



Review Article

Tagore: Poet, Patriot, Critic, Liberal Humanist.

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Abstract

Nobody can deny the fact that not only India but the world owes a lot to Rabindranath Tagore, reverently called “ Gurudev” , who was a poet, a patriot, a critic, a liberal humanist thinker, all rolled into one. He was one of the undeniable pillars of the Bengal Renaissance, and his relevance even today cannot be waived off. Not only men of literature, but luminaries from every sphere of knowledge and from every corner of the globe could hardly deny the influence of the wave of the Tagore school of thought. His ideas about human values, patriotism and education stand tall even today and are as relatable in the present day scenario as they were ages ago. This speaks volumes about the universality and permanent relevance of his thoughts which are all-encompassing irrespective of class, greed, nationality and religion,

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Rabindranath Tagore, or Gurudev as he was fondly named by the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi himself, and reverently addressed as such by not only Indians but the whole world, was a multifaceted personality. His writings are a treasure trove of brilliant and deep ideas and musings on culture, music, creativity, nationalism, literature, painting, art, aesthetics, humanism to name just a few. All his ideas flow from and into each other and form an amalgamous whole of holistic knowledge. His writing are informed both by his creative thinking as well as his deep and unending concern for the upliftment of the downtrodden and oppressed humanity.

The coming of the nineteenth century in India witnessed a great upsurge which came to be known as the Bengal Renaissance. Among other pillars of this upsurge which change the face of Bengal

forever and led to them must used saying, “ what Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow “ were people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Shri Aurobindo among so many others. Rabindranath Tagore was definitely one of the pioneers of this movement though. At the heart of this movement was the lofty ideal of liberal humanism. But to think of Tagore in thr narrow purview of the Bengal Renaissance would be to deny him his influence on the larger India context as well as a pioneer of international humanism.

His ideas and ideals as they are voiced through his writings, essays as well as lectures, have not lost their relevance even today. In his address on his eightieth birthday, “*Shabhyayar Sankat*” or the “*crisis of civilisation* “ Tagore says how deeply he is effected by the term

“civilisation “ in English as opposed to the Manuvian term “ sadachar”. But with the passage of time, colonial conditions of British India led him away from the blind adoration of English literature, which culminated in his forgoing his knighthood in protest against British atrocities on innocent Indians. The glow and pomp of the English civilisation began to slowly wear off . Saddened greatly by the British colonialism in India,he says:

Such is the tragic tale of the gradual loss of faith in the claims of the European nations to civilisation. In India the misfortune of being governed by a foreign race is daily brought home to us not only in the callous neglect of such minimum necessities of life as adequate provision for food, clothing, educational and medical facilities for the people, but in an even unhappier form in the way the people have been divided among themselves “¹ .

Tagore’s nationalism is highlighted in the fact that he was deeply shocked and wounded by the way the Indians were being treated by the British rule. His essay in the *Rabindra Rachansvali* ,² titled “Swadesh”, embodies his thoughts on nationality, nation building and patriotism. Presented in two parts, “ Nutan o Puratan” (The New and the Old) , and “ Samajbhed” (Division of Society), Tagore very impartially and keenly highlights the flaws of the Indian culture and society. That his nationalism was never blind adolation is on of the major reason why his ideas are universally relevant even today. Tagore does not hesitate to pull up the Indians on their age old lethargy and complacency. He also does not negate the value of age old traditions, neither does he turn a deaf ear to the fast advancing

marching sound of modernity. In his amalgamation of the old and tge new, culling carefully from each to present a time-defying and tested philosophy , Tagore is unparalleled.

Another essay in the *Rabindra Rachanavali*, “ Shiksha” (Education), is a much needed one today when education is an imposing and burning issue in modern day India. Analysing our education system closely, Tagore identifies the reasons for the inadequacy and irrelevance of it, as also pointing out the necessary changes it urgently requires:

The more we get B.A. and M.A. degrees the more wr swallow piles and piles of books, the less strong becomes our intelligence, and the less mature our mind. We cannot have any hold on anything, we can neither construct the beginning nor the end of anything; we can not strongly establish anything.

The harsh truth of this statement is more pertinent today than it was when he wrote it many many years ago. The futility of bookish knowledge, without its holistic output is so correctly highlighted by the visionary that Tagore was. The need for a multidimensional and multidisciplinary development cannot be over-emphasised in today’s world of globalisation. Tagore has also street the need of national schools and education for all in our country. The more we delve deep into Tagore’s ideas, the more we realise with awe the thinker he was and how he thought way beyond his times. It was this zeal of his for holistic education that led him in 1901 to establish the famous experiment university at Santiniketan in Bolpur, West Bengal. Today this place is a seat of culture,

education and music of international fame and stature.

Tagore's idea of religion is extraordinary too. Influenced by his reading of the *Upanishads*, he views God as an embodiment of love, and Man as a manifestation of that Divine Love. He sees festivities and rituals not as dogmatic practices, but as a way to bring people together in an egalitarian way and remove all social disparities and discriminations. In his poems too, many a time we see God portrayed as the beloved and the worshiper as the lover. This ambiguous portrayal of the God-man relationship renders the much discussed mystic quality to his body of poems. This his portrayal of the God-man relationship is a highly humanised one.

Nature, too, has been greatly humanised by Tagore. Tagore is in league with Keats and Wordsworth when it comes to his love of Nature and her effect on the human psyche. He believed that Nature gives us *ananda*. The fact that Santiniketan is situated in the lap of nature, and has open air classes under lush trees is a direct emulation of Tagore's philosophy of Nature as the greatest healer of the disease of the machine-driven modern world. He echoes W.H. Auden in this respect. Like Keats, for Tagore natural beauty was truth, and truth was beauty. Tagore was particularly fond of the Night, and has sung numerous songs in its praise. He was of the opinion that Night, like Death, was a great leveller. It was a balm to the soul scorched by the heat of life's troubles and tribulations. S.K. Nandi has rightly pointed out about Tagore's kind of pantheism:

*Tagore believes in a continuum starting from divinity converging on men and then passing on to nature*³

Tagore gives great value to these troubles and tribulations of man's life on earth too. He opines that only the experience of sorrow renders value to joy. Thus, to Tagore no aspect of man's life on earth is without its own value. From each and every experience there is something to learn. This great respect for human life is a sign of Tagore's liberal humanism too.

Tagore's concept of art is yet another manifestation of his humanism. Tagore strongly believed that expression was the soul of art. For him Man-God relationship could also be seen as an Artist-God relationship. Tagore's theory of art involves a deep and intrinsic relationship between the artist, the universe and God, the Maker. It is through art that the artist realizes the truth of the universe, and the existence of God behind it. Thus Tagore's philosophy is a fusion of art, religion and humanism.

Thus it can be said with enough conviction that Tagore's art was a result of synthesis. It was this thread that held together the artist, God and society in one interminable bond. To see Tagore as only a poet who was untouched by the conditions of colonial India, to study him only as a poet concerned with mysticism without understanding the tangible realities of human life, is a wholly incorrect and fallacious way of studying him, and that will necessarily require a re-reading of this great poet-thinker-patriot-humanist that he was and that time has abundantly proved him to be. He remains, even today, the driving force behind humanism, a balanced

view of nationalism and also a pragmatic acceptance of religion. His writing, even today, have inspiration and zeal enough to bring about a new, much needed, long overdue renaissance in our beloved country.

References:

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