

Concept of Man in Rabindranath Tagore's Philosophy

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Rabindranath Tagore is an important figure of India in the literary as well as in the philosophical world. He is a great novelist, writer, philosopher, painter, patriot, humanist and above all a Universalist. He has written many books, essays, poems etc. and those are the sources of his philosophical ideas. His contributions to the field of art, music, literature, religion, education, politics, and social reforms etc. are noteworthy. However, Tagore has not given a systematic philosophy but the world view behind his works and his ideas are complex as well as original. He does not state his philosophy in the academic manner. His philosophical thoughts are scattered in his literary works. He doesn't write a systematic philosophical treatise but authored many essays and lectures in which he depicts his philosophical worldview in a poetic way. In his philosophical ideas, the concept of man occupies a significant position. Through his poetry, he strives to communicate his vision of reality. He has developed spiritualistic humanism that connects ancient Indian philosophical ideas with western ideas and has given them his original twist. In this paper, an attempt has been made to discuss Rabindranath Tagore's views on man and to show that whether he can be regarded as a humanist.

Generally, man is said to be the highest creature on earth. Unlike the other animals, man has the power of reasoning. Man can make his life worth living by using his reason. Rationality distinguishes man from other animals and makes him essentially and fundamentally a progressive being. The concept of 'man' has occupied an important place in both ancient Indian philosophy and in contemporary Indian philosophy.

But, there is an insignificant difference between man as depicted in ancient Indian philosophy and in contemporary Indian philosophy. Ancient philosophy gives much importance to the spiritual nature of man rather than his physical nature. The ancient thinkers emphasise on values that is super natural and other worldly. But, contemporary philosophers believe in philosophy to be essentially tied up with life. Their attitudes towards the world is very much positive, optimistic and dynamic. These philosophers of India deal with the problem of man's nature and destiny in an integral and comprehensive way and take full account of man's spiritual as well as physical existence. They are traditional, they reinterpret the classical Indian thought and reveal to us the essential truths of the past in a new form and with a new orientation. It shows great appreciation of the values of life, viz; individual, social and national. Its appreciation of the values of life and the cultural stream are influenced by the ancient Indian and the western philosophers. Contemporary thinkers are highly influenced by the Upanishads and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. They believe that man is essentially spiritual. He is to realise his inner spirituality and freedom. They also have given importance to man's existence in the world and to the fulfilment of his entire being, viz; his empirical i.e. physical as well as spiritual personality. Thus, it is seen that contemporary Indian thinkers are equally concerned with both the natures- spiritual and physical. There are various conceptions about the nature of man in the history of philosophy. Most of the Indian thinkers have given importance to both man's physical and spiritual nature. This spirituality, they do not mean in metaphysical sense which is beyond life and death, but it is a guiding principle that leads human existence from particularity to the fullness, it implies a change in one's attitude to the world, one can move away from his egoistic nature towards the world which is the source of our own sufferings and happiness. As Rabindranath Tagore is a Contemporary Indian thinker so that he shows the nature of man in the same way to some extent like his contemporaries which can be found in his different works.

The concept of man has a distinctive role to create a plan for good living as well as for the development of the whole world, which may be said the central theme in Tagore's philosophy. He believes that man has a nature and this nature is man's truth which is regulative. He is very

much concerned with the problem of man and his destiny. He is deeply connected with the humanity, tried to establish an all comprehensive view of life. Tagore is a firm believer in the evolution of man to a higher destiny. Man is closely related with the universe and he holds that the evolution of mind and spirit makes man superior to animal. He is superior to all living creatures of the world not only with regard to his spiritual nature but also in respect of his physical organism. He believes that man in his very being unites spirit and nature. Man is a physical, moral and spiritual being and society is the expression of both moral and spiritual aspiration of man, which belongs to his higher nature. Man has an inner power within him which enables him to realise his unity with the whole of mankind, with nature, and also with God. This inner power of divinity that latent in man, which is characterized by him as the Universal Man. He has preached for the exaltation of the spirit of man. It is possible for man to realise the supreme personality through love in his life-time. He stresses the ideal of human unity.

Regarding the nature of man, Tagore says that there are two important factors of man; firstly, the physical nature which he received from evolution and secondly, the spiritual nature which makes him unique and gives to him some amount of freedom. Man's physical nature includes his biological, physiological and psychological aspects and spiritual nature is the realization of the Divinity, the real nature that is present in that physical nature. The physical nature of man is called the finite aspect and infinite aspect is his spiritual nature, according to Rabindranath Tagore. It is through the infinite aspect of man that impels him to go beyond. Thus, he says that the best way of describing man's nature is that man is finite-infinite. He combines himself the physical nature with the spiritual nature. "He is earth's child but heaven's heir." Tagore describes this clearly through these lines, "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."

Nothing is impossible for man. He may attempt and fail, but even

failures prompt him to make renew efforts. Again, this spiritual nature of man along with the different functions of the mind like feeling, memory, imagination etc., reveal some power or energy that cannot be valued by his biological functions. This energy is named as Surplus energy or Creative energy by Tagore with the help of which man can employ for cultivating knowledge for the sake of knowledge, to give a shape to man's civilization, makes man conscious of his own self, or he can utilise his surplus energy in different artistic creations.

Man is aware of the fact that he is not only a physical being, so that he is to transcend his physical nature, to develop his inherent spirituality where he will have full freedom of creation, where he will come in touch with the infinite. Rabindranath Tagore does not agree with the thinkers who do not believe in the reality of the finite self. He says that the finite self represents the self which lives and moves in the world. "Tagore says that a rejection of the finite self will naturally mean a rejection of the Infinite self also, because it is in and through the finite that the Infinite is sought to be realised. If the finite self is rejected, self would become content less and hence there would not remain any basis even for the Infinite self."

Rabindranath Tagore lays emphasis on three aspects of man's finite nature. Firstly, he says that in his finite existence man shares some qualities and characteristics of the animal world. He is determined, have desire, motive, self-satisfaction attitude, some instinctive and mechanical ways of action and behaviour like other animals. Secondly, even in his finite existence man possesses certain peculiar characters that distinguish him from other living beings. Thirdly, the finite nature of man itself gives evidence of the spiritual potentialities of man. They are not always ego-centric, they aim at the realization of some social good. It also trying to transcend itself.

Like other Indian thinkers, Tagore also believes that the ultimate aim of human being is to attain perfection or self-realisation. It is the realisation of unity, the realisation of Divinity, it is the realisation of the Universal within. He emphasises on the cultivation of the divine power in Man. There is an element of divinity present in every man. If the divine elements like conscience, free will, reason etc. are used in the right way, man can bring down heaven to this earth. Man has a self-awareness,

which reveals to him the fact that he has a capacity of going beyond himself, towards higher and higher regions.

According to Tagore, death plays a distinctive role in order to attain the ultimate destiny. Normally, we all believe that death is the state where all our activities puts an end. But, Tagore maintains that death is not the end of one's life, it is not even the negation of life, and it is a positive aspect of life which gives to life a significance and a value. Man is afraid of death because he is not able to perceive its real meaning and takes it differently and putting an end to what his life stands for. But, if all are understood the real meaning of the word death, then it shall find it to be a stage that gives to life an onward direction. For Tagore, death serves another human and spiritual purpose also. It is a supreme lesson in 'giving away'. He said that life can realise its proper function only when it gives up its narrow egoistic outlook. Death gives away life itself, puts an end to whatever man considers as his 'own' in life. Thus, death may be an end of this life but, it is not the destiny of man, it is a phase, a stage of his existence. Thus, death has an essential place in the spiritual process of the extension of consciousness.

The ultimate destiny of human being is the realisation of immortality, of complete freedom. Man as a spiritual being tries to get freedom from the bondage of the world. The embodied state is a state of bondage as all its powers are body-determined. As we go on unfolding the powers and the freedom of the soul by rising above the bodily and trying to realise our essential affinity with all, we are progressing towards immortality, towards the realisation of complete freedom. This is the state in which man rises completely over his egoistic life and has a realisation of the essential unity of everything. He feels one with nature, one with everything. It enables man to rise above even the distinction between pleasure and pain, and good and evil, because these distinctions arise only when we believe in the distinction between me and thou or between mine and yours. This is the feeling of the presence of 'Him' all round, this is the realisation of Divinity and this is the ultimate human destiny. Thus, it appears that Rabindranath Tagore in his view in man tries to show that finite man is not an end in itself. Finitude of man always has an appeal to the Infinite and that can be realised in this life. His humanism is universal because it deals

with the analysis of the universal nature and creative existence of man. He believes that human beings can fulfil their potentiality and find freedom and fulfilment through love and knowledge only if they succeed in connecting their narrow self with the universal Being. The most central theme in his philosophy is the human being, his or her potential and the question of how this potential can be reached. It is the human mind that reveals the meaning and significance of things. His humanistic attitude pervades all aspects of his thoughts and his philosophy would not be completed without making a mention of his humanistic beliefs. The humanism of Tagore is the application of the belief that feeling anything as human, in the human way, a source of joy.

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