

## Rabindranath Tagore: a Social Thinker and an Activist A Review of Literature and a Bibliography

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**Abstract:** Rabindranath Tagore, although basically a poet, had a multifaceted personality. Among his various activities his sincerity as a social thinker and activist attract our attention. But this area is till now comparatively unexplored. Many scholars in this area have tried to study Tagore as a social thinker. But so far the findings are scattered and on the whole there is no comprehensive analysis in the strict sense of the term. Hence it is necessary to collect the different findings and to integrate and arrange them within a theoretical framework. This article is an attempt to make a review of literature of the existing books and to prepare a short but sharp bibliography to introduce the area.

**Key words:** Rabindranath Tagore, society, social, political, history, education, *Santiniketan*, *Visva-Bharati*

Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941) was a prolific writer, a successful music composer, a painter, an actor, a drama director and what not. Besides these talents, he was also a social activist and contributed a lot to Indian social and political thought, although this area has not been very much explored till now.

Tagore was emphatic upon society building. So he tried to develop all the component elements which were essential for developing the Indian society. He studied the history of India to follow the trend of its evolution. Next he prepared his programme of action – rural reconstruction and spread of education. He tried to implement the programme of rural reconstruction first at *Sheliadaha* (now in *Bangladesh*) and then at *Sriniketan*. He was the first thinker who widened the definition of education and equated education with the total lifestyle of a human being. He tried to modernize education perfectly in an Indian manner, an idea, which he implemented through *Santiniketan Brahmacharyashram* and *Visva-Bharati*. No less important is the cultural uplift of the society where he contributed a lot. In fact he introduced a new culture, very original, which is reigning the world today and has been recognized as a class by itself. Moreover, for the development of the society Tagore tried to distinguish between Politics and *Swadeshi*.

This approach has another dimension. Due to prolonged colonial domination, we have become habituated in accepting the Western origin as the only source of socio-political philosophy. This is the status of the newly independent states. But since the last two decades of the twentieth century there is an attempt to find out the indigenous origin of the theoretical structure in the non-western societies. Indian society is no exception. Accordingly India is also busy to find out her socio-political philosophers in order to construct a new discipline on Indian Political Thought in this Post-colonial era. Rabindranath Tagore is one among them who has made rich contributions in this area.

Review of Literature -

Commentaries on Tagore's books and works:

*Rabindra Bitan* is a collection of critical essays on Rabindranath Tagore written within a span of thirty five years (1878-1913). Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay has collected these essays written on Tagore. Basically, these are literary criticisms made by his contemporaries in the pre-Nobel period. So, this book helps to locate Tagore in the spatial context.

In *Rabindra Parikrama* Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay “has attempted to evaluate Tagore as a poet and a seer, as a great humanist of radical outlook and an intellectual giant, as a theorist of beauty and a writer of social thoughts.” This is an intensive research work which enriches the understanding about Tagore.

*Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World - A Critical Companion* is a critique on the novel edited by P. K. Dutta. A number of scholars have dealt with *The Home and the World (Ghare Baire)* from different dimensions.

One of the most important sources of Tagore's thought is embedded in Sanskrit text and literature. Sukhomaya Bhattacharya, Sastri, Saptatirtha authored a book *Sanskritanushilane Rabindranath* in which he has attempted to find out the influence of Sanskrit on Tagore.

Nitai Basu in his book *Ananya Rabindranath* has tried to present Rabindranath Tagore as a very familiar and intimate personality. It is a great comfort to go through this book and to come across Tagore in his day to day life. *Antaranga Rabindranath* is another book almost similar in its approach and written by Pashupati Bhattacharya.

Rabindranath Tagore took the responsibility of a *Zamindar* in their estate at *Sahajadpur* from 1890 – 1896. The father of the present author used to visit Tagore during that period. Apart from this there were other elderly persons whom the author met who had come into direct contact with Tagore. *Shahjadpure Rabindranath* has been composed by Nareshchandra Chakraborty by collecting those experiences.

*Rabindranath Swadesh O Samaj* written by Monoranjan Jana gives a clear idea about the nature and character of the Indian society as Tagore perceived it. It is mainly composed of quotations from different writings of Tagore.

*Pallir Manush Rabindranath*, authored by Sachindranath Adhikary is a simple book consisting of a number of incidents where Tagore has been revealed as a human being. The author is indebted to Pramatha Chaudhury, Rathindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose for this book.

Pramathanath Bisi was the direct student of Tagore. As a student he narrates his days at *Santiniketan* – taking lessons, participating in festivals, intimacy with nature, different ventures carried on by the students, the dedicated and scholarly teachers, different interesting events and so on and so forth. The most interesting experience is to know about Tagore as a teacher – his uniqueness, his brilliance and his dedication. We should remain thankful to Pramathanath Bisi for his book *Rabindranath O Santiniketan*.

Sayed Mujtaba Ali was another direct student of Tagore who gives a vivid picture of Tagore as a person, as a teacher and as a scholar in his book *Gurudev O Santiniketan*.

*Rabindra – Prasanga* by Haricharan Bandopadhyay also needs special mention for its honest and intimate vision which helps us to recognize Tagore.

Ramachandra Guha in his book *Makers of Modern India* profiles nineteen Indians whose ideas had a defining impact on the formation and evolution of Indian society and presents rare and compelling excerpts from their writings and speeches. Here we find almost all the Indian political and social thinkers besides Tagore.

*Santiniketan Smriti* originally written in English by William Winstanley Pearson is reminiscences as the name suggests. Pearson dedicated himself to the philosophy of Tagore and to the cause of his *Santiniketan* programme. This book is his realization about Indian mode of education.

Today religious fundamentalism, racialism, nationality clash, separatism etc. are the evil features not only of a nation but also of the whole international society. Tagore could foresee them and tried to give proper solutions by his opinions, writings and above all by his role and status. In the book *Samajchintay Rabindranath* the author Abha Nath has made an earnest attempt to find out that Tagore.

*Rabindrachintacharcha* by Bhabatosh Dutta is a collection of essays which goes deep into the philosophy of Tagore and discusses different characteristics of Tagore analytically. This book can be treated as a solid background of the present research.

Krishna Kripalani, married to Tagore's granddaughter, lived and worked with him at *Santiniketan* in West Bengal from 1933 until Tagore's death in 1941. His book *Rabindranath Tagore – a Biography* is a rich contribution to Tagore research. This is a chronological study of Tagore's life by analyzing his philosophy and activities in detail.

Rathindranath Tagore, the son of the poet, is the author of *On the Edges of Time* which is a biography of Tagore and may be considered as the autobiography of the author simultaneously. Being a son, Rathindranath was privileged to come in close contact with his genius father from the very first day.

*Pitrismriti* is another such book which Rathindranath wrote in Bengali.

*Rabindranath / Rajnaitik Byaktitwa* by Arabinda Podder is an elucidatory book which has tried to analyse the essays, poems, short stories, novels and dramas written by Tagore against the economic, political and cultural background of a colonial socio-economic structure of India.

*Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and the Indian Tradition*, a book by Swapna Basu, helps the researcher to know about the contributions of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and his impact upon the contemporary situation who somehow influenced the thought of Tagore.

*Rabindra-Sanskriti* written by Nandagopal Sengupta is a treatise on Tagore and this book also tries to trace the cultural perspectives of his creations. Here, he was far ahead of his time. But, people habitually like to see him as an idealist poet preaching spiritual philosophy, engrossed in the concept of beauty and enthusiastic about *Swadeshi* movement. The author had the opportunity to come in personal contact with Tagore and so he became interested in depicting the poet as a humanist and a representative of the modern age.

*Rabindra-Samiksha* by Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay is a textual analysis of Tagore's ideas. Tagore's thoughts on state and society, painting and theatre, education and language, religion and love and above all humanism, have been thoroughly discussed here in twelve chapters.

One very relevant book for this study is *Rabindra- Amartya Bhabna: Manusher Jonya Unnayan* by Atiur Rahman. The author in this book has tried to analyse the development ideas of Tagore in the context of present Bangladesh. Very pertinently, here the author has introduced and analysed Tagore's collection of essays such as *Pallipraktiti*, *Samavayaneeti*, *Atmashakti*, *Bharatbarshiya Samaj* etc. In the last four chapters of the book, the author has discussed the development ideas of Amartya Sen in the light of Tagore's views.

*Rabindranath Chintajagat: Samajchintai* is a book edited by Satyendranath Roy. As a social thinker Tagore expressed his original ideas about the construction and reconstruction of the Indian society. The editor, here, has compiled those writings of Tagore with a long and thought provoking introduction.

In order to follow the development ideas of Tagore, it is necessary to go through the book *Rabindranath: Pallipunargathan* by Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay. Tagore could feel that rural structure was the basis of Indian society. The author has tried to discuss these observations of Tagore by presenting authentic data and statistics.

Each and every society should develop itself in its own manner and so it is necessary to study the typical socio-economic background of that particular society before initiating any development programme. *Gramonnayane Manishira* is a collection of essays by Parimal Chakravarti written on all the stalwarts who have contributed a lot for the socio-economic development of Bengal. Among them we can mention the names of Raja Rammohun Roy, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Prafulla Chandra Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and last but not the least Daniel Hamilton who came from Scotland and implemented his programme of action at Gosaba.

*Centenary Volume: L. K. Elmhirst – 1893-1993* edited by Manjula Basu makes the reader familiar with L.K. Elmhirst, the main architect of *Sriniketan*. This book narrates the role of Elmhirst, his relation to Tagore and the active participation of his two associates Kalimohan Ghosh and Santosh Chandra Majumdar.

*Itihaschintay Rabindranath* by Mriduchhanda Palit is a book which, as the name suggests, is one which exclusively deals with Indian history as has been perceived by Tagore. The author has made a very sincere effort to find out Tagore's basic historical insight in many of his writings with a very rich and analytical background.

*The Philosopher's Stone: Speeches and writings of Sir Daniel Hamilton* has been edited by Alapan Bandyopadhyay and Anup Matilal. Sir Daniel Hamilton came to Gosaba in 1903. He had a dream and he selected Gosaba as an area for his dream fulfillment. For four decades, he experimented with cooperatives, *dharmagolas* (grain bank) and one rupee notes. Tagore visited Gosaba and was involved in some joint initiatives with Hamilton. This book gives a detail picture about Hamilton's programme.

*Samaj Pragati Rabindranath* by Kshudiram Das is a book to be mentioned for analysing Tagore as a development thinker. This book has two main chapters, each comprising three phases.

*Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator* written by Kathleen M. O'Connell is an extensive research work not only about the educational policy and programmes of Tagore but also the relevance of that ideal in the to-day's world. This is a pioneering task in the context of Tagore Studies. India should remain obliged to O'Connell, a foreigner, for her valuable contribution.

One very informative and interesting book is *Santiniketan Ek Yuga* by Hirendranath Dutta. This book tells us about thirty two teachers of *Santiniketan - Visva Bharati* from the very inception of the institution along with a very relevant introduction.

Rabindranath Tagore was a great educator. To assess his role in this sphere, it is necessary to have an idea about the great educators of all times both within and outside India. *Great Educators and Their Philosophies* is such a book authored by Biswa Ranjan Purkait. In this book there are sixteen great educators to whom the whole world is indebted somehow or other.

*Poet and Plowman* written by Leonard K. Elmhirst is composed of his 'Personal Reminiscences', one lecture 'The Robbery of the soil' delivered by him under the auspices of the *Visva-Bharati Sammilani* with Tagore's introduction and the most important the '*Sriniketan Diary*' which directly makes one acquainted with Elmhirst..

Rabindranath Tagore was a great poet and his glory as a poet has curtailed his identity as a great educator. He thought about not only spread of education but also about appropriate education. *Rabindranather Chintajagat: Sikhachinta* edited by Satyendranath Roy is such a book which throws light in this sphere.

Ajitkumar Chakraborty, the author of *Brahmavidyalaya* and a teacher of *Santiniketan Brhamacharyashram* during the initial period, passed away at a very young age. He was a very dear and close associate of Tagore. His very small book is a narration of the school and its development in *Santiniketan*.

Shantidev Ghosh is known as a famous teacher and renowned artist of *Rabindrasangeet*. Being the son of Kalimohan Ghosh, the close associate of Tagore in his *Sriniketan* venture, Shantidev had a rich pedigree. He also came in close contact with Tagore and this experience has got expression in the book *Jiboner Dhruvatara* which can be treated as his autobiography where Tagore, with all his associates and activities, is present very vividly

Probhatkumar Mukhopadhyay is famous as the biographer of Tagore by authoring *Rabindrajiboni* in four volumes. Virtually this is a chronological description and analysis of Tagore's life and his achievements. The content of each volume consists of different events of Tagore's life or his creations in a chronological order.

Prasantakumar Paul, as a teacher of Bengali language and literature, became interested in Tagore study and realised the necessity of assessing Tagore more extensively and analytically. Consequently, nine volumes of *Rabijibani* saw the light of the day which came as a product of his herculean effort. Each volume deals with a specific period of Tagore's life chronologically since his birth. These books are exceptionally valuable with detail annotations and related references. The tragic and untimely departure of Paul is definitely a great loss for Tagore research which has left his work unfinished.

*Rabindra Prasanga*, a collection of valuable essays written by a number of erudite scholars of West Bengal and edited by Kshudiram Das, was published on the occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Tagore by the Department of Information and Culture, Government of West Bengal. This is a book, helpful for any kind of research on Tagore.

*Selaidahey Rabindranth* by Pramathanath Bisi, a student of Tagore, covers the period (1891 – 1901) when Tagore was residing at *Sheliadah* with his family in order to look after their estates. This book draws a picture about the geographical location, historical tradition and day to day life of Tagore along with his family members and friends.

*Rabindra Bhubane Bangladesh* by Salam Azad is a beautiful addition which describes the golden days of Tagore in Bangladesh with information and analysis.

*Samaj Sahitya Sanskriti* is a collection of essays by Anunay Chattopadhyay. Here among different articles, three are exclusively on Tagore. All of these three articles are very extensive with very relevant quotations from Tagore.

*Rabindranather Bisvaser Jagat* written by Satyendranath Roy, an intent researcher on Tagore, delivers an overall idea about Tagore. This book narrates different faiths of Tagore – their sources, background, relevance and impact which enlighten Tagore Studies.

*Bharate Jatiya O Antaratikata Ebang Rabindranath* in six volumes need special mention for the extensive study and research on Tagore's social and political thought. These volumes are rich in reference and deep in analysis. We are grateful to the author Nepal Majumdar for his intense study on Tagore.

*Rabindranth: Kaekti Rajnitik Prasanga* is a book where Nepal Majumdar has discussed some of Tagore's political views. This is a very rich book which throws light on Defense of India Act, Terrorists of Bengal, Nazism, letter to Mussolini and a number of topics are there, where concept of Tagore has been reflected.

*Rabindranth Rabindranthi* is an interesting book where the author Amitrasudan Bhattacharya has tried to find out Tagore in his manuscripts. The continuous corrections, modifications, additions and alterations in these manuscripts prove Tagore's perseverance in the path of attaining perfection.

The same author has edited another book – *Visva-Bharati Patrika- Nirbachito Prabandha Samgraha 1942 – 2003 – Prasanga Rabindranath*. This book as the name suggests, is a collection of articles written by a number of Tagore scholars.

*Bharatpathik Rabindranth* by Prabodhchandra Sen literally means 'Rabindranth the Traveller along India's Path'. This book is a collection of essays written at different times and the essays are the parts of an integral concept of Tagore's realisation about India.

*Bharatetihas Jijnasa* by Niharranjan Ray gives a total background of Indian history from a very analytical standpoint. Yet, especial mention can be made about Chapter – 5 section 4 where the Indian historians have been classified into three groups – (1) English educated Bengali middle class where there are Rammohun, Madhusudan, Devendranath, Iswarchandra, Bankimchandra, Aurovindo, Bipinchandra, Rabindranth, Chittaranjan and Subhash chandra (2) Conservative Hindu group where there are Radhakanta Dev, Chandranath Basu, Akshay Kumar Sarkar, Suresh Chandra Samajpati and others (3) Marxist historical viewpoint. This study enlightens the study of Historiography.

*Bhartiyo Aitihay O Rabindranth* by Niharranjan Ray is another important book where the chapters on Tagore's humanism, his historical view point and his concern for Indian tradition have been discussed thoroughly. *Tagore's Asian Outlook* by Saktidas Dasgupta is an important book which helps us to assess the place of Tagore in the general study of Historiography in the context of the world as a whole as well as of India.

*Rabindranath Tagore on Rural Reconstruction* by Sudhir Sen throws light on every aspect of rural reconstruction activities initiated by Tagore and followed by him throughout his life. Tagore was probably the only philosopher and thinker, who, besides, making a programme, took the responsibility of implementing it.

*A Poet and a Plan* authored by Sugata Dasgupta tells in detail, the plan of Tagore for rural development. Here, the total plan has been described in detail. Tagore wanted that his efforts of rural reconstruction should be well-planned and systematic. The objectives of *Sriniketan* along with its institutional set up have been narrated in this book.

*Social Thinking of Rabindranath Tagore* by Sasadhar Sinha is a book analysing Tagore's social ideas, beliefs and practices. In this book, he raises a very pertinent question about the possibility and desirability of keeping non-political in a predominantly political world.

*Rabindrayan (Volume II)* edited by Pulinbehari Sen is a collection of essays where all the contributors are renowned scholars and well known writers. All the essays have tried to unfold different traits of the multifaceted personality of Tagore.

*Kabi O Karmi: Rabindranath O Kalimohan Ghosh* by Purnananda Chattopadhyay is a unique collection. Besides other writings, this book includes 42 letters written by Tagore to one of his close associates Kalimohan Ghosh. These letters not only express the intimacy of Tagore with Kalimohan, but also make the study valuable and fruitful by adding annotations by the editor to each letter.

*Rabindra Sanbardhanar Etibritta Deshe O Bideshe* Volume I and Volume II edited by Baridbaran Ghosh are examples of an extensive research work made by the author on felicitation of Tagore at home and abroad. .

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay is one of the famous novelists in Bengali literature. As a conscious social thinker he tried to depict the contemporary socio-economic background of Bengal in almost all his novels among which *Pallisamaj* and *Dena Paona* need special mention for analyzing the socio-economic character of the contemporary society.

*Gurudev* by Rani Chanda gives a clear idea about Tagore as a person. Rani Chanda stayed beside *Gurudev* for a pretty long time and was one of his close associates. So, she had the opportunity to observe Tagore with all qualities, sensitivities and activities.

*Sab Hote Apon* also authored by Rani Chanda is a similar one which revolves round *Santiniketan* with a bright focus on Tagore. In this connection it is relevant to mention the name of *Shab Peyechhir Deshe* which is a memoir written by poet Buddhadev Bose on Tagore and *Santiniketan*

Pratima Devi, Tagore's daughter-in-law expressed herself in some essays which we find in a book, *Smritichitra Rabindranath O Ananya*. This book is small but authentic and helpful in this context.

*Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray Rachana Sankalan Volume I and Volume IA* have been edited by Anil Bhattacharya which are composed of essays and articles written by Prafulla Chandra Ray. Prafulla Chandra was a contemporary of Tagore and had a scientific vision by which he was in a position to identify the basic areas from where development would start in a society. He suggested a number of agricultural reforms suitable for Indian soil which can enrich Tagore's programme of social development.

*Rabindranath O Biplabisamaj* unfolds one of the main traits of Rabindranath Tagore's thoughts. Tagore used to believe in construction not in destruction. He did never support the terrorist activities but he was very sympathetic to those young bloods who dedicated their lives for the sake of freedom. Chinmohan Sehnobish, the author of this book, has analysed how these terrorists felt about Tagore and vice versa.

*Ekatre Rabindranath* in two volumes (Volume- I and Volume – II) by Amitabha Chaudhury is a valuable addition to Tagore Studies. Each volume is composed of six articles unpacking different facets of Tagore. All the articles are informative and analytical.

*Rabindra-Natya-Parikrama* written by Upendranath Bhattacharya, as the name suggests, is an analysis of Tagore's dramas. For this study three dramas are relevant – *Muktodhara*, *Raktakarabi* and *Prayaschitta* which can enrich the present research.

Bijoylal Chattopadhyay as an expert on Tagore Studies came to the limelight in the 1930s-40s. During that time a number of his articles were published in the contemporary magazines and journals. *Rabindranath* by this author is a book which has collected all those writings which were later available in the form of four books in addition to a number of letters written to each other.

*Rabindra-Andrews Patrabali* is a translation of a number of English letters in Bengali by Molina Roy. Most of the letters are written by Tagore to C. F. Andrews who was famous as 'Dinabandhu' (friend of the poor).

*Rabindranath O Banglar Palli* is a collection of memorial lectures delivered by the famous Bengali author Tarasankar Bandopadhyay at *Visva-Bharati* with which the last or fifth article has been added. The author, a renowned writer in Bengali who personally met Tagore in his youth, has analysed Tagore's genuine involvement with the rural problems, rural people and last but not the least the rural nature.

The famous Bengali newspaper Ananda Bazar Patrika started its journey on 13 March 1922. Since then until the death of Rabindranath Tagore, this news paper published different types of news relating to Tagore's views, philosophy, activities and criticisms so on. Thanks to the editor Chittaranjan Bandhopadhyay who has collected all those news and edited four volumes under the name *Rabindra-Prasanga: Anandabazar Patrika*.

*Santiniketaner Chithi* composed by Shuvomoy Ghosh gives us a picture of *Santiniketan* after the demise of Tagore.

*Rabindra Boloya* helps us to know about the close relatives friends and associates of Tagore. The author Karunamoya Mukhopadhyay needs special thanks for this valuable contribution. This is a research work and will help any type of Tagore research.

Gopal Chandra Roy is known for his short but sharp book *Rabindranather Chinnapatrabali*. This is an analytical commentary on Tagore's famous *Chinnapatrabali*.

Abu Sayeed Ayyub is a great name in Tagore research. His book *Adhunikata O Rabindranath* is critical and valuable book which proves his scholarship honesty and originality in this sphere.

Two other important books are *Development as Freedom* the famous book by Amartya Sen and *Political Philosophy of Rabindranath* by Sachin Sen which have been included in the bibliography for further reading in this area.

The 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Tagore saw the publication of a number of volumes from different corners of our society. A few of them can be included in the list.

*Anna Rabindranath Nana Rabindranath*, a book compiled by Barun Kumar Chakraborty has tried to focus on the versatility of Tagore. *Smritir Saranite Rabindranath* is a collection of some old reminiscences on Rabindranath. *Rabindrastite Samaj O Samakal* edited by Minakshi Sinha is also a valuable addition to interpret the social ideas of Tagore. Anasua Guha has edited *Anubade Rabindranath* (Tagore in Translation) published by Bethune College, Kolkata-6. Another important book is *Rabindrajanprabaha Kalanukamikbarshapanji* composed by Gourchandra Saha which is actually Rabindranath Tagore's life: Chronologically arranged. *Rajnitir Pathakrome Rabindranath* authored by Ashok Sen needs a special place here for its critical and fruitful analysis. On the eve of 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Centenary of Tagore, Dikshit Sinha published his book *Rabindranather Pallipunargathan Prayas* .

C.F.Andrews, a close associate of Tagore wrote a number of articles at different points of time which lay scattered. Thanks to Tapan Kumar Chatterjee who took the trouble of collecting those articles and was eager to publish a book – *Tagore and the Visva – Bharati*.

*Rabindranather Samaj O Rashtrabhavna* edited by Asis Kumar Basu is an important contribution to the study of social thought of Tagore. Kumkum Chattopadhyay has published *Rabindranath: Bektittwa O Samajchinta. Rabindranath: Nana Bhavna* edited by Amal Kumar Mukhopadhyay also needs special mention here.

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