

INDIA'S GRETEST POET : RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Dr. Rajiv Ranjan

M.A., B.Ed., Ph.D., P.G. Dip in Human Rights

Principal

Simultala Awasiya Vidyalaya, Simultala (Jamui, Bihar)

A great poet, Rabindranath Tagore was born in Calcutta in 1861 under the influence of the English rulers. He was influenced strongly by some of the events during the period of his childhood and he imbibed the lustre of the Indian mediaeval heritage, along with the new vision of modern European culture. His name is known to the educated people all over the world. The creative intellect of Tagore had flourished at the confluence of currents of ideas. Here, he is venerated as a poet and philosopher in the tradition of the ancient rishis. I don't fail to note that Tagore had no methodical schooling when he was a boy, he attained the height of a great poet. We find his poetical zenith with patriotic aspects and he pleads on the darkness of slavery and bondage. In one of the extract of Gitanjali prescribed for the intermediate students in Bihar titled "Where the Mind is without fear", in which he feels that like a free bird in the vast expanse of the blue sky, a growing mind should also be given the complete freedom to do anything in his or her own way. Defiance of orthodoxy appears indeed to be one of the characteristic traits of the Tagore family. They are supposed to have broken caste rules by eating with Muslims once in the past. This offence costs them their place in the Brahmin community; and notwithstanding their great wealth and prestige, they are still "looked down upon with certain contempt as perils". Tagores were not only hereditary landowners but were noted for their munificent patronage of art and literature.

Later on, Tagore conducted educational experiments based on the idea of Nature from the chirping of birds, the gurgling of streams and the changing colour of the landscape in different seasons in his institution Vishwabharti of Santiniketan. He had his schooling at the oriental seminary, Calcutta. He also joined at another English-medium school, St. Xavier's School in Calcutta. Dwijendranath, the poet's elder brother, was a philosopher and essayist of repute, while another brother Jyotirindra was an artist who earned the praise of such discerning critics. Rabindranath spent sometime in the villages around Calcutta, making his first acquaintance with the lush fields and the drifting sails and the simple peasant folk of rural Bengal. Sometimes Tagore paid his visit to the north-west he was able to steep his senses in the sights and sounds of India from the mouths of Ganges.

Rabindranath Tagore paid his first visit to England in 1877. He was admitted into Brighton School for a while then joined University College London. He brought some unpleasant memories of England and knowledge of Sir Thomas Browne's Religion Medici which he had studied with Henry Morley at the time of returning to India. Now, he was able to write verse almost as soon as he could walk. His work appeared in print before he was fifteen, and before he was eighteen had published nearly seven thousand lines of verse and a great quality of prose.

I find the themes and melodies of the old Vaishnava poets that many a scholar was misled into lauding them newly discovered masterpieces of Bengali literature in the Bhanu Singh Poems

(first published in Bharti in 1877. Rabindranath himself attached little importance to them. We may Judge from the pieces he selected for the first collected edition of his poems (1896).

In 'Letters of a traveller to Europe' he described his experiences in the west and maintained that the social morality of Europe was in some respects superior to that of the East.

In his early twenties, Rabindranath passed through mystical illumination-the first of many similar experiences – I must relate it in his own words "One morning" he writes in his Reminiscences "I happened to be standing on the veranda. The sun was rising through the leafy tops of those trees. As I continued to gaze, all of a sudden a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side. This radiance pierced in a moment through the folds of sadness and despondency which had accumulated over my heart, and flooded it with this universal light."

"Evening Songs" maintains an important stage in Rabindranath's development but it does not keep intrinsic merit. In 'Morning songs' I find poet's exultant and tumultuous expression to his new found sense of inner freedom and considered better than 'Evening songs'. Nature's Revenge, his first important drama, embodied one of the key-thoughts of all his life-the joy of attaining infinite within the finite. The Love of Rahu' in Pictures and Songs, is held to be perhaps his greatest poem. It ended with the publication of "Sharps and Flats (1887)" which is for the beauty of its sonnets.

Rabindranath returned to Calcutta after his holiday from the west coast and married Shrimati Mrinalini Devi (December 1883). He was trying to establish himself as the best of the younger literary men of Calcutta, the "Bengali Shelley". He is known to have introduced among educated Bengalis the fashion of wearing long wave hair and the "Napoleon beard". "My recognized cognomen was the lispng poet", he says, in his reminiscences. In 1887 he took his attention to Ghazipur, in the United Provinces, intending to project himself to the single-minded worship of his muse. He wrote Manasi, his first mature work, roughly satirical in parts, but the life of semi-retirement amid the famed roses of this provincial town palled on him before long.

Rabindranath Tagore went to Shileida at the wish of his father and spent some of the happiest years of his life. He was in touch with the common people and gained a first hand problem of the rural problems of India in their human aspects. He had the leisure and peace of mind for the complete enfoldment of his genius. This period was important for his contribution for four years a ceaseless stream of essays, short stories and Poems to Sadhana.

Further more, it can be mentioned that from 1902 to 1905 were full of grief. Rabindranath's wife died in November 1902. His second daughter was ill with consumption. She died in 1904. In 1905, his father, Devendranath, passed away. It was, however, during these years that he wrote most of his novels including Gora, "a long story with the fullness of detail of the Russian novel". He wrote a group of symbolic plays – Autumn Festival: The king of the Dark chamber, and the post office; and he wrote Gitanjali.

After a visit to America, Rabindranath returned to Santiniketan in the autumn of 1913, universally recognized as one of the foremost poets of the age. Within a few weeks of his arrival the Nobel Prize for Literature was conferred on hi. In 1914, he was knighted. During these years, when his fame was fleeting over the world, he wrote the Gardener, The Crescent Moon, The Cycle of Spring, The Home and the World – a long novel – and Balaka, "The greatest of his books".

A cult of his work sprang up. His popularity abroad was on the increase. He undertook no less than seven extensive lecture tours in the west in Europe and America, and throughout the East. He was everywhere welcomed with enthusiasms and made countless friends and admirers.

To sum up, Rabindranath's literary achievement in India is at its height no doubt. It should be recorded, however, that he was not only poet, playwright and novelist, but a musician, actor, painter, Philosopher, Journalist, teacher, orator – and distinguished himself in each of these very different roles. He is supposed to be the unsurpassed genius in history.

The main sources of his inspiration are the Sanskrit poets of the classical age and the medieval Vaishnava lyrics. Blending these with the lofty mysticism of the Upanishads, Rabindranath achieved a distinctive synthesis which is as perfect an expression as it is perhaps possible to have of the spirit of India. Rabindranath secluded from the rough and tumble of politics, he instilled a sense of awareness of the plight of his country under foreign rule. He inveighed against a system which destroyed freedom and condemned millions of miserable and poverty-stricken lives. To my mind that I feel he has never ceased to urge with all his eloquence that the subject nation, struggling for independence, should not acquire the aggressive vices of its rulers. His intellectual powers however are unimpaired but he has raised his voice in indignant protest at the barbarism and bloodshed.

Rabindranath Tagore is great courage, in endurance and hope. A sunrise, a flower, a garden, a mountain speak to the great poet like Rabindranath Tagore. When he goes to the rural area, he claims for rural humanity. Tagore ascribed to the influence of the natural objects which men are linked by many associations. The poet has a tough-minded view regarding the facts of human suffering. His view is a call to revise our conventional conceptions of the meaning of pain.

References:

1. The great Philosophers: An Introduction to western Philosophy Oxford/New York Press – 1988.
2. Great Men of India: L.F. Rushbrook Williams Delhi Giyan Publishing House 1985.
3. Great Men and Famous Women New York Selmer Mess 1894.
4. The Great Indian Patriots: Rao P. Rajeshwar, New Delhi Mittal 1991.
5. The soul of Modern Poetry: Strachan R.H.
6. Songs of Two Nations: Algirnon Charles.

□ □ □