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REVIEW ARTICLE

HUMANISM IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PHILOSOPHY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ROBINDRANATH TAGORE

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ABSTRACT

Submersed Humanism is a system of views based on respect for the dignity of man, concern for his welfare, his all round development and creation of favorable conditions for social life. The humanism that we have seen in thoughts of contemporary Indian philosophers is different from the western humanism. Western humanism is mostly intellectual, economic and political in nature. But the Indian humanism is primarily Spiritual. The Indian humanism does not take man to be material being but as one with spirit, mind, life and body. It aims at the fulfillment of the aspirations which are physical, vital, mental and spiritual in nature.

INTRODUCTION

Humanism is a system of views based on respect for the dignity of man, concern for his welfare, his all round development and creation of favourable conditions for social life. The humanism that we have seen in thoughts of contemporary Indian philosophers is different from the western humanism. Western humanism is mostly intellectual, economic and political in nature. But the Indian humanism is primarily Spiritual. The Indian humanism does not take man to be material being but as one with spirit, mind, life and body. It aims at the fulfillment of the aspirations which are physical, vital, mental and spiritual in nature. In contemporary Indian philosophy we find Balgangadhar Tilak appealing people to strive to life themselves up to achieve union with God and to seek unity with the world taking disinterested action as the guiding principle. He further urges people to carry on their duty so that the fruits of their action may be enjoyed by the future progeny if not by them. Even Gandhi speaks of the upliftment of every individual in all spheres of life including social, political, economic, moral and spiritual. To embark on the ideal of Ram Rajya, he suggested certain practical measures like Bread labour, Trusteeship etc. In Aurobindo, man is projected as as a moral personality and the ethical impulse evolves with the emergence of the higher nature of man. This attitude leads man from lower harmony and individual discords towards a higher harmony and universality based on oneness of all existence self- sacrifice or self-condemnation is core of humanism in Aurobindo's philosophy and the passage from the self-regarding animal to selfless divinity can be regarded as

mankinds highest ethical growth. Radhakrishnan also believes that we live at the dawn of new era of universal humanity. Man exists for a higher cause than merely growing up, mating, producing and passing out. This is an aspiration to grow better, to become better humans. Radhakrishnan's philosophy tries to restore mankind to its origin, announcing that the spirit of the east and west is over, and the history of a new world has begun, humanity being the sole mantra, the binding thread. In this article a special attention has given on humanism in the philosophy of Robindranath Tagore.

Robindranath Tagore is a poet philosopher. It is from his poetry and other writings that we know of his philosophy. He does not state his philosophy in the academic manner. His philosophical thoughts are scattered in his literary works. Tagore's philosophy is based on his intuition. Humanism is the dominant principle in Tagore's philosophy. His humanistic attitude pervades all aspects of his thoughts. Robindranath's philosophy of humanism can be studied in the light of some of his basic concepts like religion of man, the surplus of man and the like. Robindranath observes 'man' the highest evolutionary product, the cream of creation and praise his due honour even to man's biological facilities. With the four footed structure in the lower animals it is much easier to resist the downward push of gravitational force. But Robindranath says that human being due to his innate urge from freedom defined as it were as rule of nature and making amendments on constitution of providence. He makes somehow his hands free, somehow he acquired the capacity of stand erect to turn his eyes on all sides. Man gain freedom of action with his hands, freedom of views with his eyes, in his high vertical position. Thus man could get his freedom of action and vision by his biological structure

itself. But it is not the whole picture of man. He gains a mental freedom due to his capacity of imagination. The poet observes that it is the ability of observation which makes us constantly aware of life which transcends the limitations of our biological needs. Hence we cannot rest content only with accomplishing what convinces it the preservation and enjoyment of our mundane existence. Our imagination is not same to the animal. Apart from his mind-body complex the human being possess also a free spirit. This free spirit is Godly which alone can kinship with God.

According to Tagore, man has a bipolar existence. He has a smaller self and a greater self, the physical aspect and the spiritual aspect. He is finite-infinite. "He is earth's child but heaven's heir." Tagore describes this very clearly when he says, "At one pole of my being I am one with the stocks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of Universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies... 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" (Religion of Man, 1949). The physical aspect of man is determinable in terms of biological, physiological and psychological facts and the spiritual aspect is expressed in longings and aspirations that are not rooted in these conditions. Man in his physical aspect is confined in a narrow outlook. Here he simply displays himself on the plane of necessity and needs. But Tagore thinks that man is more than this. There is an inner urge in man which impels him to go beyond. This is his spiritual aspect. This spiritual or infinite aspect of man has been variously described by Tagore. It has been called the Universal in man, the surplus in man, the element of divinity present in man and so on. This surplus in man is spiritual in nature and it is the basis of all values. This is the consciousness of oneness beyond all boundaries. It is the realization of one's own self in harmony with that of others. Tagore gives more importance to the development of this aspect in man because the communion of man with God which is the sole destiny of man in the world is possible only through the development of this aspect. Robindranath Tagore assimilates both theism and absolutism in his philosophy. Like the Vaishnavas, he chooses to emphasize those aspects of the Upanisads which teach that finites are created by the infinite out of its own endless joy of Love. Tagore recognizes two aspects of God- personal and impersonal. But to him, the personal aspect of God is greater than his impersonal aspect. His God is a God of love who finds fulfillments in the lives of sentient beings. According to Tagore, both souls and the world of nature are contents of God. They are parts of God. For Tagore the world of nature is real.

Robindranath Tagore has all along been a prophet of harmony. For him man, nature and God are integrated one whole. He humanizes nature, or the world. He believes in kinship between man and nature. According to him, nature apart from man's appreciation and understanding is only a dumb mass having no significance at all. Tagore believes that man has the capacity to manipulate nature in such a manner as to serve his own ends. He thinks that it is human mind that reveals the meaning and significance of things. Tagore humanizes not only nature or the world but also God. In his book *Religion of Man*, while describing the purpose of the book he says, "The idea of the humanity of our God, or the divinity of man, the Eternal, is the main subject of this book." (Religion of Man, 1949) This

appears to represent the basic idea which Tagore tries to develop in so many ways. At times, man is raised higher to the status of God, at other times, God is brought down to man in so far as divinity is said to be discernable in the heart of man. Tagore's God is somehow God and man at the same time and he asserts that "If this faith be blamed for being anthropomorphic, man is to be blamed for being man." (Religion of man, 1949) He humanizes God to make possible the divinity of man in the world. Instead of worshipping a transcendent God he has turned to man, whom he has called Manab – Brahma. Tagore believes that man apart from God is empty and God apart from man is an abstraction. For Tagore reality is human reality and truth is human truth. God depends on human beings for realizing the fullness of his creation. Tagore ceaselessly affirms: "Our God is also man." Tagore humanizes God and divineness man. For him divinity of man and humanity of the divine are complementary half-truths. In fact, the humanism of Tagore is just the application of the belief that feeling anything as human- in the human way is a source of joy. It is the human mind that reveals the meaning and significance of things. Tagore's 'Idealism' is humanistic. He says, "It is almost a truism to say that the world is what we perceive it to be. We imagine that our mind is a mirror that it is, more or less, accurately reflecting what is happening outside us." (Personality, 1948). If we could adjust the focus of the mind the forest might appear as running, the pleasurable may appear as painful. This speaks of the primacy of the human point of view. The one effort of man's personality is to transform everything with which he has any true concern into the human. For example, the description of the beauty of sunrise has its eternal interest in us because, in fact, it is not the sunrise that catches our interest, but the fact of sunrise in relation to our interest or aesthetic sense.

This is why we always find a human touch in the writings and poems of Tagore. If a river is described, a ferry at once appears, if a scene or a landscape is painted, a human form must remain there; when a flower is presented, it is presented as bringing a message for the human soul; when the beauty of the rainy night is being described, the rains have to fall on the 'spire of the temple rising above the undefined mass of blackness grouped around the village huts'; and if the quietness of solitude is pictures, its peace has to be intensified with joy by the rising notes of a faint song. The outer world, according to Tagore is nothing but 'a cradle for the human spirit'. That is why in Tagore's thought the notions of 'life', rhythm, beauty, harmony, order, love, delight, music etc. have become important. All these are human concepts; they become meaningful when they are related to human values. In fact most of the analogies that Tagore uses to describe nature are related to man's disposition and urges and feelings. For example in the *Lover's Gift and Crossing* he says, "O, listen to the secret of the world, I know that lily is pale for moon's love. The lotus draws her veil aside before the morning sun and the reason is simple." (Lover's Gift and Crossing, 1927) or again in the same series of verses he says, "The world to you is like an old Woman's chant at her spinning wheel- un meaning rhymes crowded with random images." (Lover's Gift and Crossing, 1927) such similes and analogies are not rare, and they all are indicative of the intensely human disposition of the poet – philosopher. Throughout *Gitanjali* we find that God has been conceived as a human being. In the *Gitanjali* Tagore looks upon God as

Friend, Companion, Lord, The Beautiful, Man of the heart, Beloved and so on. According to Tagore, God is the Supreme Person who is the innermost shrine of our own heart. Tagore conceives that there is an intimate relation between God and Self. The Self seeks God, but God also longs for communion with it. Tagore thinks that it is only through the finites that the music of the infinite is sung. Thus, it is seen that humanism is the dominant principle in Tagore's philosophy. Tagore glorifies man throughout his philosophy. Man has been given a key status in his philosophy. Without affecting the Godness of God, he gives to man also a special dignity and uniqueness. Divinizing man and humanizing God he gives the theory of spiritual humanism. In fact his humanism is rooted on spiritual foundation. Tagore is a prophet of harmony and fellowship. By raising man to the status of God he feels the presence of love, harmony and fellowship in the human world. Again by bringing down God to man and considering God as the discernable entity of human heart he gives more prominence to humanity and its service. Like many other humanists and religious thinkers of the world, Tagore asserts that by loving and serving humanity one can show his love and service to God. Considering man as the only unique model of God Tagore desires the exaltation of the spirit of man. Tagore's philosophy of humanism can not be separated from his particular religious standpoint and it is his religion which leads him to spiritual humanitarianism in proclaiming the reality of Man Divine.

Tagore takes help not only from the ancient Indian tradition; he stands also in the tradition of the great religions of the world like Christianity and Buddhism. Power loving moderns of west are taught by Robindranath what is their real need which is no other than deemphasizing of materialism. He teaches his countryman that here the danger comes from the other side, that is our partiality is for the internal world. He unites the savior east and west into the fundamental unity which is humanity.

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