

Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore Related to Nature, Man and God

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Abstract:

Religion does not mean that the finite being is under the control of an infinite being like God. According to Rabindranath Tagore the function of religion is to bring the harmony of reason, love and deed of Supreme into the individual. The relation of the Supreme Person is as dependent upon the personal being and the personal being is dependent upon the Supreme person. In this sense, God may be considered as a personal being like man. We find a similarity between the Vedāntic conception of the Nara-Narayana, divinity of man is developed in Tagore's philosophy of religion. Rabindranath avoided the rituals, superstitions and mythologies of the formal religions. The essence of religion is to realize that God is omnipresent. Like Vivekananda, he believed in religion as manifestation of divinity already in man. This knowledge is possible only through the knowledge or intuition. He thinks that God is to be found not in temples or mosques but in humanity itself. Tagore's concept of humanism is basically devoted to the service of mankind. According to Tagore, the ultimate end of humanity may be achieved through the realization of our relationship with all finite beings as the union of the infinite being. Therefore, the spirit of One in God is the only truth and truth behind this spiritual union is love. Tagore's philosophy reveals that his philosophical thought was like the Vedānta philosophy in true sense. He believed in one Supreme reality that is the Brahma. And, he believed in the relationship of God and man is just like love and joy. In this paper I wish to discuss the conception of God of Rabindranath Tagore in a comparative manner.

Keywords: Trinity, Literature, Rabindernath Tagore, Poetry.

Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a man of many parts, is greatly esteemed for his multi-faceted output as poet, novelist, dramatist, essayist, philosopher, artist and musician. Gitanjali is undoubtedly the work with which his name will always be linked, both because of the wide acclaim which it earned him - extending to the Nobel Prize for Literature - and because it is considered his most artistically mature creation. As is generally understood, Gitanjali was first published in India in 1910, and then two years later, in 1912, Tagore selected a range of verses from that volume and a range from other earlier poetry collections of his, translated them from the original Bengali into English and published them in London in 1913, now as a work of poetical prose entitled Gitanjali (Song Offerings). This volume comprised 103 pieces of poetical prose which, from first to last, are offerings dedicated to God. God, then, is the macrotheme of Gitanjali, the axis around which turn all its microthemes - including freedom, love, simplicity, devotion, life and death. God is consistently represented as a centre to which is drawn humanity and everything else that broadly characterizes it. Tagore wove his verse offerings for God, expressing the greatest devotion, and in so doing he established a vertical channel of communication: from low to high. Thus we have Tagore addressing and God addressed or, in other words, the poet as addresser and God as addressed; the first offering and the second accepted what is offered, albeit as a silent interlocutor, for such is the dictate of his mysterious and transfinite nature, which the human mind, "created for a finite universe" (Barone 1996, 29), may not deeply penetrate. These offerings are words from the soul, wrapped in the philosophy of life and death and everything that exists between them. The works of Rabindranath Tagore - admired by icons of poetry such as André Gide, Romain Rolland, Juan Ramon Jimenez, Paul Valéry, Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats - has persistently provoked the curiosity of critics to study it from different perspectives. This was chiefly because his output, as well as being voluminous, was rich in substantive content and always left room for further study. Inspired in this way, the analysis offers a broad discussion of the nature of God in the Gitanjali of Rabindranath Tagore.

The existential question that raises its head in this context is the way in which God is conceived in this anthology of poetical prose, and from this follow other issues such as: the philosophy of Tagore's poetry, his religious philosophy, the perception of the presence of God in the life of man, union with God as an aim of life, the manifestation of the character of God as an axial theme within the thematic universe of a literary work where love, death, freedom and devotion - all conceived philosophically - are connected around this central axis and all of them understood more clearly in relationship to it. In this way, the attention is automatically drawn to the revelation of the nature of God, since everything that is discussed in the work has God as its start-point and end-point. Thus love springs from God and returns to him, spiritual freedom triumphs fully only in the knowledge of God, simplicity is the key to the knowing of God, devotion is humility and an explicit affirmation of God as Absolute, and so on. Taken together, all of these enable us to see Gitanjali as a journey from life to death, or more precisely as a path of life that begins in God and ends in God. Accordingly, the road from God to God is the road to the Absolute, the road to love, the road to freedom, to devotion and to simplicity - for God is synonymous with all of them. Based on this premise, God emerges as the centre around which are guided and gravitate all things that make up the constellation called life.

Rabindranath Tagore was born on 7 May, 1861. At some time towards the end of the seventeenth century, his forefathers had migrated from their native lands to Govindpur, one of the three villages which later came to constitute Calcutta. In the course of time, the family came to acquire property and considerable business interests through the pursuit of commercial and banking activities. They had particularly benefited from the growing power of the British East India Company. Rabindranath's grandfather, Dwarkanath Tagore, lived lavishly and broke the Hindu religious ban of those times by travelling to Europe, just like his contemporary, Rammohan Roy, the nineteenth century social and religious reformer. Roy started a religious reform movement in 1828 that came to be known as the Brahma Samaj Movement.² Rabindranath's grandfather supported Roy in his attempts at reforming Hindu society. Dwarkanath's son, Devendranath Tagore, also became a staunch supporter of the Brahma Samaj Movement. In order to encourage its spread, in 1863 he established a meditation centre and guest house on some land about 100 miles from Calcutta at a place called 'Santiniketan', the Abode of Peace. Although deeply steeped in Hindu and Islamic traditions, Tagore's family contributed large sums of money for the introduction of Western education, including colleges for the study of science and medicine. This peculiar situation explains the combination of tradition and experiment that came to characterize Rabindranath Tagore's attitude to life.³

Rabindranath's father was one of the leading figures of the newly awakened phase of Bengali society. He had been educated at one stage in Rammohan Roy's Anglo-Hindu school and had been greatly influenced by Roy's character, ideals and religious devotion. Devendranath Tagore was well versed in European philosophy and, though deeply religious, did not accept all aspects of Hinduism. He was to have a profound influence on his son's mental and practical attitudes. Rabindranath was the fourteenth child of his parents. His brothers and sisters were poets, musicians, playwrights and novelists and the Tagore home was thus filled with musical, literary and dramatic pursuits. The family was also involved with diverse activities at the national level. Important changes were taking place in Bengal at the time Rabindranath was born. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar had been attempting to reform the position of women in society. Schools using English as the language of teaching were being established, alongside the traditional Sanskrit schools. Vidyasagar had established Bengali-medium schools at different places in Bengal with little or limited government support. He had also established a centre to train teachers for these schools. Rabindranath attended this school and, as he says himself, owed his love of Bengali language and literature to it. He was also sent to a number of English-speaking schools, but he did not like their teaching style and had no wish to be taught in a foreign language. He gradually withdrew from formal schooling when he was around 14 years old. The

remainder of his education was carried out at home through his own personal efforts and with the help of tutors in various subjects.⁴

He also had lessons from professionals in wrestling, music and drawing. The manner of his early schooling was to leave a deep impression on him. When Rabindranath was 12, his father took him to Santiniketan, the meditation centre established in 1863. During their brief stay there, Devendranath gave his son lessons in Sanskrit, astronomy and the scriptures that formed the basis of his reformed religion. After these lessons were over, Rabindranath was free to roam among the fields and forests. This routine continued when father and son journeyed on and stayed at Dalhousie in the Himalayan foothills. After lessons in Sanskrit, English literature and religion, the would-be poet explored the mountains and forests. Life in close proximity to nature was unknown to him in the urban surroundings of Calcutta.

The close and affectionate contact between teacher and pupil that he felt when his father taught him was also completely absent in Calcutta. It was this childhood experience of the willing pupil enthusiastically following lessons given by his father in the manner of a noble teacher among agreeable surroundings that guided Rabindranath in establishing a school at Santiniketan in 1901. In 1878, when he was 17, he was sent to London by his father to qualify for the Indian Civil Service or as a lawyer. He took his matriculation examination and then joined University College, London. He came to like his lessons in English literature, and became exposed to British social life and Western music, both of which he enjoyed. But he returned home suddenly after some eighteen months without completing his education. However, he did gain the impression that human nature was perhaps the same everywhere. Back in India he continued with his personal education and his creative writing and music.⁵

God in Tagore's Philosophy: According to Rabindranath Tagore God is the reason for whom the world came into its existence, so that, we can say that for him God is the efficient cause of the world. Rabindranath has been described a special force as the power of God that causes the whole creation and evolution. Through the power of God the different creatures have been created. Human beings are superior to all the creatures of the universe. Rabindranath does not understand God and truth as two different entities. He believes that God and truth are inseparable aspects of the same reality. But, in metaphysics, they are two different entities. Rabindranath ignore these differences. Tagore was a monotheistic philosopher, because he took God as reality and reality as God. Rabindranath understands the 'absolute' just as Śaṅkara interpreted the concept of Absolute. The realization of this ultimate absolute is possible only through the intuition, rather than the logic or reason, thus for him, God is a person. According to Radhakrishnan "he (Tagore) gives us a human God, dismisses with contempt the concept of world illusion, praises action overmuch and promises fullness of life to the human soul" (Radhakrishnan, 1918) . We can realize His existence by the internal realization. Many names, in his philosophy, has been used instead of God, these are 'universal man', 'the supreme man', 'the supreme spirit', 'the infinite personality'. Tagore accepted two different aspects of God. According to him, God is personal as well as He is impersonal. Rabindranath takes Absolute as the impersonal aspects of God. Being the impersonal God is featureless, attribute less. There is a similarity between the impersonal aspect of Tagore's God and the nirguṇa Brahma of Śaṅkara. On the other hand, one more similarity can be found between the personal aspect of God and saṅguṇa Brahma of Śaṅkara. The impersonal aspect of God is infinite and the personal aspect of God is finite. The finite aspect is the part of the infinite, so that finite beings take their births from the infinite. Tagore considered finite as forms and infinite as idea, but he does not make any clear distinction of them. Rather than he made an interrelationship between them to develop a synthesis of them. "For revilement of idea, form is absolutely necessary. But the idea which is infinite cannot be expressed in forms which are absolutely finite. Therefore forms must always move and change, they must necessarily die to reveal the deathless. The expression as expression must be definite, which it can only be in its form; but at the same time, as the expression of the

infinite, it must be indefinite, which it can only be in its movement. Therefore when the world takes its shape it always transcends its shape; it carelessly runs out of itself to say that its meaning is more than what it can contain” (Tagore, 1917).

Love of God: Nature:

Life is harmony, and the law or principle which governs its rhythms is the principal of love and joy. And the love dwells everywhere as His Omnipresence. Like man Nature is also one of the myriad notes, His creation, the source of joy and His love for mankind. The river, flower, sun, moon, stars, trees, leaves all symbolize His love for mankind. These are the token of love of God for man. That is why:

The Affinity between Man and Nature:

Tagore has accepted that there is intimate relationship between man and Nature. Tagore accepts the interdependence of man and Nature on both of them. Tagore believes that man cannot separate himself from Nature. Man sometimes tries to prove his superiority by keeping himself apart from the Nature but as he becomes wiser, he breaks the walls of separation between himself and Nature, a deeper unity grows between them. Man himself is both Nature and spirit, and so he cannot reject Nature, as Nature has to depend upon man for giving meaning to it. Tagore does not look upon Nature as hostile to man. He does not consider it as an enemy to self or its aspiration. He has a positive view of the kinship of spirit to Nature.

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