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RABINDRANATH TAGORE: THE HARBINGER OF INDIAN LITERARY RENAISSANCE

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Mrs. B. Shobha Rani, Dr.T.Sandhya Rani, -Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology OfEgypt/Egyptology 17(7),ISSN 1567-214xRabindranath Tagore: The Harbinger of IndianLiterary Renaissance

ABSTRACT

The first Asian Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is noted for his extraordinary achievement in literature, music and art. He is considered the greatest creative artist of modern India. He is one of the most prolific, diverse and outstanding writers of the world. He was a renowned poet, novelist, short story writer, playwright and essayist. He was a myriad minded literary genius. As a prophet and visionary, his works form an integral part of the Indian. In this paper I want to explore Tagore as an Indian literary renaissance writer, basing on his poetry, plays, novels and short stories.

Keywords:

Discourse, Epoch, Genius, Humanitarianism, Lyrics, Microscope, Modernity, Patriot, Renaissance, Sensitiveness.

The first Asian Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is noted for his extraordinary achievement in literature, music and art. He is considered the greatest creative artist of modern India. He is one of the most prolific, diverse and outstanding writers of the world. He was a renowned poet, novelist, short story writer, playwright and essayist. He was a myriad minded literary genius. As a prophet and visionary, his works form an integral part of the Indian. In this paper I want to explore Tagore as an Indian literary renaissance writer, basing on his poetry, plays, novels and short stories.

‘No man is an island’, said Donne. A man of genius is as much moulded by the age he lives in, as he, in his turn, shapes the times. Tagore lived in times when the forces of the Indian Renaissance were asserting themselves in all directions. They were the days of conflict between the old and the new, of rebellion against tradition and reaction against modernity. Many educated Indians regarded the Western ideal of life as containing the *summum bonum* of life, while a few turned their eyes to the ideals of Indian culture for enlightenment. They were the days of political upheaval, social reforms and cultural renaissance. Tagore, one of the finest products of that period could not keep his eyes shut to the cross-currents of the times. His works being the imaginative reconstructions of reality, reflect the working of these forces.

Tagore is an all-round genius. He is a poet, dramatist, novelist, short-story writer, musician, painter, critic, philosopher, educationist and patriot. Ananda Sankar Ray, A Bengali critic, remarks, “His life, is in fact, Rabindranath’s greatest work. He was a unified man, a whole man and as such an example to his country and a missionary to the west. Sunita Kumar Chatterjee, another Bengali critic praises Tagore as “The full or complete and Integrated Man, with a mind of the widest perception.” He was a sterling humanist. Tagore toured incessantly and became a sort of unofficial ambassador, visiting the countries of the east and the west and by his speeches, and even by his mere presence, raising India’s prestige abroad. He did not involve himself very intimately with the political currents in India, but he maintained very friendly relations with Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Edward Thompson, a critic of Tagore, said of him, “Not a man only, but an age had made its way at last into history.... He had summed up in himself a whole age, in which India had moved into the modern world.”

Tagore left behind him an immense mass of prose writing, in Bengali as well as in English. There are the novels, the short stories, the lectures, the essays on a variety of subjects. His heart ruled the mind whenever he applied his mind to a current social, political or economic problem. Tagore says that the most important distinction between the animal and man is this

that the animal is bound within the limits of its necessities, but man has a vast amount of surplus energy left in him after fulfilling the necessities of life. Man's knowledge and altruism are not exhausted by the biological necessities of life. He has a surplus in the domain of knowledge and so he can claim the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Science and philosophy are the outcome of this pursuit. Tagore combines in himself three distinct roles-that of a poet, a philosopher and a patriot. His influence on Indian culture and thought is second only to that of Mahatma Gandhi. He is one of the foremost leaders of Indian Renaissance in art, music, dance and Literature. The genius of Tagore is universal in its Scope. An endless stream of poems, plays, stories, novels, essays and discourse followed from his ceaseless pen and overflowed into his brush when he found himself a painter.

Tagore is a great literary artist. His sense of rhythm, his daring invention of new meters, his power of yoking sound with sense, entitle him to rank amongst the foremost lyric poets of the world. He has portrayed the soul in all its moods. His genius matured early and some of his best poetical work was done between his 25th and 40th year. In the earlier stages of his development, his poetry swells and swings with the pulsating passions of life. The themes of his poems change very frequently from man and human life to nature and its charms. His love-poems display a great depth of feeling and charm of form which rank them with the finest love-lyrics of the world. His *Gitanjali* (song of offerings) marks the highest watermark of lyrical excellence. His other works 'The Lover's Gift', 'The Gardener' and the 'Fruit Gathering' have established themselves as literary master-pieces. The *Gitanjali* poems (song-offerings) in English are indeed, full of rare charm. The one hundred and odd songs in it form a mighty piece of prayer and pleading and exultation. They are mainly poems of bhakti in the great Indian tradition. "The Crescent Moon" is a book of poems about children. It lets us into the secret of the child's life and thought. It contains a handful of poems about childhood and children. One of these 'Bless this little heart'- as a matchless beauty and tenderness. Tagore has found in the young children beauty, innocence, charity, humor and a king of ancient wisdom and these, he has celebrated in songs. He

nicely sums up his philosophy of children in the poem entitled 'On the sea-shore'.

Tagore's 'The Gardener' is a rich collection of poetic flowers and is indeed a feast of love-poetry. Dr. Iyengar feels "All the make believe and love-play that lovers feed on, all the agony and hopelessness, all the ecstasy and fulfilment of lover's lives, all is woven here into a garland of memorable song." It has won a deepened popularity for him. But on the first reading, the collection as a whole seems to lack the intensity and the organic unity. It includes Nature poems, love poems, religious poems, mystical poems, bird poems, and a few poems with a political touch. The finest poem in the collection is the dialogue between the bird in the cage and the free bird in the forest. They are perhaps symbolic of the slave country and the free country respectively. It may also be representative of sophistication in the city and the freedom in natural surroundings of the village. There is a haunting music beneath its tragic under-tones. Tagore presents in these poems the most beautiful images of flowers, honey, bees, thorns-the music of laughter, the cry of birds, the jingle of bracelets-the filling of the pitcher at the fountain, the hunting for the golden stag, the caressing of the soft-haired lamb, the green and the yellow rice-fields. Then Tagore wrote "Fruit Gathering", "Love's Gift and "Crossing", "The Fugitive" and "Stray Birds." Besides, he wrote a long poem entitled 'The Child' in ten sections. It breaths the hope that one day the new-born, the divine child will annul the burden of the ages and dispel the dichotomy between the impulse and the act. "The Fugitive and Other Poems' contain certain mystical beauties. "The night deepens and the dying flame flickers in the lamp." The poet wishes that freedom from fear is the real freedom, he claims to his motherland. So rich are Tagore's poems both in content and form. In them we have such exquisite blending of the harmony of thoughts, feelings and melody of words, and they cover such a wide range of human feelings and emotions-love, earthly and spiritual, devotion, the yearnings of the human spirit towards the Divine that age cannot wither them nor custom stale their infinite variety.

Rabindranath Tagore is also famous for his plays. The most well-known among them and perhaps the greatest play, 'Sacrifice' bears the characteristic touch of Tagore. The incidents are highly dramatic and the characters are powerfully drawn, especially, the priest Raghupathi and the devoted temple servant Jaisingh. The plays *King and Queen*, *Malini* and *Sanyasi* are also expression of the problems of human life. Rabindranath raises some problem or other in his plays and very often his solution does not appeal to the reader. His *Chitra*, in the worlds of Krishna Kripalani, is one of the poet's most beautiful plays, perhaps the only one that is flawless. In the *Post-Office*, Tagore's genius has blossomed into full flowering in the short and sweet dialogues of the play. *Mukta Dhara*, *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika* bring the whole career of experimentation to a point of culmination by integrating the two levels of dramatic vision-those of the intellect and of the experience. The play, 'The King of the Dark Chamber' is written by Tagore in 1910, bore the title 'Raja' in Bengali. It was the first of Tagore's audacious attempts to invade the invisible. Tagore himself translated the play into English, and published in 1914, under the title *The King of the Dark Chamber*. The play can be said to the best literary representation of Tagore's philosophy of life. It is rich, not only in the philosophic meanings it conveys, but is equally rich as a piece of dramatic art-showing how artistically Tagore could blend and fuse the Indian classical drama, particularly the form called *Natyadharma* or 'imaginative' reality; and the folk-drama -the 'yatra' of Bengal. "*The Post Office* has a tighter structural unity and its meaning comes to us like a deep dream of peace. As in the physical world action and reaction or equal and opposite, so in the spiritual world too, aspiration and response have alike casual relation. *The Post Office* was an especial favourite not only with the author but the readers as well. It is a moving piece of work. It is full of feeling and the handling is delicate. The language is of an unsurpassable naturalness. The dialogue flows in even, unhurried stream. Thompson Edward feels that *The Post Office* is beautiful, touching of one texture of simplicity throughout and within its limits an almost perfect piece of art."

Rabindranath's genius is brought out in his stories as well. As short-story writer he ranks with the greatest masters of the craft. His stories reveal a

delicate sensitiveness to beauty. Tagore's power of undertake subtle analysis of human relationship, his capacity to view life from the heights, and at the same time to bring the smallest details to life. It is as if he were directing his microscope on some aspects of our social life and throwing a penetrating light on some common incidents to show the poignant intensity of human suffering. His short stories have compactness of design and achieve remarkable unity of effect: while some of his longer stories or novels are marked by 'structural weakness and looseness of situations.' K. Chandrasekharan, a critic of Tagore feels that "Tagore's capacity for arresting descriptions, his highly cultivated sensitiveness to beauty and penetrating analysis of the relationship between human beings, have all brought us a wealth of felicity derivable from literature."

No less remarkable are Tagore's attainments as a novelist. He has taken for themes problems of current social life. Some times his novels present a large mass of discourses. That is why his novels make rather difficult reading. But nevertheless, his power of characterization holds the interest of the reader throughout. The ethical outlook of his characters and their great confidence in life imparts a unique charm to his novels. Perhaps the best of his novels is *The Wreck*, in which the action is more rapid, the story better constructed and the characters drawn with the sure touch of a master. *The Home and the World* and *Gora* have a remarkable splendor of their own. Tagore's greatness as novelist lies in his artistic detachment while painting the canvas in diverse hues of his novels. *Gora*, *The Home and the World*, *Binodini* and *Four Chapters* are highly stimulating and thought-provoking. Among the main novels, *Farewell*, *My Friend*, *The Wreck* and *The garden* are noteworthy. *Choker Bali* was his first novel. It is acknowledged on all hands that *Chokar Bali* had adhered to a new trend in the history of Bengali literature. Krishna Kripalani has translated it into English under the title *Binodini* named after the heroine. Tagore came considerably under the influence of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and the latter's works had a substantial impact on Tagore's writings. *Binodini* deals with the social problem of early marriage, the cursed Hindu system of a few decades ago, in India. The most beautiful character studies are those of Binodini, Bihari, Asha and Mahendra. The entire story of the

novel is a record of the mental conflict that this novel lies not in episodes but in that exploration of the individual personality. Tagore's novels resemble those of Tolstoy with whom his political philosophy also coincided. Novel writing for Tagore and Tolstoy did serve a social purpose. Tagore's characters were of flesh and blood and realistic. He did not fly into the world of fantasy in such a way as to be shorn of all contact with the earth.

Last but not the least, Rabindranath is a great prophet of the new dawn. His humanitarianism is universal. He has carried the message of the collaboration of the East and the West to all parts of the world through his numberless discourses, essays, letters and addresses. He has brought about a mutual understanding among the various cultures of the world. He is neither Eastern nor Western out and out, but meeting-point of both and thus a typical product of Indian Renaissance. He strove to attain the ancient Indian ideal of *Vasudhaika Kutumbakam*.

Besides, Tagore has a powerful insight into child life. One aspect of life which has engrossed him, as perhaps none else, is his treatment of child-psychology. As W.B. Yeats, an Irish English poet remarks, when he is speaking of children, he seems to be speaking of saints as well. The innocence and harmless curiosity of the young touch him, and his fertile imagination supplies in its turn a pile of image of the child as it plays, imagines, creates, destroys, and builds. The poems on childhood reveal his great capacity to look at the world through the eyes of a child.

Like a master sociologist and psychologist, Tagore has studied, rather perceived, the motives of human beings in their pursuits and conflicts and with insight the complications in the resulting situations of life. He has not portrayed the lowest rung of the society. As he was born in a rich aristocratic family, he had very little contact with low life. Despite his reformist tendencies he could view with sympathy and understand orthodoxy and conservatism. He has always emphasized upon the essential oneness of humanity and the need for universal love and brotherhood.

He was indeed an epoch like a true humanitarian, he loves Man, not in spite of, but because of the imperfections in life. A voice both of ancient and modern India, Tagore never loses his faith on Man.

Conclusion: To conclude Rabindranath Tagore is an era with its diverse, coloured, senses, objectives and implications. His themes have remained as eternal source of inspirations for the readers. His innovative style fills energy and strength to them. His universal appeals based on peace, love, joy, and death shapes him to be called a great philosopher and honors him as a guru of the gurus, having disciples like Mahathma Gandhi and Pandith Jawaharlal Nehru.

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