

## REALISATION AND REFLECTIONS ON THE TAGORE'S IDEAL SOCIETY: A STUDY

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**Abstract:** It is an established fact that Rabindranath is only a philosopher of high stature but a social philosopher as well. But the purpose of this paper is not to establish Rabindranath as a philosopher or a social philosopher. The paper tries to focus on some aspect of Tagore's social thinking from which we shall ultimately be able to derive a picture of his ideal society. In order to accomplish this task, we have to acquaint ourselves with socio- cultural background of Tagore's thinking and with some basic problems of social philosophy.

**Keyword:** Humanist, Family Culture, Inspired, Social, Logical, Interpretation, Philosophy, Principle, Concerned, Environment, Universe, Harmony, Lamb of light, Educate, Relation, Clearly, Rabindranath, Upanishad, Manusher Dharma.

### **Discussion:**

If we try to count the socio-cultural factors that influenced Tagore's thinking we shall find them well distributed in togetherness in his family life, traditional Hindu religious scriptures of the Vedas and Upanishads and the 19th Century Bengali Renaissance. The humanitarian views of different members of Tagore's family and the humanist approach of his family culture have influenced the development of the life and thought of Rabindranath. He was born in an illustrious affluent family where he was inspired by the humanistic idea presented through daily prayers from Upanishads by his father. He learns from the Upanishads not to have desire for the possession of other men for desire increases greed that creates obstruction to love. The idea of love inspires a man to realise the significance of the ultimate truth of life that is beyond the desire of worldly object. The humanistic outlook in Tagore thought is developed under the influence of Indian culture and Indian way of life. From his very childhood Rabindranath was influenced by the wider and dynamic ideals of the Vedas and the Upanishads. In Manusher Dharma he writes that the age of twelve years he got Gayatri Mantra from his father as the transcendent song and spirit of life. In Jivanasmriti, Tagore points out that initially he could not understand the meaning of this mantra, then he gradually realised its transcendent significance as the urge for life. This realisation inspires him to observe the existence of an integral process within human life and in society. This spirit of impenetrable identity supplied by this mantra, influenced Tagore to realise the intimate relation of Infinite and external world confronting and surrounding him. On his way to the cultivation of the humanistic ideal of love in life, Rabindranath is also very much influenced by the humanistic views of different Indian sects, different thoughts and way of life of Mystics from Kabir and Dadu to the Bauls of Bengal.

What influenced Tagore most was the cultural upheaval of the 19 century which took place in Bengal. This movement was marked by two conflicting trends of westernism and the traditionalism. The influence of westernism brought many reforms in the existing social order. Many evil practices like 'Sati', ban on widow marriage, polygamy, child marriage, untouchability, casteism etc. Were condemned and came under severe criticism. Along with Westernism, the movement was also marked by the Traditionalism orientalism. The most

important element of the Orientalism was the worship of the past glories of the nation. It was also marked by the revival of Hindu culture values and achievements. Tagore's thought was influenced by both Westernism and traditionalism. Tagore initially was a traditionalist as he came of a family dominated by the traditional customs and beliefs. He was not entirely free from his parental heritage. He was a Brahma by parental heritage. But with growing maturity of age and experience Tagore's mind was shifted from pure Traditionalism to Westernism. As a matured man he felt that pure Traditionalism does not hold good and cannot bring everlasting welfare of the people. So, he urged for a change and took effort to harmonize the traditional values of India with dynamism of modern western thought. This systematic development of his thought urged him to be more active in work and writings for the re-information of society, for the elimination of superstitions and ignorance in the traditional way of life and the establishment of humanist outlook for the welfare of the society. He raised his voice against the orthodoxy of Hinduism in his various writing like *Tashed Desh* and *Achalayantan*. In *Achalayatan*, Tagore directly assaulted on the edifice of established custom and tradition. The drama indicates a confluence between the old conservative outlook of Mahapanchaka\*\* and the new revolutionary idea of Panchaka\*\*. Though this interchange and exchange of thoughts and ideas of the new and the old, completely new light of knowledge has been focused. *Achalayantan* which provoked the then Hindu Society of Bengal represent some of the silent features of Tagore's social philosophy.

## II

With these pre-requisites of the socio-cultural background of Tagore's thinking in general let us acquaint ourselves with some basic problems of social philosophy. Because only with clear understanding of the problems of social philosophy a fruitful effort can be made to relate Tagore's reflection to these core problems of social existence. Philosophy is said to be rooted in life and its problem. So philosophers should realise that philosophy does not only mean metaphysical speculation and logical analysis but it has a social significance as well. Philosophy should not ignore its social role. If it does so, philosophy will become a barren discipline. A day will come when philosophy will fail to evoke any respect and credibility as a meaningful intellectual discipline. No other branches of knowledge will come to philosophy for inspiration and guidance. In the discharge of its social role, philosophy cannot decline to examine man's social existence in its multidimensional manifestations. The significance of social philosophy lies in interpreting social phenomena and the fundamental principles underlying them with a view to present a coherent picture of our social existence. Social philosophy is a philosophical interpretation and evolution of the fundamental principles and concepts of social life with a view to affect a higher synthesis in the light of some fundamental values cherished by mankind in its long history of civilised existence. Social Philosophy studies some meta- sociological issues relating to Individuo-social reality.

As regards the mode of functioning of social philosophy we find that socio-philosophical study has an ontological aspect. In its ontological function, social philosophy aims at the examination of the fundamental principles and concepts of social life, such as man, society, justice, freedom, equality, happiness etc. Social philosophy is also concerned with ethico-teteological study of society. The activities of self-conscious human being in a social environment are not all mechanical or repetitive but creative and appreciative. As a creative-appreciative being, man gives momentum to the reshaping of society which is perpetually undergoing change. Social philosophy studies the nature of social teleosis mid

examines how the telic principles operate in the social plane and how the social teleosis gives orientation to the cultural advancement of society.

Social philosophy should also aim at the study about the Society of future. Social philosophy as the philosophy of society cannot ignore to give rational guidance to individuals and rational ordering of the society. As a social philosopher one must have clear understanding of the significance of the past, a proper perception of our present concern and commitments and also a vision of future possibilities. A social philosopher must search for a thread of continuity in the midst of historical changes. The task of social philosopher is to work out the full implications of the meaningful alternatives for the future of humanity and to enquire into the possibilities of their realisation.

### III

Rabindranath was very much concerned about the Society of future. He tried to give us a model of an 'ideal society' for the future humanity. If we try to highlight his views on individual and his relation to society, Tagore's view on ideal society will gradually be unfolded. Tagore's social ideas were deeply influenced by his views of man in his place in the universe. In his lectures on 'personality' Rabindranath said that the soul which is the unifying principle in me finds the perfection in its unity with other.<sup>1</sup> He wanted to say that a man has relationship with the whole world, both human and non-human. He further says that the consciousness of relationship dawned in us with our physical existence. There is a separation and meeting between our individual life and the world of things. It took a deeper hue in our mental life with a separation and continual reunion between our individual mind and the universal world. It widened where there was a separation and a combination between the individual will and universal world of human personalities. In the words of Rabindranath, "it came to its ultimate meaning where there was a separation and combination between the individual one in us and the universal one in Infinity"<sup>2</sup>. He says that the consciousness of human personality begins with the separateness from all and culminates in the feeling of unity with all. According to Tagore, the whole object of man is free his personality of self into the personality of soul.<sup>3</sup> It is this life of soul in which man is united with the universal unity. Rabindranath would like to call it 'harmony' and it is in this context of harmony in which we have to understand his idea of man and society. He wants the soul to be free in order to reveal its real nature which is good. One can experience the real joy of life when he becomes free from the burden of his physical desires and passions. Tagore thinks that the modern man is too much oppressed by the material needs and the desire for satisfying his physical passions and mental and intellectual curiosity. But he thinks that limitless greed for material achievements and material pleasures can never bring to man the joy of fulfilment and satisfaction. He feels that the joy can be experienced by becoming one with the infinite. He says that the joy of infinite can be experienced not by craving material things and by piling up material achievements but through renunciation. Tagore wants man to do all his work not out of egotism and selfishness but with a sense of dedicating the fruits of work to the Infinite and with disinterestedness. He says that we should not cling to the work and develop attachment for the work and its fruits. Though Tagore attaches much importance to the universal soul, he does not underrate the value of individual souls or the individuality of each person which is the source of all creative activities. For him, there is no opposition between the individual and the universal. On the contrary the individual has to reveal through his creative activities the Divine and the universal. The spiritual personality of man must be

naturally manifest itself in mundane affairs in a way which bridge the gap between man and society. The value of spiritual world necessarily has an impact on the man's day-to-day behaviour. Tagore wants us to see that the individuality of man is not destroyed, but at the same time he is able to reach a social harmony. In order to achieve this, man has to reduce his desires, he has to abandon his greed and realize that all men have to be treated in terms of equality.

Rabindranath in his essay *Atma-Parichaya* says that every man has himself an image of the universe, but at the same time he has an idea of his individuality. Man has an outward aspect where he comes to unite with men of society. Tagore thinks that there should be harmony between this outer and inner world nature. He further says that it is easy to fill harmony between man's nature and the cosmic nature. But the individual human mind seeks harmony with the universal humanity. Man wants to expand himself and unite with this infinite man. He has thus believed in an inseparable bond between himself and the nature and human society. Rabindranath would say that man would have to realise this sense of unity with the universe and such unity can give him a fullness of existence. He said this also above society. He says that the man who exist in cooperation with other human beings is a whole being, individual man is just a fragment. He had felt that when men, become united in a group they can attain the good of the society but when man remains plunged in his pride, greed and power, he gets separated from others. To come to a perfect harmony with society man has to rise above these inhuman tendencies. These evil tendencies of man can be overcome by mutual understanding, faith in each other's goodness and tolerance of another's viewpoint and ideas. Rabindranath believes in a philosophy of the different viewpoints and cultures. He tried to evolve a new culture of life in which good elements contained in different cultures and philosophies can be synthesized and harmonised. He wants love and mutual trust to be the basis of all social political affairs. If human relations are governed by love rather than force and coercion, many social and political conflicts would be averted and greater social harmony would be achieved. Rabindranath believed that social harmony and progress could be achieved not only by harmonization of interest but by mutual love, respect and trust. In short, he dreamt of a society which would be free from greed, fear, conflict and expectation. He wanted an elegant society and that elegance was not for few but for all.

The study of India's history led Rabindranath to give emphasis on ideal society. In his thesis of ideal society, he laid emphasis on social co-operation, On the maintenance of the dignity of the individual, on the need for social balance through proper recognition of all elements in society. He acknowledged the living principle of growth which could be maintained not through competition and exploitation but through co-operation and synthesis. Tagore in his view of ideal society gives emphasis on the principles of cooperation, harmony and synthesised growth. In his article "city and village" and "swadeshi samaj" he has clearly indicated his dream of future Society of India. In *Muktadhara*, Raktakaravi Rabindranath analysed the malady of our divided society, the society which was divided on the basis of the oppressor and the oppressed, exploiter and the exploited. He believes that society loses its balance when the opportunities for the growth are denied to weaker members of the community. In *Muktadhara*, the poet-philosopher showed that man's craving for power leads to a distortion of his being. If man with his power attempts to create an absolute being for himself, he fails to reach the harmony which works in all the religions of the universe. This harmony can be realised through love and not by power. This has been shown by

Rabindranath in his drama *Muktadhara* through the portrayal of the character of Dhananjoy and Abhijeet. In *Raktakaravi*, too, he has shown how the greed for wealth and hunger for power have reduced man to such a wretched existence that he has no identity and has no relation with other human beings and nature. He wants to show how the harmony of existence can be restored by revolting against the inhuman mechanical system which has destroyed man's existence as a human being. It is possible to restore it through love for other human beings, love for beauty of nature and participation in the festival of delight. We can, perhaps say that Rabindranath indicated how man loses his human identity by creating a barrier of separateness. The separateness of being come from pride, greed and power. The separateness can be removed if Man unites with other human beings and nature of the feeling of love and mutual participation.

Tagore's ideals of man and society were also clearly indicate in his lecture "construction versus creation". In his lecture Rabindranath has said that our civilization find its completeness when it expresses humanity not when it displays its power to a mass material wealth but when man displays love far and wide across all barriers of caste, colour, creed, religion, gender etc.<sup>4</sup> In many of his letters to Leonard Elmhirst is in connection with Sriniketan Rabindranath expressed this idea. As a visionary he wanted to make Sriniketan a "Lamp of light" and not a lamp of gold. He did not want Sriniketan to be mere "store house of benefits". He wanted regeneration of village life, a total change of social relationship, a complete self-dependent village. A Village development in fact was the development of human relations based on love and co-operation; co-operation through proper education. To educate all men in ideals of love and friendliness, sacrifice removal of pride, greed and power is an infinite task but not an impossible task. We cannot deny that society cannot reach the desired goal, unless all men realise that it is by love and sacrifice that we can reach everyday nearer the ideal society. This is not only the message for the prosperity of a particular society, but also the message for the whole humanity where each man will have total existence in relation of humanity.

From what has been discussed so far it becomes evident that the essential aspects of Rabindranath philosophical reflections about societal problems and prospect of an "Ideal society" strongly grounded on the historical situations of human civilization and cultural mega-diversity of the ethos of India. He contends that modern individuality and modern social membership are compatible on the basis of principle of harmony. In Tagore ideal society people can in principle be individuals as well as a member of family, civil society and the modern state without disturbing his eco-friendly relation with nature. The inner rhythm of multi-faceted rules of individual is operative with the gift of the principle of harmony and it is these principles of harmony which seems to have found a way of conceiving things such that a full-fledged form of individuality, and full-fledged form of social membership can be combined. The civil society Tagore dreamt of, would be free from all shots of domination and discrimination, a society mark by equality, justice and co-operation. He hopes for a society that good rest on the ideal of universal men. A healthy civilisation, Rabindranath pointed out, contains in its inner core some creative ideal that embraces and binds the members of the society in a rhythm of intimate relationship. If a sense of spiritualism and unbroken faith in human dignity Rabindranath says, "Let our life be simple in its outer respect and rich in inner gain let our civilization take its prime stain upon its basis of social co-operation and not upon that of economic exploitation and conflict, I am willing to

acknowledge that there is a law of demand and supply and an infatuation of man for more things than are good for him. And I will persist in believing that there is such a thing as harmony of completeness in humanity, .....”.5

**Notes:**

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2. Tagore, Rabindranath, Ibid. P-84
3. Tagore, Rabindranath, Ibid. P-98
4. Tagore, Rabindranath: “Construction Verses Creation”, The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Ed. by Sisir Kumar Das, Vol. 3, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1996, P-402
5. Tagore, Rabindranath: ‘Nationalism in India’. Lecturers and Addresses, selected by Anthony X. Soares, Macmillan, London, 1955, P-121

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  4. Tagore, Rabindranath: Muktaadhara, Rabindra Rachanavali. Vol-14, Visva-Bharati, Calcutta, 1349 B.S
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  11. Mackenzie, J.S.: Outline of social Philosophy, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1918
  12. Sen, Sachin: “Tagore’s Welfare Society”, Proceedings of Conference, Vol-3, Indian Philosophical Congress, 26<sup>th</sup> session.
- \*\* Mahapanchaka and Panchaka are the two characters in Tagore drama Achalayatan. Mahapanchaka represents the old traditional conservative outlook and Panchaka represents the new revolutionary outlook of the Hindu society of Bengal.