Chapter 3
Chapter III
Social & Cultural Development of Rabindranath Tagore

Social and Cultural thought of Rabindranath Tagore:

There have been pioneers in religion, politics, social work and education fields in India during the last century.¹ Nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements erupted simultaneously from all sides. The Brahma Samaj movement of Bengal, Arya Samaj, Prathana Samaj, Ram Preshna Missions, Servants of India society are some of the noted movements of this period. They led and prepared the country for a social order, which was a necessity of the time.²

All great movements of human renewal have had their prophets. Bengal’s prophet was Rabindra Nath Tagore. Tagore, who came after Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Ram Krishna and Bankim Chanda Chatterjee, was the soul-mate of every one of them and gathered up into his personality the essence of what they had thought and taught. He wrote and sang with intuition and passion of all the great and the small things that marked the ‘Bengali’s re-entry into the life everlasting.’³ Tagore’s thoughts and writings deal with the problem of women, their status and role in society and their education —not only in his capacity as a sensitive, socially conscious poet, but also as a leading social thinker and educationist in the country. Tagore’s social

¹Rabindranath Tagore: A Century Volume, Published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1861-1961, p.74.
thoughts have huge area but there are some Social thoughts, which are explained in a precise manner.  

**Condition of the Women:**

Rabindranath Tagore, had direct role in social uplifting of women and spreading of women’s education. Due to their untiring efforts, the widow Remarriage Act of 1856, legislation against Child marriage was regulated and the Shard Act of 1929 were passed. It is not easy to evaluate the condition of Hindu women during the second half of the nineteenth century. The life of an average Hindu woman was difficult and pitiable owing to the existing social customs and practices of the time. The present study is made against the background of Bengali society which is not very different from Hindu societies existing in other parts of India.

At that time the condition of Hindu widow and child widow was still worst. They were neglected and ill treated from her very childhood. The Girl Child grew up as helpless and was destined to suffer. Tagore focused on the other problems faced by women of that time such as –

1. The plight of the widows in the joint family who were economically exploited and prevented from remarriage.
2. The struggle of modern educated women for equality and freedom in the male dominated conservative society
3. The complications that arose in the family had set up when the modern women participated in the freedom movement.
4. Dowry system was yet another evil that prevailed in the Hindu society during the period under investigation. Dowry had to be paid, as a rule, at the time of the girl’s marriage.

5. *Purdah* was another great hindrance for women. She had to stay in the inner most part of the house and had to live in strict seclusion.\(^8\)

So during Tagore’s time Child marriage, the *Purdah* system and *Sati Pratha* were practiced.\(^9\) Rabindranath Tagore was not only a political thinker but also a writer, and poet too, He used the power of his pen to show the ills of society. Such as short stories, one is struck by the vividness and the strength of Tagore’s women characters. This is especially true of *Cokheray Bali*, and other classic play *Dena Poana*, he has vividly described the evil effects of dowry.\(^10\)

**Status of Women:**

Tagore had a great regard for women. He has upheld that the caressing love of women is very essential for the proper development of the child. To him the nature of men and women are different. Tagore finds good qualities of head and heart among the women in general. He maintains that “Woman is endowed with the passive qualities of Chastity, modesty, devotion and power of self sacrifice in a greater measure than man is.” Tagore is conscious of the powers hidden in women. He thinks that good of human beings can be achieved only when there is a happy combination of male and female.\(^11\)

Rabindranath points out that “women is the builder and moulder of nation’s destiny”. Women can know liberation only when they too acquire earning power, shoulder responsibility, speak out against injustice and confidently go about building a future for themselves.\(^12\)

Tagore does not think of women’s confined activities within the narrowly limits of the four walls. He maintains “I do not mean to imply that domestic life is the only life for a woman. “I mean that the human world is the woman’s world, be it domestic or be it full of the other activities of life which

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\(^8\) Ibid. pp. 7-8. (*Hindu Women and Marriage Law.*)
\(^9\) Ibid. P. II (*Rabindranath Tagore and The Challenges of Today*)
\(^11\) Ibid. p.13, (*Rabindranath Tagore and The Challenges of Today.*)
are human activities and not merely abstract efforts to organise.” Tagore wishes women to inculcate higher power of reasoning and initiative and so he wants that “women should use her power to break through the surface and go to the center of things, wherein the mystery of life dwells, an eternal source of interest.

Tagore feels that women are always a source of inspiration for man. Man’s constructive energies get a fillip only with the loving caresses of women. Tagore has warned society of the imminent dangers of loosening the string too much. He wishes women to be given due place but never does he like that they should be made improportionately domineering. Thus Tagore favours a specific place of women in society, the possible roles which she has to play, the future responsibilities due to her, and the future picture of the social order.\(^\text{13}\)

**Political thought of Rabindranath Tagore:**

“I believe that when anti-human forces spread their dominion, individuals with firm faith in humanity are born, who become acutely conscious of the menace to man and fearlessly fulfil their destiny through insult and isolation.”\(^\text{14}\)

In considering the social and political ideas of Rabindranath Tagore. The first thing, which strikes one is that they were deeply influenced by his view of man and his place in the universe.\(^\text{15}\) Tagore was born and lived during at a most crucial function of history, a period, which was fraught with political upheavals, downfall of imperialism, renaissance in, and growth of suppressed nations. He was also an architect of democracy on the world political scene, when it was period of struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. In this period of political turmoil Tagore was there to contribute his share of political activity. Individuals make a society and a society ultimately forms a state.

Tagore thought about the political ideology, individual, the society, and the state.

A. Individual:

Tagore says, “The natural law of human nature is sociability”. In fellowship man finds his true refuge in society. There man may be deprive of everything, but he has an abundant satisfaction in the human soul.” “Man has two sides-the individual and the social. One is unreal without the other” 16. Thus his ideal of a world where there will be friendship and co-operation among all men and mutual regard and respected among all people.

B. Society:

Society- “Society is the expression of those normal and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature”. 17 Society has been used in different connotations. It may mean a community, an association, a group, or a nation. Tagore’s views are clear when he asserts that man has two sides one the individual and the other the social. It means that for him society is an equally important aspect of man. Tagore finds that society is to meet certain higher ends welfare of the individual. Tagore product of the society. 18

State / Society:

Tagore placed the greatest emphasis on the freedom and dignity of the individual, he was equally conscious of his obligations to society. He drew a distinction between state and society, and held that one of the greatest achievements of the ancient, Indian society had survived through many ups and downs of history because it had defined the welfare of society as largely a non-political function and placed it in the hands of the community rather than the State. According to Tagore, in Europe the Center of national life was located in the State while in India it was base on the community. So Tagore’s views a

16 Ibid, pp.33-34. (Rabindranath Tagore and The Challenge of Today, 2001)
17 Tapati Dasgupta: Social Thought of Rabindranath Tagore A Historical Analysis, Abhinav Publications Hauz Khas, 1993, p.47.
18 Ibid. pp. 35-36. (Rabindra Nath Tagore and The Challenges of Today)
clear demonstration of the way in which society and state has been separated in the Indian conception. Tagore believed and repeatedly declared that the caste system and its attendant practice of untouchability were among the darkest blots on Indian society.\(^{19}\)

Tagore has given more importance to society than to the state. In a nutshell Tagore's views on society that "Samaj or society" is the key concept in his social philosophy. The goal of the samaj is to advance the 'civilization of the people. It is only the strong, confident and self-reliant individuals, who can, in their turn, take the responsibility of sustaining and directing this live society. The function of the state is protective, while that of the samaj is largely promotive and creative.\(^{20}\) Society is itself a great co-operative endeavour and it is through co-operation that mankind has survived and triumphed over all other orders of living beings. He held that through co-operation men and women can satisfy their economic needs as well as create conditions of social well-being and cultural progress.\(^{21}\)

(i) Patriotism: About his own country Tagore says, "I shall be born in India again and again; with all her poverty, misery and wretchedness I love India best."\(^{22}\) Tagore said, "I do not believe in those leaders who have succeeded in moulding opinions, but not men".\(^{23}\)

Struggle For Independence: Tagore was among those who raised the slogan of freedom. "He recognized the right of each nation to work out its own destiny, but he also proclaimed that national claims must never encroach upon our human obligations."

Internationalism:

According to Rabindranath Tagore "Nationalism is the training of whole people for a narrow ideal" and proceedings from this abstract theory, he calls

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19 Ibid. p.146, Rabindranath Tagore. (A Century Volume)
20 Ibid. p.37.
21 Ibid. p.148. Rabindranath Tagore. (A Century Volume)
22 Ibid. p. 48. (Rabindranath Tagore and The Challenge of Today.)
India a land of no nation. He was the most uncompromising critic of British rule in India and he has never tried to be popular. He has spoken truth, cruel, and unpleasant. He believed in work—not excitement."Tagore was convinced that the nations of the world can only find happiness and real wealth by friendship and cooperation.” He associates himself with the entire humanity and says, “Unless the problem of entire mankind is solved, that of one’s own nation only can not be solved". Rabindra Tagore was a great spiritual anchor to Indian in the midst of the storm of the freedom struggle.

**Humanism:** Tagore’s humanism is visible in his awareness of life and problems of the people around him and in his appraisal and criticism of those problems in the context of the wide humanity and mankind. There were very few Indian writers of that period who could discern the temper of their age with such keenness and subtlety and reflect it with such fidelity as Tagore. The Indian National Anthem is one of Tagore’s greatest deep humanist gifts to India. Rabindranath dream of a harmony of Universal humanity among the people of different origins through freedom of mind and spiritual Sovereignty. In this way, Tagore believed that peace and unity could be achieved through cultural contacts, through education, and it could be one of the best meeting-grounds for humanity was the University. It could create opportunities for revealing different people to one another. Tagore could never tolerate insult to humanity in any part of the world. He wrote in a letter: “To break through the coil of nationalistic snobbery will be the work of my last years.”

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25 Ibid. p. 71. (Rabindranath Tagore and The Challenge of Today)
26 T.R. Sharma: *Perspective on Rabindranath Tagore*, Vimal Prakashan Publisher & Distributor Ram Nagar, Ghazibad, 198, p.63.
Economic Thought:

Economy plays an important role in life. Tagore was unhappy at the increasing concentration of the people in urban areas. He held that constant and intimate contact with nature is necessary not only for the physical but also for the mental and spiritual health of the individual.India is primarily a land of villages. The main occupation of the people there is Agriculture. It was only with dawn of independence that an all-round change enveloped the entire society. The wide-spread poverty due to the low yield of agriculture moved Tagore. All his efforts were therefore, diverted towards improving the lot of the suffering masses of the country. The demarcation of poor and rich also appeared stifling to him.

Rural Economy:

Tagore felt that the bipolar division of people between rich and poor, the Zamindars and non-Zamindars had greatly influenced the economic condition of the people. The toiling masses do not get their due share. He was therefore against such a system. About the relation between the poor and the rich he feels extremely sorry and says that the difference in the economy of the village and city is primarily due to the nature of the two societies. The differences between the village and town grow with the growth of society while in the beginning the center of activity is common. Tagore had always been inclined towards harmony and synthesis. He is a person believing in the principle of the golden mean. Secondly, the new industrial economic system with its emphasis on profit motive and material "self-aggrandisement" has cut at the root of the Indian social system. Thirdly, with the advent of the British, the power of the state emerged in a more ruthless and all persuasive form ...Rapid urbanization in its turn has affected the economy considerably. The basis of economy was rooted in the general interests of society and so was the basis of production.

29 Ibid. p.147 Rabindranath Tagore, (A Century Volume)
30 Ibid. pp.24 -26. (Rabindra Nath Tagore And The Challenges of Today.)
This combination of the agricultural with industry and craft had served to meet the major requirements of life for the vast majority of the people. Tagore also welcomed the fact that this system had developed among Indians an attitude of contentment and philosophical acceptance of life.  

2. Urban Economy:  

The natural implication of mechanization is that man is replaced by machine. Production is speedy. The cost of production is reduced. Machine made goods compete favorably with those made in cottage industries and thus mechanization comes in the economic field in direct competition and ultimately in conflict with human beings. With the environment so encumbered with machinery man also became mechanical. This expansion challenged man in all aspects.  

In the urbanized industrial economy material wealth inevitably grows. Moreover, he sees good points in cities too. “Tagore does not think that the city is the repository of all evil, and the village of all good. He believes that with the growth of cities, the concepts of individuality took firm roots, with the growth of villages, evolved the town”. Diversified activities grow round the seat of government” Although Rabindranath Tagore was not in favour of factories yet he thought that we could not reject the factory system. Tagore was very keen to implement cooperative mechanized cultivation in his Estates. Tagore’s attention was not limited to agriculture only. Tagore believes in the spiritual evolution of man. As Tagore rightly says: In the modern civilization, for which an enormous number of men are used as materials, and human relationships have in a large measure become utilitarian, man is imperfectly revealed. For man’s revelation does not lie in the fact that he is a power, but that he is a spirit.  

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31 Ibid. 147. Rabindranath Tagore, (A Century Volume,)  
32 Ibid. pp.23-31.(Rabindra Nath Tagore and The Challenges of Today,)  
Tagore knew India as a land of villages. Many anthropologists took the position that the village was a kind of microcosm in which the macrocosm of the wider world was reflected in miniature. He examined the networks based on the economic and that stretch out word from the village. Tagore was a great believer in co-operation in every sphere of human life. He thought that the answer to India’s poverty lay in the adoption of the co-operative method in production and distribution of every type and particularly in the field of Indian agriculture. Rabindranath Tagore also highlights in their writings made reference to woman’s economic independence.

Thus can be seen Tagore’s concern for the villages, the rural and the urban economies and also the warning issued by him against the tendency of blindly throwing society into excessive industrialization? The utility of the cooperative principle, both in the rural and the urban economy, has been established. So Tagore’s economic philosophy was based on a cooperative mechanized economy.

Education:

Tagore, the great Educational philosopher, preached the creed of internationalism to establish international brotherhood and thus found ‘one world’ where all people would live in a state of happiness. Her aims of education belong to the realm of philosophical thought, the realm of truth and peace. Here lies the greatness of Tagore, who is a practical Educationist.

Means of Education:

Education means to bring out the innate abilities of the child and give them training. Love of truth, and Love of Good are in the child. Education is a process of learning. The human child learns both from Nature and Society. Nature as a means of learning provides a surrounding for the child to learn.

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35 Ibid. p. 148, Rabindranath Tagore. *(A Volume Century,)*
Society provides a social environment for the development of the child. Tagore regards both Nature and Society as potent means of education.

**Nature as a Means of Education:**

Tagore believed that there was a kinship between nature and man. He thought that real education was that which brought about a full development of the human personality. It was possible only in unison with nature. Ignorance is a great evil. It also permeates other evils. So it is desired to improve a society. Efforts should be made to spread maximum education. Though Tagore spoke for mass education, he did not favour any dilution of the standards of education. The aim of mass education can be fulfilled only when knowledge is available in the language of the masses. The development of the language of the masses is very essential for their awakening. Moreover, apart from the formal sources of education there are informal sources of education also. Since education had to be mass oriented, it also had to be within the masses of the common man. He appreciated the ancient pattern of Indian education because it was close to nature and also inexpensive. One more reason why Tagore deprecated western education was its developed, formal nature and extensive paraphernalia.

**III Education Institutes:**

Tagore translated his dream of ideal education into action by establishing institutions that educated people according to his plans. He sought to put his various ideals of education to work through various institutions at Santiniketan, Sriniketan and Visva-Bharti.  

I. Santiniketan:

Rabindranath Tagore founded a small School in Southern Bengal at a place called Santiniketan, a hundred miles North West of Calcutta, in the year,  

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Year 1901. At Santiniketan, he wanted to establish an ideal school. He was unhappy with the schools he was sent to in his boyhood, he thought English schools were cut off from Indian life, society and culture. In choosing Santiniketan he had three district goals to make the children grow up in an ideal physical environment, close to nature, an education to balance the city and the village in a changing India and to impart knowledge capable of accepting a large world. The school is now world famous. Among its teachers have been artists of reputation such as Nandalal Bose and Asitkumar Haldar, writers such as Ajitkumar Chakrabarti and Satischandra Ray, Philosophers such as the poet’s eldest brother, Dwijendranath Tagore, and English men such as C.F. Andrews and ‘Willie’ Pearson.

II. Sriniketan:

It is Rabindranath Tagore’s international University at Santiniketan. The word “Sri” contains the idea of prosperity, of welfare resulting from activity and growing into healthy beauty. The name Sriniketan reveals Rabindranath’s hopes and ideals. Because he wanted that the rural folk may also be able to lead a life of happiness which could not be possible in the absence of the proper education, and training, which the institution provided. “Rabindranath established Sriniketan side by side with Santiniketan, because he thought that there would be no real emancipation of our country if the so called education of the townsmen remained their monopoly and failed to reach the vast multitude in the country side. So he took up the uplift of our villages. Sriniketan became the center”, Sriniketan took up various activities simultaneously. Such as Economist, agriculturalists, social workers, doctors, midwives, healthcare workers, and specialists in various fields of rural industry and education.

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40 Mohit Chakrabarti: Philosophy of Education of Rabindranath Tagore, Atlantic Publisher & Distributor, Ansari Road, New Delhi, 1998. p.30.
41 Edward Thomson: The Heritage of India Series Rabindranath Tagore His Life and Work, Y.M.C.A. Published House, Russell Street Calcutta, 1974, pp.75-76.
43 Ibid. p. 91. (Rabindra Nath Tagore and The Challenges of Today)
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experimented and worked with the villagers on different aspects of rural problems.\textsuperscript{44}

III Visva- Bharti:

Visva-Bharti to translate his ideas into reality. No amount of theories and lectures could be a substitute for a way of life which practised this ideal. Visva-Bharti was to be an institution where the world makes home in a single nest.\textsuperscript{45} The education of the girls at Visva-Bharti was, therefore as fully conceived that of the boys, the physical, and intellectual. Vocational, cultural, and social aspects of their personality receiving as full an attention as those of the latter, while matters specially associated with their sex also duly received the importance they deserved.\textsuperscript{46}

So in this way Visva-Bharti, an institution whose stated objective was to study the mind of man in its realisation of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view. When it started Visva-Bharti was not a university that gave away degrees. It was conceived to be a meeting place of the East and the West where sorters and students would line in common fellowship, studying each other's culture. To get women in the main stream, Rabindranath Tagore tried to inculcate in women the spirit and values of the society by spreading knowledge with the help of educational institutions.\textsuperscript{47} The practical education of women should naturally be different from that of man, because they have different physical and mental make-up. Tagore, a pioneer of co-education in this country, dearly stated his convictions.

Nari Bhavan:

As early as 1908, a girls' section was started in Tagore's institution at Santiniketan, and co-education of boys and girls, went on vigorously for two

\textsuperscript{45} Santa Bhattacharya: \textit{All India's Conference 78th Annual Session}, Bharatiyam Eastern Zonal Cultural Center Salt Lake, Kolkata, January 2002, p. 72.
years, after which the section had to be closed down owing to certain administrative difficulties during those days of meager resources for the institution. In 1928, a hall residence, known as ‘Nari Bhavan’, was started with four girls. The permanent hostel for girls, known as ‘Sri Bhavana’ (later ‘Sri Sadna’), was ready by 1929. The policy of the institution being professedly co-educational, the girl-students attended all its academic departments on the same footing as the boys, with practically the same course of study, and were required to show the same level of attainment. Teaching of subject like Domestic Science, Cooking, Needle work etc., specially meant for women; and the special courses in Art, crafts, Music and Dancing provided in respective departments of the institution were particularly popular with the senior women students, which not only enriched their cultural equipment but also proved very useful for their future independent careers.48

II. His Aims:

He started social and religious reforms movements as a strategy for uplifting the population. This was later given more content and focus by the development of rural India through the basic education. Basic aim was;

A. Intellectual Aims:

Tagore says: “We touch the world not with our mind, but with our Books.” The intellectual aim of education for Tagore is the development of the faculty of assimilation, critical appraisal and logical thinking in the domains of ideas.

B. Physical Aims:

“Education of the body in the real sense, according to him, does not exist in play and exercise but in applying the body systematically to some useful work.” Great emphasis on physical education, that in his school Tagore provided full freedom for the development of body along with that of mind.

48 Ibid. pp. 306-307, (Women Education in British India, 1995.)
C. Moral and Spiritual Aims:

Tagore, by temperament was a religious man. Religion was the basis of his entire philosophy. Obviously, its impact is apparent when he thinks of education also. In education, his religiosity was expressed seeking to establish moral and spiritual values in it. He wrote: “Real moral training consists not in foisting moral teachings like external decorations, but in making religious and morality on intimate part of life.”

A social education was purposeless for Tagore for he thought, “the fundamental purpose of education is not merely to enrich ourselves through the fullness of knowledge, but also to establish the bond of love and friendship between man and man.” Education is also associated with refinement. Refinement is the domain of delicacies and niceties of life. This aspect of our life is cultivated through Art. For cultivation and development of Art he wished their all concerned with education should be directed to take sufficient care that art of all varieties including fine arts and Music may be given an appropriate place in curriculum.

D. General Aims:

Tagore did not fully agree with the utilitarian aim of education. For him education should be only partially inspired by the utilitarian motive. He started “Knowledge has two departments: One pure knowledge; the other utilitarian Knowledge”.

Rabindranath Tagore told that my idea was that education should be a part of life itself and must not be detached from it and it be made into something abstract. Tagore believed that peace and unity could be achieved through cultural contacts through education. He recommended that from the very

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49 S.R.Bakhshi: Rabindra Nath Tagore and The Challenges of Today, Om Publication, New Delhi, pp. 73-81.

50 Sisir Kumar Das: The English Writing of Rabindranath Tagore, vol.3 Sahitya Akademi. p.642.
beginning children should be educated so that their minds remained free from all racial prejudices.\(^{51}\)

Tagore believed that education of any country should be rooted in its native soil.\(^{52}\) So Tagore’s educational efforts were ground breaking in many areas. He was one of the first in India to argue for a human education system that was in touch with the environment and aimed at over all development of the personality. Santiniketan became a model for vernacular instruction. Rabindranath Tagore by his efforts and achievements in part of a global network of pioneering educators such as Rousseau Pestatozze, Froebel who have strive to create non-authoritarian learning system appropriate to their respective surrounding. Rabindranath shows through education the avenues of renewal for mankind. As every man differs, so is every difference in instinctive appeal.

**Culture Thought:**

Rabindranath Tagore says, “Communication of life can only be achieved through a living agency. And culture, which is the life of mind, can only be imparted through man to man. Culture grows and moves and multiplies itself in life. Man’s intellect has a natural pride of its culture. Culture only acknowledges excellence in inner perfection, not in any external success.”\(^{53}\) Rabindranath Tagore’s views on culture are significant for three reasons- First they did not remain static; Second, he recognised the need for a split between technological civilisational forces identified with the imperial mission, and the spiritual cultural traditions, but at another level he was not willing to accept of difference. Universal or common world-wide culture was an ideal which he propounded. This was a development of humanist thought and is central to the beginning of colonial struggles. In order to emphasize their humanity, colonial

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\(^{53}\) Ibid. p. 47. (*Social Thought of Rabindranath Tagore A Historical Analysis*)

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societies accepted the idea of “universalism” which was also an argument, which aided the expansion of imperialism and capitalism.54

Tagore says I have no distruct of any culture because its foreign character. I believe that the stretch of such forces in necessary for the vitality of our intellectual nature. It is admitted that much of the spirit of Christianity of our intellectual nature. It is admitted that much of the spirit of Christianity runs counters, not only to the classical culture of Europe, but to the European temperament altogether. The same thing is happening in India. The European culture has come to us not only with its knowledge with its velocity. Though our assimilation of it is imperfect and the consequent aberration numerous. Still it is rousing our intellectual life from its inertia of formal habits into glowing consciousness by the very contradiction it offers to our own mental tradition.55

The main river of Indian culture has flowed in four streams-

1. The Vedic
2. The Puranic
3. The Buddhist
4. The Jain

It had its source in the heights of the Indian consciousness.

His Literary Mission Poetry and Letters

Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest poets, not only of India but also of the whole world is the only Indian who received the Nobel Prize for literature (1913). He was a worthy representative in the modern times of a long tradition of great poets of India which included such immortals like Adi Kavi Valmiki, Jaidev, Kalidas, Amir Khusro, Tulsidas, Surdas, Kabirdas, Abdul

Rahim Khankhana, Malik Mohd, Jaise and Mirza Ghalib, who have enriched the vast canvas of Indian literature.56

As a poet Rabindranath’s appeal is perennial like of Kalidasa, Li Po, Shakespeare, Hafiz, Rilke or Anna akhmatova. But he was also an outstanding man of ideas very much occupied with the deep and complex problems of modern times who, unusually for a poet, tried to put some of those ideas into practice.57

The first of the twentieth century is generally known as the age of Tagore in modern Bengali literature. As the second half of the nineteenth century is generally known as Bankim era, so the first half of the twentieth century may be called the Rabindranath era. Rabindranath’s reputation, however, started in the eighties of the nineteenth Century with the publication of a number of his poetical works.58 In Bengali, there are 28 large volumes consisting of poetry, dreams, operas, short stories, novels and essays and a similar number of volumes of letters. Besides he wrote merely 2500 Songs and drew over 2000 painting. He once said in Germany, “My poetry is for my countrymen”.59

The expedition of his poetic life is amazing. Not less surprising are the variety and the beauty of the literary forms. Rabindranath composed his first poem at age eight and by the end of his life, had written ever twenty-five volumes of poetry.60 His first signed poem, Hindu Melar uphar, was read in the Hindu Mela of 1875, the poem is composed in imitation of Hemachandra’s Bharat Sangit, and these poems comprise the nebulae of his poetic career, having little touch with reality. The first three years of his poetic career may be

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56 http://www.comwritespirit.net/spiritualpoets/RabindranathTagorepoetry.
59 http://rPo.library.utoronto.ca/poet/389.html
60 O’Connell’s, Kathleen: Rabindranath Tagore the Poet as Educator, Calcutta, Visva Bharti, 2002, p.3.
called the child period or ‘The beginning’. It covers the period from 1878 to 1881.

The adolescent poet first entered into his real self when in 1871 he abandoned the traditional versification and instead of chasing after the illusive romantic tales composed Bhānu Simha Thākur Padābali in the manner of ‘Brajabuli’ of Vaishanav padābal. From 1882 to 1886, was the when in fact, that the real development of his poetic career started Sandhīṣa Sangit (Evening Song, 1882) Prabhat Sangit (Morning Song, 1883), Chabi o Gam (Picture and Songs, 1884), Bhānu Simha Thakur Padābali, 1884) and kadi O Kamal (sharp and Flat, 1886) belong to this period. It is practically impossible to summarise the achievement of a prolific poet like Rabindranath (1861-1941), whose entire career, right from the age of twelve to the age of eighty when he died was one continuous cealen harvest of literary compositions. He is as much versatile, as he is profound. No other poet -Vyas, Valmiki, Homer, Shelley, Keats, Heine or Goethe is comparable with him. There is same similarity between Goethe, and Rabindranath in the nature of poetic talent and the philosophy of life, but all things considered Rabindranath is simply matchless.61

1. His Universality:

Tagore was a great Indian who embodied in himself the image of a universal man. His works have a definite touch of universality. Richard Church thus writes on Tagore. “He was a unified man, a whole man and as such was an example to his country and a missionary to the West. “When our lords and leaders pass into oblivion, Tagore will continue to enchant us by his music and poetry for though he is an Indian. He has added to the sweetness of life, to the stature of civilization.”

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Chapter III

2. Poet of Love:

Love to Tagore is not merely an emotional outburst and is also not an outflow of libido. To him it is an irresistible spiritual urge. It is the call of the soul, which cannot be denied. Love constitutes a major theme in his poetry. He interprets the love of mother, of father, of son, of husband, of wife, of lover, of beloved and of friend. Tagore’s love-poetry shows the influence of Vaishnava love poetry which centers round the love of Radha and Krishna.\(^{62}\) Love is undoubtedly one of the most important themes of Tagore’s poetry.\(^{63}\)

3. Nature-Poet:

Rabindranath always felt inspired by the varied and myriad forms of natural beauty. He himself professed, “In our blood we feel a relationship with the ever-new green, juicy grass, creepers, trees, bush, stream wind, light and shade, the cycle of the seasons, the eternal movement in the sky of planets and stars, the varied earthly life.”\(^{64}\) He shares with Wordsworth a love of Nature, which love one can see in Indian poetry too whether of Valmiki or Kalidasa. But in his writing the personality of the poet becomes the medium of expression as in Wordsworth or Shelley.\(^{65}\) Wordsworth believed that there was a natural sympathy between men and nature. The philosophical background of the theory is that both nature and man being manifestations of God, are capable of finding themselves in a union of joy. But unlike Wordsworth Tagore is a poet both of a pleasant and soft nature and also of nature in its harsh, unpleasant and ugly moods. He opines, “East and West have met in Rabindranath’s attitude nature -----Eastern vision and Western hedonism have given a special turn to his love of nature -----he has at once enjoyed nature as a separate existence and realized it by setting it properly in the stream of

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\(^{63}\) Ayyub Sayeed Abu: *Tagore Quest*, Published Papyrus Ganendra Mitra Calcutta, 1980, p.31.
\(^{64}\) Ibid. pp. 130-131.
\(^{65}\) Ibid. p.113. (*Rabindranath Tagore and The Challenges Of Today*)
universal existence. Neither aspect is in his opinion inferior to the other. This individual outlook is the differential of Rabindranath among poets". 66

**Imagery and Symbolism in Tagore’s poetry:**

Imagery is the most important single item in poetry; it is more impotent in mystical poetry than in other poetry. Tagore’s imagery comes from the ways, customs and culture of medieval feudal life, which had lingered on, particularly in Bengal, long enough for Tagore to have got more than a glimpse of them. Tagore draws much of his imagery from his legacy of mythical and doctrinal lore of Hinduism. This is a pervasive element. Tagore’s imagery is drawn is that of the cultural in which he breathed and in which music and theatricals were the dominant elements. Tagore’s imagery is not ground in earthly things but draws inspiration from cosmic entities, and in the formation of it, perception and imagination have as much a role as conception and inspired faith. 67

**The Jivan Devta Image:**

The concept of the Jivan-Devata is present in his poetry from beginning to the end. This Jivan-Devata is the Lord of the poet’s life leading him, despite all obstacles, towards the fulfillment of his Innermost yearning. He is a part of the poet’s self an apotheosis of his inner spirit. He is the Lord of the poet’s soul, but also its lover. The Jivan-Devata is not only the Lord of the poet’s life, he is also the Lord of the universe.

**Romantic, Sensuous and Picturesque Imagery:**

Tagore’s imagery is largely romantic, sensuous and picturesque. Romantic feelings are beautifully expressed through equally romantic images which are polished, suggestive and picturesque. The following lines from one of his early poem contain a romantic image of surpassing beauty:

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66 Ibid. p.131. (*K.K. New Standard Studies*)
"I clasp both thin hands in mine. And keep thine eyes prisoner with my hungry eyes Seeking and crying, where art Thou where, O where As in the solitary star of the dark evening sky Quivers the light of heaven with its immense mystery, In thin eyes, in the depth of their darkness There shines a soul beam tremulous with a wide mystery."

Tagore’s love poem in ‘Lover Gift’. ‘The Garden’ and ‘Fruit Gathering’ are redolent of romanticism and are also erotic. Even in ‘Gitanjali’ erotic images are found.

Nature – Objects as Symbols of Human Emotions:

Tagore’s poetry does not lack in sublimity and depth of thought. It has richness of diction and imagery and yet this is his uniqueness’. It has the open-air atmosphere of a folk song. There are constant references in it to common things of Nature and to common people flowers, the fruits, rivers an ferries, clouds and rains, the sky and the stars, the boatman and the beggars, travelers on the road and shepherd with their flutes. These common objects of Nature provide Tagore with his imagery.

The Flower:

Flower imagery also recurs in Tagore’s poetry. The flower symbolises the fulfilment of human longing for God. The bud blooms into flower and the flower finds it fulfilment in fruit. Images come from Tagore’s pen as do sparks out of chimney fire. His images are colourful, highly sensuous and ordinary objects and phenomena of nature and yet they enable Tagore to communicate highly abstract truths to his readers. These commonplace images create a deceptive impression of simplicity; in this way Tagore achieves a rare union of simplicity and sublimity.

Poetical Works:

Rabindranath seems to have been a master of all forms, lyrical, narrative or heroic. But the major portion of his work is lyrical and everything he wrote, even his prose, bears the impress of strong personal feeling and the musical abandon of his lyric expression.69 Tagore’s works were of intransient significance for the contemporary Indian poets. Tagore introduced, a spirit of high national awareness into Indian literature and through his works helped to produce new artistic trends and aesthetic norms. Like the new poets, Tagore was a rebel.70

(1882) Sandya Sangit (Evening Songs):

In the collected works of Rabindranath, the first book is Sandhya Sangit, (Evening Songs). About the poems of this book Rabindranath himself said that the pain and sadness, which sought expression in them was the expression of the struggle of his submerged innerself to free itself from complexities and come out into the open. The keynote of Sandhya Sangit is the unhappiness of an imperfect adjustment with the world and nature, which Rabindranath started feeling at a very tender age, when he was merely child.

Prabhat Sangit (1883):

The next book of verse, which Rabindranath wrote was the Prabhat Sangit or the “Morning Song”.71 In this book he had called out to nature and humanity.72

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69 Sati Ghose: Rabindranath, Published book land Private limited. Sankar Ghose Lane Calcutta-6 1996, p. 78
72 www.cabinetorg, calcuttalibrarynetwork, cabinet.
Manasi "Dream of Love" (1890):

Manasi published in December 1890 is the first book of verse, which bears the stamp genius. Mansi is a quest of the perfection of love and of the perfect object to love.  

Sonar Tari (Golden Boat) 1894:

Sonar Tari is the next book of verse after Mansi. When this book was written Rabindranath had reached full manhood. Sonar Tari (Golden Boat, 1894), may be taken as symbol of the poetic career of Rabindranath. In it the charm and sweetness of nature mingle with the poetic mind. We can find in this book full-fledged expression.

Citra (The Variegated) (1896):

Published in 1896 is the product of Rabindranath’s most matured mind, one of the best poetical works in Bengali literature and certainly a masterpiece of world literature. It contains some of the finest poem of Rabindranath. In it his theories of ideal beauty and ‘Jeevan Debata’ are reconciled into a perfect whole. In this book we find his mysticism in a fully developed form the faint glimmering of which flit across our mind in the ‘Golden Boat’.

Kalpana (1900):

Kalpana period may be considered as Tagore’s dark night of the soul before he emerged into the morning light of Gitanjali. The best poem of Kalpana and the most appealing songs of that period express spirit darkness fatigue and despair.

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73 Ibid. p.31. (Tagore Quest, 1980.)
Naivedya:

This is the book of verse and rightly dedicated to his father. It was his last book in which he made poetry out of imbibed religious experience or rather ideas Naivedya is dominated by ideas.\(^75\)

Gitanjali (Songs Offering):

*Gitanjali* was described on its first appearance in English as ‘Songs offering’. The pieces included in it were prose rendering of a selection of poems from the Bengali *Gitanjali, Naivedya, Kheya, Gitismalya* – tell- tale titles all.\(^76\) Tagore’s Bangala Songs which were later on rendered into English and published in the form of *Gitanjali* were composed in the first decade of this century. This decade had a saddening effect on Tagore’s life as it had brought five deaths in the poet’s family viz that of his wife in 1902, second daughter in 1903, eldest daughter in 1907 and of his youngest son in 1907. It is this sadness that finds projection in his compositions. These incidents very much affected of his life.\(^77\)

Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* has held a special pride of place in the hearts of all Indians. This slim volume of songs –offerings catapulted India on to the literary map of the world. It has been translated into almost all Indian languages. *Gitanjali* (Songs Offering) was first published by the India Society London, on November, 1912. The next edition published by Macmillan and Company, London in March, 1913 was reprinted ten times before the award of the Noble prize on 13 November, 1913. It was William Rotheustein who first read Tagore’s manuscript. The poems delighted him. He contacted Yeats and introduced Tagore to authors, poets, painters and thinkers of the West. He also arranged for the publication of the book by the Indian society.\(^78\)

\(^75\) Ibid. p. 46 (*Tagore Quest, 1980.*)
\(^77\) Ibid. p. 84. (*Essays On Rabindranath Tagore*)
There are 103 poems in the English *Gitanjali*, but only 53 of these poems have been taken from the Bengali originate. The others poems, translated into English, included 16 from Gitimaliya, 3 from shishu, 1 from chaïtali, 1 from Kalpana, 1 from Litsarga, 1 from Samarn and 1 from Tagore’s symbolic drama *Achalayatan*. The *Gitanjali* songs have become world of famous. *Gitanjali* brings the poet into closer and more familiar contact with the natural world than any previous book. The book’s mood is gray, its key is almost minor, its pictures mournful, or, at best by exhilaration. Almost every line of *Gitanjali* is crammed with natural things.\(^{79}\)

The peculiar glory of *Gitanjali* is that in it the vision of God and hunger for the infinite are in touch with human life, do not scorn the passions and affections of the heart, and are full of a heavenly tenderness for the limitations of life.\(^{80}\) In Tagore’s *Gitanjali* there is only one current, the poet is speaking directly to us. He is not expressing another’s attitude and feeling but his and only his.\(^{81}\) Men and women of Bengal felt doubly proud of Tagore, for they know the real poet, Rabindranath, who song to them in their own mother Tongue.\(^{82}\)

The poems of *Gitanjali* have been compared to the work of almost all the living or dead poet on earth, from Sappho to T.S.Elit. Such as Francis Thomson, Wordsworth, patmore, Tennyson, Walt Whitman, Traherne, and Herbert Vaughan etc.\(^{83}\) There are some selected poems from the *Gitanjali*.

(i)

"Thou has made me endless, such is the pleasure.

*This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again,*

*and fillets it ever with fresh life.*

*This little flute of a read thou has carried over*

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\(^{80}\) Ibid. pp.142-143. (*Rabindranath Tagore and The Challenges of Today*)

\(^{81}\) Ibid. p. 68. (*Tagore Quest*)


hills and dales and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.
At the immortal touch of they hands my title heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.
Thy infinite gifts came to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou poorest, and still there are room to fill."

(I) Reference to the Context:

These lines have been selected from poem no.1 of Gitanjali composed by Rabindranath Tagore. In this poem he shows the inner most essence of his views of life.

Explanation:

The poet says to us the meaning and value of life in a beautiful and convincing manner, how the soul is immortal and is dowered by God with many lives to make is gather experience, became fitter for union with Him, and rise from partial perception and realisation of love and beauty in the universe to rejoicing for ever in His infinit beauty and love.84

(ii) The child who is decked with prince’s robes and Jeweled chains round his neck loses all Pleasures in his play, his dress hampers him at every step In fear that it may be frayed or stained with dust he keeps himself off the world, and is afraid even to move

(II) Reference to the context:

These lines have been selected from poem No. VIII of ‘Gitanjali’ composed by Rabindranath Tagore. In this lyric the theme of the foregoing

lyric is continued and there is direct condemnation of worldly wealth, power and pelf.

Explanation:

The poet says that the child is wearing fine clothes and decorated with ornaments, is deprived of his freedom and joy. He does not feel free. He can neither play freely nor can he enjoy the company of his fellowmen. His dress creates obstacle in his way of enjoying his life. He fears lest he should spoil his fine clothes. He is so much worried of his clothes that he keeps himself off from people and is even afraid of moving freely.

(iii) O Fool to try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders!
O beggar, to come to beg at thy own door!
Leave all thy burdens on his hands, who can,
and never look being in regret.

(III) References to the context:

These lines have been taken from poem Nov. 9th of ‘Gitanjali’ composed by Rabindranath Tagore. The poet exhorts his readers to place themselves in the hands of God. They should have complete faith in divine wisdom, love and charity.

Explanation:

The poet says that it would be foolish on our part to carry the burdens of cares and worries of life on our shoulders. To try to carry the burden of our own life is as foolish as to come back and knock at our own door. God bears the burden of the whole universe. We should also place ourselves in his hands. He can solve our problems. He will do the best for us. We should be hopeful about our future. We should not look to the past with sorrow and grief.

(iv) The sleep that flits on baby’s eyes—does anybody know
From where in comes? Yes, there is a rumour—
that it has its dwelling where, in the fairy village
among shadows of the forest dimly lit with glow
Worms, there hang two limited bands of enchantment
from there it comes to kiss baby's eyes.

(IV) References to the Context:

These lines have been selected from the poem No. LXI of 'Gitanjali' composed by Rabindranath Tagore. In these lines the poet gives us a details description of various aspects of a baby's life. The poet says that a baby’s sleep and smile have their origin in the enchanted fairy land.

Explanation:

The sleep says, Tagore, that hangs over a baby's eyes in no ordinary sleep. It is a magic sleep that comes from two magic buds blooming in same enchanted fairy island which is lit with glow worms. This sleep stands in contrast with the sleep of the grown ups who are tortured, tormented and harassed by their sordid activities and greedy habits even in their slumber. As children are yet unacquainted with life, they are spotlessly pure and unspoiled and have a feeling of wonder and this purity are well reflected upon their innocent visages when they are lost in the enjoyment of sweet sleep.  

(I) Sandhya Sangit (offering songs):

Poem – Suicide of a Star. This is a poem in the Sandhya Sangit called the “suicide of a star”.

Reference to the context:

According to Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay this poem refers to a first suicide attempt Kadambari is supposed to have made in 1880. The poem reflects no more than a generalised mood of youthful romantic agony. The poem is more likely to have been written at Chandernagore when Tagore was

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holidaying with Jyotindra Nath and Kadambari. The young Rabindranath expresses his romantic pessimism in his poem “The suicide of a star” Thus:  

“From the shining bank
Into the dark sea,
A star jumped like one mad,
And all the other stars around
Looked on — as if stemmed.”

He did kill himself
And sank deep into the sea
with all bright light, extinguished
To the place he reached
Where hundreds of stars
In ashes lay dead.”

What had happened to him
And why he did so
Why he gave up life
None cared to know.
No loss was there
To all, was the same?
All starts shine as ever
Without a shadow of pain!
Gone! Gave! A star is given!
Into the oblivion it sank,
Into the sea of dark!
In the deep night,
In the sky infinite!
My heart! do you desire!
To fall in eternal sleep

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86 Ketaki Kushari Dyson: Rabindranath Tagore, I won’t Let You Go Selected Poems, USBPD, 5-Ansari Road, Published, New Delhi, 1992, p.238.
By the side of that star.
Into the dark sea,
Into that deep night
Into the sky infinite!

The poem says that a star, though it looked bright and happy, was miserable in the heart of hearts. It actually got tired of its dreary life and destroyed itself. But the impervious world went on in its usual way as if nothing had happened. Nothing was lost in the world; no one felt the loss of the star.

Prabhat Sangit (Morning Song):

Reference to the context – In this book there is a poem called the "Nirijharer Swapna Bhanga" ("The Awakening of the Brook") wills several the feeling of the poet. Some lines quoted from "Nirijhare Swapna Bhanga".

"How this day
At down, so early,
The sum beam kisses
The is heart, melancholy,
How does the song?
Of the merry bird, joyful,
Enter into the cane,
Dreary and dismal
After so many day
And after so long
The heart awakes from sleep,
And a weary dream
Then in gushing torrents
Do bubble end

Sati Ghose: Rabindranath, Publisher Book Land Private Limited, 1966, p.79.
All vain desires and
Vain emotions Aspen
The mountain quinces
Vain emotions Aspen
The mountain quinces
**And massive stares roll by,**
The foams rise high
*Furiously angry,*
Like mad,
The water whishes
Round and rounded
*To break through the person*
**And come out free.**

The poem, *Awakening of the waterfall* (*Nirijharer Svapanbhanga*) was taken from the popular anthology of Rabindranath in Bengali *Sanchata.*

**Meaning:**

In this poem the poet describes his heart like a stream gushing out into light from the deep darkness of a cave. The darkness of the cavern which the stream broke through was the darkness of his own heart, and the suffering from this oppressing darkness.

**Manashi ("Dream Love"):**

The prayer of Surdas (*Surdaser Prarthana*) is a significant poem in Manashi, in which this attitude has full expression and this attitude marks the dawn of the mystic query in the poet’s mind.

**Meaning:**

In the *prayer of Surdas*, Surdas entreats his beloved to blind his eyes with a knife for the eyes with which he had looked at her face were blemished.

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with intense desire, which in all sense was "physical". In this poem Rabindranath has turned his eyes from the beauties of the external world, and has placed them in the midst of his soul. His enjoyment of beauty has gone much beyond physical limitations and has reached the level of spiritual realisation.\(^9\)

(I) Sonar Tari (The Golden Boat):

Reference to the context:

The First poem of the book, "Sonar Tari" also titled the same. The poem was written in mid- Kartik end of October. As poem sonar Tari The "Golden Boat" is an excellent example of Rabindranath Tagore’s artistry. The resembling clouds, endless rain, fiercely flowing swollen river, the farmers busy in harvesting the paddy. Boats filled with shaver piled high, trees like – ink smears on the far bank all of these create a natural unexpressed restlessness in the mind.\(^9\) There are some lines of the Golden Boat quelled here.

*Clouds rumbling in the sky: teeming rain*

* I sit on the riverbank sad and alone
* The sheaves lie gathered, harvest has ended.
* Thee river is swollen and fierce in its flow.
* As we end the paddy it started to rain
* No room, no room, the boat is too mall
* Loaded with my gold paddy, the boat in full
* A crass the rain – sky clouds heave to and go
* On the bare river, banks, I remain alone
* What had has given: the golden boat took all.


\(^9\) Rabindranath Tagore, The Golden Boat – Poetry on All sprit / www all sprit co. 4 tack html. p 1.
In this poem we find the picture of a peasant, harvesting alone in his small field. The field is on the margin of a river and on the other bank, glimpses of Village, hazy through the morning mist, come to the vision. While the peasant is reaping corn, a man comes in a golden boat and takes away all the ripe, golden paddy, cut afresh. When the peasant entreats the boatman to take him along also, he only smiles and goes away. The peasant is left alone on the bank of the river under a sky grim with heavy rain-clouds. Many critics have identified the “Boatman of the golden boat with the Jivan Devta” of Rabindranath Tagore. On this opinion that the poet says he felt that he knew the Boatman but could not recognise him fully.\footnote{\textit{Sati Ghose: Rabindranath}, Publisher Book Land Private Limited, Shankar Ghose Lane, Calcutta-6, 1966, p.83.}

\textbf{Chitra (“Many Colours”)}

\textbf{Farewell to Heaven:}

\textbf{Reference to the context:}

In this poem Tagore’s rejection of mythical heavenly worlds and his firm commitment to the earth are put into the mouth of a hero who had earned a temporary Sojourn in Indra’s heaven, whose term in heaven is now over and who must now return to the earth we quote it below some lines.\footnote{Ibid, pp.240. (\textit{Rabindranath Tagore, I won’t Let You Go. Selected Poems.})}

\begin{verbatim}
(Farewell to Heaven)

Now fades the garland of menders round my neck
O great Indra, and the radiant mark in quenched
On my sullied forehead. My piety’s strength
Wanes. And gods, goddesses, today I must
Say good-bye to human. Gladly have I spent?
Many millennia in the king doss of the gods
As one of the immortals, and hoped to see
At this parting. Hour hint of tears
\end{verbatim}
In heaviness’s eyes. But heartless, void of grief
Indifferent, this happy celestial land
Just look on.

Sometimes, gods, I shall remember this heaven
like a far--off dream, when half--way through the night
Waking suddenly from sleep, I’ll see the moon
Flooding the while bed, and my love fast asleep.

Slack arm lying likely, sere disheveled,
Shyness forgotten until round by my soft
Amorous basses, she will, startled, fold me
Fast in her arms, twine around my chest.

At the sound wind wafts flower, scent, and wide awake,
A poet calls from a distant branch

In this poem, “Farewell to Heaven” the poet’s heart is crying for the
‘indigent afflicted, tearful, sullied’ Mother Earth. The heaven is in his
imagination separate and detached from the Creation. The joys and sorrows of
the Earth or the loss of one or many humans do not affect the fare of happiness
of the gods. Man cannot be satisfied with a monotonous life of unbroken
happiness. He becomes restless for a varied and greater life on earth. Happiness
may be short lived and peace may be rare here but man’s fulfillment can only
be found on this earth. The farewell to heaven is a Jivan Devta poem only in
the sense that their thoughts stratum is that out of which the true Jivan Devta
poems after rise.

Kadi O Kamal:

Poem – Breast:

Reference to the context:

This poem written when he first goes to know her intimately. This was
probably in the post rains of 1885 at Sholapur.

93 Ibid, pp.9-10. (The Flute Selected Poems of Rabindranath Tagore)
Truly, we have the scares summer here
That Golden Mountain, dalliance –land of gods
The light breasts of this virtuous lady light
With rays of b heaven the earth, man's mortem, lot
From there the infant sun rises at down
And there in the evening, exhausted, he sinks
At night a dirty's irises keep watch
On two secluded unpolluted peaks
A nectar – flow from love's perennial source.

Tagore, poetry is born out of an amalgam of the rich classical heritage of ancient India, the spacious way of the Mughal Court, the simple varieties of the life of common people of Bengal and the restless energy and intellectual vigour of modern Europe. He is an inheritor of all times and all culture. It is this combination of many different strands and themes that gives to his poetry. It resilience, Universality and infinite appeal. So we can say that, Tagore’s poetry created the cult of the human being. His experience has helped the new poets understand the need to search for new poetics and new interpretation of ancient mythology. He was the first Indian who attempted to eradicate these contradictions by building a bridge between Oriental and Western cultures.

Selected Works:

KABIKAHINI, 1878- A Poet’s Tale
SANDHYA SANGEET, 1882-Evening Songs
PRABHAT SANGEET, 1883-Morning Songs
BAU-THAKURANIR HAT, 1883
RAJASHI, 1887
RAJA O RANI, 1889- The King and the Queen/Devouring Love
VISARGAN, 1890-Sacrifice

Chapter III

MANASI, 1890
EUROPE-JATRIR DIARI, 1891, 1893
VALMIKI PRATIBHA, 1893
SONAR TARI, 1894- The Golden Boat
KHANIKI, 1900- Moments
KATHA, 1900
KALPANA, 1900
NAIVEDYA, 1901
NASHTANIR, 1901- The Broken Nest
SHARAN, 1902
BINODINI, 1902
CHOCHER BALI, 1903- Eyesore
NAUKADUBI, 1905- Haaksirikko
KHEYA, 1906
NAUKADUBI, 1906- The Wreck
GORA, 1907-09-suum
SARADOTSAVA, 1908- Autumn Festival
GALPAGUCCHA, 1912- A Bunch of Stories
CHINNAPATRA, 1912
VIDAY-ABHISAP, 1912- The Curse at Farewell
GITANJALI, 1912- Song Offerings (new translation in 2000 by Joen Winter, publ. Anvil Press)- Uhrilauluja
JIBAN SMRTI, 1912- My Reminiscences- Elamani muistoja, trans. by J. Hollo
DAKGHAR, 1912- Post Office
The Crescent Moon, 1913
Glimpses of Bengal Life, 1913
The Hungry Stones and Other Stories, 1913
CHITRA, 1914-transl.
GHITIMALAYA, 1914
The King of the Dark Chamber, 1914
Chapter III

The Post Office, 1914
Sadhana, 1914

GHARE-BAIRE, 1916 - The Home and the World-Koti ja maailma
BALAKA, 1916 - A Flight of Swans
CHAURANGA, 1916 - transl.
Fruit Gathering, 1916
The Hungry Stones, 1916
Stray Birds, 1916
PERSONALITY, 1917-Persoonallisuus
The Cycle of Spring, 1917
My Reminiscene, 1917
Nationalism, 1917
Mashi and Others Stories, 1918
Stories from Tagore, 1918
Palataka, 1918
JAPAN-j ATRI, 1919 - A Visit to Japan
Greater India, 1921
The Fugitive, 1921
Creative Unity, 1921
LIPIKA, 1922
MUKTADHARA, 1922-trans.
Poems, 1923
Goa, 1924
Letters from Abroad, 1924
Red Oleander, 1924
GRIHAPRABESH, 1925
Broken Ties and Other Stories, 1925
Rabindranath Tagore: Twenty-Two Poems, 1925
RAKTA-KARABI, 1925-Red Oleanders
DADHANA, 1926-suom.

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NATIR PUJA, 1926-transl.
Letters to a Friend, 1928
SESHER KAVITA, 1929- Farewell, My Friend
MAHUA, 1929- The Herald of Spring
JATRI, 1929
YAGAYOG, 1929
The Religion of Man, 1930
The Child, 1931
RASHIAR CHITHI, 1931- Letters from Russia
PATRAPUT, 1932
PUNASCHA, 1932
Mahatmahi and the Depressed Humanity, 1932
The Golden Boat, 1932
Sheaves, Poems and Songs, 1932
DUI BON, 1933- Two Sisters
CHANDALIKA, 1933

Letters of Rabindranath Tagore:

Rabindranath Tagore being a social reformer had done lot for the masses. But he was basically a poet at heart. Besides writing poems, he has also written many letters on various occasions. Through the letters can easily undusted his poetic and saintly personality. Tagore’s letters are full of beauty and charm.

Some of the letters tell us about the themes that Rabindranath wanted to talk about his international tours, and sometimes express his frustration at not being heard.\(^{95}\)

The letters of Rabindranath Tagore which have so far been published in book Form comprise eleven volumes. His best letters are admittedly his ‘Torn

letters' (Chinnapatra) written between 1885 and 1895. He is like who sits at an open window, looking out on the passing show of life in front of him. But, as he says in a letter, one must have a genuine love for the spectacle before him, for then only can he write of the procession of events 'in words that sail and dance in the air with light wings outspread'. It must be remembered that Rabindranath wrote no finer prose than is to be found in Chinnapatra, which means, therefore, that Bengali prose reaches its highest watermark in them.

**Intimate relation with Mother Nature:**

The *padma* becomes for him a living being; river he sees her sometimes as a wild and wayward women madly dancing and shattering everything that comes in her way; at other times she in to him a pale, fair slip of a girl with grace in every movement of her slender body. The evening star is to him as one long known and loved, and when he opens his eyes at dawn to see the morning star smiling down on him, he feels that a radiant and vigilant love has kept watch over him as he slept.

In one of the letters from Shelidah dated 27 June 1894, he says the happy thought has suddenly come into his head that instead of trying to improve the world and failing, he might set himself to accomplishing what he can do, namely write stories. Many of the letters, again, bring out one leading Characteristic of this earlier stories- the fusion in his mind of his characters with their environment. To see a great writer giving shape to an idea two different media at about the same time is a fascinating experience, for it seems to given us a glimpse of the very process of literary creation.

There is one other point with this collection of the finest letters that Rabindranath ever wrote; his humour, which irradiates a large part of this delightfull correspondence as it does so many of his other prose writings. His humour contradicts the opinion of an eminent European philosopher that laughter and sympathy are incompatible. Rabindranath wrote during a long life, there are few that excel them in beauty of the thought and language few that
can be read so often with undiminished pleasures and with increasing interest in the mind which they mirror – a mind of rare loftiness and brilliance steeped a quite joy in nature and a deep inner peace, and yet keenly alive to every aspect of the world of men and the world of Art.

The sixth volume of Rabindranath’s correspondence, published by Visva-Bharti in May 1957, contains thirty-six letters to his great friend Jagadishchandara Bose and seven to his friend’s wife Abala. The majority of these letters were written in the early years of the present century when neither the poet nor the scientist had achieved world recognition.

The poet’s loyalty, his interest and wholehearted support must have sustained the great scientist in the struggle for the establishment of the truth of his discoveries in England in the teeth of jealousy, suspicion and hostility, open and covert. How much greater than himself he considers his friend to be, and how ardently he looks forward to the day when India’s valuable contribution to the store of scientific knowledge through Jagadishchandra will be gratefully acknowledged by the world! In his letter dated 17 September 1900, he writes from Shelidah.

When you return victorious we in Bengal will enjoy a share of your triumph. We need not understand what you have achieved, nor need we spend much thought or money or time over it; we shall simply help ourselves to all the credit when The Times publishes words of praise from the lips of Englishmen. A prominent journal in our country will then point out that we also are men to reckon with, another will probably Proclaim that we are making one discovery after another in the realm of Science. No one bothers about you knows, but when you return home with your harvest of glory, we shall all claim you as our very own. For ploughing and sowing – you alone; for enjoying the fruits of your labour - why, every one of us! So you see we stand to gain much more than you, if you win victory.
Before passing on to a consideration of the letters in path o pather prante. A translation of a few lines from a letter to Jagadischandra (written in April 1902) to reveal Rabindranath’s burning love for his mother land and for the simple Indian way of life and his distaste for any display of power and pomp.

India’s far-stretching plains and her sky’s wide expanse wait for that day with a yearning heart and outstretched arms... Whoever may rule over us, no one can snatch from us our sky, and our fields and meadows that extend to the horizon; or rob us of our right to knowledge or meditation or the spirit that spurns pomp and riches. In path o pather (On the Road and at the End of the Road) are collected together a number of letters which Rabindranath wrote to Mrs. Nirmal Kumar Mahalanobis. The letters in this volume, besides possessing high literacy value, have another interest in a marked degree; they give us very clear pictures of the poet’s mind during his last years. He tells us about his outlook on life, his weaknesses and his qualities, his moods of happiness and depression with less reserve than elsewhere. In one of the ‘Torn letters’ written in July 1893, he speaks of nursing a hopeless passion for ‘that art called painting.’ In a letter dated 7 Nov. 1928, he writes:

The principle news about me from day to day is that I am drawing pictures. Lines have spread their magic net over my entire mind... I have forgotten that I have at any time written poetry. However indistinctly, the thought of a poem suggests itself to the brain at the very beginning; and then like the Ganges rushing down from the melted locks of Shiva’s hair through a chasm in the Himalayas, the poem comes cascading down the tip of the pen, and the rhythm begins to flow. But in the picture I try to draw, the method of composition is just the reverse of this. The first faint suggestions of lines came from the pen itself; then, as these lines began to assume familiar shapes, the brain stars to take cognizance of them.
In another letter, dated 28 Nov. 1928, he writes: "...The joy that pictures bring is the joy of definiteness; within restraint of lines we see the particular with distinctness.

Many of the letters in this volume give us the poet's own evaluation of himself and his work. There is no end to the discussion in his mind as to what is his real nature. He feels certain that the poet-nature is not the whole of him - that to perceive beauty and to express it in beautiful words is not his sole function in life. Many other parts of his being call him to account. 'My vina has too many strings', he writes, 'and it is very difficult for all of them to be in perfect tune with each other.'

Sometimes, memories of his boyhood days come back to him with startling clearness, memories often tinged with a gentle sadness. While on a voyage to Japan in March 1929, he writes from his boat:

I was very lightly clad in a cotton upper garment and loose trousers for we were brought up like very poor children. Feeling cold, I went into a small room in a corner of the house, which we used to call toshakhana, where the servants lived. In the semi-darkness Jyotida's servants Chinte was toasting slices of bread on a toaster over a small Charcoal stove. Mingled with the delicious smell of buttered toast which filled the room was the song Chinte was singing and the comfortable warmth of the stove. Of himself in his prime he writes. "There was a deep tapasya behind my manifold activities of that time - I was, infect, a complete samnyase in my search for truth and in my endeavors to give shape to my ideals".

Such reminiscences and illuminating passages of self-evaluation occur in many of these letters. Rabindranath's best letters - and their number is not inconsiderable - are among the best in their kind in any literature. There are some another important letter, which stated on different aspects such as,

A very valuable letter by him to Mr. Frederick Bose who wrote to Tagore asking what methods were adopted by him to unfold the mental and
spiritual faculties of his pupils. We have the model before us in the tradition of our ancient forest schools. Having this ideal of a school in teaching my mind which should be a part of a worshipful life, hallowed with the memory of a pious life whose days were passed here in communion with God—The first help that our boys get here on this path is from the cultivation of love of nature and sympathy with all living creatures.  

I Natural Calamities (Poet):

(a). In one letter, dated June 1891 he describes a storm of the kind, which still wreaks terrible havoc in today’s Bangladesh:

I had been setting out on the deck for more than a quarter of an hour when heavy clouds rose in the west. They came up black, tumbled and tattered with streaks of lined light showing through here and there—

I allowed my thought to take part in this terrible revelry; they leap into the open like a pack of schoolboys scudding set free. When, however, I got had to shut up the window and my poetizing, and retire quality into the darkness inside, like a caged bird.

(b) Natural Beauty:

Storm such as this were a comparative rarity. A completely typical science by contract, in captured in a letter dated July 1893:

The flow of village life is not too rapid, neither is it stamens, work and rest go together, hand in hand. The ferry crosses to and from, the passes—by with Umbrellas wend their way along the two Path.

II. Women are washing rice on split—bamboo trays that they dip in the water—

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III Social Reform:

In another letter, Rabindranath speaks moving of the peasants and their plight:

I feel great tenderness for these peasant folk – our riots – big, helpless, infantile children of providence, who must have food brought to their very likes, or they are undone – Whether the socialistic ideal of a more equal distribution of wealth is attainable, but if not, the dispensation of providence is indeed cruel and mans truly unfortunate creatures – Only a utopian dream these social problems are hard indeed. Fate has allowed humanity such a pit fully meager covered, that in pulling it over one part of the world, another has to be left bare. In allaying our poverty we lose our wealth, and with this wealth what a world of grace and beauty and power is lost to us.

Shelidah laid his inner life———

IV Spiritual aspect:


Shalidah laid his inner life. This he expresses with particular felicity in a letter of June 1894:

The fact is that here away from Calcutta, I live in my own inner world, where the clocks don’t keep ordinary time where duration is measured only by the intensity of the feelings; --Immeasurable and every moment infinite -- With this beginning, Tagore wrote several hundred short stories of many kinds. A large proportion of them deal with social issues both in rustier and urban settings --. Tagore’s attitude to Indian nationalism.97

Letter to great friend Thomson, Shantiniketan 24 Oct. 1936; highlight his impartial political thinking.

I have great regard, connote a definite political group in the country and I do not want to be identified with any political grouping.

Social & political thinker and above all a patriot.

Letter # 7: Rabindranath to Van Eden; Shantiniketan, Nov. 19, 1919.

He wrote a blunt and straightforward letter to an European condition of Europe.

Against – our arms and ammunition:

For I cannot leave India now when she is having her own share of suffering which has spread over all the continents of the earth. The machine guns and airship showering wholesale death are grimly Serious in a battlefield but outside it they have the vicious fascination of a leaver and ugly toy----It cannot be true that the chivalry of Europe has all long been a myth, but there must be a cause for such steadily growing impairment of her humanility. My heart is drawn to you, my friend, because I know that you are one of those in Europe whose noble mission it is to remove this cause at the root.

The poet’s letter to Lord Chelmsford the viceroy, repudiating his kinghood in protest for jalian wallah bag mass killing. The letter was published in the sates man, June 3, 1919.

To show his anger and discontent to watch Britishers he rejected to accept the reward of king hood.

The time has come when badges of honor make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of the humiliation and I for my part, wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions are liable to suffer degrade action not fit for human beings. And these are the reasons, which have compelled me to ask your Excellency, with due reference and regard to relieve me of my title of

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knighthood, which I had the humors to accept from his Majesty the king at the hands of your predicators ----

(I) Jillian Wallah Bagh Incident: Tagore's letter dated 30th May 1919 to Lord Chelmsford, viceroy of India.

The enormity of the measures taken by the government in Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has with a rude shock revealed to our minds the helpless of our position as British subjects in India. The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convulsed governments, barring some conspicuous exceptions recent and remote. Conserving that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resource less by a power which has the most terribly efficient organization for destruction of human lives, we must strongly arrest that it can claim no political expediency far moral justification -----

The time has come when badges of humor make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, an I far my part wish to stand shorn of all special distinction by the side of my countrymen who, for their so-called insignificance are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings-----

(II) Letter to Mahatma Gandhi on non-cooperation movement:

Tagore's letter dated April 10, 1919 to Mahatma Gandhi, Shantiniketan.

Power in all its forms is irrational .It is like the horse that drags the carriage blindfolded ----- 

I know your teaching is to fight against evil by the help of the good. But such a fight is for horses and not for men led by impulses of the movement. Evil on one side naturally biggest evil on other, injustice leading to violence and insult to vengefulness. Unfortunately such a force has already been started, and either through panic or through wrath our authorities have shown us their
clams whose sure effect is to drone some of us into the secret path of resentment and others into utter demoralization —

We must know that normal conquest does not consist in success that failure does not deprive it of its dignity and worth. Those who believe in spiritual life know that to stand against wrong, which has overwhelming material power behind it is victory itself; it is the victory of the active fault in the ideal in the loath of evident defeat — I have always felt and said in accordance that the great gift of freedom can never come to a people through charity. We must win it before we can own it. ¹⁰⁰

In this way collection of letters cannot however, give a representative view of an authors work, especially in the case of person poetry is as important as Tagore is. The letters are inevitably more geared to prose than to poetry and to non-fiction while reader will find how he explained his inspirations and objectives it is one deliberative subject that the letters provide the greatest insight.