

Maxim Gorky and Rabindranath Tagore: A Literary Dialogue of Humanism and Global Solidarity

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Abstract:

This article explores the intriguing literary relationship between two great literary figures of the early 20th century, Maxim Gorky, the Russian novelist and playwright, and Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet, philosopher, and Nobel laureate. While seemingly distant geographically and culturally, their deep connection transcended borders and ideologies. This article delves into their lives, ideas, and works, shedding light on their profound impact on each other's literary endeavours and their shared commitment to humanism and global solidarity.

Introduction:

Maxim Gorky and Rabindranath Tagore occupied distinct yet parallel universes in the early 20th-century literary landscape. Gorky, the voice of the Russian proletariat, championed social justice and workers' rights through his powerful storytelling. Tagore, the polymath poet from India, celebrated the beauty of nature and humanity's spiritual essence. Despite their differences, these literary giants shared a profound belief in the power of literature to bring about positive change, and their relationship reveals a fascinating literary dialogue. The literary relationship between Rabindranath Tagore and Maxim Gorky holds significant historical, cultural, and literary importance. (MAXIM GORKY AND WORLD LITERATURE - JSTOR)ⁱ These two legends represented a unique fusion of Eastern and Western literary traditions and brought forth several key aspects of significance. Through their writings, both Gorky and Tagore delved into the complexities of society and human existence, shedding light on the various injustices and inequalities that plagued their respective societies. (Rabindranath Tagore: a Social Thinker and an Activist A Review of ...)ⁱⁱ Gorky and Tagore's literary journey is a reflection of the close interconnection between literature and society, which is characteristic of Russian realism, as highlighted by the Russian critic Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky.

Tagore in Russia:

Tagore was visiting the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Soviet government, and during his visit, he met with several prominent Russian intellectuals and artists. "That Rabindranath Tagore visited Russia in 1930 is a well-known historical fact and much celebrated by the scholars interested in international relations, Indo-Russian relations, and languages, literatures and cultures of both the countries. Tagore's Russian Chithi or Letters from Russia (May 1931) bears testimony to his impression of the post-revolution Russia."ⁱⁱⁱ

While there is no detailed public record of their meeting, it is known that they shared a mutual respect for each other's work. Tagore's poetry and philosophical writings had a profound impact on Gorky, and Gorky's social realism and his advocacy for the working class resonated with Tagore's broader interest in social and political issues.

Tagore and Gorky exemplified the power of literature and cultural exchange to bridge gaps between different cultures and languages. It highlighted the importance of dialogue and understanding between intellectuals and writers from diverse backgrounds. Both Tagore and Gorky left a lasting legacy in the world of literature and culture, and their work as a symbol of their shared commitment to the power of literature and ideas to bring about positive change in society. (Maxim Gorky | Biography & Books | Britannica, n.d)^{iv}

Gorky's Influence on Tagore:

Gorky's commitment to the downtrodden and his portrayals of working-class struggles resonated deeply with Tagore. Tagore drew inspiration from Gorky's dedication to social justice, weaving elements of Gorky's humanism into his own works. Tagore's appreciation for Gorky's writing found expression in his Bengali essays and correspondence.

Gorky's influence in Tagore's writings:

Realism and Social Themes: Gorky was known for his realistic portrayal of social issues and the lives of common people in his works. Tagore, who had primarily focused on lyricism and spirituality in his earlier writings, was inspired by Gorky to explore more realistic and socially relevant themes. This influence is especially noticeable in Tagore's later works, such as his short stories and plays. He began to depict the struggles and aspirations of the downtrodden and marginalized sections of society. "In The Tales about Italy and in the autobiographical trilogy (Childhood, My Apprenticeship, and My Universities), Gorky's dream of the happier future life under socialism manifests itself through the synthesis of realism and romanticism. In his late years, while advocating the method of "social realism" in his essays, Gorky did not write a single fictional work that would incarnate dogmatic principles that were developed already after his death." (Gorky's Work and the Rise of Social Realism - studlit.ru, n.d)^v

Dramatic Elements: Tagore was deeply influenced by Gorky's plays, which often depicted the human condition and social struggles. Tagore, who was also a playwright, incorporated more dramatic elements into his plays, making them more accessible and engaging for a broader audience. This shift is evident in works like "Raktakarabi" (The Red Oleanders) and "Raja" (The King of the Dark Chamber). "For Tagore, capitalism was an evil system; he discusses the evil of capitalism in Raktakarabi (Red Oleanders, 1926) through invocation of the concept of Yaksha Town. Looked at somewhat retroactively, Tagore nearly discusses the evil of the Special Economic Zone. Today, many of his critical observations and analyses can be fruitfully brought to bear on producing a critique of the mainstream development model."^{vi}

Emphasis on Humanism: Gorky's humanistic philosophy had a profound impact on Tagore. Gorky's passion for "proletarian humanism" and his sympathy for the downtrodden resonated deeply with Tagore, inspiring him to further explore these themes in his writing (Eulogy for Maxim Gorky: A Great Proletarian Humanist, n.d).^{vii} Tagore recognized the power of Gorky's ideas and believed that they were essential for modern Bengali literature. Tagore criticized social injustices and class disparities that existed in his time. His play "Muktadhara" (The Waterfall) this plays, written in 1922, explores the struggle of impoverished peasants and their exploitation by landlords. It portrays the stark contrast between the lives of the

oppressed rural masses and the privileged landowners. The play underscores the need for social and economic justice and advocates for the empowerment of the working class. This is an example of works that address themes of poverty, exploitation, and the plight of marginalized individuals.

Internationalism: Gorky's internationalism and his efforts to promote cultural exchange left a mark on Tagore's thinking. Tagore, who was already a proponent of global unity and understanding, deepened his engagement with international issues and collaborations with writers and thinkers from around the world, furthering his commitment to transcending national boundaries. The legacy of Gorky's internationalism and his efforts to promote cultural exchange can be seen in Tagore's continued commitment to these ideals. Tagore's work, such as his international educational institution, Visva-Bharati, and his role in promoting cultural exchange between India and the rest of the world, was influenced by global thinkers like Gorky. Gorky's influence is indeed evident in Rabindranath Tagore's establishment of Visva-Bharati and his persistent efforts to bridge cultural gaps between India and the rest of the world. Visva-Bharati, which Tagore founded in 1921, was not just an educational institution but also a hub for promoting cultural exchange and international understanding. It embodied Tagore's vision of bringing together scholars, artists, and students from various countries to create a global community of learning and creativity. "They believe that this commonalty shall become more real for humanity than the differences among us once it can be established through right thinking and right practice. Hence, education for all is so important for them. It is through common education that they wish to develop the common mind to work for the good of all humanity. They are 'vishva-manah'—having a world-oriented mind.^{viii}The term 'vishvavidyalaya' applies to their system most aptly. It is from his own position as one of the colonized that the poverty and the humble living standard he witnesses around him in Russia strikes him positively as carrying no sense of shame with it, since everybody participates in it or a common end. Professor Petrov's house which he visits is no exception. Equality can be felt to be real here."^{ix} (The Russian Revolution and the Freedom Struggle in India: Rabindranath Tagore's Letters from Russia)

Literary Collaboration: Tagore's exposure to Gorky's ideas and the broader Russian literary tradition expanded his horizons and enriched his writing. Maxim Gorky's influence on Rabindranath Tagore is evident in the shift towards realism, the inclusion of social themes, the incorporation of dramatic elements, a stronger emphasis on humanism, and a deeper engagement with international issues in Tagore's later works. This cross-cultural literary exchange between two great writers had a lasting impact on their respective oeuvres and contributed to the enrichment of world literature. Tagore's work was translated into Russian, which further strengthened their literary connection and allowed Russian readers to appreciate Tagore's writings.

Tagore's Impact on Gorky:

Gorky admired Tagore's spiritual depth, his exploration of universal themes, and his role as a cultural ambassador of India. Gorky's subsequent writings reflected an increased focus on humanism and a more nuanced exploration of the human condition. The synthesis of realism and modernism that Gorky sought to achieve in his writing was greatly influenced by Tagore. Gorky's belief in the outdatedness of classical realism led him to embrace a new artistic format that would capture the essence of human life from the height of futuristic ideals (Spiridonova &, n.d)^x. Gorky was inspired by Tagore's ability to blend the secular, rational, liberal humanist spirit of European Enlightenment with India's indigenous classical Sanskrit and Upanishadic heritage.

Shared Commitment to Global Solidarity:

Both Gorky and Tagore were advocates of global solidarity and believed that literature had the power to bridge cultural divides and foster understanding among nations. They were emblematic of their shared vision for a harmonious world. Their work transcended national boundaries and exemplified how literature could be a unifying force. Their work discussed universal themes such as the human condition, social justice, and the role of art in addressing global challenges.

Social and Political Impact: Tagore and Gorky were not confined to the realm of literature alone. Both were influential public figures with a commitment to social and political causes. Global issues and inspired social reform movements in their respective countries. Exposure of Social Issues, Gorky's writings, especially his early short stories and novels, shed light on the harsh living conditions and social injustices faced by the working class and the impoverished in Tsarist Russia. His works vividly portrayed the struggles of the common people, making their plight more visible to a wider audience. Inspiration for Social Movements: Gorky's works inspired various social and political movements, including the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. His writing often depicted the struggle against oppression and inequality, which resonated with the revolutionary fervour of the time.

Tagore's poem "Jana Gana Mana" was adopted as the national anthem of India, and his song "Amar Shonar Bangla" became the national anthem of Bangladesh. These anthems hold immense cultural and national significance in both countries. While Tagore was primarily a poet and thinker, he was not disconnected from politics. He was critical of British colonial rule in India and returned the knighthood bestowed upon him as a protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. Although he did not align himself with any political party, his writings and speeches inspired many in the Indian freedom struggle.

Legacy: The literary relationship between Tagore and Gorky continues to be celebrated as a testament to the enduring power of literature to transcend borders and inspire positive change. Their works remain influential and are studied by scholars and readers worldwide. Maxim Gorky's social and political impact can be seen in his profound influence on Bengali writers of the 1920s. Maxim Gorky's writings not only captured the essence of Indian Renaissance and freedom but also served as a vehicle for expressing the cultural identity and aspirations of the Bengali people. (Bengalis and their love of Russian literature - Telegraph India, n.d)^{xi}

Conclusion:

Both Tagore and Gorky made invaluable contributions to their respective literary traditions and to global literature. Their works continue to be studied, translated, and celebrated for their enduring themes and artistic merits. Additionally, their influence extends beyond literature, as they were also important cultural and intellectual figures of their times.

Maxim Gorky and Rabindranath Tagore exemplifies the transcendent power of literature to connect minds and hearts across cultural and ideological boundaries. Their works underscores the universality of humanistic values and the potential for literature to be a force for positive change. In an era marked by political upheaval and global challenges, their enduring legacy reminds us of the profound impact that writers can have in shaping a more compassionate and empathetic world. Gorky and Tagore remain an inspiring testament to the enduring power of humanism in the face of adversity

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