

# Rabindra Nath Tagore is a soul of literature

Vandana Shrivastava

Department of English Guru Nanak Khalsa College, Karnal

## ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was the youngest son of Debendranath Tagore, a leader of the BrahmoSamaj, which was a new religious sect in nineteenth-century Bengal and which attempted a revival of the ultimate monistic basis of Hinduism as laid down in the Upanishads. He was educated at home; and although at seventeen he was sent to England for formal schooling, he did not finish his studies there. In his mature years, in addition to his many-sided literary activities, he managed the family estates, a project which brought him into close touch with common humanity and increased his interest in social reforms. He also started an experimental school at Shantiniketan where he tried his Upanishadic ideals of education. From time to time he participated in the Indian nationalist movement, though in his own non-sentimental and visionary way; and Gandhi, the political father of modern India, was his devoted friend. Tagore was knighted by the ruling British Government in 1915, but within a few years he resigned the honour as a protest against British policies in India.

Tagore had early success as a writer in his native Bengal. With his translations of some of his poems he became rapidly known in the West. In fact his fame attained a luminous height, taking him across continents on lecture tours and tours of friendship. For the world he became the voice of India's spiritual heritage; and for India, especially for Bengal, he became a great living institution. What makes Rabindranath Tagore special for Indians is "Jana gana mana" and it is our National Anthem. Rabindranath Tagore wrote it when he visited Madanapalli in Andhra Pradesh on the eve of the Rishi Valley School Anniversary at the invitation of Dr.Arundale, the Principal. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru had the greatest respect for Rabindranath Tagore. Though Tagore did not participate in politics headlong, he was a great nationalist. Many of his writings express his nationalistic spirit. For this, he got into trouble with the British rulers. He was a great philosopher and a teacher. He was called "Gurudev" by all. He breathed his last on August 7, 1941, leaving his thoughts and ideas for all to follow.

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Viswakavi (World Poet) Rabindranath was born on May 9, 1861 in Bengal. His father Maharihi Devendranath Tagore was a rich man and an aristocrat and his mother was Sarada Devi. He was the eighth son and fourteenth child of his parents. Rabindranath Tagore was not sent to any school. He was educated at home by a tutor. Rabindranath was not happy, getting educated within

## Address for correspondence

Apparao Thamminaina: Department of English Guru Nanak Khalsa College, Karnal, India

E-mail: vandanashrivastav77@gmail.com

the four walls. He was a curious and creative child. Even as a boy he felt that nature is a mystery and he should unravel the secrets of nature, through education.

Though he was educated at home, he studied many subjects and there was a method in his studies. He would get up early. After physical education he would study Mathematics, History, Geography, Bengali and Sanskrit. In the afternoon, he learnt drawing, English and play games. On Sundays he would learn music and conduct experiments in science. Reading plays was of special interest to him. He was happy to read plays of Kalidas and Shakespeare. He had a special interest in Bengali, which was his mother-tongue.

For further studies, he was sent to a public school at London, where he became a student of Prof. Henry Morley whose lectures influenced Rabindranath to take interest in English literature. He developed interest in English culture, traditions and literature. While studying in England, he wrote a poem "Broken Heart" (Bhagna Hriday). After 18 months in England, he returned to India without taking any degree.

Rabindranath started writing poetry in Bengali. His poem "Sandya Geet" (Song of Dusk) was appreciated by many, including Sri Bankimchandra Chatterji, who wrote the National song "vandemataram". He later wrote in Bengali a number of devotional songs "Nivgarer", "Prabhat Sangeet" etc.

"Gitanjali" is a well-known collection of his poems. Gitanjali contains his various noble thoughts common to the vast humanity, viz. pessimism, love, satisfaction, dignity of labour etc. for this book "Gitanjali" Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1931. Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. Rabindranath Tagore was the first Indian to get a Nobel Prize and the British Government conferred on him knighthood and gave the title of "Sir".

He had great interest in village reconstruction, India culture, music and dance. He was himself a good singer and he composed a new form of music called "Rabindra Sangeet". He had special interest in Kathak and Bali dances. He wrote a number of plays. Some of them are (1) Valmiki Pratibha (2) Post Office (3) Naure's Revenge

(4) Katha Devayaem (5) Saradotsav (6) Mukta dara (7) Nater Puja etc., and (8) Gora. Gora deals with the theme of friendship between persons belonging to two different religions.

Rabindranath started a school at Bolpur, a village 112km. north of Kolkata. This school developed into Shantiniketan. Students come to Shantiniketan from many countries. It specializes in arts, crafts, music and dance besides rural reconstruction.

He established Viswabharathi University near Santiniketan in 1921. It is now a university of the Central Government. He gave all his money from Nobel Prize and royalty money from his books to this University. Tagore was not only a creative genius, he was quite knowledgeable of Western culture, especially Western poetry and science too.

Rabindranath Tagore was also a good artist. He started to learn painting at the age of 60. He drew more than 2000 pictures, which were exhibited in many countries. He also travelled extensively throughout the world.

In 1905, Lord Curzon decided to divide Bengal into two parts. Rabindranath Tagore strongly protested against this decision. Tagore wrote a number of national songs and attended protest meetings. He introduced the Rakhibandhan ceremony, symbolizing the underlying unity of undivided Bengal.

In 1909, Tagore went to Europe for the second time. On the journey to London he translated some of his poems/songs from Gitanjali to English. He met William Rothenstein, a noted British painter, in London. Rothenstein was impressed by the poems, made copies and gave to Yeats and other English poets. Yeats was enthralled.

In 1919, following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Tagore renounced his knighthood. He was a supporter of Gandhiji but he stayed out of politics. He was opposed to nationalism and militarism as a matter of principle, and instead promoted spiritual values and the creation of a new world culture founded in multi-culturalism, diversity and tolerance. Unable to gain ideological support to his views, he retired into relative solitude. Between the years 1916 and 1934 he traveled widely.

To the end Tagore scrutinised orthodoxy—and in 1934, he struck. That year, an earthquake hit Bihar and killed thousands. Gandhi hailed it as seismic karma, as divine retribution avenging the oppression of Dalits. Tagore rebuked him for his seemingly ignominious inferences. He mourned the perennial poverty of Calcutta and the socioeconomic decline of Bengal. He detailed these newly plebeian aesthetics in an unrhymed hundred-line poem whose technique of searing double-vision foreshadowed Satyajit Ray's film *Apur Sansar*. Fifteen new volumes appeared, among them prose-poem works *Punashcha* (1932), *Shes Saptak* (1935), and *Patraput* (1936). Experimentation continued in his prose-songs and dance-dramas: *Chitra* (1914), *Shyama* (1939), and *Chandalika* (1938); and in his novels: *Dui Bon* (1933), *Malancha* .

At sixteen, Tagore led his brother Jyotirindranath's adaptation of Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. At twenty he wrote his first drama-opera: *Valmiki Pratibha* (The Genius of Valmiki). In it the pandit Valmiki overcomes his sins, is blessed by Saraswati, and compiles the *Rāmāyana*. Through it Tagore explores a wide range of dramatic styles and emotions, including usage of revamped kirtans and adaptation of traditional English and Irish folk melodies as drinking songs. His other works fuse lyrical flow and emotional rhythm into a tight focus on a core idea, a break from prior Bengali drama. Tagore sought "the play of feeling and not of action". In 1890 he released what is regarded as his finest drama: *Visarjan* (Sacrifice). It is an adaptation of *Rajarshi*, an earlier novella of his. "A forthright denunciation of a meaningless [and] cruel superstitious rite[s]", the Bengali originals feature intricate subplots and prolonged monologues that give play to historical events in seventeenth-century Udaipur. The devout Maharaja of Tripura is pitted against the wicked head priest Raghupati. His latter dramas were more philosophical and allegorical in nature; these included *Dak Ghar*. Another is Tagore's *Chandalika* (Untouchable Girl), which was modeled on an ancient Buddhist legend describing how Ananda, the Gautama Buddha's disciple, asks a tribal girl for water.

In *Raktakarabi* ("Red" or "Blood Oleanders"), a kleptocrat rules over the residents of Yakshapuri.

He and his retainers exploits his subjects—who are benumbed by alcohol and numbered like inventory—by forcing them to mine gold for him. The naive maiden-heroine Nandini rallies her subject-compatriots to defeat the greed of the realm's sardar class—with the morally roused king's belated help. Skirting the "good-vs-evil" trope, the work pits a vital and joyous *lèse majesté* against the monotonous fealty of the king's varletry, giving rise to an allegorical struggle akin to that found in *Animal Farm* or *Gulliver's Travels*. The original, though prized in Bengal, long failed to spawn a "free and comprehensible" translation, and its archaic and sonorous didacticism failed to attract interest from abroad. *Chitrangada*, *Chandalika*, and *Shyama* are other key plays that have dance-drama adaptations, which together are known as Rabindra Nritya Natya.

## CONCLUSION

Tagore's remit expanded to science in his last years, as hinted in *Visva-Parichay*, 1937 collection of essays. His respect for scientific laws and his exploration of biology, physics, and astronomy informed his poetry, which exhibited extensive naturalism and verisimilitude. He wove the process of science, the narratives of scientists, into stories in *Se* (1937), *Tin Sangi* (1940), and *Galpasalpa* (1941). His last five years were marked by chronic pain and two long periods of illness. These began when Tagore lost consciousness in late 1937; he remained comatose and near death for a time. This was followed in late 1940 by a similar spell. He never recovered. Poetry from these valetudinary years is among his finest. A period of prolonged agony ended with Tagore's death on 7 August 1941, aged eighty; he was in an upstairs room of the Jorasanko mansion he was raised in. The date is still mourned. A. K. Sen, brother of the first chief election commissioner, received dictation from Tagore on 30 July 1941, a day prior to a scheduled operation: his last poem.

"I'm lost in the middle of my birthday. I want my friends, their touch, with the earth's last love. I will take life's final offering, I will take the human's last blessing. Today my sack is empty. I have given completely whatever I had to give. In return if I receive anything—some love, some forgiveness—then I will take it with me when I step on the boat that crosses to the festival of the wordless end."

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