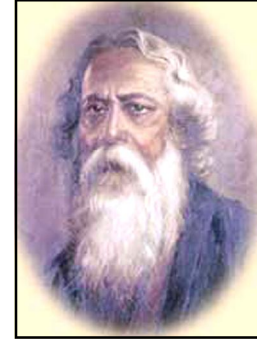


Rabindranath Tagore: The Guru of Indian Poets



Pradeep Kumar Gan

During the days of freedom movement, several poets and writers of India produced creative works capable of inspiring nationalism and patriotism among the people. Among the poets Rabindranath Tagore was a great Indian poet, who contributed enormously to the nation's freedom movement.

The Guru of Indian poets, Rabindranath Tagore was born in Calcutta on 7th May 1861. The Tagore family had a long tradition of culture and yet was not closed to the new winds coming from the west to India at that time. And what is more, the family was ready to provide its children every thing that was congenial to the flowering of their inherent talents.

Rabindranath Tagore ran away from a traditional school during his early teens and had his education seen to and supervised by his father. He was sent to England in 1878 for further education under Henry Morley at London University College. At the threshold of his youth, he had already been initiated into Indian classical literature, Indian and western music and had begun to write verse. In his making as a poet, Tagore was greatly influenced by the inspirations from Brahma Samaj. His books of poems, dramas, short stories and novels in Bengali soon gave him a distinctive place in that literature.

Initially a raconteur, his compendium 'Letters from a Sojourner in London' which was based on his life and times in London was published in book form in 1881. During the same

year he wrote the play 'Valmiki Prativa' and it was a rare stage appearance when Tagore appeared in the title role. Tagore's genius entered a new phase when he composed the poems of 'Manasi', the musical play 'Mayur Khela' and the drama 'Raja Rani'. He was the editor of the monthly magazine 'Sadhana'. He ultimately published his works 'Sonar Tari' and 'Panchabhuta' in the same journal.

It is the powerful patriotic spirit of Tagore's literary works that brought him in the mainstream of the freedom struggle and earned him national wisdom. He captured the depth of the nation's feelings in his poem 'Into That Heaven of Freedom' a poem that moved many nationalists to tears.

*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 words come out from the depth of truth,
Where tireless striving stretch its arm towards
perfection,
Where the mind is led by thee into ever-widening,
Thought and action into that heaven of freedom,
My Father; Let my country awake.*

As a patriot poet and a nationalist, Rabindranath Tagore influenced not only the leaders of the national movement but also the masses. His works generated a spirit for liberating India from colonialism. He was on a poetic mission

to save India from slavery. His works ignited passion and united people to dedicate themselves to the national struggle. He opposed the Partition of Bengal along communal lines and resented the concept that would divide his beloved state. He preached swadeshi, composed soul-stirring songs, wrote incisive essays, addressed meetings and led protest marches.

Tagore gifted to India her national anthem, a prose paraphrase of which he read at Over Town Hall as part of his world famous essay 'My Interpretation of India's History'. The national anthem was composed for the Brahma Samaja anniversary in 1912. The inspiration and patriotic spirit generated by this song was considerable and immeasurable. The song generated a sense of national unity during the days of freedom struggle which made India stronger than ever before. That poem made one of the makers of modern India. He was a seer and national builder. He was given importance for revival of Hinduism.

Tagore was a great poet. In 1874 his first poem 'Abhilash' was published in 'Tattobodhini Patrika'. During his life his entire writings include 1000 poems, 2000 songs and large number of short stories. In 1912, Tagore sailed for England, where the translation of the 'Gitanjali' (Song-Offerings) created a literary sensation among the British poets. Gitanjali established Tagore as a world poet. In 1913, Tagore's Gitanjali was nominated and selected by the Swedish Academy for the Nobel Prize for literature.

For his literary activities, he was Knighted by the British government in 1915. But protesting the Jallianwalabagh tragedy, Rabindranath Tagore gave up his 'Knighthood' in 1919. During this time he declared, "When the badges of honour make our shame glaring in their congruous context of humiliation, and I, for my part, wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of my country men who for their so called insignificance

are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings."

Rabindranath Tagore had started his own school at Shantiniketan in West Bengal in 1901, which grew up gradually to be named as the Visva-Bharati or the centre of the world learning in 1971. The place is now one of the recognized Universities of India and has been a place especially for the study of art, music, literature and cultures of the world. Today this university at Shantiniketan sought to provide a place where children could grow up in freedom, amidst an environment of nature's beauty and warm human relationships.

Tagore was not only a good litterateur, but also was a good painter. In his time each painting of his life was very individualistic. He had given tunes to his songs and having a style and a nuance of their own, they form now a separate category in Indian music called Rabindra Sangeet.

Tagore was a pioneer in the experiment with rural reconstruction in India. The contribution of his songs to the national freedom movement was immense. In short, he is an example of the multifarious ways the excellence hidden within a person can express itself, provided the proper environment is there and provided the centre within the individual is awake to take advantage of that environment.

To conclude, Tagore's life time achievements can be put in Iqbal Masud's words "In Tagore we have a culture going back 2000 years-it is what one can call the Hindu Culture. But a point that is often missed is that Tagore was a product of the Bengal Renaissance, which in turn was a product of 19th century liberalism."

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