

## Chapter One

### THE INDIAN ROMANTICS

#### I

This chapter deals with the critical works by some representative early twentieth<sup>/</sup>century Indian critics who could be described as Romantic critics. The critics selected are Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), and Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), whose works are available in English, and Anandshankar Dhruv (1869-1942), and B.K. Thakore (1869-1952), whose works are available in Gujarati.

The term 'Romantic' is a confusingly inclusive term. It may be possible to characterise many critics belonging to any literary period as Romantic critics. Romanticism in Europe has been regarded as (1) an antithesis of Classicism or Realism, (2) as a historical movement with certain identifiable concepts, values and style<sup>1</sup>, or (3) as a psychological prototype.<sup>2</sup> If Romanticism is treated as a psychological pattern which allows 'emanations from the unconscious mind',<sup>3</sup> as expressed in a writer's work, it may be possible to identify Romantic writers in any given literary period; and those critics who value such work can be described as Romantic critics. In the present study however, the term is used in a restricted sense with

doesn't the period label  
arise out of the romantic  
sensitivity of that time?

label

application mainly to the Indian context and as a period  
label to describe Indian criticism of the late nineteenth  
and early twentieth century.

Probably the most obvious aspect of criticism of  
this period is its dependence on English critical ideas.  
The first few generations of Indians educated in the  
universities established in the latter half of the  
nineteenth century, admired the English Romantic and  
Victorian writers. This educated elite class or Bhadra Lok,  
as Broomfield calls them,<sup>4</sup> produced modern Indian literature  
in its early phase. Owing to the influence of the English  
Romantic and the Victorian writers, subsequently the  
literary values and critical concepts in the early twentieth  
century India acquired a distinct Romantic character.

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In using the term 'Romantic' to describe criticism  
in the early part of this century, it is not implied that  
there necessarily was a distinct mark or presence of any  
particular English Romantic critic in the works of Tagore,  
Sri Aurobindo, Anandshankar and B.K. Thakore. Romantic  
criticism cannot be thought of as only a body of critical  
texts produced during the English Romantic age. It would  
be appropriate to think of it as a certain philosophical  
orientation in the manner in which M.H. Abrams describes  
Romantic criticism.<sup>5</sup> In his view Romantic criticism  
values the process of creation more than anything else.

He says :

... Almost all the major critics of the English romantic generation phrased definitions or key statements showing a parallel alignment from work to poet. Poetry is the overflow, utterance, or projection of the thoughts and feelings of the poet; or else (in the chief variant formulation) poetry is defined in terms of the imaginative process which modifies and synthesises the images, thoughts and feelings of the poet.<sup>6</sup>

When Romantic criticism is understood in these terms, it becomes possible to identify a Romantic critic as

? distinct from a Romanticist. A 'Romantic' critic is one

whose philosophical orientation is 'expressive' <sup>as outlined above</sup>. On the

dearer working

other hand a 'Romanticist' is one who displays the influence of one or more Romantic critics preceding him.

The aim here is not to establish or explore the inter-

-connections between British Romantic criticism and Indian

Romantic criticism. There has already been an argument to

that effect in <sup>the</sup> case of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo.<sup>7</sup> I wish

What is the difference?

to extend the argument and discuss the <sup>philosophically</sup> <sup>basis of the ideas of</sup> Romantic/nature of ideas reflected in the works of these critics.

The critics mentioned here were born soon after the universities at Madras, Bombay and Calcutta were established.

The literary ethos in which this generation of critics spent its mature years, which shaped its critical ideas was largely a product of the British education in India, even when these ideas agitated against the British colonial rule. In the early part of the nineteenth century the

British established printing presses for administrative purposes.<sup>8</sup> Even earlier the European missionaries had started printing The Bible in Indian/vernacular languages.<sup>9</sup> The printing technology gave a boost to the activity of reproducing books in India. Books had been published in India in the form of hand-written manuscripts reproduced on paper before the printing technology came to be used.<sup>10</sup> But these books were prepared for the elite or for the devotees of a sect. Printing technology made books available to a large number of readers. Simultaneously with the growth in the book industry, there was a growth of the urban centers with population interested in modern education, as it happened during the initial stages of industrialisation in England, Germany and France.

The nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of a large number of literary periodicals in India. The models for Indian periodicals were English periodicals<sup>3</sup> like The Spectator, (1711-1712), The Tatler (1709-1711), and the Victorian journals like The Athenaeum (1828).<sup>11</sup> The result was that Indian periodicals like Gujarat Shalapatra (1867-88), and Vasant (1902-37) in Gujarati, and Dhyan prasaraka (1850-66), and Vividha Dhyan Vistar (1867-1937) in Marathi, started devoting space to literary topics.<sup>12</sup> The discussion in the journals as far as criticism was concerned was confined to two major areas : (1) restatement of Sanskrit poetics and (2) introduction of English authors often in

i/ the form of translations. The periodicals started serialising romances and novels. Gradually these creative works came to be discussed through the literary periodicals. Thus through them modern Indian literary criticism emerged as a valued literary activity.

It may be noted that literary criticism of the periodicals was not the result of any preceding radical changes in the field of creative literature. The Western literary historiography believes that literary criticism follows creative literature in a chronological sequence.

Historians of criticism argue that literature poses new problems and unsettles established critical values, and in turn criticism refines itself to appropriate these new literary problems.<sup>13</sup> But such a historiography does not adequately explain the emergence of modern Indian criticism since its rise was concomitant with the emergence of modern Indian literature, rather than being subsequent to it.

Why? { In order to describe the nature of criticism published in India during the later half of the nineteenth century, a distinction between criticism as a literary genre and criticism as a philosophic analysis of literature has to be introduced. This kind of distinction may not have a universal validity, but it is convenient for understanding colonial literary culture such as that of the nineteenth century India. Colonial cultures import and imbibe forms

of intellectual activity irrespective of their indigenous necessity. The criticism of the late nineteenth century was written mainly because the Indian intellectual had discovered it as a form of writing through his English education.

In all preceding periods of Indian literature criticism was related to the developments in philosophy, logic, drama and poetry. But this correspondence between criticism and other more fundamental paradigms of knowledge and literary traditions was lost during the initial phase of the colonial period. Numerous critics of this period discuss literature as if it were an abstract phenomenon such as God or Truth, free of any social bonds and rules of tradition. Therefore the most crucial task of the literary criticism in the twentieth century India has been to eliminate the gap between critical theory and creative literature and to establish the natural chronological sequence of these two activities. The specific nature of attempts made by the Indian Romantic critics in this direction will be considered in this chapter. But before doing that it is necessary to establish another parameter of the processes involving cultural thought in the nineteenth century. It relates to the growth of nationalism in India.

It is an acknowledged fact that nationalism has diverse cultural manifestations.<sup>14</sup> In Europe nationalism

grew out of economic pressures, in England and France due to a series of rapid changes in the land revenue structure, in Germany out of a federation of traders, and in Russia owing to a policy of economic protectionism.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, nationalism in colonial societies emerged as a political ideology. Generally, such a nationalism is of ? reactionary and negative nature. It thrives on an anti-colonial sentiment. It heightens political awareness without accelerating a corresponding development of the economy. Therefore the colonial nationalism acquires an idealistic character. It leads the participants in that ideal towards an unduly romanticised vision of the past, and to an excessively idealised vision of the future.

Is the distinction as clear-cut as this?

Argument

Indian  
Literary criticism of the last decades of the nineteenth century did not escape the influence of the nationalistic current [of cultural thought]. The result was : (1) an indiscriminate revival of Sanskrit poetics, and (2) formulation of utopian literary aesthetics. The peculiar character of Indian nationalism also created a tendency to resist, more appropriately to subvert the Western influence as argued by Ashis Nandy.<sup>16</sup> With this general background in mind, let us turn to the discussion of the four Indian Romantic critics.

## II

Anandshankar Dhruva and B.K. Thakore, who had long and productive literary careers, count foremost among the

literary critics of the period between 1880 and 1915, termed Pandita Yuga<sup>17</sup> by the historians of Gujarati literature. It is debatable whether they are truly representative critics of the age, because their range was eclectic and their focus was on just one form of literature, namely poetry. However they occupy a position in the history of modern Gujarati literature that is comparable to the position that, for instance, F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot occupy in modern English literature. If they did not postulate any new and radical theory of literature, they did none the less, exert a pervasive influence on literary thought in Gujarati and created a climate of literary opinion.<sup>18</sup> *established literary opinion as a valid part of intellectual formation.*

Anandshankar was an erudite scholar and was well versed in Indian philosophy and Sanskrit poetics. He spent an illustrious academic career at Banaras Hindu University, first as a professor and later as the vice-chancellor. In recognition of his learning, he was awarded an honorary D. Lit. by that University. He was described by one of his contemporaries as a 'A devout Hindu with broad culture... Champion of free thought, possessing the happy faculty of seeing everything with freshness and wit'.<sup>19</sup> Judging from the popularity of Vasant,<sup>20</sup> the periodical he launched, he became not only a respected man of letters but also a cultural leader of modern Gujarat, and earned compliments from Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore and many others.<sup>21</sup> It is



necessary to refer to these biographical details to show two central features of Anandshankar's criticism : (1) The role of the writer as a prophet that he consciously played, and (2) the tendency to synthesise Indian poetics with (the) western views on literature and poetry.

Like the British Romantics, Anandshankar perceived criticism as an integral part of a hermeneutical visionary activity.<sup>22</sup> The range of intellectual interest and the capacity to assimilate ideas from diverse sources that his writings display, may give the impression that he was subject to receiving influences freely. He commented on literature, the arts, education, history, economics, polity, philosophy, and theology. However, all his intellectual activity was informed by a desire to bring about cultural change and progress. Implicit in this attitude was a certain basic restlessness. Romanticism in Gujarati was not a matter of literary revolution, but it certainly had this restlessness as the driving spirit behind it.

Anandshankar's Sahityavichar<sup>23</sup> is a collection of essays on Gujarati writers and literature, while Kavyatatvavichar<sup>24</sup> is a collection of philosophical statements about poetry. Thus Anandshankar functioned both as a theoretician and a practical critic. Though Sahityavichar as practical criticism explicitly states his literary principles, it does not articulate the critical methodology

he followed. This does not mean that his criticism was without any direction, but he seems to have approached literature like a true Romantic with a sense of mystical awe. Anandshankar perceived literature as 'a rhythmic' expression of imaginative life. When literature is seen in this light, it follows that criticism becomes an expression of empathy. Hence specific and definable principles of criticism cannot be laid down.

At this stage it may be interesting to examine some representative samples of Anandshankar's practical criticism. In one of his contemporaries, Manilal Dwivedi (1858-98), he finds a strong affinity between philosophy and poetry, which in his opinion, excelled on account of being emotive : Anandshankar comments :

Manilal's philosophy has influenced his poetry in two ways : (1) in assigning primacy to human heart over nature and (2) in emphasising the end of human existence, the sole motivation of life even in poetry. The former is an indirect impact of his idealism, and the latter is a direct one of his philosophical orientation about the end of human existence ..... There are two kinds of poets : Some have a affinity for and learn from nature, and some find human emotions particularly meaningful. Manilal belongs to the second kind.<sup>25</sup>

In his assessment of Premanand (1640-1700?) his familiarity with both alamkarashastra and English literature/ is clearly felt.

The test of poetry is its profundity and beauty, from this point of view, if anyone has the least limitations or faults, it is Premchand .....  
 Charming Characterisation, power to draw attractive portrayals instead of exact descriptions of nature, are wonderfully present. Characters like Krishna are realised in such a way, that his art stands equal to that of Shakespeare. The theatre in Shakespeare's times was congenial to theatrical art. But it delights one to find that Premchand has used similar pictorial imagination.<sup>26</sup>

In Narmad (1833-86), he finds both vitality and imagination, which raise his otherwise earthy idiom to the status of poetry.

The first poet to make Gujarat feel the autonomous and lively poetry instead of constricted and dull kind, was Narmadashankar. The kind of earnestness and vitality deemed necessary for poets, were there in him in full measure. The degree to which the earnestness and vitality should have transformed into beautiful, magnificent, and untainted imagination, they were not transformed. To that degree his poetry remains deficient. But his earnestness and vitality marked all his utterances so much that they attain the status of poetry.<sup>27</sup>

For Anandshankar, K.M. Munshi (1877-1971) is able to -

- ① - transform the phenomenal into the great world of imagination:

In order to understand Munshi, one should note some of his personal qualities, manifest in his literature. One is courage, boundless courage and firmness, and the other is his idealism, meaning thereby a world of imagination ..... That world is a greater reality than the gross world of experiences.<sup>28</sup>

These responses of Anandshankar to various writers show

his enthusiasm for literature as a means of spiritual ascent<sup>s</sup>ion and social transformation. They reveal his reverence for the artistic world and the 'genius' of the poet. What these comments do not indicate is the presence of objectivity in the thought processes that constitute literary criticism. In other words, criticism for Anandshankar is not an intellectual discourse rooted in philosophical developments but a metaphysical exercise guided by the critic's intuitive ability. In this sense he deviates perceptibly from the fine distinction between meaning and style available in the alamkarshastra of Sanskrit, and accepts unconsciously yet compellingly Coleridge's idea of interpretation as being synonymous with yielding to the irrational forces of the mind excited by poetry/. Sahityavichar thus reflects the general Romantic tenor of Anandshankar's practical criticism.<sup>29</sup>

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- give ref.*

The theoretical statements about literature made by Anandshankar at various times are compiled under the title Kavyatatvavichar. The volume, though impressive in its scope of concerns, is not a systematic presentation of any theory. It is only a collection of discussions of diverse aspects of literary creation. A scrutiny of these essays [included] shows that Anandshankar is not interested in literature as a social activity. If he looks at literature as an agent of cultural change, that function is perceived to be a subsequent effect rather than an

organic component integrated in the spectrum of literary transaction. For him literature is a personal and an autonomous activity, which, if authentic, will affect the society. It is therefore an ego-centered or <sup>a</sup> more appropriately ~~the~~ soul-centered activity.

In the essay 'Kavita' (first published, 1902)<sup>30</sup> which is pivotal to Kavyatatvavichar, he argues that the source of poetry is the soul of the poet. Poetry is a life giving force with a deified immortal body. These views are reminiscent of the views of the British Romantic *evidence?* < critics, particularly those of Shelley. One can compare Anandshankar's view that poetry synthesises the diversity of sensory perceptions, with the view expressed in Shelley's statement :

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connections than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds.<sup>31</sup>

Like Shelley, <sup>as inspired by divine power</sup> Anandshankar accepts Plato's notion of the ideal world by attributing the highest importance to 'genius' and to the creative power of the poet.<sup>32</sup>

Anandshankar's concept of the relationship between the Creator, the poet and poetry is akin to what M.H. Abrams

calls the 'triple parallel' in the context of Romantic criticism.<sup>33</sup> For Anandshankar, poetry is as much a description of the poet's consciousness as it is that of the linguistic text he 'expresses'.

Anandshankar maintains that a poet is necessarily a prophet and a seer (Krantdarshi-Manishi).<sup>34</sup> He argues that the apparent vagueness of the notion that poetry is an immortal expression born in the soul of the poet is not an undesirable theoretical position. Such an abstract concept which endows poetry with a spiritual value is the only way to understand its true nature. He maintains that the ontological status of poetry is superior to that of the material world. These views remind one of the Romantic reverence for 'the genius' and his 'expression', and are manifest in the statements such as the following by Shelley,

Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.<sup>35</sup>

It <sup>is</sup> might be inappropriate to interpret Anandshankar's criticism as mere replication of the British Romantic criticism. His profound knowledge of the classical Sanskrit literature, and of the ancient Indian poetics

becomes manifest through numerous allusions to both, particularly in Kavyatatvavichar.<sup>36</sup> His essays 'Sahitya Ane Sakshara' and 'Sahitya Ane Jivan',<sup>37</sup> prove his knowledge of Sanskrit literary theories. His use of the terms Vagdevi, Akshara-darshana and Alokikabhavana elsewhere, indicates his rootedness in the discourse of Sanskrit poetics.

is/ It should be clear by now that the conceptual structure implicit in Anandshankar's critical writing in Romantic. His emphasis on the personality of the poet, more particularly on the spiritual making of the poet, the spontaneity in expression, and the capacity of poetry to appeal to the soul of the reader, all point to his Romantic leanings. He accepted the prevalent polarity between the Classical and the Romantic; the classical being a cultivated restraint (Sanskari Sanyam), and the Romantic being a celebration of life (Jivan-no ullas).<sup>38</sup>

Anandshankar's writings display a mature attempt at synthesising English Romantic poetics with the Romantic elements in Sanskrit poetics. He maintains that poetry affects the reader by causing an indescribable delight in his soul. He claims that poetry is anandlakshi. This principle is drawn from the classical Sanskrit poetics, which considered the delight in poetry to be of as high an order as the delight in the realisation of the infinite.<sup>39</sup>

In this respect of integrating the Western Romanticism with Indian traditions, he is typical of the Indian Renaissance critics.

If one views Anandshankar's achievements from the modern structuralist perspective, it may become necessary to revise the established view of his works. Roland Barthes and the other structuralists who have devoted their energy to the analysis of the language of literary criticism, consider criticism not as a vehicle of meaning but as a linguistic performance legitimised by a discursive ordering.<sup>40</sup> Philosophers like Wittgenstein look at the language as an order of 'no-sense' logical premises.<sup>41</sup> Its validity is not in being true or false, it only admits the test of being self consistent. If one considers Anandshankar's works as a language or style of a discourse rather than a set of philosophical propositions, one would have to admit that this kind of language and style of critical discourse have no Sanskrit or Gujarati precedents. The precedents have to be traced back to the writings of English critics such as Dr. Johnson, Shelley and Arnold.

The characteristic features of Anandshankar's discourse are a centrally placed argument linked to his individual perception of literature, movement from an idea to another idea through analysis of certain key terms, and a completely ahistorical approach to the material discussed. The first two of these are a positive



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to  
Anandshankar

ance?

contribution of the British influence. The third, I tend to think, is [on the other hand] an epist<sup>e</sup>mological distortion caused by the colonial cultural interference. While

revealing these features of critical discourse, Anandshankar becomes a truly representative Gujarati critic of the colonial period. His real contribution to Gujarati

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criticism - so far completely overlooked [is not so much in giving new concepts and tools but a new language of

reaction?  
hence?

critical discourse. It can be claimed that he shaped the

language of Gujarati criticism which, thought not supple, made it possible to carry on the synthesising work. The

mixed  
referent

direct?

terminology in his criticism was varied and eclectic. The discursive style shaped by Anandshankar has become the central characteristic of the style of criticism in Gujarati in the post-Anandshankar decades.

### III

B.K. Thakore an exact contemporary of Anandshankar, was like him an academic. He was at home with Sanskrit lore, and was a serious student of history and English literature. He wrote poems, plays, short stories and biographies, as well as historical, cultural, and literary essays. He translated and adapted works from both English and Sanskrit sources, and edited medieval Gujarati texts. In the history of modern Gujarati literature, Thakore's image is that of a prolific writer and an independent critic.<sup>42</sup> Thakore's

lectures on literary personalities, works, and literary principles, his reviews and introductions to various literary works form the corpus of his critical writings. He had plans to write two books, one each, on Indian poetics and Western poetics, but he did not execute his plans.<sup>43</sup> The main focus of his critical writings was the literary culture of Gujarat which he wanted to enrich by creating a sympathetic, scholarly, and responsible criticism. Thakore's idea of poetry is comparable to that of Matthew Arnold. The qualities of good poetry that he enumerates are : 'simple, perspicuous, sensuous, imaginative, sculpturesque, picturesque, rhythmical, harmonious, well proportioned, radiant, brilliant, impassioned and profound'. He has proposed parallel Gujarati terms for each of the above qualities in his book Lyric.<sup>44</sup> Thakore advocated diachronic comparisons as a means of critical evaluation. In reply to the charge that Lyric was in Gujarati but the examples cited were all from English literature, he writes :

Partiality towards one's self is natural. If such a tendency leads to conscious or unconscious mistakes committed in evaluating art of poetry, there is just one well-known and fruitful solution. The solution is to view a number of great works from different cultures and periods frequently, and cultivate as much aesthetic sense as possible, by evaluating their merits or demerits ... My intention was to supply the principles to a sympathetic, Gujarati reader, so that, by himself, he is able to compare the existing, and accepted concepts of poetry. The questions as to which of the concepts

is better, ... or effective, would automatically arise in his mind and thus his aesthetic sense would be released from the traditions ... and would seek independent comparison and preference...<sup>45</sup>

He believed that a critic must possess a sense of discrimination, and a scholarly awareness of traditions and interest in literature other than one's own.

*Sentence?* Along with maturity in a critic, subtlety of taste, thorough knowledge of tradition of poetry and prosody, vast experience, sympathy for various styles and forms of art, imagination capable of grasping a situation or a poetic mind, and much more is required for serious, scientific, comparative, (and) historically analytical critical activity.<sup>46</sup>

For him 'art activity' is not an 'activity straying away from the mainstream of life'.<sup>47</sup> Art and criticism are logically linked like cause and effect. He says :

Art and criticism are inseparably linked. Art creation is one type of living i.e., the action of a living being. Simultaneously with, or before and after any action, (as in cause and effect) ... thought is inevitable ... and beneficial as an inseparable part of action itself; the relationship between art and criticism pair has to be perceived in the same way.<sup>48</sup>

Criticism has a wide spectrum of affinities, but its main function is to establish the distinctiveness of works through comparative evaluation :

Criticism is akin to art and also akin to science. To evaluate merits or demerits, achievements, formal and artistic material of poetry, or other works of literature, is a favourite activity for

criticism. Placing new works against acclaimed ones, comparing them, finding distinctions, and forming conclusions are favourite methods for criticism. In the process, descriptive and normative sciences related to philosophy of art, aesthetics, and literature, are formed.<sup>49</sup>

Thus criticism is required to be friendly, and empathetic to art and yet to remain objective in its assessment. The following statement reiterates this position using the following :

In the cultural court of literature judgements are to be delivered on merits or demerits of works. The judge as a human being is not likely to be free from personal preferences and prejudices; the writer is a human being too, having his personal preferences and prejudices, the judge may be favourably or otherwise inclined. But leaving all that aside, only those judgements, not tainted by any of the above, would be culturally acceptable.<sup>50</sup>

Over and above the insistence upon a sympathetic, and objective approach to works of art, Thakore deems the sense of history and tradition to be of utmost importance, specially when the literary works judged are culturally or temporally remote :

In any work of imagination, the creator forms a pattern of characters and their actions, and thus manifests the essence of his creation. If the locale, situation etc., in a work of art are remote from us, it is difficult to understand the pattern in it, and some more knowledge of history is required in order to be sympathetic. To which race a particular work of art belongs and the kind of tradition the race had, should be kept in mind. If there are two different works, by two different poets on a common theme, the

more distant they are in terms of locale, time etc., the worse would be the superficial comparisons between them by common readers.<sup>51</sup>

Thakore's criticism shows singular affinity for Arnold's style of criticism. Like Arnold he is an enthusiastic comparatist, whose standards of evaluation are drawn from his intimate knowledge of the best works in several traditions. But Thakore refrains from offering precise definitions of concepts. The strength of Thakore's criticism lies in its attitude of 'seriousness' towards literature, and its **comparative** spirit. Implicit in his writings is a self consciousness about being a critic, which once again is reminiscent of Arnold's criticism.

The range of references to critics and critical theories in Thakore's writings is impressive : Aristotle, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Ruskin, Arnold, Drinkwater, on the Western side, and the rasa theory, Pingal (prosody), Sahitya darpana of Vishwanatha, on the Indian side.<sup>52</sup> This wide frame of references seems to support Thakore's belief that a critic has to be a scholar as much as a lover of poetry. The belief echoes Arnold's idea of the function of criticism as a culturally ennobling activity.<sup>53</sup> Thakore's influence on Gujarati literary criticism was as pervasive as that of Anandshankar's. If Anandshankar created the modern discourse of Gujarati literary criticism, Thakore legitimised the institution of the 'scholar-critic'.

The discussion of the two pioneering critics in Gujarati points to the fact that Romanticism was a multi-faceted phenomenon in Gujarati criticism. Romantic criticism did not mean advocacy only of the imagination, inspiration, and intuition. It did not mean the advocacy only of restlessness, experimentation and dynamism in literary style. Romanticism in Gujarati primarily means acceptance of 'the exotic' English ideas, whether they are drawn from the Pre-Romantics of the Post-Romantics.

Romanticism was perceived by the generation of Anandshankar and Thakore as new and vital literary thought. Their generation desired to inject this new vitality into the

traditional alamkarashastra : hence the critics attempted a synthesis of the two. This generation of Romantic

critics in Gujarati, did not see the two traditions as alternative modes of criticism. They did not perceive their own critical preferences as a matter involving radical choice. That is why their criticism was a liberal blending of Sanskrit poetics and Western criticism. That they did not look at critical theories as culture specific and period specific constructs, and that they imagined an easy synthesis being possible, were the consequences of their being products of the colonial education.

The image of the Romantic critic in the modern Gujarati literature is not that of a rebel figure, but that of a scholarly and an eclectic reformer. Anandshankar and Thakore were cast into this image as much as they

and continuation of Sanskrit ideas

the apparent coincidence of ideas about it

were responsible in creating it. Its hallmark is not the rejection of tradition but a universal acceptance.

Therefore the critics of this period did not lay a new foundation for literary theory - theory relevant to their contemporary literature. Their contribution was that they created (1) a new idiom of criticism, a new horizon of critical expectations, and (2) an institution of the scholar critic.

> ~~the~~ Gujarati literary criticism during the early years of the twentieth century, developed as an academic discipline, without any support from developments in the related fields of Gujarati<sup>s</sup> sociology, psychology, and linguistics. There were impressive social and philosophical movements taking place in India during the time of both Anandshankar and Thakore. But they did not build their theories upon these movements. Their engagement in theories, distant in terms both of time and space, indicates the quality of Romanticism they nurtured. The adjective 'pandits', applied to the generation of Anandshankar and Thakore, and to the literary period, does not involve any <sup>of the</sup> sarcasm associated with the English term 'pundit'. The criticism generated by it was an exercise valuable in itself, and is of importance important as a colonial intellectual project.

## IV

In the first half of the twentieth century the most significant Indian Romantic critics who used English language as the medium of expression are Brijendranath Seal, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sri Aurobindo. If literary criticism in regional languages found an incentive in the emergence of literary periodicals, in English the main incentive was offered by the various social reform movements. The three critics named above were social reformers, nationalists, and philosophers. Literary criticism for them was an essential aspect of rejuvenation of Indian culture. Their writings are therefore more serious and less sporadic in nature. Of the three critics mentioned, Tagore was a versatile creative writer and an artist, and Sri Aurobindo was a poet and a dramatist of a considerable stature. *ied ?* Because of their personal and life long commitment to poetry and literature, literary criticism figured prominently in their project of cultural reconstruction.

Tagore wrote all his creative works in Bengali, only occasionally translating them into English. However his worldwide fame as a visionary and a poet, thanks to the Nobel Prize (1913) awarded to him, took him to various parts of the world for lectures on literature. He lectured in the U.S., in England, and in Japan as also in all parts of India, on poetry and poetics. It therefore became



necessary for him to use English for his critical comments. The books of criticism in English, by Tagore, are compilations of his lectures delivered outside Bengal. They are in a way lectures in comparative literature rather than any specific literary tradition, such as that of Bengali.

e/ Sri Aurobindo was a polyglot and could write in his mother tongue Bengali with case<sup>54</sup> but he choose to write mainly in English. He was well trained in Greek, Latin, and modern European languages. He had a mastery over Sanskrit and had knowledge of some Indian languages. With his range of literary scholarship it was natural that he should seek for a universally valid literary aesthetics. Since he led a secluded life as a sadhaka and a yogi for the most of his mature literary career, all his criticism came in the written form, first published arbitrarily, and now included in his collected works.

Seal's case is somewhat different. His stature as a Bengali intellectual is of significance, but in comparison to Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, he cannot be said to have been an equally great figure. His choice of English for expressing his critical ideas was typical of his generation of Bengali intellectuals.<sup>55</sup> Thus the three critics discussed chose English language for critical writings for different reasons; Tagore used English because

*Why mention Seal at all?*

it was an international language, Seal used it because it was the new intellectual language in India, and Sri Aurobindo used it because it was his language for creative expression. The Indian criticism in English during their times was not related at all to a body of Indian writing in English. In the regional languages criticism followed at least to some extent, the developments in creative literature. In Indian English, on the other hand, criticism emerges as a completely autonomous activity independent of ~~and simultaneous with~~ creative writing in English. <sup>though the few examples of</sup> ~~emerges at the time.~~ The philosophic character of the critical concepts and ideas of Sri Aurobindo and Tagore will be surveyed in the following sections.

## V

The earliest of Sri Aurobindo's critical essays 'The Harmony of Virtue',<sup>56</sup> was written in 1890, while he was still an undergraduate at Cambridge. The last of his critical works was a letter on his epic Savitri, written to a disciple to explain his literary philosophy.<sup>57</sup> During the sixty years spanning these two dates, he wrote innumerable essays, letters, and stray comments on art, literature, and poetry. One can discern a gradual progression and development of ideas in Sri Aurobindo's literary criticism, and therefore, his critical writings yield to a chronological ordering. It is possible to

distribute his critical writings in the following phases :

- (1) The Early Phase - This includes The Harmony of Virtue, 'The Sources of Poetry', his introductory essays on Bankimchandra and Kalidasa, also the archaeological investigations of Valmiki and Vyasa and 'The National Value of Art'.<sup>58</sup>
- (2) The later Phase - This includes a long essay on English Meter <sup>the of</sup> and monumental books Foundations of Indian Culture, Future Poetry, and Letters on Savitri.<sup>59</sup>

It is possible to cull out philosophical statements about the nature of meaning and beauty from his other works, such as The Life Divine,<sup>60</sup> and to reduce some of his verses to aesthetic statements. It is also possible to deduce from The Supramental Manifestation,<sup>61</sup> a concept of order and structure which has a bearing on Sri Aurobindo's idea of beauty. However these works have not been referred to so as to focus on his writings that can be described purely as literary criticism.

The earliest of Sri Aurobindo's work was inspired by his reading of Plato. A note dictated by Sri Aurobindo, reads :

I read more than once Plato's Republic and Symposium, but only extracts from his other writings. It is true that under his impress I rashly started writing at the age of eighteen an explanation of the cosmos on the foundation of the principle of Beauty and Harmony, but never got beyond the first three or four chapters.<sup>62</sup>

The essay referred to in his note is The Harmony of Virtue.

It may be interesting to note that Shelley's A Defence of Poetry too was prompted by his reading of Plato.

Shelley happened to be reading Plato's Ion... and had only recently translated the symposium, as well as portions of some others of the more mythic dialogues. There is more of Plato in the 'Defence' than in any earlier piece of English criticism.....<sup>63</sup>

The Harmony is written in the form of a Platonic dialogue between Wilson and Keshav. It is a dialogue carried out in a leisurely manner and touches upon issues ranging from God, religion, truth, beauty, culture to history, chastity, myths, economics, and colonialism. Through this dialogue Sri Aurobindo presents the philosophy of harmony in art and life. The ideas presented here are pure abstractions besides being highly derivative. The general definition of beauty that Sri Aurobindo offers is 'Beauty is a regular variety' :

It is because a curve possesses that variety which is the soul of proportion. It rises, swells and falls with an exact propriety - it is at once various and regular as rolling water; which the stiff monotony of a straight line disgusts the soul by its meaningless rigidity and want of proportion. On the other hand a system of similar curves, unless very delicately managed, cannot possibly suggest the idea of beauty; and that is because there is no proportion, for proportion, I would impress upon you consists in a regular variety.<sup>64</sup>

This essay indicates that Sri Aurobindo began his search

for a universally valid principle of beauty, which included literary beauty, at a very early stage in his literary career.

Sri Aurobindo returned to India in 1892 and began teaching at the Baroda College. Soon after his return, he started acquiring knowledge of Sanskrit and Bengali. The essays on Kalidasa, Vyasa and Valmiki, and those on Bankimchandra are a result of his encounter with these literary traditions.

*then* The essay on Kalidas, which in fact is a series of short essays, was occasioned by his attempt to translate Kalidasa's Vikramorvashiyam. Sri Aurobindo was struck by the variety and the vividness of Kalidasa's imagination. He was also attracted by Kalidasa's intimate knowledge of nature. There is no evidence in his writing to establish whether the attempt to translate Kalidasa was inspired by the translations of Sir William Jones and others. It can be assumed that Sri Aurobindo's engagement in Kalidasa was less <sup>as</sup> of a linguist and more <sup>as</sup> of a Romantic nationalist. The nature of his appreciation of Kalidasa as a genius, as nature's child reflects his Romantic attitude :

*e/* Once in the long history of poetry the great powers who are working the finest energies of nature into the warp of our human evolution met together and resolved to unite in creating a poetical intellect and imagination that, endowed with the most noble and various poetical gifts capable in all the great forms used by creative genius, should express once and for all in a supreme manner the whole sensuous plane of life, its vigour and sweetness.<sup>65</sup>

It may appear that Sri Aurobindo displays a revivalistic tendency in talking about Kalidasa, Vyasa and Valmiki. The general climate of literary opinion in India during the early years of this century was indeed influenced by the Indological works of Sir William Jones and Friedrich Max Muller; and in their works one finds a tendency to glorify ancient India. However in Sri Aurobindo's discovery of the ancient Indian writers there is hardly any trace of revivalistic nationalism. <sup>ms 46</sup> All his critical writings of the early phase need to be read in the context of <sup>this</sup> a short essay titled 'On Original Thinking',<sup>66</sup> which he wrote during this phase. He states in it that the value of the Indian past lies in its capacity to raise original questions.

"I am inclined to give more credit for the secular miracle of our national survival" says Sri Aurobindo "to Shankara, Ramanujam, Nanak, and Kabir, Guru Gobinda, Chaitanya, Ramadas, and Tukaram than to Raghunandan and the pundits of Nadia and Bhatpura".<sup>67</sup> He claims that cultural dynamism <sup>whether</sup> whether in the West or in the East, depends on original and systematic thinking :

on thinking fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of pre-judgements, shearing sophism and prejudice as under as with a sharp sword....<sup>68</sup>

It is obvious that Sri Aurobindo would [not] have taken to the ancient Indian writers merely because it was a fashion of the day. At the same time it can be said that his aim was not to bring together Homer and Valmiki, or Shakespeare and Kalidasa mechanically.

Let us not, either, select at random, make a nameless hotch-potch and then triumphantly call it the assimilation of East and West. We must begin by accepting nothing on trust from any source whatsoever, by questioning everything and forming our own conclusions. We need not fear that we shall by that process cease to be Indians or fall into the danger of abandoning Hinduism. India can never cease to be India or Hinduism to be Hinduism, if we really think for ourselves. It is only if we allow Europe to think for us that India is in danger of becoming an ill-executed and foolish copy of Europe. We must not begin by becoming partisans, our first business as original thinkers will be to accept nothing, to question everything.<sup>69</sup>

Reading his essays on Kalidasa, Vyasa and Valmiki, we see that his response to their poetry <sup>not via European concepts</sup> is unmediated, and yet the references to European poets and numerous comparisons that he attempts between the Indian poets and English poets show that somewhere in his mind there is a desire to present a comparative picture of Indian literature. For instance, in commenting upon Kalidasa, he is easily reminded of Shakespeare's fools. Similar comments on the meter, diction, imagery, characterisation, dialogue, and plot construction, are found in abundance in his essays. It is because of these comparisons that

*by means of*

not really. They're there from the outset  
 & form the bulk of his examples  
 English and European critical concepts enter his critical writings.

2x plain &  
 substitute

Those concepts of Western origin which Sri Aurobindo put to use show a marked inclination towards the expressive theories. Though he follows the method of historical contextualising with whatever little information about Vyasa and Kalidasa was available to him, he seems to question the inflated utility of this method. He laments the fact that there was no Boswell to Kalidasa, that there are no personal documents to reveal his personality as Byron's letters. But he is quick to state that :

It is only the most sensational and therefore the lowest natures that express themselves mainly by their actions. In the case of great poets with whom expression is an instrument that answers spontaneously and accurately to the touch of the soul, it is in their work that we shall find them, the whole of them...70

but in more than genius  
 Sri Aurobindo believed in the Romantic concept of 'genius'. To quote Coleridge, the most eloquent exponent of this concept :

What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet? that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies that images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind.71

Following this attitude, Sri Aurobindo tries to reconstruct the genius of Kalidasa, Vyasa and Valmiki through an



penetrating  
detailed

ardous analysis of their texts.

is he?  
is they different  
connected?

Though interested in Indian philosophy and mysticism, Sri Aurobindo shows enough maturity to look at the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana primarily as poetry. The most essential characteristic of Vyasa's genius is, in Sri Aurobindo's opinion, the sustained imagination. In order to describe this quality, he refers to Coleridge's aesthetics.

doesn't connect  
quotes

i.e. Rajas

he?

Vyasa is the most masculine of writers. When Coleridge spoke of the femininity of genius he had in mind certain features of temperament which, whether justly or not, are usually thought to count for more in the feminine mould than in the masculine, the love of ornament, emotionalism, mobile impressionability, the tyranny of imagination over the reason, excessive sensitiveness to form and outward beauty, tendency to be dominated imaginatively by violence and the show of strength; to be prodigal of oneself, not to husband the powers, to be for showing them off, to fall in self-restraint is also feminine. All these are natural properties of the quick artistic temperament prone to lose balance by throwing all itself outward and therefore seldom perfectly same and strong in all the parts. So much did these elements form the basis of Coleridge's own temperament that we could not perhaps imagine a genius in which they are wanting.<sup>72</sup>

The early phase of Sri Aurobindo's interest in Indian literature and art reveals his inclination towards original thinking and his dependance on unmediated critical response. At the same time it also shows his indebtedness, albeit with a sense of discrimination to some Romantic

critical concepts. There is a refusal in his critical writings to accept the values of European literature blindly. On the other hand, he does not ascribe any absolute value to Indian literature. In summarising the literary achievements of Bankimchandra and Michael Madhusudan Dut, and their contribution to Bengali society, he states :

They have given it Bengali literature, a literature whose princelier creations can bear comparison with the proudest classics of modern Europe. They have given it the Bengali language. The dialect of Bengal is no longer a dialect, but has become the speech of Gods, a language unfading and indestructible, which cannot die except with the death of the Bengali nation and not even then. And they have given it the Bengali nation; a people spirited, bold, ingenious, and imaginative, high among the most intellectual races of the world, and if it can but get perseverance and physical elasticity, one day to be high among the strongest.<sup>73</sup>

Point?

The common platform for comparison between Indian literature and European literature for him is Romanticism. It is on the foundation of this Romantic tendency in his thoughts that he builds a grand structure of poetics in his middle phase.

The most systematic statement of Sri Aurobindo's literary values during the early phase is presented in 'The Source of Poetry'. This essay is a theoretical statement. It discusses the nature of the poetic inspiration. For the first time in his essay Sri Aurobindo

are aware of this?

employs Sanskrit terms to define inspiration. The terms used are Tamasic, Rajasic and Sattwic<sup>74</sup>. It may be noted that these terms are not derived from Indian poetics, but from a school of philosophy, namely Samkhya philosophy. In that philosophy the terms perform the epistemological function of describing the cyclicity of various zeitgeists.

An enigmatic aspect of Sri Aurobindo's critical writing is that he does not refer to any concepts and terms from Sanskrit poetics in spite of his erudite Sanskrit scholarship. The essay proposes a hierarchy of inspiration. The highest is Sattwic, or what Sri Aurobindo calls 'luminous inspiration'.<sup>75</sup> He describes it as "disinterested, self-contained ..... having its eye on the right thing to be said and the right way to say it."<sup>76</sup>

Sattwic inspiration is a gift of the intuitive mind. It is the inspiration which brings the highest kind of perfection in poetry. When the human intellect interferes with the flow of this inspiration, it introduces a falsification in poetry. Sri Aurobindo describes this kind of imperfect inspiration with the term Rajasic :

[but]?  
It is not flat and unprofitable ... vain. It is eager to avoid labour by catching at the second best expression or the incomplete vision of the idea.<sup>77</sup>

Another kind of imperfection and a worse kind at that, comes through the tamasic inspiration which creates :

"ingenious conceits, logic, argumentation, rhetorical turns, ornamental fancies, echoes learned and imitative rather than up-lifted and transformed".<sup>78</sup>

One strikingly original idea stated in 'The Sources of Poetry' is that poetry has an impersonal existence. It is a pre-verbal existence, referred to by Sri Aurobindo as 'higher ideation'.<sup>79</sup> In other words, poetry exists at a higher plane in a non-linguistic form, the poet's mind catches its glimpses through inspiration. Such inspiration which is in tune or harmony with that higher source is the perfect Sattwic inspiration. The other types of inspiration are inferior, because they admit active interference by the intellect or the emotive energy. Thus Sri Aurobindo reduces the importance traditionally given <sup>in Romantic tradition Western tradition</sup> to the poet's personality, and emphasises the poet's role as a prophet and a seer. In this essay he thus moves away from

Wordsworth's concept of egocentric sublime to Shelley's vision of the poet as a vehicle of creativity itself. It can be assumed that by the middle of the early phase the expressive orientation of Sri Aurobindo had taken a definite shape. His later aesthetics serves the purpose of strengthening the argument presented in 'The Sources of poetry',<sup>80</sup> in a Sketchy manner.

After 1902 Sri Aurobindo's involvement in the nationalist struggle deepened. In order to take up his

position as a leader with complete devotion, he moved from Baroda to Calcutta in 1905. 'The National Value of Art'<sup>81</sup> is a brief manifesto written during the turbulent year 1907. It has, as the context would suggest<sup>5</sup> a nationalistic fervour about it. It is a passionate defense of art and literature against the forces of materialism let loose by modernisation within the colonial context. Sri Aurobindo could see that the pace of modernisation had stepped up without a corresponding cultural and spiritual development. Sri Aurobindo feared that the utilitarian tendencies produced by this social change would diminish the spiritual strength of art and literature. He describes this lop-sidedness thus :

There is a tendency in modern times to depreciate the value of the beautiful and overstress the value of the useful, a tendency curbed in Europe by the imperious insistence of an age-long tradition of culture and generous training of the aesthetic perceptions; but in India, where we have been cut off by a mercenary and soulless education from all our ancient roots of culture and tradition, it is corrected only by the stress of imagination, emotion and spiritual delicacy, submerged but not yet destroyed in the temperament of the people. The value attached by the ancients to music, art and poetry has become almost unintelligible to an age bent on depriving life of its meaning by turning earth into a sort of glorified ant-heap or beehive and confusing the lowest, though most primary in necessity, of the means of human progress with the aim of this great evolutionary process.<sup>82</sup>

Had it just been a passionate defense of art, 'The National Value of Art' would not have gained the place that it has in Sri Aurobindo's critical writings.



Like 'The Sources of Poetry', 'The National Value of Art', employs terms from the discourse<sup>of</sup> Indian metaphysics. Terms such as pran, chita, karan, buddhi, and rasa, bhoga, and ananda abound in it. The term rasa may suggest that Sri Aurobindo's use of it alludes to Bharata's Rasa theory.<sup>83</sup> However the only other occurrence of the term in the rest of his work is in the Life Divine, in its vedic sense of 'a concentrated test, a spiritual essence of emotion, an essential aesthesis'. The attempt here seems to be not so much to revive Indian poetics as to connect contemporary life with the timeless values in Indian philosophic tradition.

Sri Aurobindo maintains that every race has a unique genius and that every society has a peculiar aesthetic tradition. He observes that the society and life in India have an aesthetic vision at their center; a vision of the world as a passing aesthetic phenomenon. He argues that Indian chita, i.e., consciousness, seeks transcendence through an aesthetic enjoyment of the life experience, i.e., transcendence through rasa and bhoga. The ideal goal of life is to seek a delight in existence, to seek ananda. When rasa and bhoga lead to ananda, human beings achieve a

perfect purity and perfect knowledge, i.e., the stage of chit shuddhi. Therefore art which trains us in (seeking) aesthetic enjoyment is an important instrument in national evolution. As he puts it :

A little of this immortal nectar poured into a man's heart transfigures life and action. The whole flood of it pouring in would lift mankind to God.<sup>84</sup>

★ [ 'The National Value of Art', is the first nativistic critical statement in modern India. It makes the first ever attempt to articulate <sup>a</sup> metaphysics of poetry in correspondence with <sup>a Hindu</sup> Indian metaphysics of life. During the fifteen years from 1892-1907, Sri Aurobindo moved from an initiative Platonism to a nativistic vision of art. This attempt to nationalise and nativise literary criticism is an essential feature of Sri Aurobindo's Romanticism. It is also the guiding principle behind his more mature work during the middle phase.

o/c In 1909 Sri Aurobindo moved to Pondicherry, leaving political activities, to pursue his Sadhana. From 1926 onwards he lived a completely secluded life. The period between these two dates was the most productive. Through his journal Arya, he serrealised most of his seminal works : The Future Poetry, The Essays on Gita, The Foundation of Indian Culture, Human Cycle, Supremental Manifestation, and The Life Divine.<sup>85</sup> Of these The Future Poetry and

The Foundation of Indian Culture, are of importance in this study. These can be said to have continued and substantially developed the arguments presented in 'The National Value of Art'.

The Foundation of Indian Culture in its present form contains a series of articles which appeared in Arya from December 1918 to January 1921, initially titled 'Is India Civilised? A Rationalistic Critic on Indian Culture; a Defense of Indian Culture'. In addition there is also the essay 'Indian Culture and External Influence'. The volume is obviously written in defense of Indian culture. Sri Aurobindo examines in it various issues related to religion, spirituality, art, literature, and the social structure. These essays are a result of Sri Aurobindo's involvement in a debate between Sir John Woodroffe and Mr. William Archer.<sup>86</sup> The debate was about the status of civilisation in India. Sri Aurobindo's aim is to set the record straight. He claims to be a discerning and a dispassionate critic, holistic in his attitude.

Discussing whether India is civilised or not, Sri Aurobindo maintains that civilisation is not a matter of mere external progress. He finds Western criticism of India irritating and exasperating. He claims that the Western criticism fails to grasp the nature and meaning of Indian culture because there is a marked difference between



the life values of the West and those of the Orient. In defending Indian achievements in the field of culture, Sri Aurobindo offers highly original and perceptive comments on arts and literature, and also defines in the process what we understand by these terms. He states :

*The greatness of a literature lies first in the greatness and worth of its substance, the value of its thought and the beauty of its forms, but also in the degree to which satisfying the highest conditions of the art of speech, it avails to bring out and raise the soul and life or the living and the ideal mind of a people, and age, a culture, through the genius of its greatest or most sensitive representative spirits.*<sup>87</sup>

Thus literature is a social art which uplifts the society by expressing its intimate spiritual experiences. It is also an expression of 'the mind of a people', and appeals to the soul of a reader. This idea is certainly an Indian variation of Wordsworth's belief that poetry proceeds from the soul and appeals to the soul, and that 'it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man'.<sup>88</sup> Sri Aurobindo finds Indian literature from the earliest times to his own to be full of, 'the largest metaphysical truths and the subtlest subtleties of psychological experience'.<sup>89</sup> He finds it to be replete with spiritual symbolism. It is this symbolism that Sri Aurobindo sees as the principle of dynamism in the entire history of Indian literature.

Unlike many other critics of his times, Sri Aurobindo sees an unbroken continuity in Indian literature. Unlike the Western indologists William Archer and Max Muller, with whom he takes <sup>up</sup> ~~up~~ <sup>issue</sup> issues, he does not look at the medieval period as a period of cultural decline. He enthusiastically appreciates the poetry of Ramdas, Kabir, Nanak, Meera, Chaitanya, and Thiruvalluvar. He appreciates the Sanskrit poetry and the popular as well as the folk songs, the artistry of Kalidasa and the simplicity of Tulsidasa, the symbolic richness of the Upanishads and the social protest of Tukaram, with equal intensity. Thus The Foundations of Indian Culture is an attempt to provide a history of Indian literature. However it is a skeletal history of Indian literature. It is a skeletal history which reduces large periods and multitudes of details to sketchy paragraphs and simplifying statements. However it does not show any trace of partisan spirit. It thus forms a useful context within which to read The Future Poetry, his metaphysics of literature.

The Future Poetry was first published as a series of essays from 1917 to 1920. Sri Aurobindo thought of revising it before giving it the form of a book. But in its present form, it comprises [of] the essays in their original form. There are in all twenty three essays in the volume, the first five and the last eight of which are theoretical. In terms of its intention and its achievement The Future Poetry

is probably the most important theoretical document produced in English in ~~the twentieth century~~ Indian criticism. In spite of its form as a sequence of essays, it has <sup>an</sup> in amazing consistency of argument and unity of purpose. It was occasioned by Sri Aurobindo's response to New Ways of English Literature<sup>90</sup> by James Cousins. Cousins, an Irishman, <sup>was</sup> appreciative of the spirit of mysticism in Indian literature.<sup>91</sup> Sri Aurobindo's attempt in The Future Poetry is to build an aesthetic of literature on the basis of mysticism and its capacity to enlighten the imagination.

Sri Aurobindo begins his argument with the question 'What is the highest power we demand from poetry? In answer he suggests that poetry with this highest power will be 'The Mantra Of the Real'.<sup>92</sup> The essays that follow in the volume are devoted to explain the concept of poetry as Mantra. In the process of defining ideal poetry, Sri Aurobindo comments on the nature of poetic language, meter and style, the nature of creativity, imagination, inspiration and the nature of aesthetic delight and the reception of poetry. What The Future Poetry does not discuss is the relationship between poetry and [the] society.

In Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics, the poet is the center of literary transactions, and the deeper that a poet goes in search of eternal truth, the more hypnotising and enchanting his expression becomes. There is however no

polarity of object and subject in Sri Aurobindo's vision. Rather following the Vedic epistemology, Sri Aurobindo believes that the way to greater objectivity is through a great subjectivity. Hence the poet's turning inward does not necessarily mean celebration of the ego. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "the poet seeks, greater truth and its delight and beauty ....., beauty which is truth and truth beauty and therefore a joy for ever."<sup>93</sup> One can see the presence of John Keats in this pronouncement, yet a facile comparison can be misleading. In equating beauty and truth, primarily in that order, Keats had sought to establish the primacy of the active poetic imagination - excited and turbulent - as a means of grasping the truth.<sup>94</sup> Sri Aurobindo thinks that the poet must become a vehicle, a passive vehicle of the voices, coming from 'the home of truth'.<sup>95</sup>

What of  
negative  
capability?

That state of complete silence from where the poetic speech emanates, is a state which transcends all subjective perceptions, and unites truth and beauty. He says: "The privilege of the poet is to go beyond and discover that more intense illumination of speech, that inspired word and supreme inevitable utterance."<sup>96</sup> If the British Romantic poetics revolves round the concept of spontaneity, Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics focuses upon inevitability of speech, expression, rhythm, and style.

Much of the critical terminology used in The Future

is this distinction: He was spontaneous. It is inevitable. He can be spontaneous.

Poetry, is conventional. The terms like style, form, expression are used without proper definitions and in a way that reminds one of Victorian criticism. What is revolutionary in Sri Aurobindo's criticism is the evaluation of English poetry, which in his opinion had achieved poetic greatness only in Shakespeare and some of the more mystical expression of the Romantics. He asserts that the English language has passed through a process of evolution which makes it a fit medium for expression of the Mantra. In the last section of the book, he outlines the qualities of the 'inevitable' poetry, or the mantric poetry. He suggests that such poetry:

Comes into being at the direct call of three powers, inspiration, beauty and delight, and brings them to us and us to them by the magic charm of the inspired rhythmic word.<sup>97</sup>

Sri Aurobindo sees a possibility of the emergence of such poetry in what he calls the 'celtic' mind or else the Indian mind. In other words, he takes upon himself as an Indian mystic and a poet, the awesome responsibility of completing the work left unfinished by the British Romantic poets. The Future Poetry, therefore is the most ambitious and the most radical Romantic statement to have come from any of the twentieth century Indian critics.

## VI

The corpus of Rabindranath Tagore's literary writings is varied and full of new beginnings, particularly in the field of poetry and drama. In these two fields he has produced many modern classics as a pioneering legacy for Bengali literature. In an excellent critical study of the entire range of poetry of Tagore, S.B. Mukherjee has discussed the romantic elements in Tagore's poetic sensibility.<sup>98</sup> *Key Cite* The critics of his paintings and drawings *Paints* too, emphasise the Romantic element in his art.<sup>99</sup> In the area of literary criticism Tagore's works are disproportionately scant. These are without exceptions texts of lectures delivered - mostly abroad. They do not seem to have attracted the desired attention. It is therefore necessary to see his critical writings [by placing them judiciously] in a historical perspective.

Tagore played the role of a founding father for Bengali literature, and to some extent for modern Indian literature. As a Nobel laureate, and as a prominent nationalist leader, he exerted widespread influence on Indian literature. Hence even his casual critical comments were taken seriously by his contemporary Indian intellectuals. A testimony <sup>to</sup> of this influence is a book <sup>length</sup> study of ~~The~~ philosophy of Tagore, his philosophy of literature included, by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a major modern philosopher himself,

published in 1918. In the preface to his book<sup>100</sup>

Dr. Radhakrishnan states that to interpret Tagore is to interpret India' :

In interpreting the philosophy and message of Rabindranath Tagore, we are interpreting the Indian Ideal of philosophy, religion, and art, of which his work is the outcome and expression. We do not know whether it is Rabindranath's own heart or the heart of India that is beating here. In his work, India finds the lost word she was seeking. The familiar truths of Indian philosophy and religion, the value of which it has become fashionable to belittle even in the land of their birth, are here handled with such rare reverence and deep feeling that they seem to be almost new.<sup>101</sup>

Since Tagore's writings were taken so seriously by his contemporaries and as his influence was widespread, it is logical to assume that he made very significant contribution to the making of modern Indian criticism, notwithstanding his relatively meager critical output. Tagore's Critical comments are scattered in stray comments all over his philosophic and discursive prose. But there are two works where we have a more or less systematic statement of Tagore's poetics. They are : Personality, lectures delivered in America 1917, and Creative Unity - 1922. One essay titled 'What is art?' in Personality<sup>102</sup> and two essays titled 'The Poet's Religion', and 'The Creative Ideal', in Creative Unity,<sup>103</sup> merit the label 'literary criticism'. [The other essays in these two works are illuminative and can be read

profitably as supplementary reading.] *fill*

In Tagore's critical writings the focus of philosophic consideration alternates between the act of creation, and creation itself. There is a considerable complexity of ideas, though his deceptively simple style may mislead one to believe the contrary. Tagore often speaks of beauty, art, and poetry simultaneously as a philosopher and a poet. There is in him a certain degree of nobility of the soul which makes him rise above his personal literary predilections. As in the case of Sri Aurobindo, in Tagore's critical writings there is no vehement attack on the poets that he disapproves<sup>of</sup> or a passionate defense of any poetic creed.

Though Tagore had evolved his own literary style (or styles), his critical writing is not a credo in defence of his kind of poetry. There is no anxiety of influence which guides or conditions Tagore's critical writings, perhaps because he wrote in Bengali as a pioneer who had no long<sup>standing</sup> tradition to quarrel with. The unperturbed critical mind creates in Tagore's critical writings a sagacity. Since he felt at home in Bengali and was wedded to developing literature in it, he does not involve himself passionately in the English critical tradition. It need not mean that he was ignorant of it, or was impervious to it. He had a healthy almost a non-colonial, relationship with it.

*meaning?*



logic?

namely?

Though Tagore is one of the central figures of the Indian renaissance, in his case as a literary man, the colonial relationship remained suspended, thanks to his pioneering position in Bengali literature, and the Nobel prize. Because of these he could be his own literary hero, and also a literary hero for the Western critics. Most of his contemporary writers in India had made themselves vehicles of Western literary influence. In Tagore's case it was possible for him to exert influence at least to some degree on the Western writers like W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot. This status as a writer recognised universally, during the period of the colonial influx of Western values, gives Tagore a unique kind of poise in his critical writings.

Another aspect of Tagore's cultural context needs to be considered here. Seventy-five years before his birth, the Asiatic Society was founded by Sir William Jones. The Society was interested in studying Indian texts and languages. Many eminent Indologists rallied round the society. Towards the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bengalis started writing in English. In the discursive prose produced by Bengali educated class were books on social reform, history and reinterpretations of the past. The last class of books, which can be described as 'Indian Indology', were produced in the early part of the twentieth century in order to gain appreciation from the Western

scholars, causing a colonial revivalism.<sup>104</sup> The scholarly value of such work cannot be doubted. Tagore had learned Sanskrit, he had access to some Sanskrit poetics texts, and had sympathetic feelings towards them. Yet it was because he was so deeply rooted in medieval mysticism, that he did not succumb to the revivalistic tendencies.

The appreciation that Tagore's creative writings received from the West takes away the need to be explicitly Indian from his criticism. Therefore his critical writings flow majestically with an almost self effacing ease. In terms of the effects they produce, they can be compared with the prophetic writings of Khalil Gibran and William Blake. They have a quality of self-assurance. But for this very reason, they are essays more in philosophic contemplation than in literary theory and practical criticism. This is not to say that they are not supported by a definite conceptual scaffolding. This scaffolding has to be discerned by a close scrutiny of key terms and dominant attitudes. The dominant philosophical attitude in Tagore's essays is that of Romantic phenomenology and the key terms are 'unity', 'personality', and 'heightened consciousness'.

The aesthetic experience in Tagore's view is a concentrated form of the life experience itself. He considers life to be an interplay between consciousness

and the world created by God. An open, full and unmediated experience of the creation enlarges and heightens consciousness. The visible attributes of this state of heightened consciousness <sup>are</sup> is a flow of powerful emotions. They act as an agent of transformation of facts and objects into an aesthetically pleasing unity. Defining emotions Tagore says, "Our emotions are the gastric juices which transform this world of appearances into the more intimate world of sentiments".<sup>105</sup> This is a clear allusion to the term rasa in its literal sense. Interestingly Tagore combines the term with the concept of poetry as originating in powerful emotions, a patent high Romantic concept.

Though in poetry he is a mystic of a high order, in criticism Tagore does not postulate an a priori creativity, which exists before and beyond a poet's consciousness. Creativity is not a metaphysical or a mystical activity for him. It is almost a volitional act of grasping the essence of freedom, of transcendence by consciousness of the experiential world. In this sense one can claim that the dominant attitude in Tagore's criticism is a phenomenology of his own type. The crucial expression of this attitude can be located in the following simple yet profound passage in 'What is Art?'

cap? This world, which takes its form in the mould of man's perception, still remains only as the partial world of his senses and mind. It is like a guest and not like a Kinsman. It becomes completely our own when it comes within the range of our emotions. With our love and hatred, pleasure and pain, fear and wonder, continually working upon it, this world becomes a part of our personality. It grows with our growth, it changes with our changes. We are great or small, according to the magnitude and littleness of this assimilation, according to the quality of its sum total. If this world were taken away, our personality would lose all its contents. 106

e The visible world acquires an ontological status <sup>experiential</sup> entirely through its epistemological assimilation. Such assimilation is therefore the central activity of the consciousness. The consciousness in Tagore's philosophy can be dormant, active, or hyper active in itself; but it has no content of its own. The content is accorded to it depending on 'the quality of the sum total' of the experiential world assimilated. This 'quality' is what Tagore describes as personality. The quality of assimilation has a limitless potential of self-creation and self-liberation. The liberated assimilation of the rational world which endows the consciousness with its content, is what he describes in abstraction as 'freedom'. Thus creation, or else the discovery of freedom, is a profoundly intricate interplay between the apparatus of consciousness and the rational world. It is a phenomenological experience.

In Tagore's phenomenology the concept of consciousness is transcendental in nature. It partakes<sup>of</sup> the phenomenological interplay and simultaneously transcends it to enter a pure realm of freedom. This realm of freedom conceptualised by Tagore is not an a priori presence but merely a qualitative attribute of the act of creation. While describing the act of literary creation he states :

All the language of joy is beauty. It is necessary to note, however, that joy is not pleasure, and beauty not mere prettiness. Joy is the outcome of detachment from self and lives in freedom of spirit. Beauty is that profound expression of reality which satisfies our hearts without any other allurements but its own ultimate value. When in some pure moments of ecstacy we realise this is the world around us, we see the world, not as merely existing, but as decorated in its forms, sounds, colours and lines; we feel in our hearts that there is one who through all things proclaims; 'I have joy in my creation.'<sup>107</sup>

A major difference between the expressive theories of literature and the other preceding Western theories is that the expressive theories view literary creation as a dynamic act, probably moving interminably towards a stasis or a poise. Poetry is described by the expressive theorists as an overflow, a torrential revelation, a haunting visitation, and an ongoing meditation in the monastery<sup>e</sup> of the heart. Poetry is a continuous act, comparable to the growth of a tree'. It is not a moving towards something that is pre-determined.

Tagore's phenomenology approaches the Romantic ideal of creativity as dynamism by virtue of its emphasis on freedom as an end in itself, a process which is never ending. His transcendentalism has no connection whatever with Kant's transcendentalism, Kant postulates the categories of the phenomenal and noumenal worlds which leave scope for transcendence through imagination.<sup>108</sup>

[ In Tagore the transcendence is not from consciousness to a preconscious condition. It is transcendence from consciousness to heightened consciousness, an idea made familiar in Sanskrit poetics by the term cheto-vistar. It is a heightened state which brings aesthetic delight, a state in which the consciousness transcends the ordinary modes of perception, and in conceptual terms transcends itself.

Tagore's phenomenology is expressive in orientation without being transcendentalist. It is close to Hegel's phenomenology of consciousness, which does not admit a third and a preconscious term of existence. Yet nowhere in Tagore's critical writings does the term 'alienation' figure. Unlike the Western tradition of phenomenology from Hegel down to Merleau-Ponty,<sup>109</sup> Tagore's phenomenology does not think in terms of 'reductions'. Tagore thinks of creativity in terms of a grand enveloping consciousness.

In Tagore's conception of poetry, emotion occupies an

important place. Emotions are caused by the interplay of the consciousness and the rational world. But they have their own dynamic creative power. When they are generated in abundance they become creative. Tagore maintains that "where there is an element of the superfluous in our heart's relationship with the world, Art has its birth".<sup>110</sup> The idea of Surplus emotions as a creative force is related to his concept of personality.

Tagore thinks of Man in terms of two qualitatively different personalities, viz., (1) a functional personality which merely stores information, and follows entirely rational modes of perception; and (2) a total personality which is revealed in freedom and feeds on the 'superfluous' emotion. Hence Tagore holds that "The principle creative forces which transmute things into our living structure are emotional forces."<sup>111</sup> According to him, human energy is distributed in two parallel fields, utility and self-expression. The former enriches rational activity and the latter inspires art. The self-expressing faculty is constituted by dynamic emotions, for which Tagore uses the term 'soul consciousness'. He states :

But when our heart is fully awakened in live, or in other great emotions, our personality is in its flood-tide. Then it feels the longing to express itself for the very sake of expression.<sup>112</sup>

Thus, freedom, expression, creativity, revelation, emotions and personality form a chain of abstractions which Tagore uses to describe his own idea of consciousness or the heightened consciousness. They are the pinheads he uses to draw a map of the interior landscape of the poet's mind. They are less of systematic philosophic concepts, defined with precision and used consistently, and more of an illuminating diction in Tagore's mystical vision of creativity.

justified?

Tagore's criticism begins with a rational phenomenology, but that is not its sole concern. It also takes into account the relationship between consciousness and the poet's entire personality. In a significant essay 'The Second Birth,' he makes elaborate comments on this expressive phenomenology. He states :

In the rhythm of harmony, whatever may be its reason, we find perfection. There we see not the substance, or the law, but some relationship of forms which has its harmony with our personality. From the bandage of mere lines and matter comes out that which is above all limitations - it is the complete unity of relationship. We at once feel free from the tyranny of unmeaningness of isolated things, - they now give us something which is personal to our own self. The revelation of unity in its passive perfection, which we find in nature, is beauty; the revelation of unity in its active perfection, which we find in the spiritual world, is love. This is not in the rhythm of proportions, but in the rhythm of wills. The will, which is free, must seek for the realization of its harmony other wills which are also free, and in this is the significance of spiritual life. The



infinite centre of personality, which radiates its joy by giving itself out in freedom, must create other centres of freedom to units with it in harmony. Beauty is harmony realised in things which are bound by law. Love is the harmony realized in wills which are free.<sup>113</sup>

The terms 'revelation', 'harmony', 'unity', 'freedom', and 'personality' used as key terms in Tagore's criticism establish a kinship with the expressive theories of the high Romantic period.

There is not much evidence <sup>upon which</sup> to assert that Tagore was directly influenced by the writings of the Romantics. In the study of Tagore's philosophy of art, probably the earliest one, Dr. Radhakrishnan has pointed out several resemblances and parallels between Tagore and the Romantic poets. But these comments are of comparative nature, and the element of influence remains doubtful. The concern here is not to establish conclusively, that there was some such influence. It may be clear from the discussion so far that Tagore has an expressive orientation in his literary criticism. It may also be clear that some of the central concerns in his writings relate to the patent Romantic debates about utility - creativity, rationality - emotions and objectivity - subjectivity.

In conclusion it may be stated that Tagore leans neither upon ancient Indian poetics, nor upon Western criticism in formulating his thoughts. His is an indigenous

? and a partially nativistic critical stance. His theory is neither a defence nor a credo for a certain kind of poetry. It is not also a refutation or an elaboration of any prevailing mode of criticism. It is not even a theory which offers critical tools for analysis of poetry. It does not yield guidelines for evaluating literature. It is a statement about the nature of creativity depending mainly on the personality of the poet. The most remarkable aspect of Tagore's theory is that there is no facile attempt at synthesising Indian theories with British theories, or the ancient with the contemporary. In this sense it is not characteristic of his age. Tagore represents an extreme and important dimension of Indian Romantic criticism.

*If it is not characteristic  
then how is it important?*

## VII

It may be concluded that a whole generation of critics, represented by the four ~~critics~~ discussed, subscribe to <sup>an</sup> expressive theory of literature, though every critic mentioned has his selective focus, and free interpretation of the expressive principles.

? | Anandshankar perceives literary criticism as a part of a larger social project. In his view, literary criticism has to be sensitive enough to register all the social vicissitudes. For him literary criticism is a quest for

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style, without being tentative. It is thus an informed activity with distinct comparative basis. Anandshankar is responsible for giving modern critical discourse and idiom to Gujarati literature.

B.K. Thakore insists upon sensitivity, erudition and analytical qualities in literary criticism. He advocates practical criticism based on both Indian and Western traditions. In his opinion such a critical practice would not only be authentic but also scholastic.

He institutionalised scholarly criticism in Gujarati literature.

By writing in English about Indian literature, Sri Aurobindo becomes a pioneering comparatist. His idea was to make both Indian and English literary traditions accessible to each other. It is Sri Aurobindo who invested Indian literary criticism with seriousness and a sense of purpose.

Rabindranath Tagore's criticism is more individual than social in comparison to Sri Aurobindo's. Tagore's literary criticism centers around the poet-poem relationship. He discusses literature as an expression of personality without relying upon the critical tools, either <sup>from</sup> in the Indian, or in the Western to critical traditions.

The four critics discussed here indicate the various dimensions of Romantic criticism in India during the early twentieth century.

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