

Study on Rabindranath Tagore's Novel with Reference to Humanism

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Abstract:

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. He talks about the emancipation of women in his book 'Khata' and 'Wife's Letter'. According to him, humanism is the greatest religion. Rabindranath Tagore was not like the traditional landlords. He was a social reformer and he took various steps for the welfare of the people and he was called the true advocate of humanism. Humanism and human love for human beings are the main tenets of Rabindra philosophy and literature. He has made equal contributions in all branches of Bengali literature and at the same time he has established himself in the hearts of the people by promoting universal humanism. He gave guidelines in his literature on how disadvantaged people can establish their rights in society. He has taught his readers how to protest and stand up against injustice and has inspired his readers to sing for humanity all the time.

Keywords: Literature, Humanism, Rabindernath Tagore, Novels.

Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore is the poet whose writings have enriched all branches of Bengali literature and opened up new horizons of creativity. This great poet of Bengali literature was born in Calcutta on 7 May in 1861. He was simultaneously a poet, a rhymer, a novelist, a composer, a playwright, a painter, a short story writer, an essayist, a vocalist, a philosopher, and a creative humanist. His 52 books of poetry, 38 plays, 13 novels, 95 short stories, 36 essays and 1915 songs have taken Bengali literature to a unique height. This great poet has painted about 2000 pictures. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his book Gitanjali in 1913. He has perfected Bengali literature through poetry, short stories, essays and numerous songs. Rabindranath Tagore has made the Bengali nation known internationally through his unique creations. In 1901 he established the Brahmacharyashram at Santiniketan in West Bengal. In 1905 he became involved in the anti-partition movement. In 1915, the British government awarded him the title of Knight but in 1919 he returned the title in protest of the Jallianwalabagh massacre. In 1921, he set up an organization called Sriniketan for rural development. He preached the message of brotherhood through his sharp writing. In his literature, human love, love for country, love for nature, cosmopolitanism and the sense of beauty have been described in a very beautiful and perfect way. As a means of social welfare, he advocated for educating the poor people of the village. He protested against social discrimination, religious orthodoxy and bigotry in his literature. His songs continue to play a unique role in promoting humanism. The main theme of his poetry is the sadness of the human heart, joy, and love of humanity. Rabindranath Tagore's 'Balaka' (1916) was a great manifestation of the humanism that was written after the outbreak of the First World War.

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.

Humanism 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 Rachanavali, 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 shear 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-relation 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 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 Wolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Simone 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.

Krishna Kripalani 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 a 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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