

# RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS ON HUMANISM

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper is an attempt to describe the humanistic view of Rabindranath Tagore. India is the great seat of spirituality. The great vows of India are service, sacrifice and austerities. The worthy successor of this tradition is the sage-poet-philosopher Rabindranath. His deep insight showed that there is 'parabrahman' in man. The idea of human welfare will spontaneously inspire man only if who can properly realize this absolute, eternal being of the human heart. If someone keeps himself focused on his own welfare and well-being, he cannot be called a humanist. That is why Rabindranath says in Chitra's poem that those who are selfish are averse to the big world, he never learned to live. Rabindranath has established humanism in a philosophical framework through a series of writings in his book '*Religion of Man*'. In his book he writes human beings have humanity in addition to all the bodily life - that is '*manūṣyatva*'. According to Tagore those who realize the 'universal soul' they easily dedicate their life for human being or humanity. Clearly, in Rabindranath's humanism, the moral ideal of human welfare has been expressed. At the same time, the path of liberation that has been spoken of in Indian spiritual thought has also been sought. According to Rabindranath, the path to liberation is the path of connection with the world or realization of *Paramātmā*. Therefore, by removing all the smallness and isolation of the country and society, provide universal welfare, instead of fulfilling personal interest, men obtain to liberation. It the best way of worship is to provide universal welfare and service to the poor people. "*The welfare of mankind is the best religion*" - this is the essence of Rabindranath's humanism.

**KEYWORDS:** Humanism, *Jivan Devatā*, liberation, Religion of Man.

## INTRODUCTION:

Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore are most pronounced among the scholars of India who are referred to as the modern commentators of the Upanishads or Vedanta. Rabindranath was deeply influenced by the Upanishads.

*"Asato mā sad-gamaya  
Tamaso mā jyotir-gamaya |  
Mrtyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya  
Om shānti shānti shāntiḥ" ||1*

In the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad* we find that the *vedic ṛṣi*-s were praying not to keep them in the unreality and darkness, but to lead them towards the reality and light. They prayed to lead them toward the immortality. Rabindranath Tagore followed this Upanishad's view through all his actions, through all the ups and downs of life, even in his entire creative creation. In "*The Religion of Man*", Tagore described the desire for the union of the *jivātmā* with the *Parātmā*. For him it is the last desire and prayer of the human soul or *jivātmā*. However, when it comes to discussing Rabindranath's humanist thought, Rabindranath is a philosopher or a poet - a solution to this debate is needed. Rabindranath Tagore himself was reluctant to call himself a philosopher. In fact, Rabindranath was not only a writer; he was also an extraordinary lyricist, composer, singer, playwright and painter. He wrote many poems, novels, short stories, essays and plays. Therefore,

<sup>1</sup>*Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad*

there is no room for doubt that he is a poet. Again, Rabindranath's thought is so vast that it pervades all spheres of the world and life. There is nothing in human inquiry that is beyond Rabindranath's thought. One cannot think of Indian culture without the philosophical ideas that are hidden in Rabindranath's poetry and fine arts. There is no place for fragmented knowledge in Rabindranath's thought, he was a worshiper of unbroken knowledge, in this sense he is a philosopher. Therefore, it is reasonable to call Rabindranath Tagore a humanistic philosopher.

#### THE MEANING OF HUMANISM:

'The English word 'humanism' is derived from a Latin word 'humanitas'. The word 'humanitas' means – "the full development of life". So, what indicates the full development of human life is humanism. This is a doctrine that thinks only of the welfare of the people. This is the triumph of man as a human being, the triumph of humanity, which unites all human beings in the same formula and inspires them in the world consciousness. Humanism pushes the individual beyond his own boundaries and inspires the consciousness of the Absolute. Such consciousness of man is the full development of his inherent energy. Humanism encourages and inspires every man to awaken his own self-power. Thus, it can be said that the welfare of human society as a whole, not just the welfare of the individual or the nation, that is, beyond the realm of the ego; is considered Humanism.

#### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANISM:

The essence of humanism can be seen in the words of Pythagoras who is the sophist thinker of Ancient Greece. According to Protagoras, "Man is the measure of all things". This means that everything that exists or can exist in the world will be valued in terms of human needs and humanity. There are clear examples of humanist thoughts in the writings of Socrates, Martin Luther, August Cote, Russell, Satre and Gautam Buddha, Swami Vivekananda, Rammohan, Vidyasagar, Rabindranath and many more prominent persons. The main goal of humanism is to establish justice and welfare in the society through the domination or oppression of the people and the elimination of all kinds of social injustices. Humanism means love, friendship and brotherhood between people. According to Chandidās, "Sabār upor mānus satya tāhār upore nāi", that means above all is humanity, none else. Humanism has emerged through this line. Chaitanyadev, Lalon Fakir also sang the triumph of humanity. In fact, Rabindranath is also a successful successor of this genre. 'Khokābābura Pratyābartana', 'He mor dūrbhāgā deś', 'Duibighā Zami', 'Orā kaj kore', - in those poems Rabindranath has shown his deep sympathy and humanity towards human being.

#### SOURCE OF HUMANISM OF RABINDRANATH:

Rabindranath's family influence was immense in the development of Rabindranath's humanistic outlook. His family liberal tradition has helped a lot in his deep love for mankind and a positive outlook on human life. He realized that if man immersed himself in a world of personal petty and narrow interests, the greater humanity would be neglected; the realization of universal humanity could not take place. That is why he wanted to put aside caste and communal differences and establish a great love affair between nations.

The source of Rabindranath's humanism dates back to the time of composing 'Prabhāt Sangit' poetry. Here he said that –

*"Hriday āji mor kemone gelo khuli*

*Jagat āsi sethā koriche kolākūli"*

In the Upanishads it is said that 'Ātmānam biddhi' that means 'know yourself' Introspection is the greatest question of human beings. This is me, who am I? People have been searching for the answer to this question for hundreds of years, but no solution has been found. People are not explicitly - but in vague hints - they have realized that the answer to the question lies far beyond me. According to Rabindranath every human being there is a 'great self' and that 'great self' is 'the innermost self of the person'. In this context he said that-

*"Biśwasāthe joge jethāy bihāro*

*Seikhāne jog tumār sāthe āmāro |*

*Noyko bone; noy bijone ,noyko āmr āpon mone-*

*Sober jethāy āpon tumi, he prio sethāy āpon āmāro” |*

In the eyes of Rabindranath, on the one hand man has his ‘jivasattā’ and on the other hand he has his ‘humanity’ or ‘paramātmān’ or ‘universal being’. In order to get to know a person, it is not enough to know his personality, it is necessary to know ‘biswasattā’. Because, in the words of Rabindranath - on the one hand the position of man is within the boundaries of his personal life, on the other hand his position transcends into ‘biswasatta’. Rabindranath says - the responsibility of man is the responsibility of ‘mahāmānav’ - there is no limit to it. The great man is the ideal man or the ideal humanity. Man has been striving to realize that ideal humanity in various ways- thoughts, knowledge and deeds. Man believes that even if he dies as an individual, he does not die for his relentless efforts, relentless pursuit for the ideal humanity. Of all the people one ideal man or humanity has always existed. People go, people come, but the ideal man or humanity is eternal, Rabindranath also thinks that through the realization of humanity, man acquires humanity and transcends the boundaries and moves towards the unbroken infinity, and then he thinks about himself he is actually universal man or ideal man.

#### PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS ON HUMANISM:

Tagore was a humanist philosopher. He was a worshiper of humanity. Humanism is the core subject of his philosophical thought. At Manchester College, Oxford in 1930, Rabindranath gave a speech on humanism. On the basis of speech he wrote the book “**Religion of Man**”. In this book he rationally argues that humanity is the only religion of man. The Signs of Humanity he says that lead us to renunciation and austerities is called humanity or the religion of man. He wanted to establish humanism as the only religion. In his introduction to “**Religion of Man**”, Tagore says that there is someone in our hearts who is a human being but who transcends the personal human being into universal human being. His attraction is the emergence of universality in human thought and action. According to Tagore those who realize the ‘universal soul’ they easily dedicate their life for human being or humanity. It is in the realization of that human being (*mānavsattā*) who transcends the boundaries of human life (*Jivasattā*).

The universal quality that exists among all human beings is called ‘*manūṣyatva*’. For this nature ‘*manūṣyatva*’ that we claim to be different from other animals. The human qualities that are present in the human mind such as kindness, love, and affection etc. are called humanity. And the doctrine that relates to humanity is therefore humanism. Rabindranath has established humanism in a philosophical framework through a series of writings in his book ‘**Religion of Man**’. In his book he writes human beings have humanity in addition to all the bodily life - that is ‘*manūṣyatva*’. The creativity is the nature of ‘*manūṣyatva*’ which Tagore is called ‘*srjanīśakti*’. The nature of ‘*jala*’ is ‘*jalatva*’, the nature of ‘*āgūṇa*’ is ‘*āgūṇatva*’, just as the nature of man is ‘*manūṣyatva*’. Rabindranath did not see Dharma as isolated from life. According to him, ‘*My religion is at the root of my life*’. Although God is the central character of all other religions, but the central character of Rabindranath’s religion is man. He called this religion ‘*human religion*’. According to Rabindranath, man’s religion or real action is to realize himself. There is a duality in every human being. On the one hand, there is the living entity limited to the time, and on the other hand, there is the cosmology beyond the time period, that is, the living consciousness on the one hand, and the cosmic consciousness on the other. In order to realize one's own nature, one has to transcend one's living consciousness and merge with the cosmic consciousness. The realization of this cosmic consciousness in the human heart is the realization of the ‘ideal man’ or ‘humanity’ and that is the religion of man. This realization did not happen overnight, but through the ups and downs of mankind, man has gradually come to this realization, although that realization is still not fulfilled. Rabindranath has given a detailed explanation of this subject in his book ‘*The Religion of Man*’.

According to Rabindranath, it cannot be an ideal religion if religion is given priority deeds or devotion over people. In his language, “**Religion of Man can be better fulfilled by developing the virtues of Personality**”. The ideal religion is to dedicate oneself to the overall welfare of the people of the world through love,



affection and selfless actions' then it may be ideal religion. This is the main aspect of Rabindra humanism. Rabindranath called humanism a religion. In this religion, the welfare of the people is taken as the main goal. According to Rabindranath, the path to liberation is the path of connection with the world or realization of *Paramātmā*. Therefore, by removing all the smallness and isolation of the country and society, instead of fulfilling personal interests man obtain to liberation.

In this context, Rabindranath referred to the Indian philosophical 'yoga'. Yoga means 'to be united'. That is, the union of the living entity with *Paramatma* or Brahman or the acquisition of oneness. According to Rabindranath, *Narayana* abode in the man. Man has a god in his heart, not in the outside world, so it is possible to unite with the god of the heart through love or good deeds. Man must therefore be connected with that Supreme Being, with the inner world of man, through love in order to transcend his life. In order to be associated with the humanity that is universally functioning and residing in the heart of man, man does not have to be idle; he has to devote himself to the welfare of the world, by giving up all interests. By becoming a novice in the pursuit of the well-being of the world, man must be universally active. Goodwill-inspired, love-loving-motivated action, even if it is very small, it will be a universal action even if it benefits a small number of people. The love that unites people with each other, the love that is motivated by love, is not self-interested, it is the devotee. In such an action there is no violence, envy, selfishness, enmity, it is done for the welfare of the world. It is only through such selfless action that man can be connected with his inner *Mahaātmā* or *Naranārāyaṇa*.

In this way, Rabindranath considered the inherent superhuman or ideal humanity as God and called it God's service in the service of the world. It should be noted that even in the great religions of the world, the ultimate truth has been found in human beings, not in the supernatural deities outside human beings. In order to serve the inner man-like deity, man must serve - this is the essence of all the great religions of the world. Rabindranath realized - man is the child of nectar, he is not small, he is big. So the god of man is the man of the human mind. This 'man of the mind' as a deity is not out of the mind, he is in the human mind - in my mind, in your mind, in the mind of everyone in the world. If you look for him outside, you will not find him, you will not find him on the altar of worship with flowers, garlands and sandalwood, you will not find him even if you worship him in the temple. It is necessary to dedicate one's whole life to the welfare of the world by realizing that universal human being or human being in the human mind and that will be the true reverence of human beings at the base of the altar of the innermost deity of human beings. That is why the poet says - the realization of the great man or soul that is common to all human beings is the realization of God and his service, that is, the service of the world is the service of God. For those who have fully realized this universal soul or deity in man, Rabindranath called this man as '*Jivan Devatā*'.

#### CONCLUSION:

According to Rabindranath - there are two entities in every human being. One is the '*choto āmi*' or '*jīvasattā*' and the other is the '*baro ami*' or '*mānavsatta*'. Rabindranath's fictional '*choto āmi*' is limited to the interests of the individual. That is, the *jīvasattā* is the source of human selfishness. *jīvasattā* leads people to enjoy. It makes people self-centered. On the other hand, '*biswasattā*' or '*baro ami*' has novice in the pursuit of welfare of all in the entire world. The part of the human mind that rises above individual interests and thinks of the welfare of all human beings is called '*biswasattā*' or '*baro ami*'. Rabindranath has called him '*biswamānav*'. Elsewhere, he is also called '*mahāmānav*'. But to say '*mahāmānav*' does not mean great man. The entity that cares for the welfare of all human beings is the one that makes '*mahāmānav*'. Therefore, it can be seen that in Rabindranath's view, '*mānavsatta*' or the cosmic being is the inner soul of man. Rabindranath referred to this spiritual being of man as surplus. Surplus is expressed through creative action. Creative action is good action or superior action. Through good deeds, people leave the *jīvasattā* and enter the world life. That is why Rabindranath says - the human being is '*biswamānav*'. Man is actually God. This great man or '*biswamānav*' or humanity leads man to self-sacrifice. Sacrifice is the greatest identity of man. The world is freed from the bondage of human interest by the motivation of man or the motivation of the inner soul. He enters the larger life, the world emir. Love awakens in him. Love is the relationship between '*choto āmi*' and the '*baro ami*'. In the feeling of love man realizes himself in the other life. Thus man became perfect. The inner soul of man awakens perfection in man. It is inform to us that

there is a life beyond the personal life, that life is not compatible with our daily life. Rabindranath said - the way out of that larger, noble life is public welfare. Through public welfare we transcend the realm of the ego into Surplus. It means that the individual is connected with the world. In the words of Rabindranath, the fullness of a person's life will come when the person becomes connected with the '*biswamānav*'.

A notable feature of Rabindranath's humanism is the discovery of the ultimate wealth that lies in one's own heart and the wealth that is dormant in others as well as the manifestation of humanity, love, selfless sacrifice and service. In this philanthropy, there is no place for caste and creed like high and low, rich and poor, Hindu and non-Hindu. It is a human identity that is more valuable to him than others. And he was able to say that he had chanted the mantra of love to this man all his life. That is why Rabindranath said that-

*“mor nām ei bole khyato hok  
āmi tomāderi lok”*

In fact, in Rabindranath's thought, the ideology of the Upanishads, the modern humanism of the West has merged into one. He firmly believed that the great mantra of service and sacrifice would make the welfare of mankind possible. In his numerous writings, Rabindranath has referred to human service and selfless sacrifice as the true ideals of human beings. Therefore, he considered the welfare and service of the people as the ultimate goal and motto of his humanism.

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