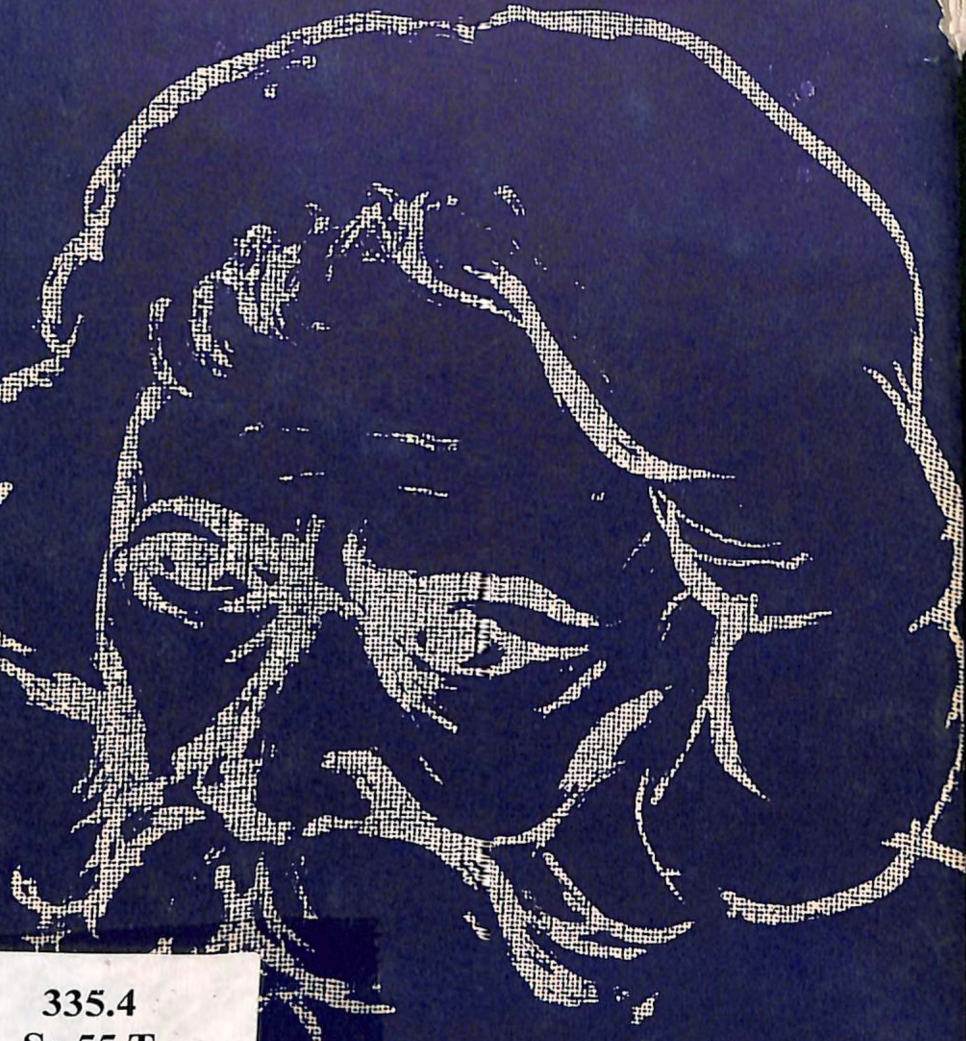


Tarvit Kr. Serw

335.4
Se 55 T

335.4
Se 55 T

Tagore's
humanism





***INDIAN INSTITUTE OF
ADVANCED STUDY
LIBRARY SIMLA***

DATA ENTERED

TAGORE'S HUMANISM

DATA ENTERED

TAGORE'S HUMANISM

TARIT KUMAR SEN

1990

**Publisher : Smt. Arati Sen
Address : 6B Kirti Mitra Lane,
Calcutta-700004**

TAGORE'S HUMANISM
(Four Essays on Rabindranath's
ideas on Socio-Political and
Economic Issues)
By **TARIT KUMAR SEN**

Time of Publication : April, 1990.

Publisher : Smt. Arati Sen
Address : 6B Kirti Mitra Lane,
Calcutta-700004

Cover Design by : Sunil Kr. Dasgupta

Printed by Dwijendranath Bose,
at Ananda Press & Publications Private Ltd,
248, C.I.T. Scheme No. VI-M,
Calcutta-700054.



Library IIAS, Shimla



00075486

PRICE Rs. 15/-

75486
11/12/90
335.4
Se 557

**Dedicated to my beloved son
Swapn**

INDEX

- | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|
| 1. Tagore's Humanism. | .. | .. | 1 |
| 2. Tagore The Socialist | .. | .. | 7 |
| 3. Tagore, a Votary of World Peace. | | .. | 14 |
| 4. Tagore, a Friend of the Poor
and the Oppressed. | .. | .. | 20 |

FOREWORD

Born on September 19, 1911, at Benda, a remote village in Jessore district (now in Bangladesh), Late Tarit Kumar Sen studied the Honours course in English Language and Literature. After having graduated from the Scottish Church College, Calcutta, he joined the Reserve Bank of India, and at retirement in 1969, was its Treasurer. Once off from active service, he reverted to his old interest—study of literature and poetry and writing on socio-economic and literary subjects. The centre of his interest was, of course, Rabindranath. Well-read in both Bengali and English literature, Tarit Sen was endowed with a keen intellect and a fine sensibility and was remarkably adept in literary appreciation. After retirement, he used to give occasional talks over the All India Radio on topical economic and banking problems. Those talks, though intricate in contents, were remarkable in clear thinking, lucid expression and convincing logic. He contributed to several newspapers and journals quite a number of articles and essays on literary and socio-economic matters of paramount interest to the people. All those talks and writings were widely acclaimed for their analytical insight, integral outlook and emphatic assertion of social responsibility as the touchstone of all social actions and national policies. His life, however, was unfortunately cut short in January, 1986.

The present booklet—"Tagore's Humanism"—collects only four of his previously published articles on Rabindranath's anguished concern, as a supremely

responsible representative of the literary world, at the engulfing crisis of human culture and civilisation, decline of human values and man's age-long injustice to man. Sen also especially noted the Poet's hopeful vision of the inevitable redemption of mankind through the historic struggles and heroic efforts of the suffering humanity.

NIHAR K. CHAUDHURI

PREFACE

'Tagore's Humanism' is a small book with lofty thoughts. It contains only four of the many articles which the late Tarit Kumar Sen wrote and got published in several newspapers and journals on Rabindranath's ideas on certain issues of paramount material and spiritual concern to mankind.

It is said that a true poet can see beyond the horizon of ordinary vision. More than half a century ago, in those decades of anxiety before the Second World War, despite old age and failing health, Rabindranath was mentally keen enough to be still able to envision a gathering human predicament rapidly cumulating into a crisis of civilization, and to fulfil his part of the moral obligation by standing up to it and raising his voice of indictment and warning. He knew that capitalist imperialism with its lust for wealth and power and its cult of violence was the matrix from which the crisis issued forth. It is noteworthy that Tarit Sen in his choice of the themes for his four articles preferred only those which Rabindranath recognised as essential components of that crisis: perennial poverty, violence and oppression, the cleavage between the rich and the exploited poor, threat to social peace, menace to world peace and the danger of war and the decline of human values.

But, then, Rabindranath never despaired of man's future. He had a firm faith in man's capacity and will to stand up to evil. He visited the Soviet Union and saw for himself how the Soviet people after having once thrown off their oppressive exploiters were building up for themselves a new life with tremendous zeal and gigantic efforts. There he did see a sure 'budding morrow in the midnight' and sent its authentic intimation in his 'Letters From Russia.'

Tarit sen in the four articles included in the book made discerning appraisal of Rabindranath's views on all those questions. It is, of course, true that a vast and varied literature already exists in appreciation of Rabindranath's Works from innumerable view points. To some of its readers the present book may, therefore, appear redundant or even as unnecessary as an ant-hill beside a grand mountain, serving little or no purpose.

It is, however, never in question that Rabindranath is a boundless ocean where there still exist more treasure islands than discovered—an ocean depths of which are yet to be fully fathomed to reach those unexplored beds where richer and more brilliant gems—countless of them—can still be gathered.

Never also has it been doubted that it is always possible to approach Rabindranath from ever newer points of departure, to seek newer meanings and find them. Tarit Sen's articles will hardly appear redundant if one only consider his point of departure. It is perfectly clear from the articles that evaluation of Rabindranath's poetic or literary genius was never his intention. He was well-read enough to know that other more capable scholars had done that job most ably. What he wanted to bring out and be emphatic about is the Poet's supreme sense of social responsibility, so urgent, so unmistakable and so poignantly expressed in what he wrote, said or did.

Tarit Sen made it clear that Rabindranath never acquiesced to, nor failed to raise his voice against, wrongs done either to an individual or to a nation anywhere. When, during the brief, anxious interlude between the two World Wars, the insidious forces of evil arose in the form of Fascism and Nazism vaunting

their arrogant unreason, weird irrational creeds and cruel apparatus of terror and put millions of the Jews and ideological and political opponents to slow death in concentration camps, kept on invading and devouring weaker nations, destroying liberties and debasing ancient human values and still the so-called Great Powers averted their gaze and continued in their acquiescence and turned deaf to the wail of the oppressed, Rabindranath, however, with his profound sense of social responsibility could not remain indifferent or silent. He declared that all men of good will everywhere must stand up, be partisan to the oppressed, and resist those who dared crimes against humanity. He decried and indicted those who would tolerate crimes. Those were times when toleration was a vice and not pardonable. When General Franco's reaction trampled democracy and freedom in the Republic of Spain, the Poet's sensibility and responsibility to mankind did not allow him to remain silent and he gave an urgent call for material and spiritual help to the fighting Spanish people.

Keenly aware as he was of 'the pestilence of intellectual corruption' and cowardice abroad in the intellectual world, he disdained to keep himself aloof from the people in their suffering.

Readers, we believe, will undoubtedly derive great pleasure and benefit from this small book and will realize that Rabindranath was no remote eminence, but belonged to them with authentic intimacy as their friend, philosopher and guide, in distress as in happiness. To Tarit Sen goes some credit, at least, for fostering this realization.

(Dr.) KALYAN DASGUPTA

Tagore's Humanism

(Published in Economic Times in May, 1980)

In this strife-torn world with nations harbouring mutual distrust and suspicion among themselves and rivalling one another in the race of power politics, in a state of cold war, Tagore's message of universal love and international brotherhood acquires added significance and suggests the only way out of the eternal conflict afflicting mankind and threatening world peace. Trampling of human rights, racial hatred, political and ideological differences deepening to develop into a third world war, frantic arms race are ominous and make mockery of international efforts at establishing world peace by effecting disarmament, SALT agreement etc. urged by narrow national interests and lured by love of power, nations have plunged headlong into a reckless race of nationalism, regardless of higher human and moral values of life and norms of international behaviour. Rabindranath has decried the modern civilisation as the root of all evils in his following strong note of dissent :

“The epidemic of human oppression stemming from the marrow of western civilization has polluted the atmosphere from one end of the world to the other by degradation and humiliation of the human soul” (Essay—Sabhyatar Sankat)

Economic warfare and constant clash of national

interests have created a world-order in which peace is disturbed and tension among nations increases. Rabindranath visualised a world where nations will be bound together by the indissoluble ties of love, brotherhood, friendship and co-operation and where each nation will respect the religion and ideologies of the others and each will contribute to the spiritual, cultural and material growth of the world as a whole in a spirit of mutual accommodation and give and take. In his essay entitled 'Topoban' he has opined, "The relationship between one nation and another is not that of imitation and following but that of give and take." Stronger nations exploit the weaker ones by depriving the latter of their legitimate needs and resources. Developed nations with their overflowing wealth shirk their moral responsibility of rendering adequate help to the developing nations in their hour of crisis and need. Colonialism and racialism still reign rampant. Democracy degenerates into tyranny by brute majority. Socialism in its extreme form means abject surrender and sacrifice of human rights at the altar of the so-called social welfare. Hate and confrontation instead of love and co-operation has been the administrative principle of governments which tumble down like a house of cards as it is evident from frequent overthrow of powers and constant change in political set-ups. Power blocks are formed primarily to prepare for world war. The objective of economic growth and social justice for which every state professes to strive seems utopian with its mounting unemployment and grinding poverty. The disparity between the rich and the poor widens nationally and individually. Rabindranath was a staunch advocate of human dignity and international morality. It has been the established prac-

tice with states to view with impunity offences : viz. falsehood, breach of trust, deceit, suppression of human rights etc. committed in the name of nationalism on the avowed ground that the end justifies the means. According to Rabindranath, what moral code of conduct applies to an individual should apply to a nation as well. If a nation lags behind in the race of life and falls sick, it is the moral responsibility of the wealthier and stronger nation to come to the rescue of his weaker brother and nurse him to health. Rabindranath was strongly of opinion that the conflict between the rich and the poor, the haves and have-nots will escalate to international conflict and engulf the world at large unless the nations develop a spirit of international brotherhood and tolerance and live accordingly. While adversely commenting on the baneful effects of western civilisation, Rabindranath has remarked, "If the basic foundation of European civilisation viz. national interest, swells so much as to exceed the limits of humanity and international integrity, leakage of destruction will make its appearance and Saturn, the deity of destruction will enter that way". (Essay —Prachya O Paschatya Sabhyata).

Individuals constitute a nation while nations spread over the world form the international community. The love and fraternal feelings should percolate at the grass root level from individuals to a nation and from nations to the group of nations.

According to Rabindranath, the duty of a civilised government does not end merely in maintaining law and order. It is its primary responsibility to meet the basic needs of food, clothing, education and health of its citizens and also to ensure that there is no exploitation of an individual or individuals by a state and

that each individual is given full opportunities for harmonious development of his qualities of head and heart. In his vehement attack of British Rule in India he remarked, "British have made a parade of their brute force to Indians but have failed to show the way of their emancipation. In other words, the observance of the proper relationship between man and man which a civilised government is morally bound to ensure is woefully wanting in the treatment of Indians by the British and that is why their road to progress is completely blocked." (Essay—Sabhyatar Sankat).

Rabindranath nostalgically looks back upon the ancient Indian civilisation with our spiritual and cultural heritage which had survived many vicissitudes of history and impresses on mankind the example of renunciation, contentment, faith, restraint and religious toleration set by the ancient Indian sages and the social and religious reformers of the East and the West. Unity in the diversity, love, equality and fraternity formed the core of their preachings. The only way for mankind to attain peace and emancipation is by following their precept and practice. Greed breeds sin culminating in death. Love of power debases a man and deprives him of his moral and human qualities. What really matter for Rabindranath are tolerance, good temper and sympathy. If they are not made to dominate our life, the human race is bound to perish.

Like Wordsworth, Rabindranath is deeply aggrieved to find what man has made of man. While perfect peace and tranquility prevails in Nature which works quietly, ceaselessly and methodically to set the universe in motion and lays bare her bosom to yield fruits of human labour, it is deplorable that man

should engage in endless conflict with man and waste his resources and energies in fratricidal war. Rabindranath laments that with the modern civilisation vitiating the entire atmosphere with its insistent emphasis on machinery, we have lost contact and communion with Nature and failed to draw inspiration and lessons from her workings. Rabindranath condemns the demoralising effects of the modern age of machinery in the following terms. "Under the cruel pressure of competition workmen become worse than machines". Elsewhere he has remarked, "Workmen huddled and lumped together in and around giant factories emitting black smoke feel stifled and are deprived of their inherent right of leisure and loneliness and the scope of communion with their inner selves. Thus unaccustomed to the enjoyment of their own company the least leisure they can snatch out of their daily routine they spend in drinking and merry-making, forgetting their real selves in the process." (Essay—Nababarsha).

Rabindranath strongly advocated rural regeneration and development of labour intensive technology in India of which the bulk of the people live in villages. Speaking of cottage industries, Rabindranath says. "If the loom is good and workable and every weaver works on the loom, earns his living and spends his life in peace and contentment, the poison of poverty and jealousy cannot accumulate and permeate rural life and Manchester with all its huge machinery cannot kill them". His economic view was to make machinery simple and easy so as to render it workable by all and to make food, clothing and other needs of the villagers cheap and easily available. This will breed contentment and not competition and make villagers

happy.

Rabindranath's concept of universal love and international brotherhood stems from his deep humanism and his conception of Nature comprising the universe, as the nursing and life-giving mother of mankind. Man owes his existence to Nature but for whose blessings life is not possible. It is by defying Nature and deviating from her laws that human miseries have multiplied. He drank deep into the fountain of beauty and serenity of Nature which gave him food for reflection and sustenance. In his poem entitled 'Basundhara', he longs to be at one with Nature so that, merged with nature, he can share the purity, majesty, sublimity, simplicity and even the wildness of all her beings inhabiting the earth and the universe. We are all children of the Almighty, the all-merciful and the all-embracing Mother whose breast we suck and on whose gifts we live. The citizens of the wide world, however varied and diverse in culture, customs and conduct they may be, he would call his own. In his poem entitled 'Basundhara' he expresses this inner desire of his—"I wish I had lived, moved and had my being as native inhabitants among all peoples of the world and behaved as they do". The conviction that individuals and nations are interlinked by a natural chain of love and brotherhood was deep-rooted in him and part of his poetic faith. If the link is lost and nations fall out with one another, oblivious of their natural and spiritual affinity the world is doomed to destruction. Let the world read the writing on the wall and profit by the teachings of the world Poet when there is yet time to mend its ways.

Tagore, the Socialist

The vastness and sublimity of Rabindranath's literary creations are comparable to that of an ocean. As thousands of fleet bound for various destinations sail smoothly on the bosom of an ocean, Rabindranath's vast creative works provide breeding-ground and easy passage of thousands of literary adventurers in the pursuit of their literary career. They draw solace and sustenance from his writings, and inspired by them, venture into variegated fields of literature. Rabindranath's works constitute a fountain-head of knowledge in its deepest sense covering a wide range of subjects like poetry, drama, novel, religion, sociology, painting, music and what not. By the magic wand of his creative genius he makes his inimitable mark in each field of literature and gives guidance to many a budding philosopher and poet. Mathew Arnold spoke of Shakespeare—"Others abide our question, thou art free". What Mathew Arnold means is that while other writers and thinkers wait and pause to offer suggestions for solving the riddle of life, Shakespeare's writings readily answer all our problems. This is eminently true of Rabindranath. No problem, however difficult and inscrutable it may be, remains unanswered in his vast writings covering a wide range of thought concerning life and death. We have to toil deeper and deeper in the mines of knowledge spread over his writings to pick up newer gems of thought radiating

lustre to illuminate our line of thinking. A true poet and Philosopher that he was, his foresight and imagination were unrivalled. He dived deep into the future with the vision of a seer. Long before the Britishers quitted India, he sounded a prophetic note of caution to his countrymen saying, "Britain will quit India but what a waste of India Britain will leave behind. India will be bled white before Britain quits". After 35 years of independence we feel the force of his prophetic utterance. We have not emerged clean and clear out of the ruins and ravages wrought by age-long dependence and slavery. Slavery is writ large in our words and deeds and national consciousness is a far cry. We are still slave to our passions and self-interest and do not think in terms of national welfare. He preached his message of socialistic philosophy before the idea took root in Indian mind and warned his countrymen in his following poetic outburst, "Oh, my unfortunate countrymen—you have perforce to lower yourselves to come down low to the level of those fellow-beings of yours whom you now hold in disdain and trample under foot."

Colonialism ushered in the growth of industrial revolution, capitalism and materialism and the worst casualty inflicted thereby was the loss of higher values of life. Machinery took the upperhand of man treated as worse than a machine. The craze for competition to satisfy increasing greed for wealth became widespread. Robbery committed under the cloak of virtue received respect. Tagore has said in this context :

"European literature is replete with shocking instances of how slavery, falsehood and cruelty found their way through open and secret alleys of greed into

farms, factories, and mines and assumed ferocity.”
(Letters From Russia).

According to Rabindranath insatiable greed for wealth and power is at the root of all conflicts afflicting the world at individual, national and international levels. Arms race, false and cruel political propaganda, hurling abuses by one power-hungry state against another, character assassination, being all born of greed, surcharge the atmosphere with smokes of distrust and hatred and fan the flame of dissension and discord. In this context, Tagore denounced the dictatorial policies of all autocrats. Those who are power-hungry are apt to perpetuate their powers by keeping those over whom they wield power, under false illusion and ignorance. This happened during the reign of Czar in Russia. All pervasive religious prejudices and superstitions spread a smoke-screen of ignorance over the rank and file of the Russian people during Czarist rule. Autocracy in any shape or form breeds national and international conflicts and disturbs the peace of the world. As a seer of truth, Tagore visualised., during his life time, danger signal of conflict and disquiet engulfing the world and threatening its peace and warned the world against greed for wealth and power to which the world powers fall a natural prey and which will ultimately bring disaster to mankind. His stern warning was worded as follows :—
“Not only in India but all the world over the darkening net of danger seen enveloping is cast at the dictates of greed which breeds fear and distrust. At the back of this greed are ranged all preparations of war and false and cruel politics.” (Letters From Russia).
Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the

stage of international politics had been fully set for beating of war drums over the division of foreign trade and ill-gotten spoils of colonialism between budding imperialists like Kaiser and Theodore Roosevelt. Britain was naturally anxious about the security of the vast empire where the sun never set and maintaining the status quo. When this all powerful Britain jumped upon the weak and freedom-loving Boer people to crush them to submission with all its might, the so-called stalwarts of world imperialism were silent spectators of this shameless barbarity. It was at this crucial hour that the lone voice of protest was raised by Tagore in India, then a colony under British empire. This shows how fearless and outspoken the poet was in denouncing injustice done by the Britishers or any power in any part of the world in his efforts to restore universal peace and harmony. Tagore's nationalism stemmed from his wide internationalism and deep humanism. His was not aggressive nationalism bent on achieving the national end by defying humanity and resorting to any sordid and brutal means. He minced no words in condemning the brutalities and injustices committed by any power on earth in the name of nationalism. In his poem 'Nai-bedyā', he gives expression to his pent-up feelings on oppression of the weak by the strong.

"Interests clash with interests, battle rages between greed and greed, barbarity in a gentle garb has awakened out of its muddy bed, shunning shame and all scruples of conscience, terrible injustice rears its ugly head and submerges all principles of religion under the flood-tide of brute force. Poets cry halt and excite pity and awe by singing plaintive songs about stray dogs struggling over corpses, strewn over cre-

mation ground.” When the democratic government of Spain was endangered by the barbarous attack launched by General Franco, aided and abetted by Hitler and Mussolini, England and France the so-called champions of democracy, directly and indirectly supported Franco’s cruel campaign by pursuing the policy of non-intervention. It was then that our poet, the sole mouth-piece of the oppressed millions roused the progressive democratic forces of the world against the grave injustice done against the Spanish people in his following memorable utterances. :—

“In Spain world civilisation is being trampled under foot. International Fascism is pouring men and money in aid of the rebels. . . .The devastating International Fascism must be checked. In Spain, this inhuman recrudescence of obscurautism, of racial prejudices of rapine and glorification of war must be given the final rebuff. Civilisation must be saved from its being swamped by barbarism. In this hour of supreme trial and suffering of Spanish people I appeal to the conscience of humanity. Help the people first in Spain ! Cry, in a million voices, halt to reactions. Come in your millions to the aid of democracy, to the success of civilisation and culture.” The old order has changed yielding place to new. History has sounded the death-knell of colonialism and imperialism. Empires have collapsed under the pressure of popular upsurge. Wrecks and remnants of colonialism have started crumbling into pieces. People’s will emerges triumphant out of the ordeal of age-long war between have’s and have nots. According to Rabindranath, People’s will needs to be united and utilised in deciding the destiny of a nation and formulating policies contributing to common welfare. A classless society blessed with

love and co-operation and not cursed by hate and confrontation is the ideal society where people may be provided with opportunities of harmonious development of qualities of head and heart, and each may contribute his best to the society, sharing with others the fruits of his labour.

In the modern age personal wealth and property constitutes the source of individual strength. In ancient India values of life were not weighed in the scale of wealth. A wealthy man was under the moral obligation to share his wealth with others as a matter of course by voluntarily parting with his possessions, for charities, social welfare work, education, health etc. The merit and excellence of man was not judged by the quantity of his wealth but by the quality and extent of his social service and his intrinsic worth. Mere possession of wealth did not earn him social esteem. Under modern conditions of life the personal wealth of a rich man concentrated in self is largely squandered for personal comforts and ways of living. The benefits accruing from wealth in the possession of the wealthy do not percolate to the massive "Have-nots". This, in the opinion of Rabindranath, generates greed, sows the seed of dissension and creates a rift between the rich and the poor.

What applies to individuals also applies to nations divided by barriers of riches and resources into developed, developing and under-developed states. There is no denying the fact that the colonial empires had flourished and enriched themselves at the cost of the subject nations by exploiting their resources. The developed states owe a moral obligation to the weaker ones and are destined to pay the price of their exploitation. The stronger states which had once exercised domination

over their dominions and dependencies, now independent, will do well to read the writing on the wall and adapt themselves to the changed world conditions that now prevail and join hands with their erstwhile dependencies as equal partners in the family of Nations. In the interest of world peace, international economic co-operation, peaceful co-existence and merging of differences by Super Powers are a 'Sine qua non'.

According to Rabindranath, unless the gap between the developed and developing states is bridged by the rich countries helping the poor countries with a reasonable portion of their overflowing resources in the latter's struggle for survival, it will pose a major threat to world peace.

Tagore, a Votary of World Peace

Sabre rattling by warring states, flexing of muscles by Super Powers in posture of war, massive arms build-ups all over the world are ominous and threaten global peace. When the peace of the world is at stake with no silver lining appearing in the dark horizon we may go back to Tagore to seek solace and draw lessons from his writings. The world is alarmingly drifting towards materialism. Spiritual and moral values of life get eroded. Greed for wealth and power have permeated all strata of the society and eaten into its vitals. Norms of human behaviour have been brutally violated and sacrificed at the altar of national interest. Tagore traced the origin of national and international conflicts to the greed for wealth and power which had lured western adventurers and explorers to discover new lands on earth and rob the native population of their riches and wealth by applying brute force and enslaving and exploiting the natives to serve their selfish ends. This led to colonialism and imperialism and oppression of the weak by the strong. When Mohammedan rule was established in India, the race of the conquerors merged with that of the conquered and adjusted to the native culture and customs in a spirit of give and take. Industry and trade thrived under royal patronage and there was no question of wealth being drained out of India. But under the British regime, the motive force of

British imperialism, as under other colonial rules elsewhere in the world, was to impoverish India and enrich England by exploiting natural wealth and resources of India to their national advantage and keeping the native population under perpetual bondage. The relationship that developed, as a result, between Britishers and Indians was simply that of self-interest and greed and there was no mutual meeting of minds in a mood of reconciliation. Wealth earned by Britishers under such circumstances flew out of India to fill the coffers of England. India was thus milked dry. This method of exploitation reigned rampant under all colonial rules. How humanity is degraded and debased under abject colonialism is expressed by Tagore in his following strong and unequivocal terms :—

1) “When the relationship between man and man is motivated by pure self-interest, the relationship ceases as soon as the self-interest is served. No trace of love, respect, and gratitude on the part of the beneficiary is left behind. Although India runs dry of food, education, physician and pure drinking water, there is no dearth of fat-salaried British officials, overseers of law and order and British capitalists in India whose pensions and profits we provide by drawing on our earnings saved perforce for our funeral expenses. This attitude of mind is attributable to the fact that greed is blind and cruel. India is the victim of greed of the British demon”. (Letters From Russia).

2) In the eyes of Rabindranath, Man and nature are indivisible and part and parcel of the divinity that permeates and pervades this universal frame.

He has deep faith in the infinite capacity of man who is full of divinity. (Amritasya Putra). The flame of divinity lying dormant in man has to be sparked on in order to enable him to rise to the Himalayan height of which he is capable and contribute his best to mankind. His robust optimism can be compared with that of Browning. Throughout his writings he has preached the message of hope and impressed on mankind that God, through His infinite mercy, tests man in the furnace of sorrows and trials to make him perfect and fit for re-union with God, with calm of mind, all passion spent. "Out of evil cometh good", Light follows darkness. Our sorrows are blessings in disguise. The famous passage in Gitanjali reads as follows :—

"You have done well, my cruel Lord, by inflicting sorrows on my life. By so burning my soul in the furnace of sorrows You kindle light from within leading me to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil."

3) Rabindranath was a keen worshipper of the beauty of nature but unlike Keats his love of nature was not sensuous. To Rabindranath, Beauty, Truth and Good are inseparable, intermingled and complementary. What simply appeals to the eyes and senses is not beauty in the true sense of the term. Beauty begetting Good lasts for ever and crystalises into eternal truth. (Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram). The sights and sounds of nature appeal to him as they prevoke thoughts of the divinity pervading nature. He looks at the wild aspect of nature red in tooth and claw not with the traditional awe and horror as some western poets do but with the eye of a true Indian Mystic and

Sage delving deep into nature and churning out newer gems of thought of the divinity. The month of "Baisakh" is fierce and terrible in popular eye. The heat, fury, rage, and deserted appearance of "Baisakh" carries Rabindranath to a higher plane and company of sages, weary and worn with practising hard penance and meditation for the salvation of the human soul. Rabindranath invokes abiding peace and tranquility from the saintly self-sacrificing "Baisakh" whom he personified as such, as Baisakh ushers in life-giving rains.

4) He was a great social reformer. By the scourge of his emotional writings in prose and poetry, he sought to sweep away the dirt and filth of our society, so that we may get rid of our social evils and emerge fair and free as true citizens of the world. He lifted the veil of false-hood to bring into prominence the sunshine of truth. Man sinks low under the load of social customs, prejudices and barriers which cow him down. He has to raise his head in protest. He has to rise in revolt against the age-long oppression of society. We have to instil hope and confidence into the down-trodden and the poor who are our brethren and kith and kin. We have to raise them up from the quagmire of inertia. In his famous short story bearing the title "Guptadhan" or "Hidden Treasure" he has exposed the utter futility of wealth to satisfy our inner thirst. Mirtyunjoy was in the midst of limitless wealth. But he was denied the light of life. He felt gradually sick of wealth and craved for the joys of life instead. Rabindranath goes deep into the inner working of human mind and kindles the lamp of truth within. Human lust for wealth and pleasure is

instiable. The more one has, the more one desires. None can reach the point of satiety. But how to get out of the bondage of greed which binds us hand and foot? Rabindranath places Mrityunjoy in a conflicting mood where he is left with a choice between enjoyment of wealth on the one hand and enjoyment of life on the other. His mind sways to and fro. He wakes up to the realities of life and realises at long last the hollowness of wealth as against the fulness of life. Wealth divorced from life is not worth having. Thus Rabindranath strikes at materialism and materialistic Philosophy with the master-stroke of his mighty pen.

5) To Rabindranath, work is the grand cure of all maladies of mind to which human being is a victim. His basic teaching is to worship work as it leaves its traces all over the universe. As nature incessantly works to keep the universe going, man's ceaseless activities—peasants tilling lands to raise crops, workmen engaged in factories to manufacture goods, weavers constantly at work with looms, merchants sailing seas and rivers with merchandise, supply the charm and meaning of life. Life stagnates when work ceases. Work lasts as long as life. While civilisations may grow and vanish, empires may rise and fall, insolent power may wax and wane, the unceasing work which sustains society, at all times and in all ages, by providing the basic needs of life and means of existence goes on for ever and constitutes eternal truth. This is the message preached by Rabindranath in his famous poem. "ORA KAJ KARE". He visualised the dream of a classless society free from fear of exploitation of the weak by the strong, of the poor by the

rich, where the barriers of social prejudices and malpractices 'have not impeded the free flow of reason and conscience and each man can look the other in the face without compromising his human dignity'.

6) Rabindranath has no advocacy or admiration for those renouncing life and turning ascetic. He would drink life to the lees. He would quench his thirst for the nectar of life. He would enjoy life to the fullest brim, with its pleasures and pains, its joys and sorrows, its light and darkness which emanate all from divinity and mould our inner self. The sweet and bitter lessons of life are not lost upon the human soul. On the contrary, they pave the way for advancement of the soul towards self-effacement and self-realisation and ultimate union of the individual soul with the Universal Soul which is all pervading and all embracing divinity. Love for all beings, high or low, animate or inanimate, bears fruit in the form of devotion to divinity. This is the keynote of his philosophy of life.

“Moho mor Mukti Rupe Uthibe Jwalia”

“Prem Mor Bhakti Rupe Rahibe Falia”

Tagore, a Friend of the Poor and the Oppressed

In this world of contrasts with some very rich and some very poor living side by side, where the gap between the rich and the poor widens nationally and individually, and social rift deepens, it is worthwhile recalling the thought-provoking messages of Tagore fighting for the cause of the poor and the down-trodden in society and upholding their rights, dignities and privileges before mankind. His heart bled for man's inhumanity to man. He felt deeply for the poor who are steeped in ignorance and deprived of all opportunities of growth.

According to Rabindranath, at all times and in all ages and all over the world, two classes of people exist in the so-called civilised society, the one comprising the rich and privileged intellectuals and the other covering the poor and the weak lying low at the lowest rung of society where the light and glamour of civilisation does not reach. It has been the practice of the privileged classes to reap the fruits of civilisation by exploiting the poor and the weak to their advantage. The rich seem to derive strength from the weakness and ignorance of the poor and fondly hope that by plunging them perpetually in the darkness of ignorance and lulling them into a false sense of secu-

rity, their process of exploitation will continue uninterrupted. But history has belied this hope. The poor and the down-trodden have asserted their rights and raised a voice of protest against their age-long exploitation all the world over.

Throughout his emotional writings in prose and poetry, Tagore has sought to convey that by despising the poor and alienating and estranging ourselves from them, we are sowing the seeds of discord and dissension and weakening ourselves. In his poem entitled "Apaman" (Gitanjali) he has preached the message of equality and fraternity and advised mankind that unless we shed our vanity and stoop down low to the level of our fellow beings in a spirit of brotherhood there will be no end of the conflict between man and man. His poem rings as follows,—“Those whom you throw down will tug you down, those whom you leave behind will pull you from behind, those whom you keep down under cover of darkness of ignorance will create wider divergences by darkening and blackening your well-being”. Hate begets hate. This is human law of reciprocity.

Society grows and is sustained by the combined efforts of people at all strata. Each part of the society is vital to the growth of the other. Alienation of one part is inimical to the development of the other. Social fabric will disrupt and disintegrate creating serious imbalances if one part is fattened and fondled at the expense of the other. In fact it is the poor and the down-trodden including peasants, weavers and artisans constituting the bulk of the society who work hard to earn their daily bread and can hardly make ends meet while the rich and the affluent get wealthier at the cost of their labour. It would be the height

of our inhumanity if the weaker section of society is deprived of their legitimate share of the social wealth by denying them food, shelter, education and the basic needs of life. Decrying the modern civilisation, Rabindranath says, "It seems extremely insulting and humiliating to take it for granted that the flag of civilisation will be hoisted high by down-grading the majority of human beings and subjecting them to inhuman conditions". (Letters From Russia).

When the rich look upon the poor as an object of pity, any help rendered to the poor is crippled and stifled and degenerated into charity. The rich should, according to Rabindranath, help the poor treating the latter as a reasonable partner of the wealth the former possesses. The feeling of pity presupposes absence of the sense of equality between the giver and the taker, the donor and the donee. In this context Rabindranath has remarked, "Help coming from higher levels as from a superior to an inferior gets distorted. True help is possible when this is forthcoming at equal levels and on equal footing and out of a sense of brotherhood."

What is most needed by the rural poor, apart from food and shelter, is education awakening their higher instincts and converting them into useful citizens. Paucity of funds is put up as an excuse in view of the immensity of the task. This was the usual pretext on which the Britishers pleaded difficulty to tackle the various problems in India. While commenting on the British rule in India, Rabindranath has said, "England is well fed by the bread earned by starved Indians. The mentality of most of the Britishers is that the chief task of India is to maintain England. What does it matter if Indians are left ill fed, ill clad

and illiterate in the process ?" (Letters From Russia).

Rabindranath was impressed by the achievement of Russia in spreading all round education over the rural masses in the wake of Russian Revolution. Due to mass upheaval, no distinction was made between man and man and the entire people, unified and united, were committed to the national goal. viz, to train themselves up as useful citizens and to contribute their maximum to the social welfare. Tagore, however, did not see eye to eye with the entire soviet policy then initiated. Regarding the system of education insisted on by the Soviet Union and imposed on the Soviet people, Rabindranath had his following reservations, "There is serious draw-back in the system. The system of education which they have framed is the cast in which they propose to mould human mind. They have not taken into account the active mind which has to be shaped and patterned according to its individual make. If the mind that works in each man does not fit in with the standardised type of training imparted, then either the cast will crack into fragments or the mind of man, rendered dull and inactive, will be turned into a machine." (Letters From Russia).

What attracted Rabindranath was the total elimination of class distinctions, restoration of human dignity and the common approach of Russian people to the goal of social welfare. What further impressed Rabindranath about Russia in her strident steps towards development and growth in the initial stages was that Russian people with little resources at their disposal had to struggle hard and undergo extreme hardship by denying them physical comforts and modern amenities of life in order to engage themselves

in nation-building activities. It was their inner urge for social welfare which they would share in common that formed the mainspring of their efforts and rendered any sacrifice on their part worthwhile. This, according to Rabindranath, should serve as an eye-opener and should set an example to the toiling masses all over the world.

Improvement of agriculture which is the chief means of livelihood of rural India was Tagore's constant concern. During his long stay in Bengal (undivided) in connection with the management of his paternal estate he came in direct and personal contact with the peasantry in Bengal and saw for himself the hurdles and handicaps under which they till their lands in fragmented condition. Tagore advocated co-operative farming with tractors and other appliances on scientific lines in preference to individual farming on small and uneconomic holdings. This will render use of scientific implements possible, increase productivity and yield higher returns to be equitably distributed among farmer members forming the co-operative group on a voluntary basis. In his opinion the financial problems of rural India may be effectively solved through spirit of co-operation developed among rural population by way of setting up co-operative undertaking in marketing, farming, housing, storing and in other trading and developmental activities. Tagore was against abolition of personal property. It is inherent in the nature of man to derive satisfaction from the sense of possession of personal property. This is instinctive in an ordinary human being. As intelligence and other qualities which a man possesses are considered to be his personal attributes, his possession of property which forms part of his being is also his

personal and inalienable right. There is no scope of one being defrauded of one's intelligence and other qualities of head and heart while one's property is fraught with the risk of appropriation and fraudulent deprivation. This is why there is endless conflict and tension in society about division and enjoyment of property. Tagore has suggested a midway solution to the problem of personal property in the common interest of mankind. In this connection he has opined "personal property may be allowed to stay subject to the condition that freedom of enjoyment of one's property will be curbed to a reasonable extent of his own requirements. The surplus over one's requirements should be distributed among the needy and the distressed. The ownership of property will, in that case, not breed greed, deception and cruelty." In this context he has criticised the Soviet policy of abolishing private property. He has remarked, "It cannot be said that man will shake off his individual interest altogether but there is no gainsaying the fact that selfishness should be shunned." In other words, what is needed for self cannot be helped but the rest should be spared for others. The concept of "self" and "service above self" should be admitted and harmoniously blended in evolving solution of the problem. It will be going contrary to the law of human nature if either of the two is eliminated from society".

Tagore steered a middle course between the two extremes of individualism and socialism. He denounced complete sacrifice and surrender of human rights at the alter of the so-called social welfare. Society comprising individuals will weaken if the growth of individuals forming vital part of the society is allowed to suffer. What is condemned by Rabindranath is indi-

vidual and national greed for wealth and power and the consequent clash of interests which is at the root of all conflicts afflicting the world and the humanity.

A poet-philosopher and a votary of truth and beauty, Tagore did not spread out the wings of his imagination to soar high in the world of his own, regardless of the woes and sufferings of his fellowmen struggling for existence. In the poetic parlance of Wordsworth he was "the type of the wise who soar but never roam, true to the kindred points of heaven and home". He moved with the times. He never cut himself adrift from the national mainstream. The call of conscience brought him side by side with his fellow brethren in their hour of need. His voice was raised high and loud against all injustices and iniquities perpetrated against humanity. He renounced his Knighthood as a protest against the brutal massacre of his brethren in the Punjab, and the illustrious letter that he addressed to the British authorities to voice the depth of his indignation has passed into history. Defying his ill health and old age he rushed to Russia to see for himself and explain to his countrymen the unprecedented experiment of human emancipation in progress there, following Russian Revolution. He was not a poet hidden in the light of thought, rapt in ecstatic delight and detached from his original moorings. When the occasion so demanded, he stirred out of the cosy and cloistered tower of his imagination and raised his pen to espouse the cause of the poor and the oppressed. In the poem entitled "Ebar Phirao More", he exhorted the poet to rise to the occasion and turn the tide of his muse from the realm of fancy to the hard realities of life. He warns "Somewhere fire has broken out, someone is blowing his conchshell to rouse the

world to action ; the earth is reverberating with lamentations being raised from underneath the soil ; in a dark cell of prison some wretched and forlorn woman hardpressed in unbreakable bondage cries for help ; insult swelling in bulk and stature is sucking breast blood of the weak through myriad mouths, injustice turned insolent by selfishness mocks at sufferings". (Ebar Phirao More).

Let the poet come to the rescue of the oppressed and fight the tyranny with his pen mightier than sword.

75486

11/12/90



Library IIAS, Shimla



00075486