

Universal Message of Kivial Chārankabi Bijoy Sarkar's Songs

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Manuscript Received: Nov 18, 2024; Revised: Nov 23, 2024; Published: Nov 23, 2024

Abstract

The concept of Purusha, or the Universal Man, lies at the core of Indian speculative thought, serving as an archetype of the interconnectedness between the microcosm and macrocosm. Encompassing both immanent and transcendent realities, Purusha symbolizes the primordial Being and the inner Spirit, inspiring human creativity in art, music, and literature. Rooted in the Vedic and Upanishadic traditions, the creative process begins with the formless and unmanifest (*avyakta*), evolving through intuition (*prātīta*), symbolism (*pratīka*), and concrete form (*pratimā*), bridging the visible and invisible realms. This profound idea finds expression in the works of mystics and poets such as Rabindranath Tagore, who distinguished the "personal man" driven by love and emotional intelligence, and **Kivial Chārankabi** Bijoy Sarkar, whose songs transcend societal divides. Bijoy Sarkar's compositions reflect the psychical dimensions of man and his ultimate unity with the Purusha, as evident in his themes of impermanence, the soul's transcendence, and divine love. Drawing from Bengal's rich musical traditions, his works embody universal brotherhood and resonate deeply with the Upanishadic vision of the human journey as a microcosm within the infinite Cosmic Man. Through his music, Bijoy Sarkar, affectionately known as 'Pāgol Bijoy,' reminds us of the eternal interplay between the human and the divine, uniting art and spirituality.

Universal Message

In Indian speculative thought, the concept of *Purusha* or the Universal Man is central to every aspect of human life and creativity. The concept of *Purusha* or Man in all its dimensions – 'Man', 'person', the total human being, the original man, the primordial Cosmic Person, also the inner Spirit or Self – has served as the archetypal model of micro-macrocosmic relationships. As the all-pervading primordial Being, an indwelling Self, the *Purusha* is more connected with form (*rūpa*), especially the human form, thus embracing both, the immanent as well as transcendent reality.

The *Purusha Sukta* enlightens us about this all-encompassing *Purusha* thus,

***Sa bhumin vishwato vrtvātyattishtha dashāngulam*¹**

'He is the Cosmic Man, on whose body the entire creation is displayed, with all its material, vital, prānic and spiritual forces. This entire display is based and depends on the narrow inner space, ten fingers wide, the heart of the Purusha, the sanctuary of the temple.'²

It is in this very 'narrow inner space', the *Antarhrdayākasha*, that art is born - be it music, dance, sculpture, poetry or painting.

Any creation of art is, in essence, giving form to the Formless, manifesting the unmanifest. This act of creation is based on the Vedic conception of the origin and evolution of the universe from that One Supreme undivided Principle. The artist, in creating the form, must delve deep into herself, so as to meditate, such that the result of such intense meditation is *dhyānarūpa*, the very first symbolic perception of that which is to be created. Thus, according to Upanishadic tradition, the creative process starts from the Unmanifest (*avyakta*) or Brahman, leading to the very first inner manifestation which is *Purusha*, the mediator par excellence between the Invisible and the Visible, between *nirguna* and *saguna*. Where the conception (contemplation, bhāvanā) is void, that is *nirguna* (Brahman devoid of qualities). By a conception (contemplation) endowed with qualities it becomes *saguna* (Brahman with qualities). From *saguna* the mind materializes (becomes concrete)³.

¹ Rgveda X.90

² Translation by Griffith

³ Chapter IV, Boner Alice, Sharma, Bäumer, "Vastusutra Upanishad-Essence of Form in Sacred Art"

Hence '*Prañītat prañīkah*'⁴ that is, 'from the realization comes the symbol'.

And after this intuitive realization of the archetype or symbol, comes the image or external manifestation of concrete form, the Manifest (*vyakta*).

The Vastusutra Upanishad explains this sequence thus,

*Prañīta-Prañīka-Pratimā-krameṇa trīṇi mukhyāni...*⁵

"*Prañīta* (realization or intuition), *prañīka* (symbol), *pratimā* (image), in this order these three are essential. When in the reflection of an aureole of light Brahman is realized, that is realization (*prañīta*), like the *Purusha* consisting of consciousness, who is not seen by the eye, by whom the eye sees. That which manifests the experiences in the manner of the relationship between the resemblance and the thing to be known, that is the symbol *Purusha* of the size of a thumb' and others. That which in worship bestows Bliss, that is the image (*pratimā*).

As the nature (*bhāva*) of the *Purusha* is conceived of the size of a thumb, and in imagination the thumb means only light, so it is like the post of *Yupa*."⁶

When considering the myriad dimensions of the concept of *Purusha*, the simple twofold differentiation is that of the perishable (*kṣara*), mortal man, and the imperishable (*akṣara*), the universal or divine man. Anthropological levels are introduced by the *Taittirīya Upanishad* (III. 3-5) with the five 'sheaths' (*kośa*) which the *Upaniṣad* itself calls the *pañcapuruṣa*. From the external, physical level to the innermost dimension of man, these are *annamaya* (consisting of food), *prāṇamaya* (consisting of life-breath), *manomaya* (consisting of mind), *vijñānamaya* (consisting of consciousness) and *ānandamaya* (consisting of bliss)⁷.

Thus, delineating the most physical from the psychical, the *Taittirīya Upanishad* speaks of man and his nature. The physical is directly produced by food, and contains in itself the senses. This physical man breaths, thinks, feels, and resolves;⁸ he is alive and conscious and is the vehicle of the man who knows and can reflect I.e. the psychical man.

Rabindranath Tagore, too, speaks of this psychical man when, while expounding what art is, he distinguishes between the physical and the personal man.

*There is yet another man in me, not the physical, but the personal man; which has its likes and dislikes and wants to find something to fulfil its needs of love. This personal man is found in the region where we are free from all necessity, - above the needs, both of body and mind, -above the expedient and useful. It is the highest in man – this personal man.*⁹

Emphasizing, to a considerable degree, on the significance of emotional intelligence inherent to man, Tagore further opines that man, as a knower, is never fully his own self – his mere information does not adequately reveal his nature. But, as a person, he is the man, whose inherent power to select things from his surroundings helps him make them his own. In this way, man creates himself, his individualistic personality.

In everyday life, when one is mostly moved by one's habits, man is economical in his expression; for then one's soul-consciousness is at its lowest level. But when one's heart is fully awakened in love, or in other great emotions, man's personality is in its highest level of expression. Then man feels the longing for expressing himself for the very sake of expression. Then comes Art, and one forgets the claims of necessity, the thrift of usefulness, and, in the Nobel laureates very own words, "the spires of our temples try to kiss the stars and the notes of our music to fathom the depth of the ineffable"¹⁰.

Undivided Bengal has been the birthplace of many a great poet, lyricist, music-maker, some having attained international acclaim, such as Rabindranath Tagore, Kabi Nazrul Islam, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Jibanananda Das to name a few, while several others being widely recognized and revered locally. And each of

⁴ Chapter IV, Boner Alice, Sharma, Bäumer, "Vastusutra Upanishad-Essence of Form in Sacred Art"

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

⁷ Ed. Baumer, Bettina : "Kalātattvakośa" Vol I, Chapter - 'Puruṣa'

⁸ Sharma S: "The Concept of Man in the Vedas and Upanishads" – unpublished paper referred by Kapila Vatsyayan for her publication "The Indian Arts: Background and Principles"

⁹ Tagore, Rabindranath: "What is Art?" 1916

¹⁰ ibid

them has enriched Bengal's illustrious musical tradition with his own individualistic musical aesthetic – be it Rabindrasangeet, Nazrulgeeti, Shyamasangeet, Kabigaan or Baulsangeet. Kavial Chārankabi Bijoy Sarkar was one such renowned music-maker.

From Kabigaan to Baul Sangeet to Dhuyagaan, the latter being a unique genre created by the poet himself employing notes of *Bhātiyali*, Bijoy Sarkar's songs reflect the myriad moods and dimensions of Bengal's Lokosangeet, man and his intrinsic nature being central to his compositions. Bijoy Sarkar revelled in the Upanishadic psychical man through his musical explorations, thus transcending barriers of caste, creed, religion, society, geographical boundaries.

That he denounced social discrimination, whether based on caste or religious affiliation, is obvious in his compositions when he writes,

“Sriṣṭir pāne driṣṭi diye Sraṣṭār protī tān;

Ihar mūle nai kono byābodhān, khule dyakh jnyan noyon”¹¹

When he sang,

“Poṣa pakhi ure jābe, sajani, ekdīn bhābi nai mone.....”

He spoke of the human soul, the *Puruṣa*, dwelling in the Antārhrdayākasha, who, momentarily tamed in a particular human body, will eventually transcend this body, thus freeing Himself from the shackles of mundane life.

In “*Śundor e prithibi chhede chole jete hobe*”, Bijoy Sarkar reflects upon the impermanence of human life, the soul once disengaged from the mortal, seeks solace in the Immanent One, *Puruṣa*.

Through his compositions based on the eternal *samyoga* of Krishna and his consort Radha, he celebrates, transcending mere human love, the union of the soul with the Universal One, and likewise, the agony of separation as in the following verse,

“Kriṣṇo milon lāgi niṣi jagi bāṣor ghare

Milon-niṣi hoilo bhor

Elo na shyam kiṣore”¹²

And even in the lyrics of,

“Porobāṣi hoiya re robo aar kotokāl

Aar kotokāl porer jālā shoiya re”

For, as we know, in Vaishnavite tradition, Krishna is revered as the all-pervading Supreme Principle, *Puruṣa*, and *Rādhā* – the internal potency of Krishna himself, his *Śakti*, even Krishna's feminine self, having emerged from his left side, one who is forever yearning to unite with Him.

Kavial Chārankabi Bijoy Sarkar was one exceptionally sensitive soul, who, through his very own experiences, perceived life as a journey that man must undertake so as to fulfil his destiny. To him, it mattered little, to which class, caste or creed one was born into. For, he perceived every human being as, but a mere grain of the immeasurable primordial Cosmic Man, a microcosm within the Macrocosm. And because he held such an unbiased outlook while being fully aware that most would misinterpret his words as those of an eccentric, in his songs he identifies himself humbly using the sobriquet - ‘Pāgol Bijoy’. A mystic poet, his music touched the hearts of millions, transcending boundaries, whether physical, political, religious or social. He celebrated Tagore's personal man through his compositions, reminding us, always, succinctly, of the Cosmic Man, the Supreme force behind all human thought and action, thus propagating the message of universal brotherhood.

¹¹ Hossain, Mohosin: ‘Bijoy Sarkar’ 1995

¹² banglapedia.org

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