

Tagore as a Spiritual Humanist

P Thiyagarajan

Associate Professor, Rajah Serfoji Government College, Thanjavur

Abstract

Tagore can be rightly called the “the morning star of the literary Renaissance” in Bengal.. He is essentially a revolutionary and his mission is not to destroy but to build - his spirit is against the accepted principles and practices, coupled with his desire to make religion spiritually humanistic. Tagore brings his spiritual vision to face the social problems and try to lift the society to an idealistic plane of spiritual life. He worships God not only in privacy but also in every single manifestation of the outside world.

Tagore's religious message is simple: “The revealment of the infinite in the finite, which is the motive of all creation, is not seen its perfection in the starry heavens, in the beauty of the flowers. It is in the soul of man.” (Sadhana, 41).

In **Gitanjali**, he offers songs for his spiritual journey towards the God. The epiphany of this journey is intensely sung; the experience, especially the divine experience cannot be explained; it has to be felt within. The divine epiphany of the soul in **Gitanjali** guides others souls to undergo the experience with the same intensity and depth.

In **the Crescent Moon**, Tagore expresses his desire to have the mind of baby. The child has the capacity to transcend the mundane activities of the world.

Where as in the **Gardener**, Tagore presents the idea that “all are equal in the eyes of God, and “unbroken perfection is over all.” (V.74.Man feels restless in the world. But by accepting the finite alone - the pain and the pangs along with the flower, the joy - man deserves the infinite.

Man's life – is compared to the changing of flower becoming a fruit. Man is the fruit and God is the Fruit Gatherer; this is the theme of **Fruit Gathering (1916)**. The soul is ready even to stake himself after staking all that he has, so that he can win through his utter defeat. Gradually but surely the fruit is finally gathered by god.

In **Lover's Gift**, the poet is the lover and God is the beloved. The poet follows the unseen. God has moved from the outside world to take seat at the root of the poet's life and therefore “forgetting – remembrance” is lost in its own depth and God”no longer before my songs, but 'one' with him in a marriage bond.”

The world is a gift to man from God. Crossing describes the soul's struggle before its union with God. The soul lights lamps and hastens to the temple with its offerings but to “find him again in the market-crowd.” Thus, the world is meeting place and the act of crossing this sea of world is to be united with the infinite.

The interaction of Time with Timelessness is the dominant theme in **Stray Birds**. The everlasting voice tells man “never be afraid of the moments.” God may “grow weary of great kingdoms, but never of little flowers.” The innocent souls can reach God easily. Though man has all the three elements - the silence of the fish, the noise of the animals and the music of the bird - man's thoughts flight and astray. But God

always holds man to himself. God speaks to man through Nature. The musings of the poet convey the idea that “we come nearest to the great when we are great in humanity.”(298).

Man roams in the vast expanse of the finite world as a fugitive whereas God, the Inseparable, Infinite, Limitless Abundance is immanent everywhere. Man, the fugitive flees from God's pursuit, bondage, restraint and duty. There is an eternal “hide and seek” between the soul and Supreme soul. But “Love is the centre of his circling war-dance of light and dark.” (271). But unconsciously every move of the soul sails over the unfathomed dark abyss towards the limitless light. The “frail reserve” bends towards God with reticent Grace in the final move. The soul understands and knows for certain that “all that is left for me in this world is your love, and if I lose you for a moment I die.” (261)

The momentary visions of God brighten the mind of man like fireflies. God's love is “like sunlight, surround you and yet give you illumined freedom.”(440). The soul at last realizes the closeness of God. Man misses the meaning of his “own part in the play of life.” The soul arrives at a realization that "God waits for His Temple to built of love, men bring stones,”(444). But “When the voice of the Silence Touches” his words, the poet knows him and therefore I know myself." (475). In one last salutation, God, “who knew me imperfect” yet loved the soul. With self realization, the soul sings:

Before the end of my journey may I reach within myself the one which is the all, leaving the outer shell to float away with the drifting multitude upon the current of chance and change.(476).

“The Child” beautifully portrays the situation of the modern man waiting for the arrival of a Messiah. Men are “ever condemned to fight for phantoms in an interminable desert of mutual menace” to gather in a place to go on a pilgrimage. But they “know not the meaning” of the pilgrimage. Through they start following the Man of Faith, suddenly refuse him in doubt and kill him in anger. The old man from the east prays them to accept the Man of Faith in love for “in his death he lives in the life of us all, the great victim.”(483). Then they join together and cry exultant in a thundering cataract of voices. The irony is: The meaning is not the same to them all, but only the impulse. (484).

Tagore dramatically presents the idea that the East can guide the whole of the Universe in matters of spiritual humanism.

Tagore rises above the level of ordinary soul and like a saint cares for the spiritual salvation of all. The soul in Tagore represents the individual soul and path of realization is suggested as painful and yet easy available to all the souls. In Tagore's plays too, his deep concern about the spiritual side of humanity is well expressed. In **Red Oleanders**, in the character of Nandhini, one of the finest women characters of Tagore, he expresses the idea that wealth and power are illusions and only love is the highest expression of life. In **Natir Puja**, the problem of challenge is between the temporal and the spiritual power. It tells of Srimati who takes up a challenge and turns a secular dance into a glorious worship, an ecstatic religious sequence. The final outcome of the issue is this; “God is not mocked; the Spirit of Man cannot be crushed.” (48) In **Chitra**, the princess Chitra borrows beauty for a year from Madana (Eros) and Vasanta (Lycoris). However transient beauty may be, it is necessary because it helps in the accession of the mind and the growth of the spiritual dimension. But mere physical attraction cannot be the basis of an enduring relationship.

In **King and the Queen**, Queen Sumitra leaves the King because Love is only physical for him and it is not able to enter into the realms of the unselfish heart and the tranquillizing soul. The essence of human love is in its evolution from the physical to the spiritual. “Forgiveness” is the main message of **Malini**. This princess Malini stands for “Love for all life” in a country where people follow various creeds and cults. Her belief is in man rather than in the teachings of the sacred books. As Malini says, I have

brought the Outer world into your house, I seem to have lost the bounds of my body. I am one with the life of the world.

In **Sanyasi or the Ascetic**, Tagore does not advocate a negation of life for the unity of the finite with the infinite. In his quest for perfection, the Sanyasi leaves the cobbler's daughter Vasanti and goes to live in seclusion. But the ascetic's heart has been touched and sees the actual world. He realizes that he has failed in his attempt to conquer love because he has ignored love. Vasanti's death serves him as a realization that he has been chasing only shadows. Tagore criticizes the blind customary practices of the society in **Sacrifice**. The conflict comes to an end with the King's order to forbid the shedding of blood in the Temple. Tagore presents the idea to forbid sacrifice to God as "an awakening" and we dare not to delay to uproot sin from the world. God must be all sacrifice, pouring out his life in all creation whereas we try to fill the "stony images of delusion" with emptiness. In the modern world man loses his humanism, when it concerns his Gods." Hence Jaising says, "Help must come from man when it is denied from Gods." (504) He further says, "is there any need of God in this little world of ours? Let us be fearlessly Godless and come closer to each other. They want our blood. And for this they have come down to the dust of our earth, leaving their magnificence of heaven. For in their heaven there are no men, no creatures, who can suffer." (P.504)

In all his plays, Tagore presents the victory of good over evil force. He also rejects both the "negations, the ascetic's denial of life as the sensualist's denial of the spirit." **K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar** asserts: Tagore wants us to see "beyond the fever and the throb, the less evanescent, more subdued, joy and 'holy' wedded life." (51). He also stresses the need for the amelioration of the individual's body and soul as well of the society.

In the **King of the Dark Chamber**, Queen Sudharshana represents the finite soul, which longs for a vision of the infinite. From the "common people" to the Queen in the palace all talk about the King. Since, the King is not seen, there are various interpretations. God is everywhere, everything, hence nowhere and nobody in particular. Man with his little knowledge tries to make out what he can of God. Some people even deny with his existence. Some implicitly accept him. But the King's answer is significant.

You cannot see your reflection in your own mirror. It limits you, makes you look small. But if you see yourself reflected in the mirror of my mind, you will understand your own grandeur. To me, you are not the ordinary person you consider yourself to be. In my heart you become my own second self. (53). The Social scene in India, marked by an emphasis on humanistic values, is symbolized in Tagore's novels. This humanistic persuasion recommends a change in the evil practices of the India traditions to facilitate the birth of a new social order.

Tagore deals with social problems of a fundamental nature-the woeful condition of Hindu widows and the emergence of a new type of woman in quest of self-fulfilment as in **Binodini**, the struggle for values in one's own tradition as in **Gore**, the conflict between true and false patriotism in **The Home and the World**, the moral and spiritual dilemma generated by scientific rationalism and Hindu religiosity in two brothers as in **Chaturanga** and the futility and tragic end of terrorism in **Four Chapters**. Though Tagore upholds the Indian ideal of marriage, he also records the embarrassments and sufferings that might spring from the rigid observances of it in a Hindu society. He not only represents characters that fight against the evil practices of society, but also characters who think about bringing rational and radical changes in the society. In his novelistic world, he creates real characters and teaches, as Mulk Raj Anand says, the whole generation of the country id to be humanistic. Tagore has loved man so fervently that he always believed that nothing is greater than the spirit of man. Even God has to manifest himself

through man; “O thou Lord of all heavens, where would be thy Love if I were not?” (**Gitanjali**). Tagore’s humanism places man at the centre of things. To Tagore, Love is the highest form of religion in universal love and service to mankind, in the more humanistic and worldly sense, of service, of service to man and in the world (82). His philosophy and humanistic values help him to visualize the Universal Man, who is free from all kinds of barriers. The novelist, Bhabani Bhattacharya says, “Tagore’s firm belief is in “integration”. His life-long quest was for the integration of the simple and the sophisticated; the ancient and the modern; city and village; east and the west.”(215)

Tagore’s firm belief is in Man. The Indian ethos- the social scenario, moral, philosophical, psychological and social world, the singularity and peculiarity of Indian will-present in Tagore’s works make him relevant even today. It is the pressing need of the world at present to move towards Universal Man, as Tagore has visualized. The present cosmic order suggests a Universal Controller. As Tagore says in Personality, “world movements are not then blind movements, they are created to the will of God.” (61-62)

Books Referred:

1. Tagore, Rabindranath]
2. **The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore.**
3. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994, Vol. I, Poems.
4. **The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore.**
5. Vol. II, Plays, Short Stories, Essays