Chapter VII

Assessment of aesthetic import of Yeats' influence on Das' poetry

Aesthetics means the study of the emotions and the mind in relation to their sense of beauty in literature and other fine arts, but separately from moral, social, political, practical, or economic considerations. It also refers to a philosophical investigation into the nature of beauty and the perception of beauty in the domain of arts. The aesthetic import of a poem can be grasped only in and through language. A poem is an art form which finds its objective realization through language. Thus it has two distinct dimensions of existence. As a linguistic fact, a poem has invariably a verbal dimension of existence, i.e., it is a language form motivated to essay the aesthetic import. As an event in the field of art, it is an art form grounded in the structure of verbal symbol. The two dimensions of a poem make it simultaneously a verbal symbol and an aesthetic object. It is for this reason that a poem can be viewed on the one hand, as a verbal symbol with aesthetic import, and, on the other hand, as an aesthetic object grounded in language matrix.

The stylistic premise is that literature is simultaneously a verbal symbol. As literature is the area of convergence where linguistic experience and aesthetic sentience merge to create a verbally qualified art form, it is but natural to expect that the two dimensions of a poem, verbal and aesthetic, will illuminate each other. Because of the dialectical unity between the two, these dimensions exist in a person in reciprocal comprehensiveness. It is for this reason that stylistics demands of scholars engaged in the field that they be sensitive to aesthetic import, as well as, be aware of various linguistic functions.

Theories of aesthetics explore how we engage with and react to sensual objects and experiences, attempting to explain how we come to judgments such as ‘this is beautiful’ or ‘this is ugly’. Aesthetic experience, as it is sensory rather than conceptual, is difficult to put into language. We can agree that a painting or a sunset is beautiful for example, but we find it difficult to say what makes it so. In order to try and explain aesthetic experience, aesthetic theories of the arts have attempted to assign different types of sensory experience to each art, and delin-
iting them in this way, to describe how, for instance, visual beauty differs from
musical or literary beauty. Literature and visual art have been considered in relation
to one another since antiquity. The sense that both poetry and painting share
a fundamental task as modes of representation has been passed down the centuries. Writing in 1766, however, the German aesthetician G.E. Lessing famously
differentiated rather than conflated the two arts: poetry should appeal to the ear
and consider time based actions, he argued, while painting should appeal to the
eye and represent spatial configurations. Lessing’s argument was made in order
to claim superiority for poetry. The abstract signs of language, he claimed, gave
it greater freedom and expressivity than the natural signs of visual art. In this way,
as the art critic Clement Greenberg would later claim, his work set up a hierarchy
of the arts that would remain dominant for the following two centuries in which
literature was considered the more powerful or more dominant art.

Aesthetic responses could have one or more of the following: visualizing scenes
or characters, making associations between the story and literary or life experi-
ences, relating emotions evoked citing metacognitive awareness of living through
the story, hypothesizing alternative outcomes, and discussing personal relevance
of story experience. The realm of aesthetics defines how writers and artists view
the world and human experience and how they express those views; aesthetics
points to a kind of inquiry, or way of knowing, that is characterized by imagina-
tion, rather than empirical methods; A genuine aesthetic effect is produced if the
pleasure in that which is seen serves to bring out the values of the life that one
lives.

W.B. Yeats, an Irish, is one of the finest modern English poets. His verses
exercise vast impact upon the poets of next generations beyond geographical
distances and cultures. Jibanananda Das, a great modern Bengali poet compre-
hended the microcosm of Yeats’ poetry. Das conspicuously recognized the na-
ture of Yeats’ poetic credo built on Irish tradition of myths, legends, folklores,
etc. Das transported the essence of that credo into his own poetry and with his
sheer individualistic genius he made his poetry his own unprecedented in con-
temporary Bengali literature. Both Yeats and Das are artists. Their poetry is
conditioned by an aesthetic spirit that brings Das’ poetry parallel to Yeats’. In the
process, an aesthetic import is at work in Yeats' influence on Das' poetry. Both poets possessed aesthetic souls. They had in them an artist's mettle of seeing the beauty into the hearts of things. It is this aesthetic soul of Das that could catch the psyche of Yeats' poetic person. In the process, Das' poetry appears to have imported necessary aesthetic elements from the matrix of Yeats' poetic world. The aesthetic import of a poem can be comprehended only in and through language and a poetic language is designed by poetic vehicles in the form of images, symbols, simile, metaphor and so. The poetic language of both Das and Yeats is conditioned by myths, history and folklores, all of which remain to be the source of their love for their lands, landscapes and people. Yeats chose myth as the subject matter of his poetry. Yeats himself says that the subject-matter is something that he has received from the generations, part of that compact with his fellow men made in his name before he was born. He cannot break from it without breaking from some part of his own nature, and sometimes it has come to him in super-normal experience; he has met with ancient myths in his dreams; brightly lit; and he thinks it allied to the wisdom or instinct that guides a migratory bird.

He is a cultural nationalist. His nationalism consists in awakening people to the long-lost Irish literary tradition that would imbue them with nationalist spirits. He first took refuge to Celtic myths and came out with the knowledge of mythical figures such as Cuchulain, Deidre, Conchobar, Fergus, etc. The themes of Celtic mythology were an indirect means of expressing nationalism for Yeats. However, Yeats finds a mystery and imaginativeness in Celtic elements. In his critical treatise, 'The Celtic Elements in Literature', written in 1898, Yeats observes:

"The Celtic passion for nature comes almost more from a sense of her 'mystery' than of her 'beauty', and it adds 'charm and magic' to nature, and the Celtic imaginativeness and melancholy are alike 'a passionate turbulent, indomitable reaction against the despotism of fact'. The Celt is not melancholy, as Faust and Werther are melancholy from 'a perfectly definite motive' but because of something about him 'unaccountable, defiant and titanic'..."

The ‘charm and magic’ of the Celtic imaginativeness calls forth Yeats’ creative imagination to action. However, myths, for him, make up what is deficient in life. Yeats’ stock of mythology boasts of archetypes, symbols, dreams and history. Myths in its historical aspect represented the life and fate of civilizations. Freud regarded myths as an expression of man’s wishes and fears. He writes in ‘The Psychopathology of Everyday Life’ that in point of fact he believes, a large part of the mythological view of the world, which extends a long way in the most modern religions, is nothing but psychology projected into the external world. For Jung, like Freud, myths are a manifestation of man’s experience. Jung observes in ‘The Modern Man in Search of a Soul’ that it is therefore to be expected of the poet to resort to mythology to give his experience its most fitting expression. It would be a serious mistake to suppose that he works with materials received at second hand. The primordial experience is the source of his creativeness, it cannot be fathomed, and therefore requires mythological imagery to give it form.

The end of myth is to reveal and unify. It holds the key to the mysteries of the human mind; it draws man onward to the unknown and rewards him, with wisdom, pride and discipline. Myths for Yeats were the eternal and universal containers of man’s experience. This rich experience of various generations of men was carried forward by archetypes, symbols, rituals and dreams which were reflected in literature.

Yeats and Das at times think alike. Both poets are dreamers. Yeats was at first enshrined by lyricism and romanticism in poetry. In this phase, he was very much influenced by his father’s attitude to poetry. His father, J.B. Yeats thought that poetry must be dramatic, well-defined, sharp with high resolution, and clear. He then highly prized lyricism in poetry, as a consequence of his taking Shelly as his ideal poet. In “Reveries Over Childhood and Youth”, Yeats tells us that he made Shelley’s ‘Prometheous Unbound’ the first of his sacred books of poetic scripts. Besides Shelley, Yeats was also influenced by Blake and Spenser. Later he was much influenced by the symbolic movement spearheaded by French symbolists, Laforgue and Baudelaire. Yeats wrote in ‘Celtic Twilight’ in 1893 that literature was nothing but expression of moods through the vehicle of symbols.
and incidents. Arthur Symons regarded Yeats the chief representative of Symbolist Movement in their country. To Yeats, symbol is an artistic medium that suggests something beyond the expressed meaning. Hence, in Yeats’ poetry the use of symbols plays a significant role. His aim was to communicate between the spiritual world and the visible one.

Symbols serve for Yeats as a conspicuous tool in his poetry. For him, Rose plays the role of the symbol of spiritual love as well as of supreme beauty. One of Yeats’ earlier aesthetic conviction was put in the poem, ‘To The Rose Upon the Rood of Time’ from the volume, ‘The Rose’ (1893):

“Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways;”

Eternal beauty, the red rose, thrives on sacrifice. It is hung upon the cross of time, possibly a symbol of self-sacrifice. In the first stanza, Yeats seems to want a fusion with this archetypal beauty. The second stanza, however, qualifies this desire. The poet wants to be able to appreciate common aspects of life. Distance is needed for him to preserve this appreciation. One can find beauty in the commonplace, but the rose is ultimately a higher form of beauty, a model for aesthetics that “the weak worm hiding down in its small cave” cannot achieve.

Yeats’ desire for the timeless beauty embodied in the rose increased as he expanded his artistic potential. “Sailing to Byzantium” captures the poet yearning for this aesthetic ideal. He is disgusted with his world. It is a mortal world whose inhabitants do not respect the timeless beauty of art and literature. And so, Yeats turns his attention across the years and across the ocean to the ancient city of Byzantium.

Byzantium replaces the rose as the aesthetic ideal. In Byzantium, Reason reigns supreme. Minds revel in their freedom unbound by time. The poet’s soul yearns for the ultimate reward of Reason: release from the body, a sort of Platonic ecstasy. Yeats’ poetry expresses this ambition. Every poem tries to fulfill his ambition and make the journey to Byzantium. Abstractions and concepts express the true form of aesthetics. Such aesthetic values exist above the flux of time. Like his art, Yeats wants to exist as a collection of thought in a realm of
unchanging intellectual abstraction as is recorded in ‘Sailing to Byzantium’, “to sing/ To lords and ladies of Byzantium/ Of what is past, or passing, or to come”.

Das saw the beauty and dream in Yeats’ poetry supplied by folklores and myths. Yeats says in ‘Celtic Elements’ that all folk literature and all literature that keeps the folk tradition, delight in unbounded and immortal things. His earlier poems are replete with elements of folklores. His poem, ‘Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea’ exhibits the spirit of a folklore:

“Cuchulain stirred,
Stated on the horses of the sea and heard
The cars of battle and his own name cried
And fought with the invulnerable tide.”

In the poem, ‘The Song of Wandering Aengus’ the tone of folklore is heard:

Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

On the other hand, Das’ ‘Rupasi Bangla’ is one of the finest volumes in Bengali literature, that explores into the beauty of folklores. The sonnet kothao dekhini is noteworthy as the language employed corresponds to the essence of the folklore:

Norom kantare aei paragaar booke shuye se kun diner
Kotha bhabe; tokhon a jolsiri sukaini, mojeni aakash,
Bollal sener ghora—

In another sonnet ‘Prithibi Royeche Besto,’ who can forget such immortal lines:

Keo nai kunodike—tobu Jodi josnai pete thako kaan
Sunihe haataser shobdo : ‘ghora chore koi jao hey rairayan—’

One common aspect of Das’ and Yeats’ folklores and myths is their sense of love for their countries and love for their cultures, ‘Rupasi Bangla’ is a testimony to Das’ fullest infatuation and involvement with the folk tradition of rural Bengal. A sense of nostalgia pervades the poems of Rupasi Bangla. His nostalgia is sensed in the concluding two lines of the sonnet Jotodin Beche Aachi:
"Jeikhane ekdin sankhamala chandramala manikmalar
Kaakan baajito, aaha, kunodin baajibe ki aar !"

His another sonnet, Hai Paakhi. Ekdin is not exceptional to evoke the nostalgia by alluding to a folktale that grips the minds of the readers:

"Aaj saradin aei baadalal kolahole megher chhayai
Chand sadagar : taar modhukor dingatir kotha mone aase,
Kalidohe kobe tara porechilo ekdin jhorer aakashe,—"

Both poets espouse the aesthetic value of art. Imagination is an important facet of poetry, which is a piece of art. The object of poetry is the production of beauty. The aesthetic aspect of any art is beauty that tends to delight. Naturally imagination is closely associated with the aesthetic. In literary world, beauty is conceived of as an important ingredient. Down the ages, the creative people and artists have pursued beauty with the sole aim of gratifying the aesthetic urge. Susan Feagin and Patric Mayard, two editors, in the "Introduction" of 'Aesthetics' observe:

"...Historically 'the aesthetic' appeared as a reformulation of ideas about beauty... On some ancient traditions, beauty and the perception of beauty are of cosmic importance. Beauty was and is often associated with delight in perception, yet its older and abiding meaning, associated with order, attributes to it greater significance..."

Poet Das in his treatise, Kobitar Kotha speaks high of beauty in the genesis of poetry. He emphasizes that poetry is articulated in the form of beauty conforming to the play of imagination. He further adds that the value of poetry lies in the gratification of the sense of beauty by exploration. Das' imagination is an active and productive one. It is creative in the sense that it creates a sense of involvement, on the part of readers or listeners, with the beauty that lie in the essence of poetic lines. In the similar fashion, poet Das might have identified his vision and sense of beauty to the vision and the beauty Yeats' poetry truly holds.

5Susan Feagin & Patrick Maynars, eds., 'Aesthetics'. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997),P.4
of. But it is the creative faculty and genius of Das that he can recreate Yeats’ vision with an aesthetic taste afresh and at times more conspicuously and the aesthetic taste comes in the way of implementation of images, metaphors, symbols etc. Yeats’ nostalgic self comes alive in the person of a lover in ‘Ephemera’ picturised in a beautiful imagery, “‘Your eyes that once were never weary of mine/ Are bowed in Sarrow under pendulous lids,/ Because our love is waning.’” Das may find in Yeats’ lines a sense of involvement and recreates in Aghran Pantare, Banalata Sen:

“Jani tumar du-chokh aaj amake khnokena
Aar Prithibir pore -’
Bole chup thaamlam, kebali ashwatha paata pore ache ghaaser bhitore
Shukno miyano chhera;—aghran aseche aaj prithibir bone;”

It is the aesthetic sense working in the creative mind of Das that he finds an echo of his heart in Yeats’ poetic art. It is the perception of beauty that synthesizes poetic spirits of both Yeats and Das. Imagination is the aesthetic source of poetry. The play of imagination when merged with the consciousness of history creates great poetry and great poetry upholds beauty in its truest and wildest form. Poet Das’ active sense of history aided by the play of imagination enables him to compose a monumental poem like Banalata Sen. The aesthetic taste of the highest order is produced in the concerned poem when Das’ poetic person recounts,

“Hazar bachar dhore aami poth hnatitechi prithibir pothe,
Singhol samudra theke nishither andhokare malay sagare
Onek ghurechi aami; Bimbisar Ashoker dhusorjogote
Sekhane chilam aami; aaro dur andhokare bidhorbho nagare;”

The very phrases implemented in the poem when read out turn out to be pleasing to the ear. The audibility of the names of historical places is enough to take the readers to the bygone past and it creates such an effect that the historical places seem to come before the mortal eyes. Thus the aesthetic aspects of both literature and even visual art seem to feature in the poem simultaneously.

The treatment of nature at the hands of Yeats and Das in some of their
poems sounds identical. Yeats’ ‘He Reproves the Curlew’ and Das’ Hay chil exhibit the view of Nature in a melancholic vein. The aesthetic aspect is brought about when Yeats’ poetic persona addresses the curlew and tries to console it, “O Curlew, cry no more in the air, / Or any to the water in the west; / Because your crying brings to my mind / Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair.” On the other hand, Das employs a simile when he likens the tears of the chil to bet (the reed),

“Hay chil, sonali danar chil, aei bhije megher dupure Tumi aar kedo nako ure ure dhansiri noditir paashe! Tunar kannar soore beter foler moto tar mlaan chokh mone aase!”

Yeats’ aesthetic sense dwells on the sense of unity which his poetry seeks to achieve. His poetry is a means of philosophical exploration into the totality and the wholeness leading to the being of beauty. The poetic beauty negates the difference between sensibility and reason. It withdraws the essential border between them. Yeats, like Coleridge, adopts poetic imagination as the unifying symbol. Dream and reality co-exist in his poetry by the artistic implementation of imagination. Love and sensibility come together in his poetry through a dream which contains an aesthetic value. In a beautiful poem like ‘He Wish For The Cloths Of Heaven’, the poetic persona appeals to his lady-love:

“But I, being poor, have only my dreams; I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams.”

The thought in this poem may be conceived in the backdrop of Yeats’ gradual infatuation with Maud Gonne. However, the play of imagination recreates the dream to convey the thought for the desired effect. Yeats’ thought of love through dreams evokes a sense of beauty a human mind can only perceive. The idea of dream is beautifully framed in Yeats’ another poem, ‘He Tells Of A Valley Full of Lovers’:

“I dreamed that I stood in a valley, and amid sighs, For happy lovers passed two by two where I stood;
And I dreamed my lost love came stealthily out of the wood
With her cloud-pale eyelids falling on dream-dimmed eyes:
I cried in my dream, …”

The aesthetic value in poetry has its source in the play of poetic imagination. Poet Das always thinks highly of the role of imagination in poetry. In his essay on poetry, written in Bengali, entitled *Kobitar Kotha*, Das points out that a true poet is one who is endowed with the faculty of imagination; the incongruities in a human life is compensated with a newer world of peace and serenity by the aid of poetic imagination which is borne out of the essence of thought and experience coupled together; such an imagination integrates both reality and dream. Das’ poetic mind, at times, goes beyond the familiar world and perceives the figure and the form in the shadow with his eye of imagination. In this regard, the surrealist movement plays a pivotal role in Das’ poetic faculty. The surrealist ideology of the restraint of reason outside the so-called moral preoccupation is at work in Das’ poetry. The surrealist thought is realized in his poetry by the creative application of imagination. Das meets his aesthetic taste in the world, apparently out of human reach; but it is his knowledge of folktales and legends coupled with the sense of history and time that often lead him close to the soil of the familiar sound, smell and colour. Thus reason and sensibility co-exist even in Das’ poetry too. His creative imagination integrates the familiar world of affliction and the distant world of bliss. The aesthetic stroke in the process is culminated in Das’ poetry through various poetic lines. In his poem entitled *Prithibeete Theke*, a romantic tone is heard that drives the listener-reader to another world:

*Tumar saundorjo chokhe niye aami chole jabo prithibir theke*
*Roop chhene takhonou hridaye kuno aase nai klanti obosad*

Das’ treatment of love works beautifully in the background of a particular season, the citation of which intensifies the aptitude of love as is recorded in *Aghran Prantore*:

*Aghran aseche aaj prithibir bone*
*Se sober der aage amader dujoner mone*
*Hemanto aseche tobu*
In another poem, *Shankhomala*, the aesthetic tone is echoed in the manifestation of nature. Das' love for nature is heightened in the reference of a mysterious lady, the figure of whom is articulated in a conspicuous way:

_Dekhilam deho tar bimorsho pakhir ronge bhora :_
_Sandhar aadhare bhije shiriser dale jei pakhi dei dhora—_
_Baka chand thaake jar maathar oopor;_
_Shing er moton baaka chand shone jar swor_

The aesthetic vein of art even tends to stress the differences. Aesthetics does not exist outside life. It even exists in the clash of life and the impending death. Das treats the subtlety of life in the forecast of death in *Nirjan Swakshar*:

_Aami chole jabo, tobu jiban ogadh_
_Tomare rakhibe dhore seidin prithibir pore ;_
_Aamar sokol gaan tobuo tomare lakshyo kore :_

The nobility of love finds its extended height. To feel the experience of love's perplexity invokes an aesthetic sense. Quite a similar tone is heard in Das' another poem, *Prithibile Theke* in which a sense of consolation to own soul is grasped:

_Tomar saundorja chokhe niye aami chole jabo prithibir theke_
_Roop chhene tokhonou hridaye kuno aase nay klantu obosad_

Yeats too evokes an aesthetic sense not from any mythology or mysticism, but derived from his personal experiences and feelings. He comments upon the necessity of labour in the artefact. His poem, 'Adam’s Curse’ beautifully lay bare his personal conviction:

_“I had a thought for no one’s but your ears:_
_That you were beautiful, and that I strove_
_To love you in the old high way of love;_
_That it had all seemed happy, and yet we’d grown_
_As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.”_

The apparent shade in the opposite interaction of life and death, love and loss of
love, hope and frustration constitute the basic nature of human destiny. But the feeling of the contrasting intricacies of life is objectified by both Das and Yeats in their poetry.

Both Das and Yeats are poets endowed with the faculty of creative imagination which breeds aesthetic overtones. Both poets are conscious of artistic creativity. They appear to boast of some kind of subconscious working of brain in them, for which metaphor, symbols, abstractions, etc. crop up easily in their poetry. They can think and view the world differently; they can see beyond; they can transcend the familiar world. All these faculties can be attributed to ‘Magical Synthesis’. The term was coined by Silvano Arieti. The synthesis referred to is the ability of a person to combine the primary process and secondary process of the brain. The primary process is concerned with the subconscious workings of the brain: dreams, imagery, associations. The secondary process is concerned with logical thinking or how we express our primary thinking to the outside. The “magic synthesis” is the result of an individual merging these two processes, and then creating metaphors, symbols, abstractions and a new way of seeing or thinking about the world. According to Silvano Arieti, creative persons and schizophrenics have a greater connection to the primary process, but, unlike the schizophrenic, the creative person is able to process this thinking into a rational or logical form and create something new. Both Das and Yeats are, of course, creative persons with the knowledge of symbolism, surrealism, imagism and so. Moreover, their consciousness of history and time enable them to create and recreate. This creativity empowers the two poets with the aesthetic impulse and instinct.