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THE RELIGION OF RABINDRANATH

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Shrimati Maitraye Devi, herself a poet and a P.E.N. Member, came from distant Bengal to give this lecture at the Indian Institute of Culture on August 7th, 1954, Dr. Tagore's 13th death anniversary. Speaking under the chairmanship of the Rev. L. M. Schiff, M.A. (Oxon), she gave an appealing interpretation of the religious thought of India's great poet and her own revered and beloved mentor.

When four years old she had recited poems of his and, while only a child, began writing poetry. Her father, the well-known philosopher Dr. S. N. Das Gupta, presented her to the poet in 1926 and she offered him her immature attempts at poetry. She has written:—

There is nothing really worth mentioning in the facts of my life, except that my life was perfumed by the companionship of a superhuman genius, that my Guru stepped into my life when I was only twelve and ever remained there radiating fragrance and light.

Dr. Tagore invited her to visit Shantiniketan and taught her prosody; she was 16 when her first volume of Bengali poetry was published.

Shrimati Maitraye Devi and her husband, Dr. M. Sen, were privileged to entertain the poet for four vacations towards the close of his life. Her account of those visits is published in her *Mangpote Rabindranath* (Rabindranath in Mangpu). In their home, on a cinchona plantation in the Darjeeling District, now a Tagore Memorial museum and labour welfare centre, he rested, composing poems, singing many songs, and happy in the happiness of his friends.

Greater than Tagore's achievements as educationist and pioneer in rural welfare efforts is the witness which his poetry bears to spiritual values and the unity of life. "Joy is the realization of the truth of oneness."

Rabindranath Tagore is better known, especially in the Western world, as the great poet of India. Very many people are not aware of the substantial contribution he has made to the religious and mystical thought of modern times.

Rooted in the philosophy of the Sages of the Upanishads and of Gautama Buddha, he has greatly aided the religious renaissance which has taken place along constructive lines since the 1880's. Like his revered father, Rabindranath Tagore himself was a spiritually-minded man, free from creedal and religious dogmatism. As a poet-philosopher he was a free soul and as such he voiced the great thoughts which were taken by Maitraye Devi as the basis of her Tagore Day address.

THE RELIGION OF RABINDRANATH

FRIENDS,

I cannot tell you how grateful I feel for the opportunity granted to me by the Indian Institute of Culture, and especially by Mr. and Mrs. Wadia, to address you here, to talk about a person from whose thought and ideas I derive the sole delight of my being. Before I came here I did not know much about the Institute and its work. I knew the two charming personalities, but I did not know their philosophy. Yesterday I was fortunate enough to be present at a class conducted by my dear friend Madame Wadia, at the United Lodge of Theosophists, and was struck by the similarity that exists between the ideas of our beloved poet and the teachings of Theosophy. Had I not prepared my paper in Calcutta and were I speaking extempore I would have felt shy, thinking that people might misinterpret this affinity and think that I am saying things to please my hosts. Before I start reading out my paper I must thank you all for coming.

I have been asked to deal with the religious aspect of Rabindranath. It is a difficult task, especially because his religious ideas do not spring from or move in any clear-cut theological groove, but bloom forth in the poetry of life.

Rabindranath, as he himself has mentioned many, many times, is essentially a poet. His religion is the outcome of some deep realization of the unity which he felt with the life and nature around him. Its manifestation, therefore, has seldom been through any set philosophical dogma, or critical metaphysics. It has been rather through music, poems and lyrics which reflect a direct perception. His famous book, *The Religion of Man*, also reads like a poem. He has vision, but has brought in reason also to balance a soul-stirring intuition in penetrating into the ultimate reality. He admits, of course, that religious feeling is difficult to convey through arguments, as arguments are as wholly different from realization, "as is the perception of light from the theory of light."

The main sources of knowledge are three: the first is the testimony of others; the second is scientific reasoning; and the third, intuition. The first source was never regarded by him as very strong. He discredited mere traditional opinions and scathingly criticized many current customary beliefs of Hinduism. He was an ardent advocate of free rationalism. Science and reasoning supplied the data which were flooded with a light of inner personality to reveal the heart of reality.

He gradually discovered that poetry, art and his religion were all manifestations of the same creative spirit that was flowing out from within. This realization gave him the key to open the mystery of the universe. So he says:—

My religion is essentially a poet's religion; its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channel as does the inspiration of my music. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life; somehow they are wedded to each other and, though their betrothal had a long period of ceremony, it was kept a secret from me. Then suddenly came a day when their union was revealed to me.

But to a careful reader of the poet this union is manifest from the beginning. Even in the poems of his very young days, even in amorous poems, there rims the undercurrent of a deeper spiritual touch. As we sometimes jokingly said, in all the volumes of poems he has written, he has never composed a proper love poem. All his love songs and poems transcend the boundary of objective, sensuous attachment, and merge into an unencompassed sublimity.

I do not, of course, mean that his love poems were all Platonic, or even that he ignored

the flesh, the mundane and the ephemeral as *maya*. He was not a *mayavadi* in any sense of the term. But, through the superficial, he touched some chord that was beyond them and echoed the eternal, the real. This was an active process of his religion.

That among the stars and suns and moons that crowd the sky and among the life that fills up this world, I have found a place, the surprise of it inspires my music.

With an eager ear and with an open eye I am pouring out my life on this earth. I am searching the unknown through the known; the surprise of it inspires my music.

All along, in poems, dramas, essays and songs, Tagore has emphasized that he is essentially a lover of this earth, of the universe, of that entire he can see, that he can feel. And, through the world of matter and through the world of living beings, he perceived the personality of a supreme person, whose powers are flowing in, spontaneously manifesting in the forms of the beautiful world. From the analogy of artistic creation he concluded that creation is only possible to a person.

It is true that, like all the renowned philosophers of the world, Gurudev Tagore has a certain basic system of thought and that all his poems, art, life and actions can be explained by that. But this system of thought is not an outcome of a logical Endeavour to propound any theological or metaphysical theory to solve the mystery of the universe; it has taken shape as naturally as a flower blooming in the morning sun. The joy and beauty of the world brought to him certain messages and not only inspired his music but also gave his vision a different perspective through which he saw the meaning of the universe. He felt an emotional ecstasy that was interpreted in intellectual and contemplative writings. Sometimes his interpretations varied, but of one thing he was sure throughout, the conviction of his life, that the world is a part of the immortal.

This religious belief of his emerges from the concept of a perfect and harmonious life—the life which he actually lived. Usually the lives of poets, artists and men of genius are carried away by sentimental and emotional outbursts. It is a very exceptional thing to find such harmony of thought and action in a great artistic and poetic mind like his. The emotions were harmonized with the atmosphere round him; his actions were balanced with his feelings. Various and discordant thoughts merged in unity before his prophetic mind. He could blend the ideas of the modern world with the conceptions of the ancient minds of India.

But I would not here deal with the practical aspects of his life, which also could be an interesting illustration of the perfect balance and harmony of his life. Without these a poet-philosopher could not also be a successful social worker, a brilliant educationalist and the builder of a unique institution, amidst all the difficulties of foreign rule, lack of funds and the colossal apathy of his own countrymen.

How his religion as expressed through his work appears as a perfect unification of *Gnyana Yoga* and *Karma Yoga* can itself be an interesting thesis. But I would here deal only with how religious realization blossomed in his life through the touch and understanding of this mysterious and wonderful world around him, a world that is pulsating with life and motion and weaving patterns of forms and hues. I shall quote mainly from his own critical thoughts and poems; most of these selections are, of course, translations from the original Bengali. I shall have to be excused for this audacity. In any case they will convey the meaning.

The main difference between certain schools of Indian metaphysics and Tagore's realization is that he felt the process and purpose that are unfolding through the phenomenal

manifestations as a necessary aspect of the movement and expression of the infinite. He could not be satisfied to reject them. The world that is moving in our consciousness, in our desire, in our sorrow and in all the expressions of life, cannot be either futile or harmful. He was not satisfied only with subjective meditation, but wanted to realize the creator in his creation. So he says, “In all my songs there is only one theme, and that is to unite the finite with the infinite.”

Now, what, exactly, he means by this cannot fully be grasped and expressed through the limited meanings that are attached to the words. The inexhaustible exuberance that is in all artistic creation, in moral action and in the nature of man himself can never be measured by anything else than itself. And through such immeasurable and unanalyzable emotions we catch glimpses of infinity. So he says:—

The function of mind that is called emotion is a motion of our mind. It has a great harmony with the motion that exists in the universe. It is united with vibrations of light, color, sound and heat in a harmonious rhythm. Any beauty fills our heart with an indefinable emotion. The mind becomes detached. Many poets describe this wonderful feeling as a desire for the infinite. How many times the music and the glow of sunset have brought to our hearts the pulsation of the limitless world, have inspired inexpressible, great music that has no connection with our everyday sorrow and happiness, that is a chant of the whole universe going round the temple of its lord! Why only music? Beauty of nature also produces the same effect. When our existence is disturbed through any love, then that also snaps our tie with the small world round us and connects us with the infinite. It takes the form of a very great worship and, piercing the stone wall of time and space, springs towards the limitless. Just as in a great army, attracting the strength of emotion from each other, individuals become united and strong, so when the motion of the universe enters into our heart through beauty, we move in unison with it. Becoming a party with all the moving atoms of the world we run in an inevitable race towards the infinite.

According to him, the same realization comes through love, though we may not always be conscious of it. Through love man feels himself connected with the greater aspect of creation. The all-pervading joy of love peeps through the beloved, and an ordinary person gets transformed and endless. So he says:—

We know the infinite in the persons we love. To me love is only a name for that particular feeling of realizing the limitless in the finite persons. When the mother finds no limit to her joy in looking at her child—when her heart revolves round that small fragment of humanity and still cannot grasp it completely, we know that the mother is worshipping her God in her child.

We now understand clearly the meaning of his most oft-quoted verse from *Naiveda*: “I do not seek salvation through renunciation.” He explains in a letter:—

Nature with its form, colour and fragrance, man with his intellect and mind, his love and attachment, has enchanted me. I do not despise these bonds, they are not tying me; they are helping to free my mind and spreading me out from the bondage of my own self. Like the ropes that drag a boat into motion, and do not bind it to a pole, all the ties of the world are pulling us to progress. Like the love that surpasses the object of love, like the light that shows not only the things we are in search of, but illuminates the whole room, so through the beauties of the world, through the tenderness of the loved ones, it is God who is attracting us. No one else has any power to attract.

Through love of the world only, can one know the great joy and perceive the formless through the forms of the world; to try to achieve this, is a *sadhana* for *Mukti*. All through his prolific writings on different aspects of life this one realization is expressed, that love is worship.

In some of the negative schools of thought the aim is to reach a condition wherein the mind becomes perfectly blank, losing all its activity as a condition of *Mukti*. These states of Yoga, according to him, may be valuable as a great psychological experiment, but all the same they cannot be the true religion of man. Ultimate truth is in unity, and not in separateness and a conscious attempt to unite in love with the eternal person is the true aspiration of man. But the difficulty is that the nature, meaning and significance of this unity as the ultimate truth is not revealed to us in its completeness. We are kept engrossed and satisfied by the immediate, which appears to us as an end in itself. So he says:—

In the order of the universe there is a law that the present always absorbs our mind as the most important fact. We do not realize the present as a part of the future or minimize its significance as only a step in a series. When a flower blooms forth we feel in its beauty the supreme realization of the life of the plant. It seems that the flower is an end in itself and we forget that it is only a step to conceive the fruit for the continuity of life. It is also true in every aspect of life that the immediate engrosses our view; we enjoy it separately and do not realize the other side of its connected existence. That is the real beauty of creation, that each of its different parts appears complete and significant as a separate entity though in reality they are only a part of a dynamic whole.

But how do we know that all these apparently detached events of nature and of life are not isolated and purposeless; and that life is not an absurdity fortuitously born only to be destroyed? How do we know that there is any supreme meaning in the process of creation and that death is only an aspect of creative activity; a step in the process of the whole unceasing movement, where life and death are continually changing places? What is the proof that there is a soul ever anxious to soar beyond the fetters of the physical and, more particularly, that there is anything extra-physical in man?

According to the poet, man himself bears the proof of all these in him. In his own mind there is this expression of a dual self: one, his ego that clings to the smaller sphere of self, and the other, his soul, the partner of God himself; as the infinite is continuously descending into the finite to attain its own fulfillment. This idea is the key-note of his thought and has been fully dealt with in his great book, *The Religion of Man*. In the Preface he says: “The idea of the humanity of our God or the divinity of Man the eternal is the main subject of the book.” To realize consciously this bigger aspect of humanity is truly the aim of religion. The religion that man collects from scriptures, tradition and rituals cannot be his personal religion. These are performed by habit. But to arouse religion in oneself is one's life pursuit.

The original meaning of *Dharma* is the essential quality. And the essential quality of man is expressed, not through what he performs but through what he becomes. According to Rabindranath, the real Endeavour of man is to grow, to project himself beyond his limitations, to become more than what he is. From the analogy of the development of life and the development of animals in the scheme and course of evolution, the poet proves that nature gradually, in the movement of progress, has shaken off many details of physical machinery which were at one time very necessary for the survival of the different animals. But mind was evolved, the mind of man, whose body—though more fragile and less efficient in many ways than those of most of the animals that have specialized organs—has still helped him to be the most successful in the world of the living.

Mind is a new step in the current. Though probably it was never totally absent, still in man it has brought with it an immense possibility—a surplus—which man carries round his personality. And in this surplus, that consists in the capacity and activity of mind beyond what is necessary for biological life, lies the source of all creative work. It contains the immense possibility of carrying man far beyond material and physical interests.

Because of this liberation from the physical, man has reached a position where, in his detachment from the bondage of the flesh, he can understand his deeper relationship with the universe. Ever since man was born, he has felt this urge to go beyond himself—to know who he is—and from this urge grew his religion. At first his thoughts fumbled in the dark, trying to get a glimpse of the mystery that is on the other side of the border, but whose messages constantly come. But he has never accepted appearance as final.

In many ways has he tried to reach the goal by acquiring power through magic and rituals? He has tried to evoke the superhuman in man, the counterpart of which he saw in the force that is in nature, by emphasizing certain injunctions. But a stage came when the truth was revealed to some minds, not through these practices but through an inspiration from within. Some minds became direct mediums of communication of the divine truth, and the meaning of the world stood revealed.

But this testimony is not sufficient for the establishment of any theory or faith, especially in the modern age, when analytic reasoning is accepted as the only source of knowledge. We cannot jump over the facts that appear supreme, accepting other people's visions. But the poet has tried to prove that this inspiration comes to every man, and is not a special privilege of some. In the joy of life, in the understanding of beauty, in the self-sacrifice that even an all-round materialist performs we understand the truth of man's super-existence.

The vision of unity may come only to some, but the truth of it is in all. Just as in a piece of solid matter there are individual atoms but they combine to express one truth, so it is in humanity, which is evolving a common history through immense space and time. The facts that can be touched and measured may convey certain aspects of truth that are necessary for the immediate present, but they do not always convey the whole truth, which can be directly revealed to man in his own personality, in his joy, which cannot be measured or explained. The existence of an all-pervading personality answering to the personality of man is revealed to him in the depths of his heart, which revelation moves him towards the achievement of all his ideals of perfection, though he may not always be conscious of it.

So Tagore says:—

I believe in a spiritual world, not as anything separate from this world but as its innermost truth; with the breath we draw we must always feel this truth that we are living in God. Born in this great universe full of infinite mystery, we cannot accept our existence as a momentary outburst of chance, drifting on the current of matter towards an eternal nowhere! We cannot look upon our lives as dreams of a dreamer who has no awakening in all time. We have a personality to which matter and force are unmeaning unless related to something infinitely personal, whose nature we have discovered in some measure in human love, in the greatness of the good, in the martyrdom of the heroic soul, in the ineffable beauty of nature, which can never be a mere physical fact or anything but an expression of personality.

These qualities, to him, stand as a proof of man's second existence. His biological life alone cannot account for these. Sometimes, in minds that are engrossed with immediate gain and are destroying each other in a fight to grab and to store, the moral instinct gets

submerged and they lose their reference to the context. Then, getting enclosed in the shell of selfishness, they become separated from the reality and lose the significance of their human existence.

We may sometimes fail to realize the motive power of the moral and social instinct which moves humanity to fulfil itself in service and sacrifice— service to others and sacrifice of one's exclusiveness—and the messages that come to us through the beauty of nature and in the perfection of human love. Still there cannot be any doubt about the truth of these greater aspects of humanity. He explains this with an example:—

Think of evolution; first the earth, then the animals. It was dark; then it was light; then there came intellect; and physical life found its highest strength through mind. It extended its arms into weapons enlarging the domain of physical power and man became master over other animals. But evolution did not stop here. There is another instinct evolving in human beings who is not to gain but to give—the spirit of sacrifice.

What is this spirit of sacrifice? This is something new in the field, and developed when the process of evolution was unfolding the mind in man. It is only natural that life, for the sake of its own preservation, will be always up in arms against all that are antagonistic to it. That is how the law of the survival of the fittest runs its course. No animal encounters danger for the sake of another, its own young or its herd accepted. Instinctively all life turns back in the face of danger. But it is not so with man. He goes quite against the laws of nature by sacrificing life and happiness, suffering pain not only for his loved ones but also for what he thinks is duty, for posterity, for the good and benefit of a distant future, where he will never be. He dies happily for others whom he does not know, and, defying all the code of self-preservation, he says: "Forgive thine enemy." What is the reason for this paradoxical behavior?

According to Tagore, this is possible because man has faith in the existence of a universal human spirit; he knows in himself that he is a part of a great connected existence, separated from which his individual entity loses its significance. It is like the cells of our own body which, though they have a life of their own, are never complete till it is joined with the life of the whole body, on whose existence depends their significance. That is why individual cells die the martyr's death when the whole system gets threatened by disease. They do not know why they fight, why they must die, yet willingly they go because there is that hidden belief that they are only parts of some greater reality.

This organic condition of human society implies a harmonious relationship. This harmony is lost and the whole system tends to collapse when the strong oppress the weak, when selfishness and greed grow to disproportionate dimensions. Just as in the social life of man the renunciation of the baser passions and the sacrifice of selfish ends do not make him a loser, so in the sphere of a greater life even death is not destruction. One day we have to die completely, to be reborn in God, but before that our smaller aspect, the ego that quivers in wealth, power and fame, dies to gain, to realize, its inner aspect of universal manhood. Dr. Tagore explains this with another simile: —

The chicken within the egg has rudimentary wings, rudimentary eyesight and legs. These are of no use while the chicken is still in the shell. But some chicks, let us suppose, even while there might feel that there must be a realm beyond, where they can make full use of their potential faculties. Other chicks, again, being rationalists or logicians, argue that there is no life beyond the shell. Human beings are likewise divided into those who have faith in the life beyond the shell and those who have not; those who believe that they have faculties which are not to be accounted for by the intellect alone and those who do

not.

We cannot fully understand the outer world; we are within the shell. The loss entailed in breaking the shell, in self-sacrifice, is not an absolute loss; the gain is far greater. All religions have dwelt upon this point of gaining by sacrifice.—*Tyaktena- bhunjitha*.

The philosophy of Tagore professes a view maintained by critical reasoning and logical arguments, as also by inference and analogy, that nothing in the universe is separate or disconnected and that the world is a creation. And that at its centre there is a living idea which reveals itself in an eternal symphony. Also, from the analogy of our own personality, we understand that at the centre of the creation there is a great personality which is striving, through the process of evolution, to reach the sphere of human consciousness. Man appeared in the arena and, conquering the greed of self, searched through love and sacrifice for the meaning of creation, the meaning which is directly revealed in his delight. To realize this sublime, indestructible existence, connected with the totality of creation, and to participate in the universal function of creation through the establishment of harmonious human relationship, through peace and joy and works of art, is the religion of man.

But who is this man? He cannot be our biological self. Within that, we know, we have in us a man who is also in all. It is he that pervades all men of all time and because of his existence in us there is this feeling of universality. Those that are great easily realize this larger aspect of self, transcend their smaller sphere and can divest their work of selfishness, to become one with the divine worker. But this realization is not perfect in every man and that is why all men are not perfect embodiments of humanity. Consciously or unconsciously, however, all are striving to become one with that person, who is to be realized: "*Tam Vedyam purusham vedah*"—of whom it is said:—

Esha devo Vishwakarma Mahatma sada jananam hridaye sannivishtah.

This is the divine being, the World Worker, who is the great soul, ever dwelling inherent in the hearts of people.

Ya etad viduramritaste bhavanti.

Those who realize him transcend the limits of mortality.

So the poet says that, in order to be one with the Vishvakarma, we shall have to be the "World Worker" also—that is, we must work for all. When he says "We must work for all," he does not mean to work for a great number of persons; all "work that is morally good, however small in extent, is universal in character." And to be one with the Mahatma, the "Great Soul," one must cultivate the greatness of soul which one makes identify himself with the souls of all people, and not merely with his own soul.

Truth is like a million-petalled lotus that unfolds its petals one by one to the capacity of the minds that are trying to grasp it. Upon the great personalities sometimes it is flashed in its totality and they perceive it in its completeness. They are the seers—such were the seers of the Upanishads. The truth revealed in their sayings is true for all, of all ages, but each age, according to its own capacity, is unfolding the meaning gradually.

Rabindranath's philosophy is not different from that of the Upanishads. His whole structure of thought is based on them, but the messages of truth that have come from a distant past have unfolded a new petal for him. His interpretations have conveyed an aspect which is best fitted for the present age. It is not in conflict with the scientific facts that stand like a Colossus over the life of humanity today and cannot be either ignored or rejected. They may be temporary but they are real, so we shall have to go through them in order to go beyond

them.

The modern age is groaning under acute materialism. The extraordinary nature of the human personality can never be satisfied by materialism, which insists on reason based on the experience of the senses as the only criterion of truth. Rabindranath supplies data from the well-known scientific facts to establish a harmonious relationship between the physical world of the senses and the endless world of the human Soul. There is no denying that in man there is an underlying faith that he is greater than himself, greater than the small enclosure he is fitted in. In all his endeavors man is seeking the value of his life and not merely success.

So from Tagore, as from Buddha also, conduct and moral action and the realization of man's supreme end in love, receive the sole attention. For him, in the perfection of human quality is reflected the divine.

So the religion of Tagore cannot become a creed for a community of men, nor can it grow into a sect, collecting a band of followers with certain chalked-out ways and injunctions. All works that are universal in character are manifestations of religion. His voice is addressed to all humanity and arouses the spirit of man, bringing release to the minds that are caught in the meshes of materialism, like the chick in the shell denying the truth of the sky.

It is surprising that the idea of universal man or the presence of a supreme personality ever manifesting itself through human consciousness was felt by the poet very early in his life, when he was merely a boy. It is strange that such an understanding would reveal itself in a young mind. Rabindranath was born in a family where religion was very much alive, his father being a renowned religious preceptor belonging to the Brahma Samaj. The revival of Upanishadic ideas rejecting idol worship captured the mind of rationalistic and intellectual Bengal. The ritualistic and conventional meaning of religion lost its grip and the Bengalis sought for eternal and universal truth.

The philosophy of the Upanishads influenced Rabindranath from childhood but he did not accept them in a passive way; their meaning became living to him. The thoughts of the ancient minds entered his life stream as a direct perception and were transfigured by his interpretations.

He has described in many places his first sudden awakening. When only 18 or 19 years of age, standing on the veranda of a Calcutta house, he was watching the morning sun come up. Suddenly he felt as if a curtain was lifted, the curtain which separated him from the reality. He felt an intense joy and through it he saw the truth as it really is. Everything round him appeared beautiful. He saw two laborers walking hand in hand and they appeared extremely beautiful. He saw in them the eternal man, in who is the real significance of beauty. This phase lasted for some time, as if the doors of his heart were open and the world entered into it. This state of sublime ecstasy passed but it left an impression so deep that his whole outlook on life, his philosophy and religion all were woven round this experience of his young days. This revelation had not only an artistic side but a deeply religious side too, as it made him realize the feeling of the brotherhood of man which is the supreme message of all religions.

He wrote a poem on that day describing the awakening of a stream that had heard the call of the sea. The stream woke up from its stupor and started to run its course, enriching itself through a variety of experiences, towards the sea, craving for the union on which depended the ultimate culmination of its individual existence. So felt the poet, A tremendous

urge to run forward, breaking the shell of the ego, not by denying the experiences of life, but by moving like the river that flows through the varied lands, sometimes drying up, sometimes overflowing its banks, enjoying all the aspects of existence to a final culmination. In later years he mentions this great ocean as universal man, the man that pervades the heart of all for all time. This idea was also quite clear in the immature poems of *Provati Sangit*.

From the testimony of his inspired moment he knew that there is only one life which is in the objective world and also in us—that it is possible for a man to comprehend this world in his knowledge, in his feeling, because man as a creation represents the creator. And the true religion of man consists, not in rituals, ceremonies, dogmatic beliefs or metaphysical discourses, but in perceiving, in one's individual spirit, union with a spirit that is everywhere. So, that particular day of experience, the world appeared bright with a new light and roused in him a profound feeling of love. He felt that there was nothing in the world that was not beautiful and he grasped the meaning of the sloka, "*Ananda rupam Jadbibhati*" He "saw the *mantra*."

It is clear that, from the very beginning, ideas of God dawned on his mind with other active emotional feelings. But he was not a believer in the ordinary idea of a personal God as a creator different from his creation. In all our spiritual relations with the world, there is a continuous act of creation of the Great Person through our human personality, which holds within its small sphere an image of the infinite power which is possessed by the Supreme One. So he says:—

Religion inevitably concentrates itself on humanity, which illumines our reason, inspires our wisdom, stimulates our love and claims our intelligent service. And this God which pulsates in us, through all humanity and through all the universe, by our participation in their essence, cannot be a God of duality, a personal God who is different from me; but it is the God who is the essence of my being.

This experience of direct perception of an inexplicable delight is not mentioned by him again as a religious experience. His life as a poet and a composer passed through different phases, unfolding an inner unity towards a culmination which was not always revealed to him. He says he was like an instrument through which flowed a music of which he was not the real author, though he was deceived into thinking he was. All individual compositions had some limited meaning but their true interpretation was revealed to him much later when he saw them all together from a distance of time. They were an expression of a total reality which he did not realize when he composed them individually. So he describes himself as an instrument that is being played, but the instrument knows not what music is in the mind of the player.

What a joke you are playing on me! Whatever I want to say you let me not— sitting in my heart you constantly rob me of my words, and you express your own meaning through my words. I forget what I wanted to say, and utter only what you intend.

This is not utter fatalism or a denial of freedom of the will. What the poet says is that, when he was busy expressing his thoughts of smaller dimensions, without his knowing how, a greater significance was getting attached to them. So he said that it was not only that an author of his composition was moving his pen, but that, along with this, his life was also taking shape. Through all the sorrows and the happiness, through all the disconnected experiences of life, a personality was woven which gave a significance to all the detached events of life.

Once he had been collecting wealth for his own pleasure, for his little home—but who is it that has forced him out and is pulling him, through intense pain and suffering, through an uneven path, towards all? He is the poet, the creator. It is he who is creating the life of the poet. So Rabindranath calls him the deity of his life (*Jeevan Devata*).

He is not only the deity of his present life, who is trying to unite all the separateness of this life and is uniting the individual with the universal man in the present existence. It is he who is carrying him through varied experiences from time immemorial to the present existence. So he says, “I feel that great flow of different existence like a forgotten memory in me.”

I do not know whether I acquired in me that particular quality which is generally known as *dharma* but I sometimes feel quite clearly that a living thing is taking shape in me. I am confident that I will gradually be able to establish a harmony in ‘myself. My happiness and sorrow inside and outside the world, all my thought and action, will combine to create completeness in life.

When one realizes this unending force of creation that is within as connected with the infinite universe that is ever being created, like the stars and planets that are ever taking shape in their unending motion of fire and will go on forever, so in me is also going on a process of creation from the unending past—and all my feelings and emotions are only parts of that process, though I do not know what might be the ultimate result. But, connecting with this flowing and moving life, with infinite time and space, our sorrows also get threaded through with a sublime joy. I know that I exist, I become and I am moving; this great fact is connected with all the great facts of the world. Even a particle of dust will not desert me; I am part of the whole. That is why the beautiful autumn morning is no less friendly to me than my relations and this infinite emptiness of sky fills up my soul.

This feeling of oneness with all, with the animate and the inanimate is the result of a conscious process of thought and feeling and is the main inspiration of his delight and his poetic creation. They may appear as abstract ideas only, when read in literature, but the concrete application of them came in his political thought and actions and also in building up a unique institution where the world would be “in one nest.”

Tagore decried the aggressive nationalism of the West. He aimed at a cooperation of ideas from all over the world, to create a harmonious movement “of a whole towards a yet fuller wholeness.” To realize this, one has to regulate one’s passions, greed and love of power and to cultivate love for his fellow human beings. These are the creative aspects of social movement and not destructive in nature like the mechanical union of political and economic power.

But, just as in the metaphysical aspect while striving to unite the individual with the eternal he rejected nothing as small, so also in the sphere of political and national life he did not ignore the smaller needs of his country. His were among the first attempts to promote rural welfare, the co-operative system and also many, many other activities in all the spheres of life, cultural, social and economic. Everywhere he stressed the point of mutual co-operation. Whatever is richest in man’s life, according to him, comes from this mutual co-operation. In those days of the political struggle for freedom he was the greatest political force to fashion the mind of modern Bengal, but all his political ideals sprang from principles of humanism and were never choked by blind patriotism.

He wanted for his countrymen freedom from fear, from superstitions and from blind imitation of the West. The idea of narrow nationalism is, according to him, particularly

Western. He faced criticism and was sometimes sore with failures but he strove on. In his institution and also in his own home he tried to bring back the best customs of India, its ideals of social and moral harmony, and was quite against a complete Westernization. But he did not hate the West.

Every nation, he said, just like individuals, had to maintain its own individuality to be able to unite with all, in bigger spheres, just as variety in nature is an expression of one creative force.

Each nation has arrived at its goal by a different path which has given a special significance to its civilization but the fruits of it are offered to all.

When nations come together as they have done now, our education must enable every child to grasp this purpose of the age, not to defeat it by acquiring the habit of division, of cherishing national prejudices. There are, of course, natural differences in human races which should be respected and preserved, but our education should be such as to make us realize our unity in spite of them and discover truth through the wilderness of contradictions.

This was attempted in Visva-Bharati. The endeavour was to include this ideal of unity in all the activities of the institution, some educational, some artistic, some that involved different kinds of social service activities. This is the first institution of its kind in which great minds from all over the world were invited to take part, the first place where we saw a Japanese girl teaching arrangements of flowers in an Indian home to an Indian.

To me, the greatest achievement of this Institution was that here a mode of life was developed where beauty became a supreme inspiration to all work. Consequently, money was no more the criterion of life. Simple and cheap goods received a new value for their artistic quality. Nobody was ashamed to live in huts because they were beautifully shaped. Earthenware flower-pots could replace the valuable china and no one was sorry. Poverty lost its sting. This ideal was achieved not through the preaching of any maxims of self-sacrifice, boycott of foreign goods, or detachment, but through the elevating influence of art and beauty.

All these practical applications of his creed cannot be dealt with here more elaborately. But, looking at a great life spreading over **80** years, expressed through a variety of actions rich and pulsating with an ever-flowing creative spirit, we realize the Religion of Rabindranath as something living and tremendously active. It is not a creed only, to be preached; it is a way of life, to be lived.

Though fundamentally a man of action Rabindranath was never groaning under the pressure of a stupendous amount of work. He harmonized leisure with work in such a way that he really played through his work. This realization of harmony in every sphere was really the manifestation of his religious achievement. Each individual part fitted with the other to complete a perfection, to create one of the best specimens of humanity—an instrument through which the deity of his life played sublime music and was pleased with it.

Into the pilgrim's temple of the God of this world

Flower offerings I have brought, collecting carefully;

This is the last preparation of the evening.

This complete obeisance, which is the unflinching message of my whole life,

I leave burning in the flame rising from the evening lamp of Arati.

And this is my appeal to you all, O ray Guests!
You came into my life, some in the morning,
Some in the evening, some in spring and some during the Sravana showers.
Some had *vinas* in their hands;
Some have brought lamps with trembling tapers into my home.
Breaking open my door, some have forced in repeatedly into my yard, turbulent gusts of gale.
But when you are all gone you have left footprints of God on the floor of my home.
My God has taken name and form in all of you and in my worship I offer salutation to you
all.