

Tagore's Romanticism: A Study of His Poetry

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Abstract

In Indian literature, Romanticism developed as a movement that combined elements of Western literary Romanticism with native customs. Nature, feelings, mysticism, and a close relationship with the god and oneself were all highlighted. In his poetry, one of India's best writers, Rabindranath Tagore, represented these Romantic values by referencing nationalism, love, spirituality, and nature. Through a textual examination of Tagore's poetry, this essay examines his Romanticism, stressing both his distinctive philosophical and cultural achievements and its links to Western Romantic philosophy. The study shows how Tagore reinterpreted Romanticism in an Indian setting by looking at themes of nature, emotional intensity, individualism, and nationalistic idealism in his writings.

Keywords: Romanticism, Tagore, Nature, Mysticism, Love, Spirituality, Nationalism, Lyricism

Introduction

One of the greatest writers in history, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), was greatly impacted by Romanticism. Romantic literature is known for its deep involvement with nature, emotions, individualism, and the transcendental, all of which are evident in his poetry. The worldly and the spiritual, the philosophical and the personal, are all skilfully merged in Tagore's writings. Through the prism of Romanticism, this essay examines Tagore's poetic output, highlighting his interest in nationalism, mysticism, love, and nature.

Review of Literature

For many years, academics have been interested in analysing Tagore's poetry within the framework of Romanticism. According to Sisir Kumar Das (2000), Tagore's Romanticism was distinct since it blended Indian spiritual traditions with Western Romantic elements. While acknowledging Tagore's Romantic inclinations, Edward Thompson (1926) emphasises how he moved beyond conventional Romanticism into a more expansive intellectual and humanitarian sphere. Drawing comparisons to English Romantics such as Wordsworth and Shelley, William Radice (1994) examines how Tagore's poetry and emotional depth speak to the Romantic ethos.

Furthermore, according to Amartya Sen (1997), Tagore's Romantic vision was closely related to his concepts of creative and political freedom in addition to being centred on human feeling.

Methodology

This study employs a textual analysis method, examining select poems of Tagore that embody Romantic themes. The analysis will focus on four primary aspects of Romanticism in Tagore's poetry:

- Nature and Mysticism
- Love and Emotionalism
- Individualism and Spirituality
- Nationalism and Romantic Idealism

A Brief History of Romanticism in Literature

In the late 18th century, a literary, artistic, and philosophical movement known as romanticism arose in opposition to the Enlightenment's order and rationalism. It placed a strong emphasis on individualism, emotion, creativity, and nature. The movement started in Europe, especially in Germany and England, and then extended to other countries, impacting music, art, and literature. Themes of love, beauty, and the sublime were frequently explored in romantic writing, which was intensely personal. It praised nature as a source of inspiration and valued the feelings and inner experiences of the individual over social norms or formal reasoning. By the 19th century, Romanticism had spread throughout the world, including India, where poets such as Rabindranath Tagore blended Indian intellectual and spiritual traditions with Romantic aspirations.

Romantic Themes in Tagore's Poetry

Nature and Mysticism

In Rabindranath Tagore's poetry, nature and mysticism are deeply intertwined, with the natural world acting as a metaphor and a conduit for spiritual transcendence. Influenced by the Romantic tradition and the Upanishadic philosophy, Tagore views nature as a divine presence that binds the human soul to the infinite rather than just as a physical object. Like the English Romantics, Tagore frequently extols the divine and beautiful aspects of nature in his poetry. According to Gitanjali (1910), nature is a living being with spiritual significance rather than just a setting. "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure," Gitanjali writes in verse 63. You continually empty this fragile vessel and replenish it with new life.

Here, Tagore perceives nature as an eternal force that connects man with the divine, reflecting the Romantic ideal of nature as a source of inspiration and transcendence.

A recurring theme in Gitanjali (1910) is nature, which Tagore uses to examine spiritual enlightenment. "The stream of life that runs through my veins night and day traverses the world and dances in rhythmic measures," he writes in Poem 1. His conviction that all living things are intertwined with the everlasting world is reflected in this. He also sees nature as a representation of divine rebirth in Poem 63, where he writes, "This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life."

In *The Gardener* (1913), where love and nature combine to form a spiritual quest, Tagore's mysticism is clearly apparent. This is best illustrated in his poem "Light, my light," which equates light with cosmic unity and spiritual wisdom. His profoundly spiritual interpretation of nature is both distinctively based in Indian philosophy and in line with Wordsworth and Shelley's Romantic heritage.

Love and Emotionalism

Rabindranath Tagore's poetry vision is centred on love and emotionalism, where love takes on a spiritual, even mystical, dimension that goes beyond simple human interactions. His poetry blurs the lines between earthly desire and spiritual longing as it examines love in all of its manifestations—romantic, divine, and global. Love is shown as passionate and intensely personal in *The Gardener* (1913). Love is portrayed as an overwhelming force in the poem "Do not keep to yourself the secret of your heart, my friend," which exhorts candour and honesty. Similar to this, love is compared to a bird in flight in "My heart, the bird of the wilderness," signifying unrestricted emotion and freedom.

Love is elevated to a divine world in Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1910), where the soul longs to unite with the eternal. He states in Poem 50 that "my life has been blessed because I have received my invitation to this world's festival." In this context, love is a comprehensive spiritual path that reflects the Bhakti tradition's fervent devotion to the divine. Love is revealed as both a cosmic power and an earthly joy in Tagore's emotionalism, which is profoundly introspective rather than romantic. His poetry embodies the Romantic ideal of love as a transformational and transcendental experience, despite being intensely intimate.

Individualism and Spirituality

In Rabindranath Tagore's poetry, personal independence and self-realization are entwined with a search for the divine, reflecting a deep engagement with individualism and spirituality. Tagore, who was influenced by the Upanishadic philosophy and the Romantic ideal of self-discovery, sees the person as a truth-seeker who aspires to harmony with the infinite. Tagore places a strong emphasis on personal spiritual enlightenment in *Gitanjali* (1910). He promotes intellectual and spiritual freedom in Poem 35, where he imagines a perfect society "where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; where knowledge is free." His conviction that inner freedom and fearlessness are the foundations of authentic self-realization is reflected in this.

Stray Birds (1916), a collection of aphoristic poetry in which self-reflection yields universal insight, is another example of Tagore's individualism. He adds, "He who loves finds the door open; he who wants to do good knocks at the gate," in one verse. The idea that love and devotion are routes to spiritual fulfilment is further supported by this, which emphasises the individual's journey from action to enlightenment. His very intimate yet universal poetry presents spirituality as a dynamic, human experience rather than a dogmatic ideology. Tagore is in line with Indian philosophical traditions and Romantic individuality by fusing mysticism with introspection.

Nationalism and Romantic Idealism

Love for the country transcends political conflict and turns into a spiritual and humanistic pursuit in Rabindranath Tagore's poetry, which reflects a distinctive fusion of nationalism with Romantic idealism. In contrast to militant nationalism, Tagore's conception of national identity prioritised harmony over conflict and was firmly anchored in the Romantic values of freedom, unity, and cultural pride. Poem 35 of *Gitanjali* (1910), "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; where knowledge is free," demonstrates his nationalist fervour. Reflecting the Romantic ideal of an enlightened society, this vision of a liberated India goes beyond political independence to include moral and intellectual awakening.

His poem *Jana Gana Mana*, which was eventually designated India's national anthem, encapsulates the spirit of patriotism and solidarity. He also states, "The soil of my country, I bow to thee," in *The Fugitive* (1921). But as seen in *Nationalism* (1917), where he cautions against forceful nationalism that stifles individuality and spiritual progress, Tagore's nationalism was not

insular; rather, he promoted international humanism and denounced parochial patriotism. With an emphasis on harmony, peace, and human dignity, Tagore's nationalism—which was enhanced by Romantic idealism—redefined patriotism as a moral and cultural awakening.

Conclusion

Through its profound exploration of nature, love, spirituality, and nationalism, Rabindranath Tagore's poetry epitomises Romanticism. His writings combine aspects of Indian mysticism with the Romantic ideals of Wordsworth's devotion to nature, Keats' sensuality, and Shelley's revolutionary fervour. Tagore reinterpreted Romantic principles to suit his own cultural and philosophical perspective, making him more than just a Romantic poet in the Western sense. Around the world, poets, visionaries, and literary academics are still motivated by his legacy.

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