

Tagore's Concept of God

Abstract

The concept of God occupies the central place in the religious philosophy of Tagore. Since it is a religious Philosophy of a theistic type, the concept of God becomes the basic source from which all other religious concepts derive both their intelligibility and justification.

Tagore's concept of God can be described as a kind of theism. It ascribes to God almost all the theistic characters, and yet this conception of God, remains unique in so far as it tries to incorporate some such ideas that ordinary theism never thinks of. For example, the identification of God with the supreme principle, the humanization of God, the approach through love etc. are some features that make this conception unique.

Tagore's concept of God has succeeded in clarification of some concepts. 'Absolute and God' 'God as love' 'Personality of God' 'Humanisation of God', are some of the concepts that have been clarified. Hence, Tagore's concept of God should be judged in a new perspective.

Keywords: Tagore's Concept, God

Introduction

The concept of God occupies the central place in the religious philosophy of Tagore. Since it is a religious Philosophy of a theistic type, the concept of God becomes the basic source from which all other religious concepts derive both their intelligibility and justification.

It is important to note that Gitanjali of Tagore is nothing but a record of devotional offerings to God. His other works entitled The Religion of Man. Sadhana and Personality are also dealt with God. Commenting on Tagore's philosophy of God, Prof. S.C. Sen Gupta remarks: "Some of his important works are devoted entirely to religious discourse. Of the transcendental entities, God has been treated more fully than any other".¹

This remark appears to be both true and significant. It is significant, because a belief in the reality of God (of his own conception) appears to permeate the entire work of Rabindranath. Of course, his views are not categorized or systematized strictly from the point of view of academic philosophy, but it is not difficult to put them in that mould.

Aim of the Study

Any attempt to give an academic exposition of Tagore's philosophy of God, will inevitably raise the questions-How does Tagore derive faith in God, Therefore, the first problem to be taken up under this head is rather epistemological and concerns the sources on which Tagore's belief in God is base.

Sources of the Belief in God

There are three sources of this belief.

1. Reasoning
2. Experience
3. Authority

Before dealing with any of these, it is important to make a general comment. For Tagore, it is not essential to try to demonstrate the existence of God. His existence, according to him, can be felt within, inwardly realised. But then reasoning or proofs do serve the function of generating initial conviction.

Proofs for God's Existence

Prof. V.S. Narvane says : "There are many passages in Tagore's works in which we have suggestions and hints reminiscent of the traditional 'proofs' of God's existence-the Moral, the Causal, the Teleological and the Ontological arguments ".²

The Causal Argument finds mention at various places. He says the more finite "is a dead wall obstructing the beyond. This knowledge merely accumulates but does not illuminate. It is like a lamp without its light, a violin without its music".³ Tagore here infers the existence of God as Infinite from the insufficiency of the finite as finite.

Ravindra Kumar Sinha

Assistant Professor,
Deptt.of Philosophy,
J.J. College, Jhumri Telaiya
Koderma, Jharkhand

Anthology : The Research

The most important proof for the existence of God which finds repeated reference in the writing of Tagore is Teleological proof. In the king of the Dark Chamber, Janardan one of the characters says: "look at the nice order and regularity prevailing all over, the place-how do you explain it without a king".⁴

Another reference to this arguments, is given in the book Personality, where Tagore says: "World movements are not merely blind movements, they are related to the will of a Supreme Person".⁵ Yet another reference to the Teleological proof or an Argument from Design is made in Creative Unity. Tagore avers: "We feel that this world is a creation: that in its centre there is a living idea which reveals itself in an eternal symphony, played on innumerable instruments, all keeping perfect time".⁶

Tagore finds, a different type of evidence, for God's existence in the fact of knowledge. He is emphatic in asserting the necessity of a world Mind to explain the fact of knowledge. When Einstein asked Tagore 'Does the table exist in some one's mind when there is no one in the room? Tagore replied in the affirmative 'Yes, it remains outside the individual mind but not outside the universal Mind. The table which I perceive is perceptible by the same kind of consciousness which I possess'.⁷

But, Tagore does not attach to conventional proofs for God's existence that importance which is given to them by rational theology, In fact, he feels that the securer evidence of God's reality is personal realisation and feeling and also to some extent dependable authority.

Authority

He attaches great value to authority in so far as it has always played an important role in generating faith in God. Tagore's own case is clear illustration of this fact. Tagore was brought up in the religious environment of his family. This contributed a great deal in his cultivating a reverential attitude towards God and other religious notions. But, he is not a blind worshipper of authority. He feels that authority can be accepted only when it is able to create an inner conviction. Tagore gives tremendous importance to, his own 'Sense for the Sacred' and uses it almost as a touchstone for testing every authority that presents itself to him.

Nature of God

It is significant to note that the word 'Absolute' or 'God' is not very frequently used in the writings of Tagore. The words which have been most frequently used are the 'Universal Man', 'The Supreme Man', 'The Supreme Spirit', 'The Infinite Personality'.

All these expressions clearly indicate that Tagore's conception of God tries to strike a balance between the Absolutistic demands of the supreme, and the humanistic needs of such a concept. In order to do this, he first deals away with the distinction between 'Absolute' and 'God'. This distinction, according to him, does not have any objective basis, but is rooted in the varying attitudes of different men.

Secondly, he asserts that the Supreme has to be a person, He tries his best to show that this would, in no way, imply any limitation or imperfection on the part of God.

In order to substantiate his view point, he quotes from the Upanisads and the Vedas, which according to him, give due credence to the personality of God. He says that Reality can be regarded as "personality acting upon personalities through incessant manifestations".⁸ He also says: "Reality is the expression of personality, like a poem, like a work of art".⁹

This does not mean that according to Tagore Divine personality is exactly similar to human personality. He asserts the similarity between the two and yet feels that there is a difference.

Divine personality stands for the 'highest and the best that humanity strives for but does not attain. A student of western philosophy will find it difficult to appreciate this point. Western idealists, like Bradley, have tried to bring to the surface the inconsistencies involved in attributing personality to the Supreme. They have clearly shown that personality is necessarily a limitation. But Tagore believes that personality does not necessarily imply finitude. Personality is a limitation only, if it is by conception a limited personality. If personality itself is thought of as the supreme-as infinite the question of its limitation does not arise. Tagore clearly says: "It is not in my own individual personality that reality is contained but in infinite personality".¹⁰

The notion of God as an Impersonal entity does not appeal to him. A Brahman who stares at us with frozen eyes, regardless of our selfless devotion and silent suffering "does not appeal to our religious instinct. Tagore explicitly says: "But as the physiology of our beloved is not our beloved, so this Impersonal law is not our God.....".¹¹ He feels that God has to be brought nearer to man. "Man can take interest in the Absolute only when it is humanised".¹²

Although maintaining that the distinction between "Saguna" and 'Nirguna' God is unnecessary. Tagore emphasized the importance of the 'Saguna' notion of God. God, according to him is 'Satyam', 'Anandam' 'Shivam' and 'Sundaram'. It is on account of this conviction that Tagore comes to talk about the characters of God.

God is Love

One of the most frequent and clearest expression used for describing God's nature is that, God is love.

Although, this assertion appears to be similar to the Christian assertion of God as love. The fact remains, that for Tagore this statement is not so much Christian as Vaisnava. The emphasis here is not so much on service or compassion as on 'devotion' and 'surrender'. Metaphysically speaking, both the Christian and the Vaisnava thinkers, may ultimately come to mean the same thing by the statement 'God is love'. But Tagore speaks about an emotional realization of oneness which will lead to an extension of consciousness beyond the narrow limits of the self. His emphasis thus brings him closer to the supporters of the Bhakti cult. Therefore, the statement 'God is Love' means that God is the ultimate hope and source of strength to man. God becomes a being with whom an emotional relationship can be established and through whom life can derive sustenance and solace.

Anthology : The Research**Uniqueness of Tagore's Theism**

Thus, we can say that Tagore's concept of God can be described as a kind of theism. It ascribes to God almost all the theistic characters, and yet this conception of God, remains unique in so far as it tries to incorporate some such ideas that ordinary theism never thinks of. For example, the identification of God with the supreme principle, the humanization of God, the approach through love etc. are some features that make this conception unique.

Conclusion

Tagore's concept of God has succeeded in clarification of some concepts. 'Absolute and God' 'God as love' 'Personality of God' 'Humanisation of God', are some of the concepts that have been clarified. Hence, Tagore's concept of God should be judged in a new perspective.

References

1. Sengupta S.C. (Ed) *Some Reflections on Tagore's Approach to God in Rabindra Nath Tagore Homage from Vesva-Bharati* P-82.
2. Naravane, V.S. *Modern Indian Thought* P- 125
3. *Tagore Rabindranath, Personality* P- 56
4. *Tagore, Rabindranath, The Kind of The Park Chamber* P-9
5. *Tagore, Rabindranth, Personality* PP-61-62
6. *Tagore, Rabindranath, Creative Unity* P-35
7. *A conversation between Rabindranath Tagore and Professor Albert Einstein printed as an Appendix to The Religion of Man* P-224.
8. *Tagore, Rabindranath, Creative Unity – P-35*
9. *Tagore, Rabindranath, Personality* P – 69
10. *Tagore, Rabindranath, Personality* P – 58
11. *Tagore, Rabindranath The Religion of Man – P-114*
12. *Raju, P.T. 'Idealism of Rabindranath Tagore Visva Bharati Quarterly November, 1939 January 1940. P- 205.*