INTRODUCTION

The recent times are literally engaged with cultural and literary festivities of Rabindranath Tagore. This leads us to the perpetual question: What makes him relevant today? The immediate answer is the relevance of Tagore’s universalism to our unfair and embattled world. Even after many years, the ideas of Tagore on education, religion, nationalism, development etc. seem to be addressing many of our contemporary anxieties and problems. Tagore’s personality is a constant reminder that many people are invested with the similar ideas of Tagore. No doubt, Tagore is a great, infinitely varied and complex creative artist. His attempt to feel and recognise the reflection of these varied interests in all the people make him significant even today. Tagore’s works are not just vehicles of poetry, songs, stories, novels, plays or paintings for proffering the incomprehensibilities of life, they are containers of paradoxes and counter currents. They have immense potential for exploring the new insights of life and literature for adaptation by artists and performers. They are great resources, because every generation can find new insights of life in them. With the Asian cultural traditions catching up with the European and American in terms of global influence, Tagore’s works have become more relevant.

The personality of Tagore continues to remain as an enigma. Tagore is perceived as a great philosopher and a great writer. Ever since, his creative achievements have received global appreciation, with the Noble prize for Gitanjali
in (1913), the audiences who flocked to hear him on his extensive foreign tours aspired and craved for his philosophical messages rather than poetic outbursts. Tagore has fulfilled the intellectual appetites and lived up to his role as sage by his long beard and unique, ‘pan-Asian’ style of dress code. But at one point of time; he often constricted by his external appearance. He wrote to his close friend, William Rothenstein about the rich luxury of leisure experienced by him in Europe. Tagore found himself doomed to be unrelentingly good to humanity and remain harnessed to a cause. He firmly believed that the artist in him surges to be naughty and natural but a good deal of courage makes him the man of hundred good intentions.

For many academicians across the globe, the unfazed fame of Rabindrantha Tagore is a curious issue. Very anxiously, they have examined the test of the time. Tagore himself doubted the test of the time which encourages human beings to hide anyone under the blanket of obscurity. Because, as a prophet of the time, he saw all his achievements turning someday into dust ‘under the wheel of time’. In his philosophical way, he confirmed that all his achievements will be gnawed away into nothingness by the remorseless ‘ocean waves of time’. Many critics in putting together different pieces of writings of Tagore are not found to be conflating different points of time. From this perspective, an acute consciousness of his ‘place in history’ in the memory of his people seems to be a trait marking out Tagore from many other authors. As he came an icon in India, Tagore
repeatedly asked himself the question, could 'this image that has been made' escape the 'hunger of the dust'.

Today, when we explore and evaluate Tagore's life and works, he is remembered as a national icon with only fading remnants of his fame in the public mind and steadily fading knowledge of his place in history. The Bengali speaking community in India and across the globe does not believe in the eclipse of his fame. It is only to defuse these perceptions; there is a revival in reinterpreting the account of Tagore's life and work. In pursuing this perception, my approach has been to draw from Tagore's own statements about the ideas and experiences which drove his creative and intellectual life. Tagore himself left the abundant sources to critically analyze his life and writings. His autobiography, reminiscences, occasional self analysis, twenty five hundred letters which have been archived and his literary works throw light on the much required understanding of his 'inner life'.

Tagore's versatile creativity and the staggering range of thoughts and writings hold key to any attempt to comprehend his works as a totality. There is a surging creative self renewal in his vast creative life. In a precious reflective contemplation, Tagore commented on his creative life: "My literary writings have undergone changes just as seasons of nature change. Often that has occurred without my being conscious of it. Such changes in the trend of writing follows changes in the environs, it is so natural that it is not a conscious act. The writer remains unaware of it. It is the critic at a distance from him who can observe those
trends" (R. R. Vol. XII. 101). This observation is so crucial that it remained as a
touchstone method in evaluating the creativity of any writer. It is apparent that
there are few things that remained constant in the life of Tagore. Considering this,
Tagore had the perspicacity to concede that it is the privilege of the ‘external
observer’ to perceive the trends, changes and continuities. This perception
justifies the periodization of the Tagore’s intellectual life. It also takes us to locate
Tagore in the historical transition. It is often acknowledged that Tagore is much
‘in advance of his times’. But considering and withstanding the autonomy of the
authorial mind, evaluating the historical circumstances that shaped the personality
of Tagore deserves consideration. For a better comprehension of reality,
considerable space is required to assess the inheritance of the past. Tagore himself
reflected on his restless present and historical past in all his philosophical density.
In addition to the qualities of a lyricist and a poet, the social and political
comprehensibility was more on the shoulders of Tagore. This has consolidated the
role of Tagore as an ideologue. But this has invited possible interpretations raising
new questions about Tagore’s literary and social personality.

To explore the intellectual evolution of Tagore is a challenging task. The
University of Oxford has conferred the degree DLitt honoris causa on Tagore in
1940 with a memorable inscription: ‘Here before you is the myriad minded poet
and writer’. This is regarded as an appropriate recognition for the vast range of
literary creations in the form of poetry, dramatic works, songs, essays, novels and
short stories. Tagore not only produced a vast corpus of literature but recreated
Today, what is prevalent in Bengali is the language of Tagore. His writings have reshaped the aesthetic sensibilities of Bengali and initiated a complete cultural change across India. His presence in English language has recently grown. The response of the western scholars is so paramount that there is an unstoppable continuity translation of his works. There are well received translations by William Radice, Ketaki Kushari Dyson and by his biographers Andrew Robinson and Krishna Chaudhuri. Almost every publication provoked controversy, or at the very least disagreement and in some cases furore. There are other scholarly works by Sahitya Akademi. The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore edited by Sisir Kumar Das were published in three volumes by Sahitya Akademi. The voluminous size of these enterprises reminds one that there is more significance to Tagore's writings in English. And more over, critics have realized the necessity to historicize and contextualize Tagore through English writings than in regional writings.

Tagore’s literary output was prolific and variegated during the last decade of his life. Conscious of the end of his life, Tagore's creativity gushed out like a volcano in philosophical writings, experiments in new literary forms and into the world of graphic arts. He became an influential spokesman, sending messages and delivering addresses. He has developed a kind of humanist universalism which formed the core of Tagore's Philosophy of life. This has found its ultimate expression in the concept of 'Religion of Man'. He has elaborated the idea of 'Religion of Man' through his Professorial lectures at Oxford University and
Calcutta University. This is also seen in various creative works such as *Chandalika* ('The Untouchable Girl') and the novel *Char Adhyay* (Four Episodes).

Finally, Tagore has delivered the last testament on the theme of humanist values in *The Crisis in Civilization* (1941). This theme has dominated his thoughts and became part of his personal outlook on life finding expression in his poetry.

During this period Tagore has introduced an innovation in form the ‘prose-poem’. He has produced *Punascha* (‘post-script’, 1932), *Shesh Saptak* (‘The Last Chords’, 1935), *Patraput* (‘latter of Leaves’, 1936), and *Shyamali* (‘Dark Maiden, 1936). Tagore considered this experiment of ‘Prose-Poem’ as liberation of poetry from metrical discipline. This has made him dear to the modern poets of Bengal. In his essay 'Modernism in Literature', Tagore has appreciated the bold creativity and cautioned the tendency to imitate the modern western style of the day. His encounter with Modernism is much illustrated in his analysis of the works of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell et al.

Tagore's innovation in literary forms and his venture into the world of painting has surprised many critics and contemporaries. Tagore has openly acknowledged that his sensibilities were shaped by three movements: Rammohan Roy's social transformation, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's literary renaissance, the spirit of Nationalism. Tagore who lived at the confluence of three movements derived inspiration and guidance for his own self expression. He considered himself as a 'literary outlaw'. He said: "... he never had complete acceptance from my own people, and that too has been a blessing, for nothing is as

So, it is in the light of Taogre’s encyclopedic life the question of relevance is answered through the festivals of Tagore observed across the world. The recently organized Tagore festival at Dartington Hall in Devan explored the question of relevance of Tagore engaging various communities. The capaciousness of this issue lies in articulating Tagore’s appeal both as a thinker and an artist. It is the intellectual and philosophical personality of Tagore that made possible the assembly of idealists and artists to examine the relevance of Tagore. The passionate interest of scholars in Tagore is primarily ideological and is accompanied by their commitment to peace, ecology and progressive education. These literary festivals have provided a larger scope to artists, musicians, dancers and translators to reexamine their performances emphasizing Tagore’s adaptability for opera, theatre and film. There are many world class adaptations of Tagore’s works. Alexander Zemlinsky in his massive *Lyrische Symphonie* (1992) incorporated seven poems of Tagore from *The Gardener* in German Translation. Param Vir has based his opera *Snatched* by the Gods with libretto on the translation of *Debatar Gras*. In the same fashion Valerie Doulton’s new production premiered *The Post Office* at Nehru centre London on 4th May 2011. Some of the Prestigious Global Premiere institutions like Akademi in London are producing songs by Tagore. These explorations and developments are even beyond the imagination of Tagore himself. These new perceptions, approaches and
productions have initiated an interrogative and subversive intellectual atmosphere that make Tagore Gurudev even to future generations. So exploring the universe of Tagore is a brilliant enraptured unifying experience. This brings idealists, aesthetes and scholars together and illustrates the relevance of Tagore beyond across Space and Time.

The thesis titled “A Sesquicentennial Reflection on Rabindranath Tagore’s Works & Life” explores the social, literary, philosophical and cultural relevance of Tagore in all its scholarly density. The thesis divided into seven chapters establishes a scholarly probe into the literary works of Tagore and his life. Chapter one titled: “Tagore As a Humanist & Novelist” with the subtitle (‘Discovering Divinity’) locates Tagore in the Pre Independent situation and posits him as the central figure for the literary renaissance in Bengal. The chapter explores the history of Humanism from the ancient times and examines the religious and social influences responsible for the Humanism of Tagore. Further, the chapter examines the aspects of Humanism reflected in the novels of Tagore. It is argued that Tagore has perceived the right concerns and perspectives of Victorian Women novelists that enabled him to articulate the social issues in espousing the amelioration of women. This aspect is illustrated from the thematic concerns of Binodini, Home and the World and Four Chapters. The Chapter also examines the emergence of Modernism in Bengali literature and the attempts of Tagore in advocating modernism not as a blind imitation of Western tradition but on the lines of condemning orthodoxical practices of Indian culture. Tagore’s attempt in exposing
the dichotomy involved in India's glorious past is also examined in this chapter. This is further illustrated by presenting the critique of Tagore's nationalism. It substantiates that the critique of Tagore's nationalism is a prognosis of Post Colonial criticism that defuses the myth of modern nationalism and the existence of nations. This is argued in the light of the perception of Post Colonial critics of Nation and nationalism such as Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Timothy Brenan, Simon Gikandhi etc. Tagore's conflict with Gandhi in accepting the notion of nation and the reasons for the formulation of Universalism are convincingly presented in this chapter.

Chapter two titled as 'The Emergence of New Women' presents the critical elucidation of the novel Binodini. The chapter presents a synoptic view of the evolution of Feminist literary criticism and places Binodini within the centrality of Feminist consciousness generated by Tagore. It also examines the history of widow remarriages in the social context of India. The theme of the novel is narrated lucidly simplifying the narrative strategies executed by Tagore. The evolution of Binodini's personality is explored and perceived with the textual illustrations. Tagore unfurls the multi dimensional character of Binodini adopting innovative narrative techniques. Tagore distances himself from the voice of the author and speaks through the voice of the characters. He lashes out the pseudo moral standards of other characters through the character of Binodini. Through the character of Binodini, Tagore has paved the way for the emergence of new class of women in literature. The self denial and the humble submission of Binodini at the
moment of her life's triumph had expressed the resentment of Tagore against the prejudices of contemporary society. Tagore projects the new perception in understanding the human beings in the light of sexual passions. Through this Tagore succeeds in exposing the strategies of the society in portraying women as silent sufferers from the duplicity of male imposed moral code. The chapter also examines the short history of individualism and looks at the classification of Feminism and the subaltern feminist consciousness analysed in the light of Binodini's characterization.

The third chapter titled as 'The Conflict of Tradition & Modernity' provides a critical evaluation of the novel The Wreck. The novel is a perfect representation of the ideas of Tagore in harmonizing the different cultures of the world. It examines the problems of the individual entangled within the traditional framework of arranged marriages. It has presented the conflict of values in Indian society. The theme has invited global attention and invited appreciable conflicting critical perception. The chapter presents the different critical perceptions of the critics on the theme of the novel. It also compares Tagore's literary genius with James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley, considered as high priests of modernism. The chapter discusses the thematic concerns of the novel with the textual illustrations and offers a detailed critical and analytical evaluation of the novel. The chapter examines the tragic disaster of the incident that reverses the destiny of the characters. The melodramatic events in the novel lead to a sequence of events inviting the study of changing the attitudes of the characters. These
perspectives are viewed in the light of the psychological probe effectively executed by Tagore into the density of the characters. Further, the chapter offers a detailed analysis of all the major characters in the novel.

Chapter Four ‘Appraisal of Nationalism’ examines the contemporary relevance of the novel *Gora*. Tagore’s vision of syncretistic India is presented on the broader canvass of Nationalism. The novel is understood to have interrogated social, political and cultural issues that hold relevance to the contemporary times. The novel has fulfilled Tagore’s search for national identity and his aspiration for the synthesis of east and west. The chapter presents the synoptic view of the critical evaluation of the theme of the novel drawing sustenance from the critical perceptions of various critics. Then, the thematic presentation of the novel with necessary textual illustrations is offered in the chapter. Examining the factors responsible for the popularity of the novel, Tagore’s ideas on Nationalism from his seminal essay *Nationalism* (1936) are discussed in relation to his quest for universal harmony. The character of Gora is perceived as a matchless and exemplified character. The chapter provides critical illustration in substantiating this aspect with textual illustrations. Apart from the character of Gora, Tagore has created memorable women characters: Sucharita, Lolita, Anandomoyi, Harimohini and Sundari. Through these, Tagore has succeeded in subtly presenting the balanced view of the different shades of life.
The chapter in all its massive expansion offers a scholarly probe into the critical aspects of the novel, equally considering even the minutest thematic concerns of the novel.

Chapter Five ‘Contesting Biogoticism’ offers a thorough analysis of another popular novel *The Home and The World*. The chapter examines the reasons for the popularity of the novel and its fiercest attack on the ideology of nationalism. Many critics are of the view that Tagore’s vehement criticism of Nationalism has helped the novel’s success. The chapter provides a brief thematic illustration of the novel, explaining different connotations of the title of the novel. Arguing for the necessity to depend on the ability of the reader, the chapter presents the idealistic representations of central characters in promoting different perceptions of truth. Particularly, the chapter hinges on the analysis of the central characters Nikhil, Sandip and Bimala. The element of love and its nuances are thoroughly probed depicting the genuine evaluation of the position of women in Indian society. Apart from illustrating the instances in the novel to evaluate the role of women, the narrative structure of the novel is elucidated to simplify the techniques employed by Tagore to provide a comprehensive view of life. The chapter also discusses the allegorical qualities in relation to the opposing views of Nikhil and Sandip for promoting Nationalism. The chapter presents an intense sense of debate on pugnacious nationalism and patriotism, while exposing the unpatriotism of Swadeshi movement. The chapter also presents the critical
encomiums showered on Tagore from William Rothenstein, W.B. Yeats and Einstein.

Chapter Six 'Humanist Universalism' provides a critical elucidation of the novels *Four Chapters* & *Chaturanga*. Discussing the prefatory notes to the themes of the novels, the chapter traces the evolution of Tagore's Humanist Universalism. The theme of the novels is considered as Tagore's admiration for the young men and women who sacrificed their lives for the cause of Independence. The chapter presents the novels as Tagore's glowing tributes to young generations. The thematic analysis carried through textual illustrations expose the pitfalls of bloody revolution practiced by the misguided youth for independence. The chapter succeeds in providing new insights into the thematic concerns of these novels.

Chapter Seven S'New Insights' explores the life of Tagore and makes a universal critique on the multifaceted aspects of his life. The chapter presents Tagore's theory of literature and its evolution. Tagore's essays on literary criticism were not explored in the right perception. In fact, they have reconstituted the foundations of Bengali literature and evinced the innate human desire for self expression. Providing a comprehensive understanding of theory of literature, the chapter goes on to examines Tagore's contribution in different genres of literature: musical drama, prose fiction, nonsense literature. Tagore's experimentation in different genres is virtually a manifesto of rebellion against tradition. Tagore's poetic creativity is driven by three great waves of literature. The chapter offers a
detailed analytical perspectives of the writings as Tagore’s creativity underwent changes like the change of seasons in nature. Tagore’s perception of the world has become so significant as it always suffered reduction in the hands of interpreters. The chapter provides a scholarly understanding of the perception of Tagore’s ideal of universalism and the stream of global events. Tagore’s description of ‘Religion of Man’ is re inscribed in view of the three professorial lectures: *Manusheer Dharma, Religion of Man* and *Man*. The essence of these lectures obviously registered the reassertion of Tagore’s faith in humanism and universalism. The chapter, then, offers the course of Tagore resistance in nullifying the conventional discourse of Education. It is pertinent to observe that Tagore’s views on Education underwent a great change during the times of Swadeshi and National Education Movement. Tagore’s contemplations on ‘Music and Language’ unexplored by many of the critics is also lucidly discussed extracting new insights related to Tagore’s life. Tagore’s public sphere is interrogated in relation to the autobiographical resonances concealed for a long time from the accounts of his letters. The new directions in understanding Gandhi and Tagore debate and his enriched perspectives of literatures that stemmed from the Travelling Experiences are also discussed in this chapter. Tagore’s ‘theory of art’ seldom understood by the critics and intellectuals is also deftly analysed to the appreciable extent. Under the head of creative writings, Tagore’s plays *Mukta-Dhara* and *Rakta Karabi*, the complex novel *Yogayog* and the theme of liberation in *Sesher Kabita* (Farewell Song) are discussed in the chapter. Towards the end, the chapter also provides
glimpses of Tagore’s experiences as the sage of Santiniketan and the unknown thoughts on death during the last days of his life.

The conclusion offers a summation of all the literary, social, philosophical and cultural aspects related to Tagore’s literature and life. It tries to substantiate that the personality of Tagore remains an everlasting enigma in inspiring the civilization of India as long as the world survives.