



# Exploring The Life And Works Of Rabindranath Tagore

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**Abstract-** In this research paper the researcher has examined the various impacts and inspirations that helped in making the personality of Rabindranath Tagore. His birth, parentage and his education all are included here. It unravels several experiences that he has gone through while visiting abroad for studies, and his important works are mentioned here. The way young Rabindranath was craving for love and affection of both father and mother is also discussed in this paper. All the important happenings of his personal life like his marriage and several other things that inspired him to be a part of 'Brahmo Samaj' are included. His important works are discussed and the long lasting impact of him on people is also discussed.

**Keywords-** Rabindranath Tagore's birth, parentage, Jorasanko Home, education, maharishi, visit to England, marriage, Bramho Samaj, Important works of Tagore.

## INTRODUCTION

The Tagores were Brahmins, they moved to Bengal around AD 1000. In 17<sup>th</sup> century some members of the family converted to Islam and they were banished for it. Probably because of this banishment, they pushed from conventional Brahminical lifestyle to entrepreneurship. They became successful middleman and they were among the first to get benefit significantly from trade with the British. In 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a rift within the family and this led to the departure of Nilmoni Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore's great great-grand father from the family home Pathuriaghata in north Calcutta and his arrival at Jorasanko. It is the place where he would build the stately home in which Rabindranath would be born, three quarter of the century later.

The city Calcutta prospered and proliferated with British merchandising and political power in India. Tagore's family was sharing with equality the affluence of the city. Rabindranath Tagore's grand-father Dwarkanath Tagore, was called 'Prince' because he believed to live life luxuriously. He used to occupy himself in the sparkling parties. The ancestral Jorasanko home had a large number of dependent relatives and servants too. While lavishly constructed and furnished rooms were set apart for the head of the Tagore family. He had gathered much wealth through business and transaction but because of his opulent, and lavish style of living, he left his family heavily indebted when he died at early age of 51 in London.

His eldest son Debendranath Tagore, unlike his father had little interest in parties and entertainments. He was a platonic figure, a man who cares for both, this and the other world. He was not only an original scholar but also a man of great probity, integrity and nobility. He had a great courage and firmness in his purpose of life and was called 'Maha Rishi'. He was contemplative and meditative by nature. He used to claim that he receives

instructions directly from God, and of having experience of epiphany while reading 'Upanishda'. He devoted much of his time to the study of philosophy and religious literature. He paid off all the debts and made his family financially secure again. One of dedicated Tagore scholars, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya observes,

“Debendra fought his way out of near bankruptcy and meticulously repaid numerous debts, a story he recounts in his autobiography.”<sup>1</sup>

Maha Rishi proved to be a blessing for not only the Tagore's family but for the whole country, because he became one of the founding members of 'Brahmo Samaj'. He protested emphatically for all that was questionable in Hindu tradition like age old beliefs, and idol worships. The most admirable thing about him is that he did not break with the Hinduism, but he questioned what was uncertain in Hindu tradition. He emphatically proclaimed that 'Brahmo Dharma' is the fundamental and indispensable part of Hinduism. He examined and corrected the ambiguous things in religion as he was a truly religious man. He continued to be not only a Hindu man, but also a religiously strong man. Under his superintendence and guidance, Brahmo Samaj developed into a platform for unbiased and liberal thought in Calcutta. His house turned to be the center around which the cultural life of the city revolved. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya furthermore states,

“He virtually insulated his family and few followers into a sect called 'Adi Brahmo Samaj' which was almost indistinguishable from the 'Hindu' society. At the same time he was hailed by Brahmo samajists as a 'Maharishi’<sup>2</sup>

But by nature and temperament, he was not a 'city-man'. For most of the time, he used to be away from home for supervising his lands, in rural area. At times he used to be there for withdrawing from his worldly duties and doing expedition to the 'Himalayas' and spending time in sustained meditation. His interest in countryside enhanced and he purchased two bighas of land near Bolpur. On that unpopulated place, he had erected a garden house, and named it as 'Shantiniketan', 'abode of peace'. Thus the unfrequented place turned to be 'Shantiniketan', later on he confirmed a 'Trust Deed' to turn Shantiniketan into an 'Ashram', for Brahmo householders. As they needed a place for intercession and retreat.

Debendranath and Saradadevi had 15 children. Rabindranath was their youngest child. There were some other relatives also and a large number of servants at their ancestral home. All the children were brought up in a healthy amalgamation of freedom and discipline. It is believed that Hindus are conservatives and conformists but the Tagore's family was exceptionally sophisticated, broad-minded and progressive. Every child was left free to develop his extra ordinary, original aptitude and to express himself without hesitancy and reluctance.

With the result of that great scholars came out of Tagore's family. His eldest brother Dwijendranath, was a philosopher, a poet, mathematician who conceived the short hand in Bengali and also musical codes, for the piano. Satyendranath, second brother, was the first Indian to come in Civil Service. Jyotindranath, who among other things composed his own songs on the Piano. His elder sister Swarnakumari was the first Bengali women novelist. His nephew, Abanindranath and Gaganendranath, were the Great Twin Brethren of Bengali, or indeed Indian Art. As in other arts the family touched the equal excellence in Music as well.

Tagore's Jorasanko Home was the center of theological, political, artistic, cultural and literary activities. Spiritual and ethical plays were performed on the stage. Musical concerts were arranged frequently and poetry were recited. Great theatrical performers, instrumentalists and scholars frequently visited the house. On various subjects the conversations and discussions were stimulated and controversial issues were freely discussed with enthusiasm.

## RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S CHILDHOOD, PARENTAGE AND EDUCATION

Rabindranath Tagore was born and flourished in Joransanko house where the flowing tide of the Indian Renaissance could move around his daily life. His home itself was the place where he saw, observed and learnt everything. At this abode he was learning everything with excitement, ecstasy and revitalization. He was fortunate to have such an atmosphere of aesthetic excellence. The family was marked by enlightened artistic sense and cultured disposition. However he was little unfortunate in the other way, because though he was the youngest child, he was pampered or received every attention and comfort that a youngest child is supposed to get.

Young Rabindranath was craving for love and affection of both father and mother. As his father was very strict, busy and rather unapproachable for the growing child. He could not take out time for fondness and affection. His mother was always occupied with her domestic duties. As there were lots of members including relatives in the family. Those duties left no time for love and pamper her youngest son. He was looked after chiefly by servants and for their convenience, they did not permit him to go out of the house. He sums up these years by saying that,

“We used to be under the rules of the servants. To save themselves trouble they had almost suppressed our right of free movement.” 3

The scene that comes in front of our eyes is that of an isolated boy. One who has lot of members in the family but still he is alone and longing for something. Probably he wanted to have that affection and time of his parents. But it is also noticeable that, he never seems to be complaining about them, rather he shows great reverence for both of them and speaks with respect about his father. Once when his father came back from Himalayas, he memorize,

“When, after his long absence, my father came home even for a few days, the whole house seemed filled with the weight of his presence.” 4

His father's often unannounced return home created bewilderment, joy and tumult in the household, which was also felt by the youngest member of the family. His mother left him alone, when he was just 14 years old. He shows the same kind of respect for his mother as well, when he remembers the way she expressed her admiration on his reading 'Valmiki Ramayana',

“I recited a portion of Valmiki's Ramayana in the original, and complete with Sanskrit terminations. Mother was no judge of the accuracy of her son's pronunciation, but the range of his learning filled her with awe, and seemed to her far to outrun the nine-crore miles journey of light.” 5

He had gone through a terrible blow when his mother died, he was very young. Nonetheless it is truly said that when God closes one door, he opens the other one, because he is an escort and caretaker of not only all human being but also all living creatures. As Rabindranath lost his mother, he got a sister-in-law, who was just like a mother for him, Kadambari Devi, the most dominant influence on him during childhood. Whose affections were unreserved, with the help of the fondness she became an emotional escort to the child. She could drew out his latent literary talent. She was an enlightened personality and knowledgeable in her views and was interested in art and literature.

She was the compassionate friend and a guide to the lonely child. When he started writing, she used to stimulate and inspire him to write in his own way. She became his writing's first supporter and adherent critic by saving him from the fault of self-conceit. She did not let him get carried away by the excitement of his early creations. But unfortunately she also died at the very young age, in the year 1884. Her death was a distressing blow to the young Rabindranath it left enduring impression on his mind. The awareness about the importance of education



is appreciable in Tagore's family. Though his parents had 15 children they were very concerned about the education of each of their child. Rabindranath was also admitted in a school at the age of 4. Maha Rishi himself used to take care of each and every thing related to his school and his tutors. When he used to be away, his third brother Hemendranath, was in charge of his education. He had to take watch on, whether the boy is taught properly everything from wrestling to grammar and anatomy. This was just the home studies, for which different tutors came to home in morning and evening. Apart from this in the day time he was sent to school.

In 1865 he was admitted in 'The Oriental Seminary School', then 'The Calcutta Training Academy', then to 'The Normal School', one after the other at the age of seven. 'The Bengal Academy' and 'St. Xavier's School' when he was 13 years old. But he detested all the schools wherever he was admitted. Actually he disdained the school syllabus, a particular pattern that had to be followed and the inflexible discipline of education of those days. At the age of 13 he declared emphatically, that he cannot tolerate this suffering anymore and he stopped going to school. Thus his schooling was unusual one.

"I rebelled young as I was. Of course this was an awful thing for a child to do—the child of a respectable family! My elders did not know how to deal with this phenomenon." 6

After all, tired of doing all the efforts his elders paused their struggle to convince him for his further studies. He was a very vigilant boy by his nature himself, who observes everything very keenly. He could get much valuable education from the world around him and from the Nature. He was astonishingly shrewd and gifted learner apart from that Tagore's mansion, itself was a center of all aesthetic, cultural, creative and literary activities. He could assimilate whatever he wanted as per his inclination. His interest lies in the artistic activities where he was enlarging and uplifting his mind and spirit. He was gaining much beneficial experience by involving in all these activities.

### VISIT TO ENGLAND AND IMPORTANT WORKS

In 1878, the family made one more attempt, for his further studies. He was sent to England and admitted to a school in Brighton and then to London University college. Here he studied Religio Medici, under prof. Henry Morley. He expressed great respect and admiration as he energized his mind and soul and inspired him a lot. But he went to London for the well planned study of Law and after a casual start, it came to nothing. He did not become a barrister there instead he read literature. His interest was different and it was his nature, he did what he wanted. He returned from there in 1880 without completing his degree. But there he made long-lasting friendship with Lokan Palit <sup>7</sup> who always stimulated and encouraged him, in the years to come. This is the unforgettable record of his childhood. He memorize,

"Lokan's unstinted appreciation kept my energies from flagging for a moment. Many an extraordinary prose and poetical flight have I taken in his bungalow in the mofussil." 8

This is the record of his childhood, one of the most magnificent and memorable moments of his childhood, must be mentioned here, which remained unforgettable to him, and left an everlasting influence on him. When he was barely 8 years old, he found he could actually arrange some lines in rhyme and metre. On hearing these first verses, his father Maha Rishi had uttered,

"If the king of the country had known the language and he could appreciate its literature, he would doubtlessly have rewarded the Poet. Since that is not so, I suppose I must do it." 9

With which he gifted him a cheque, as he was more than happy that his son could compose rhymes at the age of 8 only. Rabindranath Tagore began his life in print as a poet in the strictest sense, when he wrote songs during the year 1878 to 1881, several books, published as 'kabi-kahani', 'Bana-phul', 'Balmiki-Pratibha', 'Bhagna-Hriday', 'Rudrachanda' and prose 'Europe-Prabasir patra'. In 1882 he had published 'Kal-Mrigaya', it was followed by the series of poems called 'Sandhya Sangit'. Here we see Rabindranath had forcibly snatched himself remote from human society, into the complexities and created an artificial world of unreal despondency. In 1883 he published 'Prabhat Sangit' where he had included a most striking poem 'Nirjharer Swapnabhanga' or 'The Awakening of The Waterfall'. It is regarded as the fitting symbol of the entire poetry and the mood of the poet, where he has shared his prolonged experience in the discovery of a beautiful and happy world. With 'Prabhat Sangit' he had actuated on his literary career. Here we see his style and thought content are not entirely free from romantic thought but it is here that he discovered his identity. Love and joy both the elements that develop the poetry with infinite magnificence and an imaginable fullness are first touched upon in 'Prabhat Sangit'.

Thereafter Poems, dramas, novels, short stories, flowed from his pen in an unending sequence. He also edited and bestowed to the journals like 'Bharti' and 'Balak'. 'Sanyasi', 'Prakritir Pratishodh' or 'Nature's Revenge' are the important work of this period. The core of his achievement may lie in his poems for which he was admired and at first criticized by his contemporaries. One such appreciation is from Mohit K Roy, when he asserts,

"It is practically impossible to summarize the achievements of a prolific writer like Rabindranath Tagore, whose entire career right from the age of twelve to the age of eighty when he died, was one continues ceaseless harvest of literary compositions." 10

#### WORK-CITED

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6. Rabindranath Tagore "My Life in My Words" Edited by Uma Das Gupta, Published Penguin Books, 2010. Pg. 68.
7. 'Lokan Palit' was the member of Indian Civil Service, and close friend of Rabindranath Tagore.
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9. Ibid. Pg. 90.
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