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RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S SOCIAL VISION AND LITERARY CREED

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest figure of Indian Renaissance, has shed the golden luster of his genius through his literary endeavours; poems, dramas, short stories, essays, songs, paintings, and so on. His view of life, literature and art is vast and varied, in that his social philosophy has been completely submerged. He is a great poet as well as a great visionary. He realizes the ideal of universal brotherhood irrespective of caste, community, colour, sex, race and country. He has expressed his view of universal love and compassion for mankind in his writings. That is why he is appreciated and loved all over the world. As a poet he wants to unite entire humanity in the bond of love and sympathy. He strives to break barriers between rich and poor, great and small. He has a great sympathy for the people of lower cast and poorer farmers, laborers, menial and manual workers. He feels sorry that he could not properly mixed up with them in life. But he expresses his sincere feelings of pain in his writings. In this article, I have tried to find out his views and feelings for common people in his literary endeavors.

Key words- Great patriot, social philosophy, great visionary, humanist

Tagore is a great patriot. He goes so far as to say that 'Had I died begging for my country, even unsuccessfully, that would have been worship, acceptable to the gods.' ¹ He believes in Indian culture that is divided into four parts: 'The main river of Indian culture has flowed in four streams, the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist and the Jain. It has its source in the heights of the Indian consciousness.' ²

Tagore is a humanist par excellence. His humanism has been influenced by the Renaissance humanists. His humanism resembles Indian humanism of the Upanishads, Buddhism and Vaisnavism and therefore, it is spiritual in its essence. According to him, 'Spiritual life is the emancipation of consciousness. Through it we find immediate response of soul everywhere.' ³ He is intensely aware of his surroundings. He sees the rise and growth of liberalism, extremism, socialism, and formalism in the country. He endeavours for the political freedom of India and for the preservation of the spiritual individuality of each and every nation of the world: He asserts, 'We must refuse to allow our country at the bar of foreign court and be judged according to a foreign law We

must save our country and ourselves from insult by manfully bearing the burdens of our motherland with all our strength and all our pride.' ⁴

Tagore's view is in harmony with William Wordsworth on man and nature. He says that there is none but a man who raised difficulties for man. He feels sorry to see that man is not afraid of natural calamities, wild animals and other fearful things but he is suffered by inhuman behavior of human being. He is aware of man's role, what man has made of man: 'We too have suffered at the hands of man—not tigers and snakes, not elemental forces of nature, but human beings. Men are ever the greatest enemy of Man. I had felt and known it; all the same, there was a hope, deep in my heart, that I should find some place, some temple, where the immortal spirit of man dwelt hidden like the sun behind clouds.' ⁵

In one of his poems, Tagore pleads for equality. He does not believe in caste system, no one is great or small to worship God. God is not in His temple but in every one's heart. Nature has given man the right to worship God who has faith in him. ⁶ With regard to his social vision, it may be said that he recognizes the existence of both good and evil. Like good, evil is an essential part of the world. He says that, 'The question why there is evil in existence is the same as why there is imperfection, or in other words, why there is creation at all.' ⁷ He is of the view that 'Evils are like meteors, stray fragments of life, which need the attraction of some great ideal in order to be assimilated with the wholesomeness of creation.' ⁸ He does not lend support to people's divergent opinions that they cannot live in unity and harmony. He insists that if Evil and Good can live together, then why not men of different opinions: 'It is one of the most difficult things to make bad and good harmonize—and yet in this world they are found together—and in that union sorrow and happiness are found—it is not always evil that is seen but also good. And if that is possible then I fail to understand why it should be difficult for two people whose opinions differ to unite happily.' ⁹

According to Tagore, there are only two passions which attract everyone—beauty and emotion. Beauty of the body is as important as the soul, though only for a short time. These are the everlasting truths for him. As Ayyub observes, '..... emotions occupy a very important place in Tagore's philosophy of arts, for they are the principal instruments of man's unification and harmonization with the world.' ¹⁰ In the play Chandalika, Tagore gives importance to physical beauty. Prakriti, the heroine of the play, falls in love with Ananda, the famous disciple of the Buddha, at first sight. Later Prakriti's love changes into lust. She compels her mother to exercise her black magic on him to call. It shows that love is the highest expression of joy as love provides freedom. 'We find in perfect love the freedom of our self. That only which is done for love is done freely, however much pain it may cause. Therefore, working for love is freedom in action.' ¹¹ Without love life is incomplete. 'For love is the highest human truth, and truth gives fullness of life. The earth is overwhelmed by it, not because of man's covetousness, but because of this life giving shower, heart and mind that he has poured around him.' ¹² The same idea he gives in his play, Chitra.

Dr. S.Radhakrishnan, the former president of India, is of the view that Tagore is a philosopher of man and for man. ¹³ He loves this earth of mankind which is no less than paradise. The richness and variety of Nature make the Earth a lovely place. Paradise is nowhere but on the Earth. The real 'vision of paradise is to be seen in the sunlight and the green of the Earth, in the beauty of the human face and the wealth of human life, even in objects that are seemingly insignificant and unprepossessing.' ¹⁴

Tagore maintains that man must have an extended vision of his true self so that he can get conscious of his moral nature. Narrow-mindedness and mean mentality make man small. He brings out this noble idea in Sadhana, 'I do not put my faith in any new institution, but in the individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth. Our moral ideas do not work with chisels and hammers—like trees, they spread their roots in the soil and their branches in the sky, without consulting any architect for their plans.' ¹⁵

For Tagore, orthodoxy, traditionalism, ritualism and false religion are the subjects of rejection. For this reason his writings are pregnant with great ideas. Raghupati, a character of his play Sacrifice and Kemankar, of Malini are fanatic worshippers of gods. Raghupati is of the view that to please goddess Kali, animal sacrifice is a must. To save the state by god's anger and to alleviate the sufferings of citizens, it is necessary to sacrifice

animals before the goddess. To fulfill his desire, superstitious Raghupati is ready to kill his King who is not in favour of any sacrifice before goddess and forbids the shedding of blood in the Kali's temple which has been practiced by his ancestors and kings in the long past. He says, 'The creature's blood is not the offering of gods.'¹⁶ And in Malini Kemankar kills his friend Supriya as he denies following him blindly. Like King Govinda, Supriya is on the righteous path and represents true religion.

Tagore's social philosophy and humanism are the two sides of a coin. They cannot be separated from each other. Three major movements influenced his life very much. He points out that, 'I was born in 1861: That is not an important date of history, but it belongs to a great epoch in Bengal, when the currents of three movements had met in the life of our country. One of these movements, the religion, was introduced by a great-hearted man of gigantic intelligence, Raja Rammohan Roy. It was revolutionary, for he tried to reopen the channel of spiritual life which had been obstructed for many years by the sands and debris of creeds that were formal and materialistic, fixed in external practices lacking spiritual significance.'¹⁷

The second movement was the literary revolution pioneered by the contemporary of Tagore, Bankimchandra Chatterjee. And the third was the National movement. It was not fully political. It began to give voice to the mind of the people trying to assert their own identity. The participation of his father Debendranath in these movements encouraged him to campaign to remove the evils of the society. Therefore, he took part in removing social injustices of his time prevailing in society.

All these things make Tagore a humanist and a lover of man. He feels the troubles of an ordinary man in his heart. He never had such troubles as he belongs to a rich family. His love is based on the Vedantic concept of unity in all living beings. He is never in favour of a life which is full of greed, false ambitions, cruelty, pride, self-seeking temper, and over-confidence. They ostracize man from the flow of life and he forgets the Supreme Reality that surrounds him. He has expressed his feelings through his plays Gandhari and Red Oleanders which embody the same idea. Duryodhan, in the play Gandhari, is full of ignoble ambition. He defeats Yudhishtir by unfair means in treacherous game of dice just to fulfill his perverted ambition. The reason is that he is not a just man and wants to usurp pandavas' (son of king Pandu) kingdom. In Red Oleanders, Tagore shows how man becomes merciless. The king in this play does not understand and behave as man. He never deals with labourers kindly but treats them as machines. This play shows Tagore's view of anti-totalitarianism. It is a satire on totalitarianism. He has a great sympathy for the people of lower and poorer classes—farmers labourers, menial and manual workers. He feels sorry that he could not properly mix up with them in life. But he expresses his sincere feelings of pain in his writings. He expresses his sincere feelings of pain and regret for this in one of his poems. He considers it his failure in life. He says,

'Man stands farthest in the mystery
Hidden in time and space.
.....
The tiller
The weaver
The fisher man,
.....
I have known them for any corner of renown
unable to enter the intimate precincts.
.....
I know my failure wherever my songs have been
Left incomplete wherever it has missed the all.'¹⁸

The entire world is a family for Tagore. Everyman across the world is a member of his family. He always believes in universal human order. Whenever humanity has been hurt, man has insulted, his pen has shone just like the Sun. He sends out his message of sympathy and sorrow to oppressed humanity all over the world and raises his voice of protest against wrongs done to them. He protests against cruelty, violence, injustice, exploitation and oppression wherever he finds them. His plays and other writings are the mirror of all these

deeds. Old customs and animal sacrifice in his play *Sacrifice*, diversion with nature in *Mukta Dhara*. Untouchability in *Chandalika*, confined existence within the four walls of a room in *The Post Office*, attraction for the physical beauty in *Chitra*, narrow-mindedness in *The King of the Dark Chamber*, Three riddle plays, *The Test*, *The Reception* and *The Patron*, are satire on education system, pride and miserliness. No act of injustice has escaped from the poets' eyes. For him, these are the conspiracies to let down man—the Supreme Being, from his dignity. The poet attributes highest rank to human existence. For him nothing is as real as man. Tagore did not take part in active politics. But he used his pen to arouse people's social and moral conscience. His so many writings, addresses, speeches, national songs, and essays show his political views on country's politics.

Tagore is of the view that there should be no interference with the law of Nature. He is against methodized nature with man-made machines. It is harmful for both Nature and man because machines sometimes become the means of destruction. Tagore presents it in his play *Mukta Dhara*. Bibhuti, the royal engineer, built a dam over a water fall to stop the natural flow. But it could not benefitted people but caused conflict among the citizens of Shiv-tarai. Tagore is of the view that science and technology are good when they help man and are harmful when they seek to master him. He says, 'the history of a struggle between the mechanical spirit of conformity in social organization and the creative spirit of man which seeks freedom and love in self-expression.'¹⁹ Thus, it is clear that he is a lover of mankind in the age of machines. Through the medium of literature he sought to disseminate his philosophy of humanism in an era and world order torn by strife, violence, selfishness, superstition, irrationality and so on. Genuine faith and reverential adoration, which characterize a true religious creed, had come to be replaced by an order of things entrenched in orthodoxy and ritualism. Love and kindness which are the loftiest attributes of man were supplanted by hate and narrowness. Tagore's literary endeavours appeared as a beacon light in the midst of darkness.

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2. *Ibid.*, p.113.
3. C.F. Andrews, *Thoughts From Rabindranath Tagore*, (London:1929), p.5.
4. N.B. Sen, ed. *Glorious Thoughts of Tagore*, (New Delhi:1965), pp.177.
5. Rabindranath Tagore, *Lecture and Addresses*, (London:1970), p.142.
6. Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all forever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

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 13. "He was one of those rare men about whom it may be said without any exaggeration that neither his own generation nor another will look upon his like again. He was one of the few representatives of the universal man to whom the future of the world belongs." S. Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, (London:1918), p.2
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