



RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND HIS UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore, a major bridge builder between the East and the west could make an indelible mark on the pages of the history of Indian writing in English, viewing the composite culture and pluralistic society of India through the inward his eye, being of a universal poet of a great intellectual variety and depth of his approach, which fetched him the unique distinction of being the first ever receipt of the Nobel Prize for literature for his 'Gitanjali' in the year 1913 in Asia. It is the rarest honour that his literary acumen has gifted him with. Being a man of great versatility, proving his mettle in the arts such as painting, singing, writing and composing music, Tagore could bring to our a close 'The Universal Man', 'the Cosmic Man', The poetry and prose which accrued from the great literary genius of Tagore catered to the men and women of all ages, nations and generations with their quality of being able to get matched to their needs both aesthetic and spiritual. Coupled with Tagore's traits, as a poet, of making the people understand what true nationalism was and is and what it should be his poetic exuberance succeeded in making the people of a subject nation understand the real reasons for their subjugation, which were, in a word, ignorance, illiteracy and superstition.

INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore held aloft the torch of nationalism, writing the national anthems of two countries like India and Bangladesh. The songs that fill our hearts with a great patriotic favour and the deep sense of belonging to his nation which has given birth to Gautama Buddha, the Light of Asia and Mahatma Gandhi, the title, "Mahatma" being given to Gandhiji by the universal poet himself. Tagore's being the proponent of the theory of one world does not come into the way of his being a patriot which is evident through his renouncing of the title, 'sir' in response to the Jallian Wallabagh Massacre. It is believed that he had often supported India's struggle for freedom at various stages even while denouncing her ignorance superstition, illiteracy and mythical beliefs. It is the same emotional aspect of

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nationalism perpetuated the Indian to give a mere geographical unit of India which occupies roughly 2.5% of the area of the world, a shape of a Goddess and worship her and even the meetings of the congress before independence echoed the words 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai'. The slogan was used to welcome the leaders like Gandhi and Nehru to address the masses, as Jawaharlal Nehru describes us in his discovery of India. It is the same Idolatry of the nation that resulted in our people holding firmly the view that India and culture was far superior to others, being indifferent to the fact that the mere geographical unit was a land of almost all the races of the world, as it continues to be. As goes the beliefs of the people that the river, 'Saraswathi' flows with the Ganga and the Yamuna and all the three find a merge in Allahabad, called the "Triveni Sangaman". But the existence of the river Saraswathi is mythical. It is not a hyperbolic statement to say that every passing generation finds a new element in Tagore, a combination of a nationalist and an internationalist, in the truest sense of the terms. Every generation also finds it more relevant in its own ways and its times to real and understand Tagore's idealistic world that has not been broken up into fragments by the narrow domestic walls (Where the mind is without fear an English poem) of unbounded patriotism that gives way for the people to think that one country is superior to the other and a country is inferior to the other. The destruction of the Berlin wall and the unification of Germany that has made it one of the world's richest countries which has happened in our own times can be taken as an example to say that Tagore's idea of oneness would bring us good results and eventually fetch us progress and prosperity, "United we stand, divided we fall".

Rabindranath Tagore was a great visionary who had always dreamt of India's freedom (Comparing freedom to Heaven in one of the most celebrated poems, ever written by him, where the Mind is Without Fear, "Into that Heaven of freedom my father, let my country awake).

He waited for and wanted not the and the social liberation of the country, the transfer of power from the English to the Indians, not at least the economic liberation of the country which had been a British colony for several years but the liberation of the consciousness of man. When our consciousness is liberated, we would be liberated from our ideas of the subjugation, servile attitude and subservient thinking. When we have that liberation of consciousness, we would also have the liberation in the physical sense. We would also have the freedom of the spirit. Here it should be understood that spirituality and religion were not one. Spirituality as understood by Rabindranath Tagore, does not give God a shape, as the universality of religion, as was propounded by the Brahma Samaj goes. Tagore's inseparable association with the Samaj is one of the reasons for his practical approach towards religion.

Here, the idea of India's spiritual Guru, Jaggi Vasudev is worth quoting, saying, "Inner Engineering is the peak of well-being". We can ensure that the human beings are free from their anxiety, fever and fret only when they can engineer themselves. A nation, at large, is the collection of individuals. The Darwinian theory of the struggle for existence and the survival



of the fittest does not suit the case of the human beings, as it leads to anarchy, danger and the license of the few individuals being killed and butchered by a few individuals being killed and butchered by a few others. It will also result in the sense of: 'Might is right', It would, beyond any doubt, result in the loneliness of spirit. This loneliness of the spirit of man would make man anti social and very often he might also become misogynist, hating the entire mentioned, living on the face of the earth. It is rather unbecoming of the human being, striving to destruct the web, defending his own idea of nationalism, which is often aggressive. According to Tagore, an important figure of the Indian renaissance, man could not reach his finality as a mere citizen or patriot because it was his soul which could contain him and not the bubble some city, country and the world at large. It was something which could contain the eternal soul of man which was more important than anything else for Tagore. It was Tagore who said that man was greater than all his desires of being a part of the country (Village), city or even the world. Tagore also praises man for being true in his freedom. Rabindranath reiterates his conviction of the necessity of man to bind his will in the process of the attainment of freedom.

He tells us that binding the "will" will save itself from the forces of distraction and wastage, while saying that the velocity of binding the will comes from the bondage itself. Tagore puts it straight across that the liberty of the consciousness is mortgaged for political liberty is the political liberty. Rabindranath Tagore tells us that India had accepted the bonds of her social system in order to progress further ahead in future like the rider who puts reins on his horse and stirrups on his feet in order to ensure a greater speed towards his goal from individual to community, from community to universe and from universe to Infinity – this is the soul's normal progress" (Tagore). Here, it is understood that Tagore's idea of nationalism starts from the individual and ends with the cosmic 'man'. He criticizes the idea of narrow nationalism which would end up in disasters and dangers.

Rabindranath Tagore was a man of a commanding exposition in the sense (real and true) of nationalism in India, not being bent towards the Hindu fundamentalist nationalism which was propounded by a group of leaders like Hedgewar and Sawarkar and even Nathuram Vinayak Godse who assassinated Gandhiji, who was fondly called the Father of the Nation, who is now being venerated with deep sense of respect by the Government at the centre as a part of its power game. While dealing with so complex subjects as religion, God, Spiritualism and Nationalism, Tagore also attempted to explore the concepts thread - bare, elucidating their relevance and significance in the modern world of hatred of one country for the other, which have resorted to a sheer nuclear war.

Tagore tells us through his works that the idea of nationalism is the one that is international with the idea of humanism, universalism and in a word, he emphasizes on the value of progressive internationalism and humanism which should now be the governing principle of the world. This is the idea which would bring together the three people such as Rabindranath



Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who also held the view of “One world”, a world with no barriers, a world which respects the varied forms of culture of all nations. The writings of Tagore, in the context of Universalism, instills the sense of the whole world being one, even while respecting one another’s distinctive existence and brings to a close at once the famous Sanskrit idea of Vasudika Kutumbakam.

Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the prime minister of India got influenced by the Congress of the Oppressed Nationalities, he attended in 1927 in Brussels and concluded that it was the human kind that was confronting the issue of racial superiority and discrimination and it was not just India. Hence, he said that it was this racism that had to wiped out of the world first and when step forward, thinking about the freedom of our country. Nehru’s ideology more or less goes in time with Rabindranath Tagore and so a fitting place is found here to make a mention about. It was the same spirit that he moved forward with, that made Nehru to have an agreement, Panchasheel with China (though the country subsequently broke it) and opt for Non alignment, not joining either of the power blocks. There are no power blocks now. Every country is unique and powerful in its own way. Hence, it is found that studying Tagore’s brand of universalistic nationalism is more significant now than ever before. This is the same approach of Tagore that finds expression in the system of Education that he designed for the students of his Viswa Bharati University, keeping in view the changing needs of both the emerging world and the students. It is where we find a contrasting difference between Gandhi’s Basic Educational plan of 1937 that was confined to the Indian setting and the Indian Mind

The blazing nationalism in Tagore comes out through these lines which find place in his letter addressed to the Governor General in the wake of the Jallian-Wallabagh massacre, “The very least that I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving. Voice to the protest of millions of my countryman surprised into a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when badges of honour make the same glare in their incongruous context of humiliation and I for my part wish to shorn decorations, by the side of my countrymen” (Ghose).

It was exactly this man with a great galvanizing power to stimulate people of his country to a united action and a collective service to the cause of the native land. If this service alone is called nationalism, Tagore was certainly showing his deep sense of nationalism at the very outset of this paragraph in the particular letter, saying that he did not want the decorative title ‘sir’ or the ‘knighthood’ that he was presented with. He, in a word, said that it was not right on the part of the British to try to please a group of intellectuals when a big pool of the massive innocents was suffering from the torment of the subjugation.

Therefore, in this context, it can be argued that Tagore was as nationalist as Gandhiji who also renounced his title ‘Kaiser I – Hind’ in response to the same incident, roughly



simultaneously with Tagore. Though Rabindranath Tagore did not come out to take part in the mass movements which were more or less aggressive and destined towards the goal of driving the British out of India and making India free from the shackles of the British. But undertaking the services rendered by Tagore to the nationalistic spirit of India would be rather a disservice to the country. The robust literary work of Rabindranath Tagore, both quantitatively and qualitatively brings out the real essence of Nationalism, the torch of which blazed like the rising Sun in his hand with the voluminous work produced by him both in prose and poetry. The most cherished poems such as "Freedom and Where the Mind is Without Fear" bring out Tagore's idea of creating a new world that is not broken up into fragments by the narrow domestic walls such as ignorance, illiteracy, disease, death and the elements of unbounded patriotism to one's own country and religious fanaticism which would break up the country into pieces. The other works of Tagore's like Chandalika, Sacrifice, Postmaster etc., also hold a mirror to his perfect understanding of the Indian cultural heritage, not putting aside his basic idea of the entire world getting turned into a village. His typical verbosity and the over use of cliché make Tagore remain away from the average reader, besides possessing the distinction of being the poet who could compose the National Anthem of the two countries like India and Bangladesh. The other important factor that keeps Tagore away from the normal readers is his over philosophizing of the element of life with the idea to bring about a sort of commonality in the religious life of India and the people of different convictions and religions. The last factor and the one that cannot be neglected when it comes to the point of Tagore is that his dealing with the Vedas and Upanishads in English to bring out the greatness of the Cosmic Being that makes it very complicated to understand Tagore.

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