

Tagore's Concept of Mystic Vision and Realization

N. Kaushi Reddy, Ph.D. Scholar (Full-Time)

Department of English & Comparative Literature

School of English & Foreign Languages

Madurai Kamaraj University

Madurai-21

Tamilnadu, India

=====
Abstract

This paper is an attempt to highlight Tagore's concept of Mystic vision as projected in his plays. This paper gives a clear view of the term 'Mysticism'. The concept of mysticism is something simple and clear which provides a tiny beam of light in readers minds and illuminates the soul. Thus, through this paper it is made clear that the concept of deathless soul and endless possibilities in life.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, Tagore's plays, mysticism, realization, fulfilment, spirituality, consciousness.

'Mysticism' is a term which is something related to religious ideas and sometimes used to replace the words such as 'allegory' and 'symbolism'. Many people think that mysticism is something that is related to love but the universally acknowledged mystics have put their efforts fully to make sure that it is the idea of uniting the ordinary soul (Jivatma) with the heavenly or the superior soul (Paramatma). Mysticism is closely related to the term 'Savikalpa Samadhi' which means realising one's own self as a part of the supreme soul or the discovery of one's inner self. No other word in English could well mean this idea other than 'mysticism'. Going further into this idea, mysticism could be a part of theological study or an occult science or a collective term used as a fanatic opinion about God and world. No matter what the religion is, mysticism joins hands with all religions. It goes parallel with all philosophies and arts because the home place of mystic study is religion and only religion. Religious mysticism is defined as "the attempt to realise the presence of living God in the soul and in nature, or more generally, as the attempt to realise in thought and feelings, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal and of the eternal in the temporal". (Inge 5)

There is another form of mysticism which says about the merging of the individual identity with the Brahman, otherwise the supreme soul. To be true, this kind of mysticism speaks about the Jivatma fighting to get freedom from life and death and join hands with the Paramatma. This form of mysticism is called the 'Vedantic Mysticism'. The intuitive experience that arises in the individual's mind makes this mysticism happen so easily. As said by the present-day mystics, the main focus of all mysticism focuses on love. Love is

nothing but the sense of superficial emotions and an incomparable ultimate expression of one's innermost feelings. Love is "a total dedication to heart and will. It is described as a deep-seated desire and tendency of the soul". (Seshadri 10). Every soul needs love because it is the only way to attain the supreme soul. The supreme soul that an ordinary self loves, may be for no reason or might have fixed through thoughts. Whatever the reason may be, the supreme soul could be attained only by love and not by any understanding. This is the basis of a mystical love and it considers devotion as one of the substances of mystic. The ordinary self in the process of attaining the supreme soul dedicates or sacrifices all the worldly possessions and falls deeply in love with the unidentified supreme soul. This process does not give the devotee a personal gain or precious worldly possessions, it gives him a way to attain God and strengthen God-man relationship. To understand this view in a better way, it is necessary to read Professor Seth Pringle's lines about mystic, it is:

"The thought most intensely present to the mystic is that of the supreme, all pervading an indwelling power, in whom, all things are one- the possibility of direct intercourse with this being of beings, God ceases to be an object, but becomes an experience". (Fleming 3)

Mysticism does not come into a theory nor rely upon any dogmas and have no desire, it is purely an attempt to see and communicate with God and merging the ordinary Jivatma with the supreme soul. The mystics are one to whom God dedicates himself on seeing their unconditional love towards them. Mystics consider themselves as empty vessels that must be filled only by the God. Mystics also knew that even if they are so great in their attempts to communicate with God, the instance happens only as a gift or a chance and not because of the efforts that the mystic made. Only if the mystic sacrifices all the worldly pleasures he could purify his soul. Purifying one's soul is the main attempt to attain God. Even if one purifies their soul fully, they will not meet the supreme soul immediately, the chance comes as a gift of time. Mystic character is inside every soul, but its discovery makes the soul think that it came from God. The following line is the best example to rather this idea better:

"Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born,
If he be not born in thee, thy soul is still forlorn". (Kingsland 45)

The main aim of mystics is to sacrifice everything including worldly joys, families and even themselves and purify their soul and attain a sense of unconsciousness and submit themselves totally to the powers above them. They will actually be in an ideal state of mind where they go for the search of reality and nothing else. Mystic experiences may be gained through other heavenly things like music, painting, poetry or nature. The poetry of a great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore induces such a kind of mystic experience through his poetry as for him the religion is the soul of life. He does not speak about a particular religion, for him any power that creates or illuminates the heart and mind is superior and he considers that as the supreme soul. Tagore's search for the purity of his heart in religion made him to make

him up mentally and attain the knowledge of worldly life. Tagore believed more in feelings and emotions than his knowledge. He confesses that point in his *Religion of Man* as follows:

“The solitary enjoyment of the infinite in meditation no longer satisfied me, and the text which I used for my silent worship lost their inspiration without my knowing it. I am sure I vaguely felt that my need was self-realization”. (P94)

Tagore expressed his views on his own mystical experiences which he himself experienced when he went deeply through his own religion. He expressed his ideas about his experiences in his poetry, essays and even speeches. This exposure is the evidence that he dedicated himself fully to the form of union with the heavenly soul. Tagore strongly believes that the mankind is the quest from the finite to the infinite. Understanding his poetry will give the readers a better understanding of his spiritual and devotional mind. Tagore says that a poet’s religious belief stands in between the mind of an orthodox man and a theologian. Tagore says that his first love is nature and that proves that his search for mystic ideas and religious beliefs started with nature. Even at his early childhood days, he started developing his love towards nature. After gaining more experience on nature, Tagore became aware of the unseen greatness of nature. It took so long for him to understand the mystery of nature, but when he started loving it, he understood the different aspects of nature in a better way. Vedic ancestors believe that behind every movement of nature, there is a single particular theme. Tagore in his poetry projects different aspects of nature and comes with a single inner being. His words are as follows:

“The wonder of gathering clouds hanging heavy with the unshed rain, the sudden sweep of storm arousing vehement gestures along the line of coconuts trees, fierce loneliness of the blazing summer noon, the silent sunrise behind the dewy veil of autumn morning kept my mind with the intimacy of a pervasive companionship”. (Kingsland 45)

These lines are with the idea that the God is seriously working with mankind to attain the infinite stage. He believes that there is a single force that binds the nature and human beings and helps mankind to attain the state of infinity. He feels that the unity and harmony among nature and mankind is achieved only by that binding force. To him, the enormous astonishing beauty of nature mesmerizes mankind and makes him long for delight and that desire takes delight into the mind and heart of the human beings. To Tagore, the grandeur of nature seems to be like a love – letter to God. The smiling fresh flowers, the uncountable awesomeness in the clear night sky, the multi-coloured ceiling of evening earth, the cold breeze are used to touch the human soul. The nature is the thing that is used by the God to draw human beings towards eternity and completeness. He says that it is also a kind of experiencing the mysticism as nature bears peace that helps in the proper working of the supreme principle of God. Tagore spoke about this idea on many occasions in his poetry.

Once when he leisurely stood near the window of his room gazing the beauty of nature, he experienced the call of the vision. He responded as:

“Suddenly, I became conscious of a stirring of a soul within me. My world of experience in a moment seemed to become lighted and facts that were detached and dim found a greater unity of meaning”. (Mysticism 56)

Tagore’s view is that, the inner force controls a person’s thoughts and directs his life towards unity and spirituality. It is by some means that God takes human form and lives among mankind and teaches them moral values that takes them to the God. This process is called “Jivan Devata”. Tagore spoke much about this idea in his works **The Gitanjali**, **The Gitimalya** and **The Gitali**. These three poems were mainly created by him to express his fullest ideas in this particular theme of ‘Jivan Devata’. People usually worship God and praise him but through this idea, God is made to live among mankind to make man experience the real moral values. People believe in the intellect, emotions and will as the three main faculties that is in correspondence with the Indian ideologies of Jnana, Bhakthi and Karma.

Tagore attempted to discover God in everything through the mystic vision he acquired. He is of the opinion that only man can realize the completeness of God by searching him all the times. By being kind to others and doing one’s duty perfectly could make oneself identify the existence of God within themselves. Thus, by realizing his existence one could attain knowledge (Jnana), love (Bhakti) and service (Karma). Thus, according to this view of Tagore, it has become clear that the man is the centre of interest in binding the human-God relationship in a better way.

Tagore being the mystic, does not expose mysticism in an obscure way but his mysticism is simple, kind and elegant. He watches beauty in everything about nature and enjoys its elegance. The beauty in nature fills his mind and heart with spirituality and encourages him to worship and aspire the goodness. Writers of mysticism are seen with the strange eyes by the readers because mysticism was itself considered as a strange course of study. Tagore’s spiritual development due to his interest in mysticism was explained by him in the following lines:

“when I was eighteen, a sudden spring breeze of
religious experience for the first time came to
my life and passed away leaving in my life and
passed away leaving in my memory a direct message
of spiritual reality, one day while I stood watching
at an early dawn the sun sending out its rays
from behind the trees, I suddenly felt as if
some ancient mist had in a moment lifted

from my sight and the moving light on the face of
the world revealed an inner radiance of joy. The
invisible screen of common place was removed from
all things and all men, and their ultimate significance
was intensified in my mind; and this is the
definition of beauty.” (OH 84)

It is really a tough task for the readers to understand what made Tagore write such a beautiful and harmonious work of art that attracts and makes mankind go further in search of that supreme celestial power. The resultant of his poetry makes all readers understand the real sense of mysticism. There are some lines through which his techniques of making the mankind understand the nature clearly:

“Thou art the sky and
thou art the nest as well”. (Gitanjali 67)
“The same stream of life that runs
through my veins night and day runs
through the world and dances in rhythmic measures

In this playhouse of Infinite forms I
have had my play and here have I
caught sight of him that is formless”. (P. 96)

The idea of Mysticism is not new to Indian society. there was always a clash between Nayanmars and Alwars in the south and Vaishnavites and Singers in the north. These clashes made each of those groups sing in praise of their lord to prove the power and greatness of their own God. They split out their words in proving their beliefs and thus finally intoxicated poetry. But Tagore in some lines of his books, written about the higher visions which he experienced himself when he started writing. Tagore wrote his unforgettable experience he had at the age of seventeen, when he stood at the Veranda and looked at the sky. He shares his experience in the following lines:

“While the self was rampant during the
glare of day everything I perceived was
mingled with and hidden by it. I could see
the world in its own true aspect All of a
sudden, a covering seemed to fall away
from my eyes and I found the world bathed
in waves of beauty and joy swelling
on every side” (Reminiscences 110)

He once again experienced this kind of experience many times in his life. He recorded some of those experiences in his poems. One such experience is brought here for enjoying the mind of Tagore better:

“They knew the way and went to seek you
along the narrow lane but I wandered
abroad into the night for I was ignorant ...
I turned away in doubt, but you held me
fast, and their scolding became louder everyday” (Fruit –gathering XVI)

All these lines deserve to be read so closely to and understand its deep meaning. Tagore’s mystical experiences came to him even without his knowledge. He says that the spiritual idea comes to a poet’s mind at a point of time, the only thing that the poet has to do is to identify the real essence and start experiencing it. He spoke about this in his poem ‘Reminiscences’. He found that this new experience under a broad category called ‘Mysticism’. Tagore narrates all his experiences in an excellent way. He wonders how this world is soaked in radiance with a wave of beauty and joy in the lines following:

“The radiance pierced in a moment through
the folds of sadness and despondency which
had accumulated in my heart and flooded
it with this unusual sight” (My Reminiscences 115)

Through these lines, Tagore says that he acquired the spiritual insight which he enjoyed all through his life. This spiritual insight will be with every human being was explained in the lines:

And it came to me that no person or thing
in the world seemed to me trivial or
unpleasing. Everything seemed to me
extra ordinarily wonderful (P 115)

Tagore had a strong belief and faith in God because he thought that there is nothing beyond the power of that supreme soul. He had a belief that he has seen the god’s face. He says that in a line “I felt I saw your face...” (Crossing 76)

Tagore poured out his experiences in his poems he had nothing to explain than that. He enjoyed the beauty of nature truly but when he started explaining it through words, he could not control his emotions because his soul was filled with the thoughts of God. Many of his readers may not experience that kind of vision. Those who had experienced what the poet said could understand his emotions too and for those who did not experience it will get a deep

knowledge about that vision even before seeing that. Tagore gained faith and courage only through this encouragement.

Mystics usually enjoys every little thing in life because they were in a constant search of kindness and love everywhere. For them, even the dry leaf that fell on earth is beautiful and mysterious. The sudden emotion that comes in a person's mind when he comes across the particles of nature is like a spark that initiates the vision of soul. If this happens in a person's life, the nature opens its doors and allows them to experience the fullest of its beauty. He says that his first book of life ended with union, separation and reunion of god with mankind.

Thus, Tagore's concept of vision is filled with his own confessions of his experiences. He considers that acquiring that vision is like gaining a deathless spiritually conscious soul.

Works Cited

1. Inge, William Ralph. **Christian Mysticism**
London: Methuen & co., 1948.
2. Seshadri, K. "Bridal Mysticism", **Tagore Academy** ed. Ghose
3. Fleming, W. **Mysticism in Christianity**
London: Robert Scott Ltd. 1931.
4. Kingsland, William. **An Anthology of Mysticism and Mystical Philosophy**. London: Methuen & Co Ltd. 1927.
5. Tagore, Rabindranath **Religion of Man**
London: George Allen Unwin Ltd. 1949.
6. Atmananda, Swami trans. **Sankara's Teachings in His own Words**
Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1958.
7. Marquette, Tacques de. **Introduction to Comparative Mysticism**.
New York: Philosophical Library, 1949.
8. Tagore, Rabindranath. **Personality**
London: Macmillan & Co Ltd. 1970.
9. Tagore, Rabindranath. **My Reminiscences**
London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1970.
10. Dutt, Indu. **A Tagore Testament**
Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1969.