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SOME ARTISTIC PERSPECTIVES OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Abstract

Each author should be open to learning about other cultures, but they still have to keep their own unique features in their own culture. Tagore is such an artist. That explains why Tagore has been, is and will be shining in the Indian and world literature.

The paper mentions some artistic perspectives in Rabindranath Tagore's works with two main parts: 1. Tagore's view of artistic creation and 2. Tagore and the journey to find Beauty.

Keywords: R. Tagore – artistic creation – journey to find beauty

Introduction

Tagore's publications on literary theory include various works such as *Modern Literary Points of View*- 1920; *Legacy of Thoughts*-1921; *Creative Unity*- 1922; *East and West*- 1935; *Man* - 1937; *Crisis of Civilizations* - 1941, *Sadhana*- 1914, *Centre of Indian Culture*-1919....

In Vietnam, those who have read Tagore and love him as a poet and writer rarely know that Tagore is not only a creative writer but also a respected literary critic theorist recognized as a pioneer and leader of modern Indian literary criticism.

Tagore always emphasized that concepts like classicism, romanticism, social realism...are not enough to explain the interactions in Indian literature. The writers like Kalidasa, R. Tagore, Jaisanka Prasat... are both classical and romantic writers

whose ultimate aim is Truth-Goodness-Beauty (satyam-shivam-sundaram). Thus, in my opinion, Tagore adopted a literary model that emphasized both emotional control and emotional freedom.

In fact, Tagore's artistic views changed over time. From the initial mystical romanticism, Tagore gradually moved closer to the reality of life and even entered into life, participating in social reform movements, against enslavement of British colonization in India. However, Tagore always adhered to the three main elements in his artistic views: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.

1. Tagore's view of artistic creation

1.1. Truth - satyam

According to Tagore, literature is concerned about human existence on both the material and spiritual levels. Matter is finite,

but spirit with extraordinary inspiration can transform that finite, it manifests through the individual symbols of each writer and naturally seeks perfection. Therefore, the concept of Truth in literature rejects all that is shallow, superficial, lame, lacking in inspirational power and irrational. Literature builds for itself a paradise by using all the materials that can transform from earthly reality into a paradise right here on our Earth.

In his 1922 book *Creative Unity, The Religion of the Poet* part, on arguing about the Indian epic, Tagore follows neither the traditional Indian poetry nor the standard of poetry song of the West. He created his own poetic standards as a response of man's creativity to a practical need. He said: "Poetry is both the story of an individual and the story of the whole community. The Indian epic belongs to the second category"¹.

Tagore says that our penetration into reality is not through judgmental reasoning but through feeling and penetrating from internal life. That is why the Laksmana in the *Ramayana* is more appealing to us than his brother Rama because Rama is described so perfectly that he walks through the story as a painted face, not animated.

In literary criticism and research, Tagore often associated with the adventures of his own soul. He presents a work from its inception to its formation and development. According to him, the reality of life has made a deep and immediate impression on the writer. Writers perceive reality through feeling, not through speculation. He embraced tradition but built a style of his own. Tagore says life is like a channel that allows the ocean currents to flow freely in its own right, and only when there is danger of going astray should one be alert and watchful.

1.2. Goodness - *shyam*

Living in a society that always thinks "Good is supreme" (*Upanishads*), Tagore's whole life was concerned with goodness and strived to make goodness become brilliant in the human world. In a devout country like India, Tagore exalted man to the highest position, he once declared: "My religion is man's religion"².

In *Sadhana*-1914, Tagore emphasized the relationship between the individual and the universe and argued that man's perception of evil and of self is the realization in love and action, in the conflict between the two finite and infinite.

Born and raised in a country where all elements, all classes of society were based on the caste system to survive and develop, Tagore is one of the pioneers calling for the removal of barriers to human rights. In his works, he formulated a moral and political doctrine, considering the liberation of healthy human needs in the immediate world, not in some mythical world, as the goal of his life.

Tagore tirelessly demonstrated that human beings are equal. Among the characters that he paid attention to and deeply exploited their inner feelings were the people from the poorest class of society. Not avoiding the weaknesses of this class, Tagore described their sedentary lifestyle, their illusions about life and their unconscious instinctive activities.

Tagore especially had a deep love for children and women, considering it the noblest symbol of human purity, kindness and beauty. He said: "Love is the perfection of human consciousness because love is the ultimate meaning of everything around us. It is not only sentiment but also truth, it is love that is the root of all creation"³.

Tagore was interested in the impression of what emerges from the initial emotion. According to him, in criticism, impression is the subject's perception of the object's own characteristics. Tagore gave the example of a tree. When a writer looks at a tree, he sees it as something that exists in the world, animates with the pulse of life in a way that characterizes it as a separate tree rather than seeing it in his own way of a botanist specializing in the classification and generalization of plants.

As an example of what the real thing is, Tagore gave the image of the round and hot Sun as a reality, but the beauty of the dawn is a poetic reality. "Reality reveals itself on the basis of our emotions and imagination," says Tagore.

Tagore often explained that "There are two different kinds of reality discovery as we approach the world: One is aided by the mind and the other by the heart"⁴. He argued that people can only penetrate reality when they are not only acquainted with its outer form but also perceive it with their hearts - This is where the subject has accessed to the object. Tagore said: "The outer and the inner have become one. The infinite and the finite are united and I am intoxicated myself when that happens. The infinite and the finite must be one as a song and the voice singing"⁵. Traditional Indian art calls this sublime state of the artist *Aswadanam* when the enjoyer of creative joy and the object of creation merge into a mystical shared joy of perception. That sublime state we can never reach through mere mental activities. Tagore's aesthetic view follows this approach and the most important principal phenomenon in any artistic creation is this relationship between subject and object.

The question is what creates the harmonious unity between the subject and the object of the artist himself. It was this constant urge for the absolute merging of the finite and the infinite that Tagore himself felt in himself. Before we create art, subject and object are clearly distinguished but by the time the creation begins, Tagore feels like there is another soul with his help aesthetically creating a spiritual harmony with the subject. This is the most important aspect of creativity to create a soul-to-heart connection.

According to Tagore, behind any artistic creation there are principles. The artist's emotions are the main architect of artistic creation. Man liberates his emotions from the need for action and unites them in his imagination where the desire for emotional expression has made the artist forget the importance of all good techniques and principles, making creation such an absolute satisfaction that the pain and hardship of creation is forgotten. Therefore, creativity becomes an urgent need of the artist's inner feelings and is a harmonious combination between imagination and reality, between subject and object.

³ R. Tagore (1964), *Sadhana*, London, Macmillan Company, Pocket Books, England, p. 9.

⁴ Sahityer: *Rabindra Centenary Edition*, vol. 14, Calcutta, Government of West Bengal, India, p. 353.

⁵ R. Tagore (1985), *Personality*, London, Macmillan, Pocket Tagore Edition, England, p. 57.

¹ R. Tagore (1922), *Creative Unity*, The Macmillan Company, New York, America, p.45.

² R. Tagore (1931), *The Religion of Man*, New York, America and London, Macmillan, 1931, England. See also R.Tagore (1998), *The Religion of Man*, Rupa Publisher, ISBN-10: 8171676286, India,

1.3. Concept of life with aesthetic function

According to Tagore, life is a harmony, a whole. Tagore's journey in the search for beauty is primarily aimed at understanding his own life in its entirety.

Initially, Tagore's creative joy was described in the satisfaction of searching for beauty in form, beauty that aroused the human senses.

In the middle of his life, Tagore suffered a lot of loss and sufferings when his beloved ones left one after another: his wife, father, daughter, son, which made him think more about death and life, about joy and sadness, creates an urgent need in understanding a mystical spiritual world, about the mixing of happiness and suffering in human existence, making the Tagore's artistic creation and lifestyle changed a lot. In this quest for truth in life and self-discovery, Tagore had a profound and subtle insight into perfection. He reached the peak of emotions as well as made a fresh discovery of the changes in the personality and moods of people, highlighting the thoughts and vision of the poet.

Towards the end of his long creative life, Tagore felt that even death was an inseparable and eternal part of human movement, of an eternal aesthetic order. Tagore felt as if his life had been magnified with light from the battle between life and death of man, between the gradual alienation of life and the beginning of a new life. He perceives the functions and components of each stage of a person's life in aspirations, motives, ideas, feelings and perceptions to achieve a harmonious blend of individual and community, between small people and vast universe. Tagore once took the image of a petal leaving the calyx to describe human death; that is the last moment when beauty gives up beauty itself, gives up the fragrance and life-force of the world. It is at this stage that the poet perceives and considers the last moments of human life as a spectacular departure on the way to integration with the eternal and the infinite. Life and death, with such heightened meanings, have become the two sides of a joyful reunion with cosmic creation: life transforms gradually into death and death brings the beginning of life.

1.4. The role of the artist in the aesthetic order of the universe

The artist, his work and the art objects have a close interaction relationship with one another. Tagore believed that an artist can only create good works when there is a close, implicit interaction between reality and himself:

- a) *It provides an answer to the question: "Why is the concept of art an open concept?"* Tagore considered that the concepts of logic, mathematics, or algebra are closed concepts when compared to the open concepts of art. The phenomenon is that because new forms of art are constantly arising, the conditions for applying the concept of art are always changing.
- b) *It emphasizes that the primary importance of the relationship between people and the world is dialogue.* Artists do not use images of reality to obtain information of a scientific nature because we cannot perceive reality only in the limits of sciences or art, but a skillful combination of both these aspects.
- c) *The truth of our aesthetic experience and judgment is therefore very different from the truth of reasons and truth.* The uniqueness of Tagore's approach to the world

between truth and reality arose precisely from this connection.

- d) *In his life, Tagore dealt with his artistic subjects from a personal point of view, and his works and creative personality were inextricably linked.* The real world created by Tagore, therefore, is heavily influenced by his personal identity.

2. Tagore and the journey to find Beauty

2.1. Beauty and accessibility

Man is by nature always attracted to what pleases him. A flower with beauty, color and scent, a piece of music with a sweet melody will not only appeal to a civilized person but also the most ordinary people because flowers and music satisfy internal needs of anyone's mind.

According to Tagore, humans always have two essential needs to be satisfied: a physical need and a spiritual need that always wants to reach a more beautiful world than the existing world. It is thanks to this second need that man always wants to discover aesthetic values in life, he will accept or reject a certain thing or things according to certain standards. It is thanks to this capacity that he becomes a creator of beauty and becomes an artist. Plato once said: "Beauty is artistically expressed as a leading element in the creative process of man. One cannot be indifferent to the aspects of sensory perception and desire perfection in any artistic creation but the most important factor behind the creation of a work of art is the subjective imagination of the artist. This imagination is expressed through different mediums and we will have music, painting, literature and poetry..."⁶

In India, going through the history and development of the study of beauty, we come across two different approaches to the subject.

- A phenomenon or event is considered beautiful when it pleases us through melody, harmony of shape, rhythm of time, color, brightness... Literary works make us pleased with the description of phonetics, sounds, comparisons, sweetness. This approach emphasizes mainly on the external factors of things. India is rich in tradition of theories of aesthetics in all respects, definitions and basic features, internal relationships, major artistic motifs, their functions, materials and methods, expressive means... The Indians often refer to technical issues when talking about aesthetics as details in artistic creation.
- However, the Indians also have the second approach to beauty which they call *Rasa* or *Rasa-dristi*, which is to approach things according to the inner connections that we see first appearing in the works named *Vishnudharmottara Purana*. Kevala Mishra said: *Rasa-dristi* is the look of joy. Although interpreted in different ways, the content of this concept is mainly about the forms of excitement and satisfaction on the basis of any Indian art. This approach transcends the limitation of perceiving beauty only through the senses and gives us a great spiritual awakening. Man will approach reality to extract joys and invisible emotions and in turn, man will create a new reality from his points of view in new forms

⁶ R. Tagore (1964), *Sadhana*, London, The Macmillan Company, New York, America, Pocket Books, p. 9

and materials. This approach involves not only the senses but also the aspects of the artist's spiritual joy through self-perception and self-revelation.

2.2. *Beauty and Tagore*

In Tagore's view, realizing beauty from reality is only the first step, the second step is to create a new order and form to represent the new reality which is the most important task of the artist. In Indian thoughts, the experience and creation of beauty is called Ananda - the artist should not only focus on the external elements of nature and its forms but must also find the invisible inner beauty that we can only perceive through abstract psychological experiences. From the concept of Ananda or Divine Beauty, Indians go even further to the view of Atindriya Premanubhuti or the concept of Beauty as a transforming form of love, a concept that is hard to find out anywhere in the world.

In trying to understand Tagore's conception of aesthetics, we need to recall that Indian culture has always been based on a special relationship between belief and philosophy about Beauty. Indians have always believed that human activities in art are to satisfy an urgent inner need to find a limited form to express the infinite and invisible. Professor Nagendra said: "The integration of mind and body in Art is firmly and naturally established in Indian aesthetics"⁷. Therefore, Indian arts in particular and Indian culture in general has brought a harmonious and holy spirit. Its themes often refer to the inner joy in people's efforts to create. *It can be said that the spiritualization and deification of beauty are the key elements that have created Indian literature and arts.*

For Tagore, beauty is neither a logical concept nor an objective truth; nor is it entirely subjective to the artist. This is a harmonious mixture between the object and the subject, the individual artist and the object of art, the ego and the common, gradually discovered through creative activities full of joy. Tagore believed that when we analyze things deeply, we are dividing and destroying the purpose of art. Tagore's views are very different from those of the West because he considered it inappropriate to impose Western views and standards on Indian art and literature; clearly analyzing and separating each element of art is an incorrect way to do.

Tagore believed that artists perceive life through their sensitivity; they enter beauty or Sundaram with the immediate perception of the infinite in the finite. The understanding of reality occurs in Tagore's inner feelings when the infinity of the universe comes into contact with the human finiteness of himself. As spiritual insight took place, pure joy filled his heart as well. It is this overwhelming pure joy that finds its own expression and form of expression in Tagore's achievements because he conceived that creativity is the essence of the joy of understanding reality in its highest and most subtle form.

Tagore said that if we want to have characters that can create strong imprints in the reader's memory, those characters must be built in harmony with nature. Tagore's dominant idea in his works is the perception of the intimate relationship between man and nature. In fact, he argued that literary criticism should never be based on dead theories but on fresh and relevant practices. In the often mystical expression in Tagore's works, what stands out to

captivate readers is his love of life and his faith in people and life. Tagore once stated that: "People should know that when they cut off all contacts with the world around and live only for themselves, it will become crazy and self-destructive."⁸

Tagore argued that the beauty of a poem lies in the strict rules of conveying its ideas. That law is the wings that carry it to freedom. The form is in the law, but the thought is in the beauty that the form conveys. The law is the first step to freedom and the beauty is the liberation that lies entirely within that law. Beauty contains the harmony between the finite and the infinite, between law and freedom. The beauty of a flower's color and shape is to serve the supreme purpose of yielding fruit and seeds, otherwise life would not be possible. So the color and scent of the flower is intended to attract bees and butterflies, which will make it fruitful. Beauty also has another effect on people: in addition to being useful, it is also a message of love.

Tagore doesn't care much about personality; he agrees that "The truth about a personality lies not in our understanding of that personality but in how we accept it in our hearts." When our hearts agree, the object becomes beauty and produces a feeling of satisfaction.

In Tagore's critical theory, artistic sublimation is the key factor. Tagore said: "Philosophy and science, the whole of human civilization is built on sublimation and surplus". The ascent of mankind, as Tagore asserted, is the ascent of the world beyond matter.

2.3. *Human sublimation and artistic creation*

R. Tagore was not a philosopher by profession, nor was he a cold facts analyst or a system builder of his own. He always emphasized that he was a poet and saw life through the lens of a poet. However, no one can deny that Tagore's concepts have created a new philosophy based not on technology but on a deeper and broader human perception of the objective world as well as self-awareness.

Tagore's primary concern is people. He tried to find different aspects of the meaning of human existence mainly in two areas, in relation to nature and in relation to other human beings. For Tagore, man represents the highest evolutionary ladder: from darkness to light, from bondage due to material needs to spiritual freedom, from imperfection to perfection.

Evolution, according to Tagore, is based not on competition but on creativity. It marks the transition from quantity to substance. He objected to the naturalists' view of human evolution because they misunderstand the truth about human development and they deny the uniqueness of man as well as the value and possibility of progress.

According to Tagore, human evolution must be based on biological, intellectual, moral and spiritual factors. It is these factors that give humans a superior stature and progress compared to other races. Thanks to that, humans have unique abilities: a broader and deeper progression of meaning that helps them create freedom on the basis of your pressing needs and strengthen the unity of a set of people, there is depth of consciousness. That is

⁷ Nagendra (1977), *An Outline of Indian Aesthetics: Indo-Iranian Studies: Golden Jubilee Volume of the Pahlavi Dynasty* Number edited by F. Mujtabai, New Delhi, India, p. 193

⁸ Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi (2011). *Rabindranath Tagore: an interpretation.* New Delhi: Viking, Penguin Books India. ISBN 978-0670084555, p.153

why, according to Tagore, humans have created a world with harmony between two sides: monism and idealism.

That commitment is monistic: according to Tagore, there is never a separation between the facets of life because "reality is not based on the separated substances of life but on the relationship between them"⁹. And it is because of this union that no two things are ever exactly alike. For Tagore, infinitely rich and different things met in monism because they were just different manifestations of the one Supreme Being.

"We need to learn how to merge ourselves between the outer world and our inner selves because the Eternal Soul is the One who created and united this earth, the sky and the stars and at the same time, it conveys to us a sense of consciousness existing and moving. It makes us an integral part of the world outside of us."¹⁰ Progress and growth are nothing more than a movement from this unified harmony to a more unified harmony.

Idealistic commitment, according to Tagore, is the primary concern with the sense of a twofold assertion: one is an individual opinion and the other is an absolute one, which depends on the perception that only man has, which is the perception of the Absolute Spirit.

Tagore believed that man's uniqueness is that he himself only can find the direction of development for his material and spiritual excess: "It is on the basis of surplus that human philosophy and science are born" and "Our civilization is based on material surplus and spiritual sublimation"¹¹. This surplus, according to Tagore, reflects the nature and way of human development. Man is unlike animals in that he is aware of the shortcomings and limitations of matter and is not satisfied with that limitation. Man's essential need is to overcome his own limitations in all aspects, he is never satisfied with reality. Therefore, man's material excess and spiritual sublimation manifests his aspiration in the contradiction between reality and ideal. Manifestations of this contrast are reality and dream, cosmic and personal, appreciation and truth, freedom and necessity, joy of self-expression and anxiety about everyday subject.

According to Tagore, human existence manifests itself in three aspects:

1. *Individual:* An evolutionary change has arisen in the personality of man. Man is an ultimate individual existence. There are two aspects to his existence that reach great development, understanding and the joy of living. Understanding gives birth to science while the joy of living gives birth to art. Tagore writes: "Where there is a surplus in our emotions that is where art begins"¹².

As for him, the transition from a naturalist to an artist must follow the following stages:

To what extent is individual freedom recognized. Only with individual freedom, can there be intellectual liberation so that

people can move from mechanically perceiving the objective world to creatively perceiving the subjective world.

The unity between the objective and the individual is the second fundamental factor because "The principle of unity is the most mysterious of all mysteries"¹³. From this unity, we have the rhythm of music, the harmony of artistic creations, the community in human society ... It is at this point that man has surpassed all other creatures because it is outside the inherent principles and laws of nature.

People's dissatisfaction in life is caused by material domination. That is why people have a need to go beyond the daily material needs, enjoy the joy of living in a state of freedom, get rid of the worries of the urgent daily material needs. That leisure is not laziness but freedom, a deep dive into the self-awareness of the individual and only in this world, can man be completely free because its frontiers are limitless, its time is eternal and its vitality is eternal.

2. *Moral sublimation:* Another evolutionary change is the introduction of morality. Morality is another dimension of human existence. The dualistic view of perception between what is present and what will be in the future is a trait only humans have. Selfishness is a natural tendency of creatures, only humans can set moral rules, it is these rules that keep people from genocide; making human's real, genuine instincts develop to approach the absolute, the divine. It is thanks to this development that "we have gone from the world of nature to the world of man"¹⁴.

According to Tagore, man matures when he determines his true self or sacrifice through goodness and idealistic actions: "It is in the moral life that man feeling one's duty and one's freedom at the same time, and this is goodness"¹⁵.

Therefore, kindness and morality are not inherent in natural circumstances. These are special values that only humans have.

The sublimation in morality or the sublimation of human personality is the ideal way of looking at the objective world, the freedom to choose and also the duty that people set for themselves.

From nature to morality, from compulsion to freedom, from selfishness to altruism, that is the moment when people transform and transform qualitatively, is the time when love is born.

It is from this perspective that Tagore sees the relationship between man and nature and with each other very differently from other artists:

Human and Nature: a. Nature is not an enemy, not a stranger to humans. The unification between man and nature is the beginning of the harmony between man and the only Almighty; b. The communication between man and nature has two levels: existence and perception. At the first level, nature is objective and at the second level, nature contributes to human development.

⁹ Tagore (1985), *Personality*, London, The Macmillan Company, Pocket Tagore Edition, England, p. 88

¹⁰ R. Tagore (1998), *The Religion of Man*, Rupa Publisher, ISBN-10: 8171676286, India, p. 31

¹¹ R. Tagore (1998), *The Religion of Man*, Rupa Publisher, ISBN-10: 8171676286, India, p. 35

¹² R. Tagore (1922), *Creative Unity*, The Macmillan Company, New York, America, p. 7

¹³ R. Tagore (1964), *Sadhana*, London, The Macmillan Company, Pocket Books, New York, America, p. 97

¹⁴ R. Tagore (1985), *Personality*, London, The Macmillan Company, Pocket Tagore Edition, England, p. 80

¹⁵ R. Tagore (1931), *The Religion of Man*, The Macmillan Company, London, England, p. 27

People and people: Tagore's principle when talking about this relationship is coexistence, so it also has two levels: communication and sociability. The first is functional and practical, and the second is self-denial and introspective. Tagore wrote:

“Human society is the best expression of man and that expression—when in perfect measure, leads man to the fullest realization of his divine nature.¹⁶”

Because of this concept, Tagore worshiped humans, placing them on an equal footing with the gods in his writings.

3. *Spiritual sublimation*: As for Tagore, spirituality or religion is the human effort to transform towards the infinite. Religion is what man practices when he is not satisfied with reality, a person who is always satisfied with life cannot be religious!

Supreme Being - we roughly translate as Absolute Being - is something we cannot equate with material needs or other concrete things. Tagore relied on the *Upanishads* to develop his ideas of the Absolute Being. Tagore held that man's existence has real meaning only when he feels the infinite in the finite, the eternal in the temporal.

“This is the ultimate end of man. That end comes only when he feels the Absolute Being, the Supreme Being within himself. It is the truth to which he always strives, is his soul, is the key to open the gate of spiritual life, the kingdom of the Eternal Heaven.¹⁷”

This is the difference in Tagore's conception from that of the followers of any other religion. He believed that human beings have a divine nature already, and he placed his faith in people, upholding them. He always believed that even in this painful earthly life, the Eternal God still exists with us, raising us to His level and the strength for humans to reach that power lies in each person of us, the ordinary people.

Conclusion

Compared with his predecessors in traditional Indian romantic poetry, Tagore established his own moral, social, religious and cultural standards to offer a new, independent vision and highly personal to perceive the finite real world as well as the infinite divine world. Tagore's creation lies in his approach to realism, moving away from impersonal or obscure objects to delve into individuals with rich interiority, from the ancient order in classics of sanskrit literature to reach strong and new emotions of individual personality.

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¹⁶ R. Tagore (1922), *Creative Unity*, The Macmillan Company, New York, America, p. 23

¹⁷ R. Tagore (1964), *Sadhana*, London, The Macmillan Company, Pocket Books, New York, America, p. 35-36

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