
**SPIRITUAL QUEST THROUGH NATURE: A STUDY OF KUNTALA KUMARI
SABAT'S POEM 'ODE TO THE JASMINE'**

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ABSTRACT: *Kuntala Kumari Sabat (1901–1938), popularly known as Utkal Bharati, is one of key poets from Odisha, india. In her poems we find a spiritual quest via nature. Her vision and viewpoint of life get reflected in the lines of her poetry. As a true lover of nature, she finds beauty everywhere, may it be a faded flower, a twisted tree or zigzag river. She considers nature as a wonderful design by God which reserves vigor to endure as long as life survives. Omnipresence of divinity and connectivity with God vide communion with nature boosts her spiritual quest in many of her poems. In the present paper beautiful lines on nature with spirituality having deep inner implication have been explored. Through the poem, an attempt has also been made to reveal her devotion towards humanity as a whole. The poem, originally written in Odia, has been translated into English by the researcher herself.*

KEYWORDS: Kuntala Kumari Sabat, nature, spirituality, humanity

INTRODUCTION

Merriam Webster dictionary defines natural world as “all of the animals, plants, and other things existing in nature and not made or caused by people”. The natural world, filled with wonder and splendor, has been a resource of insight for poets and philosophers from the beginning of time. The sea and the sun, the night and the stars, the flowers and the fruits- all have a constructive role to ignite and orient the poetic imagination. While Raymond Williams asserts, “Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language”. (Raymond, *Nature*), Wendell Berry offers an easy but useful definition of nature poetry as poetry that “considers nature as subject matter and inspiration.” Spiritual quest through nature has yielded many great songs as spontaneous manifestations of a poet's vision and love towards the natural world. It is through these songs that he makes his eternal appeal to the heart of his readers. At times, a wide range of mystical emotion is expressed: from the loftiest abstractions, the most otherworldly passion for the Infinite, to the most intimate and personal realization of God, expressed in homely metaphors and religious symbols drawn indifferently the natural surroundings.

Spirituality differs from religion in that religion is dependent on spirituality, whilst spirituality is independent of religion. The growth of one's spirituality is the ideal emphasis of religious

traditions. However, one can be incredibly spiritual without knowing anything about religious customs. Wordsworth aspires to create his own vision of the Ultimate Mystery, which underpins all things. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth says,

*A gracious spirit o'er this earth presides,
And o'er the heart of man; invisibly
It comes, to works of unreproved delight,
And tendency benign, directing those
Who care not, know not, think not, what they do" (Prelude 5: 491-495).*

In his *The Sacred Paths*, Theodore Ludwig states,

"Words can attempt to describe the sacred, but it is understood that words can only point to the mystery in a symbolic way" (Ludwig 5).

When Wordsworth addresses his sister in the latter half of "Tintern Abbey," he lays the foundation for his spirituality:

*This prayer I make
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings (Tintern Abbey lines 121-134).*

Despite the fact that Wordsworth never uses the word "God" in "Tintern Abbey," his spirituality is strengthened by his encounters with nature. He doesn't have to talk about God precisely; instead, he searches for Truth and the Holy in nature. He describes the wonderful manner he views Nature in "Tintern Abbey," saying,

*I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;*

*A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And tolls through all things (Tintern Abbey 93-102).*

Indian poet R.N Tagore's View of God and Spirituality revolves around the very opening lines of Gitanjali:

*"Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again
and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life." (Tagore 2003: Poem No.:1:21)*

The poet's inner peace is reflected in Gitanjali's very first lines. In the life of every genuine poet, there comes a time when he encounters the infinite. The master poet, who is also the universe's creator, is a single entity. The limited bound human heart develops into boundless delight, and poetry is born out of divine inspiration. Man is a common poet, and the Universe is His creation. In a dedicated short piece in *A Tear and a Smile*, The God separated a spirit from Himself and fashioned it into Beauty, says Kahlil Gibran, addressing the divine genesis of the soul as well as some of its other aspects. The picture of incarceration fully evolves into the famous mystical motif of veiling and revealing in several of Gibran's writings. The body and other material concerns impede the soul from accessing the Truth; therefore revelation becomes the "primary method" for seekers on the mystical journey towards access to the supra-sensible universe. Gibran's early English works contain analogous references to the uncovering of the soul and visions of the immaterial universe. Gibran's writings are infused with the idea of God as absolute truth. The initial pages of Gibran's first English work, *The Madman*, contain a prose poem evocatively titled *God*, which contains mystical resonances of God consciousness. This book was "the Key" to Gibran's ideas, according to him, because it encapsulates his philosophical views and emotional experiences with beautiful nature imagery.

The present poem *Ode to the Jasmine* of K.K.Sabat is undoubtedly a nature poem which celebrates and almost revolves around a flower, the *shephali* or the Jasmine. Cycle of season, its associated changes, green meadows of Nature- all have a lasting impact on the poet's mind. Cheerful reminiscences come to the front with a free play of the poet's ideas and emotions. With spilled up eyes, her heart hops up in a sublime tune of fantasy.

*On an autumn day sitting by window
In (which) love sentiment deep in meadow
My eyes spill up
my heart hops up
Its string hums in (which) tune of fantasy
Now I feel like breathing in ecstasy.*

It is a piece of genuine poetic sensibility by Kuntala Kumari Sabat which directly addresses and appeals to the jasmine itself. It is a piece of lyric, elaborately structured and carefully styled, glorifying the God and Her creation, i.e. the flower Jasmine. The poem triggers out the poetic genius of Kuntala Kumari Sabat with elaborate descriptions of Natural world, both intellectually

as well as emotionally. As the poem progresses, we find the poet's effortless ability to use metrical lines with aesthetic connotations. It's an exposure of her approach towards a simple flower- for her, the flower after a life of a few hours, falls on dirt. Still the crystal like dew drops on her petals with fascinating fragrance adds vigor to the graceful making of the flower.

*Every morning I see, you fall on dirt
With shaking dew drops, (your) petals look great
Like coral crystal
Your body looks typical
With full of fragrance so fascinating
So soft so charming so graceful the making!*

The poem attributes personal nature and human characteristics to the Jasmine. The flower is beautifully personified by the poet. The Jasmine is offered with a life of its own as if the poet feels its true presence somewhere around. When the flower blooms, its fragrance sails in the nearby areas and addicts the poet in lyrical effusiveness. The poet's personal outlook and observations are symbolically expressed through the beauty and fragility of the flower. Harmony with nature and the romantic glorification of natural world find frequent expression in many lines of the poem. Being one with nature, being a part and parcel of nature via a flower, the poet thinks as if she is now a flower herself and the flower is inside her igniting keenness, making every nerve shiver, filling every unit of her with zeal and enthusiasm. The awesome imagery of nature, the simple flower offers an optimistic and emotive experience to the poet. In last few lines of the poem, she implores the Almighty God to give her shelter in her after life period as follows:

Jasmine!

*In my twilight, I'll drop down on dust
Won't He hug me with love and trust
My cute soul bud
Not destined to be rubbed
He'll adorn her abode with (my soul) flower
He will love me much in shower!*

Here, the poet thinks the flower as an alive human being and shares her humdrum day to day experiences in the following lines:

*My heart gets lighter if I speak you in sequence
You realize or not – both mean equal in sense
It offers me solace and peace
Let me tell day-night please
I dedicate you my heart's agony
Suppose you don't hear- He listens me!*

The poet has used her personal experiences as the contributing factor which spring up in the following lines. The poem has a universal feel and appeal which assists its readers to join to the

verse of life and sense as if the lines define common human predicament. Life seems not so simple for the poet. Wearying life at times becomes full of stress and strain. Still she never forgets to capture the lovely sunset, the colorful west, the twilight tune of the returning birds and the arrival of the evening followed by the darkness of night.

*Endless weariness all day long
Sickness, stress, pain, ache me along
While the sun sets
Slowly in west
Birds come singing twilight tune
Night smears dark on earth's face soon*

Breathing in ecstasy is nothing but a state of blissful joy in a poet's life. The poet's mood and temper fluctuates with the process of sensory visualization and the quest for spiritual attainment. The poetic mind sees God's sport in each of Her creations as full of splendor and wonder. The poet's heart is bewildered to discover the artistic touch of God on the flower Jasmine inside green leaves and foliage.

*Jasmine!
Little your body with full of splendor
Who knows God's sport full of wonder!
In green leaves, hay
Bloomed at faraway
Even so my core bewilders lately
Tell me which artist shapes you deftly!*

The color, echo, aroma and varied views of nature add varied feelings to the creative spirit. The soft, sweet and slushy aroma of jasmine has the intrinsic ability to make the tree look immense amid odd and coarse leaves! The unseen flower stuns with its beautiful fragrance inside roughness. Almighty God has created the instance of high in lowly birth and reveals her worthy devise, i.e. the lovely Jasmine.

*How soft, sweet and slushy your incense!
Coarse, odd leaves but tree looks immense
Inside roughness
So many assets
Unseen! Still stun all by fragrance
High in lowly birth- it's God's instance!*

Let us see how the poet has successfully weaved words into striking lines with deep sense in these lines! But what is spiritual orientation of the poet? In easy words it means being able to untie one's inner self to attach with the Supreme Being. It is the exploration of one's being, a voyage to discover the import of one's existence. The poem has explored spirituality most effectively in the following lines.

*God creates Lotus in mire-How neatly!
God inserts pearl in oyster-How greatly!*

*In every cloud's black
He puts shiny spark
He adds honey in Black cuckoo's voice
Nothing is trivial, tiny in His choice!*

Nature as a catalytic agent

Catalyst, in chemistry, means any substance that increases the rate of a reaction without itself being consumed. In general, catalytic action is a chemical reaction between the catalyst and a reactant, forming chemical intermediates that are able to react more readily with each other or with another reactant, to form the desired end product. During the reaction between the chemical intermediates and the reactants, the catalyst is regenerated.

Here too, nature plays the role of a catalyst as a means or a channel, escalating the pace of man-nature response, without itself being distorted in the creative process. The poet seems as a reactant here towards nature, forming new thoughts and ideas, feelings and emotions to form the metaphorical lines as end artifact. The renewal and regeneration of nature, in varied forms and feathers, charms and appeals become possible in the precious lines of poetry.

*Jasmine!
Your aroma slowly blows in breeze hence
Restless my heart stirs in silence
(As if) All my torment
Sail far for a moment
Loads of imagination comes up still
I reach (as if) in heaven for a while!*

Nature in poetry of K K Sabat and other poets:

The sublime (from Latin *sublimis*) is a quality of greatness that can be physical, moral, intellectual, philosophical, aesthetic, spiritual, or artistic in nature. The word is used to describe excellence that is beyond computation, measurement, or imitation. In their artistic endeavor, the Romantics frequently seek the sublime or the state of sublimity, in contrast to reason and rational thought. The following are the definitions for the word:

"The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature . . . is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other." [Edmund Burke, On the Sublime , 1756 ed. J. T. Bolton. 58]

Awe and reverence are evoked by sublime experiences, whether in nature or in art, as well as an emotional understanding that surpasses rational intellect and words or language. For Romantics, the sublime is a meeting of the subjective-internal (emotional) and objective-external (natural world): when we experience the awe of creation, we allow our emotions to overwhelm our rationality. To understand objective, quantifiable truths in the form of facts, the Enlightened

scientist logically studies the natural world, isolating and shutting off her emotions and biases. The Romantic engages emotionally and imaginatively with the natural world, actively dismantling the Enlightenment's carefully constructed barriers. Because the sublime is so emotive, it has long been thought that one must experience it alone.

It's no surprise, then, that in Marlowe, it's the bad angel who says:

*Go forward, Faustus,
in that famous art
Wherein all Nature's treasure is contained. (Marlowe, 1604)*

What was concerning was that man might consider himself as Lord and Commander of these elements in his dealings with nature. nature in its polar opposite state. Cruel and cruel are two words that come to mind when I think of you.

As A.L.Tennyson put it:
*Or seal'd within the iron hills?
No more?
A monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of the prime,
That tare each other in their slime, (Tennyson, 1850)*

Many modern feelings are now dominated by ideas of tearing and eating, by inherent ferocity. Inside the brooding reflection of human mind, if we are to know nature as varied and variable, as the changing conditions of a human world. Hence, Nature seems dead even in the lines of William Shakespeare:

*Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night.
God said, let Newton be, and all was light.
Now o'er the one half world
Nature seems dead. (Shakespeare, Macbeth-II)*

But in the poems of the Romantic Poets, the personal experiences have been found natural expression. Experience of the divine is the immense topic here. A comparison between the self and the flower has brought forth the following lines of poetess K.K.Sabat:

*Jasmine!
I am just like you- tiny and transitory
My smile, scent and sentiment- all temporary
You will return to dirt
I will return to dirt
But my soul flower will never decline
With this hope I pass my days jasmine!*

Religion, Death and spirituality:

Nineteenth century poets like John Keats, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson have written many poems based on the theme of death and its associated connotations. Subtle anxiety pertaining to occurrence of death, voluntary disappearance from the world by the poets, thoughts on uncertain outcomes of life – all these things find illustration in these poems. The cynical psyche at times bumps into a universe in which the existence of God is not easily established, rather questioned differently.

The spirituality in Sabat's poetry is somewhat distinctive and individualized enough. She is found to have drawn towards the mystery of life and the divine. At the centre of the reality of survival, a deep mystery prevails and this is the mystery of existence on earth itself as expressed in the following lines...

*Demise will be my last resort never
Bloomed in God's tree, not to decay ever
In God's pretty grove
I will bloom with love
(Having) Endless, deathless, timeless fragrance
I will charm my God with elegance.*

CONCLUSION

To Conclude, Kuntala Kumari Sabat's nature-poems are notable for their spiritual longing for nature; appeal for the past, an interest in expression of individual feelings and imaginative appropriations. Ode to the Jasmine is undoubtedly an artistic, musical and intellectually rich poem which appreciates the inherent values of nature with humble reverence. The poet's passive and pleasant return to nature at times of despair and despondency makes the natural surroundings a source of soothing solace. The use of imagery and evocative details of the poem is characterized by a highly subjective approach of the poet, emotional intensity, freedom of thought and expression, an idealization of nature and a dream like or visionary quality.

Kuntala Kumari Sabat's poetry shows that nature really touches her soul. Nature seems to be something beyond its mere physical entity. The discovery of a living spirit inside the natural elements and the comparison of things from Nature with the poet herself helps her viewing the things rather mystically. She presents herself more as a lover of Nature than a worshipper and tries to explore herself as a part and parcel of Nature.

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