

## Truth, Beauty and Goodness: The Three Eternal Values of R. N. Tagore

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### Abstract

This essay basically deals with Tagore's philosophy of three eternal values namely, truth, beauty and goodness. For him, "beauty is truth" and truth is beauty" is an ethical ideal for the individual and for society. Tagore suggested that all ugliness and evil, imbalance, discord, disharmony and disproportion should give place to beauty and goodness. It will help man to consider other fellow being his own self and establish unity in diversity.

**Keywords:** truth, beauty, goodness, eternal, philosopher, freedom, humanity, immortal man etc.

### Article

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a poet-philosopher, the mastermind, preceptor, sage, and unique literary giant, was one of the great religious humanists of 20<sup>th</sup> century India. The outward life of Tagore was not very eventful. Excepting the award of the Noble Prize and the founding of the 'Visvabharati' the external events of his life were, more or less, normal. But this was an index of a very powerful and dynamic life being lived within.<sup>1</sup>

Tagore described values by identifying reality with eternal humanity or immortal man. According to him, our life gains values in those of its aspects which represent eternal humanity in knowledge, in sympathy in deeds in character and in creative works. From the beginning of his history, man has been seeking these values, sometimes at the cost of so-called worldly gains and successes. The values that man seeks constitute his reality or his truth. And the values for which the supreme person or God stands as a symbol constitute man's own essential being and truth.

Tagore explained in **the Religion of Man** that our life gains what is called 'value' in those of its aspects which represent eternal humanity in knowledge, in sympathy in deeds, in character and creative works. And from the beginning of our history we are seeking, often at the cost of everything also, the value for our life and not merely success; in other words, we are trying to realize in ourselves the immortal man, so that we may die but not perish.<sup>2</sup>

Tagore therefore, believed that man die when they lose their physical life but they perish when they miss their humanity. It is so because humanity is the 'dharma' of man. It is an inspiration for freedom which enables individuals to realize their dharma which is the truth of Eternal man<sup>3</sup>

According to Tagore, there are mainly three eternal values namely truth, beauty and goodness. "Beauty is truth" and truth is beauty" is an ethical ideal for the individual and for society. Tagore suggested that all ugliness and evil, imbalance, discord, disharmony and disproportion should give place to beauty and goodness.

We therefore observe that Tagore's notion of beauty as truth links aesthetics with ethics through metaphysics. These values-truth, beauty and goodness are made manifest in thinking, feeling and willing of man. It is the apprehension of truth, the appreciation of beauty, and the direct contact with the ultimate reality. The said values are values as well as the three forms of the same non-dualistic absolute reality.

Tagore claimed that these values are practical too. They represent the basic reality or truth from the metaphysical point of view. Facts in themselves have no value. But they are converted into value by man who is the meeting-point of facts and values, as well as ethics, science and metaphysics. This is the transcendental or spiritual aspect of life which is the most highly developed in his personality. This is the reason Tagore regarded human personality as the principle of unity. It is not individual but universality.

Music, in Tagore's view, is the purest form of art. It is therefore the most direct expression of beauty. The manifestation of the Infinite in the finite forms of creation is itself music, silent and visible.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, every aspect of the universe reflects the Infinite. Tagore expressed his feelings:

Gladness is the one criterion of truth, and we know when we have touched Truth, by the music it gives, by the joy of greeting it sends forth to the truth in us. That is the true foundation of all religions. --- In the same way we touch the infinite reality immediately within us only when we perceive the pure truth of love or goodness, not through the explanations of theologians, not through the erudite discussion of the ethical doctrines.<sup>5</sup>

Tagore also tried to discuss imperfection and evil by saying that imperfection and evil are not absolute. But they are aids in the process of the attainment of good. What is then to be remembered is good, not evil. Evil thus, cannot progress is from evil to good. Evil, then, is merely a stage to be displaced an occasion for the disciplining of the life's ways.

There is a thing as progress in our civilization, which means that there is an ideal of perfection which the individual seeks to reach by-extending his limits in knowledge, power, love and enjoyment. Tagore insisted that man is to realize not only the reasoning mind, but also the creative imagination for seeking perfection, love and wisdom belong to the Supreme Person, whose spirit is over as all.<sup>6</sup>

Tagore observed two aspects of perfection in man, the perfection in being and perfection in doing, they, to some extent, can be separated. Tagore argued that through some training and compulsion, good works may possibly be extorted from a man who personally may not be good. This kind of work may be useful and may continue to exist beyond the lifetime of the individual who produces it.

Tagore here does not consider the utility of the work but of the moral perfection. According to him, it is important that the individual must be true in his goodness. His outer good work may continue to produce good results, but the inner perfection of his personality has its own immense value. It for an individual is spiritual freedom and for humanity is an endless asset though we may not know it, Tagore said:

For goodness represents the detachment of our spirit from the exclusiveness of our egoism; in goodness we identify ourselves with the universal humanity. Its value is not merely in some benefit for our fellow beings, but in truth itself through which we realize within us that man is not individual passions and appetites, but a spirit that has its unfettered perfection. Goodness is the freedom of our self in the world of man, as is love. We have to be true, within, not for worldly duties, but for that spiritual fulfillment, which is in harmony with the perfect, in union with the Eternal.<sup>7</sup>

Tagore considered freedom as a positive realization which gives pure joy to human beings. It is not the mere negation of bondage and lack of freedom is based upon the spirit of alienation. Man is greater than all objects of his desire. He is true in his freedom. But in the process of attaining freedom one must kind his will in order to save its forces from distraction and wastage.<sup>8</sup>

The history of the growth of freedom is the history of perfection human relationship. Therefore, truth is in unity and freedom is in its realization. We realize our unity according to Tagore, through the discovery of harmony of its working with reason and therefore we also realize our freedom.<sup>9</sup> Tagore pointed out that in the very beginning of his career Man asserted in his bodily structure his first proclamation of freedom against the established rule of Nature.<sup>10</sup>

Freedom, in Tagore's opinion, is achieved only when our mind is free. An automobile does not create freedom of movement, because it is mere a machine. But when a man himself is free he can use the automobile the purpose of his freedom.<sup>11</sup>

Tagore argued that the people who have political freedom, they are merely powerful. They create huge organization for slavery in the disguise of freedom. They surrender their won freedom the humanity to the organizations for holding their peoples in slavery. This becomes possible only because people do not acknowledge moral and spiritual freedom as their object. Man's truth, according to Tagore, is moral truth and his emancipation is in the spiritual life. Thus those who come under the delusion of political freedom lose their faith in humanity. Because whatever weakness we cherish in our society will become the source of danger in politics.<sup>12</sup>

Tagore, therefore asked, "Is the mere name of freedom so valuable that we should be willing to sacrifice for its sake our moral freedom?"<sup>13</sup> According to Tagore, we cannot sacrifice our moral freedom because man's world is moral world and moral law is the law of humanity. So it would be dangerous for the entire humanity to ignore this fact. It is because man blindly agrees to believe it, but because it is the truth. This moral nature of man therefore cannot be divided into convenient compartments for its preservation.<sup>14</sup>

In Tagore's eyes, liberty is also not freedom because our social ideals create the human world. But when our mind is diverted from them to greed of power then in that state of intoxication we live in a world of abnormality. He said:

Freedom in the mere sense of independence has no content, and therefore no meaning. Perfect freedom lies in a perfect harmony of relationship, which we realize in this world not throughout response to it in knowing, but in being. Objects of knowledge maintain an infinite distance from us who are the knower. For knowledge is not union. Therefore the further world of freedom awaits us there where we reach truth, not through feeling it by our senses or knowing it by our reason, but through the union of perfect sympathy.<sup>15</sup>

Tagore realized that man's true power lies in yielding up his brute power for the freedom of spirit. He argued that our great prophets in all ages realized in themselves the freedom of soul in their consciousness of the spiritual kinship of man which is universal.<sup>16</sup> Tagore said:

Those of our community who believe in the liberation of man's limited self in the freedom of the spirit retain the same epithet for themselves. In all departments of life man shows this dualism-his existence within the range of obvious facts and his transcendence of it in a realm of deeper meaning.<sup>17</sup>

Tagore equalized love and freedom. According to him one can find once freedom in nature by being able to love it, he said that for love is freedom; it gives us that fullness of existence which saves us from paying with our soul for objects that are immensely cheap. Love lights up this world with its meaning and makes life feel that it has that 'enough' everywhere which truly is its 'feast'.

To conclude the essay we would like to say that this paper is an important attempt to understand Tagore's philosophy of three eternal values. These values can never be separated from the lives of men. They have theoretical as well as practical importance to live our life with the essence of man that is his humanity.

## References

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