



Practical Philosophy of Tagore

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ABSTRACT

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy -Tagore

This paper seeks to study the collection of Tagore's lectures in the book Sadhana which deals with his practical philosophy of life. At various instances in his lectures Tagore repeatedly emphasizes on the Indian philosophy of oneness of Being that is the cause for the progress of the soul towards the union with the Brahman. The collection is compiled of eight lectures, based on ideas of the individual's relation to the universe, soul consciousness, evil, self, of love, of action and of beauty and finally the nature of union with the Infinite. The Infinite can be attained through endless means of activities found in joy and love. His sadhana has been in writing poetry and in living his life in all its hues and colors and thereby attaining realization of life.

1. Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore, the poet- saint of India, with his creative soul endeavored upon varied literary enterprises - poetry, drama, novel and short story to mention a few, that are truly the manifestation of his realization of man's integral presence in the overall infinite and sublime purpose of the cosmic Godhead. Sadhana, a collection of Tagore's discourses delivered at various instances to his students at Bolpur, Bengal, contrary to his claim that these lectures do not carry any philosophical bent of mind, in fact represents the culmination of the poet's

2. Philosophy of life in a comprehensive manner.

Deeply indebted to the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha, Tagore speaks from his own personal experiences at once instinctual and individual, the values of the spirit which enables man to achieve communion with the divine in his everyday life. Comprising of eight titles -'The Relation of the Individual to the Universe', 'Soul Consciousness', 'The Problem of Evil', 'The Problem of Self', 'Realization in Love', 'Realization in Action', 'The Realization of Beauty' and 'The Realization of the Infinite', the poet has offered in this collection the ways and means of attaining the ultimate purpose in human life -that is to become one with the Infinite.

In his book, The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, S. Radhakrishnan states that, Rabindranath's philosophy of life is viewed... as nothing but the ancient wisdom of India restated

to meet the needs of modern times. His writings are a commentary on the Upanishads by an individual of this generation on whom the

3. Present age has had its influence. The soul of ancient India is mirrored in them.

In the first lecture, 'The Relation of the Individual to the Universe', Tagore distinguishes between the Western ideas of the relationship between nature and man, with those of the Indian concepts. The West always believed in the mastering of nature because to them nature consisted of inanimate things and the beasts. This kind of thinking stemmed from the sense of superiority that man stood first in the scale of creation that he is born to rule over the universe. In today's world situation, this attitude of man has led to diverse problems between not only man and nature

but also between man and man. 'The Problem of Evil', deals with the fact that suffering and pain and evil in world are only impermanent though we imagine it to be standstill and therefore exaggerate its presence. The idea of death too is similarly questioned by Tagore when he says: "Life as a whole never takes death seriously. It laughs, dances and plays, it builds, hoards, and loves in death's face... we lose sight of the wholeness of a life of which death is part... but the truth is, death is not the ultimate reality" The very goal of life is to move from imperfection to perfection, as the poet establishes that:

"This life process is going on- we know it, we have felt it; and we have a faith which no individual instances to the contrary can shake, that the direction of humanity is from evil to good. For we feel that good is the positive element in man's nature and in every age and every clime what man values most is his ideal of goodness".

In the lecture on 'Problem of Self', Tagore discusses how the self is responsible for the sufferings and the sins that man commits; "It has led man to shame and crime and death; yet it is dearer to him than any paradise where the self lies, securely slumbering in perfect innocence in the womb of Mother Nature"

The true nature or essence of our being is the godliness inherent within us. This can be realized only when selfishness is extinguished from us. In recalling the words of Buddha, Tagore says:

The emancipation of our physical nature is in attaining health, of our social being in attaining goodness, and of our self in attaining love. This last is what Buddha describes as extinction- the extinction of selfishness. This is the function of love, and it does not lead to darkness but to illumination. This is the attainment of Bodhi, or the true awakening; it is the revealing in us of the infinite joy by the light of love.

In his last discourse on 'The Realization of the Infinite', Tagore speaks about the nature of attainment of God. At the outset he categorically states that God is not a material possession like money, or house or car. All these earthly objects manifest but one truth and that is they have their meaning not in themselves but only in their relation with the infinite. Desire for man is endless but once he realizes that worldly possessions are not the end, but he has to outgrow his desire for them, then that very moment his soul takes to the path of the eternal. He puts forward the proposition that God cannot be possessed; rather, He is to be experienced.

Brahma is Brahma, he is the infinite ideal of perfection but we are not what we truly are; we are ever to become true, ever to become Brahma. There is the eternal play of love in relation between this being and the becoming; and in the depth of this mystery is the source of all truth and beauty that sustains the endless march of creation.

The philosophy of Tagore, as he presents in his work *Sadhana*, thus, is a comprehensive one that at once includes the idea of a happy reconciliation between service and renunciation, action and seclusion, between self and soul, the finite and the infinite, the individual and the world. As S. Radhakrishnan rightly says, Tagore gives an eloquent expression to his thirst for social betterment. Man as a member of society has to offer himself entirely and exhaustively to the service of one's fellows (*The Philosophy* 79-80). The soul filled with the infinite love spends itself in the service of man, which otherwise would be an abstract barren negative. To quote Radhakrishnan:

The philosophy of Rabindranath is an absolute idealism of the concrete type... Rabindranath's is a wholeness of vision, which cannot tolerate absolute divisions between body and mind, matter and life, individual and society, community and nation, empire and the world... (*The Philosophy*)

Though *Sadhana* is a collection of discourses offered at various times it still represents the fine thread of Tagore's philosophy that forms the connecting link between all these lectures - that of the purpose of human life i.e., the realization of Brahma in our every thought, our every word and our every action on this earth, this universe which is but a manifestation of the Infinite, in terms of joy and love? *Sadhana*, means rigorous practice, and the subtitle being *Realization of Life* clearly states the mission of Tagore, that the poet-saint has been striving endlessly to realize his purpose in life in all its glory. Tagore himself is a fine example of this philosophy, for he has truly been a man of the world in fulfilling his worldly duties as a family man on the one hand and on the other he has been a man of the world in his service to society at large as a poet who rendered his work in joy and love, in propagating the oneness of Being, so as to be united with the Paramatman.

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