

HUMANISTIC APPROACHES IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Abstract: Rabindranath Tagore is the most outstanding name in modern Bengali literature. He is indisputably one of the most renowned writers in Indian English literature. He is a prolific writer and versatile genius. The range and variety of his achievement are quite astonishing. His active literary career extended over 65 years. He wrote primarily in Bengali, most of his works later came in to English either through the translation by the author himself or by others. Thus his works consist of thirty plays, twelve novels, two thousand poems, two thousand essays and hundreds of letters, lectures on variety of subjects.

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Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore(1861-1941) was a renowned poet, writer, novelist, philosopher, dramatist, essayist and a prophet. He was the youngest son of Maharishi Debendranath who was the pioneer of the Brahma Samaj and strived to bring into the society, a monistic view of religion. This multitalented personality also composed the National Anthem of India. Apart from 'Jana Gana Mana' he also composed 'Amar Shonar Bangla' which means 'my Golden Bengal' which was adopted as the National Anthem of Bangladesh. The National Anthem of Sri Lanka was also taken from one of his works. Popularly known by his sobriquets Gurudev, Kaviguru, Biswakavi he is sometimes referred to as the 'Bard of Bengal'. Rabindranath Tagore also known as "a citizen of the world", "a liberated spirit", and "an ecumenical (universal) man" was an ardent advocate of humanitarian universalism. He was not only the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 but also one of the four founders of Modern India, the other three of the great quartet being Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and B.R. Ambedkar. He dreamt of a harmony of universal humanity among people of different origins through freedom of mind and spiritual sovereignty. Rabindranath Tagore played a very significant role in promulgating humanism at the beginning of the 20th century.

The word 'humanism' is derived from the Latin word 'humanus' which means human being. It is a system of thought which recognizes the man as the centre and asserts the dignity of a human being. Humanism

is an attempt to uplift human beings in all fields - social, economic, and political and aspires to the welfare and progress of humanity. Tagore laid emphasis on the development of human personality by negating the so-called opposites of flesh or spirit, human or divine, and reconciling the apparently discordant elements to attain the symphony or harmony. In other words, he believed in the divinity of man and the humanity of God. In fact, he preached the religion of man and urged not to renounce the world and the same faith runs through almost all the works of Tagore.

The idea of the human, which played a central role in the thought-world of Rabindranath Tagore, was invoked by him in 'Sabhyatār sangat' ('Crisis in Civilization', 1941), his last address in Santiniketan, to envisage a possible future on the other side of a global civilizational crisis:

Tagore did not live to see the full genocidal impact of the Nazi regime, but had he done, he might still not have endorsed the anti-humanist sweep of Adorno's famous observation on the silencing of poetry, the most refined expression of human language: '[T]o write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today.' To revivify civilization cannot be anything but a human project; crisis, however deep, can only be contested in Rabindranath's thinking by the figure of the human. Yet the idea of the human, at least in its essentialist formulation, has been under severe

pressure in recent times. The attack took its sustenance from Nietzsche, one of the first architects of the anti-humanist gesture.

In European modernity, the human, in its essentialist formulation, travels from Renaissance painters and thinkers to the Cartesian discovery of the centred *cogito* to the ethics of human dignity propounded by Kant. Each of these conceptions argues for a common presence of the human across histories and cultures, subverting the idea of difference. Nietzsche famously questioned this idea of 'man as an *aeterna veritas* [eternal truth], as something constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things' by noting the lack of historical sense in philosophers and concluding that there are no eternal facts, just as there are no absolute truths.

Man and Universe

Indian philosophy has always been concerned with an enquiry into the nature of man, his destiny his place in the world, his personality as a social being, religious being, ethical being, finite being, infinite being, cultural being, the relation of man to man, human welfare i.e. humanism. . Ancient scriptures are replete with the humanistic ideas. The supremacy of man can be seen emphasised in a number of instances in the ancient literature where the welfare of mankind is considered to be the central theme. The essence of Indian humanism is 'Ayamatma Brahma' (I am Brahman) and the prayer consequent to it, Lokasamasta sukhinobhavantu." (Syamala 10-11) Indian humanists are interested in the self of man. "Atmanan Viddhi"- "know thy self" is their direction. In India, the fundamental aspiration of man is to realise his best self. As it is stated by Dr S. Radhakrishnan: "In recognising the central importance of man in the scheme of things - and emphasizing his freedom and individuality, and creative power - his role in shaping and moulding his environment with a view of making a better and happier world, humanism preached the gospel of activism, full of hope and promise for the future of mankind - a philosophy likely to rescue man from the slough of despondency and vivify him with self - confidence and faith in his own power as the shaper, not only of his own destiny, but as one who is also destined to play an effective part in the larger field of human welfare and progress." (Qtd in SATYANARAYANA and HARI HARA RAJU 67) Tagore was a humanist who proposed a philosophy of life which is spiritual in its perspective. In Personality Tagore writes: I believe in a spiritual

world—not as anything separate from this world—but as its innermost truth. With the breath we draw we must always feel this truth, that we are living in God.(407) He avers that man is one with the universe and same spirit runs through all the elements of the universe. Man should not feel dissociated from the outside world rather feel the oneness , concord and harmony with it. Similarly in Sadhana: The Resalisation of life the author asserts:When a man does not realise his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison-house whose walls are alien to him. When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects , then is he emancipated, for then he discovers the fullest significance of the world into which he is born; then he finds himself in perfect truth , and his harmony with the all is established. (15) Thus he emphasises on the spiritual nature of man and denounces the mechanisation of the world. That is why in Nationalism in the West, he repudiates the concept of nation as he defines nation as "the political and economic union of people" and it is "that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose."(444) he denigrates it as the destructive force which leads to the dehumanization and mechanization of man leading to the formation of a soul-less organization. He also withdrew from the Indian national movements as he considered spiritual freedom would lead to emancipation of man. Spiritual freedom according to Tagore is freedom of the spirit to rise above the narrow self and realize kinship and unity with fellow-beings. According to Tagore freedom has to be global and not compartmental. "Freedom is a spiritual and mental phenomenon". Tagore asserts: "Real freedom is of the mind and spirit; it can never come to us from outside. He only has freedom who ideally loves freedom himself and is glad to extend it to others. He who cares to have slaves must chain himself to them; he who builds walls to create exclusion for others builds walls across his own freedom; he who distrusts freedom in others loses his moral right to it.(623-24)

Humanitarianism of Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore is a shining star of India's Renaissance, regarded as the sun of India, the great originator and the "pinnacle of human culture." Rabindranath Tagore entered the path of composing artistic literature very early when he was an 8-year-old boy. In 1913, when the Gitanjali was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, Tagore became a literary phenomenon who was interested and studied in and outside of India. Andre Gide commented: "I feel small and trivial in front of Tagore like Tagore feels small and trivial when singing in front of the God1 .

Nadim Hitmet commented that Tagore's works always contain the most "love of life, belief in life", he affirmed that "Tagore is still the very great among the greatest poets."² Speaking at the Nobel Prize award ceremony for literature for the Gitanjali, Per Hallstrom stated, "Since Goeth's death in 1832, no poet in Europe could compare with Tagore's noble personality, natural greatness and the harmonious purity."³ "A man of prodigious literary and artistic accomplishments, Tagore played a leading role in Indian cultural renaissance and came to be recognized, along with Mohandas Gandhi, as one of the architects of modern India. Tagore's career, extending over a period of more than sixty years, not only chronicled his personal growth and versatility but also reflected the artistic, cultural, and political vicissitudes of India in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century."⁴ In the introduction to the Gitanjali first appeared in the United Kingdom, W. Yeats emphasized that this work originated from a transcendental culture and that these poems were no different from the development of happy land and plants.⁵ In his opinion, it is the crystallization of Indian culture "for thousands of years of poetry and religion united and harmonious to be the one". From that point, he talked a lot about the special affection that Tagore has shown in his collection of poems — the simple affections in real life are a philosophical way of Tagore to the love for life and love for humanity

The Indian humanism is primarily Spiritual. "The Indian humanism does not take man to be material being but as one with spirit, mind, life and body. It aims at the fulfillment of the aspirations which are physical, vital, mental and spiritual in nature."⁶ Tagore's humanitarian spirit is the succession of the humanitarian tradition of the Indian people through the classical literature, from the Vedas, Upanishads, Buddhist scriptures to Kalidasa's poetry.¹ "The mysticism of Rabindranath Tagore blossomed on the soil of rich and complex religious influences, which became the fusion of his poetic interest."² He is also influenced by the Western humanism and renaissance culture "Thus Tagore's humanism is in tune with the renaissance humanism, the central focus of which is quite simply human beings."³ He acquires the positive values such as demanding the personal liberation, giving prominence to the self-discipline, fighting for freedom, demanding the justice and humanity for people. Of which, Tagore always believes in human love and gives prominence to the human values "Tagore introduces a process which is manifest in love; because it helps a man to develop his

infinity of existence through the relationship of the highest value of life."⁴ Tagore's compositions always overflow of love for human, give prominence to human values, pay attention to all areas of human life and "the idea of the human, which played a central role in the thought-world of Rabindranāth Tagore, was invoked by him in 'Sabhyatār sangkat' ('Crisis in Civilization', 1941)."⁵ He has condemned the society with backward conceptions, caste distinction, injustice, oppression and exploitation of the colonialist, causing the Indian people to undergo great suffering. At the same time, his works clearly shows the humanitarian spirit, the love for nature, country and Indian people, the love for humanity, the love for peace and the spirit against feudalism, colonialists, imperialist, and against wars. He advocates that the country should first liberate the human and the natural natures of human which are love and goodwill. "Spiritualism of Tagore is not equivalent to Godliness. His God manifests himself in the divinity of man."⁶

Rabindranath Tagore with Love for Children

Children are always the subject of Rabindranath Tagore to be portrayed with depth, viewed from the pure, innocent and beautiful aspects, comes from the "sincere feelings of their grandfather, father, teacher, who love them, believe in their future and teach everyone to keep the true, the good and the beautiful in children."¹ Researching Tagore's love for children, the researchers believe that: "In the Crescent moon Tagore depicts the beauty of Love of child" and "The child's Love of adventures and high achievement is equally beautifully described in his songs. Tagore's insight in to the child's hearts is equally admirable. Tagore shows how full of love for the mother the child is, and how to it she is the dearest thing in the world. The child's purity, trustfulness, innocence, and love for all — in fact the whole paradise of the child's moral nature is beautifully revealed to us in his poems. The mother's deep love for the child — that most wonderful and divine thing to which there is no paralleled the side of heaven — is well described by the poet."² Tagore is a person who understands the child psychology and, according to him, it is needed to educate them with love, which is the understanding of child psychology.³ Author Luu Duc Trung selected and introduced Tagore — a collection of works including two volumes. Of the 35 short stories presented, there are 21/35 short stories under the Clouds and Sunshine short stories collection. In the introduction, the author commented, "Tagore's short stories contain the great humanistic spirit."⁴ In Entering the Asian literary

garden, the author made remarkable comments on Clouds and Sun shine short stories collection and claims that realistic value and humanistic value are the core values of this collection. Short plot, some stories have just only a few pages, but the contents are concise, closely structured, dramatic, creating attractive stories. Tagore created works for children with the sincere feelings of a grandfather, a father, a teacher who loves children, believes in the future of children and wants to educate everyone to keep good values for children. Tagore was an expert in the psychology, emotions and dreams of children, so he described the diversity and abundance of children's personalities. In works for children, he always uses language, images and stories suitable for children. Children always like to be in harmony with nature, to have fun and joke around in that boundless world. Tagore paid attention to praising the innocent, honest and carefree personality of children: On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds, the children meet with shouts and dances.¹

The Philosophy of Men of Action

Dignifying human values, Tagore has made philosophies of men of action. The human of action in Tagore's poetry seeks to act inwardly, free himself from the constraints of religion. All catechisms of religion that regulate caste, reincarnation— karma, duty are obstacles preventing the human from coming to freedom. In order to be free and bring human to freedom, it is necessary to free the human soul from the obsession of such religious catechisms. By his passionate love to the life and great intelligence, Tagore has realized and explained the familiar problems of religion: The God, liberation, heaven, hell, life, death,... brings all the abstract, metaphysical problems to the concrete, attached to the life of human beings, to real life. In Tagore's poem, the image of human throughout his life is a long and tireless journey to the God, God is the center that people set great hopes and look forward to. In the great hope of every human being, the God bears the appearance of the supreme, mystical, distant power. But for Tagore, God is not far away but a source of joy, a source of comfort, a love that gives the human the ability to act. God is everywhere and is developing in an infinite life, developing in every human being. Tagore conceives that God is only an abstract idea but embodies multi forms of life. By his clairvoyance and the ability to flash, he has realized the beauty of the real world. Tagore's devotional verses are not intended to solve the abstract and

mysterious problems, but to pull back into real life and he asserts that the journey to God is the journey to the real world. The existing world is the embodiment of God, the human in his journey to God has no other way but immerses himself into the real world, into the human life "expressing the infinite in the finite" and absolutizing the spiritual connection between human and God. "Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord."² By this awareness, the human has made a great liberation of spirit, escaping from the ignorance, the binding of religion to immerse himself in life and realize the value of life. This is a selfconscious act of cognitive value, awakening human, from which impels the human towards building Nirvana not to be far but right on the earthly life.

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