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Aparupa Chakraborty
Office Assistant, Swami
Vivekananda University,
Barrackpore, West Bengal,
India

Santanu Tewari
Assistant Professor and Head,
Department of Music, Batter
College, Dantan College, West
Bengal, India

Corresponding Author:
Santanu Tewari
Assistant Professor,
Department of Music, Batter
College, Dantan College, West
Bengal, India

Critical appreciation of Rabindranath Tagore and his literary contribution: A review

Aparupa Chakraborty and Santanu Tewari

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore is one of the greatest Indian poets, novelist, philosopher, and a short story writer of early twentieth century. He is also the first non-European who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 that make us proud to be an Indian. He wanted to hold on the Indian culture over the European culture which he depicted in his every poet, novel, drama. This paper points out the philosophical view of Rabindranath Tagore and his thoughts about education, tradition, and society of India. The contribution of Rabindranath Tagore in the world of literature is clearly discussed in this paper. Rabindranath was so fond of nature and believed that education cannot be properly done in a constructed area of brick and cement rather than a free natural area, beneath the sky and trees with a free mind. That's why he founded Visva Bharti, located at Santiniketan, Bolpur for independent education in India. In this paper I've tried to bring up some of the contributions and thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, philosopher, Gitanjali, Visva-Bharti, contribution

1. Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore is celebrated composer for celestial literature and for the national anthem of India and Bangladesh. He established Shantiniketan as a university and mesmerized everyone through his potent yet subtle writing (Rani, 2021) ^[8]. Tagore was born on 7th May 1861, who was a poet, painter, novelist, and a great scholar and a universal philosopher of the 20th century (Rani, 2021) ^[8].

In Rabindranath's opinion genuine education might advance mankind. During traveling the world, he realised the crucial role of education in culture. (Malik, 2020) ^[7]. Rabindranath Tagore was honoured by the Nobel Prize for his collection of poems *Gitanjali* or Song Offerings (1913, London, Macmillan) has been commended as a universal message of abundance, tranquillity, fortitude, and determination for every individual. (Bhattacharya, 2014) ^[2]. Foreign system of education affected Tagore's initial education, but he greatly emphasized the importance of traditional Indian educational system. All these factors strengthened his point of view as a philosopher, his ideas about education went far beyond only theoretical knowledge and utilized as well in real life. This is still relevant to the modern society of 21st century and our new generation that can be found in all his writings. He has a strong desire to make India a country where Indians can live with full dignity and respect (Rani, 2021) ^[8].

The nucleus of his educational idea was centred around the need for self-determination and strengthening the nation from the root. He realized that the beginning of education was best in mother tongue or the vernacular. He provided appropriate and surplus reading materials for the students through his many writings (Bhattacharya, 2014) ^[2].

1.1 Tagore as Philosopher

Gupta (2005) comprehensively introduced about Tagore's philosophical, socio-political, and religious thinking in his book. After exploring the wide range of Rabindranath Tagore 's thought Sen Gupta briefly discussed Tagore's idea of spirituality, his educational innovations, his reflection on the significance of death, what is Tagore's view on marriage, his distinctive understanding of Hinduism etc. Sudhir Kakar considered Tagore's mysticism and his connection with the Bauls of Bengal in the psychoanalytic theories.

The relation between Tagore's metaphysics and his brand of feminism is analysed. (Haq, 2010) [4].

F.B. Jevons (1918) [5] noted that "I find that for myself the easiest way to approach Sir Rabindranath Tagore's book on Personality is to start from Dr. Merz's Religion and Science." Dr. Merz exposes the two ways in which we may consider the world, in the one world, we are aware of everything and falls within our consciousness; in another world we are surrounded by an external world. We are unable to combine the two points of view into one. Dr. Merz says "let our thought wander from one to the other without trying to unite both aspects in one moment of time."

1.2 Tagore as Poet

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 Hinder burgh 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).

1.3 Rabindranath as Novelist

At the age of just seventeen Rabindranath's first novel *Karuna* was serialised in 'Bharati' (1877-78) but as the 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 (Bandyapadhyay, 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].

2. Conclusion

In a sense, 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.

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