

Rabindranath Tagore's Concept of Religion

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Abstract- This research paper describes Rabindranath Tagore's concept of Religion along with various influences on his mind viz. Maha Rishi (his father) Baul singers, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Though he was thoroughly immersed in Indian philosophy. He had never been narrow minded. He used to accept the changes, his lucidity and straightforwardness about his philosophy of life is discussed in this paper. All the influences are perceived in a sequential frame work so that we can recognize and distinguish various important points of his transition. His concept of religion is discussed here with close penetration.

In Valmiki Pratibha, the Goddesses Sarasvati has come down to melt the heart of cruel robber and to bless him with the power of music. In the same way his play 'Malini' is full with religious thoughts as the protagonist wanted to spread the message of Buddhism in the whole country. 'Chitra' is the play, wholly based on the great religious epic 'Mahabharata'. The play 'Chandlika' has criticized the contemporary existing prejudice, which was prevailing in the name of religion and caste. The play 'Shyama' witnesses the terrible consequences, if someone follows his or her whims, power and physical gratification without thinking of consequences. The researcher has explained Tagore's message of serenity, tranquility and unity of all religions with the help of his plays. And it explores the basic themes like 'God and human soul', 'God and nature', 'nature and human soul' and 'individual and humanity'. It explores Tagore's aim that to convert religious orthodoxy of myths into spirituality. It also describes his image of God in his epoch-making work 'Gitanjali', and his idea of 'Jivan-Devata'. He wanted to reach man to the highest level, to the zenith that is the 'Divinization of Man'. He believed that human being and Divinity do not belong to two different orders, they are just like two sides of the same coin.

Keywords- concept of religion, straightforwardness, philosophy, existing prejudice, God and human soul, individual and humanity, religious orthodoxy, Divinization of Man, spirituality, mischievousness, innermost faith, unambiguity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Religion can be defined as a belief on someone whom we have not yet seen still we cherish faith in Him. An innermost faith, whom we ever try to communicate with the help of prayer. This prayer is like water that keeps the roots of faith alive. It is the essence of culture where we get assurance that we are safe and protected from wickedness. Religion is something that which we call perpetual and eternal. We all human being and each and every living thing eventually are subject to perish. But if something is everlasting, which will never end, is nothing else but God, the Almighty, Who is an endless phenomenon. Religion is the perception of that which surpasses the limitations of reason and scientific knowledge.

Religion protects us like a safeguard and holds all of us together in a pervading unity. Without religion the world would have been mayhem of utter havoc, anarchy and pandemonium. Without this faith nothing could have been ever born and nothing would have ever remain alive. Because of this belief we can perpetually get protected and prevail over the fear of mischievousness and fear of death. We must say that after getting tied with religion the meaning of death changes from negative to positive and death becomes a gateway to Heaven.

The aim of religion is to elevate human being from physical plane and to make them work on higher level that is spiritual. For that it gives the complete rule of life and law of man's living. Though we human being can survive without being religious but with religion we can get control over ourselves. Because of religion we restrain ourselves from doing wrong deeds. As we have a certain kind of awe and a veneration that God who is omnipresent. He is always there, who can punish us for this, and we prevent ourselves from doing anything wrong. Without religion we will spend the whole life as it is. But when we are in, we step up with spiritual and intellectual progress.

Some people misinterpret religion with customs, rituals, traditions and even festivals. These things are nothing but the practices that are followed by our ancestors. Actually Religion has two aspects inner and outer. From inner point of view it is a real faith in God. It is an inmost spiritual experience of giving ourselves completely to an unrevealed faith. From an outer point of view it is an expression of belief in religious institutions by following traditions and customs.

But without performing any of the customs and without following any creeds and doctrines we can be a nice devotee and we can be a true religious person. By following practices and taboos we go through uncertainties and apprehensions. Whereas religion is something that gives us assurance, reliability and faith. Religion is actually a positive and clear attitude of life that is full of straightforwardness and unambiguity. It enables us to live life with balance, concord and unanimity within ourselves and with society.

The most esteemed Indian thinkers of 20th century are Balgangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Sarwapalli Radhakrishnan and Rabindranath Tagore, all are of the view that man should improve his status, he should develop his physical world and materialistic world but at the same time he should always take out some time to develop in himself spiritual values. It is immensely important to develop thoroughly, physically, intellectually and spiritually.

2. VARIOUS INFLUENCES ON TAGORE'S MIND

Particularly Rabindranath Tagore's attitude towards religion is something outstanding and different from others. For his idea of religion is the 'religion of the whole race of mankind'. He was largely inspired by '*Upanishads*', '*Bhagvatgita*', his father 'Maharishi', 'Baul-Singer', 'Vaishnavism', 'Brahmo Samaj', 'Christianity', 'Buddhism', 'monotheistic ideology of Islam' and 'liberal national outlook that gives utmost importance to humanity'. He has developed encouraging affirmations towards humanity.

One of the great and long-lasting influences on Tagore's mind is his father. He came to inherit right from his very birth a deep religious vision because of his close alliance with his father Maharishi at Jorasanko home. He believed that the ideas of '*Vedas*'

and '*Upanishads*' were proliferated and prospered as an indispensable part of cultural heritage.

His father Debendranath, who had agreed on the fact that there should be a particular source book on which the reformed religion of Brahmos could be based. When we examine his father's life we can understand the cause that compelled him to renounce his home. We can also come to know the spiritual gains that he made which rationalize his renunciation from worldly life. He was a very strict and sincere yet he had never been a conformist kind of man. He even kept himself away from all the rituals of Bengalis. He travelled out empty handed and gave up everything including his customs, traditions and his habits. Even the strict social conventions could not hold him back. It was his own will and his own spiritual thirst that led him to this spiritual path.

This path was born out of the inborn and inherent nature of his soul. Having got rid of all the other paths, he had found that path for himself. On the course of his journey he had to put up with much agonies, afflictions and social mistreat but that did not demoralize him. He was of the view that God is the Lord of the universe. He wants it in this way. It is His wish that He connects to us only individually. He himself helped us to build an invulnerable individuality that can hold out against all attacks from all quarters. It is within this flawless and unblemished isolation that He has decided the spot where the two of us will meet.

Maharishi was of the view that religion is a natural light. Just as natural light comes to us naturally without making efforts so also religion. It reaches to human being effortlessly. It is true and eternal, we are only supposed to seek God and adequately stir our heart. We cannot do anything else just as we cannot produce daylight similarly religion cannot be acquired through human efforts. In order to deliver his thoughts Maharishi took the help of 'Brahmo Samaj', which became the second most influence on his youngest son.

Rabindranath Tagore also had a great impact of 'monotheistic ideology of Islam'. He firmly believed that God is only one. He had made us, created us then why we are following castes, untouchability, idol worship and multiple Gods. We all are His production so we all are same. Like his father he also took the help of Brahmo Samaj to preach all these things and firmly opposed 'Sati Pratha' which was the most abominable

act of contemporary India. He taught that true religion cannot be personal, regional, appropriated by caste and colour. True religion is common to all and equal to all. In every religion there are lots of misconceptions and miscomprehensions that should be removed and Rabindranath Tagore has learnt it from his father, who being founding member of Brahmo Samaj did the same. He left most influential mark on his youngest son Rabindranath. Rabindranath Tagore was very much inspired by 'Baul Singers' of Bengal in particular. They are the travelling saints in India, they go on travelling all around the country, helping and serving mankind. They do not believe in any of the religious institution nor do they enter in any of the place of worship in order to perform religious rites and ceremonies. They have a strong belief in the 'love for humanity' and they do it by self-sacrificing duties. He found ultimate comfort with the songs of Baul singers who used to spectacle their thoughts with their songs. They are open-minded and free thinkers. According to them, the belief in God is not in constituting a formal expression of reverence to a Deity, but the faith in God is 'to serve humanity'.

Rabindranath Tagore came personally in contact with 'Baul Singers' in 'Shaileedah Period'. Where he met 'Lalan Fakir', who used to create his own poetry, Rabindranath liked to spend time with him, talking to him, listening his stories and his self-created songs. Lalan fakir did not believe in God but that does not mean he rejected Divinity. He believed in Godhood but that God exist in human-being. If one wants to make God happy he should take care of those who are deprived and dispossessed of everything. As human being are created by God, by making His creature happy we can make Him happy. The same idea seemed acceptable to Rabindranath Tagore. He named the idea 'Jivan-Devata', his lord of life.

Apart from that he had a great impact of 'Nirguni saints of North India' and 'the Godly love of Vaishnav poets', that is 'Vaishnavism', 'Sufism', 'the hymn of Mirabai', 'Tulsidas' and 'mystic songs of Kabir' have influenced him to the great extent. Rabindranath Tagore is the first person who has added literary value to all these primitive sources of Indian tradition. Some of their poems and songs have been translated by Tagore himself.

Let us see the influence of various religions on Tagore. All these borrowed religious theories enabled him to decorate and transform his own thoughts.

3. INFLUENCE OF 'HINDUISM'

Let us see what Upanishads says about God. According to 'Upanishads' whatever is apparent in this world confirms the presence of Divinity. Each and everything in this world, including every human being, trees, seas, sky, planets, and mountains manifest His existence. We find various similarities between the Tagore's concept of religion and the ancient sagacity of 'Upanishads' and 'Bhagvatgeeta'. These similarities transcend the gap of at least three thousand years, yet they seem to be adjacent and apparent.

4. INFLUENCE OF 'BUDDHISM'

The second most influential religion for Rabindranath Tagore is 'Buddhism'. It is Buddha's moral and spiritual teaching that have made a great impact on his mind. His views about religion, humanism and internationalism, his predominance on endless love, compassion, pity and his refusal of negative attitude, anger, and hatred are all inspired by Buddha's preaching.

5. INFLUENCE OF 'CHRISTIANITY'

One more influential religion for Tagore is 'Christianity'. He picked all the beautiful and positive things from all religions, and gifted the world his 'ideology' which was based on those positive things. According to the sacred writing of Christianity contained in the 'Bible', 'when God was born as a man with his own choice he took upon himself the responsibility of the sins that we people had committed and a crown of thorn upon his head, representing his suffering. One who endures penance and misery in life, he is very close to God'.

6. INFLUENCE OF 'ISLAM'

Tagore had been very much influenced with 'Monotheistic Ideology' of Islam. He believed that God is only One. He always refused paganism. Islam affirms that God is Infinite, human being are finite this is the difference between God and any living creature. God has made the world and He has created the time. In the whole universe only one thing that will remain forever and ever, He is God. He has infinite time, His time has no limits.

7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that a thorough study of Rabindranath Tagore and his selected plays bring to light that his eloquently written work offers philosophical perceptions of life. It also lucidly displays its various influences that molded his virtuosity. The virtuosity that is able to influence not only Indian education and literature but also Indian minds.

Rabindranath Tagore's work has fascinated not only his country and his continent but also the whole world. If we consider him as a writer of our country only, we are not judging his brilliance rightly. He has written for the anguish, longing and hankering of all humanity, for he has a vision of the whole world. In his life time he became a heroic figure with his unchallengeable opinion. With his encouraging and magnificent imagination, he articulates his coherent, spontaneous and lofty thoughts which are unparalleled and relevant even today. Though there is abundant writing available on his political, social, and literary viewpoint but his religious views and his thoughts on love are not that accessible. When we see his writings with religious perspective, it seems some of his thoughts remained neglected. We are here going to speculate on the same, with the reference of contemporary Hinduism and image of God, and his own chronological modification of religious thoughts and philosophical thoughts.

Religion is something that which we call innermost spiritual experience, this experience is so powerful that one surrenders himself to the unknown reality that reality claims about the existence of God. It is a belief on that Almighty that He is there and He will be there for us, with us ever and ever. This belief is so powerful that it can transcend the human reason and scientific knowledge.

8. FINDINGS

We can sum up the main features of Rabindranath Tagore's writings based on critical evaluation.

- He was such an exceptional man who could shower down his exceptional creative imagination on the whole world.
- He was the one who is bestowed with multiple merits.

- He was both intensely oriented with Indian established thoughts and encouraged with modernistic sensibility.
- He was a messenger of love and peace as he expresses his views on universal love.
- His writings are far ahead of his time.
- He sheds illumination and fondness on his age which will remain till ages to come and exposed unidentified perspective of thought.
- He worked like a mediator between human being and Divine.
- His brilliance modified and augmented whatever he touched.
- His thoughts are worth soothing heart and even the soul of humanity.
- He made fertile almost all literary fields and ventured to explore some unrevealed and unknown fields.
- His vision about man's destiny was flawless and firm.

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