

God and Religion: In the Thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and M. K. Gandhi

Gurdeep Singh

Assistant professor, Dept. of English, Sikh National College, Qadian, Punjab, India

Abstract

The aim of present paper is to discuss the ideas about religion and God, propounded by Rabindranath Tagore and M K Gandhi. The introduction of the paper views importance of Indian philosophy in the historical and contemporary contexts. Indian philosophy has provided substantial insights on multiple walks of life. These multiple walks of life include art, architecture, literature, religion, morals, and science. The reflections of the Indian thought system has been providing insights to the practical as well theoretical affairs of the multiple facets of life. In spite of the foreign invasions, at different intervals and periods of time, the Indianness has never been felt separated from that wisdom. However, Indian philosophy is accused that there is note of pessimism, guised in hopefulness. Against this accusation Dr Radha Krishnan argues, "No Indian seer has allowed himself to be overpowered by a sense of evil."

The next part of this paper reflects upon Gandhi's ideas about his religion and God, along with their social significance. Gandhi asserts, My religion is Hinduism which, for me, is Religion of humanity and includes the best of all the religions known to me' (p21). He further extends the argument. "I am being led to my religion through Truth and Non-violence, i.e. love in the broadest sense. I often describe my religion as Religion of Truth". However his ideas about God are different from the Samkhya's philosophy. This philosophy observes, ". . . the eternal existence of the 'Purnas' is inconsistent with God. If they are the parts of God, they must have some divine power, If they are created by God, they are subject to destruction. Hence there is no God".

In the last part, the paper ponders over Tagore's idea of religion. Tagore claims that his religion is the religion of a poet. Tagore thinks that the source his 'religion' is inspiration from the music. This music has provided him rhythm and harmony to his attitudes towards social, literary and national life. He concludes that his religion has freed him from the clutches of . . . education system. To quote, "and when I was thirteen I freed myself from the clutch of an educational system that tried to keep me imprisoned within the stone walls of lessons" (HOP Vol 1, p31-32).

Introduction

The newest understanding about the old and even, recent Indian wisdom in the contemporary period is that it is a substantial philosophy, having insights on multiple walks of life. These multiple walks of life include art, architecture, literature, religion, morals, and science. The Indian philosophical thought system, for example in the 'Vedas', 'Mahakavyas' etc, comprehends unity in diversity. In spite of the foreign invasions, at different intervals and periods of time, the Indianness has never been felt separated from that wisdom. Here the term, Indianness signifies social, religious, cultural and spiritual sharing between the people, who have lived as a civilisation in this part of the region. The Indian thought system has been providing insights to the practical as well theoretical affairs of the multiple facets of life. Dasgupta observes that although the 'Greeks, the Huns, the Scythians, the Pathans and the Moguls who occupied the land and controlled the political machinery never ruled the minds of the people, for these political events were like hurricanes or the changes of season, mere phenomena of a natural or physical order which never affected the spiritual integrity of Hindu culture'. There were times when through propaganda, the efforts were made to cite the concepts,

related to Indian philosophy, as mere abstractions. However the time has changed now and the exact appropriations in this regard are appearing on the scene.

Dr S. Radhakrishnan claims that 'There is hardly any height of spiritual insight or rational philosophy attained in the world that has not its parallel in the vast stretch that lies between the early Vedic seers and the modern Naiyayikas' who with their analytic and critical methods may be said to stand to the Vedanta in somewhat the same relation as Kant and his followers stand to the great neo-Platonic and Patristic tradition of the West' (p.13). However, the modern civilization cannot always take pleasure in the achievements of the past. Therefore a question arises that are there any fresh developments in the philosophical traditions or only we are left with memories of the glorious tradition. Dr S. Radhakrishnan asserts that 'in present-day philosophy there is more than a tradition,...a fructifying contact with Western thought, the tree of philosophical knowledge has recently put forth fresh flower and fruit'. The idea behind contacting with Western thought is that political bearings are of no concern when there is a reason to develop mutual understanding between the 'whole mind' of East and West.

Amongst many accusations, Indian philosophy is accused that there is note of pessimism, guised in hopelessness. Against this accusation Dr Radha Krishnan argues, "No Indian seer has allowed himself to be overpowered by a sense of evil." We hear much indeed of philosophy as a call to transcend the narrowness of egoism and identify ourselves with something greater than ourselves as the way of salvation, but this is not in order to escape from the ineradicable evil of existence but in order to find ourselves in things that give to existence its only true value. For "in the man who transcends his narrow self and merges it in the life of the whole philosophy as truth, religion as devotion and morality as goodness meet" (p.15).

In the background of this argument, the present paper has been written to highlight Dr Radhakrishnan's attitude towards religion. For this the author has taken two twentieth century prominent Indian philosophers, Rabindranath Tagore and M K Gandhi. The ideas about religion or of an artist's religion, are of Gandhi and Tagore. However, the inclusion of the respective thoughts in the *History . . . Vol 1* in a way is the representation of Dr Radhakrishnan's attitudes. About these two great thinkers, he states, that they 'while on the whole remaining true -to the spirit of that tradition, has sought to give new interpretations of it, either by instituting comparisons of it with the Western doctrines most closely allied to it or by treating of modern problems in a way which, though suggested by what . . . learned from the West' (p. 16).

M. K. Gandhi

In *HOP Vol1* by Radhakrishnan, Gandhi writes, 'I have been asked by Sir S. Radhakrishnan to answer the following three questions: (1) What is your Religion? (2) How are you led to it? (3) What is its bearing on social life?'. Gandhi responds to the first two questions, that 'My religion is Hinduism which, for me, is Religion of humanity and includes the best of all the religions known to me' (p21). He further extends the argument. "I am being led to my religion through Truth and Non-violence, i.e. love in the broadest sense. I often describe my religion as Religion of Truth". Though Gandhi seems to be defining his religion, but he gives it an interpretation as the 'religion of humanity'. From here onwards, Gandhi moves on to another base of his religion, 'love'. Then Gandhi reveals the path of his religion, which he names as 'Truth' and 'Non-violence'. For him, 'Truth' and 'Non-violence' are the two sides of the same coin, that is, his 'religion'. About 'Truth', Gandhi extrapolates that for him, 'Truth is God' and vice versa. He further adds that "the most ignorant among mankind have some truth in them. We are all sparks of Truth. The sum total of these sparks is indescribable, as-yet-Unknown- Truth, which is God. I am being daily led nearer to It by constant prayer." (p21).

However, Gandhi's concept of God differs from the 'Samkhya's'. In *I to IP*, (p, 17-18) Dr L Sankar observes, "The Original Samkhya was monistic and theistic. But the classical Samkhya, perhaps under the influence of Materialism, Jainism and Early Buddhism, became atheistic. It is orthodox because it believes in the authority of the Veda. It does not establish the non-existence of God. It only shows that 'Prakriti' and 'Purus' are sufficient to explain this universe and therefore there is no reason for postulating a hypothesis of God". This concept realises God as a pure form of knowledge, which cannot produce this material world. To quote, "God being pure knowledge, this material world

cannot spring from Him. The effects are implicitly contained in their cause and the material world which is subject to change requires and unintelligent and ever changing cause and not a spiritual and immutable God". The argument concludes that God does not exist. To quote, "Again, the eternal existence of the 'Purus' is inconsistent with God. If they are the parts of God, they must have some divine power, If they are created by God, they are subject to destruction. Hence there is no God".

While responding to the third question, Gandhi states, "The bearing of this religion on social life is, or has to be, seen in one's daily social contact. To be true to such religion one has to lose oneself in continuous and continuing service of all life". In his sense, this religion brings people together by giving importance to social contacts. The continuous social interactions diminish ego of the person, to which describes as to 'lose oneself'. This behaviour provides an access to 'Truth'. To quote him, "Realisation of Truth is impossible without a complete merging of oneself in, and identification with, this limitless ocean of life. Hence, for me, there is no escape from social service, there is no happiness on earth beyond or apart from it. Social service here must be taken to include every department of life. In this scheme there is nothing low, nothing high. For, all is one, though we seem to be many" (p31).

The Religion of an Artist

Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore observes that there are three movements – religious movement under Raja Ram Mohan Roy; literary revolution under Bankim Chandra Chatterjee; and National movement under G K Gokhale. These three movements made Bengal great in the late 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. Tagore claims that religious movement "was revolutionary, for he tried to reopen the channel of spiritual life which had been obstructed for many years by the sands and debris of creeds that were formal and materialistic, fixed in external practices lacking spiritual significance...Ideas cause movement and all forward movements they consider to be a menace to their warehouse security. . . . the literary revolution, which happened in Bengal about that time...He lifted the dead weight of ponderous forms from our language and with a touch of his magic wand aroused our literature from her age-long sleep. A great promise and a vision of beauty she revealed to us when she awoke in the fulness of her strength and grace. There was yet another movement started about this time called the National. It was not fully political, but it began to give voice to the mind of our people trying to assert their own personality. It was a voice of impatience at the humiliation constantly heaped upon us by people . . . The national movement was started to proclaim that we must not be indiscriminate in our rejection of the past. This was not a reactionary movement but a revolutionary one, because it set out with a great courage to deny and to oppose all pride in mere borrowings . . ." (HOP Vol 1, p 25-27).

Tagore shares his own idea about religion. He asserts, "My religion is essentially a poet's religion. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channels as does the inspiration of my music". Tagore thinks that the source his 'religion' is inspiration from the music. This music has provided him rhythm and harmony to his attitudes towards social, literary and national life. He further writes, "My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life. Somehow they are wedded to each other, and though their betrothal had a long period of ceremony, it was kept secret from me....From my infancy I had the keen sensitiveness which always kept my mind tingling with consciousness of the world around me, natural and human . . . I had been blessed with that sense of wonder which gives a child his right of entry into the treasure-house of mystery which is in the heart of existence . . . and when I was thirteen I freed myself from the clutch of an educational system that tried to keep me imprisoned within the stone walls of lessons" (HOP Vol 1, p31-32).

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