

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is said to be a literary genius with his profound contribution to the genre of the prose and the poetry of an Indian English literature. He is known as a multifaceted personality with an innate wisdom and knowledge. He was an intellectual and a spiritual being. He was a true patriot who loved mother India and composed our National Anthem. Tagore, a poet, a playwright, a music composer, a philosopher and a social reformer has an incredible contribution towards his motherland with regard to Indian history, culture, art and literature. His artistic skill poured life in both the genres of Bengali and English literature. Comparative studies explore Tagore's works with the other prominent Bengali authors, such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, and Manik Bandopadhyay. These comparisons highlight the similarities and the differences in their themes. His style and narration are remarkable in the genre of Indian literature.

Keywords: Philosophy, Spirituality, Indian ragas, Reformer.

1. RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861-1941)

Rabindranath Tagore was born in Kolkata to a great sage, Debendranath and Sarada Devi. He was one among thirteen siblings. He was exposed to swimming, wrestling, gymnastics, music and different subjects of learning like mathematics, history, geography, anatomy, Sanskrit but he was more interested in literature. He was tutored by his brother, Hemendranath.

Tagore was the most influential literary figure of the 20th century. His works transcended the boundaries of India and influenced the western minds and their culture. His literary career unfolds his numerous works in the form of essays, poems, plays and novels. The themes of his writings contain the elements of philosophy, spirituality, patriotism and the beauty of Nature. In 1913, he was the first non-European to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature for his collection of poetry, *Gitanjali*. His works deals with the socio-cultural lives of the Indians. Another way to appeal his people are his music composition and his songs. He composed more than 200 songs that reflects Indian ragas and folk songs. He gained global recognition for his incredible work, music and songs. His image both as a literary genius and as a social reformer are remarkable.

2. LIFE

Rabindranath Tagore was born in a brahmin family on 7th May, 1861. His father, Debendranath Tagore was a prominent leader of Brahma Samaj. Rabindranath was quite influenced with his father's ideals and his doctrines of philosophy. He was the youngest among his siblings. He lost his mother at a very young age. His father travelled long distance so he was raised by his maids. He was inspired by his father who was a philosopher, a saint and a social reformer. He was from well-to-do family and had ancestral estates in Shelaidaha. He wrote poems at a very early age under the pseudonym Bhanusimha. His poetry has a blend of classical literature.

Tagore received the education at his place. He studied various subjects like Sanskrit, Mathematics, Geography, History, Literature, Anatomy and English. He was interested in drawing, music, art and literature. He learnt swimming, wrestling and other activities from his brother, Hemendranath. He had a very good family background with intellectuals. His siblings also acquired good social position. His father wanted him to become a barrister. In order to fulfil his father's dream, he went abroad. Rabindranath aspired to become a writer so he gave up law. He read innumerable literary works of 15th and 16th centuries renowned writers. His first short story *Bhikharini* in Bengali language was published in 1877. In 1863, Rabindranath Tagore's father established a meditation centre, Shantiniketan. It is situated in Bolpur, West Bengal.

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Rabindranath Tagore believed that the children learn better in Nature so the children were taught in open, under the trees, under the sky and close to Nature. He believed in experimental learning. He wanted the children to grow physically and mentally. In 1901, he started the Brahmacharya Ashram in Shantiniketan with limited teachers and limited students of around five in number. He started open-air classrooms for his students. Students were taught under trees.

Comparative Indian literature in relation to the works of Rabindranath Tagore involves examining Tagore's influence on and connections with other literary figures and movements in India. Few to mention:

Rabindranath Tagore is an exceptional writer in Bengali literature. His works, including novels, short stories, poetry, and essays, have set a benchmark for the subsequent generations of Bengali writers. Writers like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, and Manik Bandopadhyay are often contrasted with Tagore due to their distinct styles and thematic concerns.

Tagore's influence extends beyond Bengal to the broader landscape of modern Indian literature. His exploration of universal human themes, such as love, identity, and spirituality, resonates with writers across different linguistic and regional backgrounds.

Contemporary Indian writers like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao, who wrote in English, were influenced by Tagore's humanism and philosophical depth. Rabindranath Tagore was a central figure in the Indian Renaissance, a period of cultural and intellectual revival in India during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His works reflect the spirit of this movement, which aimed to rejuvenate Indian society through a blend of traditional wisdom and modern thought. Tagore's emphasis on cultural pride, education, and social reform resonated with other luminaries of the Indian Renaissance, such as Swami Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, and Mahatma Gandhi.

Tagore's literary themes and techniques have been subject to comparative analysis with other Indian writers. His use of symbolism, lyrical prose, and exploration of complex human emotions distinguish his works and invite comparisons with writers like Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay and Premchand, who also delved into social issues and psychological insights. Tagore's influence varies depending on the cultural and linguistic context. In regions like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, or Maharashtra, where there are strong literary traditions and movements, Tagore's impact might be less pronounced compared to Bengal or other regions directly influenced by him. However, scholars often draw parallels between Tagore's thematic concerns and those of regional writers, highlighting common threads of humanism, spirituality, and social critique.

Comparative Indian literature with regard to Rabindranath Tagore involves exploring his influence on Bengali literature, his contribution to the broader landscape of Indian literature, his role in the Indian Renaissance, his thematic concerns, literary techniques, and his connections with regional literatures across India.

3. POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Rabindranath Tagore was against violence and British colonialism. He supported the reform movement and the nation's independence. His compositions, *Chiito Jetha Bhayshunyo* and *Ekla Chalo Re* were notable among Indians for freedom struggle. The song 'Bharoto Bhagyo Bidhata' was composed in 1911. It was adopted by the Constituent Assembly in 1950 as 'Jan Gan Man'. In 1915, Tagore was awarded Knighthood by King George V for his remarkable contributions in the genre of literature. He renounced his Knighthood due to the dreadful Jallianwala Bagh massacre, 1919.

4. CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Tagore played a pivotal role in the Indian Renaissance, a period of cultural and intellectual revival in India. Comparative literature studies might explore his connections with other figures of the Indian Renaissance, such as Swami Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, and Mahatma Gandhi, examining their shared vision for societal reform and cultural resurgence.

Tagore's works have a profound impact across the globe, influencing writers and thinkers worldwide. Comparative literature analyses explore Tagore's reception in different cultural contexts, his translations into various languages, and his resonance with global literary movements such as romanticism, modernism, and postcolonialism. Tagore's humanistic and universalist outlook makes his works relevant for comparative studies with authors from diverse cultural backgrounds. Comparative literature analyses might focus on themes of love, spirituality, freedom, and the individual's relationship with society, drawing parallels with authors from different parts of the world who explore similar existential questions.

Overall, comparative literature of Rabindranath Tagore involves contextualizing his works within various literary traditions, exploring his influences and connections with other authors and movements, and examining the universality of his themes and ideas across different cultural contexts.

5. WORKS

Tagore wrote poetry, novels, short stories, essays and dramas. His writings throw light on the growth of an individual and the development of his nation. Few to mention:

5.1 Poetry

- a) Gitanjali (1912)
- b) The Crescent Moon (1913)
- c) The Gardener (1913)
- d) Fruit-Gathering (1916)
- e) The Fugitive (1921)
- f) Sheaves (1929)

5.2 Drama

- a) The King and the Queen (1889)
- b) Sacrifice (1890)
- c) Malini (1896)
- d) The King and the Dark Chamber (1910)
- e) The Post Office (1912)
- f) The Cycle of Spring (1916)

5.3 Essays

- a) Personality (1917)
- b) Nationalism (1918)
- c) Thought Relics (1921)
- d) Crisis in Civilization (1941)

6. THEME

Tagore's writings consist of different shades of themes. He wrote on the beauty of Nature. Nature plays a vital role in human life. The greatest lesson of life is learnt from Nature. Tagore believed that nature moulds one's personality. So, his works reflect the beauty of Nature. Tagore's works contain spirituality. He had a great knowledge of Vedas, Upanishads and the classical literature. His works contain the human values, tradition and spiritual elements to transform an individual into a perfect well-being. Tagore believed in freedom of an individual and dealt with the adverse effect of modernisation. He showed the path of simplicity, honesty, truthfulness and divinity.

7. MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- a) Rabindranath Tagore was the first Indian poet to win Noble Prize for his collection of poetry *Gitanjali* in 1913.
- b) Tagore's National Anthem was adopted by the Constituent Assembly in 1950.
- c) National Anthem of Bangladesh was composed by Rabindranath Tagore in 1905.

- d) In 1915, Tagore was awarded Knighthood by King George V for his remarkable contributions in the genre of literature.
- e) Tagore introduced a unique educational system of learning in nature, under trees and in an open atmosphere. He carried his teaching in Shantiniketan with an open-air classroom.

8. CONCLUSION

Rabindranath Tagore was a poet, writer, painter, philosopher and a social reformer. He used excellent dramatic techniques to reflect the societal issues. He believed in social equality, justice and freedom of an individual. He composed National Anthem of India and Bangladesh. He was an outstanding literary figure of 20th century.

The comparative literature in Rabindranath Tagore's works encompasses a wide range of themes, influences, and literary traditions. By placing Tagore's writings in dialogue with those of other authors and movements, scholars and readers can gain deeper insights into his literary legacy and its significance within the broader context of world literature.

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