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THE NONSENSE WORLD OF SUKUMAR ROY: THE INFLUENCE OF BRITISH  
COLONIALISM ON SUKUMAR ROY'S NONSENSE POEMS-WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE  
TO ABOL-TABOL

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ABSTRACT

The British Raj produced, and continued to inspire, a genre of literature in which the writing of Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, John Masters and Paul Scott among others features prominently. Kipling more or less subscribed to the dominant attitude of superiority with his concept of the "white man's burden", other writers including Forster in A Passage to India exposed the hypocrisy and mean spiritedness of colonial rule. Such literature, together with the non-fiction work of Charles Allen, reveals the views and habits that the British developed in India, their preoccupation with precedence, their attitude towards servants especially and Indians generally and their attempt to replicate a British life-style in a very different environment. Nonsense poetry gained popularity in English literature under Lear and Carroll although its roots can be traced back from classical antiquity. However, in the genre of Bengali nonsense poetry, Sukumar Roy remains unparalleled. Through his immortal creation of Abol Tabol, he parodies the British Raj and the pseudo-bourgeois "Babu Culture" in emerging metropolitans such as Calcutta.

Keywords: Abol Tabol, Sukumar Roy, Carroll, British Colonialism, satire, Nonsense Verse.

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Earnest nonsense, which follows logically the initial pattern of its absurdity, as many limericks, as Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass where mathematics and chess control the world of rigamarole. This nonsense (the off-with-her-head Duchess, Alice in the wood surrounded by mad folk, Humpty Dumpty's business dealing with his words) has a topsy turvy bearing on real life. Nonsense here is achieved through logic, reason on a holiday- for "mankind in the main has always regarded reason as a bit of a

joke.” (Chesterton) This often leads us along familiar paths until we look up in a nonsense world where we are nonetheless surprisingly at home” (The Dictionary of World Literary Terms. Edited by T.Shipley)

Sukumar Ray (30 October 1887-10 September 1923), the Bengali humorous poet, story writer and playwright was born in a Bramho family in Calcutta, India on October 1887. Born in the era which can be called the pinnacle of the Bengal Renaissance, he grew up in an environment that fostered his literary talents. His works as the collection of poems ‘Aboltabol’, (আবোল ভাবোল) novella ‘Ha Ja Ba Ra La’, (হ য ব র ল) short story collection ‘Pagla Dashu’ (পাগলা দাশু) and play ‘Chalachitta-chanchari’ (চলচিত্ত-চঞ্চরি) are considered equal in stature to Alice in Wonderland.

Although before Sukumar Roy, Trailakyanath Mukherjee (1847-1919) had gifted his Bengali readers with the comic elements in his creativity and in post Roy literary sphere, Sunirmal Bose, Annadasankar Roy or Premendra Mitra had left their mark, but they were devoid of the sharp insight Roy had in parodying his contemporary society and the falsity in it. What Trailakyanath in his lucid rural dialect had left to achieve, Roy took the helm and carried it forward in his satiric description of modern city life, the ‘Babu culture’ imposed upon the rising middle class by the British imperialists and finally of the colonizers themselves. In that respect, Roy’s nonsense poetry becomes pregnant with anti colonial sentiments that lie in a shimmering haze under the guise of an apparently meaningless ramble of children’s verse. “In an absurd universe without belief there are no ethical standards, no moral judgement, no perception of valid motifs; one thing or one action is as good as another.” (The Dictionary of World Literary Terms; J.T.Shipley)

Krishnarup Bhattacharya in ‘Sukumar Royer Aschorjo Jogot’ writes “ বুদ্ধদেব বসু তাঁর ‘কবি সুকুমার রায় প্রবন্ধে (বুদ্ধদেব বসুর রচনাসংগ্রহ ১ম খন্ড) ‘আবোল ভাবোল’ – এর ছড়াগুলিকে তিনটি শ্রেণীতে ভাগ করেছিলেন। প্রথম শ্রেণীতে বুদ্ধদেব এই ধরনের ছড়াকে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করতে চান, যাকে বলা যেতে পারে human experiences exaggerated- (চ্যাপলিনের শিল্প সম্বন্ধে কথিত)। ‘গোঁফচুরি’, ‘কাতুকুতু বুড়ো’, ‘ফসকে গেল’, ‘ঠিকানা’, ‘কাঁদুনে’, ‘গানের গুঁতো’, ‘চোর ধরা’, ‘কাঠবুড়ো’, ‘সাবধান’, ‘বুঝিয়ে বলা’, ‘ডানপিটে’ প্রভৃতি এই ধরনের ছড়া। এগুলির কোনো-কোনোটর মধ্যে কোথাও দ্বিস্তর অর্থের অন্য উদ্দেশ্য প্রতিভাত হলেও রসের বিচারে এগুলি ঐ শ্রেণীর।

দ্বিতীয় শ্রেণীর কবিতা বা ছড়া প্রসঙ্গেই ‘হ য ব র ল’ বা হেশোরামের কাহিনীকে মনে পরে। বোঝাই যাচ্ছে যে, এইগুলি আজগুবি শ্রেণীর। ‘খিচুড়ি’, ‘কুমড়োপটাশ’, ‘হাঁকোমুখো হ্যাংলা’, ‘ট্যাঁশ গরু’, ‘ভয় পেয়ো না’ প্রভৃতিতে এই শ্রেণীর অন্তর্ভুক্ত করা যায়। ‘হ য ব র ল’ র মতোই এগুলির কোনো-কোনোটর মধ্যে ও কোনো-কোনো স্থানে সমাজ-সমালোচনাত্মক মন উঁকি মেলেছে- কিন্তু তাও ছড়াগুলির মূল স্বভাব আজগুবির রসকে নষ্ট করেনি”

Born in an extremely politics conscious family and surrounded by luminaries like Rabindranath Tagore, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Prafulla Chandra Roy and his father Upendrakishore, Ray grew up in an environment that fostered his literary talents and his poetry shows an extremely poignant ridicule of the rising Bengali middle class and their pseudo-bourgeois ways. The poems depict in a garb of comic deliberation; the futility of human endeavour and the ridicule it generates in the process. “Surrealism turns away from life, but the absurd claims to be a reflection of life.”(The Dictionary of World Literature. T.J.Shipley)

Baburam Sapurey, (বাবুরাম সাপুড়ে) reveals an interesting study of the gradual influx of British East India Company on the soils of the nation while it was still in its hay-days. The speaker may be identified with the British imperialists and the snake charmer “Babu ram” (বাবুরাম) with Farrukhsiyar, the 10<sup>th</sup> Mughal Empire. The Farrukhsiyar’s Farman (April 1717) gave the Company the right to purchase 38 villages around Sutanuti, Gobindopur and Kolikata and collect taxes directly from the provinces and instilled rulers who would suit the interest of the Company. Roy then goes on an elaborate description of the easily mouldable and docile nature of the apparently powerful and revered figure heads like the Nawab of Bengal- Shiraj Doulla and later the Nizam of Hyderabad and Oudh whose presence only facilitated the colonialists in enriching their coffers without stirring up much ado. (Here, the imagery of the snakes can be equated with both dread and reverence. Much like the kings and rulers were)

As the readers move on to Sotpatro, (সংপত্র) “kongso raj er bongsothor” (কংস রাজের বংশধর) identifies the protagonist’s Indian roots and lays down upon him “rong jodio bejay kalo”-(রং যদিও বেজায় কালো) which reminds us of Ania Loomba’s reading of Caliban in Tempest where Caliban has been depicted as the black native and “abhorred slave”. Marriage between British and Indians, though, did occur, producing the Anglo-Indian community. This is explored by Masters in his Bhowani Junction, and other works. In Wicked Women of the British Raj by Coralie Younger, this theme of marriage has received ample attention and discussion through her “unputdownable factual account of the zenana world of the rajas and sultans of India, concentrating n the Firangi batus and begums of this veiled world of myths and folklore” and of the “European women who broke society’s rules to marry the ‘heathen’ princes of the pompous and extravagant Indian aristocracy”

In Gof Churi (গোঁফ চুরি) we have the “head officer boro babu” (হেড অফিসের বড়বাবু) that puns the Bengali “Babu culture” that sought to make a living off their British masters. The protagonist’s reference “Nongra chata, khangra jhata bicchiri ar moyla (নোংরা ছাঁটা খ্যাংরা বাঁটা বিচ্ছিরি আর ময়লা)

Amon gof to rakhto jani Shyambabu der goyla” (এমন গোঁফ-ত রাখত জানি শ্যামবাবুদের গয়লা) is demeaning as it portrays that the physical appearance of none but the lower class people may exhibit such traits.

Pyacha Koy Pyachani (প্যাঁচা কয় প্যাঁচানি) may be studied as an interesting case-study of the relation between the East India Company and its ties with mainland England. Although functioning under the protective umbrella of Mainland England, the relationship between the individual companies working independently in the colonies were often strained with the mainland. Thereby, a policy of appeasement was often followed by the Company to let it carry on with its Opium trade and independent misrule; often at the cost of heavily enriching the royal coffers. The role of the ‘pyacha’ (প্যাঁচা) appeasing the ‘pyachani’ (প্যাঁচানি) may be equated with the appeasement policy followed by the British in India with the English Queen.

Through lyrical creations as

“Samney tahar khaddo jholey, jar je rokom ruchi,

(সামনে তাহার খাদ্য ঝোলে যার যে রকম রুচি)

Monda mithai chop cutlet, khaja kimba luchi,

(মন্ডা মিঠাই চপ কাটলেট খাজা কিংবা লুচি)

Mon boley tai khabo khabo, mukh choley tai khetey,

(মন বলে তাই খাব খাব, মুখ চলে তাই খেতে)

Mukher songey khabar chotey, palla diyey metey”;

(মুখের সঙ্গে খাবার ছোট পাল্লা দিয়ে মেতে)

The readers are left to question whether Khuror Kol (খুড়োর কল) portrays the lure of high offices and fat salaries dangled by the imperialists that produced a class of the westernized Bengalis to work for the Company till they realized that most of the high places were reserved for the colonizers themselves and not through the basis of merit. This became a contributing factor to the growth of nationalism in gradual times.

Roy’s poem Thikana (ঠিকানা) may remind the readers of “turn up on your right hand at the next turning, but at the next turning of all, on your left; marry at the very next turning, turn of no hand, but turn down indirectly to the Jew’s house” (Merchant of Venice, William Shakespeare).

According to Gestalt psychologists, the idea of the “absurd” is infact rooted to reality. Thereby, Roy borrows his characters from real life, mainly the rising middle class and interestingly enough, centres them on an emerging city life- the initial vortex for rootlessness. To evaluate the colonial impact of Roy’s poems, a foreknowledge of the history of Bengal and particularly of Calcutta becomes indispensable. The bustling city life grew up around Fort William to seek protection from the plundering raiders and to earn a livelihood by working for the British. Just as Calcutta gave people a new identity (or a loss of it?), it also fostered

rootlessness and a sense of alienation so poignant in Roy's poem Thikana (ঠিকানা) or "Address" that lays light upon this theme of the loss of individual identity as the readers are made to move through a maze to seek out the "address" of one who is apparently a known individual. At its hay-days, Calcutta saw an influx of people from the villages who came and settled in shanty towns around the fringes of the city. The by-lanes and alley ways receiving mentioning here may also refer to those tightly knit shanty towns growing up in claustrophobia and almost without a breathing space.

Burir Bari (বুড়ীর বাড়ী) leaves us open to the question whether the house loosely held together is infact a portrait of the colonies, the old lady to Queen Victoria herself and the gradually failing attempt of the colonizers to maintain the colonies in the aftermath of the First World War scenario when mass revolution had already begun to make a front.

Another interesting dimension added to the written verse is the illustrations Roy have made to substantiate his poetry. 'Ekusey Ain' (একুশে আইন) for example portrays figures with rigid geometric proportions and an Indian Sepoy arresting one of his fellow countrymen. Poems like 'Khuror Kol', (খুড়োর কল) 'Gof Churi' (গোঁফ চুরি) and 'Haturey' (হাতুড়ে)- all denotes the westernized Bengalee.

'Bhaturey Khala' (ভুতুড়ে খেলা) is a satiric description of the famines and the emaciated figures it leaves at its aftermath. The phrase 'Bina chosmatey' (বিনা চশমাতো) denotes the poets vision of reality without the stereotyped ideals imposed on it. The 'panto bhuter janto chana' (পান্ত ভুতের জান্ত চানা) becomes symbolic of the corpse like bodies of babies barely alive in the aftermath of the famines created by the First World War on India from whose soil, was supplied food to sustain the troops across the globe at the cost of starving India. The term "bhuter faki miliye gelo chot korey" (ভুতের ফাঁকি মিলিয়ে চট করে) in the final concluding stanza depicts the inevitable self-surrendering of ourselves as we separate ourselves from reality into the comforts that a bourgeois culture provides. The poem satirizes the middle class morality and its conditional ability to avoid looking into the reality.

Ekushey Ain (একুশে আইন) begins with 'sib thakurer apon deshey' (শিব ঠাকুরের আপন দেশে) identifying the glories of classical antiquity and shifts to 'ain kanun sorbonese' (আইন কানুন সর্বদেশে) that has been imposed by the colonial rullers. This poem is remarkable for its vivid description of anti-imperialist feelings. 'Sethay sondhey chotar agey, hachtey holey ticket lage' (সেথায় সন্ধ্যা ছটার আগে, হাঁচতে হলে টিকিট লাগে) scorns at the British ruler's attempt to bring in suppress at the slightest possible instance. George Lamning in Pleasures of Exile has pointed out the subordinate position held by the colonised natives to economic and ideological "master race" and that the colonized "must surrender their liberty in the interest of men (British)" (Fielding Hall, Political Officer in the British Colonial Administration) 'Karor jodi gof gojay, Akso ana tax chay' (কারুর যদি গোঁফ গজায়, একশো আনা ট্যাকস চায়) refers to the indiscriminate taxation imposed on the Indian soil while 'Jesob lokey poddo lekhey, Tader dhorey khachay rekhey' (যেসব লোকে পদ্য লেখে, তাদের ধরে খাঁচায় রেখে) may be seen as a reference to the censorship imposed on the intellectuals who try to reveal the ugly face of the empire.

'Huko Mukho Hangla' (হুকোমুখো হাংলা) is a vivid representation of the average Bengalee adhering to the Babu culture and surviving on the patronage of the crown and the deliberations they face and how the slightest instance of disorientation brings them out off their comfort zone and leaves them displaced. The 'thanadar' (থানাদার) uncle represents the lower ranks of administration vested out to the natives.

A study of the poem 'Bigyan Siksha' (বিজ্ঞান শিক্ষা) may be achieved with a foreknowledge of Sukumar Roy's life. Roy who graduated with Physics and Chemistry from Presidency College, Calcutta, also studied lithography and photography. Roy, himself a scientist in all respect but endowed with a poet's sensibility could see through the attempts made by the lemon squeezing school to define and classify everything in terms of scientific postulates and deliberations recently brought in and popularized by the colonialists.

In 'Bhoy Peona' (ভয় পেওনা) we get a picture of how the colonialists gradually rope in the colonised. The reader can associate the term 'mathay amar sing dekhey vai' (মাথায় আমার সিঙ দেখে ভাই) with the British

crown and the 'mugur' (মুগুর) with the 'boniker man dondo' (বনিকের মানদণ্ড) turned into the ruler's 'raj dondo' (রাজ দন্ড) as the traders turned into rullers with the passage of time. Finally 'ovoy dicchi suncho na j' (অভয় দিচ্ছি শুনছ না যে) denotes the use of brutal power when cajoling and deliberations fail.

"The Carracci brothers, who invented caricatura, developed the idea of 'perfect deformity' in their satirical sketches. Hogarth's prints, which attacked moral shortcomings in society rather than individual idiosyncrasies, made the transition from broadsheets to cartoons as an art form. But it was the printing presses in Britain that turned cartoons into pictorial journalism, dominated by the genius of Gillray and Rowlandson. The first comic illustrations by the British expatriates chew upon Rowland-son's cartoons on the Raj. Humorous drawings, as entertainment rather than as social protest, spread with the rise of illustrated magazines. In India, by the 1850s, the British cartoonist found ample material in the social 'foibles' of his community. The first visiting artist to explore this was Sir Charles D'Oyly. His Tom Raw the Griffin (1828) charted the faux pas of an East India Company novice and the funny situations in which the lad found himself. The British cartoonists in India as well as Indians learned from D'Oyly and similar artists."- (The Power of the Printed Image)

"আবোল তাবোল- এর ছড়ার সঙ্গে অশ্বেদ্যভাবে জড়িয়ে আছে তার ছবি। পরশুরামের গল্পের মতো (যতীন্দ্র সেনকৃত ছবি 'গন্ডলিকার ভূমিকায় রবিন্দ্রনাথ এ সম্পর্কে লেখেন, "লেখনীর সঙ্গে তুলিকার কী চমৎকার জোড় মিলিয়েছে, লেখার ধারা রেখার ধারা সমান তালে চলে, কেহ কাহারো চেয়ে খাটো নহে তাই চরিত্রগুলো ভাষায় ও চেহারায়, ভাবে ও ভঙ্গিতে, ডাইনে বামে এমন করিয়া ধরা পড়িয়াছে যে তাহাদের আর পলাইবার ফাঁক নাই।" লিয়রের ছড়ার মত (যাকে ছবিতে ব্যাখ্যা করেছেন লেখক নিজেই), ক্যারলের গল্পের ছবির মতো (জেনি থর্নকৃত) বা 'সের ছবির মত (রবীন্দ্রকৃত) এখানে লেখার সঙ্গে স্বভাবে, গুণপনায় সমানে পাল্লা দিয়েছে এর অনবদ্য ছবিগুলি। উপেন্দ্রকিশোরের ছবি আঁকার মুন্সিয়ানা সুকুমার রায় হয়ে সত্যজিৎ পর্যন্ত প্রসারিত। তাঁদের গল্প বা ছড়ার ব্যাখ্যা রূপে অনেক ছবিই তাঁরা এঁকেছেন। তবে উপেন্দ্রকিশোর ও সত্যজিতের ছবি যেমন চিত্র-ব্যাকরণের দিক থেকেও নির্ভুল, সুকুমারের ছবিতে সেক্ষেত্রে মাঝে-মাঝে জ্যামিতির দৌর্বল্য, মানুষের শরীরগঠন পদ্ধতি সম্বন্ধে চিত্রীর অনভিজ্ঞতা লক্ষ্য করা যায়। তবে এ সবকিছুকেই পুষিয়ে দিয়েছেন সুকুমার তিনটি জিনিসের দ্বারা। এক, তাঁর অসাধারণ পর্যবেক্ষণ-শক্তি যা মূল বিষয় ও তার পরিপার্শ্বকে খুঁটিনাটি সমেত ধরে রেখেছে।" (Krishnarup Bhattacharya, Sukumar Royer Aschorjo Jogot) The illustrations of Roy to verse works like 'Allhadi', 'Kaduney' and 'Haturey' (হাতুড়ে) shows a caustic parody of British culture. The illustration to 'Ekushey Ain' (একুশে আইন) is equally significant for we notice the arbitrariness of British misrule while 'Khurur Kol' (খুড়োর কল), 'Gof Churi' (গোফ চুরি) and the like shows a more westernised 'babu' culture and indulges in its parody. Few satirists in Bengal rivalled his vocabulary of invented words. But the work that best caught his genius came in the final stages of his brief life - Abol Tabol, a collection of verse from a supreme word-maker. In The Power of the Printed Image, the author has depicted how the readers were then treated to a new form of comic drawing that blended fantasy and sharp observation of cultural behaviour. As a child, Sukumar read European humorous publications and he sometimes used them as a point of departure for his work. His poem 'Danpitye' (The Little Horror), for instance, reminds us of the notorious brats of the American strip cartoon, 'The Katzenjammer Kids'; yet Sukumar's brats are definitely Bengali brats. Heath Robinson's uncle Lubin and his fantastic machines is similar in spirit to Sukumar's poem, 'Khurur Kol' (খুড়োর কল). Robinson's machine solves the problem of eating tricky little items at dinner as Ray's machine enables one to travel great distances fast: the incentive is some mouth-watering food dangling just beyond reach. Sukumar's unique blend of literary and pictorial wit forms the bridge between drawings for children and social and political cartoons, the other thriving genre in illustrated magazines. Caricature, which makes an unsentimental observation of human foibles, was part of Sukumar's humour but the element of cruelty or the grotesque used by cartoonists for effect fell outside his dream world. The earliest newspapers to carry political cartoons were the English- owned Bengal Hurkaru and the Indian Gazette in the 1850s. Within decades, cartoons appeared in papers owned by Indians, as colonial administration became the legitimate target of journalists. The nationalist paper of Bengal, Amrita Bazar Patrika, published its first cartoon in 1872.44 One of the earliest cartoons to make a political impact was in Sulav Samachar in the 1870s. Its message foreshadowed

the Ilbert Bill (1882) which sought to abolish the immunity of European offenders to being tried by Indian judges, a government measure fought tooth and nail by the expatriate British. Sulav Samdchar put the Indian case forcefully by highlighting a blatant injustice: often poorer sections of the Indians were found to be assaulted by Europeans, leading to their death. If the case came to court at all, the 'enlarged spleen' of the victims were blamed for their deaths. The cartoon shows a dead coolie with his weeping wife by his side. A European doctor conducts a perfunctory post mortem while the offender stands nonchalantly smoking a cigar. This suggestion of collusion between European judges and offenders did have an impact, if not the intended one. It was among the incriminating evidence that led to the vernacular press censorship of 1878. The assaults continued as late as 1908, as Upendrakishore's indignant satire in *Modern Review* suggests:

"It is almost as natural for a healthy human animal to kick as it is for a horse or a cow. And kicking is a delightful pastime too. But it is deeply to be deplored that Indians should have maliciously . . . developed very big spleens, which are ruptured at the slightest touch of a human animal's boots, so that the possessors of these enlarged spleens die . . . It is sad . . . what trouble and expense the kickers are put to, and how much of the time of the British Indian Law Courts is wasted ... In order to save kickers ... trouble and expense in future and to prevent the waste of time of the Law Courts, we have invented the Spleen-protector . . ."

In *Abol Tabol* the magical met the real in brilliantly matched words and images. But these nonsense poems specialised in Bengali idiosyncrasies, Their 'untranslatability' stems from the fact that the puns and alliterations ingeniously juxtapose Bengali and English. Sukumar Ray plays with the Bengali resonance of certain English words and images inextricably bound to *bhadrolok* or *babu* culture. That mixture made perfect sense in, the bilingual colonial milieu of urban Calcutta in the early decades of this century. In later time, perhaps only Salman Rushdie has attempted a similar play with words (using by contrast Indian words within novels written in English). Those who can fully appreciate his work must be familiar with both cultures. The outlandish behaviour of Sukumar's characters amused Bengali readers because hardly anyone failed to recognise the originals. This is not true of Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*. *Jabberwocky* was a purely fantastic creature, an idea reinforced by the meaningless words invented for it; but Sukumar's 'Tickle-My-Ribs' was near to that well-known figure, the dreadful bore, who was oblivious of other people's feelings. He repeated his stock of excruciating jokes and expected people to laugh at them every time. Another set of characters, eternally condemned to portentous solemnity, evoked all sorts of memories, especially of self-righteous humbugs at Brahmo prayer meetings. The colonial interaction was prominently also a target. The maudlin 'Blighty Cow' was manifestly a hybrid that surely only colonialism could have produced. The bizarre 'Ekushey Ain' (একুশে আইন) that prevailed in the land of Lord Siva was likely a pointed allusion to the British Raj; under this law one could be fined for merely tripping accidentally. Sukumar was here exposing the absurdity of the laws passed during the *Swadeshi* era but his message was so gossamer-like that it seldom jarred.

Edward Lear's limericks deeply influenced Sukumar Roy. Both of them shared a passion for mingling the surreal with the mundane. Both possessed a flair for standing a perfectly logical statement on its head. Both of them generated funny, gently satirical ideas. Both eschewed sarcasm, malice and ridicule; both left out the cruel and the grotesque. Above all, they were inspired illustrators. And yet their works display significant cultural as well as temperamental differences. Melancholy tinges Lear's verses, whereas Ray's topsy-turvy world is full of robust laughter. The finest instance is perhaps the 'Dream Song', which forms the closing verse of *Abol Tabol*; composed in the last weeks of Sukumar's life, when he was dying from *kala-azar* at the age of thirty-five:

The spirits dance in cloudy vaults.  
Where elephants turn somersaults.  
While flying steeds their wings unfold.  
And naughty boys turn good as gold..  
A keen primordial lunar chill,  
The nightmare's next with bunchy frill –  
My drowsy brain such glimpses steep,

And all my singing ends in sleep.'''

Even if the rhythm and the imagery of the poem lose a lot in translation, as they are bound to, the creative spirit still alive at the approach of death, and the poet's total absence of self-pity, cannot but remind us of other creators in a similar situation, notably Schubert.

Krishnarup Bhattacharya in Sukumar Royer Aschorjo Jogot writes "আপাতত মনে হয় শেষ ছড়াটিতে ('আবোল তাবোল') রূপকথার অনুপম মিষ্টি সৌন্দর্যকল্পনার সঙ্গে ঘুম পাড়াবার সুর মিশে গেছে। কিন্তু সত্যজিৎ ও পার্থ বসু সম্পাদিত 'সমগ্র শিশুসাহিত্য : সুকুমার রায়' (আনন্দ পাবলিশার্স) –এর ভূমিকায় সত্যজিৎ যে খবর দিচ্ছেন, তাতে এই কবিতাটির অন্য একটি অর্থের রহস্য উদ্ভাসিত হয়ে ওঠে : "তাঁর শেষ রচনা ছিল আবোল তাবোলের শেষ কবিতা, যার বিচিত্র মিশ্র রস বাংলা সাহিত্যে চিরকালের বিস্ময়ের বস্তু হয়ে থাকবে। এটি রচনার সময়ে যে তাঁর উপর মৃত্যুর ছায়া পড়েছিল, তার ইঙ্গিত এর শেষ কয়েক ছত্রে আছে-

আদিম কালের চাঁদিম হিম  
তোড়ায় বাঁধা ঘোড়ার ডিম।  
ঘনিয়ে এল ঘুমের ঘোর  
গানের পালা সাঙ্গ মোর।

জীবনমৃত্যুর সন্ধিক্ষণে উপস্থিত হয়ে এমন রসিকতা আর কোনো রসমস্তার পক্ষে সম্ভব হয়েছে বলে জানা নেই। "সতর্ক পাঠকের চোখে পড়বে যে শুধু শেষ চারটি পঙ্ক্তিতে নয়, জীবন নাটকের মঞ্চ থেকে বিদায় নেবার অনুভব কবিতাটির ত্রয়োদশ পঙ্ক্তিতেও আভাসিত হয়েছিল :

"আজকে দাদা যাবার আগে  
বলব যামোর চিত্তে লাগে-"

Like Alice's dream (in "the drowsy hypnagogic period experienced just before falling asleep; at that time, images and apparently random thinking may well up and float freely) Roy's final poem depicts a dream vision, an utopia, a wistful longing for freedom and liberation –'Hethay nisedh nai re dada, Nai re badhon, nai re badha' (হেথায় নিষেধ নাইরে দাদা, নাইরে বাঁধন, নাইরে বাঁধা) that he had advocated in the earlier section of his creation. The poem appears as a vision of India's freedom struggle and nationalist movement. He envisions unrestrained freedom and liberation like the one that only death may offer.

"If it is to be argued that a great volume of verse written with serious intent by mystics, by symbolists, by visionaries is so obscure to the ordinary mind that it may well count as nonsense, then nothing should properly be included in the category if it can be explained by the psychologist or by the interpreter of dreams, and if these soothsayers consider that there is nothing written which cannot be so explained then indeed there is no nonsense at all."

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