

## UNIVERSAL OUTLOOK OF TAGORE

DR.R.MANJULA

**Abstract:** No other writer of India has attracted the attention of such wide range of readers and critics as Rabindranath Tagore. No poet in history has perhaps earned so much honour in his life time as Tagore. No poet again has perhaps suffered public indignation as Tagore. For that he himself provides the answer

“The desire for unity with the rest of the world”. The humanism of Tagore is a part of unity with the whole world”. Gradually this feeling of unity grows into the feeling of love for the whole mankind. As the poet was moved by universal love he was against all customs, creeds, prejudices and sectarianism. In fact Tagore’s greatness lies in his global vision.

“I love India but my India is not an idea, not geographical expression. Therefore I am not a patriot”.<sup>1</sup>

Tagore’s vision of human unity and equality, and his critique of modern civilization with its twin principles of materialism and nationalism, is recurrent in all his works. His vision emerges most explicitly and powerfully, however in several of his lectures and Addresses, including ‘My Life’, ‘My School’, ‘My Religion’, ‘Civilization and Progress’, ‘Nationalism in India’, ‘Nationalism in Japan’, ‘Nationalism in the West’, as well as in his novels ‘Gora’, ‘The Home and The World’ and Four Chapters. In each of these works, Tagore most engagingly and energetically investigates what has gone wrong with the world and where the remedy lies. Tagore was a champion of national movement, a composer of patriotic songs, writer of our national anthem, an inspiring anti colonial activist, a vigorous critic of western imperialism, he was considered a precursor to Gandhi, Romain Rolland had described a meeting between Tagore and Gandhi as one between “a philosopher and an apostle, a St. Paul and a Plato.”<sup>2</sup> So why Tagore’s reputation has fell when published *The Home and the World* in 1915 and even further when he published *Nationalism* in 1918 and *Four Chapters* in 1934. The reasons are not so much poetical but ideological and philosophical.<sup>3</sup> Tagore’s vision of universal human unity, of living bonds in society<sup>4</sup> of spontaneous expression of man as a social being<sup>5</sup> of his equation of nation with the universe. (*The Home and The World*, p. 37). In the context of National freedom movement those who accused the role of the poet of being an escapist failed to see his philosophical thinking. Because he was not a politician in its technical and professional sense: he was a political thinker. According to Tagore Nationalism is not patriotism. But what is a nation? A nation is the feeling of unity irrespective of caste or creed or religion. Nationalism is not opposed to internationalism. According to Tagore the purest

form of nationalism is that which promotes international harmony and international cooperation and progressive development of mankind. Nationalism is not based on one religion rather on the principle that all religions are true and one. Tagore’s disenchantment with the national movement grew out of his bitter experiences of the Swadeshi movement. Tagore witnessed that the patriotic feelings that roused during the Swadeshi movement were synonymous with Hinduism, symbolized by aggressive form, and resulted in bitter fruits of terrorism. Rabindranath himself was deeply scarred by the outcome of Swadeshi which he had earlier embraced. *The Home and The World*, produced out of the ravages of time, relives some of the poet’s own anguish. In a series of essays written shortly after this novel, Tagore would aggressively decry the goals and outcome of nationalist politics. Nikhil in the *The Home and The World* is benevolent progressive Zamindar whose vision is one of the enlightened humanitarian and global perspective, based on true equality and harmony of individuals and nations. Nikhil’s childhood friend Sandip a charismatic nationalist leader. Nikhil and Sandip are two opposite poles. Nikhil is an idealist where as Sandip is an opportunist. Nikhil is reason where as Sandeep is an emotion. Nikhil seeks social freedom Sandeep seeks political freedom. If Sandip equates Nation with God where as Nikhil equates Nation with the universe. Nikhil is constructive where as Sandip is destructive. Bimala stands between the two, married to Nikhil, loving Sandip. Here Tagore identifies Bimala with the people of India who are not matured enough to distinguish between constructive and destructive patriotism. Their passion for India is the same as their passion for its leader. So Bimala too is blind to reason behind her emotion. She so superficial that, she does not know the returns of burning of foreign cloth. Nor does she know the core of Bandemataram and the cause of communal virus. She has lost the sight that the history of India is citadel of diverse cultures and religions. She blindly follows the murky path of Sandip who is symbol of separatism and communalism. Intoxicated by passion for India and its leader. Bimala is unmindful of the danger of her patriotism which is associated with theft lie, cheating, murder and exploitation until she is exploited by Sandip. When Bimala sees the true colour of Sandip under the banner of patriotism she

comes back to Nikhil. But at what cost? She has lost Amulya a true patriot in the communal riots. Almost the same is Nikhil's condition, his life too is uncertain. Sandip who came from nowhere in sight. What else left is blazing fires of communalism. As Bimala robbed by self seeking Sandip so India by self-seeking nationalists. Through the character of Sandip, Tagore openly criticised the extremist nationalists of the then Swadeshi movement. The lapses of Sandip represent the lapses of Swadeshi leaders. The failure of Bimala represents the failure of Swadeshi movement. The attack on Nikhil is parallel to the attack on Tagore. It is not surprising that *The Home and The World* invited protest letters. Swadeshi movement produced a galaxy of political leaders extremists and moderates, charismatic leaders, and fiery orators, true patriots and also self seeking leaders. It can't be denied Tagore totally ignored true patriots, highlighting pseudo patriots like Sandip. Not all leaders are self-seeking and anti-secular like Sandip nor all people are blind participants like Bimala. Tagore denounced nationalism attributing Swadeshi lapses, attributing communal riots. If Swadeshi movement would not have ended with communal riots would then Tagore supported the movement? It seems that Tagore denounced nationalism only to embrace universalism and Swadeshi lapses are only reasons to defend his role further. Tagore political philosophy like his literary works rise above regional considerations. This is one of the greatest reasons that critics attacked him by pointing that his sense of nationalism was subdued by his passion for internationalism.<sup>6</sup> We see Tagore's global sentiment through Nikhil when Sandip arbitrarily equates God with nation, Sandip: I truly believe my country to be my God. Nikhil:

"If that is what you really believe, there should be no difference for you between man and man and so between country and country" (*The Home and The World*) p.37.

Sandip in *The Home and The World* emerges as a hard core terrorist in *Four Chapters*. This novel is not only a condemnation of terrorist elements in the freedom movement but also self-introspection of misguided young patriots. During the Swadeshi Movement Tagore was pained to see how patriotism bred terrorism. He was annoyed to see the youth desperately running after the messenger of death in the name of patriotism. Tagore in one of his many letters to Mr. C.F. Andrews popularly called Dinabandhu explained his concept of patriotism, the basis of his love for the mother land.

"When India suffers from injustice it is right that we should stand against it, and the responsibility is ours to right the wrong, not as Indians but as human

beings".

According to Tagore the purest form of patriotism is not selling of our conscience, killing of our own soul, claiming other lives. Patriotism is not secret machination either, which is a curse to humanity even if it were a God's gift. It is wrong to exercise one man's hating philosophy for the purpose of what we call the country's need. For this reason neither in *The Home and The World* nor in *Gora*, nor even in *Four chapters* patriotism is glorified. Nowhere his patriots turn up victorious. All patriots in Tagore's novels either lose their lives or extend their vision, from nation to the universe. Initially *Gora* is a sturdy Hindu patriot. Later he throws his Hindu nationalism over-board to embrace universalism. *Gora's* successor Nikhil too is not a genuine patriot at all, as we see him expressing the global sentiment throughout the novel. Of course the only true patriots are Amulya and Atin, but they are not heroes, they are mere puppets in the hands of their leaders Sandip and Indranath, respectively. Bimala and Ela's situation is the same. Bimala is attracted towards Sandip's patriotism as Ela towards Indranath. Bimala misuses her freedom, whereas Ela not only misuses her high talent and creativity but also drags innocent Atin into her path and later repents for her folly. Of course Bimala has an escape. But Ela and Atin such young dynamic youth resort to lead their lives as puppets. Their introspection and inevitable tragic death is an eye opener to the youth who are being tempted to the blood thrusting philosophy. Sandip and Indranath are shown as pseudo patriots, escapists and opportunists to conspire even with alien forces. Their movements which are intended for the noble cause of the nation are only guided by tyranny of their mind not harmony of understanding. Tagore was concerned with man, not as the citizen of a particular state. To him humanity stands above everything. He was never in favour of fostering a dull uniformity between the East and the West. He believed that their meetings will be all the more fruitful because of their differences; it will lead both to holy wedlock before the common altar of humanism. In his "Nobel Prize acceptance speech" Tagore advocates how India's and the world's sole objective should be to attain global unity and shun the politics of nationalism, which violates man's inherent bond by generating hatred between nations and lacking each in a separate geographical cage: I do not think that it is the spirit of India to reject any thing, reject any race, reject any culture. The spirit of India has always proclaimed the ideal of unity...Now when in the present time of political unrest the children of the same great India cry for rejection of the West. I feel hurt"<sup>7</sup> To translate his ideas into practice, Tagore thought that the last method would

be to start a world university – a centre of learning where through cultural integration and search of truth, one could train himself as a citizen of the world. With the establishment of Viswa Bharati, Tagore gave practical shape to his idea of international citizenship. Highlighting the purpose of Viswa Bharati he says:

“Through Viswa Bharati as a whole to seek to establish a living relationship between East and West, to promote intercultural and inter-racial amity and understanding and fulfil the highest mission of the present age-unification of mankind”<sup>8</sup>

Of course humanism is a common factor in every version, but what is worth mentioning is that the human significance of his works transcend not only regional but national boundaries as well. In his astonishing version nationalism ceased to be mere political concept, spiritualism ceased to be mere divine concept and religion had reached a deeper meaning i.e. religion of man. His radical humanistic approach to spirituality annoyed many of the ancient spiritual humanists of our country Perhaps Tagore was also the first who has given to our nationalism the outlook of internationalism. No other writer except Tagore has ever written so frankly about the orthodoxy of his own people. No other writer was daring to protest against cruelty, violence, injustice, tyranny and oppression that associated during national movement. Thus his message is most significant for us from the point of view of pure humanity. His writings are not narrowly national but are touched with a wider spirit. In him the voice of

India speaks not only to Indians but to the world at large. Dr.Sunder land, in the course of a contribution to the Christian Register, well observers :

“No land in the world has ever produced profound thinkers on all the problems of religion and life than the India of the past. The India of today has no wiser, kinder more broad minded or greater teacher than Mr.Tagore, none more eager to receive from us whatever of value we have to give or better able to impart to us the best wisdom of his own historic land”<sup>9</sup>

Tagore’s political philosophy of one world, social philosophy of one religion and spiritual philosophy of one man harmoniously inter blended and gave significant message for the whole man kind. The world respects him not merely for his richly endowed personality and many sided nature, which come out in his beautiful poetry, but also for the spiritual message of his writings. Tagore was listed to have belonged to the school of Art for Art’s sake.<sup>10</sup> But he wrote songs, poems, plays, letters, diaries, ranging from religion to science, music to politics, education and social reform. His novels not only serve social purpose but also national and universal purpose.

“Humanity is the very epitome of the wide and varied universe. To know it properly is to realise the highest manifestation of Brahma, since in all its world-wide aspects humanity is permeated with the spirit of God. This universal greatness of humanity has truly found its triumphant poetic expression in our age in the literature of Rabindranath Tagore”<sup>11</sup>

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Asst Professor in English  
JNTUACEA, Anantapur  
reddivarimanjula@gmail.com