

Abstract

If we discuss the philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore and Buddhism deeply, we shall come across some similarities and dissimilarities. Tagore was influenced by the *Upaniṣads*, Buddhism and others scriptures. He developed his concept of philosophy from *Upaniṣad*, Buddhism, *Bāuls*, folk-singers and others mystic saints like Lalan, Kabir etc. In the present era I mainly discuss how Tagore develops his philosophy being influenced by Buddhism. Both Rabindranath and Buddha has admitted suffering (*duḥkha*) as a truth or reality of life. Rabindranath was influenced by Buddhism, because he realised the importance of prohibition or restriction in one's life.

An effort will be made to highlight the contribution of Tagore while interpreting some of the Buddhist texts like *Dhammapada*, *Sutanipata* etc. Tagore and Buddha have welcomed misery/ suffering in the form of death etc. due to their some positive value of purification. Suffering, if limited, can rectify an individual, but not always. Unlimited suffering makes a man crippled after closing all doors of improvement, which is not at all acceptable.

Rabindranath has found something 'extra' ('surplus' as coined by Tagore) in an ordinary man. To him a man is an 'unmeasured one' which has been described by him as *ManerMānuṣ* as discovered by the *Bāuls* etc. The theory of 'change' as found in Buddhism and Rabindranath is subject to logical scrutiny.

Tagore as a metaphysical poet was influenced by Indian Scriptures like *Upaniṣads* and *Vedānta*. Especially he frequently and spontaneously recited Buddhist hymns. This influence lasted long, till his death. It was not because he was born in a Hindu family but because the philosophy of those scriptures shaped his own way of life and helped him reach the highest goal of human aspiration. Tagore's monism, his emphasis on the all-pervasive character of God, his assertion of the kinship between 'man and man' and between 'man and nature' are all taken from the *Upaniṣads*. He was also fully acquainted with the entire *Upaniṣadic* tradition and as such carried the stamp of some of the *Vedāntic* system in his thought. *Vaiṣṇavism*, a sect of *Vedānta*, made him realise the necessity and importance of opening the ways of the heart for apprehending the one.

Rabindranath had brought harmony between the Finite and the Infinite. To him such harmony remains within a man. An individual's ego wants to bind him in this worldly object while his soul longs for the Infinite, which is represented in the poem- '*Dui Pākhi*'. In an individual there is both *Viśva* (whole world) and *Viśeṣatva* (ego). Just as a string of the lyre remains in two poles a man while performing his worldly work is conjoined with the Infinite.

Rabindranath accepted good (*Śreya*) as moral value. Our life gains what is called *Śreya* in those of its aspects, which represent eternal humanity in knowledge, in sympathy, in deeds, in characters and creative works. When the 'surplus in man' is not revealed, he would not be in a position, which exceeds him. Under this situation all will seem to be *preya* (pleasant) to him, which is not at all desirable to Tagore.

Freedom, for Tagore, is a freedom from bondage created by alienation, which is essentially a 'freedom to'. The action which is taken out of need brings bondage while the action taken from the area of surplus is called *Mukti* or salvation.

Buddhism also shaped Tagore's own metaphysical philosophy like the verses of *Upaniṣads*. Tagore said, "To me the verses of the *Upaniṣads* and the teachings of the Buddha have ever been thing of the spirit, and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth as being instinct with individual meaning for me, as for others, and awaiting for their confirmation my own special testimony, which must have its value because of its individuality" So, it is clear to us by his own words how he was influenced by Buddha.

Tagore was impressed by *Bāul* singers of Bengal, Kabir and other mystic saints. The unsophisticated theology and the simple ways of the *Bāuls* impressed Tagore very much. Besides the *Bāuls*, the mystic Saints like Kabir and other saints always held special fascination for Tagore. Under these influences Tagore shaped his own religion – "*The Religion of man*" and composed a lot of poems, songs, novels, paintings etc. for us.

The points of departure of Rabindranath from our ancient *Śāstras* need to be explored and examined. Is his philosophical thought related to our religious tradition?

Tagore earnestly says, "My religion essentially is a poet's religion". But what is poet's religion? To whom he was worshipping? Only answer is *SatyaŚiva, Sundara*- the Truth, the Beauty and the Goodness. "Beauty is Truth, Truth is Beauty" this famous assertion of Keats has

come to a state of creative reality in Tagore's life, thought and literature. This is also he inherited from the *Upaniṣadic* seers.

Tagore's philosophy of religion and concept of man have a close affinity with the Buddhist idea of holy man (*Arhat*). He, who is always in worldly ties but free from all illusions is the real holy man. He says, "The real tragedy, however, does not lie in the risk of our material security but in the obscuration of man himself in the human world". The ultimate realization again expressed like this, "perpetual giving up is the truth of life, the consciousness of the infinite in us proves itself by our joy in giving ourselves. Out of our renunciation it is one with our life". This is the real Buddhist philosophy reflected in Poet's mind.

Rabindranath has taken pain (*duḥkha*) as a form of *ānanda* (bliss), and opposite to *sukha*. There is a general experience that *duḥkha* or suffering is opposite to *ānanda*, but actually it is not so. In suffering there is bliss or *ānanda* on account of which pathos (*karuṇarasa*) in literature is possible. Suffering is something which is relish able also.

Though Tagore was highly influenced by the Buddhistic thought and philosophy, it is found that he has not taken all theories into consideration. He was deeply moved by the moral aspect of Buddhism like honour to humanity, friendliness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), non-violence etc which are embedded mostly in Pali literature by *Hīnayāna* school of Buddhism. To the Buddhists the Eight-fold path (*aṣṭāṅgika-mārga*) is the correct path to know the right knowledge of reality, which ultimately leads to the control of sense-organs. If it is realized that each and every object is transitory or momentary, essenceless (*śūnya*), our mind, being

controlled, can reduce the thirst for enjoyment. An individual, being free from mental pollution, can achieve peace. That is why; Buddha himself is called an embodiment of peace and an aesthetic pleasure called *śāntarasa*. By virtue of being worthy of it he is called *śāntatmā* and *śānta-mānas*, which is admitted by Rabindranath in the following piece of poetry – “*Śānta he, mukta he, he anantapuṇyakaruṇāghana-dharaṇūtalakarakalankaśūnya*”.