

Rabindranath Tagore as a Social Philosopher: An Analytical Study

Dr. Prem Bahadur Khadka

Lecturer of English, Gurans Multiple Campus, Madhuwan-8, Bardia, Nepal

Email: prembahadurkhadka810@gmail.com

Abstract

Tagore was a Bengali poet, philosopher, social reformer and dramatist who came into worldwide reputation when he was honored the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. The paper focuses on the Indian principle of philosophy, religion and art of his works are the result and appearance. The recognizable truths of Indian philosophy and religion, the worth of which it has become fashionable to disparage even in the land of their birth, are here handled with such atypical respect and profound feeling that they appear to be approximately new. The theme of social philosophy and his patriotic feeling that obviously exist in all his poems, dramas, short stories and novels. Man lives in a society with some agreeable circumstances for the growth of his character. Social philosophers have undertaken down to earth voyage in addition to seeking luck in paradise. His novels treat with social problems of an original nature the doleful situations of Hindu widows and the appearance of a new type of woman in quest of self-fulfillment.

Keywords: Religion, Caste, Gender, Humanism, Philosophy

Article Received: 18 October 2020, Revised: 3 November 2020, Accepted: 24 December 2020

Introduction:

Tagore was an extremely creative Indian poet, philosopher, dramatist, novelist and educator who wrote novels, essays, plays and poems in colloquial Bengali. He was a very crucial person of the Bengal Renaissance, a cultural nationalist movement in the city. Social philosophy contemplates its attention on the communal unity of mankind and seeks to construe the importance of the social features of human life. Social philosophy is normative in the sense that it deals with the ideals of social change. As well as it advises paths for the implementation of the plans for social transformation.

Content

Tagore protests against the recognized custom for a novel social order. Social philosophy is tentative and reflective every social philosopher has some reflective ideals in his mind. He struggles to give concrete form to them in his social philosophy. He decides the aims and ideals of the society. Social

revolutions and movements are the products of his thought.

“The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions and subdivisions among them entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprises. It was necessary that some change should take place in their outlook to religion, at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort” (1958: 9).

Social philosophy is productive in the sense that it studies the dissimilar facets of our social life for the rebuilding of a new social order. It analyzes the nature of human society from the philosophical point of view and attempts to find out the link between human society and basis nature of reality. It tries to find out those primary principles which are accountable for the human society with its basic principles. The social philosophy of early India thinkers was mainly based on social custom and traditions. Tagore elevated voice in the form of his

poetry against the ill-will and abhorrence in the society which was the outcome of the obstacles of caste, creed and race separating man from man. In the lifetime of Rabindranath Tagore, the country was torn into the Hindu-Muslim divide, caste-conflict among the Hindus and the religious prejudice in regard to the mode of adoration, idol-worship etc. and these tribulations in the country were extremely felt by the poet. The endeavor of the poet in this regard can be best explained in the words of Ernest Rhys "the unions of nations, the destroying of caste, religious pride, race-hatred and race-prejudice in a word, the Making of man" (1915:18).

Tagore's collection of essays like *The Religion of Man* and *Sadhana* are thoughtful and challenging accompaniments to the enormous religious and philosophical literature of India. Tagore's novels like *Gora*, *Seser kavita* (Farewell My Friend) and *Ghare baire* (The Home and the World) represent not only Tagore's skill with the novel form but, even in translation, some of the novelties he brought to the Bengali novel: social realism, colloquial dialogue, light satire and psychologically inspired plot development. His dramas, one of which was shaped on Broadway as *The King of the Dark Chamber*, occasionally bordering on fancy and fantasy, are frequently complex political or social commentary. Tagore's novels cover the wide range of themes, which traverse the entire socio-cultural space of his times. The themes which can be noted in his novels are of conjugality, status of women, nationalism, the illusionary idealism, caste system, untouchability, and hindu-muslim conflict. His novels worship the cultural heritage. His novels are novels of concepts but without the spoil of propaganda: in spite of the particular research article in most of his novels, the characters are free in their action and organic in their growth. The novels of Tagore inexorably comprise the ingenious representation of the modern social history for as Ernst Cassirer comments,

"All human works arise under particular historical and sociological conditions"(1999: 293).

Tagore's greatness as a novelist lies in his artistic detachment while painting the canvas in diverse hues. His novels ideologically transcend race, gender, religion, politics and geographical territory. Tagore also helped to shape the improvement of Indian philosophy in the early 20th century. His

philosophical works have religious and ethical themes. His best-known philosophical writing is *The Religion of Man*, based on the Hibbert Lectures he conveyed at Manchester College, Oxford, in May, 1930, which contains his reflections on the spirit of religion and explores the themes of spirituality, God, the divine experience and humanity. His body of literary works also articulates worldwide humanism, in particular his sympathy for the lives of women and the deprived people of Bengali. The most important characteristics of Indian society are the caste system which has exhausted every thread of it. Not astonishing that Tagore who supported for „creative mind“ of an individual was against the caste system and its associated practices including those of untouchability and animal sacrifice. In the *Land of Playing Cards* (Tasher Deshe), *The Red Oleanders* (Rakta Karobi), *Chandalika* (Untouchable Girl), *Mukta Dhara* (Free Rivulet). These plays are full of advises not only on modern politics but also on many other troubles that unveil the modern world. Most of the works of Tagore were against caste system in India. He highlights religious contradictions in his works like *Gora*. His aim was to end the narrowness of caste and religion.

All of his works like *Visarjan*, *Mukta Dhara*, *Chandalika*, *Tasher Deshe* and *Kabuliwala* talk against the caste, religion and orthodox mindset. He was a poet of an era when such social evils as caste, class and untouchability dominated the society. He fought it out through his works. A dialogue in *Chadalika*, Jo Manav Tum, Wahi Manav Mai..., "talks against caste system," said theatre actor Swastika Chakraborty who has rendered *Chandalika and Chitrangada* into Hindi. Tagore talked about social reforms through his works as well as uprooting of caste system. *Chandalika* is the supreme example of his voice against caste system. The message, drifted through this dance drama, was against brutality that lies in caste system. Tagore was upset with the social evils existed that time in United Bengal as a consequence he chosen Brahmo Samaj. Tagore was one of the personalities of the Brahmo Samaj like his father Debendranath Tagore. The fundamental tenets of Brahmo Samaj inter alia, are treating all human beings as equal and discarded social evils like caste, child marriage and the „Sati“ etc. In any society, the social positions, be it masculine or feminine, have certain expectations programmed in such an unusual behavior that trains

them as to how they should communicate with others in a conventional style. These social scripts define one's behavior, cognitions and emotions in relation to the notion of gender. Gender roles consistently employed by males and females assist in differentiating their respective identities. Connel refers to gender roles as: "Specific ways in which a particular culture has expectations about the ways in which people's behaviors, thoughts, and feelings should be" (2009: 53). In the light of argument regarding masculinity, the present paper embarks upon revisiting the knowledge about masculinity as a transition away from gender and sexual politics in Tagore's *The Home and the World*. As a thoughtful reformer, Tagore "ceaselessly import methods, techniques, ideas and skills from all over the world in order to fertilize and develop the home that would stand out as an example to the world" (2013: xiv). Being a cultural prophet, Tagore aimed at combining and bonding sticking together between the Home and the World, between people belonging to different class, culture, religion and gender. In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore rightly highlights his upbringing in which there was no room for the inflexible, traditional social practices like caste favoritism, gender bias or the suppression of oppressed by the colonizers during British-occupied India. He claims, "I was born in what was once a metropolis of British India...The unconventional code of life for our family has been the confluence of three cultures, the Hindu, Mohamedan and the British" (2013: 156). Tagore created women characters in his novels, dramas and short stories which could stand at par with the Western understanding of new woman. Tagore in his diverse literary writings presented the psychology of a woman who is consistently abused by the patriarchal society and is capable of resisting the patriarchy. To understand Tagore's ideas about the emerging new woman it becomes inevitable to trace the position of women in Bengal during the 19th century which is regarded as the period of enormous intellectual excitement. As discussed previously, the conventional rules regarding women's individuality were interrogated and revisited by men who inquired into widow burning, child marriage, status of women, etc. Even women readdressed their role in society enlightening the understanding of the process of social change under colonial rule. The latter half of the 19th century witnessed consciousness and

sensitization regarding public sphere. Customary household roles were adapted in order to engage women in the public sphere. Tagore, thus, in the vein of a true poet prophet anticipates many of the strands that were to develop later within the ploy of feminism. However, as with all his concerns, his dealing of the woman question is not feminist but humanist. Tagore's every creation is engrossed in a philosophy and demands a social reform in a certain context of the fashionable life. His poems, novels, dramas, every artistic creation leaves a flawless message for the welfare of humanity in the society. His only direct effort to reform, restore the present society can be found in his two unparalleled dream institutes Shantiniketan and Sriniketan. His school which he began on the footprints of Hindu philosophy is an expression of his being a Hindu nationalist. As Uma Das Gupta in *Santiniketan: Continuity and Change* avers, "The Santiniketan school was essentially a patriotic gesture; it was a phase of reconstruction, of swadeshi, of the organization of a national education, of education in the mother tongue, that would put balm on our wounds" (1988: 154).

Tagore constantly advocated practical knowledge over bookish knowledge. He made it sure that his students be educated in a holistic pragmatic manner and not in the abstract theoretical manner. In his novel *Gora* Tagore again comes with his philosophy of education in the words of Gora where he demands for an education which will serve the humanity and not just cater to the ego of one, who is educated. Gora in the novel says to Binoy: ... you and I imagine that we are not of their party, simply because we have studied a few pages of science! Know this for certain: a select few can never protect themselves with textbook knowledge from the seductions of self-debasement all around them. So long as they fail to recognize the supremacy of tradition in worldly life, so long as they remain bound by false fears, even our educated members cannot escape their influence.... I've repeatedly observed that your respectability and education makes all of you arrogant enough to remain very comfortable with your distance from the masses. That's why I wish to caution you that without freeing the people beneath you, there can be no freedom for yourselves, either! (2011: 353) Tagore believed that without the complete knowledge of rural life and without an effort to bridge the gap

between the rich and poor as well as between rural and urban, no Indian education is complete. He frequently insisted upon the Bengali Bhadrakalok to come out of their educated elite shell and extend their hands to the helpless and needful people. After sometime, Sriniketan became a centre where economists, agriculturists, social workers, doctors, midwives and specialist in various fields of rural industry congregated and experimented to improve different aspects of rural life. Tagore appreciated maintenance of Indian culture and rural society and on the other hand, he endorsed the progress of science and technology, industrialization and urbanization. The main objective of Tagore in his village work at Sriniketan was to take villagers towards self-reliance and to bring back the innocent life in its completeness to the villagers where they could enjoy and compose music and read the epics as in the past without the problem of finance. Due to the limited resources, Tagore started his experiment of rural reconstruction with only two-three villages around Shantiniketan. During the Swadeshi period, Tagore had already started his project of village reconstruction. Sriniketan was just the formal continuation of his already conceived idea. This spirit of Tagore is also very well manifested in the novel *The Home and The World* which he was writing at the same time.

Tagore's philosophy was not limited to the ideas. Shantiniketan and Sriniketan are the living proof of it. Both of these institutes became a center of varied activities and learning. Shantiniketan provided opportunities for higher learning in Hindu philosophy, medieval mysticism, Islamic culture, Zoroastrian philosophy, Vedic and Classical Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Tibetan, Persian, Arabic, French, German and Latin. Sriniketan also with the passage of time deemphasized the rustic rebuilding work and it twisted into an institute of artistic craft on the footprints of Shantiniketan. It is tricky to say how Rabindranath felt after all these changes but one thing is very much sure that Visva-Bharti as a University was of its own kind and unsurpassable. Whatever the inconsistencies and failures it faced, the truth is that it was the creation of a man who loved his nation and all the humanity – a realistic philosopher. Conclusion: Tagore's own vocabulary is sufficient for the classical appraisements of his life and works. He sought to generate a paradise of liberty on earth that appears to be established in his

social and educational philosophies. Tagore was above caste, class, color and creed as it is perceptible in all his novels from *Bou Thakuranir Hat* to *Char Adhyay*.

The imaginative composition of Tagore replicates the essential demand of social restructure throughout his times. The understanding of his novels presumes a greater importance today as they endow with a kaleidoscope of diverse filaments of ideologies and movements that go into the preparing of a society culminating into nation building. Tagore's novels are an exceptional blend of ideology and philosophy woven within a structure of objectivity. In the present research article, heavily ideologically infused times, such an objective and philosophical depiction has to be reasserted in the current discourses. Issues of Nationalism, Masculinity, Women and Religion are being always reframed, readdressed and re-interpreted. His novels are based on the theme of conjugality, position of woman, masculinity, nationalism, the illusionary idealism, caste system, untouchability and hindu-muslim conflict. In his novels, he presents people with a dream for his country which is very much practical even though it sounds ideal, a vision that needs a vigorous communication today more than ever. The research paper intended at bringing out the Tagore as a social philosopher and novelist by providing a new dimension to the reflection of modern thoughts and counter-ideas of his works. The present research revisited the ideas of Tagore on nationalism, masculinity, femininity and religion. His ideas on these issues are analyzed vis-à-vis his different novels and the article validates that all the issues which are taken in this paper is as vital today as they were during Tagore's time. Tagore's ideas on each issue were so worldwide that it gives solution to each problem everlastingly.

Works Cited

1. Cassirer, Ernst. "The Symbolic Function". 20th Century Theories of Art, edited by James M. Thompson, Carleton UP, 1999.
2. Dyson, Ketaki Kushari, In your blossoming flower-garden: Rabindranath Tagore and Victoria Ocampo, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988.
3. Gupta, Atulchandra, editor. Studies in the Bengal Renaissance. Jadavpur U, 1958. 4. Gupta, Sanjukta

Das and Chinmoy Guha, editors. Tagore At Home and in the World. Sage Publications. 2013.

5. Gupta, Uma Das. Rabindranath Tagore: My Life in My Words. Penguin Books, 2010.

6. ---. "Santiniketan: Continuity and Change." Rabindranath Tagore and the Challenges of Today, edited by Bhudeb Chaudhuri and K.G. Subramanyan, Indian Institute of Advanced Learning, 1988, pp. 153-59.

7. Joel, P.J.K. "The Parrot training and stories", Calcutta: Viswa Bharati, 1944

8. Kahn, Jack S. An Introduction to Masculinities. John Wiley and Sons, 2009.

9. Kripalani, Krishna, Rabindranath Tagore: a biography, Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1980.

10. Kripalani, Krishna. Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography. New York: Grove Press, 1962.

11. Rabindranath Tagore: a 125th birth anniversary volume, Calcutta: Govt. of West Bengal, Dept. of Information & Cultural Affairs, 1988. 12.

-----Gora. Translated by Radha Chakravarty. Classic Rabindranath Tagore, Penguin Books, 2011.

13. Rhys, Earnest. Rabindranath Tagore: A Biographical Study. Mcmillan Company, 1915.