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# **The Concept of God in the Vision of Rabindranath Tagore**

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*“....our daily worship of God is not really 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 in love....”*

**— Rabindranath Tagore**

### **Abstract**

*Religion does not mean that the finite being is under the control of an infinite being like God. According to Rabindranath Tagore the function of religion is to bring the harmony of reason, love and deed of Supreme into the individual. The relation of the Supreme Person is as dependent upon the personal being and the personal being is dependent upon the Supreme person. In this sense, God may be considered as a personal being like man. We find a similarity between the Vedāntic conception of the Nara-Narayana, divinity of man is developed in Tagore's philosophy of religion. Rabindranath avoided the rituals, superstitions and mythologies of the formal religions. The essence of religion is to realize that God is omnipresent. Like Vivekananda, he believed in religion as manifestation of divinity already in man. This knowledge is possible only through the knowledge or intuition. He thinks that God is to be found not in temples or mosques but in humanity itself. Tagore's concept of humanism is basically devoted to the service of mankind. According to Tagore, the ultimate end of humanity may be achieved through the realization of our relationship with all finite beings as the union of the infinite being. Therefore, the spirit of One in God is the only truth and truth behind this spiritual union is love. Tagore's philosophy reveals that his philosophical thought was like the Vedānta philosophy in true sense. He believed in one Supreme reality that is the Brahma. And, he believed in the relationship of God and man is just like love and joy. In this paper I wish to discuss the conception of God of Rabindranath Tagore in a comparative manner.*

**Keywords:** *Absolute, finite being, infinite being, freedom, Brahma.*

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**I. Introduction:** In Indian philosophy ‘*darśana*’ means *samyag driṣṭi* (perception). Which things are to be perceived? The answer is perception of truth. In this sense, the word

'philosophy' was taken by Rabindranath Tagore. Radhakrishnan wrote a book about the philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, the book is entitled as '*The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*', after going through this book one can understand so easily that Rabindranath was not just a poet, he was a great philosopher too. This is the reason he was the president of Indian Philosophical Congress organized in Kolkata for the first time, it was 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1925. Radhakrishnan in his book entitled '*The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*' said that "Rabindranath is essentially a poet not a philosopher, though it is possible for us to gather his philosophical views from his poetry" (Radhakrishnan, 1918). The whole life of Rabindranath Tagore was very much influenced by the Indian tradition, specially by the *Upaniṣad*, *Bhagavadgita* and the *vedāntic* view points. From his childhood, Tagore has been planted by the ancient Indian tradition and was advised by his father to remember all the verses of *Bhagvadgita* by heart. For that we can see the impact of these ancient Indian traditions in his lifelong writings. "*Upaniṣads* literally means 'sitting near to' or 'sitting close to' and implies listening closely to the mystic doctrines of a guru. It was also been translated as 'secret wisdom' that includes philosophical discussion of concepts such as salvation (*mokṣa/mukti*), ultimate reality (*Brahman*), the individual soul (*ātman*), religion, duty, essence". Besides this *Vaiṣṇavism* and *Bhakti*-school have been manifested mostly in his philosophy. It results that, his *bhakti mārṅa* has been met with the *upaniṣadic* abstract impersonal entity which is *Brahman* or God. This God is omnipresent, eternal and the ultimate truth.

**II. God in Tagore's Philosophy:** According to Rabindranath Tagore God is the reason for whom the world came into its existence, so that, we can say that for him God is the efficient cause of the world. Rabindranath has been described a special force as the power of God that causes the whole creation and evolution. Through the power of God the different creatures have been created. Human beings are superior to all the creatures of the universe. Rabindranath does not understand God and truth as two different entities. He believes that God and truth are inseparable aspects of the same reality. But, in metaphysics, they are two different entities. Rabindranath ignore these differences. Tagore was a monotheistic philosopher, because he took God as reality and reality as God. Rabindranath understands the 'absolute' just as Śaṅkara interpreted the concept of Absolute. The realization of this ultimate absolute is possible only through the intuition, rather than the logic or reason, thus for him, God is a person. According to Radhakrishnan "he (Tagore) gives us a human God, dismisses with contempt the concept of world illusion, praises action overmuch and promises fullness of life to the human soul" (Radhakrishnan, 1918) . We can realize His existence by the internal realization. Many names, in his philosophy, has been used instead of God, these are 'universal man', 'the supreme man', 'the supreme spirit', 'the infinite personality'. Tagore accepted two different aspects of God. According to him, God is personal as well as He is impersonal. Rabindranath takes Absolute as the impersonal aspects of God. Being the impersonal God is featureless, attribute less. There is a similarity between the impersonal aspect of Tagore's God and the *nirguṇa Brahma* of Śaṅkara. On the other hand, one more similarity can be found between the personal aspect of God and *saguṇa*

*Brahma* of Śāṅkara. The impersonal aspect of God is infinite and the personal aspect of God is finite. The finite aspect is the part of the infinite, so that finite beings take their births from the infinite. Tagore considered finite as forms and infinite as idea, but he does not make any clear distinction of them. Rather than he made an interrelationship between them to develop a synthesis of them. “For revilement of idea, form is absolutely necessary. But the idea which is infinite cannot be expressed in forms which are absolutely finite. Therefore forms must always move and change, they must necessarily die to reveal the deathless. The expression as expression must be definite, which it can only be in its form; but at the same time, as the expression of the infinite, it must be indefinite, which it can only be in its movement. Therefore when the world takes its shape it always transcends its shape; it carelessly runs out of itself to say that its meaning is more than what it can contain” (Tagore, 1917).

**III. Finite Nature of Human Beings:** Human beings as finite beings are dependent on nature. Human beings have an infinite aspect also, that is He is the creator of this world. In *The Religion of man*, Tagore says that, “as an animal, He is still dependent upon on nature, as a man, He is sovereign who builds his world and rules in it” (Tagore, 1933). Lives of human beings are very much controlled by the stimulus coming from the environment surrounding them. Sometimes the behavior and the actions of human beings are influenced by the dispositions, like other animals human beings are very much conscious, and their most of the actions are directed by the tendencies of self-satisfaction and self-defence.

Secondly, the behavioral characteristic of human beings make them superior to other living beings. Human beings have controls on their senses that other living beings have not. After all human beings have an internal organ called ‘mind’. Having a mind is the most important features of human beings differentiate them from other living beings.

And finally, human beings as finite beings, it is observed in their nature that they have the possibility of spirituality. Human beings are not totally self-centered by nature. By the analytical examination it can be said that they are very much social beings. Most of their intensions are socially valuable and aesthetically valuable. This side of human nature confirms that they have the will power to overcome his all limits and want to reach the limitless being or infinite being or God.

**IV. Infinite Nature of Human Beings:** Rabindranath have been explained the infinity of human nature by various ways. Sometimes he called this infinity of human beings the universal nature, the surplus entity in human nature or the divine entity. He was very much convinced about the fact that to examine the infinite aspect of human being is not so easy but Rabindranath tried so well to explain this side of human being. Any human being, when he is prepared to accept all the good things and ignore the bad things, actually can realize the divinity presents in him. Rabindranath said in *Personality* that “we have seen men conquering pain by undaunted prowess, plunging into fiery ordeals only to march forward with triumph. What striving is this? This power that lies behind is neither physical nor mental, it belongs to the inward self where man is united with his God” (Tagore, 1917).

On the other hand any human being who is intensely yearning for the liberation always tries to go beyond all limitations. Even though there is no the ultimate end of human expectations. After achieving an end they persuaded to achieve another end. This particular nature of human being proves that this is the infinite aspect of human nature. The spirit to achieve higher to higher helps them to overcome his limits and reaching to the Absolute.

**V. Freedom as the Nature of Human Being:** Rabindranath talked about another aspect of human nature which is freedom. Generally finite body enjoys the freedom what Rabindranath called ‘the freedom in cage’. This kind of freedom does not help man to realize the universal or Absolute. Rabindranath talked about the ‘spiritual freedom’ or ‘infinite freedom’. Being superior to any other animals human beings have the aspiration to realize the supreme reality. Human beings only aspire for the immortality, because they know the fact that death is not the end of this life. There are four *puruṣarthas* in Indian traditions, the fourth one *mukti* or *mokṣa* is the ultimate aim of our life. Due to get attain the state of *mokṣa*, we are to do all our deeds without any expectations or results. In order to understand how can we do any action without any conviction? – the Indian tradition there are two *karmās* (action); *sakāma* and *niskāma*. *Sakāma karmā* is the *karmā* with conviction and *niskāma karmā* is the *karmā* without conviction. We can say Rabindranath being influenced by the ancient Indian tradition talked about the *niskāma karmā*, only doing this *niskāma karmā* human being can be free from all attachment of this earthly life. In this sense, human being have the freedom of what action they will prefer. “The *Gīta* says action we must have, for only in action do we manifest our nature. But this manifestation is not perfect so long as our action is not free. In fact, our nature is obscured by work done by the compulsion of want or fear. (...) our true freedom is not the freedom from action but freedom in action, which can only be attained in the work of love” (Tagore, 1913). This freedom breaks all the diversity in human beings and be the cause to realize the one and worldwide unity. But the actual realization is the realization of happiness. “Man’s abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than himself, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God” (Das, S. 2017). After the realization of the greater one man can be promoted to the state of bliss (*ānanda*). So, this state of *ānanda* can be attained only when we practise the truth. This truth gives us the joy which makes our life beautiful, moral and religious. This is the ultimate end of our life, this end can be attained only by the infinite nature of human being. Because being finite man cannot be free from his physical body. In order to be free and increase the divine joy finite aspect has to be transcended to the infinite aspect. This infinite aspect of human nature is called *Jīvan Devatā* by Rabindranath Tagore.

**VI. Conclusion:** Now we can say that Rabindranath has been made a spontaneous harmony between the Absolute and the finite beings. At this point we find a similarity in Śaṅkara’s *Advaita* philosophy, like the Śaṅkara’s *Advaita* philosophy Rabindranath accepted the Absolute but negated the manyness of finite beings. He also influenced by the Ramanuja’s *Viśiṣṭādaitabad* and *Bhakti* school. From this point of view we can say that the novelty of his philosophy is that he interlinked between the *Advaita* concept of absolute monism and

Ramanuja's *Viśiṣṭāditabad* with his personal God. This special feature of his thought makes him an idealist or a spiritualist philosopher, but he believed in an organic relation between the Absolute and finite beings. So, it may be also said that he was an absolute idealist like Hegel.

India is a secular country, but still today's society is suffering from caste system, religion discrimination and so on. Our country is enriched by its culture and its root seeded in Vedanta. Just like *Advaita Vedantic* Rabindranath also believed in one reality. Realization of this one reality is our intellectual asset to uplifting our social standard. We can make our society more prosperous and beautiful by stressing importance on similarities in all mankind and ignore the all diversities in religions. In the philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore we can find the path to live a life in a harmonious way that human being can find an infinite being inside them.

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