

A STUDY ON RABINDRANATH TAGORE IN ENGLISH POETRY

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Abstract: In this paper, Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel laureate poet, writer, philosopher was the ambassador of Indian culture to the rest of the world. He is probably the most prominent figure in the cultural world of Indian subcontinent and the first Asian person to be awarded with the Nobel prize. Even though he is mainly known as a poet, his multifaceted talent showered upon different branches of art, such as, novels, short stories, dramas, articles, essays, painting etc. And his songs, popularly known as Rabindrasangeet, have an eternal appeal and is permanently placed in the heart of the Bengalis. He was a social reformer, patriot and above all, a great humanitarian and philosopher. India and Bangladesh - the national anthems of these two countries are taken from his composition.

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Introduction

Rabindranath Thakur was a Bengali polymath who reshaped his region's literature and music. Author of *Gitanjali* and its "profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse", he became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. In translation his poetry was viewed as spiritual and mercurial; his seemingly mesmeric personality, flowing hair, and otherworldly dress earned him a prophet-like reputation in the West. His "elegant prose and magical poetry" remain largely unknown outside Bengal. Tagore introduced new prose and verse forms and the use of colloquial language into Bengali literature, thereby freeing it from traditional models based on classical Sanskrit. He was highly influential in introducing the best of Indian culture to the West and vice versa, and he is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of modern India. A Pirali Brahmin from Calcutta, Tagore wrote poetry as an eight-year-old. At age sixteen, he released his first substantial poems under the pseudonym Bhānusiha ("Sun Lion"), which were seized upon by literary authorities as long-lost classics. He graduated to his first short stories and dramas and the aegis of his birth name by 1877.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is widely celebrated as one of the most influential literary figures in modern Indian literature and beyond. His contributions to poetry, particularly through his seminal collection *Gitanjali* (1910), have left an indelible mark on the global literary landscape. However, Tagore's poetic evolution is a complex journey, characterized by significant shifts in style,

theme, and philosophical inquiry. This paper explores the trajectory of Tagore's poetic development from his early works to the transformative *Gitanjali*, providing a detailed analysis of how his writing evolved over time. Tagore's literary career spans several decades during a period of significant social, political, and cultural transformation in India. Born in 1861 in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Tagore was immersed in a rich cultural milieu that combined traditional Bengali literary forms with emerging modern influences. His early exposure to various literary genres, including poetry, drama, and prose, along with his engagement with the socio-political issues of his time, profoundly shaped his literary output.

As a humanist, universalist internationalist, and strident anti-nationalist he denounced the Raj and advocated independence from Britain. As an exponent of the Bengal Renaissance, he advanced a vast canon that comprised paintings, sketches and doodles, hundreds of texts, and some two thousand songs; his legacy endures also in the institution he founded, Visva-Bharati University. Tagore modernised Bengali art by spurning rigid classical forms and resisting linguistic strictures. His novels, stories, songs, dancedramas, and essays spoke to topics political and personal. *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings), *Gora* (Fair-Faced), and *Ghare-Baire* (The Home and the World) are his best-known works, and his verse, short stories, and novels were acclaimed or panned for their lyricism, colloquialism, naturalism, and unnatural contemplation. His compositions were

chosen by two nations as national anthems: India's Jana Gana Mana and Bangladesh's Amar Shonar Bangla. Tagore's life as a "peripatetic litterateur" affirmed his opinion that human divisions were shallow. During a May 1932 visit to a Bedouin encampment in the Iraqi desert, the tribal chief told him that "Our prophet has said that a true Muslim is he by whose words and deeds not the least of his brother-men may ever come to any harm" Tagore confided in his diary: "I was startled into recognizing in his words the voice of essential humanity." 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* (1934), and *Char Adhyay* (1934). 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."

Novels

Tagore wrote eight novels and four novellas, among them *Chaturanga*, *Shesher Kobita*, *Char Odhay*, and *Noukadubi*. *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World) through the lens of the idealistic zamindar protagonist Nikhil excoriates rising Indian nationalism, terrorism, and religious zeal in the Swadeshi movement; a frank expression of Tagore's conflicted sentiments, it emerged out of a 1914 bout of depression. The novel ends in Hindu-Muslim violence and Nikhil's likely mortal wounding. *Gora* raises controversial questions regarding the Indian identity. As with *Ghare Baire*, matters of self-identity (*jāti*), personal freedom, and religion are developed in the context of a family story and love triangle. In it an Irish boy orphaned in the Sepoy Mutiny is raised by Hindus as the titular *gora* "whitey". Ignorant of his foreign origins, he chastises Hindu religious backsliders out of love for the indigenous Indians and solidarity with them against his hegemon-compatriots. He falls for a Brahmo girl, compelling his worried foster father to reveal his lost past and cease his nativist zeal. As a "true dialectic" advancing "arguments for and against strict traditionalism", it tackles the colonial conundrum by "portray[ing] the value of all positions within a particular frame not only syncretism, not only liberal orthodoxy, but the extremest reactionary traditionalism he defends by an appeal to what humans share." Among these Tagore highlights "identity conceived of as dharma." In *Jogajog* (Relationships), the heroine Kumudinibound by the ideals of Śiva-Sati, exemplified by Dākshāyani is torn between her pity for the sinking fortunes of her progressive and compassionate elder brother and his foil: her roue of a husband. Tagore flaunts his feminist leanings; pathos depicts the plight and ultimate demise of women trapped by pregnancy, duty, and family honour; he simultaneously trucks with Bengal's putrescent landed gentry. The story revolves around the underlying rivalry between two families the Chatterjees, aristocrats now on the decline (Biprodas) and the Ghosals (Madhusudan), representing new money and new arrogance. Kumudini, Biprodas' sister, is caught between the two as she is married off to Madhusudan. She had risen in an observant and sheltered traditional home, as had all her female relations. Others were uplifting: *Shesher Kobita* translated twice as *Last Poem* and *Farewell Song* is his most lyrical novel, with poems and rhythmic passages written by a poet protagonist. It contains elements of satire and postmodernism and has stock characters who gleefully attack the reputation of an old, outmoded, oppressively

renowned poet who, incidentally, goes by a familiar name: "Rabindranath Tagore". Though his novels remain among the least-appreciated of his works, they have been given renewed attention via film adaptations by Ray and others: Chokher Bali and Ghare Baire are exemplary. In the first, Tagore inscribes Bengali society via its heroine: a rebellious widow who would live for herself alone. He pillories the custom of perpetual mourning on the part of widows, who were not allowed to remarry, who were consigned to seclusion and loneliness. Tagore wrote of it: "I have always regretted the ending".

At the age of just seventeen Rabindranath's first novel *Karuna* was serialised in 'Bharati' (1877-78) but as he considered it immature the novel was not published in a book form. He was influenced by Bankimchandra for beginning his career as a novelist. Rabindranath started with sentimental novel and the sob-stuff and soon discovered his real self. That's why he started with the sentimental story *Karuna* after that he started writing fact based historical novels such as –*Rajarshi* (uranir Hat (1883) and *Rajarshi* (1887) which closely follow the story of Bengal and Tripura as well. After Bankimchandra's *Krishnakanter Uil* Rabindranath wrote *Chokher Bali* which seemed the second landmark in the history of novel in the world of Bengali literature (Bandyopadhyay, 2004). The "almost half poetry" novel of Rabindranath *Seser Kabita* that borrows the expression of Krishna Kripalini (Kripalini 2001, 194) is linked to the abortion of poet's travel to England in January 1928. Oxford University invited him to deliver the Hibbert Lectures but due to illness in Madras he postponed his voyage and for recovery detoured to Colombo but returned to India eventually and for three weeks stayed in Bangalore where the manuscript of Tagore's novel *Seser Kabita* was completed by him what he started in Colombo (Sil, 2020) [10].

Stories

Tagore's three-volume *Galpaguchchha* comprises eighty-four stories that reflect upon the author's surroundings, on modern and fashionable ideas, and on mind puzzles. Tagore associated his earliest stories, such as those of the "Sadhana" period, with an exuberance of vitality and spontaneity; these traits were cultivated by zamindar Tagore's life in Patisar, Shajadpur, Shelaidaha, and other villages. Seeing the common and the poor, he examined their lives with a depth and feeling singular in Indian literature up to that point. In "The Fruitseller from Kabul", Tagore speaks in first person as a town dweller and novelist imputing exotic perquisites to an Afghan seller. He channels the lucubrious lust of those mired in the blasé, nidorous, and sudorific morass of

subcontinental city life: for distant vistas. "There were autumn mornings, the time of year when kings of old went forth to conquest; and I, never stirring from my little corner in Calcutta, would let my mind wander over the whole world. At the very name of another country, my heart would go out to it I would fall to weaving a network of dreams: the mountains, the glens, the forest." The *Golpoguchchho* (Bunch of Stories) was written in Tagore's *Sabuj Patra* period, which lasted from 1914 to 1917 and was named for another of his magazines. These yarns are celebrated fare in Bengali fiction and are commonly used as plot fodder by Bengali film and theatre. The Ray film *Charulata* echoed the controversial Tagore novella *Nastanirh* (The Broken Nest). In *Atithi*, which was made into another film, the little Brahmin boy Tarapada shares a boat ride with a village zamindar. The boy relates his flight from home and his subsequent wanderings. Taking pity, the elder adopts him; he fixes the boy to marry his own daughter. The night before his wedding, Tarapada runs off again. *Strir Patra* (The Wife's Letter) is an early treatise in female emancipation. Mrinal is wife to a Bengali middle class man: prissy, preening, and patriarchal. Travelling alone she writes a letter, which comprehends the story. She details the pettiness of a life spent entreating his viraginous virility; she ultimately gives up married life, proclaiming, *Amio bachbo. Ei bachlum*: "And I shall live. Here, I live." *Haimanti* assails Hindu arranged marriage and spotlights their often dismal domesticity, the hypocrisies plaguing the Indian middle classes, and how *Haimanti*, a young woman, due to her insufferable sensitivity and free spirit, foredid herself. In the last passage Tagore blasts the reification of Sita's selfimmolation attempt; she had meant to appease her consort Rama's doubts of her chastity. *Musalmani Didi* eyes recrudescant Hindu-Muslim tensions and, in many ways, embodies the essence of Tagore's humanism. The somewhat auto-referential *Darpaharan* describes a fey young man who harbours literary ambitions. Though he loves his wife, he wishes to stifle her literary career, deeming it unfeminine. In youth Tagore likely agreed with him. *Darpaharan* depicts the final humbling of the man as he ultimately acknowledges his wife's talents. As do many other Tagore stories, *Jibito o Mrito* equips Bengalis with a ubiquitous epigram: *Kadombini moriya proman korilo she more nai* "Kadombini died, thereby proving that she hadn't."

Poetry

Tagore started writing these poems in his childhood. A book named 'Gatha' and some poems and stories were published before 20 years. Love of nature and spiritual themes are prominently described in his

poetry. Tagore has also written many poems in prose-poetry style. His poetry is immense. He has written countless love songs and poems. He also wrote poems full of country-premise in Bangla literature. 'Sonar Nari', 'Kathaon Kahini', 'Balaka', 'Urvashi', 'Gitajanli' etc. are some of his excellent poetic compositions.

Rabindranath Tagore is highly honoured as one of the greatest literary figures in history. Tagore wrote more than thousand poems of various inner meanings (Majumdar, 1993) [6]. He was invited by the kings of Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Norway, President Hoover of the USA, Mussolini, Deuce of Itali, Soviet Government and President Hindenburg of Germany. Rabindranath was hailed as the Poet-Sheer of India by China and Japan. Rabindranath Tagore was basically lyric poet of India (Majumdar, 1993) [6]. According to Rabindranath what ultimately means around us is love but basically it is God-love. The following words were appealed by Rabindranath: 'Where is this hope for union except in thee, my God?' (The Gardener: poem no. 50). In Gitanjali (2011, p. 20) Tagore expressed vividly and inspiringly: "The morning light has flooded my eyes – this is thy message to my heart. Thy face is bent from above, thy eyes look down on my eyes, and my heart has touched thy feet." (Gitanjali: No.59) (Samantaray, 2013) The part of Tagore's writing in English is diverse and large. He translated a huge portion of his Bengali poems and plays into English including a few poems of his contemporaries, and religious lyrics of medieval saints. He was awarded The Nobel Prize in literature in 1913 for Gitanjali and The Gardener (Tagore, 2004).

Tagore's poetic style, which proceeds from a lineage established by 15th- and 16th-century Vaishnava poets, ranges from classical formalism to the comic, visionary, and ecstatic. He was influenced by the atavistic mysticism of Vyasa and other rishi-authors of the Upanishads, the Bhakti-Sufi mystic Kabir, and Ramprasad Sen. Tagore's most innovative and mature poetry embodies his exposure to Bengali rural folk music, which included mystic Baul ballads such as those of the bard Lalou. These, rediscovered and repopularised by Tagore, resemble 19th-century Kartābhajā hymns that emphasise inward divinity and rebellion against bourgeois bhadrak religious and social orthodoxy. During his Shelaidaha years, his poems took on a lyrical voice of the moner manush, the Bāuls' "man within the heart" and Tagore's "life force of his deep recesses", or meditating upon the jeevan devata the demiurge or the "living God within". This figure connected with divinity through appeal to nature and the emotional interplay of human drama. Such tools saw use in his Bhānusimha

poems chronicling the Radha-Krishna romance, which were repeatedly revised over the course of seventy years. Tagore reacted to the halfhearted uptake of modernist and realist techniques in Bengali literature by writing matching experimental works in the 1930s. These include Africa and Camalia, among the better known of his latter poems. He occasionally wrote poems using Shadhu Bhasha, a Sanskritised dialect of Bengali; he later adopted a more popular dialect known as Cholti Bhasha. Other works include Manasi, Sonar Tori (Golden Boat), Balaka (Wild Geese, a name redolent of migrating souls), and Purobi. Sonar Tori's most famous poem, dealing with the fleeting endurance of life and achievement, goes by the same name; hauntingly it ends: Shunno nodir tire rohinu porī / Jaha chhilo loe gēlo shonar tori "all I had achieved was carried off on the golden boat only I was left behind." Gitanjali is Tagore's best-known collection internationally, earning him his Nobel.

Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore was both philosopher, poet, and novelist as well. He dreamed of an Independent India, he wanted to change the European educational system. He believed that one cannot properly understand the concept of education and gather knowledge in a foreign language rather than one's mother tongue. Tagore wrote so many poems, novels, short stories, essays in Bengali. But Tagore became famous specially as a poet, he became famous as a poet at such an early age and during his lifetime he had written 108 of poems listed in the book Gitanjali and received Noble Prize in 1913. He also translated 103 of his Bengali poems in English and name the book Song Offerings. Tagore wanted to show the world that how beautiful the Bengali language is. He has gifted us so many beautiful poem, novel, drama, short story that makes him international poet to Indian Poet. We should be proud as Indian to be born in that country where Rabindranath was born as well. The Bengali poet, writer and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) remains a unique, though still under-recognised genius. Tagore's cultural production was vast, covering poetry, prose and plays; an astonishing volume of music which is played and sung throughout Bengal to this day (and includes the national anthems of two countries, India and Bangladesh); internationally acclaimed and exhibited paintings; social, political and philosophical essays; agrarian reform; pioneering environmentalism; the creation of a school and a university. His philosophy of education may yet come to be seen as one of his most significant contributions.

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