

TAGORE'S POETRY AS THE LYRE OF HEAVEN AND THE SONG OF HUMANITY SOOTHING AND EMBALMING THE HEART OF HUMANITY IN ALL RESPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Ravindranath Tagore, a man of versatile genius and achievements, was the first Indian poet and writer who gained for modern India a permanent place on the world literary map. He mainly wrote in Bengali and translated his own creations into English. His English renderings may be called transcreations. Tagore was a poet par excellence and his writings – plays, short stories, novels, essays, letters, reminiscences and speeches, he gave in India and abroad, are permeated with a rich fund of creation imagination. Tagore is said to have travelled extensively, visited many lands and peoples, studied deeply their different principles of philosophy and life, enriched his various experiences with life-long contemplation and gave out to the world the wealth of wisdom.

INTRODUCTION

Tagore was born in a home teeming with creative activity. He wrote: “We wrote, we sang, we poured ourselves out on every side” In the Tagore family, the East and the West met under the influence of his grandfather who had introduced European paintings, the essential unity of man, God and Nature is again and again stressed. All discord and disharmony are resolved into unity and harmony. That is why it has been said of him, “to read one line of Tagore is to forget all the troubles of the world”. Tagore’s poetry soothes, consoles and strengthens, because it is an expression of his firm faith in the principle of unity, rhythm and harmony. Indian Renaissance influenced Tagore’s personality and found superb expression in his creations. Edward Thompson writes:

*“So that Rabindranath, from his earliest days grew up
in the one house where all the surging tides of the
Indian Renaissance could flow round his daily life
and fill the air he breathed with the exhilaration
of their fresh airs”* (Thompson 10)

As a poet of man, Tagore sings of man in relation to other man or society and he believes in the progress of humanity through the ages. He is horrified at the various evils of materialism and industrialism and the consequent decay of spiritual values. He advocates a remodeling of society on the basis of loving – kindness. His poems have projected Tagore as a great humanist, realist and internationalist. His lyrics are a rare combination of simplicity with sublimity and with intensity and spontaneity. As a poet par excellence, Tagore himself said:

“I am a poet and nothing else” (33).

Tagore is said to have had a very high conception of the aims and functions of poetry and in this respect, he agreed with the great poets of the world. Matthew Arnold said in **Wordsworth**:

*“Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the
greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful
application of ideas to life – to the question; How to live
.... A poetry of revolt against moral ideas in a poetry
of revolt against life; a poetry of indifference towards
moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards life”*
(Ramaswami 54).

For Horace, the end of poetry is to give joy to the mind. Longinus says: “In poetry, the end is enthrallment”. Defining poetry, Coleridge said: “A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object of pleasure, not truth”. According to Wordsworth, “Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression that is in the countenance of all science”. Ruskin defines poetry as “supreme moral truth”. Tagore’s conception of poetry has much in common with these opinions. Poetry leads us in higher and healthier ways than those of the world, and interpret to us the lessons of Nature and the mystery of God. Tagore rejects “the art for art’s sake theory” and says that the significance of art lies in enriching human life. Art is “the illumination of feelings”.

The object of poetry, according to Tagore, is to elevate man’s soul from materialism and to establish a perfect communion between man and his surroundings and the ultimate reality. The poet should aim at achieving creative unity of the individual with the universe. Creation

is the sum bonum of a poet. He says, "Construction is for a purpose, it expresses our wants; but creation is for itself, it expresses our very being" (Tagore-59).

W.B. Yeats finds in the poems of Gitanjali one signal characteristic which is the result of the wedding of poetry to life; Here in these poems, there is harmony between religion and philosophy. Yeats says thus:

"A tradition where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble" (P xiv).

Both mysticism and romanticism blend together in Tagore's poetry. Each draws its sustenance from the other Tagore's mysticism and romanticism are interdependent. Tagore's mysticism is neither a creed nor a philosophy but a practical way of looking at the world with a pure soul. He reveals his vision of life which is an attempt at the purification of soul and the realization of inherent unity with all. His poetry romantic imagination is primarily mystical. His poetry is not an escape from life, rather it is an expression of his joy in the mere act of living. Real happiness is to be found not in the pursuit of distant gains but in the enjoyment of the trifles of the moment. His is a romantic poetry which does not ignore reality, its romance springs out from an acknowledgement of the trivialities of daily life. In the words of S.B. Mukherji,

"The pained vision rouses the poet-prophet;" (P 117).

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