

THE UNION OF THE FINITE AND THE INFINITE- IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RABINDRANATH

□ Bibek Manna*

ABSTRACT

As a poet and artist, Rabindranāth Tagore always aspired towards the realization of the transcendental personality of man, which he believed is immanent in the finite self only. In his writings, he laid stress on the realization of unity between the individual and the Universal Being through a perfect relationship. With Tagore, “religion” is the ultimate awakening of man's ego-consciousness in the Universal Consciousness. It is a process of realizing the Infinite 'I' in the finite 'I', by the freedom of mind and creative activities, for the goodness of humanity at large. The aim of this paper is to bring out Tagore's bifocal idea of the Self – the finite and the Infinite, his idea of humanism, Universal Man and his very own way of discovering the “religion of man”.

Keywords : Self; Religion of man; Tagore; Universal Man; finite; infinite; humanism.

Introduction :

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), a revered Bengali poet, lived during a pivotal moment in history when the flow of ideas, people, and people of different faiths and civilizations grew even more linked. The decreased space between people as the world moved faster made people more prone to explosive and violent outbursts. When nations asserted their exclusive dominance and sovereignty over land, people, and the planet, however, some nations created walls while others built bridges. At that time, a voice from Bengal shouted of yoga, union, and the global religion of man.

In essence, an interconnected world is captured in Tagore's works. Both external inquiry and personal discoveries are combined in his poems. The enchanting dance between the unfathomable infinite and the completeness of the finite is celebrated in his songs. His books, plays, and other writings provide insight into a life that was always in flux, one that accepted change while relentlessly pursuing the perfection of truth. For Tagore, in a world on the verge of division, unity had to be accomplished by a process of creative meditation on the

sublime—of coming to one's spontaneous self-realization—rather than by identification with that which is fleeting, such as the nation or state.

Gitanjali is by far Tagore's most well-known work in the West. He was the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 with this collection of 103 poetry. In the foreword to the book, W.B. Yeats makes the observation that Gitanjali seems to have taken up into this imagination a whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image. In fact, a sense of universal searching seems to emanate from the words heard in his “song offerings. These phrases are meant to capture and preserve the divine self-awareness of the all-pervading deity alone. Three outstanding poems that were chosen from Gitanjali's beginning, middle, and end can be used to evaluate this trajectory.

For the straightforward, antagonistic reason that my interpretation of Tagore's ideas differs significantly from his, I have taken the title from the most well-known contemporary Indian philosopher. It would be impossible

*Research Scholar - Department of Philosophy, Calcutta University

to comprehend all of Tagore's works in a brief study because of the enormous magnitude of his body of work. So I'll start by defining the textual parameters of my investigation. Even if we limit ourselves to what is available in English, five of Tagore's books—*Sadhana*, or *The Realization of Life* (1913), *Personality* (1917), *Nationalism* (1917), *Creative Unity* (1922), and *The Religion of Man* (1930)—as well as a significant number of lectures and essays identify him as a significant twentieth-century thinker. Tagore is rightly hailed as a synthesis of some of the best aspects of East and West. But, an analytical mind has a challenge when dealing with them due to Tagore's linguistic choices. Bertrand Russell said that Tagore's language about the infinite is “vague nonsense,” yet Tagore claims that he has “some untold mystery of unity” and “has the simplicity of the infinite” (*The English Works*, Vol. 2, 494). I might also add that Russell continues, “Unfortunately, the kind of language that is admired by many Indians in fact means nothing” (qtd. in Dutta and Robinson 96.) (Now, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and others of their ilk might be the most appropriate candidates for such a censure.) Russell's caution should have prepared me for Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's book *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, to which I turned for clarification and instead discovered claims like “Man is a finite-infinite being” and pseudo-poetic flourishes like: “Rabindranath advocates life in nature and in the open as the best means of spiritual progress, for in nature the religious eye will see the infinite lying stretched in silent repose” (13). Only a quick rush indoors will do.

The *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Vol. 8) describes Tagore's ability to combine the best insights of humanists and of otherworldly seekers; of naturalists, and extreme partisans of spirit; of determinists and defenders of free will; of hedonists and ascetics; and of romantics and realists with wisdom. Other admirers of Tagore rightly emphasise this and make excuses for his status as an Asian sage (75). According to Amartya Sen, this Tagore was the West's own creation to a certain extent, following a tradition of message-seeking from the East, particularly from India, which, as Hegel put it, had “existed for millennia” in the imagination of Europeans.”

Xvii, Dutta and Robinson Nirad Chaudhuri, who holds Tagore accountable for allowing himself to be lured by the grandeur of guruhood, best exemplifies the qualification “to some extent” (*Thy Hand, Great Anarch* 87). But by putting Tagore's spiritual fervour in a separate category, we risk overlooking the fact that he did take them seriously. They present key facets of his philosophy, which, Romantic though he may be in his orientation, is organically connected to every other component of his huge work. In fact, the organic metaphor itself is crucial to his worldview. Tagore's “poet's religion” is unorthodox, fluid, and characterised by negative capability. It is informed by his idealist philosophy and extends into his perspective of science, though not always with good outcomes. This can be observed in the well-known conversation between Tagore and Einstein that was published in Volume 3 of *The English Works of Rabindranath Tagore* (911-16). They had a remarkable conversation during which, according to one observation, they “talked past each other when they did not openly disagree” (Dutta and Robinson 530). Tagore glibly educates his listener on the mystery of the universe, while Einstein speaks cautiously and makes uncertain remarks. Their points of view are very different, especially when it comes to the issues of “What is truth?” and “What is the status of reality?”

In all most all the religions God or the Infinite has been regarded as the creator, sustainer and the destroyer of the finite or the world. So natural the relation between the creator and the creation becomes a topic of curiosity for all of us. In all ages most philosophers had tried to solve the mystery of the relation between this two. Rabindranath also had his own idea about this relation. This was a topic of enquiry throughout his whole life.

It should be mentioned that philosophy of Rabindranath cannot be termed as Realism, Idealism or Advaitism because the ideas of Rabindranath never followed any of them. The present paper attempts to give a brief idea regarding this relation between the finite and the infinite in Tagore's philosophy. Rabindranath himself has confessed that- “Me seems, there is only one grand tune of all my compositions and it may conveniently be styled as the union of the Infinite with the finite in

finiteness.” The discussion is divided into two parts. The first section is to discuss the nature of the finite world and the infinite. The second section is to show that they are United.

Apparently it seems that the finite and the infinite are basically two different, because the finite world has its different forms, shapes, sizes, colour etc. So it is perceivable. Rabindranath in one sense was a critic of Samkara. To Samkara- 'Brahma Satyam Jaganmithya'. But Rabindranath considered this world as real as the infinite because he firmly believed that this world is the abode of the infinite God. The only difference between them is that the world of the finite has a form while the infinite has no such form. Rabindranath has termed the infinite as 'aruparatan'. The infinite is expressing himself through the finite world, and it is best expressed in one of his famous songs-

সীমার মাঝে অসীম তুমি বাজাও আপন সুর
আমার মধ্যে তোমার প্রকাশ তাই এতো মধুর।।
কত বরণে, কত গন্ধে, কত গানে, কত ছন্দে
অরূপ তোমার রূপে লীলায়, জাগে হৃদয়পুর,
আমার মধ্যে তোমার শোভা এমন সুমধুর।।
তোমায় আমায় মলিন হলো সকলই যাই খুলে
বিশ্বসাগর ঢেউ খলোয়ে উঠে তখন দুলায়ে।

Rabindranath, throughout his whole life searched for this infinite in the finite world. The reason is, he believed that ananda is in the finite world. Rabindranath also believed that the absolute or the infinite is expressing himself through the various worldly objects like water, sky, ear, forest etc. So the infinite takes the finite as the medium of expression of Himself. In the Upanishad, it has been stated that the worldly objects are nothing but the expressions of his infinite pleasure or ananda. The finite world is the ocean of infinite forms, so the infinite being can be discovered in this finite world.

Some may say that the infinite is free and the finite is bound. So there is a contradiction between the finite and infinite, but Rabindranath totally rejected this contradiction and considered that the finite and the infinite can never be opposed to each other, rather they are complimentary to each other, one is incomplete without the other.

Rabindranath, following the Upanishad admitted

that the infinite is Sat, cit and ananda. He is saccidananda. The infinite as 'Satyam' can be known he is also of the nature of light (Jyotirmoy). Moreover he is of the nature of immortality (amrita svarupa). He is 'anandam Paramanandam'. His ananda is nothing but his love (prema). Rabindranath has beautifully expressed the idea of the infinite in one of his songs-

সত্য মণ্ডল প্রমেময় তুমি
ধ্রুবজ্যোতি তুমি অন্ধকারে।

But we, the finite people, cannot feel His existence only because of the fact that we have no love for Him. We all believe that the infinite exists everywhere. This truth is known to us, but in our daily activities we do not show any sign of our love for Him. He has his infinite love for us; still we do not feel or recognise this. Rabindranath that in love only the infinite comes to the finite.

It seems that Tagore's view of the infinite is similar to that of swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda was also of the opinion that the infinite(God) exists in the finite in various forms. But we fail to recognise Him.

বহুরূপে সম্মুখে তোমার ছাড়কি কথা খুঁজছি শিবর,

To Rabindranath the finite can say-

তাই তোমার আনন্দ আমার পর
তুমি তাই এসছো নাচি
আমায় নইলে ত্রিভুবনশের
তোমার প্রমে হতো যো মছি।

So the finite world is essential for the infinite to express Himself. Moreover he has infinite love for the finite being. Rabindranath believed that when we realise the infinite in the finite world, only then we feel delighted. We should think ourselves fortunate to be united with the infinite. If we cultivate this love for him then and Olympic then we can realise that we feel to be united with Him, We can say-

বিশ্বসাথে যোগে যথায় বহির
সহৈথানে যোগ তোমার সাথে আমার।

The relation between the finite and the infinite is such that one is empty without the other. The finite without infinite is meaningless and the infinite without the finite is empty. When they are United this distinction no longer remains. Rabindranath viewed this relation in unique way. According to him, the finite is eager to meet Him and the infinite is waiting to embrace the finite. Only

for this reason, the finite can say-

তাই তেঁা তুমি রাজার রাজা হয়ে
তবু আমার হৃদয় লাগি
ফরিছেঁা কত মনোহরণ-বশে
পরভু, নতিয় আছোঁা জাগি

Upanishad says mind can never know Brahman, words can never describe him; he can only be known by our soul, by our joy in him, by our love. In other words, we can only come into relation with him by union -union of our whole being. We must be one with father, we must be perfect as he is. But how can that be? Rabindranath with the tune of Upanishad says the realization of the Paramanandam, the supreme soul, with our Antaratman, our inner individual soul, is in a state of absolute completion. The Upanishad also say - He who knows Brahman, the true the all conscious, and the infinite as hidden in the depths of the soul, which is the supreme sky (inner sky of consciousness), enjoys all objects of desire in union with the all- knowing Brahman.

Rabindranath believes that the union is already accomplished. He has beautifully expressed it with the help of similes. The Paramatman, the supreme soul has himself chosen this soul of ours as his bride and the

marriage has been completed, the solemn mantra has been uttered-"Let thy be even as my heart."

In the conclusion we can say that according to Rabindranath there is union between the finite and the infinite, but we, the finite, fail to discover this union and the goal of human life is to understand it sincerely.

References :

1. Tagore, Rabindranath., *Santiniketan (prathamkhand)*, Visva Bharati Ghantan Bhivaga, Kolkata, 1909.
2. Ray, Benoy Gopal., *The Philosophy Of Rabindranath Tagore*, Pally sree press, Bolpur Ramkrishna Road, Birbhum, 1949(2012).
3. Manna, Ghunamoy., *Rabindracharanar Dharsonbhumi*, Papiroush, 2 ganendra mitra lane, Kolkata, 1993.
4. Bandhopadhya, Hiranmoy., *Upanishad O Rabindranath*, Nabapatra Pakashana, Kolkata, 1980(1984).

Note and Reference :

1. Roy, Benoy Gopal, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, Pally Sree Press, Birbhum, 1949, p. 20



UGC-CARE List

You searched for "2348-2397". Total Journals : 1

Search:

Sr.No.	Journal Title	Publisher	ISSN	E-ISSN	UGC-CARE coverage years	Details
1	Shodh Sarita (print only)	Shodh Sanchar Educational and Research Foundation	2348-2397	NA	from September-2019 to April- 2021	Discontinued from April 2021

Showing 1 to 1 of 1 entries

Previous Next