

Tagore on History of Civilisation

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RABINDRANATH WAS BORN with a silver spoon, a progeny of highest ranked wealthy family of Bengal, if that was the only factor nourishing his intellectual excellence, people would never had the best exponent of Bengal 'Renaissance', despite the controversy of the term for Bengal's intellectual excellence in social and material sciences. Much more significant was his birth in the circle of most progressive family in art and culture of Bengal in that period.

In Tagore family culture, there was a symbiosis of ancient Indian pedantry like Veda and Upanishada with best legacy of Western philosophy and its repositories of the western art and literature. The colonial presence of British in India facilitated the access to these basic ingredients of European culture. It was the arrogant dominating intention of British to establish that their culture was superior to ancient Indian civilisation that prompted these exhibition of proofs of European advances of science, arts and culture. It was not an honest intention of enlightening the backward East (as they conceived) but ingrained euphemistic white man's supremacy and the pretention that in order to develop the east they had appeared as the messiah like lady with the lamp from the west.

Maybe, the intention of the cultural uprising or nationalistic challenge of the Tagore family was to place India to the world at pedestal of wisdom at large to counter the arrogance of the colonial power as an intellectual war against British, the intruder. It was the strategy of first step of learning the essence of western art and literature followed by the second step in resurgence of repositories of Eastern wisdom resourced in Veda, Upanishada and alike other oriental books of knowledge.

In the lifetime of Rabindranath, the most prominent among the earth shaking events was the first World War which exposed the real face of greed for power and profit. It helped in a big bang the believers of greatness of grand European civilisation to come out of the myth that the west is great. That world war had the mean intention to grab greater share of the world market, exposing how cruelly they kill man in billions in order to sell growing volume of mass products churned out by glorified large scale production by steam engine as the great 'Industrial Revolution'. What was fallout of the contradictions of the international power game was the first successful Socialist revolution in soviet Russia. It resulted in birth of the first Communist state ruled by the proletariat—the labour class named as Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

This revolution shook the earth, the impact of which not only inspired the intellectual class of Russia but also philosophers, litterateurs, artists and all schools of Humanists all over the world. It was a brave new world.

Rabindranath was born in 1861. So he witnessed the contemporary ruthless power struggle—fearsome first world war that continued from 1914 to 1919. Then came 1917 when the dream of all kinds of humanists of the world based on the theory of Marx and Lenin and by leadership of Stalin got realised. So the birth of first Communist state materialised the dream of all Philosophers of the world. It shivered the Capitalist world. Cold war started brewing.

So far Baul or folk music and songs of different genres were marked as subaltern culture as because it had depicted the life and livelihood of peasants and labourers round the year. In that period in the mainstream, the poet laureates of kings' favour depicted only eulogies of kings or art and literatures that entertained the royal court. They composed 'Baishnab' (Lord Krishna as subject) and 'Shakta' (Lord Shiva as subject) Padavali which were anthology of lyrics, songs or distichs but highly charged with sex. Other literatures composed by them were also erotically spiced for instant pleasure but lack of intrinsic and classic value. Other music and songs /ragas all were composed to entertain the feudal lords for instant gratification and reward.

In expectation of material gain showered by royal favour, whatever literature and history that cropped up, not that all were trash but some of them were of good quality but due to servile attitude predominating the creation in every composition—king, queen, prince and princess were the subject matter. So those were typical feudal boot-lickers, a cesspool of non-flowing river of fresh flavoured anything.

The invasion of British capitalism though not abolished but caused a mutation of this feudal legacy since Imperialism ties up with feudalism with a motive of destroying the potentiality of capitalist development because for obvious reasons Capitalist development of India was never desired by the British. Primarily in that case not only the market of British products would reduce and by virtue of that progressive Capitalism, but also Bourgeois nationalism would be inspired which would arouse an active Indian political opponent. The British colonialist was much aware of the symbiosis of nationalism and capitalist development in an economy.

Rabindranath was born in India which was under the boots of British rule and its contradictions, moreover he was familiar with wide historic implication of arrival of socialism in Soviet Union. He was charmed with the revolutionary emergence of Soviet Union and its wide and deep socio-political impact alike many other great intellectuals of his time.

When the political power of state governance has gone to hands of labour class, on the one hand it will end the exploitation of the wealthy class of own state power and on the other hand it will abolish the prowess of imperialist capital, this was clear in the vision of the great poet and philosopher of his time. His prose piece 'Letter from Russia' had its multifarious expression in the subsequent poems and lyrics.

Rabindranath believed in God. He was born in a 'Brahmo' family. God is good. It is the essence of all religions. Born in an aristocrat affluent family of Calcutta, spending early childhood in Britain was his family culture. But when he went to administer their Zamindari

(Estate) in Shilaidaha, now in Bangladesh, he had seen like the 'Happy Prince' of Oscar Wilde, the distressed common people of India majority of whom stay in villages. He had first hand witness of their chill penury.

Rabindranath introduced the short story in Bengali. In many of his fictions dowry, religious malpractices to sanctify social exploitation were exposed. This bears his depth of perception and liberalism. But a person like him who was a voracious reader, can his vision be restricted to these few observations? His contemporary another great man Vivekananda's vision had already captured the transition of governance of the state through evolution and revolution of state power from Brahmin, Warrior, merchant class to proletariat. This long lived author being Radical, anti-imperialist, conscious of British colonialist for impoverishment of India and committed to amelioration of poverty of the people calling an independence struggle in redeeming India from colonial exploitation, had already written this in his pen. That means this Marxist vision of Socialism has already reached to the Bengali intellectuals. Rabindranath expressed his enlightenment in his various literary writings and performing arts like songs and dances.

Meanwhile Ramakrishna Param-hansadev in course of his Dhyanyoga arrived at the truth that serving the people is serving God, whose most favourite disciple Swami Vivekananda said, 'Indians! Declare with pride that the peasants, cobblers, sweepers are our brothers'. This two in one clarion call was not only intended to elevate the Indian caste ridden society to get rid of social caste discrimination and inherent injustice, the broader goal was to realise his dream of Indian freedom struggle uniting everyone irrespective of caste, feeling one common identity as Indian, to be ready for sacrifice as freedom fighters.

European Renaissance, had enlightened man from Feudal culture with end of Serfdom redeeming man from human bondage to landed aristocracy and thus making the labour class free to attain dignity of being unshakled human being and becoming a harbinger of new wave of culture with deep and wide impact of culture of consciousness among the mass. Though it is disputable, symbiosis with European culture of Ancient Indian culture had a semblance of Renaissance of which Rabindranath was the best vanguard, had his few steps forward written in his inimitable verse that was named 'Those who toil' ('Ora Kaj Korey' a poem in 'Sanchayita') eulogising the working class that 'It is they who are rowing for ever, holds the oar of economy, it is they who under rain and scorching sun sows the seed in fields and harvest the ripe paddy, it is they who toil in cities and countryside' (Translated by the author of this article thematically).

Rabindranath wrote that history books are full of vivid description of wars and conflicts, but beneath the thick dust of king's chariot, how the common man struggles in his mundane life, our history did not chronicle that. But it is the common man who creates the real history of mankind. In the same verse Rabindranath comments on history about kings :

'The imperial power of the British; had exerted its prowess, I know time will travel across its roadways, will float away its global imperial possessions of colonies. I know their army that

accompanys their merchandise, will not be able to preserve its trace in Galaxy'. This history that chronicles the blood soaked episode of hanker for royal profit and greed, but does not keep record of time and space in proper form.

In this blood soaked history of royal episodes of greed and profit, the true history of a country is not found. This is because: 'The royal reign breaks down; War cries of drums do not sound becomes feeble, Towers of Victory forget their own worth of being there; Red eyes of hands with blood stains, cover their face in children literature'.

Once upon a time there was a king; in such children literature kings are wrongly portrayed in place of history of truth. So Rabindranath had expressed in his inimitable verse.

'It is the toilers whose painstaking work, in own country and abroad, Anga-Bango-Kalingo ocean and riversides, In Punjab, Bombay, Gujarat, In bursting sound of thunders-in humming tunes-reading out fact driven fictions making lives journey acrimonious!. Sorrow and happiness in day and night, fill up with sound of noble chants of life. Hundreds of empires have withered away, but the toilers work on and on'. (Translation of verse by the author)

Hence the great chanting of life or the truth eternal consists of contribution of labour, their sweat and blood. Chronicle of that is the proper history of civilisation. □□□