

# Kabiguru and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy

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## Abstract

The great poet and well-wisher of mankind, Rabindranath Tagore was the pole star of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's life. Under the influence of Rabindranath Tagore, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy freed himself from the evil tendency of blind imitation of Western civilization, just as he rejected communalism, religious orthodoxy and extremist nationalism. He assimilated and harmonized the good results of the East and the West in his life. Like Tagore, Dr. Roy also distanced himself from the Boycott Movement of 1905, perhaps for this reason. Extremist nationalism and the 'Hindu-centric' movement did not attract Dr. Bidhan Chandra, who was liberal as well as a Brahmo. The basis of the philosophy of both Rabindranath and Bidhan Chandra was spiritual and transcendental. In the life of Dr. Roy, the combination of the Eastern and the Western ideas took place under the influence of three people - Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Rabindranath Tagore. Both Rabindranath and Bidhan Chandra believed in individualism. This idea of individualism was one of the strongest principles of the age of Renaissance. Just as Rabindranath freed himself from the shackles of religious orthodoxy on his own initiative and dedicated himself for the sake of the country, nearly the same happened in Dr. Roy's life. Like Tagore, Bidhan Chandra also believed that poverty and illiteracy were the main problems of the country. And to solve this problem, he devoted his entire life to the service of the distressed and the welfare of the state and country.

**Keywords:** *Influence, Religious orthodoxy, Communalism, Affection, Respect, Visva Bharati, Tapovan*

The relation between the families of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and Rabindranath Tagore developed on the basis of Brahmo Samaj. Bidhan Chandra's parents - Prakash Chandra Roy and Aghore Kamini Devi had a close acquaintance with Rabindranath's father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore. Just as Bidhan Chandra Roy got attracted to the ideas of Ram Mohan, preached by Maharshi; that idea was later transmitted to him. Dr. Roy was deeply influenced by Raja Ram Mohan Roy's ideology of monotheism, anti-idolatry, rationalism and self-reliance. Just as Bidhan Chandra was inspired by the modern Western ideology, on the other hand he kept his mind tree rooted in Indian civilization and culture. In his early life, the tendency of blind imitation like the other inexperienced young people of the era was seen in Bidhan Chandra. He was proud to call himself 'Benjamin Charles'.<sup>1</sup> However, the thoughts of Ram Mohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore were transmitted to Bidhan Chandra through his parents' close relationship with the Brahmo Samaj. In the June of 1886, Aghore-Prakash went to visit Darjeeling. On their way, they met Maharshi Debendranath Tagore at the ashram of Pratap Chandra Mazumdar in

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Kurseong. Dr. Bidhan Chandra's parents were impressed by Maharshi's brilliance, his enthusiasm and his greetings to the guests. K.P. Thomas writes, "It was while at Darjeeling that they became acquainted with Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, the father of Rabindranath Tagore. Not only did they become great friends of Maharshi, but they also won the esteem and love of his son, Gurudev Rabindranath."<sup>2</sup>

After the demise of Maharshi in 1905, his devotee Prakash Chandra once went to Santiniketan and met Rabindranath. Rabindranath was already aware of the well-known and respected Aghore-Prakash family in the Brahmo Samaj. He welcomed the revered guest with deep respect. Nagendra Kumar Guharoy writes, "Prakash Chandra enjoyed pure bliss by spending some moments with Rabindranath, the worthy son of the venerable Maharshi Debendranath Tagore."<sup>3</sup> It was through the appreciative devotee Prakash Chandra that the Aghor-Prakash family developed a loving and respectful relationship with Rabindranath, which Bidhan Chandra Roy did not allow to be tarnished. Rather, he deepened the relationship. Tagore, who possessed some extraordinary talents, knew how to appreciate the qualities of the talented people. Bidhan Chandra Roy, who became popular in various fields as a medical scientist, as a professor, as a public servant, gained respect and dignity in the field of politics in a short period of time as a result of his skill, ideals and honesty, drew the attention of Kabiguru. Bidhan Chandra was enriched by Rabindranath's affectionate wishes and blessings. Therefore, the Tagore family as well as Rabindranath Tagore had an impact on Dr. Roy since his childhood. Bidhan Chandra Roy has remembered it many times with respect. Besides, the family of Bidhan Chandra had close ties with the Brahmo leaders like Shivnath Shastri and Keshab Chandra Sen.<sup>4</sup>

Some say that Dr. Bidhan Chandra was a fan of Rabindranath since his student life. According to them, like Rabindranath, Bidhan Chandra Roy stayed away from the Boycott Movement in 1905, perhaps for this reason. Critics who are against this viewsay that Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy did not get involved in any movement in his student life for another reason. Firstly, his teacher Principal Lukis advised him not to join in this movement (Anti-partition Movement in Bengal). Secondly, his immense respect for Western civilization and culture compelled him to get attracted the British rule in his early days. As a student, he blindly followed the English manners like many others of the era. This proves his devotion to the British. Thirdly, he was able to keep himself free from any kind of religious orthodoxy. In this case, Bidhan Chandra is actually the successor of Tagore's sensibility. Rabindranath freed himself from the pit of religious

orthodoxy on his own initiative. At this time he was sincerely looking for a way to solve the real problems of Bengal as well as India. Professor Jyotirmoy Ghosh writes, “The salvation of ‘Gora’ from the pit of narrow communalism and religious orthodoxy is the result of the efforts of salvation of his creator Rabindranath...As a result, he was looking for a way to solve the real problems with great passion and sincerity. He explored a noble ideal...”<sup>5</sup> Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy undoubtedly applied this great ideal of Kabiguru in his life and work.

Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy came in direct contact with Kabiguru after the death of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das in 1925. When Deshbandhu breathed his last in June 1925, Mahata Gandhi, like Dr. Roy, was deeply shocked. On his own initiative, Chittaranjan’s deadbody was brought from Darjeeling to be cremated at Keoratala Ghat. Then Gandhi took the initiative to commemorate him. It was decided that the residence of Chittaranjan Das will be converted into a women’s medical centre. A lot of money was needed for this purpose. It was decided that the money will be collected by selling a printed photograph of Deshbandhu’s lying body. It was recommended that something written by Tagore will be attached to the photo of Deshbandhu. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was entrusted with the task of collecting the lines from Tagore. Dr. Roy visited Tagore at his house in Jorasanko and made the request. Hearing this, Kabiguru told Dr. Roy, “Hey doctor, is it as same as treating a patient that the writing will come out like a prescription from the tip of the pen when the stethoscope is placed on the chest.” Then he said, “Wait, let’s see what I can do.” Saying this, he went up to the first floor leaving Dr. Roy on the ground floor. Half an hour later he came down and handed over the famous eternal lines to Dr. Roy:

“Enechhile sathe kore mrityuheen pran:

Morone tahai tumi kore gele daan.”

(The life, eternal, you brought along;

You’ve given us away at your swansong.)<sup>6</sup>

Bidhan Chandra was overwhelmed to see how the deep but touching thoughts could be accommodated in the two rhythmic lines. Rabindranath said many more things to Dr. Roy when he gave him the lines. He spoke of the unique difference between the ‘poet’ and the ‘prophet’. The poet further said, what he wrote often emanated from his mind. At that time, he didn’t have any control over his mind. Dr. Roy later mentioned this in a speech. He was fascinated by this wonderful interpretation and Tagore became his ideal. Dr. Roy said to his famous administrator and the secretary and commissioner of the Department of Refugee Rehabilitation, Hiranmoy

Banerjee, “There is something in this man, we have to understand him properly.”<sup>7</sup>

Kabiguru had deep confidence on the treatment method and efficiency of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. That’s why, when he fell ill, Dr. Roy was often called along with Dr. Nilratan Sircar. On September 10, 1937, the poet got recovered from erysipelas treated by Bidhan Chandra. Three years later, in September 1940, the poet went to Kalimpong and fell ill. On hearing the news, his secretary Shri Anil Chandra and Prashant Chandra Mahalanbis arrived Kalimpong on September 28, with three eminent doctors (Dr. Amiya Basu, Dr. Satyasakha Maitra and Dr. Jyotiprakash Sarkar) from Calcutta. The three doctors diagnosed the poet and declared that the poet must be operated immediately. According to them, Kabiguru was suffering from kidney trouble. On the same day he was brought to Calcutta under the supervision of the three doctors. The poet arrived Calcutta on 29 September and was immediately taken to his residence in Jorasanko by an ambulance. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy examined the poet. Then two doctors - Dr. P.N. Roy and Dr. Dinesh Chandra Chakraborty also examined him. The three discussed and came to the decision that there was no necessity of operating the poet. At this time, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy used to visit the poet once a day. On Dr. Roy’s advice, the details of Kabiguru’s physical condition was brought out in the bulletin on a regular basis. Mahatma Gandhi sent his secretary Mahadev Desai to Calcutta with a letter addressed to Gurudev. Gandhiji wrote:

Delhi; Oct.1

Dear Gurudev,

You must stay yet a while. Humanity needs you. I was pleased beyond measure to find that you were better.

With Love

Yours

M.K. Gandhi<sup>8</sup>

Towards the end of 1941, the poet fell ill again in Santiniketan. His temperature started rising daily. Day by day his condition worsened and he was bedridden due to weakness. On July 1, the renowned ayurvedic practitioner Shri Bimalananda Tarkatirtha arrived Santiniketan from Calcutta to take the charge of Kabiguru’s treatment. Although the poet responded to ayurvedic treatment, his illness recurred on July 13. On that day, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy left for Santiniketan. On

July 26, the poet was brought to Calcutta for treatment. On July 30, he underwent an operation on the advice of the doctors. The poet needed surgery for bladder disease. But after the operation, the poet's physical condition did not improve much. The anxiety and concern of Dr. Roy and his fellow physicians increased. At ten o'clock on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, Dr. Roy and Dr. L.M. Banerjee examined the poet and declared that his physical condition was poor. Countless devotees of the poet started assembling in Jorasanko just to pay respect to their lord of life. Bidhusekhar sat at Gurudev's feet and started chanting hymns. Everyone's eyes were filled with tears. The moment of Gurudev's death was gradually coming forward. The heart that once danced like a peacock stopped beating at 12:10. At the age of 81, a great life came to an end.

The poet passed away, but Bidhan Chandra Roy did not take a break from his duty. Because the relationship between the two was not limited to the patient and the doctor. Their relation is deeply rooted in affection, love and respect. Nagendra Kumar Guharoy writes, "The bright sun of the Indian sky set forever. The whole country was grief-stricken. When their grief subsided, the thought arose in the mind of the intellectuals, erudites, scholars, tribunes, social workers and countless devotees of the poet, how to save the institutions of Kabiguru and develop them. Undoubtedly, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was one of those citizens. After the demise of the poet, the thoughts related to Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan and Sriniketan arose more and more in his mind."<sup>9</sup> During the poet's lifetime, the Dr. Roy's reverence for him and his relentless efforts to nurture his ideals were not revealed. After Kabiguru's death, Dr. Roy's attempts seemed to show his sense of duty towards to poet. To him, Kabiguru was a memorable person. A religious music of Kabiguru had such a great effect on Bidhan Roy that he recited it in the morning while worshipping. When the worship was over, his busy schedule started. The song is:

“Protidino aami, he jibanoswami, dnaarabo tomari sammukhe  
Kori jorokoro, he bhubaneshwaro, dnaarabo tomari sammukhe.  
Tomaro apaar aakashero tole bijone birole he-  
Namro hridaye nayonero jole dnaarabo tomari sammukhe.  
Tomaro bichitro e bhabosongsare karmoparabaropaare he-  
Nikhilo bhubonloker maajhere dnaarabo tomari sammukhe,  
Tomar e bhabe mammo karmo jabe samaapan habe he.  
Ogo raajoraaj, ekaki nirabe dnaarabo tomari sammukhe”<sup>10</sup>

(Day after day, O lord of my life, shall I stand before thee face to face.  
With folded hands, O lord of all worlds, shall I stand before thee face to face.  
Under thy great sky in solitude and silence,  
With humble heart shall I stand before thee face to face.  
In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil and with struggle,  
Among hurrying crowds shall I stand before thee face to face.  
And when my work shall be done in this world, O King of kings,  
Alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face.)

Then on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1948, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy took oath as the Chief Minister of West Bengal. Since the beginning of the rule of Dr. Roy's cabinet, adequate financial support has been provided to Tagore's dream - Visva Bharati and Sriniketan. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy has contributed a lot to the transformation of Visva Bharati into an independent university. Dr. Roy, while delivering his informative speech at the convocation ceremony of Visva Bharati University on December 24, 1954, he not only paid homage to the ideals of the poet but also left a mark on the pages of history. In his speech, he highlighted the history of the foundation of Santiniketan as well as gave a vivid picture of the education system initiated by Tagore based on the idea of the Tapovan of the sages of ancient India. Dr. Roy said that Rabindranath established the first school in Santiniketan in 1901 based on the idea of Tapovan. In his speech, Dr. Roy referred to the past history of Santiniketan and analysed the contemporary education system of India with impartiality. He was quite sure that the views of Tagore and the path shown by him would bring immense prosperity to the nation. Dr. Roy highlighted that the poet showed the students the way of victory in the battle of life with the help of scientific and craft-centred education, although he established the school in Santiniketan based on the ideals of Tapovan. Despite the establishment of the Brahmacharya Vidyalaya, Rabindranath joined the National Council of Education - Bengal wholeheartedly. In April 1919, Tagore proposed to rename his ideal school as Visva Bharati. Dr. Roy quoted Rabindranath Tagore in his speech. "Our new school is not on the soil of the country. It is hanging on the branches of a foreign tree like a climber. If a true school is established in India, the school will secure the central position in the Nation's livelihood from its very beginning by applying its economics, agriculture, medical science, applied sciences all around its

area. The school will cultivate the best ideals, rear animals, weave clothes; and will deeply be involved in the livelihood of the students, teachers and the residents of the area by adopting the co-operative system for their own financial profit...I have proposed to name such an ideal school as Visva Bharati."<sup>11</sup> Visva Bharati was officially established on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1919. Dr. Roy, in his speech, also informed the people about the purpose of the establishment of Visva Bharati and its gradual development.

Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy took the initiative to build new industries to make the campaign in Bengal more impressive and also paid equal attention in establishing training institutes. He was eager to set up a university at Thakurbari (Jorasanko) to preserve the memory of Rabindranath. But he came to know that Rabindranath's son Rathindranath had expressed his desire to rent the share of the poet in the house at Jorasanko. Dr. Roy could not even imagine that outsiders would come to live in the house that carried the memories of Tagore. He decided to acquire the property of all the shareholders of Thakurbari and set up a university there in the name of Rabindranath; it will be known as Rabindra Bharati University. Although Rabindra Bharati Society had already been established and they took the initiative to preserve the property of Tagore for the sake of the nation. Dr. Suresh Chandra Majumder was the first to take initiative in this matter. However, the construction of Rabindra Bharati University started when the plan was finalized. In 1961, while speaking about the role of Rabindra Bharati University, Dr. Roy mentioned that the aim of the university established at Thakurbari is the advancement of learning and culture particularly in the branches of music, fine arts, dance and drama.<sup>12</sup> He said that that the university will conduct research on Tagore along with general education. Dr. Roy did not want the university to be a mere institution of learning performing arts and fine arts. He opines that the Academy is doing the same.

There was a lot of speculation about the future role of Rabindra Bharati University or whether there would be any conflict between Visva Bharati and Rabindra Bharati. But Dr. Roy made it clear that there was no space for conflict between Visva Bharati and Rabindra Bharati as they would play different roles. Visva Bharati would play a role to facilitate the exchange of spiritual resources in the international arena in a natural environment. On the other side, Rabindra Bharati would be dedicated to the mission of disseminating the thoughts and ideas of Tagore by providing general education and offering higher learning in dance, music and acting as well as enriching the culture of Bengal. Moreover, it would help to know Tagore by discovering the

spiritual theories underlying in Tagore's works. Therefore, the role of the two institutions would be complementary to each other. On Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's request, Hiranmoy Bandopadhyaya took charge as the first Vice-chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University on May 8, 1962 (25<sup>th</sup> Baisakh, 1339). Dr. Roy could not see the full-fledged development of the university as he breathed his last on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, in the same year. On December 31, 1968, when Hiranmoy Bandopadhyaya retired from the post of the Vice-chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University, he said, "I have somehow fulfilled the responsibility given to me by Dr. Roy, six years ago. With his blessings, Rabindra Bharati has now become a full-fledged university, passing through various obstacles. So, its future security can be assured to a certain extent now."<sup>13</sup>

The development of personality and mental structure of any human being depends on the circumstances. Bidhan Chandra too was not an exception. Bidhan Chandra Roy witnessed a conjuncture. It was a period of conflict and co-ordination between the thoughts and ideals of different schools. Dr. Roy, in the midst of the tension between those different ideologies, developed and even refined his personality. Although the Brahmo Samaj Movement under the leadership of Rammohan, Debendranath and Keshab Chandra was able to spread its ideologies at that time, it failed to gain popularity due to its internal conflict, its mentality of staying isolated by ignoring Hinduism and the Hindu society, its insurmountable distance from the lower classes of the society. Conflicts between the leaders of the Samaj have repeatedly pushed the Brahmo Samaj to the brink of collapse. Just as this backdrop did not attract Rabindranath to the Brahmo Samaj, it failed to make Dr. Roy an intent devotee of Brahmo Samaj. But both the personalities were influenced by the ideology of co-ordination. Nilendu Sengupta writes, "The similarity of Bidhan Chandra's physical structure with his nature, draws our attention. His personality was upright like his body structure. It is natural for us to be curious about the background of this upright personality and characteristics."<sup>14</sup> Neither Rabindranath nor Bidhan Chandra could deny the backdrop of the time and the nation. There was an idea of the age of Renaissance that retrospection and the ancient Indian civilization and culture is the only way to liberate the country. Though he was a Brahmo on the influence of father Debendranath Tagore, Rabindranath sang the glory of the caste system.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the religious orthodoxy of Hinduism made a way into Tagore's mind. However, he was soon disillusioned. He was able to free himself from religious orthodoxy.

On the other hand, we see the entry of another trend in Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy in his



early days. He started imitating the West like many others. He imitated the West in manners, clothing, ideals; even in the case of his own name he imitated the West. (He called himself as Benjamin Charles Roy). But in a few days he also changed. He became a believer of integrative ideology and individualism. There is no doubt that a follower of Rabindranath in his personal life. He had immense attraction towards Rabindra Sangeet and the literary works of Tagore. As a Chief Minister, he made many dreams of Tagore come true and used the property of Thakurbari for a noble purpose. He said, “We have to know Rabindranath properly and the great wealth he has left must be discovered and propagated.”<sup>16</sup> Although Bidhan Chandra was influenced by the humanist ideology, rational and scientific thoughts of Tagore, he did not always follow the path shown by him. Rabindranath had trust on the panchayati social system. But Dr. Bidhan Chandra had not shown so interest in rural development, land reformation, mass education and small industries, as he had shown in modern industrialization and urbanization. In this case, he followed the Nehru model, not the Gandhi and Tagore model. However, both Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and Rabindranath Tagore were believer of individuality; they were humanist and internationalist. Both of them were the critics of extremist nationalism. Both criticized the narrowness and thoughtlessness of the political activities of the country. Both were the believers of reformism and modernism.

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