

A SYNTHESIZED WORLD OF IDEAS:
WEAVING A NARRATIVE THREAD THROUGH
RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S SELECTED POEMS,
LETTERS, AND SPEECHES

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ABSTRACT

Tagore's idea of 'Viśvasāhitya' presents a deeply philosophical understanding and successfully threads together Upanishadic high theory with contemporary popular folk culture. His ideas speak of the universal values that world literature can embody and its cross-cultural articulation is truly reflected in his aesthetic philosophy, concerning how truth and beauty cannot be understood unless human nature is studied in tandem with the world in its totality. This paper will look at Tagore's writings (in the 21st century through a Cultural Materialist lens) in tandem with the philosophical ideology that he exhibited for a united-synthesized world and will try to bring the contemporary reader on the same theoretical plane.

Keywords: World Literature, Viśvasāhitya, Popular Culture, Cultural Materialism.

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is considered one of the most famous Indian writers and philosophers. He envisioned world literature as a process in a continuum, a journey (*All honor to you, heroic host of the interminable path!* [sic] – *Gitanjali*, "Song 48") of unfinished paths and incomplete creations towards an ultimate ideal and goal of synthesis. In 1914, when W. B. Yeats found that the translation of the poet's *Gitanjali* had stirred up his blood as nothing

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had for years, he could not help regretting that he knew nothing about Tagore's life and the literary-cultural movements that had made it possible. Similar to Yeats's epiphany, this paper would delve deep into Tagore's writings (as the active artist) in tandem with the philosophical ideology of oneness (being his inspiration, his passive muse) that he exhibited for a united-synthesized world, and would try to bring the contemporary reader on the same theoretical plane.

Mary M. Lago says, "Tagore was eager to find in the West men whose thinking was akin to his own" (1). Strong narrative undertones exist quite explicitly in his repertoire of writings – personal letters, poetry, prose, and public speeches. The study would try and prove through the course that these nuanced undercurrents run through the entire stream of his public and private discourse. With selected poems from *Gitanjali*, the paper would draw a comparison to some selected letters written to C. F. Andrews during the year 1914, and some of the many public addresses delivered by him.

The primary texts would include the following poems from *Gitanjali*: "Song 1", "Song 5", "Song 20", "Song 39", "Song 48", "Song 58", "Song 60", "Song 65", "Song 80", "Song 100"; the following lectures and addresses: "Civilization and Progress", "Constructions *versus* Creation", "What is Art?", "The Voice of Humanity", "The Realization of the Infinite" (all his public addresses now exist in the form of prose, henceforth, they have been italicized in the entire course of the paper), and the following dated letters to C. F. Andrews: Dated 'Ramgarh, May 17, 1914', 'Ramgarh, May 21, 1914', 'Ramgarh, May 22, 1914' and 'Calcutta, November 12, 1914', 'Ramgarh, May 23, 1914', and 'Ramgarh, May 24, 1914' and 'Ramgarh, May 25, 1914' (for ease of reference, letters would be referred to just by dates from hereon in the study; places have been omitted). The secondary sources would include some responses, critiques, and works on similar lines.

Noting some instances too explicit to ignore, the study would capture Tagore's idea on life ("Construction is for a purpose, ...but creation is for itself..." from *Construction versus Creation versus* "Song 5" of *Gitanjali*: "I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side"); on spirituality ("I'm struggling on my way to the wilderness..." Letter dated 'May 22, 1914' *versus* "Song 39" - "When the heart is hard and parched up, come upon me with a shower of mercy"); on humanity ("I have great faith in humanity" from *The Voice of Humanity versus* "Song 60"- "On the seashore of endless worlds children meet..."); and on art and infinity ("We see all the contradictions, yet we feel the inner harmony" from Letter dated 'November 12, 1914' *versus* "Song 1" - "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure...").

The above paragraph presents some quick fleeting observations, however as one delves deep into Tagore's works and philosophies – as this paper would attempt to do – one realizes that in his translation and transformation of “comparative literature” into ‘Visvasahitya,’ the categories of “world literature” and “comparative literature” exist as a destabilized bind. Hence, this paper will argue how this comparative translated literature also gets translated into his entire ideology about the world through his letters and speeches similar to Yeats's “*Spiritus Mundi*” and Shaw's idea of the ‘Life Force’, of the world progressing as one in contrast to Darwin's idea of the survival of the fittest. Thus, a narrative thread would be woven through the selected texts to further the argument of presenting a synthesized world of ideas.

Review of Literature

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophical ideas have attracted the attention of numerous erudite scholars. Different scholars and critics like Spivak (in her *Death of a Discipline*, she engages with Tagore's ideas on nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and the politics of translation), and Amartya Sen (about Tagore's contributions to literature and social thought; his book *The Argumentative Indian* features discussions on Tagore's ideas on identity, freedom, and social justice) add to the rich tapestry of contemporary debates, including the ongoing engagement with Tagore's literary and intellectual legacy.

One major theme explored by scholars is Tagore's concept of universalism and his vision of a harmonious and synthesized world. Researchers such as Sisir Kumar Das and Amiya Chakravarty have examined the philosophical foundations of Tagore's universalism, emphasizing its connection to Indian philosophy, Western philosophical traditions, and the implications for ethics and social relations. Das's work on Tagore's aesthetics and Chakravarty's exploration of freedom and spirituality offer valuable insights into the interdisciplinary nature of Tagore's philosophy.

Another area of inquiry builds around Tagore's educational philosophy. Scholars like Sibnarayan Ray have delved into Tagore's views on education, highlighting his belief in holistic learning, creative expression, and the integration of nature into the educational process.

Furthermore, the political and social dimensions of Tagore's philosophy have been a subject of study in Krishna Kripalani's biography, which offers a comprehensive account of Tagore's socio-political thought, elucidating his ideas on nationalism, social justice,

and internationalism. Additionally, Uma Das Gupta's exploration of Tagore's political thought sheds light on the contemporary relevance of his ideas, particularly in the context of global challenges and cultural diversity.

While significant scholarship exists on Tagore's philosophy, several gaps point towards the need for further investigation. For instance, an in-depth exploration of how Tagore's philosophy threads together the literature that he produced and the worldviews that he expressed, still needs to be undertaken.

This research proposal aims to bridge these gaps by conducting a comprehensive study of Tagore's philosophy by employing a multi-textual approach that incorporates textual analysis and comparative philosophy. It seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of Tagore's philosophy of the unity and oneness of the world and its relevance not only in the times during which Tagore wrote but also in the twenty-first century's literary-cultural scene. The research methodology, which will be elaborated upon in the next section, will also focus on building narrative threads through inter-textual and inter-philosophical comparisons.

Research Methodology

The literature review given above demonstrates that scholars have extensively explored various facets of Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy, including universalism, education, politics, and aesthetics. However, certain gaps remain, suggesting opportunities for further research. As its proposed research methodology, the study seeks to take up a textual analysis of the chosen primary readings mentioned and elaborated before. Further, comparative philosophy would aid and encourage a holistic understanding of Tagore's philosophy by incorporating insights from his multiple texts. As Pradip Kumar Datta rightly says:

Rabindranath Tagore's notion of the relational self and the commitment to work [explores] the idea of work as connecting relationships that make up the world, [which] is something that is derived from neo-Vedantic conceptions that privilege the concerns of this world. Institutionally, this translates into various forms of cooperation of which cooperatives are the primary mode. (40)

Along with the above, investigating the historical and biographical context of Tagore's life can provide valuable insights into the development of his philosophical ideas, especially through the lens of Cultural Materialism. This methodology involves examining primary

and secondary sources related to Tagore's life, along with looking at what other contemporary writers had to say. By understanding the influences of Tagore's thoughts and his interactions with contemporary intellectuals, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of his philosophical foundations. The paper will also try to look at the said themes through the scientific approach given to literature by Hippolyte A. Taine ("race, milieu, and moment").

In addition to the above-listed approaches, this study would engage in looking at the narrative turn in the contemporary literary scene. Majorly, it would employ a narrative approach to the texts, in an attempt to thread a narrative around his fictional and non-fictional (expressed) views. The "narrative turn" in post-theory refers to a shift in the field of literary and cultural theory towards a greater emphasis on narrative and storytelling as a central element of analysis. One influential figure in the narrative turn was the literary theorist and philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur's work, particularly his book *Time and Narrative* (1983), emphasizes the role of narrative in human self-understanding and the construction of personal and collective identities. One other text of extreme importance is Noel Carroll's "Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding" from the writer's book *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection* (1998; edited by Jerrold Levinson).

While a narrative approach might have some methodological challenges and epistemological concerns, nonetheless it proves to be an approach with a strongly nuanced foundation. Moreover, the narrative turn opens up avenues for interdisciplinary approaches and dialogue. This study attempts to argue that Tagore's concept of 'Visvasahitya' and his philosophies in general, would thread all the points covered above in a well-knit narrative of the socio-cultural-literary discourse of his as well as the contemporary times.

Main Body and Findings - A Comparative Analysis while Threading a Narrative

Tagore's literary accomplishments, worldviews, and philosophies worked perfectly in tandem and on coherent lines with the cultural and socio-political life that he lived as a whole, as the introduction of this research study elaborates. Often called the minstrel of Mother India, he occupies a frontal position in the galaxy of the prophets of Humanism. To put the same in his words: "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high..." (*Gitanjali*, "Song 35"). Some significant events of the cultural and socio-political scene during Tagore's time included the British colonial rule; the rising

nationalistic fervour and the freedom movement; Renaissance and reform movements in the context of a resurgence of intellectual and artistic endeavours, including literature, art, music, and social reforms (Tagore himself played a pivotal role in this movement, contributing to literature and promoting educational and social reforms); the socio-religious context (with his philosophy emphasizing the importance of spiritual and humanistic values, transcending religious and cultural boundaries); and the urgent need for social reforms (he used his writings and public speeches to highlight social ills and advocated for social reforms, emphasizing the need for compassion, empathy, and human dignity).

Tagore's works and ideas reflected his engagement with these cultural and socio-political conditions. His writings often explored themes of nationalism, identity, freedom, social justice, and the universal human spirit. He used literature, poetry, music, and art as powerful tools to challenge prevailing norms, inspire change, and shape the cultural and socio-political discourse of his time.

Harmony in Life and Works

The first and most major theme explored by him was the endlessness of life created through harmony. In the letter dated 'May 17, 1914' he notes: "When we are restless we raise dust all about us and we forget the supreme truth that 'we are'" (22). Alternatively, *Gitanjali's* "Song 1" echoes a similar sentiment when he writes: "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. / This frail vessel thou emptiest [sic] again and again, and fillest [sic] it ever with fresh life" (19). "Song 60" follows similar lines when he says: "On the seashore of endless worlds children meet." "The infinite sky," and "restless water" of the poem, all culminate in the "great meeting of children" (88-89) and harmony among life's various elements and world's various components stand as one of the most striking points of discussion. This remains a significant thread of focus amongst scholars working on Tagore today.

In his public address *The Voice of Humanity*, he says: "I am...a poet. When I speak, I speak *with* my surroundings and not *to* my surroundings" (137) and talks about the "rigid ugliness" in cities without a place "for a living expression of the spirit" (144). Declaring his "great faith in humanity," he continues, "Like the sun it can be clouded, but never extinguished...We are waiting for the time when the spirit of the age will be incarnated in a complete human truth and the meeting of men will be translated into the Unity of Man" (146).

He continues on his social reform undertones when he declares in the same piece of work that, he is waiting for a day when “the vulgar shout of brute force is silenced in awe” (147). The selected instances not only highlight his belief in the oneness of humanity but also his views on the necessity of social reform and a peaceful co-living and co-habitation with fellow beings.

Tagore is one of the most celebrated authors who wrote about the universal appeal of literature and culture. His idea of the ‘Visvasahitya’ (a polar opposite from Goethe’s very particularistic idea of ‘world literature’) meant to introduce harmony not only in the realms of literature but also in the world in its totality and infiniteness. This idea introduces a connection to Rousseau as he once proclaimed: “An author who would brave the general taste would soon write for himself alone” (*Letter*). Talking about the “infinite” as his next major theme, one can see, for instance, in his letter dated ‘May 23, 1914,’ he reasserts his worldview about sin and the soul through the metaphors of water and fire. He says “...we can see that sacred sight in the intense glow of the fire of suffering...the fire is burning fiercely, exposing the hidden corners of my being with all their unsuspected accumulations of untruth and self-deception. Let the fire burn until it has nothing to feed upon. Let nothing be spared that awaits destruction” (23-24).

The above can be placed alternatively with “Song 5” in which he writes, “I ask for a moment’s indulgence to sit by thy side” (23; with “thy” as a reference to his image of God, almost treated as a beloved), along with “Song 100” where he says: “I dive down into the depth of the ocean of forms, / hoping to gain the perfect pearl of the formless...I shall tune it [the harp] to the notes of forever, and when / it has sobbed out its last utterance, lay down my / silent harp at the feet of the silent” (135). The reader here witnesses the complete submission of the speaker’s self in an attempt to merge it with divinity – making the themes of unity and spirituality work together.

The Intersection of Ethics and Aesthetics

The coming along and the intersections of ethics and aesthetics that one finds in Tagore are deeply reminiscent of what scholars like Martha C. Nussbaum in the essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” from her book *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* (1996) highlights – the cosmopolitan approach – that Tagore always professed in life through various mediums. As one visits Santiniketan

today, where Tagore established his cosmopolitan university – the *Vishvabharati* (which means “all the world”) – and through his fictional works like *The Home and the World* (originally published as *Ghare-Bhairs* in 1916) – where Bimala realizes in the end that Nikhil’s universal morality was far superior to Sandip’s blind run after a nation only superficially contained in symbols – one is forced to look at the complex intersection of ethics and aesthetics at various levels of cognition (including emotive and sensual) that Tagore seamlessly threaded in his fictional and non-fictional worlds.

He opens his famous address *The Realization of the Infinite* by quoting the *Upanishads*: “Man becomes true if in this life he can apprehend God ; [sic] if not, it is the greatest calamity for him” (148). He also talks about how one is not seeking anything additional, but the *nityo nityânām*, the permanent in all that is impermanent and looks at the *rasānām rasatamak*, the highest abiding joy that unifies all enjoyments. Therefore, when the *Upanishads* teach one to realize everything in Brahma, it is never to seek something extra or to manufacture something new, but to realize the capacities and potentialities that lie inside the human sensual self. Following the *Upanishads*, he asserts to be “conscious of being absolutely enveloped by Brahma” and how it “must be the aim of the whole of our life” (150). Tagore clearly highlights in his discussion that man in his real and liminal or subliminal states seeks the infinite – in pleasures and in pains – and that in the soul (or the everlasting abode of the āīman), the revelation of the supreme soul (the *paramātman*) is already complete and merged. Again pointing out his themes of unity and harmony (but here, in oneself).

The kind of harmony that Tagore propounded gets mirrored in the theories that scholars of narrative studies talk about. Richard W. Miller in “Three Versions of Objectivity” notes:

Though the occurrence of such harmony is unpredictable, everyone's cognitive equipment is the same, so what can create such enjoyable harmony in one can create it in everyone. In either view, the truth of an aesthetic judgment is a nonperspectival [sic] matter of how all well-qualified judges would respond, even though the response itself is unpredictable. (*Aesthetics and Ethics* 36)

While talking about art and its different forms and the unity it provides, to focus on as his next major theme, in his letter dated ‘May 25, 1914,’ he writes, “Harmony is difficult when one’s own nature is complicated; when the strings in the *vina* are numerous and each one claims its right to be tuned...” (25). Alternatively focusing on creativity and chaos together for the creation of art through ‘light’

and ‘thunder’, in “Song 39”, he writes “When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust, O thou holy one, thou wakeful, come with thy light and thy thunder” (60). In “Song 65”, he fuses art in the liminal space between life and the divine, as he says “What divine drink wouldst thou have, my God, / from this overflowing cup of life? My poet, is it thy delight to see thy creation” (96).

In his address, *Construction versus Creation*, he highlights that: “When humanity lacks this music of soul, then society becomes a mechanical arrangement of compartments...such a machine... [does not have] unity at its heart [and] it enforces it in its outer structure for mere convenience” (62) and that “...this world...as a habitation of man’s soul with its eternal music of beauty and its inner light of a divine presence” (76) is what constitutes the real existence of being. It often becomes difficult to locate one single motif or trope in Tagore’s works. However, the overlapping intersections among themes also help to solidify the arguments that this study sets out to be based on.

Tagore’s idea of harmony also corresponds to Shaw’s idea of the ‘life-force’ that he has expressed in his “Epistle Dedicatory to Arthur Bingham Walkley” of his play *Man and Superman* (1905) when he says that: “we [here assuming it to stand for the entire human race] are both critics of life as well of art” (44). In Act III, the character of Don Juan expresses his belief in the ‘Life Force’, which he refers to as “the life instinct” or “the vital force.” He argues that this force drives all living beings to seek pleasure, procreate, and ultimately continue the cycle of life. Shaw’s concept of the ‘Life Force’ suggests a natural and instinctive drive for survival and reproduction that underlies human behaviour. It is a key element of the philosophical discourse within the play, and one can draw clear inferences between his arguments about ‘life-force’ and Tagore’s ideas of ‘oneness’ and unity among all beings present – living and non-living.

The Individualistic ‘I’ versus Tagore’s ‘We’

In another theme greatly explored by Tagore, the ‘I’ in the ‘We’ and vice-versa gets explored. In his letters dated ‘May 22, 1914’ and ‘November 12, 1914’ he says, “I am struggling on my way through the wilderness...it is hard to part with the old self...For we can never enter the realm of white light and pure love until all our debts are cleared and nothing binds us to the dead past” (‘May 22’, p. 23), further saying that: “...I am hopelessly lost in the wilderness of correspondence, distributing thanks to all quarters of the globe, till not an atom of gratitude is left in my nature” (‘Nov. 12’, p.

28). Finding the individualist 'I' in the collective 'we' formed an important part of his writings and his broader philosophy.

Building on the above, in "Song 20", he writes, "That vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to me that it was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion." He later says in the poem that he did not realize that it was his own (coming to him as a consequence of the harmony he had made himself a part of) the whole time and that the feeling had its source in his own heart, that is to say, in his inner deep self. From this point onward, the reader is thrown back to reassess and reiterate Tagore's belief of the basic essence as contained in the inner depths of the being itself, in his/her mind. Further in "Song 58", he writes: "Let all the strains of joy mingle in my last song...the joy that sets the twin brothers, life and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter..." (86). These liminal spaces explored by Tagore (between life and death, 'I' and 'we', among others) also stand out as important threads of discussions among scholars today.

This coming together of life in narrative and narrative in life is further highlighted in his address, *What is Art?*, where he says that: "This world, which takes its form in the mould of man's perception, still remains only as the partial world of his senses and mind. It is like a guest and not like a kinsman" (83). This is greatly similar to what contemporary narrative studies scholar Noël Carroll in his essay "Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding" highlights:

[N]arratives make all sorts of presuppositions, and it is the task of the reader, viewer, or listener to fill these in. It is of the nature of narratives to be essentially incomplete. Every narrative makes an indeterminate number of presuppositions that the audience must bring, so to speak, to the text. All authors must rely upon the audience's knowledge of certain things that are not explicitly stated. Authors always write in the expectation that the audience will correctly fill in what has been left unsaid. (*Aesthetics and Ethics* 138)

Carroll further highlights that a narrative is a selective piece of prose by its very nature and hence always remains incomplete in certain and most senses. There is greater similarity and unity to this in Tagore's idea when he says: "The principal object of art, also, being the expression of personality, and not of that which is abstract and analytical, it necessarily uses the language of picture and music... beauty in art has been the mere instrument and not its complete and ultimate significance" (87).

Tagore further brings in his ideas and worldviews of unity and

harmony as the oneness of humanity when he says: "Because we have faith in this universal soul, we in the East know that Truth, Beauty, lie in Simplicity – where it is transparent, where things do not obstruct the inner vision" (90-91). As will be discussed in the next section, this draws strong comparisons with Yeats and Pound's aim of seeking 'light from the East'. This not only helps the readers to draw parallels between the intersections of the themes of unity and oneness hitherto discussed but also professes a strong connection between the Western and Eastern traditional philosophical systems. From the above-mentioned discussion, it would be most fitting to say that Tagore's philosophy and writings thread together not only as a narrative but also as the connecting rope that binds him to readers in the twenty-first century.

Tagore and Other Writers Through a Comparatist Lens

W. B. Yeats and his concept of the "Spiritus Mundi" as an all-encompassing spiritual force or collective consciousness that influences and shapes the events of the world (as "a vast image") is also significant to look at here. Yeats's idea of a unified folk culture and the 'unity of life' was a common thread that he shared with Tagore. The Irish poet, like Ezra Pound, was seeking 'light from the East.' Tagore and Yeats had similar social and ideological philosophies, with Tagore living as a liberal Brahmo Samaj member in the traditionally Hindu-dominated Indian subcontinent and Yeats living as a Protestant in Catholic Ireland. Yeats's introduction to *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* proves to be one of the reasons that the work (as a text – in academia and the 'public sphere') is still picked up, widely known, read, and translated by scholars and avid readers alike. The stark similarities that we find between the Bengali bard and other Western writers are what remain as significant threads that need to be highlighted more.

One is left spellbound to see striking similarities between Tagore's and Tolstoy's visions about the world, God, and how men 'should' live. Tagore's vision of a one-unified world is reciprocated by what Tolstoy says in his novel *Resurrection* (1899). Tolstoy notes:

It was not this spring morning men thought sacred and worthy of consideration not the beauty of God's world, given for a joy to all creatures, this beauty which inclines the heart to peace, to harmony, and to love, but only their own devices for enslaving one another. (4)

Another instance worth noting is Tolstoy's observation in his work *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, when he attempts to discover

propositions, which are convincing and in harmony with “man’s mind and nature” (54). Tagore’s idea of ‘Visvasahitya’ is very clearly posited by Rosinka Chaudhuri when providing a summary she says: “His [Tagore’s] concept (or anti-concept) [of world literature] was premised upon his advice to find the world in the self, and was one that may, perhaps, be mined for its emphasis on particularity and attention to the individual as it exists in relation to the whole” (*Viśvasāhitya*).

While looking at Tagore and drawing threads among his philosophies, and views of other writers, one theme that distinctly stands out is that of morality and values. In his letter dated ‘May 21, 1914’, referring to a stormy morning, he says: “It seems like the symbol of a new spiritual birth... To be born naked in the heart of the eternal Truth; to be able to feel with my entire being the life-throb of the universal heart – that is the cry of my soul” (22-23). Alternatively, in “Song 48” he focuses on the harmony achieved by simple acts: “All honour to you, heroic host of the interminable path!” “How I had feared that the path was long and wearisome, and the struggle to reach thee was hard!” (72) And in “Song 80” on the coalition of morality and nature: “If this be thy wish and if this be thy play, then / take this fleeting emptiness of mine, paint it with / colours, gild it with gold, float it on the wanton / wind and spread it in varied wonders” (114). Morality and values, along with the previously discussed area of ethics and aesthetics, also exist in the liminal space between the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ that Tagore is exploring, and can only exist by keeping the same as a context and functioning as a context for the same.

In his address *Civilization and Progress*, Tagore opines that:

Civilization cannot merely be a growing totality of happenings....It must be the expression of some guiding moral force which we have evolved in our society for the object of attaining perfection...The Sanskrit word *dharma* is the nearest synonym in our own language that occurs to me for the word civilization...The specific meaning of *dharma* is that principle which holds us firm together and leads us to our best welfare. (43)

The most important thing that he highlights is the simplicity and perfection that lie in spiritual expression, which forms the highest product of a civilization. Professing unity among disharmony (building upon the theme of creativity taking birth from utmost chaos), he quotes Plato and says: “An intelligent and socialized community will continue to grow only as long as it can remain a unit ; [sic] beyond that point growth must cease, or the community will disintegrate and cease to be an organic being.” Tagore further opines

that “That spirit of the unit is only maintained when its nucleus is some living sentiment of *dharma*, leading to co-operation and to a common sharing of life’s gifts” (52-53). Therefore, the Eastern ethical concept of ‘dharma’ has an important role to play not only in his writings and philosophical system but also in the social reform movements that he heralded.

Jerrold Levinson in the introductory section to *Aesthetics and Ethics*, builds on Richard Miller’s argument and says:

[M]oral and aesthetic judgments display objective validity insofar as they make rationally defensible claims to non-perspectival truth about the moral rightness of actions or the aesthetic value of works of art, a nonperspectival [sic] truth claim being one whose pretension goes beyond merely affirming how things are for the judge. (3)

Assessing all that has been discussed above, it can be safely concluded that Tagore’s idea of ‘*Viśvasāhitya*’ (1907) presents a deeply philosophical understanding and successfully threads together Upanishadic high theory with contemporary popular folk culture. His idea, as highlighted above is very different from what Goethe presented through his ideas of ‘World literature,’ and speaks of the universal values that world literature can embody. His cross-cultural articulation of the same gets truly reflected in his aesthetic philosophy concerning how truth and beauty cannot be understood unless human nature is studied in tandem with all other fellow beings and this world in its totality, regardless of the binaries of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ (as most other scholars and studies have strived hard to prove). A simple life of values and good deeds – that constitute ‘dharma’ – is all that is required for attaining fruitful consequential results in Tagore’s synthesized world.

Looking at Tagore from a Cultural Materialist Lens

This paper having employed a New Historicist lens to look at the contemporary appeal of Tagore, also promised in the beginning to employ a Cultural Materialist lens to look at the current reception of Tagore. Cultural materialism was first introduced and popularized in the field of anthropology via Marvin Harris's 1968 book *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. In this work, Harris built on Marx's theory of base and superstructure to craft a theory about how culture and cultural products fit into the greater social system. Building up on Harris’s methodology and similar to what Hippolyte Taine refers to as looking at culture through the lens of “race, milieu, moment,” as talked about by R. Wellek (1), when one looks at Tagore and

his contemporary scenarios, one gets forced to build comparative threads with the present times with similar socio-economic and cultural representations.

Looking at the above, one is bound to shift their focus on some current instances like *The Economic Times* report article with the most significant headline in this context, which reads “Rare Handwritten Letter by Rabindranath Tagore Fetches Rs [Rupees] 21 Lakh at Online Auction.” The letter was addressed to Satyabushan Sen and was part of AstaGuru’s “‘Collector’s Choice’ Modern Indian Art.” This indicates how Tagore himself has been transformed into a cultural icon to be circulated in the ‘public sphere’ (in Habermas’s terms). Even *Godrej’s* relatively recent (2020) initiative to make their advertisements stand out by making use of an old poster which featured Tagore promoting their product (*Get Bengal*) makes one think along the same lines of how the contemporary society (in need of the unity and harmony that Tagore so strongly professed) has made great personalities like him into a treasure to be proud of, a worldview to profess, and a narrative to be passed on amongst future generations. It also highlights the kind of effect it has on the readers and philosophers alike.

It would be most fitting to move towards the conclusion of this study while returning to Tagore’s profound idea of the unity of literature, culture, and the world. In one of his most quoted essays *East and West*, he opens his argument by highlighting that: “It is not always a profound interest in man that carries travellers nowadays to distant lands” (*The Complete Works*, sec. 2.4). His repetitive metaphors of nature and journeys – finished and unfinished, and his continuous themes of unity, harmony, divine, the mystical, art and creativity, among others – almost makes these opening lines the most appropriate to end this research study.

As paradoxical as the two words used above (‘opening lines’ and ‘end’) might sound, they truly represent the oneness and totality and the cyclic nature of all entities that exist in this world with no fixed beginnings or end *per se* – building a synthesized world of ideas (to fixate one’s attention on the titular importance of this study). Existing as a part of the continuum, of the constitutive whole of the ‘*Visvasahitya*’, this research study also attempts to capture something essential and unique in the larger literary repertoire of writings.

Conclusion

The paper posited in the beginning that there is no clear line between Tagore’s poetry, his speeches and addresses, and his everyday letters

to friends and family, especially focusing on his letters addressed to C. F. Andrews (a great friend of Tagore and Gandhi). Now having reached its conclusion, this study clearly shows how Tagore's creations play along with linguistic ideas, with Tagore deeply immersing himself in historical and cultural narratives. His works and ideas successfully bring his society's socio-politico-literary scene alive in front of the eyes of the present-day reader. This linguistic and narrative thread amongst his thoughts and work comes to the fore when we consider his aesthetic ideology of 'Visvasahitya', as he transforms into a literary narrative himself about the one who professed unity and harmony as no other writer did.

The narrative approach employed by the study helped this paper to understand how seemingly different mediums like letters and speeches come together and exemplify Tagore's overarching aesthetic philosophy. Roland Barthes argues in *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* that:

Narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, *drame* [sic] [suspense drama], comedy, pantomime, paintings (in Santa Ursula by Carapaccio [sic], for instance), stained glass windows, movies, local news, conversation...present in all times, in all places, in all societies. (237)

This is exactly what this study attempted to do, and has been largely successful to the extent of building a narrative in, of, and around the great bard of Bengal. However, further studies can focus on the gaps left in the analysis done through New Historicism and can employ a more refined Cultural Materialist lens for the same. Rabindranath Tagore has been one of the stalwarts of not only the Bengal Renaissance but also of the entire literary scenario of the Indian subcontinent. He and his narrative of world literature, has not only survived the test of time, but has also paved the way for India's original literary, cultural, and popular trends. He was, and will always remain one of the most favourite of all historical personalities, not only in the literary-academic arena but also in popular mass cultures, which also proves the significance of all academic and non-academic projects still taken up by scholars and the general public alike, while looking at the different interpretations of the contributions given by him.

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