

Universal Humanism of Tagore

F. M. Anayet Hossain

Department of Philosophy, University of Chittagong,
BANGLADESH.

fmhossain77@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Tagore's universal humanism is mainly expressed through his concept of inter-personal 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. I shall discuss here, the universal form of Humanism as developed by Tagore, searching for man, in human existence, beyond his limitations and differences, which, in my opinion, is the fundamental object of the tradition of Humanism in the East. In this connection, Humanism, in the modern international and intercultural context, is to be taken as the total development of man, which, in the observation of Rabindra Nath Tagore (1861-1941), is the accomplishment of universality in human existence, developing the philosophy of universal humanism. In order to expound his idea of humanism corresponding to inter-personal relationship, I shall delve more on his concept of man. His views about man can be found in various writings, particularly in Sadhana (1913), Personality (1917), Creative Unity (1922) and The Religion of Man (1930).

Keywords: Tagore, Universal, Humanism, Inter-personality

INTRODUCTION

It is said that philosophy of humanism is a product of the Renaissance in western Europe. It is closely associated with the Latin 'humanus' as 'human' Which means 'homo' as man and 'homines' as mankind. The European context, explain the human existence in the background of the philosophical ideal of humanity, expressing material and social freedom of man. It we examine different thoughts of different thinkers in the East, different systems of philosophy in India, Japan, Bangladesh and other counties in the East different religious like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Baulism, Vaisnavism etc., it is observed that different types of humanistic approach or different attributes of humanism are present in these thoughts and systems. In this connection it may be pointed out that in every form of humanism I have used the term 'socio' because I think that all these systems put much importance on the reorganization of the social existence of man through his mental development, as coherently related to his material and social nature.

One vaisnava poet (Baru Chandidas) of Bengal expressed that, 'savar upar manus satya, tahar upare nai'. It means that the man is truth over everything. In this context, first question is who is that man? According to Lalan sha who is the prominent Baul of Bengal, answer is that he is 'maner manus' or man of our minds. He is within the man who is free from all conditions of human existence. For this, Lalan, raises a question about his own existence like, 'sav loke kay Lalan ki jat sainsare'. It means that the inner essence of man is not limited to a particular caste, community, nation or country. For man, in human existence beyond his limitations and

differences, this is the fundamental object of the tradition of humanism in the East. In this connection, the universal form of humanism as developed by Tagore is discussed here.

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. Thus the infinite personality of man, if properly examined, is found able to develop his philosophy of life as the universal humanism, which in the observation of Tagore, a great humanist in the East, stands on the expression of inner personalities. In this paper, I shall discuss the humanistic philosophy of Tagore, which is largely expressed through the concept of inter-personal relationship. In order to expound his idea of humanism corresponding to inter-personal relationship, on his concept of man.

THE IDEA OF MAN ACCORDING TO TAGORE

The idea of man in him, who cross all limitations, contradictions or finiteness of life which are due to material 'ego'. 'Ego' in man satisfies material interest which is responsible for producing contradiction or duality, but 'I' or 'Universal Man' in him inspires man to overcome all limitations and contradictions through the development of his integral spirit of unity or synthetic outlook. Tagore observes with a profound sentiment, "Someone lives in our heart, who is Man, but who cross individual man... He is a man for all and for all times. Great men feel Him in all men, and sacrifice life easily through his love. Through the feeling of that man, a man crosses the individual limitation and reaches the boundary of man.¹ Man is not satisfied with what he is. He has a desire to transcend his own limitation and finitude and ultimately wants to reach a point where one is identical with oneself, and it is nature that helps man to realize this goal. Man carries within himself the beauty of nature and an urge to transcend one's facility and reaches the infinite. Tagore says that, man is a bridge between two poles. He remarks: At one pole of my being I am one with stock and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies, deep down below..... But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable.²

Tagore realizes his own self or nature as unity or identity through the development of his personality in its completeness and progress. So to know one's own self as a process towards universal unity is to become a universal man. This is the realization of a complete man, who, according to Tagore, is 'Manava Brahma' where a man through the realization of a universal consciousness or infiniteness, becomes 'divine' and God as infinite potentiality also becomes human through his perfect manifestation and realization in human life. In this regard of human life, the humanistic ideals of Tagore as the 'divinity of Man' and 'the humanity of God' are developed.

This state of human life, according to Tagore, is the highest state of salvation through unity, when all contradictions, limitations or finiteness are merged into an infinite process which is 'Brahmavihara' living in the infinite.³ In this state of completeness all contradictions of life are got rid of through the effective realization of infiniteness in life and world. To explain this state, Tagore says, to be dwelling in such contemplation while standing, walking, sitting or lying down until sleep overcomes thee, is called living in Brahma.⁴ In this state of life, man reaches the highest mental equilibrium when his narrowness or limitation does not touch him and then he can realize the prospects beyond contradictions and diversities. To realize this final state of integral experience is to develop the highest state of human existence as infinite through a mergence with the infinite. 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.

This method of love develops the infinity in the finite life and existence, which goes so well with Tagore's statements: ".....the infinite was not the idea of a spirit of an unbounded cosmic activity, but the infinite whose meaning is in the positive ideal of goodness and love, which cannot be otherwise than human."⁵ This type of humanistic outlook, present in man inspires him to solve all contradictions of moral and social life through the development of selflessness in love and action. A man can overcome contradiction and finally he can establish for himself a humanistic ideal of unity in love, through selfless service for others.⁶

This types of humanism in Rabindra Nath Tagore's philosophy of man through the introduction of the human ideal of love in man and society. Ordinarily man may work for his own self but the ideal of love as indicated develops a disinterested feeling for others that inspires him to work for other human beings in society. In this way a man is intimately related with others in an eternal and continuous process of life in society and thus finally he is united with all. This is the final and of Tagore's Universal Humanism from an international perspective, that is, the development of universality or infiniteness through the development of universal humanity when man realized to the inauguration of 'Manava Brahma' or 'Universal Man', in the human existence.⁷

TAGORE'S IDEA OF UNIVERSAL MAN

Tagore's idea of universal man is the highest form of realization of human nature or existence that is not extra human or super-human. In order to understand this highest form of human nature we should know the proper meaning of human existence. Man exists two needs, according to him- ordinary or material needs and higher or human needs.⁸ In human existence both these needs are combined and the humanistic outlook of man, as Tagore observes, is due to the expression of the intrinsic power of a man. This highest state of life, as Tagore observes, is to be recognized as the human freedom or the salvation through unity. The salvation is not the super-imposition of something on human nature, but is the natural expression or self-manifestation of human existence in its highest state of unity in contradictions. The final idea of salvation which is in the form of universal nature, cannot reveal itself in an individual in a particular process, but it is revealed as the eternal or universal union of individual man with all human beings that is a perfect unity with universal man.⁹ This meaning of universal humanism as the expression of the universal nature of man in his material existence, may be called the manifestation of the total man which is properly required for his freedom in unity.¹⁰ The personal man, according to Tagore, is the highest in man, the Eternal man, the Complete Man in this realization of the unity of beauty, truth and goodness. There is an inter-relation between the world in which we live and the personality of man. In fact, this world is indispensable for the development of the personality of man. According to Tagore, with our love and hatred, pleasure and pain, fear and wonder, continually working upon it, this world becomes a part of our personality, if this world were taken away; our personality would lose all its content.

The highest state of human freedom, in the observation of Tagore, is the manifestation of his universal nature that is potential in his material existence in this world. But man, in the opinion of Tagore, is not a mere material being as it in man expresses a false 'ego' that is responsible for producing contradictions in life and society. But the universal or eternal 'I' in man can overcome these contradictions through the development of universality in him.¹¹ But this development does not mean the change or elimination of contradictions in society, but it

is the reconciliation of contradictions through a harmonious development of human existence as a creative personality that finally leads to the inauguration of unity in the highest state of freedom.

TAGORE'S IDEA OF HUMAN FREEDOM

Tagore's idea of the human freedom is the essential expression of universal nature of man which is not through the elimination of contradiction but through a reconciliation in unity through a process of love that reveals the totality or completeness of human life.¹² This totality, according to Tagore, is the truth of man, manifested in the different creative spheres of his life. He also says, man's personality and creativity go together. Man comes out of his boundary of physical necessities and moves forward to realize the infinite run on two parallel lines- that of unity and of self-expression.¹³ But true freedom is the transcendence of mere being through creative becoming, he says.¹⁴

After Tagore, the idea of human freedom refers to the social freedom of man, who as an individual, exists with others in the society and so his freedom is the expression of his social or universal nature which is intimately related with others and thus is manifested in its highest state of unity in social life.¹⁵ This unity is the highest state of human freedom as a expression of infinite or universal nature of man through disinterested love and service of mankind. The personal man, according to Tagore, is the highest in man, the Eternal man, the complete man in this realization of the unity of beauty, truth and goodness.¹⁶ There is an inter-relation between the world in which we live and the personality of man. In fact, this world is indispensable for the development of the personality of man. For this idea by Tagore as the human mind and the realization of the life Divine is the accomplishment of human value as love that directs him towards his highest state of life. Tagore's believes in the Gita's concept of freedom; true freedom is not the freedom from action but freedom in action. He says that there may be two types of freedom- one outer and the other is inner, where outer freedom is the freedom from the guidance of pleasure and pain, and inner freedom is from the narrowness of self-desire. We have our own freedom of will, which can also find its true meaning in relation to the freedom of other wills. The more our will is freed and widened, the stronger our relationship with the universal world of reason. This is the bond of union through which man is related to the world and he feels an exceeding joy through this communion.

Above this explanation of human life given by Tagore is an unique and it differ from the traditional outlook of the 'Divinity of Man' given by western and Indian thinkers. These are put an importance on the divinity of human life; still emphasize the transcendental divinity, which is to be realized in the life beyond. But Tagore, explain the significance of the 'Divinity of Man' as the expression of the universality in human personality in man's social and worldly existence.¹⁷ This explanation of Tagore also differ from Western Humanists and Socialists as they denounce the ideal of the 'Divinity of Man' and emphasize the development of socio-economic and socio-political values in the life of man.¹⁸ Tagore does not deny the importance of these values in human life, but he thinks that, the life of a man is something more than these values.

FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION ACCORDING TO TAGORE

The function of religion, according to him, then is to bring the individual into harmony in reason, in love, indeed with the Super 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. In this sense, God is also a personal being like man. The *Vedantic* conception of the

divinity in man-- *Nara-Narayana*, is developed in Tagore's philosophy of the Religion of Man, avoiding the formal religions with their rituals, superstitions and mythologies. God is there in every life (*Jivan Devata*), and the realization of it through knowledge or intuition is the essence of religion. He thinks that God is to be found not in temples or mosques but in humanity itself. Tagore's concept of humanism is basically to the service of mankind. 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.

He writes, "Today, in Europe, everything is to be judged in the context of science. Thus the explanation is going on that the human material is only Physiological or Zoological or Psychological or to a great extent is Sociological. But man is not this reality, he is with all these realities and manifests his own self towards the infinite beyond all these realities."¹⁹ Tagore's idea of humanity is to be operative with man and society to raise both process of divinity in activity. Regarding the development of this complete spirit in man in the world, Tagore says, the consciousness of man with the universal man is the greatest spiritual truth.²⁰ This universal consciousness or spirit is fully developed and fulfilled through love and service for man and universal man.

This development of infiniteness or universality, according to Tagore, is the development of the 'Divinity of Man' and manifestation of universality in human life is the humanity of God. One is the realization of universality in man and the other is the manifestation of universality in human life. Through this process of life and individual man becomes free, selfless and complete, which, in Tagore's opinion, is something divine and spiritual. He says, 'for free spirit is godly, and alone can claim kinship with God'.²¹ This 'kinship with God' according to Tagore, 'is the divine union, when man becomes free from all limitations and thus relates himself with all men; that he observes, is the realization of unity in love.

Tagore's notion of the inter-personal relationship, because he distinguishes between experiences as such, and one's consciousness of experience. He maintains that in art, is not the experience itself that the artist expresses, but his personality i.e., his own consciousness of the experience. According to Tagore, self-expression is the important channel of communication. As an expressive being, man recovers communion with the universe. It is man consciousness of a deeper unity with nature, with the world, of which we are apart. The self-expressive being carries an eternal relation with the other and the other is also dependent upon my existence. Tagore thinks that to attain our world-consciousness, we have to unite our feelings with this all-pervasive infinite feeling and this is possible when we free ourselves from the bonds of personal desires, 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.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Tagore's views the universal humanism is, how a man becomes infinite or Universal Man. Tagore observes that man realizes all social values not in limited sense, but all these relations through selfless service for mankind in love are for the realization of absolute values of truth, goodness and beauty as essential unity in man. He says, 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. Above Tagore explanation is something more than the traditional explanation, as it expresses a synthetic attitude towards human life, where man becomes divine through the realization of the absolute value of unity through the manifestation of this value or goodness as the socio-cultural value of creative humanity in different self-creating and self-manifesting states of human existence. According to Tagore's 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 an interchange with the greater nature. The self-expressive being carries an eternal relation with the other and the other is also dependent upon my existence. In this way, there arises an inter-personal relationship between 'myself' and the 'other' (I and thou).

REFERENCES

- [1] Tagore, R. N. (2008). *Sadhana*, In the English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore (Vol 2, pp. 19-26). Ed. by Sisir Kumar Das. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- [2] Tagor, R. N. (2008). *Sadhana*, op. cit., P.306.
- [3] Tagore, R. N. (1970). *The Religion of Man* (pp. 42-44). London: Unwine Books.
- [4] Ibid, P. 43-44.
- [5] Hegel, G. W. F. (1979). *Phenomenology of Spirit* (p.14). Translated by A.V. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [6] Ibid, P. 19-21.
- [7] Tagore, R. N. *The Religion of Man*, op.cit., P. 17-22.
- [8] Banerjee, S. P. (1988). *Rabindranath's Concept of Personality* (p.10). Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
- [9] Radhakrishnan, S. (1919). *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (p.45). London: MaCmillan and Co.
- [10] Ibid. P. 57.
- [11] Tagore, R. N. (2008). *Personality*, in the English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore (Vol 2, p.13), Ed. by Sisir Kumar Das, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- [12] Ibid. P. 49.
- [13] Radhakrishna, S. (1918). *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op.cit; P. 73.,
- [14] Tagore, R. N. (2008). *Creative Unity*, in the English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, (Vol 2, p.61), Ed. by Sisir Kumar Das, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- [15] Tagore, R. N. *Personality*, op.cit., P. 11.
- [16] Roy, P. K. (1990). *Beauty, Art and Man: Recent Indian Theories of Art* (p.9). Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
- [17] Tagore, R. N. *The Religion of Man*, op.cit., P. 106.
- [18] Ibid., P. 99.
- [19] Tagore, R. N. *Sadhana*, in the English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore (Vol 2, p.47). New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- [20] Tagore, R. N. *Personality*, op.cit., P. 67-68.
- [21] Radhakrishna, S. (1918). *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, op.cit., P. 117.