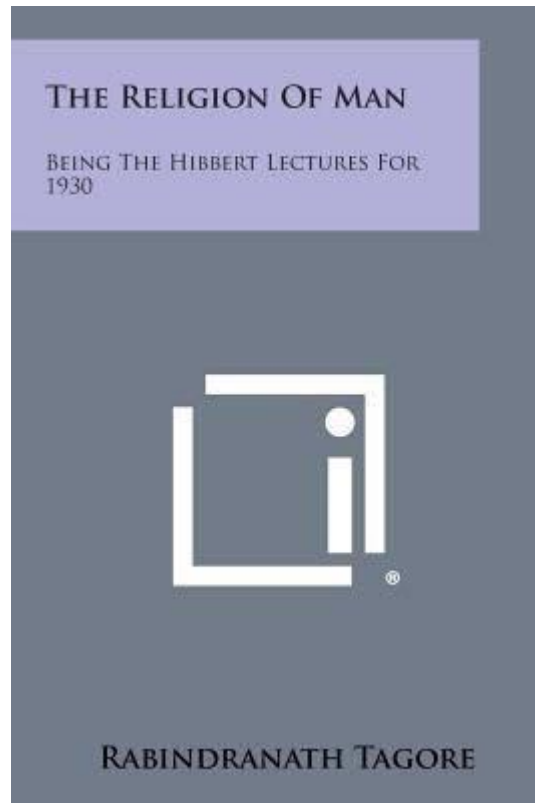


Humanistic Approaches in the Selected Works of Rabindranath Tagore

M. Sriprabha
G. Sankar



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Abstract

Tagore's humanism is mainly expressed through his concept of inter-personal (I and thou) relationship. I shall discuss here Tagore's humanism vis-à-vis inter-personal relationship.

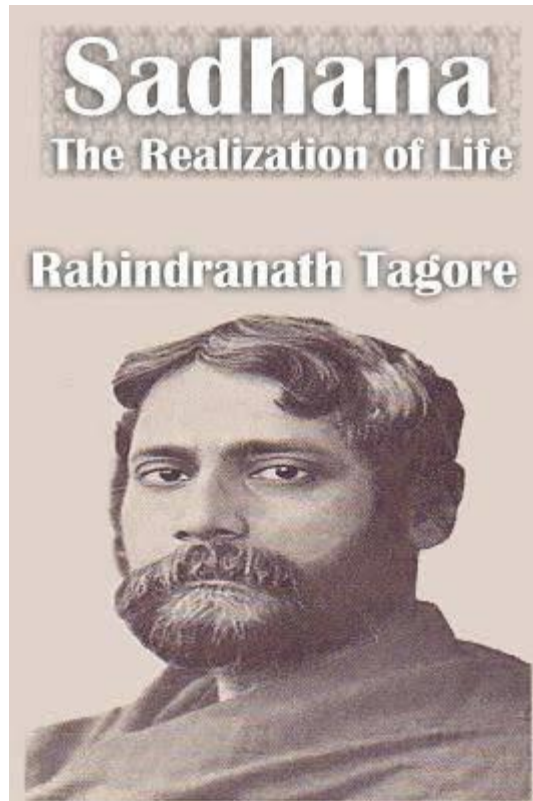
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In order to expound this idea, I shall embark on his concept of man; man the finite and man the infinite, man within bounds and man the boundless. Tagore has reflected comprehensively and intensely on the ontological status of man in idiosyncratic dimensions and the revelation of the meaning in relation (a) to nature and (b) to modes of inter-personal relationship. I have also discussed the role of language in understanding inter-personal relationship, and finally arrive at the conclusion that the inter-personal relationship of I and thou takes the form of intra-personal relationship of I am thou. Humanism is emphasizing the importance of human beings – their nature and place in the universe. It means love of man with all his flaws and fallacies. It is an attitude that concentrates on the activities of man more than the super natural world. During the colonial rule, the British lost their humanity and were brutal and cruel towards their fellow-beings. Many novelists used their pens to protest against the violence of the British. Rabindranath Tagore is one of them who used his pen over swords to vehemently protest against the cruelty meted out to his fellow-beings. In this paper, I shall discuss humanism as a concept in Indian English Literature with reference to Tagore's novel Home and the World. The three main characters of the novel portray different personalities and thus reflect humanism.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, Humanism, *Home and the World*, Indian English literature



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Introduction

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Humanism as “A rationalist outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters.”

Humanism is a philosophical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and generally prefers critical thinking and evidence over established doctrine or faith. The meaning of the term humanism has fluctuated, according to the successive intellectual movements which have identified with it. Although humanism lost its significance a long time ago, a certain naivety about its natural and obvious connotations,

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complicated by anthropological hubris, lingers on. The tendency consequently is to compulsively and exclusively read humaneness, universal compassion and glory into humanism.

Neither the violence of the human being nor the violence on the human being gets registered in the process.

Dealing with Humanism and Its Effects

Grappling with humanism's bad conscience in the complex terrain of Indian literature is an obligation that remains unfulfilled. Rabindranath Tagore lifted Indian literature to world level and gained for modern India a place on the world literary history that won him the Noble Prize for literature and gave recognition to India on a global scale. Tagore, the versatile personality of Indian literary scholarship is considered as the Rishi, the Gurudev and the Maharshi. He was a poet, dramatist, actor, producer, musician, painter, an educationist, reformer, philosopher, prophet, novelist, story writer, and a critic of life and literature.

Tagore is a multi-dimensional personality and the underlying theme of his creations is love for man. Tagore wrote primarily in Bengali and translated many of his poems and plays into English. To his credit, there is a long list of poems and plays, both in Bengali and English which had made his place among the world's greatest writers. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the Indian poet and artist is not a philosopher in the academic sense of the term - in the sense in which one reads and writes on philosophy as an academic discipline. Moreover, he is neither an analyst nor a system builder. Instead he has always considered himself to be a poet and neither a scholar nor a philosopher. He acknowledges that his religion is a poet's religion.¹

Tagore's universal humanism is mainly expressed through his concept of interpersonal relationship. He has reflected comprehensively and intensely on the ontological status of man in idiosyncratic dimensions and the revelation of the meaning in relation to nature and to modes of inter-personal relationship. It is said that, the philosophy of Humanism is a product of Renaissance in Western Europe. Although the inner essence of 'the Humanism in the East', is found to place much emphasis upon the mental existence of man expressing his mental and spiritual freedom. I shall discuss here, the universal form of Humanism as developed by Tagore, searching for man, in human existence, beyond his limitations and differences, which, in my

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opinion, is the fundamental object of the tradition of Humanism in the East. In this connection, Humanism, in the modern international and intercultural context, is to be taken as the total development of man, which, in the observation of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), is the accomplishment of universality in human existence, developing the philosophy of universal humanism in order to expound his idea of humanism corresponding to inter-personal relationship.

Concept of Man

We shall delve more into his concept of man. His views about man can be found in various writings, particularly in *Sadhana* (1913), *Personality* (1917), *Creative Unity* (1922) and *The Religion of Man* (1930). Tagore has a vision of the world; the mysteries of man, of nature and of the vast universe have unfolded themselves before his vision and the truth he has realized from the bottom of this comprehension. And this gives us the grounds to claim Tagore a philosopher. Radhakrishnan aptly remarks that, “In interpreting the philosophy and message of Sir Rabindranath Tagore, we are interpreting the Indian ideal of philosophy, religion, and art, of which his work is the outcome and expression.”³ Moreover, Tagore’s way of thinking is akin to some of the views of western philosophers like Kant, Hegel and Sartre. I shall show their affinity in the course of developing this paper.

Tagore envisages that the perfection of man is attained in the relationship of nature with man, through the enlargement of personality. Man is the architect of his own destiny. His perfection leads him to have a link with infinity. The perfection attained by the man should be applicable to the entire society and not to the individual alone. Tagore’s concept of man/human personality is finding its fruition through the realization of the feeling of intimacy with nature. From his childhood days, he is fascinated by the splendor of nature - the rising of the sun, the chirping of the birds and the whistling of the wind through the trees. He is of the opinion that nature does not lose herself but reveals her true colour to a person’s self, having her own eternal bindings with human nature. Nature is not alien but is essentially related to man. In the vastness of nature, we are not unknown strangers; we are her kith and kin. He also compares beautiful nature with our mother.

Tagore writes: When in the morning I looked upon the light I felt in a moment that I was no stranger in this world, that the inscrutable without name and form had taken me in its arms in the form of my own mother.³ S.C. Sengupta in his article, “The Surplus in Man: The Poet’s Philosophy of Man,”⁴ Argues that the inter-relation between man and nature can be found at the lower or the communication stage and the higher or the communion stage. They are not two different stages. Rather, one stage is ultimately passing over into the growth of another stage. Man has very good communication with nature. Nature helps man to develop his personality in as much as man helps nature to reveal its beauty. Man grows along with nature in so far as he can identify himself with nature and makes it his messenger of communication. With the help of nature man creates his own nature, creates beauty, and creates art. In his creativity and self-expression, man becomes conscious of the abundance, his ability to go beyond his physical finitude and through creation of art, strives to send his communication to the Supreme Person who reveals Himself to him. Again, Communication as a form of inter-relation between man and nature has two levels - one is the cognitive and the other is the existential. At the cognitive level, nature contributes to knowledge not as an externality, but as revealed to man. Tagore writes, “All our knowledge of things is knowing them in their relation to the Universe, in that relation which is truth.”⁵ But man due to his engagements with the day-to-day activities, forgets that nature is his. It is not because nature has grown out of touch with us, rather, we do not perceive nature in its aspect of unity; we are driven to destruction by our focus on the fragmentary. He laments that, “we grow out of touch with this great truth, forget to accept its invitation and its hospitality, when in quest of external success our works become unspiritual and unexpressive.”⁶ Tagore also quotes here Wordsworth’s line: ‘The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers. Little we see in Nature that is ours.’

Receiving from Nature and Separating from the Ego

There is always a correlation between the extent of receiving from nature and separating from the ego. There is now a deepening of self-knowledge and self-development; at the higher level of relatedness to nature is communion or unity. Tagore thinks that the unity of man and nature has its source in the One or the Absolute. The spirit and nature are the twin aspects of the Absolute

Inter-personal Relationship - *I and Thou*

In this section, we discuss the Inter-personal Relationship of the *I and Thou* relationship in Tagore's humanistic thoughts. The assertion of the primordial relationship is the essence of Tagore's humanism; and he calls his humanism the Religion of Man. But the term, 'Religion', does not suggest that man is under the control of an infinite spiritual being like God. The function of religion is to bring the individual into concord with reason, with love, indeed with the Supreme Man, the Universal being. The reality of the Supreme Person is as much dependent upon the personal being as the latter is dependent upon the former. So God is also a personal being like man. Tagore believed that the state of realizing our relationship all through as a union with the divine is the ultimate end and fulfillment of humanity. Therefore, the spirit of Oneness in God has the many, for the realization of this unity and the truth behind this spiritual union is love. He thinks that man is above all a lover, his freedom and fulfillment is in love, which is another name for perfect comprehension. By this power of comprehension, this permeation of his being, he is united with the all-pervading spirit. Through love, human society is set for the best expression of man, and that expression, according to its perfection, leads him to the full realization of the divine in humanity.

Conclusion

Tagore had a prophetic vision. Tagore's view of language is ontological, because, human ontology determines the nature and function of language. Man expresses himself through his creativity, and language is one of the important modes of communication of man's self-revealing activity. Man is an expressive being, and therefore, he is capable of achieving self clarity and freedom. Freedom is integral to a self-realizing subject. According to Tagore, self-expression is the important channel of communication. As an expressive being, man recovers communion with the universe. It is in man's consciousness of a deeper unity with nature, with the world, of which we are a part. The self-revealing being (I) is in interchange with the greater nature. The self-expressive being carries an eternal relation with the other and the other is also dependent upon my existence. There arises an interpersonal relationship between 'myself' and the 'other' (I and thou). It will be appropriate to fit here the views of Hegel that the Idea becomes its other, and then returns into self-consciousness in Geist. The life of the absolute subject is essentially a process, a movement, in which it posits its own conditions of existence to the universe, and then

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overcomes the opposition of these conditions to realize its goal of self knowledge .But at the deeper ontological level, this inter-personal relation of I and thou takes the form of intrapersonal level of human existence (I am thou). I am dependent upon other and the other is a condition for my union with the all pervading spirit. Tagore thinks that to attain our world-consciousness, we have to bring together our feelings with this all-pervasive infinite feeling, and this is possible when we free ourselves from the bonds of personal desires, prepare ourselves for our social obligations and sharing the burdens of our fellow beings. So I and thou work for a common cause to achieve the unity of consciousness. He says that to be truly united in knowledge, love and service with all beings, and to realize one's self in the all-pervading God is the essence of goodness, and it is also the key that opens the gate of spiritual life.

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