

of him an object of derision. Consequently, that expression of humanity which is not insignificant, that which the human heart in its mercy or heroism, wrath or peace, considers without inhibition to be a worthy representation of itself, that which while standing within the girdle of artistic craftsmanship can withstand the continuous stare of eternal time—that is what man naturally places in literature. Otherwise its oddity becomes painful to us. Our hearts rebel to see anyone but the rightful emperor seated on the throne.

But not all men have broadness of feeling or discretion, neither do all societies, and there comes a time when fleeting and small desires diminish man. In that hour of crisis the distorted mirror magnifies the small and in the literature of such a time man augments his pettiness, floods his own shortcomings with audacious light. Then craftiness takes the place of art, pride substitutes glory and Tennyson is replaced by Kipling.

But eternal time (*mahakal*) reigns supreme. He must strain everything. Through his sieve all that is petty and withered slips through and loses itself in the dust, becoming the dust. Through ages and generations of men only that survives wherein all men can perceive themselves. Through this process of careful filtering what remains is man's treasure of all times and all nations.

In such demolishing and re-making of literature the eternal ideal of man's nature and self-expression builds up on its own. That ideal also embodies the hull which guides the literature of a new age. If we judge literature according to that ideal then we have made use of all humanity's powers of discretion.

Now is the time for me to come to the main point—and this is it—to see literature through the mirror of nation, time and people is to diminish it, not see it fully. If we understand that in literature the universal man (*vishva-manav*) expresses himself, then we can perceive what is truly worthy of observing in literature. Where the author has not been simply the pretext of literary composition, his literature has failed. Where the author has experienced in his own being the being of all men, whose writing expresses the pain of every man, that writing has found a place in literature. Thus must one view literature as a temple that the universal man (*vishva-manav*) has built; writers have come from all times and all nations to work as labourers in that project. The plan of the building is not available to us, but whatever is wrong is immediately demolished; every labourer has to use his natural competence to integrate his own composition into the whole and thereby complete the invisible plan. In this is expressed his power and the reason why no one pays him a pittance like an ordinary labourer but respects him like a maestro.

You have called the topic I have been entrusted to discuss as "Comparative Literature" in English. In Bangla I shall call it *Visva Sahitya* (world literature).

What does man say through his work, what is his direction, what is he trying to accomplish? To understand this one needs to follow man's intention through history. The reign of Akbar or Gujarat's history or Elizabeth's character—such piecemeal viewing only satiates our curiosity for information. The one who knows that Akbar and Elizabeth are merely pretexts, who knows man has tried to fulfil his intentions across history through many efforts at realization (*sadhana*), many mistakes, and many corrections, who knows that man is trying in every way to

connect with everyone else in the broadest way in order to free himself, who knows that the individual is struggling to succeed in politics (*rajtantra*) and from politics progress to democracy—man is breaking and re-making himself only to voice himself in the universal, to realize himself in the many—such a person tries to see not the individual but the deeper intention in the striving soul's constant endeavour to transcend his personal history. He does not return after seeing the pilgrims—he looks for the deity that all the pilgrims have congregated to see.

Similarly, how man expresses his joy in literature, how and in what form the human soul chooses to manifest its diverse, variegated, multiple images of self-expression, that is the only thing worth considering in world literature. Literature must actually enter the world—whether it pleases to express itself in the form of the diseased, the accomplished, or the ascetic person—to know how far man can find his kinship in the world, and to what extent he can realize truth. It will not do to know it as an artificial construct; it is a world in itself. Its essence exceeds the individual's grasp. It is in continuous creation, like the material universe itself, but in the innermost core of that unfinished creation is a perfected ideal that remains unmoving.

The substance of the Sun's core is recreating itself in many liquid and solid forms that we cannot see, but the corona of light that surrounds the sun ceaselessly proclaims its existence to the world. Thus it constantly bestows itself and unites itself with everyone. If we could perceive the totality of humanity in a visual metaphor, we would see it as a vision of the Sun. We would see its matter slowly arranging itself in many layers within itself, surrounding itself in a halo of joyful expression, shedding its light in every direction.<sup>5</sup> Regard literature for once as that halo of expression composed in language and enfolding humanity. Here is a tempest of light, the source of radiance, here are clashes of brilliant spray.

Walking through a neighbourhood you notice how busy everybody is: the grocer tending his shop, the blacksmith hammering on the anvil, the labourer carrying his load, the merchant balancing his accounts—what may at first be invisible, you may perceive with your heart—on both sides of the road, in every home, in bazaar and shop, in lanes and by-lanes, how the torrent of *rasa* (relish) floods through so many streams and tributaries, overrunning so much shabbiness, wretchedness, and poverty. The nectar of the universal soul of man is apportioned out among all men through the Ramayan—Mahabharat, tales and fables, *kirtans* and *panchalis*; Ram—Lakshman appear to prop up the most insignificant actions of the pettiest of men; the merciful breeze of Panchavati blows in the darkest home; man's heart-creations and self-expressions enclasp the penury and stringency of the workplace of the labouring man, with arms bejewelled with bracelets of beauty and beneficence. For once we need to see literature as embracing all of humanity. We have to see that in his emotional self man has expanded his practical being

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<sup>5</sup> Rabi, the poet's own name, means sun; in several of his poems, Tagore uses the metaphor of the sun to represent himself and his creativity. It is not unlikely that a similar self-referentiality is subtly in operation here.

so far in manifold and multi-directional ways. The monsoons that bless him are composed of so many rains of songs and showers of poetry, so many *Meghdutams*, so many Vidyapatis; the pains and joys of his small home have been augmented with the tales of the pains and joys of so many great monarchs of the solar and lunar dynasties! How the humblest man engirds the pains of his daughter with the consummate compassion of Princess Parvati, daughter of the King of the mountains; how in the glory of Kailasha's poverty-stricken Lord, he glorifies the pain of his own poverty! In this way man advances, surpassing himself, intensifying himself, burnishing himself with a halo of brightness as he struggles on. Though sorely straightened by his circumstances, man has created for himself an augmented thought-creation, a second *samsara* (universe) of literary composition that surrounds this worldly *samsara*.

Do not so much as imagine that I will show you the way to such a world literature. Each of us must make his way forward according to his own means and abilities. All I have wanted to say is that just as the world is not merely the sum of your plough field, plus my plough field, plus his plough field—because to know the world that way is only to know it with a yokel-like parochialism—similarly world literature is not merely the sum of your writings, plus my writing, plus his writings. We generally see literature in this limited, provincial manner. To free oneself of that regional narrowness and resolve to see the universal being in world literature, to apprehend such totality in every writer's work, and to see its interconnect-edness with every man's attempt at self-expression—that is the objective we need to pledge ourselves to.

—*Translated by Rijula Das and Makarand R. Paranjape*