

# Humanistic Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore and its Importance in Modern Society

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## Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to explore the humanistic view of Rabindranath Tagore and its relevance in modern society. Rabindranath Tagore is the most outstanding name in modern Indian literature and he was the one writer who first gained for modern India a place on the world literary scene. Tagore was one of the creative geniuses of the Indian mind, who had played a vital role in the history of Indian Renaissance in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rabindranath Tagore played a very significant role in promulgating humanism in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are many factors that shaped his personality and the ideals of humanism. Tagore humanism is mainly expressed through his concept of inter-personal relationship. The philosophy of humanism as developed by Tagore, is universal, because it deals with the analysis of 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. This paper will focus on how Tagore Humanism is relevant for present society.

**Keyword:** Humanism, Indian literature, Universal, Surplus in Man, Freedom, Religion of man and Inter-personality.

## Introduction :

Rabindranath Tagore is distinguished for being a man with numerous dimensional personalities and is the most eminent Bengali renaissance poet, philosopher, essayist, critic, composer and educator who dreamt of a harmony of universal humanity among the people of different origin through freedom of mind and spiritual sovereignty. Rabindranath Tagore occupies a fore position in the galaxy of the prophets of Humanism. He became the first ever Asian writer to be awarded a Noble Prize in 1913 for translated version of his cycle of song poems entitled Gitanjali. He is a multi-dimensional personality and the underlying theme of his creations is love for man. The outward life of Tagore was not very eventual concept the Noble Prize and the founding of the 'Santiniketan', but he was mainly a man of the world of songs and literature. His life itself was a philosophy, though he was not a philosopher in systematic meaning of the terms.

Tagore humanism is mainly expressed through his concept of interpersonal relationship. He has reflected comprehensively and intensely on the ontological status of man in idiosyncratic dimensions and the revelation of the meaning in relation to nature and to modes of inter personal relationship. It is said that the Philosophy of Humanism is a product of Renaissance in Western Europe. Although the inner essence of the Humanism in the East, it is found that it puts much emphasis upon the mental existence of man expressing his mental and spiritual freedom.

In this paper I shall discuss the Humanistic Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore and its importance in modern society, which is largely expressed through the concept of interpersonal relationship.

**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 an 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.

**Inter-Personal Relationship :**

Rabindranath Tagore the poet and the humanistic philosopher, the concept of religion is based on his idea of God and the significance of man given by him. Tagore's religion is the Religion of Man. It is the religion by which man can realise his innermost essence. For Tagore religion is a very simple gift of God to man, but it is we the human beings because of which religion has become so much complex. 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 harmony 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 realizing our relationship with all through the union of the divine is the ultimate end and fulfilment of humanity. Therefore the spirit of One in God has the many for the realisation of the unity and the truth behind this spiritual union is love. He thinks that man is above all a lover, his freedom and fulfilment is in love which is another name for perfect comprehension. Through love, human society is for the best expression of man, and that expression according to its perfection leads him to the full realisation of the divine in humanity.

The spiritual bond between the personal man and the universal world of reason ensures our integration in the national sphere and paves the way for international amity. According to him human civilization can best be understood through our loving concern for mankind. He says that, ".....we never can have a true view of man unless we have a love for him. Civilisation must be judged and prized, not by the amount of power it has developed, but by how much it has evolved and given expression to, by its laws and institutions, the love of humanity". Tagore works for one supreme cause, the union of all sections of humanity in sympathy and understanding, in truth and love. His Visva-Bharati is a university of his dreams, where the whole world has become a single nest :

Yātra Viśvam bhāvati ekānidam.

It is one such university, where all culture, language and faith are welcome to form a symphony of universalism.

## **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 gain 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 capacity 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 fulfil his imaginary and ideal realm. According to Rabindranath this ideal realm, the realm of the Surplus, the philosopher observes is expressed 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 change 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 represent 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 exist 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 attained 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 the profoundest and noblest spirit of humanity. He says in 'Sadhana' - "Civilization must be judged and praised not by the amount of power it has developed but by how much it has evolved and given expression to by its laws and institutions. 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".

### **Conclusion :**

From the above discussion we may say that Tagore's humanism is manifested in all the aspects of nationalism discussed in its wide spectrum of related aspects of divinity, salvation, universalism and diversity. His humanism is distinct from ancient and contemporary philosophies in humanism. Referring to the *Brahadaranyaka Upanisad* Tagore says:

*A person who worships God as exterior to himself does not  
know him, he is like an animal belonging to the goal.*

Thus Tagore divinizes man by saying :

*God loves to see in me not his servant but himself who serves all.*

Thus Tagore's humanism is in tune with the renaissance humanism, the central focus of which is quite simply human beings.

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