

'The Religion Of Man' & 'My Religion': A Comparative Study About The Vision Of Rabindranath Tagore And Mohatma Gandhi And Its Impact On Contemporary Context

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Abstract—This article mainly deals with two scholarly books 'The Religion of Man' and 'My Religion' written by Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, two great scholars of India and also known to the world as poet, politician and social activist, philosopher and reformer. Despite being Hindu in religion, both of them believe in universal truth of all great religions and radical humanism. They have immense contribution to develop not only the Indian culture and civilization but also the human civilization of the entire world. In this article, I also try to give emphasis on the religion of man and religion of humanity and suggest to take the ideas established by them that can only be a safest way to live decently and peacefully in this present ominous world.

Keywords—religion, humanism, non-violent, secularism, mankind, world-peace

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) are the two great scholars of India. Both of them are known as poet, politician and social activist, philosopher and also as reformer. These two scholars were born as Hindu. But their religious faith was in their inherent. Here it should remarkably be identified that India is a country where people are predominantly religious and their customs are of very ancient traditions. During ancient India of India, the people and state have basic faith according to Manosanghita: This book was regarded as the code of conduct in Hinduism. Ancient Hindu state was ruled by the principles of the Manosanghita. The Hindus and the rulers believed in the fundamental ethics and values according to Manosanghita. But Rabindranath and Mahatma Gandhi believed in universal truth of all great religions and radical humanism. So they have had immense contribution to develop the Indian culture and civilization. Not only in India but also in the whole world, Rabindranath and Gandhi were two of the pioneer intellectuals of the then times, even in this period.

It is also remarkable that the earlier history of intellectual movement in India, we do admit with due respect that Rammohan Roy (1722-1833),

Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) were known as radical humanist and social reformer. Accordingly they did many social activities for the betterment of the Hindus and mankind. Especially Sohamoron (a taboo to die together with the dead body of husband), polygamy, women oppression as early marriage and dowry, demand of property inheritance as to establish the right of women, protection of violence against women, social security and dignity of women. Vidyasagar championed the elevation of the status of woman in India, particularly in his native Bengal. Rammohon and Vidyasagar's experience working with the British government taught them that Hindu traditions were often not credible or respected by western standards and no doubt, this affected their religions to reform. The ideas of religion of Rammohon Ray actively sought to create a fair and just society by implementing humanitarian practice similar to Christian ideals and thus legitimate Hinduism in the modern world.

In these circumstances, of course, we should remember that the French revolution of 18th century brings a vast change in the structure of social, ethical and cultural activities in Europe. The earlier Scholars like Dr. Martin Luther king, Voltaire, Rousseau, Adam Smith and other contemporary scholars, they did and contribute to establish their thoughts and ideas for the betterment of the man and mankind. The motto (Slogan) of equity and equality, humanity, solidarity and realism with the touch of truth spread all over the Europe and even in the whole world have got a new impression to think about what the life and views of a man should be. As a result of new impression or thinking against fundamentalism, Puritan and Catholic Christianity began to think in other ways. This evolution of new thinking, the European brings the light of real freedom of mind and thinking about the whole activities should be for the mankind.

But it is really a matter of mystery that in one side they wanted to bring the mental and real freedom of man. On the other hand, the British were devoted and dominated to establish empire at any cost, even after all sons of injustice and oppression. In fact the British colony in Indian subcontinent was flourished in 18th century. The impact of British invention indeed the

Mughal imperialism of Indian Subcontinent exists about more than five hundred years in this Subcontinent. To tell the truth, the rulers, imperialists and various kinds of Administrators put special kind of influences on the people of the native. Our experiences follow the Hinduism, Brahmanism, Islamic realist and at times the foreign protagonist, antagonist like Portuguese, Olondaz, Turkey and so on were continuously oppressed the common peoples' own culture, language, religious faith of own special philosophy. It is really unforgettable and the most painful fact is that the natives were the greatest enemies or lay in the untouchable position for the cause of racial differences that were imposed to the open minded common people by the so-called rulers and the religious believers. We should be very conscious and look back that they all are outsiders. In the name of education, ethics and practicality they exploited and destroyed the thought, dignity, humanity, nationality and wisdom and freedom. Actually the then Indian native were divided by the intellectual aggression, religious conflict, color and creed conflict, language and cultural conflict, food habit, social customs and various conflicts compiled to keep separate each other natives. In fact in the beginning of the nineteen century, the first Bengali scholar Raja Rammohan Roy and Isswarchndra Vidyasagor came forward to removing the darkness and the superstition. It is certain that these two great personalities started to get rid of all sorts of wrong and unjust activities. In fact, by virtue of their practical activities and performances it is believed that they were the pioneers of social reformation as Voltaire and Rousseau.

We do admit that the Bengal Region was introduced in the 19th century by these two great radical humanists. Afterwards the great poet Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi became as the new think-tank and the pioneer to open a new horizon for the Indian as well as before the whole world.

In this study, I would like to emphasize this in reference to the two epoch-making books 'The Religion of Man (1930)' and 'My Religion (1948)' written by Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi respectively.

The Religion of man written by Rabindranath Tagore was known as Herbert Lecture of Oxford University in 1930.

My Religion (1948) is written by Mahatma Gandhi after eighteen years of his experience. During this time the British imperialism lost their crown. But by their evil intention they used two nation theories and divided India in two parts and from the then period, they intellectually sowed the seed of intolerance against communal harmony, which has been continuing till today. And for this very reason, religious paradox could able to keep us unrest in this subcontinent even today.

Under these circumstances the two books of the two great scholars can help us remove the religious, racial, social ignorance and intolerance not only in this subcontinent but also it can have an universal impact for the entire world. Since then they can be proved to be a role model to the world as the pigeon of harmony.

The Religion of Man' & 'My Religion'

Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi were deeply interested in the comparative study of religion. So Ancient Indian Religions and Philosophy and many other books of religion had a remarkable contribution in establishing peace and harmony in world. According to Max Muller's opinion the study of religion is incomplete unless it's studied with reference to India. He said, 'Take religion and where you can study its true origin, its natural growth, and it's inevitable delay better than India, the home of Bralimanis, the birth place of Buddhism and the refuge of Zoroastrianism. So Rabindranath and Mahatma Gandhi both of them drew concepts from depth of their religious inheritance as well as from the emerging context of a new world-wide understanding between religions. Shree Ramkrishna's interpretation of the unity of faiths depicted that a unity based on the acceptance of unique spiritual and cultural legacies, he has given to Hinduism a responsibility along with the line of its ancient affirmation. In spite of few revivalists uprising in Hinduism, a deep modesty of spirit and devotion in characterize modern Hinduism as it seeks to strengthen the elements of Ethicism and join with other great religions in creating peace and understanding between men. Hinduism, for instance, has come closer to Christianity than ever before in its reference for Sermon on the Mount and for its eternal message of worship and service. Islamic thought and culture have also deeply intended the current Hinduism.

So, Rabindranath Tagore also observed the nature of religion and culture broadly. 'The Religion of man' was in Herbert Lecture Course at Oxford University in 1930. Many of the things which he seeks arc virtually timeless in his account of nature of religions of India, the historical quest of Indian scholars and his own journey toward his current views in 1930. However, an important part of the lecture is to speak to relevance of his particular prospective on Indian Religion for the time and issue of the particular time in 1930. When Rabindranath gave these lectures then he was 69 years old. He proved himself as a man of universe. It is true that Tagore did not believe in Traditional Religions. He thought most of the religions of the world are book related. For Hinduism, the Vedas are the fundamental source, for Buddhism the Tripitak and Christianity has the Bible and Islam has the Quran.

But his religion is totally based on nature. So he felt the need to take a fresh look at religion. He asked to use word 'religion' for describing some aspect of living such as worshiping God in Indian context. From his early life, Tagore argued with some other Indian thinkers that the right idea of religion in Indian context

should be based on the Indian concept of 'Dharma'. Rabindranath also felt that Hindu dharma is religion in itself a matter of debate. Tagore found out that it is operational. Later he says, The Sanskrit word dharma which is used into English as religion has a deeper meaning in our language. Dharma is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth of all things. Dharma is the ultimate purpose in working in us. When any wrong is done we say that Dharma is violated, meaning that the lie has been given to our true nature.

So he thought that the soul of a man is like the universe, vast like nature. This unique feeling will surely develop a man's intelligence. Besides, a man will make the idea of humanity of our God, or divinity of man is eternal. This fact has been developing in his mind as religious experience. Rabindranath Tagore says:

'During discussion of my own religious experience I have expressed my belief that the first stage of my liberation (liberation) was through my feeling of intimacy with nature not that nature which has its channel of information for our mind and physical relationship with our living body, but that which satisfies our personality with manifestation that make us rich and stimulate our imagination in their harmony of forms, colors, sounds and movements.'

Rabindranath Tagore mentioned that his personal experience of religion is like Bawls, who have no images, temples, scriptures, or any ceremonials, it is just feeling of truth and love. This truth and love is personal but impersonal. So that reason the religions are never about God of cosmic tone, but rather about the God of human personality. According to his views,

'It must be admitted that even the impersonal aspect of truth dearth with by science belongs to the Human universe. That ideal truth does not depend on upon the individual mind of man, but on the universal mind which comprehends the individual?'

So the essence of religion is spiritual unity that is 'man's religion in man' as against 'man's religion in god religion through a process of growth and not by inheritance. Religion is the liberation of our individual personality in the universal person who cannot be other than human. Tagore talks of man's perfection as opposed to God's perfection in his 'being' and his 'doing', he himself as a traveler (pathik) and God is a friend a fellow traveler, and we all are travelers in religion.

Rabindranath addresses God by saying 'Hey! Fellow Travelers, I bow down to you again and again.' But there is not a single way (path) but many ways to touch the life of God (jibondevota). Poet Rabindranath approaching God like infinity (Anima) it is a new way again and again which does not have any destination but only sustains the hope to get us closer to the goal.

Tagore believed that the Religion of man is not is normative; it rather describes the nature or essence of

man. This man is universal it is a man of all, of all times, of all locations, the core of mankind. This perspective on religion of man is nourished much by the ideas taken from Bengal folk Tradition and Sufism and upanishadic spirit. But Rabindranath was afraid and asked himself, is there any contradiction between religious truth and scientific reality? He says, -The details of reality must be studied in their difference by science, but it can never know the character of the grand unity of relationship pervading it, which can only be realized immediately the human spirit. And therefore it is the Primal imagination of man-the imagination which is fresh and immediate in its experience.- That he exclaims in poetic verse-

Wisdom and sprit of the universe!

The soul. That art the eternity of thought

And Gist forms and images a breath.

And everlasting motion."

Again he explains it in another poem-

"I have seen the vision

The vision of mine own revealing itself

Coming out from within me.

So we call the ideal reality spiritual and that is the lord of life. This word is highly paradoxical and we cannot prove by own senses or reason. This spiritual freedom of Indian spark for mukti the liberations of the soul as like as intimate light of nature, the miracle of creation. The religion of man is the universal harmony of humanity and supreme power of endless time, nature and life. So Rabindranath Tagore absolutely comments about himself that 'my religion is poetic religion'.

Mahatma Gandhi also elaborately discussed about the religions and he reflected his own visions in the book 'My Religion'. He compares with the all national religions. He said, after study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that (i) all religions are true; (ii) all religions have some error in them; (iii) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's close relations. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith; therefore no thought of conversation is possible. The aim of conversation is possible. The aims of fellowship should be to help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a mussalman to become a better mussalman and a Christian a better Christian. The attitude of patronizing toleration is a flash to the spirit of international fellowship. If I have a suspension in my mind that my religion is more or less true, then, though I may have some son of fellowship with them, it is on an entering different kind from the one we need in true international fellowship our prayer for others must be Not God, give him the light that thou has given me'. But give him all the light and truth for his highest development. Prayer merely that your friends may become better men, whatever their form of religion.

Gandhi's religion was spiritual humanism and there was no class contradiction in society. He declared himself for the betterment of schedule cast poor whom he called affectionately the 'Horijan.' He also served the poor whom he called Daridra Narayana is we are in the service of God. Gandhi's researcher Manisha Barua said, 'Gandhi found God amidst his creation, this creation is to confide not only to India his own land and not Hinduism alone, but also the different religions. Therefore the study of comparative religion was important to Gandhi. The best principle of religion he felt should be assimilated for the advancement of our society.'

The broad outlook of Mahatma Gandhi, his life and religions faith, concepts and activities was experimental that he called Brahmacharya. Gandhi was more than ever convinced that his quest of Brahmacharya and the steps that he had taken in its pursuit was a unique venture- the biggest and last in his life. Mahatma Gandhi said, 'cannot say I have attained the full Brahmocharya of my definition but my opinion. I have made substantial progress towards it. If God wills it, I might attain even perfection in this life. Some of my experiments have not reached a stage when they might be placed before the public with advantage. I hope to do so someday if they succeed to my satisfaction. Success might make the attainment of Brahmocharya (by others) comparatively easier.'

His interpretation of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity made his religion a federation of different religious faiths. He has been also existentially in the search of such studies as has been evident from his famous book, My religion: The story of my experiments with truth. He thinks that truth is God and God truth. So he refers to 'God' as Truth; and this has very important bearings. Gandhi said, 'To me God is truth and love. God is Ethics and morality. God is fearlessness. God is essence of life and light. Yet he is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in his boundlessness, God permits the atheist to live. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us.'

Gandhi don't believe in formal religion or any traditional customary religion, it is practical affairs to activity of a man. So at first he attempts to make the definition of religion. He likes to quote from Joseph J. Doke — "By religion, I do not mean formal religion or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker."

According to Gandhi, religion is equal to life and deeds. In "My Religion", he mentions it in reference to all aspects of a man's life. He reflects the source of religion in home, school, in his students life in abroad, Raichad Vai and in South Africa. In the third chapter of 'My Religion', he shows his respect to all other religions. He mentions that all religions take him to God. After describing some other religions like Christianity, Buddhism, Islamism, Hinduism,

Theosophy, Life afterwards, Perfection and imperfection of religion, migration and the better way of religion, he comes to his own view of religion in chapter four where he ensures that God is there with His own form. In the later part of the book he explains the practicality of religion. In Religion of Love, he says, "Where love is, there God is also." So love and God are infinite. So, it is clear that the people who divide humanity and religion in different casts, color and classes and creates indifferent attitudes actually humiliate the religion and mankind. Those who deny this truth, they, in fact, deny the religion and God. Respect, believe and love to the mankind is religion in reality.

After the comparative study of 'The Religion of Man' and 'My Religion', one can find the similarity of thoughts and ideas between Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. Both of them try to establish that religion can only survive if there is love and truth in it. God can never exist in any conservative mind, society and religion itself. This method of free thinking might lead the whole world to a better place to live in which Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi had dreamt a long ago. This value can protect the world from being spoilt.

Contemporary Context, in the emergence of human civilization, Prophets and Avatar are of different religions like Hazrat Mohammad (Sm.). Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ Martin Luther King, Voltaire, Rousseau, Adam Smith and many other scholars have a remarkable contribution to make the life peaceful and as a social reformer.

They established a cultural and philosophical state of mind of secular humanism. As a result, we had a way out from the experience and view of world human civilization of last two decades. In this context, there should be a harmony, brotherhood and unity in human civilization. But in the 21st century, in the present era there is a harsh reality of religious terrorism, panic, murder and war in humanity. Despite the vast improvement of information technology and science, the world is surprisingly moving towards a religious war. The cultural movement and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, religious aspect of Swami Vivekananda, the vision of life of Bauls and Vaishnava had made the Orientalism indispensable for the world of culture to establish a unity in the Indian sub-continent between different religions and casts. To make a modern secular free state in Bangladesh, the father of the nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with the four national leaders had been killed brutally. Before that Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Rajib Gandhi, Chandrilca Kumaratunge and many other great leaders were also killed. Therefore, the path of secular state and politics had been blocked again and again. The religious extremist roar and leaders took over the ruling power at times. As a result the countries of the South Asia have turned into asymmetry/incoherence and still it is happening continuously. By degree violence is increasing in the name of creed and cast. The

Muslims are being killed in Myanmar by the Buddha orthodox with the help of state. Even in Bangladesh the minority people have been oppressed and got into a terrible shape when the fundamentalists are in power. At present, in India which is considered as the largest democratic state, there are religious intolerance and panic; even it is noticed in the food habits of them. As there is BJP in power, the Gerua are heinously trying to make India as a Hindu State.

In Pakistan, there are Sian-Sunni clash, on the other hand in Middle East it is seen a barbarous step to establish Islamic States. Not only in Middle East, this violence now explodes into France, Russia, Turkey and many other countries in the world. After the demolition of twin tower in America the whole world is facing such incoherence. In Africa, there is class distinction and mass starvation for year after years. So, it is evident that we are living in an intolerable and a terrible world.

In this circumstance, freethinking is also getting disturbed and attacked. The writers, bloggers and publishers are being killed regularly in Bangladesh. The fundamentalists are targeting the intellectuals one after another and threaten to kill them in their cell phones though the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is continuously trying to establish a secular country with a liberal modern democratic spirit full of love, patriotism and humanity. In India, after taking over the state power of BJP, the Hindu fundamentalists are brutally killing the Muslims by the name of cow protection. The ban on beef is merely the beginning of India's prejudice against non-Hindus. But it is found that two of India's great leaders were purely secular. When Nehru became prime minister, Gandhi blessed him saying "be the leader like Hazrat Umar. Even Nehru used to eat pork and beef. Besides, today's prime minister of India, Narendra Modi says that the constitution of India is the religion of India. But in contrary to this view, the intellectuals, writers and cultural persons who express their sympathy towards them are threatened to death or to leave the country. For this unfriendly environment, many of the intellectuals do not accept the state honor. By this time, 30 Indian intellectuals avoid the national honor or return it as a symbol of protest. It is also evident in years for them to protect the human civilization and humanity. Hence, the intellectuals and writers of free thinking have become the victims of state power. From Socrates to Bruno, Galileo to Copernicus, Dorian Gracelekh, Oscar wild, Dostoyevsky, Bhagat Singh all are the victim of such state intolerance. African poet, Benjamin Molaiesky was sentenced to death for his verse against class conflict. The helpless condition of poet Nazim Hekmot of Turkey, poet Steinemark of Bulgaria, the imprisonment of Kazi Nazrul Islam the national poet of Bangladesh and today's killing of the bloggers and writers eventually prove that it is the intellectuals and writers who always come out with the duty to preserve all the we history of the decades. The rulers are always afraid of them and for this very reason they always try to dominate

and oppress them. In this context, Rabindranath Tagore's Kotha O Kahini can be used as a reference. In this poem, the intolerance of the King of Magadha, Ajatsmatru is mentioned. In the poem he has been killed for his devotion to Lord Buddha. But this death is being immortalized through Rabindranath. So, keeping Rabindranath in mind it can be said that it is the duty and responsibility of the writers, poets and intellectuals to remain by the humanity and to protest against such evil deeds and intolerance of the state. This message is proved and established again and again in the world. So all the cure of the fear and panic created by the terrorist activities of IS, Taliban, Boca Harem, Jamayatec Shiv Sena are in the discourse of writers, in the thoughts and practice of the intellectuals.

In today's world imperialism and terrorism are similar to one another. A horrible giant of imperialism and capitalism lays in a hidden mask the Christianity of Europe and America, tan Judaism of Israel, the Islamism of the Middle East, the Hinduism of India or the Buddhism of East-Asia. And the ominous claws of this hidden giant scratch the harmony of human civilization.

So, we must give priority to the religion of man and religion of humanity. If the God is One, then all human beings are His creation. If there is a division in creation, there is a division of God. This distinction can be removed by Rabindranath's poetic religion, Gandhi's assimilation of religious philosophy. The philosophy and values of these two great scholars can be a role-model to deal with this ominous world. Even the writers and columnists of the present world can be an inevitable document by expanding these ideals of Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. Hence both these great men leave huge impact on the mankind through their religious thoughts, philosophy and ideals. Their outmost effort is to elevate the status of human beings so that they can live with peace, harmony and amity with each other irrespective of castes, creed, religions, societal and political affiliation.

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