



## Symbolism in the poems of Ravindranath Tagore and Ruskin Bond

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**Abstract :** *'Symbolism', according to the Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, means representation of ideas (especially in literature and art) by the use of symbols. There may be two kinds of symbols - traditional and personal. In traditional symbols, for example, "cross" is a symbol of Christianity and in Hinduism "Aum" is the symbol of God. In British culture "lame" is the symbol of meekness, "lion" that of courage and "Oliver" that of peace. While a personal symbol is one whose meaning is known only to its maker and is intentionally kept hidden. In literature its scope is very broad, for literature deals more with abstract ideas, feelings or moods than with concrete objects.*

### Introduction:

. At times symbol create confusion as they differ from country to country but it happens in social content. But, Literature, being universal, does not suffer from such probole

Rabindranath Tagore enriches his nature poems through symbols which add deeper meaning to particular situations, events and happening. The objects of Nature symbolize the creative joy of the eternal and their beauty is the expression of his delight in the art of creation. The objects of Nature and eternal and so they symbolize eternity and the infinitude of God himself. The symbols that Tagore draws from the natural objects are - Flowers, Light, Sky, clouds and stars. In Tagore's poetry the flowers symbolize the fulfillment of the human longing for the unknown; victory of joy over pain, of beauty over ugliness. They symbolize love, power of love, rhythm of life and death etc. The following examples are apt in this respect :-

"On the day when the lotus bloomed, Alas! my mind was straying, and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded. - - - - - and I started up from my dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the south wind. That vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to me that it was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion. I knew not then - - - - - that it was mine, and that this perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart." Pluck this little flower and take it Delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop, Into the dust. It may not find a place in thy garland but honour it with a touch of pain from thy hand - - - - - ." "I wait here weary hours spreading my offerings for thee, while passerby come and take my flowers one by one, and my basket is nearly empty."

In Tagore's 'Gitanjali' light symbolizes the victory and bondage; it is the symbol of freedom. Tagore's this symbolism can be clear in the following illustrations :

"Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light heart-sweetening light! Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life; the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love; the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth. The light is shattered into gold on Every cloud, my darling, and it scatters Gems in profusion. - - - - - The heaven's River has drowned its banks and the flood of the joy is abroad." "Yes, I know, this is nothing but thy Love, O beloved of my heart - this Golden light that dances upon the Leaves, these idle clouds sailing across the sky, this passing breeze leaving its coolness upon my forehead. The morning light has flooded my Eyes - this is thy message to my heart- - - - -"/

Darkness on the other hand is not always night but it symbolizes the renewal of life through the



darkness of death (Darkness - light - darkness is the symbol of birth - death - rebirth). Tagore expresses it in the following lines : "In the night of weariness let me give myself up to sleep without struggle, resting my trust upon thee - - - - -. It is thou who driest the veil of night upon the tired eyes of the day to renew its sight in a fresher gladness of awakening."

In Tagore's 'Gitanjali' Darkness also symbolizes the mystery of the unknown. God is the king of the dark chamber. Tagore displays it in the following lines : "- - - - - In the depth of the might has come the king of our dark, dreary house. The thunder roars in the sky. The darkness shoulders with lightning - - - - - with the storm has come of a Sudden our king of the fearful night."

An important criterion of great poetry is that it does yield its meaning at the first reading. But when we read the poem between the lines, the real philosophy comes to the mind. Tagore also does the same. In 'Gitanjali' the natural objects - the sky, clouds and the stars have the hidden symbolic meaning. The sky symbolizes Immensity, Eternity, the Infinite o God. Tagore's these symbols in respect of the sky in the following illustrations : "Thou art the sky and thou art The nest as well. - - - - - But there, where spreads the Infinite sky for the soul to take Her flight in, reigns the stainless White radiance. There is no day nor Night, nor from nor colour, and Never, never a world."

In Tagore's nature lyrics the clouds and the wind symbolize the joy of freedom so significant to life as is displayed in the following lines : "I am like a remnant of a cloud of autumn uselessly roaming in the sky, O my sun ever-glorious; Thy touch has not yet melted my vapour, making me one with thy light, and thus I count months and years separated from thee."

In Tagore's 'Gitanjali' the clouds also symbolize death : "The rain has held back for days and, my God, in my arid heart. The horizon is fiercely naked - not the thinnest cover of a soft Cloud, not the vaguest hint of a Distant cool shower."

The stars in 'Gitanjali' symbolize a variety of things -freedom, love, joy, rhythm of life. They also symbolize the urge, the yearnings of the individual to be united with the infinite :- "Whom the creation was new and all the stars shone in their first splendour, the gods held their assembly in the sky and sang Oh, the picture of perfection! The joy unalloyed!"

In Tagore's 'Gitanjali' the sea symbioses the desire for union with the Creator : "In that shoreless ocean, at thy silently listening smile my songs would swell in melodies, free as waves - - - - -."

The sea also symbolizes eternal mystery as he expresses in the following: "Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean, plunge it into the deepest fullness. Let me for once feel that lost sweet touch in the allness of the universe."

In his nature poem 'The Rainy Day' from his another collect on symbolic art. He gives the rain- water the symbol of a laughing boy who runs away from his mother to tease her : "Men have crossed into the flooded field to catch the fishes as they escape from the over flowing ponds; the rain - water is running in rills through the narrow lanes like a laughing boy who has run away from his mother to tease her."

Ruskin Bond also claims that the great memory of Nature can be evoked by symbols. Many of his poems are simple and plain, but some of his poems are rich in symbolic content and have symbolic overtones. His symbols are all drawn from the ordinary common place objects and phenomena of nature. The common objects of Nature symbolize human passions, ideals and longings. The objects of Nature symbolize the creative joy of the eternal and their beauty is the expression of his delight in the art of creation.

Ruskin poem 'Wall Talk' can also be appreciated on the symbolic level. In this poem the 'cosmos seed' is the symbol of a banner and for the ant. It symbolizes the banner of victor against all the hardships for the way and the atmosphere. The water collected rain drops has been given the symbol of the sea which the ant



acrosses in a very difficult attempt. Ruskin draws this symbolism in the following lines : "Small reed and, now crossing a sea Of raindrops; your destiny To carry home that single, slender Cosmos seed, Waving it like a banner in the sun."

In his Nature poem 'The Message of The Flower' the chrysanthemum flower has three symbol. When it is red, it is the symbol of love, when it is white it symbioses youth and when this flower turns to bronze colour, it symbolizes truth as Ruskin expresses in the following lines :- "Chrysanthemum - when red, it's love. When white, it's youth. When bronze, it has the Ring of truth."

In 'A Nightmare' Ruskin gives life the symbol of gamble. According to him life is really just like a gamble in which a man can be either victorious or loser : "Cupid, with his famous dart, Struck me just above The heart 'Life' he said, "is just a gamble."

In his another symbolic level poem 'Kites' Ruskin gives a symbol of his poems to the Kites. Just as he Kites are caught in the trees, similarly his poems strike the heart of the readers and therefore some of them call these poems filmsy things as he writes in the following lines :- "My poems are filmsy things - Torn by the wind, caught in mango trees, Gay sports for boys and dreamers."

The most prominent word of Ruskin's symbolic poems is 'dragon' which means 'an imaginary serpent'. He has used this work in most of his poems given the shape of dragon to different objects of Nature. In 'As A Boy' Ruskin used 'dragon' for 'a running engine of the train' that passes through a tunnel : "The whistle of the engine hung on the forest's silence. Then out of the tunnel, a green - gold dragon. Came plunging, thundering past - Out of the tunnel, out of the dark."

#### References

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4. Ruskin Bond : 'The Message of Flowers', a poem, from a collection of poem 'A Little Night Music', Rupa Co. 7/16, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002, p. 41.
5. Ruskin Bond : 'A Nightmare', a poem, Ibid, p. 49.
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