



LITERATURE RELATED TO HUMANITISM IN THE NOVELS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Abstract: 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 Rabindra Nath 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.

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Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore accepts the 'degree of reality' while taking 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 is 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 an 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 the reveals the fact that there are two essential aspect 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

Review of Literature Rabindranath Tagore is such a kind of personality, who is considered as a blazing resource of the research work. During the searching of the existing literature, it had been observed that there are uncountable research works on Rabindranath Tagore in numerous dimensions; these studies primarily emphasized the Personality of the poet, the poet as a human being, poet as a novelist etc. Moreover, many research works focus upon the impact of different political and socio-cultural issues on his creative works; which is reflected through the different characteristic features of his novels. Along with this, there are plenty of research works which emphasized to find out the aesthetic as well as the philosophical interpretations of his creative works. In particular, some psychological interpretations of the poet's psyche and his works are also found mostly from Freudian perspective. It is evident that other than Freudian analytical angle there was no such types of literatures exist where the interpretations primarily focus on the Eriksonian perspective.

Review of Literature

Rabindranath Tagore has written about various contemporary problems of women in his various poems and has highlighted them with the stroke of a perfect pen. In both his *Purabi* (1925) and *Mahua* (1929) books of poetry, humanism is eloquently expressed and love is perfectly described here. Rabindranath Tagore was the first successful short story writer in Bengali literature and the way he portrayed humanism in his short stories was not possible for any other writer. He has given more prominence to the intellectual analysis of psychological conflicts in his short stories. His novel, *Chokher Bali*, explores the problems of widows' lives in contemporary times and seeks to address them. Rabindranath Tagore in the novel *Naukadubi* highlights complex family conflicts or problems and gives them an aesthetic form. In his novel *Gora*, he deals with the conflict between Hindus and Brahmo Samaj, social and political conflicts and other issues in a way that no other poet-writer has been able to do, and at the same time he has promoted world humanism. Rabindranath Tagore has perfectly illustrated the complex nature of relationship between men and women in his novel 'Ghore- Byre' and 'Jogajog' and has shown how to establish true humanism.

He has sharply criticized extremist nationalism in his book 'Nationalism' (1917) and said, it is never possible to establish true humanism with a fierce nationalist spirit. The lectures he gave on philosophy at Oxford University, compiled as the *Religion of Man* (1935), are truly a great example of humanism. The main element of Rabindranath's writing is human, humanity and humanism. 'Kabuliwala' reflects Rabindranath's worldly human consciousness and echoes the tune of universal humanity. He has given an artistic and universal form of human affection and love in his literature and has proved that the field of humanism is above all caste, religion, race, country, etc. He paints a grim picture of dowry in his short stories *Dena-Pawna*, *Thakurda*, *Ponrakkha*, and how a housewife is driven to death by dowry. Rabindranath Tagore has portrayed the tragic consequences of dowry on Haimanti's life in a very artistic way and has shown the fragility of a corrupt society. In his book *Aparajita*, Rabindranath Tagore paints a grim picture of the inhuman behavior of greedy people and their ugly appearance. The pain of the humiliation of humanity is embodied in the story of *Rakanaier Nibuddhita*. Poet Rabindranath Tagore reacts sharply against social injustice in his story *Bicharok*. Rabindranath Tagore has condemned the kind of society in which men insult the dignity of women and again they play role as judge. He has always protested against the unscrupulous society and advocated for the sake of humanity. He was anti-imperialist and in his story 'Megh O Roudra' he condemned the brutality of the British bureaucracy. He protested against the tyranny of the rulers, judges and landlords in his literature.

He has written with a strong hand against race and caste discrimination and social inequality. In his story 'Laboratory' he beautifully illustrates how racism and apartheid can lead a society to the brink of destruction. In this story, he speaks out against caste system and breaks the caste system with his sharp writing. In his story "Musulmani" story, he paints a picture of how poor people were harmed and humanity was ruined as a result of the introduction of the permanent settlement system during British ruling. He preached in his literature the philosophy of secularism and cosmopolitan which was one of the driving forces of humanism. Humanist poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote in defense of women's dignity and continued his writing until the last moment of his life in establishing women's rights. He vehemently opposed the dowry, co-death, widowhood, polygamy and other harmful issues which tarnish the dignity of women in the society. The main theme of his short stories was the liberation of women. In his story, Rabindranath Tagore portrays *Kadambini* in a way that truly illustrates the negative aspects of male dominated

society.

Tagore's abstruse philosophy underwrites his well-known brand of "feminism." Tagore sees evolution as a process of refinement, of ascent from the material through the animal towards the spiritual – there is some influence coming from Bergson in shaping his thought in this regard – and thinks that just as homo sapiens has superseded bigger and physically stronger species, within this species a similar supercession will place women ahead of men. Since power – Foucauldian power – has so far been wielded chiefly by man, he blames them for "building up vast and monstrous organizations" – such as the nation, as he has defined it – but now, "woman can bring her fresh mind and all her power of sympathy to this new task of spiritual civilization." Whether this is to come about or not, I was reminded of his general prophecy that women "will have their place, and those bigger creatures [men] will have to give way" (The English Writings, Vol. 2, 416), by a BBC TV documentary comparing the careers of boys (Kaiser Haq, 2010).

This article investigates Rabindranath Tagore's perspectives on women as seen through his short stories. While his poems primarily describe beauty, nature and his search for what is beyond mundane life, his short stories deal with the lives of ordinary people. Women's struggles and sufferings are particularly highlighted. This article argues that while on one hand Tagore reveals the unequal social structure that oppresses women, on another, he creates courageous women who challenge tradition. His short story "Laboratory," written a few months before his death, expresses his latest views on women and gives shape to the "new woman," whom he perceives as arriving in India in the near future. In so doing, Tagore urges women to find an identity of their own, and realise that wifehood and motherhood are but fractions of their who emancipation of women in the nineteenth century Bengal. Tagore's position was not akin to that of an extremist (Bharati Roy, 2010).

The novels of Tagore have not been paid due attention as his poetry has been but his novels are remarkable from every point of view. His claim in Bengali fiction is most predominant and now in free India they are being read and revived with great gusto. Had Rabindranath Tagore written nothing but novels, he would still be the most predominant figures in the literary history of Bengal and English literature (P. Satyanarayana, 2013).

This paper explores Tagore's engagement with the wave of emancipation of women in the nineteenth century Bengal. Tagore's position was not akin to that of an extremist. Rather, he opted for a mid-way while representing female voices in his works. This paper focuses on three of Tagore's female

protagonists - Mrinmayi, Uma and Mrinal - from *The Conclusion* (Samapti), *Exercise-Book* (Khata) and *The Wife's Letter* (Streer Patra) to show how their repeated individual scripting are mercilessly thwarted by social interventions (Roy Madhumati, 2010).

Tagore always considers women as social agents to transform society. The women in his poems challenge the male dominated society. "Woman is imaged as a human being in the process of full humanization and man finds in this image the creative principle of growth" 9. According to Tagore, the human world is also the woman's world. He had in mind the sufferings of the young brides in the joint families of Bengal. Tagore never wanted women to waste their talents, time and energy in the endless tedium of cooking and washing. Woman should extend their radiance beyond the boundaries of the family. He had a great concern for the women employed in cheap labour (Joseph Thomas, 2013). Much has been said about the way Tagore views his women in his poems, essays, novels and drama. Yet it is the dance dramas of Tagore, a genre quite unique in his time and milieu, which portray the radical nature of Tagore's conception of women and the maturation of their selfhood. The dance dramas illustrate Tagore's bold and perceptive experimentation with various literary forms and techniques and the radical nature of his ideological orientation. Among the dance dramas of Tagore, *Chandalika* has a special place as it foregrounds the theme of female desire in an untouchable girl, a tabooed subject in his times, indeed even now in Bengali writings. This paper tries to show how Tagore uses the nuances of the dance form to showcase the intersections of caste, class and gender as well as the evolution of selfhood in *Prakriti*, the *Chandal girl* (Sutapa Chaudhary, 2010).

Rabindranath Tagore is the well known philosopher, educationist, musician, story writer, humanist, novelist, social reformer, patriot, who wrote the national anthem of the nation. Though he is a genius in many fields of intellect, his dramatic genre is not fully explored. The study under taken is an honest and humble attempt to discover him as a well versed playwright. The playwright himself translated from the Bengali originals. Such are the following plays *Sanyasi* or *The Ascetic*, *Malini*, *Sacrifice*, *The King and The Queen*, *Kacha* and *Devyani*, *The Mother's Prayer*, *Karna* and *Kunti*, *Ama* and *Vinayaka*, *Somaka* and *Ritvika*, *Chitra*, *Autumn Festival*, *The Waterfall* or *Muktadhara*, *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika*. Tagore's plays are theme oriented and symbolical. His themes are different and the treatment is unique and well suited to the them (Pathan M.D., 2012). Rabindranath Tagore's plays like *Chitra*, *Karana* and *Kunti* and *Gandhari's Praye* are being inspired from Mahabharat. In *Chitra*, transformation

of Arjun comes from physical to spiritual life. Chitrangadha has got the supernatural power with that she gets the attraction of Arjun. And then, when the beauty of Chitra decrease, Arjun negates Chitra. Later Arjun comes back to the sense. In Karna and Kunti, both the characters are thinking for their salvage at the last hour of the war from its wreckage. In Gandhari's prayer, Gandhari knows the truth of Duryodhana's bad things, whereas his father Dritarashtra supported him. Gandhari knew that the Duryodhana will be doomed for his bad thing (Nagraja, 2012).

He was very much concerned with women's education. His educational institutions have almost always been co-educational and the number of female students is conspicuously large at Santiniketan. He wanted women and men to be offered similar theoretical courses with separate practical courses for women, since their roles in life differed from those of men (Jha, N., 1994). Rabindranath Tagore has described the journey of his women characters from ignorance to knowledge. Self-consciousness in all the characters play vital role in their development. As far as Chitra had no consciousness as woman, she was just the princess of the land. When she sees Arjuna, she realizes for the first time her womanhood (Pathan M.D., 2011).

According to Yadav Shalini, (2012), Rabindranath Tagore is an exceptional stature in the history of Indian drama in English. He was a man of the classics of Indian drama and was, at the same time, alive to the European dramatic tradition. His career as a dramatist may be divided into three periods, namely—pre-Gitanjali period, Gitanjali period and post-Gitanjali period. During the pre-Gitanjali period he wrote Sacrifice, King and Queen, Malini, and Balmiki-Pratibha. During the Gitanjali period appeared Autumn Festival, The Castle of Conservatism, The King of the Dark Chamber and The Post Office. During the post-Gitanjali period he wrote The Cycle of Spring, The Free Current Tent and The Red Oleanders. The range and variety of his drama is astounding. Many of his themes are borrowed from Indian mythology, Buddhist legends and other classical resources without any creative reticence or scruple.

Tagore's characters are never artificial creatures. They are ordinary men and women, and children and babies whom he met in his life in the estate. Till that time ordinary men and women had no entry in Bengali literature. There were none before or after him, who portrayed these categories of characters with so much insight and sympathy. His stories show a wide canvas of reality through which one can have a glimpse of the widest sections of society like peasants, petty officials, poor workers, intelligentsia living in city and villages, impoverished landlords. Brahmin

priests, petty traders and so on. Through these characters Tagore shows life as it flows in the Bengali society. The characters have their own personalities. At the same time they are typical of the 19th century Bengal. The tragic conditions of women in all roles of life, wife, mother, daughter, sister are drawn through a number of characters in his stories. The spineless intelligentsia of Bengal during Tagore's days makes central characters in some of his stories. The narrator in many of his stories is a shallow, jaunty, self-regarding person, who is changed (Rai Anita, 2012).

Tagore's reputation far exceeded the boundary of the literary-cultural world. He was in the company of the likes of Russell, Einstein, Mussolini and Gandhi, and they all held him in the highest esteem (Quayyum M.A.2005).

Tagore is the first modern Indian writer who brought his women out of the kitchen and bed room into the parlour where they argue with men and exchange ideas while still remaining very feminine (Roy, M.) He was a poet in the traditional Indian sense of the word, Kavi, a seer, an intermediary between the human and the divine. His genius enriched whatever it touched. Like the sun after which he was named (Rabi in Bengali, derived from Sanskrit ravi, means the sun), he shed light and warmth on his age, vitalized the mental and moral soil of his land, revealed unknown horizon of thought and spanned the arc that divides the East from the West (K.Kriplani, 2004:74). Myth is a vital ingredient of human civilization, it is not an intellectual exploration or imagery but a pragmatic character of primitive faith and moral wisdom. (Encyclopaedia Britannica) Myth is a traditional story concerning the early history or people or explaining natural or social phenomenon and typically involving supernatural being (Concise Oxford Dictionary) The Buddhist literature - including the contemporary studies of Buddha's life and teaching as well as the ancient tales of the Jataka- leave permanent trace on his mind and work (Kundu R.) Tagore presents a psychological study of a young woman who suffers on account of her vanity and self-consciousness. Her wild physical desire surrenders before Ananda resplendent with the light of truth; perhaps Tagore highlights the enigmatic character of a woman, the character of being all dominating over possessive to devour all that stand before her, precisely, her excessive materialistic approach that ultimately fails"(Agrwal, B. R., 2004).

Gandhari's Prayer is a study of mother and her son, the great and magnanimous mother of the Kurus and her eldest ill-fated son Duryodhana. Both Dhritarashtra, the father and Gandhari, the mother know that, Duryodhana is wrong; but father compromises while Gandhari will not. She is a great character (Iyengar, 1995). The word myth originally simply meant speech. Then in a narrower sense, a tale

of tradition. Particularly one handed down from prehistoric times giving, in the form of a story about a God or hero. Some ancient belief regarding the process of nature, customs, problems of cosmology (The New Gresham Encyclopaedia of World, 1991:53). If Romeshchandra Dutt brought realism and reform to the novel, if Bankimchandra invested the novel with a romantic halo, Tagore revealed the inmost currents of man's mind in his novels he brought psychological delineation to the novel. He added depth and significance to the novel - a great leap forward in the development of the novel (Mehta P.P., 1968:28).

The theme and thought of Tagore's poetry can be summed up with four letters 'LOVE'; that is, love for humanity (both man and woman) love for divinity (God and his Kingdom) and love for nature. In his poetry he interprets love in all his multi form expressions the love of a mother, son, husband, wife, lover, beloved and friend and above all of a true devotee of God. Through his poetry, Tagore comes out as a great lover of liberty, fraternity and equality (P. Hariom, 2004:71).

Human values are paramount, and to ignore this truth is to canter towards self-destruction. Tagore never wrote a more powerful play, or one richer in suggestion, than *Mukta Dhara* (Sharma M., 1970:92).

In *Karna and kunti*, Tagore snaps another pair, another mother and another ill fated son. Kunti, the mother of the Pandvas and her eldest son Karna, whom she had castaway as first born baby on waters. It is a lacerating, soul-searing scene. Kunti too is the mother of sorrows, she too is great because she has suffered, and Karna is great because fate has played with him for a cruelly difficult role. But now mother and son try to salvage what even at this late hour is possible from the general wreckage. (Iyengar, 1995:139) *Natir Puja* is one of the simplest and most moving of Rabindranath's plays (Kriplani, 1950:81). The poem naturally gives to many a troubled soul. It is a great document of intuitive faith and reads like *Bhagwat Gita* on the one hand, and the *Psalms* of the Old Testament, on the other. It can be called a synthesis of all that is best in the Indian and the Western traditions (Sharma T.R. 1998:32).

Getting inspiration from Mitra's tale *Kaliprasanna Sinha* (1840 - 1876) wrote some satirical sketches of the Calcutta life in his *Hutum Pachar Naksha*. But the real starting point of Bangla novel was 1865, the year when *Durgeshnandini*, the first Bangla novel of Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1834 - 94) appeared. A born story-teller, Bankimchandra took the heart of Bengal by storm. His other well known novels are *Kapalkundala* (1866), *Mrinalini* (1869), *Vishabriksha* (1873), *Chandrasekhar* (1877), *Rajani* (1877), *Krishnakanter Will* (1878), *Rajsingha*

(1881), *Anandamath* (1882) and *Sitaram* (1886). As Bhabani Bhattacharya says :

"The novels he wrote have been justifiably called epoch making and less justifiably modern" (Bhattacharya, 1961: 96).

The appeal of his novels was soundly based on Bengali people's increasingly strong desire to read about themselves, to have literature that depicted their daily life as they knew it. Under the impact of the powerful influence of Bankimchandra, a whole class of novelists appeared in Bangla Literature. They more or less relayed Bankimchandra's manner and craftsmanship in their work. But Rabindranath Tagore was different. Taking the cue from the period pieces of Bankimchandra, he started writing Bangla novel and developed it to a great height by writing fourteen novels in all. They are - *Karuna* (1877, incomplete novel), *Bauthakuranir Hat* (1883), *Rajarshi* (1887), *Chokher Bali* (1903), *Naukadubi* (1906), *Prajapathir Nirbanda* (1908), *Gora* (1909), *Chaturanga* (1915), *Chore Baire* (1916), *Jogayog* (1929), *SesherKabita* (1929), *Dui Bon* (1933), *Malancha* (1934) and *Char Adhyay* (1934).

In his early years Tagore yielded to the prevailing mood and wrote three novels. Being fascinated by Bankimchandra's novel *Durgeshnandini* and Biharilal's romantic poems, Tagore wrote his first novel *Karuna* in 1877 while his age was only sixteen. So long Tagore was alive he did not publish the novel *Karuna* nor did he place it in any of his complete volume as he considered it an incomplete novel of his early life. It was only after his death the novel was published by Visva- Bharati marking it as an 'incomplete novel of Tagore'. The next two novels of Tagore *Bauthakuranir Hat* (1883) and *Rajarshi* (1887) have their plots taken from the history of the seventeenth century Bengal. The cue of the plot of *Buthakuranir Hat* was taken from Rameshchandra Ghose's *BhangadhipParajaya*, but it is more a domestic novel than historical. The plot of *Rajarshi* was taken from the history of Tipperah. The conflict between head and heart, thought and feeling, intellect and emotion is the main note of the two novels.²

The influence of Bankimchandra is seen more in *Bauthakuranir Hat* and less in *Rajarshi*. However, Tagore was undoubtedly an inborn genius, his strong individuality asserted itself and after several years break from fiction writing, he found an appropriate medium in the short story. The years 1894 - 95 were remarkable for a large output of short stories which rank even today as some of the best in the Bangla language. Then he returned to longer fiction but with a remarkable difference.

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