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The influence of Platonic philosophy on Christian doctrine

The Religious Message
of
Rabindranath Tagore.

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Bibliography.

I. Chitra. A play in one act.

II. The Crescent Moon: child-poems.

III. The Gardener. A collection of lyrics of love and life.

IV. Gitanjali. (Song offerings.) A collection of prose translations.

V. The King of the Dark Chamber. A play.

VI. Sādhanā, the Realisation of life. A volume of essays.

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These are translations from the original Bengali, made by the author himself.

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Introduction.

What good can come out of India? It was Rabindranath Tagore, poet and philosopher of India, who surprised the West by winning in 1913 the World's Nobel Prize in literature. This uptowering mountain peak among the learned of today was born in 1861. He belongs to a family of famous people. His religious affiliations are, or were, at least, with the Brahmo Samaj, or "Church of God" a sect of reformed Hinduism. His own system of religion may be called a unitarianism. He still lives, and conducts a school for boys. His influence in his country is (tremendous)

Rabindranath Tagore is a poet, philosopher, and religious teacher. In all these roles he is a master. Both in style and sentiment he surprises us. If his English translations are so perfect and facinating in style, how delicate and forceful his work in the mother tongue must be! While his poetic style pleases and even facinates, his prose style is clear, yet varied in expression. Never have we seen illustrations that so illustrate as those of Tagore.

And when we read his message, we cease to

wonder why the world gives him a hearing. She listens because her son has something to say. She realizes that here is a teacher who knows something, who has experienced something. Here is one who understands the meaning of the world, and human nature. Here is one who has a religious message, a message closer than which no other kind can be to the heart of man. Tagore is a great preacher setting the unseen and the spiritual over against the seen and the material. Across the skies goes thundering his message of "the soul, which is greater than the things man accumulates, the deeds he accomplishes, the theories he builds; the soul whose onward course is never checked by death or dissolution;" his message of selfishness and service, of devotion to the one holy, loving Father.

Tagore is a wonderful man to worship with his songs. Says he to his God: "I put my tales of you into lasting songs. The secret gushes from out my heart." And in his songs he sings of nature and its workings; of the little child and his mother; of the girl in love, and her lover; of his fellow-men and their life; of death and the life to come; of himself and God his eternal lover.

1 Sadhana p. 33

Religion can be predicated alone of man. Therefore in this paper, which is to present Tagore's religious message, we shall follow ~~him~~ man, first in his relation to the world; then in his relation to his fellow-man, and lastly in his relation to God.

Part I. Man and the World.

In Tagore all plurality is dissolved in a fundamental unity. The whole world and all life is an unbroken whole. He says the mind always puts a question mark behind the thought of duality and seeks to overcome it by the explanation of the One. The same stream of life that is in the poet's own body, courses thru the grass and the animals.[1] "I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life." This fundamental unity of all things is held together by the one Eternal spirit.[2] "Every moment it (the universe) comes from the heart of the Master, it is breathed in his breath." It is the One appearing as the many. Creation is God's manifestation of himself. His joy, which is formless, must take form, and this it does in creation. The spirit of the Infinite is everywhere, all-pervading, in every plant, every form and being. We experience[3] "the bliss of the touch of the one in the play of the many."

Tagore's World-view is joyous and optimistic. He sees God's working and his love in every little ray of sunlight, in every little fleeting cloud, in every gentle cooling breeze. The great unbroken

1. Gitanjali Song 69.
2. Sādhanā p. 89
3. Gitanjali Song 63

stream of world-life is a joyous rhythm; not sorrow and disharmony. Such a world-view would naturally make his religion joyous and optimistic. He will not flee from the world, he will not play the part of an ascetic.[1] "No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delight of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight." He will remain in this "play-house of infinite forms." It is here, in this world, that God is to be found, and the supreme goal .... of life is to be attained. In fact, this world is anthropocentric - it has a deeper meaning, and that meaning is to manifest God's love and woo the soul back to the Infinite Father.

This world and life is for Tagore a great festival, and his part is to sing for it. We are invited to a world-festival.[2] "Beauty is omnipresent, therefore everything is capable of giving us joy." The motive back of this wonderful creation is love and joy. God is the singer and this world his song. Singer and song are never separated: they are in eternal union. Then he asks,[3] "what does it matter if we fail to devine the exact meaning of this great harmony? It is the language of beauty, the caress, that comes

1. Gitanjali Song 73
2. Sadhanā p. 137
3. Sadhanā p. 144

from the heart of the world and straightway reaches our heart." The beauty of nature is to ~~the~~ man what colored toys are to the child.

The relation of man to the world is one of kinship and harmony.[1]"To realize this great harmony between Man's spirit and the spirit of the world was the endeavor of the forest-dwelling sages of ancient India." The West, reared within city walls, alienated itself from the world. In city-life man concentrates his vision on his own works, and creates an[2]"artificial dissociation between himself and the Universal nature within whose bosom he lies." But[3]"India included the world with the man as one great truth. India put all her emphasis on the harmony that exists between the individual and the universal." We are not living in a hostile world. Nature does not have to be "subdued." There could be[4]"no communication whatever with our surroundings if they were absolutely foreign to us." That man daily gains his ends in applying his efforts to nature, shows that there is a rational connection between him and nature.[5]"For we never can make anything our own except that which is truly related to us. Man can think because his thoughts are in harmony with nature." Nature may be conceived of

1. Sādhāna p. 4.
2. " " 5.
3. " " "
4. Sādhanā p. 5
5. " " 6

as a road, which some consider a hindrance, or a separation from our goal; while others have the truer view that it is a means and an aid, a connection with our ends.

There is no abrupt break between nature and human nature. We do not put bud and blossom in two different categories. We are akin to nature, we have an unbroken relation with all.[1] "This world is our compeer, nay, we are one with it." If it were so vastly inferior to us, it would degrade us. Thus we are to love the animals, to have affection for them much as tho they were human. Man and the animal are friends yes, kindred. Man looks upon the beast with affection, and the beast up to man in tender trust. It deserves the same sympathetic treatment we give the child.

But this fundamental unity of creation is not to be a mere philosophical speculation. It is to be experienced. Thus everything comes to have a spiritual meaning. Water, earth, air, flowers, animals, etc., all have much more than their daily practical, physical values. The spiritual man knows that the ultimate truth about earth and water is not such as they appear to us, but that they are the eternal will taking form and working[2] in the forces we realize.

1 Sādhanā p. 113

2 " " 8

under those aspects." But this is spiritual discernment, only the soul, the spiritual man, can know this. And this knowledge does not give us power, but joy, "which is the product of the union of kindred things." To the spiritual man contact with the earth is more than merely physical. The realization of this kinship with the world brings peace and joy. So the world has a vital meaning for the soul - it is necessary for the soul's perfection. We need to[2] "realize the essential unity of the world with the conscious soul of man." When man separates himself physically and mentally from the world he cannot solve the problems of life. Separate from the world and God, man goes astray and starves. He needs the world's "vitalising and purifying touch."

Man's relation, to the world, then, is to be one of intimacy, of love, of union. It can be fully appreciated and understood only by the spiritual man. Science and intellect alone cannot reveal our inner relation to the world, and its meaning. This can be seen alone by the soul's direct intuition. Tagore muses[3] "how mysterious the relation of the human heart with nature must be." From without it looks as if nature has necessity as its sole director, and utility

1 Sadhana p. 8

2 " " 9

3 " " 100

as its only value. But from within! ah, here beauty is its only qualification.[1] "In the heart of man it comes like a messenger from the King." The flower is a messenger from our great Lover telling us he has come to rescue us and take us back! It is our wedding ring! Yes, nature is a love-letter to the human heart![2]

And since the Infinite Spirit is all-pervading[3] " the attitude of the God-conscious man towards the universe is one of a deep feeling of adoration."

But in all this Tagore does not lose the sense of the superiority of man over the rest of the creation. Different things, it is maintained, have different values; Man is superior to all. And this superiority consists in the power of union.

The world and our possessions become harmful to us only thru the perversion of their use by our lower and selfish natures. The world may be fraught with spiritual beauty and meaning for us, or it may serve only to gratify our greed, lust, and love of comfort. Our possessions may separate us from others, they may be our limitations, and again, in and by them we may give ourselves, and in the giving find the fulfilment of our being. They may involve us

1 Sadhanā p. 101

2 " " "

3 " " 17

in bondage, so that we can have no spiritual appreciation.[1] "But, you man of riches, your wealth has no part in the simple grandeur of the sun's glad gold and the mellow gleams of the musing noon. The blessing of the all- embracing sky is not shed upon it. And when death appears, it pales and withers and crumbles into dust." In the pursuit of wealth we give up everything to gain a few things. When a man truly realizes what his possessions are, he gets rid of his illusions about them; knows his soul is far above them, and becomes free from the bondage of them. He who is bound by the habit of accumulating suffers from a "bulging" of the eye, and he is not able to comprehend the spiritual world, which is the world of perfect harmony. He is shut up within his narrow self.

Yet, as we observed before, Tagore would not leave this world with its hurry and worry. He would not renounce the life of the senses. The change that must be made is not external, but inward.[2] "No, my friends," says he, "I shall never be an ascetic." Yet he maintains that the glory of man's life is in renunciation. Man is to remain among the things of this world, and ever have a due appreciation of them. Yet

1 The Gardener Song 73
2. " " " " 43

always to be above them. But though Tagore is a friend and lover of Mother Earth, though she feeds us with life, yet he realizes that she cannot feed us with immortality. She is dear to him, yet she "cannot satisfy all our hungry hopes."

This brings us to the threshold of the thought in Tagore that the realization of the universe is necessary for the realization of God, and vice versa. We read,[1] "In order to find Him you must embrace all." To truly unite one's self in knowledge, love and service with all beings, is a way to realize one's self in God, the all-pervading Spirit. Again we read,[2] "In perfect harmony with man and nature, and therefore in undisturbed union with God." A thought akin to this is that the world is a school for self-expression; it furnishes that upon which the soul can act and work in order to its self-manifestation, its self-realization. Another thought that might be here referred to is that in his "King of the Dark Chamber" Tagore uses the argument from the law and order of creation for the existence of God.

1 Sādhanā 16

2 " 15.

PartII Man and Man.

In Tagore we find the doctrine of man's pre-existence. Before birth into this life the soul lives unfettered and free in God. But in this life it puts on bonds and limitations. Man's true self is good, but his lower self is passionate, ignorant, and weak. In "The King of the Dark Chamber" we see in Queen Sudarshana two natures - one that craves the outward, the physical, the beautiful to the eye; and the other, more deep and spiritual, that longs for the true, the good. The lower self is proud and selfish; it loves to accumulate for its own gratification. It is almost as though the pure spiritual soul were bound to an animal body.

Tagore is a prophet standing forth to tell the world that man is more than animal.[1] "Man is not entirely an animal. He aspires to a spiritual vision of the whole truth." He is also spiritual, a soul, [2] "which is greater than the things man accumulates, the deeds he accomplishes, the theories he builds; the soul whose onward course is never checked by death or dissolution." In[3] "The Gardener" we see that

1 Sādhanā p 111
2 " p 33
3 Song 71

there is more to a man than simply his material gains. Tho' penniless, he still possesses riches. Man is essentially a lover.[1] "His freedom and fulfilment is in love." He is a moral agent. Man is a superior being. He is only a little lower than the angels; indeed he is the acme of creation. Both God and His universe have thought and striven and yearned for aeons to perfect this wonderful object: man. And God has made him immortal.

Yet man in and through himself is insignificant. It is only through the Infinite that he becomes wonderful and worthy. Through Him does man become His second self.[2] "Man is great because his soul comprehends all." He[3] "has a universal aspect; and when he recognizes this, he becomes great. Man's[4] "reality is measured by the scope of his consciousness."[5] Man is not complete; he is yet to be. In what he <u>is</u> he <u>is</u> small, and if we could conceive him stopping there for eternity we should have an idea of the most awful hell that man can imagine. In his <u>to be</u> he is infinite, there is his heaven, his deliverance."

Man does not lose his individuality in the rest of creation. There is nothing else like it in the universe. It is that which distinguishes man

1 Sādhanā p. 15
2 " " "
3. " " 55
4 " " 19
5 " " 153

from all else in the world. It is his speciality.[1] "I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable." Man stands out from the universal as individual; and it is this individuality that man considers his most valuable possession. This consciousness of his individuality he gained by [2]"eating of the fruit of knowledge."

Man is also a free-will agent. We are at liberty to choose as we please in regard to our action. Here, in the region of the will, man is master.

Man's world-view and life-view is a subjective matter; it depends on the individual himself. The cause of pessimism is not in the world or this earthly life. [3]"Pessimism is a form of mental dipsomania." [4]"Man does not really believe in evil, just as he cannot believe that violin strings have been purposely made to create the exquisite torture of discordant notes," though there are many more of them than there are those of harmony. In actuality [5]"the potentiality of perfection outweighs actual contradictions" with us. [6]"If existence were an evil, it would wait for no philosopher to prove it. It is like convicting a man of suicide, while all the time he stands before

1 Sādhanā p. 69
2 " " 70
3 " " 52
4 Sādhanā p 52
5 " " "
6 " " 53

you in the flesh. Existence is here to prove that it cannot be evil." We are going from imperfection to perfection, from evil to good. What man everywhere values most is his ideal of goodness.

Nor is man naturally lazy. He is the hardest working of all creatures. He creates more work for himself than is necessary for him to live. He is incessantly thinking, seeking, and suffering. In toiling and sacrificing and suffering to become more than he is, in this ~~turmoil~~ travail is man's glory.

Tagore understands and has a high conception of woman. Indeed, he almost worships her. He says her arms "would add glory to kingly splendor with their touch." Yet she uses them "to sweep away the dust, to make clean her humble home," and all this fills him with awe. The sweetheart, the wife, the mother—he has a wonderful understanding of them all. Woman is precious to man, he glorifies her, she is his life's completion.

It is in "Chitra" that we see Tagore's conception of true womanhood portrayed. And here we see how great a love-poet he is. Chitra, a princess, had been reared as a boy, but when the spark of love was set aflame in her, she had to throw all mannish ways

1. The Gardner, Song 80

aside and be a woman. She wants to be a true woman. She says to Madana, the god of love, "Teach me thy lessons; give me the power of the weak and the weapon of the unarmed hand." She prefers love to power and outward, physical strength. Love is the stronger power. With this weapon she, in her weakness, can vanquish the world. Her true self is, to be a real woman and this it is her great desire to bring forth. But she says, "It is the labor of a lifetime to make one's true self known and honored." But wherein does true womanhood consist? "Of what use to her," says the princess, "are learning and great achievement? when a woman is merely a woman; when she winds herself round and round men's hearts with her smiles and sobs and services and caressing endearments; then she is happy." Nor is beauty woman's greatest worth. She is not to be married for beauty and pleasure, ~~and then~~, and then, when her beauty has vanished, to be set off in a corner. She is "to be the helpmeet of the day, the left arm to share the burdens of the proud right arm." Mere outward beauty is evanescent. You cannot make it permanent; it is like a summer blossom - it soon fades. But there is something deeper and inwardly beautiful, which is lasting. Chitra tells Arjuna, her

never, that she is "no goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference." She thinks it her duty "to share the great duties of life" with Arjuna. And thus he will come to know her true self. "If your babe, whom I am nourishing in my womb be born a son, I shall myself teach him to be a second Arjuna, and send him to you when the time comes, and then at last you will truly know me."[1] Arjuna yearns for the ultimate, true self of Chitra, and it is precisely that which she longs to give to him. Chitra cannot bear falsehood, neither in her lover nor in herself. She is fearfully embarrassed by her beauty, which is only borrowed and not really hers. "I will reveal my true self to him, a nobler thing than this diguise." If then her lover rejects her, she is determined to bear the humiliation. Finally she throws off her beautiful but borrowed appearance and says to Arjuna, "The gift I proudly bring you is the heart of a woman."

But, "when woman swerves from the right path, then she appears fraught with the direst calamity." It is a question with us whether the following words, put into the mouth of one of the characters in "The King of the Dark Chamber," expresses the author's own

1. King of the Dark Chamber p.130

conception of woman:-[1] "Every one knows that a woman's eyes are like a moth in that they fling themselves headlong on the glare and glitter of jewel and gold."

Not only the mother, but also the mother's little one, does Tagore understand and love. How sweetly and lovingly, how sympathetically the poet sings of childhood![2] "The sweet, soft freshness that blooms on baby's limbs - does any body know where it was hidden so long? Yes, when the mother was a young girl it lay pervading her heart in tender and silent mystery of love - the sweet soft freshness that has bloomed on baby's limbs." Baby is a "dear little naked mendicant," "My little life-bud" and "a world's treasure."

Baby comes from the land of perfect bliss. He came just for the sake of his mother's joy; for that he sacrificed his former freedom.[3]" In the lap of the deathless spirit who rules our home you have been nursed for ages." This recalls to mind Wordsworth's

"Trailing clouds of glory
Do we come from God who is our home."

Mother says to her babe;[4] "You have floated down the stream of life, and at last you have standed on my heart."

1 King of the Dark Chamber p 166.

2 Gitanjali Song 61
3. The Crescent Moon p 15
4 " " " " 8

Tagore's understanding of the child is a sympathetic one. The child nature is morally good. He does no wrong when he dirties himself, tears his clothes, and is greedy for sweet things. The little child is an angelic creature; he is pure and innocent. "Bless this little heart, this white soul that has won the kiss of heaven ~~from~~ for our earth."[1] The child has not learned to despise the dust, nor to hanker after gold. The poet enters into the very joys and sorrows of the child. They are of importance to him. Yes, he knows that even God did not "turn in contempt from my childish play among the dust."[2] Even the child can stand in a personal relation with God. We are to have sympathy with the child in his child-world and child-conceptions. Yet he does not love the little one just because he is good, but because he is his own little child. When he punishes his child, he weeps with him. ~~The parent~~ He alone may punish, for "he only may chastise who loves."[3]

The child has a real mission in life. Through the child the poet understands the deeper meaning of nature. God makes the world beautiful for the pleasure and enjoyment of men.[4] "When I kiss your face to make you smile, my darling, I surely understand what the

1 Crescent Moon p 74.
2 Gitanjali Song 43
3 Crescent Moon P 22
4 Gitanjali Song 62

pleasure is that streams from the sky in morning light, and what delight that is which the summer breeze brings to my body - when I kiss you to make you smile." To the fighting, the clamoring, the doubting and the despairing, the child is to be[1] "like a flame of light, unflickering and pure, and delight them into silence." Amongst the cruel, the greedy, and the envious, the child is to let its[2] "gentle eyes fall upon them like the forgiving peace of the evening over the stripe of day. Let them see your face, my child, and thus know the meaning of all things; let them love you and thus love each other." A king tried to hire the poet with power; an old man with money; a fair maiden with smiles; but a child said he would hire him with nothing.[3] "From thence-forward that bargain struck in childs play made me a free man." Thus our service to the world is to be disinterested, free, without expecting reward. We become free in and through unselfish service, service that looks not for pay. The worker looking for reward is a bondman; freedom comes through giving one's self for nothing. Let the child then[4] " come to your heart, forget him not in your hurry;"[5] "Keep his trust, lead him straight, and bless him."

1 Crescent Moon p 79
2 " " " "
3 " " " 81
4 " " " 86
5 " " " 74

Tagore comes forth with a strong social message. He is a friend and a brother to man. He cannot turn any from his door. The ultimate truth of humanity is its oneness; no man liveth unto himself. Man's individuality is not his highest truth. Society is an organism, and we are its parts. Man's highest joy and end consists in union and harmony with his fellows. All men are brothers; and God their Great Brother. On the eve of his departure, Tagore would say,[1] "Bid me farewell, my brothers!" His prayer is[2] "Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent ~~knights.~~ might." In the kingdom of God men are comrades. There are no lords; there are none that do obeisance to others.

Man is spirit, and we must recognize him as such in order to treat him justly. Spirit can be known alone by love; and when we know our fellow being as a spirit we know him as our own. Civilization is to be judged and prized, not by its power, but by its love for humanity. Its question must ever be[3] "whether and how far it recognizes man more as a spirit than as a machine." We look upon the world and man from the utilitarian view-point instead of from the point of view of love and the spirit, and man and the world become only

1 Gitanjali Song 93
2 " " 36
3 Sādhanā p 111

things to be exploited for our lust, greed and love of comfort. Hence our[1] " ugly sores in the body of civilization, its hovels and brothels, its vindictive penal codes, its cruel prison systems, its organized methods of exploiting foreign races."

Tagore calls us from the life of self to the life of service and sacrifice for others.[2] "It is our life of the self that causes conflicts and complications everywhere, upsets the normal balance of society and gives rise to miseries of all kinds. It brings things to such a pass that in order to maintain order we have to create artificial coercions and organized forms of tyranny, and tolerate informal institutions in our midst, whereby at every moment humanity is humiliated." Tagore laments this selfish life, that he heeds not his brothers, does not divide his earnings with them and thus share his all with God. These sentiments are strikingly like the social conceptions of the New Testament.[3] "In pleasure and in pain I stand not by the side of men, and thus stand by Thee. I shrink to give up my life, and thus do not plunge into the great waters of life." Sin is anti-social. It separates us from God and man. It

1 Sādhanā p 109
2 " " 63
3. Gitanjali song 77

arrogantly and exclusively sets us apart by ourselves. "For sin is not one mere action, but it is an attitude of life which takes for granted that our goal is finite, that ourself is the ultimate truth, and that we are not all essentially one but exist each for his own separate individual existence."[1] "Whatever we treasure for ourselves, separates us from others." In our endeavor to hoard up for ourselves we take what belongs to all, we deal unjustly, injure others and are out of harmony with humanity.

What we must do, then, is to "plunge into the great waters of life." Not in accumulating and living for self, nor in escaping into hermitage, is man's goal reached. Man has to undergo the discipline of freeing himself of his personal desires, in order that he may be fit for social duties, for bearing the burdens of his fellows. Our gain, our enlargement of life, is in giving away.[3] "Our great revealers are they who make manifest the true meaning of the soul by giving up self for the love of mankind. They face calumny and persecution, deprivation and death in their service of love. They live the life of the soul, not of the self, and thus they prove to us the ulti-

1 Sādhanā p 111
2 " " 16
3 " " ~~56~~ 28

mate truth of humanity. We call them Mahātmās, the men of the great soul." The life of goodness is the life lived for all[1] "Pleasure is for one's self, but goodness is concerned with the happiness of all humanity for all time."[2] "He who is wise tries to harmonize the wishes that seek for self-gratification with the wishes for the social good, and only thus can he realize his highest self.... The emancipation of our social being is in attaining goodness, and of our self in attaining love."

But the soul has two aspects, the finite and the infinite; the former working for the self, and the latter for humanity as a whole. Our truer self is social in nature. It finds rest, peace, and joy alone in living the unselfish life. There it finds the least resistance, for we are constituted to live with others.[3] "Man's deepest joy is in growing greater and greater by more and more union with the all." We see the true nature of the soul in that its highest joy is in ridding itself of its selfishness and in living in union and service with others. Man is essentially a lover, Those who have reached the goal of life, are in perfect harmony with man, and this is necessary in order to be in perfect union with God.

1 Sādhanā p 56
2 " " 83
3 " " 60

Part III. Man and God.

With Tagore, God is one, a spirit, a personality. As such he is complete, and is not amenable to any law of evolution. He is also perfect in every way, the ideal of perfection. He is infinite, and the only limits he has are self-imposed. He is, then, a free agent. As spirit he is formless, and inscrutable. He is truly knowable only by love. He is omniscient, feeling all and being conscious of all. His omnipotence he does not exercise, since he has placed limitations upon himslef. He is like a chess-player, who plays according to self-imposed laws, and in that sense limits himself. He is also omnipresent. This Tagore emphasises again and again. He is all-pervading. He is everywhere, in everything. He fills all. He constitutes the unity which holds together all. He is the one appearing as many. In creation He manifests himself. Tagore even seems to hold that the essence of our soul is God. Indeed, he he quotes the Upanishads as saying that God in his essence is the life of all. Here one recalls the Pauline "In Him we live and move and have our being." Tagore says the Indian sees and

worships God in everything; and that his object of worship is present everywhere. This needs not necessarily be idolatry. The ancient poet-prophets of India felt that "the same energy which vibrates and passes into the endless forms of the world manifests itself in our inner being as consciousness; and there is no break in unity. Since God is all-pervading, the Upanishads say that "He is the inmate good in all."

God is also eternal. He is permanent in all that is ~~important~~ permanent. He is active. He is ceaselessly at work; Tagore calls Him "Worker of the Universe!" It is His nature to work. In creation he gives form to His joy, His love, and in it he manifests himself.

But Tagore recognizes likewise the greatness, the majesty, the sovereignty of God. He is the "Lord of all worlds", the "King of Kings." "The world with eyes bent upon thy feet stands in awe with all its silent stars." It is an honor for the poet to come into God's presence. He is wonderful, superb, miraculous; "beautiful" is far too inadequate an attribute for the Great king.

But what are the moral qualities of his God? He is pure, holy. He is altogether faithful and just.

1. Gitanjali Song 97.

Suffering and physical evil among men does not impeach the perfect holiness and justice of his Lord. Furthermore, God is love. Out of His love, God created all that is. Out of his love he limited his freedom. Tagore can call Him Brother, Friend, and finds Him such. He is no respecter of persons.[1] "When I bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depths where thy feet rest among the poorest, the lowliest, and lost." God is calm and serene. The slanders, blasphemies, infidelities of men against Him do not scathe his character nor provoke Him to wrath. In all the abuse and suspicion of men against Him his mind remains imperturable. He is tender, and infinitely patient.[2] "Thy centuries follow each other perfecting a small wild flower. Thou knowest how to wait." The last point may be introduced by a question. Does Tagore in his "King of the Dark Chamber" mean to portray the severity of God's nature by the pitiless character of the king? If so, does he not overdo the portrayal? One of his characters prays that the king may never be moved by pity, by a bleeding heart; his king shall remain as pitiless as adamant. It is true, this would all be for the purpose of saving and schooling men, but if

1 Gitanjali Song 10
2 " " 82.

it is meant to be a picture of God, it is at least overdrawn, if not in contradiction with Tagore's other ideas about God's nature. This would be too much Stoicism, for we need a Lord touched by sympathy and pity, one who can behold Jerusalem, and weep over it. The Christian's God is calm, imperturbable, sovereign, majestic but he is also Father, in other respects. Among the other works of Tagore here under consideration, it is only in Gitanjali that we have an approach to this idea of pitilessness, and there it is not at all an unreasonable want of pity. In Sādhanā we fail to find anything like it.

We come now to consider ~~now~~ the final chapter of our subject: The Interrelation of man and God. Man's origin, his true nature, his means of life's victory, his life's very goal, all point directly to union and oneness with God and his purpose. It would be more correct to say that union with God <u>is</u> the goal of life.

As we observed before, man was preexistent; his origin goes back to God. This has much to do with his nature, his relation to God, and his destiny. Even in this life "man is immersed", we are told, in God's consciousness body and soul. But he is also in <u>our</u> souls. Coming from God, the true nature of man is

1 Sadhana p 18

essentially good. We saw this in our study of the child. In our heart of hearts we desire the best.[1] "This longing for the perfect expression of his self is more deeply inherent in man than his hunger and thirst for bodily sustenance, his lust for wealth and distinction." But this longing is not of us, but really of the Spirit that is in us. We see this idea illustrated in Queen Sudarshana; tho' she has been estranged from the King, in her heart of heart she says she was never untrue to Him.

But what keeps us from being in perfect harmony with our Creator, and all about us? What is the cause of our life of the self, of our passions and impulses? Coming from God, why are we not all perfect beings? How can we explain the existence of sin? suffering and imperfection? The answer is that the cause is found in avidya, ignorance. Through our ignorance we are in the thraldom of maya - appearance, or illusion. We imagine that ourself is finite, and exists only in and for itself. This heavy curtain of self is illusion; the soul which is infinite in principle, which is behind this illusory curtain, is real. Our consciousness, our comprehension, is limited and we do not see beyond the limits of self.

1 Sādhanā p 41

We do not know the truth, and therefore are not free. Enclosed within the narrow limits of self, we live the life of self. We are in disunion with God, man, and nature, and therefore out of harmony with everything, and out of true relation with all. Our individual desires conflict with all universal laws, and we meet with suffering and unhappiness. We are living the life of separateness instead of union. This disruption is an unnatural relation, and hence life is disorder and sin. We fail to recognize ourselves as spirit, as infinite; fail to recognize God within us, and man as a spirit and the spiritual meaning of the world. We do not recognize our kinship with God and his creation, our oneness with Him and all else. Tagore calls this "Insolent alienation of heart". Our self becomes its own end, it feels it is its own master and possessor, and its life is one of acquisition and accumulation, instead of self-surrender and sacrifice. Our true self is not recognized and realized; it remains entrammeled in bondage. In "Sādhanā, The Realisation of Life" we read[1] "It is our ignorance which makes us think that our self, as self, is real, that it has its complete meaning in

1 p. 72 Sādhanā

itself." Our self considered as absolute in its separateness, as finite, is appearance, illusion. Its essence is in God. and in this sense alone is it real.

Yes, the cause of all the troubles of the individual and society is the life of self, self-gratification, insatiable greed, pride of possession, love of accumulation, separating ourselves into ourselves. It is the failure to recognize and own that we and what we have, belong to God, to each and all; and that we and what we have are to serve alone for Him and humanity as a whole. We fail to plunge into the waters of life. Is this not remarkable like Christ's words [1] To save your life is to lose it?

When we enquire further into the reasons for man's shortcomings we find them in [2] "the imperfections in our knowledge and our available power and in the application of our will." The Soul, though infinite in principle, is finite in its expression. The trouble arises from avidya, the ignorance which limits our consciousness to the boundaries of our personal life. This limiting of consciousness creates the hard separateness of the ego, and is [3] "the source of all pride and greed and cruelty incidental to self-

1. Matt. 10:39
2. Sādhanā p 5.
3. Sādhanā p 32.

seeking." It is sin that puts obstacles in the way to our union with God. This narrowness of consciousness is spiritual sleep. Our passions and selfish impulses lead us our own way. There is no self-restraint, no great guiding purpose in life, no ~~ground~~ graced idea for which one would fain sacrifice and give all,-- only the freedom of license has full sway.[1] "We are in misery because we are creatures of self." It is our desires that limit the extension of our consciousness and which are the source of sin. And sin, to quote again,[2] "is the innermost barrier that keeps us apart from God, setting up disunion and the arrogance of exclusiveness. For sin is not one mere action, but it is an attitude of life which takes for granted that our goal is finite, that our self is the ultimate truth, and that we are not all essentially one but exist each for his own separate individual existence." In sin we lust after pleasures, not because they are truly desirable but because our passion makes them appear so. [3]"It is this failure to bring all the elements of his nature under the unity and control of the Supreme one that makes man feel the pang of his separation from God and gives rise to the earnest prayer, O God, O Father, completely sweep away all our sins."

1. Sādhanā p 37
2. " p 111
3. Sādhanā p 39

But how far is man himself to blame for his weaknesses and his shortcomings? Certainly, since he has a free will, man must be responsible for at least some of his wrong-doings. In Tagore we do not find an overwhelming sense of man's moral responsibility for his shortcomings. Tagore says the heart is weak, the passions strong, the application of our will imperfect. He says he does not do what he ought, and as well as he ought; but there is no strong censure of man for these conditions.

Man is here for a great purpose. His destiny is a glorious one. His goal is union with God, and therefore union with all, and he is to stop with nothing short of perfection. His call is to a life in harmony with the universe, wherein alone he will be happy, at peace, and truly free.[1] "Thus the state of realizing our relationship with all, of entering into everything thru union with God, was considered in India to be the ultimate end and fulfillment of humanity." Freedom and joy, or love, are our highest attainments, and these we reach when we unite with the Infinite. The one important question in life, is as to what relation we have established with the Infinite. We have reached life's goal when we know that "beauty is truth, truth

1. Sādhanā p 9

beauty", when we have established a relation of love with all, when God and we are[1] "in the perfect union of two."

But where lies the way of man's attainment of life's goal? The answer may be anticipated: By union thru surrender. Knowing that the life of the self is between man and his union with God, we know what is to be done in order that man may attain God. The self must be drawn aside in order that our soul may live in the universal. Man must be disillusioned of the belief that his self is finite and exists alone in and for itself. He must get out of the narrow limits of self. He must realize that his soul has its life and essence in God, and that he is truly a part of humanity. His selfish life must be cast off, and he must live for his God, and humanity as a whole. He gets out of his narrow self by comprehending all that is beyond him. "When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects, then he is emancipated." Now, this comprehension is not merely intellectual, but the comprehension by love. Tagore says that love is another name for perfect comprehension.[2] "By this power of comprehension, this permeation of his being, he is united with the all-pervading Spirit, who is the breath of

1 Sādhanā p 8.
2 " p 15.

his soul." In order to reach at-one-ness with God, man has to establish himself in harmony with both man and nature, for God is the fundamental unity that underlies all. And, on the other hand, in order to comprehend all, we must unite with the All-providing Spirit. For this comprehension is by love. Again, the price for gaining this consciousness is giving one's self.[1] "Our soul can realize itself truly only by denying itself." We must free ourselves of personal desires, of pride of self. The attainment of this comprehensive consciousness is not an outward process; it is an inner adjustment. We make the adjustment when we break down the narrow limits of self, take it from its detached position and unite it with the Infinite. Then it finds joy and peace,[2] "for its very essence is unity." But this salvation is only by love on our part, for it is alone through love that we can realize our true self and its union with God.

The key to cosmic consciousness, to God consciousness, is in the consciousness of the soul. To know our soul apart from the self is the first step towards the realization of the supreme deliverance. We must know with absolute certainty that essentially we are spirit. This we can do by winning mastery

1 Sādhanā p 19
2 " p

over self, by rising above all pride and greed and fear, by knowing that worldly losses and physical death can take nothing away from the truth and the greatness of our soul." The soul is like the chick, the self like the shell. The shell must be broken then in order that freedom may be gained and the purpose of the chick achieved. Tagore says the man who has gone through years of self-restraint and high thinking and has come out simple in wants, pure in heart, and ready to serve in a disinterested spirit, is born into the spiritual life. In Sanskrit the bird is called the twice-born; so is the spiritual man a twice-born.

Avidya is the trouble. This ignorance envelopes a man within his self, and he sees no farther, has no higher purpose than the gratification of his own desires. Then comes the comprehension that he is not finite, that he is more than himself, that he stands in relation with all, that he exists not for himself alone, that he is spirit and infinite in principle. Now he gives himself up in love, and lives the life of ceaseless union and self-sacrifice. In humility he casts off the bonds of pride and exclusiveness of self. He now is in harmony with all and walks the road of the common people. The meek shall inherit the

earth. Jesus said that when man gets rid of his pride of self he comes into his true inheritance. So it was with Queen Sudarshana, in "The King of the Dark Chamber," humility is set forth in the strongest light as the virtue whereby man attains his deliverance. Pride of self, Tagore maintains, interferes with the proper function of the soul, which is to realize itself by perfecting its union with the world and the world's God. When the queen was ready to give up her iron pride, and willing to be meek and submissive, and to stand at the very foot of the servants of the Lord, she found her deliverance and was at one with Him. Then there was joy and peace within, and all nature was a message of joy to her from her Lord.

The deliverance, again, is in harmonizing our will with the will of God. But this cannot be done by compulsion; it must be done thru love. It must be a free act on our part. For love and harmony is the result of the free union of two free wills. So in our actions we are doing what he likes, and at the same time what we like. Our purposes are the same. It takes two lovers for the realization of love. Therefore God has given us freedom and in that sense we are separate from Him. God's giving us a free will is like a "father's settle-

1. Sadhana p. 86.

ing upon his son some allowance within the limits of which he is free to do what he likes;" it is still the father's property,"yet he frees it from the operation of his own will." It is God's love that makes the reconciliation. But Tagore does not seem to distinguish clearly between two different kinds of separation:- the metaphysical separation of two free wills, and the moral separation of them out of disharmony. He says God has separated us from himself thru love and his love again makes the reconciliation. If the metaphysical separation of free will is meant, then a reconciliation might never be necessary. If the moral separation is meant, we make God responsible for moral evil. Anyway, we can gather from Tagore that God's love is infinitely patient, unceasingly wooing the wandering soul, doing all he does out of love and for the salvation and solace of that soul and that the soul finds its deliverance when in humility it throws off its shell of selfishness and pride, volitionally and in love recognizes God as its own and itself as God's and sees its true relation to all. Then the soul has entered the spiritual life; the heavenly kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Yet, Tagore holds our freedom is limited on the negative side; we cannot go on in evil for ever. We must

come into union and harmony with God. But we would ask our philosopher here, how is this "must" harmonized with the preserve will? Compulsion cannot be employed, for reconciliation can only be thru love, thru man's free consent. The outcome would be a thorough universalism; all will finally be at one with God. But how this can be done does not not appear. Tagore seems to hold that God's love is so strong and persistent that it will finally win all to Him. This would be a solution of our problem.

In Tagore's theology there is no atoning Savior; no heavy debt to be paid by a vicarious sufferer. Man's nature is not essentially bad, but essentially good. It is not true that alone by the special grace of God a soul can be saved.[1] "This" he says, "would be like saying that the nature of the seed is to remain enfolded within its shell, and it is only by some special miracle that it can be grown into a tree." All man needs to do is bring out dharma, his innermost nature, which is inherent, and not apparent. This is done by casting off the bonds of self, by transcending its narrow limits and by self-sacrifice.[2] "We seem to watch the Master in the very act of creation of a new world when a man's soul draws her heavy curtain

1 Sādhanā p 74
2 " p 43

of self aside, when her veil is lifted and she is face to face with her eternal lover." But here the question arises again, what about the soul that persists in remaining unto herself ?

But self-sacrifice and Nirvana with Tagore is not blank negation. The end thereof is peace and joy, it is fulfilment. He says significantly[1] "It is the function of religion not to destroy our nature but to fulfil it." Our complete surrender is not an impoverishment, but then only do we begin to be rich. Then first does our true nature come to expression and fulfilment. When we plunge into the great waters of life, losing ourselves, then do we save ourselves. [2]"Nirvana is the highest culmination of love." There is still a fundamental, yet a higher, egoism, in Tagore. In revealing itself the self gives up everything it has, like a bud pouring out its beauty in a full-blown lotus flower. Yet it is itself it has revealed, and the resplendent flower is its own fulfilment! The extinction Tagore speaks of is only the extinction of the selfish life, and nothing else.[3] "We are called", he tells us "not to annihilation but to eternal life. The eyelid is drawn up, not the eye destroyed. Nirvana in Tagore is what the death of the

1 Sādhanā p 74
2 " p.77
3 Sādhanā p 82

selfish life is in Christ. It is not inaction, That would be the soul's very stagnation. It must be active, and herein is its likeness to its heavenly Father. It is not inaction that is to be attained, but action more and more in tune with the eternal harmony.[1]" The soul is to dedicate itself to Brahma through all its activities." Thus he attains fulfilment, and thus comes the kingdom of God. Tagore has no patience with the ascetic and hermit.[2] "Why so foolish as to run away from the gladsome throng and seek Him in the listlessness of inaction?" The soul needs both inward worship and outward ministrations.[3] "Wherever the peasant tills the hard earth, there does thy joy gush out in the green corn, wherever man displaces the entangled forest, smoothes the stony ground, and clears for himself a homestead, there does thy joy enfold it in orderliness and peace."

More should be said here about love. It is not only means, but also end.[4] "It is not a mere sentiment--it is the joy that is at the root of creation. For love is the ultimate meaning of everything around us." Thru love we reach our deliverance, and in love is our deliverance. It is an end in itself; it is ultimate, permanent and absolute. Love is the highest bliss

1 Sādhanā p. 128
2 " "
3 " " 134
4. Sādhanā p. 107

that man can reach, and it is also the truest way of knowing. In love we know by our whole being, by fusion, by union. The reason cannot know God, only the soul can by love. In love all the contradictions of existence are dissolved. In it alone can the problem of two free wills in one- God's and man's, be solved. In love alone is true freedom.[1] "Nothing is more independent than love, and where else, again, shall we find so much of dependence?" In love, thraldom is as glorious as freedom. Love is God's final appeal to man, not compulsion. Every bit of color, of song, every grace of form, all beauty everywhere, is God's call of love for our love. And it is the result of oneness; the love must be one[2] and two at the same time."

Man's true estate in this life, then, is at-one-ness with God and man and nature. Having realized himself and humanity as spirit; that God is his Father, and that he as an individual belongs to all, and having given up the life of self in humility and love, and living now for the fulfilment of his highest self, for the service of his fellow men and the performance of God's will, he is a Rishi - one who has attained the goal of life, the spiritual kingdom. He has been reborn; his life has a purpose which directs him for-

1 Sadhana 155
2 " 144

ward, upward, and Godward.

Life is now one of joy and love. All the world has a spiritual meaning to him. He is now free, truly free. He now has attained the truth, wherein is freedom. What harm can befall him now? He realizes that his soul is spirit and far above his possessions; even bodily hurt cannot really harm him. Why should he worry or despair though the direst earthly calamities befall him? Grandfather in "The King of the Dark Chamber " asks his materialistic friends whether they thot that, after he had lost all his children and his wealth, whether he would be fool enough to lose also his God. Pain and suffering are the school-masters preparing him to be seated with the Infinite. To such a man both pain and pleasure are the same. Both are cheerfully taken and used as servants toward perfection. What is more touchingly beautiful than song 86 in Tagore's collection of Song Offerings?; "Death thy servant, is at my door. The night is dark and my heart is fearful - yet I will take up the lamp, open my gates and bow to him my welcome. It is thy messenger who stands at my door, I will worship him with folded hands, and with tears. I will worship him placing at his feet the treasure of my heart------ And in my

desolate home only my forlorn self will remain as my last offering to thee." This comes nothing short of Longfellow's quatrain in richness of sentiment:-

> Angels of life and death alike are His,
> Without His will they pass no threshold o'er.
> Who, then, would dare, believing this,
> Against his messenger to shut the door?"

To watch Tagore face to face with his God is a study that has a positive devotional value. It is an honor for him to come into the presence of the King of Kings. There must be times of quiet and meditation when he can have his love-tryst with his Infinite lover. God is his King, his Lord, his Friend of friends, his Father. This great King of kings has taken him into partnership with Himself to share inthe wealth of His love. There is in Tagore not merely a yearning, a thirst to get to God, to feel Him, and commune with Him. There is also a positive, real fulfilment of this desire. "In my heart" he tells his God "is the endless play of thy delight. In my life thy will is ever taking shape." There is a progress, a development, a fulfilment in his spiritual life. It is not a mere negative goodness; not the mere emptiness of the absence of bad motives and sin. He and God are in love.

1 Gitanjali Song 56

How joyously, how almost with ecstacy, his soul responds to the divine light! There are seasons when his joy is like a river over-flooding its banks; and we hear him speak of[1] "this overflowing cup of my life." Somewhere this poet seems to have found "the life more abundant." His Nirvana is surely not an empty inert life. "Thou ever pourest for me[2] the fresh draught of thy wine of various colors and fragrance, filling this earthern vessel to the brim.[3] "Thou givest thyself to me in love and then feelest thine own entire sweetness in me." There is for him no true wealth or happiness without God, his "sun ever-glorious." Again he has his seasons of yearning for true oneness with God, and for the feeling of his presence. It is God who ever gives him fresh life, and who sings through him. When God's hands touch his heart, it becomes unspeakably full of joy. When his God asks him to sing, it seems his heart would break with pride, and tears come to his eyes! He and God find delight in oneanother. All his senses, all his mind, all his songs, yea all his life are to [4]"bow in one great salutation." to his God.[5] "Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord." God is his master-poet.

1 Gitanjali Song 65
2 " " 73
3 " " 65
4 " " 103
5 " " 54

All his strength in any effort he makes comes from God, and he wants to give himself entirely up. He wants to put his trust in Him. When his heart grows hard and dry, he would have God visit it with a "shower of mercy." In the tumult of life, he would go to God for peace and rest. God shall ever be his first consideration. God's love is stronger for him than that for his friends, and thus he remains safe. The Lord came to him as a thirsty traveller, and he gave Him to drink. Afterwards, when his Lord acknowledged this act of kindness and service, the poet asks[1] "what have I done for thee to keep me in remembrance? But the memory that I could give water to thee to allay thy thirst will cling to my heart and enfold it in sweetness." His daily worship of God is a process of surrendering himself daily,[2] "removing all obstacles to union and extending his consciousness of Him in devotion and service, in goodness and in love.""

But how will all this life end, and what of the future? Man is not complete; he is yet to be. Yes, Tagore says he must become Brahma."[3] So it seems that Tagore holds that we are ever to be in the process of becoming God, but never to reach the attainment[4]

omission →

"Our existence is meaningless if we can never expect to realise the highest perfection there is. We are not what we truly are; we are ever to become true, ever to become Brahma."

1 Gitanjali Song 54
2 Sādhanā p 149.
3. Sādhanā p. 155
4. Sādhanā p. 164

of being God. God is God, but we are becoming God. The soul is like the river, it says "I shall become the sea." This is not vain assumption, but true humility, for it is the truth. The stream can and does become the sea. It has no other alternative . Tagore even says to God "Thou without me, or I without thee are nothing."

Death is nothing to be dreaded, and unwelcome. He speaks of death as his bridegroom. It is God's servant, taking us from one life to the next. A striking comparison is this;- "The child cries out when from the right breast the mother takes it away, in the very next moment to find in the left one its consolation." So he has no fear of death. Music will greet him at the King's gateway. The future life for him is bright; better than the present. He speaks of God's "world with its careless treasures. Rare is its lowliest seat, rare its meanest of lives." His departed ones are in his Lord's mansion; "eternity from which nothing can vanish- no hope, no happiness, no vision of a face seen through tears." He yearns for the fullness of the ocean of eternity. As at birth he was no stranger to the world, so even in death the unknown will appear familiar to him, "and because I love this life

1 ~~Sadhana 164~~ 1. Gitanjali Song 95
2 Gitanjali Song 92 = 2. Gitanjali Song 92
3 " " 87
4 " " 95

I know I shall love death as well." When ready to respond to the call of death he says,[1] "The sky is flushed with the dawn and my path lies beautiful. I start on my journey with empty hands and expectant heart. I shall put on my wedding garland."

Let us conclude this study of the religious message of Rabindranath Tagore with one of his own song[2] - offerings to God;- "Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eteranl home in one salutation to thee."

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1 Gitanjali song 93 - Sm, 94
2 " " 103.