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RABINDRA NATH TAGORE: A PATRIOTIC POET

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INTRODUCTION

The loss of pride in our national heritage has brought our country to the brink of despair and destruction. The present generation of Indians is experiencing a sense of loss of direction. Nobody seems to bother about the country. This has resulted in a great deterioration in values. A revival of a sense of pride in our country's greatness is needed to counter the present negative mood of the country.

" Thy centuries follow one another,
perfecting a small wild flower."¹

These lines prove true in reference to Tagore, the first Asian to get the Nobel Prize, who made pioneering contribution to literary field. Voice of Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore, is a towering figure in the millennium old literature of Bengal. Anyone who becomes familiar with this large and flourishing tradition will be impressed by the power of Tagore's presence in Bangladesh and in India. His poetry as well as his novels, short stories, and essays are very widely read, and the songs he composed reverberate around India and throughout Bangladesh. Tagore speaks about himself in the preface to **Sadhana**, 'Brought up' in a family where texts of the Upanishad's are used in daily worship and he has had before him the example of his father who lived his long life in the closet communion with God, while not neglecting the duties to the world ... ²

" Let the promises and hopes, the deeds
and words of my country be true, my Lord."³

For Tagore it was of the highest importance that people be able to live in freedom. His attitudes towards politics and culture, nationalism and internationalism, tradition and modernity, can all be seen in the light of this belief.

The volume and variety of Tagore's works are extraordinary and the quality of an order yet unsurpassed in India and on par with the best else where in the world. His first poem '**Banphool**' was published in 1876 in a Bengali magazine named '**Gyanankur**' and then in 1877, joined the editorial board of '**Bharti**'. He wrote stories to awaken the spirit of patriotism among countrymen and also composed and sang a song in Bengali language at the Indian National Congress Bhavan in the year 1901. Rabindranath Tagore started the school '**Shantiniketan**' with four disciples, a unique system of education amidst nature under shade of trees and mystic silence. By 1930, Rabindranath Tagore skilled himself with the art of painting as a medium of expression and created 3000 words of art during the period of ten years. He wrote about 4000

songs and his compositions came to be known as '**Rabindra Sangeet**'. He also wrote a number of books, including collection of poems, short stories, novels, essays, plays etc. A few to mention are '**Banphool**', '**Morning Songs**', '**Sandhya Sangeet**', '**Raja**', '**Mansi**', '**Malini**', '**Gora**', '**Post Office**', '**Gitanjali**', etc. He was a recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, the first Asian to receive the honor. He had endless love for his country and countrymen. He also received many awards and honors within and outside the country.

Tagore was, both, a poet and an excellent musician. In his introduction to **The Gitanjali**, W.B. Yeats lavishly lauds the musical quality and popularity of Tagore. To him no other poet seemed as famous in Europe as Tagore was among the poets. About his music, Yeats remarks:

"He (Tagore) is as great in music as in poetry, and his songs are sung from the West of India in to Burma wherever Bengali is spoken"⁴

Shantiniketan as a home for retirement and meditation, an Ashram for cultural and spiritual realization, owed its origins to Tagore's father, the Maharshi. In course of time, Shantiniketan and the nearby Sriniketan became the focal centers of a new experiment in living. The cultures of the East were to be brought together, and a living relationship was to be attempted between the West and the East: the East was first to find its own soul, and then help the world to transmute the seeming west-East dichotomy into a creative unity and thus achieve a broad base for human understanding and purposive activity. "We must recognize", Tagore once declared, "that it is providential that the West has come to India, and yet some one must show the East to the West, and convince the West that the East has her contribution to make to the history of civilization. India is no beggar to the West. And yet even though the West may think she is, I am not far thrusting off Western civilization and becoming segregated in our independence. Let us have a deep association".⁵ When the political climate irked him, he returned to Shantiniketan and sought the cultivation of solitude and Nature the innermost springs of spiritual life.

Tagore was a proud and ardent patriot. His most intense period of political activity was in the years following 1905, when the agitation against the partition of Bengal was at its height. He renounced his knighthood in 1919 as a protest against the **Amritsar affair**.

The horror of the **Jallianwalla Bagh** massacre stunned Tagore and he renounced his title. In a letter to the Viceroy he wrote, "the disproportionate severity of the punishment inflicted the unfortunate people and the method of carrying it out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilized government and these are the reasons which have painfully compelled me to ask your Excellency to relieve me of my title."⁶ Tagore remained a true patriot, supporting the national movement and writing the lyrics of the Jana Gana Mana, which is India's national anthem

Tagore has been generally regarded as a critic of patriotism. When he was criticised for his anti-patriotic views, he wrote in a letter to Mrs. Abla Bose, wife of a great Indian scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose, patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter, my refuge is humanity. I will not

buy glass for the prize of diamonds and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live." ⁷ Here makes it clear that for him the whole of humanity is more important than narrow patriotism. In his view patriotism is an antithesis of humanitarianism.

Tagore seems to believe that one should not worship one's country as God. Since patriotism requires worship of one's motherland, Tagore does not approve of such patriotism. Tagore believes in universalism. He did not want the world to be broken into smaller fragments, because in his view patriotism divides and separates people of one country from those of another. He did not show any enthusiasm for patriotism the way it is generally understood. Though nationalism was "**a great menace**" for R.N.Tagore, yet he wanted his nation, i.e., India to be free. Jawahar Lal Nehru, writing about Tagore said. " He played a prominent part in the Swadeshi movement that swept through Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century" Prof. Humayun Kabir writes, In 1919, it was again he who first raised the voice of protest against the atrocities at Jaliawala Bagh." ⁸

According to Prof. Humaun Kabir " The whole of Tagore's adult life was passed in a tense atmosphere of rising and developing nationalism in India" ⁹

Tagore's poetry reveals him as a poet of man. For instance, in '**The Foreigner**' he declares that man can have his name in every clime and his country in every region of the world, for he has discovered, love in each speck of earth and joy in the spread of the sky," In '**Basundhara**'.

The poet says:

".....How I long in my mind.
To be the kinsman of all people in all lands"¹⁰

Universal religion and international humanism are the most distinct contributions of Rabindranath to modern thought. In the political field nationalism had been regarded for long as the highest ideal. Tagore was the first in the modern age to denounce aggressive nationalism and hold up the ideal of internationalism before the people of the world. According to Tagore, nationalism is based on greed, hatred and fierce competition and it dehumanises the entire mankind. That is why he asks in sheer indignation:

Are we to bend our knees to the spirit of this nationalism which is sowing broadcast over all the world seeds of fear, greed, suspicion, unashamed lies of its diplomacy and unctuous lies of its profession of peace and good-will and universal brotherhood of man?¹¹

Tagore was deeply influenced by Hinduism as expressed in the Upanishads, which ultimately turned him into a staunch humanist and internationalist. For the sake of national freedom, he said, " If Hindu and Muslim had united in real friendship, a long stride towards the attainment of Swaraj would have been taken".

Tagore composed verses and prayed to God for the freedom of the nation. In his **Gitanjali**, he wrote the following poem praying for the freedom of India in an ideal atmosphere:

“Where the mind is without fear
 and the head is held high;
 where knowledge is free;
 where the world has not been broken up,
 into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
 where the clear stream of reason,
 has not lost its way
 into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
 where the mind is led forward
 by thee into ever widening thought and action.
 Into that heaven of freedom, my father,
 Let my country awake.”¹²

Thus Tagore wanted India to be free and prayed to God for it but he was not at all in favour of the ‘narrow domestic walls’ of the nation in this world. In his opinion “blind worship of the nation and the nation state contained the seeds of disaster for man.”¹³

Rabindranath Tagore is much impressed by Wordsworth’s immortal message to humanity. He shows his awareness of the universal personality and individual’s personal link with him. Under Wordsworthian impression, Tagore has eagerness to see things in the light of eternity as Wordsworth has sung in his sonnet:

“The world is too much with us.”¹⁴

Tagore, after articulating a prayer for his country’s redemption, felt that the modern age has brought the whole world very close but it has really made it difficult or rather very difficult for human beings to come in touch with man – his inner spirit.

Rabindranath Tagore carries out this message to humanity in his **The Gitanjali**, **Geetmalya** and in other short lyrics. In his earlier poems, Tagore has only thought and yearned for it, but in his later poems, he pledges deep into it and he tries to discover the ultimate reality. T.S.Eliot comments on Tagore’s Poems which **Gitanjali** Contains:

“In perfect language some permanent human impulse.”¹⁵

The poet’s quest for ultimate realisation is evident in his poems. In the **Gitanjali**, this easily touches the inner chords of human soul. Tagore’s mind was turning more and more universal; in a letter he wrote, “we must go beyond all narrow bounds and look towards the day when Buddha, Christ, Mohammed become one.” The idea of the universal man (Vishwamanava) was slowly taking shape in his mind.

Tagore believed that a man should achieve his perfect success in merging his human individuality in the welfare of the common men. He, therefore, laboured all his life to serve his countrymen. In spite of his devotion to mysticism his poems proclaim that life is meant to be lived. He found the attainment of freedom in a happy worldly life.

He stated; " I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim.....yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination and all my desires ripen into fruits of joy."¹⁶

There was perhaps never a poet more of the "earth" than Tagore. In many a poem he had proudly sung the beauty and splendour of the 'earth'. But he also liked the 'earth'; perhaps all the more for his poverty and imperfections, and also for its vitality in worldly life. He sang:

How often, great earth, have I felt my

being yearn to flow over you, sharing in
the happiness of each green blade that
raises its signal banner in answer
to the beckoning blue of the sky,
I feel as if I had belonged to you
ages before I was born.¹⁷

He has the love for his mother earth in the bottom of his heart. He wants to share his happiness and grief all with her. He feels that the relation of him, with the earth is eternal. It seems that he belonged to her from centuries ago. It is the relation of soul.

His love of life and world is again manifested in another writing, he wrote:

" This world is sweet, I do not want to die

I wish to dwell in the ever-burning life of man."¹⁸

These above cited lines show that he is such a patriot that having so many agonies, poverty and so many difficulties, he loves his country, his earth very much. He wants to live in this world forever. This earth gives him so many happiness that it seems that he has his relation with the world with many ages.

CONCLUSION

Let us hope that our young patriotic poets will use the magic of their pens for the re-construction of our country. With this hope we recall the beautiful lines of Tagore here: -

"Into that land of freedom, my father,
let my country awake."

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