

PREFACE

Both William Blake (1757-1827) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) wrote poems about children and presented their respective visions about the state of childhood being a state of unalloyed joy. I was acquainted with William Blake while doing my post-graduate studies in English. His Songs of Innocence (1789) and Songs of Experience (1794) moved me so much that I was thinking whether I could work on William Blake in future for my Ph.D. dissertation. Blake's vision of childhood gave me a perspective to look into the poems of Tagore who in Shishu (1903) and Shishu Bholanath (1922) had responded well to the emotions of the children's world and sang the songs of innocence. My immediate response was to work on both Blake and Rabindranath as poets of childhood.

Poems about children in English literature were not unheard of before Blake. But Blake explored a "New Eden to which man had long been an alien". Against the natural and idyllic background, in which the children respond themselves well, Blake wrote his "happy songs" so that "every child may joy to hear". The essence of the life of children he had translated into print in Songs of Innocence (1789).

Though there is no reference in the whole Corpus of Tagore literature whether Rabindranath had anything to do with Blake so far as his poems about children are concerned, however a closed reading of Blake and Rabindranath would evince, how both of them were kindred souls as poets of childhood. Blake, of course, had not that amazing range of Tagore. But the basic approach of both the poets to childhood remains almost the same.

While Blake drew inspiration from the life of the "Infant Jesus", Tagore's inspiration to write about children came directly from the reminiscences of his own childhood as well as an onlooker of that state : "*Jagat parabarer teere shishura kare khela...*". Spontaneity of expression, tenderness of feeling and simplicity of thought have gone a long way in making such poems as inestimable treasures in the literature meant primarily for the children. Such a comparative study till now has not been pursued by any Blake or Tagore scholar. Hence the significance of this dissertation.

The thesis will have five chapters. The first chapter, Introduction in brief, will explore the horizon of the poems for children, written both in English and Bengali languages. And it will be simply an introductory chapter. The second chapter, William Blake, will be exclusively devoted to the study of William Blake who is the first poet in English literature to have discovered childhood and wrote poems about children. The third chapter, Rabindranath Tagore, will introduce Rabindranath Tagore who pioneered the cause of the literature for children and in whose hands the poems (meant for children) reached a culmination. The fourth chapter, Childhood : A Study in Images and Symbols in the Poetry of William Blake and Rabindranath Tagore, will study the images and symbols used by the respective poets to present their visions of childhood. As the thesis is comparative in nature, in the concluding chapter, Theme and Treatment of childhood : A Study of William Blake and Rabindranath Tagore, Blake and Rabindranath will be assessed primarily in relation to their theme and philosophy as evident in their poems for children.

This thesis may open new vistas for further research works while widening the horizon of the literature for children as a whole.

'Works Cited' and 'Select Bibliography' are prepared in strict adherence to the instructions given in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers by Joseph Gibaldi (New Delhi : Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd., 2000). In the body of this dissertation I have drawn the textual references from the original texts and acknowledged them. In case of Rabindranath the original texts have been referred to (wherever necessary) and English translations of the same have been done for the understanding of those who may not know the Bengali language.

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