Resonance of Lawrence in Buddhadeva Bose’s early poetry

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Abstract

Buddhadeva Bose, a pioneer of Modernism in Bengali literature was greatly influenced by Lawrence. Bose’s expression of the bodily desires in his early poetry, his treatment of love and the beloved carry a strong resemblance with those of Lawrence’s. The aim of this paper is to look into the early poetry of Bose and to study them in parallel with those of Lawrence’s poems to indicate how they resonate Lawrence.

While evaluating the literary career of Buddhadeva Bose (1908-1974), a poet, novelist, critic, and above all, a pioneer of Modernism in Bengali literature, almost all critics agree at one point that he was deeply influenced by D.H. Lawrence. Sukumar Sen, the most prominent Bengali literary historian comments that Lawrence had a “considerable” formative influence on Bose (322). Deepa Tripathi’s An Introduction to Modern Bengali Poetry and Mahboob Sadiq’s Poetry of Buddhadeva Bose: Content and Form spare a few paragraphs on showing how Lawrence was a major influence on Bose (Tripathi 66-75; Sadiq 38-42). But the meager amount of study conducted in this aspect of Buddhadeva Bose’s poetry does not suffice, especially, for one interested in mapping out Lawrence’s reception among the littérateurs of Bengal. This paper aims at looking at some of the early poetical works of Bose that register a resonance with Lawrence.

Although Kazi Nazrul Islam’s relatively brief but jubilant career as a poet shed a new light in Bengali poetry with a note of rebelliousness and wholehearted spirit, his was not of any defiance of the colossal presence of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941); rather, he was like a shooting star that glows alone in the literary realm of Bengal and holds a unique position. It was Buddhadeva Bose and his comrades like Achintya Kumar Sengupta, Premendra Mitra, Jibanananda Das, Sudindranath Datta, and Bishnu Dey who felt a very conscious need to override the dominance of Rabindranath Tagore prevalent in the Bengali literary scene. The age they were living in was an age that experienced the aftermath of the First World War. Their world also underwent changes because of the intellectual upheavals that took place around them: Darwin’s concept of Evolution, the socialist revolution in Russia, Frazer’s study of the myths and lore, and Freud’s interpretation of the psyche are some of the landmarks in this regard. The literary ideals that were followed in Bengali literature fashioned by Tagore were a result of the advent of Victorian prudery and the quasi-Puritanism and were formulated by the romantic concept of love as portrayed in the poetry of Shelley and Keats. Even when Rabindranath wrote about the body he gave it a mystical coating. These young poets first noticed the absence of expression of the bodily desires in the works of Rabindranath Tagore and the other Tagorian poets. This is where Lawrence came in to fill in the void.

D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930), an English novelist, poet, essayist, playwright, painter, and a writer of numerous letters, was born in a working class family in a mining village of Nottinghamshire. Aspiring to be teacher at a very young age, he had to abandon his teaching career due to ill health and eventually spent his short but productive life in writing and travelling. Of his thirteen novels, the mostly read are Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow, Women in Love and Lady Chatterley’s Lover. Lawrence’s best-known short stories include “The Captain’s Doll,” “The Fox,” “The Ladybird,” “Odour of Chrysanthemums,” “The Princess,” “The Rocking-Horse Winner,” “St Mawr,” “The Virgin and the Gypsy” and “The Woman who Rode Away.” All his sixty two stories and novellas are collected in a one-volume Collected Stories (Everyman, 1994). Although his reputation as a poet is overshadowed by those of his novels, any reader of his poems would be drawn towards them for their powerful lyricism, simplicity yet craftsmanship and, above all, for the true reflection of the tumultuous feelings that the poet felt in his life. All his 800 poems along with the various working editions are collected in Vivian de Sola Pinto edited The Complete...
The recurring themes of his works are men-women relationship and their relationship with nature and the changing society due to the advent of capitalism and industrialism. Lawrence’s graphic description of sexual union was his effort of conveying a message that through having a complete sexual coition, a world fallen into negation can be reinstated to its positivity. However, this has crowned him with notoriety worldwide.

Buddhadeva Bose and the other modernist poets who launched their poetic career by discarding Tagore’s aesthetic and idealistic perceptions of beauty, love and pleasure in poetry, were academically trained in the English Departments that were established by the British colonisers. Although Lawrence’s works were not yet included in the syllabi followed in the English Departments of British India of 1920s, young men like Bose read Lawrence as they were voracious readers of contemporary western writers. Bose recalls in the first volume of his memoirs Amar Chelebela how his mentor Prabhucharan Guhathakurta while studying abroad sent him books of many contemporary writers of the West (97-98). He confirms in the second volume Amar Jauban that he spent all the stipend money he got for his MA result for buying the complete works of Lawrence and Huxley (58). Bose confesses that he had an “undying weakness” for Lawrence (Complete Works IV 130).

Before exploring the reasons behind Bose’s likings for Lawrence, it would be worthwhile to explore why or in what condition a writer inclines toward another writer. For Buddhadeva Bose there was a unique factor working behind his response towards an English writer like Lawrence. Lawrence arrived at the subcontinent with the British colonisers, who introduced the study of English Language and Literature into the Indian curricula to fulfil their vested interest. In two of his essays, “Engreji shahitya o amra” (Swadesh or Sanskriti 80-89) and “Modern Bengali Prose,” collected in An Acre of Green Grass, Bose discusses how the people of Bengal responded towards English. Bose writes in the latter: “Our soil had drunk of the literature of England, the essence of England, and a new literature was born. This is a fact for which I find no parallel, for though the British have cast their nets over half the globe, no other foreign shores have responded to them in this particular fashion” (An Acre of Green Grass 61) A complex but close relationship between the colonised and the literature of the master-race existed among the men of letters of Bengal. Regarding liking in general, a poet or a writer would obviously be drawn towards another poet or writer who resonates what the reader-poet feels or wants to write about. In Lawrence’s poems and novels young Bose found a free and frank expression of the bodily desires that was lacking in contemporary literature and he was inspired by it. Often the reader-poet would express his own appreciation of the second poet through translating their works. Bose addressed this issue in his essay “Kabitar onuban o Sudhindranath Datta” (Swadesh or Sanskriti 165).

The early poetry of Buddhadeva Bose reveals a strong sense of physicality. The poems in Bondeer Bondona (1930) to Notun Pata (1940) are poems of love. This love is not spiritual love; rather, it is sensual love. In fact, the recurrent theme in Bondeer Bondona is the dilemma of the soul, which, against the backdrop of the latest developments in the fields of psychology and anthropology, has realised for the first time that the days of spiritual love as delineated in the poetry of Rabindranath and other pro-Rabindranath poets is over. The speaker in the poem “Bondeer Bondona”, says: “A perpetual prisoner in the instincts’ inescapable cage—/ that’s how you have made me, my ruthless creator!” (1-2) The speaker in this poem acknowledges that he is entrapped in the cage of desire where he suffers within himself on how to express his feelings and quench his thirst, his “hunger of youth.” Buddhadeva must have been influenced by Lawrence’s expression of sensuality in his poems. Bose must have read Lawrence’s letter in which he theorises his concept of “the religion of blood” and gives more emphasis on “the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect” (Selected Letters 53). Lawrence expresses his carvings for sex in “Manifesto” like this:

But then came another hunger  
Very deep and ravening;
The very body’s crying out  
with a hunger more frightening, more profound  
than stomach or throat or even the mind;  
redder than death, more clamorous.  
The hunger for the woman. Alas,  
It is so deep a Moloch, ruthless and strong,  
‘tis like the unutterable name of the dread Lord,

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1 Buddhadeva Bose translated Lawrence’s five poems and the story “The Rocking-Horse Winner.” The poems are “Snake,” “Spring Morning,” “December Night,” New Year’s Night,” and “A Young Wife.”
not to be spoken aloud. 
Yet there it is, the hunger which comes upon us, 
Which we must learn to satisfy with pure, real satisfaction; 
Or perish, there is no alternative. (39-51, Complete Poems 264)

In a similar manner, Bose, in his “Mohomukta” realises that the only feeling that lasts is the desire, which is “like the engravings on stone.” He says, “My ever-living desire; —/Only truth is this body, this thirst for blood.” (45-46, Poems I 55) Lawrence’s “hunger for woman” is re-echoed in Bose’s “thirst for blood.” How can one satiate this thirst, this hunger? Bose gives the reply in the same poem:

. . . Come here, all the pretty girls of the world
I will satiate this venomous-thirst by the wine of your body
Do not bring anything else, except your newly-bloomed youth. (74-76, Poems I 56)

Both Lawrence and Bose desire some beautiful female body, and the ultimate end for Bose is not only the body. In “Shapbhroshta” he says:

I am a fallen god
My eyes are like that long-caged bird
Who wants to tear the shackles of his body to soar into air
And wants to drink upto the throat the vastness of that blue sky.3 (45-48, Poems I 20)

The same desire to reach eternity is also there in “Bondeer Bondona”: “Creator, you don’t know how immeasurable is my thirst/ for immortality!” (55-56, Poems I 36) He wants to reach eternity, and he knows that eternity could be reached through the union of the two bodies and the souls in love, which is “the last resort for human heart” (“Prem o Pran” 65, Poems I 78). Thus, the poems in Bondeer Bondona come to an end with a hope to get out of the cage of instincts.

Bose further explores the possibilities of reaching eternity through the body of the beloved in his later poems. Lawrence’s poems in Look! We have come through! reveal “the intrinsic experience of a man during the crisis of manhood” (191). In “Song of a Man who is Loved” Lawrence finds his peace in a woman’s body:

Between her breasts is my home, between her breasts, 
Three sides set on me space and fear, but the fourth side rests 
Sure on the tower of strength, ‘twix the walls of her breasts (1-3, CP 249)

Bose also finds his peace in his lady:

Your dark hair is the source of fathomless peace, 
Peace that stretches through the farthest corner of time and space (39-40, Poems II 126)

It is not only peace that these two poets find after consummating with another body, it can also beacon immortality. Lawrence experiences immortality in “Manifesto”: “Immortality, the heaven, is only a projection of this strange but actual fulfilment./ Here in the flesh.”(82-83, CP 265) So says Bose in “Papee”: “I have accepted this human body as a sacred alter/ With the touch of the body I have felt the eternity” (41-42, Poems I 368)

That peace and the projection of immortality experienced during or right after sexual consummation for Lawrence and for Bose is not everlasting; soon both realise that they are in the harsh realities of life. This feeling of opposites takes expression in Lawrence’s “In the Dark,” (CP 210) “She said as well to me,” (CP 254) and “Both sides of the medal” (CP 235); and in Buddhadeva Bose’s “Aporna’s Enemy” (Poems I, 47) and “Moitrayee’s Rejection” (Poems I, 38). After every sexual consummation Lawrence and Bose experience a rebirth which is the topic of Lawrence’s “New Heaven and Earth” (CP 256) and Bose’s “Birth.” (Poems I, 222) Lawrence expects something new in his “Wedlock:”

3 Unless otherwise mentioned, free translations from Bengali are done by this author. 
4 Dyson 2
I wonder what it will be,
What will come forth of us,
what flower my love?
. . . There will something come forth from us.
Children, acts, utterance
Perhaps only happiness
. . . Only that one newness.  

Bose also anticipates the same to be born of them in “Samudra Snan” (Sea bathing):
Let it bloom, let it bloom
From our touches, in midst ourselves
Like this world that once emerged like a lotus
Out of Lord Vishnu’s lotus-like naval
. . . It might be a lotus,
Just a lotus
Or, may be, who knows, a New World!  

The poems in *Konkaboti* (1937) and *Notun Pata* (1940) bear similarity with Lawrence’s poems in *Look! We have come through*. Lawrence wrote most of the poems to embody “the conflict of love and hate” that went between him and his wife Frieda (*CP* 191). Lawrence reaches his conclusion that this episode marks a new beginning when he proclaims, “A fine wind is blowing the new direction of time” (*CP* 250). Bose wrote the poems in these collections after his marriage with Prativa Bose in 1934 (104). He dedicated his *Notun Pata*, meaning “New Leaf,” to his wife. Lawrence’s “new direction of time” can be found in Bose’s poem “Punorojjibon” where he celebrates a “resurrection,” “a new tide of the self,” which is “like a spring bringing fresh sap in the trees” (22-26; *Poems I* 168). Conjugal love marks a new beginning for both Lawrence and Bose in these poems. Lawrence writes in “Wedlock:”

> Those shoulders so warm and smooth: I feel that I
> Am a sunlight upon them, that shines them into being.
>
> But how lovely to be you! Creep closer in, that I am more.
> I spread over you! How lovely, your round head, your arms,
> Your breasts, your knees and feet! I feel that we
> Are the bonfire of oneness, me flame flung leaping round you,
> You the core of fire, crept into me.  

Bose writes in “To a woman”:

> Come on, come on, come on
> Cover me up with your hair, with your darkness:
> Take me into the bliss of oblivion, to the unknowing,
> Let the heat of your body circulate in my blood,
> Ravish me in your darkness,
> Shred me into pieces.
> Let me fall into the hidden chamber of you soul
> In many drops,
> Till my end  

The description of consummation sounds the same in Lawrence and Bose. These lines reveal their intensity of passion in love, where the body plays a pivotal role.

The affinity between Bose’s early poems and those of Lawrence’s is in the recognition and celebration of “hunger for woman” in their poems which was something shocking for the Victorian and puritan temperament. Abu Sayeed Ayyub confirms that Bose “was the first one to become poetically aware of the lack of sensuous element in the poems of Tagore” (163). With a portrayal of the cravings of the senses openly like that of Lawrence, Bose initiated his revolt against Tagore. Ayyub thinks that Lawrence’s “iconoclasm” “impelled” Bose to launch his literary rebellion against Tagore (163).
Physicality or sensuality was not something entirely new in Bengali literature. The medieval texts like *Charyapada*, *Srikrishnakirtana* (14th Century), poems of Vidyapati (15th Century) upheld the importance of the senses in love. Nirad C. Chaudhury in his *Bangalee Jibaney Ramani (A Social History: Women in Bengalee Society)* has elaborately shown how the attitude towards love and the female body has undergone changes over the years in Bengali society and culture (23-44). Ancient Indian philosophy placed sex in a very high place. In Hinduism, religion, earthly possessions, sex, and salvation of the soul have been placed in equal importance. According to the scriptures, absence of any one of these principal pursuits of life will make human life incomplete.

But the fact of the matter is that the literary taste of this subcontinent underwent a massive change, especially, with the arrival of the British rulers. With them they brought Victorian attitudes towards life and love. Hence, frank expression of bodily desires that was commonplace for the Sanskrit and the early Bengali poets was absent in literature until the first two decades of the twentieth century. With the major changes that took place in the political, economical, and the sociological areas, this literary canon had to give in. Influence of Western authors once again played a considerable role. The post-Tagore writers embraced the European writers with great zeal. In Lawrence Bose found a precursor, whom he made his idol; especially, in his early years of writing poetry.

Works Cited


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*There are varied opinions regarding the date of composition of Charyapada. Dr Sukumar Sen says: “No definite date can be assigned to the songs. The lower limit, however, is 1200 and the upper limit cannot be later than 1000” in *History of Bengali Literature* (Kolkata: Sahitya Akademi, 1960) 24.*