

A Study of Humanism in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract - Humanism is considered as most influential term and it is a moral and intellectual concept. Humanistic philosophy emphasis that all human beings are born with moral value, and have a responsibility to help one another live better life. Rabindranath Tagore's humanism and its significance in contemporary society are the focus of this study. The name Rabindranath Tagore is synonymous with modern Indian literature, and it was he who first established modern India's literary reputation around the world. As one of India's greatest literary masters, Tagore had a significant impact on the history of the Indian Renaissance in the early twentieth century. Tagore had a major impact on the rise of humanism in the early part of the twentieth century literature. His personality and beliefs of humanism were shaped by a variety of factors. Interpersonal relationships are at the heart of Tagore's humanism. Tagore's theory of humanism is universal since it analyzes the universal nature and creative existence of man. Rabindranath Tagore Philosophy of humanism can be studied in the light of his basic concept like Surplus in Man, concept of freedom and religion of man. The relevance of Tagore Humanism in today's society shall be the topic of this paper.

Keywords - Humanism, humanist philosophy, Freedom, Religion of man and Inter-personal Relationship.

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INTRODUCTION

The nature of Indian humanism is spiritualistic. Indian humanists give importance to spiritual ethical nature of man; whereas Western humanists though do not reject the importance of ethics for human beings, give more importance to material nature of man than to spiritual. The humanism of RabindraNath is influenced by Renaissance humanists, still his humanism resembles Indian humanism of Upanishads, Buddhism and Vaisnavism, and therefore is spiritual in its nature. Though Tagore gives equal importance to man's economic, political and social welfare, he looks at these problems from spiritual viewpoint. Any attempt, made for welfare of mankind is to him adequate where it helps to reveal the spiritual and ethical nature of man. Man is accorded highest place in the world because he has spirit in him. Man is replica of the Divine spirit, the ultimate consciousness is revealed in man. Tagore has seen the great 'purusa' the universal spirit manifested in man who is one; the poet has seen him in many. Therefore, we see, there is no conflict between his spiritualism and humanism. His spiritualism does not make him reluctant of world and man, but brings him nearest to man. Belief in spirituality is translated into love for humanity. For realizing the spirit in himself man does not have to go to any supernatural world, but in this worldly existence he realizes spiritual nature of him. The aim of spiritual discipline for Tagore is to enter into the hearts of all men. Tagore believes in harmony between man, nature and the universal spirit. Therefore, he says, "From grass to man, where ever in the world my mind becomes indifferent, there my spirituality becomes limited. When our consciousness, our spirit get diffused in the whole world then we feel all consciousness with our consciousness.

Tagore is rationalist humanist. His belief in spirituality of man does not make him non-believer of rational power of man. He gives importance to reason and so is against any prejudice and pre-conceived motion, be it of religious sect or narrow nationalism. Tagore accepts the reality of the two, man and God, but man for him is great because God is present in him. He says that when we insult man we insult God, who dwells in the heart of every man. He believes that God has created the world but man will have to give it meaning by making it

charged with values. Man's truth is grounded on his own greatness and perfectness. He is purifying himself more and more through many births and this God also is becoming greater with the purification of Himself. Thus in this period, man has become more real to him than God.

CONCEPT OF MAN

Rabindranath Tagore accepts the 'degree of reality' while talking about the mysteries of creation. The Supreme has been conceived as the unity of the manifold. He gives the analogy of a musical instrument like this to express the fact of gradation- God has many strings in his Sitar, some are made of iron, others of copper and yet others are made of gold. Man has been at times described as the golden string of God Sitar. Tagore talks about the superiority of man over other aspects of creation.

Tagore conceives man in such a manner that without affecting the Goodness of God, he gives to man also a special dignity and uniqueness. He traces the history of evolution of life and shows that with the advent of man evolution itself strikes a different note. Before man appeared on earth, evolution proceeded more or less in a mechanical manner. But with the advent of man there appears a significant change in the nature of the evolutionary process. Because man is not a tool in the hand of the physical forces. He has the power to change the matter of his behaviour and responses. Evolution changes its course with the evolution of man and it goes beyond the mechanical and the physical level and enters into spiritual level. This change is because of a peculiarity with which man appears on the earth that is the Surplus in him. This Surplus enables man to transcend his limitations from which other animals can never free themselves.

Man is conceived by Rabindranath Tagore as earth's child but heaven's heir. Tagore says that and insight into the nature of man clearly reveals the fact that there are two essential aspects of his nature- a finite and infinite, the physical and the spiritual. The physical is determinable in terms of biological, physiological and psychological facts, the spiritual is expressed in longings and aspirations that are not rooted in these considerations, that are aspirations of a higher kind. Tagore is critical to those thinkers who deny the reality of the finite self. Because the finite self represents the self which lives and moves in this world. A rejection of the finite self will naturally mean a rejection of the infinite self also, because it is in and through which the infinite is sought to be realised. On the other hand the infinite aspect of man's nature has been variously described by Rabindranath Tagore the 'Universal in Man', 'the Surplus in Man', the element of divinity present in man and so on. The most obvious character of man is that it constantly impels the individual to go beyond on account of this aspect of his nature that man has a yearning for mukti or immortality.

IMPORTANCE OF HUMANISM

Tagore was considered as a great humanist. In his literary works, Tagore expresses the universal humanism. He gives importance on all round development of women and the poor people of Bengali. Tagore declares that Man is the architect of his own destiny. Tagore rejected the concept of hedonism and utilitarianism. He believes in the intellectuality and morality of human being. Tagore does not accept the existence of God as an absolute truth. He believes that this universe is not created by God, it is considered as the universe of human beings. According to him "In the large life of social communism, man feels the mystery of unity, as he does it music. From the sense of their unity, men come to the sense of their God."

According to Tagore, "In today's eternity none of us are different from another but rather we should have feelings that every human being is identical between each other. We should not possess any vicious feelings about others." Tagore expressed that service to mankind is service to God. In "Gitanjali", Tagore expresses a humanistic thought, it is purely humanistic. He writes in "Gitanjali"-

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground

And where the path maker is breaking the stones

He is with them in Sun and Shower

And his garment is covered with dust

Put off thy holy mantel and even like him

Come down on the dusty soil Deliverance?

Where is this deliverance to be found?

Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation he is bound with us all forever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense

What harm is there if they cloths become tattered and stained?

Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

HUMANISM OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Rabindranath Tagore the contemporary Indian Philosopher was an apostle of humanism who without harming the humanity of man has given it a divine status and without harming the divinity of God has given it a human touch. Tagore in the first chapter of his work 'Religion of Man' writes that- "The idea of the humanity of our God or the divinity of Man, the Eternal, is the main subject of this book". Rabindranath philosophy of humanism can be studied in the light of his basic concepts like Surplus in Man, concept of freedom and religion of man.

Rabindranath Tagore observes Man as the highest evolutionary product, the cream of creation. He traces the history of evolution of life and shows that with the advent of man evolution strikes a new turn. Before man appeared on earth evolution proceeds more or less, in a mechanical manner. But with the advent of man there appears a significant change in the nature of the evolutionary process. The responses of every other product of evolution are determined by the environmental factors and the physical forces, their patterns of response and behaviour can be rigidly determined and forestalled. But man is not a tool in the hand of the physical forces. It is with the appearance of man that this rigidity, this pattern of behaviour change with the appearance of man evolution changes its course and goes beyond the mechanical and physical level and enters into a spiritual level.

Tagore is critical to those thinkers who deny the reality of the finite self. The finite self represents the self which lives and moves in the world. So it cannot be an illusion. Tagore says that a rejection of the finite self will naturally mean a rejection of the infinite self also, because it is in and through the finite that the infinite is sought to be realised. Tagore praised his due owner even to man's biological facilities, with the four footed structure in the lower animals it is much easier to resist the downward push of gravitational force. But man makes somehow his hand free, acquired the capacity to stand out, to turn his eyes on all sides. Man gain freedom of action with his hands, freedom of view with his eyes, in his high vertical position. Thus man could get his freedom of action and vision by his biological structure itself.

But it is not the whole picture of man. Man gains a mental freedom due his capacity of imagination. Man cannot rest content only with accomplishing what convinces to the preservation and enjoyment of mundane existence. All the products of imagination-science, philosophy, art, and ethics are the creations of man's free will. For preservation or satisfaction of the biological structure of man these products are not needed at all. But man's capacities are guided by his Surplus. It so becomes that he begins to give more importance to his Surplus than his base necessities. It is the Surplus which expresses through the autonomous unnecessary act of studying the Stars, the poets composition of rhythmic words. These acts are additional or Surplus or they do not satisfy one's hunger or thirst or other organs needs. In these phase man works not to fulfill his imaginary and ideal realm. According to Rabindranath this ideal realm, the realm of the Surplus, the philosopher of observes is express differently in different ages by different mentality. Beginning from the crude savage stage to the highly criticized state of today human beings have been trying to get the answer to question "what have truly is as a man?". Man has taken centuries to discuss the question of his own identity, but has not come to a conclusive

answer with his unique endeavour. Its acts reveal the Surplus. The expression of the perfection and identity in man through different means as like the case of the formation of the Roman empire or in the form of different religious institutions. Whatever may be means through these diverse processes man tries to assert that he is something that his actual achievements.

Man finds himself as a traveller in the changeful path of human civilization and culture. His activities are change from time to time but these changes do not occur in a seasonal or natural way. Human beings are not satisfied with one particular stereo type form of expression. The most obvious character of the infinite aspect of man is that it constantly impels the individual to go beyond. There are nothing which can finely arrest his energy. There is no goal in life, that does not induce man to go ahead. There is at the same time no task which is completely impossible for man. He may attempt and fail but even failure prompt him to make renewed efforts.

Rabindranath Tagore develops his philosophy of humanism in his book 'Religion of Man' the poet says " Let me assert my faith by saying that this world consisting of what we all animate and inanimate things has found its culmination is man, its best expression. Man as a creation represents the creator and this is why of all creators it has been possible for him to comprehend this world in his imagination to realise in his individual spirit union with a spirit that is everywhere. Again he says in Sadhana, "Man is not entirely an animal, he aspires to a spiritual vision which is the vision of the whole truth. This gives him the highest delight because it reveals to him the deepest harmony that exists between him and his surroundings".

Tagore's philosophy definitely humanistic, love for human being is central note. The sub title of his work 'Sadhana' the series of lecture derived in Herbert University is realization of life. A lover of the upanishadic tradition, the poet meditates on the concept of self-realization. But he does it not only from our contemporary standpoint but also from his unique vision. He says self-realization will be possible only through social action in the spirit of love. It can never be attaining in isolation. The poet sings in his 'Gitanjali'-He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stone.

To the humanist Rabindranath a true civilization is present only where rules he profoundest and noblest spirit of humanity. He says in 'Sadhana'- "Civilization must be judge and praised not by the amount of power it has developed but by how much it has evolved and give an expression to by its laws and institution. The love of humanity , the first question and the last it has to answer is whether and for it recognises man more as a spirit than as a machine". Tagore himself admits that, "We have great faith in humanity like the Sun, it can be clouded but never extinguished.....we are waiting for the time when the spirit of age will be incarnated in a complete human truth and the meeting of men will be translated into the unity of man".

FREEDOM OF MAN

Human progress is impossible without the pursuit of personal autonomy. A naturalist and an educator, he aspired to see education as a means of bringing a child's intellect into direct contact with nature. It was his belief that "Education has its only meaning and object in freedom from ignorance about the laws of the universe and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world." The main theme of Tagore's philosophy was man of God. Man enjoys some amount of freedom even in the physical realm. But according to Tagore, this freedom is inside a cage. The physical man is basically limited by the physical body.

The spiritual freedom that Tagore speaks of is the freedom that comes from man's unlimited essence. It frees oneself from the limitations of one's physical body and seeks to achieve oneness or unity. The realization of the Universal within the individual is the only way to achieve complete freedom.

INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

The Inter-personal Relationship of the I and Thou relationship in Tagore's humanistic thoughts. The assertion of the primordial relationship is the essence of Tagore's humanism; and he calls his humanism the Religion of Man. But the term, 'Religion', does not suggest that man is under the control of an infinite spiritual being like God. The function of religion is to bring the individual into concord in reason, in love, indeed with the Supreme

Man, the Universal being. The reality of the Supreme Person is as much dependent upon the personal being as the latter is dependent upon the former. So God is also a personal being like man.

Tagore believed that the state of realize our relationship with all through the union with the divine is the ultimate end and fulfillment of humanity. Therefore, the spirit of One in God has the many for the realization of the unity and the truth behind this spiritual union is love. He thinks that man is above all a lover, his freedom and fulfillment is in love, which is another name for perfect comprehension. By this power of comprehension, this permeation of his being, he is united with the all-pervading spirit. Through love, human society is for the best expression of man, and that expression, according to its perfection, leads him to the full realization of the divine in humanity.

The moral development lies in man's growth to his unselfish and true self through good and desirable acts. In his moral life, man has the sense of obligation and his freedom at the same time. Morality relates to conduct which essentially is a function of our will. Morality cannot be reduced to mere good conduct. It is a way of attaining to what one ought to be through right or good doing. Morality consists in being good through good action. Such action is possible through discrimination between the desired and the desirable. Selfishness or egoism is normally desired, but it is not desirable because it hinders the proper development of social relationship and the growth of the true self of man.

Tagore equates love with truth and truth with beauty. He says that it is only when one can detach from the narrow boundaries of selfishness, can one have a true vision of the beauty, which is omnipresent and realize its everlasting relation with truth. This is the ultimate object of our existence, that we must ever know that 'beauty is truth, truth beauty'; we must realise the whole world in love, for love gives its birth, sustains it, and takes it back to the bosom. Tagore thinks that there is no other concept of truth, except human truth. The entire universe is linked up with us, and it indicates that the truth of the universe is the human truth. Tagore believes that truth and beauty are also dependent upon man.

Beauty is in the ideal of perfect harmony which is in the Universal Being; Truth the perfect comprehension of the Universal Mind. We individuals approach it through our accumulated experience, through our illumined consciousness. It is pertinent to discuss here the conversations of Tagore and Tagore believes in the Gītā's concept of freedom; true freedom is not the freedom from action but freedom in action. He says that there may be two types of freedom — outer and inner, where outer freedom is the freedom from the guidance of pleasure and pain, and inner freedom is from the narrowness of self-desire. We have our own freedom of will, which can only find its true meaning in relation to the freedom of other wills. The more our will is freed and widened, the stronger our relationship with the universal world of reason. This is the bond of union through which man is related to the world and he feels an exceeding joy through this communion.

There is a popular belief that Tagore's idea may be roughly coined as spiritualistic. At least, by going through some of his writings, one may have such a perception. But this will not be a complete interpretation about him. While Tagore's thoughts can be considered spiritual but it is not a mysticism of irrationality. Spiritualism of Tagore is not equivalent to Godliness. His God manifests himself in the divinity of man.

CONCLUSION

Indian philosophical thought is heavily influenced by Tagore's Humanism philosophy. He is regarded as a significant character in the Humanism movement because of his writings, which express this philosophy. It doesn't detract from his achievements as an artist or writer because he is a dedicated advocate for human rights. While finding the ultimate truth that will free us from the cycle of birth and death is crucial, Tagore's idealistic beliefs are more important in our daily lives. Tagore viewed nationalism as a recurring menace to humanity since it trampled over the human spirit, morals, and movement, concealing his human side under the shadow of soulless organization.

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