CHAPTER-3

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA ON WESTERN LITERATURE

The medieval India closed all its doors to the outside world; this was the consequence of an ego-centric sensibility\(^1\) the Indians fell victim to. As a result of this ego-centrism, all possibilities for expansion, material as well as spiritual, were barred and the result was more or less a general, narrow outlook on life. But the Bengal Renaissance\(^2\) brought a new awareness of life and the world. The hidden spirituality in the minds of the average Bengali (Indian) mind got woken up from age-old slumber: “This awareness was not limited to the exposition of the self to the world, rather he invited the world to his own small world…”\(^3\) Naturally, side by side with the rise of nationalism there was a universal awakening the at the same time.

Nolini Kanta Gupta, the child of the Indian Renaissance, was a many-sided genius. Besides being well-versed in ancient Sanskrit literature, even Pali and old Bengali, he possessed at the same time, a profound knowledge of modern Bengali literature as well as modern western literature. To speak the truth, he drank deep into the ocean of western literature and chose to write on the life, philosophy and works of some geniuses of his choice. Interestingly, he wrote on the works of only those writers in whom he had nurtured throughout a special interest. His eye often fell on the life and works of the mystics or men of enlightenment with mystical turns of mind or on literary pieces which are more or less open to mystical interpretations. He cherished a profound interest in western life, philosophy, culture and literature. It was the need of the hour to pave the way of a cultural exchange between the East and the West. The treasures of
the East were yet unexplored by the West; the East was also deprived of the treasures of the West until Raja Rammohan Roy appeared on the scene.

But Rammohan’s efforts at bringing together the East and the West met oppositions from orthodox orientalist camps. After Rammohan Roy, however, the lamp of the urge for a mutual correspondence was carried forward by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Ranade, Nolini Kanta Gupta and so on. The advent of Rabindranath Tagore was another great event; for it was he who would play the most vital role in that direction. But leaving aside the parts played by Rammohan, Rabindranath and others, Nolini Kanta’s contribution in this respect has also been very great and significant, which, unfortunately, has gone almost unrecognized. While Rammohan was a man anchored thoroughly in the western enlightenment, Nolini Kanta was out and out an Indian soul liberal enough to embrace all that he considered valuable for the uplift of the nation.

As a result of the endeavours of these great men of the 19th-20th centuries, the Bengali mind broke free from the age-old narrow boundaries; the other realms beckoned him from across the shores. In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, though much was lost as a result of the introduction of the European life and culture, it was beneficial in three respects: first of all, “It revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse; it rehabilitated life and awakened the desire of new creation; it put the reviving Indian spirit face to face with novel conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity of understanding, assimilating and conquering them.” The literary world of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Homer, Euripides and others enthralled them and “… intellectual excursions to the ideological world of Virgil, Ovid, Tasso, Dante and Petrarch…” became a
regular event. They came into intimate contact with the works of the English poets and writers, viz., Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, Browning, Eliot and the like; and tasted the immortal works of European literature such as those of Dante, Goethe, Racine, Hugo, Baudelaire, Supervielle, Mallarme, Eliot, Pasternak and many others. As a result of all this, the Bengali mind underwent an expansion.

The literary efforts of Bankim Chandra and Michael Madhusudan Dutta quickened the process; but it was Tagore who brought an awareness of the universal through his works. Later on, it was Nolini Kanta himself who became the channel through which world literature made its way smoothly to the hearts of enlightened Bengalis. The yogic orientation of Nolini Kanta had its play here. In effecting this individual identification with the universal, he himself turned into a yogic instrument, for yoga is essentially a union—a union of the microcosm with the macrocosm.

Many of Nolini Kanta’s writings contain his insightful observations on western poets and mystics and their works. Nolini Kanta has authored illuminating essays on poets and writers of different languages such as Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Blaise Pascal(1623-1662), Jules Supervielle (1884-1960), Walter Hilton (1343-1396), William Blake(1757-1827), Nicholas Berdiaev (1874-1948, Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), Goethe (1749-1832), T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947), Shakespeare (1564-1616), Robert Graves (1895-1985), Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), George Seferis (1900-1971), and Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980)—all these essays are to be found in Volume Two of *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta* which unmistakably bear the mark of an enlightened mind. Besides, in the essay *Two Mystic Poems in Modern French*, he has provided explanatory paraphrases of two mystic
poems written in modern French, viz., *Chanson Des Étages* and *Poèmes (Extrait)* by René Char and Jean-Claude Renard.

Nolini Kanta’s essay *Mystic Poetry* is concerned with the mystical elements in Indian as well as Western poets; and among the western poets Nolini Kanta brings to his discussion, poems and even hymn of poets like John Donne, Henry Vaughan, Addison, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Browning, Arnold, Hardy, George William Russel (A.E.), John Hall, Thomas Ken (English), Mallarme, Baudelaire, Albert Samain (French), Lucretius (Roman), Sophocles, Euripides (Greek) Dante and Goethe (German). In his *The Poetry in the Making*, he attempts a definition of poetry and in connection with his discussion on poetic composition makes brief mention of the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Dryden, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Thomas Hardy, A. E. Housman, Robert Bridges, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden (English), Voltaire, Jacques Delille, Baudelaire, Stendhal, Flaubert, Mallarme, Valery, Louis Aragon (French) Homer, Aristotle, Sophocles (Greek), Virgil, Horace (Roman) and Goethe (German).

In addition to these essays, in many places of his writings of general nature, he has referred to different poets and writers. In his essay *Occult Experiences*, Nolini Kanta has shed light on two French poems, one by Alfred de Musset, the renowned French poet, dramatist and novelist and the other by Jules Supervielle, especially in connection with his discussion on occult experiences. Sri Aurobindo was all praise for the Western master Dante and Nolini Kanta was no exception; the result was an essay that came from his multifarious pen-- *Vision of Dante*. In addition to these, he has expressed his views on modernism in two brilliant essays, namely, *Aspects of Modernism* and *Modernist Poetry*. It would be better, therefore, to look at Nolini
Kanta’s essays under the following captions, viz., (i) French Literature (ii) English Literature (iii) Russian Literature (iv) German Literature (v) Greek Literature (vi) Italian Literature and (vii) The Essays of a General Nature.

(i) FRENCH LITERATURE:

BLAISE PASCAL

Blaise Pascal is chiefly known today as a renowned French mathematician, philosopher, physicist, inventor and theologian of the seventeenth century. In his essay *Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)*, Nolini Kanta has tried to focus deeply on Blaise Pascal the mystic and theologian. In a brief biographical note, Blaise Pascal has been described as—

He came under the influence of Jansenism, a branch of Catholic thought which emphasized original sin and predestination,…he wrote *les Provinciales*…His greatest work is the posthumously published *Pensees*…The *Pensees* paint a dark picture of human beings, their contradictions analyzed with an intensity of logic and passion characteristic of all work.⁹

Blaise Pascal was a versatile genius. The history of philosophy remembers him as one of the founding fathers of existentialism. His interests in science and mathematics remained with him even after his midnight conversion, the *Night of Fire*.¹⁰

In the sphere of exact science, Pascal’s achievements were great. But Nolini Kanta’s interest in Pascal lies elsewhere; his intention is to examine how Pascal’s preoccupation with mathematics went into laying the foundations of his metaphysics and theology. Pascal, even in his investigation into truth, clang to his geometrical method. Pascal believed that side by side with the order of physical truths, there is another valid order
which also deserves enquiry and investigation—that is the order of the Spirit. Intuition plays a vital role; the human experiences have their roots in the heart. But reason too is an essential part of the existence.

But Pascal is equally concerned of the two excesses: the first is to reject reason and the second is to accept nothing but reason. He applies the mathematics of probability to metaphysics and draws the conclusion that theism is more advantageous than atheism. Nolini Kanta is aware that Pascal’s journey is a journey from reason to faith; and that he has journeyed the path attaching due importance to reason. A critic has observed: “Pascal’s keen intelligence made him realize that there are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamed of in a proposition of Euclid and that the emotions very often have a logic of their own which reason itself cannot fathom.” Pascal’s preoccupation with Jansenism makes him look at man as a sinful creature and here his attitude differs from that of the ancient Indian seers; he lacks their serene and happy self-possession. But he considers him an antidote to the contemporary stagnant and gloomy state of affairs.

Pascal was an extra-ordinary writer of prose as well. Nolini Kanta is all praise for Pascal’s power of expression. The style of his prose, according to a critic, is natural, plain, and unornamented. Another critic considers his style to be the most spontaneous of his age bearing the marks of meditation, logic, and a rare psychological insight. In the opinion of Nolini Kanta, the development of French prose owes a lot to Pascal. There are the virtues of clarity, precision, logic, warmth, colour, life and plasticity—all blended together in his prose.
JULES SUPERVIELLE

Nolini Kanta Gupta in his essay *Jules Supervielle* sheds a searching light on the poems penned by Jules Supervielle. According to him, Jules Supervielle has broken a new ground in French poetry and that is definitely because of his mystical vision so characteristic of the East. According to Nolini Kanta, his mysticism is not the normal spiritual one; it is oblique and it is this oblique approach that helps him render the veil and look beyond. The straight approach, on the other hand, is incapable of securing entry into the inner realm of the soul. He speaks of two other approaches: 1. The approach which is upward looking and not an inward movement, and 2. the one which is downward gazing seeking a contact with the underworld. In Nolini Kanta’s opinion, it is this very obliqueness of his approach that makes Supervielle modern.

Nolini Kanta characterizes Supervielle’s poetry as mystic, not religious. In his poetry, as another critic has observed, there is a fluidity and the borderline between the earth and the sky, the sea and the land are not distinctly marked and “its mutual sorrow that somewhat binds the living and the dead.” As an instance of his mysticism, Nolini Kanta takes up Supervielle’s poem *Alter Ego* and interprets it as a conversation between the ‘I’ and the ‘Other-I’ and emphasizes that the reality lies with the other self. In another poem, *Lui Seul*, the image of reality that is presented is not always unreal. But one cannot be sure even that it is the reality. Here, the boundary between reality and unreality vanishes. But man comes to identify this reality in its true perspective in the very dead of night, when he has forgotten himself and the world around. The poem *Saisir* has also that mystic air around. It is about knowing the reality with the help of the senses. Shedding light on the modernity of Supervielle’s poetic style, Nolini Kanta refers to his straight and clear diction used in an oblique way.
RENE CHAR AND JEAN-CLAUDE RENARD

Nolini Kanta Gupta has also offered explanatory paraphrases of two mystic poems, namely, *Chanson Des Étages* and *Poèmes (Extraits)* by René Char and Jean-Claude Renard respectively and the paraphrases are followed by short comments. *Chanson Des Étages* by Rene Char, taken from *Poetry*, Volume 104, No 5 August 1964 issue, is a poem of 31 lines and it is divided into six stanzas. Significantly, Nolini Kanta approaches the poem quite from an Indian viewpoint. He reads the poem in its symbolic perspective and interprets the symbols employed in the poem, such as the queen living upstairs, the king downstairs, the secret flame etc. in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy: the ascent and descent of Consciousness. He also uses Aurobindonian terminology such as consciousness, earth-consciousness, Ignorance to describe the symbols used in the poem.

Nolini Kanta has also given an explanatory paraphrase of Jean-Claude Renard’s *Poèmes (Extraits)*. He explains the three stanzas of the poem one by one and ends it with a note on the whole poem. The poem speaks of the higher consciousness hidden in the heart of leaves and flowers. Though the poet feels the fragrance but he is unable to catch it. With his inner vision, the poet, however, catches a glimpse of the higher consciousness. In the second stanza, the poet exploits animal symbols--a hound of Heaven and a falcon of the sky. The animals rush about and hide in secret holes and corners. But men with a secret, bright vision can catch a glimpse of them. He expresses that his blood is a willing prey, i.e., ready to be hunted. It is alive only because of the fact that it is no more. All forms are but walking statues here. His earthly home is a mourning hall and it cannot be transformed into a hall of beauty. His mouth is bitten by
acid that has been thrown upon an increasing silence. It is a fire coming from heights that are snowy and chilling cold.

Nolini Kanta’s explanatory paraphrase to the second poem begins with a definition of mysticism and the definition is also expressive of the yogic philosophy he believes in. Here he defines mysticism as the outcome of an interaction between the Higher, symbolic of light and the Lower that stands for darkness. Though initially hostile to one another, with maturity, the communication between the two takes place. The Lower flies to the Higher and the Higher come down to get lodged in the lower in order to purify and transform it.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Freedom is one of the fundamental ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80). Nolini Kanta’s short essay Sartrian Freedom revolves round Sartre’s key conclusion on freedom. Sartre does not consider freedom as a being in itself: to him, it is the being of man and the being of man is essentially his non-being. It is well-known that freedom is conceived of as an intolerable burden in his celebrated Being and Nothingness. As a philosopher, Sartre owed a lot to Husserl and Heidegger. His own philosophical system “rests on the premise that ‘God is dead’; therefore atheism is a necessary basis for ethics. In Sartre’s view, man’s destiny is not predetermined, and there is no universal moral law; thus, as a moral agent, man is free; indeed he is condemned to freedom, so that his commitment remains his own choice and responsibility. He cannot, however, exist as an individual without recognizing the role played by others in his own evaluation of himself.”
The question of freedom was Sartre’s life-time preoccupation and since the time of his imprisonment following his arrest during the World War, this became “the central problematic of his thinking.”25 Nolini Kanta, however, says that freedom is not simply what it means—existing; it is a movement. He refers to Bergson according to whom the ultimate reality means continuity of urge i.e élan vital. Sartre considered reality to be an assemblage of discreet units of energy. Therefore, Nolini Kanta concludes: “So, freedom is an urge, a spurt (jaillissement): it acts in a disconnected fashion and it is absolute...It has no purpose, no direction, no relation: for all those attributes or definitions would annul its absoluteness. It does not stop or halt or dwell upon, it bursts forth and passes. It does not exist, that is stay,: therefore it is non-being.”26

He further says that the being of Man consists of a conglomeration of such freedoms.27 The Sartrian Purusha, he assumes, is a personality divided with itself.28 Despite having the sense of responsibility, he acts without it, as acting otherwise would mar his freedom. Therefore, for Sartre, “it is the emptiness behind all concrete realities that is the true reality.”29 This idea, according to Nolini Kanta, abolishes all relations and obligations. He says that Sartre’s novels and plays depict the interactions of free persons. Though essential freedom means licence, society curtails or inhibits this. This conflict is fundamental to Sartre’s philosophy and has been left unresolved. This is the foundation of his tragic nihilism. According to him, this is psycho-vital consciousness which is horizontal; only transcendence can offer a way out. Nolini Kanta, it is quite note-worthy, looked at Sartre’s ideology as something that negates life. He, however, prescribes transcendence or a vertical uplifting of the being as a remedy for Sartrian consciousness which he considers horizontal.
(ii) ENGLISH LITERATURE:

SHAKESPEARE

Nolini Kanta Gupta’s essay *Hamlet: a Crisis of the Evolving Soul* is an essay in which he studies the character and crisis of Hamlet from a peculiarly Indian standpoint. In his appraisal, he has kept in mind Sri Aurobindonian concepts of evolution and involution of consciousness and his views on Shakespeare expressed in his *The Future Poetry*. Besides, he also takes destiny into account in his appraisal of Hamlet. Shakespeare can be intensively studied in two ways that may be regarded as the scholarly and the critical.30 The scholarly study takes into account “Shakespeare’s environment and examine his plays in the conditions of their original composition.”31 But in a critical study, great literature is viewed as “timeless and therefore perpetually modern.”32 The critic does not bother about antiquity and all that; and hence, Nolini Kanta’s approach in this essay can be termed as critical. We may begin with Sri Aurobindo’s observation on Shakespeare: “The outward form of Shakespeare’s work is a surge of emotion and passion and thought and act and event arising out of character at ferment in the yeast of feeling and passion, but it is its living interpretation of the truth and powers of the life-soul of man that are the core of greatness of his work…”33.

Commenting on Shakespeare’s heroes, S. C. Sen Gupta writes: “The hero of tragedy in Shakespeare…is always an extra-ordinary man. He either possesses traits which no ordinary mortal shares or he exhibits ordinary qualities in an extra-ordinary combination.”34. Hamlet is no exception either. He suffers, physically as well as psychologically, at the hands of his adversaries and a merciless destiny. His crisis apparently results from the fact that “He is slow to act, given to too much to brooding, too fine a soul to remain untouched by the grossness and rotten-ness of things
According to Bradley also, his thought, which is the element of his life, is infected. But what is generally considered by some to be a flaw in his character may stand out to be ‘a symptom of genius’ for some others.

Nolini Kanta’s appraisal of Hamlet and his crisis, however, is peculiarly Aurobindonian. The evolution of consciousness and involution of consciousness are important concepts in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Nolini Kanta, obviously, looks at Hamlet’s crisis in the light of these concepts. He looks at Hamlet’s crisis as one facing the consciousness as it moves—“forward and upward, towards a greater and greater self-expression and self-expansion…”Interestingly, ‘the truth and powers of the life-soul of man’ in Sri Aurobindo’s statement has been expressed as ‘greater and greater self-expression and self-expansion’ of consciousness by Nolini Kanta. In his opinion, Hamlet exhibits “…the consciousness and the destiny of the human soul at a most fateful crisis, a crucial turning-point in the course of its evolution.” He does not look at Hamlet as an individual with distinctive characteristics of his own; he rather looks through Hamlet’s soul in turmoil the consciousness and the destiny of the human soul.

According to him, in Macbeth as well as in King Lear, Shakespeare has given expression to two other mysterious crises of the consciousness in its evolution. The three great tragedies, namely Hamlet, Macbeth and King Lear “…form a trilogy with the karma of the human soul at different crises as its theme.” Obviously, the Hindu theory of the Karma enters here. In Hindu philosophy, great emphasis has been laid on karma or action and it is believed that a man actually reaps what he sows. Commenting on dramatic poetry, Sri Aurobindo also has made the following significant remark: “…drama is the poet’s vision of some part of the world-act in the
life of the human soul, it is in a way his vision of Karma, in an extended and very flexible sense of the word; and at its highest point it becomes a poetic rendering or illustration of the Aeschylean *drasanti pathein*, ‘the doer shall feel the effect of his act,…’ It is, therefore, quite clear that Nolini Kanta is following the Aurobindonian track in his criticism of Hamlet.

While throwing further light on the evolutionary aspect, Nolini Kanta says that Lear, Macbeth and Hamlet represent three stages in the scale of evolution—the *Rakshasa*, the *Asura* and the *sattvik*. The consciousness that is depicted in *King Lear* is at its lowest, the *tamasik*; it is in the realm of utter ignorance, hunger and greed. Man is characterized here as nothing but a biological entity—the *Rakshasa* and the world depicted in *King Lear* is a *tamasik* one. But in *King Lear* a divine ray, descending from above, is discernible only in the character of Cordelia. But in *Macbeth*, it is not hunger or greed or cruelty but a craving for power and authority that is the driving force. In his view, in *Macbeth*, the *Rakshasa* is replaced by the *Asura*. This is the world of *rajas*. Hamlet represents the third stage in the gradient of consciousness: “it is a vision of sattva-guna and a creation attempted by that vision.”

In Hamlet, Nolini Kanta observes, man is almost free from the lower impulses and begins to bear the imprint of a divine nature. Hamlet is not an intellectual genius only; he is a moral idealist as well. Side by side with Nolini Kanta’s observation, we may also recall here what G. Wilson Knight says about Hamlet. In his opinion, Hamlet did possess certain good traits of character and conscience, but “Whatever he is, he is no hero” and so the duty of avenging his father’s murder was too heavy a burden for him to bear. Knight also notes the presence of the element of evil as the main source of convulsion in Shakespearean Tragedy producing suffering, misery and death. But in his
opinion, the nature of evil is not the same everywhere. Though *Hamlet* foreshadows *Macbeth*, the evil is not that powerful and “though we have a villain, he is a small one.”\(^{49}\) But the presence of evil is definitely conspicuous in the tragedies that follow *Hamlet*.

G.W. Knight has assigned *Hamlet* the first place in his gradient foreshadowing not only *Macbeth*, but *Troilus and Cressida*, *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens* as well in the working out of the tragic and supernatural machinery; but his gradient is obviously not based on the evolving consciousness as is Nolini Kanta’s. Nolini Kanta’s approach is quite different from the western approaches to evil; it is at bottom Indian and also Aurobindonian. The concepts of the *Rakshasa* and the *Asura* etc. are not degrees in the scale of moral evil; they are the stages in the development of consciousness. The application of the *Rakshasa-Asura* concepts and the concepts of the *gunas* such as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* to literary criticism are entirely new and the dexterity with which Nolini Kanta has used these Indian spiritual concepts as tools in his interpretations of the Shakespearean tragedies is astonishing. His interpretations undoubtedly have a force of their own and it is this that make them sound plausible, though a little bizarre.

Many of the Western critics have approached the play from a religious angle. H. D. F. Kitto, for instance, in his appraisal *Hamlet as Religious Drama* tried to show *Hamlet’s* resemblances to Greek tragedies like the *Choephoroi* in some fundamental aspects and comes to the following conclusion: “We may say that both in the Greek trilogy and in Shakespeare’s play the Tragic Hero, ultimately, is humanity itself; and what humanity is suffering from, in *Hamlet* is not a specific evil, but Evil itself.”\(^{50}\) But Nolini Kanta has approached the play from the angle of Indian spirituality which does
not look at human nature as a plaything in the hands of the evil forces. His appraisal of Polonius is also noteworthy; he characteristically remarks: “Polonius is humanity arrested in its path of straight development.”

What makes Hamlet a dreamer, visionary and an idealist is absent in his character. The crisis that Hamlet confronts in his evolution results from the realization that an ideal is still unable to meet its promised fulfillment and that the aboriginal humanity has not been transcended yet. The existence of the aboriginal is still very real and it is the aboriginal that Nolini Kanta is concerned with, not so much the Evil which occupies a central place in Christianity. Despite having all wisdom and virtue, man stoops low and becomes a knave and woman a whore. An Indian critic remarks, “In Hamlet, the sense of the futility of the human engagement with the universe runs even deeper.”

Hamlet is disillusioned as a result of his encounters with stark realities of life – as the painted mask is removed, the horrific, beastly reality is revealed to him. According to K. R. S. Iyengar, Hamlet realizes that “…evil in its innumerable forms is a fact of life, living means either patient sufferance of all this budget of evil or an all-out resistance to it, which may mean killing others (and, perhaps, meeting one’s own death also ).” This revelation was sudden enough to make an innocent man like Hamlet lose all his strength and become gloomy, melancholic and despairing. Obviously enough, K. R. S. Iyengar in his criticism refers to the existence of evil at par with Christian theology; but Nolini Kanta looks at the problem from an Indian spiritual angle.

Nolini Kanta Gupta’s *The Shakespearean Word* is a masterly essay on Shakespeare’s artistry as a word-painter. The chief instrument of poetry, according to
Sri Aurobindo, is the rhythmic word which is ‘fuller of subtle and immaterial elements’. Further, for him, “The poetic word is a vehicle of the spirit, the chosen medium of the soul’s self-expression.” According to him, Shakespeare possessed this inspired, rhythmic speech in plenty. It is for this reason that Sri Aurobindo addressed Shakespeare as a great magician for his wonderful poetic representation of life. Nolini Kanta is also very much aware of this inspired possession of Shakespeare. According to him, “His magical, all-powerful words are sufficient to do the work of the decorative artist.”

Nolini Kanta begins his essay by referring to the Vedic Rishis for whom the poet “…by his poetic power, brings out forms, beautiful forms in the high heaven.” The poets would create concrete images appealing vividly to the mind’s eye, the faculty which stands for the natural genius of a poet. Before shedding light on Shakespeare’s pictorial art, he makes a brief survey citing beautiful pieces of poetry containing marvelous word-pictures right from Lucy Aikin, historian and composer of books for children, to Dante. He quotes lines from Milton’s Paradise Lost, Book-II, picks up exquisite examples of pictorial art from Wordsworth, from Kalidasa, the great ancient Indian bard. His last quotation here is from Dante and his opinion about Dante is—“They are painted pictures, still life, on the whole, presented in two dimensions.” And in this connection, he also refers to Kalidasa again and quotes from his Kumarsambhava—“She moved not, she stopped not (na yayau, na tasthau)” He does not fail to note the beauty and accuracy of the picture painted by Kalidasa with the help of words—“a movement suddenly arrested and held up on a canvas” Sri Aurobindo also speaks of ‘the decorative imaged style’ of Kalidasa.
As a disciple of Sri Aurobindo, Nolini Kanta is also fully aware that Poetry first needs ‘a higher adequacy of speech’ and then “Beyond this adequacy it may aim at a greater forcefulness and effectiveness by various devices of speech, by many rhetorical means for heightening the stress of its intellectual appeal…It may even make such a free or rich use of images as to suggest an outward approximation to the manner of poetry; but it employs them decoratively, as ornaments…”

Nolini Kanta observes that most great poets have described objects in motion, living things as “fixed stable entities as a procession of statues.” These are two-dimensional presentations. But Shakespeare differs with them here: “Life in Shakespeare appears, as in life, exactly like a three-dimensional phenomenon.” In this connection, he refers to Michelangelo, the great Italian painter, sculptor, architect and poet of the Renaissance whose paintings are supposed to be throbbing with life. But, in his judgment, “Still he has planted moving life in immobility…”

But Shakespeare was a powerful artist who was gifted with the faculty of creating matchless word-pictures—“The magic of the articulate word, the mere sound depicts, not only depicts but carries you and puts you face to face with the living reality.” In order to bring home his point to the readers, he takes the readers to the castle of Duncan in Macbeth and significantly remarks that the castle stands there in the play “almost physically—perhaps a little more than physically—with its characteristic setting and atmosphere.” He illustrates extensively from the play to prove his point. He also presents before the readers in two parts the scene in King Lear in which Gloucester makes a vain, comic attempt at suicide. He is of the opinion that the picture given is not merely photographic; it is, rather, cinematographic. In the opinion of K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar: “The supremacy of Shakespearian imagery rests on the fact that he
could with a word, a phrase, sum up theme, plot or character: the world is an unweeded garden that grows to seed.”

In the essay, what Nolini Kanta seeks to do is to focus on the magical, evocative power of the Shekespearean word. This also reminds him of utterances regarded as Mantra in India—“…a certain sum of syllables charged with dynamic force, creative consciousness…” Sri Aurobindo’s opinion is that mantra is “rhythmic speech which, …rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the Truth…” Hence for Nolini Kanta, the Shakespearean word is a charged, word-particle which is the basis of poetic creation. The coinage word-particle speaks volumes for his potential as a critic of poetry. His last analysis about Shakespeare is “……. the whole body of Shakespearean utterances may be described as consisting in the last analysis, of starry vacables, quanta of articulate Life-energy.” We may effectively quote K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar here, “Shakespeare was able—with a pragmatism that paid rich dividends—to load every rift in the received ‘literary’ language with the ‘ore’ of the living speech of his time”

In the essay, Two Sonnets of Shakespeare, Nolini Kanta has focused on Shakespeare’s novelty in the use of the love-theme in the sonnets numbered 73 and 146 respectively in his Sonnet-sequence. Love is a common familiar emotion but Shakespeare’s treatment of it is quite unfamiliar and he has also added new meanings to Death. Quite characteristically, Nolini Kanta observes that: “From a human carnal base there is a struggle, an effort here to rise into something extracorporeal…” The Sonnet-73, it is well-known, belongs to the Friendship sequence and it is one of those sonnets which, “though inspired with love, are haunted with a plaintive sense of personal decay.” Nolini Kanta’s opinion is that in the sonnet, amid sense of physical,
material decay, it is true love that lingers, reciprocating the same in the beloved.\textsuperscript{79} His observation rings true when he notes extracorporeal and impersonal elements in the sonnet.

In \textit{Sonnet-146}, Nolini Kanta observes, the poet sings of the \textit{soul’s conquest over Death}.\textsuperscript{80} Commenting on this sonnet, a modern critic of Shakespeare remarks, “In sonnet 146, the sonnet that immediately precedes ‘My love is as a fever’ in the 1609 sequence, Shakespeare explicates the abiding tension between the hedonistic demands of the body and the exalted aspirations of the soul.”\textsuperscript{81} Nolini Kanta considers the soul as ‘sinless in the sinful’\textsuperscript{82} because it makes the impurities of the physical body its home. He explains: “Death eats away the body, but in this way the soul grows and eats away Death. This is the final epiphany, the death of Death and the resurgence of the soul divine in its love divine.”\textsuperscript{83} Quite interestingly, he concludes the short essay comparing the last line of the Sonnet 146 announcing the death of Death with Sri Aurobindo’s famous lines in \textit{Savitri}—

“Even there shall come as a high crown of all

The end of Death, the death of Ignorance”\textsuperscript{84}

\textbf{WALTER HILTON}

Nolini Kanta Gupta’s \textit{Walter Hilton: “Scale of Perfection”} is an illuminating essay on Walter Hilton’s prose work \textit{Scale of Perfection}. \textit{The Oxford Companion to English Literature} briefly describes him as an: “Augustinian canon of Thurgarton, Nottinghamshire, the author of a prose work in two books, concerning prayer and contemplation, known as \textit{The Scale of Perfection}, written in English and translated into Latin; and of \textit{Mixed Life}...”\textsuperscript{85}
Nolini Kanta probably felt drawn towards Walter Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection* for its clear and unconventional approach to the spiritual reality. He makes an attempt here to shed light on its resemblances with the thoughts of the Eastern philosophers. He confesses: “The mystic lore, the Holy Writ, the mediaeval sage says, echoing almost the very words of the Eastern masters…” 86 Walter Hilton is clear enough to announce that those who are worldly are denied divine vision and hearing. 87 The motto of the essay *The Scale of Perfection* is an Augustinian mantra; Nolini Kanta translates it from Latin as: “We ascend the ascending grades in our heart and we sing the song of ascension.” 88 So, this spiritual journey is about ascension and the steps involved are vividly visible to the spiritual eye of the aspirant. Hilton makes mention of the steps which Nolini Kanta takes serious note of, probably because of their resemblance to some of the Yogic steps as discussed by Patanjali, the ancient Indian master and also by Sri Aurobindo, his Guru. The steps lead the true follower to God or the Christ within and he gets purified. But complete purification is never possible without God’s grace. Here Hilton’s words sound very Indian. “The Christian mystic speaks almost in the terms of the Gita…” 89

Nolini Kanta very nicely compares and contrasts the Eastern and Western approaches to Divine Love and finds that the Christian and the Vaishnava approaches are in many respects one. The Indian spirituality in general believes in the three-fold unity: transcendental, cosmic and the unity expressed in the words soham, tattvamasi which means “That One is I, you too are that One.” 90 But Christianity lays a great emphasis on rejection and looks upon individual beings as separate entities. 91 The Vaishnava’s feeling of love for God is superior to that of the Christians. In the case of a Vaishnava, it is not the inmost soul only, but the outer heart of the devotee gets aflare
and seeks the Lord. The *Vaishnava* seeks and achieves communion with Him in and through his senses embracing even the world and the objects around. Characteristically, he relates this to man’s spiritual evolution, gradually from lower nature to higher ones. In Christianity, the notion of the original sin is a fundamental factor. Remorse and sorrow are two other factors associated with it. But Hilton lays little emphasis on sin and if a devotee follows the path of Christ, all his sins will melt away. Hilton’s words here greatly resemble the utterances of the Hindu scriptures.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Nolini Kanta essay on T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* is a thought-provoking one. The *Four Quartets* are regarded as Eliot’s greatest work. The four poems, *East Coker, Blunt Norton, The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding* - deal with multiple themes; but it is generally agreed that they deal chiefly with questions of religion and spirituality. The poems along with his plays explore “the soul’s search for stability and order but skepticism now has made way for faith.” In the opinion of David Daiches also, the poems “…treat with an almost mystical intensity of the search for the ‘still centre’, the quest for spiritual peace and assurance, which may lead through the dark night of the soul.” Nolini Kanta, it is clear, is also concerned with spiritual import inherent in the poems and not its structure. But before discussing his essay, it would be better to remember what C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson have remarked in regard to Eliot’s religious poetry: “The greatest of Eliot’s religious poetry derives from its scrupulously honest depiction of his own states of mind, its precise analysis of his indecisive religious apprehension…This is seen in ‘Marina’, and of course, in *Four Quartets.*”

Nolini Kanta’s theme is that the *Four Quartets* represent Eliot’s religious and spiritual explorations and the four poems stand for different stages in his spiritual
journey. At the very beginning of the essay, he makes the pronouncement that in the poems T. S. Eliot has completely turned a poet of the Dark Night of the soul. The phrase Dark Night of the soul is culled from the title of a poem by a 16th century Spanish poet and mystic John of the Cross who influenced Eliot very much. The 16th century poem tells about the soul’s journey for a mystical union with God and the darkness that engulfs the path of the seeker. An Indian commentator remarks, St. John “exhorts us to descend into the ‘dark night of the soul’ for a single-minded contemplation, not unlike that propounded by Indian philosophers.”

Nolini Kanta interpretes the Quartets in terms of their inherent spirituality. F. O. Matthiessen, one of Eliot’s greatest critics, considers Blunt Norton to be “the most philosophically dense of the series” Further, Matthiessen writes, “With the opening phrase of ‘East Coker’, ‘In my beginning is my end’, he has extended his meditation on time into history…Eliot is using these words in a double sense. He is thinking historically…But he is also thinking in religious terms—in my beginning, in my birth, is implied my end, death; yet, in the Christian reversal of terms, that death can mean rebirth, and the culminating phrase of ‘East Coker’ is ‘In my end is my beginning.”

In the essay, Nolini Kanta also, in his own way, traces the poetic trajectory T. S. Eliot has traversed and digs at philosophical meanings, specifically Eliot’s passage into the dark night of the soul. According to him, Eliot’s Waste Land marks a preparatory stage for the forthcoming passage into the Night. His Hollow Man stands at the next stage of his development finally ending up in the production of Four Quartets in which: “things appear somewhat changed”. He refers to the beginning lines of the poem (East Coker):
“I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come

Upon you

Which shall be the darkness of God”¹⁰⁰

and takes note of the poet’s freedom from the darkness enveloping him and coming out into the open. He concludes that the poem is a song of redemption. He quotes lines from *Little Gidding* in which he finds “The full story of the purgatory, of man’s calvary ….”.¹⁰¹ In his opinion, Eliot has very deftly presented the stage of conversion—conversion from the ordinary day-to-day life to a spiritual one. However, Nolini Kanta’s concern with the thematic content here does not prevent him from enjoying the grace and sincerity of these lines of the modernist poet.

In course of his discussion, Nolini Kanta sheds searching light on the consciousness of a modern or modernist poet and remarks – “God meets him only half way, he has to work up himself the other half”.¹⁰² The modern mind is conscious of the problems of Life and Death, Time and Eternity etc. In Eliot, he has marked a longing for transcendence, but this transcendence is intended to be achieved through synthesis, the modern way. In Eliot, Time is not annihilated, it is in *suspended animation*¹⁰³ and that is the *still point* Eliot speaks of in Blunt Norton. Eliot, in his opinion, opts for a neutral point “between the positive and the negative poles, which is neither, yet holding the two together at the crossing of Yes and No, the known and the unknown, the local and the eternal.”¹⁰⁴ Naturally the journey in the night ends in light and with death, a new life begins—“…In my end is my beginning”¹⁰⁵.

Nolini Kanta knows where the modern poet has his footing; he received this knowledge from the Gita. He is not only a poet, but a yogi as well. Nolini Kanta’s final
words exhibit his marvelous understanding of Eliot from both an Indian mystical standpoint and the standpoint of a modern secular critic of literature: “Our poet flies high, very high indeed at times, often or oftener he flies low, not disdaining the perilous limit of bathos.”

**ROBERT GRAVES**

In the essay *Robert Graves*, Nolini Kanta has shed ample light on the use of myths in Graves’ works, drawing their thematic similarity with the *Upanishadic* verses. It is well-known that Graves, with his allegiance to an older English tradition, cherished a deep attachment to the muse of poetry. In his *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar Poetic Myth*, published in 1948, he argues that it is the Moon Goddess, the female principle, that inspires true poets. He says that “Poetry began in the matriarchal age, and derives its magic from the moon, not from the sun.” But this female principle has unfortunately been replaced by logic and reason—the male values associated with the Sun. Graves calls his Muse by various names, viz., *Calliope, White Goddess* etc. Graves’ poetry is mythical as well as magical and not that simple as is generally supposed to be. He writes: “…I am not a medieval historian. But my profession is poetry, and I agree with the Welsh minstrels that the poet’s first enrichment is a knowledge and understanding of myths.”

Nolini Kanta takes up Robert Graves’s poem entitled *The Ambrosia or Dionysus and Semeli*, published in the collection *New Poems 1962* and observes that in the poem, as in his other poems too, “He has indeed succeeded … in removing the veil, the mystic golden lid, partially at least and revealed to our mortal vision a glimpse of light and beauty and truth…” The poem is on *Ambrosia*, the god enjoying a lower status. The poet here invokes the toadstool, which is actually a poisonous fungus.
Graves has recorded: “Dionysus had two feasts—the spring \textit{Anthesterion}, or ‘Flower-uprising’; and the autumn \textit{Mysterion}, which probably means ‘uprising of toadstools’ \textit{(mykosterion)} known as \textit{Ambrosia} (‘food of the gods’).”\textsuperscript{111} The ingredient used to make \textit{Ambrosia}, the divine food, is mushroom.\textsuperscript{112}

In this connection, Nolini Kanta mentions the Sanskrit word \textit{Chatraka}\textsuperscript{113} and recalls Kalidasa who gave it a graceful name-\textit{Silindhra}\textsuperscript{114}. This fungus is a special one and in olden times used as an intoxicant. This also reminds him of \textit{Vedic Rishis} who used to consume the juice of \textit{Soma}.\textsuperscript{115} The juice can bestow delight and ecstasy and also the supreme fulfilment of desire—\textit{ananda, moda, mud, promud, kama}. In his opinion, these are, in essence, the five fruits mentioned by Robert Graves.\textsuperscript{116} The \textit{Tantriks}\textsuperscript{117} also used certain intoxicating drugs for controlling the senses.

In the poem concerned, Graves is making an appeal to the Toadstool deity to grant him right vision and transport him to divine realms of the god. The poet considers himself the divine food—the \textit{ambrosia}. \textit{Ambrosia} belongs to the class of narcotic drugs and it has its counterpart in Heaven called nectar. The story of the birth of \textit{ambrosia} resembles that of Dionysus. The Toadstool came into being amid thunder and lightning and so he shares also the strength of thunder. Graves advocates the use of myths in poetry and his own poems, Dinah Birch notes, is pervaded by a personal mythology.\textsuperscript{118} Nolini Kanta finally observes that Graves’ poems reflect the sad plight of existence in passing through a painful purification process.

\textbf{WILLIAM BLAKE}

In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, William Blake “…occupies indeed a place unique in the poetry of the English language, for there is no other singer of the beyond
who is like him or equal to him in the strangeness, supernatural lucidity, power and
directness of vision of the beyond and the rhythmic clarity and beauty of his
singing.” Elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo refers to Blake as a poet of luminous simplicity;
and one of the “…first explorers of a new world of poetry other than that of the
anceints or of the intermediate poets…” It is obvious that Blake was a poet of an
other-worldly vision who held unique views of life, the world and the beyond. In the
essay, William Blake: “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”, Nolini Kanta dwells upon
the poet’s own conceptions of Heaven and Hell. In the words of G. E. Bentley, Jr.:
“Blake was a devoted reader of the Bible and profoundly Christian, but his
understanding of the Bible and of Christianity were peculiarly his own.”

His The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is written in response to a book by
Emmanuel Swedenborg, Swedish philosopher and theologian. Blake disagrees with his
views accusing him of “not having conversed sufficiently with Devils but only with
Angels…” In his Marriage of Heaven and Hell his ideas have found their first
expression and “…from such seeds flowered many of Blake’s most eloquent verses.

Blake held unique views of such opposites as Heaven and Hell. It is well-known
that in the scriptures and in conventional education everything is considered in terms of
opposites. But, in essence, life is not always composed of polarities of this kind. In the
first two sections of the book, viz. The Argument and The Voice of the Devil, Blake
expresses his opinion that good and evil are nothing but necessary energies that we
cannot do away with. Life is a gigantic mass of energy pervaded by good as well as
evil. The evil is not at all a foreign element; it is essentially a part and parcel of life in
its entirety and it also plays a significant role in life and in its flowering. In his book
The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (The Argument), Blake observes, “Attraction and
Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to human existence.” In his poetry also, Blake deals with opposites and contrary states of experiences and this is so characteristic of him. Blake himself wrote in his *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that “Without contraries is no progression.” In this respect, his poems compiled in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is no exception either. David Daiches’ remark would be mention-worthy here—“*Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, etched between 1789 and 1794, ‘showing the two contrary states of the human soul,’ are more characteristic and more original.”

A reading of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* shows that it depicts an impeccable world seen through the eyes of a child. The *Songs of Experience*, on the other hand, presents a world whose innocence is thwarted by age, cruelty, hypocrisy, deceit, snobbery and other such evils. These poems, in other words, depict a mature world which has lost its pristine innocence and beauty. But Blake’s poems uphold neither innocence nor experience: it opts for a comprehensive vision, as there is “…no road back to innocence, only a road forward through experience to a comprehensive vision.” Blake’s vision of life is a comprehensive one; he even thought of Hell as the energy of life. David Daiches voices similar idea when he remarks, “…Hell for Blake was a deliberately perverse symbol of liberty and the spontaneous activity of genius”.

Nolini Kanta considers this Christian rejection of the body and the earthly life for the pursuit of the spirit as an ascetic ideal. But Blake’s vision was a unified one. In his view, he was even more radical and declared “a new apocalypse and said that Lucifer, the one called Satan, was the real God, the so-called messiah the fake one…” In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake has also pronounced these iconoclastic words: “…the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he who dwells in
flaming fire. Know that after Christ’s death, he became Jehovah.”

Nolini Kanta rightly notes a Miltonic shadow in Blake’s contentions here. He also finds Blake sounding like Nietzsche who thought God was dead and also thought of creating a Superman or Overman (Ubermensch).

Nolini Kanta’s view is that neither the body nor the spirit is man’s reality; Man has equal claim on the both. He calls up the Vedic Rishis who also advocated the marriage of heaven and earth. In this connection, he also refers to Gustave Thibon, an eminent French philosopher of the 20th Century. According to Thibon, salvation must come from the higher planes, but there is a condition; and the condition is that the higher must completely accept and protect the lower. Though Nolini Kanta almost finds an Indian overtone in Thibon’s ideas, he disagrees to his view that for salvation, the senses are to be given a free play. In Nolini Kanta’s opinion, for spiritual transformation, what is required is the sublimation of the senses.

ALDOUS HUXLEY

Nolini Kanta Gupta’s next essay is on Aldous Huxley’s book The Perennial Philosophy. Aldous Huxley was a poet, story-writer, novelist, satirist and essayist; he wrote essays, historical studies, travel writings and a study in sexual hysteria. Huxley has defined the present book which is actually a compilation of the sayings of the sages, saints and philosophers of the world as follows: “The metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds.” The sayings so collected are placed under different heads such as That are Thou, Self-Knowledge, Silence and the like. The headings give a clear idea of the contents of the book with its neo-Brahmanic preoccupations. The book is also enriched with notes and commentaries on the sayings compiled in it. Nolini Kanta goes on to compare Huxley’s
book with a similar compilation entitled *The Eternal Wisdom* which was published in the *Arya*.

The first title with which Huxley began his compilation is an *Upanishadic* one—*That are Thou* with a saying by Eckhart; the *Arya* compilation too focused on the same idea as it began—*The God of All; the God who is in All* with a quotation from Philolaus. In Huxley’s compilation, there is only one quotation from Sri Aurobindo which is placed under the heading *God in the World*. Nolini Kanta could not help quoting the saying:

> “The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness—to its heights we can always reach—when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. ‘Earth is His footing’ says the *Upanishad*, whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe,”

In his commentary upon the quotation, Huxley says that for the average humanity, “for those of us who are still splashing about in the lower ooze”, the line—“to its heights we can always reach” in the above quotation has an ironical ring. Nolini Kanta objects here and makes clear the fact that the ‘we’ in Sri Aurobindo’s quotation does not refer to humanity in general, but to those with “a sufficiently developed inner spiritual life”. But he finds the commentary of Huxley otherwise perfect as a whole. This shows how well-versed he is in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and distortions, willing or unwilling, of any kind could not escape his notice. Another quotation used by Huxley under the heading *Grace and Free Will* is from Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher and founder of the Chinese philosophical school, Taoism. Lao Tzu is well-known in the religious and philosophical world for his masterpiece *Tao Te
Ching (300B.C.). The quotation used is from Chapter 18 of the same book translated with annotation by Arthur Waley, the renowned Orientalist and sinologist and it is as follows—“I was when the Great Way declined that human kindness and morality arose”\textsuperscript{139}

Nolini Kanta is not at all satisfied with the interpretation of the cryptic quotation for it says that through kindness and morality the ancient, lost way can be recovered.\textsuperscript{140} For Nolini Kanta, it is the reverse, for “…it is man’s humanity that clouds the Divine and to reach the Divine one must reject the human values, all the moralities…”\textsuperscript{141}

**WILLIAM WORDSWORTH**

In his essay, *Worthworth*, Nolini Kanta Gupta begins with the common aversion of most Bengalis to Wordsworth for his artless and simple manner. The Bengali taste for poetry was formed by Tagore. He also recalls Professor Manmohan Ghosh who used to dismiss Wordsworth as a poet on the ground of didacticism and philosophy. In this context, we may also recall Arnold’s words: “He is not fully recognized at home; he is not recognized at all abroad.”\textsuperscript{142} But Arnold too was aware of the presence of philosophy and doctrine in Wordsworth but he was sure that in Wordsworth, there is no dearth of the poetic quality; rather it is strongly present in his poems.\textsuperscript{143} Nolini Kanta, however, admires Wordsworth and reminds his readers that before making an entry into Wordsworth’s citadel, one must go through the motto engraved on the gateway:

“*The Gods approve*  

The depth, and not the tumult of the soul.”\textsuperscript{144}

In other words, what matters in a poem is depth of feeling, not the use of an artificial poetic diction and an obsession with form.

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The world of Wordsworth’s poetry is, in Nolini Kanta’s words, “the hermitage of old, an abode of peace and quiet …”\textsuperscript{145} Clearly enough, the calm, the charm and underlying sweetness of Wordsworth’s poetry has not escaped his notice. A. C. Bradley in his celebrated \textit{Oxford Lectures on poetry}, has also remarked, “The spirit of his poetry was also that of his life—a life full of strong but peaceful affections; of a communion with nature in keen but calm and meditative joy…”\textsuperscript{146} Nolini Kanta points out that Wordsworth strikes the deeper chords of the human heart and so, for an appreciation of his poems, the outer ear is of little use, what is needed is inner hearing.\textsuperscript{147} This clearly brings out the perennial quality of the poems of Wordsworth. In support of his stand, he quotes lines from two of his well-known poems:

1. “She was a Phantom of delight

When first she gleamed upon my sight”\textsuperscript{148}

2. “Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!”\textsuperscript{149}

He is of the opinion that the lines from his \textit{She was a Phantom of delight} offer a silent, divine opening to the readers and those from ‘To a Skylark’ transports them to far-off regions. The meaning is that the reading of his poems often gives a trance-like feeling. We may quote here the opinion of a renowned critic, according to whom, in its exaggerated form, the mystical mood of Wordsworth:“…was a profound trance, in which the world of material things is canceled, is superseded by a world that seems to emanate from the depths of the soul’s inner being—a transcendent, highly spiritualized world.”\textsuperscript{150}
Nolini Kanta speaks of three doors to the world of Wordsworth and this is something new in Wordsworth criticism. The first door is the sense of ‘Tranquility and a pleasant sweetness’ which is easily noticeable in such lines as

…quiet as a nun

Breathless with adoration.

The second door is the feeling of ‘wide intimacy, all-pervading unity’ with Nature which is well-exemplified in the poems, such as, *Daffodils, Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower* and the sonnet *London 1802*. He quotes lines to prove his contention,

for example:

I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o’er vales and hills

It is well-known that to Wordsworth Nature is not inert and insensate; rather she is endowed with conscious life of her own. But an Universal Spirit also pervades Nature. Nolini Kanta’s third door leads to: “…an inner region, a secluded apartment of the soul where poetry assumes the garb of magic….” It is certain that he is referring here to the mantric quality of Wordsworth’s art, that is to say, the presence in his poems of “the rhythmic speech”. For instance,

A voice so thrilling ne’er was heard…

Breaking the silence of the seas …

According to him, these lines have their parallels only in Shakespeare. He then refers to yet another point of greatness of Wordsworth. Wordsworth not only developed an intimacy or communion with the universal spirit in Nature, his poetic mind soared yet
higher “opening itself…to the voice of a highest infinity.”\textsuperscript{160} In the opinion of Caroline F. E. Spurgeon also: “Wordsworth possessed in a peculiar degree a mystic sense of infinity, of the boundless,...”\textsuperscript{161} Nolini Kanta’s conclusion is that Wordsworth’s poetry lead one to the the innermost realm of the poetry proper.\textsuperscript{162} His poetry offers a poetic delight more akin to spiritual delight, the Delight of Brahman.\textsuperscript{163}

But, Nolini Kanta is not deaf to Wordsworth’s limitations as a poet: the heavy presence of didacticism and rhetoric, the prosaic style, the logical elements etc. But the real merit of an artist, Nolini Kanta puts, should be judged by his best creations\textsuperscript{164} and there is no dearth of that in Wordsworth’s poetic realm. Nolini Kanta also finds masculinity in Wordsworth’s poetry; by masculinity, he means an unornamented, plain style bearing the marks of intellect, restraint, immobility and stability.\textsuperscript{165}

(iii) RUSSIAN LITERATURE

NICHOLAS BERDYAEV

Nolini Kanta had a special interest in Nicholas Berdyaev\textsuperscript{166}--a renowned Russian religious and political philosopher of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. He was a Christian existentialist, but his existentialism differed widely from the existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre. Berdyaev began his career as a Marxist, though, later he lost much of his faith in it and turned a Christian and became an active member of the Russian Orthodox Church. He could not support Bolshevism as it was opposed to freedom of the individual. At some point he also turned critical of the authority of the Church and as a result, was even charged with blasphemy.

According to Nolini Kanta, Berdyaev’s views are not altogether original; they are mostly repetitions of the ancient truths. Again, some of his ideas are conditional in
nature and also of limited scope the justifications of which doubtful. For example, his views in regard to the value of the human person, the dignity he attaches to it, are also of little value in a world which hardly recognizes and upholds individuality. As regards man, Berdyaev’s view is that: “His roots are in heaven, in God, and also in nethermost depths. Man is not merely a product of the natural world, although he lives in it and participates in the processes of nature. He is dependent upon his natural environment and at the same time he humanizes it…”

Nolini Kanta rightly points out that the most important and interesting of Berdyaev’s conceptions is his belief that—“…the true person is a spiritual being, that is to say, it is quite other than the empirical ego that man normally is—‘not this that one worships’ as the *Upanishads* too declare.” The individual, the spiritual person, is not a fraction; he is an integer, a complete whole-- a microcosm who holds the image of macrocosm in him. He is a creative focus and Berdyaev has placed greater emphasis on this aspect of creativity. Nolini Kanta recalls here the *Upanishadic* idea of *Prakriti* or Energy which is “…the executive will of the Purusha, the Conscious Being. The personality in Nature is a formulation and emanation of the transcendent impersonality.” But Berdyaev, the neo-Christian, also sounds quite biased when he equates personality with the capacity for suffering and even God is not immune to suffering if he is a personality. But, in eastern spirituality, Nolini Kanta notes, “God and the Divine Consciousness can only be purity, light, immortality and delight…The Divine—the Soul—can be in flesh and yet not smirched with its mire…”

**NICHOLAS ROERICH**

Nolini Kanta Gupta’s essay *Nicholas Roerich* deals with the mind and temperament of the artist and his oriental soul. Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947) was a
painter, poet, traveler and writer of short stories. Despite being a westerner, he had a great interest in the Orient and his hankering after occult experiences brought him to the lap of the Himalayas. Nolini Kanta looks at this turn of his life as the inevitable outcome of a secret Western longing for all that is Eastern. Roerich loved India from the very core of his heart and brought India and the West Russia closer to each other. He considered the Himalayas as the very abode of the Divine Spirit\textsuperscript{172} and his love for the mountains got reflected in his paintings. He was a prophet and seer who had always been looking forward to a Golden Age when peace and harmony will dawn upon the soul of humanity and all forms of narrow egoism will go away yielding place to identical culture, civilization and spirituality. According to Roerich, this depends on the growth of a sense of beauty and an aesthetic temperament.\textsuperscript{173}

Nolini Kanta notes that Roerich’s spirituality has found befitting expression in his paintings. In the opinion of a critic: “Roerich’s mountain paintings are a constant focus for meditation, also creating a longing in the viewer to experience the challenge of gaining those heights, both physically and spiritually.”\textsuperscript{174} The consciousness of man is not satisfied with the apparent and the obvious; it seeks to go beyond and find for himself the driving force behind life and things. This explains why Roerich’s poems are vague and at the same time simple. It is deep and prophetic in nature.\textsuperscript{175}

Nolini Kanta was also aware of this prophetic nature of his creations. According to him, Roerich developed a technique of his own to give expression to the inexpressible. He speaks through symbols and uses a pantomimic style of execution. He also has an innate love for geometrical patterns as a result of which his works and utterances have the qualities of balance, regularity, fixity and solidity. His works shows heavy influence of Cezanne, the French painter and the poet, Mallarme. Nolini Kanta
utters a significant judgment here:“ Indeed, he stands as the hierophant of a new cultural religion and his paintings and utterances are, as it were, gestures that accompany a holy ceremonial.”\textsuperscript{176} There is a primitive, aboriginal element in Roerich’s works and Nolini Kanta’s observation is that in an elemental genius like Roerich, an amount of unconventionality and irrationality is quite natural.

**BORIS PASTERNAK**

Pasternak was one of the greatest poets of the post-revolutionary Russia. But his popularity in the world today rests mostly on his masterpiece *Dr. Zhivago*. But he is fundamentally a poet and Nolini Kanta, in his essay, is quite cognizant of this fact: “…he is more of a poet than a novelist.”\textsuperscript{177} The portrait of the poet printed on the cover of the British edition of the novel reminds him of Hamlet, the tragic hero of Shakespeare. Interestingly there is a poem entitled *Hamlet* at the very beginning of the collection accompanying the novel, *Doctor Zhivago*. Obviously he knows the history of the agonized soul: “Here is a sensitive soul thrown into a world where one has to draw one’s breath in pain…, he has to share in the sufferings and errors of an ignorant humanity.”\textsuperscript{178}

Boris Pasternak’s early works were difficult and the reason for it is their metaphorical expression. Larissa Rudova, in her book *Understanding Boris Pasternak* has made it more expressing: “Already these early poems display a semantic tension in the unusual connections between objects. Special mention should be made of such aspects as metonymy, …and anthropomorphism, …”\textsuperscript{179} After 1930, the style of his poetry, however, underwent a change and that he began to write in a more direct manner. In his later poetry, there is a ‘restrained simplicity’.\textsuperscript{180} Nolini Kanta attributes this change characteristically to Pasternak’s consciousness : “…Pasternak has a well-
pronounced view of things and it is characteristic of his consciousness."\(^{181}\) In this respect, Larissa Rudova’s view is that this simplicity had its roots in Soviet socialist requirements and that affected his later style.

Nolini Kanta goes on to analyse Pasternak’s beliefs one by one. He was a unanimist belonging to Jules Romains’ school. This is the first article of faith. This sounds like the utterances of Rousseau, the first Romantic and Wordsworth. But “There is a near view that isolates the human phenomenon, and then a different picture emerges”\(^{182}\) and that forms the second article of Pasternak’s faith. In Pasternak’s belief-system, his searching mind discovers a belief in the phenomenon of evolution: “Life is rhythmic whole, but it is not static, it is dynamic movement, it is a movement forward—toward growth and progress”\(^{183}\) and that in life, there is “the inevitable urge of evolution”\(^{184}\). This process of evolution leads to creation as well as destruction. Evolution often turns into revolution and uglier things—cruelty, inhumanity, falsehood, and even perversity are born crushing the lofty ideals. So, “the calvary of the individual”\(^{185}\) is central to and the very core of the tragedy of human existence. Evolution in the sense of progress and growth is meaningless without freedom of man and this forms the third article Pasternak’s faith.

The problem confronting Pasternak is the freedom of the individual versus the progress of the society. This problem has always been there since the very dawn of civilization. Pasternak also had his moorings in the environment surrounding him; but he “…tried to stay outside organized movements and groups”\(^{186}\). But he was at the same time an individualist and individual sacrifices made at the altar of collective humanity is what is behind Pasternak’s tragedy. It is for this reason that he could not support Vladimir Mayakovsky, the poet of the Bolshevik revolution. But it does not
imply that he was against collective endeavours. Nolini Kanta is also aware of
that: “The human individual, in one part of his being, is independent and separate from
the society in which he lives and in another he is in solidarity with the rest.”

For the set norms for literary activity in the post-revolution Russia, he had to
make a lot of unwanted sacrifices. The essay brings out how the poet was torn inside
finding himself in between these two opposite forces—individual aspirations and the
state-imposed collectivism. Dr Zhivago’s life is an example of how society thwarts
individual fulfillment. This is Pasternak’s calvary, as Zhivago; this is also the core
theme of his autobiography. This explains why “… even when Pasternak speaks of
social progress, a better humanity, we are not sure.”

Every sensitive soul is tragic.

A tragic sensibility is central to Pasternak’s poetic utterances and is woven into
the texture of his poems. He also notes that Pasternak’s poems at times sound like a
psalm. There is often a deep spiritual note perceived in his utterances. Nolini Kanta also
points out the Chinese style used in Pasternak’s poems. The poet, in the poem ‘fairy-
Tales’, evoked the landscape in the manner of Chinese poetry. Pasternak could also
beautifully evoke a snowscape full of nostalgia. Nolini Kanta Gupta quotes—

“The driven snow drew circles and arrows

On the window pane.

The candle on the table burned.

The candle burned.”

(Winter Night).
But the images of snow presented here have a symbolic function. They stand for a ‘wintry blizzard’, to quote Nolini Kanta, that are meant to be of a passing nature in man’s journey through the calvary, reaching the stage of a renewed life—the Resurrection. In the words of Larissa Rudova: “Pasternak held Christian beliefs throughout his life, but of a rather personal and unorthodox character and changing over time.”

(IV) GERMAN LITERATURE

GOETHE

Goethe (1749-1832) is unquestionably considered the greatest ever German literary figure of the time. Sri Aurobindo has remarked: “In Germany, so rich in music, in philosophy, in science, the great poetic word has burst out rarely: one brief and strong morning time illumined by the calm, large and steady blaze of Goethe’s genius and the wandering fire of Heine, afterwards a long unlighted stillness.”

This essay is written on the occasion of the 200th birth anniversary of Goethe who has all along been an iconic figure in Germany. Nolini Kanta writes: “He made the German language sing, even as the sun’s ray made the stone of Memnon sing when falling upon it.” He has offered his assessment of Goethe under four sub-headings, viz. Goethe and the Problem of Evil, The Challenge and the Pact, Love Human and Love Divine, and The Cosmic Rhythm.

In the section Goethe and the Problem of Evil, Nolini Kanta offers a discussion on the problem of Evil. The Indian traditional philosophy is not so much concerned with the concepts of suffering, evil and all that. But the Christian doctrine has laid huge emphasis on these concepts. The existence of Evil has all along been a riddle to
humanity. The problem of Evil was not a great matter of philosophical interest to Goethe; rather it was “…a burning question of life and death.—life and death of the body and even of the soul.”

Nolini Kanta tries to focus on the prevailing views regarding Evil. According to one view, God and Evil are of the same antiquity; it is equal with God in strength and has always maintained its separate, independent existence. Like God, Satan is also eternal. Nolini Kanta calls this principle Manichean and notes that fundamentally it is the same dualistic conception of chit-achit as found in certain Indian systems. Chit however enjoys a higher position than achit. This duality is also present in the Christian system but equal status is not granted to them. But the question that is often asked is--why has God created Evil? The advent of Enlightenment gave rise to rationalism and so the the conception of God was put under scanner:“A little logic showed that the Christian conception of God was self-contradictory: if he was both supremely powerful and completely good, why had he let the world get into its present dreadful state?”

Goethe was also a child of Enlightenment but “he rejected the egalitarianism and irreligion of the enlightenment’s radical wing.” The orthodox Christian answer to such a rational question has always been that the purpose behind the creation of Evil is to assist and guide man through the ordeals of life towards a comprehensive realization of God. W. P. Andrews says that in the first part of Goethe’s Faust, “In showing all the beneficial results of these ills on the individual and on the whole progression of life, he (Goethe) suggests a solution of that troublesome enigma of evil, which is the great hindrance to a rational faith.”

Nolini Kanta, however, identifies the two challenges that the earth encounters—first, there is the challenge between God and Satan; secondly, the one between Man and
Satan which is a fallout of the first challenge. God has granted a little bit of his light to man which is opposed by Satan, who considers man a trifle and expresses his willingness to do whatever he likes with man if given a free hand. God allows this to happen considering it to be of ultimate good to man suffering from inertia and stagnation. This leads to a pact between Man and Satan according to which “Satan will serve man here in life upon earth, and on the other hand, in return, man will have to serve Satan there, on the other side of life.” Man, ignorant as he is, agrees to this. It is his life-force that drives him to accept this. Satan plans to misguide man from the path of righteousness by inciting love and temptation in his heart for a woman thinking it would lead man to damnation. Satan succeeds in his attempt, but love at a crucial moment, attains the capacity to attract Divine Grace and the soul is blessed with ascension unto heaven. There lies the irony of God. But Goethe’s Satan is different; he is aware of what awaits him: “He speaks of the doomsday for people, but it is his doomsday also, he says in mystic terms. Yes, it is his doomsday, for it is the day of man’s liberation.”

Now, the final question remains, who is Satan? Nolini Kanta’s answers that Satan is ‘a doubting voice…a dissenting note’ that refuses to accept that the cosmos is perfect. But, in the long run, God intervenes and the Evil is nullified. But Goethe never seems to entertain the idea that it is ever possible to eradicate evil altogether from the world and the mind of man.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Nolini Kanta Gupta’s essay *The Nietzschean Antichrist* is an illuminating essay on Nietzsche’s *Ubermensch* or Superman. Nietzsche, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not a philosopher in the true sense of the term; because “if the philosopher makes his
thought substance of poetry, he ceases to be a philosophic thinker and becomes a poet-seer of Truth."201 In his *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche gives his notion of the *Ubermensch* or Overman or Superman—“I teach you the overman. Man is something to be surpassed.”202 But Nietzsche is not the first philosopher to advocate the concept. It was Lucian of the 2nd century who, in his writings, first mentioned about *hyperanthropos.*203 Goethe has also used the word *Uermenschen* in his play *Faust.*204 According to Nolini Kanta, the Nietzschean hero or ideal man never accepts suffering and defeat; he fights endlessly to conquer his adversaries. The Nietzschean Superman is “the champion of strength, of greatness, of mightiness. The dominating personality infused with the supreme ‘will to power’ – he is *Ubermensch*, the Superman.”205 Nietzsche has not offered any definite definition of Overman; but, in his opinion, in a Godless world, man attains the status of Overman by surpassing himself.206

Nolini Kanta says that Nietzsche had little faith in emotions and sentiments and believes that the motive power, the creative urge has its roots, not in the heart, but in some higher regions. He does not either believe in the Christian doctrine that has put so much of stress in love, pity and charity as a means of attaining a heavenly, blissful state;“the way of the Cross, the path of love and charity and pity does not lead to the kingdom of Heaven. The world has tried it for the last twenty centuries of its Christian civilization and the result is that we were are still living in a luxuriant abundance, of misery and sordidness and littleness.”207 Nietzsche considers Christian morality as “a piece of tyranny against ‘nature’, likewise against ‘reason.’”208 In Nietzsche’s opinion: “Christian morality—the most malicious form of the will to the lie, the actual Circe of mankind: that which has ruined it.”209 What Nietzsche wants is a revolutionary, radical
remedy to the human condition. His teaching, in this respect, is that “by violence only
the kingdom of Heaven can be seized.”

According to Nietzsche the world consists of a clash of forces and his
Superman, therefore, is “the embodiment of the greatest force.” It is not ‘good’ that
moves him; rather he is moved by what is great. The good, the moral is fictitious,
whereas the great, the non-moral is divine. Nietzsche believes—“ The good—cannot
create, they are always the beginning of the end—” In this respect, Nolini Kanta
remarks :“The good is nothing but a sort of makeshift arrangement which man makes
for himself in order to live commodiously and which changes according to his
temperament. But the great is one with the Supreme Wisdom and is absolute and
imperative. The good cannot create the great; it is great that makes for the good.”

But this is not all about Nietzsche. He is not “all storm and fury”. According
to Nolini Kanta, Nietzsche’s Superman is a Destroying Angel no doubt, but he is after
all an angel-- an embodiment of the beautiful residing in the core of his heart. In the
words of Kaushik Joardar: “Nietzsche announced the death of God through Zarathustra.
In the Godless world, man will become the architect of his own fate; he will become
the maker of his laws. The Superman obeys no law; nor is he a puppet…the Superman
is against being slave to laws and against mediocrity, he is the symbol of Individual’s
protest.”

Nolini Kanta refers to Nietzsche's Apollonian dream. Nietzsche has used the
terms Apollonian and Dionysian in his The Birth of Tragedy. According to Nietzsche
himself: “…the antithesis Dionysian and Apollonian—translated into the metaphysical;
history itself as the evolution of this ‘idea’; in tragedy this antithesis elevated to a unity;
from this perspective things which had never before caught sight of one another
suddenly confronted with one another, illuminated by one another and comprehended…for example opera and revolution…\textsuperscript{218}

Nietzsche considered weakness, misery, sickness and injury as “… a sort of blot, a kind of ulcer on the beautiful face of humanity.” \textsuperscript{219} Pity and charity perpetuate the blot; this explains why Nietzsche abhors Christianity. He loves beauty, health and vigour which are parts of aristocracy of the soul. The Nietzschean secret which Nolini Kanta uncovers is this: “The real secret of Nietzsche’s philosophy is not an adoration of brute force, of blind irrational joy in fighting and killing…What Nietzsche wanted was a world purged of littleness and ugliness…”\textsuperscript{220}

(v) GREEK LITERATURE

GEORGE SEFERIS

In his essay, \textit{George Seferis}, Nolini Kanta begins by admitting his ignorance about the cadence and breath of the Greek rhythm in original. This reading of Seferis’ poems has given him the impression that his poems are “more like a heave of sighs.”\textsuperscript{221} Seferis’ chief contribution to Greek poetry is that he has brought great complexity to it; his utterances are full of direct statements in the modern idiom. He also has a great nostalgia for the glorious past of Greece. His poetry is melancholic, full of human sentiments and also sensual.\textsuperscript{222} He refers to the beginning lines of the poem \textit{Santorin} (or \textit{Santorini}) from \textit{Gymnopaedia} (or \textit{Gymnopaidia}) to focus on the note of sadness running through Seferis’ poems. In a modern translation, the poem \textit{Santorini} begins with the lines:

“Bend if you can to the dark sea forgetting
The sound of a flute on naked feet

97
That trod your sleep in the other, the sunken life.”

Nolini Kanta derives the Latin phrase *lacrimae rerum* from Virgil meaning ‘tears of things’ or, as given in another translation, ‘tears of passing things’ that moved the muse of the great ancient poet of Rome. He uses the phrase both in its subjectivity and objectivity. He says—“Seferis’s poetry sobs – explicit or muffled – muttering or murmuring like a refrain – a mantra”.

Seferis’s poetry reminds Nolini Kanta of Jeanne d’ Arc and her sense of pity at the misery in the lives of people in contemporary France under foreign rule and her tragic, classic end. Seferis is essentially a Greek soul and his poetry also “stems first of all from a tradition that is eminently Greek.” Nolini Kanta knows that the poet has a tragic sense of history. Seferis found ruins everywhere and it pained him greatly and the ruins, he speaks of, is not always material, they are moral too. Nolini Kanta rightly discovers in Seferis a sobbing poet.

(vi) ITALIAN LITERATURE

DANTE

In the essay *Vision of Dante*, Nolini Kanta Gupta describes in short Dante’s journey through the *worlds*, ending in Heaven and Beyond Heaven and his catching sight of the Divine Vision. This journey of Dante (1265-1321) is the subject matter of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, a poem which Dante completed shortly before his death in 1321. According to a critic, “...the poem depicts a progress from grief to joy (damnation to heavenly bliss)...” According to another commentator, however, Dante’s use of the term *comedy* was a satirical one. It is a straightforward narrative poem with layers of meaning inside; but on the physical level, it gives an account of
Dante’s imaginary journey through the three realms “where he gradually transcends to a state of godliness and finds a contented resolution in heaven.”

Sri Aurobindo considers Dante as sharing, along with poets like Homer, Shakespeare, Valmiki and Kalidasa, the fundamental character of greatness, viz. “a large and powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of Nature and life and man.”

Dante’s journey into the worlds resembles that of Aswapathy, the traveller described in Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri. The menacing forest in which Dante finds himself in the middle of his life has also its parallel in the Dandaka forest described in the Mahabharata. In the forest, however, Dante comes across Virgil, the great singer of the Roman civilization. Virgil tells him that he has been sent by Beatrice to guide him through three worlds, the first one being Inferno, the Hell. The two other worlds after Inferno are the Purgatory and the Heaven and finally there is the Beyond Heaven. The journey through these worlds would enrich his knowledge and consciousness, purifying and heightening his spirit.

As the journey begins, the two first approach a river named Acheron, beyond which lies the Hell. Nolini Kanta does not miss the parallel again with the Hindu theology and myths. In India, this very river is named Vaitarani. It is, however, believed that a bath in the river Acheron removes all earthly stains. Then a huge wall with a door on it rose before them. It was the entrance to Inferno. Virgil tells Dante that in Hell, sinful souls are punished for their sins and that it is Divine Justice. After Inferno, they move on to Purgatory. Here too, there is a river, Lethe, dividing Hell and Purgatory. The literal meaning of Lethe is forgetfulness.

The souls entering this region forget what they have suffered in Hell. Now it is time for Virgil to go back and another person comes to take charge of him and that
another person is none other than Beatrice herself. Virgil tells him that though he (Dante) had a lot of intellectual knowledge, he lacked true faith and for this he cannot enter Heaven. The pagans and others can only reach up to the top of the Purgatory. It is believed in Christianity that it was Mary who went to Heaven in her physical body. In Hindu mythology also, there were similar instances--- Yudhisthira and the dog, Narada, Bhibhishana, Ashwatthama and Hanuman ascended the Heaven in their subtle physical bodies.

The word *Ennoe* is a word of Greek origin meaning mind, thinking, intelligence or *right consciousness* as Nolini Kanta takes it for.235 As one bathes in the river, one’s old mind is washed away and a new bright mind is born. Then following in the footsteps of two beautiful damsels he finds himself on the other shore of the river and looking up catches sight of the divinely beautiful figure of Beatrice at a distance. As he looks at Beatrice, his old, suppressed passions begin to assail him. Beatrice reproaches him for being carried away by his past attachments. She, in a severe and stern voice, asked him to look ahead to the future. Then they begin to move upward to their final destination, that is, Heaven. Nolini Kanta describes Heaven in the following words: “The Heaven is composed of many circles or regions, tier upon tier, a hierarchy of worlds. They are inhabited by saints and holy persons of various degrees of merit”236 The first Heaven is the moon which is followed by many other planets. Dante, in an effort to know the mind of the saints inhabiting Heaven, approaches one and asks whether he is happy and does not feel bored. The saint replies that he is happy and never feels bored. The upper Heavens which are inhabited by angels, archangels, cherubs and seraphs are named by Dante as *Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Principalities* etc.
Beatrice, in her effort to purify him, disclosed to him the nature of true mind and consciousness. Her words echo the Indian Upanishads: Dante’s mind is purified and Truth becomes visible. Moving on further, they reach the highest Heaven. It is Saint Bernard of Clairvaux who becomes his final guide. It is *Empyrean*—“the sight of Dante’s farewell to Beatrice.”[^237]. Looking ahead, Dante’s eyes catches sight of the enchanting world. It looks like a perfect geometrical kaleidoscope. He, being utterly confused, loses his consciousness. On waking up, everything appears crystal-clear, simple and beautiful and as a result, his confusion is no more. The self-evident Truth is in front of his very eyes. He begins to chant the thanksgiving hymn to the Divine. Nolini Kanta’s observation is worth-mentioning here: “It was her grace that let him to the miraculous vision and realisation which he describes in his hymn to the Supreme Lord.”[^238]

The superb vision that unfolds itself before Dante is a divine play; Dante names it Divine Comedy. Dante’s *Purgatorio* is situated in between the eternal tortures of Hell and the eternal bliss of Heaven; before Dante’s full-fledged conception of it in his Divine Comedy, it was more or less an abstract place in the minds of the theologians[^239]. Dante’s Purgatory is undoubtedly his fundamental contribution to Christian cosmology.

In Nolini Kanta’s narration of the journey, it is interesting to note that Nolini Kanta does not fail to take note of the parallels existing between the Christian theology and the Hindu Mythology. He also finds Beatrice’s words resembling those of the *Upanishads*. 

[^237]: 237
[^238]: 238
[^239]: 239
Nolini Kanta, in his *Mystic Poetry* and *The Poetry in the Making*, has thrown light on the works of a number of Western poets and writers along with some Indian ones. In *Mystic Poetry*, he makes a nice distinction between mystic poetry and spiritual poetry. He quotes the following lines from George William Russell’s poem *Desire*:

\[
\begin{align*}
… & \text{ I turn} \\
& \text{To Thee, invisible, unrumoured, still:} \\
& \text{White for Thy whiteness all desires burn.} \\
& \text{Ah, with what longing once again I turn!}
\end{align*}
\]

and he points out that it is not a pure mystic poem as it lacks the vision or revelation as found in Tagore’s *The Golden Gate* or Sri Aurobindo’s *Transformation*. But he admits that the poem is certainly on the borderline of mysticism. In this context, he distinguishes between spiritual poetry and mystic poetry. For him, spiritual poetry is the very language of the Spirit, as found in the *Upanishadic* verses. But if the Spirit speaks out of its own accord something in an alien manner and diction or if it endeavours to imitate the spiritual language, we have what is called mystical poetic creations. He illustrates from the French poetic works of Albert Samain, Mallarme and even Baudelaire and brands them all as mystic poets. He regards them as ‘the mystique of the senses’.

There is another type of mysticism in which the spirit is expressed in relation to the flesh, for example, the kind of mysticism found in Tagore and the *Vaishnava* poetry of India. Mysticism, according to Nolini Kanta, has nothing to do with allegory and for this reason, there is more mystical import in the great Romantic Wordsworth, even in
Shelley and Keats, than in the poetry of Spenser and Bunyan. He does not either consider religious poetry, e.g., hymns, to be truly mystic in character.

In his opinion, Sanskrit language is a fit medium for spiritual expressions as it is still near to the source. But Hebrew or the Zend has never reached the pinnacle of spiritual tone. Greek or Latin has become down to earth and lost much of their capacity for spiritual expressions. Among the ancients, he names Lucretius who was inclined to metaphysical speculation, moralizing and philosophizing. Among the philosophical poets, not in the rational sense, but metaphysical, he names the following ones—Dante, Goethe, Wordsworth, Shelley, Browning, Arnold and Hardy. In his opinion, Dante is more a philosopher (in the medieval sense) and less a poet. Goethe is philosophical in the modern way. Wordsworth and Shelley are metaphysical from head to foot. He leaves out the *Metaphysicals* considering them theological or religious poets. In modern poetry, Nolini Kanta says, thought-content, reason and rationalisation is all. Modern poets, unlike the religious or mystic or spiritual poets of the past, are intellectuals.

In the earlier stages, mental life was secondary and man’s physico-vital life was all important. The transition from Mind to Overmind influenced poetry in the subsequent periods. The higher-mental played a role in the transition. But this faculty was bypassed in ancient poetry, the *Upanishads* etc., as the poets wanted to establish a direct and immediate contact with the transcendental. The natural outcome of this was the birth of pure spiritual poetry or speculative philosophy as found in the *Gita*, Vyasa’s the *Mahabharata*, Valmiki’s the *Ramayana*, in Homer and Socrates. In the later periods, slowly an intellectual element entered, for example, in the works of
Sophocles and Euripides; the moderns, however, are more radical and totalitarian in this respect.”

Nolini Kanta is of the opinion that the religious poets seeks to hide the earthly either by metaphysics (Donne) or by symbolism (Blake). The spiritual poetry needs a higher scale of consciousness. The Upanishads, for example, gives expression to ”spiritual consciousness in its original and pristine purity and perfection, in its essential simplicity.”

The spiritual consciousness proper is is revelatory knowledge in its condensed form. Poetry has always been earthly and profane but the way it has been dealt with has made it something calm and purifying. Because of this cathartic process through history, the mundane has given way to moral and spiritual.

In Poetry in the Making, Nolini Kanta speaks of the fusion of the mundane and the infra-conscient, as found in St. Francis’ addresses to the Sun or the moon or even in the Upanishadic verses. In the supreme artist, we find superconsciousness in place of normal ordinary consciousness. For example, in Wordsworth, an withdrawal from the ordinary level of consciousness can easily be noticed and then the way he recollects in tranquility his fused, moulded treasures. The same bearing down of the secret consciousness giving way to a purified, transformed form is to be found in Shakespeare, in Homer and in Valmiki. Coleridge heard his Kubla Khan being recited to him in sleep. But except the opening lines, the poet could not recollect anything on waking up. Still, Nolini Kanta considers Coleridge to be a rare example. When the conscious plane gets quieted down, the unconscious or half-conscious things come up and bring with it the glow of pure illumination from higher regions. A poet can be partially passive; but absolute passivity is the domain of the Yogi. An artist cannot be fully conscious; he can be half-conscious only. This explains why artists do not know
or cannot explain how they create. The primitives were of this category; the elemental poets--Shakespeare, Homer or Valmiki belongs to this category too. The poets like Virgil, Milton and Kalidasa were near the original light; Dante was positioned somewhere in between the wholly conscious and half-unconscious or the unconscious states. Pope and Dryden with their intellectual power occupy a lower status.

In French poetry, Voltaire and Delille are good versifiers having their place further below. The Greeks are creators of rational, intellectual and self-conscious poetry. Even Sophocles and Euripides could not go near the central impulse. In Theocritus, intellectuality lost much of its hold making him truly self-conscious. In the modern age, leaving behind primitivism and the realm of the conscious, the artists are gradually being self-consciousness which is essentially a 'return upon oneself'.

Nolini Kanta’s conclusion is that the “the modern mentality has turned away from the normal and the oblivious; it does not accept and admit the ‘given’ as the final and wishes to discover and establish other norms…” Despite the presence of the ugly and macabre, the meaningless and the insignificant, the modern poet is essentially a prophet, perhaps a violent prophet—an iconoclast.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. *The Indian Renaissance* was first felt in Bengal; hence it is also termed as *Bengal Renaissance*.


10. “During the night of November, 23, 1654, Pascal’s doubts were settled by a sort of vision…”—Joseph Lataste: *Blaise Pascal*, in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11, Not paginated.


12. Ibid.


19. Ibid.


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., p.204.


28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 352.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.


35. Ibid.


39. Ibid., P. 185.

40. Ibid., P. 185.

41. *The Gita* upholds selfless *Karma* performed in a non-attached way; Sri Krishna exhorts Arjuna, “Therefore always do without attachment the work you have to do; for a man who does his work without attachment attains the Supreme.”—Swami Nikhilananda (tr.): *The Bhagavad Gita, The Way of Action* (Chapter Three), Verse or *Sloka*-19, p. 112.

42. Sri Aurobindo: *The Future Poetry*, p. 75.

43. From *tamas*—“the quality that hides or darkness; the quality of ignorance, inertia and obscurity…”—Heehs , Peter & Bob Zwicker (comp.): Sri Aurobindo: *The Integral Yoga*, p. 397.

44. Demons or men with demoniac, *tamasik qualities*. According to Sri Aurobindo, Rakshasas are hostile beings of the middle vital plane—Heehs , Peter & Bob Zwicker (comp.): Sri Aurobindo: *The Integral Yoga*, p. 378.

46. One of the three gunas—Sattva, Raja and Tama. “It is the quality that energises and drives to action...”-- Heehs, Peter & Bob Zwicker (comp.): Sri Aurobindo: The Integral Yoga, p. 391.


48. G. Wilson Knight: The Wheel of Fire, p.80

49. Ibid., p. 64.


52. Santanu Majumdar: The Virtues of Disbelief: The Sceptical Shakespeare and the Role of the Miraculous in “The Winter’s Tale” in Goutam Ghosal (ed.): Indian Thoughts on Shakespeare, p. 35.


55. Ibid., P. 13.

56. Ibid., p.287.

57. Ibid., p. 296.

59. Ibid., p. 168.


64. Ibid., p. 16.

65. Ibid., P. 16.


67. Ibid., P. 170.

68. Ibid., P. 170.

69. Ibid., P. 170.

70. Ibid., P. 170.


77. Ibid., p. 178.

78. Kalyannath Dutta (ed.): *A Bouquet of English Sonnets and Lyrics*, p. 34.


80. Ibid., p. 178.


83. Ibid., p. 178.


85. Ibid., p. 485.


87. Ibid., p. 114.

88. Ibid., p. 115.

89. Ibid., p. 117.

90. Ibid., p. 119.

91. Ibid., p. 119.


95. A. N. Dwivedi (ed.): Four Quartets, p. 140.


97. Ibid., pp. 184-185.


99. Ibid., p. 140.

100. T.S. Eliot: Four Quartets, East Coker-III, Not paginated.


102. Ibid., p. 143.

103. Ibid., p. 144.

104. Ibid., pp. 144-145.

105. T.S. Eliot: Four Quartets, East Coker-III, Not paginated


108. Ibid., pp. 434-435.


113. Sanskrit equivalent of fungus.

114. *Silindhra* is a mushroom—a fungus.

115. *Soma* is the narcotic juice extracted from a creeper of the same name.

   {Sailendra Biswas (comp.): *Samsad Bangla Abhidhan*, p. 845.}.


120. Ibid., p. 103


125. Ibid., p. 66.


127. Ibid., p. 866.


131. William Blake : *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in


135. A monthly periodical. “Soon after his arrival at Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo
    founded the monthly *Arya* (1914 -1921), in which most of his later prose writings
    initially appeared.”—M. K. Naik : *A History of Indian English Literature*, p. 89.

136. Aldous Huxley: *The Perennial Philosophy*, p. 74

137. Ibid., p. 74.


    in Criticism*, p. 107.

143. Ibid., 114.

144. William Wordsworth: *Laodamia*, *Poems Akin to the Antique and Odes*, in
    Mathew Arnold (ed.): *Poems of Wordsworth*, p. 177.

146. A. C. Bradley: *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 89


148. William Wordsworth: *She was a Phantom of delight*, in Mathew Arnold (ed.): *Poems of Wordworth*, p. 148.

149. William Wordsworth: *To a Skylark*, Ibid.


156. Ibid.


161. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon: *Mysticism in English Literature*, p. 67


163. Ibid.


166. The books in English spell the name as Nicolas Berdyaev.


169. Ibid., p. 129.


173. Ibid., p. 152.


176. Ibid., p. 153.


178. Ibid.

179. Larissa Rudova: *Understanding Boris Pasternak*, p.16.

180. Ibid. p. 2.


182. Ibid., p. 186.

183. Ibid., p. 186.

184. Ibid., p. 186.

185. Ibid., p. 187.


188. Nolini Kanta Gupta: *Boris Pasternak* in *Collected Works*, p. 188.

189. The source of the English translation has not been provided. In another translation of the same poem, however, the lines appear as:

“Snow-blasts moulded circles,
arrows on the glass.
The candle burned on the table,
the candle burned.”


193. Ibid., p. 136.

194. From the name of the Persian *Mani*, who founded *Manichaeism* in the 3rd century.


196. Ibid., *Preface*, p. xiv.


198. Ibid.

199. Ibid., pp. 138-139.

200. Ibid., p. 139.

201. Sri Aurobindo: *The Future Poetry*, p. 34.


207. Ibid.

208. R. J. Hollingdale (tr.): Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 110.


211. Ibid.


214. Ibid., p. 23.


216. Pertaining to *Apollo*, the Olympian deity, is supposed to rule music, poetry, arts, truth, healing,, the sun etc. “The Greek god Apollo…seems to have begun as the Demon of a Mouse-fraternity in pre-Aryantotemistic Europe: he gradually rose in divine rank by force of arms, blackmail and fraud until he became the patron of Music, Poetry and the Arts and finally, in some regions at least, ousted his ‘father’ Zeus from the Sovereignty of the Universe by identifying himself with Belinus the intellectual God of Light.”—Robert Graves: *The White Goddess*, p. 10.

217. “Dionysus and Apollo are the two chief deities of Greek Mythology. Dionysus stands for frenzy and excesses;…On the other hand, Apollo represents
harmonizing power;…Apollo symbolizes economy and well-contained grace.”—Kaushik Jaordar: Nietzsche, p. 10.

218. R. J. Hollingdale (tr.): Friedrich Nietzsche: Ecce Homo, p. 49.


220. Ibid., p. 24.


222. Lillian Herlands Hornstein (ed.): The Readers’ Companion to World Literature, p. 663.


224. “…there are tears for passing things…”—Allen Mandelbaum (tr.): The Aeneid of Virgil, line 655, p. 17. In the original work, the phrase occurs in line 462.


228. Lillian Herlands Hornstein (ed.): The Readers’ Companion to World Literature, p. 200.


233. Dante was nine when he first met Beatrice, aged only eight then. She died in 1290. Her memory never faded from his mind and it was she who was destined to play a providential role in his poetic vision. (Giuseppe Mazzotta: *Life of Dante*, in Rachel Jacoff (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, p. 4.)


235. Ibid., p. 54.

236. Ibid., p. 55.


240. An Irish poet--also known by his pseudonym, A.E.


243. Ibid., p. 66.

244. Ibid. p.73.

245. Ibid., p. 75.

246. Ibid., p. 87.

247. Ibid., p. 88.