

Rabindranath Tagore's Arogya (*Convalescence*): Philosophical Perspectives

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Abstract

Arogya (Convalescence) represents the best of Tagore's realisation of life from manifold perspectives. It encompasses his realisation of the ascent and excellence of man in terms of soul consciousness, humility and the Infinite.

What is most noticeable is that as a creative contributor Tagore introduces, towards the fag end of his career, the realisation of self from a few important aesthetic dimensions where beauty, love, joy and freedom make a harmonious contribution to understand and appreciate the meaning and purpose of life and the beyond.

Being prompted by an urge to delve deep into the philosophy of Buddhism, Rabindranath has made serene inroads to inwardness. The harmony of human life in eliminating avidya or ignorance and addressing life afresh and anew find superb avenues of efflorescence in translating joy and truth, freedom and love.

The present paper is an in-depth study of how Tagore's philosophical vision of life in terms of creativity and critical awareness reflects through his aesthetic, spiritual and mystic consciousness in the poems of Arogya. It also introduces his experience as a pioneer in handling with emotional sensibilities associated with the vision of the All Serene.

As a practical and aesthetic visionary, Tagore welcomes spirituality attuned to mysticism where the spirit of the beyond is addressed with all catholicity of vision. He looks upon 'I' as a grand partner to the All Good and All Beautiful who invites us in the cathedral of the prayer of All Love. Interestingly, the philosophy of Buddhism in Arogya finds a new mark of poignance which significantly highlights man reborn and re-kindled with the treasures of life in fullness.

Key words: soul consciousness, Avidya, call of the beyond and aesthetics, philosophical harmony of spirituality and mysticism, march for ascent and excellence.

Poetry is always a serene and sombre revelation. This amounts to a greater phase when the poet reaches almost the zenith of his creative life. Towards the end of his poetic career, Rabindranath enters into a new life, a new world and a new expression of self-thought and self-enquiry masterfully borne out through Arogya (Convalescence). Like a child quite innocent of what is right and what is wrong, what is effective and what is ineffective, and over and above, what is complete and what is incomplete, he begins to take account of the self in all profoundness and simplicity, politeness and frankness. He does not conceal anything which is needed for the success of a poet or his poetry, as it may be, and opens up his area of futility in success.

In fact, Tagore in his self-confession in Arogya sincerely admits some of the loopholes or lacunae which stand in the way of pure poetry. One of such lacunae is his taking recourse to the reminiscences of his childhood which not only debar him from sticking to the avenue of the success of a poem but neglecting it in the pretext of some undesirable events. In this connection, one might recall his description of his association with nature in boyhood days along with some trivial activities of life which have nothing to do with the creation of a great poem. Life seen objectively from an unending veil of the ocean of his experiences is what Arogya faithfully represents. It is seeing at a distance but seeing introspectively and significantly. As such, Tagore has a trump card in Arogya: he has become, more or less, on the point of transvaluation of life. He is beyond worries now. He is far away from the murky and quarrelling world. This is why, prior to crossing the bar, Tagore prepares himself alone with the calmness and confidence so necessary for fulness of life. Therefore, Arogya can be called a perfect perfume of promise – the promise from stark reality to sombre divinity, a wailing incompleteness to a sojourn towards the halo of the Infinite.

The later poems of Rabindranath Tagore do indeed reveal most illuminatingly his innermost

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sensibilities and philosophical depth of vision. This fact is particularly significant in the poems of Arogya where in almost all the poems his realisation of the ascent and excellence of man has found vivid representation. Out of the thirty-three poems contained in Arogya, the major ones are his ardent manifestation of straightforwardness, catholicity, soul-consciousness and the call of the Infinite. Along with these, what is particularly noticeable is that his philosophical vision is a grand welcome to the philosophy of Buddhism through which he conceptualises joy and freedom, creation and contentment, peace and quiescence.

The very opening poem of Arogya is a testament of Tagore's welcome to Buddhism where the 'halo of the Eternal' is a serene outcome of his poignant sensibilities:

Pleasant is this heaven, pleasant is the earth's dust,
Upon my heart have I recast
This great vow
The message of life deep does bestow.
Day by day the gifts of truth did I receive whatsoever
Decay in the present juicy form will ne'er favour
This message of vow on the edge of death so creates
The joy of the endless makes all loss futile and permeates.
When I shall depart with the last touch of the earth
I shall say the dust from my path
Has adorned my forehead
The halo of the Eternal have I seen in the mystery of dismay shrouded.
The joyous form of Truth in this dust has taken the image,
Knowing this, I salute the dust on the earth's stage.

Deeply immersed in the life of man, Tagore wants to explore in Arogya a new pathway to existence on earth. Yet, he suffers terribly from the conflict between reality and desirability. A certain sense of passive pathos runs almost parallelly in whatever he wants to say about life and afterwards. Arogya has, as Professor Sisirkumar Ghose remarks: "A pervasive pathos about it, in which the love of the earth and every common sight blend with premonitions of the beyond. It is a point of some delicacy to decide which of the kindred points, home or heaven, attracted Tagore more. In the immediate context, the love and loyalty to earth seems to deepen; in grateful terms he acknowledges the bliss that is at heart of creation and for a while forgets, if he can, the darker questions that he could not avoid before. But it is not an exultant discovery now, the statement is much more in the nature of a simple but subtle notation, the outline of a wisdom gained after long struggle, but in the final result, little of the strain is left or allowed to obtrude. The note is purer, sometimes rising in a noble thanksgiving."

Indeed, what makes Arogya a real sojourn philosophically is an entry into the world of basically four components which Tagore has surveyed not in abstraction but very critically. These are light, nature, life and man's affection towards man and nature. Sometimes he makes a combination of all these four components which not only reveal his wide and varied experience of life but also a sombre peep into trivialities where he explores light with all its brilliance. Even sorrow becomes sweet sorrow and he accepts the world in reality and never flees away from the experience in all its different dimensions. On one hand, he enjoys the songs of birds and on the other he ponders over the departing period of his life. Is it a premonition of futility, a thanksgiving with no result, a mere living in this world proving his passivity? Simply in fact it is a hopeless surrender which sometimes aches him. So, the real Arogya, to Tagore, remainsever elusive.

The philosophy of love, as Tagore explains in Arogya is a wonderful and majestic exploration of the encounter between internal psychology and Nature as it has endeared him. How does he love Nature as the love of All Love? It is a matter of suspense never to be forgotten. It comes almost in a living form in his thoughts and imaginations. That was when he was young with the vibrant joy and bliss of love. And what is the condition now? In Arogya Tagore makes a quite contradictory but apposite inroad to inner consciousness. Love is now not at all lost but a matter of consolation with gentility and silence. It makes its passport to the great void apparently. And what more are the contributions of love to Tagore? The intensity of love is to be united with the

great bliss of the universe around and that would be in terms of easy fusion. The night will no longer remain a scope for love as usual but as a shadow of night like a saint. All light will be the light of the stars whose sweetness can be really blessed with the offerings of flowers from the forests. What an exquisite psychology of love in relation to man and vice-versa!

Nature with all her flora and fauna is the inner voice of man. She is living with her heartbeat to anyone who cares for the feeling of the throbbing leaves or the sparkling necklace of the morning. Tagore introduces the touch of human love well embraced in the pleasant earth where he seeks, quite naturally, the Eternal Man everywhere. One's quest is endless but the endeavour for the same always persists for the unavoidable call within – the call of truth, goodness and beauty. Tagore combines aesthetics with spirituality, the religion of man with the religion of love in the midst of nature and natural surroundings, a fact that can hardly be ignored. In response to the language of the void, Tagore delves deep into the language of silence straight into the blue mystic firmament. He considers that there is an invitation of the beyond which none can ignore. He characteristically displays in Poem No. 4 the real image of mystery:

Mystery reigns in the sombre forest on the two banks:
The image of the quiet night dressed with the crown of the moon
In the seat of humbled slumber did speechless remain.

Deeply indebted to the philosophy of Buddhism, Tagore's splendid vision of spirituality, aesthetics and mysticism in perfect harmony of human endeavour has been reflected in almost all the poems of Convalescence. Particularly remarkable is the Poem No. 5 which is an incomparable, and perhaps, unparalleled example of how a poem can represent a happy cohesion of the three philosophical aspects, namely, mysticism, aesthetics and spirituality:

On the edge of the open window in the lonely parlour
I remain seated in the silent hour.
Outside in rhythm of the green songs herald
The beckoning of the life of the world.
Towards the flow of the origin of eternity
The mind floats in with the horizon's bluish spree.
To whom adoration is to be sent
Is the eager mind's only incumbent.
On he seeks in the image of words the priceless to pay,
Not a word does he say.
Glad am I, he murmurs, rhythm comes to a stop,
Says he, the harvest of thanks I crop.

Interestingly, the set patterns of the poem with expressions like 'open window', 'lonely parlour', 'silent hour' are not mere abstractions of the mind sadly soaked in disappointment and bare solitude but the sense of gladness presents the poet with a rhythm from the beyond where his thanks pine to reach. It also upholds the truth: one may be alone but never lonely. This rich treasure one receives from Convalescence pays one with priceless dividends of how to live and why to live in this world of our very own.

Creativity and critical consciousness are never a forceful exercise but a spontaneous one playing with the All Beautiful in the mind of anyone who responds. It is a typical Tagorean philosophy of aesthetics where creativity and critical awareness are wedded together in harmony of the human soul. Consciousness is never an ordinary watchword for a poetic mind but it is an embracing call within, extending its world to the beyond.

Tagore's translation of joy and truth, freedom and love as we come across in Convalescence in the form of marvellous poems is always a sensitive response to the fundamental truth of Buddhism. It is to drive away avidya or eliminate ignorance and herald the efflorescence of life in terms of aesthetic brilliance, mystic aura of the beyond and the endless light of spiritual radiance. Tagore conjoins and communicates the spirit of the

practical teaching of the Upanishads side by side with the philosophy of Buddha so that the individual must not be apart from the universe. As such, he refers to Bramha Vihara which is possible only when one accepts the Buddhist philosophy of truth contained in non-killing, bereft of aspiration and unalloyed love:

Buddha, who developed the practical side of the teaching of the Upanishads, preached the same message when he said, with everything, whether it is above or below, remote or near, visible or invisible, thou shalt preserve a relation of unrelated love without any animosity or without a desire to kill. To live in such a consciousness while standing or walking, seating or lying down till you are asleep, is, Brahma Vihara, or, in other words, is living and moving and having your joy in the spirit of Brahma.

The vision of truth in Convalescence finds a new language in diverse forms of joy. It allows Tagore to enjoy and experience spiritual love conveyed through his own inner experience in terms of the life of his little devoted dog in Poem No. 14. He finds out the real worth of man out of his association with that canine being:

When I devote the dumb heart's
Untiring self-submission,
Proclaiming the poverty of its own,
I fail to make out what price it has haunted out
With its easy feelings in the form of man.
The piteous anxieties of its speechless look
Fail to spell out whatever it feels.

This makes Tagore understand that the 'real worth of man is in the creation' (Poem No. 14). What he really wants to highlight is that the spirit of man always seeks joy from anywhere and everywhere with realities as constraints notwithstanding.

Tagore invites our attention to all that we see, think and feel in terms of transfer and transcendence. Towards the fag end of life, the last quarter to be positive, he is different because he has an unflinching faith in humanity that adores nature and natural atmosphere. He never yields to illness or decay for he knows it best that these are the natural offshoots of life. Loss and pain, sorrow and languishment, crudeness and littleness – all are the invaluable components for enrichment of experience and personality. He invites nature as his own, typically his very own. This is why he alone can humbly submit his vision of truth and love, freedom and experience very simply and cordially in Poem No. 18:

Today I fail to plough, no scope for ploughing have I
In left out cornfield's idleness, lazy days I pass by.
Life in land is somewhat there, the seed is not yet ripe,
Fruit it does not bring forth, the soil is still alive.
My Shravan is gone away, there's rain no more,
Aghran with golden days of paddy is already o'er.
My Chaitra is burnt in the sun, when the river is dry,
If under the bush of fruit wild its shadow does sigh,
I shall know then that in my last month my lot did not slip,
My enchantment with the green world still does peep.

For one to live life anew and afresh, one seeks justification of life in relation to death and vice-versa. Extinction or last salutation to earth must not suffer from inanity. For life to be meaningful one must, as Tagore affirms, find out the meaning of love for revelation of freedom. Here the poet comes close to Buddhism, once more. His cycle of the vision of life with that of the seasons of nature finds a wonderful assimilation which widens love as an image of illumination preached by Lord Buddha. Tagore seeks emancipation in the same way as one should translate freedom in life:

He [Buddha] asked the lamp to give up its oil. But purposeless giving up is a still darker poverty which he never could have meant. The lamp must give up its oil to the light and thus set free the purpose it has in its hoarding. This is emancipation. The path Buddha pointed out was not merely the practice of self-abnegation, but the widening of love. And therein lies the true meaning of Buddha's preaching.

When we find that the state of Nirvana preached by Buddha is through love, then we know for certain that Nirvana is the highest culmination of love. For love is an end unto itself. Everything else raises the question 'Why?' in our mind, and we require a reason for it. But when we say, 'I love', then there is no room for the 'why'; it is the final answer in itself.

The religion of love in Arogya is a new religion devoid of any rigidity or, to be better expressed, religiosity. Tagore dons religion with the apparel of four components to be very specific. These are freedom, love, truth and beauty. This is not all. He welcomes goodness once and for all despite all constraints or obligations whatsoever or why-so-ever.

Convalescence to Tagore is never a consolation but a road to inwardness – it is the inwardness that puts together accountability and credibility, accreditation and quality. He is never happy with the happiness of so-called affluence in apparent fullness. He enters into the mystery of what is unknown and beyond the range of human consciousness. Assurance or expectations embodied with the living form of standing strength do not please him. He wants to justify his role in the world not merely in living presence but also in more living posterity. This mystic vision has a marvellous fusion of spirituality which has been earlier depicted in serenity and grandeur:

When thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride;
and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes.

All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony – and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.

I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence.

I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.

Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord.

The aesthetic experiment attuned to mysticism and spirituality as Tagore has made in Convalescence is not only sensitive in appeal but also a rediscovery of the universe as a soul. It is an opportunity for broadening the mind and widening the outlook. This is why in a span of thirty-three poems in Arogya Tagore exposes quite radically the new philosophy of vision of the religion of an artist. He intensifies all so-called realities of life as an adventure of the surplus. It is an incessant explosion of freedom – a quest for finding out the meaning of death as a living tissue. It is a new religion which he frankly explains elsewhere:

My religion is essentially a poet's religion. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channels as does the inspiration of my music. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life. Somehow they are wedded to each other, and through their betrothal had a long period of ceremony, it was kept secret from me. I am not, I hope, boasting when I confess to my gift of poesy, an instrument of expression delicately responsive to the breath that comes from depth of feeling. From my infancy I had the keen sensitiveness which always kept my mind tingling with consciousness of the world around me, natural and human.

I had been blessed with that sense of wonder which gives a child his right of entry into the treasure-house of mysteries which is in the heart of existence.

In Poem No. 20 of Arogya Tagore's experience of human emotions find a splendid reflection where sorrow makes its meaning resplendent with a great artistic truth:

In the backdrop of drowsiness
In tired moments of nights afflicted with disease
In a heart embodied with the living form of standing strength
Brings forth powerful assurance,
Amid stars instantaneous
Alike the living force that silently heralds
In unfailing assurance
In the sky of the universe at night asleep
When he says, 'Do you feel sorrow anywhere?'
No meaning is there I think.
Sorrow is a sham illusion,
With manliness of mine shall I overcome it.
The strength inherent in service affords in the body of the weak
The honour of the strong.

Exceptionally positive in his vision of life, Tagore embarks upon the loftiness of mind unbounded and eternal. The sky of the mind – Cidakas– welcomes an unending canvas where the stamp of creativity and aesthetic consciousness deserves to be adorned with the vastness of spirituality. In fact, he makes a wonderful combination of emotion and spirituality quite natural for a march to the beyond. It is a process of relationship between laughter and tears, joy and sorrow, advent and farewell. Perhaps, Tagore comes close to the desirable journey of harmony in trio of aesthetics, spirituality and mysticism like Starhawk who observes:

The circle is cast.
We are between the worlds,
Beyond the bounds of time,
Where night and day,
Birth and death,
Joy and sorrow,
Meet as one.

In Arogya Tagore makes a buoyant experiment on the theory of aesthetic criticism where he makes a point of departure between the real and the beautiful. He knows it very well that the expression of any artistic creation is largely a matter of mind where emotions are crystallised and balanced for a move ahead and beyond that. This is characteristically revealed in his toying with mind as a creation of art that he ensures through Poem No. 25:

In the vast human mind
The cluster of words untold
Hovers from time to time with emotions unexpressed.
Like a nebula in enormous oblivion
In the arena of the mind
Suddenly being whisked away in a stroke
Consolidated has it become,
And is rotating in my creative hemisphere.

In fact, Tagore debates that art is not an extra but very essential to the aesthetic being of a man. The Tagorean theory of art demands a look anew from this point of view. He hails art not as an exercise but as a refreshing spirit for which almost all the poems in Arogya breathe an air of poignancy and simplicity and cadence and catholicity so succinctly brought out:

The Tagorean theory tells us more of the creative impulse and less of the art object as an artefact, more the whys and whens than about the how. The aspect of form, of making, medium and technique, communication, the structure and constructive process are left almost untouched. Though, as an artist, he knows the passion 'to make objectively real that which is

inwardly real to us', he does not look upon the art object as an object among other objects. It is more a focus of psychological (invisible but real) energies, a magnetic or psychic apparatus pointing to the beyond. Interestingly, Tagore does not equate the real with the beautiful, "my friend may not be beautiful or useful, rich or great, but he is real to me. In him I feel an extension of my joy." What else is there to be said about it?

The meaning of art, an exercise for self-expression, is freedom as Tagore defines it. This makes art arresting and interesting without caring for meaning most often meaningless but essential. Beauty, love, the grace of God, victory or defeat – all crumble together in the festival of inwardness. Tagore is quite experienced, perhaps perennially unparalleled and incomparable. Here is a classic example (Poem No. 29):

The sweet blessings of beauty have I received in this life,
In the urn of human love do I have the taste of drinking pipe
In unbearable sorrowful days
Known have I the self that unheard and unbeaten stays.
The day when I have felt the shadow of death inside,
I faced not defeat meek at the hands of fright.
Ne'er was I from the touch of the greatest men debarred,
Their message of nectar in the heart have I treasured.
The favour of the God of life that I've received in the life of mine
With grateful mind that memorandum do I entwine.

This is aesthetic enjoyment baked in the warmth of spirituality and mysticism in the oven, as it were, of the heart. As Professor Ghose significantly remarks:

This brings Tagore to the nature of aesthetic enjoyment. He has no hesitation saying: "Enjoyment is the soul of literature – enjoyment which is disinterested" that's the catch and also why before one can be qualified to enjoy and understand beauty, one has to go through a stage of discipline. In a sense the true artist is an ascetic. The disinterestedness is a mark not only of the creative activity but also of its enjoyment, in and as freedom. To use another ancient equation: the delight self is the free self.

Too protean ever to put into a formula, Tagore explores and expands his philosophy of life with a prayer for the light of joy of the eternal man. He also wants truth to be unmasked from the cocoon of the self in the final poem of Arogya:

Let the cocoon of this self unmask
The bright halo of consciousness
Express the Eternal form of Truth
By piercing the mist.
Let the light of joy of a Man Eternal
Amid all men
Be enkindled in my mind.

Tagore further submits his longing for 'Beyond the silent world of worldly grievance' the blessed form of the Eternal when he poignantly points out:

Whatever is amply meaningless and critical in this life
Whatever embodies falsehood in the sham value of the society,
Leaving aside all beggarly and
Troubled crowd
Let me know the true meaning with me vivid eyes
Prior to crossing the bar.

The wailing in the heart is endless. The wailing of consciousness in Tagore comes out quite differently in the forms of self-submission and self-surrender as dividends of *c'est moi*— here I am. He admits his reservations, which he earnestly considers the gifts of his inner being blessed with the touch of joy and truth. The man eternal awaits warm greetings from his mind. Like Tennyson, prior to bidding farewell to earth, Tagore, too, wants to be enriched with bright prospects of posterity. What a gift of convalescence! A maestro to be most himself in mystic march for the grand truth of humanism in symphony of freedom and joy, Tagore remains altogether different, and therefore, most endearing to the man of the heart. Is it a welcome to 'atmadeepa bhava'?

What an upshot by a bemused and brightened Buddha in quest of nirvana before the final whistle from the abode of God!

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