

Religious Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: Rabindranath Tagore is considered one of the greatest personalities of modern India. He was not a philosopher academically but his outstanding writings and spiritual thinking are very deep insights into the world of Philosophy. His concept of humanism centers rounded or tinted by the lessons of Vaishnavism. Rabindranath Tagore was the greatest poet of contemporary India and the religion propounded by him is essentially known as the poet's religion. His religion is the essence of human life. Tagore perceives God in the wake of variety. Like Tagore, Vivekananda is one of the living figures of contemporary India. He put effort to establish brotherhood among the people of different world religions. He stood for religious pluralism and tolerance as well. He referred; universal religion as a common platform for all religions. He was also known as the initiator of Hinduism and the introducer of Nationalism. For Vivekananda religion is the essence of a man, a living path in favor of truth. Hinduism is a religion that is not a doctrine or not a statement of belief but the basics of it. Every religion has its quality that is why it is very hard to find out some common or universal elements and to compare all religions. The religious ideal given by Tagore and Vivekananda is very important in our modern times to lead a proper ethical and peaceful life. This paper is an attempt to understand the religious interpretation of Tagore and Vivekananda in the domain of religion and philosophy. Effort is also being made to understand their ideal and religious values in real life.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Jivana Devota and Universal religion.

Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore is one of the most brilliant personalities of India. He is the greatest poet, humanist, philosopher, cosmopolitan, scholar, novelist, short story writer, painter, and composer. This multifaceted figure was born on 7th May of 1861 and died on 7th August of 1941 at the age of eighty. He was born in a very famous Bengali family in Bengal. He was a contemporary philosopher and poet, who was highly impacted by European culture and literature. He achieved both national and international gratitude for his outstanding literary and scholarly work and was also

awarded Nobel Prize for his most creative and exceptional work 'Gitanjali'. We can see many deep-rooted marks and contributions in the fields of literature, culture, philosophy, religion, paintings of South East Asia widely those had left by him through his valuable works. He always spoke and stood in favor of individual freedom and social justice. He was a person who tried to show people the values of love and humanitarianism. Gitanjali (1912), Sadhana (1913), The Religion of Man (1931), Creative Unity (1922), etc. are some of the very significant writings of Tagore. Tagore's poetics foundation is intimately connected to his basic notion of the harmony presented between individual and universal thought which is also the base of Indian traditions. Radhakrishnan said, "The worldwide interest and popularity of his writings are due as much to the lofty idealism of his thoughts as to the literacy grace." (Radhakrishnan, 1978, p2). Swami Vivekananda is one of the exceptional Philosophers and intellectualists, who supported universal religion as a world religion. He was an eminent personality and religious pluralist of the 20th century. This genius figure was born in a Hindu family on the 12th of Jan in the year 1886 and died on 4th July of 1902, when he was only 39 years old. Vivekananda was a very well-known personality both in India and the USA in the 19th century. He had been an exciting and inspiring individuality of the then time. He was a very spiritualistic person that has been reflected through his valuable writings. Jnana Yoga, Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, etc. are some of the impactful philosophical works of Swami Vivekananda. He was one of the prominent personalities to introduce Vedanta and yoga in the domain of Indian philosophy and to the western world. He was highly impacted by his guru Ramakrishna from his childhood.

Objectives: 1. To understand Tagore's and Vivekananda's philosophy of religion.

2. To understand the importance and significance of religious philosophy of Tagore and Vivekananda in modern world.

3. To make a comparative study between the religion of Tagore and religion of Vivekananda and understand their similarities and differences.

Methodology: The methods have applied in this research paper are analytical and comparative methods. The books written by Tagore and Vivekananda are considered as primary sources of information. Again, other sources such as journals, books as well as articles written by different authors are also consulted to fulfill the objectives and complete the work.

Discussion and Finding: Religious Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore: Rabindranath Tagore is regarded as one of the very eminent initiators to drag the idea of universal religion in the philosophy

of Modern India. He brought the concept of universal religion to the people and the domain of Philosophy through his impactful work 'Religion of Man'. His religious philosophy is completely man-centric. One can realize the absolute in him as his supreme self, exists within himself. Regarding the term religion Tagore in his exceptional work 'Sadhana: The Realization of Truth' holds that the Sanskrit word *dharma* which is usually translated into English as religion has a deeper meaning in our language. *Dharma* is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth, of all things. Dharma is the ultimate purpose that is working in our self. When any wrong is done we say that the lie has been given to our true nature. (Tagore, 1915, p.43) He always thought good for people and tried to make people free from superstitions constructed taking one's religions. He put effort into people think logically and demonstrated distinctive ways in contemporary Indian philosophy. Tagore was hugely influenced by the teaching of Upanishads from a very young age and it was the key instrument of building up his philosophical life. Apart from Upanishads, Vaishnavism, Brahma Samaj, Bhagavat Gita were also impacted Tagore tremendously. His scholarly or philosophical growth was pleaded with also by some other basis like-Modern Western thought, culture, and literature, Christianity, Brahma Samaj's humanist philosophy, Vedic thought, etc. His vision towards the Hindu religion was a mixture of the elements of Brahma samaj and the Hindu orthodox system. Brahma Samaj was one of the most abiding influences of his life. The greatest Buddha and Raja Ram Mohan Ray were the people whose influences are also seen in the life and works of Tagore. He is regarded as a theistic philosopher. He considers the reality in God or God as reality. According to him, God is not an abstraction in transcendental isolation from the world. But, he is both immanent and transcends.

Tagore stated in his well-known book Religion of Man that my notion of religion is the religion of a poet. In his word, "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. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life. Somehow they are wedded to each other, and through their betrothal had a long period of the ceremony, it was kept secret from me." (Tagore, 1978, p. 5)

God is the creator, the principle of unity. He is immanent by nature and cannot be seized by reason or logic. His creation is the manifestation of Him or the Devine. Human beings are the image of God. Tagore in his philosophy describes the harmonious connection of nature and the human self. God is the root of this universe and our existence. Tagore deeply observes God as a person who manifests himself in a human being. God for him is the person who is invariably associated with the man or human life. He also admires Vaishnavism's concept of Bhakti as a means of divine realization. We can feel the existence of God that is why he gave stresses on the personal realization

of God. He asserted that man can sense the contact of the infinite but cannot get the infinite. He holds man as a supreme person, is the ultimate source and spirit of unity of nature. This is a similar fact that is expressed in nature and the person. Love is the central theme of Tagore's religious philosophy. He also believes in the concept of spiritual realization of Vaishnavism, which is possible by the virtue of love and devotion. Love is the key to attain everything in life. He asserted that essentially man is not a slave either of himself or of the world, but he is a lover. His freedom and fulfillment is in love, which is another name for perfect comprehension, With this permeation of his being, he is united with the all-pervading Spirit, who is also the breath of his soul. Where a man tries to raise himself to eminence by pushing and jostling all others, to achieve a distinction by which he prides himself to be more than everybody else, there he is alienated from that spirit. This is why the Upanishads describe those who have attained the goal of human life as "peaceful" and as "at-one-with-God," meaning that they are in perfect harmony with man and nature, and therefore in undistributed union with God. (Tagore, 1915) "Love is the highest bliss that man can attain for, through it alone he truly knows that he is more than himself and he is at one with all." (Tagore, 1915, p.65). On the other hand vice or evil appears because of our insufficient knowledge about true nature within us. He always tried people to feel the freedom in practicing religion. For him without the love of God human life is full of suffering, misery, and so on. So, the achievement of God's love should be the ultimate desire of man. He is in the view that one can feel the supreme man in his imagination but cannot be made-up that being. Our self is Devine and it is not separated from God. God is infinite and a part of our finite self. God put all his potentialities on man and his highest creation is the human being. Our self is Devine resides within ourselves. He admits that man's self is included all that qualities to become Braham.

Tagore's whole religious philosophy is rooted in the conception of Man. One of the most famous and unique terms Tagore used in his philosophy is '*Jivana Devota*'. By the word '*Jivana Devota*', he means the God of life, who resides in the heart of man. This term indicates a deep sense of the special and personal name of God, who again transforms the self. Tagore's philosophical concept of God is similar to the humanism of Advaita Vedanta, who always resides within the human being. Gods dwell in the heart of Man. *Jivan Devota* is God in human beings and the highest self of Man. *Jivan Devota* does not exactly indicate the Infinite Absolute. God is called by many names as Universal man. He was also influenced by Vedic thought.

He was a person, who has full respect and love for man. He considers nature is the most sacred place or place of pilgrim for man. Through his religious philosophy, Tagore describes a very clear and auspicious relationship between the Absolute or Brahma and man as well as Nature and Man. He was a philosopher of humanism. Tagore's main direction to personal God is gratified to the

philosophy of Gita. He again followed the basic thought of Vaishnavism that love is the key to connect both finite and infinite ceaselessly. They are both dependent on each other and are bound up eternally.

Tagore regarded the Supreme self as Paratman or Brahma in his religious philosophy. In the words of the legends, "Our self is *maya* where it is simply individual and finite, where it considers it is separateness as absolute, it is *satyam* where it recognizes its essence in the universal and Infinite, in the Supreme self, it *Paratman*". (Tagore, 1931, p.57) Hence, the supreme soul is Brahma.

Self-realization is also an important theme of Tagore's life and philosophy. He deeply believed in the self-realization that a man can do. For him, worship of man is the same as worship of God. In other words service of man, is considered as the worship of God. He did not incarcerate religion in any group. any caste and any institution. He says that being Hindu, Muslim, or Christian is a subject of opportunity. It is a fact that every man takes birth in a particular family and bringing up in that way by practicing some specific traditions and standard of living in society. For instance—a Hindu follows the rule and regulations of a Hindu family. However, it is not the factual religion of that person. Because practicing those rules and regulations that person may not be able to do self-realization. The mean of true religion is recognizing the supremacy of self, generate self-consciousness, and presented the freedom of choice. I was born to a family who was pioneers in the revival in our country of a religion based upon the utterance of Indian sages in the Upanishads. But owing to my idiosyncrasy of temperament, I could not accept any religious teaching on the only ground that people in my surrounding believed it to be true. I could not persuade myself to imagine that I had religion simply because I might believe in its value. "(Tagore, 1978, p.5) Tagore is of the view that a person must be free to select his religion or he must first get to know the chance to know him. To realize one's self is regarded as to realize one's manhood. The nature of man is creative and this creative power is called the true religion of that man. Man expresses his intrinsic truth of life through his religion. It means he has the inner power of knowing himself as a spiritual being. The realization of self is the realization of one's manhood. As we know that by nature man is creative and his creative power is his dharma or true religion.

Tagore was a Universalist in many ways and at many levels. He opposed the militant and hierarchizing dharma of his Hindu tradition and his own nationalist compatriots, involving instead the universal, egalitarian dharma of truth and ahimsa. He opposed the sectarian identities of nation, religion, caste, race, region, and ethnicity, implicitly invoking a "politics of Otherness" against this politics of identity. He sought to base his ethics and politics not on legalism or on group narcissism, but on empathy. (Hogan & Pandit, 2003, p.17)

Tagore was so deeply realized the idea of creation. For him, Creation has been made achievable throughout the constant self-surrender of the part to the cosmos. And the divine creation of Man is also ever maintaining self-abandonment from the person units. This spiritual development is not so easy as the physical one in the corporeal world.

It is said in a verse of the Upanishads that this world which is all movement is pervaded by one supreme unity, and therefore true enjoyment can never be had through the satisfaction of greed, but only through the surrender of our individual self to the Universal self. (Vivekananda, 1931, p.20-21) In this regard to quote Radhakrishnan, “There are two views regarding his philosophy of life. If we believe one side, he is a Vedantin, a thinker who draws his inspiration from the Upanishads. If we believe the other, he is an advocate of a theism more or less like, if not identical with, Christianity. (Radhakrishnan. 1918, p.2-3)

Religious Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda: The philosophy of Vivekananda is strictly following the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta and he admitted that the religion of Vedanta is pure. Vedantic religion never contradicts any other religion. He asserted that The Upanishads, or the Vedanta, or the Aranyakas, or Rhasya, is the name of this portion of the Vedas. Here we find at once that religion has got rid of all external formalities. Here we find at once that spiritual things are told not in the language of matter, but in the language of the spirit. (“Selections from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda”, 1991, p.245) Religion as he quoted, “Of all the forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destinies of the Human race, none, certainly, is more potent than that, the manifestation of which we call religion.” (Vivekananda, 2015, p.1) Here, he spoke about the power of religion as follows-all social organizations have as a background somewhere, the workings of that peculiar force, and the greatest cohesive impulse ever brought into play amongst human units has been served from this power.” (Vivekananda, 2015, p.1)

For him, every distinguished religion is based on three conceptions and these conceptions are respectively-Philosophy, Mythology, and Rituals. In the first concept of religion, Vivekananda referred to universal religion as one eternal which exhibits human's religious consciousness. Religious consciousness of different religions can be seen in different places. He compares universal religion with science and gave the view that it is the same as science, one and unique. In the second concept, he established universal religion as a spiritual religion. In the third concept, he highlighted the dynamic character of religion and mentioned that universal religion is the religion where all religions of the world can communicate with each other with full of freedom for the welfare of the whole human being. In this way, Vivekananda has also become a humanist philosopher.

Swami Vivekananda introduced and promulgated his idea of harmony of religions for the first to the West at the Chicago Parliament of Religion and he added three corollaries. These are-

1. Religions of the world are mutually complementary, not contradictory
2. There is no need to change one's own religion for another
3. The ideal approach is to accept and assimilate the best elements of other religions while remaining steadfast in one's own religion. (Bhajananda, 2008, p.36-37)

Although social scientists have treated religion as a universal phenomenon, their conception of religion is very low, being based on mythology, rituals, institutions, etc., Swami Vivekananda has given a very high conception of religion as a universal phenomenon. He identified religion with transcendental spiritual consciousness, man's struggle to attain that consciousness, and his experience of it. It is this universal spiritual consciousness of humanity that Swamiji called Universal Religion. (Bhajananda, 2008, p.41) Vivekananda was a greatest admirer of Hinduism and religious pluralism. But he never said that other religions are inferior to Hinduism. Hinduism gave stresses on spirituality, Christians on self-purification, etc. As human beings, it is our duty to seek unity in this diverse world of religion. They are different in some ways but they also have some common factors, like-instance-every religion speaks about the ultimate reality which is termed as God. Again, although we are all human beings but still we have classifications of man and women.

In contrast to the narrow concept of universal religion, Swamiji's concept is a broad, truly universal concept. Swamiji's concept embraces all the religions of the world. It is based on universal principles and reconciles the contradictions found among religions. It is not, however, widely known that Swamiji has given three concepts of Universal Religion. (Bhajananda, 2008, p.39). Religion is described as the highest motive power of the human mind in the religious philosophy of Vivekananda. Nothing can be compared with this spiritual energy through which one can realize the infinite.

Swamiji did not identify Universal Religion as any particular religion like Hinduism (although he made Hinduism a universal religion by throwing open his doors to all people all over the world) but with humanity's common spiritual heritage. He looked upon world religions as manifestations of the universal spiritual consciousness of humanity. (Bhajananda, 2008, p.41) In his valuable work *Jnana Yoga* Vivekananda said that "As the Human mind broadens, its spiritual steps broaden too. The time has already come when a man can not record a thought. Without its reaching to all corners of the earth; by merely physical means, we have come into touch with the whole world; so the future religions of the world have to become as universal, as wide. (Vivekananda, 2015)

He also said about the relationship between the Infinite and the human soul. Divinity is embedded in each human soul and it can be referred to as God. Vivekananda's concept of God is not

personal. According to him, it is not rational thinking to consider what is taught in other religions about the construction of God. For instance- God created the world out of nothing, God created the world out of some material cause, etc. In this regard, Bhajananda explained that for Vivekananda the essence of every religion is the realization of Divinity. He asserted that religion is not simply belief in God, adherence to a creed, or following certain rituals or customs. For him, religion involves the whole life. It is nothing short of the transformation of human life into Divine life. It is the conversion of every thought, feeling, and action into a spiritual discipline. It is the conversion of one's whole life into broken yoga and the dedication of man. This defied life can be seen in the lives of great saints and mystics in all religions. (Bhajananda, 2008, p.48)

The world where we are living belongs to us and it has many qualities like-it the world of senses, it is rational, it is intellectual, etc. In his words, this universe of ours, the universe of the senses, the rational, the intellectual, is bounded on both sides by the illimitable, the unknowable, the ever-unknown. Herein is the search, herein are the inquiries, here are the facts, whence comes the light which is known to the world as religion. Essentially, however, religion belongs to the supersensuous and not to the sense plane. It is beyond all reasoning and is not on the plane of intellect. It is a vision, an inspiration, a plunge into the unknown and unknowable, making the unknowable more than known, for it can never be known. (Vivekananda, 1931, p.1) His gracious and dignified thought for humankind was reflected through his philosophy of religion.

Comparisons: Differences: Differences can be seen mainly in the following points in the religious philosophy of Tagore and Vivekananda:

1. Rabindranath Tagore's concept of religion is not based on any institutional religion. His religion is regarded as Man's religion. For him, man is the image of God, and service of man is the service of God. He never talked about any particular religion that people can follow or practice. On the other hand, Swami Vivekananda's religion is a universal religion that is a common platform to practice world religion. He also talked about Hinduism and showed how Hinduism can be good religion for people to practice.
2. Tagore's Philosophy of Religion is essentially a monotheistic religion while Vivekananda's philosophy of Religion follows the concept of pluralism in his religion.
3. For Tagore liberation can be attained through love. He considered love is the only means of attaining liberation. Love for Tagore is the supreme truth. In this case, Tagore agreed with the Buddhist concept of liberation and admitted that Avidya is the root cause or ultimate reason for bondage and all sufferings. So, to remove Avidya, Vidya is important. He also believed that the practice of love, charity, kindness can lead one to the way of salvation. On the other hand, Swami Vivekananda

rejects Buddhist concept of liberation and believed that liberation can be attained by performing bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, and karma yoga. For Vivekananda, these three yogas are the ultimate path to attain salvation.

4. Tagore's concept of God is purely personal. On the other hand, Vivekananda rejects that God can be personal. For Vivekananda God is always impersonal. He held in the multiplicity and religious plurality. He places Hinduism at the peak in its Advaita glance. But his universal religion also does not indicate that one principle should be chased.
5. Tagore made a lucid division between the Absolute and God. He holds that the realization of the *paratman*, the supreme soul, within our *antaratman*, our inner individual soul, is in a state of absolute completion. (Tagore, 1915, p.88) But Vivekananda does not recognize Absolute with God. To him, the absolute is beyond our thinking.

Similarities: we can also see many similarities in the religious philosophies of these two greatest philosophers. Some of them are-

1. Both Tagore and Vivakenanda believe that Religion is the essence of life and is described in their way.
2. Both of them were the follower of Advaita Vedanta.
3. Both of them were spiritualistic philosophers. They explored the spiritual nature of philosophy in their way.
4. Both of them believed in the concept of liberation.
5. Both of them were tried to establish universal religion and universal brotherhood through their conception of religion.
6. Both of them were theists, realists, and practical philosophers.
7. Both of them emphasize the concept of unity in diversity in their way.
8. Both of them wanted a peaceful society through the practice of their religion.

Conclusion: From the above, it can be consummate that the conceptions of the Religion of Tagore and Vivekananda are dissimilar from each other in some points and from the usual idea of religion. But both of them reflected their realistic, dynamic, practical views throughout their works in different ways and emphasized mankind as well. Hence, both the conception has values in many standpoints of their own. The conceptions of religion provided by these two legends may be considered very significant in this modern age in practical field. The Religion described by Tagore does not define any specific group. His religion is based on the whole of mankind. It is the essence of man and the appearance of man's intrinsic nature. Tagore was a Universalist philosopher but his

philosophy of religion is completely personal and man-centric. For him, religion is the exercise to realize the absolute and provides power to bring peace for all. He is in the view that Man must realize the wholeness of his existence, his place in the infinite; he must know that hard as he may strive he can never create his honey within the cells of the hive; for the perennial supply of his life food is outside their wall. (Tagore, 1915). Tagore's conception of humanism is reflected in his religious philosophy chiefly grounded by the teaching of Vaisnavism. He showed the value of human beings, how man self is connected with the absolute. He was a seeker of peace. He wanted people to understand the worth of nature and to be a better human beings. In the 21st materialist world, his religion is perfect to follow to live peacefully. By following his religion we may be spiritual in a way.

On the other hand, Swami Vivekananda's conception is purely Universal. His notion of religion is the perfect solution to the country, where multiple religious and cultural groups of people live. Universal religion is the religion for both religious believers and non-believers. Every person in this world can practice universal religion. His religious view is very practical, dynamic, and rational. By universal religion, he means that the world must go on working like the wheel within the wheel. He compares this with machinery which is very complex and wonderful. The religious philosophy of Vivekananda is one of the key concepts to build mutual trust and co-existence among all in the world in a peaceful environment. According to him, "The religious ideals of the future must embrace all that exists in the world and is good and great and, at the same time, have infinite scope for future development. All that was good in the past must be preserved, and the doors must be kept open for future additions to the already existing store. Religions must also be inclusive and not look down with contempt upon one another because their particular ideas of God are different." (Vivekananda, 2015)

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