

## Utopian Vision in Master Poems: Tagore and Sri Aurobindo

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**Abstract:** Like Kabir, Meerabai and Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore is one of the greatest devotional poets of India. He received the Nobel prize for *Gitanjali* in 1913 which is a classic devotional poem of Indian literature. A classic or timeless literature is an outstanding instance of expressing some eternal passion and in a particular style of the author which endures time. It greatly influences the readers of all times. In other words, there is something unique in the subject matter and the way it is presented. Both W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound were fascinated by the English translation from Bengali of these poems by Tagore himself and praised it as great art. W.B. Yeats wrote the Introduction to *Gitanjali* which appeared in 1912. This paper would highlight how devotional poems contained in *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)* are unique and timeless in their theme and artistry; how these lyrics not only reflect Tagore's love of the all-pervading God, but express his love of Man and Nature as well; how his mysticism is combined with his humanism in this collection of poems.

**Keywords:** Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Poetry

Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo are two outstanding poets in the domain of Indian English poetry. Tagore was awarded the Nobel prize for his idealistic vision reflected in his masterpiece *Gitanjali*. Sri Aurobindo created sensation and won admiration in the literary circles for the composition of his epic poem *Savitri* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this voluminous epic Sri Aurobindo highlights the evolution of superman. Both these master poets dream of better future on this Earth torn by wars, strife and “walls” erected on the grounds of race, religion, creed and nationhood. Tagore metaphorically states in the *Gitanjali* that the narrow domestic walls’ stand as barriers in the path of a new world order which corresponds to that of a utopia—a fictional island in which the citizens possess highly desirable qualities. Thus, both these poets are gifted with a better and superior world vision which can be termed as utopian. The aim of this paper is to analyze the thought-provoking passages from both *Gitanjali* and *Savitri* and show how the idealist in both these poets asserts and pictures a world that needs to be contrasted with the present world of suffering and torture. The effort is also made to show the distinctions between the two poets in their narration of utopian vision. The paper is divided into four sections: the first section is the introduction; the second section dwells upon the poetry of Tagore and drops hints about the nature of utopia the poet dreams; the third section concentrates upon the analysis of the splendid passages from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and sheds light upon the seer poet's prophetic vision that can be labelled utopian; the fourth section is the conclusion in which the utopian vision of Tagore gets contrasted with that of Sri Aurobindo. On the whole, this paper makes a modest attempt to show the relevance of utopian vision in an age where the power-drunk politicians, religious bigots and terrorists worsen the conditions of the Earth to live.

## II

Tagore is a patriot and visionary; through his vision he could dream of India to be an ideal land—a land that corresponds to the Thomas More’s idea of utopia. In the poem no XXXV of *Gitanjali* Tagore pictures his dream of motherland. The poem reads as follows:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into  
fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its  
way into the dreary desert sand of dead habits;  
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening  
thought and action—  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my  
country awake. (40)

The poem is written in a single sentence—a complex sentence which has several clauses. The principal clause is “let my country awake.” The poet longs for awakening of the motherland to “that heaven of freedom” which has necessary conditions that are prevalent in a utopia. At the outset he holds that the citizens of the land must be fearless; they must stand straight and live righteous lives. They won’t bow down before any forces of intimidation. He puts emphasis on free thinking and knowledge to be acquired must be freed from superstitious beliefs, irrational ideas and dogmas. Tagore’s vision is global, total and holistic. He does not appreciate the division of the world on the basis of race, religion, creed, caste and above all, nationality; such division is the product of narrow outlook. Tagore uses a dexterous phrase in context of human speeches or utterances that is “depth of truth.” Truth has various levels and different degrees; to explore truth is not an easy task. Tagore wants the citizens of such a dream land where they will voice their innermost feelings. Tagore categorically states that the citizens of such a land strive ceaselessly for perfection because perfection is an ideal. The poet personifies “striving” because efforts should be lively and the doers should be dynamic. Tagore is a rationalist and reason is just like a clear stream that flows. Clarity is the typical feature of reason; confusion characterizes irrationality or sentimentality. The poet uses a striking phrase “dreary desert sand of dead habits” which is alliterative as well as pregnant with profound significance. By “dead habits” he means the habits that don’t yield pleasure nor joy nor new knowledge nor anything creative. Hence, he uses the metaphorical expression like “dreary desert sand” which is vast but cheerless. In India under British rule most of the citizens were not progressive thinkers; they were lay men and women acting under fear, suspicion, jealousy, anger, infatuation and any human vice. They were not introspective; they didn’t have the habit to question their own activities, thinking process and feelings. Tagore is a staunch believer in God; he believes in God’s grace for the success in human endeavors. Human endeavors can be highly productive and multi-dimensional if the doers receive Divine grace. When Tagore uses the expression like “my Father” he refers to God, the governor of the universe.

Thus, the entire poem gives a picture of Tagore's dreamland which can be viewed as a utopia—a perfect society in which the citizens are happy because they cultivate fearlessness, strong sense of reasoning, free thinking, faith in God and human virtues which pave the way for progress, prosperity and peace. Tagore's vision of India is utopian which is clearly evident from his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech; an extract from it is given below:

I do not think that it is the spirit of India to reject anything, reject any race, reject any culture. The spirit of India has always proclaimed the ideal of unity. This ideal of unity never rejects anything, any race, or any culture. It comprehends all, and it has been the highest aim of our spiritual exertion to be able to penetrate all things with one soul, to comprehend all things as they are, and not to keep out anything in the whole universe—to comprehend all things with sympathy and love. This is the spirit of India. Now, when in the present time of political unrest the children of the same great India cry for rejection of the West I feel hurt. I feel that it is a lesson which they have received from the west. Such is not our mission. India is there to unite all human races. (*Gitanjali* 140)

The passage above contains the essence of Tagore's philosophy that permeates through all his master poems. Tagore's vision or culture is inclusive. The great poet does not like to reject anything that promotes the ideal of unity among the humans. He perceives that India has a message to tell the whole world, that is, there is only one culture that is human culture, one religion that is human religion, one race that is human race. A true Indian think of humanity as a whole. Thus, the poet's vision is holistic; holism is the hallmark of utopia.

### III

Sri Aurobindo, a seer poet, educated at Cambridge, and well versed in Indian scriptures visualize a new world order. He believes in the theory of evolution and visualizes that there will be the emergence of a better human race which he calls the superman. His concept of superman corresponds to Thomas More's concept of utopians because a utopian claim that it is possible to build a new and perfect society where every human being will be happy and joyful. Sri Aurobindo's superman is the embodiment of undiluted happiness and peace. *Savitri*, the masterpiece of Sri Aurobindo's poetical achievements, contains several passages that delineate supramental consciousness which can usher in an age of progress, prosperity and peace. Perfection is the watch word in the ideology of the utopians. Here is a brilliant passage from *Savitri* where Sri Aurobindo dwells upon the source, the nature and the effect of perfection in any domain of human activity:

A fourth dimension of aesthetic sense  
Where all is in ourselves, ourselves in all,  
To the cosmic wideness re-aligns our souls.  
A kindling rapture joins the seer and seen;  
The craftsman and the craft grown only one  
Achieve perfection by the magic throb  
And passion of their close identity. (112)

Human world, to borrow the phrase from Robert Frost, is “lovely, dark and deep” because man, the paragon of creation is gifted with the aesthetic sense—the sense of beauty that yields a higher order of pleasure. In any kind of aesthetic product, be it poetry or painting or a piece of sculpture ordinarily there are three dimensions: the world of producer or creator, the consumer and above all, the product or the creation itself but Sri Aurobindo visualizes the fourth dimension of the aesthetic sense. Here the creator absorbs himself in the act of creation to such an extent that he perceives that his product belongs to the universe and he himself is a part of the universe. This cosmic dimension of aesthetic object adds value to the work and such a dimension is felt in a better world which can be labelled as utopia. Sri Aurobindo categorically states that when the observer and the observed, the actor and the act are one perfection is achieved. Thus, the poet has a message that total absorption in any act is the key to perfection—the idea with which the utopians are haunted.

Sri Aurobindo’s preoccupation with better world order is based upon certain premises. In the following passage the poet reflects upon the limitation of humans and their efforts to climb upon the ladder of consciousness for a better world view. The poet writes:

Only when we have climbed above ourselves,  
A line of the Transcendent meets our road  
And joins us to the timeless and the true;  
It brings to us the inevitable word,  
The godlink act, the thoughts that never die.  
A ripple of light and glory wraps the brain  
And travelling down the moment’s vanishing route  
The figures of eternity arrive. (110)

In the passage above Sri Aurobindo is making a striking point in regard to the emergence of a better human race. He harbours and visualizes that as man rises higher and higher in the ladder of consciousness there is a descent of God’s grace. The whole creation is governed by a power: invisible and gracious that we are moving towards the better. Man is mortal; his life is time-bound; his memory fades with passage of time but Sri Aurobindo visualizes the messengers of eternity. In fact, these messengers herald a new era which can be aptly called the era of utopians or the perfectionists. Such a perfectionist will be endowed with a brain that will not experience fatigue; he will experience the timeless through time. The humans are such beings that their minds or hearts are always preoccupied with the strange ideas—utopia is one of such ideas. The poet writes:

As the mind’s visitors or the heart’s guests  
They espouse our mortal brevity awhile,  
Or seldom in some rare delivering glimpse  
Are caught by our vision’s delicate surmise. (ibid.)

The humans have a tendency to infer, conceive or perceive but utopic experience can be had if the humans try to explore the grandeur of the soul. In the *Book of Love* Satyavan tells the heroine of the epic Savitri how the visionary powers grow within him:

As if to a deeper country of the soul

Transposing the vivid imagery of earth,  
Through an inner seeing and sense awakening came. (404)

Utopia is experienced only through vision and just to have it one must visit through the country of soul through “inner seeing” and awakening of inner sense which can be termed as intuition. The seer poet reflects upon human predicament which prevents vision that is utopian.

A city of the traffic of bound souls,  
A market of creation and her wares  
Was offered to the labouring mind and heart. (197-198)

Human beings have been constituted of such materials: labouring mind and heart that they find it difficult to visualize utopia. The mind or the heart that exerts experiences pain or suffocation or frustration but not happiness. Happiness can be cultivated if one visualizes the infinite-the limitless and meditates to have it. But in human world the humans focus on specialization, logic which do not elevate the humans to experience pure bliss or happiness that the utopians hope for. Sri Aurobindo aptly remarks:

A specialist of logic's hard machine  
Imposed its rigid artifice on the soul;  
An aide of the inventor intellect,  
It cut Truth into manageable bits  
That each might have his ration of thought-food. (242)

Sri Aurobindo views that just to experience truth is the way to be happy or live in a world of utopians but truth can't be experienced only through intellect. One is to go beyond the realm of intellect in order to experience the splendour of soul-in that experience lies happiness.

#### IV

To conclude, the concept of utopia is spiritual in its connotation. When utopia is translated into Indian language it means Rama Rajya. Rama is the incarnation of God. He was born just to destroy the evil and restore the world order. When this word is used by Thomas More it refers to an imagined perfect society. From its inception the word generated a lot of controversy among the philosophers. Whatever may be the controversy the word in its essence refers to a perfect world. Perfection is a term that is much used by the utopians. In this paper two outstanding Indian poets: Tagore and Sri Aurobindo merit attention because both of them love perfection. Tagore categorically states in his famous work *Gitanjali* that in the ideal world of his dreamland “tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection.” The poet in Tagore unconsciously uses personification in context of striving which should be non-stop. Both the poets have faith in God who can transform this imperfect world into a perfect world or utopia. Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, as read by disciples or critics, focuses on something Divine or celestial for the betterment of humanity or the emergence of a new race-a race of people who can be branded as utopians or super humans-definitely much better than the humans who struggle, suffer and experience split personality. The distinction between Tagore and Sri Aurobindo lies in the fact that the latter is a greater seer or mystic than the former but former appears to be a

more popular and better poet. Sri Aurobindo visualizes things and represents them in such a language that proves to be difficult for the ordinary readers to comprehend. On the other hand, the translated poems in *Gitanjali* are easier to understand. Doubtless, much of lyricism evaporates in translation from Bengali to English but the appeal of the poem is beyond dispute. Tagore elevates the consciousness of the readers and enables them to have the vision of utopia; Sri Aurobindo transports the reader's mind to a different world where one can experience and visualize perfection as the utopians long for. Finally it can be said, with any kind of discourse on utopia these two poets merit mentioning because both of them were gifted with superior order of creative imagination and both of them advocate perfection in any area of human endeavor and both of them have unflinching faith in the powers of Divine to execute a better world order which the utopians visualize.

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