

**Rabindranath Tagore's  
Contribution to  
Literature, Culture and Education**

*Madhu*

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Finally *Gitanjali's* affirmation of human life and celebration of human equality find their prototype in the Tamil Bhakti poetry and the modern parallel in Bharathi. Tagore speaks of God's love for the common and the lowly. In Bharathi kannan becomes the servant of man. Whereas Tagore says that he does not want deliverance from life as our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation", Bharathi also accepts this world and this life and prefers human life to heaven because even gods have to be born on earth in order to attain salvation. In Gnana Ratham he chooses to come to this world leaving the world of immortals. He prefers imperfect humanity to frozen eternity.

The above comparative study of *Gitanjali* and Tamil Bhakti poetry shows that Indian literatures show significant similarities in their evolution, Bhakti has evolved into spiritual humanism and nationalism, though with different shades in Tamil and Bengali. More than that, we also realize that Indian English literature is very much a part of Indian literature, though written in English. Of course, Tagore's English *Gitanjali* is only a translation. As Sisir kumar Ghose and others have pointed out, it is not the same as the Bengali version, it lacks the music of the Bengali version and also it has several songs from other sources. But that is as it should be. The English language can convey certain aspects of Indian experience and culture very effectively, but in that process the experience as well as the English language have to undergo certain changes. And this is one of the central problems of Indian English literature and Tagore's *Gitanjali* is a pioneer in this regard also as it shows the creative marriage of Indian English and the English language, and it paves the way for several later writers with bilingual writers such as A.K.Ramanujam Kolatkar and Bala.

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## RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND ANGELOS SIKELIANOS: TWO THINKERS - ONE UNIVERSE

Dr. Andreas L. Katonis\*

I have deliberately chosen to use the words "thinkers": Tagore and Sikelianos may be familiar to us more as national poets and writers, they are, however, both, something more, they are comparable, and their work and their universality connects them. One of the first in Greece to draw a parallel between them was the Indologist Vassiliades who remarked that they shared similar inspirations. Both of them founded, e.g., spiritual movements to promote global understanding (2000: 174). The two lives (Tagore: 1861-1941, Sikelianos: 1884-1951) ran, indeed, almost in parallel. Tagore, to be sure, is more known world wide; he came from a big country, he travelled a lot, whereas Sikelianos' Greece was and remains small, and if the country is familiar, then, its reputation is generally meant for Ancient Greece. This was, in a sense, also the concern of the Greek thinker helped by his American wife: the revival of certain aspects of Ancient Greece, not for his actual homeland only but for the whole world. Now admired in his country and in Europe, Sikelianos is among the most renowned modern Greek poets, integrated by some critics, together with Cavafis and Seferis, into a "Modern Greek Triptych" (Ivanovici 1979).

As we know from different sources, Tagore visited Greece, during a series of travels in European countries. His *Song Offerings* or *Gitanjali* had already been translated into Greek, and this cycle was republished, for the last time in 1978. The collection contains 103 poems, so that it may be assumed that it relies on the English corpus that consisted largely of the translations made by Tagore himself. The Greek title, like the English one, may not render satisfactorily the strong devotional connotation of *anjoli*, something like a 'prayer offering', but, to be sure, the religious tenor is well apprehensible in all texts. Trikoglidis, who approaches his work with great respect, goes as far as to place Tagore's figure between Jesus of Nazareth and Plato (Tagore 1978: 5). He adds that the Indian poet, with his calmness and his serene beauty, "paved for the Europeans the way to the orient", and "graced the entrance to the Oriental temples with

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flowers; the exhausted western spirit found a new source of inspiration" (*ib.* p. 6).

There are several points where a comparison between Tagore and Sikelianos is relevant. Tagore may have been more successful reaching his objectives but the *universalism* of the two authors in thought and programme is similar. Both of them travelled a lot though, Sikelianos mostly to the West whereas Tagore visited also several other countries. Both of them originated from a wealthy family: self-evident for a Brahmin family like in the case of Tagore; whereas Sikelianos was born into a wealthy and educated milieu (his father was a language teacher) with an aristocratic attitude and traditions (Anton 1988b: 253), on the western Greek island of Leukas. Both of them had the possibility to read and learn at home, and, strikingly, both of them began to read law: prospective barrister Tagore left University College London to explore Shakespeare and more; Sikelianos enrolled at the Faculty of Law of Athens University in 1901. By 1902, it was clear that he took a much more intense interest in the cultural and literary life of the Greek capital, and he never transferred to the Bar. Tagore, as early as 1913, and as the first non-European, won the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Greek poet was not as lucky as that, but as a fact, he was nominated for this prize three times, in 1945, 1947 and 1949 (Frangou-Kikilia 1993/2001: 47). Tagore, in the wake of the family tradition, founded an ashram, and later the Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan (Vassiliades 2000: 191[17], Sen 2005: 114ff.); Sikelianos did much to develop the so-called *Delphic Idea* part of which would have been a "Delphic University" (Sikelianos 1930b). If he had been successful the university would have been, in continuation of the Delphic Oracle that was in a sense a centre in classical times, a universal educational establishment, open to the whole world (*ib.*, e.g. p. 7), with a focus on art, literature, drama, dance and similar. One may recall here that in Delphi, on the site of very ancient centres of cult, from the 6th c. B.C. onward, a famous seat of oracle of international reputation had developed, and it was literally believed that Delphi was the centre ("the navel") of the Earth: the *omphalos*, symbolizing the centre, an ancient religious stone artifact, is now on exhibition in Delphi Archaeological Museum. Sikelianos was helped by his wife, Eva, with her contributions, and in an altruistic fashion, with her whole fortune. Eva's contribution is set out in a large autobiography (Palmer-Sikelianos 2010). Tagore was happier: the Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan provides education on Indian culture both to Indians and foreigners. The Delphic University would have been also part of a universal *Delphic Union* (on which cf. Sikelianos 1932). There is no direct information on any relationship between Sikelianos and Tagore. I don't know if they knew each other personally or by repute but certainly, the Indian tradition

and culture is present in the Greek thinker's work. E.g., he writes on cultural and moral "revolution" and he acknowledges Gandhi's achievements (1932: 3-4). He also invites East and West to meet at Delphi (*ib.* p. 16), and does not forget about Eastern and Western music either, for the cultivation of which he had ordered a special organ for his wife from Germany capable to analyze and play also Eastern tunes (*ib.* p. 17). One remembers that Tagore was a composer, too. In his treatise on the *Delphic Union*, in quest for the origins, Sikelianos alludes to "the clean foundations of primeval societies", and Vedic India, together with "Orphic Greece", is among them (1932: XI). Surprisingly, he cites Dhan Gopal Mukerji who wrote that "Europe cannot attract India any more since Greece is not any more with Europe; Greece, however, speaks to the heart of the Indians" (*ib.* p. 2). Last but not least, *love* is essential in the poetry of Tagore. Sikelianos may not have written on love and affection so often if compared, but in his *Delphic Appeal* this is, beside universality, very emphatically present: "Mankind needs love", he repeats several times (e.g. 1930a: 4-5). Similarly, an important thought is expressed in his work on Digenis Akritas, a medieval Greek epic hero, when he declares that thought is unable to come up because love had come before (cited by Ivanovici 1979: 67). Last but not least, the "Delphic Idea" can be compared with the "Idea of India", at least in Tagore's interpretation, who thought that the idea "militates against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others" (Sen 2005: 72). Sen adds: "Celebration of Indian civilization can go hand in hand with an affirmation of India's active role in the global world". On Tagore, he writes further that "Tagore put the rationale well, in a letter to C.F. Andrews: 'Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, wherever they might have their origin'" (*ib.* p. 86).

It is impossible to present the two, perhaps, greatest poets and thinkers of India and of Modern Greece respectively, in a short address. Having a look at Tagore's Nobel Prize Winner work, the *Gitanjali*, the Western reader is impressed by the fact how similar his poems to works of Christian inspiration are. This might be a "departure" from the prescribed course of Indian thinking. We know, however, that the moral worth of Hinduism and the Christian values are close. Sikelianos also "departed" from accepted values, but this was not a real departure: he remained in his native culture and native land. He only expanded various dimensions and stressed things differently. Beside universality of the two spiritual commitments, Hinduism and Christianity, there is also the universality, strongly felt, both in Tagore's and Sikelianos' work. One may consider Tagore's short poem "Who is This?" meaning the Lord in whose company the poet is "ashamed to come to [His] door" - this finds a parallel in

Christian (Catholic) liturgy. The "Signet of Eternity" expands the horizon both in time and space: the poet waits for "the happy moment [when he is going] to see", whereas in the "Brink of Eternity", at which he has arrived to see "the allness of the universe" one feels an affinity with Christian hymns. Let's stop here: we cannot analyze the amazing passage by Sikelianos on "The death of Digenis". Beside "love", already mentioned, that "overtakes thought", there is an addition. Thought says "you can't enter", but the poet is defiant: "I'll enter; and I enter free, and I will step out free" (Ivanovici 1979: 67).

Tagore gained a unique professional and social standing. For Sikelianos, there was the indifference instead. This may happen to great spirits. In such cases, it is Posterity that must discover them, and give them a just evaluation. Should, perhaps, Sikelianos have been born in India?

## TAGORE'S CONTRIBUTION TO LITERATURE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION

*Dr. S. Subbiah\**

Indian Contribution to the development of European civilization was there even from the earliest times as India had contact with Greece in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The fables of the Panchathantra reached Europe through a chain of translations, reincarnating themselves in many European Languages. The mathematics of Europe derived benefit from the decimal system notation which the Arabs brought to Europe from India. The kitchens of Europe were enriched by pepper, ginger, sugar and rice and the looms of India satisfied the Roman aristocracy's needs for muslin drapery.

For the westerners who turn with relief from the negative features of western modernism to holistic perspectives', to qualities such as compassion and affirmation, Tagore's poetry proves to be the panacea as it is characterized by an impressive wholeness of attitude: a loving warmth, a compassionate humanity, a delicate sensuousness, an intense sense of kinship with nature, a burring awareness of the universe of which we are a part. The great English Poet, W.B. yeats in his introduction to Gitanjali remarked: "I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omni buses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me."

Tagore was a great champion of the individual. In his fictional work he often portrays thinking. The vulnerable individual is often the focus of his attention in poetry too. He was acutely aware of the oppression of women and looked forward to the coming of an epoch when men and women would be equal partners.

Tagore's thinking mind involved him in political gestures. He wrote songs which protested against Curzon's partition of Bengal. He returned his knighthood after the Amritsar massacre He spoke out against terrorism as a political Strategy to the displeasure of those who favoured it. Moreover he criticized aspects of Gandhiji's non-co-operation movement and engaged in

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