



Analytical Study of Religious philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore in View of a New Social Ideal

Dr. Naba Kumar Kalita

Associate Prof. and Head

Dept. of Philosophy

Chhaygaon College

P.O: Chhaygaon, PIN-781124

Dist: Kamrup, Assam

E-mail: drnaba@yahoo.in

Ph.: 7002685720

Abstract

Religion of Mahatma Gandhi was spiritual humanism as he revealed that service to the poor is service to God, i.e. the service of the poor he named "Daridranarayana" is a true service of God. That is to say, Gandhi discovered God amidst his creation which is confined not only to India, his own land and not Hinduism alone, the religion he belonged to. It is to be noted here that Gandhi referred to "God" as "Truth" which bears a great significance. He started his mission of life not merely to humanize religion, but also to moralize it. His interpretation on Hinduism, Islam and Christianity turned his religion into a federation of various religious faiths.

In accordance with Rabindranath Tagore, religion should always be a uniting force and not a dividing force. To him, true religion accepts the unity of all people despite their differences in religious faiths. True religion indicates intrinsic upliftment of the individual which makes a man to rise above his society, country and sect. That is to say, Tagore's religion is based on the divinization of man and humanization of God. He said that humanization of God does not only mean that God is God of humanity but also it means that God exists in each and every human being.

Keywords: Daridranarayana, Divinization of man, God, Humanization of God, Spiritual humanism, Truth.

Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi may be said to be basically a man of religion. His philosophy of religion is primarily based on truth and love, and non-violence. His religion is his philosophy of life, and it furnished him strength. Gandhi said that religion can become a basis of fraternity among all human beings. He firmly kept belief that religion never teaches mutual enmity; rather he considered different religions to be different ways of reaching same destination, i. e. God. Gandhi after a long study on religion came to the conclusion that each and every religion is based on the same principles, namely, truth and love. He asserted that religion is a binding force and not a dividing force. He was greatly disturbed by the fighting among people in the name of religion, and, in fact, sacrificed his life for the cause of religious unity.

To Rabindranath Tagore, humanity is the essence of religion, i.e. the basis of religion is formed by humanity. He kept belief that humanity and divinity are not belonging to two different orders. These two behave like two sides of the same coin as religion aims at awakening the element of divinity that has been latent in mankind. According to Tagore, true religion accepts the unity of all people despite their differences in religious thoughts. True religion aims at enhancing the inner world of the individual making a man rise above his society, country and sect. To him, the realization of one's own nature is the main concern in view of religious life. Tagore didn't believe in any religious institution and religious practices be it Hinduism, Islam or Christianity. Rather he kept belief in organized religions which act as a banner of communal harmony. His vision of God, unity and equality received spontaneous expression in many of his lectures, addresses, poems and in his novels.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the study are:

- (i) To find out similarities of thoughts among the great two Indian philosophers.
- (ii) To establish the necessity of the analytical as well as comparative approaches in the context of religious philosophy.
- (iii) To establish the importance of religious consciousness along with humanism in contemporary Indian philosophy.

Methodology:

The methods of the study are descriptive and analytical with the purpose of studying the religious philosophies of two great Indian philosophers in the context of Positive Humanistic Impact on human mind. Both primary and secondary data have been analyzed for the study.

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Mahatma Gandhi kept belief in the concept of Sarvadharmā Samānātva which indicates equal respect for all creeds and beliefs. But he very distinctly said that equal respect doesn't signify the adoption of other's religion by someone. Rather it merely refers to understanding the opinions revealed by other religions adhering to one's own views. It signifies emphasizing the points of agreements than that of disagreements. As a Hindu, Gandhi took religion as being most tolerant and it provides scope of worshipping each and every prophet of the world. He once stated that Hinduism tells each and every one to worship God as per his/her beliefs or dharma, and thereby living at peace with all the religions of the world. In accordance with Gandhi, Hinduism is not only a religion, but a way of life, where exists relentless pursuit of truth. He became successful in understanding the very spirit of other religions, by way of being a Hindu.

The religion of Tagore is based on the divinization of man and humanization of God. Explaining the meaning of humanization of God, Gandhi said that humanization doesn't only indicate that God is God of humanity but also it signifies that it is the God in every man. He was one of the greatest creative geniuses of the Indian thoughts as he was a great poet, prose writer, playwright, philosopher, novelist, essayist, musician, singer and artist. Due to his many sidedness of his genius, Sisir Kumar Ghose described him as "complete man".¹ Explaining Tagore's encyclopedic mind, Niharanjan Ray rightly described him as a reconciler of indigenous and foreign traditions and "the Leonardo-da-Vinci of the Indian renaissance".² For Tagore, religion is not renunciation, not an escape from the worldly duties and responsibilities. Religion is not asceticism taking refuge in the ordered serenity of heaven. In accordance with Tagore, true religion is a rhythm of life, action and existence. In his Introduction to Tagore, Naravane said that the rejection of asceticism doesn't indicate an endorsement of hedonism. To look to the world as joyful doesn't mean becoming a slave for pleasure. Self-realization becomes possible in maintaining a fine balance between desire and renunciation. Tagore believed in acceptance of life with joy. To him, the highest glory of mankind lies in rising above the defeat and disillusionment and not in the abandonment of the world. We find his constant glorification of beauty of man's life on earth in many of his poems and plays. He said in the Gardener, 'I shall never be an ascetic.....I shall never leave my hearth and home and retire into the forest solitude'.³ To Gandhi, the chief objective of religion is to make a one-on-one interaction between God and man. He kept belief that God is not different from truth. He found God through the service of humanity as God lives in the heart of each and every human being. Gandhi didn't believe in any issue of having merely one religion as God himself created various religious forms and

hence none possesses power to question the same. He clearly stated the ultimate aim of the human being is the realization of God and for this purpose, all activities –be it social, political or economic—must aim at the proper understanding of God. Two different concepts of reality were supported by Gandhi which assisted in correctly judging the beliefs of different religions. He possessed a balanced regional standpoint that took him to treat the whole world in the embrace of his love and respect. The twin doctrine of Satya or truth and Ahimsa or non-violence was given due importance by Gandhi.

Gandhi with these two principles evolved a comprehensive view of religion far beyond the narrow sectarianism. In accordance with Gandhi, there exists no higher way of worshipping God than serving the poor, the needy, the downtrodden, the helpless and identifying God in them.

The intrinsic contention regarding what is truth is found while he, on his personal choice, travelled in third compartment with cladding himself in a join cloth to remind himself that he is one among the poor millions belonging to the lower order of mankind where humanity and love get the richest position. The word 'love' has been understood by Gandhi in terms of non-violence. He gave a base for this understanding and made attempt to enlighten people that differences of different religions of the world are merely in terms of their approach toward God. For Gandhi, truth and love are the two instruments that bind us to one another along with God.

The method formulated by Tagore for realization of God is also humanistic. In Tagore's philosophy of religion, the Vedantic conception of the divinity in man has been developed. In view of Tagore, true religion signifies humanity of mankind: basically the service of mankind. In this context, Tagore said " It is the human aspect of this truth which all great personalities have made their own in their lives and offered to their fellow beings in the name of various religions".⁴ In the words of Tagore, God realization through worship doesn't indicate "the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service in goodness and love".⁵ Tagore emphatically asserts that the divine is also in certain aspects human, i.e. God is expressed in best way in man, sometimes man himself becomes God, the object of worship for Tagore. He says that he wants to see God in that temple, where there are no rites, rituals and rigid practices. Tagore utters that all rites, rituals and practices are obstacles in realizing God's presence in man's heart. Giving clarification in respect of his philosophy of religion, Tagore says that his religion is "the religion of man in which the infinities defined in humanity".⁶ According to Tagore, religion aims at realizing divinity which is immanent in human beings. To him, the purpose of religion is not merely making awareness of the element of divinity but also making it universal as possible.

Really speaking, Tagore finds God through the beauties of nature as he keeps belief that God reveals Himself through nature. The nature is not treated by Tagore as alien and inert rather something living with which he feels affinity. Tagore feels an intimate relationship with trees and clouds. He says: The wonder of the gathering clouds hanging heavy with the unshed rain of the sudden sweep of storms arousing vehement gestures along the line of coconut trees, the fierce loneliness of the blazing summer noon, the salient sunrise behind the dewy veil of autumn morning, kept my mind with the intimacy of a pervasive companion ship.⁷ Tagore, in his mystic vision, consciously visualizes God through the beauties of nature. In the flowers, in the green grass, in the play of colours on the clouds, in the murmuring music of running water.⁸ In accordance with Tagore, man and nature are not antagonistic to each other. To think it is so it is like a dividing the bud and the blossom into two separate categories and putting their grace to the credit of two different and anti-theatrical principles.⁹ In the eyes of Tagore, religion indicates the realization of man's true nature. Here, he speaks about various ways of self-realization, i.e. realization through love, through action and realization through beauty of nature lead to the realization of the infinite. To Tagore, human beings can visualize God merely through love as he believes that God is inherent in true love. He is confirmed that love claims some action towards the object of our love. Tagore says that Upanishads never forbade us to work because freedom of joy lies in the work. Just as the joy of a poet in his poem, of the brave man in the output of his courage, of the wise man in his discernment of truths, so the joy of the Brahma in the whole of the everyday work.¹⁰ He kept belief that realization of beauty paves the way towards the realization of the infinite. Tagore prescribes man a life of nature- "tending trees, feeding birds and animals, learning to feel the immense mystery of the soil water and air."¹¹ Tagore may be said to be a pantheist in spirit as he sees God everywhere. He takes nature as the most sacred place of pilgrimage and detects the miracle of God in nature. He heartily fees that the changes occur in the nature are nothing but the divine manifestations. According to Tagore, man can detect his concrete vision of God in the following expressions- "to me religion is too concrete a thing, though I have no right to speak about it. If the vision of God has ever been granted to me I have received the vision through this world, through trees and birds and beasts, the dust and the soil.....I feel His touch in the air, in water: everywhere I feel it."¹² Under these influences, Tagore himself introduced his religion as religion of man. The very significant aspect of Tagore's religion is its aesthetic character where his religious life and poetic life are almost mingled with each other. He himself names his religion to be poet's religion.

Gandhi, on the other hand, prescribes three significant virtues of a religious life: first of all, truth as a divine quality, secondly, non-violence or ahimsa and thirdly, the virtue is brahmacharya. He in a lucid manner explains that ahimsa as the supreme religious duty with reference to the Mahabharata. He again

says that if one doesn't keep belief in non-violence, it's proved that he bears no kindness to others. In this manner, sympathy and kindness towards all human beings becomes the basis of true religion. That is to say, religion for Gandhi incorporates worshipping God or reading a religious book signifying religious life means identification with human. He treats religion as self-realization, as the striving of the human personality to reveal it in service, suffering and sacrifice.

Gandhi bears a very rational approach towards religion with clear explanation that religion must be capable of solving the day-to-day problems as it is a practical discipline. Any religion that doesn't have appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality has been out-rightly rejected by him. Gandhi clearly believes that once man loses their morality, they cease to be religious, and thereby become selfish and narrow-minded. In this way, religion claims true consideration for all faiths. Gandhi through his prayer meetings attempted at offering a broad basis for religious approach in respect of man. This may, in fact, be named the greatest contribution by Gandhi towards religion and thereby the ideal of universal brotherhood.

Conclusion:

Gandhi's philosophy of religion bears very significant message stating that if love fails in affecting people, then the blue sky will be covered with clouds of hatred and communal disharmony. This feeling clearly shows the discomfort he experienced due to the religious conflicts during days he lived. It may here be mentioned that it is, in fact, a great tragedy that he has been a victim of religious hatred, for which he fought and suffered throughout his life.

Tagore regards dynamism as the essence of religion indicating incorporation of even new ideas without affecting its own basic nature. He asserts that true religion should always tries to incorporate all novel ideas, thoughts with a view to enhancing its standard without affecting its basic nature. That is why Tagore gets agreed with Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's perspective that "If religions are to continue to have their original appeal, they must adopt themselves to the needs of the times. For religion, there is no such thing as standing still. Stagnation is bound to overtake a religion, unless it is alive to the changes taking place around it."¹³

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