

Reinstating Harmony Through Religion: An Evitable Endeavour Of Tagore In Select Works

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The very term 'religion' has been closely entwined with the lives of every human being living in this world in his or her own way. The word etymologically has been adapted from the word 'religio', which historically meant 'scrupulousness'. The early usage of the word was not related to any God by any means, rather it was taken to be a consequence of taboos, promises, curses, or transgressions. The phrase 'nobis religio' translated as 'our way of worship' was seen to be widely used in the context when a group of people rivaled against another group on account of being committed to different Gods. However, the word 'religio' later developed into encompassing a host of senses. Augustine considered the term as the abstract expression for 'how one worships God' following the practice of using the word, referring to the expression for devotion to one's divine as well as their human relationships. The term has been further used in the middle-ages to describe vows taken to exist under a definitive rule. The devotees were also called by the adjective form of the word, while in noun form it alluded to worship; 'religiones' being the plural form. Significantly as time passed, the Christians and the non-Christians considered 'religion' to be a genus of which they were two species. The European Christians continued to put this concept into use as a social genius which defines the varieties of cultures they have encountered as they invaded different regions of America, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, and Oceania. However, from the twentieth century, the concept has been further widened being connected to not only the practices of connecting people with spirits but at the same time connecting people to power and forces that impel to lack their minds, wills, and personalities. Thus, in short 'religion' as a taxon refers to the different kinds of social practices prevalent in different cultures which categories them into different groups and distinguish one from the other.

India has been known for ages to be the cradle for great religions. Being a multicultural country, there is a perfect blend of races, cultures, customs, languages, belief systems, and food habits. The religious view of India has been shaped by the ideas of different sages and seers on account of their perspective of defining divinity and this is how the country has reached to such a spiritual height. In India and beyond, it is believed that religion has the main role of aiding men to cultivate and expose the traits which are already inherent in their basic nature and ultimately helping them to grow their trust in these features. Here, it is important to note that, since these characteristics in the individuals do not form naturally and because they are ever evolving too at the same time, religion finds its prominence in this context. The great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore can be safely be identified as a genuine and apt manifestation of the nineteenth century spirit of India. He is always reputed for his endeavour to celebrate peace and beauty of the world through his works. He called his philosophy of religion to be a 'poet's religion.'

Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore has time and again proven himself to be the world poet. It is impossible to bind him by the borders of a single country and likewise the readers have discovered over and over again that he has not limited himself to one single religion. To Tagore, religion can be in the simplest form – both 'divinization of man' and 'humanization of God' at the same time. While explaining the phrase 'humanization of God', he seems to hint at the fact that God is present in every human being. He repeatedly wants to establish his claim through his literary venture that humanity is the essence of religion. According to him, religion must be a means to unite all forces rather than being a dividing entity. Religion for an individual must be a mode by which he or she can rise up above his society, nation, and sect. A truly religious person takes the help of religion to rediscover his or her own nature, according to Tagore. He has always identified religion with love. Tagore proclaims that religion must help to initiate hunger for unity through joy and sorrow, which in turn will constitute the spiritual substance of religion and the desire for this unity will instigate to unravel the whole world in one's own self. Religion is thus the process of experiencing God through the deep harmony that exists among all that survive on Earth. Moreover, in India, it is much more evident as, in the view of Tagore, religion leads to unity in the face of its diversity.

Tagore neither draws his religious beliefs from any written doctrines or theological principles nor his perspective of religion emerges from any God; rather it is deeply rooted in human beings. In fact, he asserts

boldly that institutional religions can never be true and more effectively it is perhaps meant to be dogmatic but not necessarily with any particular honest purpose. He admits, "It was through idiosyncrasy of my temperament that I refused to accept any religious teaching morely because people in my surroundings believed it to be true.....my mind was brought up in an atmosphere by freedom.... freedom from the domination of any Reed that had its sanction in the definite authority of some organized body of worshippers." (Tagore 91) According to him, a man's religion is drawn from his ultimate consciousness of his or her own self. Man in its true sense finds his or her essence as a human being through religion. Divinity lies amidst all multiplicity, in his words, which can be actually a creative principle of unity. Reason and knowledge alone cannot put God into the grip of man. It is not only divine that is evident in creation; rather creation is the manifestation of divine itself. Tagore has a view almost alike the Christian faith that God has made man in his own image and thus He has attempted to create a harmony among man, nature, and himself. In this context, he used a term 'Jivana Devota', by which he stated that God resides in the heart of human beings.

The grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore, Maharishi Debendranath Tagore was reputed for being an important member of Brahma Samaj, which was established in 1842 by Ram Mohun Roy. The Brahma people believed God to be infinite, indivisible, imperceptible, and indefinable. They neither believed in any elaborate rituals nor in any form of idol worship. Another very important point to be mentioned in this aspect is that they never had any faith in the practice of appointing a priest, who will serve as an intermediary between common man and God. Precisely, they always advocated against any kind of discrimination on the basis of caste, class, religion, etc. When Rabindranath Tagore took over the responsibilities of this Brahma Samaj, somehow the rift with the two sects, i.e., Adi Brahma Samaj and the Brahma Samaj of India slowly began to dissolve, mainly with the involvement of Keshab Chandra Sen. His religious philosophies can be observed in his works like *The Religion of Man*, *Sadhana: The Realization of Life*, *Gitanjali* etc.

Tagore edited a compilation of his own Hibbert lectures given at Oxford University and published it under the title *The Religion of Man* in 1931 in which he talked about a surplus energy characterizing human nature which gets manifested best through creative art. It is in this volume where one can get a glimpse of his idea of spiritual principles transcending beyond any organised religion prevalent in this world and here he also stresses on the universality of their nature. The book begins with an overview of the poet's personal life and the evolution of his religious and spiritual thoughts as he passed through different stages of his life. Next, he moves on to explain the role of imagination and freedom in the creative expression of man. This creativity no matter where it manifests itself, be it in science, philosophy or arts, can be considered to be a part of the 'religion of man'. (Web) Tagore writes –

"... the universe to which we are related through our sense perception, reason or imagination, is necessarily Man's universe. Our physical self gains strength and success through its correct relationship in knowledge and practice with its physical aspect. The mysteries of all its phenomena are generalized by man as laws which have their harmony with his rational mind ... I have expressly said that I have concentrated my attention upon the subject of religion which is solely related to man, helping him to train his attitude and behaviour towards the infinite in its human aspect. At the same time, it should be understood that the tendency of the Indian mind has ever been towards that transcendentalism which does not hold religion to be ultimate but rather to be a means to a further end. This end consists in the perfect liberation of the individual in the universal spirit across the furthest limits of humanity itself ... In the Sanskrit Language the bird is described as "twice-born"--once in its limited shell and then finally in the freedom of the unbounded sky. 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." (Web)

With this assertion, he tries to explain the spiritual journey of every human being. He also mentions that his philosophy is highly influenced by the Baul singers. He ends the book by putting forward a pressing concern of the modern world that geographical separateness impacts man's understanding of the divine in different way as they tend to ignore their humanity, which is always a common factor. Hence, he advocates strongly for a universal God, disregarding the racial or national identity of individuals. In this regard, he highlights the role of brahmacharya (education), garhasthya (worldly work), vanaprasthya (retreat), and pravrajya (awaiting freedom across death) in the lives of human beings.

In his Preface to *Sadhana: The Realization of Life*, Tagore further strives to explain that a man's words must be justified by spirit rather than by his letters. This book is also a compilation of eight lectures on his religious philosophy. Here, he mainly ponders upon the chasm existing in between the self and God. He efforts to project how animal world is different from the human world drawing upon the teachings of the *Upanishads*, which he had always focused upon from his childhood. He also deals with the philosophy of creation and the subject of mortality. He directly gets critical about Western materialism, though he appreciates Western scientific theories including Darwinism, which he claims to be the central truth about living beings.

In his seminal work, *Gitanjali*, Tagore in his poetical pieces or song offerings realizes divinity through purification of the soul of man and through man's service towards humanity. He denies national boundaries and appeals to the entire mankind to get united through love and harmony. The central theme of this volume is man's yearning to get united with God. Hence, the lyrics are primarily religious in nature, describing a devotional quest for the mystical realization of the soul. A man wants to surrender his or her entire self to God

through the songs. The poems are evidently written in the Bhakti tradition, having a significant influence of Vedas and other sacred texts of Indian culture.

It can be safely concluded thus that Tagore's poetry, religion, and music sprung from his vision of life and the world. He has always made a sincere effort to seek the truth prevailing everywhere.

"My religion is essentially poet's religion. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channels as does the inspiration of my music. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life." (Tagore 25)

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