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Spiritual Flights: The Concept of Jevan Devata in Tagore's Poetry

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Abstract:

Rabindranath Tagore, a versatile artist and a renowned poet and playwright is a dominant literary figure who won Nobel Prize for English Literature for devotional poetry, Geetanjali. He presented the relation of the Almighty God with the human being. All the natural objects are eternal symbolizing the eternity and Omniscient Himself. The flower, in all its beauty, is a symbol of the fulfillment of the human desire for the Eternal. Tagore's imagination incarnates God in human form and makes him see the finite in the Infinite. The union of an individual with the other man or with things external to himself is a union of love. Jevan Devata expresses the inner spirit of Tagore. His poetry is full of mysticism and spiritualism which reflects his ideology that one can attain God only when one is free from malice and vengeance.

Keywords: Jevan Devata, mysticism, spiritualism, eternity.

Rabindranath Tagore, a versatile genius, received Nobel Prize for English Literature in 1913 for Geetanjali. The poems of Tagore reveal a deep and sensitive understanding of man's relation to the universe. They show that the whole universe is life, shaped with love over which death has no power.

Tagore combines mysticism and seriousness which is reflected in the image of Jevan-Devata. The concept of Jevan Devata finds a prominent place in his poetry from beginning to the end. The Omnipotent expresses Himself in varied forms through the individual. Jevan Devata is a part of the poet's self, an expression of his inner spirit. It loves the poet's soul as well. The Supreme Person discloses Himself in the yearning of the poet to mingle and blend with the world lying beyond Maya. Jevan Devata expresses itself also through the myriad forms of Nature. It desires for the individual as a bridegroom yearns for the bride and the boatman for the passenger. All the natural objects are eternal symbolizing the eternity and Omniscient Himself. One should treat the poor with love and care and serve them joyfully with all his might:

If you seek your own salvation, you will go to hell. It is the salvation of others that you must seek....and even if you have to go to hell in working for others that is worth more than to gain heaven by seeking your own salvation.-1

The doctrine of oneness of all creation is, infact, a part and parcel of Hinduism. For example, the text of our everyday meditation is Gayatri, a verse which is considered to be the epitome of all the four Vedas. With its assistance, one tries to realize the essential unity of world with the conscious soul of man. One learns to witness the unity held together by the One Eternal Being, whose power has caused the creation of the earth, the sky and the stars and at the same time, illuminates our minds with the light of a consciousness that moves and exists in an unbroken continuity with the outer world:

Nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is....
 I, who am curious about each, am not curious about God.
 Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.....
 Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
 In the faces of men and women I see God and in my own face in the glass.-2

Life is harmony and the principle of love and joy is the law or principle which governs its rhythms. The union of an individual with other man or with things external to himself is a union of love:

Only a great monk (in the widest sense: a man vowed to the service of the Absolute) can be a great worker; for he is without attachment.....There were no great workers than Buddha and Christ..... No work is secular. All work is adoration and worship...-3

It has no other motives and its effect is one of joy. A person can become aware of the truth about himself only through inter-relatedness with other persons and with the external universe. This relation frees a person from the burden of selfishness. Happiness is to be checked by penance, and it must pass through a process of self purification through suffering before it can attain fulfillment. Therefore, a mother's joy achieves fulfillment in her child after she has undergone the pains of labor. Emotion must be disciplined before it can give birth to beauty and, finally, give joy and peace. This is the truth of life.

Rabindranath's poetry has a universal appeal because of its affinity with the fundamental things of life and open atmosphere. Tagore finds human significance in the physical universe besides drawing on natural objects for descriptive images. Tagore is a firm believer in the essential unity of man and the external universe. Nature and Man are the Prakriti and Purusha, the two aspects of the Absolute. The meditation on nature leads to realization of the Divine. Tagore's philosophy is also the doctrine of surplus. The surplus is what man has in excess to his physical needs. It represents the measure of freedom which man enjoys from bondage to the practical necessities of life. True freedom only means the liberation of the soul from the bondage of practical utility. The human soul can expand and go out to meet the Divine when freed from the bondage of practical utility. It is this freedom which brings man face to face with the Infinite. Divinity is in man and nature and above them also. One can approach the Almighty only when one has acquired freedom from bondage of practical necessity. It is through this freedom that man approaches and blends with the Omnipotent as a river mingles with the sea.

Men and material things must not only be related to one another but must be related harmoniously because all are parts of the same Supreme Person. It is selfishness alone that sets obstacles among men and presents the physical world as hostile to the human. The Almighty is a supreme creative artist and His creation is universe. The act of creation is delightful and, so, delight is the basic principle of the creation in Tagore's philosophy. This universe is His Lila, as it is said in Vaishnava poetry. The first characteristic of the Divine's lila is that it is not guided by any purpose or motive. It exists in and for itself. It proceeds from His joy and bliss. The principle feature of a work of art is that it is the expression of the concealed personality of the artist. God is seen as the Supreme will and He expresses himself in this universe. Lila is not only unmotivated but also impeded and elusive. It is a ceaseless process in which the divine artist both expresses and hides Himself. God didn't cease the process of creation after a fixed period of time. He is continuously depicting Himself in the finite, in the heaven full of stars, in the flowers and in the soul of man. The final truth of life is inter-relatedness, the unity which is the result of harmony. A work of art is the revelation of the personality of the artist. This personality has a centralizing and controlling influence on the works created. This sense of inner unity can be entirely realized only if the artist feels the presence of the Supreme Person who comprehends both the human and the material world. Tagore has no trust in absolute Identity. He is a dualist who has faith in a mysterious identity in difference. Tagore also requests for a synthesis of Being and Becoming. Brahma is the Supreme Being, but we have also to become Brahma. We should Become and lose ourselves in the sea of Supreme Being like a river. This process of Becoming and Blending with God is everlasting like the everlasting flow of the river towards the sea. This is also the continuous manifestation of the Almighty. Mutability is the law of life and there is unity in diversity everywhere.

Tagore also harmonizes the opposition between illusion and truth. The world may be Maya, but it is also necessary for without appearance reality cannot exist and truth will be hollow without illusion. It can be said that truth derives its significance from the existence of illusion. It is through the illusory world that God expresses Himself and it is by reaching forth to the Absolute that illusion justifies its existence. Life manifests itself through reality and illusion. Death has its own place in the scheme of life. Rabindranath Tagore, himself, had to suffer bereavements one after another but he was not dismayed. He felt that the death was swallowed up in the victory of life over death. He realized that his sorrow only made him capable to witness the beauty and charm of nature in a more correct perspective. His attachment to the world was relaxed. He came to realize a deeper meaning of the beauty of the world. The death provided him with a sense of freedom. He came to admit that death is the completion and fulfillment of life. There is nothing lost in death. It is the medium through which life ceaselessly flows and renews itself. Just as death has its place in the rhythm of life, in the same way evil, ugliness and imperfection have their own importance and significance. Creation is a ceaseless process continuously perfecting itself. Imperfection can be called as only incompleteness, a part of the rhythm of life. The tragedies of life are only a part of the rhythm of life through which the joy of life asserts itself.

Tagore's view of life is optimistic. He can't find any room for ugliness in life as he finds it difficult also to assign a place to untruth. Truth and beauty are omnipresent representing the law and the harmony of the universe. It is man's incapacity to behold life as a whole that produces untruth and ugliness. If one can get over his selfishness and observe things in a detached manner, one can have the true vision of beauty that is everywhere. Mysticism denotes that the divine reality may be realized directly. Tagore always knew that he had communion with the Omnipresent and this spiritual consciousness casts a net of mysticism all round. Tagore believes that union with the Almighty, like most of the mystics, could take place in two ways: - first through trust and love and second, through perception. That's why Tagore enunciates the blessings of love and the consequent union with the beloved in his poetry. All his writings express the joy of attaining the Infinite with the finite. Tagore's poetry is an authentic representation of the mystical values. Tagore's songs get their basis from the emotional experiences of one whose soul longs to feel intuitively the soul of existence through trust and love in this world's festival. The wanderer who is restless in the poet is very intense to establish the relationship with the Great Beyond as he calls him. The mysticism's true and genuine power is the strength of its psychology in the real sense of the term i.e. "autology, the science of self", to use Prof. Ghose's words. By these words, he means, "the art and science of human becoming, his possible evolution."-4

The Crescent Moon develops the love between mother and child in such a way that it achieves metaphysical heights. The Gardener deals with the meditative design of love between man and woman. Tagore explains clearly that which is given by pious love alone should be accepted as it offers numberless possibilities for a man to rise above himself from finite to infinite. Once this continuity is believed into existence, the rapturous happiness and spiritual illumination fills the entire earth, and the poet experiences immortality in all mortal things. It is love that blesses and flows through the creation and gives its glow even to the blade of grass. Death is the divine messenger in The Gardener who merges the soul with the God. Kabir says, "The inward and the outward are become as one sky, the infinite and the finite are united. I am drunken with the sight of this All."-5

His spiritual love presents the impact of Vaishnava love poetry which revolves around Radha and Krishna. The secular wish of the lover becomes the spiritual want of the human soul for union with the Almighty. Nature is the manifestation of Omnipotent which is the medium of spiritual communion. The Supreme Being is, therefore, the immanent spirit which guides, leads and controls everything in the universe. God exists in every form of life according to Tagore. After the consideration of all the aspects of Tagore's philosophy, it becomes quite clear that the concept of Jevan Devata forms the basis of Tagore's poetry.

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