

150th Anniversary of Kuka Movement

(Prof. Hazara Singh)

The following celebrations were held at national level during 2007 :

150th anniversary of the 1857 - Revolt by the Bengal Sepoys of the East India Company on May 10 acclaiming it as India's First War of Independence ;

Diamond Jubilee of Independence on August 15

and

the birth centenary of martyr Bhagat Singh on September 28.

Such celebrations need to be objectively assessed for imparting their precise impact at national level.

The terming of 1857-Revolt (regarded as mutiny by the British) as India's First War of Independence leads to the implied recognition that the earlier invasions from north-west were not acts of foreign aggression but had been a chain of home-coming by the natives despite their being marauders. If this is accepted as a historical fact then the heroic deeds of Indian patriots and reformers prior to the advent of East India Company would appear as acts of treason. Any resentment against the demolition of religious places would not only be misplaced but amount to sheer vandalism. If the invasions from north-west had been continual aggression, then the acclaiming of 1857-Revolt by a few detachments of Bengal Sepoys as India's First War of Independence is a misnomer.

In fact our approach to historical events had been casual if not distorted. The redemarcation of Bengal into two provinces in 1905 was resented as partition, whereas the separation of Burma from India in 1937 was accepted as a prerogative of the British. It would be worthwhile to note that Lokmanya Bal Ganga Dhar Tilak (1856-1920), who spearheaded a sustained campaign for swadesi

and swaraj, did not accept the 1857-Revolt as an uprising of the masses, because beyond Mogulserai in the east and Jhansi in the south-west, there were no noteworthy protests.

The Punjab Government took a corrective step by deciding to observe the 150th anniversary of Namdhari (Kuka) Movement at a state-level function at Bhaini Sahib on April 15, 2007. Ram Singh, founder of the Namdhari sect, adored as Satguru (preceptor of truth) had been a soldier of the Khalsa Army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. After the demise of Maharaja in 1839, he got fed-up by the intrigues of his survivors and the gradual departure from lofty ideals of Khalsa Raj. In disgust, he left the army service in 1845 and returned to his native place, Bhaini, near Ludhiana. But after the annexation of Punjab by the East India Company in 1849, the provocative activities of patronized missionaries and the demoralization of the disarmed Khalsa Army awakened his national pride. He resolved to restore the glorious values of sovereign secular Khalsa Rule. It was on the Baisakhi of 1857, about four weeks earlier than the revolt of Bengal Sepoys on May 10, that Satguru Ram Singh founded the Sant Khalsa. It enjoined a strict code of simple pious living attuned to Naam (Name of God). The new sect began to be called Namdharis accordingly.

As in their ecstasy they often indulged into loud shrieks (called kuks in Punjabi) the epithet Kuka also got added to Namdhari. Because wearing of kirpans was resented by the East India Company regime, the Kukas began to carry sticks (lathis). Mass physical drills formed a part and parcel of their congregations. The Namdharis were the first to start a parallel self-rule by introducing their own postal system for maintaining secrecy about their activities. They settled all mutual disputes through *sabhas* (panchyats) instead of petitioning to courts. Child marriage, infanticide, sati and all such practices, derogatory to dignity of women, were forbidden. Education through mother tongue was encouraged so that the taught remained acquainted with their cultural heritage. The campaign was the forerunner of the non-co-operation movements launched by Mahatma Gandhi from 1921 onwards. The

British did not take kindly to the growing activities of the Namdharis, as they were reviving the national pride and martial spirit of the ruled.

The opening of a chain of slaughterhouses by the British for providing beef to the colonial army was resented by the Namdharis. The sentiment for cow-protection was exploited by the British to incite clashes between Namdharis and the local butchers. After one such encounter sixty six Kukas were blown off without any trial by L. Cowan, Deputy Commissioner, Ludhiana on January 17-18, 1872. The executed included Bishen Singh, a teenager, who was hacked to pieces. Satguru Ram Singh was deported to Rangoon where he passed away in 1885. **As per its aims and goal, the foundation of *Sant Khalsa* on the Baisakhi of 1857 deserves to be acclaimed as the declaration of India's First War of Independence.**

Baba Sheikh Farid Ganj -i- Shakar

(Prof. Hazara Singh)

Baba Sheikh Farid Ganj-i-Shakar is not the baptised name, but a galaxy of venerable modes of address with which Farid-ud-Din (1175-1265), who used Masud as his pen-name, began to be adored after his death by his devotees. The elders are called respectfully *Baba* in Iran, Afghanistan and Northern India.

Sheikh (Urdu writers spell it as *Shaikh*, while the Punjabi ones as *Sheikh* in respective transliteration) is a reverential religious title among Muslims for *sufis* (mystics) who are variedly referred to as *khwaja*, *pir* or *sultan*. Farid in Arabic means 'rare' which indeed Masud had been. The epithet *ganj-i-shakar* stands for 'a treasure of sweetness' which eulogises the modest and sympathetic temper of the seer. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, Professor of History, Muslim University, Aligarh, in his well documented book *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar* (1955) provides comprehensive information about Shaikh Farid. Farid-ud-Din's grandfather was a part of the exodus of scholars, artisans and of other such careerists who considered it expedient to migrate to Northern India from Kabul when Afghanistan was trampled by hordes of Mongols during the eleventh century. The Mongols were given to mass plunder, carnage and arson leading to vandalism.

The eleventh century marks a watershed in the history of India as well. The caste-based Indian society, bereft of social equality and dignity of individual had been stagnating under barren rituals and silly superstitions. Concepts like social welfare had no place in that set-up. India had been divided into hostile princedoms which invited unscrupulously foreign invaders even for settling personal scores. In due course the throne at Delhi got occupied by the Slave Dynasty of Turkish origin, which foreboded the liquidation of native Rajput power and the gradual subjugation of Hindustan at large. Delhi began to be developed as a city of minarets, mosques and

pleasure parks, with a *khanqah* (preaching centre of Muslim mystics) here and there in its suburbs.

Multan, near the confluence of Chenab and Ravi, which had been a halting place for the migrants coming through Bolan pass had acquired importance as a seat of Quranic learning and Muslim mysticism. It was the theological glimmering of Multan which induced the elders of Baba Farid to proceed towards it instead of their getting enamoured by the growing royal glory of Delhi.

Lineage and Religious Grooming

Farid-ud-Din was the second son of Jamal-ud-Din Sulaiman born at Kahtwal near Multan. (Year of birth is stated conflictingly as 1173 and 1175 by different writers). His early education had been under the strict supervision of his mother, Qarsum Bibi, a pious devout housewife. He later shifted to Multan for further learning from where he left, as advised, for Delhi at which place the legend, that Farid became, began to unfold itself as the stem of a religious order called the Chishti Silsilah. His teacher Khwaja Qutab-ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, was an erudite mystic who preached and practised the gospel of oneness of God through selfless service of mankind. An authentic source which throws light on various aspects of Farid's life is *Fawaid-ul-Fuad* by Amin Hasan Sijzi which is a chronicle of conversation that Sheikh Nizam-ud-Din Auliya, next in silsilah succession to Baba Farid, used to have with his predecessor. In this book, Farid is all through referred to as Masud, his pen-name, which confirms that the honorific terms with which he is adored got adopted later. Even Ajodhan, a *pattan*, (place for crossing a river on boat; ferry) where Baba Farid chose to settle in his later years, began to be called Pak Pattan, (sacred ferry) by the pilgrims after his demise. All tales about the pebbles or mud getting sweetened in his mouth, the changing of *gur* into salt, etc. seem to be floated in due course by his devotees, as blind faith creates myths.

Secular Outlook

It is not the loftiness of Baba Farid as a theologian, but the soothing effect of his secular activities which is being stressed

herein. Prof. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami in his publication *ibid.* epitomises the impact of Baba Farid on his followers as :

‘Muslim mysticism is, in its essence, a message of love. It aims at creating harmony in the discordant elements of society. True to these ideals, Baba Farid strove day and night to create that atmosphere of love and good-will which was, and even today is, the greatest desideratum of human society. A healthy social order – free from dissensions, conflicts, discriminations, hatred and jealousy – was the thing he longed for. In love, faith, toleration and sympathy which included even the enemy, he found the supreme talisman of human happiness. “Do not give me scissors”, he told a visitor who had presented him a pair of scissors, “give me a needle. I sew. I do not cut”. (pp.1-2)

The treatise of Prof. Nizami interests primarily those who have a working knowledge of Persian. But the monograph *Baba Sheikh Farid – His Life and Teachings* by Gurbachan Singh Talib, published by the Punjabi University, Patiala, in 1973 to commemorate the eighth birth centenary of Baba Farid, describes in a lucid style the prolific contribution of the seer to various aspects of human development.

Association with Faridkot

Principal Talib refers to the association of Baba Farid with Faridkot (then called Mokhalhar) in 1225 as:

‘..... Faridkot would be on the road from Delhi and Hansi to Ajodhan... Here Sheikh Farid is reported to have been drafted into forced labour by the men of a Hindu Chief, Mokhal. But seeing the miraculous lifting of basket of sand a cubit over his head, the people fell at his feet, and the chief too begged for forgiveness. The saint blessed the place at the show of repentance by the chief, and in grateful remembrance the place was named after him, Faridkot (the fort of Farid). That name it still bears and its inhabitants deeply love and cherish the association of their town with the great saint....’ (pp.11-12)

Pioneer of Punjabi Verse

In spite of his early education in Persian and Arabic, Masud chose to communicate his precepts through Multani dialect of Punjabi. This added to the efficacy of his preaching because his sweet expression in the language, which his congregation understood, made the impact of his precepts instantaneous and deep.

Guru Nanak Dev, almost three centuries after the demise of Baba Farid was impressed by the enlightening and fascinating aspect of Farid’s writings in Punjabi. The Fifth Nanak, Guru Arjan Dev, while compiling the *Adi Granth* included therein 112 *shalokas* (couplets) and 4 *shabads* (hymns) by Baba Farid. This had been a rare recognition of the teachings of Farid who sparkled as a bright star in the age of dreading despotism, degrading social iniquity and debasing theological bigotry.

In the opening lines of his poem ‘*Hindustani Bachhon ke Qaumi Geet*’ (National Song for Indian Children), written as early as 1905, Dr Mohammed Iqbal eulogises Baba Farid as :

*‘Chishti ne jis zamin mein paigham-i-Haq sunaya
Nanak ne jis chaman mein wahidit ke geet Gaya*

.....
Mera watan wuhi hai, mera watan wuhi hai’

*(The land where Chishti preached his gospel of truth
The garden where Nanak sang about oneness of God*

.....
My motherland is that, my motherland is that)

(Bang-i-Dra, Part I)

Adi Granth happens to be the only source available for research on Baba Farid’s poetry. Recently Sayyid Babar Ali brought out in Urdu *Kalam Baba Farid Shakar-i-Ganj*, (Pictures Ltd, Lahore, 1984). It includes within pictorial margins the *shalokas* and *shabads* of Baba Farid in Urdu script as they appear in *Adi Granth*. In the next part they are reproduced in alignment both in *Shahmukhi* and *Gurmukhi* scripts with comprehensive footnotes. This scholarly work has been dedicated to Sardar Harcharan Singh Brar (Chief Minister Punjab 1995-96), the author’s classmate at

Aechson College, Lahore during the pre-partition years. Some such exercise be emulated in Gurmukhi and Devnagri scripts for effective extension of the message of Baba Farid at national level through universities having Baba Farid Chairs.

Baba Farid had been prominent among the seers who sanctified the secular practices through righteous conduct. The Khanqahs/Dargahs at Nizam-ud-Din near Delhi, Ajmer and Ajodhan (Pak Pattan) are the citadels of that unique cultural heritage which disapproves social inequality, human exploitation, and intolerance erupting from fanaticism. The menacingly growing theological obscurantism and the militant terrorism brewing in its lap are quite reminiscent of the vandalism which the Mongols perpetrated mercilessly a millennium earlier.

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Religion, Science and Literature

(Prof. Hazara Singh)

Religion has been a quest for truth. Science has also been defined as a systematised effort to discover it. If the destination of both which have greatly influenced human destiny, is the same, where does the difference between them lie? Religion had been preaching unflinching faith in God, and forbidding a searching look into the working of nature on the plea that God's Will is absolute. The theologians denounced all such strivings and the entrepreneurs were despised and punished. Science does not accept a fact for granted, unless it has been ascertained. The basic difference between the two disciplines in their approach towards truth makes their paths diametrically opposed to each other. Science demands an independent way of thinking and religion disfavours it on the plea that Divine Will, having been revealed through His chosen prophets, needs no further scrutiny.

Religion is primarily based on moral canons which aim at making the human life noble, pious and good. The approach of religion towards life in certain respects is negatives, as it prescribes many taboos. It tends to make people lead good lives on earth by offering them heaven as a reward after death. It warns sternly that on being allured to follow the path of sin, they would be dooming themselves to hell. Science strives for the intellectual enlightenment and is neutral in its ethical approach. It does not bother to give the verdict whether an act or a fact is good or bad, because its function is to determine whether it is correct or incorrect.

Religion had been attaching too much importance to life after death and regarding the one on earth as a mere temporary phase. Science has discovered that the human evolution on globe has been an act of great achievement and there is nothing to feel repentant about it, as the Biblical Story of Creation suggests. The scientific inventions have scanned the universe and have exploded the myth of heaven above and hell beneath.

Many a religion had been glorifying poverty as a divine blessing. It had been prescribed as a sure passport to heaven. The pernicious contentment injected into the masses through the glorification of poverty made them reconcile with a life spent in squalor, starvation and disease. Progressive thought inspired by scientific approach towards life has revealed that poverty is not God-made but political injustice, economic exploitation and social indignity. The progress achieved through scientific civilization makes many of us proclaim that heaven on earth is better than the one after death.

In spite of the fact that all religions of the world had been based on fundamental virtues like truth, mercy, restraint, humility, etc., and had been proclaiming 'Where love is, God is', the bloodshed committed in the name of religion and the devastation caused under its banner make the historians shudder. It failed to unify humanity. Even people professing the same religion had not been able to shed the prejudices of colour and race.

Science during the brief period of three hundred years or so had removed many misunderstandings and has knit the world into a sort of a global unit. The use of science for selfless service of mankind has been suggested by many eminent scientists as the best mode of divine worship. It has led to a crusade against poverty, want, disease and ignorance.

Science had not been an unmixed blessing. The industrial revolution ushered in the evils like unemployment and imperialism. The rich became richer and the poor became poorer. The world was divided into the rulers and the ruled. The exploitation of underdeveloped countries by technically advanced nations is a cruel chapter in the history of mankind.

In spite of the material comforts provided by industrial progress, an average man suffers from restlessness. The belief in the struggle for existence and the cry of survival of the fittest have tolled knell of moral restraint, sympathy and respect for elders.

The era of plenty and prosperity ushered in by science may be praiseworthy, but the constant threat, which the armoury of thermonuclear weapons holds to the very existence of human race,

makes even the sanest among us feel quite uncertain about the future of not only of the human beings but also that of almost the entire biological world. A scientist warned that the third global war is not necessary to destroy the world. If six hydrogen bombs wrapped in a cobalt case be exploded at the North Pole, the ice which had been piling up in the Arctic Ocean for ages will thaw and evaporate to form clouds within a matter of minutes. This tremendous thaw precipitating in the form of rain will lead to a rise in the level of sea by many feet. The wall of water rushing with a terrific speed will devastate all shores. All principal cities of the world are situated on shores. They will be submerged under water. The discharge of rivers into the seas will be blocked, leading to the flooding of land around them. The sudden rush of water from the North Pole towards equator may even lead to a violent earthquake. The depression in the atmospheric pressure will cause continuous torrential rains leading to doomsday.

Science, during peace, is equally dangerous. It has given us many means of quick transport. Statistics reveal that the Vietnam War did not cause as many casualties in a year as the Americans, killed in road accidents, within the States during the same period.

The pollution of water and air which has been let loose by the automobiles and industrial complexes holds a foreboding that this planet will become unfit for human habitation after decades.

The terrific rate at which the human population is increasing and the longevity which has been assured by numerous advances in medical science confirm that the population of the world is likely to be doubled within half a century. The scramble for food, leisure and privacy may start then. How it will end is only anybody's guess.

The genes which the biologists have synthesized also hold out a threat that ambitious politicians with the aid of unscrupulous scientists may plan to dominate the globe with artificially bred superior armies.

Religion did not succeed to any appreciable extent in transforming mankind, because it could not inculcate in its followers a religious way of living. With respectable exceptions here and there, it either turned them into impatient recluses or trigger-happy

fanatics. Science is leading the world towards its doom, because it has brought about intellectual awakening and bestowed material comforts upon mankind at the cost of moral laxity. The world may still be saved from such a catastrophe, if a proper co-ordination between religion and science is brought about.' *Can it be done? Who will do it? How will it be achieved?* We should be confident of achieving such an aim. Literature can shoulder this onerous job. Religion in the absence of a rational evolution has been fabricated into mythology and superstitions. Science on getting bereft of the moral restraint preached by religion has led to making man avaricious as well as egotistical. Thus, he has lost control over his own self.

Literature has been defined as the mirror of life. It is imperative to be clear about the image of the ideal life which literature should present and uphold.

In the past, men of letters, too had been the victims of many inhibitions and injurious complexes. The glorification of war had been a favourite theme with many of them. No doubt, it inspired the composition of thrilling ballads and epics, but the arousing of passions simply led to the widening of gap among people. A source of pride for one section was an occasion of humiliation for the other.

Mythological beliefs led to the production of fine pieces of literature. But the attribution of human talents to the boons of gods and goddesses did not allow self-confidence to develop among the masses. They became fatalists. Chance and destiny began to be regarded as more powerful than the human endeavour and perseverance.

Literature had also been misused by money-crazy publishers to corrupt the public taste through pornography. The cheap taste, perpetuated through works displaying nudity and sex, led to a lot of degeneration in social and moral attitudes.

During the past three centuries, the ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Freud and Karl Marx led to revolutionary changes in the way of looking at life. Rousseau raised the slogan of liberty, fraternity, equality and democracy. He made these ideas the keynotes

of his life and books. One of them gave birth to the French Revolution. The other presented a new concept of education, suggesting free expression and the use of a worthy practice in place of barren precept.

Freud elaborated the science of psychology. He emphasized the importance of study of man in relation to his environments and his reaction to them, instead of judging him with the time-worn standards based on heredity and tradition.

Karl Marx gave a new interpretation to history and attributed all the ills of society to class struggles.

The cumulative impact of writings and findings of these thinkers led to great social, economic and political changes. Inspired by the ideas of Rousseau, P.B. Shelley perceived man:

*'Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
Over himself: Just, gentle, wise: but man'.*

The goal before the men of letters today is to unite mankind with such a clear view of truth as makes all discord and conflict among them diminish. Condemnation of war in all of its forms and the denunciation of prejudices which divide humanity should receive greater attention from them. The vision that time is not far off, when none on this globe will be naked, starved, ignorant, shelterless and sick, should offer a higher inspiration than the narrow patriotic considerations, racial superiorities and ideological conflicts.

Racial segregation and the imperialistic designs offer grave threats to human dignity as well as to liberty in the present-day world. Science has given brutal power to a technically advanced minority to govern ruthlessly an underdeveloped majority. When the surgeons successfully transplanted the heart of a Black into the body of a White, the men of letters should have availed themselves of this theme to expose how superfluous the racial prejudices are.

Though the skin may differ, yet beneath it the blood and flesh have similar qualities and throbs. William Shakespeare in his play *Merchant of Venice* through the mouth of Shylock proclaims a universal truth. The Jew voices the protest of the entire wronged

humanity.

*“Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs,
dimensions, senses, affections, and passions? Fed with
the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to
the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed
and cooled by the same summer and winter as a
Christian is?”*

If you prick us do we not bleed?

If you tickle us do we not laugh?

If you poison us do we not die?”

Replace the word ‘Jew’ by either a Negro – contemptuously called a nigger by his White countrymen – or by an unfortunate person belonging, just by chance of birth, to a minority community in a theocratic state, or by a trampled subject in a ruthlessly governed colony, or by an underpaid labourer in an industrial complex, and the word–‘Christian’ by the corresponding counterpart of a supercilious White, a fanatic belonging to a religious majority, a stone-hearted imperialist, a profit-crazy industrilist, the wails of humanity get aptly echoed. The remedy too has been incidentally suggested :

*‘We all are brothers, irrespective of creed,
race, place of birth and station’.*

Rabindra Nath Tagore in one of his stories, ‘Cabuliwala’, depicts this truth in a still loftier manner. The two male characters of the story, Rehman and the Bengali Babu, have apparently nothing in common between themselves, as they belong to different nationalities, religions and professions. But the subtle art of writer finds a common bond between the two. Both are fathers. One enjoys the bliss of paternal affection and the other yearns to be reunited with his long-separated daughter, the only child in a far-off land. The Bengali Babu curtails the unnecessary expenditure on the marriage of his daughter to enable Rehman to go back to his native place for meeting his daughter with the money, thus, spared. The story aims at bringing mankind closer.

Take another literary piece of Tagore. In his discourse ‘Power and Progress’ he reveals how a plane of the Royal Indian Air Force

sent on a mission of bombardment on a hamlet in the no-man’s land bordering on the former North-Western Frontier Province in the united India had to manage a forced landing owing to some engine trouble amidst the destruction caused by it. The English pilot apprehended that the people, maddened with grief and revenge, would rush at him with daggers in their hands and hack him to pieces. A Pathan damsel came running reminding her people that whosoever came to their place, irrespective of his being a friend or a foe, was their guest and, according to their traditions, was to be extended protection and hospitality. How the scientific progress crashed before the culture of an underdeveloped people. Science has given us means to conquer nature as well as to subdue human beings. But it is only literature which can teach us how to rise superior to our passions and, thus, become sublime.

Literature should not be subordinated to political ideologies, as has been done in a few totalitarian countries. If Golden Age is assured to people, but at the same time, the political system strives to keep them in an iron cage, channeling their thinking into pre-planned ruts, man ceases to be supreme amongst God’s creatures.

The problems posed by dreaded population explosion and atmospheric pollution have to be solved through other means. But how to live with grace, restraint and love in the world of plenty and prosperity is to be suggested by the men of letters. The moral sweetness of religion and the logic of science have been blended through this stanza :

*‘Where present is faced and not escaped
Past is not praised led by blind faith
And the mirage of future casts no spell
Such attitudes lead to a rewarding quest’.*

Tagore and Shakespeare

(Prof. Hazara Singh)

A few remarks of English politicians and even men of letters about Shakespeare put me to serious heart-searching and head-scratching. In their urge to extol Shakespeare, they displayed a lot of ignorance about the culture, literature and heritage of other countries and appeared to be rabid propagandists of imperialism.

Carlyle in his celebrated essay 'The Poet as a Hero', observed that, called upon to choose between the British Empire and Shakespeare the English would prefer the latter. The rugged Scot outraged and disparaged the vast Empire, which represented a rich heritage of superb cultures. The Duke of Marlborough exclaimed that all the knowledge of English history which he possessed, was gathered by him from the plays of Shakespeare. The landmarks in English history like Magna Carta which preceded Shakespeare and played an outstanding role in the shaping of English Parliament find no mention in all the 39 plays of this renowned dramatist. Shakespeare creates anachronisms and displays utter geographical ignorance about many places. Matthew Arnold spoke of Shakespeare in a sonnet as follows :

*Others abide our question. Thou art free
We ask and ask. Thou smilest and art still
Out-topping knowledge. For the loftiest hill
Who to the stars uncrowns his majesty
Planting his steadfast footsteps in the sea,
Making the heaven of heavens his dwelling place
Spare but the cloudy border of his base
To the foiled searching of mortality.*

This is a full-throated tribute to Shakespeare by an imaginative poet and a celebrated critic, appreciative in spirit but exaggerated in expression.

It is not my intention to find fault with the art of Shakespeare. Rather I am simply trying to point out that Carlyle was prejudiced, Marlborough ignorant and Matthew Arnold hyperbolic. We have a man of letters in India, who was an artist, poet, novelist, dramatist, calligraphist, and in the words of Dr S. Radhakrishnan 'the poet of the 20th century'. He surpasses Shakespeare in his scholarship, art and insight. This towering figure is Rabindra Nath Tagore, in whose literary works the oppressed humanity sees ray of hope, the lovers of literature discover redeeming knowledge and even profound philosophers find an innovative approach. I present here only a few contrasts.

Though an unsurpassed descriptive artist, not even missing to note dew drops sparkling on dry blade of grass in the morning. Shakespeare had a rather perverted view of mankind. He is convinced that only the rich merchants, generals and princes are fit to become the heroes of his plays. Whenever common people appear in his works, they are presented as uncouth jesters and clowns. True, Shakespeare lived in a predominantly feudalistic society, not yet rocked by the slogan of equality, fraternity and liberty. Son of a butcher or a wool-trader, he did not get chance of pursuing higher education. If he could become an artist, acceptable to the Puritan Milton, why should he deride, satirize and misrepresent that stock of posterity, which is the very salt of human race? Shakespearean art is amusing, often thrilling, yet devoid of clear vision or message. He witnessed the cruel religious intolerance of his age, yet never protested against it. There were signs of disintegration in his nation; as a civil war was in the offing. Shakespeare did not care. His art amused society but did not enlighten it. Each and every work of Tagore strives for this lofty yearning to diagnose and to heal. Take his story "Cabuliwala". Apparently the two male characters of the story. Rehman and the Bengali Babu (Bhadur Lok), have little in common, Rehman, a Muslim by faith, Aryan by race, and a Pathan by nationality is a hefty hawker in the streets of Calcutta. He comes from a dry land, where the mountains are rugged, nature is harsh, and the people are illiterate. No doubt he is honest at heart, but for settling disputes, he prefers to use his knife to the advancing of an argument. The Bengali Babu, Mongoloid by race and Indian by

nationality, believes in Hindu faith. He lives in cosmopolitan Calcutta and is a writer by profession. The sky there is often covered with dark clouds inspiring poetic fancies. The subtle art of Tagore creates an invisible relationship between the two. The Bengali Babu lives with his family enjoying the bliss of paternal affection. Rehman suffers from the pangs of separation, and the only consolation he gets is the occasional look at the crumpled paper bearing the impression of his daughter's palm. Though outwardly there is nothing in common between the two, yet both Rehman and the Babu, are fathers. One realises the hardship of another father, yearning to meet his lonely child in a far off land, and readily cuts the unnecessary expenses on the marriage of his only daughter, so that with the money, thus saved, an anguished person may return home and meet his long separated daughter. Through its latent sympathy the story has served more than its purpose of uniting mankind.

Characterization of Shakespeare jolts in a few deep ruts. His heroines are as a rule orphan; the rich are wise and the poor clownish. The heroines always display their best in male attire, may be because his art is subordinate to the stage. Actually he has heroines and no heroes; the male characters are mediocres and the women superlatively virtuous, enlightened or villainous.

Rabindra Nath Tagore is a prophet speaking for oppressed humanity. He felt sorely the curse of imperialism and was depressed by a society consisting of touch-me-nots and untouchables. His play *Mukatdhara* foresaw a liberator, Dhananjaya Vairagi practising non-violent and truthful means to fight against a callous administration. *Natir Puja* is an artistic indictment of untouchability and religious intolerance. *Chandalika* is a fascinating study of the human mind, the depths to which it can fall and the sublimity it can achieve. The down-trodden sections of society find freely a place as heroes and heroines of Tagore, without his being a committed ideologue. He beautifully puts forth that wisdom is not the exclusive monopoly of the rich, nor folly and unshared heritage of the poor. His art is independent of the stage requisites. He wants to usher in an era.

*'Where the mind is without fear
And the head is held high'*.

Such exalted expressions are rare in Shakespeare; Shylock protesting against the high-handedness of Christians may provide a solitary example. As the art of Shakespeare is subordinate to the stage he has often to amuse the groundlings. Lines and paras, sometimes pages from his plays, had to be deleted to make them presentable to persons of superior taste. As is well known, Tolstoy on reading Shakespeare suffered much repulsion, weariness, and bewilderment. Indeed he was not prepared to admit Shakespeare as a writer of great genius. Tagore is invariably rekindled in his language and presentation.

Shakespeare presents the English crowd of carpenters, cobblers and other workers of his time in the streets of Rome in the play *Julius Ceaser*; unaware of the fact that manual labour was a disqualification for Roman citizenship. In *Merchant of Venice* the imprint mentioned on the gold coin is that of Queen Elizabeth I, whose reign cannot by any stretch of imagination be made to synchronize with the Augustean Era in Roman History. The forest of Orleans in France, as mentioned in *As You Like it*, is the wood near Stratford, the birth-place of Shakespeare.

This appraisal is merely suggestive and not exhaustive.