesome contribution of the non-Sanskritic to the somewhat complicated fabric of Indian culture. An excerpt from a dissertation by Dr. Suniti Kumār Chatterji will help us to understand this attitude and arrive at our own: "The thing which expresses this atmosphere of Pan-Indian is the Sanskrit language or a language derived from or connected with Sanskrit. Indian culture is, in fact, Sanskrit culture, or Sanskritic culture. It is expressed either through Sanskrit—directly; or indirectly, through modern Indian languages of Aryan, Dravidian, Austric or Sino-Tibetan origin; or even through a highly Persianised Sanskritic language like Urdu, the Muslim form of Hindi, which may outwardly or formally ignore Sanskrit and the Sanskritic heritage.

"Sanskrit in its origin is an Aryan or Indo-European language, as we all know. But in its evolution on the soil of India the non-Aryan people had a share in its development, in determining its tendencies and its history, helping to change its phonetics and its grammar and to modify and to add to its vocabulary. It was thus a joint product of both Aryan and non-Aryan, so that it could become by 500 B.C. the most natural vehicle of composite Indian Aryan-non-Aryan culture."
Here the whole thing has been discussed mainly from the philological point of view. But as the question of culture also comes in, we can legitimately draw our own conclusions from the above. We are thus not assuming that Indian culture is Sanskrit culture or inferring that Sanskrit only serves as the natural vehicle of the composite Indian Aryan-non-Aryan culture. Non-Sanskritic culture, it may safely be inferred, is not a mere derivation from Sanskrit culture but also a sharp deviation from the latter.

As regards the marked uniqueness of the Bengali Mind, it must be admitted that its difference from the Sanskrit Mind is no greater than the difference between the insular, yet accommodating, English Mind and the Mind of Europe. It is beyond our scope to dwell on the fact that the time-honoured themes of classical antiquities had to undergo a drastic process of transformation through the typically English poets like Chaucer and Shakespeare, but we can by reminding ourselves of that transmigration throw some light on the present context. Remembering that Bengal was the last region to be Aryanized, one cannot forget the interesting history of the exchange of thorough-bred complexes between Aryandom and nascent Bengal.

Affiliations With Other Vernaculars

Some of the other associate vernaculars also deserve mention along with Bengali for their pronounced disregard of
their procreator, i.e., Sanskrit:

paṭānti lātamam lātāḥ prākrtam saṃskṛtam adviṣṭah/
jihvā lalitollāpaludhāsaundaryamudraya//

(The inhabitants of Gujratā disregard Sanskrit and are fond of Prākṛt. While mellifluously reciting Prākṛt they make a gesture with the tongue which signifies agreeableness).

Read in its proper context, this statement by Rājasēkhara poses an inner conflict also, which urges the new to be different from its predecessor and to look for a distinct norm of its vernacular. The patrons of Sanskrit, on the other hand, vociferously branded these competitors as ignorant apostates. This is clear from the following comments by Hālayudha in his Brāhmaṇa-Sarvasva:

(a) tatra cha kalou āyuḥprājñotsāha-śraddhādināmalpatvāt
utkalapāchātyādibhūvedadhyānamātram kriyate, radhiyā-
vārendraistvadhyayaman vinā kiyadeva karmāṁmaṁśā
dvārena yajñetikartavyatāvichārāṁ kriyate

(The inhabitants of Orissa and Gujratā only read the Vedas but are not well versed in the Vedas because these people have neither longevity nor sanity, nor faith in this fallen era. The people of Rādha and Vārendra, on the other hand, do not even read the Vedas, but depend only on the efficaciousness of the rituals).
(Those who live in Gauda do not study the Vedas. Nor do they grasp the significance of the Vedas).

Investigating the reason behind these derogatory remarks we can easily realise that the underrated inhabitants of Utkal, Paschima (Gujrata) and Gauda are not to be blamed for their imperfect studies of, or total abstention from, the Vedas. This studied or instinctive indifference of theirs is to be interpreted as their anti-Vedic attitude, the desire to be completely different from their progenitors.

To be different was not, indeed, an easy task. The fruitfulness of Sanskrit poetry made itself keenly felt to the poets of the transitional period, i.e., the period when our poets were oscillating between the accepted norm of Sanskrit and the nascent indigenous forms.

This led to the constant conflict in them between the mind and the medium. The story of such a work of transitional period "Yasatilaka will show... that the author has used several metres only to be found in Apabhramśa works. Somadeva's Sanskrit is full of desi words and popular maxims to be found preserved in Marathi and other Indian vernaculars. It is clear that Somadeva was considerably influenced by the popular Apabhramśa literature".
The Saduktikarnāmṛta, an anthology of Sanskrit poetry compiled in Bengal by Śrīdharadāsa on 1206 A. D., poses this conflict. The following poem (ascribed to Umāpatidhara) from this anthology suffices to prove this duality:

�त्रत्‌च्छ्हायाअच्छुरिताजलाधौ मान्डिरे द्वारकयाम
रुक्मियापि प्रतातपुलकोभद्मालिंगितायस्याय /
विद्मियांनमांयामनातिरवानिर्कूले-
ष्वाभिरस्त्रिनिधर्ताचारिताह्यानामपुर्च्छ्हामुर्च्छामुरा /

(Let Kṛṣṇa's swoon in the remembrance of Rādhā's dalliance in the vetasagrove on the smooth beach of Jamunā, while he is rapturous in the embrace of Rukmīṇī in the Dvarakā temple amidst the ocean that dazzles with the radiance of gems, protect the whole world.)

What strikes the reader is the intense secular interest discernibly veiled beneath the deification. The poem is studded with rich images and has a rare subjective quality which is absent in earlier court-poetry. Yet the poet suppresses the whole thing as if in a miniature painting. This disallows the common reader to get beyond the fringe. The sloka has not been rendered in the poet's mother-tongue, as would have been natural. Despite his fine imaginative sensibility, the poet clings to a recognised convention.

Irresolution in the Court-poets and Jayadeva

Particularly interesting, therefore, is the prospective yet the procrastinating tendency in the court-poets of the time.
The sloka of Rājasēkhara referred to before does not conceal the fact that he wavered much between the established standard and the emergent one. Equally wavering, though more resolute than Rājasēkhara, was Jayadeva. If we take into consideration, argumenti causa, the conjecture that 'the Gita-govinda of Jayadeva goes back to an original work written in Aparābhramsa',9 we legitimately may ask the reason of its being recast into Sanskrit. The reason, in that case, is surely a hesitation, mingled with a note of pride of standing apart, as would be evident from the sloka that follows:

\[ \text{vāchāḥ pallavātyumāpatidharaḥ sandarbhasuddhim girāṃ} \\
\text{jānīte jayadeva eva sāraṇāḥ slāghyo durūhadrute} / \\
\text{sṛngārottara satprameyara chanāirāchāryagovardhanaḥ} \\
\text{spardhī koṭpi na viśrutāḥ śrutidharo dhoyī kavikṣmā -} \\
\text{patih//}^{10} \]

On a deeper examination of the above assessment one finds that Jayadeva has no high opinion about his colleagues. In this estimation they never rise above mediocre adroitness and have nothing original to aim at. To him Umāpatidhara is a dealer in clap-trap, Sārana a nimble quibbler, Govardhanāchārya an adept imitator of time-worn erotic models; as for Dhoyī, he is vague with a studied indifference, if not contempt, for the poet, the very title of whose poem reminds one of Kālidāsa's
Meghadūtām. There is an element of truth in this underestimation. Significantly enough, Jayadeva terms his composition as 'pure' or 'original' (suddha). From a historical point of view, Jayadeva is, indeed, 'pure' or 'original' and not a verbose craftsman of somewhat Anacreontic vein, as even Pramatha Chaudhuri, a critic equipped with a broad perspective, takes him to be.11 Jayadeva, among his diffident contemporaries, faced onerous task both in regard to form and content. It was he, who compared the Bengali Mind with the Sanskrit critic and the others only clung blindly to the latter. This spirit of comparison urged him to mould the classical Pan-Indian Kṛṣṇa-legend into a romantic Kṛṣṇa-kathā. And the whole of India again, took from him the inheritance of this romanticism, which is typically Bengali in character.12 So far as the form of Jayadeva's romantic Kavya is concerned, modern critics have found in it a lyric drama (Lassen), a pastoral (Jones), an opera (Lévi), a melodrama (Pischel) and a refined yāṭrā (Von Schroeder). It is obvious that none of these descriptions is adequate ... The chief interest of this work lies in its Padāvalīs. They are meant to be sung as speeches being skillfully composed as word-picture in rhymed, alliterative, and musical matic metres; and the use of refrain not only intensifies their haunting melody, but also combines the detached stanzas into a perfect whole. They have narration, description and speech finely interwoven with recitation and song, a combina-
Jayadeva's achievement is to be remembered as the conscious work of an exponent of the Bengali Mind. Perhaps no other artist of any transitional period had to accomplish such a huge task. His technique or form alone can give him the status of an original exponent, like Martin Opitz (1597–1639), who imitated the French poet Ronsard, but still is considered the father of German poetry because of his discovery of the mystery of stress-accent and two feet, those of the iambus and the trochee, in German poetry. Jayadeva, however, occupies a far more extensive field because his poetic form is form in the proper sense of the term, i.e., the manifestation of a being. His form reflects the dreams and resolutions of the Bengali Mind.

The Proto-Bengali Nucleus

While the honour of an all-round exponent goes to Jayadeva, he should not be accredited with the whole responsibility of rehabilitating the Bengali Mind for the first time to a modus uniquely its own. However native he is in his stanzaic patterns and sonorous quality, taking note of the fact that his lied, after all, was composed in Sanskrit, our overwhelming recognition must go to the proto-Bengali poets, who wrote Charyā-gītīs in their vernacular. What these poets handed down to posterity was not finished poetically, but then, it was the
product of a long procedure and itself a generating process. This was only the beginning, though. Compared to Jayadeva, the Charya-poets were more sanguine and unhesitant about their programme and treatment. They had the advantage of remaining distant from and, therefore, unpolluted by the court-atmosphere. Sandhyākara Nandi, a court-poet near about their time, called himself 'the Vālmīki of the fallen era' (kalikāla-vālmīki) and wrote ambiguously in Āryā metre the tale of Rāma and that of his royal patron, Rāmapāla Deva. This was the sheer outcome of an inferiority complex and had nothing to do with Bengali spirit.

The Charya-poets, on the other hand, maintained the flexible yet irrepressible Bengali spirit and their neo-Buddhist doctrine, anti-Vedic in character, was chiefly responsible for their adherence to this spirit. The Jainas, although to an extent distinct in design from the above faith, were associates of the Buddhists in achieving this common objective. To cite Kāliprasanna Bandyopādhyāya, "The ancient Bengalees were a polygenous race... Coming in contact with the Jaina teachers like Mahāvīra in West Bengal; and with mendicants in North and East Bengal, these people attained a character different from the Hindu society of other provinces."
Still these Jaina or Buddhistic influences are discernible in rituals and worships of Bengal. It is in our country that the Siddhāchāryas like Luipāda and Kāhṇa-pada adapted the old Mahāyānī Buddhistic doctrine, imbued with the pristine Hīnayānī code, to the national need of ours. They prepared the ground for their successors who could smoothly preach the Religion of Man in many ways. What these Sahajiyā Buddhists and Jainas started ran on and renewed itself in the Sahajiyā Vaisnava doctrine, the decadent aftermath of the Vaisnava ethos. This originality under an eclectic enterprise may be said to be the *sine qua non* of the Bengali Mind.

To conclude, before entering into details, "...Bengal had a distinctness which clearly indicated that before its submergence under Brahmanical tradition, the East (Bihar, Assam and the Delta of the Ganges) was the seat of a civilization different in some significant respects from that of the middle Gangetic valley... Buddhism and Jainism had their origin east of the orthodox centre of Brahmanical culture in the Middle Gangetic plain; and in both the authority of the Vedas was denied. In these two religious systems, there is not only a critical, moral approach to the problems of life, but both are informed by the insistence upon the primacy of the human manifest in Vedic ritualism and theology...The heterodoxy,
a mild degree of non-conformism has, at least, released the intellect and spirit of Bengal to experiment with new ideas, without feeling a guilt, not being closely tied to orthodoxy. And that has been one of the features which helped later on to turn this particular corner of India into a melting pot of new ideas and new institutions. At least, it helped to build up a receptivity in the Bengali Mind of what was unorthodox and what tended to lean towards humanism, whether that was of the mystical or of the more secular, rationalistic variety."
NOTES


4. Ṛṣṭiśekhara's Kāvyā-mīmaṃsā (G. C. S. I., p 33).


6. Varadarāja's commentary on Nyāya Kusumaṇḍali of Udayana.


Dr. Sukumār Sen in a recent article has expressed the view that Jayadeva's work is founded upon the non-Sanskritic basis of Atavatā and old Bengali (Visvabhārati Patrikā, Oct-Dec, 1958, pp. 114-15).

10 The Gītā-govinda (1/4).


12 Dr. Niharānjan Rāy, Bāṅgālīr Itiḥās, p. 753. Elsewhere Dr. Rāy throws more light on the decadent yet romanticizing tendencies of the art of Sena period in relation to Jayadeva's poetry: "The art of 12th century represents mainly that of the Senas, and a cross-section of the literature and culture patronised in the Sena court reveals the attitude of worldly exuberance that one notices in Sena sculptures. Even religious themes — both in art and literature — are endowed with a worldly consciousness and almost physical charm and grace... The poem of Jayadeva, for example, may be regarded as a literary counterpart of the voluptuous sensuousness of the Sena art. In its origin it had no doubt religious inspiration but there is also no doubt that what was basically a spiritual experience came to be overshadowed by a trend developed in the Sena court. Sensuousness and grace were properties of earlier period of Bengali art as well, but it was left to the Senas..."
to allow them to degenerate into mere worldly lavishness (History of Bengal, Vol. I, p. 545).


16 Nirmal Kumar Bose, Modern Bengal, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 8-12.