

Religious Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore: A Critical Analysis of the Poet's Selected Literature Works

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Abstract

Historically, Bangladesh is a multiculturalist country where religious tolerance has existed for years. However, since the beginning of the 21st century, this country has been witnessing a growing number of religious conflicts that have posed a significant threat to our glorious history of communal harmony. Amidst this troubled situation, Rabindranath Tagore's messages of religious peace, harmony and universal brotherhood can be the solution to our divided world, to our divided country. The objective of this research paper is to explore in depth Tagore's religious thought and vision that will undermine the evil spirits of racial rivalry and religious divisions that pervade in our society. By conducting a qualitative analysis of the gathered data, both from primary and secondary sources, this research paper has attempted to understand the religious philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore; by uncovering different aspects of truth from diverse points of view that underlies in the poet's literary works. The outcome of this research is intended to establish lasting religious peace and harmony in our country and around the world. This research concludes with a hope that as long as Tagore's memory lives in our heart and mind, it will continue to inspire the values and principles of the Bengali people, the values and principles of the world.

Key Words: Supreme Reality, Bhakti tradition, Vaishnava thought and philosophy, Spiritual Humanism, Religion of Man

Introduction

Bangladesh is a country that has always celebrated its multiculturalism by wonderfully blending its various races, religions, cultures, customs, languages and food habits into one unity. She has been able to assimilate all the great, diverse religions into one absolute harmony. The people here have been living side by side for centuries and respecting each other regardless of their

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ethnicity, religion, gender and political preferences. Historically, religious tolerance has existed in this country for years although sometimes there occurred tension and conflict. After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, a new constitution that was secular in character was adopted. Secularism, which originally meant religious neutrality, was understood as one of the basic principles of the constitution and the dominating cultural norm of the country. As a matter of fact, a growing number of religious conflicts have been occurring in Bangladesh since the beginning of the 21st century. Many factors have been instrumental in triggering religious intolerance that poses a significant threat to our glorious history of communal harmony. People have been drastically divided on the issues of religion, e.g., whether one religion is true, or all religions are equally true or false have partitioned them into various groups and sects. Amidst this world which is so filled with hatred, division and shallowness, Rabindranath Tagore stands as a symbol of peace, tolerance and universal love. His messages of religious harmony and universal brotherhood can be the solution to our divided world, to our divided country.

According to poet Ezra Pound, Tagore's literature contained a melodious perplexity which has distinguished it as "great art" (Hurwitz, 1964, p. 55). He also compared Tagore's '*Gitanjali*' with Dante's '*The Paradiso*' which rightly justifies the all-embracing solicitation of those poems. Ezra Pound felt that Rabindranath was a man of supreme brilliance who rightfully carried the Eastern light to the Western land (Prakash, 2013). He can also be compared with any writer in Paris possessing a very fine and subtle sense of humor. (Hurwitz, 1964, p. 57) When Tagore's philosophy and poetic perspective gets dissolved into one person, it leads that person to a universal religion. Within this religion, one has to strive to identify the all-embracing soul comprising the objective aspects outside and the theological aspects within (Prakash, 2013). This religion can be termed as a "Poet's Religion". Strickland has rightly observed that Tagore has immeasurably blessed India by influencing her literature. Tagore has also worked for the promotion, exaltation and spiritualization of India's musical ideals on a global scale. Tagore's literature will be loved by everyone in everywhere wherever "there are lovers of the good and beautiful in art" (Prakash, 2013).

While Gandhi has initiated India's national strife towards freedom, Tagore has bestowed an intellectual spirit onto it. However, these two great minds of Indian soil also had their differences of opinion. Tagore was obsessed with creating more space for argumentative judgment and was also reluctant to accept any traditionalist view. Tagore always wanted to establish a greater connection with the rest of the world. He also had a deep reverence for science, objectivism and realism in general (Sen, 2001). Avinash Moharil, in his journal

article 'Mysticism in Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*' has justifiably stated that Rabindranath Tagore was glorified by Mahatma Gandhi as "The Great Sentinel". According to Avinash, many versatile roles have been played by him with consistent excellence during his long and prolific career (Avinash, 2012). Tagore and Einstein, two sagacious men possessing great intelligence joined together from two different parts of the world in order to overcome the gap between the East and the West as well as between science and humanities. Both Tagore and Einstein sought out each other going beyond national borders and subject areas to share their perspectives as they were operating in a single world of international academics (Einstein & Tagore, 2001). This research paper attempts to explore Tagore's religious philosophy and his vision of religion that are well-expressed in many literature works of this great poet. The main objective of this research is to construct an in-depth analysis of Tagore's religious beliefs and thoughts portrayed in his selected literature works.

Research Objectives

This research is an attempt to understand the religious philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore by analyzing his selected literatures, to uncover different aspects of truth from diverse points of view that underlies the great poet's literary works. It is expected that this research will explore in depth Tagore's religious thoughts and beliefs that will undermine the evil spirits of racial rivalry and religious divisions that pervade in our society. The outcomes of this research will play a crucial role to encourage the principles of unity and brotherhood amongst people of different religious backgrounds in our country. It is expected that results of this research will enable our policymakers, educators and media personnel to revise their policies, to conceptualize their policies on the basis of Tagore's philosophies. The conclusion of this research will be intended to establish lasting religious peace and harmony in our country and around the world.

Literature Review

Rabindranath's religious thought and beliefs is not just a mere collection of written doctrines or theological principles. As a matter of fact, it is something that is inalienable from one's soul, from one's conscience. The verses of the *Upanishads* and the teachings of the Buddha have greatly influenced the poet. Hence he has practised these philosophies in his life as well as in his preaching (Tagore, 1918). Rabindranath was born in a family which was solemnly developing a monistic religion at that time based upon the teachings of the *Upanishads* (Tagore, 1932, p. 91). Tagore reconstructed the doctrine of the immanence of God portrayed in the *Upanishads*. He also earnestly contemplated the *Upanishadic* understanding of *Brahman: Satyam, Jnanam,*

Anantam (Truth, Knowledge and Infinity). Tagore unfolded the Supreme Reality in and through the Nature, “The first stage of any realization was through my feeling of intimacy with the Nature” (Tagore, 1932, p. 18). Tagore believed that the realization of our self cannot be developed in our detachment from God and the others, but in the perpetual worship through “*yoga*”, through union. Therefore, he recognizes the three *yogas* of the Gita as substantial ways of worshipping the Supreme Reality. Whether Vaishnavism had any influence upon Tagore’s life and preaching is an arguable matter, since Vaishnavism disregards this present life whereas Tagore has given enormous importance to human life and this world. Tagore remarked that Vaishnavism dauntlessly proclaimed that God has tied himself up with the mortals and in that consists “the greatest human existence” (Tagore, 1918, p. 115). Vaishnavism taught Rabindranath the doctrine of peaceful union between God and the human beings. The belief in “*Jivan-Devata*” or the Lord of Life is a profound personal designation of God, who goes beyond the poet’s self (Edacheriparambil, 1990, p. 34). In Tagore’s preaching, the Supreme Reality in some way or the other has been given a human character. While describing the objective of the book ‘The Religion of Man’, the poet stated that “The idea of the humanity of our God or the divinity of Man the Eternal is the main subject of this book” (Tagore, 1932, p. 17). Tagore was born during a great period in the history of Bengal when the course of three different movements were leading the country towards a new cultural norm. Amongst these three movements, Tagore was greatly influenced by the religious one, which was directed at a new form of social and religious revolution. The Brahmo Samaj was functioning as a medium of this movement, of which Tagore’s father was “an important member” (Sinha, 1993, p. 1). The members of the Brahmo Samaj were regarded as “Hindu Protestants” who assembled in themselves a scientific outlook along with a deep admiration for the classic tradition of their Indian culture.

In ‘*Creative Unity*’, Tagore has urged his readers not to live their entire life as “rag-pickers in other people’s dustbins” (Prakash, 2013). The poet viewed religion to be free and independent. Nevertheless, Tagore had a very progressive mind which glorified the influence of the ideas of the West upon the East and vice versa. Goethe has rightfully called him a “global-citizen”. The concept of ‘*Visva-Bharati*’ was envisaged to associate the entire human species together in order to spread messages of truth, beauty and goodness beyond all borders of race, religion or nation. This would make India responsible for offering it’s best to the entire world in exchange of what it receives (Prakash, 2013). As a matter of fact, the visionaries of modern education system both in the East and the West have taken inspirations from many of Tagore’s models and examples. However, Tagore’s special offering was that he strongly prioritized

on peace and harmony, on justice and fairness, and on all-over development of the human nature (Kabir, 1961, pp. 103-109). Therefore, the concept of '*Visva-Bharati*' was based on creating a small world of diversity that will ultimately pave its way for today's international system (Prakash, 2013). Our world is still filled with so much hatred and hostility, divisions and schisms in its every corner. In order to broaden our outlook and to establish lasting peace and harmony on this earth, it is high time for us to take inspirations from Tagore's message of universal brotherhood. Tagore, as a promoter of modern education system and globalization, has always glorified freedom of conscience, freedom of judgment and imagination. He also plead to the people of India and to the rest of the world on the fundamental importance of science and objectivity, of reasoning and realism.

Tagore has defined religion as the realization and appreciation of a harmonious union between the soul of the living being and the soul of the Supreme Being or '*Paramatma*' (Tagore, 1931). When Tagore arrived amongst the European intellectuals in 1912, it was rightly a source of comfort and solace for all of them. Poet Ezra Pound have stated that they identified signals of "a new world of faith and peace....new Greece", all of a sudden, in Tagore. (Nabaneeta, p. 282) Ezra Pound further wrote that the Bengali poet appeared amongst them with a promise of peace and serenity, with a commitment of harmony and tranquility, during an age of steel and mechanics. Tagore made a quiet pronouncement of the union "between man and the gods, between man and nature" (Hurwitz, 1964, pp. 55-64). In his preface to the *Gitanjali*, poet Yeats has remarked that all the motivations of humankind can be found in Tagore's psalms, in his eulogies. In fact, Tagore is the first amongst our ascetics who has not refused to live, but has taken inspirations out of Life itself. The present research will be an initiative to construct an in-depth analysis of Tagore's religious philosophy and his vision of religion portrayed in his selected literatures. This research will be an attempt to understand the underlying truths of Tagore's religious beliefs and thoughts that are well expressed in his various literary works.

Research Methodology

This research was conducted in qualitative method, through a scientific method of observation. During this research, the primary data were collected from books and treatises written by Rabindranath Tagore and books and treatises written by other authors reflecting upon Tagore's religious thought and philosophy. Two literatures of Rabindranath Tagore, e.g. '*Gitanjali*' and '*The Religion of Man*' was mainly pursued to collect the primary data. Many other literatures of Rabindranath Tagore which reflect upon the poet's religious philosophy were followed as well while undertaking this research. Journal

articles and newspaper sources, available both in print and online mediums, on the relevant subject were also consulted. Researcher of this study conducted in-depth interviews of research scholars on Tagore at the University of Dhaka in order to collect reflections of such scholars on religious philosophy of Tagore. Researcher of this study also conducted semi-structured interviews of other Rabindra scholars to get an in-depth insight on the research topic. A qualitative analysis of the gathered data was undertaken to outline the results of this research study.

Observation, Research Findings and Discussion

Common themes which emerged from the analysis of data will be discussed here. The eleven main themes that emerged during the analysis stage are:

Influence of the Bhakti Tradition upon Tagore

Tagore's India has always been trying to develop a social cohesion amongst its people within which everyone could be held united, yet fully enjoying the freedom of maintaining their individual differences. This nation has tried to create a synthesis of different races, recognizing the real differences between them, while seeking for some basis of unity alongside. This fundamental basis was constructed through our ascetics, like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others preaching one God to different races of India (Sharma & Chakravarti, 2019). In the philosophical system of Tagore, one can recognize the same doctrine of unity of life, which these ascetics have practised. Tagore's in depth Upanishadic knowledge fused with the spirit of a religious rebel was an outcome of his fostering. Rabindranath was brought up in a family which was one of the forerunners of western education and the western way of life in India. The religious rebel Tagore was the outcome of the influence of Brahmo Samaj, while his intellectual freedom was the result of the heterodox grooming of this young boy. Tagore's ideas of religiousness and spirituality can clearly be seen in *'The Religion of Man'*. Here, besides showcasing his in-depth knowledge of the Upanishads and the Vedas, he exhibits his great interest in other religions like Zoroastrianism, Buddhism etc. (Sharma & Chakravarti, 2019). Tagore has been greatly influenced by Rammohan's and his own father's doctrine of Brahmatism and strongly believed the worship of figures or icons to be completely artificial. Readers can observe this in his article *'Sakar O Nirakar'*. For him, the God or the Deity has always been Infinity. This Infinity is immediately connected to humanity, which is expressed in truth, goodness and beauty. This immediately reminds one of "Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram" (Sharma & Chakravarti, 2019). According to Dr. Basu, the philosophical addresses of Rabindranath in "Santiniketan, Dharma, Sadhana, Creative Unity,

Sanchaya, Manuser Dharma, Man and Personality” are greatly affected by the teachings of *Upanishad*. Besides the poet’s God in ‘*Gitanjali*’ is powerfully identical with the God of *Upanishad* (Basu, n.d.). According to the critics, ‘*Gitanjali*’ should be regarded as Tagore’s theological autobiography. It is originally a collection of religious and spiritual lyrics, which recognizes a relationship between Man and the God. According to Hariom Prasad’s analysis, in ‘*Gitanjali*’ poetry changes its character into another manifestation like “*Vedic Mantras*” (Prasad, n.d.). In the twentieth century, Rabindranath started talking about a “someone”. In his poetry, this love and devotion to “someone”, to God is compassionate, appreciative, lasting and eternal; resembling to a profound connection between lovers. They are entangled within a metaphorical web of the Finite struggling to reach out to the Infinite.

Influence of Kabir upon Rabindranath Tagore

One can observe in Tagore’s literature that Kabir’s beliefs and faith have greatly influenced the poet. He was deeply persuaded by Kabir’s monism and staunch religious syncretism. Tagore took charge of only one translation work, which was Kabir’s. Critics presume that the reason behind undertaking such an act was that in ‘mysticism’ Tagore found a similarity, a harmony with Kabir. In Kabir, Tagore identified one of the pioneers and remarkable figures of India’s unity (Sharma & Chakravarti, 2019). When Tagore was intending to publish his translation work on Kabir, he was deeply influenced, intellectually, by the notion of uniting different conflicting claims and faiths of India.

Influence of Vaishnava Thought and Philosophy upon Rabindranath Tagore

When we analyze the verses and hymns symphonized by Tagore critically, it will be revealed to the readers how Vaishnava theology has influenced this great poet. This is the reason why Vaishnava scholars like Harekrishna Mukhopadhaya, Haridas Das and many others have considered Tagore as a true Vaishnava. Jyoti Ignace Tete, while analyzing the extent of influence Vaishnava thought and philosophy had upon Tagore stated that, Vaishnava theology has taught Tagore the procedure through which human love can be transfigured into spiritual love. Vaishnava theology has also taught Tagore the process through which God can be connected with human beings (Tete, 2017). According to Vaishnava thought and philosophy, a worshipper’s ultimate objective should be to attain a supreme metaphysical realization through “*Prema-Bhakti*” or “loving devotion”, which means the spiritual service through love and veneration. Tagore also recognized the Vaishnava doctrine of “consciousness of love”. Tagore’s article entitled as ‘*Mānuṣya*’ or ‘*Man*’ from his collection ‘*Panchyabhut*’ proclaims that Vaishnava religion has always

made efforts to feel God in all devoted relationships. In '*Sadhana*' Tagore has portrayed God as the "Divine lover" and the connection between human soul and the Supreme can be established only through love. According to Tagore, we get a brief look of the Supreme Being in the person whom we adore. In all loving relationships the Vaishnavas have endeavored to realize God (Tagore, 1913). In some of the early writings of Tagore, one can find an eagerness to connect the Vedic Upanishadic and the Vaishnava perspectives. Rabindranath believed in the Upanishadic doctrine that the Infinite has created the finites out of his own everlasting joy and love.

It may appear to the readers that the poet is trying to make a structured analogy of "theism and absolutism" where theistic side gets more prominence in his thought. Tagore further states that God has two aspects, intrinsic and divine, where the Absolute or the Supreme stands for the divine aspect. Here God is associated with the person immediately and also connected to human being as "lover to the beloved" (Thakur, 2017, pp. 607-621). According to Tagore, God is the substantial ideal of human life and its inspirations. The poet believed that people will portray their true faith in the Supreme Being only when they can realize it in their own experience, only when it is given a human character (Tete, 2017). The verses of '*Apramatta*' in "*Naivedya*" (1308 B.S.) is enriched with a reverence towards Vaishnavism and with the illustrious thought of the Upanishads. In Tagore's early literatures we find an exposition of a "brilliant synthesis" he made between two notions- the notion of human love he learned from the Vaishnava compositions and that of the divine love he learned from the Upanishads (Thakur, 2017, pp. 607-621). Tagore learned from every tradition that he thought to be the best. In his all-encircling vision, the radiance and the affluence of Vaishnava thought and philosophy as well as the moral and spiritual vision of the Upanishadic theology remained side by side (Dasgupta, 1993). Tagore was highly motivated by this notion of the Vaishnava poets and by following them, he has tried to construct a strong systematic bonding between the Absolute and the finites. Vaishnavites were much influenced by the doctrine of the "*Lila*" of God for they assume God to be the "Divine Master" of this universe and the whole universe as His playing-field. According to them, God is all in all and all activities of human being should be devoted to him (Tete, 2017). They also consider the Infinite as "Perfect Man", for whom nothing can be unattainable. This notion of painting the divine with a human character was glorified by Tagore. Tagore also believed that the universe is created by God for his "*Lila*", and all the finite souls or "*Jivatma*" are earnestly waiting to watch him playing in His own created playing field. Tagore has aptly emphasized on this notion in '*Gitanjali*' or '*Song Offerings*'- "You will play in me that is why I have come to this world" (Pradhan, 2002). The Vaishnava

Sadhana always yearns for overcoming the gap between the Infinite and the finites. In Tagore's writings, one can encounter the same propensity. Being influenced by the Vaishnavites, he also depends upon the theistic, intrinsic aspect of God rather than to the divine aspect of God or "*Brahma*". Tagore always acknowledged this notion that unless God reveals himself to the poet, it will be impossible for him to love the detached, the unconcerned Infinite who stays far away. Tagore has written several hymns where he has recognized the Supreme Being as "*Paramakarunāmaya*" or "Absolute Merciful". He has also visualized the Infinite as "*Lilamaya*". Tagore has used this Vaishnava perspective and dauntlessly proclaimed that God needs to rely upon mortal souls for the contentment of his own solicitation- God has to depend upon mortal soul for the completeness of his love (Thakur, 2017, pp. 607-621). Tagore has given more prominence on the doctrine of "*Abhisara*" than to the notion of "Union". Being a true Vaishnavite, Tagore acknowledged that a mortal soul is continuously in search of the path of the Divine, the Absolute. However, the doctrine of "*Abhisara*" refers to the journey of the "*Jivatma*" to become united with the "*Paramatma*". Besides Tagore also believed that the final goal of one's life should be to know the Infinite, the Supreme Being (Thakur, 2017, pp. 607-621).

Vaishnava Thought and Philosophy in 'Gitanjali' or 'Song Offerings'

Tagore's '*Gitanjali*' or '*Song Offerings*' portrays at its best the thought and philosophy of Vaishnavism. This book is filled with hymns and lyrics offered at the feet of the Eternal, the Supreme Being. This book also showcases the spiritual perspective of this great poet. Readers of '*Gitanjali*' can feel that Tagore was deeply influenced by the splendid lyrics, the Vaishnava poets have composed. Tagore used the thought and philosophy of Sri Chaitanya in several of his hymns and lyrics, which had a strong impact upon him. In the first song of '*Gitanjali*', one can trace the resemblance of such thought and philosophy (Thakur, 2017, pp. 607-621). According to Sri Chaitanya, a true Vaishnava man has to be as trivial as grass yet as gracious as the tree. A true Vaishnavite also has to honor and respect others by eliminating all his arrogance and egocentric nature. The eleventh song of '*Gitanjali*' condemns Hindu practices like preaching, remembrance, singing, salvation, contemplation, burning of flowers and incense etc., on the other hand, it glorifies the doctrine of "*Prema-Bhakti*" or "loving devotion" in a profound manner. Tagore has used the philosophy and teachings of Sri Chaitanya to promulgate the message that acts like preaching, singing and remembrance will not lead a worshipper towards the Supreme Being because what God wants is not the imitation of rigorous customs and traditions. Rather God

wants His devotees to pursue the path of “*Prema-Bhakti*” or “loving devotion” (Thakur, 2017, pp. 607-621).

Tagore's Religious Philosophy in the Eyes of Sri Aurobindo

According to Sri Aurobindo, one of the most extraordinary characteristic of Tagore's brilliance is the joyfulness and novelty with which he has blended the whole essence of Vaishnava poetry and transformed it into something which is basically the same yet absolutely new and fresh. Tagore has enriched the old, sweet essence of a deep and profound religion with manifestation of a more perfect, subtle and exquisite richness (Thakur, 2017, pp. 607-621).

The Influence of Spiritual Humanism upon Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore had deeply realized that one way of coming closer to the Supreme Being is through loving our fellow brethren. The poet admitted that during his metaphysical journey how he was misguided and shattered with illusions believing that the path to the Eternal was a “long and exhausting” one. In poem 48, of ‘*Gitanjali*’, the poet exposed his ultimate realization: the Supreme Being dwells in our own true selves (Fernandes, 2019). Tagore further states, in poem 10 of ‘*Gitanjali*’, that the Supreme Being cannot be found decorated in some temple or in some religious shrine. Rather the Divine Being resides in between “the poorest, the lowliest and the lost”. Tagore says, in poem 11 of ‘*Gitanjali*’, that the Eternal cannot be found in the “dark corner of a temple”, rather He can be found in the hard labor and perspiration of a poor person. Tagore can visualize the holy and the sacred in hard labor and certainly not in any sort of monkhood or asceticism that stands for abandoning everything in order to attain the Supreme Being. The poet insists to adjourn all the religious and spiritual activities and instead to pray for “redemption”, man should welcome all hard work and toil with open arms. The poet also opines that as the Supreme Being has delightfully established a connection with the creation, therefore, the finites should not turn to a solitary life of monkhood. Rather the finites should become attached to an earthly life filled with all activities (Fernandes, 2019). The Supreme Being dwells in amongst the modest, the poorest, the lowliest and the lost. According to Tagore's belief, decorations, embellishments and ornaments should be regarded as obstacles between the Supreme Being and the humans. Capitalistic or consumerist tendencies will only take us far away from the Divine, the Infinite. Tagore says in ‘*Gitanjali*’, in poem 7, adornments will only ruin the divine union. According to Tagore, the fundamental characteristic of true religion is love for one's fellow human beings. The next stage for attaining “spiritual humanism” is to eliminate all arrogance, boastfulness and

greediness in an individual in order to attain the Supreme Being amongst the humans. In poem 30 of '*Gitanjali*', the poet cautions us against arrogance and egoism stating that the finite beings should not become absorbed in these bad habits (Fernandes, 2019). Tagore appoints metaphors like walls and chains to symbolize the discrimination between humans. Tagore encourages his fellow beings to destroy all fetters of superstitions and animosity that behold them. He envisions of a world which has not yet been fall into pieces by "narrow domestic walls" and where there is nothing to be afraid of. He envisages of a country that will be free from terror, superstition, animosity and evil wishes. A harsh truth of everyone's life is that we depart from this world emptyhandedly and with a heart awaiting for union with the Supreme Being. In poem 93 of '*Gitanjali*', when the poet is withdrawing from his earthly life, he wants to give up all his temporal belongings and only yearns for gracious and compassionate remarks from his fellow human beings (Fernandes, 2019). In 1914, Tagore wrote to a friend that when the various, multiple races and nations of this earth will be able to dissolve their exclusive characteristics and will attach them to one root of humanity, then and only then a perfect, harmonious world will be established (Fernandes, 2019).

The Influence of Mysticism upon Rabindranath Tagore

The poet was also deeply influenced by a popular sect of Bengal called *Bauls*. The *Bauls* never followed any traditional method of religious ritual observances. According to them, religions are never about a God of divine, spiritual forces, rather it is about "the God of human personality". The hymns and lyrics of '*Gitanjali*' portrays Tagore's contemplation of "God, Man and Nature". '*Gitanjali*', recognized as the most prolific work of this great Poet; exhibits his subtle sense of inspection, his inquisitive nature, his humorous spirit, his humanitarian instinct and his thought and philosophy of "love, life and God". While writing the preface of '*Gitanjali*', W. B. Yeats made his remarks: Rabindranath Tagore, he is so diverse, so sufficient, so natural, so fearless in his passion, so full of amazement and so sensational. As if he is doing something which never seemed unfamiliar, unnatural, peculiar or in need of any justification (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107). '*Gitanjali*' is a prolific spiritual work and its spirituality is going to last longer. This book is devoid of all kinds of objective considerations and materialistic desires or aspirations. Here, Tagore is longing for an ultimate union with God and he is confident that he would succeed in his endeavor (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107). In the poems of '*Gitanjali*', all the components of spiritualism can be found. However, in order to admire its spiritualism we must lay aside our objective concerns and worldly obsessions. The very opening remarks of '*Gitanjali*' portrays Tagore as an ascetic. Here Tagore has showcased the divinity, the eternity of

human soul, whereas the human body is frail, perishable (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107). In '*Gitanjali*', as an ascetic, Tagore also recognizes the necessity of integrity in life and in one's attitude. It is this consciousness which makes Tagore to pledge to God that he would always try to keep his body both holy and sacred, to keep his mind aloof from all falsehoods and to eliminate all the evil desires from his heart. Here Tagore exhibits his firm conviction of attaining "God's company" (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107). In '*Gitanjali*', Tagore wrote poems after poems showing off this strong desire, this faith and this expectation (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107). In course of time, Tagore also unfolded that a "perfect sweetness" has bloomed within his heart. This harmony, this sweetness has clearly been caused due to his intimacy with God. Here Tagore accentuated upon the godhood within him. Tagore has emphasized on his realization that God has been coming closer and closer to him ever since the beginning (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107). The Poet has further ensured that a complete union has taken place between him and the God as he has fused himself in the love of God. It portrays that Tagore's heart is internally outpouring with a mystical passion and spirit (Moharil, 2012). Tagore always supported harmony, consistency and unification. Hence, the composition of asceticism and pragmatism in '*Gitanjali*' would then no longer puzzle the minds of the critics. In '*The Religion of Man*' the poet has declared that the notion of the humaneness of our God or the eternity of Man the Divine is the main discussion of the this book (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107). This fact must be acknowledged that Rabindranath is not a spiritual person in the ordinary sense. Yet he is one of the most liberal, reformist thinkers of all time, so radical, so unconventional. But his graciousness consists in his childlike purity, in his sacredness. He is a poet of the supreme category, also he is an ascetic. In the history of mankind, such a fusion has happened only once or twice before, "in Kahlil Gibran, in Friedrich Nietzsche and in Rabindranath Tagore". With these three persons, the entire order is finished. This has been an astonishing, an exceptional phenomenon in the human history (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107).

Influence of the Teachings of Gautama Buddha

The doctrine of "*Brahmavihara*" or "living in the Infinite" developed by Buddha had a great impact upon Tagore. The poet believed that by being charitable, kind and compassionate, the Infinite will be revealed in Man. Buddha's teaching preaches the doctrine of "*Nirvana*" as the supreme end. To realize its original character we have to know the path of gaining it. *Nirvana* cannot be attained merely by denying all evil thoughts and deeds, but by removing all limitations to love. While discussing the fundamental cause of

our existence, the Buddha has sternly remarked that it has nothing to do with man's *dharma*, man's inner psyche. However, Man's *dharma* is there, where his love attains utter fulfillment. It is through which man acquires the supreme reward for which he has completely renounced himself (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107).

How can "Mukti" be attained

Salvation or "*Mukti*" can only be attained by harmonizing our relationship with "Man the Eternal, Man the Divine". Once a question was asked to Buddha that "Who is the God to whom we must bring our oblation?" According to Tagore, mankind is still looking for its answer. But in order to answer it we must know with the experience of our wisdom what man is, we should know him not only through compassion but through science. We should know him in the joy of invention and in the pain of might and prowess, *tena tyaktena bhunjitha* means "enjoy him through self-renunciation": the renunciation that comes out of love. Our lust disarticulates our attention to materials away from the ultimate value of truth which is the characteristic of the Supreme Being (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107). In such a world there can be no questions of "*mukti*" or salvation, the freedom in reality. In all likeness, our world is an enclosed world of brutal facts. But within this perimeter, we are silently crying of life for "*mukti*". Even when we are aware of the fact that all our prayers will go unanswered. However, Tagore believed that this "*mukti*" or salvation can be found in the truth that lives in the perfect man (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107).

Religion according to Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore has always appreciated his religion through a process of development and never through the help of heredity or assemblage. He was born in a family which at that time was sincerely developing a monistic religion based upon the philosophy and teachings of the *Upanishad*. At first, the poet's mind was absolutely indifferent, coldly detached from any religion whatsoever (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107). The poet refused to accept any religious philosophy or teaching only because people of his community believed it to be the truth. The poet was brought up in an environment where freedom and independence were always appreciated. He earnestly believed in freedom from the influence of any faith or any belief that had its supreme authorization upon some scripture or in the preaching of an organized body of devotees. Therefore, the poet never asserted any authority to preach. When the poet looks back into his past, he realizes that perhaps unknowingly, he has walked upon the path of his Vedic ancestors. Perhaps

he was much inspired by the haughty, summer sky that signifies an ultimate beyond (Matta & Roshan, 2017, pp. 103-107).

Union with the Supreme Reality

According to Rabindranath, there are people amongst whom the spiritual sense is so weak and feeble that their desire for consciousness of the Ultimate is limited to only material possessions. But true spiritual awareness can never be gained through growth or expansion in wealth, property or power. This perceived truth can never be appreciated in space, it can only be appreciated through one's own inner spirit (Tagore, 1931). According to the poet, the word "Yoga", which means to effect harmonious union, has perfectly symbolized the unique psychological perspective which India has in her religion. Some religions glorify our relationship with God and guarantee us of reward in this life and hereafter; if that relationship be kept true and intact. We have such religions in India, which give us some motivations outside ourselves for following the true and proper path. But Tagore believed that those religions that have acquired a higher spiritual truth have always yearned for their fulfillment "in union with *Narayana*" or the 'Supreme Reality of Man', which is divine" (Tagore, 1931). The poet further stated that our union with this holy and sacred cannot be acquired through the mind. But it is the purpose of "Yoga" to rise above those limits which have been falsely built up by the mind. When these limitations are defeated, our inner self will be overwhelmed with joy. When we attain a perfect union with the Ultimate Reality through such freedom that is an end in itself and therefore, is a blessing (Tagore, 1931). According to Tagore, those who comprehends Him, rises above the limits of mortality. In order to be associated with Him, all of us will have to abandon our selfish nature and become "*Visvakarma*" or the world-worker, we must work for all". In order to be united with the "*Mahatma*" or the 'Great Soul', one must contemplate the greatness of soul, one must practice all good works that are universal in character. Such good works will assist a human being towards the realization of "*Visvakarma*" or the world-worker, who works for all" (Tagore, 1931). Rabindranath has taught us about the Supreme Being of this mortal universe whose mind and spirit we share in all our perceived knowledge, in our true love and in our dedicated service. This Supreme Being will reveal itself in ourselves but this realization should come through true worship and devotion, through self-renunciation. According to Rabindranath that is the supreme end of life.

How a Man should live his Life

According to Tagore's observation, every individual should live his life for Man the Great. He must reveal himself through objective and passionless works. His objective works in the fields of science and philosophy, in the fields of literature and arts and in service devotion will symbolize the characteristics of his religion. This religion encourages us to perform such work that exhibits the nature of a Universal Spirit. Amidst of a self-centered life, it invites us towards a great, a supreme sacrifice. After receiving a call from this Universal Spirit, we hurry to surrender our lives to the cause of truth and beauty, to devote our lives to the service of others (Tagore, 1931). The poet further stated that a fundamental stage of his consciousness was gained through his closeness with Nature- the Nature which pleases our personality. It makes our life richer and invigorates our vision. The poet also believed that true pleasure can never be gained through satisfying our materialistic tendencies. True rejoicing can only be attained through the surrender of our selfish nature and through devotion to the Universal Self (Tagore, 1931). There is a concept of "evolution" in our civilization, where "evolution" means that there is a supreme excellence that the individual endeavors to reach by extending his boundaries of "knowledge, power, love and enjoyment". Thus, the individual seeks to approach the Universal. According to the poet, we share the mind and spirit of the God of this mortal universe in all our true knowledge, love and service. However, the "evolution" which covetously allows an individual's life to be congested with extravagant production of machines and devices, ultimately culminates into an evolution towards death. For life has its own natural symphony. And any unwise and irresponsible progress in this "evolution" of life destroys it in the end. Tagore suggested the readers that they must comprehend that life's evolution should be a perfect evolution of one's inner spiritual self and not of devices and machines, "the non-living must not continue outgrowing the living" (Tagore, 1931). Man in his separation from the materialistic world has comprehended himself in a deeper and wider relationship with the spiritual world. In his mortal life, he has a sense of responsibility and his freedom of conscience at the same time. In his theological life, his consciousness of union with the Supreme Being has its consummation in love. According to Tagore, man acquires the freedom of establishing social relationships within his community by executing his responsibilities to his people. By executing responsibilities to the people of his own community, an individual gains a corporate power for his own well-being. When he becomes united with his Supreme Being, he finds a satisfaction in the devoted life of an ever-developing truth and ever-energizing love. The poet is conscious of the fact that the largest possession of the mortal soul has been produced through compassion and

collaboration, through objective persuasion of knowledge that recognizes no boundaries and is unafraid of defying all time-honored restrictions. The poet also recognizes that the spirit of love is always trying to extend its revelation in the mortal world. This is the heart of our civilization. It always incites our Supreme Being with its best effort to strengthen the only connection, the only unity that leads us to the truth; namely, that of religiousness (Tagore, 1931).

Man's Search for the Truth

According to Rabindranath, the freedom of thought and freedom of action have always been associated with a corresponding psychological freedom in man that works through his insight, through his vision. This psychological freedom is the most exclusive human faculty amongst all our faculties. This freedom is a spiritual gift that has been lent to the human beings who are unsophisticated and uncultured. Tagore asserted that the purpose of granting this divine gift to the mortals was to reinforce the path of their creative development. According to Rabindranath's perspective, our insight, our vision makes us deeply aware of a life we must live which goes beyond the mortal life and should defy the organic meaning of the instinct of self-defense. Every true independence that we may acquire in any direction widens our path of self-appreciation. Tagore further asserted that a life without any imagination and with recurrence of same events everyday, within a safe restriction which has been attributed by Nature, may be good for the animal, but never for the humans. Human being has the obligation to go beyond his material life, "to outlive his life in order to live in truth" (Tagore, 1931).

The poet confirmed that this notion signifies a history of constant resurrection, a series of fresh starting with a continual presumption of the old: with a pursuit of reaching a more perfect synthesis, with some original ideals of the truth. We, human beings, must offer reverence to the Man of eternal life. In the pursuit of doing so, we are responsible to pay a great deal more than we need to do barely for living. The poet expressed with deep regret that in the attempt of maintaining our existence, we sometimes perish "our very means of livelihood and even life itself". Man is never pleased with what he is in his physical limitations. He inevitably feels a continual urge to rise above his natural limitations that could give him higher value in life. It is the principle of might and authority, it is a universal fact and it is man's sacred responsibility to manifest this fact; even at the cost of his own happiness (Tagore, 1931). In fact, he becomes united with his God through it. For man, his God is nothing more than might and authority, nothing more than prowess. The poet realizes with deepest remorse that the uncivilized and uncultured man undergoes immeasurable trouble and misery, sometimes suffers from distress and anxiety, in order to

present in himself a reflection of power. The savage man, in order to get a glimpse of power, gets involved in brutal and inhumane activities. He becomes indulged in acts of unkindness and mercilessness. According to Rabindranath, man has a self-realization that he is truly represented in something which goes beyond himself. He is conscious of the fact that although he does not have any deficiency, yet he is still incomplete. He realizes that in himself "some meaning has yet to be realized". "What am I? What is it to be like a man?" Man is not pleased or satisfied as the other species are; for his peace and happiness depends upon identifying the true answers of these questions (Tagore, 1931). Tagore further remarked that man has taken years to analyze the question of his own true personality. He has been constructing elaborate religions to persuade himself that he is not what he apparently is, but something more than that. According to the poet's observation, in order to recognize himself truly, man has contemplated the vision of a Being who surpasses him in reality and with whom he also has his connection. Amidst all these religions, men look for their own supreme worth which they call *the divine spirit*, "in some personality anthropomorphic in character" (Tagore, 1931).

'The Poet's Religion' and 'The Religion of Man': In the Works of Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore never paid a visit to any religious sites, he never worshipped God in an orthodox ritualistic way. Though he was born as a Hindu, but it would not be justice to this great poet to restrict him to a specific order of humanity; he was so catholic, so cosmopolitan. It has been recorded in history that he was told on many occasions: "Your words are so fragrant with religion, so radiant with spirituality, so alive with the unknown that even those who do not believe in anything more than matter become affected, are touched. But you never go to the temple, you never read the scriptures" (Tagore, 1931). His answer is extremely important and should be kept in mind. He said: "I never read the scriptures, in fact, I avoid them because I have my own experience of the divine and I do not want others' words to be mixed with my original, authentic, individual experience. I want to offer God exactly what is in my heartbeat. Others may have known, certainly, others have known but their knowledge cannot be my knowledge. Only my experience can satisfy me, can fulfill my search and can give me trust in existence. I do not want to be a believer" (Tagore, 1931). These are the words that should be meditated upon: "I do not want to be a believer; I want to be a knower. I do not want to be knowledgeable, I want to be innocent enough so that existence reveals its mysteries to me. I do not want to be worshipped as a saint". Nevertheless, the reality is that during this entire century, there was no one else more virtuous, godlier than Rabindranath

Tagore. Yet he denied to be recognized as an ascetic. In his literature, the poet, the saint takes us on a metaphysical journey and provides us with a glance of the Supreme in the midst of the mortals, a sight of unity amongst all diversity and a glimpse of the Eternal in all entities and things of this universe (Tagore, 1931). According to Tagore, our daily contemplation of God is not really the procedure of gradual winning of His heart. Rather than that we can attain the Supreme Being through a daily process of renouncing ourselves, by eliminating all barriers towards communion and by expanding our consciousness of Him in dedication and in service (Anderson, 2010). Tagore apparently mentioned elsewhere that man's lasting happiness is not in acquiring anything but in dedicating himself up to ideas which are greater than his individual self; for example, the ideas of his nation, of his fellow human beings and of God the Infinite (Anderson, 2010). In 1930, while giving speeches at the University of Oxford on *'The Religion of Man'*, Tagore endorsed for a new, apparently "universal religion"- one that had the prospect of uniting mankind rather than to splitting it. He absorbed deeply and displayed a passionate, sound knowledge of and reverence for the religions of the world, both of the Indian origin and those of the Western (Anderson, 2010). Tagore has delightfully grasped the positive value of India's profound and persisting notions of "religious and cultural pluralism" and of "global pluralism" as well. Thus, a reader can presume that Tagore's *'Religion of Man'* and *'The Poet's Religion'* are not entirely unfamiliar to the contemporary history of world religions. However, they are in no way restricted by the typical borders that has been created over centuries and which attempt to create division and discrimination amongst humans. Therefore, in his worldwide known treatise *'The Religion of Man'*, Tagore has called for "something new, but not entirely new" (Anderson, 2010). When the poet was composing *'Fruit Gathering'*, he clearly seems to be less self-reliant and entirely dependent upon the Absolute, the Eternal (i.e. the God). This anthology is an appeal filled with self-allegation and self-condemnation, of remorse and penance, a solicitation in submissiveness to be liberated from any greedy and covetous human character and to be vacant by the power of God. The poet seeks for courage, calmness, endurance and wants to be unafraid in order to win and to achieve glory and thus acquire success. The poet now acknowledges the inefficacy and hollowness of running away from God, by asserting the "omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence" of God and by recognizing the absolute authority which God claims upon each one of the mortals. Instead of escaping away from this infinitely powerful, the poet now intends to "lay my all before His feet" (Anderson, 2010).

Tagore's thought on Traditional Religious Ritual Observances

In '*Gitanjali*' Tagore portrays a similar perspective regarding orthodox religious ritual ceremonies and their irrelevances to the needs and demands of our contemporary world. The saintly Tagore states, without any doubt, that the Infinite cannot be traced in the "dark corner of a temple with doors all shut". Rather an individual is encouraged to "open thine eyes", to come out into the hot sunlight of day where farmers and villagers are working very hard, where life is grimy and frowzy, filthy and foul. Tagore declared fearlessly: "Our Master himself has joyfully taken upon Him the bonds of creation, He is bound with us all forever!" According to Tagore, we can practically be united with Him, not in the inner sanctuary of religious sites but only in the outside world; amongst the poorest, the oppressed and the underprivileged (Anderson, 2010). Tagore's proposed idea of "*Religion of Man*" demands the renunciation of devout and authentic forms of religiosity. At least, whenever and wherever such righteousness, such devotion moves the devotee away from filthy and messy world of everyday human life. Tagore's religiosity consists of a real world of muddle and clay as an alternative to the world of flowers and eulogies. Tagore acknowledges that such a form of religiosity upholds the mortal world, its senses and its entirely mortal experience of life as favorable, as definitive of all that the Supreme has created. Tagore wants to experience a fully human life which is not filled with falsely constructed, hypothetical religiosity. This life, which Tagore so passionately advocates for, is one of incorporating, of embodying all diversity. When Tagore fearlessly proclaimed that even God finds joy and happiness through creation (Anderson, 2010), he was, therefore, referring to human imagination and creative expression. If even God can find himself through artistry, through inspiration, then we surely may anticipate to "find ourselves" through artistic expressions and innovative reflections such as poesy (Anderson, 2010).

Relevance of this Research to National Development

The constitution of Bangladesh designates Islam as the state religion but upholds the principle of secularism. It prohibits religious discrimination and provides for equality of all religions. The government representatives of the country have always spoken out against acts of religious violence and encouraged citizens to uphold the rights of different religious minority groups and to foster a climate of tolerance. In spite of all these efforts, Bangladesh has witnessed many incidents of religious and communal conflicts that have raised concerns amongst its people, e.g., mostly amongst followers of minority religions. Under these circumstances, the religious philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore that has always preached the message of religious peace and harmony should be critically analyzed and publicized at every level of the society.

The policymakers can formulate such education policies that would incorporate Tagore's religious philosophy in every level of our education in an increasing manner, starting from the primary schools. Media, i.e., radio, television and online media can broadcast and share messages of Tagore's religious philosophy of peace, tolerance and harmony in an increasing manner. In order to implement the aforementioned recommendations, more authentic research studies should be conducted, e.g., of Tagore's selected literature works to uncover the philosophies of Tagore's religious beliefs and of his vision. Such critical research studies will make valuable contributions to our national development.

Conclusion

Great art apparently goes beyond itself, it points towards the Infinite, towards God, towards the Eternal. It can never be restricted within sheer boundaries of our mundane, temporal existence. Otherwise, it cannot be considered as great art. Rabindranath Tagore was a great man, a great poet. Apart from his literature, his life was a prolific and passionate work of art as well. This fact must be acknowledged that Rabindranath was not a spiritual person in the ordinary sense. Yet he was one of the most liberal, reformist thinkers of all time; so radical, so unconventional but his graciousness consists in his childlike purity, in his sacredness. He is a poet of the supreme category, also he is an ascetic. In the history of mankind, such a fusion has happened only once or twice before. Tagore has always tried to develop a social cohesion amongst the people of his country within which everyone could be held united; yet fully enjoying the freedom of maintaining their individual differences. Tagore strongly believed that when the various, multiple races and nations of this earth will be able to dissolve their exclusive characteristics and will attach them to one root of humanity, then and only then a perfect, harmonious world will be established. Tagore tried to establish this unity in diversity to its fullest. If we follow the religious thought and philosophy of Tagore wholeheartedly, irrespective of our religious differences, we will ultimately be able to establish a world, a country filled with peace and harmony, joy and happiness. As long as Tagore's memory lives in our heart and mind, it will continue to inspire the values and principles of the Bengali people, the values and principles of the world.

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