

Breezy April

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) (sobriquet Gurudev), the author of *Gitanjali* and the only Indian to have won the Nobel Prize for Literature, was one of the greatest writers the nation has ever produced. With the rare distinction of having penned two national anthems—India's *Jana Gana Mana* and Bangladesh's *Amar Shonar Bangla* (Our Golden Bengal)—and founded the Visva Bharati University, he was awarded the Knighthood in 1915, but he returned it in 1919 in protest against the Jallianwallabagh Massacre. Tagore's influence over Mahatma Gandhi and other founders of modern India was immense.

The youngest of thirteen children, Tagore was born into a highly influential family in Calcutta on 7 May 1861. His parents were Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi. He started to compose poems at the age of eight. His first book of poems appeared when he was 17. Tagore received his early education from various tutors and schools. He studied law at University College, London, but left after a year because of his dislike for the English climate. In 1883 Tagore married Mrinalini Devi Raichaudhuri, by whom he had two sons and three daughters. His wife died in 1902. The following year one of his daughters died, and he lost his younger son in 1907. After an eventful life, Tagore died on 7 August 1941 at the age of 81.

Most of Tagore's works were originally written in Bengali, but later on translated by himself into English. His oeuvre fills up 30 volumes—poems and songs, short stories, novels, plays, history, textbooks, and treatises on pedagogy. Tagore turned to painting at the age of 70 and became a prolific painter. Being a music composer, he has composed 2,230 songs.

'Breezy April' is one of Tagore's best known nature poems. A short lyric poem in the form of an ode, it begins with an address to the month of April. April, the month of regeneration and rebirth, is personified. The apostrophe to April gives a personal touch to the poem. It reinforces the man–nature relationship. The poem is filled with the quickening resonance of resurgence in nature, the hum and bustle of life after the long freezing north Indian winter. In the introduction to *Gitanjali*, W.B. Yeats wrote in 1912, 'These lyrics—... full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention—display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long.'

Breezy April

Breezy April, vagrant April,
Rock me in your swing of music;
Thrill my branches with enchantment
At your touch of sweet surprises.

In my life-dream by the wayside 5
You come startling me from slumber,
Wilful in your mood fantastic
Courting, teasing, and inconstant.

Breezy April, vagrant April, 10
Living with my lonesome shadows,
I know all your fitful fancies
Leafy language, flitting footsteps.

All my boughs break into blossom,
At your passing breath and whisper,
All my leaves break into tumult 15
Of surrender at your kisses.

Tagore is a great poet of nature which exercised great influence in shaping him as a poet. In "Breezy April" he looks at the mystery of the breeze in the month of April with a feeling of wonder. Nature appealed to him as it did to Wordsworth. He loved the outward appearance of nature, her grandeur, her beauty, her colour and her sounds. In the short lyric "Breezy April" he gives a subtle expression to the sensuous delight in the world of nature. His descriptions are marked by accuracy of perception and description. How

minutely and picturesquely he describes the hum and bustle of life in nature after the long freezing winter in north India. He is less concerned with the mere sensuous manifestations in nature than with the spiritual significance underlying these manifestations. To him nature, man and God are one and the same. Like Wordsworth he thinks that there is a harmony between the spirit of nature and the mind of man. Being a romantic mystic, he loses himself in his contemplation of nature as seen in this short poem.

Tagore had great command over English and he artistically used it to express his spiritual vision. The words chosen by him are all easy, simple and highly suggestive. Even colloquial idioms are not rare in Tagore's verses. Sometimes a single word is artistically used to make the meaning clear as we find in "leafy language" and "life-dream". Simplicity and sublimity run together in poems as "Breezy April". Tagore is a great metrical artist. He tried verse-forms and prose-poems. As Edward Thompson says, Tagore's poetic prose is an "impeccable metrical achievement".

Imagery is all pervasive in Tagore's poetry. He uses numerous beautiful images, romantic metaphors and suggestive symbols. We find direct images as "Rock me in your swing of music" and figurative images expressing his visions "you come startling me from slumber". Sometimes he uses reciprocal images and romantic images. For instance in "Breezy April" he says "All my boughs break into blossom. At your passing breath and whisper" The trees and the breeze appear to be excited.

There is a profusion of nature-imagery in Tagore's poems. "Breezy April" expresses not only his intense love of nature but also his minute observation of its beauties and charms. Water imagery, flower imagery and light and darkness recur

in Tagore's poems. "Boughs breaking into blossom" in "Breeze
April" seem to symbolise the poet's yearning for complete
identification with the Supreme.

Tagore was like Wordsworth a mystic-romantic poet who
added from his imagination a new light to what he saw or
heard. His romanticism finds expression in his feeling of awe
and wonder at creation, at nature and at humanity. It is closely
related to his inherent mysticism. An Indian critic called him
"Vak-pati", the master of words because we can never
substitute even a single word used by him, for it will then destroy
the sense, spirit and intrinsic beauty of the poem.