CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF ROMANTIC LYRICAL POETRY

In the earliest times it may be said that all poetry was of its essence lyrical, a spontaneous flash of emotion which makes its own music and as such we attribute a general term for the lyrical poetry which is, or can be supposed to be, susceptible of being sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. Of the two main branches of literature in the general sense, prose and poetry, the lyrical poetry comes under the purview of latter. Of course, literature in the broadest sense, is defined as the lasting expression in words of the meaning of life. When we speak of the literature of a nation or of a people, we include all of their life and thought which has found lodgment in language. Every literature has its distinct branch of poetry which includes drama and poems of every description—lyric, narrative and epic. Now, what is a lyric? A lyric is technically a poem that can be set to music. As a matter of fact, it is a poem of emotion. It is marked by rhythm, grace, and suggestive and beautiful imagery. Its aim is to awaken in the hearer the emotion felt by the poet. This emotion may be love, grief or happiness or pleasure felt upon viewing beauty. The poet expresses his personal reactions to things—what he sees, hears, thinks and feels.

Lyric is derived from Greek, Latin and Middle English names for a musical instrument (the lyre) dating back to ancient Greece.
As a noun or adjective, lyric is applied to any poem expressing personal emotion, to any short poem that does not primarily tell a story and to prose or verse that is characterised by a direct spontaneous outpouring of intense feeling⁴.

Great literature abounds in lyric poetry, the type of verse which takes its place among the most beautiful styles of writing in any language. Lyric poetry which received its name from ancient days when it was sung to the accompaniment of lyre, an ancient stringed musical instrument, differs from dramatic or epic poetry in that it does not necessarily have a plot or story. It must, however, express the thoughts of the poet or the emotions of someone else³.

The origins of lyric poetry are merged with those of narrative, because of the Primitive conditions under which the distinction between these types did not exist, - that is, when there was no clearly felt difference between the relating of an incident and the expression of the emotions associated with it. With the development of art there seems to have been a gradual differentiation of lyric and narrative expression, as there was a differentiation of the originally united arts of poetry and music. The progress of poetry was, in general, marked by an increased emphasis on the individuality of the artist and on the personal or subjective elements in lyric poetry; further, by the diminished importance of its association with music, and a corresponding growth of the reflective or intellectual elements, so that modern lyric poetry is but slightly associated with actual song, though, it is still centred on the expression of subjective emotion. The surviving sense of the original connection between this utterance of personal feeling and song is well illustrated by Wordsworth's observation that his lyric poems, though none of the songs, could not have their full force without a supposed musical accompaniment⁴.
We have so long been discussing about the lyrical poetry - its origin and characteristics with literary qualities. A lyrical poem is the outcome of the emotional feelings of the composer, the lyricist who is our point of discussion here. This research work consists in critical appreciation of the three Bengalee romantic lyricists of the nineteenth century- Biharilal Chakrabarti, Debendranath Sen and Akshay Kumar Boral with special reference to Bengali lyrical poetry, mingled with romantic fervour.

The spontaneous fusion of Romanticism and Lyricism in the works of those three romantic lyricists, we have to have an overall estimation of Romanticism. What is Romanticism? What part did it play in the then prevailing literary movement of the 19th century and what indeed is the principal ideal of Romantic faith?

In order to satisfy the insatiable curiosity, man aspires to discover as much as possible of the truth about the universe. This discovery of the truth generally means the interpretation of the universe in terms of human instincts and of personal emotions and desires. In short, man has two things to take into account- what he knows and what he does not know, former being comparatively still very small. Man knows full well that his mind is filled with much finer things than he can see in the world about him. These finer things do not come from the known. They come only from the unknown. So, as the unknown is the source of these impressive conceptions, it must somehow be a more valuable and higher realm than the known. Man has, all along, been regarding the unknown with the awe and derives a pleasing thrill from its mysteries. He fills it not only with the nameless terrors which he fears, but with the beauty, love and moral guidance for which he hankers after. Again, the unknown is strongly emotional and strong emotion is likely to be expressed in images
which are filled with illusions. Man makes those illusions as much concrete and specific as possible.

Now-a-days, despite his ignorance to the unknown, an educated person, having sufficient understanding of the known world, can spend his life in this natural world without constantly falling back upon the supernatural or the unknown for explanations of his experience. But this was not true of our remote ancestors. At every step, they had to be confronted by some questions which could only be answered only by the imagination in the guise of the supernaturalised unknown. Consequently, the known was penetrated through and through by influences supposed to arise from the unknown. As time went on this penetration of the natural by the supernatural, of the known by the unknown, could be used in more conscious endeavours to interpret life in terms of wishful emotion. It would soften the hard obstinacy of the known by investing it with the mystery and glamour of the unknown, enabling man to think of something more of the known. This admixture of the naturalised known and the unnaturalised unknown still gives us a unique sense of pleasure in the inmost recess of our heart. This pleasure is inexplicable. We explain this according to our individual temperaments. This self innovated pleasure or happiness should not be believed to be an absolutely primary fact of consciousness or temperament; - but it is so deeply rooted that it is primary so far as our own powers of introspection are conserved. Consequently, this pleasurable thrill provides us with an illusioned view of the whole of life. Since this illusion satisfies very deep, strong and primitive emotional desires, we cherish it.

In short, this illusioned view of life which results from the interpenetration of the known and the unknown or the natural or the supernatural, constitutes the romantic element in human thought. No human being is without it, more or less. We may call this instinctive
romantic trait of the mind as romanticity. Romanticity demands an intellectual environment in which the romantic illusion can be enjoyed without the disturbing awareness that it is illusory. Romanticity becomes Romanticism in spite of being checked by serious obstacles which may be summed up in the single term science.

Romanticism is, therefore, the endeavour, in the face of growing factual obstacles, to achieve, to retain or to justify that illusioned view of the universe and of human life which is produced by an imaginative fusion of the familiar and the strange, the known and the unknown, the real and the ideal, the finite and the infinite, the material and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural.

Romanticism represents much more than new artistic, literary and musical styles. It brings forth new attitudes towards man and nature in nearly all phases of life. It is a reorientation, along many lines, as fundamental as that of the Renaissance and its results are still being worked out.

Romantic imagination is said to be fundamental, because without it poetry is impossible.

THE ADVENT OF ROMANTIC LYRICISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

The predominant English literary movement of the early part of the 19th century was Romanticism; the fundamental idea of Romantic literature as something that began in English poetry with William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Romanticism, as discussed earlier, has two prominent elements curiosity and beauty, the one intellectual, and the other
emotional. Liberalism in literature is the basic principle which gives the pursuers free delights and utilisation of their romantic fancy in their literary pursuit. Intense emotion coupled with an intense display of imagery is the foremost principle of Romantic literature which took its new shape and characteristics, after being transited from the bondage of rule and custom of the Classicism. The central figures of English romantic movement were Wordsworth and Coleridge. Both these poets developed in their poetry separate trends of Romanticism. They set themselves to two opposite tasks of Romanticism. Wordsworth took upon himself to make natural things look supernatural, by adding to them the light that never was on sea or land. Coleridge, on the other hand, was to take the supernatural things and bring them down to the level of the natural. It was Wordsworth's task to throw the colour of imagination upon the common things of life and nature so as to make them to be like supernatural things. He used to create things common place importance. That was the great role of Wordsworth as a Romantic poet, adding a sense of Romanticism to the common beauties of life 7-

*The earth and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparalled in celestial light
The glory and freshness of a dream.*

- Wordsworth

The romantic poet Wordsworth learnt to look at the universe in a mood of wonder and curiosity rather than to accept the phenomena as they were. Imagination which was banished by the neoclassicists, was once again enthroned on her seat by the advent of the romantic movement in English literature.
Wordsworth typifies most of the romantic qualities. Impelled by the desire for simplicity and lucidity, Wordsworth made a return to the speech of common men, discarding Classicism with its insistence on reason and logic, order and sanity, passionlessness and purity. So, it seemed, Nature had practically no place in classical poetry. But in the poetry of the Romantic movement, the interest of poets was transferred from the artificial decorations of drawing rooms to the natural beauty and loveliness of nature. Wordsworth brought nature in his poetry as poetic inspiration and joy. He fervently believed that underlying the external forms and shapes of nature there is a soul. To him:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{In all things, in all natures, in the stars} \\
& \text{This active principle abides, from link to link} \\
& \text{It circulates the soul of all the worlds.}
\end{align*}
\]

- Wordsworth

Wordsworth again exclaimed with childlike wonder:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{My heart leaps up when I behold} \\
& \text{A rainbow in the sky.}
\end{align*}
\]

- Wordsworth

Thus, it was Wordsworth's task to throw the colour of imagination upon the common things of life and nature so as to make them appear to be like supernatural things.

As for Coleridge, he was the first and the finest dreamer in English verse and this dreamy quality of Coleridge made him the supreme romantic poet. Supernaturalism in Coleridge's poetry is essentially a
romantic trait. Coleridge took the supernatural things and brought them down to the level of the natural. His handling of supernatural characters was so fine that he certainly claimed the first place among the Romantic poets. *Kubla Khan*, *Christabel* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* are poems of pure supernaturalism.

Romantic poetry was marked by a love of Nature. In this respect Coleridge was no way inferior to Wordsworth, the high priest of Nature in the Age of Romanticism.

In the atmosphere of Romanticism dominated by Wordsworth and Coleridge, John Keats, young as he was, felt his kinship with them, possessing all the romantic qualities to the extreme degree, love of nature, love of beauty, imagination, love of past and wearied sadness.

Among the younger group of Romantic poets, comprising Keats, Byron and Shelley, Byron's special contribution to Romantic poetry was in the direction of adding the note of revolt and satire to poetry. Romantic poetry in his hands did not remain as a matter of appreciating the calm and placid life of nature and human beings, nor a fight into supernatural creations, but became a potent force to satirise and to attack what he considered to be worn-out and harmful.

Shelley's Romantic verses were perfumed with idealism, dreaminess and visionary fervour. He introduced the power of imagination and idealism in Romantic poetry, creating a world according to his heart's desire. He added the note of noble idealism to poetry, and made poetry an instrument of attacking the evils of society as in *Queen Mab*, and singing songs of freedom and liberty as in *Prometheus Unbound*. In short, Shelley, as a poet, imparted to Romantic poetry the
touch of lyricism, for he sang of his vision of the future in notes of haunting loveliness and beauty. He was the loftiest and the most spontaneous singer in Romantic poetry.

So long, we have discussed about some prominent Romantic poets of the English literature. There were of course, some other minor romantic poets of the 19th century. They were, in style, romantic poets; but lacked the transfiguring fire of true genius and as such they have now been almost forgotten. Among them, Robert Southey, Thomas Moore, Thomas Campbell, Samuel Rogers are worth-mentionable.

WESTERN INFLUENCE ON THE BANGALEE ROMANTIC POETS

With the coming of the Britishers in India, western influence started regenerating in Indian minds, by and by. It, of course, gained a special momentum in the hands of Christian missionaries, backed by the then government machineries. A well-known Christian missionary William Carey was virtually the pioneer of introducing English education in Bengal. During the governorship of Lord Warren Hastings, with the constant efforts of David Hare and Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the Hindu College was established at Calcutta. David Hare also established an institution known as the School Book Society to publish English books. A number of schools for imparting English education were also set up through public efforts. Again, after the establishment of the Scottish Church College, a new intellectual climate for the spread of English language penetrated into each and every part of Calcutta, influencing the young generation of Bengal with a particular fascination of western education and culture. Moreover, the Wood's Despatch of 1854 was, in fact, the Magna Carta of English education in India. So, it is obvious that the western education and western administration affected, in
varying degrees, the ever-flowing current of Bengali literature and cultural excellence. This is how the western influence on Bengali literature initiated with ever-flourishing trends and as such a revolt was on the tip between two extremes; on one hand inexplicable patriotism that was not ready to welcome western influence readily, and on the other hand, the wave of western culture, patronised by some magnanimous personalities of Bengal. But, as a matter of fact, this immigrant neo-western influence was an imperative necessity for our literature to be an expression of the concrete realities of life. In this connection, De Quincey remarked, "Every literature, unless it be crossed by some other of different growth, and particularly, at a critical time of its career, naturally tends to superannuation."

The assimilation of the literature and culture of the West, however, gradually settled down in Bengalee minds. Let us therefore, discuss how this western influence penetrated in the Bengali poetry of the nineteenth century, while treating on the critical appreciation of three Bengalee romantic lyricists of the nineteenth century.

Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats and other Romantic Poets of Victorian Age had a common theme of their poetical works that life was a burden and a futility and that there was, above all a higher agency, fate or something else, that controlled the destinies of man. The same sentiments were echoed in the early poems of Michael Madhusudan, Hemchandra, Nabinchandra, Bihari Lal Chakrabarti, Debendranath Sen, Akshay Kumar Baral, Rabindranath Tagore and women-poets Kamini Roy, Saralabala Dasi and Priyambada Devi. All of them were dominated by a morbid melancholy, an unreality, and a kind of pessimism which was altogether a new current in Bengali poetry. But those sentiments or attitudes to life were handled by the poets of that age on different grounds and so their appeals were so different. Bihari Lal and his school are Love
and Beauty mystics. Hemchandra's philosophical mysticism, however, aims at the principle of good that will ultimately triumph over evil. Nabinchandra is a religious mystic and pre-eminently devotional. Debendranath Sen may be considered a nature-mystic, though somewhat of the Keatsian type. Like Biharilal, the quest of the mystery of Love and Beauty in nature becomes the sole preoccupation with Akshay Kumar Baral and Debendranath Sen also. Such mystical ideas also pervade in many of the poetical works of Rabindranath Tagore. As for the women-poets, Mrs Kamini Roy sees everything with the eye of a realist, and sketches her picture live by virtue of her profound humanity, without the aid of colour. Mrs Girindramohini Dasi's beauty-way of seeing nature is the main characteristic of her mind, capable of choosing the best out of myriad objects. Mankumari Basu's poetry with the confident note of robust optimism, is an expression of the reaction against the imitative westernism of Bengal in the early nineteenth century. Again, the mystic temper of Biharilal in adding curiosity to the desire of beauty is said to be revived by the influence of Shelley's works.

To express the growing diversity of thought and feeling, we observe, new ideas and new poetical forms were imported and experimented upon. Romances, Epics and Lyrics are illustrative as much of the vastness of a foreign literary heritage as of a complex national awakening at home. Each of these poetical forms has, indeed, won a distinct ground in our literature. Each has been popular to the extent of the spontaneity it has shown in reflecting the heart of the nation.

The English education in Bengal ushered in a new venture in Bengal poetry in the hands of Michael Madhusudan Dutta who earned reputable reputation by composing English verses, analogous to Byron's themes of love.
I sigh for Albions distant shore,
Its valleys green, its mountains high;
Though friends, relations I have none
In that far clime! Yet oh I sigh
To cross the vast Atlantic wave
For glory, or, a nameless grave-

- Kidderpore, 1841

(Albion's → Britain's, clime → country)

Michael's epical masterpiece *Meghnad-badh* is above all, the creation of a Bengalee poet, inspired by foreign literature. Very often it is asserted that Michael was Homeric in his adaptation of his great poem. He has indeed freely drawn upon Homer for his epical machinery and has also "engrafted the exquisite graces of Greek mythology on our own". His excursion into the worlds of Greek myths and foreign poets was inspired by the idea of giving "free scope to his inventive powers".9

Madhusudan was inspired by the Hellenic in the display of a free-hearted heroic energy. Hemchandra, on the other hand, was a new spirit of the emotional synthesis in Bengali poetry of the 19th century. He was Romantic, soared with the thrilling ecstasy of a Vaishnava. Nabinchandra's Vaishnavism, in certain aspects, was not far from the main currents of Western thought. So far as moral or humanitarian atmosphere is concerned, Nabinchandra re-creates a passion for us with all emphasis on love, an ideal religion for India, based on brotherhood and self-suppression. He is a truly national poet of the 19th century in Bengal.
With all his debts to the West, Nabinchandra found his ideal of poetry in the expression of that divine impulse, the very soul of Indian literatures. His poetry is the poetry of impulse, and it is only in this sense that he may be called Byronic. The patriot Nabinchandra, the poet of *Palāśīr Yuddha*, took the idea from Byron's *Childe Harold* while describing the dead soldiers in the battle-field of Pallasy. The poet says:

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kālī niśāyoge loye romanīratan
āmode bhāṣitechilo man kutuhale,
prabhāte samar-sāje sajilo sakal,
madhyānhey mātilo darpe kālāntak raṇe;
nā chūīte prabhākar bhudhar - kuntal
sāyānhe sāyita halo ananta sayane.
bipaksa, bāndhah, aśwa, aśwārohīgaṇ,
eki sāyyāy śuye kṣatriya yahan.
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- *Palāśīr Yuddha*, 4th canto

In Byron's *Childe Harold*, we find the same mournful numbers in describing the slain soldiers lying in the blood-red battle-field of Waterloo. -

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Last noon beheld them full lusty life,
Last eve in Beauty's circle proudly gay;
The midnight brought the signal-sound of strife,
The morn the marshalling in arms, - the day
Battle's magnificently stern array!
The thunder-clouds close o'er it, which when rent
The earth is cover'd thick with other clay,
Which her own clay shall cover, heap'd and pent,
Rider and horse, - friend, foe, - in one red burial blent!
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- *Childe Harold*, III
So long, we have given some glimpses on Lyricism and Romanticism along with some well-known Romantic lyricists of Bengal and abroad. We also discussed about the Western influence on Bengali poetry of the nineteenth century in course of an earnest endeavour of giving a befitting shape to our treatise on the three Bengalee romantic lyricists of the 19th century- Biharilal Chakraborti, Debendranath Sen and Akshay Kumar Baral about whom an elaborate discussion will follow.
NOTES

   (Wonderland of knowledge Corporation)

2. *Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Harry Shaw.

3. Same as 1.


   New York, Russell and Russell, Inc (1965)
   (Copy right-1931, Columbia University Press) Reissued,
   1965 by Russell and Russell, Inc.

6. *The Romantic Imagination* by C.M. Bowra (Page-1)
   Oxford University Press, Oxford, London. First issue as an
   (This book contains the lectures of Mr. C. M. Bowra, delivered
   at Cambridge, Massachusetts, during the month of 1948-1949).

7. *A History of English Literature*- J.N. Mundra (Publishers:
   Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, U.P.)

8. *Studies in Western Influence on Nineteenth Century Bengali
   Poetry* (1857-1887) by Harendra Mohan Dasgupta, M.A
   SEMUSHI, 42-1A, Sarat Bose Road, Calcutta-20. Copyright 1969
   by Smt. Suprity Dasgupta.

9. Same as 8.