

Towards One World:
A Journey Through the English Essays of Rabindranath Tagore

Submitted by Christine Elizabeth Marsh, to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English
in April 2013

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Abstract

Tagore is viewed through the medium of five books of essays which he wrote in English. Most of the essays are the texts of lectures Tagore delivered to audiences in England and America. They are important because they constitute what Tagore actually communicated to audiences and readers in the West during his tours outside India. The five books are taken chronologically in the chapters of this thesis, each one being a stage on Tagore's journey. They are read in conjunction with information about his activities in India prior to each particular tour, his encounters during the trip, and any relevant correspondence, in order better to understand the ideas he expresses. A key finding from close study of the essays is the extent to which Tagore draws on his understanding of the evolution and special capabilities of the human species. This philosophical anthropology, or 'deep anthropology', is used to describe what mankind ought to be, as well as what we are. Tagore was critical of what he considered the dehumanising economic systems of the West, which were supported by educational methods that focussed narrowly on training people to participate in such systems. The ideal behind the design of Tagore's own practical projects was a modernised and less restrictive form of traditional society, comprising networks of self sustaining villages or small communities, where children and young people are encouraged to develop their natural curiosity and creativity, and to express themselves freely with body and mind. Tagore's approach to education and rural reconstruction, if implemented widely as he intended, could lead to a radical redesign of society, a turning of the world upside down. The aim of my dissertation is to help encourage a wider appreciation of Tagore's pioneering work in this field.

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