

## Study on The Literature of Rabindranath Tagore

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### *Abstract:*

Rabindranath 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. He was also a cultural reformer who modified Bengali art by rebuffing the strictures that confined it within the sphere of classical Indian forms. Though he was a polymath, his literary works alone are enough to place him in the elite list of all-time greats. Even today, Rabindranath Tagore is often remembered for his poetic songs, which are both spiritual and mercurial. Being a natural poet, his poetic outpourings in Bengali began to rejuvenate and recreate Bengali literature. In his late twenties he was entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the family estates in North Bengal. There he came into contact with the daily life of the village folk. He started his village re-construction program there. Tagore was a great humanist, painter, patriot, poet, playwright, novelist, story-teller, philosopher, and educationist. As a cultural ambassador of India he gave voice to the country and became an instrument in spreading the knowledge of Indian culture around the world.

**Keywords:** Literature, Rabindranath Tagore, Poetry, Drama and Prose.

**Introduction:** Tagore's life was marked by several paradoxes; inconsistency was the hallmark of his personality. A poet, he was also very much a practical man,<sup>5</sup> and managed the family estates in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and Orissa, where he would spend many days on a boathouse, interacting with ordinary people whilst writing in his spare time.<sup>6</sup> His time there brought him in, close touch with common humanity – “the patient, submissive, family-loving, Bengali ryots” (Das Gupta 440) – and increased his interest in social reforms. Many of his letters written to Indira Devi, from his estate in Shelidah, often interspersed with humour, show the affection and sympathy Tagore bore for the poor villagers who made their living by working on his land. In a letter to a Bengali woman friend in 1931, who was the daughter of an orthodox zamindari family from Natore in East Bengal, he declared in simple but pointed language, “I love [my tenants] from my heart, because they deserve it” (Dutta and Robinson, Selected Letters 405). Critics who accuse Tagore of being a “bourgeois reactionary” (Lukács' famous attack on Tagore in his review of *The Home and the World* is a typical example<sup>7</sup>), have perhaps misunderstood the writer, or failed to take into account stories such as “The Postmaster” (Postmaster), “Assets and Debts” (Denapaona) “Kabuliwala” (Kabuliwala), “Subha” (Subha), “Punishment” (Shasti) and “Purification” (Shangskar) or his play *The Post Office* (Dak Ghar), which are all written with empathy for the poor and the downtrodden.

Tagore's empathy also extended towards women. He was opposed to gender hierarchy created by the age-old patriarchy in Indian society. Indian women have been oppressed since their legal rights were curbed in the ancient Sanskrit Manu's Laws (Manavadhrmasastra or Manusmrti), and women were compared to “dogs” and “crows” as physical embodiments of “untruth, sin and darkness” (Reese 57). To dismantle such false notions about women and restore to them the dignity that prevailed in Vedic Indian society, when women were seen as conduits for the primal energy of the universe, primordial to the male force, Tagore created several strong and assertive women in his works.

The worldliness and materiality is too much expended that humankind unable to rise beyond these evils. Ralf Waldo Emerson and Rabindranath Tagore illumined mankind to perceive the power and puissance of the inherent glory. Emerson and Tagore strove to seek the Eternal and the Infinite will erect the edifice of self- fulfillment, selfabnegation and self-surrender for the attainment of the universal consciousness. Emerson understood and adopted: a major part of his transcendentalism from Indian and German school of philosophy in which the central core was Puritanism, Platonism and monastic idealism. The philosophy of Kant influenced his main by his empirical understanding in place of theoretical reasoning.

Rabindranath Tagore was born on 7 May 1861. At some time towards the end of the seventeenth century, his forefathers had migrated from their native lands to Govindpur, one of the three villages which later came to constitute Calcutta. In the course of time, the family came to acquire property and considerable business interests through the pursuit of commercial and banking activities. They had particularly benefited from the growing power of the British East India Company. Rabindranath's grandfather, Dwarkanath Tagore, lived lavishly and broke the Hindu religious ban of those times by travelling to Europe, just like his contemporary, Rammohan Roy, the nineteenth century social and religious reformer.

Rabindranath Tagore has a distinct place as a dramatist. He was the first Indian dramatist who was not satisfied with the Western melodrama and was attracted towards the tradition of classical Sanskrit plays. Tagore has successfully molded the elements of the folk drama of Bengal known as Jatra with classical Sanskrit drama. He was familiar with the works of Shakespeare, Ibsen and Maeterlinck and was influenced by the works of Kalidasa. He was familiar with the problems of his age and was very much concerned about the 5 values which he saw vanishing. He evolved idiom, a dramatic technique. Tagore cannot be considered either classicist or modernist. Tagore's concept of the theatre was essentially a poet's concept: he wanted the theatre to be a place where poetry ruled supreme, revealing 'the inner reality of things'. Tagore in his own words says: "Drama has the responsibility of drawing apart the curtain of naturalism and reveals the inner reality of things. If there is too much emphasis on imitative naturalism, the inner view becomes clouded." It is significant that, right from the beginning of his dramatic activities, Tagore was greatly influenced by the jatra of Bengal. What he particularly liked in the jatra was 'the easy bond of mutual trust and dependence' between the actors and spectators, so that the poetry which, after all, is the main thing, falls like a spreading fountain through the medium of acting on the gladdened heart of the spectators. Tagore went back to the folk tradition of starting a theatre not for the masses, but for those who want to taste the deliberate pleasures of a fine art. He was in full sympathy with the ideals of the Little Theatres in the Western countries, whose aim was to provide a meeting place for the discerning and the cultivated.

Roy started a religious reform movement in 1828 that came to be known as the Brahma Samaj Movement. Rabindranath's grandfather supported Roy in his attempts at reforming Hindu society. Dwarkanath's son, Devendranath Tagore, also became a staunch supporter of the Brahma Samaj Movement. In order to encourage its spread, in 1863 he established a meditation centre and guest house on some land about 100 miles from Calcutta at a place called 'Santiniketan', the Abode of Peace.

Although deeply steeped in Hindu and Islamic traditions, Tagore's family contributed large sums of money for the introduction of Western education, including colleges for the study of science and medicine. This peculiar situation explains the combination of tradition and experiment that came to characterize Rabindranath Tagore's attitude to life.

Rabindranath's father was one of the leading figures of the newly awakened phase of Bengali society. He had been educated at one stage in Rammohan Roy's Anglo-Hindu school and had been greatly influenced by Roy's character, ideals and religious devotion. Devendranath Tagore was well versed in European philosophy and, though deeply religious, did not accept all aspects of Hinduism. He was to have a profound influence on his son's mental and practical attitudes.

Rabindranath was the fourteenth child of his parents. His brothers and sisters were poets, musicians, playwrights and novelists and the Tagore home was thus filled with musical, literary and dramatic pursuits. The family was also involved with diverse activities at the national level. Important changes were taking place in Bengal at the time Rabindranath was born. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar had been attempting to reform the position of women in society. Schools using English as the language of teaching were being established, alongside the traditional Sanskrit schools. Vidyasagar had established Bengali-medium schools at different places in Bengal with little or limited government support. He had also established a centre to train

teachers for these schools. Rabindranath attended this school and, as he says himself, owed his love of Bengali language and literature to it. He was also sent to a number of English-speaking schools, but he did not like their teaching style and had no wish to be taught in a foreign language. He gradually withdrew from formal schooling when he was around 14 years old. The remainder of his education was carried out at home through his own personal efforts and with the help of tutors in various subjects. He also had lessons from professionals in wrestling, music and drawing. The manner of his early schooling was to leave a deep impression on him.

Tagore married when he was 23. At this stage, beyond his literary pursuits, he had begun sharing his father's religious responsibilities. In 1890 he made a second trip to the United Kingdom, but came back after a month to look after the family estates. This responsibility opened up new vistas of inspiration for him. Whereas his previous literary work had been primarily based on imagination, he now came to acquire a direct and intimate experience of the wretched life led by the poor Bengali peasants. This new experience led to the composition of *Galpaguccha* [A bunch of stories] (1900), and the many letters he wrote to his niece, subsequently published as *Chhinnapatra* [Torn letters] and *Chhinnapatravali* [A collection of torn letters], considered to be landmarks in the writing of Bengali prose and in describing the countryside of Bengal.

Tagore was overwhelmed by the economic, social and political misery in which the peasants lived. Tagore, one of the founders of the 19th-century Hindu religious reform movement, the Brahmo Samaj. Although he had the opportunity for formal schooling in England, the young Rabindranath had little interest in formal education and returned to India before finishing his education abroad. At home, his father arranged for private tutoring, the flexible pace of which appealed much more to him than the school's rigid curriculum. During this time, his intellectual horizon expanded and he developed a wide range of interests, especially in the arts.

He was deeply acquainted with Sanskrit Classics, Bengali Literature, English Literature and Continental European Literature. Out of his father's spiritual legacy and moral earnestness and his grandfather's spirit of enterprise, he created his own artistic sensibility. He enriched every genre of literature as a restless experimenter and innovator in the field of poetry, novels, plays, short stories, essays, literature criticism, polemical writing, travelogues, memoirs etc.; he created his own genre of dance drama. His plays are basically expressions of the soul's quest for beauty and truth. There are certain traditional national attitudes; some unshakable obscure racial memories and quite a few recurrent archetypal human patterns and these are the stuff out of which he creates his dramatic world. Tagore has projected his idea through his dramatic works. Edward Thomson aptly says: "His dramatic work is the vehicle of ideas rather than the expression of action." He produced outstanding plays. His works are the creations of his age and the harbingers of a new era. During the period of sixty years that he wrote, there witnessed a rapid widespread advancement of Western type of education both amongst the middle classes, man and woman and growth of new professional classes and the virtual decay of the feudal structure of society. The barriers between castes, classes and regions came to be destroyed due to rapid industrialization and the development of transport and quick and ready means of communication.

Advancement was seen stage-by-stage, though it was from a colonial dependency to the threshold freedom. Amongst this social, cultural, economic and political influences, which were ushering in changing of a far-reaching significance, was the influence exercised by Rabindranath himself. It was Tagore who in reality moulded the thoughts and aspirations of three generations of educated middle class who derived their intellectual sustenance and spiritual inspiration mostly from his works and his influence penetrated every corner of India. We can see in him the fulfillment of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in many aspects. What Roy advocated as an abstract proposition with regard to women, came to be fully illustrated in great many ways by Rabindranath in his poems, short-stories, novels and dramas. None in India championed the cause of women so stoutly and persistently as Tagore.

## Review of Literature

Review of Literature Rabindranath Tagore is such a kind of personality, who is considered as a blazing resource of the research work. During the searching of the existing literature, it had been observed that there are uncountable research works on Rabindranath Tagore in numerous dimensions; these studies primarily emphasized the Personality of the poet, the poet as a human being, poet as a novelist etc. Moreover, many research works focus upon the impact of different political and socio-cultural issues on his creative works; which is reflected through the different characteristic features of his novels. Along with this, there are plenty of research works which emphasized to find out the aesthetic as well as the philosophical interpretations of his creative works. In particular, some psychological interpretations of the poet's psyche and his works are also found mostly from Freudian perspective. It is evident that other than Freudian analytical angle there was no such types of literatures exist where the interpretations primarily focus on the Eriksonian perspective.

Tagore's works included numerous novels, short stories, collection of songs, dance-drama, political and personal essays. Some prominent examples are Gitanjali (Song Offerings), The Religion of Man. His verse, short stories, and novels, which often exhibited rhythmic lyricism, colloquial language, meditative naturalism, and philosophical contemplation, received worldwide acclaim. Tagore was also a cultural reformer who modernized Bengali art by rejecting strictures binding it to classical Indian forms. Two songs from his rabindrasangeet canon are now the national anthems of Bangladesh and India: the Amar Shonar Bangla and the Jana Gana Mana.

Dr. Bagdwal Seema (2006) in his study on **Tagore's idea of God** states that Tagore's vision on God depends on his intuition. He describes that Tagore's God is his supreme person. According to him, there is no contradiction between God and his views. His idea of personal God, is of a God with whom finite beings can have personal relationship. He says that by developing or improving the values of life like love, benevolence, fraternity and by accepting them, we can build a better society. The researcher has attempted to define Tagore's idea of God.

Dr. John Flynn in his study on **Nature, Man and God** (2007) points out that, the people of the world need to talk of creation, which reminds us of God. He continues without a belief in God's creation, the people of the world can not appreciate nature which may cause ecological problems. One has to wonder the beauty of God's creations and a deep contemplation and awareness of the divine presence. He further states that nature is for man, and man is for God. It is a mistake to consider man's presence disturbs the natural ecological equilibrium. At the same time people have the responsibility of conserving and developing nature. It is expected to respect nature not only in natural ways, but also by means of a upright moral life.

Dr. Rich Deem in his study on **How Man is unique Among all other Creatures on Earth** (2006) states that only human beings can have contact with God. Adam and Eve had a personal relationship with God in the Garden of Eden. Such a personal relationship can not be possible for any other animal species. It is the presence of a spirit that was instilled into humans that separates us from the animals.

Dr. Nirmala in her study on **Tagore's concept of Divinity in His Poetry** (2009) asserts that Tagore's concept of divinity revolves around his belief, that is the realization of perfect love between the supreme soul and the soul of all created beings. God is personal and super personal. Tagore perceives beauty of a divine nature. Tagore's concept of divinity stems from his immense passion for love. He saw God as the great creator and he never forgot to do justice to Him. His poetry describes human love, love for man, woman, children and nature, and the love of the Lord is the supreme. Tagore believed in the divinity of humanity. For him God lives in man, particularly in the poor and his

life's mission is to lift them to a level of dignified existence. To achieve this ideal, Tagore sought to delight the human soul with the rhythm and melody of his poetry. He saw the world as the 'garden of God'. He explains the concept of the Lord of life in all his poems. Tagore believes that the purification of body, mind, and heart is essential for the realization of the Divinity.

According to Tagore, God is the 'master poet'. He raises our soul. The 'master poet' is not available to us without enlightenment; what more one needs is the manifested gifts of God. True worship is the surrender to what one can term as Truth. An overview of the studies mentioned above by and large reveals that a few studies have been taken up on Tagore. Most of the studies highlight the factors such as, divinity, love, beauty, nature and Tagore's philosophy. Most of the researchers have confined on Tagore's philosophical ideas. They have attempted to define Tagore's view on God and how one can make communion with the eternal. Some have taken up the topics on Nature, Man and God, but their significance is not combined and brought out. Most of them seldom attempt to define the intended idea which is hidden under the three heads. Under these

conditions the investigator has made up his mind to investigate the sublime idea, which is unexplored by many research scholars.

The Third Group includes Nalini (1884), Sanyasi or The Ascetic (1884), Mayar Khela or The Play of Illusions (1888), Gandhari's Prayer (1897), Karna and Kunti (1897), Bashikaran or Captivation (1901), Vyanga Kautak or Fun and Daughter (1909), Phalguni or The Cycle of Spring (1915), Chirakumar Sabha or Bachelor's Club (1920), Sesh Varshan (1926), Nataraj (1927), Rituranga (1927), Muktir Upaya or The Way of Deliverance (1938).

In Valmiki Prathibha (The Genius of Valmiki-1881) what was striking, so early was the fusion of classical, folk and European strains. The Ramayana story of conversion is retold, how the robber chief, Ratnakar, turns into a poet. The cry of the bird for its mate killed by Ratnakar is replaced by the wail of the young captive girl. The repentant Ratnakar, instead of offering her to Goddess Kali, prays to Saraswathi. When she appears before him, he prays for a boon. It is granted: "Just as your heart of stone has melted with pity, so your poetry will melt millions of hearts and reach many lands and shores and be echoed by future poets".

The Bangla novel in its proper sense, came into existence by the middle of the nineteenth century. It was initiated by Pearychand Mitra (1814 - 1883) who invariably used the pen name Tekchand Thakur. His first and the most representative novel *Alaler Ghorer Dulal* may be considered as the first specimen of original novel in Bangla. It narrates the tragic career of the elder son of an elderly man, who had made money but lacked proper education and good sense.<sup>1</sup>

In such a crude and a simple way was drama performed during the age of the Vedic Aryans. Later, different episodes from The Ramayana [Ram Leela], The Mahabharata and The Bhagavadgita were chosen and dramatized in front of the people. This kind of performance is still very popular in India especially during the time of Dussehra, when the episode of the killing of Ravana is enacted indifferent parts of country (Dr.Sharma, 2010).

The most celebrated dramatists of the ancient era are Ashwaghosh, Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidas, Harsha, Bhavabhuti, Visha-khadatta, Bhattanarayana, Murari and Rajeshkhora, who enriched Indian theatre with their words like MadhyaMavyaayoda, Urubhangam, Karnabharan, Mrichkatikam, Abhigyana Shakuntalam, Malankagnimitram, Uttar Ramacharitam, Mudrarak, Shasa, Bhagavadajjukam, Mattavilasa etc. The supreme achievement of Indian Drama undoubtedly lies in Kalidasa who is often called the Shakespeare of India. The Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory till the 12th century in India when the Mohammedan intrusion shifted the Sanskrit stage. But till the 15th century, plays of Sanskrit tradition were performed on stage in Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra, Utter Pradesh and Gujarat but thereafter, Indian dramatic activity almost ceased due to foreign invasions on India. The beginnings of Loknatya (People' Theatre) are noticed in every state of India from the 17th century onwards.

We see in Bengal "Yatrakirtaniya" "Paol" and "Gaan" in Madhya Pradesh "Mach" in Kashmir

"bhandya thar' and in Gujarat the forms were "Bhavai' and "Ramleela' in Northern India. There were "Nautanki, Bhand, Ramleela and Rasleela' in Maharashtra "Tamasha' in Rajasthan "Raas' and "Jhoomer' in Punjab "Bhangra' and "Song' while in Aasam it was "Ahiyanat' and "Ankinatya' in Bihar it was " "Videshiya' and "Chhari' in West Bengal and Bihar (Dr.Sharma, 2010).

Similarly, Tagore's abstruse philosophy underwrites his well-known brand of "feminism." Tagore sees evolution as a process of refinement, of ascent from the material through the animal towards the spiritual – there is some influence coming from Bergson in shaping his thought in this regard – and thinks that just as homo sapiens has superseded bigger and physically stronger species, within this species a similar supersession will place women ahead of men. Since power – Foucauldian power – has so far been wielded chiefly by man, he blames them for "building up vast and monstrous organizations" – such as the nation, as he has defined it – but now, "woman can bring her fresh mind and all her power of sympathy to this new task of spiritual civilization." Whether this is to come about or not, I was reminded of his general prophecy that women "will have their place, and those bigger creatures [men] will have to give way" (The English Writings, Vol. 2, 416), by a BBC TV documentary comparing the careers of boys (Kaiser Haq, 2010).

Kal Mrigaya (The Fateful Hunt, 1882) takes up another event from the Ramayana, the killing of the son of a hermit by the unwitting king Dasharatha, Rama's father. The plot is thin and not dramatic. It is the music and the singing that matter. Some of it was later incorporated in Valmiki Pratibha.

Mayer Khela (The Play of Illusion, 1888) written at the request of the Calcutta Women's Club for an all-women's cast, the play, as Tagore himself knew was but "a garland of songs with just a thread of dramatic plot running through it". Its charm and popularity are still undimmed. Krishna Kripalini summarizes as "We chase happiness in love and miss both love and happiness".<sup>12</sup> Mayer Khela indeed is a divertimento rather than a regular play, with almost no action worth speaking of but much feeling and insight into feminine psychology, of lovelorn youth and maidens; it provokes both smile and tenderness. There is a certain detachment in the dalliance, the dialects of paganism and Puritanism that runs through much of Tagore's play, can be seen in embryo.

This article investigates Rabindranath Tagore's perspectives on women as seen through his short stories. While his poems primarily describe beauty, nature and his search for what is beyond mundane life, his short stories deal with the lives of ordinary people. Women's struggles and sufferings are particularly highlighted. This article argues that while on one hand Tagore reveals the unequal social structure that oppresses women, on another, he creates courageous women who challenge tradition. His short story "Laboratory," written a few months before his death, expresses his latest views on women and gives shape to the "new woman," whom he perceives as arriving in India in the near future. In so doing, Tagore urges women to find an identity of their own, and realise that wifehood and motherhood are but fractions of their who emancipation of women in the nineteenth century Bengal. Tagore's position was not akin to that of an extremist (Bharati Roy, 2010).

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