

Rabindranath Tagore: Vision and Art

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MEERA PUBLISHERS

Pudukkottai - 622 001.

2011

First Edition: January, 2011

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Peravurani - 614 804.

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ISBN No: 978-93-80481-09-8

Size : 14.5 cm × 21.5 cm

Pages : 328

Published by
Meera Publishers,
2470, South Main Street,
Pudukkottai - 622 001.

Printed at:
Poocharam Prints,
Karaikudi.
Ph: 9884712091

FOREWORD

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The present Book, '*Rabindranath Tagore: Vision and Art*' brought out by Sri Venkateshwara College of Education is a token of '*shraddhanjali*' to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore on his sesquicentennial birth anniversary. Tagore's innovative theoretical formulations on topics ranging from history, philosophy, education, painting, music and literature have been immensely explored in Bengali and at present times in English too. Gurudev represents a personality who chose the middle path between radical modernism and proud traditionalism in the face of scorn and threats from both sides – left and right, so-called Westernisers and Traditionalists. His was the early voice of modern Indian consciousness, a builder of a national ideology for cultural survival transcending the overtones of nationalism that ushered in a harmonious assimilation of Indian culture with the liberal West.

The management of Sri Venkateshwara College of Education shows keen interest in celebrating the greatness of literary men and literary events. An international conference was conducted last year so as to compare the literature of Greece and India. In order to celebrate and perpetuate the glory of Rabindranath Tagore, an international conference was held on 2nd and 3rd January, 2011 at Peravurani. It is a pleasure to record our gratitude to **Mr. K.N. Ramajayam** Managing trustee of the Visionary trust and **Mr. K. Rajavel**, Secretary of the trust who provided financial assistance and encouragement for conducting the conference.

Around 200 Scholars presented their valuable research papers in the conference. The editorial board deserves special appreciation for selecting the best papers and compiling them in the form of a book. We would like to express our gratitude to **Dr. K. Chellappan** for his suggestions and advice. Finally I would like to thank **Meera Publishers** and **Poocharam Prints** for making this edition presentable.

the wonderful rhythm of the finite he fetters himself at every step, and thus gives his love out in music, in the most perfect lyrics of beauty.

But this God-man partnership in the making of life and history is meant to charge the human with the divine "to seize life, without fear to temper and transform it". He asks for the wedding of the old and the new in a ceremony of life. To him, man is the crown of life in the evolution from a cell of life and even if there be death, Man should, "declare across all space and time" I am He".

Bharathi also speaks of God-Man relationship as one of love, and he also speaks of both as equal partners in the evolution of life. His songs on Kannan humanized God in a very profound way and Kannan comes down to earth seeking the human lover.

"Kannan is said to be the comrade of the poor, and he has burnt to ashes all the false 'Scripts' which divide men as high and low based on sheer appearance and birth." He also says:

"Our ancestors said that all life is God. I accepted that statement as final truth. The great people said that the scholarly Guru is Shiva and the Vedas say that the unlettered lowly is also the same."



PORTRAYAL OF FEMINIST PROTESTS AGAINST FEROCIOUS KINGS IN *SILAPPATHIKARAM, ANTIGONE AND NATIR PUJA*

Andreas L.Katonis*

Literature in Greece has about the same time- depth as have different ethnic literatures in India, and just like the language and the literature experience in this country, in Greece too, both language and literature live on and still develop continuously.

Greek literature begins with two ripe, perfect products; with the Iliad and the Odyssey, two epics attributed traditionally to one poet, Homer, who lived in the 8th c. BC. "Traditionally", because "Homer", i.e. "Homeros", may have been a generic name, a kind of pseudonym meaning the 'compiler' or 'composer'. The word is thought to have to do with the adverb "homou", (together) and the verb "ararisko" ("to fit together"). A "homeros", then, is nothing more than a gifted person able to fit several separate songs together and to perform them as a long, single poem. Similarly, the word "harmonia" which gives English 'harmony', has the same root-ar-A "harmonia" ('harmony') means, in this way, originally, things whatever put together properly. This, however, need not be the matter of this communication.

A French proverb says "Cherchez la femme", 'try to find the woman, meaning that in every important event, in politics or elsewhere, there is a woman either as a motive or, at least, as a propelling force in the background. Looking for a proper topic for this communication I thought exactly of this; the narrative of the Iliad, the older Homeric epic, is about a great war in the second millennium BC between the united Greek kings and Troy as the capital and leader of several equally united forces in Asia Minor (the actual Turkey).

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There may have been various historical reasons for this clash which was a reality but the epic finds only one: the abduction of Helen, the beautiful wife of Menelaos, king of Sparta, by Paris, son of the Trojan king Priamos. Troy's fate was to be captured. Menelaos sought help from Agamemmon the chief king, and the united forces of all the Greek kingdoms invaded and destroyed Troy. A reconciliation between Helen and Menelaos followed and they returned to Sparta. We find a parallel to this in the Ramayana, similarly a great epic. There is an abduction, that of Sita, with heavy consequences. There is no place to analyze the episode but I think that in the case of an abduction the lack or the presence of the willingness of a woman is a secondary detail only; a structural approach in mythology and literature certainly would find deeper similarities. Such similarity is perhaps that at least in one version Sita returns to her husband.

An even more important instance is the case of Antigone, the heroine of Sophocles, the second in the row of the greatest Greek dramatists. To her, we find a parallel in the Tamil epic *Silappathikaram*. It is about Kannaki, a simple woman, whose husband was killed by the king. She was bold enough to oppose the king's order, and sought justice. Antigone was similarly bold but her fate was very tragic. She opposed the king's will when she buried her brother Ployneikes. Kreon, a tyrant type of king, prohibited the burial because he considered Polyneikes a traitor.

Antigone was an exponent of divine law and she was ready to die for her deed. In a larger sense, it pays to remember that this problem was part of a more general philosophical question consisting in the physis-nomos complex which was present not only in politics and in philosophical thinking but even in what could be called the ancient linguistics (think of Plato's dialogue *Kratylos*).

In the Sophoclean interpretation, Antigone's motives were those of nature (physis), and the king's motives were those of law (nomos), i.e. the legislation of a tyrant who gave "law" against nature. In the Athenian democracy of that time this was understood with a special sensibility because the famous Periclean democracy maintained that written and unwritten law were the same thing, and consequently no contradicting individual and institutional law existed.

Antigone's tragedy, who preferred to kill herself, was not the only tragedy. Haemon, Kreon's son, who loved Antigone, wanted first to kill his father as a revenge. Kreon, rather cowardly, escaped, and then the son killed himself. Following this death, Eurydike, Kreon's wife, committed suicide. The tyrant

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king's tragedy was complete: he remained alone, he cursed himself ^{45 if} he lost his sight. This was also symbolic: the king did not see what he should have; think of Sophocles' other play, *Oidipous*.

Long before Shakespeare, this is a Shakespearean drama. Written in 442 BC, it was considered the best, and remains one of the greatest achievements in literature until this day. "Cherchez la femme"—looking for the woman, the female figures, you arrive at the frontiers of divine and human law, an ever existing problem in Greek literature and thinking.

In *Natir Puja*, Rabindranath Tagore describes the protest of Srimathi against King Ajatasatru's order that the females should not Sweep the stupa on pain of death. Being a female slave, not at all caring for her life, she washed it neatly and lighted it with a row of lamps. Srimathi was asked to dance and not to offer worship before the stupa. While dancing she discarded all her garments and ornaments and was left with only the ochre wrap of a Bhikshuni. She knelt down and recited verses of formal worship. Her head was struck off by order of the king. The protests of the protagonists in the three great works viz., *Silappathigaram*, *Antigone* and *Natir Puja* have to be admired and appreciated.

