# UNIT 2: R.N. TAGORE'S HUMANISM

## UNIT STRUCTURE


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## 2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define, what is humanism
- explain Tagore's humanism
- analyse different features of Tagore's humanism

## 2.2 INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), one of the most distinguished personalities of modern India had achieved international reputation within his lifetime, crossing the barrier of locals and nationals. He was not a systematic philosopher, but the worldview behind his works and his ideas are complex as well as original. Though he did not write a systematic philosophical treatise but authored many essays and lectures in which he depicts his worldview in a poetic way. It is therefore Dr. S. Radhakrishnan truly realised about Tagore's philosophy "It is a sigh of the soul rather than

a reasoned account of metaphysics; an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy. But we feel that the atmosphere is charged with a particular vision of reality. Though poetry is not philosophy, it is possible for us to derive from Rabindranath's works his philosophical views." In another place he stated "Though it is not the aim of poetry as a species of art to tell us of a philosophy, still it cannot fulfill its purpose unless it embodies a philosophic vision. It must offer an interpretation of life; give us a fuller view of reality. Poetry would not delight and give joy if it did not reveal the eternal through its form." It is admitted that Tagore is known as a complete man who encompassed everything in his poetry ranging from religion, aesthetics, education, nationalism, and social dynamics to internationalism and race relations. 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. This gives us the ground to claim Tagore a philosopher. His contribution in enriching and ennobling human life through his writings which reflect the feelings, emotions and passions of all men upon the earth has been phenomenal.

## 2.3 HUMANISM: WHAT IT IS

Humanism is a rationalist outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters. It is a philosophical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively. Generally it 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. In this age of humanism we understand the concept of man as the centre of all things.

## 2.4 TAGORE'S HUMANISTIC ATTITUDE

The humanistic attitude of Tagore pervades all aspects of his thought, but he never allows it to fall down to the status of narrow

anthropomorphism. It can be assert that the philosophy of Tagore is largely expressed through the concept of inter-personal relationship. In order to expound his idea of humanism corresponding to inter-personal relationship, it is necessary to delve more on his concept of man. His concept of man provides us with the real knowledge of man, who is finite and infinite, biological and spiritual in nature. His views about man or personality can be found in his various writings, particularly in Sâdhanâ (1913), Personality (1917), Creative Unity (1922) and The Religion of Man (1930).

In his philosophical journey, Tagore was guided by the ancient Indian thought of the Upanishads and the Vedanta. These scriptures represent loftiest ethical and spiritual values of mankind and being inspired by it Tagore's philosophy also resolves round mankind, which is known as humanism. Like the ancient and contemporary Indian philosophers Tagore also inclined to spiritualism in his humanistic approach and man holds an exalted position in his philosophy. We always find a human touch in the writings, paintings and poems of Tagore. In this way he humanizes not only nature and objects but also God. The outer world, according to Tagore, is nothing but 'a cradle for the human spirit'. It is seen that in Tagore's thought all the human notions of life, rhythm, beauty, harmony, order, love, delight, music have become important. These concepts become more meaningful when they are related to human values. There are unanimous similes and analogies everywhere in Tagore's writings which indicate the intense human disposition of the poet philosopher.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESSS**

Q 1: Fill in the blanks:

a) Some books, where Tagore analyses his concept of humanism are ……., ……..., and …… .

Q 2: Can Tagore be claimed as a philosopher? Show reason.

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Q 3: What is Humanism?

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The following features of humanism are derived from Tagore's extensive writings.

## 2.5 BOND OF HUMANITY AND NATURE

Tagore's concept of man or 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 splendour 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 its true colour to a person's self, having its own eternal bindings with human nature. Nature is essentially related to man. In the vastness of nature, we are not unknown strangers; we are her kith and kin. He also compares the 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." Tagore thinks that there are essentially two senses in which we can think of our relationship with nature- one in which we ordinarily treat it as an insentient, objective mode for information, binding down man to the physical and essential needs; and the other in which it satisfies our personality with manifestations that make our life rich and stimulate our imagination in their harmony of forms, colours, sounds and movements. S.C. Sengupta in his article, "The Surplus in Man: The Poet's Philosophy of Man," 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 to the growth of another stage. Man has a 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. Describing the integral relationship of nature with man Tagore quotes 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". Rabindranath Tagore, Personality, in 'The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore', vol. 2, ed. by Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2008), 349. Tagore recommends that man should lead a life of nature tending trees, feeding birds and animals, learning to feel the immense mystery of the soil and water and air.

## 2.6 DESIRE TO SERVE GOD THROUGH MANKIND

The important aspect which makes Tagore's humanism more appealing and inspiring is that he has a strong desire to serve God through mankind. He conceives man in such a manner that without affecting the Godness of God, he gives to man also a special dignity and uniqueness. Tagore perceives God in every human being. In his philosophy God and man go together. It is therefore a clear picture of Tagore's conception of Jivan Devata emerges after having an idea of his philosophy of man. A deep insight in to the Tagore's explanation of the nature of man reveals the fact that there are two essential aspects of man's nature; lower or finite aspect and higher or infinite aspects. In his book 'The Religion of Man' when Tagore states about man that 'he is earth's child but heaven's heir' thereby he indicates clearly about these two aspects; the physical and the spiritual. The physical or finite aspect is determinable in terms of biological, physiological and psychological

facts. On the other hand the spiritual, which implies the infinite aspect of man expresses in loving and aspirations of a higher kind. This aspect of man's nature is sometimes described by Tagore as the 'Universal' in man, the 'Surplus' in man, the element of Divinity present in man, and so on. The important character of this infinite aspect of man which makes man God like is that all its expressions and activities are expressions of joy. Man's natural urge for realizing the Truth, the Good and the Beautiful is an expression of joy. Joy is both the condition of man's spiritual growth and also ultimate growth. It is on account of the element of joy inherent in the human soul, that whenever man rises above the mere physical he is able to forget the worries and anxieties of life. It is on account of these that Tagore calls this aspect of man's nature as 'Jivan Devata'. Jivan Devata is god in man, the element of Divinity present in man, which makes man God-like. He feels that man can take interest in the absolute only when it is humanized. His God or the universal spirit dwells not in heaven but in the heart of man. In the book 'Religion of Man' while describing the purpose of the book Tagore says, "The idea of humanity of our God, or the Divinity of man, the Eternal, is the main subject of this book". This represents truly the Tagore's sense of humanizing God. A clear picture of humanizing God by Tagore is emerged in the writings of B. K. Lal in his book 'Indian Philosophy' –"…….At times, man is raised higher to the status of God, at other times, God is brought down to man in so far as divinity is said to be discernible in the heart of man."

## 2.7 RELIGION IS THE FOUNDATION OF HUMANITY

Tagore's concept of Religion is colored by humanism. The account of religion as given by him is the realization of the universal within the individual through an act of supreme love. His humanistic attitude pervades in his religious thought. Though, initially as Brahmo-samaji he developed a religion combining elements of Brahmo samaj and of orthodox Hinduism; finally he comes to believe in what he called, 'the religion of man'. He claims that his religion towards all forms rituals and it is the true expression of the spirit in man. Without belonging to an

established religion, he could easily express the idea of a universal human religion, which can be termed as 'Humanism' in its purest form. Tagore clearly expresses in his writings how his spiritual realization was slowly transformed in to human religion. He visualizes in a way that as the wateriness of water is essentially its religion and in the spark of flame lays the religion of fire, in the same way man's religion is his innermost Truth. Religion of man grows within his mind as a religious experience. The aim of true religion is the realization of one's kinship with everything. Religion is therefore life and existence and ultimately it is the religion of Man. True religion is nothing but an attempt to realize the Divinity in Man.

## 2.8 LOVE AND SACRIFICE IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF HUMANITY

Describing religion as the Religion of Man, Tagore recommends the rule of love in religion. Love is the main principle underlying Tagore's philosophy. He holds that the goal of man in the world is to annihilate the consciousness of separateness from the supreme reality and this can be attained by complete self sacrifices and self surrender. This can be realised only through love. Tagore never tired to repeat it that 'love' is distinct from attachment because it has no egoistic motive. True love identifies oneself with object of one's love. It means to go beyond oneself and hence a source of joy. It is on account of this, love is identified as comprehension which implies comprehending 'all' in a unity. In love the sense of difference is obliterated. Tagore states in his book 'Sadhana' p. 29 "….The meaning of this is that whomsoever we love, in him we find our own soul in the highest sense….because in them we have grown larger, in them we have touched the great truth which comprehends the whole universe." Therefore it is clear from his writings that it is only through love that our consciousness can be enlarged.

Another aspect of love is that it presupposes sacrifice. Love and sacrifices go together, without the one the other loses its function. Man begins his spiritual journey with the act of love and thereby able to sacrifice of all personal consideration. Tagore realized in a way that loves

removes the transitory state of man and he comes in contact with universal humanity. Repeating the importance of love Tagore states in 'The Gardener' "Trust love even if it brings sorrow…..let sorrowful love wake in your eyes." Mentioning the practical side of love Tagore states that love is not mere sentimentality or emotional attitude towards its object, as it demands some action on his part. The practical side of love refers to certain corresponding actions springing from and expressing the feelings of love. To increase the awareness about the importance of love in human society Tagore states that a civilization can be judged and prized by how much it has evolved and given expression to, by its laws and institution, the love of human unity.

## 2.9 SERVICE TO HUMANITY IS THE SOURCE OF SALVATION

According to Tagore perfect freedom is the harmony of relation and this harmony which the Upanishad speaks when it says that truth no longer remains hidden in him who finds himself in all. So service to humanity is the better source of salvation. He prefers dedication instead of renunciation as the path of salvation. Usually the Indian philosopher conceives liberation as freedom from rebirth – from the tendency to be reborn. Tagore thinks in a different way and states that renunciation of the individual self for the check of supreme soul positively means dedication to it. Human beings find joy in dedication. Thus the liberated man does not become an entirely different individual or a separate unit. On the other hand, his self centered outlook gives place to love and joy.

The ultimate destiny of man is the realization of immortality, of complete freedom. It is a state in which man rises completely over his egoistic life and has a realization of the essential unity of everything. This enables him to rise above even the distinction between pleasure and pain, and good and evil, because these distinctions arise only when we believe in the distinction between mine and yours. Following Gita, Tagore also believes that working for love comprises freedom in action. As a profound believer of freedom he states that freedom means the freedom

of consciousness, seeking and modulating our relationship with other beyond ego. To establish this concept he established an educational institute at Santiniketan, where he professed but never preached. This aspect makes Tagore a crusader of freedom for every human soul and thereby a true humanist.

## 2.10 HUMANITY IS GREATER THAN COMMUNITY

Tagore through his extensive literature expresses and analyses all possible tenets of human characters and emotions. The important aspect of Tagore's humanism is that he considers humanism is greater than community. He advocates universal brotherhood and the poems specially written in his later life reflect his philosophy of humanism by pointing out the divinity in man. Tagore's humanism is guided by Vedantic ethics and holds that moral law is the discovery of man and it is the discovery of the wonderful truth that man becomes all the truer the more he realizes himself in others. Tagore feels in a way that the degradation which we cast upon others in our pride or self interest degrades our own humanity. The awareness of universal brotherhood exist in the soul that is spiritual unity of mankind is essential for lasting peace in the world. He states that the cultivation of the aesthetic sense and developing the artistic sensibility helps us to place humanity over and above community. According to him the world is a song, which is never separated from the singer. Every aspect of the universe is a note of this music, and therefore, every aspect of the universe reflects the Infinite. Art, music, cultivation of the aesthetic sense are the ways through which one can develop the feelings of universal brotherhood, the feelings of humanity. Tagore comments that when a man does not realize his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison-house whose walls are alien to him. When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects, then is he emancipated for then he discovers the fullest significance of the world into which he is born; then he finds himself in perfect truth, and his harmony with the all is established.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 4:** Mention some features of Tagore's Humanism.

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**Q 5**: What are the two essential aspets of man's nature described by Tagore?

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**Q 6**: What is the aim of true religion?

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## 2.11 LET US SUM UP

- Tagore was not a systematic philosopher. But he is known as a complete man who encompassed everything in his poetry ranging from religion, aesthetics, education, nationalism, and social dynamics to internationalism and race relations.
- Humanism is a rationalist outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters. It is a philosophical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively. It prefers critical thinking and evidence over established doctrine or faith.
- Tagore's view about man or personality can be found in his various writings, particularly in Sâdhanâ (1913), Personality (1917), Creative Unity (1922) and The Religion of Man (1930).
- The humanistic attitude of Tagore pervades all aspects of his thought. His philosophy resolves round mankind, which is known as humanism. We always find a human touch in the writings,

paintings and poems of Tagore. In this way he humanizes not only nature and objects but also God.

- 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.
- A deep insight in to the Tagore's explanation of the nature of man reveals the fact that there are two essential aspects of man's nature; lower or finite aspect and higher or infinite aspects. The physical or finite aspect is determinable in terms of biological, physiological and psychological facts. On the other hand the spiritual, which implies the infinite aspect of man expresses in loving and aspirations of a higher kind.
- Without belonging to an established religion, he could easily express the idea of a universal human religion, which can be termed as 'Humanism' in its purest form. . The aim of true religion is the realization of one's kinship with everything.
- Love is the main principle underlying Tagore's philosophy. He holds that the goal of man in the world is to annihilate the consciousness of separateness from the supreme reality and this can be attained by complete self sacrifices and self surrender. This can be realised only through love.
- Tagore states that freedom means the freedom of consciousness, seeking and modulating our relationship with other beyond ego.
- The awareness of universal brotherhood exist in the soul that is spiritual unity of mankind is essential for lasting peace in the world. The cultivation of the aesthetic sense and developing the artistic sensibility helps us to place humanity over and above community.



## 2.12 FURTHER READING

1) Tagore, R.N.(1917). Personality, London,Mamillan&Co.
2) Tagore, R.N.(1949). The Religion of Man, London, George Allen and Unwin.
3) Tagore, R.N. (1950). Creative Unity, London,Mamillan&Co. (Indian edition).
3) Tagore, R.N. (1947). Sadhana, London,Mamillan&Co.
4) Tagore, R.N. (1961). Towards Universal Man, Bombay,Asia Publishing House.
5) Lal, Basant Kumar. (1999). Contemporary Indian Philosophy, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers,



## 2.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Sâdhanâ (1913), Personality (1917), and The Religion of Man (1930).

**Ans to Q No 2**: Tagore was basically a poet, but he can be claimed as a philosopher. Though he did not write a systematic philosophical treatise but authored many essays and lectures in which he depicts his worldview in a poetic way. Tagore is known as a complete man who encompassed everything in his poetry ranging from religion, aesthetics, education, nationalism, and social dynamics to internationalism and race relations. This gives us the ground to claim Tagore a philosopher.

**Ans to Q No 3:** Humanism is a rationalist outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters.

**Ans to Q No 4:** Some features of Tagore's Humanism are- 1. The bond of Humanity and Nature is an important aspect of Tagore's humanism. 2. There is a desire to Serve God through Mankind. 3.

Religion is the Foundation of Tagore's Humanism. 4. Love and sacrifice is an integral part of Humanity. 5. Service to Humanity is the Source of Salvation. 6. Humanity is greater than Community.

**Ans to Q No 5:** The two essential aspets of man's nature described by Tagore are the lower or finite aspect and the higher or infinite aspect.

**Ans to Q No 6:** True religion is nothing but an attempt to realize the Divinity in Man. Therefore, the aim of true religion is the realization of one's kinship with everything.



## 2.14 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A. Very Short question**

**Q 1:** What is Humanism?

**Q 2:** Is Tagore a philosopher?

**Q 3:** Write the names of some books by Tagore.

**Q 4:** Write a note on tagore's religion.

**Q 5:** What are the two aspects of man's nature described by Tagore?

**Q 6:** How Tagore established the fact that Humanity is greater than community?

**Q 7:** What is love?

**B. Short question (Answer in about 150 words)**

**Q 1:** Write a note on Tagore's concept of Religion.

**Q 2:** What is Humanism? Briefly explain Tagore's humanism.

**Q 3:** How Tagore describe the integral relationship of nature with man.

**C. Long Questions (Answer in about 300- 500 words)**

**Q 1:** Explain the different aspects of Tagore's humanism

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