Chapter - 7

Summing Up:
Pastures New
Rabindranath Tagore’s writings are not narrowly national but are touched with a wider spirit. In him the voice of India speaks not only to Indians but to the world at large. To the British Empire he has a special charge, which he does not hide during his period. He fearlessly advocated his opinion.

The world in its present crisis appeals to him, and he has a mission to it. Dr. Sunderland, in the course of a contribution to the Christian Register, well observes: ‘No land in the world has ever produced profounder thinkers on all the problems of religion and life than the India of the past. The India of today has no wiser, kinder, more broad-minded, or greater teacher than Mr. Rabindranath Tagore, none more eager to receive from us whatever of value we have to give, or better able to impart to us the best wisdom of his own historic land.’

A strong element of didacticism colours much of his serious writing. One is told not only what to do but also how to do. He was a Gurudev to his core, analysing the spiritual malaise and prescribing the remedy. This Gurudev-syndrome at times makes him irritatingly platitudinous and even dull. But his message is clear and to the universe.

Another serious charge often levelled against his essays is their thinness and vaporousness and it is not entirely untenable. His essays in general are imprecise, vague, misty, and cloudy. When one wants to summarize a Rabindranath Tagore essay one is often disappointed to find that he has actually very little to say and that he has taken a long time to say that. It is not that he is comprehensive and hence has to discuss a thing threadbare from every single point of view; he is rhetorical and repetitive.

Many of these faults can be explained and also condoned if one makes allowance for the poet in Rabindranath Tagore. Then these perhaps do not
remain faults. Imprecision becomes an asset. One is convinced not by facts and logic but by a strong, though undefined, quality of persuasiveness. His prose is not rigid; it has a great deal of flow and freedom in it.

One of the best qualities of Rabindranath Tagore’s prose, as of his poetry, is his effortless use of imagery. It is subtle and homely, at the same time. Much of it is derived from and related to nature and natural processes.

Some of Rabindranath Tagore’s best prose is in his Armaparichaya, Chhelebela, in his reminiscences and letters. Here he is less overbearing, more human and shows a charming playfulness. His most memorable letters are those which he wrote in his youth before he became the legend, the Gurudev. The letters he wrote in the last thirty years of his life were written primarily for publication. These letters are rather impersonal on the whole, and quite different from Chinnapatra.

Critics have seen a strong affinity between the later prose of Rabindranath Tagore and the writings of Sir Thomas Browne. Both have a predominant quality of tolerance and suggestiveness, a poetic tone in their prose. Rabindranath Tagore has been successful to some extent in combining the force and variety of English with the music of Bengali.

Finally, in spite of all its limitations Rabindranath Tagore’s prose remains very much alive, forceful and rich. Its sheer variety is amazing; it is hard to believe that one man could have written so much in so many fields. One may disagree with him here and there, but one cannot ignore him. His influence on Bengali literature and culture is immeasurable. His best prose, like his best poetry, teaches one the great lesson of love and humanity. At its best it makes one experience intensely the joy of being alive.
Rabindranath Tagore’s prose is imbued with the spirit of his poetry. Its greatness as well as limitations is conditioned by the fact that he is a poet. Its logic is the logic of poetry. Instead of facts and figures, readers see symbols; instead of arguments, they see impressions. There are no cut-and-dried schemes, no logical progression and also no solidity of specifications.

Yet, there is breezy warmth in it. It has a man-speaking-to-another-man voice in it. Its lyricism and inner grace have a magical effect on the reader. One is convinced not by its arguments—because when one comes to think of these, there may be hardly any—but by its sway and force. And let us not forget here the force of Rabindranath Tagore’s personality—the man and his legend—behind what he wrote. It’s one to one communicative tone touches the reader to the core, as he himself has said in his writings that his mind is not divided into compartments, classifying his writing into categories is neither desirable nor useful. Truly speaking, so some of his best poetry can be seen in his prose pieces.

Rabindranath Tagore’s prose, both in Bengali and English, has a peculiar suggestiveness, a subtle elusiveness. Many of his essays are hard to summarise; the summaries will have a thin content. Often, he gives the reader the impression that there is a whole lot which is unsaid. It is not because he cannot concentrate on the subject or that he has little to say. It is because he is a poet and he writes like a poet. Poetry never explains the whole of anything; at its best, it suggests. The same is true of Rabindranath Tagore’s prose. If one is looking for that finish, that comprehensiveness, that detailed, threadbare analysis which are normally required—of good scientific prose, one is sadly mistaken.

There is, however, enough compensation. Rabindranath Tagore delights the reader by his playfulness, ingenuity, and witticism. He is personal everywhere—in his literary criticism, in his essays on education, history, religion,
in his pieces written for children. His best prose is in his letters, diaries, and autobiographical accounts. Even when he writes on such ‘prosaic’ subjects as cooperative farming, the personal tones till predominates.

Rabindranath Tagore’s earliest collection of essays VividhPrasanga was published in 1883 when he was twenty-two years old. Many of the essays included in this collection were written much earlier. There is variety of themes: Ideal Love, Friendship, Birth and Death, University, Prakriti and Purusa.

Four years later appeared another collection of essays, Alochana. He has discussed in this book the nature of beauty, the first indications of his aesthetic views. The last part of Alochana deals with the various aspects of Vaishnavism. Samalochana, the book which followed Alochana deals mainly with aesthetic issues. Panchabut, published in 1896, is a book in the form of a half-serious and half-jocular conversation between ‘elements’ which symbolize different human attitudes.

In the period between 1901 and 1909 Rabindranath Tagore wrote many essays on political, educational and literary themes. His educational views can be seen in his various essays published in Sikhsha. Essays grouped in Atmasakti, Swadesh, Samaj, RajaPraja deal with political problems. He wrote four books of literary criticism, all in 1907, Sahitya, Prachin Sahitya, LokSahitya and Adhunik Sahitya.

In 1909 Dharma and the first eight parts of S were published. These are important from the point of view of Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy. In Dharma the influence of Upanishads is predominant while in S the attitude is modified by Vaishnava influence. In 1912 Rabindranath Tagore published his
most important autobiographical work *Jibansmriti and Chinnapatra* (a collection of letters), *Dharma Shiksha* and *Dharmer Adhikar*.

Rabindranath Tagore’s lectures delivered in 1912-13 at Harvard University were later collected under the title *Sadhana*. It deals with the nature of self, God and Man’s relationship with nature, problem of evil etc. This is Rabindranath Tagore’s chief philosophic work. The year 1916 saw the publication of the last three parts of *S*, *Sanchaya* and *Parichaya. Personality* published a year later, deals mainly with the personal element in reality.

*Creative Unity* published in 1922, emphasises some of Rabindranath Tagore’s aesthetic views. Here he pleads for reconciling the finite with the infinite, a synthesis of Eastern and Western thought. There is - a warning about the danger of a dogmatic approach. Rabindranath Tagore’s famous Hibbert Lectures delivered at Manchester College, Oxford, in 1930 were published the next year under the title *The Religion of Man*. His last important philosophic essay was *Man*, lectures delivered at Andhra University.

A brief mention may be made here of his several volumes of letters, *Bhanusinher Patrivali*, *Patheo Pather Prante* and Letters to a Friend, and *Chitipatra*. *Chhelebela*, the Bengali original of *My Boyhood Days* is a sequence of memories covering the period from Rabindranath Tagore’s earliest recollections to his first trip abroad in 1878. *Chhelebela* was published in 1940.

In addition to these, Rabindranath Tagore contributed prolifically on various topical themes and problems to journals. He also addressed many gatherings and many of these are collected in Anthony X Soares’s edition of *Lectures and Addresses of Rabindranath Tagore*, 1928. *Nationalism* (1917) contains various lectures on the subject of nationalism.
Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest figure of the Indian Renaissance has conferred the golden luster of his genius. Through his ‘poems, dramas, short stories, essays, songs, paintings etc. which express his spiritual ideologies. His teaching with his faith in the redeeming power of spiritual forces as builder of perfect human society on the earth has greatest value at the present time when the whole ‘world is passing through the panic of a ruinous world war that can even erase the name of human being from this earth. His pursuit is the pure suit of a single-minded, serene devotee offering prayer for human-salvation in the midst of atrocious human passions in the World. His patriotism, humanism and prophetic vision are harmoniously inter-blended which have significant message for the whole mankind.

Here is a brief survey of the entire research monograph which aims at indicating and measuring the humanistic elements in the prose of Rabindranath Tagore. It is proved in each and every chapter that Rabindranath Tagore is humanistic in every sense.

Rabindranath Tagore has studied literature, philosophy, art and religion of the East and the West with an open mind. Some of these have influenced his mind consciously or unconsciously though his thinking and views are his own. Humanism in Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy is influenced by the humanistic ideas found in the Vaisnava literature, Brahmao religion, philosophy of the Baul sects and mystics of medieval age, the religion preached by The Buddha and above all by the Upanishads.

The entire writings of Rabindranath Tagore mainly teach humanism in various angles. Actually his conception of God, world, soul, death and salvation are humanistic in nature. He conceives of God as immanent, personal and creator of the universe. He gives a human conception of God who loves man-
creation, and like human lovers makes Himself dependent on finite beings for getting their love. One human, it is natural and also correct for one to have the conception of a human God.

Again, in his *Religion of Man* he describes God as an ideal of perfection which people are yet to attain in themselves, but with which they have close relationship. As man’s ideal of perfection changes with time and place the conception of God also changes with time and place. Thus, when man's ideal of perfection becomes identical with the idea of God, God remains no more a transcendental Reality. But ‘Perfect Man’ and ‘God’ both mean the same. In this way-Rabindranath Tagore’s God is a human God. Nature too is conceived by him as spiritual as the Eternal consciousness is expressed through it. Again, he conceives close relationship between man and nature.

From humanistic viewpoint, his conception of a free and independent soul through which God reveals Himself in the best manner is striking and important. He has also given a new conception of death. For him, death is necessary for the perfection of human beings which can be attained through different births. He not only conceives of human soul as beyond death, but life too as immortal which remains forever as a part of the eternal flow of consciousness. His concept of salvation too, is unique, as for him man’s freedom is deliverance of soul from the grip of ego but human being remains so eternally and never loses its identity in the Absolute. Thus he has attributed greatness to human existence.

The conception of man in Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy is total. He has given a concept of moral, spiritual, and social man. He believes in the dignity of man above everything who combines in himself Truth, Beauty and Goodness. Being a man of the present era he has studied man in his social, political, cultural and economical background.
Man is individual as well as a social being. Keeping individual difference man should merge in the universal society of man. But the eternal individual in man is not to be subjected to state or society. Communist social order tries to destruct individuality for bringing equality in society.

But it is proved that Rabindranath Tagore is not a Communist in that sense, as for him, ‘Eternal individual ‘in man is that which protests against inequalities and injustice of the society. So, individuality in man should be preserved. But when Individual man, due to false ego tries to destruct individuality in all others: that too is not desired, according to Rabindranath Tagore. For him, progress of man as well as society means, paving the road for ‘eternal individual’ and ‘perfect man’ in human beings to his journey towards eternity and perfection.

Perfect adjustment of ‘social’ and ‘individual’ man is his aim. This aspect of his ‘humanism’ is that which distinguishes him from ancient Indian humanists. Whereas they talked for preservation of individuality in man, Rabindranath Tagore does not neglect human society, and hence describes man as social in nature. The central message of Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy is the attainment of fullness, which according to him is the highest aim of life. He wants to get the ‘man’ of his heart who is the ‘man’ of hearts of all men.

Thus, Rabindranath Tagore’s Man is far above all narrowness of caste and creed, and also-above particularity of nation and race. He has immense faith in man. He believes in greatness and goodness of man, which, according to him, is the positive element in man. He believes that the direction of humanity is from evil to good, as in every age and at every place, man values most his ideal of goodness.
Rabindranath Tagore is undoubtedly a great humanist. He associates humanity to God and speaks of divine nature of man. For him, it is not by merely attributing humanity that one realizes God, by realizing humanity one reaches God. But he never has forgotten the demands of earthly existence when he has talked about man’s spirituality and divinity. As he does not consider the world as an inn where man lives only for a short time, and reaching a transcendental world is his aim, he wants to establish the kingdom of God on this earth and man to become perfect in this worldly existence.

As Rabindranath Tagore has a total view of life which combines spirit and matter in it, he never neglects in defining common people as illusion, nor has conceived a materialistic view of life. Removal of social and political injustice and suffering, proper education of man and establishment at universal peace and unity of mankind, are the aim of Rabindranath Tagore’s social philosophy.

Here it must be mentioned that Gandhiji, like Rabindranath Tagore, does not believe untouchability and he does not consider that inter-dining and even inter-marriage can deprive a man from his caste-status by birth. Here, one finds that Rabindranath Tagore’s viewpoint is more humanistic than that of Gandhiji as he believes that one’s caste should be determined both by birth, but by his character and deed. It proves that unlike Gandhiji he is a believer of human greatness and his capabilities. Both Gandhiji and Rabindranath Tagore are spiritual humanists and hence both of them have served man as God. Both of them ask to extend his love over the entire creation. In religious field both are tolerant, but Gandhiji does not make any attempt to synthesise all religions and is content with existing religions but Rabindranath Tagore has-done so. In political field, though Rabindranath Tagore accepts Gandhiji’s idea of ‘Satyagraha’ i.e. the force of truth against all injustice, he does not accept Gandhiji’s oversimplification of method forgetting ‘Swaraj’.
He is against the application of ‘force’ and believes in individual difference which dissuades him from believing that by any mechanical work like ‘Charka-turning’ and not by any greater hardship and sacrifice can we get swaraj. It shows in any field, he first of all wants to preserve personality and individuality.

Another point of difference between them is while Gandhiji has stressed on austerity and self-control as guiding principle, Rabindranath Tagore never has accepted any negative means. He has stressed on joy and self-expression, while Gandhiji believes in compulsions to be accepted in one’s educational life, Rabindranath Tagore believes in no such restriction in one’s educational life which hampers the free growth of his personality and expression of his real nature.

Rabindranath Tagore has the idea of eternal truth, good and values in his mind. Rabindranath Tagore reconciles subjectivism and objectivism. In the field of religion the western thinkers too, are against scepticism and agnosticism like Rabindranath Tagore. They believe in God as, they say, it and pays to have faith in God. For them, God is ‘used’ in life. James says, ‘Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life is, the last analysis, the end of religion.’ Thus, though this approach to religion is humanistic as it places man’s life above all, it has biological attitude towards religion. One sees, Rabindranath Tagore, too, has placed religion in life, but his approach to religion is not, biological, but spiritual. Thus, Rabindranath Tagore gives much higher and greater concept of man and his ideas of truth, reality, morality and religion than the pragmatists give of those.

Another modern trend of philosophy in the West is of ‘Existentialism’. The French writer Jean Paul Sartre, German philosopher Martin Heidegger and
Karl Jaspers, Danish thinker Kierkegaard are most important personalities to represent this school. They all are against abstract philosophising and system building.

It has been seen, Rabindranath Tagore too, is against system building and for him philosophy is vision of the real. The existentialists call themselves so, as they are interested in the problem and meaning of existence. They deny the priority of ‘essence’ to ‘existence’. For them, it is only important for man that he-exists.

Does one find this type of thinking in Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy? In one place he writes, ‘It is a great piece of luck that I am here and this wonderful world is here, could.

He says that sometimes one suffers from pain, evil and depression, but as one loves existence more than the suffering of pain one is ready to bear that pain for the sake of existence. But, at the same time Rabindranath Tagore considers that man’s human essence must never become a means for individual existence. For him, existence and essence are not opposed in nature. Inherent universal nature which are called ‘essences’ are common to all individual Man is at a time individual, subjective and objective. Thus existentialists are individualistic and subjective in nature, in Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy one finds reconciliation of opposites.

Again, being anti-intellectualists (as for them essence is conceivable by reason, but existence can be grasped by one’s immediate experience) the existentialists give importance to non intellectual faculties like sense, intuition, emotion etc., in man’s nature. Rabindranath Tagore gives importance to man’s reasoning and intellectual power too, with accepting the presence of non-
intellectual faculties in man's nature. If the motto of the existentialists is to ‘be’, the motto of Rabindranath Tagore is to ‘be’ and to ‘know’. Thus Rabindranath Tagore’s conception of ‘man’ and his essences is much broader than the conception of ‘man’ of the existentialist.

It is shown that the message of Rabindranath Tagore’s humanistic and practical philosophy is applicable in the present age. It is thought the greatest contributions of Rabindranath Tagore’s humanistic philosophy to the modern world are its high concept of man, concept of ideal society, ideal of universal unity and universal religion.

In this age of humanism one understands that the concept of man is at the centre of all things. One cannot make out the nature of things and their capacity to meet human needs unless one has a proper knowledge of man’s nature and his cravings. Without first of all acquiring an insight into what man is, one cannot make a proper assessment of the environment of man and cannot fulfill man’s demands.

Rabindranath Tagore’s concept of man provides one with the real knowledge of man who is finite-infinite, biological and spiritual in nature. The whole philosophy of him is man centred. His concept of man makes one conscious of one’s greatness, makes one aware of one’s potentialities, and gives one the strength to unfold these possibilities and reveal one’s true nature.

In this age of industrialization Rabindranath Tagore reminds the reader that man should not be used as a means to realize some material purpose or as a mechanical force which has often done in the Eastern and Western countries. In this age of extreme individualization Rabindranath Tagore’s message of universalism makes people aware of the inherent unity between man and man,
man and nature and man and the Absolute. This feeling of unity of oneself with the universe and God only can remove selfishness from man’s nature.

It is found that from the very beginning Indian philosophers talked about importance of society and man’s social life while talking about preservation of individual dignity. Whereas state or nation i.e. political organization is the basis of Western civilization, society, which is a social organization, is the basis of Eastern civilization. In India, in medieval age, society dominated man, and instead of working for the growth of human personality and welfare of mankind it crushed man’s free spirit under the force of superstitions and narrow social laws.

As a revolt to this in the nineteenth century social reformers have came to remove all social evils from society. Among these social reformers Raja Rammohan Roy, Annie Besant, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi Babasahib Ambedkar and Rabindranath Tagore are important personalities. According to them, one can realize spiritual nature living in the society among our fellow-beings. One must realize spiritual unity with the whole mankind is attained by mutual co-operation, love and fellow feeling. Mahatma Gandhi’s ideal of ‘Ramrajya’, Vinoba Bhave’s ideal of ‘Sarvodaya’, Rabindranath Tagore’s ideal of bringing down the heaven in this earth all aim at forming ideal society.

The social philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore shows that he presents the picture of ideal form of society. Inspired by his humanistic feeling he has dreamt of ascent of such individual beings on the earth in whom all inherent qualities are completely developed, who have acquired perfect knowledge, who express themselves in aesthetic creations, and who, realizing their unity with the whole world, love and act for the mankind.
For the ascent such individuals who will be the ideal of perfection, there is the need of ideal society which creates the necessary “atmosphere for that. An ideal society is that which provides the scope for the fulfillment of one’s material as well as spiritual needs. It will be based on individual dignity and freedom of man. Democracy, socialism and secularism will be its main principles. Today one sees, in every corner of the world people cry for getting equal rights in the political field and getting freedom in economical, social and religious fields. One sees, Rabindranath Tagore too has accepted equal rights of man in every field. In such society everyone will be well-fed and well-clad though may not be rich; there will be no capitalist system of economy and all will be paid according to his labour.

In that society people may possess private property but their money will be used for the good of the whole society. That society will be free from all social evils found in Indian society like untouchability, caste-distinctions, parda of women, class-distinctions based on economic inequalities etc. There will be no suppression of man by powerful personal, national and so called religious force. In that society nobody will be considered as untouchable or low; all will be provided with proper education and will be able to develop their personal abilities in fields of arts, aesthetic, literature, science and commerce.

This attempt to clarify religious concepts serves another purpose also. It is able to raise some new issues, create some new problems and develop some new ways of viewing at philosophical questions. It thus can claim to suggest a method by following which contemporary Indian philosophy of religion can grow on technical lines.

It is interesting to find that rudiments of such a method can be discovered in the religious philosophies of Rabindranath Tagore and Radhakrishnan who
cannot by any standard be called ‘modern’ in the technical sense of the modern. They also more or less in the spirit of Indian tradition try to develop system of philosophy. In the academic circle it may be urged that any attempt to develop a system of religious philosophy purely on ancient Indian tradition can only be an attempted repetition.

Moreover, such an attempt may not find ready favour with the empirically oriented modern philosopher for whom the tools of philosophy are purely rationalistic and naturalistic. But if it can be shown that it is possible to pick up ideas from their systems and develop them in the manner in which the modern academic thinker wants them to develop, then it is possible to assert that a contemporary. Indian philosophy of religion can grow along a line acceptable even to the modern academic thinkers.

This suggestion has also been clearly made in this work and certain actual attempts to develop new issues in the light of the two religious philosophies have been made. This will again require a going back to the different chapters. But a few examples will make the understanding convenient.

It is mentioned that Philosophy for Rabindranath Tagore is the art of seeing; it is darshana-to see things in the light of eternity, to establish man’s faith in meaningfulness of his existence and seek a harmonious relationship between man and the objective reality. He is world’s great reconciler. He has tried to reconcile the extremes of transcendence and immanence; of one-sided naturalism which makes of man a mere product of nature and extreme spiritualism which cuts man off from nature altogether.

In his ethics, too, one sees the same attempt at reconciliation between two polarities. He condemns Hedonism without losing his faith in the joy of life; he
shows how determinism and freedom both hold for more mechanical activity which one sometimes mistakenly calls progress. Man is the measure of everything in Rabindranath Tagore—religion, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics. Man is the music-maker; man is the dreamer of dreams. Rabindranath Tagore’s universe is essentially man-centered.

Rabindranath Tagore’s guiding principle in aesthetics is harmony, or rather reconciliation between two harmonies—the external which he calls proportion or Pramana and internal harmony to which he gives the name of Lavanya or grace. With these principles he tries to synthesize the human and the divine in his art. Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy largely centers round the eternal question: What is the relation of the finite with the infinite. In Jibansmriti he writes, “It seems there is only one grand tune of all my compositions and it may conveniently be styled as the union of the infinite with the finite in finiteness.

In The Relation of the Individual to the Universe, the leading essay in Sadhana, Rabindranath Tagore tries to find the clue to a perfect relationship of the two. Comparing the Eastern and the Western point of view on the subject, he says, “The west seems to take pride in thinking that it is subduing nature; as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything we want from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things. (Sisir Kumar Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol-II, 282).

This creates an artificial dissociation, a kind of separateness, between man and the universal nature. India, on the other hand, according to Rabindranath Tagore, puts all emphasis on the harmony that exists between the individual and the universe. “India intuitively felt that the essential fact of this world has a vital meaning for us; we have to be fully alive to it and establish a conscious relation
with it, not merely impelled by scientific curiosity or greed of material advantage, but realizing it in the spirit of sympathy, with a large feeling of joy and peace.” (283).

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. Rabindranath Tagore stresses again and again that man must realize the wholeness of his existence, his place in the infinite. The spirit of the Upanishads—“in order to find him and must embrace all”—is the key to Rabindranath Tagore’s thought and art.

Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophic world-view was mainly influenced by the Hindu tradition of the Upanishads and medieval theistic movements like Vaishnavism. “The absolutistic interpretation of the Upanishads given by the Advaita school, however, did not appeal to Rabindranath Tagore. He felt closer to the theistic Upanishads like Isa and Sverasvatara rather than those like Katha, Chhandogya and Brihadaranyaka—in which the identity of the Absolute with the self is the dominant idea.” (V.S. Narayana, 30) Rabindranath Tagore was one of the first to point out that the Western scholars had given a distorted picture by emphasizing the idea of maya or illusion. He has never accepted sorrow and asceticism as the goal of man's life; his emphasis was on Ananda or Bliss.

At one time Rabindranath Tagore’s art and thought were interpreted in terms of opposite pulls—viz., the Upanishadic and the Vaishnava. It is true that his writings do emphasize the one-ness of God—the ultimate reality. His God is inscrutable and formless, but he also manifests Himself in various forms, things, etc. Rabindranath Tagore’s Absolute needs finitude and it is here that one finds
the other pull-the influence of the Bhakti cult. Hence, there is no basic tension between the Upanishadic and the Vaishnava aspects of his thought.

Rabindranath Tagore accepts God as a postulate, an axiomatic reality, which needs no proof. “We must feel God as we feel light”, he says in The Religion of Man. All this ceaseless activity going on in the universe cannot be understood in the absence of the infinite. The mere finite is like a dead wall obtruding the beyond. The knowledge of the mere finite accumulates but does not illuminate. It is like a lamp without a light, a violin without its music. “The infinite and the finite are one as song and singing are one.” (369) There are indeed contradictions in the finite, but when we look beyond the finite, we find the purposive design of the infinite. The only possible answer is: There He stands, silent like a tree.

It is stressed in this thesis work that Rabindranath Tagore does not accept the impersonal Absolute God of Sankara. He believes that Absolute monism does not satisfy the moral, religious and aesthetic requirements of man. Like the Vaishnava theist, he accepts God who is near to human beings, who is interested in what human beings do and feel. For God is essentially personal and can be understood only in terms of humanity. It is the God of love and joy and not one who stares at human beings with frozen eyes regardless of their selfless devotion and silent suffering.

To the objection that by ascribing personality to the highest reality, one perhaps makes God limited, Rabindranath Tagore’s answer is that since we can understand the nature of God only in terms of our experience, reality has to be personal but then there is also an impersonal element which can be reconciled to ‘the idea of personality through love’. In love yea and nay are held together. Love has nirguna at one end and saguna at the other.
Now, if one believes that a personal God exists, one has to accept the independent existence of self also. This is the theme of many of his essays and lectures. *Atmabodh and Atmaparichaya* (I exist, I become, I move) is very important.

This separate identity of self is indispensable for the working of the universe. Man is a finite-infinite being. He has a finite pole in the world of necessity and an infinite one in the world of aspirations. “Man must realize the wholeness of his existence, his place in the infinite.” (284) Man is conscious of his finite nature only in the presence of an infinite nature within him. Life is the relationship of ‘the that and the this’. The unity of the Divine is not barren; it leaves room for difference.

Belief in the complete freedom of self is an important aspect of Rabindranath Tagore’s thought. The self must retain its identity, its separateness. The finite should not be lost or dissolved in the Absolute. Man ever approaches but never merges into God. Here Rabindranath Tagore stresses, “Bondage and liberation are not antagonist in Love.” (325)

The religious experience, in Rabindranath Tagore’s view, is a process and not an event, an eternal attempt at realisation, which is never completely achieved. He has become what we are ever striving to be. God is the infinite ideal of perfection and man the eternal process of its realization.

The infinite reality is reflected not in sheer oneness but also in unity through diversity. Duality and unity are, according to Rabindranath Tagore, complementary forces. Only death is monistic, life is dualistic. The desire we have to keep our uniqueness intact is really the desire of the universe acting in us.
And again, within the finite many, the infinite one looks for its own truth; the Absolute seeks itself in others.

Uniqueness and variety are indispensable. God delights in our uniqueness. In other words, this paradox of manyness and oneness cannot be explained but approximate in terms of personal experience. This paradox is at the root of existence. Love synthesizes the limited and the limitless.

Let one now look at Rabindranath Tagore’s ideas regarding man’s relationship with the world of multiplicity, and nature’s role in man’s life. “The Absolute monism of Sankara rejects the reality of the world altogether since both unity and multiplicity cannot be equally real.” (S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II 561)

The world of seeming is regarded as maya or illusion—which conceals the real and projects the unreal. Our Avidya or ignorance is the source of this error which confuses the seeming with reality.

Rabindranath Tagore does not refute the doctrine of maya but at the same time tries to establish the reality of the world. The world appears to be illusion only when one looks at it intellectually; it becomes positive and real to one when one enjoys it.

He cautions one against accepting the finite as wholly separate. It is because if one looks at it from that angle, the world would be a crude form of pluralism. He believes that maya is a kind of false belief, that the world of appearance is wholly real in its own right without any reference to the infinite. Maya is that which revolts against the truth of relatedness.
The poet in Rabindranath Tagore makes use of the quality of elusiveness and unpredictability that maya denotes. But elusiveness is, of course, not non-existence. When man deprives truth of its appearance, it loses the best part of its reality. For appearance is a personal relationship.

Rabindranath Tagore emphasizes in all his works the idea that man and nature need each other and their meaning lies in their relatedness. “When a man does not realize his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison-house whose walls are alien to him.” (283) On the other hand, without man nature would be like a ‘broken arch’. The earth and the sky are woven with the fibres of man’s world.

What unites man to nature is the ‘life’, the rhythm and beauty which they share in common. Rabindranath Tagore has given this “life” various names, *Jivana Pravaha, Jivana Shakti*. “The Chema Pravaha in nature flows through every blade of grass, every branch of the forest trees; it thrills the green fields around me. I see very fibre of palm tree quivering consciousness.” (Rabindranath Tagore, *Amar Dharma*, 131)

In his opinion, there is no anarchy or chaos in nature, it has rhythm and harmony. The language of harmony in nature is the mother tongue of one’s soul. “They have the rhythm of cosmic motion.” (10).

If everything is perfect, then why do people have death, evil and pain? In The Problem of Evil included in Sadhana, Rabindranath Tagore discusses the nature of evil and other related matters. Evil is not ultimate reality, it is negative. Pain is not an end in itself but joy is. The essence of evil is impermanence; it is ever moving. The most important lesson man can learn from his life is that there is pain in the world, but it can be transmuted into joy. Man has infinite
possibilities of perfection. The moral sense of man not only gives him the power to see that the self has a continuity in time, but it also enables him to see that he is not true when he is only restricted to his own self. “In this moral world we come from the world of nature into the world of humanity.” (Sisir Kumar Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol-II, 378)

Rabindranath Tagore’s religion is essentially the religion of man. His God can be expressed only in terms of humanity. It is man who has the highest place in the phenomenal world. His uniqueness lies in the fact that he is free and has ethical and aesthetic consciousness. There is determinism in nature; but man has freedom and it helps him to cross nature’s bonds. It is because of this freedom that man is not receptive but a creative being. Rabindranath Tagore strongly believes that humanity is a necessary factor in the perfecting of divine truth. Man is not a casual visitor but a special guest in the universe.

As regards Rabindranath Tagore’s aesthetics, here too, he was no system builder. He abhorred the academician’s interest in theorising. His writings on art, painting and music which are quite extensive reveal the influence of Indian, Neo-Platonic, and nineteenth century romantic theories of art. The principle of harmony is basic to Rabindranath Tagore’s aesthetics. He believed that form must be clothed in proportion or pramana. The outer proportion should be enriched by inner harmony which in turn depends upon bhava-the feeling evoked by the art. As with from, so with bhava, both differentiation and unity are necessary. Only then true communication is possible.

Abu Sayeed Ayyub, in his essay on Rabindranath Tagore’s aesthetic philosophy, writes, “his indebtedness to Indian theory of poetry and to its dominant school of Rasavada was not very extensive.” (*Quest*, 37) The essence of poetical experience, according to this school, lies in the enjoyment of the sheer
tang or the feel of the emotion. The real task of the objective reality is to suggest and clarify the emotion. Once it is done, the objective constituents move out—they become aesthetically non-existent. In short, this presents a highly subjective view of artistic experience.

For Rabindranath Tagore, on the other hand, art should make one realize the world more fully. It is a bridge across the chasm which normally separates the individual from the world around. (“What is Art?”) “In art the person in us is sending its answers to the supreme person, who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across the lightness world of facts.” (Sisir Kumar Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol-II, 362) Emotions have an important place in Rabindranath Tagore’s view of art. For through emotions one is united to the outside world. But there is a note of warning also; an excessive stress on unification is bad. One’s emotions can also divide one. Hence, Rabindranath Tagore lays greater stress on harmony.

Rabindranath Tagore’s view of art is “idealistic” because he does not limit the aesthetic experience to the realm of objectively variable reality. It is “realistic” to the extent that art is supposed to bring one closer to actuality. Art for art’s sake had no meaning or relevance for Rabindranath Tagore.

Let the reader now turn to Rabindranath Tagore’s contribution to our economic thought. In essays such as *Cooperation, Samarbaya*, he deals with the problem of rural reconstruction. He admires the balanced economy which once characterized the Indian village. Cooperation is coloured with nostalgia for a time and system which no longer prevail. In terms of concrete and detailed proposals, the essay perhaps does not say much. Its logic is the logic of poetry. For the deep-rooted malaise Rabindranath Tagore blames our fatalistic view of life. Secondly, it is not merely the shortage of funds that affects our village life and programmes, our shortage of hope affects us in a much more crippling way.
He says that it is better to instill hope in the heart than to offer alms. How can men do it? Rabindranath Tagore’s answer is: By cooperation, at all levels. Man’s segregation, in Tagore’s opinion, is the main cause of poverty.

Rabindranath Tagore’s approach to machines is cautious but optimistic. He says that India like Europe should adopt machines and improved techniques in farming. He admires the initiative of the western man who has been continually finding new avenues of employment and new uses for his leisure. Handicrafts are good and beautiful, but if we are to provide the necessary goods and services to all, the machine will have to be increasingly used.

Condemning the severance between city and village life and exploitation of villagers by city people, Rabindranath Tagore pleads for coordinated efforts of economy. In ‘The Changing Age’, Rabindranath Tagore compares India’s past with its present. In the past, life in India was the life of ‘walled-up complacency’. Fatalism was and is a curse, a blot on one’s life and thought. Rabindranath Tagore finds gaps in one’s complacency and sees the European spirit of enquiry penetrating us here and there. Democratic forces are beginning to prevail and the caste system is gradually losing its earlier hold. But he also condemns the selfishness of Europe which is least concerned with what is happening in Asia. ‘Crisis in Civilization’, an important address of Rabindranath Tagore, ends on a note of prayer and hope that soon a new dawn will come in the East.

Rabindranath Tagore says that he looked back on the stretch of past years and saw the crumbling ruins of a proud civilization lying heaped as garbage out of history! And yet he would not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. He continuous to believe in the strength of man because according to him man is everything.

It is said in the thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore there was a mystic element which coexisted with a vivid concern with the immediate problems of
practical life around him, and so in his own way he fused nationalism and internationalism into a unity of faith, diversity being permissible while discord was to cease. He was sure that the colourless abstraction of cosmopolitanism was no answer to the problems that the world faced. In his own way he tried to combine the finest elements of West and East, his aim being to relate our lives to the outside world, to reach not other people and other nations

Rabindranath Tagore was no hermit, no isolationist. His extensive travels to nearly all parts of the world equipped him with the necessary vision and foresight to look at world problems in their proper perspective and to warn people against the danger of self-idolatry. He strongly believed that people in India had to learn a great deal from the West. For him a journey to Europe was almost a pilgrimage. “On the Eve of Departure” speaks of Rabindranath Tagore’s respect for western values, although he was equally aware of the great injustice indicted by Britain on India and wrote scathingly on Britain's imperialistic interest. In ‘The Changing Age’ again Rabindranath Tagore shows the healthy impact of Western values on Indian social fabric, as seen, for instance, in one’s attitude to authority.

Without the slightest hesitation Rabindranath Tagore accepted the Western idea of democracy, but ‘to this he added the Indian conception of social initiative and social responsibility.’ He insisted that one should help oneself and work for the nation without looking to the state for help and initiative. He was all for circumscribing the functions of the state and transferring them to the community.

*Presidential Address* is an important document from the point of view of Rabindranath Tagore’s political philosophy. Here one has an outline of his political programme based on economic self-sufficiency and social freedom. The root cause of India’s slavery lies in her neglect of an overpowering social system which humiliates and crushes the individual.
Rabindranath Tagore accepted the ideal of Indian nationalism but he strongly believed that the mere denunciation of the British would not bring independence to the country. “He recognized the right of each nation to work out its destiny, but he also proclaimed that national claims must never encroach upon human obligation?” Aggressive nationalism was condemned by Rabindranath Tagore: “Nations do not create: they merely produce and destroy.” With the unchecked growth of nationalism the moral foundation of man's civilization is unconsciously undergoing a change.

The ideal of the social man is unselfishness, but the ideal of the nation, like that of the professional man, is selfishness. This is why selfishness in the individual is condemned, while in the nation it is extolled, which leads to hopeless moral blindness, confusing the religion of the people with religion of the nation.” Rabindranath Tagore found great danger in the enthusiastic advocacy of the cause of nationhood:

The nation with all its paraphernalia of power and prosperity, its flags and pious hymns, its blasphemous prayers in the churches and literary mock thunders of its patriotic bragging, cannot hide the fact that nationhood is the greatest evil for the nation.

Though the cause of Indian freedom was very dear to Rabindranath Tagore, he did not approve of Gandhi’s idea of non-cooperation. He was also critical of Gandhi’s programme of the Charkha. Some of these basic assumptions of Gandhi are challenged in essays such as "The Striving for Swaraj” and “The Call of Truth.” He wanted political action to be a positive programme of national regeneration and he had the courage of openly expressing his disapproval of what he considered a negative programme.
Finally to conclude, though Tagore was been in India, his intellectual, spiritual understanding of the man, the world, the creation and the Creator transformed him into a universal citizen. He epitomized in himself all the ‘isms’ of the modern state and modern philosophy. He lent his voice to the voiceless and he wanted to correct the behavior of the world when he wrote,

“This is my prayer to thee my lord.
Strike, strike at the penury in my heart.”

Tagore also wanted the man, to evolve above all the prejudices. He did not like the boundaries between the nations. His magnanimous desire was the unification of the universal man. The below mentioned legendary poem illustrates his wish for a world of harmony and fraternity.

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

Thus by birth Tagore was Indian and by evolution Tagore is a noble personality of this universe.