

Rabindranath Tagore and his multi-faceted philosophical approach

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy is rich and diverse in its emphasis on various aspects of liberation. He highlights the values of uniformity, harmony and developing a balance between the finite and infinite by the individual. This paper analyses the aforementioned aspects as well as examines Rabindranath's approach on the various dimensions of the self, ego and manifesting the divine within us through universal love.

Key words: Self, Harmony, Universality, Liberation, Divinity

I. INTRODUCTION:

Rabindranath, the poet is perhaps more familiar to us than Rabindranath, the philosopher. This paper however attempts to focus on Rabindranath, the philosopher and analyses various aspects of his philosophical outlook. Before diving into discussion of his philosophy, it's imperative to glance over the three main branches of philosophy. These are - Metaphysics (The exploration of the fundamental nature of reality, being etc.), Epistemology (The theory of knowledge) and Axiology (The study of value).

Explanation: Apparently, among the three branches, Metaphysics predominates Rabindranath's philosophy at least up to the point he composed his poetry book *Balaka*. At the time of writing *Balaka*, Tagore had already undergone many changes with his emphasis on the creativity of mankind- a man not only creates civilization and industries but is also involved in the process of creating himself. As long as human beings exist, this creativity prevails in the universe because man always transcends himself and this self transcendence means going beyond his physicality. A man lives with Dual *Bhāva* (state or aspects) - the state of '*jīva-bhāva*' (Physicality) and the state of '*Biswa-bhāva*' (Universality). A man has affinity with an animal in terms of gross physicality but

bestly carnality is not all that a man lives for as it only lasts for a certain period. The urge of sublimity takes precedence over this, finally driving him towards acquiring the quality of universality. A man in his moment of nearing transcendence leaves behind the boundary of physicality- the boundary of possessiveness, avarice etc. Rabindranath describes it as 'mean I' and its 'boundary'; he goes on to say that we must proceed towards attaining the 'nobler I' with the 'mean I' belittled and shattered.

Everything including our family, wealth, fame, sometimes our resorting to violence, killing, our worldly concerns centre around this 'mean or narrow I'. However, by rising above these trifles a man advances towards the '*Param Purush*' (Supreme Power) or '*Greater I*'. A man grows better with the intent of reaching the '*nobler I*'. This happens as he realises the universal aspect of humanity and thereby tears off the trap of mean-mindedness. For instance, a man who risks his own life and jumps into the river to save a man from drowning is capable of transcending his '*mean I*' and realizing his benevolent altruistic self. He can therefore, perform selfless actions and even lay down his life for the good of others. In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore observes, "The individual man must exist for Man the great, and must express him in disinterested works, in science and philosophy, in literature and arts, in service and worship. This is his religion..."¹

Whatever we suffer from, we suffer as we get oblivious of the supreme man or the divine self within us. Rishi Aurobindo and Rabindranath share a similar outlook on this subject. According to Aurobindo, it is not the ego feeling that encourages a man to do good for others. Rather it is this ego feeling that stands in the way of a man's expression of the universal being within himself. Man is also thought to be born twice as initially man gets confined in *Jīva Bhāva* (physicality). Later on, he regenerates to reach the state of

ViswaBhābha (universality) from his surplus. Here, Aurobindo uses the term 'Superman' instead of the 'Universal man' (VishwaMānav). Divinity has to flow from within, it lies at the core of every man. Tagore enlightens us by saying that man can realise this power of divinity through Sādhanā or meditation. Rishi Aurobindo is of the opinion that yoga can help mento reach the state of Superman. In this regard, Raghunath Ghosh comments, "Sri Aurobindo has shown that a man possesses Superman in him. He has given the name of the Absolute as Superman which is new in Indian tradition. Here the highest honour is given to mankind."²

In the field of epistemology, Rabindranath mentions two important things – feeling and creative insight or aesthetic insight. Rabindranath treats feeling in a deep and particular sense - feeling metamorphoses into content i.e. feeling grow to become content with the process of imagination, fellow feeling, insight etc. which result from selfless love. It is this insight, imaginative feeling and selfless love which Tagore describes as aesthetic insight. Herein, lies the uniqueness of Rabindranath's philosophy. Tagore speaks of three values – Satya (truth), Siva (Good) and Sundara (Beautiful). These three values become one when perceived with aesthetic insight.

Uniformity is one of the main areas of importance in Rabindranath's philosophy. The Satya (Truth), Siva (Good) and Sundara (Beautiful) have uniformity and exist in the perfect rhythm. When we simply read the lyrics of a song, we just come across an accumulation of words, but when we hear that song through a combination of music and rhythm, it becomes beautiful and appealing to us. Similarly, when we link the universe with our consciousness and become aware of it, we perceive the true beauty of everything.

It is evident that Tagore was part of a family that was deeply engaged in the matters of religious reforms. But Tagore's conception of religion was fluid and quite inclusive of spiritual elements. Instead of associating himself with any dogmatic or rigid aspects of religion, he made an attempt of collaborating different ideas and integrating them in his personal philosophy. Tagore emphasizes on the harmonious nature of the infinite. It is unitary in nature and devoid of any inherent contradictions. Man is unaware of the loving harmony that exists amongst us. Since men remain constricted in their prejudiced view, they look at each other with the lens of superiority and inferiority. As a result, division and discrimination persists. But once he becomes aware of the infinite, the rhythm of harmony reverberates across his soul.

He then acquires Satyadrstian and perceives others with kindness and through an egalitarian lens. Nature and men become one in Rabindranath as an extension of the divine. This aspect becomes obvious through many of his poetic creations which reflect his realisation of the divine in the midst of nature. Tagore speaks of similar concepts as is emphasized in the Īsopanisad. He says that every man upon realising the underlying harmony between himself and others must treat every other man as he would treat himself. This is because at their core they are not truly isolated from each other.

Tagore also highlights another important aspect of harmony. This harmony is representative of the synchronicity between a man's ego and his soul. Often the ego and the soul signify two contradictory desires in men. The ego is enclosed in the narrow realm of materiality while the soul craves for the affinity of the infinite unbridled force. Tagore's poem 'Dui Pākhi' reflects these contradictory states of desire between the ego and the soul. The caged bird is representative of the limiting ego while the free bird embodies the Soul's attainment of Liberty.

It is necessary however that the ego and the soul stand not in opposition to each other but in peaceful coexistence within a man. It is only through their harmonious juxtaposition that a man can truly be enriched. He will thus cherish his individuality as well as cater to the well being of the world. In this way, he will experience true happiness. One has to recognise that there is both the 'Individual Man' and the 'Universal Man' that reside within us. Tagore mentions in his book Sādhanā, "...man's individuality is not his highest truth; there is that in him which is universal."³ Once we realize the essence of the 'Universal Man', we broaden our mind and experience the presence of the infinite energy in each and everything.

Tagore enunciated the role of ego in men's realisation of the infinite. This happens because the human mind, tormented by the ego often longs to seek solace in the realm of the infinite. Once he realizes the beauty of the infinite, he experiences bliss. It is noteworthy that both the finite and the infinite are equally significant as they are dependent on each other for their existence. It is the soul that intervenes between the finite and the infinite and helps to maintain harmony between them. This is also corroborated by mantras in Upanishad. Tagore emphasizes on the balance between finite and infinite which is reflected in his poems like 'Vairāgya' and 'Swarga hate vidāi'. Only upon attaining this equilibrium between

the finite and infinite one can experience true liberation.

Tagore has stressed on the importance of attaining harmony in man. Excessive inclination towards materiality or worldly objects is detrimental to the establishment of harmony within a man. This is why there are often prohibitions and regulations against acts of indulgence in religious doctrines as well. Tagore has stressed on the merging of man's ego, soul and the Almighty. Yet he asks us to adopt a sense of reverence and devotion towards God and perceive him as a fatherly figure. Man must try to mirror this fatherly figure without obstinately placing himself on the same level as God. True union with God can be achieved only by glorifying him and irreverence towards God would prevent man from realising his true inner harmony.

In order to attain spiritual liberation and enrich oneself, the understanding of *Sāntam*, *Sivam*, *Advaitam* become immensely important. The realisations of these aspects are all equally important as one follows the other. Tagore highlights the value of inculcating wisdom, action and love within every man through a wholesome comprehension of *Sāntam*, *Sivam*, *Advaitam*. Once the man experiences *Sānta* nature, he is filled with a sense of tranquillity. This attainment of serenity is essential to get rid of fear and restlessness. After the realisation of the *Sānta* aspect, a Man becomes ready to perform all his duties and face any kind of upheaval in his life with a fearless attitude and a peaceful mind. The *Sīva* nature is materialised through the performance of good deeds. Once a man realizes both *Sānta* and *Sīva* aspects, through knowledge and good works, he is released from the shackles of selfishness and ego-driven attitude and enters into a state of bliss marked by Universal Love. Therefore Tagore opines that in order to achieve *Advaita*, a man has to realize the states of *Sānta* and *Sīva* through the attainment of wisdom and the performance of righteous actions and good deeds.

One needs to glance over the philosophical ideas adopted by Tagore to understand his stands on religion. He opines that the phenomenal or the material world cannot be discarded as illusion as it is quite real and divinity mirrors itself in the world around us. Tagore also holds that a man is neither completely detached from the divine and enclosed in his finite ways nor does he absolutely transcend the infinite and isolate himself from the material reality of the world. Thus, Tagore highlights the value of both the ego and the universal spirit that exists within man. In this regard, Tagore takes a middle ground and is

eager to emphasize on the significance of both the finite and the infinite. He repeatedly draws our attention to realise the underlying harmony between the finite and the infinite in order to achieve spiritual liberation.

It is of utmost importance to note that Tagore's usage of the term 'Universal Man' to stress on the inner divinity of an individual makes his philosophy quite enriching. The 'Universal Man' breaks the shackles of his narrow self, perceives the whole world as an extension of himself and is eager to carry love for everyone within his heart. Tagore equates the greatness of the 'Universal Man' with divinity. In doing so, he symbolically states that goodness and greatness lie within each and every man, not outside of himself. His philosophy therefore, carries a humanitarian approach. In *Creative Unity*, Tagore observes, "Through creation man expresses his truth; through that expression he gains back his truth in its fullness. Human society is for the best expression of man, and that expression, according to its perfection, leads him to the full realisation of the divine in humanity."⁴

II. CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, it can be said that harmony is the key theme that reverberates across Tagore's philosophy. He mentions that one is often prohibited from engaging in certain activities while he is emerged in *Sādhana* so as to not disturb the harmonious state of mind. One needs to perform certain actions and simultaneously refrain from performing certain others to achieve mental equilibrium. This ultimately leads one to experience wholesome spiritual growth.

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