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### Social Justice in the Writings of Rabindranath Tagore

#### Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore is called by the people of India as Maharishi, Gurudev, and Rishi. He was a very vibrant personality of his time in the Indian Literary World. He was known to be a multifaceted genius as a dramatist, poet, producer, actor, painter, musician, social reformer, educationist, prophet, philosopher, story writer, novelist, and a critic of literature. It is not exaggerated if Tagore is called a phenomenon in the history of India. He was a freedom fighter, scholar, painter, and writer and yet above all, he was a man with humility. The contribution of Tagore to the Indian Literature was enormous. He had been a cultural reformer and renaissance man, who revamped Bengali art by removing the obstacles that held its progress. Tagore was an undeviating anti-colonialist. He had a profound understanding of this life. Tagore's writings are assets of India. He was of the opinion that improving one's culture and accepting others' cultures could be one and the same attitude. Tagore belonged to the noble society of Bengal, but he never had an elitist view. He believed that all the problems of the human life could be resolved with the education. He thought that poverty, pestilence of communal conflicts, and industrial backwardness did stifle the society because of insufficient education. Also, he advocated against the dilemma of women and contended for the welfare of women and for their independence by means of his letters, essays, and short stories. Through his writing, he could build vital and upright women role models in order to render the social justice that was due to them at that time. Then, through his act of enrolling the women into his Santiniketan Ashram Education, he was symbolised as a new thinker and forerunner in the coeducation system. Rabindranath Tagore was one of the supreme geniuses in the Indian intellectual society, who did play an important role in the history of Indian Renaissance that happened in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Dr. Radhakrishnan was all praise for Rabindranath Tagore and he pointed out aptly that "he was

one of those rare men about whom it may be said... He was one of the few representatives of the universal man to whom the future of the world belongs” (Radhakrishnan, 1961).

Tagore was known to be a wonderful Universalist and humanist, who did strive hard all over his life to find the sublimit of man in his simplicity. In fact, he wanted to be seen as a man among all men. He demonstrated his desire in one of his poems that “he wanted to be identified as man of all.” Tagore had a broad sense with respect to the humanism, as he had a sense of universalism. Rabindranath Tagore’s humanism teaches us that feeling anything as human – in the human way is a source of joy. Of course, it is the human mind that signifies the meaning and importance of things. Upanishads impacted and formed the Tagore’s humanistic perspective. Many of his philosophical teachings such as Sadhana, Santiniketan, Personality, and The Religion of Man are profoundly affected by the teachings of Upanishads. While he was deeply influenced by Upanishads, his approach of humanism is entirely based on his own knowledge and ideas. In Upanishads, “Brahma” is delineated as devoid of attribute, that is nirguna. However, at the same time, it is also emphasised that “everything is Brahma,” but Rabindranath Tagore acknowledged only the positive aspects of the preaching of Upanishads. In the same line of thought, Tagore declares, “Some modern philosophers of Europe...maintain that the Brahma of India is a mere abstraction, a negation of all that is in the world...but this is certainly not in accord with the pervading spirit of the Indian mind. Instead, it is the practice of realising and affirming the presence of the infinite in all things which have been its constant inspiration.” (Tagore, 1979).

The metaphysical or ontological discussion did not interest Tagore to a great extent because he believed in the constructive works for the removal of deep rooted social evils. His aim was to renovate the ancient Indian religion, culture, and last but not the least, this society. The Tagorean philosophy is not speculative; however, it is the philosophy for a suffering man. The Indian thinker, Dr. Radhakrishnan, has correctly observed that Tagore’s philosophy is “a genuine manifestation of the Indian spirit” (Radhakrishnan, 1961,p.460).

Methodology:

It is a fact that the works of Rabindranath Tagore mandate a very close research. He was of the opinion that a woman could construct and shape the destiny of the nations. He demonstrated through his female protagonists in his novels the growth of women with the passage of time. The lead characters of his novels are depicted as tolerant, submissive, and

broadminded. Many of the novels authored by Tagore investigate the life of the middle class family and the plight of Indian women who were not freed from the shackles of social injustice in a patriarchal Indian society. Therefore, the aim of this article lies in analysing critically the social justice in the works of Rabindranath Tagore.

Critical analysis of works of Tagore in the context of social justice:

The novel *Binodini Kripalini* (1959) has an important place in the works of Rabindranath Tagore which was initially published in Bengali language called *Chokher Bali* (meaning eye sore) in the year 1902. In Bengali, this novel is the first and foremost modern novel and perhaps also in Indian literary world. The core of the novel lies in the complexity of human relationship and reveals the happenings inside the walls of an affluent Bengali home at that time, where a widowed mother lives with her son on whom she does keep all her affection. In this novel, there are only six characters. Binodini is the most realistic, influential, and full-of-vigour woman character of all female protagonists created by Tagore in his novels. Binodini is not afraid to take on the contemporary society and culture. A pretty and young widow, Binodini, breaks the shackles of social injustice that denies her basic right to love and pleasures of human life. When she fights against the injustice meted out to her in the disguise of social norms, she shines as the real heroine of the novel. Thus, she is considered as the liveliest character in the works of Tagore. Binodini is a pretty, brilliant, and educated girl, who is not able to get a husband, as her parents spent what they had on her education. The parents cannot afford a dowry for the marriage. At that time, it is a shame for a Hindu family to keep a girl aged above 12 years unmarried. Panic-stricken, Binodini's parents marry her off to an unhealthy boy, who dies soon after the wedding. She becomes a waif in an insensitive village. Being conscious of her brilliance and prettiness, she takes on the insensitive system in the society in her own stride. She struggles with vigour in her battle against the hardships and humiliation that were the norms in those times for a widow like her. The tragedy she faced in the novel is seen as the shame for a Hindu conscience. A careful investigation of his novels demonstrates two important ideas of special importance to his country. One is about the Universalist as per the ideals of Upanishad, that is the enlightened soul and the other is about the nuance of woman, signifying the energy and sensitivity the Universal Mother, definitely not the sensual young woman as seen by this pleasure-seeking society. They are the two fundamental concepts of the Indian social consciousness that Tagore depicts in his works against the current milieu of violence, hatred, superstition, and vice.

The next work of Tagore taken for the analysis is *The Wreck* (Tagore, 1926). *The Wreck* is thematically wonderful novel, since the story is unfolded on the basis of the accidental meeting of Ramesh and Kamala after the boat tragedy. They are completely

unaware of each other's true relationship. This novel is one of Tagore's detached and light social fantasies. The chief characters in this novel undergo several tragedies. The incidents, thematic development, and the final catastrophe in the novel are described in style; however, while comparing this novel even with his other novels, *The Wreck* is loose in construction and melodramatic rather than being real or natural. The character of Ramesh is indecisive and frail and moreover he sounds artificial. However, except Ramesh, the other characters in the novel are very convincing. The character of Akshay is sophisticated and meddling, which is a common type of character in the real world. Nalinaksha is a straightforward man and he has a kind heart and good understanding. He is really "a solemn stick" as he calls himself in the novel. Like Nalinaksha, Hemanalini is courageous and honest both in her actions and words. However, in this novel, the character of Kamala is stealing the show owing to her meekness and girlish attitude in the beginning and her brilliant and mature behaviour in the end. She is the symbolic representation of a devoted Hindu wife. The whole plot is constructed on the basis of ill-fated capsizing of the boat in the Padma river because of the fierce storm, when Ramesh and Nalinaksha attempt to cross it with their respective brides. The starting point of this novel is the accident. The plot development is entirely based on the element of chance. Fate and faith both lead the characters of the novel.

Rabindranath Tagore's "The Home and The World" Tagore (2005) is taken next for the analysis. It demonstrates Tagore's skill as a novelist which is clearly obvious. The chief characters are Nikhil, Bimala, and Sandip. For Bimala, her home is the world and she is the devoted wife of Nikhil. Their lives are smooth until Sandip makes his entry. He is a man of aggression. Bimala is torn between Nikhil and Sandip. Though Nikhil is aware of the happening in the household, he shows maturity due to his inherent ideal thoughts and large-mindedness. Nikhil and Sandip are north and south poles when it comes to the ideology. While Nikhil is non-violent and humane, Sandip is an unscrupulous and aggressive nationalist. He does not concur with Sandip on the Nation-God ideology. Sandip who is a skilled user of words triumphantly gets the sympathies of Bimala and he declares Bimala as Shakti and Mother India. The slogan of 'Vande Mataram' attracts her and she even goes to the extent of stealing the money from her own house, as encouraged by Sandip, for the national cause. Nikhil allows Bimala to take her own decision. However, Bimala soon realises what she has been doing so far and she dislikes the ugly ways of Sandip to achieve his goals. She is able to identify his lust and greed in the disguise of patriotism. She starts to hate Sandip to the core. The goal of this novel can be found in one of Tagore's lectures in

which he says “Japan With the growth of the power the cult of self – worship of the nation grows in ascendancy; and the individual willingly allows the nation to take donkey rides upon his back and there happens the anomaly which must have such disastrous effects that individual worships with all sacrifices a god which is morally much inferior to himself...” Nikhil is the true hero of this novel by being against the “organized selfishness of nationalism.” In this novel, Sandip’s pseudo-patriotism is defeated by Nikhil’s humane ideology. Bimala is truly a Shakti, the Eternal Energy; however, Sandip’s unscrupulous means of exploiting the Eternal Energy ends with a disaster, suggested in fact by the communal riots that happen at the end of this story. Tagore in this novel supports the creative aspects of energy.

In another short story “Streer Patra (Letter from a Wife),” (Tagore, 1941). Mrinal, the heroine, declares her liberation from her husband in a manner, which is identical to the thoughts and ideas of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengali humanists (K. Bardhaned. , 1990). Tagore’s story is about the injury that has been caused by the hardened customs to the search for love and self-expression. However, these thoughts and expressions are not limited to Bengali modernisation alone. Independent moral argument does not alone form the basis for the Bengal Renaissance, but also a close analysis of the Hindu tradition. This calls for all the Hindus to throw away meaningless superstitions and rigid misconceptions in order to absorb the goodness in the tradition (K. Bardhaned. , 1990). In this aspect, Mrinal resembles the famous Meerabai, the sixteenth-century Rajput queen, who came out of her wedding lock and her royal status in order to perform bhajans. Mrinal says to her husband, “Meerabai too was a woman like me (Gupta, 2009).”

The philosophy of education as proposed by Tagore includes the aesthetic improvement of the senses as well as the intellectuality, literature, music, dance, art, and drama in the day-to-day life. Tagore remembers that in his adolescent age, 'cascade of musical emotion' flooded every day at Jorasanko. “We felt we would try to test everything, and no achievement seemed impossible, we sang, we acted, we poured ourselves out on every side” (Tagore, 1917, p.141).

Tagore was definitely more than a brilliant and important Indian thinker in the twentieth-century India. He was a dominant personality by means of his poetic brilliance. He belonged to the conventional group of Indian philosophers of education motivated by the ancient school of thoughts of Indian education. He intensely panned the defects of English

philosophy of education and western educational approach in India because the goal and means were entirely against the interest of Indian people, and so he presented his philosophies on education. Per Tagore, deficiency in education is the chief stumbling block in the path of India's success and the root of all problems. Per his views, the joy of academic learning is lost when it is seen only as a tool for getting jobs, materials, and wealth. The merit of academic learning lies in understanding the circumstances in which the people are placed and to assume perfect attitude towards them. The aim of the educational system must improve and enrich the emotions, faith, and imaginations through which the people can evaluate, assess, and assume suitable attitudes towards their knowledge. The opinion of Tagore is that the traditional academic learning serves only as a knowledge-factory and no goodness can be derived from such system.

In accordance with Tagore, the education should offer wisdom of one's identity as a complete man and education should be brought in harmony with life. This is called the self-realisation. He tells that such realisation should be the aim of education. The current social condition needs a system of education that must be on the basis of self-realisation so as to begin a stable relation with others in the various social echelons. To achieve this fundamental identity of a human being, one requires undergoing processes towards this phase of a complete man. This can be reached only through education.

Tagore did not identify any contrast between life, thought, and philosophy. In addition, he trusted that each human being has the power to become a super human being, the Universalist. Self-realisation is based on the self-education and this is also paramount in man's development. However, the very important aspect in this is that the educator should believe in himself and universal self that underlies his soul. The educator must have the principles, according to Tagore's conception of self-education, such as freedom, perfection, and universality.

Tagore was very critical of the British educational system because it did not develop the spirit of inquiry and attitude. Furthermore, it segregated the people of India into two classes, the people who underwent British education belonged to an elite class residing in towns and cities of India and the people who did not afford such education belonged to the rural areas. Tagore desired that Indian universities should teach India's own philosophical and spiritual school of thoughts along with the science. According to him, science without the knowledge of self-realisation could only result in ceaseless want for material and wealth and

could lead to the conflicts and wars among the nations of the world which would ultimately bring in the ruins and social inequality and social injustice through the suppression of the weaker by the stronger. Hence, he recommended science should be taught along with spirituality.

On gender equality, Tagore opined that a woman could not be seen as a replica of man. By the very nature of body and mind, a woman differs from man. Tagore wrote, “If woman's nature were identical with man's, if Eve were a mere tautology of Adam, it would give rise to monotonous superfluity”(Tagore, 2009,p.162).

Tagore glorifies the woman's passive quality and compares this quality to that of the soil which not only enables the tree to grow but “helps it to grow in limit” (Tagore, 2004,p.232). Tagore describes that man is engaged in generating the wealth and power. He is not afraid of the annihilation in his endeavour for achievement. He does not bother for the havoc and mayhem caused because of achieving the impossible by means of conflict and extermination, but a woman by her natural virtue of modesty, charity, sacrifice, and love provides life to this world. A woman will nourish and heal the lives on earth. Tagore writes this that without care and love of a woman, “the masculine intellectual civilisations are towers of Babel” (Tagore, 2004, p.171).

During the travel in the boats on the river Padma, while he was looking after the family zamindari in Central Bengal, Rabindranath came into contact with the rural population of Bengal for the first time. In the year 1893, he wrote, “I feel very sorry for these poor riot of my country - they are as helpless as a new-born child sent by God. They have got no other recourse than to rely on the mercy of God for food. I do not know whether it is possible to distribute wealth in the Socialist pattern, if it is not at all possible, I should say it is a very cruel principle of God — men are really very helpless. Let agony be there, but there should be at least some means left for men by which men can aspire for betterment”(Tagore, 1958, p.294).

In some of his poems of “Chitra”, especially in the poem “Ebar phirao more”(Bhattacharya, 2017 , p.42) Tagore's concern and sympathy for the plight of the poor could be found. He desires to provide them with wealth, health, and education, but then this was probably too early for him to think of a way out for the poor. The writings of Rabindranath Tagore about folk people and their culture were true. He wrote in his article

called “Gramya Sahitya” that it is the task of a poet to gather the scattered ideas of the common people and bring it to a shape, a kind of literature(Dasgupta, 1993).

#### Conclusion:

The society can be rehabilitated by means of a strong human relationship. The shortage of such a relationship encouraged the invaders from overseas countries and they created a gulf between the master and the slave and the weak and the strong. Tagore laments that the gate to the entrance of this country is wide open rather than elsewhere. So, Tagore felt that reformation of the society could not be effected without freeing the society from the evils. His aim was to form an undivided society in order to raise the dignity of man. The key factor here is the proper education. Hence, he emphasises on proper education for all the sections of the society in order to bring in the social reforms. Through his writing, he created female role models in order to encourage a new generation of women. Then, by admitting the females into his Santiniketan School, he became a true reformer of the Indian society. Tagore was not satisfactory with the prevalent educational models and he formed a substitute model of education that aimed at the enrichment of whole self of the human beings. The social change and justice that were born out of Rabindranath’s writings were immense. The effect that was achieved through Tagore’s writing is very enormous. His ideal is a combination of rural life and global university, without desensitising the nations, cities, and profit systems in the process. Tagore, in fact, did not provide a new world; rather he provided us with a multitude of views to scrutinise the world and the life. The undercurrent of his views is the humanity and social justice. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore shall remain to be relevant in this world as long as the humanity has its relevance and a place in this world.

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