



THE ARTISTIC JOURNEY OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE: A PAINTER FROM A POET

KEYWORDS

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The popular Bengali saying:

"It is impossible to finish reading in a lifetime all the Rabindranath wrote in one life" (Guha-Thakurta qut in Koch 2)

In the year 1905, Bengal partition movement happens; perhaps Tagore's pick period in writing political songs, also arranging "Shobha Jatras". During such time he involves in the Bengal Renaissance and eventually joined the *Swadeshi* movement. In entering the early second decade of 20th century we find his intoxication on his hope against the colonial British Government. In 1914 the First World War is declared, mean-while he makes repeated trips to Europe, America and South East Asia which create the crisis in his stream of thought.

Tagore became sceptical of surrender to a mass ideology. As opposed to this he began thinking if there can be a process of development for a human being not by competing with his fellow human beings but through a process a self-enlightenment, self-development. He was proposing a development which is not generated or controlled by external influences but comes from within the *being*. (Konar 622)

Thus the concept of humanism and universalism emerges in Tagore from early second decade of 20th century up to the end of his life.

At the age of 13 Tagore attended his formal schooling, before schooling he received an extensive education in his own home. The philosophy of the Tagore family is, "a kind of nature-mysticism within which ethics and aesthetic experience shaded one into the other; to live close to nature, open to its impulses, was to them near to religion." (K qut in Koch) Tagore's view on art is that art should be in unity with his surroundings, both socially and naturally; artist should be with his relationship to the universe and the expression of the truth which should be represented his individual personality.

Tagore's attempt in painting at the age of 63 but his quest for painting was from his childhood. The painter in Tagore has lain dormant since his childhood. In his autobiography and in letters from

Silaidaha (Now in Bangladesh) there are sporadic references of his initial efforts in drawings and paintings. In 1892 he has mentioned this effort in a letter to his friend and famous scientist Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose.

Tagore basically a literary artist, earned a big name in the field of literature gives the arisen of enigma for all critics on Tagore's painting. Tagore had no kind of technical knowledge in the field of painting; even he did not belong to any kind of school. Critics cannot define any kind of relativity in Tagore's painting with his contemporaries either technically or thematically. Tagore, in a poem written to Sudhindranath Dutta mentions-

"Words do not pamper me, her rule is strict; my lines laugh at their will, they do not restrict me..."

In a series of letters written in the 1930's we find Tagore conveying similar feelings. He writes to Indira Devi from Santiniketan-

"I was very busy. Now Holidays have begun. I am thinking of just to sit in a corner and paint. I don't feel like using my pen..."

Writes to Pratima Devi-

"Practically these days I am not writing at all. When I get free moments, I paint..."^{xiii}

In Rani Chanda's book we find,

"I wish I could do away with all other things and just paint. I truly feel in my life today an urge, to paint...." (Konar 618)

There are many references in which Tagore finds reservations in words, while in paintings he finds the feeling of freedom. Tagore's painting represents the theme of universal being which appealing in different forms of portraits, animals, landscapes, etc. Tagore's believe in universal appeal, and his paintings are the attempts for that; against the boundaries of language, culture and nations. He writes: "In pictures, or in plastic art, the material consists of the representation of things which are in a way familiar to most people and can easily be

apprehended by everyone ... This is why it is much more difficult for a foreigner to understand foreign music than to appreciate foreign art." (Konar 623) Tagore described his painting progress in a letter to Rani Mahalanobis, in 1928.

First, there is the hint of a line, and then the line becomes a form. The more pronounced the form becomes the clearer becomes the picture of my conception ... The only training which I had from my younger days was the training in rhythm, in thought, the rhythm in sound. I had come to know that rhythm gives reality to which is desultory, insignificant in itself. (Sen 41)

Tagore's travels in early second decade of 20th makes the awareness in different form and technics of the art in him. "In 1913, he visited the Chicago Art Institute Armory Show with 1600 exhibits, where Rabindranath studied the entire range of modern artists from the Impressionists to Marcel Duchamp." During the year 1916 his trip in Japan gives the realization that art can syncretise the various strains; do not to fall back upon tradition but boldly enlarge it. "Writing to Abanindranath, Tagore's tone is almost one of admonishment: Aban, the more I travel in Japan the more I feel that you should have been here too. Squatting there all the time in your south verandah you will never realise

how very essential it is to have contact with the living art of Japan so that our own art may revive and flourish."

Tagore's paintings adore and praised by all over the worlds. His first exhibition of paintings was arranged by Victoria Ocampo in Paris in May 1930. Later the exhibitions moved to other famous destinations in Europe and America – in Birmingham, London, Berlin, Munich, Dresden, Copenhagen, Geneva, Moscow, Boston, New York and finally Philadelphia in May 1931. Tagore wrote to his son Rathindranath on 31.10.1930 saying, "From my experience of my painting exhibitions in Europe, I realise, I can rely on my ability on painting." He also wrote to Pratimadevi his daughter – in – law in 1930 saying, "My paintings command decent prices and it will increase in the coming years." He felt immensely pleased when the Berlin National Gallery procured five of his paintings.

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