



THE REMEDY FOR SOULS IN THE PRESENT SCENARIO: A STUDY ON THE SPIRITUALITY OF TAGORE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to cultivate a positive attitude in the masses through the spiritual poetry of Rabindranath Tagore to get rid of the fear of uncertainty, anxiety, loss and death during the threats of this global health emergency sprung from Pandemic: Covid -19 or Corona Virus. The history of human civilization had witnessed so many horrible situations when humanity was at the brink of a holocaust. Millions of people died, leaving the big cities into cemeteries and lots of people lost their loved ones in these man-made disasters. Wars, epidemics, famines and draughts remind the survivors of the horrible and traumatic remembrance of their past. During such crises, people suffer more psychologically than physically. Fear of illness, personal loss as well as commercial loss and death haunt them repeatedly. They feel lonely and dejected. A temporary isolation from social activities to stop them from being a host of a fatal disease turns them into permanent isolated zombies-like creatures who are alive but lack sensory balance and do not know what they are up to. Though no crisis is as strong as to remain in this world for a long period of time, lack of knowledge of crisis management and aloofness from reality in such times makes people more pitiable. We can overcome such situations and threats through alertness, prudence, obeisance and exposing our attention towards the Ultimate Truth and Reality which means the cultivation of spiritual insight into us.

Key Terms: Tagore, Coronavirus, Spirituality, Ecology, Resilience etc.

INTRODUCTION



A famous biologist, Rachel Carson rightly says, "But Man is a part of Nature, and his war against Nature is inevitably a war against himself."(Carson, "Silent Spring")

We know that we do exist so long as we are in a harmony with Nature and follows the natural laws. As an organism evolves out of another organism, so we are born from Nature. When Man attempts to intervene in the scheme of Nature, he has to face the consequences. As long as man does not disturb the equilibrium maintained by Nature, he enjoys the innumerable gifts given to him by it. But if he tries to temper with her clandestine plans, he is surely to be a victim of her frown.

Development in any field does not allow us to disrespect our roots. Not a single tree can survive for a very long period of time if it disconnects itself from the roots which give nourishment to it. We are a part of Nature and apart from her, we can never survive howsoever artificial conditions to survive we may create. For example, if we build an artificial wall around us, we will disassociate ourselves from the cosmic soul of which we are an inseparable part, and narrow down our vision. It must be clear that things are going to be worse if we try to subdue Nature and we will undergo a drastic change that will leave us repenting as the situation will be not in our control at that time. We should give up trying to master Nature. We can feel the difference when we are inside the air-conditioned chambers and when we are directly exposed to a naturally fresh, energising and healthy atmosphere. If we invest the amount of money that we afford in making artificial surroundings, into reviving the age long natural habitat and lessen the activities to exploit it destructively and maintain the lost balance between Nature and Man, we may be the happiest, wealthiest and the most powerful beings on this planet.

These horrible crises are not new to this planet. It has been observed that whenever Man has tried to encroach on the territory of Nature, he is shaken by backlashes and it takes centuries to compensate the economical loss as well as irreparable loss of human lives. Though it is done inside a specific geographical area, the whole of the globe has to pay for it.

Something like that happened in the case of the global spread of this virus, Covid-19 or Novel Coronavirus. As we know that a virus is a non-cellular organism or pathogen that feed on the other organism which is called its host. It is a non-cellular structure consisting of a protein coat that needs a living host cell to replicate and often causes disease in the host organism. It affects its host in many other ways. In most of the cases, their hosts are animal but how they transmit from animals to humans is a still a question to be explored. It has been estimated that three-quarters of new emerging diseases that affect humans originate in animals. These zoonotic diseases are linked to environmental change and human behaviour. The expansion of residential and industrial areas and disruption of natural habitats are



bringing humans and animal species into closer contact. We are making our homes there where we are not supposed to live in. These are microscopic organisms that we cannot see through normal vision. Lots of such organisms are yet to be discovered. We are exposed to them without any prior preparation. After destroying an eco-system, we are left with lots of species to infect us and affect us with diseases that are still incurable. Selling and buying the meat of such host animals in an open market and not to have a proper roadmap to dispose them in a harmless manner, are also some of the causes for them to jump from one host to the another host. In India, there is a popular proverb “When you do not know the cure of snake-bite, do not insert your hands into its hole to catch it”. This is absolutely relevant in today’s scenario that we should not intervene into the plans of Nature unless we have a detailed knowledge about it.

Therefore it becomes very important to assess our actual position, limits and our inter-relation with Nature. We should understand that Nature is not our foe; rather it is our closest friend. Since the dawn of civilization, Indian outlook towards Nature has been different. The Indian civilization was cradled under the open and fresh canopy of Nature, not in the city walls, so each of her action is guided by Nature. She has always maintained the harmony between Man and Nature. She has never tried to subdue it or encroach on it rather she has moulded Nature in a natural way to utilise it in the best possible manner. For India, this relation was explained in the *Upanishadic* concept of *Prakriti Purush*.

The great Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore is a mouthpiece of ancient Indian *Upanishadic* ideology. Tagore is often celebrated as a poet of optimism. He keeps a vast and comprehensive outlook towards life and treats the ups and downs of it as a natural and unavoidable part of it. His literary endeavours are based on ancient Indian *Vedic* philosophy. He composed a great deal of meditative poetry brooding over the uncertainties, mortality and hopelessness of human life. He seeks a ray of hope through the dark clouds. He welcomes the uninvited guest and presents him the best of his treasures. He is a lover of Nature and this is reflected in his works: poetry, prose and drama. He seeks a harmony between progress and preservation. Almost a century ago he had expressed his concerns about the irrational exploitation of natural resources and also warned the peoples of the world to get ready to face its serious consequences. According to him Nature is not a silent spectator but an active responder. In *Fruit Gathering*, he says, “No, it’s not yours to open buds into blossoms.” For this, Man has yet to learn how to react with Nature. Tagore, in the times of such crisis of identity, suggests us to be very patient and calm when the things are not in our hands. A Tagore scholar, Sukalyan Chanda says “His writings inspire us to have faith in the human capacity for resilience, resistance and transcendence.”(Chanda, “Poet and Pandemic”)

Tagore becomes more and more relevant in the times of crisis because of his insistence on the importance of faith and hope. Not only in India but even in other countries Tagore has been



cited and quoted to give solace and emotional support to cope with crucial situations. Tagore, too, underwent such a situation when death plagued half members of his family. It made him a meditative poet but not a melancholic one. He believes that suffering is all-pervasive in the universe. Every time when a deep depression seized him, spirituality and faith in humanity helped him to recover from the trauma. He believed in the immanent cosmic power. He knows that whatever happens is pre-destined. In the times of holocaust the poet sings hopefully:

“The morning will surely, come and the darkness will vanish, and thy voice will pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky.” (Tagore, “Gitanjali” 39)

He firmly believes that if there is winter, spring cannot be far behind. Sorrows and joys are the momentary flashes in human life. They are like the two stones of a grinding mill. An illusive play of the Infinite power continues between these two eternal stones. He spiritualised not only the fear, anxiety, depression and dejection but also even death. He asks us to build resilience and be calm during local or global emergency rather we should accept what we cannot change. We should nourish positive thoughts to clear away the fog of confusion and doubts. Like a prophet, Tagore gives his sermon to the whole humanity:

“What if the sky pants and trembles with the heat of the midday sun- what if the burning sand spreads its mantle of thirst- / is there no joy in the deep of your heart? At every footfall of yours, will not the harp of the road break out in sweet music of pain?” (Tagore, Gitanjali”80)

According to him we should not harbour negative thoughts in our mind rather we should look at the brighter side of things. When it is turmoil and chaos outside, we should move inside to seek shelter in our conscience to solve the issues. When the poet finds himself in this situation, he finds all the answers inside:

“I know not why today my life is all astir, and a feeling of tremulous joy is passing through my heart. /It is as if the time were come to wind up my work, and I feel in the air a faint smell of thy sweet presence.” (Tagore, “Gitanjali” 67)

The great saint poet of the 15th century, Tulsi Das explains in *The Ramcharitmanas* that nobody is the cause of sorrow or joy to anybody but man’s own deeds are the source and cause of our sufferings. All our worries feed on our concerns for futuristic planning, but we forget that our future emerges from our present. Tomorrow never comes. Our excessive concentration towards what has to come makes us irresponsible and careless towards what we



have in our hands right now. He opines that we should not miss the charm of our present by brooding over unpredictable future. When the things are not in our hands, we should not try to control it by force rather we should accept a positive change and surrender ourselves to the will of the Infinite. Tagore consoles a deprived soul:

“O fool, to try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders! O beggar, to come to beg at thy own door! / leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all, and never look behind in regret. / Thy desire at once puts out the lights from the lamp it touches with its breath. It is unholy-take not thy gifts through its unclean hands. Accept only what is offered by sacred love. ” (Tagore, “Gitanjali”29)

All the adverse situations in Tagore’s life are treated in a spiritualistic manner. His spirit is his strong retreat. He gave us some marvellous gifts through his poetic talent. He suggested us not to pray to be sheltered from dangers but to be fearless when facing them. He told us that everything comes to us or belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it. According to him Death or *Nirvana* is not extinguishing of light; it is only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come. Let us understand these two consecutive quotes from Tagore to estimate his strength of faith in Spiritual awakening:

“The water in a vessel is sparkling; the water in the sea is dark. /The small truth has words which are clear; the great truth has great silence.” (MHF, “Tribute to Rabindranath Tagore’s Positive Vision”)

The poem asks us to have strong faith in the providence of the Almighty as we are unable to predict what has to come in future. Nothing happens without the will of Immanent Power. optimism is reflected in his poetry that gives us moral and psychological strength in the times of uncertainties and panic. He proclaims:

“I have become my own version of an optimist. / If I cannot make it through one door, I will go through another door- or I will make a door. / something terrific will come no matter how dark present” (MHF, “Tribute to Rabindranath Tagore’s Positive Vision”)

Thus we find Tagore’s spiritual poetry a strong retreat in the times of economical, emotional and psychological turmoil. He asks us to regain the lost harmony between Man and Nature and give up trying to master it. He suggests us to be stable and calm during the adverse time and to console those who are around us. We must practice compassion for the poorest and the lost. In the times of unpredictable crisis, we must look inside and practice deep meditation to built resilience in us as Time never remains the same. John Milton, the great puritan poet



speaks boldly, “Solitude sometimes is the best society.” (Milton, “The Paradise Lost”) So we should try to live in solitude for some time in order to get strength to cope with the uncertainties of life. Milton rightly says that this mind of ours is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven. Finally, the great saint-poet Rabindranath Tagore, having been tired of the day to day worldly activities, longs for a moment of solitary contemplation, and this is an appropriate piece of advice from him to all of us in this crucial point of time:

“I ask for a moment’s indulgence to sit by thy side. /The works that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.” (Tagore, “Gitanjali” 25)

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