
A Pictorial Tribute to Rabindranath Tagore, Inspired by His Nature Songs¹

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About the Artist

Anirban Ray participated in the 4th (2007) and 5th (2008) Annual Exhibitions of a “Children Art & Craft School” named “Ankanalaya” held in the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata. He participated thrice in the “Charukala Barshik Pradarshani O Utsav,” organised every year by “Rajya Charukala Parshad.” His paintings were displayed in the “Utsav” section in three successive years: *Shri* (2009), *Mahishasur Mardini* (2010), and *Saraswati* (2011).

Aesthetic statement

Nature’s infinite creativity is manifested in myriads of creations – geological and biological. The foliage of plants, the arrangements and colours of petals, the zoological features of animals, the patterns of rocks, the topographies of landscapes, and the constant changes in atmosphere – express Nature’s desire to make everything unique and priceless. Nature can either be captured in a landscape study on canvas after careful observations of its objects, extent, proportions, locations, or we can create an unreal, yet ideal visual space where the decorative patterns of Nature can be selectively separated from their mingled profusions and rendered painstakingly through visually pleasing strokes and colours (as in Indian miniatures and murals). I’ve tried to capture the glimpses of Nature in ornate compositions inspired by the pictorial qualities perceived in Rabindranath Tagore’s Nature songs. They evoke the images of ever-shifting marvels of Nature in response to the changes of seasons, each of which offers its own delights of the five senses.

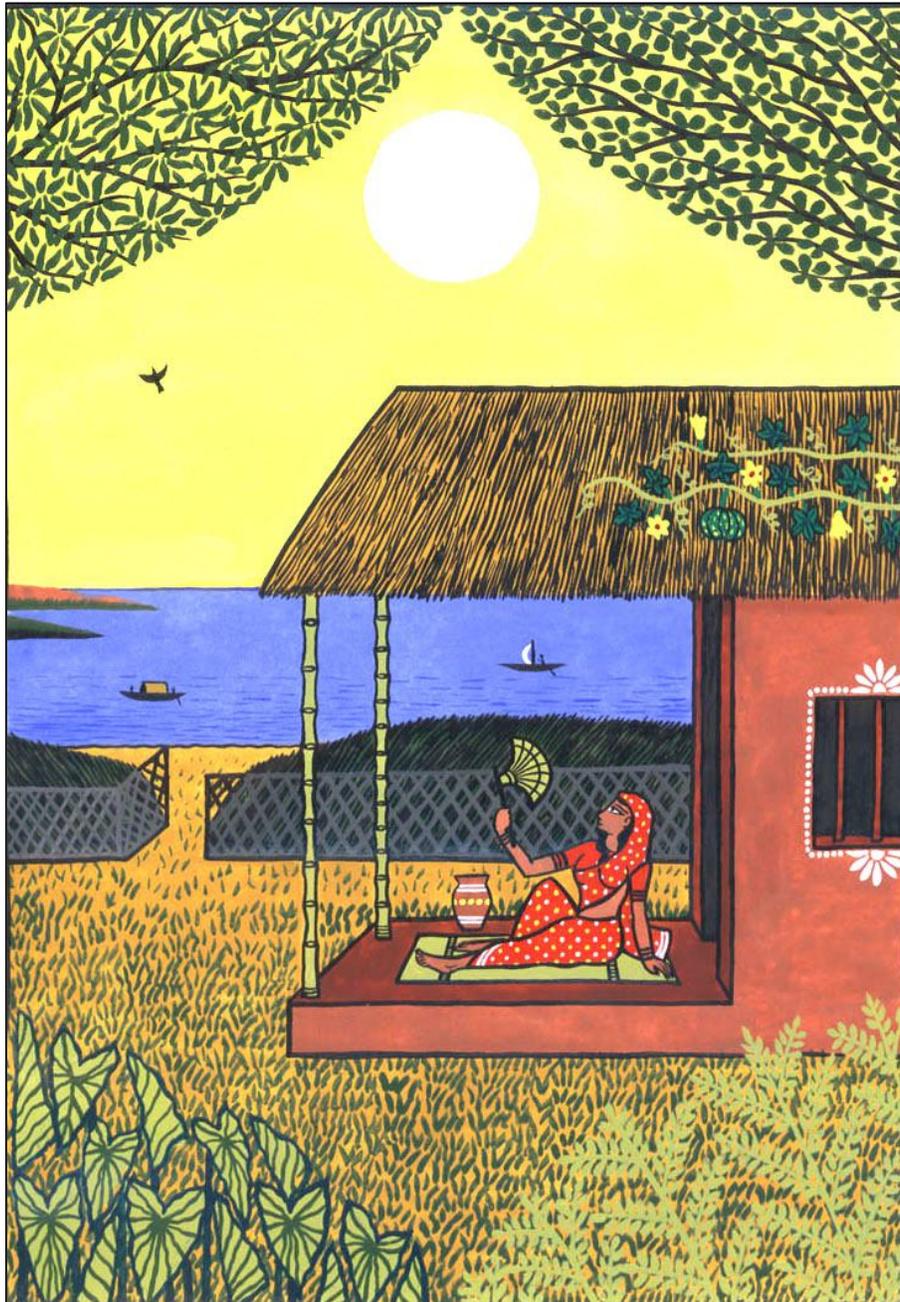
The Paintings

Description of each painting (in second paragraph) is preceded by a brief observation of Tagore’s songs on the season corresponding to it (in first paragraph).

Tagore’s summer songs (2: 431–436) are meditative and contemplative. Just as the physical world outside is dried up and cries for refreshing showers, in the inner mental world the thirst for fulfillment torments. Despite its burning heat, summer promises abundant fruitfulness, and beckons the life-giving monsoon to appear.

The *Summer* painting captures a quiet moment of summer afternoon. As the sun is ablaze at its zenith, pervading the entire sky with light and heat, a fatigued village wife is seeking rest on her mat in the shaded verandah of her thatched hut. She is fanning herself and is lost in daydreams.

Summer

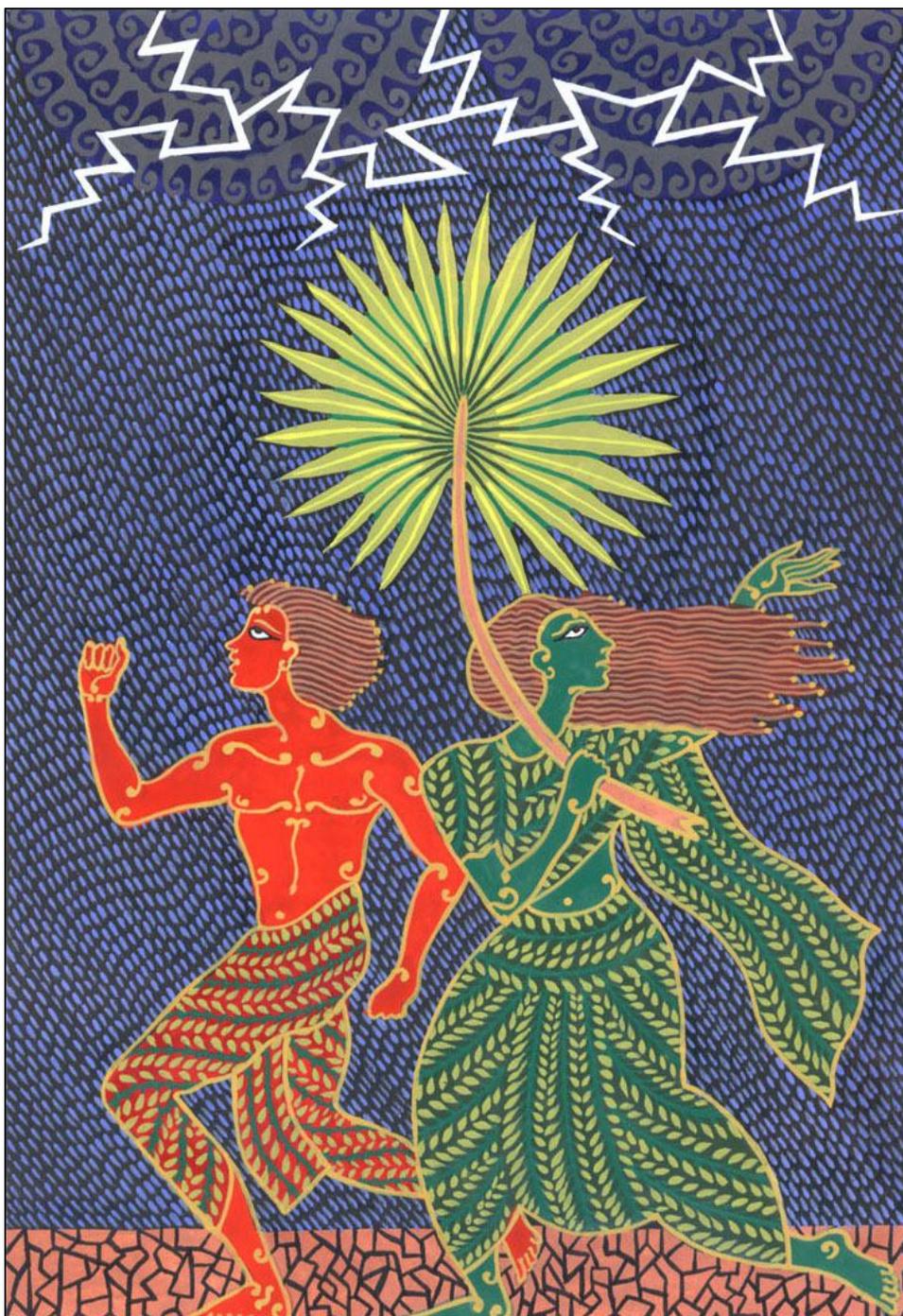


Tagore's monsoon songs (2: 437-480) fully celebrate the vivacity of life. After the scorching heat of summer, the showers appear in restless vigour, and the mind and the body respond to their vibrant rhythm. Monsoon rejuvenates and emancipates, but is chaotic and destructive as well.

In the *Monsoon* painting, as the dark sky is lit by the lightning generated amidst the swirling rain clouds from which are descending torrential showers to drench the dried

up, cracked earth, a couple is running out to welcome the storm. The dual spirit of monsoon – its destructive and reviving aspects – is symbolised in the scarlet-coloured and the green-coloured bodies of the man and the woman respectively. The latter is carrying a palm leaf as an umbrella, also as a symbol of vegetative growth, and the renewed productivity is represented in the foliage embroidered on the man's *dhoti* and the woman's *sari*.

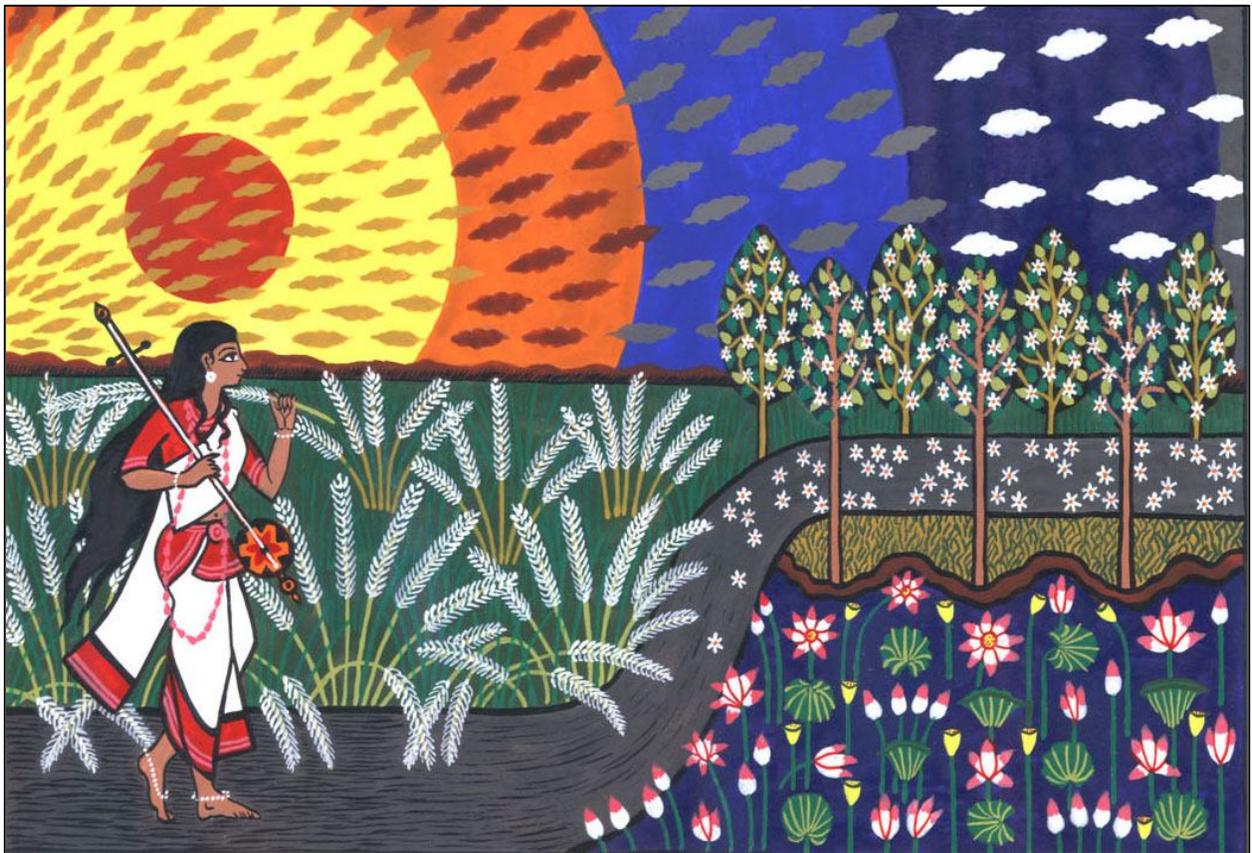
Monsoon



In Tagore's autumn songs (2: 481-493), the fulfillment of dreams and desires is perceived. Autumn interchanges rains, winds, and sunlight in a mystic harmony. A sense of freedom is felt. Arrival of the beloved and the union with him/her are anticipated.

In the *Autumn* painting, as an autumn dawn is breaking over the horizon and the light of the rising sun is dispelling the darkness away, the personified Autumn represented as a graceful maiden dressed in a red-bordered white *sari*, is following the winding trail beside the fields full of *kaash* flowers, a pond full of lotus blossoms, and through a *shiuli* forest. In the morning breeze the *kaash* flowers and the lotuses are bending towards her feet, and the *shiuli* flowers are being shed on the road to receive the gentle footsteps of her delicate feet. Clouds are floating swiftly across the sky, guiding and following her.

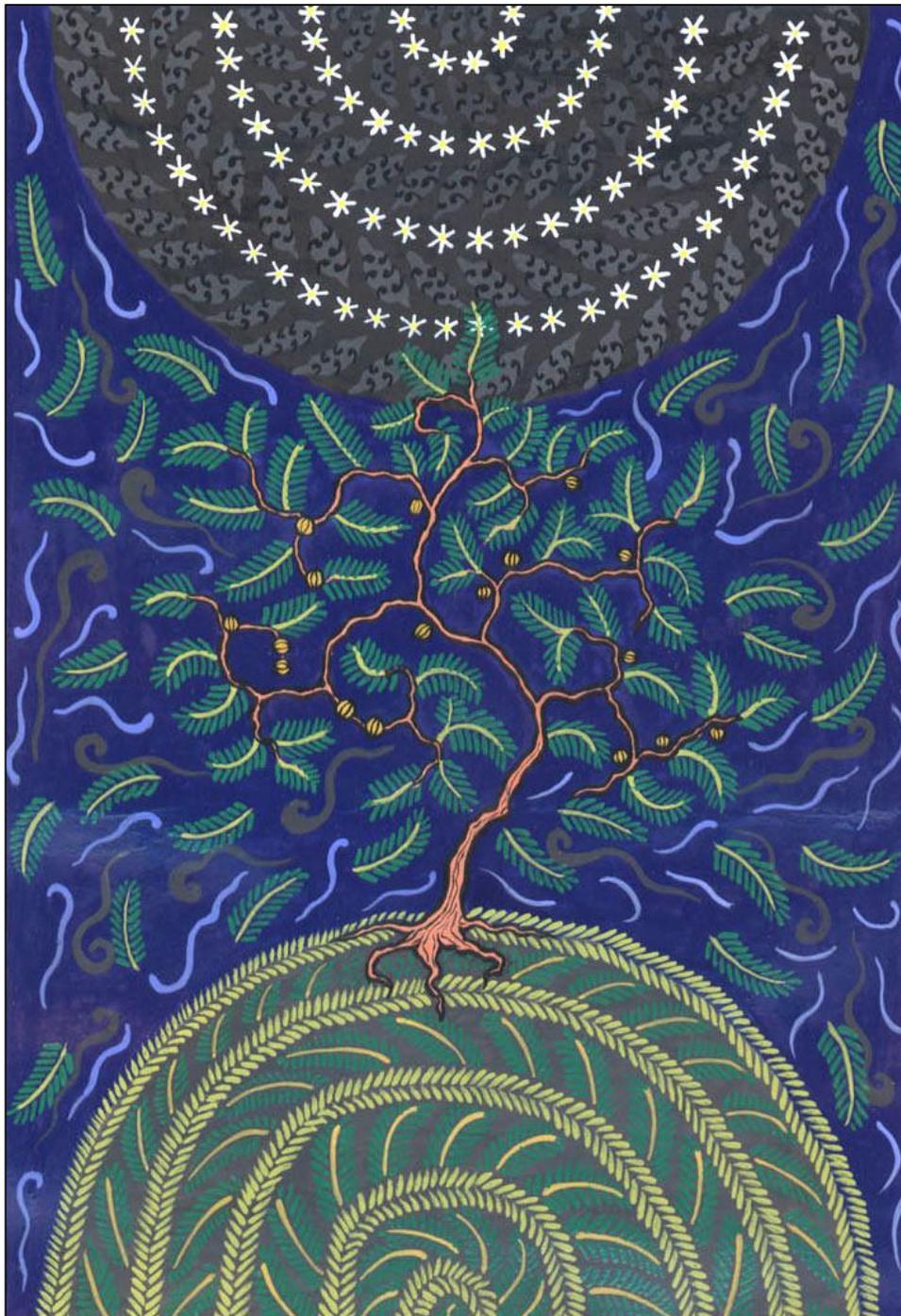
Autumn



Tagore's winter songs (2: 495-499) lament the desertion of life's ardour. Winter fortifies the mind and the body through endurance of hardships. Once emptiness is reached after leaving behind everything that was desolate, the renewed struggle for revival begins.

The *Winter* painting depicts the mystic beauty camouflaged beneath the deprivation of winter. A single *amalaki* tree is touching the sky. Its branches are dancingly responding to the rhythmic assaults of the North Wind, and are willfully shedding their leaves, which are falling on the cold earth, decorating its surface. Likewise, in the night sky above, the stars and the clouds are circling, in response to the cosmic “Music of the Spheres.”

Winter



Tagore's spring songs (2: 500–540) joyously adore life. They breathe fragrance, and paint colours of spring's floral abundance. The mind responds to the music and the rhythm perceived in nature. Spring inspires courtship; influences physical and platonic love, but it also brings pangs of separation and loneliness.

In the *Spring* painting, the foliage and the floral tributes of the flowering plants are depicted in a geometric order, to visually capture the delight of hues and odours. In the open sky, a flock of flying birds resembles the bow and the arrow – symbolically referring to the Bow of Kama, the god of love, who watches over lovers in this season of love.

Spring



Final comment

Before painting this series, I was inspired by (i) the illustrations accompanying selected lines from some of Tagore's Nature songs displayed at Rabindra Sarobar Metro Station, (ii) the styles and/or colours of compositions, figures and objects, geometric patterns, and decorative motifs of different schools and/or genres of classical, traditional Indian art (especially Kangra paintings) and native/foreign folk art, which I observed, followed, modified, and blended in my paintings. Tagore's songs are open to other interpretations, and I also expect the viewers' analysis of my paintings.

Work Cited

1. Tagore, Rabindranath. "Prakriti." *Gitabitan*. Vol. 2. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati Granthan Bibhag, 1970. 425-540. Print.

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