



HUMANITISM IN THE NOVELS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Abstract: Humanism is emphasizing the importance of human beings –their nature and place in the universe. It means love of man with all his flaws and fallacies. It is an attitude that concentrates on the activities of man more than the supernatural world. During the colonial rule, the British lost their humanity and were brutal and cruel towards their fellow- beings. Many novelists used their pens to protest against the violence of the British. Rabindranath Tagore is one of them who used his pen over swords to vehemently protest against the cruelty meted out to his fellow- beings. In this paper, I shall discuss on humanism as a concept in Indian English Literature with reference to Tagore’s novel Home and the World. The three main characters of the novels portray different personalities and thus reflect humanism. Tagore offered a genuine critique of the glorious past of India, while emulating the worthy ideals of the West. The feminist perspectives of Tagore espousing the amelioration of women are appropriately reflected in the portrayal of women characters in his novels. Understanding the Western culture in a much better light, Tagore displayed the right perspectives of the thematic concerns of significant Victorian women novelists like George Eliot. Capturing the tremors of Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, Simon De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Tagore has excelled his contemporaries in a very bold and realistic portrayal of women than the male characters in all his novels. [Pal, D. and Gupta, V. **HUMANITISM IN THE NOVELS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE.** *N Y Sci J* 2023;16(4):32-37]. ISSN 1554-0200 (print); ISSN 2375-723X (online). <http://www.sciencepub.net/newyork>. 08.[doi:10.7537/marsnys160423.08](https://doi.org/10.7537/marsnys160423.08).

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Introduction:

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Humanism as “A rationalist outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters.” Humanism is a philosophical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and generally prefers critical thinking and evidence over established doctrine or faith. The meaning of the term humanism has fluctuated, according to the successive intellectual movements which have identified with it. Although humanism lost its significance a long time ago, a certain naivety about its natural and obvious connotations, complicated by anthropological hubris, lingers on. The tendency consequently is to compulsively and exclusively read humaneness, universal compassion and glory into humanism. Neither the violence of the human being nor the violence on the human being gets registered in the process. Grappling with humanism’s bad conscience in the complex terrain in the complex terrain of Indian literature is an obligation that remains unfulfilled. Rabindranath Tagore lifted Indian literature at world level and gained for modern India a place on the world literary history that won Noble

Prize for literature and gave recognition to India on global scale. Tagore, the versatile personality of Indian literary scholar is considered as- the Rishi, the Gurudev and the Maharshi. He was a poet, dramatist, actor, producer, musician, painter, an educationist, reformer, philosopher, prophet, novelist, story writer, and a critic of life and literature. He is a multi-dimensional personality and the underlying theme of his creations is love for man.

Humanism of Tagore is an aspect of scholarly probe for many of the scholars. Humanism as a body of literary knowledge and linguistic skill based on the ‘revival of good letters’ had profound social and political consequences in transforming the conservative Social order of Indian society. From the ancient pre Socratic Greek times of Thales of Miletus and Xenophanes of Colophon, Anaxagoras, Democritus and Thucydides, there were attempts to explain human reason. In Asia around 1000 B.C, there was human centred philosophy known as Lokayata system of Indian philosophy, much before Gaiifama Buddha had expressed skeptical attitude toward the supernatural. During the Renaissance period it became an intellectual movement. German historian Georg Voigt (1827- 91) identified Petrarch as the first

Renaissance humanist. During the modern period particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries Humanism was represented by Galileo and Erasmus. This was also carried out by many American thinkers and British Victorian novelists. Thomas Paine father of American human rights called for 'the philanthropism' initiating the phase of religion of humanity. George Eliot Victorian novelist, influenced by Auguste Comte's Positivism along with her companions George Henry Ewes, Harriet Martineau propagated and consolidated secular religion of humanity asking for the consideration of all forms of religion including religious humanism! Modern humanists such as Carl Sagan hold that humanity must seek truth through reason. In the contemporary perspective, Humanism is perceived as comprehensive life stance that upholds human reason, ethics and justice.

Humanitism in Novels of Rabindernath Tagore:

Tagore was deeply impressed by these social, cultural and religious movements. In his tribute to Raja Ram Mohan Roy on his death centenary on 18th Feb. 1933, he observed:

*"Ram Mohan Roy inaugurated the modern age in India...
In this dark gloom of India's degeneration, Ram Mohan
Roy rose up, a luminous star in the firmament of India's
history, with prophetic purity of vision and unconquerable
heroism of soul... He is the great path maker of this
century
who has removed ponderous obstacles that
impeded our progress at every step and initiated us
into..."*

(Ram Mohan Roy. An essay read by the poet on 18th February 1933 in Rabindra Rachanavalli, Vol.xi, W.B. Government Publication, Baisakh, 25, 1368 B.S.)

Romain Roland has appropriately captured the influence of Ram Mohan Roy on Tagore and his observation justifies this perspective: "This man of Gigantic personality whose name to our shame is not inscribed in the pantheon of Europe as well as of Asia, sank his plough share in the soul of India and sixty years of labour left her transformed...and out of the earth of Bengal has come forth the harvest... A harvest of works and men. And from his inspiration sprang Tagore's" (The Life of Rama Krishna. 1986.108).

THE RELATIONSHIP OF NATURE WITH MAN

Tagore envisages that the perfection of man is attained through the enlargement of personality. Man is the architect of his own destiny. His perfection leads him to have a link with infinity. The perfection attained by the man should be applicable to the entire society but not to the individual alone. Tagore's concept of man/human personality is finding its fruition through the realization of the feeling of intimacy with nature. From his childhood days, he is fascinated by the splendor of nature-the rising of the sun, the chirping of the birds and the whistling of the wind through the trees.

He is of the opinion that nature does not lose herself but reveals its true colour to a person's self, having its own eternal bindings with human nature. Nature is not alien but is essentially related to man. In the vastness of nature, we are not unknown strangers; we are her kith and kin. He also compares the beautiful nature with our mother. Tagore writes:

*When in the morning I looked upon the light
I felt in a moment
that I was no stranger in this world,
that the inscrutable without name and form
had taken me
in its arms in the form of my own mother.
(S.C. Sengupta in his article)
"The Surplus in Man: The Poet's Philosophy
of Man,"*

Argues that the inter-relationship between man and nature can be found at the lower or the communication stage and the higher or the communion stage. They are not two different stages. Rather, one stage is ultimately passing over to the growth of another stage. Man has a very good communication with nature.

Nature helps man to develop his personality in as much as man helps nature to reveal its beauty. Man grows along with nature in so far as he can identify himself with nature and makes it his messenger of communication. With the help of nature man creates his own nature, creates beauty, and creates art. In his creativity and self-expression, man becomes conscious of the abundance, his ability to go beyond his physical finitude and through creation of art, strives to send his communication to the Supreme Person who reveals Himself to him.

Inter-Personal Relationship

In this section, I have discussed 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.

Religious influences (Upanishads, Bauls, and Mystic saints)

Drawing immense inspiration from his father Debendranath Tagore, Tagore has derived equal inspiration from Hindu Upanishads. In his Preface to *Sadhana*, Tagore has accepted that his family used, to worship the Upanishads. This is substantiated by one of the famous critics of Tagore Dr. S.B. Dasgupta who found similarity between the mind of Tagore and the ideas of Upanishads. But it is to be perceived that Tagore has not followed the dogmas of Upanishads blindly, Though he was influenced, he only drew inspiration from them. Some critics are of the view that even if Tagore has not read Upanishads, one would naturally find the similarity between the mind of Tagore and the Upanishads. But Tagore's biographer Prabat Kumar Mukherjee presents a contradictory view of this perspective. He is of the opinion: "Nothing has influenced him more, both consciously and as an undercurrent of his thought than the Upanishads... I i maintain that Rabindranath's entire life is only an evolution and development of his Upanishadic education" (S.B. Dasgupta. *Upanishada Patobhumiky rabindra Manas*. 1968).⁹

Dasgupta has established the similarity between the mind of Tagore and the mentality of Upanishadic seers. The Truth which Tagore has practiced is intuitive; it is not borrowed from any philosophy. But some of the critics portrayed Tagore's humanism as a spiritualistic form influenced by the content of Upanishads. It is from this perception Tagore's sublimation from humanism has become the conceptualization of divine presence in every living species of this world. Tagore is greatly influenced by the life and culture of Bauls. Bauls are a sect in the villages of Bengal. Away from modern education and culture, Bauls are confined to the lower rank of society. But their philosophy of life is immensely rich. Their perspective of life is Anthropocentric. To them Man is the centre of life and culture.

Aspects of Humanism Reflected in Tagore's Novels

Amelioration of Women: Tagore offered a genuine critique of the glorious past of India, while emulating the worthy ideals of the West. The feminist perspectives of Tagore espousing the amelioration of women are appropriately reflected in the portrayal of women characters in his novels. Understanding the Western culture in a much better light, Tagore displayed the right perspectives of the thematic concerns of significant Victorian women novelists like George Eliot. Capturing the tremors of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Simon De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Tagore has excelled his contemporaries in a very bold and realistic portrayal of women than the male characters in all his novels.

Krishan Kriplani in Rabindranath Tagore:

A Biography (1962) says: "...inexhaustible, sympathy and admiration for Bengali women but little for the males of his race. This is more true of his novels than of his short stories". In fact it is perceived that Tagore's empathy for the conditions of women has paved the way for humanism. Till the time of Tagore, no writer has probed and offered an in depth analysis of the circumstances in which women were destined to lead their lives. It is only Tagore who elevated the spirit and life of women to the celestial heights. The early marriage of the girls and the unbearable widowhood was a gruesome and unbearable social reality of Tagore's period. His novel *Binodini* has depicted the emptiness enshrined in widowhood and the frustration and passionate feelings of widows in a heart rending and intelligent way. Tagore has probed the depths of socio familial concept of the socially

unsanctioned love in the novel Broken Nest. The novel has succeeded in depicting the extramarital love from the perspective of frustrated wife. His novel The Wreck has portrayed the bitter consequences of the outdated arranged marriage system. Gora has dealt with the changes that education brings into the lives of women and the conflicts between love and orthodoxy, family norms and individual freedom are interrogated. The Home and the World comes out with an exhortation to women who are ignorant of the worldly wisdom.

The Inflation of Modernism

Tagore was against blind emulation of tradition. He was also against embracing too much of modernity. In his essay on Nationalism Tagore has observed: "True Modernism is freedom of mind, not slavery of taste. It is independence of thought and action, not tutelage under European school masters. It is science but not its wrong application in life". With the spirit of modernism, Tagore resisted the adherence to religious forms and rituals. Tagore himself has said about the religious and social ostracization, he has experienced as a result of denouncing the traditional practices of religion: "my country men in Bengal thought him (Debendranath Tagore) almost as bad as a Christina if not worse. We were completely ostracized, which probably saved me from another disaster, that of imitating our own past" (Anthony X Soares in Rabindranath Tagore Lectures and Addresses, 1980).¹¹

Critique of Nationalism

According to Tagore Nationalism is a source of war, carnage, death, destruction and divisiveness. It reduces international solidarity and a larger expansive vision of the world. In most of his writings: letters, essays, lectures; poems, plays and fiction, Tagore has opposed the politics of nationalism. To him hyper nationalism finds complete realization in the ancient maxim of Thucydides "large nations do what they wish, while small nations accept what they must". Nationalism generated by self interest paves the way for brute force. Radical nationalism acts as a opium and makes people irrational and fanatical. It blinds the sense of truth and justice and perpetuates logic of lunacy and war.

Tagore Nationalism obstructs cycle freedom and peace. In his polemical essay on Nationalism he has observed that Nationalism is "a cruel epidemic of

evil...sweeping over the human world of the present age and eating into its moral fibre: a terrible absurdity that is seeking to engulf humanity in a suicidal conflagration". Tagore was a believer in an interactive and dialogic world. In his perception, nations should not be parochial, xenophobic, centripetal and should not be guided by self aggrandizement. From these perspectives, Tagore stands as a front runner and promulgator to many of the post colonial critics such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, Benedict Anderson etc. Tagore believed in creating the other world which would create constructive alternatives of thought. He imagined Commonwealth of Nations in which every nation upholds its integrity and independence.

Post Colonial Prognosis

Tagore's Nationalism has inflated into the post colonial perspectives echoed by many post colonial critics of Nationalism. Benedict Anderson in Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (1983) acknowledges that it is notoriously difficult to define nation, nationality and nationalism. He demystifies the unifying the cultural signifiers claimed as the representations of nationalism. He is of the view that the birth of Nation as a political institution is the product of European enlightenment.

Ernest Gellner in Nations and Nationalism (1983) elucidates the reasons for the emergence of Nationalism and also the conditions for a culturally homogenous nation state. Timothy Brennan examines the role of the novel in the formation of national consciousness. According to him novel has played a historical role in rising nationalism allowed people to imagine themselves as special community of a nation. Tagore's objection to Nationalism is to reject the nature and purpose of Nation as an institution. Tagore who preferred creation over construction, imagination over reason, natural over the artificial considered nationalism as an organization of politics and commerce. He preferred creation as it is for itself and expresses our very being. To him Nationalism is not a spontaneous self expression of man as social being.

Critique of Indian Nationalism

Tagore vehemently has opposed the idea of 'nation' and the attempts of India to join the bandwagon of nationalism. He warned that India's identity, history and culture would be nullified by the

western culture under the shadow of nationalism. Bom during the period of severe nationalist movements such as 1857 military uprising, 1905 Swadeshi movement, Tagore has contributed severely through lectures and patriotic songs. Though apolitical by temperament, Tagore was drawn to the crux of national movement. Appreciating Tagore's contribution in espousing Nationalism, Ezra Pound observed: "Tagore Bengal into Action". When the National movement turned violent, as a champion of non violence, Tagore was disheartened and withdrew from the national movement. In Home land the World and Four Chapters Tagore has depicted how nationalism sacrificing righteousness and conscience became a ritual of violence and exploitation. Sandip and Indranath begin as charismatic nationalist leaders but are depicted as ending their lives with self obsession and vain glory, losing sight of dispassionate and disinterested glory.

CONCLUSION

Tagore have a prophetic vision .Tagore's view of language is ontological, because, human ontology determines the nature and function of language. Man expresses himself through his creativity, and language is one of the important modes of communication of man's self-revealing activity. Man is an expressive being, and therefore, he is capable of achieving self clarity and freedom. Freedom is integral to a self-realizing subject. According to Tagore, self-expression is the important channel of communication. As an expressive being, man recovers communion with the universe. It is in man's consciousness of a deeper unity with nature, with the world, of which we are a part. The self-revealing being (I) is in interchange with the greater nature. The selfexpressive being carries an eternal relation with the other and the other is also dependent upon my existence. There arises an interpersonal relationship between 'myself' and the 'other' (I and thou). It will be appropriate to fit here the views of Hegel that the Idea becomes its other, and then returns into self consciousness in Geist. The life of the absolute subject is essentially a process, a movement, in which it posits its own conditions of existence to the universe, and then overcomes the opposition of these conditions to realize its goal of self knowledge .But at the deeper ontological level, this interpersonal relation of I and thou takes the form of intrapersonal level of human existence (I am thou). I am dependent upon other and the other is a condition for my union with the all pervading spirit. Tagore thinks that to attain our world-consciousness, we have to bring together our feelings with this all-pervasive infinite feeling, and

this is possible when we free ourselves from the bonds of personal desires, prepare ourselves for our social obligations and sharing the burdens of our fellow beings. So I and thou work for a common cause to achieve the unity of consciousness. He says that to be truly united in knowledge, love and service with all beings, and thus to realize one's self in the all-pervading God is the essence of goodness, and it is also the key that opens the gate of the spiritual life.

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