



THE PATH OF SELF-REALIZATION IN TAGORE'S PHILOSOPHY

PRANAY DEB

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, Tripura University
(A Central University), Suryamaninagar, Tripura, India- 799022

ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore is well-known to everybody. He is the poet of the poets. In his versatile writings, he deals with the problems of individuals, as well as the society and how this is related to the universe. His whole life and works are devoted for searching a new path which can save everyone from this world of discord. This is the path of self-realization, which is the aim and objective of all men. Tagore was a social reformer, educationist, political thinker and a poet-philosopher also. In this paper I will try to focus on this unique path of liberation, in Tagore's perspective and I will try to investigate, how far this path is suitable for the present day context.

Tagore's philosophy is the philosophy of wholeness and unity in thought and action – union of our own self with each and every individual – union of our own self with the whole universe, as every man has unlimited latent potentialities, the 'Divine Power of Love' in his own nature. So we have to realize our inner-strength. The idea of being a 'Global-Citizen' has to be emerged within us. According to Tagore, the real nature of man is his Divine nature. Man is the expression of the melody of the great divine power. The self of man finds its gratification through freedom, love, joy and creativity – after all through 'Spiritual Unity'. This extent of man is universal in character and it is the real nature of self and then only man can become the master of the world. This spiritual unity is the state of freedom of the soul from its finite extent to the vast sea of humanity through disinterested service to mankind.

But at present, people are being guided by egoistic feeling and they are confined within their narrow self. Today we are living in the age of science, human beings are being treated as machine, and communalism has captured the whole world in the name of 'Religion'. Today we are in progress, which are being quantified in terms of economic affluence, which are limited on superficial external progress, material progress. People have surrendered themselves to the power of greed; they have surrendered themselves to the power of the state. So they have lost their own uniting capacity. These are some of the causes of the present predicament of the world, as pointed out by Rabindranath Tagore. Hence there is an urgent need to find a way out of this deviation. The way of salvation of human beings what is needed from us. The path of self-realization, the Spiritual Unity, the realization of universal-brotherhood - is urgently needed in the present day society. It is possible only through the spiritual re-awakening of mankind.

Keywords: Spiritual Unity, Universal-brotherhood, Liberation, Freedom and Creativity, Religion of Man.



Introduction

The general readers mainly know Rabindranath Tagore as a poet. But he has written innumerable essays on social, political, religious and educational problems. He was a social-reformer, educational-philosopher and political thinker. Though Rabindranath was not an academic philosopher, he was able to establish an all-comprehensive view of life. Tagore's entire approach to life is emphasis on a philosophy of wholeness and unity in thought and action. Realization of the Supreme Being in each and all – is the central theme of the philosophy of Rabindranath. According to him, man's salvation lies on the realization of unity with all beings and nature. In this present study I will try to investigate this unique relationship of man and how far it may add new dimension to our life, will be subject matter of study.

The Inherent Power of Man

According to Rabindranath Tagore, man seeks to enrich and ennoble his earthly life by liberating the latent potentialities of his nature. Man has to develop his intrinsic power of its fullest extent. Rabindranath Tagore's poems, stories and articles reflect the Divinity of Man. In the 'Religion of Man' Tagore speaks of the humanity of God and the Divinity of Man. Tagore lays utmost emphasis on an integrated system in which the metaphysics of self and its development takes man from a lower stage to a higher stage of fulfillment. In this journey from non-freedom to freedom man extends the domain of his relationship to the universe, to the whole mankind through his divine nature of Love.

Tagore's whole philosophy is concentrated on this unity – 'Unity Consciousness', 'Spiritual Unity'. This unity can be reached by the perfection of our relationship with 'Man the Eternal', who is the Infinite in man. Tagore expressed this relationship in his various writings, such as, "Āmār mājhe tomār lilā habe, Tāi to āmi esechi ei bhave". "Ohe antarātmā, miṭeche ki taba sakala tiāsh, Āshi antare mama". All these words of Tagore express the thought that man is the most important, the most potent instrument of the divine through which the divinity manifests itself.

But ours is a time that human values have been degraded and also Tagore's humanistic religion is facing so serious problems. Rabindranath Tagore was also aware of this kind of predicament of this world.

Root Cause of World's Degradation

Tagore observed the causes of world's degradation and decay of our civilization in his lifetime, since elements of these civilizations (man) are divine in nature. He painfully observed that the united will of the society was tending to be disintegrated and we are failing to realize our inner-strength. According to Tagore, Ātmasakti (inner-power) should be cultivated and developed, because all civilizations can be reached to its highest extent by the power of assimilation, by the power of unity in spirit.



So Tagore gave emphasis on those elements of our tradition, which can build a bridge between the past and the future of our country, between whole parts of the world. Tagore valued those traditional ideals that bounded the people of the world to one another and to the universe. The idea of being a ‘Global Citizen’ has to be emerged within us.

Rabindranath Tagore in his various essays, viz., ‘City and Village’, ‘Judgement’, ‘American Experience’, ‘Construction versus Creation’, etc., expressed his thought on the root of these problems and also suggested the way to freedom from these problems.

Tagore was not interested in that part of civilization which was exclusionary in spirit. He was not willing to accept the Western concept of progress, which was quantified in terms of economic affluence, which was limited on superficial external progress, material progress. This has remained the yardstick of progress even today. But Tagore observed that with the rise of the standard of living human beings have become more and more selfish, more inhospitable, and more intolerant and people are getting more self-centered. Tagore remarks, “With what is called material progress, property has become intensely individualistic, the method of gaining it has become a matter of science and not of social ethics. It breaks social bonds; it drains the life sap of the community. Its unscrupulousness plays havoc all over the world, generating forces that can coax or coerce peoples to deeds of injustice and wholesale horror.”

Today, we are living in the age of Science. Scientists are trying to interpret the universe in a mechanical way. But science has to be guided by moral ideals. For Tagore, a world of science without any moral ideals is a world of violence and aggression. Tagore advocated a limited use of science, confined to man’s welfare and not for plundering human nature, peace of soul. For example, in present days we have so many scientific devices for saving our time, viz., mobile, computer, internet, etc., but at the same time we are saying much that ‘we have no time’, we are so busy than ever before and also we are feeling so much distress with these devices. Actually we are being a ‘Modern Citizen’ of this ‘Modern World’, become enslaves to our scientific inventions and we are now mimicking each-other. But Tagore says, “Essentially man is not a slave either of himself or of the world; but he is a lover.”

Undeniably the findings of science help us, it has its use and attractions, achievement of science and technology have unfolded new horizon for humanity, but mankind is yet to attain freedom. In Tagore’s words, “...the imaginary freedom of a fly shut up in a glass case whose walls are invisible.” Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observed, “Science has liberated man from much of the tyranny of the environment but has not freed him from the tyranny of his own nature.”



Rabindranath Tagore in his 'Construction versus Creation' distinguished construction from creation. Science produces good constructions out of men. Construction is always use-oriented, whereas creation has no utilitarian aim; it is an expression of love and joy. Tagore does not prescribe the replacement of construction by creation. The soul aspires for an expression through freedom, love and joy. And for this he needs creative space, which is not available in science. This creativity of men is expressed through his art, which is the expression of his divine personality and imagination. Through this creativity we can gain our unity with the world and with the whole mankind, which was prescribed by Tagore, the only path of our salvation from this predicament of the world. Tagore observes, "The vital harmony is lacking to-day in unity of man, for the formalness of law and regulation has displaced the living ideal of personality from human affairs and sciences has taken the office of religion man's greatest creative work, his civilization." Thus Tagore has given us the alternative way of freedom, which lies in the very nature of human being.

Creative Expression of Man's Personality

Rabindranath Tagore was mostly influenced by the teaching of Upanishads. He was a new-Vedantin philosopher; as such he follows the Vedantin-tradition. Much of Tagore's ideologies come from the teaching of the Upanishads and from his own beliefs that god can be found through personal purity, individual's unity and through service to others.

Tagore holds that ontologically the universe is one and it is united and also the very nature of human being is unity in spirit. Tagore only accepts the dynamism in every sphere of the universe and this dynamism is displayed in man's creation of art. He says, "We create not only art social organizations, but our inner nature and outer surroundings, the truth of which depends upon their harmony with the law of the universal mind."

Tagore believes in the divinity of man. Man is regarded by him as a finite-infinite being. He classified human beings into two divisions – (i) 'Choṭo āmi', (which is 'the self' and finite), and (ii) 'Baro āmi', (which is regarded as 'the soul' and infinite). The 'Choṭo āmi' confined within the self-interest, represents man's selfish works. On the other hand the 'Baro āmi' finds expression in the vast sea of humanity through disinterested service to mankind. This aspect of man indicates his divinity, by which man enables to transform his selfish desire to selflessness. Here love unfolds and man finds his position as 'Mahā āmi', by which man pervades the whole universe. This extent of man is universal in character and then man can become the master of the world, by performing his creative work. Dr. N. Sarma observes, "The poet conceives that man in his very being unites spirit and nature. He is finite-infinite being. Man has an inner power within him which enables him to realize his unity with the whole of mankind, with nature and also with God. Tagore conceives this inner power as the divinity latent in man which is characterized by him as the universal man. Tagore has preached for the exaltation of the spirit in



man. It is possible for man to realize the supreme personality through love in his life-time.”

So we have found Spiritual Unity is of utmost importance for Tagore; it is essential for the growth of humanity. Such a unity will lead to the empowerment of men of the world. For this every man has to attain their inner-strength, which is infinite in nature. Obviously, Tagore referred to man’s inner world of Personality (man’s inner potential), which manifests itself through creativity and freedom. Tagore was interested in outlining a philosophy of life based on these two: Freedom and Creativity.

Creativity is the essence of man, which is followed by law of our universal mind. Science gives us the knowledge of facts and laws of nature, but creativity acquaints us with freedom. This creative will of man is guided by emotion; emotion of love and this creativity express itself through man’s art and service to whole mankind. Many Western philosophers also have given importance on that creative spirit of man. According to Russell, “The best life is the life of freedom which most built on creative impulses.” Rabindranath Tagore says, “.....man must keep aspiring for and cultivating the creative spirit. This is the only way in which he can establish his dignity of being.” Man finds the fullest extent of freedom of his personality not in himself, but in other’s selves through his creativity.

So, man’s real freedom lies on uniting himself with the whole humanity, with the universe. The separate conscious of our own self is not the real freedom-which was described by Tagore as ‘negative freedom’. Positive freedom or the freedom of the soul is the state of harmony; the state of ‘Spiritual Unity’. Tagore says, “When we attain to that universal life, which is the moral life, we become freed from bonds of pleasure and pain, and the place vacated by our self become filled with an unspeakable joy which springs from measureless love.” For Tagore the unifying principle would be love for all, which manifests itself through selfless action for the well-being of mankind.

As a poet-philosopher, Tagore also takes aesthetic sensibility as a means of the realization of the Infinite. When one’s soul will establish harmonious relation with other souls and nature, there will be rising of beauty. There will be concord amongst the souls and external reality. This stage will be state of indescribable joy as well. Thus in ‘Gitanjali’ we find: “Antar manno Bikashita karo Antarātār hae; Nirmal karo, Ujjal karo, Sundar karo hae.”

Conclusion

This paper is my humble tribute to the great man, Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore. This study is also the approach to show the only way of salvation of human beings from the present calamity. The popularity and the relevance of Tagore’s thought will remain luster as long as the mankind will exist. The realization of Universal-brotherhood is the urgently needed in the present day society. Today



science provides more comfortable life than ever before, but it is not the final goal of men. The complete progress of man, i.e. the spiritual awakening is very much essential. Only through it, an evil-free peaceful society is possible.

At present people are being guided by egoistic feeling and they are confined within their narrow self. Today human values have been deteriorated, human beings are being treated as machine, and communalism has captured the whole world in the name of Religion. So, at this state, the study of Rabindranath and Upanishads are certainly savior of this human civilization. Tagore's comprehensive view of life, his concept of 'Spiritual Unity' for freedom will bring an integrated and comprehensive view of the reality.

Tagore's view on the divinity of man, the inner strength of personality bears relevance at present, when the people have surrendered themselves to the power of the state, to the power of greed, when they have lost their own uniting capacity and they are mimicking the Western commerce-centric culture. At present, there is exploitation of man by man. There is a clash between man and man. It is only because of man, not to understand his 'Baro āmi'. The poet said, "In the modern civilization, for which an enormous number of men are used as materials and human relationships have in a larger measure become utilitarian, man is imperfectly revealed. For man's revelation does not lie in the fact that he is a power, but that he is a Spirit." Finally we can say the path of liberation lies in the re-awakening of the spiritual nature of man.

References

- Lal, B. K. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2005.
- Radhakrishnan, S. *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1919.
- Ray, B. G. *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*. Bombay: Hind Kitab, 1949.
- Sanyal, Indrani and Sashinungla, ed. *Ethics and Culture- Some Indian Reflections*. New Delhi: Decent Books, 2010.
- Tagore, R.N. *Personality*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. (Indian Edition), 1948.
- Tagore, R.N. *Creative Unity*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. (Indian Edition), 1950.
- Tagore, R.N. *Sadhana*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. (Indian Edition), 1947.
- Tagore, R.N. *The Religion of Man*. 3rd Impression, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949.
- Tagore, R.N. *Towards Universal Man* (Trans.). Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961.
- Tagore, Saummendranath. *Rabindranath Tagore and Universal Humanism*. Bombay: St. Vaccum Co., 1961.
- R.N.Tagore, *Gitanjali* (Bengali), Poem No.130, P.149.



- R.N.Tagore, Rabindra *Rachanavali*. Vol.iv, P.106.
- R.N.Tagore, *City and Village*, The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, (henceforth cited as EWRT), Vol.-3, 1924, P.511.
- R.N.Tagore, *Sadhana*, EWRT, P.13.
- R.N.Tagore, *American Experience*, EWRT, Vol-3, 1927, P.593.
- Dr.S.Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Culture*, P.10.
- R.N.Tagore, *Construction versus Creation*, P.62.
- R.N.Tagore, *The World of Personality*, EWRT, P.55.
- Dr. N. Sarma, *Twentieth Century Indian Philosophy*, P.64.
- B. Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, cited in Preface, P.6.
- R.N.Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, EWRT, P.37.
- R.N.Tagore, *Sadhana*, PP.47-48.
- R.N.Tagore, *Gitanjali*, P.4.
- R.N.Tagore, *Creative Unity*, PP.125-26.