

Religious education and Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract: Tagore's religion is not a body of written doctrines or theological principles; rather it is something that is inseparable from one's core. He admits that he cannot define it, but he says that the aim of religion is neither idle tranquility nor the enjoyment of languid beauty. Somehow his mind initially remained coldly aloof, absolutely uninfluenced by any religion whatsoever. When he was eighteen, a sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to his life and passed away leaving in his memory a direct message of spiritual reality. Tagore reproduces the idea of the immanence of God reflected in the Upanishads. Tagore discovers God within the life of human being. He says that we know God by realizing Him in each and all. Whether there was any influence of Vaishnavism in Tagore's life is debatable since Vaishnavism neglects present life whereas Tagore gives immense value to human life and the world. What appealed to Tagore is the practical side of Buddha's teaching. The lyrics of Gitanjali represent a very simple religion, one that is characterized by sound relationship with the divine rather than by external paraphernalia. Tagore's religion is an aspect of human spirit. It does not come from God, it is rooted in human being, and, therefore, his religion is a poet's religion. Tagore introduces us to a human God, who has human qualities.

Keywords: Religious education, Vaishnavism, Upanishads

Introduction:

Tagore's religion is not a body of written doctrines or theological principles; rather it is something that is inseparable from one's core. He admits that he cannot define it, but he says that the aim of religion is neither idle tranquility nor the enjoyment of languid beauty. Somehow his mind initially remained coldly aloof, absolutely uninfluenced by any religion whatsoever. When he was eighteen, a sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to his life and passed away leaving in his memory a direct message of spiritual reality. Tagore reproduces the idea of the immanence of God reflected in the Upanishads. Tagore discovers God within the life of human being. He says that we know God by realizing Him in each and all. Whether there was any influence of Vaishnavism in Tagore's life is debatable since Vaishnavism neglects present life whereas Tagore gives immense value to human life and the world. What appealed to Tagore is the practical side of Buddha's teaching. The lyrics of Gitanjali represent a very simple religion, one that is characterized by sound relationship with the divine rather than by external paraphernalia. Tagore's religion is an aspect of human spirit. It does not come from God, it is rooted in human being, and, therefore, his religion is a poet's religion. Tagore introduces us to a human God, who has human qualities.

Objective:

To highlight the nourishment of religious education in Rabindranath Tagore's educational thought.

Methodology:

It is completely based on literature review.

Result and discussion:

Tagore had been greatly touched by the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha and he has used them in his life as well as in his preaching (Rabindranath Tagore, Preface, *Sadhana*, London: Macmillan, 1918, viii). He was born in a family which, at that time, was earnestly developing a monotheistic religion based upon the philosophy of the Upanishads (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 91). Tagore's religion is not a body of written doctrines or theological principles; rather it is something that is inseparable from one's core. He admits that he cannot define it, but he says that the aim of religion is neither idle tranquility nor the enjoyment of languid beauty. Somehow his mind initially remained coldly aloof, absolutely uninfluenced by any religion whatsoever. When he was eighteen, a sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to his life and passed away leaving in his memory a direct message of spiritual reality (Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932). Tagore reproduces the idea of the immanence of God reflected in the Upanishads. Brahman is the Supreme Reality which makes itself manifest in and through the finite world. Tagore recognizes the real spirit of the Upanishads. The Upanishadic seers sacrifice not material prosperity for the attainment of spiritual truth. In order to find him,

one must embrace all (Tagore, *Sadhana*, 16). Tagore follows the Upanishadic understanding of Brahman: Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam (Truth, Knowledge, Infinity). He also discovers the Supreme Being in and through nature. Tagore says, "The first stage of any realization was through my feeling of intimacy with nature (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 18). The concept of dualism of self has also been derived from the Upanishads: finite self in human beings which confines to the boundaries of human limitations and divine soul existing within them. The individual divine soul is the manifestation of "Jivan Devata." What differentiates Tagore from the Upanishads is his three-fold conception of reality against the Upanishad's *advaitavada* and *dvaitavada*. Tagore attaches equal importance to humanity, world and God. There is no doubt that he is influenced by the Upanishads, but he has a free integral and independent way of thinking. The Upanishads taught Tagore how human beings can transcend themselves and get a glimpse of the Infinite. Tagore accepts that the meaning of our self cannot be found in its separateness from God and others, but in the ceaseless realization of *yoga*, of union. He, therefore, accepts the three *yogas* of Gita as effective ways of the realization of the Supreme Being. As in the Gita, he gives importance to action. This is the *karma yoga* of the Gita, the way to be one with the infinite activity by the practice of disinterested goodness, i.e., *nishkama karma*. Tagore's understanding of God can be traced of Gita's Supreme Person, Purushothama, far above the level of an average person. Purushothama pervades this universe. He is the Iswara existing in the hearts of all beings, is within the world and beyond it. This conception of Purushothama in the Gita is unique. The spiritual thoughts found in the Gita present love for God by human being and the love of God for human being. Purushothama is not separate from the world and human beings, is never absent from creation. God is the immanent spirit controlling and guiding everything in the universe. Tagore finds God existing in every form of life.

Tagore discovers God within the life of human being. He says that we know God by realizing Him in each and all (Tagore, *Sadhana*, 20). God manifests himself in human beings and all objects and thus realization is possible within the soul and in nature. For Tagore, too, salvation consists in the integral divine perfection of the whole being of human being (Edacheriparambil, 26-27). Whether there was any influence of Vaishnavism in Tagore's life is debatable since Vaishnavism neglects present life whereas Tagore gives immense value to human life and the world. A divine life on earth is the supreme condition for salvation. Tagore observes that Vaishnava religion has boldly declared that God has bound himself to human beings, and in that consists the greatest human existence (Tagore, *Sadhana*, 115). The possibility of transforming human love into divine

love held by Tagore must have been derived from Vaishnavism. Vaishnavism taught Tagore the message of friendly union between God and human being. Vaishnavites view the world as real with its various colours and combination. They put emphasis on a firm organic relation between God and human being. God is everything and all actions of human being should be dedicated to Him. Tagore was fortunate to have got some lyrical poems of the poets of the Vaishnava sect. This made him aware of some underlying idea deep in the obvious meaning of those love songs. He knew that those poets were speaking about the Supreme Lover, whose touch one experiences in all his relations of love—the love of nature's beauty, of animal, the child, the comrade, the beloved, the love that illuminates his consciousness of reality (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 105).

What appealed to Tagore is the practical side of Buddha's teaching. Buddha preached the discipline of self-restraint and moral life; it is a complete acceptance of law. His teaching speaks of *nirvana* as the highest end. To understand its real character, one should know the path of its attainment, which is not merely through the negation of evil thoughts and deeds but through the elimination of all limits to love. For Tagore, the path Buddha pointed to was not merely the practice of self-abnegation, but a widening of love and therein lays the true meaning of Buddha's preaching (Tagore, *Sadhana*, 77). Tagore does not want to get into the controversy whether Buddhism accepts God or not.

In *The Religion of Man* Tagore says, "Buddha's idea of the infinite is not the spirit of an unbounded cosmic activity, but the infinite whose meaning is in the position of ideal of goodness and love, which cannot be otherwise the human" (Ibid, 70).

Dr. Aronson, in his book, *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes*, says that Tagore seemed to be more Christian than the Christians (A. Aronson, *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes*, Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1943). Tagore says, "Nobody has exalted man more in every sphere than Jesus. The divinity of man is stressed by Jesus as by Vaishnava saints" (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 52). Tagore discovers a message of friendly union between God and human being in Christianity. He agrees that like other Indian religions, Christianity, too, proclaims the ideal of selflessness. If Tagore was attracted to Christian theism, it is because it conforms to the ideas which he has already absorbed from the Upanishads and for nothing else. Tagore was a unique, an oriental occidentalist (Edacheriparambil, 28).

The lyrics of *Gitanjali* represent a very simple religion, one that is characterized by sound relationship with the divine rather than by external paraphernalia. The religion of *Gitanjali* is free from pedantic dogmas and high metaphysics. It does not

have any complicated rites and rituals. Its worship is not of the Pharisee but of the simple man of the wayside. This religion considers the world outside; the man in the neighbourhood, longs to worship the divine in the day-to-day activities of life (Edacheriparambil, 77).

The central theme of *Gitanjali* is devotional: it expresses the yearning of the devotee for the reunion with the divine. We get many instance of such poetry in *Gitanjali*, for example the opening song:

Thou has made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it every with fresh life. (Tagore, *Gitanjali*,1)

This is an acknowledgement that the human soul has no significance unless it is filled by the Supreme. Birth and death nothing but the emptying and filling of the soul by the Supreme Soul and the individual in this way shares God's endless life, His immortality.

The human body is the temple of God; so it needs to be kept pure. Since God dwells in the inmost shrine of the heart, one has to keep away all evils from one's heart. Our effort should be to reveal God in our actions because it is God who gives us the power to act (Ibid, 3-4). This is true worship.

In our relationship with the divine what is important is the total self-surrender so that we may accept God as everything. A humble devotee prays:

This is my prayer to thee, my Lord—strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor of bend me knees before insolent might

Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles;

And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love. (Ibid,2829)

Tagore is very critical with regard to the existential ritualism. The religion that does not have any concern for one's fellow beings, and the offerings that bar others their basic need, is useless. Lyric eleven exposes the uselessness of religious rituals. It tells that true worship of God consists not in the performance of rites and ceremonies, but

extending a helping hand to the suffering and the needy (Ibid, 8-9).

Gitanjali also warns us to be cautious in our relationship with the world. In the beginning the attachment to the world may not be a hindrance for our worship of God but time may come when the things of the world may occupy everything of our life leaving aside God. Tagore expresses this in *Gitanjali* as:

I thought I could outdo everybody in the world in wealth and power, and I amassed in my own my own treasure-house the money due to my king. (Ibid, 24)

God's dwelling place is among the poorest and lowliest. It is difficult for a proud person to approach where God is in clothes amidst the meanest of society. God is present in every other, in the simplest and the meekest. Lyric ten reveals God's dwelling place:

HERE is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost. (Ibid, 8)

There are certain images present in the New Testament, which appear very much similar to that found in *Gitanjali*. Christ condemns the showy type of worship of the Pharisees, the same is told in lyric eleven where it asks to leave the chanting and singing and telling beads, God's arrival in the unexpected moment, the mandate of Christ to be watchful, The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids (Matt. 25.1-13), are alluded to in lyric fifty-one:

The king has come—but where are lights, where are the wreaths? Where is the throne to seat him? (Tagore, *Gitanjali*,45)

Again the story of the Samaritan Women (Jn. 4.7-42) can be found in lyric fifty-four:

I heard not thy steps as thou camest. Thine eyes were sad when they fell on me; thy voice was tried as thou spokest low—"Ah, I am a thirsty traveler." I started up from my day-dreams and poured water from my jar on thy joined palms. (Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 49)

An account of Tagore's religion would not be complete without making a mention of his humanistic beliefs. His humanistic attitude pervades all aspects of his thoughts, and yet, he does not allow it to descent to the status of narrow anthropomorphism.

There is a sense in which Tagore humanizes not only nature and objects, but also God. In the book *The Religion of Man*, while describing the purpose of the book, he says, "The idea of the humanity of our God, or the divinity of

Man, the Eternal, is the main subject of this book” (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 17). This appears to represent the basic idea which Tagore tries to develop in so many ways. At times, human being is raised higher to the status of God, at other times, God is brought down to human being in so far as

divinity is said to be discernible in the heart of human being. Tagore’s God is somehow God and human being at the same time and he asserts that if this faith is blamed for being anthropomorphic, then human being should also be blamed for being human (Ibid, 114).

The place of Chatimtala: heart of religious education in santiniketan



The core of Visva-Bharati education : the place of Kanchmandir-the source of religious education in santiniketan



Chatimtala in Santiniketan: The base of Debendranath’s meditation.



The caption of belief of Debendranath Tagore was “thy is the my relax,joy of mind, peace of soul”



Chatimtala : the upasana bedi of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore on March, 1862.He was first came here during His invasion at Santiniketan.



The front gate of Kanchmandir with the caption of “ekomeba dityang.ananda rupam mitrang jaddi bhati”



restricted notice

Muslim Art and Sculpture

Hindu art and sculpture

Christian art and sculpture

Sculpture of Kanchmandir (based on three main religions of Earth):an educational reflection
Source of this photographic explanation : *Pal, Tapas. 2012:Wall Culture the Dawn of Cultural Geography. Laplambert Publication, Germany, ISBN 978-3-659-21049-5*

Tagore's Visva-Bharati logo and its educational reflection on the basis of Swastika symbol:

With such ideals in view, to provide at Santiniketan, a centre of culture where research into and study of the religion, literature, history, science and art of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other civilisations may be pursued along with the culture of the West, with that simplicity in externals which is necessary for true spiritual realisation, in amity, good fellowship and co-operation between the thinkers and scholars of both Eastern and Western countries. The word *swastika* has been in use in English since the 1870s, replacing *gammadion*. It was loaned from the Sanskrit term *svastika*, meaning any lucky or auspicious object, and in particular a mark made on persons and things to denote auspiciousness, or any piece of luck or well-being. It is composed of *su-* meaning "good, well" and *asti* "being"; the suffix *-ka* either forms a diminutive or intensifies the verbal meaning, and *suastika* might thus be translated literally as "that which is associated with well-being," corresponding to "lucky charm" or "thing that is auspicious."



“ Visva-Bharati represents India where she has her wealth of mind which is for all. Visva-Bharati acknowledges India's obligation to offer to others the hospitality of her best culture and India's right to accept from others their best ”

Conclusion:

Tagore introduces us to a human God, who has human qualities. His God comes to our lives in our daily experiences—God comes to us every moment of our life, He comes in the sunny April through the forest path, He is present in the gloom of July night, He comes to us through our joys and sorrows. Tagore is a symbol of harmony. For him, human being, nature and God are integrated into one whole reality. This universe is a creative act of joy and God manifests Himself in this universe. Tagore insists ceaselessly on the kinship between human beings and nature. What he means by kinship is that human beings and nature are interdependent. Tagore gives special status to human beings. According to him, human beings are the most beautiful creation of God and they are the highest manifestation of God. They are the temples of the divine. This conception of Tagore is very similar to the biblical accounts of creation;

however, we must remember that Tagore does not believe in the biblical account of creation. Since human beings are superior to other things, they can control nature. Tagore's religion is an aspect of human spirit. It does not come from God, it is rooted in human being, and, therefore, his religion is a poet's religion. Religion, for him, is a principle of unity that binds us together; it is our essential quality, inherent in us. Religion enables us to cultivate and express these qualities in us. Thus, to realize the principle of unity is spiritual and our effort to be true to it is our religion. Religion trains our attitude and behavior towards the Infinite in the finite, to find God in all things. Religion does not consist in knowledge or philosophy, truth is the essence of realizing one's personality, fulfillment. Religion enables us to experience the deeper unity of all that exists, it is God. All the same, religion is not the ultimate goal but is users us to our perfect liberation in the universal spirit across the furthest limits of humanity itself.

Reference :

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Edacheriparambil, 28

Edacheriparambil, 77

Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 1

Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 49

Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 17