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Noble Laureate's Stuggles In Education

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ABSTRACT- Rabindranath Tagore's struggles in Educating India which begun from the emergence of Shantiniketan, and lasted in building VishwaBharati University. This research paper discusses the way it turned into an acclaimed university because it was the place where he had received the news of 'Nobel Prize Award' for the English translation of 'Gitanjali'. It also explains his achievements and awards like 'D Litt' award by the University of Calcutta. It describes his experience of becoming an international celebrity. The status of 'Knight' was conferred upon him and his renunciation of 'kighthood' due to 'Jalianwala Bagh Massacre'. The special happening of his life that is the convocation arranged by 'Oxford University' at Shantiniketan to bestow on him the 'Honorary Doctorate of Literature'. It was for the first time that any university had travelled to confer a degree on someone. This paper also highlights, his selected works, awards achievements specially in the last period of his life which is fertile and variegated.

KEYWORDS- Shantiniketan, Nobel Prize Award, Gitanjali, international, renunciation of kighthood, Jalianwala Bagh massacre, convocation, Honorary Doctorate of Literature, awards achievements.

INTRODUCTION-

Rabindranath Tagore is one of the multi-faceted and prolific writers. His work have been researched widely with various perceptions. Scholars have already explored his views on religion, politics, tradition and even his philosophy. There are number of research have been done on his concept of Jivan-Devata, and on his concept of Education. However it is felt that his English writings have not received that much attention of readers that

they deserve, as basically he is called a 'Bengali writer'. Therefore the aim of this research is to make his writing available to the widest possible range of the readers those who want to read them.

In 1883 he got married to Bhabatarini who was later renamed by Rabindranath himself as Mrinalini Devi, daughter of a functionary working in Tagore estates in Jessore, east Bengal. This was the most significant thing of his life. Apart from marriage his life was full of happenings as in 1884, Kadambari Devi, his escort commits suicide. In spite of these domiciliary, his literary career was proliferating. He writes many poems in her memory, since she was his childhood companion, he dedicated 5 books to her. A year after his marriage he became the secretary of the 'Adi Brahma Samaj' of which his father was the controller. He became an untiring critic of conventional beliefs, conformism and rigid Hindu traditions. At times, this broad-mindedness brought him some disagreement with some distinguished and esteemed people like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

EMERGENCE OF 'SHANTINIKETAN'

In the year 1900, another phase of his career starts. He wrote 'Naivedya', which is a collection of songs. One of the most striking poems, of this collection is 'The Sunset of the Century'. Where he has criticized the perversion of Western nationalism. In 1901 he made a great experiment, in the field of education. As we have mentioned above, his father had bought a land at Bolpur and built an ashram and named it as 'Shantiniketan'. In summer 1901, he shifted there with his family, wife and children. On 22 December 1901, he started a school with 5 children, with his own meagre funds. As he idealizes a school according to Indian ancient ethics, he took no fees from the students. But for such an idealistic school, he had to go through lot of predicaments. It was very difficult for him to arrange funds. He was compelled to sell his wife's jewelry to pay for the expenses of the school. As per Sabyasachi Bhattacharya,

"In 1902 Tagores sold some of Mrinalini's ornaments to meet the expenses of the school."¹

When he left for Shantiniketan, it was very disappointing for lots of his supporters. He was retiring from public domain and was getting in the spiritual realm. But later on this departure became the cause of his new image, 'the sage of Shantiniketan'. But it was not only because of his single minded service to Shantiniketan that he was called 'sage', as he was represented in the West as 'sage from the East'. The spiritual poems that he had translated, established an icon of 'a saintly spiritual person'. The one who belongs to the ashram, and not to the contemporary world.

AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

At this period of time whatever he wrote was heavily remindful of 'Upanishdic Philosophy'. Even the epoch-making collection of poems, 'Gitanjali', which was originally written in Bengali. He began to write at this period of time. In Bengali language 'Gintanjali' was published in 1910, to be followed by 'Utsarga' (Dedication), 'Gitimalya' (Garland of songs), and 'Gitali' (Lyrics of songs) all published in 1914. He received 'Nobel Prize Award' for the English translation of 'Gitanjali', which was a shadowy approximation of the marvelous original Bengali 'Gitanjali' in 1913. Because of this historic event a number of scholarly visitors started to visit 'Shantiniketan'. Shantiniketan had become an acclaimed school by this time and Rabindranath Tagore's personal presence used to fascinate people from afar, like William Rothenstein and Ananda Coomarswamy visited the school. It was encouraging for Indians too to visit the school. Rabindranath Tagore being the head of the Shantiniketan was awarded a 'D Litt' by the University of Calcutta in December 1913.

If we think from longer perspective, the more important visit was that of M.K. Gandhi and his school boys from South Africa in 1914. It was on this memorable occasion that 'Gurudev', the title Gandhiji had conferred upon Tagore. He was a great Guru, in ideological sense too. He always advocated unrestrained or unconfined learning. In return Rabindranath Tagore had reportedly conferred 'Mahatma' on Gandhiji. Their meeting seems to be symbolic affirmation of the shared common traits of 'two great educational thinkers' experimenting in schooling. Both of them were very fond of each other. Rabindranath puts absolute faith in Gandhiji's leadership and Gandhiji was also aware of Rabindranath's true love and devotion towards country, but they differ about their political methods. His views are like,

“It is extremely distasteful to me to have to differ from Mahatma Gandhi in regard to any matter of principle or method. Not that, from a higher standpoint, there is anything wrong in so doing; but my heart shrinks from it?”

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VISHWABHARTI UNIVERSITY AND ‘NOBEL PRIZE AWARD’

The school had begun to attract students from various part of the country Gujrat, Panjab, Kerala and neighboring states conveying a flavour of the nation as a whole. It was the ambition of Rabindranath Tagore, that students from all the corners of the country should come together and get educated there. He made the rarest of the rare combinations of ancient and modern culture, religion and science, East and West. There are number of students who have come from China, Japan and various other countries of the world to get educated.

In December 1918 the base was erected and he named it as ‘Vishwa-Bharati Bhavan’, and thus ‘Vishwa-Bharati University’ was born. Though this development of ashram into university was very important for Rabindranath but something was more important than this and that is the daily life of the students and their association with Nature.

As he dreamt, it was an open-air school, he regulated the same. He received admiration of some of the best educationists of the world. The classes were held in the midst of Nature and students enjoyed full freedom. As far as the subjects of the study are concerned, only bookish knowledge was not considered enough practical knowledge was also given. Artistic activities like singing, dancing and acting were considered to be equally important. The purpose and the objective of education was to improve the all-round personality of the students.

At this period of time Rabindranath was suffering from continual sorrow and grief in his personal life. In 1902 he lost his wife, it was followed by the death of his second daughter Renuka. In 1905 he had lost his father, in the same year he had worked energetically in the ‘Swadeshi Movement’ which was actually a protest against the disagreeable act of partition of Bengal. In 1907 he lost his youngest child Sumitra. He remained in solitude for about a year and created some of his best master pieces like in Bengali language, ‘Gitanjali’ and

'Post-Office'. Both of them marked a great transition in his life. In 1911 the 'Bangiya Sahitya Parishad' celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his birthday with great zeal and enthusiasm.

The story of his rise to international celebrity and the 'Nobel Prize' winner is very interesting and worth knowing. Rabindranath had completed his English translation of 'Gitanjali' on board, a ship to England in 1912. Rothenstein ¹⁴ read the hand-written English translation of Gitanjali and he was completely stunned. He did not have words to express his admiration. He showed that to his friend W.B. Yeats.

After reading Gitanjali Yeats was more than happy, surprised and what not. He showed that out to an elite circle of his literary and artistic group including Pound in London. Then he selected some poems and gave an appealing and prepossessing introduction to it. It was published in 1912. Rabindranath came to know about the 'Nobel Prize Award' on 14th of Nov 1913, when he was in Shantiniketan. He wrote to Yeats,

"My heart fills with gratitude and I write to you this letter to say that appreciation from a man like you comes not only as a reward for my lifelong devotion to literature but as a token that my songs have been acceptable to Him, and He has led me over the sea to this country to speak to me His approval of my works through your precious friendship"³

In 1915 the status of 'Knight' was conferred upon him. In 1916 he went on a tour to Japan and was invariably welcomed and applauded in all the countries he visited on the way. In America he gave a sequence of lectures denouncing Western nationalism and British rule in India. Later on all these lectures were published as 'Nationalism and Personality'. But his views on nationalism were not universally liked, as in coming days these lectures became the reason for hostile denunciation.

RENUNCIATION OF KNIGHTHOOD

In April 1919 the 'Jallianwallah Bagh' massacre happened in Amritsar. When British armed forces brutally opened fire, on a peaceful assembly at an enclosed space. Unarmed hundreds of Indians had gathered, as a protest against 'Rawlatt Act' and were ruthlessly killed. Rabindranath addressed a letter to the Viceroy Lord

Chelmsford, in resentful protest against the indignity imposed on his fellow citizens, renouncing his honour of 'Knighthood'. The renunciation was worthy of the man and the language of the letter was worthy of the poet. "The time has come, when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of my countrymen who, for their so called insignificance, are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings." ⁴

He again travelled to Europe in 1920, but that affection and enthusiasm was somewhat cooled away probably because of the renunciation of the Knighthood. After going through number of European countries including France, where he was warmly welcomed, he crossed over to America. The consequential gain of this American tour was his meeting with L. K. Elmhirst and Mrs Straight. Whose specialized knowledge and his wife's generosity which enabled him to think and eventuate in reality his dream of rural reconstruction work at 'Shriniketan'.

In 1920, finally like his dream come true, the Vishwa-Bharti University officially launched, as an open-air university. As wished it a meeting place of various people and cultures. For which able tutors and dedicated friends like G.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson had already appointed. From now, till he was weakened by age and sickness he travelled various places in the world in search of support, moral and financial for this university.

He had often spoken of 'The Ideal of Universalism' earlier would have remained just in words if he had not experimented the founding of Vishwa-Bharati University. Rabindranath had become a travelling missionary in these years. More than half years of this decade were spent travelling abroad in England, France, The Netherland, USA, Japan, Sweden, Germany, China, Argentina, Italy, Poland, Greece, Bali, and Java.

Some of these countries he visited twice. His main intension was to raise funds for his university and also to invite scholars who are interested to teach in Vishwa-Bharati and are willing to make it truly a place where all cultures of the West and East would meet. But it was not all the time easy for him to travel this much and ask for funds. One of his eminent critic remarks,

“The responsibility of being on a mission was particularly irksome to Tagore when he took to lecturing, collecting funds for his school, meeting the media, etc. ‘I wish that could be released from this mission. For such mission are like a mist that envelops our soul’. He wrote this”⁵

SUMMING UP

Rabindranath Tagore was born at the time when history was heaving with events which marked a transition from an old political order, social privilege and lineaments of culture. He was very blessed for being the grandson of an exceptionally rich businessperson, a favorite son of the father of a front-rank family of Bengal. He was blessed with a talent for versifying in Bengali. He was fortunate to escape the mind-deadening schooling which his generation received and he was sent to England at the age of 17. Thus he was quite fortunate in all these respects. We will just have a look on what are the radical changes have been brought for having been blessed with the personality like Rabindranath Tagore in our country.

Though there are various other reasons also involved in the process but the contribution of Tagore is unforgettable and undeniable in the process of transformation. Politically India is on the threshold of escapade, which we saw never before in the whole history. Religiously it was developing new perspective that forbids superstitions, and spiritually she was discovering the hidden springs of creative life. Of course number of forces are also liable to these changes some are the forces of nature and some are the individuals. Some individuals have made these forces inspired and they have shaped the destiny of India, among them Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore stand pre-eminent.

This research paper includes, the wonderful atmosphere and influences he was blessed with. Apart from that his birth, parentage, his schooling, his marriage, and various masterpieces he had created. It also includes his successful effort of converting ‘Shantiniketan’ into world known ‘Vishwa-Bharati University’.

WORK-CITED

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2. Rabindranath Tagore ‘My Life in My Words’ Edited by Uma Das Gupta, Published Penguin Books, 2010. Pg. 241
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