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Influences of Purāṇas and Mahākāvyas on the *Abakashranjini* of Nabinchandra Sen

Sanjoy Chandra Das

Nabinchandra Sen (1847-1909) is one of the prominent poets of Bengali literature in the nineteenth century. His position as a successor of Madhusudan is the first among quite a few. The eminent critic Srikumar Bandyopadhyay comments— “মধুসূদনের আবির্ভাব ও পৌরাণিক কাহিনী অবলম্বনে সার্থক কাব্যসৃষ্টির ফলে বাংলা সাহিত্যক্ষেত্রে যে একটি নানামুখী বিরুদ্ধে উপাদান গঠিত ভাব-আলোড়ন জাগিয়েছিলো, হেমচন্দ্র ও নবীনচন্দ্র তাহারই তরঙ্গ শীর্ষে দুই উজ্জ্বলতম ফেন-মুকুটরূপে প্রতিষ্ঠা লাভ করিয়াছে।”¹

If must be admitted atonce that Nabinchandra could not reach the poetic height of Madhusudan. But he established himself as lyricist of that period. About this Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay has written— “তিনি (নবীনচন্দ্র সেন) একাধিক কাহিনী কাব্য এবং বেশ বড়ো মাপের পৌরাণিক কাব্য (রৈবতক-কুরুক্ষেত্র-প্রভাস) রচনা করলে ও প্রধানত গীতি কবিতার শিরোপাই তাঁর গৌরবের কারণ হয়েছিল। এ সমস্ত আখ্যানকাব্য ও পৌরাণিক কাব্যে যেখানে সুযোগ পেয়েছেন সেখানেই গীতিরসসিক্ত মনের পরিচয় দিয়েছেন।”²

Like his older Madhusudan and Hemchandra, Nabinchandra too arrived during the auspicious period of the

Renaissance of Bengal and devoted his mind in poetic composition enriched by the then revolutionary movement of Thought. One eminent critic has this to say— “নবীনচন্দ্র উনবিংশ শতাব্দীর নবজাগৃতির শঙ্খধ্বনিতে উদ্বোধিত কবি। সে ধারা মহাকাব্যের তথা মহাজীবনবোধের, সে ধারায় আত্মপ্রত্যয়ের উল্লাস ও সমষ্টিমুক্তির প্রয়াস মিলিয়া গিয়াছিল। প্রতিভাদীপ্ত বাঙ্গালার বিগত শতকের উজ্জ্বল মধ্যাহ্নে নবীনচন্দ্রের আবির্ভাব।”³

It was a time when the Renaissance in Bengal achieved a ripeness by means of an amalgamation of the eastern and western culture and knowledge and a great change was set afoot in literature, religion, society and culture, mode of life and building up the concept of nation-state in Bengal in particular. This was the time when a group of Bengali intellectuals initiated an attempt to discover and study the life and culture of ancient India from the modern angle of vision. We have discussed this point in the earlier chapter more than once. Nabinchandra also at this time tried to discover and express, being bathed in the concept of national consciousness and light of the

Renaissance, the ancient Indian life and culture in his poetical work. His works is *Trayee Kavya (Raibatak, Kuruksetra, Prabhas)* deserve special mention in this sphere.

The first poetical work of Nabinchandra is *Abakashranjini* of which the first volume was published in 1871 and the second in 1878. In this work dealing with a variety of subjects and themes the chief strains of the poet's mindset have come to the fore. The main tune of the work is overflow of feelings and lyricism. In different poems of this book the poet brought forth references from Indian mythologies, though he *Purānic* faith and the significance of the reference did not get much importance in them, rather the poet's imaginative faculty and feelings enjoyed of greater prominence. In the poem *Pirihin yuvak* of this work the poet used a comparison between the externally burning funeral pyre of Ravana and the heart-burning of a young man who has lost his father—
 “স্বৰ্গের চিতা প্রায়, হৃদয় যাহার, নিশীথে তেমনি জ্বলে
 দিবসে যেমন।”⁴

Again in this poem the poet used a reference to the Gaṅgā to bring out the mental pain of the protagonist as he sat on the bank of the river Bhāgrāthī. About the descent of the Gaṅgā on earth it has been said in the *Brahmapurana*—

“হিমবৎপর্বতং পুণ্যাভ্রতং বর্ষাসভগাং ।
 তথাধৃতং পুণ্যনদী প্রায়ঃ পূর্ষার্ণবং প্রতি ॥”⁵

Its meaning— “পুণ্যনদী গঙ্গা তাহাতে সম্মত হইয়া হিমালয়ে উপনীত হইলেন, পরে হিমালয় হইতে ভারতবর্ষে অবতরণ করিলেন এবং ভারতবর্ষের মধ্য দিয়া পূর্ষর্গারের অভিমুখে ধাবিত হইলেন।”⁶

The poet through the eyes of the sorrowful young man separated from his father discover the heart-ache of the Gaṅgā. This discovery is embedded in the voice of the protagonist. The poet accepted the mythological tale and portrayed the Gaṅgā as feeling vicarious sorrow for the young man—

“ছিলে তুমি, অয়ি গঙ্গা ! হিমালয়শিখরে
 তরল রক্তাসনে, রাজরাণী প্রায়;
 ভূতলে পতিত এবে, তাই ধীরে ধীরে
 কাঁদিতেছ মনোদুঃখে একাকিনী হায় !
 আমি ভাবি, শুনি মম দুঃখের কাহিনি,
 কাতরে কাঁদিছে আহা ! নাগেন্দ্রনন্দিনী ।”⁷

By the touch of the poet's pen here the river Gaṅgā became, like the protagonist himself, a living character and drew our sympathy. Reference to the Gaṅgā and the Bhāgrāthī appeared again and again in this work. As an example we may refer to the poem *Chattogramer Soubhagya* to celebrate the success of the first B. A and M. A of Chattogram, ⁸ In the poem the poet writes—

“ভগীরথ ভাগীরথী এনে ধরাতলে,
 উকারিল পিতৃগণে জাহ্নবীর পরশনে,
 তেমনে এ পুত্র তব তনয়বৎসলে !
 বিদ্যার বিমল-স্রোত এলেক্ষেন যবে,
 অজ্ঞান-পঙ্কিল দেহ তব নাহি রবে ।”⁹

The is here engaged to create poetic beauty by comparing the successful students with Bhāgrāthī and knowledge with the Gaṅgā.

In the second part of *Avakashranjani* the poet in such poems as *Ananta Shajya, Premomadini, Shav-Sadhan, Nabajivan, Mumurshu Shajyay Janaika Banglee Yuvak* brought in reference as the pious

We understand that here Nabinchandra

recalled the image of *Śaktidevī* the destroyer of all evil and represented the worship and shakti as the worship of the Motherland and endeavoured to inspire the people to free the country from foreign domination—

‘নাহি কি ভারতে হেন বীরচাৰী,

আপনার বক্ষ করি বিদারণ,

করে জননীৰ পিপাসা নিৰাৰি

ভারত-শ্বশানে শক্তি আৰাধন ?’¹⁸

There are two other poems in this book related to national consciousness—*Ashokane Sītā* and *Avahan*. The former poem composed with materials called from the *Rāmāyana* is one of Nabinchandra finest poems. In this poem the poet visited Sītā and Saw and felt her deep distress and agony. Actually, in this poem Sītā is image of Mother India. Therefore, when the poet enquired Sītā about her identity, she replied—

‘দুঃখিনী ভারত-লক্ষ্মী আমি, বাছধন !

আমিই অশোক-বনে সীতা বিমাদিনী ।’¹⁹

Here through the image of the distressed and agonized Sītā, kept in Ashokhan as a captive by Rāvana, has been transfigured into India, captivated and suffering under the foreign yoke. But in the poem there is hardly any yearning or frenzy for independence or any moving expression of national consciousness, rather there is the expression of deep pity. About the poetic equality of this poem Subodh Ranjan Roy has commented—
‘কবিতাটি (অশোকবনে সীতা) নবীনচন্দ্রের নবপূরণ সৃষ্টির (New myth-making) নিদর্শন। ধারণাটি মূলতঃ মধুসূদনের ‘সৈন্যদলবধ কাব্যের’ চতুর্থ সর্গ হইতে

গৃহিত, ... কিন্তু দেশপ্রেমোদ্দীপক অন্যান্য কবিতায় যে ঐতিহাসিক স্পষ্টীকৃতি আছে, তাহা এখানে এক প্রচ্ছন্ন রূপকে আত্মগোপন করিয়াছে, তাই কাল্যেগৌরবে এই কবিতাটি সমৃদ্ধ।’²⁰

This is an apt comment of the critic. In the poem *Abahan* is based on the subject of the piousness and grandeur of *Durgapūja*—worship of Goddess Durga. In the medieval period in Bengal *Agamani* and *Bijaya* songs have been composed in connection with *Durgapūja*. In the same vein, the poet here accepted the theme of *Agamani* and described the grandeur and glory of Goddess Durga in the manner of the lyric poems of the nineteenth century. At the ending of the poem the poet gave loud call to the sons of mother India to wake up and made a heart-moving prayer to Goddess Durga for the welfare of the people and in all this there is clearly discerned the patriotic zeal of the poet. The poet wrote—

‘বঙ্গ কবি, মাতা ! করে আৰাধন;

এস মা, ভারতে কল্পনার রথে,

দশভূজারূপে উজালি’ গগন।

উঠ, বলহীন ভারত-সন্তান !’²¹

In the poem *Prakṛti Geet* belonging to *Abakashranjani*, Nabinchandra has brought to the fore the beauty of Devotion. The beauty and force of devotion finds clear expression in the voice of the greatest *Gopī* women who is frenzied by her love for Śrīkṛṣṇa in *Śrīmahāgavātpurāna*—

‘হা নাথ রমণ শ্ৰেষ্ঠ কাসি কাসি মহাত্মজ !

দাস্য্যন্তে কৃপাণয়া মে সখে দর্শয় সন্নিস্বি ।।’²²

Meaning— ‘হা নাথ ! হে প্রিয়তম ! কোথায়,

তুমি কোথায় ? আমি তোমার দীনহীন অভাগিনী দাসী।

প্রাণসখা ! ছেতো না আমার, কাছে থেকে, দেখা দাও

সবচেয়ে কাছে, সবচেয়ে ঘনিষ্ঠ হয়ে।”²³

Nabinchandra's endeavour was to express this devotion and love for Krishna representing Radha as *Prakṛti*, Universal Nature, and the *Gopīnis* as eternal atoms and molecules—

“প্রকৃতি রাধিকা, করিছে এ গীতে

কৃষ্ণ আরাধনা, ভাসি প্রেমনীরে;

অনু-পরমানু, অনন্ত গোপিনী

গাইতেছে—‘নাথ! ভূ’লো না দাসী’রে।”²⁴

Love, Nature and Nationalism are the there currents that form the poems in *Abakashrajani* (Vol, I & II). In there poems through at times mythological materials came up, the main interest lay in ancient *Purānic* faith and culture. Indeed in such poems as *Sav-Sadhan*,

Ashokvane Sītā, Abhahan, Nabajivan

etc. The main parts are occupied by material taken from the *Mahākāvya*s and *Purānas*, The natural impulses and faith of the poet became the main thematic interest. And here lies the difference between Nabinchandra and Hemchandra. But it should be admitted that that all the poems of this book could not reach real poetic height which is accounted for by the fact the sentiment of the poet, his ecstasy are marked by lightness; these are also marked by unrestraint and flatness, So the poet failed to universalize his personal joy and sorrow, hope and hopelessness, betraying his weakness. His poetry remained purely confined to his

personal horizon. ■

Footnotes:

1. Srikumar Bandyopadhyaya: *Bāṅglā Sahityer Bikāsher Dhārā*, Vol.2, P-107.
2. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyaya; *Bāṅglā Sahityer Itivṛtta*, Vol.8, P-222.
3. Subodh Ranjan Roy: *Nabinchander Kabi-Kṛti*, P-20.
4. Sajjanikanta Das (ed.): *Nabinchandra Granthavali*, Vol.4, P-8.
5. Panchanan Tarkatna (ed.) *Brahmapurāṇam*, (by Krishnadwipayan Vedavyas), 78/74, 75, P-351.
6. Ibid., P-351.
7. Sajjanikanta Das (ed.): *Nabinchandra Granthavali*, Vol.4, P-23.
8. The successful ones those success was celebrated in the poem are Akhil
9. Ibid., P-67.
10. Ibid., Vol.2, P-219.
11. Ibid., P-376.
12. Ibid., P-378.
13. Ibid., P-108.
14. Ibid., P-176.
15. Ibid., P-296.
16. Haridas Siddhantabagish Bhattacharya (ed.): *Mahābhāratam* (by Krishnadwipayan Vedavyas), Vol.30, *Sauptik Parva*, 9/64,65, P-98.
17. Ibid., P-98.
18. Sajjanikanta Das (ed.): *Nabinchandra Granthavali*, Vol.4, P-297.

19. Ibid., P-233.
20. Subodh Ranjan Roy : *Nabinchander Kabi-Krti*, P-70.
21. Sajjanikanta Das (ed.) : *Nabinchandra Granthavali*, Vol.4, P-388.
22. *Śrīmadbhāgavat-Mahāpurāṇa*, 10/30/40, (Geeta Press, Gurakhpur), P-1300.
23. Ibid., P-1300.
24. Sajjanikanta Das (ed.) : *Nabinchandra Granthavali*, Vol.4, P-388.

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