

**QUEST FOR SPIRITUAL FULFILLMENT IN THE WORKS OF  
RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND T.S. ELIOT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

Dissertation submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English

By  
**THETHEM HANGSING**  
Regd. No. 17/2017

Under the supervision of  
Dr. **LEMTILA ALINGER**



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## CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I, *Thethem Hangsing*, do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled, *Quest for Spiritual Fulfillment in the Works of Rabindranath Tagore and T.S. Eliot: A Comparative Study*, submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English is my original work and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree on the same title.

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30<sup>th</sup> April 2019

## SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled ***Quest for Spiritual Fulfillment in the works of Rabindranath Tagore and T.S. Eliot: A Comparative Study*** is a bonafide record of research work done by Ms. Thethem Hangsing, Regd. No. 17/2017, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2016 - 2019. Submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, this dissertation is the fruit of her original investigation conducted during the period of her research.

Ms. Thethem Hangsing has successfully completed her research work within the stipulated time.

**Kohima**

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Place: Kohima  
Date: 30.04.2019

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is defined as an organized society that allows an individual to express faith in a divine authority that provides utmost meaning to life. It is also a cultural system of behaviours and customs, world views, holy texts and places, ethics, and societal organization that relate humanity to an order of being. Different religions contain various elements, ranging from the holy, sacred, faith, an unnatural being or some sort of ultimacy and transcendence that will provide norms and power for a lifetime. Religions like Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and New Age naming some, can be regarded some of the major religions of the world. These religions not only have their own description, their view of God, but also what man can gain by following these religions. Christianity is considered to have quite a great number of disciples worldwide, with over 2.1 billion (approx.) population. This faith came into existence with the birth of Jesus Christ, the messiah and is based on his life and teachings and the *Holy Bible*. Followers of Christ believe in one God which is the Trinity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The ultimate reward of the soul is salvation which is eternal life in Heaven after death. This religion played a major role in the development of western civilization and also spreading out its largest branches with the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox Church and Protestantism. Islam is considered to be the next largest religion of the world after Christianity with approximately over 1.5 billion disciples. Islamic religion is based on the doctrine of Prophet Muhammad and the *Quran*. Muslims believe in one God named Allah, who is superior over all humankind. After death, a person is rewarded according to their

faithful dedication. Hinduism is considered the oldest and the third largest religion of the world with almost 1 billion followers. Sacred books such as, the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavad Gita* are considered to be their most significant religious texts. Hinduism believes in the innumerable manifestation of God through many gods and goddesses. Hindus strongly believe in karma or the reincarnation of the soul and the goal of each Hindu is to become free from the cycle of rebirth and be at rest. Buddhism is being followed by more than 350 million people around the globe. This religion teaches not about any particular God or gods but rather trusts in the spiritual enlightenment of the human soul; which will give freedom to man from the continuous cycle of life and death. Buddhists follow certain religious principles and dedicates oneself in meditation which they believe, allows them to attain Nirvana.

The term "spirituality" is said to have developed originally within early Christianity, attributing to a life conformed to the Holy Spirit. Dating back to AD 30, in one of the major festivals of the Jews, the festival of Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus numbering 120 were praying with one accord in a house. Acts 2:2-4 says, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled the whole house in where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (The Holy Bible 754). "Multitude of people who had gathered in Jerusalem was stunned by the supernatural wind and fire descending on the house where the apostles were praying. Here they saw the power of the Holy Spirit manifested upon 120 men speaking in different languages but all were speaking about Jesus Christ and every man was able to hear the Gospel in his own language" (Thanasingh 4).

With the change in times, the meaning expanded to include mental aspects of life, while the term both spread to refer to a broader scope of experience, including that of mystic practice. Generally, spirituality can be referred to as having a connection to the religious and moral values, or matters concerning the inner soul, rather than the material gains. It can also be regarded a process of transforming man to its original form i.e., in the image of God. In modern times the attention is on innate experience of a sacred level, and the utmost values and meanings by which people live, separated from organized religious institutions. Spirituality in modern times typically includes a belief in an unnatural or supernatural domain, personal development, a pursuit for an ultimate/sacred meaning, or a confrontation with the inner self. The meaning of spirituality has developed over time with various connotations and significance.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of great anguish and confusion because the idea of God as “dead” was first introduced into the general culture. Man began to question the very meaning of life, and finally arrived at the conclusion that, if there is no God, there is no meaning to life. What we perceive to be true is often the only truth we rely on. For there exist nothing which is called objective truth. But the very pursuit of finding meaning to life allows man to look deeper into one self. There can be no desire for any quest unless there is something missing or lost. For instance, a man’s toil and hard labor in search of happiness, a scholar’s dedicated research in pursuit of new findings, and a lost soul’s quest for spiritual fulfillment. Literature written before World War II mostly dealt with the issue of how man could live on with these realizations. The atrocities of war forced mankind to think that the idea of God was nothing but disillusionment. It can be said so because the terrible human misery caused by the effects of war caused widespread trauma. This aftermath of war caught even the writers in dilemmas where a whole new world had taken its place. Literature



changed rapidly, and the post war writers concerned themselves in finding ways to cope up with the world which is constantly changing.

## **1.2. Christianity and Hinduism**

Amongst all the major religions of the world Christianity and Hinduism are the most talked about and also two of the most influential religions. Not only in terms of the world population following these two religions but because their teachings had provided inner solace to many of its followers. Christianity is believed to have started with the birth of Christ between 6<sup>th</sup> B.C to 4<sup>th</sup> B.C of the time of Herod the Great. This birth is no ordinary birth but the birth of a Savior bringing hope to the world. The Bible says that the world was covered with sin and man was unable to come before the perfect God and was left with no hope of redemption. But Christ by coming to this world became the bridge between the imperfect man and its perfect Creator. So, the followers of Christ believe that the world has seen a new dawn and a hope of new tomorrow with the birth of Christ. The Hindus on the other hand believe in no such thing as a savior of the world. Their belief is that, karma of a man's deeds will decide the end of the cycle of birth and death. They believe that a man's soul will find perfection only when the soul finds moksha.

Both religions have their similarities and dissimilarities. Christianity has its origin in the Roman province of Judea, whereas, Hinduism in the Indian Sub-continent. The belief of God for every Christian is the *Trinity* (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as One) while the Hindus worship many gods and goddesses realizing that they all come from *Atman* (Inner self or soul). Hinduism is pantheistic, not theistic. For every Christian believer the only means to salvation is through accepting Jesus Christ as one's own

savior, whereas Hindus do not believe in salvation not teach about salvation. But rather believe in reaching enlightenment by the path of knowledge, the path of devotion, or the path of good deeds. Christians believe that their God who is the *Alpha* and *Omega* (beginning and end), created the world from nothing whereas the Hindus believe that the world is a part of their God. Christians believe their God as an *omnipotent* God and Hindus believe in the supreme powers of *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*. Even concerning life and death, Christians believe in eternity in *Heaven* or *Hell* while Hindus believe in a constant cycle of reincarnation until enlightenment is reached.

Though there are quite a number of dissimilarities yet what we learn is that both religions teach how to cleanse the soul that can ultimately lead to spiritual fulfillment. Christians strongly believe in the concept of Heaven and Hindus too have their concept of heaven, though not like the Christians. Hinduism advocates that all living things have souls and must achieve perfection in a spiritual way. In Christianity the same earthly body goes through a similar series yet repentance and confession of ones sin leads the soul to perfection. In both Hinduism and Christianity, man lives for the glory of God. Both religions promote love, peace, charity, honesty, faithfulness and so on.

### **1.3. Background study on the age of Rabindranath Tagore**

Tagore was born on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1861 in Calcutta to a strict Brahmin family. He was the youngest son of Debendranath Tagore, a forerunner of the Brahmo Samaj, which was a new religious sect in nineteenth-century Bengal. Tagore believed that religion should not be limited or fixed but should be free and spontaneous for every single

soul. It should allow an individual to grow and realize relationships in order to cultivate the spirit of love. Tagore says “in my language the word religion has a profound meaning. The wateriness of water is essentially its religion, in the spark of the flame lies the religion of fire. Likewise, man’s religion is his innermost truth” (Dutt 37). One of the most modern and liberal writers of India, Tagore spoke not for himself or for India but for humanity at large. Born in a strict Brahmo family, raised mostly by servants; his mother had died in his early childhood and his father travelled widely. Tagore was bounded by strict rules during his childhood which ultimately made him long for freedom. His only source of escape was in writing poetry and expressing his thoughts freely. His isolation from the rest of the world instead provided him with insights to his inner being.

The modern age had a great impact in the works of Rabindranath Tagore. His concept of harmony with nature concerned the universal man and its socio-political application in India. The first chapter of *Sadhana*, “The Relation of the Individual to the Universe”, illustrates this ideal of Tagore:

“The West seems to take a pride in thinking that it is subduing nature; as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything we want from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things. This sentiment is the product of the city-wall habit and training of mind. For in the city life man naturally directs the concentrated light of his mental vision upon his own life and works, and this creates an artificial dissociation between himself and the Universal Nature within whose bosom he lies. But in India the point of view was different; it 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. She felt we could have no communication whatever with our surroundings if they were absolutely foreign to us.” (Tagore 1)

Tagore’s primitivism and valuing of nature is an internal quest for something beyond its own setting. Considering modernism as a global phenomenon requires taking into consideration alternative expressions that are not to be considered as reinterpretations and inventions of European modernisms. As defined in its European manifestations, modernism found its expressions due to global influence and exchanges within Indian Art, although the impact of its emergence in colonial India cannot be underestimated.

#### **1.4. Background study on the age of T.S. Eliot**

Eliot once said, “the poet, in writing himself, writes his time”, and to none is this remark more applicable than to Eliot’s poetry. His *Waste Land* is considered the epic of the modern age, presenting as it does a panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary civilization. Eliot’s works cannot be understood without an understanding of his age. Modernism had a deep impact on the writings of Eliot especially his poetry. In the *Hollow Men* (1925), Eliot writes, “This is the way the world ends/Not with a bang, but a whimper.”(Eliot 86) This poem describes the lost souls of Eliot’s generation, traumatized by their experience in WWI. Eliot’s writings are full of allusions which show that the poet is not contented with the modern world. Modernism was a subtle development and rejected the high moral values of culture and society. It also rejected the conservative values of the past and embraced the concept of self-consciousness. Modern man in the twentieth century has rarely any appreciation for religious beliefs, especially Christianity. They boldly embraced the concept of man as their own master. However, Eliot found this concept quite absurd and in the year 1927 converted to Anglicanism. Some of his most famous poems and

plays were produced after his religious conversion. However, he became victim to many critics who felt that his *The Hollow Men* was the last example of what can be called his pure poetry. *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets* which followed in 1930 and 1943 were only considered moralistic poems, in spite of flashes of the old fire. Eliot's poetic critique on his later works was due to modern man's depreciation of religion. Modernism brought complexities to the humankind. It was a kind of response to the different types of ideologies that modern human beings tend to follow in the twentieth century. Modern poetry and especially Eliot's poetry discuss the problems that modern humanity face in terms of theology, psychology, and loss of faith in God.

Eliot's power as a prominent and famous poet and critic of the modern poetry is clarified through his poems; which shows Eliot's personality and his wish to find a solution to the problems that people face. There are various ways of participating in rescuing the human soul. Such ways can be for instance, through one's actions or writings or even through the least possible way that is through one's heart. Eliot participated in this through his writings, which is the strongest way of reforming the society. He stresses on the impersonality of poetry by saying that, poetry "is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." ("Tradition" 21) Eliot strongly believed in the escape of man from his inner turmoil through poetry.

### **1.5. Influence of Christian concepts in Tagore's works and the influence of Hinduism in the works of Eliot**

When studying the influence of Indian and Western religion on literature, it is important to note that there are words in Sanskrit which are untranslatable in English



and vice-versa. Sanskrit words such as dharma, kala, kama, karma, moksha, nirvana etc., have no translation in English. Similarly, English words such as absolution (of sin), blasphemy, guilt, heaven, hell, incarnation, irony, miracle, resurrection, secular, sin, tragedy cannot be translated and are given a sort of depiction or representation that may not stand to the true meaning within the Indian culture. This untranslatability of words and ideas sum up to the uniqueness of both the religions. There are also concepts which may not actually exist in the original context but are described in order to make meaning to its cultural concepts. For example, Indian philosophy has no word for “miracle” in Sanskrit or in any of the Indian languages. According to this belief miracles cannot happen because everything occurs within the orbit of matter and karma. Thus, words like “heaven” and “eternity” does not make sense, for heaven is only a temporary abode, after the enjoyment of which one is born again and given another chance to do better than gaining eternity.

Even the concept of prayer differs between the Hindus and the Christians. Hindus feel one should pray not because one wants something but because one has everything. For them prayer is meant for thanksgiving and not for supplication. The tragedy of life is not that we don't get what we want but that we get exactly what we want which ultimately leads to disaster. The Hindus strongly believe that there is a sense of satisfaction in the struggles of life, irrespective of whether one learns a lesson from it or simply fade away. The point here is that, man needs to understand that life cannot be beautiful per se and therefore, “the sweetest songs are those that tell the saddest thoughts.” Life is made of birth and death and so the only way to avoid death is to never be born.

The word “Dharma” is said to have derived from the root *dhri* meaning earth or “that which is stable” and it certainly does not mean “religion.” “Kala” means cosmic time which is understood as both yesterday and tomorrow. Shiva is also considered a Kala because he is both a destroyer and a creator. The feminine of Kala is, Kali- the horrific, malevolent dark goddess, the symbol of all-consuming time.

Time past and time present  
 Are both perhaps present in time future  
 And time future contained in time past.  
 If all time is eternally present  
 All time is unredeemable (Eliot 171).

These lines from T. S. Eliot’s *The Four Quartets* make a challenging statement that time is unredeemable and it is beyond the discretion of any human existence.

Furthermore, Sanskrit has no word for “irony,” either. The use of words to express something other than or the exact opposite of their literal meaning is more associated with modern times rather than the ancient scripts. The English language is so charged with irony that one has to be careful when choosing words to translate sacred and secular Hindu texts.

Finally, in none of the Indian languages is there a word for “tragedy.” Words such as pain, suffering, loss, hurt, despair, even anguish are present except tragedy. Even the idea of Heaven differs. The followers of Christianity believe in the existence of Heaven which is permanent, whereas Hindus believe there is no heaven and nothing is

permanent. The German poet and philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) clarified this idea by saying, nature is always correct; man makes right and wrong. It can also be understood in a way that, it is man who bifurcates heaven into permanent and temporary, whereas the Creator has made heaven to be simply heaven.

Another example of discretionary translation is that there can be no word for “blasphemy” because genuine blasphemy is profanation and a reverse declaration of faith. As Ralph Waldo Emerson says in his poem *Brahma* (1856):

They reckon ill who leave me out;  
When me they fly, I am the wings;  
I am the doubter and the doubt,  
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings (Emerson 103).

Any major writer would by no means take in whole and without question whatever appeals to them in the Indian tradition. Instead they explore, differ, dissect, and when they do accept, make changes they feel are necessary. It is impossible to be firmly grounded in one’s own culture and uncritically absorb the values of another without making one’s integrity suspect because mindless acceptance could be seen as a form of disrespect to the other culture’s identity.

Perhaps T. S. Eliot is one such writer who has explored, differed and dissected traditions and teachings of other religions which allowed him to withdraw from his decision to convert to Buddhism. Eliot gave the reason for his withdrawal later saying he felt he would have to empty himself of his entire Western religious and cultural

heritage in order to fill himself with the Buddhist philosophy which was more intimidating and risky a task than what he preferred to undertake. The task is to transform and absorb.

### **1.6. Rabindranath Tagore and T.S. Eliot: The Modernist Spiritualists**

Rabindranath Tagore was a Bengali polymath who reshaped Bengali literature and music, as well as Indian art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He went on becoming the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for his outstanding verse *Gitanjali*. A playwright and poet of global renown, Tagore deals with the universal themes of God, divine experience, illumination, and spirituality. His compositions were chosen by two nations as National anthems: India's *Jana GanaMana* and Bangladesh's *Amar Shonar Bangla*. *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings), *Gora* (Fair-Faced) and *Ghare- Baire* (The Home and the World) are some of his best known works, and his verse, short stories, and novels were acclaimed for their lyricism, naturalism and unnatural contemplation. Tagore in most of his works speaks of the need for spirituality or the quest for its fulfillment. His most acclaimed poem *Gitanjali* which won him the Nobel Prize in Literature, speaks of his love and devotion to the almighty. He sees God behind the multiplicity which is a creative principle of unity. God cannot be grasped by reason and logic. This implies not only that the divine is imminent in creation but also that the creation itself is a manifestation of the divine. Human beings, for Tagore, are the fullest expressions of the divine. We are created in the image of God. God manifests Himself in the creation. Thus, Tagore sees a harmonious relationship among God, human being and nature. He holds that the world and its particulars are real because they are an expression of the divine. He feels that his entire being and reason for existence is God

alone, and nothing can separate the divine from him. *Gitanjali* talks about the poet's intense love for the almighty; *At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable*. For Tagore, the proper way to realize God is through love of humanity. He believes so because God exists in the company of the poor and the lowly, *Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and the lowliest, and lost*. Tagore's *Gitanjali* has quite a similarity to the teachings of the Holy Bible. For instance, Tagore says in the third stanza of poem 11 of *Gitanjali*, *Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all forever*. Tagore in these lines says that, God has joyfully delivered humanity from the bondage and miseries of sin forever. A close connection can be seen in John 3:16 of the *Holy Bible* where it is mentioned that, *For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*. The concepts of God giving away His only Son and God being bounded with humanity are totally different statements, yet one thing is clear for sure that humanity is the reason why God has given Himself to be bounded with and to ultimately die for them. Religion for Tagore is the essence of humankind.

Tagore's spiritual perspective is surprisingly difficult to pinpoint, for his thoughts on God, soul and divinity are more implied than explicit in the broader substance of his work, which is multi-faceted and sometimes abstract. In *The Religion of Man*, based on the Hibbert Lectures he delivered in 1930 at Harvard University, Tagore characterizes his own religious beliefs saying that a poet's religion is neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian. The more we learn of Tagore and his work, the more we come to realize that access to his inner nature is vexedly



labyrinthine, despite the prolificacy and profundity of his writings. Tagore has seen visions, and he can paint them for us with a compelling charm due to utter simplicity and fidelity. His religious beliefs were considered paradoxically unorthodox for his time. He was criticized by some for his efforts to reform Hinduism via the Brahmo Samaj movement, and introduce it to the West. Tagore felt that, with its postulation of monotheism, the Brahmo Samaj theology would be more palatable to Christians who might willingly embrace a pantheistic Hinduism.

Tagore does not mention about the holy texts of the Hindus directly in his works however, he believes that God manifests Himself in all forms of life and thus focuses primarily on man's oneness with God. He strongly believes that the purpose of man is to merge with God which is the final destination of a soul searching for spiritual fulfillment. Tagore believes that man can finally find wholeness in his soul when he finds the “One” which is in him, which is the only truth and way to unlock the doors of his spiritual life. According to him, the journey to a spiritual path can be attained successfully if man realizes that his fullest potential lies in his union with God and by avoiding all worldly distraction.

Most of Tagore’s beliefs compliment the Christian beliefs. He believes that man is the greatest of God’s creation and that man is created as a representation of God. Similarly, the Holy Bible tells us that man is created in the image of God and is above all His other creations. Though there may not be any concrete evidence to point out the influence of Christianity or the teachings of *The Holy Bible* in Tagore’s personal life, yet it has definitely influenced some of his greatest works.

Modernist writer **Thomas Sterns Eliot** (1888-1965) was born in St. Louis, Missouri, studied at Harvard, the Sorbonne and Oxford and received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948, drew his intellectual sustenance from Dante, Shakespeare, the Bible, St. John of the Cross and other Christian mystics, the Greek dramatists, Baudelaire, and the Bhagavad Gita. He gained popularity for his masterpiece, the first “modernist” poem in English, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, followed then by *The Waste Land* in 1922. Eliot used elements of conventional forms, within an unconventionally structured whole in his greatest works. He not only understood his age and the people but also felt the need to enlighten them with the things that concern their spirituality. In his quest for spiritual fulfillment, Eliot studied Buddhism and also read Hindu and Confucian religious text. This quest however, proved to be of much help to him as it became a source of inspiration to his writings.

Eventually Eliot’s quest ended with a full conversion to the Roman Catholic religion which had a great impact on his spiritual life as well as his writings. His faith became widely known with the publication of *Ash Wednesday* (1930). He believed his finest achievement was writing the broadly religious poem *Four Quartets* (1943). Eliot when first drawn towards Christianity was skeptical about any experience which could be extraordinary. But after his conversion to Christianity, his poetry, outlook towards life and writings changed completely. As he found his peace in the religion, criticism of any kind from his fellow contemporaries meant nothing. Rather, he went on expressing his longing for spiritual fulfillment, rejecting the traditions of the conventional world.

One can notice the signs of this spiritual longing-ness expressed deeply in the works written before and after his conversion to the Roman Catholic religion. His well-known poems, previous to his conversion in 1930, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* talks about the lost opportunity in life, lack of physical and intellectual inertia, lack of spiritual progress, with the recurrent theme of carnal love unattained. Another poem, *The Waste Land* draws the picture of the modern world overshadowed by the gloom that emanates a sense of chaotic existence where the sense of boredom permeates the imagination of the time. The poem illustrates the apparent chaos and failure of the modern society. *The Journey of the Magi* is another poem by Eliot that retells the story of the three wise men who undertook the long journey to meet the baby Jesus. In this poem Eliot gives a realistic picture of the actual journey undertaken by these magi and the pains that they faced. Eliot's *The Journey of the Magi* is not actually about the destination but rather the journey that these wise men undertook, which ultimately leave a permanent mark in their lives. *The Hollow Men* which appeared in 1925 is marked with similar themes of the fragmented modern world: post-war Europe under the Treaty of Versailles; the difficulty of hope and religious conversion; and Eliot's failed marriage. The concluding lines of the poem are amongst some of the most famous lines:

This is the way the world ends

This is the way the world ends

This is the way the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper (Eliot 86).

*Ash Wednesday* is considered to be his first long poem after his conversion to the Roman Catholic religion. This poem talks about the joy of acquiring faith by someone

who had lacked before and the desire to move from spiritual barrenness to hope for salvation. The style is different from the poetry that predates his conversion. The poem's structure was based on the orthodox Christian background which might have discomforted many secular writers. Though it was not well received by everyone yet, it was perhaps the most moving poem by Eliot. The masterpiece that led Eliot to win the Noble Prize for Literature was the *Four Quartets*. It consists of four long poems, each published separately: *Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding*, having five sections each. Each poem is associated with the four classical elements like air, earth, water and fire, and the relationship between theological, historical, and the physical to that of the human condition. The *Four Quartets* can only be understood with reference to Christian thought, tradition, and history. Eliot draws upon the theology, art, symbolism and language of figures as Dante, and mystics St. John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich.

Though Eliot was criticized by many of his contemporaries and friends for his overt religious works, yet this did not stop him. He was not distracted by criticism. Rather, he declared the world that his search has finally ended with his baptism into Anglicanism. Just like the magi who went through extreme cold, suffered loneliness and home sick, at times the desire of the flesh that became almost un-bearing and the desire to give up on the quest, even so Eliot faced similar situations in his life. His failed marriage, financial crisis and unstable career were some of the greatest issues in his journey to finding spiritual fulfillment. But though the quest was difficult, yet it was worth it. His works not only proved to be of major success but also ultimately won him a Noble Prize. Even today Eliot continues to inspire millions of readers with his collection of works and its varied themes.

### **1.7. Objective and Significance of Study**

The present thesis aims to undertake a comparative study of Rabindranath Tagore and T.S. Eliot's works; to examine the writers' desire for spiritual fulfillment reflected in their works thus discussing the subject of analysis. Both Tagore and Eliot are spiritualist writers, who confronted the modernists' movement and boldly brought into concern the issues of the era. They belonged to different religion and their belief systems were far from similar. Tagore belonged to the Brahmin Hindu religion and Eliot converted to the Roman Catholic religion. Not only are the teachings of these two religions different, but their outlook towards the spiritual existence also differs. However, despite their differences both writers spoke and wrote about the soul which needs a nirvana or salvation at the end of life. It is neither the cry of the world nor the teachings of any religion that can quench the thirst of the soul. It is rather the encounter of the soul with the divine that can lead to the ultimate spiritual fulfillment. Spirituality is the experience of that realm of awareness where we experience our totality. This area of awareness is a core consciousness that is beyond the comprehension of our mind and intellect. In religious traditions this inner consciousness is referred to as the soul which is part of a common soul or cumulative consciousness, which in religion is referred to as God. This idea of consciousness was deeply understood and absorbed in the works of these two writers who felt that spirituality is the answer to all the problems of the world. Eliot's views on the modern men's problems especially after the World War have become extremely intricate. As the natural world has become barren outwardly because of massive death and destruction, the internal state of humans has become obscure.

The study will also throw light on the writers' view of life and death, religion and spirituality, keeping in mind that both writers moved away from the established



systems and worked on a more tenable- personal spirituality. Furthermore, the study will aim at discussing the spiritual expression in the writings of Tagore and Eliot, aesthetic expression of spirituality, and the universality of their religious beliefs that marks the ultimate source of spiritual fulfillment. Knowing the fact that Tagore was undoubtedly influenced by Christianity and Eliot by Buddhism, though they belonged to Hindu and Christian background respectively, the union of their beliefs ultimately influenced the creation of their greatest works in literature. It is however clear without a doubt, that the idea of spirituality drawn through Christian ideologies is more dominant in Eliot's works and Hinduism in Tagore's.

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## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL VIEW OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS AESTHETICS

#### 2.1. Modernism

Modernism arose out of the rebellious mood at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was a radical approach that yearned to rejuvenate the way modern civilization viewed life, art, politics, and science. This rebellious attitude that flourished between 1900 and 1930 had, as its basis, the rejection of European culture for having become too corrupt, complacent and dull, ailing because it was bound by the artificialities of a society that was too preoccupied with image and too scared of change. This dissatisfaction with the moral bankruptcy of everything European led modern thinkers and artists to explore other alternatives, especially primitive cultures.

The first characteristic associated with modernism is nihilism, the rejection of all religious and moral principles as the only means of obtaining social progress. In other words, the modernists abandoned the moral codes of the society in which they were living in. The reason that they did so was not necessarily because they did not believe in God, although there was a great majority of them who were atheists, or that they experienced great doubt about the meaninglessness of life. Rather, their rejection of conventional morality was based on its arbitrariness, its conformity and its exertion of control over human feelings. In other words, the rules of conduct were a restrictive and limiting force over the human spirit.

The rejection of moral and religious principles was compounded by the repudiation of all systems of beliefs, whether in the arts, politics, sciences or philosophy. Doubt was not necessarily the most significant reason why this questioning took place. One of the causes of this iconoclasm was the fact that early 20th-century culture was literally

re-inventing itself on a daily basis. With so many scientific discoveries and technological innovations taking place, the world was changing so quickly that culture had to re-define itself constantly in order to keep pace with modernity and not appear anachronistic. By the time a new scientific or philosophical system or artistic style had found acceptance, each was soon after questioned and discarded for an even newer one. Another reason for this fickleness was the fact that people felt a tremendous creative energy always looming in the background as if to announce the birth of some new invention or theory.

As a consequence of the new technological dynamics, the modernists felt a sense of constant anticipation and did not want to commit to any one system that would thereby harness creativity, ultimately restricting and annihilating it. And so, in the arts, for instance, at the beginning of the 20th-century, artists questioned academic art for its lack of freedom and flirted with so many isms: secessionism, fauvism, expressionism, cubism, futurism, constructivism, dada, and surrealism. Pablo Picasso, for instance, went as far as experimenting with several of these styles, never wanting to feel too comfortable with any one style.

The wrestling with all the new assumptions about reality and culture generated a new permissiveness in the realm of the arts. The arts were now beginning to break all of the rules since they were trying to keep pace with all of the theoretical and technological advances that were changing the whole structure of life. In doing so, artists broke rank with everything that had been taught as being sacred and invented and experimented with new artistic languages that could more appropriately express the meaning of all of the new changes that were occurring. The result was a new art that appeared strange and radical to whoever experienced it because the artistic standard had always been mimesis, the literal imitation or representation of the

appearance of nature, people, and society. In other words, art was supposed to be judged on the standard of how well it realistically reflected what something looked or sounded like.

This mimetic tradition had originated way back in ancient Greece, had been perfected during the Renaissance, and had found prominence during the nineteenth-century. But for modern artists this old standard was too limiting and did not reflect the way that life was now being experienced. Freud and Einstein had radically changed perception of reality. Freud had asked us to look inwardly into a personal world that had previously been repressed, and Einstein taught us that relativity was everything. And, thus, new artistic forms had to be found that expressed this new subjectivity. Artists countered with works that were so personal that they distorted the natural appearance of things and with reason. Each individual work begged to be judged as a self-sufficient unit which obeyed its own internal laws and its own internal logic, thereby attaining its own individual character.

Primitivism was one of the artistic beliefs that the modernists adopted. It represented the simplification of form, which was to become one of the hallmarks of modernism. This abstraction of form suggested that some essential structure, previously hidden by realistic technique, would come to light. Art had, according to the modernists, become too concerned with irrelevant sophistications and conventions that detracted from the main purpose of art: the discovery of truth. On the other hand, primitivism was the expression of all that civilized man had to repress in order to enter into contract with society. According to Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in order for man to partake in civilized society, he had had to lay aside many uncivilized urges within the self, such as the natural appetite for adultery, incest, murder, homosexuality, etc., all held as taboos. It is this repression of natural desires that,

Freud argues, is the source of modern neurosis. Symbolically, the embrace of primitivism is a negation of the very principles of the Judeo-Christian tradition and an affirmation of authentic expression of that hidden self that only finds expression through dreams.

Tagore was one such writer from modern India who inspired to see the world and life in its simplicity. The modernist writer was deeply interested in *primitivism* as an artistic expression and therefore this obsession became a source of re-discovering of passion for life rather than just art, which so many creative people at the time believed to have been repressed or had lain dormant. Tagore's concept of primitivism pointed towards the universal man in harmony with nature unlike the Europeans who looked for new horizons to escape their own modernity. The first chapter of *Sadhana*, "The relation of the individual to the universe", illustrates this ideal of Tagore:

"The west seems to take a pride in thinking that it is subduing nature; as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything we want from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things. This sentiment is the product of the city-wall habit and training of mind. For in the city life man naturally directs the concentrated light of his mental vision upon his own life and works, and this creates an artificial dissociation between himself and the Universal Nature within whose bosom he lies. But in India the point of view was different; it 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. She felt we could have no communication whatever with our surroundings if they were absolutely foreign to us" (Tagore 1).

Tagore's primitivism was concerned not only with the socio-political aspects of India but from within one self, which is personal and local rather than an external quest. It is this exploration of the internal pursuit that the modernists were so keen about, and

what better way to do so than to scrutinize man's real aspirations, feelings, and actions.

However, the modernist portrayal of human nature takes place within the context of urban cities rather than in nature, where it had occurred during the entire 19th-century. At the beginning of the 19th-century, the romantics had idealized nature as evidence of the transcendent existence of God; towards the end of the century, it became a symbol of chaotic, random existence. For the modernists, nature becomes irrelevant and antique, for the city replaces nature as the life force.

## **2.2. Aestheticism and Decadent movement**

Aestheticism or Aesthetic Movement is an intellectual and art movement supporting the emphasis of aesthetic values more than social-political themes for literature, fine art, music and other arts. It was a late 19<sup>th</sup> Century European arts movement which centered on the doctrine that art exists for the sake of its beauty alone, and it need not serve any political, social didactic or other purpose. This meant that Art from this particular movement focused more on being beautiful rather than having a deeper meaning – 'Art for Art's sake'. The aesthetes believed life should imitate art in all its fabulousness, not the other way round. The Aesthetic movement was one of the many reactions of intellectuals against the Victorian puritanism. In this period, there is a fracture between the Artist and the society. In fact, the artist does not recognize himself in the world around him because that world is conventional and mediocre. He therefore turns to the world that is opposed to reality, a world of refined, unusual and precious beauty.

The movement began in reaction to prevailing utilitarian social philosophies and to what was perceived as the ugliness and philistinism (social attitude that undervalues

and despises art, beauty, spirituality, and intellect) of the industrial age. Immanuel Kant laid its philosophical foundations in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He called for the autonomy of aesthetic standards, setting them apart from considerations of morality, utility or pleasure. It was particularly supported by notable figures such as Oscar Wilde, but contemporary critics are also associated with the movement, such as Harold Bloom, who has recently argued against projecting social and political ideology onto literary works, which he believes has been a growing problem in humanities departments over the last century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was related to other movements such as symbolism or decadence represented in France, and may be considered the British version of the same style.

The Decadent Movement (degenerate in mental or moral qualities) was a late 19<sup>th</sup> Century artistic and literary movement centered in Western Europe that followed an aesthetic ideology of excess and artificiality and is originally associated with a number of French writers in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The visual artist Felicien Rops's body of work and Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *Against Nature* (1884) are considered the prime examples of the decadent movement, though others attribute this honor to Baudelaire's poetry. It first flourished in France and then spread throughout Europe and to the United States. The movement was characterized by self-disgust, sickness at the world, general skepticism, delight in perversion, art for art's sake, transgressive modes of sexuality, artificiality, decay, employment of crude humor and the belief in the superiority of human creativity over logic and natural world. The "decadence" tag was intended as an insult to Romantic writers like Victor Hugo. But some later Romantic writers who got lumped into the Decadent Movement, like Charles Baudelaire, wore the term as a badge of extravagant honor. Whether they dug the Decadent label or not, writers like Arthur Rimbaud, Oscar Wilde, and G.H. Wells



were all major players in the movement, which had a lot of overlap with Symbolism and the Aesthetic Movement. Decadence is an accumulation of signs or descriptions acting as detailed catalogs of human material riches as well as artifice. It was Oscar Wilde who perhaps lay this out most clearly in *The Decay of Lying* with the suggestion of three doctrines on art, “that art never expresses anything but itself”, that “all bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals”, and that “life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.” After which, he suggested a conclusion quite in contrast to Moréas' search for shadow truth: “Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art.”

By the end of the century, decadence had spread into many other European countries as an aesthetic term. Decadence became a vital force in England during the 1890s and thrived as one of the dominant focuses of a wider cultural debate regarding degeneration and in particular the *fin de siècle* (end of the century), a decade and an idea with which it became increasingly associated. In *fin de siècle* Europe, the Decadents were a group of artists who rejected the Modernist trend towards realism and continued the Romantic tradition of irrationalism. The Symbolist and Aesthetic movements were contemporary and similar. In Britain the leading figures associated with the Decadent movement were Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley and some artists and writers associated with *The Yellow Book*. Wilde paid a high price for his “decadence” by being sent to jail for allegations of homosexuality. In the United States, the brothers Edgar and Francis Saltus wrote decadent fiction and poetry.

As a literary movement, Decadence is regarded as a transition between Romanticism and Modernism. Decadence is often seen as a kind of Neo-Romanticism, being similar in style to the poetry of the Romantic writers from the late eighteenth century through the mid nineteenth. An overarching theme in the poetry of the Decadence is

the belief in original sin and the idea of the “fallen man”, as well as the commonality of evil and society’s lack of innocence. Eliot’s work may as well be considered a bi-product of the Decadent movement especially his poem *The Waste Land*. There is a common mood of nostalgia for times lost, a sense of tedium or lack of hope and motivation, a sense of isolation and loss. The poetry of the Decadents demonstrates a desire to escape the natural world which is considered to be a grotesque and perverse place, so there is a large emphasis on artificial things, which separates people from nature. Examples include disguises, masks, ornate jewels and metals, cosmetics and costumes. Common imagery includes dream-like states (where people can escape) and puppet shows and plays (where characters are artificial). A perfect example of this desire to escape nature for the artificial and also the nostalgia for a past time can be seen in William Butler Yeats’ poem *Sailing to Byzantium*.

### **2.3. Transcendentalism and its influence on the writings of Tagore and Eliot**

Transcendentalism in simple terms can be described as man having the ability to know and understand the world around him that “transcends” or goes beyond what he can see, hear, taste, touch or feel. This knowledge comes through intuition and imagination not through logic or the senses. People can trust themselves to be their own authority on what is right. A transcendentalist is a person who accepts these ideas not as religious beliefs but as a way of understanding life relationships. It can also be considered as new age spirituality. A philosophy which says that, thought and spiritual things are more real than ordinary human experience and material things.

It is a 19th-century movement of writers and philosophers in New England who were loosely bound together by adherence to an idealistic system of thought based on a belief in the essential unity of all creation, the innate goodness of humanity, and the

supremacy of insight over logic and experience for the revelation of the deepest truths. German transcendentalism, Platonism and Neoplatonism, the Indian and Chinese scriptures, and the writings of such mystics as Emanuel Swedenborg and Jakob Bohme were sources to which the New England Transcendentalists turned in their search for a liberating philosophy.

The writings of the Transcendentalists and those of contemporaries such as Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, for whom they prepared the ground, represent the first flowering of the American artistic genius and introduced the American Renaissance in literature. In the 19th century, under the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson and other transcendentalists, Unitarianism began its long journey from liberal Protestantism to its present more pluralist form. It has emerged out from the ideals of Hinduism that professes that one must 'lose' the self in order to 'find' the self. Emerson's essay *Nature* is the truest example of the idea that nature has the ultimate ability to balance and even out the course of life.

Emerson is considered to have influenced Eliot when it comes to the transcendental movement, "In a sense Eliot follows in the giant footsteps of Emerson and Thoreau and the early Transcendentalists, but, it would seem, with a greater sense of urgency and relevance. There is a sharper, keener perception of what endures and should endure, and incessant demand that all traditions of literature, music, painting, architecture and philosophy be put to their proper psychic or religious use. In that sense, Eliot's message is the message of the *Gita*, of the essential utility of all activity: a message for all time, though it is harder to understand because it must be united from the materials, tone and perspective of his poems." (East Meets West)

Transcendentalism is closely related to Unitarianism, the dominant religious movement in Boston in the early nineteenth century. It started to develop after

Unitarianism took hold at Harvard University, following the elections of Henry Ware as the Hollis Professor of Divinity in 1805 and of John Thornton Kirkland as President in 1810. Transcendentalism was not a rejection of Unitarianism; rather, it developed as an organic consequence of the Unitarian emphasis on free conscience and the value of intellectual reason. The transcendentalists were not content with the sobriety, mildness, and calm rationalism of Unitarianism. Instead, they longed for a more intense spiritual experience. Thus, transcendentalism was not born as a counter-movement to Unitarianism, but as a parallel movement to the very ideas introduced by the Unitarians. It became a coherent movement and a sacred organization with the founding of the Transcendental Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts on September 8, 1836 by prominent New England intellectuals, including George Putnam (1807–78, the Unitarian minister in Roxbury), Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Frederic Henry Hedge.

Transcendentalists believe that society and its institutions, particularly organized religion and political parties; corrupt the purity of the individual. They have faith that people are at their best when truly “self-reliant” and independent. It is only from such real individuals that true community can form. Even with this necessary individuality, transcendentalists also believe that all people possess a piece of the “Over-soul” (God). Because the Over-soul is one, this unites all people as one being. Emerson alludes to this concept in the introduction of the American Scholar address, “that there is One Man, - present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man.” Such an ideal is in harmony with Transcendentalist individualism, as each person is empowered to behold within him or herself a piece of the divine Over-soul. Transcendentalists desire to ground their religion and philosophy in principles not based on or falsifiable by,

physical experience, but deriving from the inner spiritual or mental essence of the human. The transcendental movement can be described as an American outgrowth of English Romanticism. It is thus, in many aspects, the first notable American intellectual movement. It has inspired succeeding generations of American intellectuals, as well as some literary movements.

Transcendentalism also influenced Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, who rejected Hindu mythology, but also the Christian trinity. He found that Unitarianism came closest to true Christianity, and had a strong sympathy for the Unitarians, who were closely connected to the Transcendentalists. Ram Mohan Roy founded a missionary committee in Calcutta, and in 1828 asked for support for missionary activities from the American Unitarians. By 1829, Roy had abandoned the Unitarian Committee, but after Roy's death, the Brahmo Samaj kept close ties to the Unitarian Church, who strived towards a rational faith, social reform, and the joining of these two in a renewed religion. Its theology was called “Neo-Vedanta” by Christian commentators, and has been highly influential in the modern popular understanding of Hinduism, but also of modern western spirituality, which re-imported the Unitarian influences in the disguise of the seemingly age-old Neo-Vedanta.

#### **2.4. Mysticism and Spiritualism**

Mysticism is defined as a religious practice based on the belief that knowledge of spiritual truth can be gained by praying or thinking deeply. It is a belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience, such as intuition or insight. The belief that there is hidden meaning in life or that each human being can unite with God. Mysticism is a religion

or religious belief based on union or communion with a deity, or divine being.

Mysticism is what lets man transcend the physical to experience enlightenment.

Mysticism is easily associated with crystals, New Age theories, or the occult (the supernatural). Many faiths, including Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism, have their own forms of mysticism, placing an emphasis on spiritual connection and union, and the mysteries of religion over doctrine or rigid authority. Outside of religion, mysticism is applied to cryptic, obscure, or irrational thought- leaning toward mystery and wonder, rather than logic.

To many modern Christians, words like “meditation,” “mystic,” and “mysticism” bring to mind Eastern religions. Certainly Eastern religions are known for their mysticism; however, mysticism is not only a vital part of the Christian heritage as well, but it is actually the *core* of Christian spirituality. Mysticism simply means the spirituality of the direct experience of God. The direct experience of God is a kind of knowing, which goes beyond intellectual understanding. It is not a matter of belief but rather it is marked by love and joy, but not “emotional experience.” In many ways, it is better described by what it is not. To describe what it is, we must use metaphors—the marriage of the soul to Christ, the death of the “old man” and birth of the “new man,” being the “body of Christ.” Jesus proclaimed “I and the Father are one,” (*Jn. 10.30*) showing the world what the union of God and man can be. Christian mysticism is about nothing else but this transforming union. Christ is the sole end of Christian mysticism. Whereas all Christians have Christ, call on Christ, and can (or should) know Christ, the goal for the Christian mystic is to become Christ-like, fully human, and by the grace of God, also fully divine. A common misconception about mysticism is that it is about “mystical experiences,” and there are many volumes on such experiences in religious literature. But true mysticism is not focused on

“experiences” but with the lasting experience of God, leading to the transformation of the believer into union with God. The religion we call “Christianity” changes, but God is eternal. Mystical faith wants to know this unchanging God to whom Christianity leads us, the One behind the beliefs and the words, the One whom beliefs and words cannot describe. This idea of mysticism can be found in the later works of T.S. Eliot.

## **2.5. Difference between Mysticism and Spirituality**

Mysticism is generally associated with the belief of experiencing union with the ultimate Divinity, Reality, Spiritual Truth or God. A mystic is a person who attains this union. The term has been expressed in various ways due to the differences in the religious, social and psychological traditions. The experience of such communion is often described by mystics. These kinds of beliefs are often considered to be beyond perceptual or intellectual apprehension. Mysticism is defined to be spiritual in nature. It has been described as an organic process which includes the perfect consummation of the love of God (*1 Jn 4:17-19*). The definition of mysticism is so wide that it cannot be limited to any one religious tradition. It is considered as the origin and fountainhead of various religious teachings. It is important to note that in the modern world, the word ‘mysticism’ is often used for non-rational worldviews.

In the words of Plotinus, a major philosopher of the ancient world, “spirituality is the soul’s solitary adventure.” Spirituality is associated with the quality or condition of being spiritual. It signifies the human spirit or soul as opposed to materials and materialistic interests. It is very difficult to explain spirituality as it is a very broad term that consists of several spectrums of perspectives. It has been defined quite differently by monotheists, polytheists, humanists, followers of new age, Native

Americans, etc. Spirituality deals with the spirit within, which can also be referred to as an absolute master and controller of the body. Spirituality and mysticism are considered to be interconnected as both deals with the transcendent or ecstatic experiences. However, the in-depth meanings may be regarded as two different concepts.

## **2.6. Mysticism and Spiritualism in Christian literature**

The term mysticism derives from *The Mystical Theology*, a tiny treatise written by the greatest Christian writer of the sixth century, Dionysius the Areopagite, a.k.a. Pseudo-Dionysius or St. Denys. But Dionysius is in no way the founder of Christian mysticism. That honor belongs to none but Jesus the Christ himself. But there was mysticism long before Jesus was born. In Christian literature, the Bible mentions about God taking a stroll with man in the Garden, Jacob witnessing the Heavens open, God speaking to Joseph through dreams, Moses commune with God on Sinai, David losing himself in dancing for the Lord and many other such references.

But when Jesus declared "I and My Father are one," (*Jn.* 10:30) He proclaimed in Himself the union of God and humankind, and He offers it to all who follow and gave them the power to become sons of God to all who believe in His name. (*Jn.* 1:12).

From there, the mystic heart is seen in the letters of the apostles: Paul reached the divinized state of losing his "self": *it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*, (*Gal.* 2:20). James wrote that *every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning*. (*Jas.* 1:17) Peter proclaimed that Christ even descended to hell to liberate imprisoned souls, (*1 Pet.* 3:19) and John understood the most sublime truth of God's essence: *God is Love* (*1 Jn.* 4:8, 16). Every century has been influenced by Christian



mystics—from apostles and martyrs, Church Fathers and Desert Mothers, to monks and nuns of religious orders, to the lay mystics—men and women and boys and girls in every century, in every denomination and in every walk of life.

Christian spiritualism cannot simply be explained as a mystery but needs to be understood. It is not just confined to the Bible but applies to the whole of life. Not everyone who has read the Bible will have a common understanding of the message. Everyone's experience and perception differ from each other. One limits God's love and the other allows God's love to be what it is, free and unhindered by the limitations imposed by the mind of man with his strange notion of love. Rev. W. T Horsley in his *An Address in support of Christian Spiritualism* quotes "The main aim of Christian Spiritualism is to bring about a spirit of true friendship among God's people, and a close communion between God and man." Thus spiritualism through Christian perspective talks not about any religion or any religious teachings but simply as the union of man with God.

## **2.7. Religious Aesthetics**

Aesthetic considerations have frequently played an important role within various religious traditions. For example, certain religious doctrines ascribe beauty to God, to various religious exemplars, and even to the cosmos itself. Similarly, various religious practices and rituals involve the use of music, dance, and architecture or artistic elements. Further, the world's religions have inspired the creation of innumerable great artworks across a range of forms and genres.

Art and spirituality have always shared a special relationship. The arts have always been integral to religion. Sacred pictures, sacred symbols, sacred dances, chants, hymns and tunes have been used in rituals, in places of worship, and as aids to prayer

and meditation in every religion. Even religious symbols have found their expression in art. Judging by this alone, the arts seem to be natural vehicles for expressing or connecting with the transcendent. The great art of the medieval Christian west is religious art, as is that of the Orthodox Christian east. For Hinduism and Buddhism it is the same. Even religions like Judaism and Islam, which consider images of God idolatrous, use decorative designs to embellish places of worship and sacred texts. Outside of formal religious contexts, religion has traditionally been as integral to the arts as to the rest of culture. The arts in traditional cultures transmit the central beliefs and values of those cultures, and those beliefs and values have a strong religious or spiritual dimension. The connection between art and spirituality has continued to remain and can thus be seen in the modern and postmodern religious art in the west. The poems in *Gitanjali* are the finest example of the aesthetic representation of the deity that Tagore worships.

Eli Siegel in his *Aesthetic Realism* (1941) quotes “All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves....There are many passages in the Bible showing that. God is to be feared and loved. He is in your heart and he made the mountains.” He then went on saying “If people can accept the idea that Christ has been seen as the visible representation of the unseen God and therefore, since the relation of visible to invisible is an aesthetic matter, that Christ is in the aesthetic field, I think Christ will be seen better. Christ is the physical embodiment of a general idea called God.” What Siegel simply wants to point out is the beauty in Christianity or rather the beauty of any religion as a whole. We become skeptical of the truth that lies in the beauty of religion as time progresses,

yet, “Man’s deepest desire, his largest desire, is to like the world on an honest or accurate basis.”

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## CHAPTER 3

### SPIRITUAL EXPRESSIONS IN TAGORE'S POETRY AND DRAMA

#### 3.1. Introduction

**Rabindranath Tagore** (1861-1941) was the youngest son of Debendranath Tagore, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, who began to write verses at an early age and, after his incomplete studies in England in the late 1870s, returned to India. There he published several books of poetry in the 1880s and completed *Manasi* (1890), a collection that marks the maturing of his genius. It contains some of his best-known poems, including many in verse forms new to Bengali, as well as some social and political satire that was critical of his fellow Bengalis. Rabindranath Tagore is India's most cherished Renaissance figure. He is a Bengali poet, short-story writer, song composer, playwright, essayist, and painter who introduced new prose and verse forms and the use of colloquial language into Bengali literature, thereby freeing it from traditional models based on classical Sanskrit. He is the poet laureate of India and is considered to be the greatest poet India has seen.

He was educated at home by his siblings in the field of gymnastics, martial arts, art, anatomy, literature, history and mathematics among various other subjects. In his mature years, in addition to his many-sided literary activities, he managed the family estates, a project which brought him into close touch with common humanity and increased his interest in social reforms. He also started an experimental school at Shantiniketan where he tried his Upanishadic ideals of education. From time to time he participated in the Indian nationalist movement, though in his own non-sentimental and visionary way. Tagore was knighted by the ruling British Government in 1915,

but within a few years he resigned the honour as a protest against British policies in India.

Tagore had early success as a writer in his native Bengal. With his translations of some of his poems he became rapidly known in the West. In fact his fame attained a luminous height, taking him across continents on lecture tours and tours of friendship. For the world he became the voice of India's spiritual heritage; and for India, especially for Bengal, he became a great living institution.

Although Tagore wrote successfully in all literary genres, he was first of all a poet. Among his fifty and odd volumes of poetry are *Manasi (The Ideal One)* 1890, *Sonar Tari (The Golden Boat)* 1894, *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)* 1912, *Gitimalya (Wreath of Songs)* 1914, and *Balaka (The Flight of Cranes)* 1916. The English renderings of his poetry, which include *The Gardener* (1913), *Fruit-Gathering* (1916), and *The Fugitive* (1921), do not generally correspond to particular volumes in the original Bengali; and in spite of its title, *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*, the most acclaimed of them, contains poems from other works besides its namesake. Tagore's major plays are *Raja (The King of the Dark Chamber)* 1910, *DakGhar (The Post Office)* 1912, *Achalayatan (The Immovable)* 1912, *Muktadhara (The Waterfall)* 1922, and *Raktakaravi (Red Oleanders)* 1926. He is the author of several volumes of short stories and a number of novels, among them *Gora* (1910), *Ghare-Baire (The Home and the World)* 1916, and *Yogayog (Crosscurrents)* 1929. Besides these, he wrote musical dramas, dance dramas, essays of all types, travel diaries, and two autobiographies, one in his middle years and the other shortly before his death in 1941. Tagore also left numerous drawings and paintings, and songs for which he wrote the music himself.

Tagore modernized Bengali art by spurning rigid classical forms and resisting linguistic strictures. His novels, stories, songs, dance-dramas, and essays spoke to topics political and personal. His compositions were chosen by two nations as national anthems: India's *Jana Gana Mana* and Bangladesh's *Amar Shonar Bangla*. He not only mastered the art of poetry but also mastered the art of expressing the soul through poetry. One of his greatest writings that put him to fame was *Gitanjali* and for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Many scholars studied side by side the *Gitanjali* to the book of Psalms from *The Holy Bible*. In both *Psalms* and *Gitanjali* the speaker offers praises and devotion to the divine. Keeping this in mind we can say that Tagore was definitely influenced by Christian beliefs and teachings and therefore applied its beliefs in his own writings.

Though he was a polymath, his literary works alone are enough to place him in the elite list of all-time greats. Even today, Rabindranath Tagore is often remembered for his poetic songs, which are both spiritual and mercurial. He was one of those great minds, ahead of his time, and that is exactly why his meeting with Albert Einstein is considered as a clash between science and spirituality. Tagore was keen in spreading his ideologies to the rest of the world and hence embarked on a world tour, lecturing in countries like Japan and the United States. Soon, his works were admired by people of various countries and he eventually became the first non-European to win a Nobel Prize.

Tagore with an idea of establishing an experimental school in his father's property at Santiniketan, shifted his base in 1901 and founded an ashram there. It was a prayer hall named 'The Mandir.' The classes there were held under trees and followed the traditional Guru-Shishya method of teaching. He hoped that the revival of this ancient method of teaching would prove beneficial when compared to the modernized



method. During their stay in Santiniketan, his wife and two of his children died and this left Tagore distraught. However, his works started growing more and more popular amongst the Bengali as well as the foreign readers. This eventually gained him recognition all over the world and in 1913 he was awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature, becoming Asia's first Nobel laureate.

### **3.1.1. His One World Concept**

Rabindranath Tagore truly believed in the concept of one world. He set out on a world tour, in an attempt to spread his ideologies- a vision of East-West unity, positive thinking, one-world, that could solve rampant political problems such as war, poverty, and social inequality. Tagore was an avid advocate of inter-civilization alliance; his vision was given to a mutualism of the East and West. He was no doubt furious with the British cruelty and oppression in India during the colonial period, and felt that the West was often immersed in commercialism, moral degradation, political opportunism, militarism and war-rabidity, and was unreasonably full of contempt for the East; yet he never gave up hope for a possible union of the East and West, in which the East and the West would meet as equal partners in a creative engagement. So he took along with him, his translated works, which caught the attention of many legendary poets. Subsequently, he was shocked by the rising nationalism found in Germany and other nations prior to the World War II. Tagore thus delivered a series of lectures on nationalism; although well-received throughout much of Europe, they were mostly ignored or criticized in Japan and the United States. Soon after, Tagore found himself visiting places like Mexico, Singapore and Rome, where he met national leaders and important personalities including the likes of Einstein and Mussolini. In 1927, he embarked on a Southeast Asian tour and inspired many with

his wisdom and literary works. Tagore also used this opportunity to discuss with many world leaders, the issues between Indians and the English. Though his initial aim was to put an end to nationalism, Tagore over a period of time realized that nationalism was mightier than his ideology, and hence developed further hatred towards it. By the end of it all, he had visited as many as thirty countries spread over five continents.

### **3.1.2. Political Views**

Tagore's political views are original yet somewhat difficult to comprehend and therefore can be considered complex. He was against nationalism and the political orientation of Gandhi and the Swadeshi Movement. This anti-nationalitarian sentiment—that nationalism is a source of war and carnage; death, destruction and divisiveness, rather than international solidarity, that induces a larger and more expansive vision of the world—remains at the heart of Tagore's imagination in most of his writings: his letters, essays, lectures, poems, plays and fiction. Tagore was a believer in an interactive, dialogic world, given to a deep sense of sympathy, generosity and mutuality, and in which nations would not be parochial and xenophobic, or guided by mere selfishness and self-aggrandizement, but poised towards a morally and politically enlightened community of nations through the acceptance of decentralisation, multilateral imagination, principle of universality and reciprocal recognitions.

However, he renounced his knighthood from the British Crown, citing the massacre held at Jallianwala Bagh, stating that the knighthood meant nothing to him when the British failed to even consider his fellow Indians as humans. Though Tagore denounced nationalism, he also vouched for the Indian independence through some of

his politically charged songs. He supported Indian nationalists and publicly criticized European imperialism; criticized the education system that was forced upon India by the English. In reaction to a July 22, 1904 suggestion by the British that Bengal should be partitioned, an upset Tagore took to delivering a lecture—entitled "Swadeshi Samaj" ("The Union of Our Homeland")—that instead proposed an alternative solution: self-help based comprehensive reorganization of rural Bengal. Tagore also lashed out against the orthodox rote-oriented educational system introduced in India under the British rule. He satirized it in his short story *The Parrot's Training*, where a bird—which ultimately dies—is caged by tutors and forced pages torn from books. These views crystallized in his experimental school at Santiniketan, ("Abode of Peace"), founded in 1901 on the site of a West Bengal estate inherited from his father. Established in the traditional brahmacharya structure—whereby students live under a guru in a self-sustaining community—became a magnet for talented scholars, artists, linguists, and musicians from diverse backgrounds. Tagore spent significant amount of energy fundraising for Santiniketan, even contributing all his Nobel Prize money. As a result, Santiniketan grew into VisvaBharati University in 1921, attracting some of the most creative minds in the country.

### **3.1.3. Tagore: Actor and Artist**

Tagore wrote many dramas, based on Indian mythology and contemporary social issues. He began writing dramas along with his brother when he was only a teenager. When he was 20 years old, he did not only pen the drama 'ValmikiPratibha', but also played the titular character. The drama was based on the legendary dacoit Valmiki, who later became Sage Valmiki and pens down the Hindu epic- Ramayana.

Rabindranath Tagore took up drawing and painting in his later years when he was around sixty years old. His paintings were displayed at exhibitions organized throughout Europe. The style of Tagore had certain peculiarities in aesthetics and coloring schemes, which distinguished it from those of other artists. He was also influenced by the craftwork of the Malanggan people, belonging to the northern New Ireland. He was also influenced by Haida carvings from the west coast of Canada and woodcuts by Max Pechstein. The National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi houses as many as 102 art works of Tagore.

### **3.1.4. Literary Works**

During his lifetime, Rabindranath Tagore wrote several poems, novels, dramas and short stories. Though he started writing at a very young age, his desire to produce more number of literary works only enhanced post the death of his wife and children. Some of his literary works are mentioned below:

**Short stories** – Tagore began to write short stories when he was only a teen. He started his writing career with *Bhikharini*. During the initial stage of his career, his stories reflected the surroundings in which he grew. He also made sure to incorporate social issues and problems of the poor man in his stories. He also wrote about the downside of Hindu marriages and several other customs that were part of the country's tradition back then. Some of his famous short stories include *Kabuliwala*, *Kshudita Pashan*, *Atottju*, *Haimanti* and *Musalmanir Golpo* among many other stories.

**Novels** – It is said that among his works, his novels are mostly under-appreciated. One of the reasons for this could be his unique style of narrating a story, which is still difficult to comprehend by contemporary readers, let alone the readers of his time. His works spoke about the impending dangers of nationalism among other relevant social

evils. His novel *Shesher Kobita* narrated its story through poems and rhythmic passages of the main protagonist. He also gave a satirical element to it by making his characters take jibes at an outdated poet named Rabindranath Tagore. Other famous novels of his include *Noukadubi*, *Gora*, *Chaturanga*, *GhareBaire* and *Jogajog*.

**Poems** – Tagore drew inspiration from ancient poets like Kabir and Ramprasad Sen and thus his poetry is often compared to the 15th and 16th Century works of classical poets. By infusing his own style of writing, he made people to take note of not only his works but also the works of ancient Indian poets. Interestingly, he penned down a poem in 1893 and addressed a future poet through his work. He urged the yet to be born poet to remember Tagore and his works while reading the poem. Some of his best works include *Balaka*, *Purobi*, *Sonar Tori* and *Gitanjali*.

**Dramas** – At the tender age of sixteen, Tagore led his brothers Jyotirindranath's adaptation of Moliere's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. He wrote his first drama *Valmiki Pratibha* (*The Genius of Valmiki*) at the age of twenty. Some of his best plays include *Visarjan* (*Sacrifice*) 1890, *Dak Ghar* (*The Post Office*) 1912, *Chandalika* (*Untouchable Girl*). *Chitrangada* and *Shyama* are other key plays that have dance drama adaptations which are known as Rabindra Nritya Natya.

### 3.1.5. Last Days, Death and Legacy

Rabindranath Tagore spent the last four years of his life in constant pain and was bogged down by two long bouts of illness. When he reached the age of 70 and his friends assumed he would wind down in his sunset years, yet instead, he took up oil painting, achieving critical acclaim all over again in yet another creative genre. However, in 1937, he went into a comatose condition, which relapsed after a period of

three years. After an extended period of suffering, Tagore died on August 7, 1941 in the same Jorasanko mansion in which he was brought up.

Since Tagore changed the way Bengali literature was viewed, he left an everlasting impression on many. Apart from many of his busts and statues that have been erected in many countries, many yearly events pay tribute to the legendary writer. Many of his works were made international, thanks to a host of translations by many famous international writers. There are five museums dedicated to Tagore. While three of them are situated in India, the remaining two are in Bangladesh. The museums house his famous works, and are visited by millions every year.

### **3.2. Tagore's Religious views**

Rabindranath Tagore was a twentieth century writer who followed the principles of monotheism. Being born and brought up in a strict Brahmo family, it is only evident that Tagore had been inspired by the Unitarian concept of belief. For him, religion was one of relationship of man with nature and with God, relationship whose goal was oneness with God. The oneness meant immersion into God, and therefore, losing one's own identity. Tagore's personal quest was to achieve this goal by love and self-discipline. For the Christian, the strength of Tagore lay in his quest for oneness with God by love and self-discipline; its weakness lay in its desired end, namely, its immersion in Brahma. Absorption in Brahma and loss of identity are marks of Hindu influence, whereas, Christians do not lose their identity when they submit their life to Christ, instead they find their true identity in Him. This can be the outcome of Unitarianism's impact on Brahmo Samaj and the followers of this religion. There are evidences of many influences in the life and works of this great man. Charles Freer Andrews, an Anglican Priest met Tagore for the first time at William Rothenstein's

house in London. This began a friendship that led Andrews to base himself in Santiniketan in 1914. During his stay there, both Tagore and Andrews exchanged intense conversations about socio-political and religious issues. Tagore later went on to compose the poem *Christ, the Son of Man* (1939) on Christmas Day. This turned profitable for Tagore not just in terms of winning royalties to Andrews' autobiography *What I owe to Christ* (1932), but he also edited various publications and acted as Tagore's representative to the publisher Macmillan.

Religion for him is the essence of human being. In one of his letters to Mrs. McCarthy quoted by Aurobindi Bose in his introduction to his translation of Tagore's poem *Wings of Death*, Tagore says "I do not belong to any religious sect nor do I subscribe to any particular creed. This I know that the moment my God created me He has made Himself mine." Tagore sees God behind the multiplicity which is a creative principle of unity. God cannot be grasped by reason and logic. This implies not only that the divine is imminent in creation but also that the creation itself is a manifestation of the divine. Human beings, for Tagore, are the fullest expressions of the divine. We are created in the image of God. God manifests Himself in the creation. Thus, Tagore sees a harmonious relationship among God, human being and nature.

Tagore is often called a philosopher of humanity. This may be on account of the fact that in his philosophy human beings occupy a very high status. Metaphysically speaking, they are God-like in many respects and yet they are very much a creature of this world. Tagore tries to give importance to both the physical and the spiritual aspect of human beings. Tagore never degrades the status of human being. To him human being is at the apex of creation and has been viewed as the crown of God's creation. He writes:

Man, as a creation, represents the Creator, and this is why of all creatures it has been possible for him to comprehend this world in his knowledge and in his feeling and in his imagination, to realize in his individual spirit a union with the Spirit that is everywhere (The Religion of Man 103).

Tagore believes in the divine principle at work in human being. The divine principle is not to be found outside human beings. It is within them. He holds that the world and its particulars are real because they are an expression of the divine. Religion, for Tagore, is not an escape from the world. Tagore does not favour asceticism and he goes to the extent of saying that deliverance cannot be achieved in renunciation. He says, "Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. / I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight" (Gitanjali 78). He goes on to say that "No, I will never shut the doors of my senses" (Ibid78). This is because the delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear God's delight to him. One has to develop a sense of affinity with everything and this can be possible only when one is devoted to the duties and responsibilities of the world.

Tagore strongly asserts that institutional religions are false and dogmatic. There is a difference between true religion and false religion. True religion to him is characterized by the qualities of naturalness and spontaneity in it. It is free and spontaneous in every individual and has no boundaries around itself. According to Tagore, true religion preaches freedom, whereas religious organizations make religions a slave of their own institutions. True religion, therefore, must not be confused with institutional religions. Tagore prefers to call true religion as poet's religion because a poet is a free thinker. He revels in flights of imagination without any constraint. Therefore, he says that in a dogmatic religion all questions are answered and all doubts are laid to rest. But the poet's religion is unstable, with no



solid conclusion yet it throws endless rays of light for anyone walking in a confused dark path. Religion for Tagore must be free from all constraints. It must allow people to grow and develop and so, poetry for Tagore is true religion because it gives free play to his spirit. It helps him communicate with God through Nature which ultimately leads to the communion with reality.

### **3.3. Influence of other Religions**

Tagore's religion is not a body of written doctrines or theological principles; rather it is something that is inseparable from one's soul. He admits that he cannot define it, but he says that the aim of religion is neither idle tranquility nor the enjoyment of aestheticism. He was never absolutely influenced by any particular religion whatsoever but many religious beliefs putting its ideas all together inspire him. He is more a spiritualist than a religious man.

**3.3.1. The Influence of the Upanishads-** Tagore had been greatly touched by the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha and he has used them in his life as well as in his preaching. He was born in a family which, at that time, was earnestly developing a monotheistic religion based upon the philosophy of the Upanishads (The Religion of Man). Tagore reproduces the idea of the immanence of God reflected in the Upanishads. Brahman is considered as the supreme reality which makes itself evident in and through the finite world. Tagore recognizes the real spirit of the Upanishads. The Upanishadic seers sacrifice not material prosperity for the attainment of spiritual truth. In order to find him, one must embrace all (Sadhana). Tagore follows the Upanishadic understanding of Brahman: Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam (Truth, Knowledge, and Infinity). He also discovers the Supreme Being in and

through nature. Tagore says, “The first stage of any realization was through my feeling of intimacy with nature” (The Religion of Man), a form of spirituality that Tagore found in and through nature.

The concept of dualism of self has also been derived from the Upanishads: finite self in human beings who confines to the boundaries of human limitations and divine soul existing within them. According to the Upanishads, the individual divine soul is the manifestation of “Jivan Devata.” But what differentiates Tagore from the Upanishads is his three-fold conception of reality against the Upanishad’s advaitavada and dvaitavada. Tagore attaches equal importance to humanity, world and God. There is no doubt that he is influenced by the Upanishads, but he has a free and independent way of thinking. The Upanishads taught Tagore how human beings can transcend themselves and get a glimpse of the Infinite.

**3.3.2. The Bhagavad-Gita-** Tagore accepts that the meaning of our self can be found in the ceaseless realization of the union between the three paths of actions, knowledge and devotion; yoga. He, therefore, accepts the three yogas of the Gita as effective ways of the realization of the Supreme Being. As in the Gita, he gives importance to action. This is the karma yoga of the Gita, the way to be one with the infinite activity by the practice of disinterested goodness, i.e., nishkama karma. Tagore’s understanding of God can be traced to Gita’s Supreme Person, Purushothama, far above the level of an average person. Purushothama permeates this universe; he is the Iswara existing within the world and beyond it and is in the hearts of all beings. The spiritual thoughts found in the Gita presents love for God by man and the love of God for mankind. Purushothama is not separate from the world and human beings, and is never absent from creation. Tagore finds God existing in every form of life

particularly within the life of human being. He says that we know God “by realizing Him in each and all” (Sadhana 5). God manifests himself in human beings and all objects and thus realization is possible within the soul and in nature. For Tagore, too, salvation consists in the inherent and divine perfection of the wholeness of human being.

**3.3.3. Vaishnavism-** Whether there was any influence of Vaishnavism in Tagore’s life is debatable since Vaishnavism neglects present life whereas Tagore gives immense value to human life and the world. Vaishnavites believe that there is only one Supreme God, who simultaneously permeates all creation and exists beyond it, being immanent and transcendent. Tagore’s monotheism can be said to have derived from this religion. For him, God is someone personal and intimate and with whom one can have a personal relationship with, which is therefore, the distinctive religious belief of Vaishnavism. Tagore observes that Vaishnava religion has boldly declared that God has bound himself to human beings, and in that consists the greatest human existence. The possibility of transforming human love into divine love held by Tagore must have been derived from Vaishnavism. Vaishnavism taught Tagore the message of friendly union between God and human being. They put emphasis on a firm wholesome relation between God and human being. God is everything and all actions of human being should be dedicated to Him. And so in *Gitanjali*, Tagore spoke about his deep emotion and devotion for the Supreme Lover, whose love illuminates his consciousness of reality. Vaishnavas often identify six qualities of God; all knowledge, all power, supreme, majesty, supreme strength, unlimited energy, and total self-sufficiency.

**3.3.4. Buddhism-** Buddhism teaches the belief that life is permeated with suffering caused by desire, that suffering ceases when desire ceases, and that enlightenment obtained through right conduct and wisdom and meditation releases one from desire and suffering and rebirth. Buddha preached the discipline of self-restraint and moral life; it is a complete acceptance of law. His teaching speaks of nirvana as the highest end. To understand its real character, one should know the path of its attainment, which is not merely through the negation of evil thoughts and deeds but through the elimination of all limits to love. For Tagore, the path Buddha pointed to was not merely the practice of self-denial, but a widening of love and therein lies the true meaning of Buddha's preaching. Tagore does not want to get into the controversy whether Buddhism accepts God or not. In *The Religion of Man* Tagore says, "Buddha's idea of the infinite is not the spirit of an unbounded cosmic activity, but the infinite whose meaning is in the position of ideal of goodness and love, which cannot be otherwise than human." The bond of unity in Buddhism is its friendship and the universal love preached by Buddha that has broken the barriers that separated mankind. Thus, it can be said that Buddhism also left a deep impact on Tagore because he saw in Buddhism what the role of love and compassion could do.

**3.3.5. Christianity-** Dr. Aronson, in his book, *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes*, says that Tagore seemed to be more Christian than the Christians. Tagore says, "Nobody has exalted man more in every sphere than Jesus. The divinity of man is stressed by Jesus as by Vaishnava saints" (*The Religion of Man*). Tagore discovers a message of friendly union between God and human being in Christianity through His Son Jesus Christ. He agrees that like other Indian religions, Christianity, too, proclaims the ideal of selflessness and love. If Tagore was attracted to Christian

theism, it is because it conforms to the ideas which he has already absorbed from the Upanishads. God is Love. This assertion seems to be similar to the Christian assertion of God as love, and for Tagore this statement is so much Christian as it is to Vaishnava. The emphasis given on a Christian context is not so much on “service” but on “devotion” and “surrender.” In both the Christian and the Vaishnava context one may ultimately understand the same thing when we say “God is love.” But Tagore speaks about an emotional realisation of oneness which will lead to an extension of consciousness beyond the narrow limits of the self. Therefore, the verse “God is love” (1 John 4:8) means that God is the ultimate source of hope to mankind. God becomes a being with whom an emotional and spiritual relationship can be established and through whom life can derive meaning and solace. It is on account of this emphasis that the world itself is seen as “creation out of joy.” If God is love, man as part of His creation is the ultimate example of His loving act. This creation being “created in God’s own image” (Genesis 1:27) truly becomes an act of joy and the feeling of the burden of existence is redeemed by His ultimate act of sacrifice through His Son Jesus Christ.

### **3.4. Elements of Spirituality in Tagore**

Tagore was born in 1861, the thirteenth child in a wealthy, Bengali Brahmin family that was devoutly Hindu yet also strongly political. He's widely considered “the Shakespeare of Bengal”, and he has been a significant influence on language, politics, art and culture. His father and grandfather were deeply involved with an emerging religious movement called the Brahmo Samaj. In this atmosphere, the precocious Rabindranath developed a fiercely individual perception of life from a very young age.

As he begins to write, Tagore's spiritual perspective is surprisingly difficult to pinpoint, for his thoughts on God, soul and divinity are more implied than explicit in the broader substance of his work, which is multi-faceted and sometimes abstract. In *The Religion of Man*, based on the Hibbert Lectures he delivered in 1930 at Harvard University, Tagore says “my religion is a poet's religion, and neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian.” In this work, he tries to explain what the concept of religion meant to him, as far as reason can capture this — in many respects irrational — issue. He generally tended to use the term “religion” when he talked about this phenomenon, but the Sanskrit term *dharma* also appeared many times. The more we learn of Tagore and his work, the more we come to realize that access to his inner nature is vexedly complex, despite the prolificacy and profundity of his writings. He was referred to as “the Indian Goethe” by Albert Schweitzer, “the Great Sentinel” by Mahatma Gandhi, and “Gurudev” by his disciples. Writing was always a great source of inspiration for Tagore. While he was revered as a guardian of tradition in Bengal, he recalls in *The Religion of Man* that, during his upanayana (coming-of-age, sacred thread ceremony) he experienced a serene exaltation of his religious beliefs were paradoxically unorthodox for his time. He was criticized by some for his efforts to reform Hinduism via the Brahmo Samaj movement, and introduce it to the West. Tagore felt that, with its postulation of monotheism, the Brahmo Samaj theology would be more palatable to Christians who might willingly embrace a pantheistic Hinduism.

In his writings, Tagore scarcely mentions the Puranas or the Bhagavad Gita, two popular scriptural texts often referred to by Hindus of his time. Instead, he focused primarily on man's oneness with God. He was obviously influenced by the monism of

the Upanishads. Again and again, he repeated that humanity's mission on this physical plane is to merge with God. In *Sadhana* he states, "Man becomes perfect man, he attains his fullest expression, when his soul realizes itself in the Infinite being who is Avih, whose very essence is expression." From Tagore's perspective, man is constantly evolving, and divine union is his assured destination. "Religion only finds itself when it touches the Brahman in man." In *Sadhana*, he writes, "This is the ultimate end of man, to find the One which is in him, which is his truth, which is his soul; the key with which he opens the gate of the spiritual life." Bits and pieces of his writings taken together outline his overall concept of man's spiritual path, which might be summarized as follows: Life is man's journey toward the realization of his fullest potential, which is union with God. That journey is best facilitated by the avoidance of worldly distraction. In differentiating between earthly knowledge and sacred wisdom, Tagore again takes his cue from principles often repeated in the Upanishads. He writes in *Sadhana*, man "has to discover that accumulation is not realization. It is the inner light that reveals him, not outer things."

Tagore considered man to be the highest of all of God's creations. He writes, "The world has found its culmination in man, its best expression. Man, as a creation, represents the Creator." By this he means to say that man being created in God's image has instilled in him the longing-ness for eternity and the want for him to have the likeness of his Creator. "On the surface of our being, we have the ever-changing phases of the individual self, but in the depth there dwells the Eternal Spirit of human unity beyond our direct knowledge." While he recognizes that man must strive to achieve perfection, he expresses his confidence that man is endowed with an inherent Divinity that assures his success.

His primary literary theme was man's achievement of moksha, which according to Webster is: "liberation from the cycle of rebirth impelled by the law of karma", or similarly salvation according to the Christian teachings. Rather than laboring in philosophical analysis, Tagore's writings amplified the devotional inspiration of surrendering to God and serving humanity with love. Even his political views were deeply influenced by this poetic and devotional view of life. There is a notable thread of soul-bearing honesty running through his work. Although he affirms his belief in reincarnation as "a history of constant regeneration, a series of fresh beginnings," he also writes in *The Religion of Man* that, "All I feel from religion is from vision and not from knowledge. Frankly, I acknowledge that I cannot satisfactorily answer any questions about what happens after death."

Tagore's religious inspiration also came from nature and his love for his motherland. It was nature that gave his poetry its ethereal beauty. *Gitanjali*, one of his best-known works, is a poem celebrating the nature worship of his "Vedic ancestors." This work, so lofty in its abstract worship, also reveals his deep patriotism to India. In one of *Gitanjali*'s most popular passages, Verse 35, Tagore blends his deep love of country with his faith in God.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; Where words come out from the depth of truth; Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection; Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake (Tagore 35).



This verse is a prayer from the heart of a devoted son of the land wishing for life, freedom, great learning and perfection acquired through truth. It particularly reveals Tagore's devotional love for his homeland. It focuses less on what India is than what it can become. Similarly, Tagore defines his religious beliefs more by what they are not than what they are. Yet his beliefs, both patriotic and religious, are never without a fundamental faith in a personal God and the role He plays in leading India toward a better life that Tagore also hopes might be possible for all of mankind. While he clearly loved his country, he was sharply against nationalism because he saw the negative impact of this movement around the world.

Tagore selflessly gave his all through his abundant writings. And for that, he earned a permanent place in the history of India. No one has stepped forward to match the thought-provoking effect he had on his cherished homeland. No one in the recent history of Bharat has ever written so broadly, so deeply, so fearlessly, yet so spiritually so much so that he could be honored and remembered by the rest of the world.

### **3.5. Elements of Spirituality in his works**

***Gitanjali***- The first published version of *Gitanjali*, a collection of poems, was in Bengali (1910) which was later translated into English by Tagore himself and published by the Indian Society of London in 1912. Tagore won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, becoming the first ever non-European to win this prestigious award.

In the poems of *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)*, the idea of man's honest, joyful, and totally fearless relationship with God can be found. From India's diverse religious traditions Tagore drew many ideas, both from ancient texts and from popular poetry.

Despite being written originally in Bengali, the simple language of the original translation of *Gitanjali*, the English translation did help to preserve the simplicity of the original, its uncorrupted humanity comes through more clearly than any complex and intense spirituality.

Tagore's poetry has a high sense of spiritual longing and to its true sense. He believed in becoming "one with God", a concept that is recurring in *Gitanjali* and his other spiritual works. The first poem in *Gitanjali* opens with the lines;

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou again  
and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed  
through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and  
gives birth to utterance ineffable (Ibid 1).

The opening lines of the poem talks about the grace of God to human being. Tagore considers human body as a frail vessel. The poet here expresses his deepest adoration to his creator who intermittently repairs all damages caused by the creation, and fills it up with fresh life, giving newness and eternal music to his soul. He also talks about the immense joy he encounters with the single touch of his creator. God is the all master of mankind; he takes care of his subjects and solves all of their problems. In that way man is made endless with the pleasure of God. Poem 7 of the collection reads, "My song has put off her adornments. She has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union;" In this poem, the speaker personifies his song to a girl. He says that he does not want to put on any sort of fancy clothes or ornaments; in other words the clothing of vanity and pride, which would corrupt or defile his union

with God. The poem no longer has “pride of dress and decoration.” Pride, of course, is a human quality, and so by speaking of the song as not having any pride the speaker continues to personify it. Not only that, but the speaker’s words here also suggest that pride isn’t necessarily a good thing. Pride can spill into vanity, after all, particularly if one is too hung up on appearances.

Tagore in all his teachings truly believed in love and humanity. All his life, the one true teaching he offered through his works focused on one direction i.e., “love.” He believed that the proper way to realize God was only through love of humanity. Thus in last line of Poem 9 he says, “Accept only what is offered by sacred love.” Tagore then goes on to say how amazing God is to all his creations. He finds it impossible to comprehend the heart that holds compassion to the poor: “My heart can never find its way to where thou keepest company with the companionless among the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost.” (Poem 10) His spirituality cannot be limited to any particular religious influence but we can see influences of Christian teachings about realizing God. This statement is made clear through the lines of Poem 11 of *Gitanjali* which says;

Whom does thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil! (Ibid 11)

Christians believe that God is omnipotent and omnipresent, He cannot be found in just the four walls of the church but He is everywhere. As Tagore puts it, He is with the laborer and the path maker, and His garment is equally covered with dust. As Christ abandoned His Heavenly throne and his mantle for the sake of humanity, likewise, Tagore calls out to all the worshippers to leave the comforts of their lives and to “Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!” To him true love is sacrifice. And this can only be fulfilled when one is equal with the rest.

There is a saying that man is not created for earth (temporality) but for Heaven (eternity). And indeed must be true. For the longing that man has for the eternal is evident in his longing for his union with God. This very intense yearning of union of the creation with his Creator is seen in the following lines when Tagore says “I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands.” (Poem 17) He says when he finally meets his master, he would “stand before thee to sing.” But this wait for Tagore is not an easy one. For he knows that to reach eternity, he has to attain perfection. And in order to reach that perfection, he has to strive and toil and still wait for the final call. He has no other option but to endure this wait and so he says, “If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it.” However, this silence that the poet is talking about does not mean that he has given up on God’s call. He only means to say that he will keep his calm and earnestly wait for his time: “I will keep still and wait like the night with starry vigil and its head bent low with patience.” He says he “can see nothing before me. I wonder where lies thy path!” He seems to be running out of patience and thus, feels weary and lonely. But his trust upon God will not be crushed for he declares, “In the night of weariness let me give myself up to sleep without struggle, resting my trust upon thee.”

We learn that, for Tagore, spirituality meant total surrender. He believes that unless one has learned the art of disowning one's own desires and submit wholly for the ultimately fulfillment i.e., God's pleasure, spirituality cannot truly be attained. Therefore in Poem 37, he prays a prayer of total surrender;

This is my prayer to thee, my lord-strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.

And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love (Ibid 37).

He tells the tale of man's stupidity and his mortal quality in Poem 50. There the poet describes how he, while begging from door to door in the village path, comes across the "King of kings" riding in his golden chariot. As he stretches out his hands hoping that this King would end the miseries of his life, then all of a sudden the King instead stretches out his hand and asks him "What hast thou to give to me? The poet in utter dismay and hesitation takes out "the least little grain of corn and gave it to thee." He did not understand the reason why this man of enormous wealth and riches would ever want anything from him? As the day ended, the poet emptied his bag to count his day's collection. To his great surprise, he finds "a least little gram of gold among the poor heap." He learned that the least little grain of corn he offered to the King was

what he received in return. The experience was bitter and he “bitterly wept and wished that I had the heart to give thee my all.” The message that Tagore wants to deliver through this poem is that, spirituality cannot be attained by partial giving or partial surrendering. It has to be whole and complete without any reservation, trusting completely and having faith in the ultimate end.

Tagore in *Gitanjali* has addressed God by different names; Immortal, Master, Friend, Lover, Lord, King, Brother and Father. He each has encountered God in these different images and situations. Here, in Poem 77, he calls God as his father and “bow before thy feet- I do not grasp thy hand as my friend’s.” His understanding of the father is unlike what he has mentioned in his previous poems. Here the Father is defined as the authority that God has as the Creator and that, no mortal being, not even his most devoted servant, the poet, can dare to stand in the same ground as Him. In Him, time is endless and “there is none to count thy minutes.” He has the power to stop time, to make “days and nights pass and ages bloom and fade like flowers.” (Poem 82) “Death,” he says is God’s servant. And whenever he hears his call at his home, the poet “will take up the lamp, open my gates and bow to him my welcome.” The poet is afraid to open the gates of his home, but he says he will do so because “It is thy messenger who stands at my door. I will worship him placing at his feet the treasure of my heart.” Tagore seems to have found his inner peace and is ready to move on to his new home. So when he questions in Poem 90 “what wilt thou offer to him?” He responds confidently by saying “Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life- I will never let him go with empty hands.” Tagore has no regrets or grudges towards life because he knows that death is the ultimate end of life. He is,

however, proud of what he has achieved and who he has become and there is nothing that is left undone throughout his lifetime; no unfinished business and thus he says;

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life I place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door (Ibid 90).

In the following poems he mentions death coming to take him, “A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.” (Ibid 93) We see that Tagore is positive about death and that he is ready to venture into the new world; “Even so, in death the same unknown will appear as ever known to me. And because I love life, I know I shall love death as well.” He gives an illustration to explain what he meant to say. He says, “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.”

Spiritualism had transcended all aspects of Rabindranath's life and he looked at man and nature as images of God. He wrote in a letter, “If I have realized God or got any hint about him, then it was from this world, its people, trees, animals, dust and soil from all these objects.” We therefore find the poet comprehending God as dearest to man and his companion in times of sorrow, as in the volumes of *Gitanjali*. For him, God is incomprehensible, known but still far from describing who or what He actually is and therefore in Poem 102 he says;

I boasted among men that I had known you.

They see your pictures in all works of mine.

They come and ask me, Who is he? I know not how to answer them. I say,  
Indeed, I cannot tell.

They blame me and they go away in scorn. And you sit there smiling.

I put my tales of you into lasting songs.

The secret gushes out from my heart.

They come and ask me, Tell me all your meanings. I know not how to answer  
them. I say, Ah, who knows what they mean!

They smile and go away in utter scorn. And you sit there smiling (Ibid 102).

Tagore honors God with his final salutation through the last Poem 103 of *Gitanjali*.  
He not only surrenders his soul to God but everything that he calls his own including  
his songs and poem to the divine. He concludes by saying,

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this  
world at thy feet.

Like a rain-cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers let all  
my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and  
flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain  
nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee  
(Ibid 103).

***The King of Dark Chambers***- The work was first published in Bengali in 1910;  
translated by K. C. Sen and revised by Tagore and published in English in 1914. The



first problem play in Bengali literature, also the first of Tagore's plays in the allegorical-symbolical genre. Tagore chose this form in order to portray what he himself described as the inner conflict of the soul. The play is an allegory of an individual's spiritual and personal awakening in their quest for beauty and truth. For some of those living or interested in male-led committed, monogamous relationships many of the themes yield useful insights that can be understood and applied within the given framework.

The plot is based on a Buddha Jataka story, *Kusha*, which deals with an ugly king Kusha who wishes to marry a beautiful girl, Prabhavati. But the King's mother worries about his son's ugliness and so orders that the queen and king should meet only in a dark chamber. Eventually the queen comes to see her ugly husband and decides to leave him and reaches her father's place. Seven kings turn up for her with the divine intervention of God Sakka. The queen is frightened and goes to her husband and asks for his forgiveness. Kusha solves the problem of the seven kings. With the backdrop of this story, Tagore in his play, *The King of Dark Chamber* raises some perceptive and pertinent questions regarding the relation of the soul to God in its mystic remoteness.

Tagore uses symbols to depict the separation of human soul from God and their union. The King in the play represents God and Queen Sudarshana stands for the human soul. God sees all but is not seen by us. The human soul, like Sudarshana, longs to see and always impatient to get united with the Supreme. Likewise, sometimes the unseen God can only be realized in the dark chambers of one's inner consciousness. Queen Sudarshana symbolizes the human soul which is ignorant of its

own identity, as well as of the true nature of divinity. The knowledge of the true nature of God comes through self-realization which is also the theme of the play.

The play revolves around the major theme of the secret dealing of God with the human heart. Among many of the play's themes the relationship between Sudarshana-the Queen and the King is symbolic for the relationship between man and the Divine; and for some, a romantic relationship between two equally powerful individuals. The 'King' of the title is unseen by his subjects, some of whom question his existence, while others such as the maidservant Surangama are so loyal and worshipful to him that they do not even request to see him. The human soul, Sudarshana, longs earnestly to have a glimpse of the God, The King.

Oh, do show me for an instant how to see with your eyes! Is there nothing at all like darkness to you? I am afraid when I think of this. This darkness which is to me real and strong as death is this simply nothing to you? Then how can there be any union at all between us, in a place like this? No, no it is impossible: there is a barrier betwixt us two: not here, no, not in this place. I want to find you and see you where I see trees and animals, birds and stones and the earth (The King of the Dark Chamber 14).

It is true that in the darkness of ignorance it is difficult to find the light of knowledge. The Darkness of the chamber signifies the seclusion of this world and physical beauty. So when Queen Sudarshana asks the maidservant how she can perceive when he comes, she simply replies "I seem to hear his footsteps in my own heart." (Act 2) Being his servant of this dark chamber, I have developed a sense-I can know and feel

without seeing. The subjects have no need for proof of the King's existence; they believe him to be real and great. Only those who have disarmed their own pride in subjection to their King know him. They have a sense of when the King is nearing and when he is present. When the Queen asks her if she can also attain this sense as her, Surangana says "O Queen ... this sense will awaken in you one day. Your longing to have a sight of him makes you restless, and therefore all your mind is strained and warped in that direction. When you are past this state of feverish restlessness, everything will become quite easy." In a deeper, spiritual sense one may ponder on how a man's spirituality actual works? Is it only when he can see and touch for himself that truth and beauty truly exist? Or can it be far more transient than this? The verse "For we live by faith and not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7) sums up the whole idea. The play is a wonderful allegory that echoes the very rhythm of unearthly and personal rousing of an individual in their eternal quest for truth and beauty. This play was adapted from Tagore's short story, *Raja*. The immense humanism, the sheer vitality and that intoxication to appreciate nature's timeless beauty coupled with Tagore's political view sets the mood of this remarkable work. This seminal play runs on two parallel themes: good governance in 1910 and talks of democracy which is quite relevant in the present time, and the philosophy of life itself. The play interprets the Raja-King as God and life itself, through the principal characters and final transformation and realisation of the Queen and Vikram as Surangama and Thakurda already know the Raja. The King finally decides to open the door of his 'dark chamber' and tells the Queen to walk out with him in the 'Light' because light symbolizes truth and spiritual beauty. The queen happens to attain this spiritual beauty at the end of the play, when the King says, "I open the door of the dark room

today the game is finished here? Come, come with me now, come outside into the light!” (KDC 46)

***The Post Office***- the Post Office is a play in two acts authored by Tagore to convey to the readers and audience a sense of gentleness and peace. It is a story of an Indian boy who has been rendered inactive due to ill health. He finds company in seclusion and more importantly, his imagination. He constructs the world around him with passersby and their experience. Since this play was written shortly after Tagore lost his wife and two children to diseases, it portrays the state of mind of a human in the state of disease-induced helplessness adeptly and tries to suggest an alternative to weakness. It is a magical journey towards a spiritual goal and a narrative full of deep symbolism.

The plot hovers around the young protagonist of the play Amal. He is described as a child angel endowed with the characteristic Tagorean qualities. He wins over people through sheer gentleness, affection and his strong love of things and beings. He is essentially a lover of life. He is just a boy and is the compendium of all qualities which Tagore considered healthy. He identifies himself with everything around him. The play deals with Amal's tragic story of suffering and pain on the surface level. But a deeper analysis will reveal that Amal's death is not at all a tragic one. Instead it is seen as union between human soul and the supreme being. Amal is an innocent boy who is tired of the suffering of his life. He is unable to go out or even enjoy his childhood without having to falls sick every time he tries to play. Therefore he is eager for deliverance from this earthly existence. It is an invitation to leave this world of pain and suffering and enter the world of eternal bliss. Though he is kept confined

in the room, his imaginative mind leads him to transcend the barrier of the four walls of the room. He sits beside the window and makes friends with the passer-by, imparting to each a new zest for life. Thus the Dairyman, Watchman, Headsman, Sudha and the village boys become his friends. He has an innocent, highly imaginative, spirited and extraordinary inquisitive mind. He says to Madhav: “See that far-away from our window – I often long to go beyond those hills and right away.” His highly imaginative mind leads him to draw a mental picture of the Dairyman’s village without actually seeing it.

Each character, like Amal, is highly symbolic and has a significant role to play in the inner drama of the soul waiting for deliverance. The Watchman symbolizes time. That time is most powerful and waits for none is clearly stated by him: “Watchman: My gong sounds to tell people, Time waits for none but goes on forever.”(Act-1 p.14) Thus behind the apparent simplicity of the dialogue, deeper and profound meaning continues to flicker. Sudha who gathers flowers stands for sweetness and grace. Madhav solicits like a common man of prosperity. The Physician symbolizes bookish knowledge that prevents man to achieve wisdom and true knowledge. Even the wicked village Headman has his place in the rich drama of life standing for his obtrusive authority. Amal alone is an angelic creature, apparently passive but highly creative through his imaginative perception.

In *The Post Office*, characters come and go, but conflict that drives traditional western drama is unimportant. Instead, what holds our attention is the transformation of Amal. Amal is an innocent boy who is tired of the suffering of his life. Therefore he is eager for deliverance from this earthly existence. It is an invitation to leave this world of

pain and suffering and enter the world of eternal bliss. At the end of the play Amal says to the State's Physician: "I feel very well, Doctor, very well. All pain is gone. How fresh and open! I can see all the stars now twinkling from the other side of the dark." (Act-2 p.31) As he grows physically weaker he grows spiritually stronger, and, in the exquisite passage at the end, as he falls into an eternal sleep, we experience the world as his dream.

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## CHAPTER 4

### SPIRITUAL EXPRESSIONS IN ELIOT'S POETRY AND DRAMA

#### 4.1. Introduction

**Thomas Sterns Eliot** was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 26, 1888. He attended Smith Academy in St. Louis and then the Milton Academy in Massachusetts, as his family was originally from New England. Eliot was descended from a distinguished New England family that had relocated to St. Louis, Missouri. Born in the United States America in late nineteenth century, he was infatuated with literature from his early childhood, inheriting his mother's literary skill, writing his first poetry at the age of fourteen. Soon after the turn of the century, Eliot began seeing his poems and short stories in print, and writing would occupy him for the rest of his life.

Eliot went for his undergraduate studies at Harvard University in 1906, graduating three years later with a Bachelor of Arts degree. At Harvard, he was greatly influenced by professors renowned in poetry, philosophy and literary criticism, and the rest of his literary career would be shaped by all three. The men who influenced him at Harvard were George Santayana, the philosopher and poet, and the critic Irving Babbitt. From Babbitt he derived an anti-Romantic attitude that, amplified by his later reading of British philosophers F.H. Bradley and T.E. Hulme, lasted through his life. After graduating, Eliot served as a philosophy assistant at Harvard for a year (1909-1910), and then left for France and the Sorbonne to study philosophy.

From 1911 to 1914, Eliot was back at Harvard, where he deepened his knowledge by reading Indian philosophy and studying Sanskrit. Eliot's study of the poetry of Dante, of the English writers John Webster and John Donne, and of the French Symbolist Jules Laforgue helped him to find his own style. In 1913 he read F. H Bradley's

*Appearance and Reality*; by 1916 he had finished a thesis entitled “Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley.” But sadly due to the outbreak of the First World War, he could not return to Harvard to take the final oral examination for the Ph.D. degree. He was soon married to Vivienne Haigh-Wood, took a job in London, as a school teacher and later became a bank clerk—a position he would hold until 1925. In 1914 Eliot met and began a close association with the American writer Ezra Pound.

T. S. Eliot is considered to be one of the greatest poets of the Modern era, who besides poetry, produced literary criticism and drama so fine he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948 and also the British Order of Merit. Eliot not only holds a degree from Oxford University, but also speaks multiple languages- Latin, French, and German. He gained popularity for his masterpiece, the first “modernist” poem in English, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917), followed then by *The Waste Land* in 1922 and *Hollow Men* (1925). His faith became widely known with the publication of *Ash Wednesday* in 1930. He further went on to write some of his well-known plays *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *The Cocktail Party* (1949). Eliot believed his finest achievement was writing the broadly religious poem *Four Quartets* (1943). Eliot when first drawn towards Christianity was skeptical about any experience which could be extraordinary. However, when he found his peace in the religion, criticism of any kind from his fellow contemporaries meant nothing. Rather, he went on expressing his long for spiritual fulfillment, rejecting the traditions of the conventional world.

Eliot has been one of the most daring innovators of twentieth-century poetry. Never compromising either with the public or indeed with language itself, he has followed his belief that poetry should aim at a representation of the complexities of modern

civilization in language and that such representation necessarily leads to difficult poetry. Despite this difficulty his influence on modern poetic diction has been immense. He knew the level of difficulty his writings hold and thus has always been indebted to authors who took the trouble of elucidating and adding introduction commentary on his works. Eliot's poetry from *Prufrock* (1917) to the *Four Quartets* (1943) reflects the development of a Christian writer: the early work, especially *The Waste Land* (1922), is essentially negative and depressing, the expression of that horror from which the search for a higher world arises. In *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and the *Four Quartets* this higher world becomes more visible; nonetheless Eliot has always taken care not to become a religious poet and often denigrated the power of poetry as a religious force. However, his dramas *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *The Family Reunion* (1939) are more openly Christian apologies. In his later essays, Eliot advocates a traditionalism in religion, society, and literature that seems at odds with his pioneer activity as a poet. But although the Eliot of *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) is an older man than the poet of *The Waste Land*, it should not be forgotten that for Eliot tradition is a living organism comprising past and present in constant mutual interaction. Eliot's plays *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954), and *The Elder Statesman* (1959) were published in one volume in 1962; *Collected Poems 1909-62* appeared in 1963.

#### **4.2. Religious Beliefs of Eliot**

Everything in the modern world is situated under the sign of crisis, not only the social, cultural and the economic, but more so the spiritual. For the contemporary man all faith has weakened. He is freer in his optimistic illusions; the idea of what he can do

without following any moral law. Modern men saw too much of death, destruction and decay that he now chose to think life has no meaning and death of the physical body meant the end of his existence. The existence or death of the spirit held no meaning to them. Self-righteous morality, hidden-injuries of the World Wars, sexuality, materialism and many more surrounded the modern man.

In the midst of these chaoses, Eliot chose to walk the path of the teachings of the church and apply it in his works that would ultimately help in spreading the good news of the gospel to the world. His approach might not have been on a strong theological perspective but it sure was convincing in a more subtle manner.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1927, Eliot converted to Anglicanism from Unitarianism, and in November that same year he took British citizenship. He said in a preface to his collection of essays *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928) that he was a “classist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion.” When Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot's fellow Modernist and patron, learnt of her friend's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, she predicted that he would "drop his Christianity with his wife, as one might empty the fish bones after the herring." While she was right about his wife, Woolf could not have been more mistaken about his Christianity, which endured until his death in 1965. Eliot had embraced a religious doctrine particularly focused on orthodox beliefs about faith and morals which were otherwise anathema to the members of the Bloomsbury Group. Lytton Strachey another friend of Eliot also fought against Anglicanism by repudiating Victorianism and conventionality of belief and behavior in all its forms.

Unitarianism is a Christian doctrine that stresses on individual freedom of belief and rejects the Trinity. Eliot's family during the nineteenth century followed the Bostonian Unitarianism which had its roots in Calvinism. But with the change of time

and with new doctrines creeping in, the strict theological beliefs were watered down declining; sin, redemption, Jesus the Son of God, His miracles and resurrection and so on. Not just religion but his subsequent education and intellectual and cultural development, more recent events in his personal life and above all, the fundamental traits of his personality and his response to the modern world. With so much of all these, Eliot found, by the time of his undergraduate years, that the threadbare theology of Unitarianism, the provinciality of its culture and moralism were dreadfully inadequate - intellectually, culturally and spiritually - for the kind of systematic, authoritative rule of life and explanation of human existence for which his soul was yearning.

The journey from the teachings of Unitarianism to orthodox Anglo-Catholicism was not the easiest ride for Eliot. Though for many years, he had been under the influence of the former religion, yet he was never really spiritually satisfied by it. He was always drawn towards the need for spirituality and strict theology that would influence both his work and in his personal life. This desire for spiritual fulfillment, however, derived from not just any form of Christianity, but the highest of Anglican modes; Anglo-Catholicism.

#### **4.3. Influence of Other Religions**

As a student of philosophy at Harvard, Eliot searched widely among a variety of belief systems, in eastern religions as well as in the western tradition, for a doctrine worthy of agreement and practice. It seems that Hinduism was an evident influence; and thus references to various Hindu texts, especially the Bhagavad-Gita, abundantly received considerable scholarly attention. But Buddhism seems to have held a deeper attraction because it was said that Eliot even considered becoming a Buddhist at the

time he was writing *The Waste Land*. His attraction to this religion is so evident and his poetry mirrors his interest to Buddhism. But what drew Eliot's interest away from Buddhism was maybe perhaps the differences in all the religions he studied; Buddhism's radical difference from both Hinduism and Christianity. Unlike those religions, which rely on concepts of an eternal self or the soul, whose purpose is to find eternal harmony with an omnipotent deity, Buddhism advocates the belief of anatman, the doctrine that there is human no permanent, underlying substance that can be called the soul. In Buddhist teaching, there is no soul and there is no God— at any point, death is the ultimate end. Eliot could not accept this proposition and thus ultimately averted from his conversion to the religion.

Teachings of every religion in the world point towards one direction, that is, the existence of one God, and deliverance of the human soul. It should be made clear that denying the soul means denying the body. The whole idea of Nirvana in case of Buddhism, Moksha in case of Hinduism, and Salvation in case of Christianity point towards the presences of the soul and its longing for eternity. The beliefs may differ and the manner of worship may contradict but whether it be Hinduism, Buddhism or Christianity, the focus is undeniably towards a deity.

**4.3.1. Representation of Buddhism and Hinduism in Eliot-** It is evident that Eliot wanted to convert to Buddhism because he was definitely influenced by the doctrine of Buddhist religion. He thus named the third title of *The Waste Land* (The Fire Sermon) from the sermons of Mahatma Buddha. He of course did not convert for so many reasons but Eliot confesses in his book *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* that he was influenced by Indian philosophy and Buddhist teachings:

“Two years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Lanman, and a year in the mazes of Patanjali’s metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods, left me in a state of enlightened mystification. A good half of the effort of understanding what the Indian philosophers were after—and their subtleties make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys—lay in trying to erase from my mind all the categories and kinds of distinction common to European philosophy from the time of Greeks. My previous and concomitant study of European philosophy was hardly better than an obstacle. And I came to the conclusion—seeing also that the ‘influence’ of Brahmin and Buddhist thought upon Europe, as in Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and Deussen, had largely been through romantic misunderstanding—that my only hope of really penetrating to the heart of that mystery would lie in forgetting how to think and feel as an American or a European: which, for practical as well as sentimental reasons, I did not wish to do.” (Eliot 40-41)

The statement above makes it clear that Eliot was drawn towards both Indian philosophy and Buddhism not for a short period of time but a lifetime of influence. This confession justifies his fruitful study of the two religions. He firmly says “I know that my own poetry shows the influence of Indian thought and sensibility.” (p-113) However, Eliot did not continue to study Indian philosophy which can be presumed as the same reason why he gave up his conversion to Buddhism, that is, the fear of losing his self. P. S. Sri says “Eliot’s chief difficulty seemed to be his sentimental reluctance to transcend cultural barriers.” (Sri 12)

Another fundamental doctrine of both Hinduism and Buddhism is metempsychosis or rebirth. Metempsychosis simply means after death man’s endless cycle of reincarnation takes place. This cycle is considered to be painful and dissatisfying and the only way to find liberation is by achieving enlightenment and by extinguishing



one's own desires. Man is ultimately weary from this feeling of repetition of birth, growth, demolition, and death. Our world is phenomenal, yet if this endless cycle of life continues then we are stuck with a history of meaninglessness.

This is probably what Eliot meant in *The Waste Land* when he called April as the 'cruellest' month of the year. These people in the waste land are afraid of reincarnation;

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
 Lilacs out of dead land, mixing  
 Memory and desire, stirring  
 Dull roots with spring rain.  
 Winter kept us warm, covering  
 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
 A little life with dried tubers.  
 Summer surprised us, coming over the Stanbergersee  
 With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,  
 And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,  
 And drank coffee, and talked for an hour (Eliot 61).

In the Buddhist viewpoint life and death is never pleasant rather it is a process of constant struggle and weariness where man has to strive for enlightenment. And unless it is achieved, the repetition of birth and rebirth will continue forever. This, Eliot understood was eternal damnation for man. April is cruel because it is that time of the year when 'spring rain' allows the 'lilacs to breed from the dead land' which metaphorically stands for rebirth which also means that the people in the waste land have no choice but to continue the life in death. This reincarnation is not a way to get out of the waste land but a trap to which they have no escape. P. S. Sri affirms that

Eliot understands the life in the waste land in the view of Buddhist reincarnation in his book *T. S. Eliot: Vedanta and Buddhism*:

April, then, seeks to awaken man and the world to her critical nature as well as to the death and burial of the man- god. This is why lilacs bloom and are vivified by rain; the lilacs are “a symbol not only of the miracle of birth in a dead land but of memory,” enabling us to recall “the dying and reviving god, Attis, whose return from the dead was foreshadowed in the appearance of lilac-coloured blossoms at the very beginning of spring.” The lilacs appear, moreover, along with rain; together they symbolize “the revival and awakening of the human consciousness to its religious dimensions.” Myth and metaphor coalesce, therefore, in Eliot’s exploitation of the philosophical notion of metempsychosis and of the anthropological discoveries connected with the vegetation ceremonies (Sri 29).

Eliot uses the myth of a vegetation god in the poem in order to suggest metempsychosis which is a part of the Buddhist faith, though he does not directly mention about it. Eliot was deeply influenced by Buddhism and his poetry shows the influence. He was interested in the concept of Nirvana and Buddhist way of salvation. He tried hard to find some ways to salvation and in this quest he found his answer in the east. He understood the very essence of Buddhism and seems to have explained this essence in Christian and mythic terms.

Not only do we see influences of Buddhism in Eliot’s “Wasteland” but there are numerous examples of Hindu influences as well. Some of these references are obvious, such as the repetition of “shantih” at the poem's close. Illustrations of life after death is a reminder of the Hindu concept of ‘Maya’ literally means “illusion” or “magic” or the ultimate unreality of what we consider life. Maya describes the veil of

illusion where things appear to be present but are not what they seem. It deludes man of reality that life is in fact a unified whole which actually the Hindus disagree. The philosophy of Hinduism actually teaches that it is the ignorance of this unity of life which is the root cause of all human suffering and misery. The concept of reincarnation in fact serves as a reminder of Hindu philosophy of the aspects of life after death. The idea of reincarnation or rebirth is not something to be celebrated; instead it signifies the failure of the person being reborn as not yet realized the unity of life. It is believed that those who fail to come to this realization are cursed to rebirth and the continuation of an endless cycle of suffering in a world of illusions.

Another important Hindu influence we can find in the “Wasteland” is the idea of non-dualism. Due to human limitations, life appears to consist of separate objects which, however, are supposed to be unified according to the Hindu philosophy. Hindus believe that all human suffering comes out of this ignorance and that the ultimate goal in life is to experience the unity of God on earth. In other words man is one with God and vice-versa. To experience union with God, man has to give up the illusion of a separate self in order to realize the divinity of the inner self, which is not separate from God. This is the motif of all the Hindu Upanishads, including the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

This unity can be experienced only through rejection and repudiation for the highest cause. However, this teaching is not really about giving up on material things but is instead focused on mental process that is, giving up on selfish attachments to things and to people because these attachments are what makes people feel separated from God and thus lead them further from its realization.

Eliot has taken inspiration from a tradition that has spent thousands of years devising ways to express the spiritual journey of man. This does not mean that his purpose was

to write a Hindu or a Buddhist poem. “The Waste Land” contains many layers of meaning and concepts from Hindu texts as a fabric to give structure to and support the many views that constitute the human psyche on a spiritual journey.

#### **4.4. Mysticism and Spiritualism in Eliot**

Mysticism can be defined as something mysterious, something indefinable and obscure, and something beyond human comprehension. It is an abstract idea that defines the reunion with the infinite; unity of the Creator with His creation. Mysticism is the hidden truth or wisdom that is present in the center of every man’s soul. It is the mystical faculty that allows man to experience transcendental reality. Mysticism does not have one single definition. Rather, it ranges from science through psychology to theology.

A mystic on the other hand is a person who has undergone some mystical experience. He need not necessarily be a religious man or practice any religion. A mystic believes in the experience of a power for apprehending the higher things, a capacity of soul which begins where reason and reasonable grounds end.

Spiritualism on the other hand can be defined as the doctrine that asserts the separate existence of God. It concerns itself with the things of the spirit and not of the flesh. In a broader sense, spiritualism is a metaphysical belief in the existence of souls, spirits of the dead and life after death. It may also be referred to as a religious philosophy pertaining to a spiritual aspect of existence. Spirituality enables man to think and act beyond the realm of the physical.

When studying Eliot it is impossible to exclude or dissect the concepts of mysticism and spiritualism from his works. Even before his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, Eliot wrote tons of works that showed his inclination towards this interest. However,

when asked by an interviewer from *The Yorkshire Post* in 1927 if he would consider himself a 'failed mystic', Eliot simply replied that he was always drawn towards mysticism but never once considered himself a mystic but rather a poet. In this sense, we understand that Eliot had the power or the ability to put these states of consciousness of a mystical kind into words.

Eliot showed interest in mysticism even while he was still a student at Harvard University. His fellow student from the Harvard E. R. Dodds mentions how he met Eliot for the first time and how they were both excitedly about mysticism. Like me, Dodds says, "he (Eliot) was seriously interested in mystical experience." In one of his poems composed in 1910 titled *Silence*, Eliot describes how one day, while walking in Boston he saw the streets shrink and divide. In that moment he says all the experiences of the past and the present and all the claims of the future dropped off and a great silence enwrapped him. Similar mystical experiences were felt constantly throughout his lifetime which induced his later famous poem *Four Quartets*.

Eliot began to write long poems like *The Waste Land* drawing his influences from the Metaphysical poets- Thompson, Yeats, Blake and others. Later after his conversion, he wrote religious poems like *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*. In *The Waste Land* he brought together three diverse religions Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity and found the resolution of the poem at the end. *Ash Wednesday* is another spiritual poem of oscillations between Heaven and hell, between anticipation and hope. It is a poem which describes man's longing for God and His glory, and to be filled with the fear of ones unworthiness before Him. The three poems are examples of Eliot's spiritual turning point: agony, solace and realization. Eliot tries to reach the Divine in his *Four Quartets*. It is a poem of struggles, conveying the fight for spiritual freedom and the

mystical experience of soul which has a personal yearning for God and that at last has found its union it was searching for.

#### **4.5. Elements of Spirituality in His Works**

Eliot's number of poems and plays written before and after his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism has in all, the elements of spirituality. There can be varied interpretations as to whether he was a religious or a spiritual man or in fact both. But whatever may be the argument, one thing is definite, that is, there are elements of spirituality found in his works.

#### **Poems**

*The Waste Land* (1922) is a poem that exposes the horrors of modern generation; moral, spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy, disillusionment and decay. Throughout the poem, Eliot shows how man has lost his passion, that is, his trust in God and religion, resulting in loss of faith and vitality, both spiritual and emotional. The title of the poem is said to have been inspired by Jesse L. Weston's book *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), where Fisher King's kingdom has been laid waste by his own sexual sins and those of his soldiers and how he wishes to restore his land and make his lands fertile again. This suggested to the poet the title of his poem, for him the whole of Europe appeared to be a spiritual waste land, laid waste by the sexual sins of the modern man. Thus the title of the poem is quite relevant.

*The Waste Land* is a vision of dissolution and spiritual drought that arises from the degeneration, vulgarization and commercialization of sex. He says that instead of the gentle music of the river Thames he hears the sound and laughter of young men and women engaging in sexual pleasures, which to him sounds like the rattling of the

bones; “And bones caste in a little low dry garret, / Rattled by the rat’s foot only year to year.” (194-95) Eliot truly believed that sex when exercised for the sake of procreation is an expression of love, Hebrews 13:4 “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” So when it is exercised beyond the boundaries of marriage, for the sake of momentary pleasure or monetary benefit, it becomes a source of degeneration and corruption giving primacy of the flesh over the spirit and this result in spiritual decay and death. Eliot saw the modern world engaging in this corruption by openly denying biblical teachings and indulging in the desires of the flesh. “The Burial of the Dead” laments over the loss of fertility, thus suggestive of the decay of love (spiritual) in the modern world.

The images of desire and materialism further progresses in section two, “A Game of Chess,” where a woman sits upon a “burnished throne” surrounded by marble, jewels, and glass. The objects surrounding her illustrate her desire for material things in the world. She prefers surrounding herself with beautiful possessions and is a symbol of the consumer ideal which instructs people to take solace in possessions in order to feel complete. This is one true example of people who lack spirituality, who have no other option but to conceal their emptiness with material wealth rather than religion. The woman’s life lacks any sense of coexistence; she is alone in her own world filled with things. Eliot is trying to say that in the modern world, people no longer want to share with those around them; but only want to encircle themselves with material possessions. The second section focuses on the lack of fellowship and relationship building in the lives of modern men as regarded by biblical teachings in Hebrews 10: 24-25 “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Self-centeredness is a disease of

modernity. In the following lines, a couple is speaking at one another but from their words it is clear that they are concerned only with their own minds and problems.

My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.

Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.

What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?

I never know what you are thinking. Think (Eliot 65).

The speaker seems to be a woman talking to her spouse. But his response reveals that he is not concerned about her issues instead is involved with his own depression: “I think we are in rats’ alley/ Where the dead men lost their bones” (115-116). She is neither interested in his issues as she keeps asking, “You know nothing? Do you see nothing?” (122) These two people represent the modern couple, unconcerned with each other’s lives and problems but rather busy in their own world.

The third section of *The Waste Land*, “The Fire Sermon,” brings up the barren godless nature of society and how men have turned away from the positive aspect of culture. We see garbage litters in the river bank while “nymphs” ply their trade. The sex scene in this section is the clearest sign of the decay of community and compassion for other beings:

Flushed and decided, he assaults at once

Exploring hands encounter no defence;

His vanity requires no response,

And makes a welcome of indifference (Ibid 68).

The act does not involve any feeling of love or compassion as it should. The man quenches his thirst for pleasure and the woman sighs “Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over” (252-252). Sex for the pair is only an act of fulfilling monotony. The scene is filled with loneliness and barren lust.



In the later lines of the section, the speaker cries out to God to free him from nothingness which is all that the people living/existing in the waste land know of. The speaker pleads “O Lord Thou pluckest me out/ Oh Lord Thou pluckest” (309-310). The whole world is “burning, burning, burning” but not with the purifying fires of suffering but with the blazing fires of hell. The poet wants to save the world from this hell and the only way for this to truly happen is by attaining salvation.

The fourth section of *The Waste Land*, “Death by Water,” is the shortest section of the poem. It reveals a change of consciousness and the desire for spiritual renewal. In it, a man named Phlebas has “...passed the stages of his age and youth/ Entering the whirlpool”, (317-318) he realizes that life is passing and youth is fading. He jumps into the whirlpool to be cleansed and renewed in his spirit and not to die. The idea of jumping in the whirlpool is an act of attaining salvation.

In the last section of the poem, “What the Thunder Said,” water is again used as a symbol of life, rebirth and purification. In the whole of the poem, water is the one element longed for and missing in the waste land: “Here is no water but only rock/ Rock and no water and the sandy road” (331-332). Without water, the earth is a dead place with no living beings. It is only filled with mere rocks. The waste land is a barren land, with no peace. Yet, there is a earnest desire for life:

There is not even silence in the mountains

But dry sterile thunder without rain

There is not even solitude in the mountains

But red sullen faces sneer and snarl

From doors of mud cracked houses

If there were water

And no rock

If there were rock

And water

A spring

A pool among the rock (Ibid 72).

The word 'if' has a deep connotation, especially for souls that had once lived in the waste land. Simply because it means that they are missing something which they once had. It is a wish and a desire to get back what they had lost; water or in other words faith that had once sustained them. With the return of water, the lands will be alive and fertile, and the earth will be a happy place. Then the Ganges River is mentioned in the next line implying that the poem has shifted from the West to the East; "...Then a damp gust/ Bringing rain/ Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves/ Waited for rain, while the black clouds/ Gathered far distant, over Himavant." (394-98) The Ganges is a sacred gift from Mother Nature to the Hindus; its waters give life to the plants and people, it purifies those who bath on its shores and the ashes of the dead find its rest in the river. The following Sanskrit words "Datta/ Dayadhvam/ Damyata" (402, 412, 419) uttered by the thunder, mean "give" or share with thy fellow man; "accept" that there are things in the world which one may not achieve even though one sets out to acquire; "control" ones actions, and cultivate obedience and wisdom instead of material gains. God speaks through the sound of the thunder bringing rain that the way to salvation is acquired through; sympathy, self-surrender, and self-control. The poem ends with the Sanskrit word "Shantih shantih shantih," (434) meaning peace- to all mankind and the end of all suffering in the world.

Eliot's *Journey of the Magi* (1927) can be read and applauded on many levels. Not only is it filled with paradoxes but also varied literary sources that enrich the meaning of the poem. The use of symbolism and imagery helps in exploring multiple themes.

Since the poem was written in the year of Eliot's own conversion, the quest of the Magi for the Christ child in the poem can be seen as a parallel to Eliot's own quest for religious and spiritual fulfillment. In this poem, Eliot gives a realistic picture of the pain and suffering the three Magus had to undergo in order to fulfill their task of meeting baby Jesus. The opening lines, "A cold coming we had of it" suggests the cold weather and the time of the year. The journey was not smooth and pleasant but was filled with obstacles all the way. The speaker of the poem says;

There were times we regretted  
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,  
And the silken girls bringing sherbet (Ibid 103).

There were times they wanted to give up; for they regretted the loss of comfort and ease they had in their countries. The speaker, one of the Magi, describes a series of difficulties they had to undergo in their journey to Bethlehem. However, after a long journey filled with hardships, the Magus reach a "temperate valley/below the snow line",

And three trees on the low sky,  
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.  
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,  
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,  
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins (Ibid 103).

These lines are filled with images from the Bible: the "three trees" foreshadow the crucifixion of Christ at Golgotha in Mark 15:22, "grape vine-leaves" symbolizing Christ as mentioned in John 15:1; the "lintel" in Exodus 12:7, was marked with blood to tell the Angel of Death to pass over the homes of the Jews; the men "dicing for

pieces of silver” hold connotations of Judas, who sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver in Matthew 26:15, as well as the soldiers who dined for Christ’s garments after the crucifixion in Matthew 27:35.

The Magus in the poem are however not aware of what these images symbolize. They simply observe and pass through asking the hostile people for directions to Bethlehem. When they finally reach their destination and meet the Saviour boy, the speaker simply says it was “satisfactory.” One might feel like the Magus that the meeting and visiting of the baby at Bethlehem would be the end of the fulfilled task. But once the Magus return back to their countries, the real spiritual journey begins. The speaker says;

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.  
I should be glad of another death (Ibid 103).

The kingdom that the Magus used to dominate has changed for him as he returned from the journey. He no longer feels comfortable in the role he previously played. And the overshadowing of the new culture and religion that he witnessed, i.e., the birth and death of Christ, makes him feel “alien” with his own people.

Eliot deliberately leaves the last line of the poem open to interpretation. It may not specifically state death the Magus wants. It could be the death of the modern age since Eliot truly always hoped for a better world. Or he could even be wishing for death of his old self.

The *Journey of the Magi* recounts the quest of two separate journeys; historical and spiritual. The problems and struggles faced by the Magus are real and true struggles; their agony, their frustrations and more so the temptation of wanting to give up

midway. But these struggles are not just physical but much more of a spiritual battle. The journey undertaken by these three wise men indicates the spiritual journey that men take on when we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour. This journey is a part of man's continual search for truth and ultimately his salvation.

*Ash Wednesday* (1930) is considered to be Eliot's conversion poem mostly because it is one of the long poems written after his conversion to Anglicanism. The title refers to 'Ash Wednesday,' the 7<sup>th</sup> Wednesday before Easter; the first of the forty days of Lent, which is a time for fasting, self-reflection, and repentance. The poem is divided into six sections, and it deals with the speaker's desire to move from a sense of spiritual despair to salvation. Because this poem was written shortly after his conversion, the thoughts and longing-ness represented in the poem is deep and very personal.

Eliot knew that the path to spiritual salvation begins with the right decision of rejecting whatever is worldly. In the first section of the poem, Eliot rejects the hope of any fulfillment in worldly amusements, any potential for joy in existence, and acknowledges that the 'one veritable transitory power' (Eliot 13) is unreal and prone to fading away because 'what is actual is actual only for one time/ And only for one place.' (18-19)

Eliot himself had faced rejection and scorn from people around him when he openly discussed his conversion. He therefore accepts heartily his own helplessness to change the human condition, thereby rejecting the beauty and temptation the world offers. Thus, he calls upon humanity to 'pray to God to have mercy upon us' (26) because this is the only way for humanity to be saved from eternal damnation. The poet's fear of judgment is ultimately felt in the line 'may the judgment not be too heavy upon us.' (33) Therefore, in the final stanza of section one of the poem, the poet makes clear his

submission from all worldly dreams and aspirations 'Because these wings are no longer wings to fly / But merely vans to beat the air.' (34-35)

Every human soul alive is bound by fleshly desires. Not even the holiest of priests or saints are free from all desires of the world. But the fight against these desires is within us. Eliot felt the need to fight these weaknesses and so when the leopards in the poem fed on parts of his flesh, 'on my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained/ In the hollow round of my skull' (Section 2- line 3), his bones sing a 'song' in praise of their achieved purity. The image of the leopards represents death and destruction (destroying his sensual desire and leaving only his bones). He credits the 'Lady' (associated to Virgin Mary) for her goodness because of whom his bones now 'shine with brightness.'

For Eliot, the idea of death in his spiritual struggle has been very prominent. He is not afraid of the physical death but the death of his soul which mattered to him the most. Therefore, the mention of the yew tree which stands as the symbol of death can be seen in the poem. This idea of spiritual death is best described in his poem *The Hollow Men* (1925). In this poem, the speakers are a bunch of hollow men who are spiritually dead. These men are looking for an escape from their present situation but are unable to do so. Their heads are empty and their prayers broken; they are exiled in a twilight world between 'death and dying'. The hollow men have no identity and therefore they are 'hollow' and 'stuffed'. As written in Galatians 2:20 – "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Through this poem, Eliot wanted to bring in the idea of emptiness and brokenness without the presence of God and Christ in man's life. *The Hollow Men* remains a thought provoking poem, like much of his other works. It perhaps

presents even more of a challenge to comprehension and close analysis than his previous poem.

*Four Quartets* (1935-42), a set of four long poems were published separately over a six-year period: *Burnt Norton* (1935), *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941), *Little Gidding* (1942). They are four interlinked meditations with the common theme being man's relationship with time, the universe, and the divine. In these poems, Eliot blends his Anglo-Catholicism with mystical, philosophical and poetic works from both Eastern and Western religious and cultural traditions.

The first of the quartets, "Burnt Norton," is named for a ruined country house in Gloucestershire. The striking opening lines of the first quartet give an explicit hypothesis on time- that the past and future are contained in the present;

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable (Eliot 171).

Eliot simply means to say the choice a man makes in the past affects his present and that the present and the past might both be contained in the future. It might be his way of talking about the idea of destiny or fate. Eliot continues to say that everything that has happened thus far and everything that could have happened is basically the same thing, because the past is finished and all we have is what is around us right now, in the present. The regrets of the past will not lead us to any spiritual peace but true peace comes from experience.

But to what purpose  
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves

I do not know.

Other echoes

Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow? (Ibid 171)

The lines simply mean to say that the same way that a dusty bowl of rose leaves is not the same as walking through an actual garden, even our idea of happiness is nothing compared to the true bliss of spiritual peace.

In “East Coker”, Eliot describes the cycle of renewal and decay. Houses and other signs of human habitation become empty fields or freeway overpasses;

In my beginning is my end. In succession

Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,

Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place

Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass (Ibid 177).

The second quartet is a reminiscent of the book of Ecclesiastes from the Bible, which emphasizes on the meaning of life and the best way to live. The poem ends with a reference to the day of Christ’s crucifixion- a reminder that anything worthy must come through suffering and tolerance, as mentioned in 1 Peter 2:21 ‘For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His footsteps.’

Unlike the first two quartets, “The Dry Salvages” talks about human negativism and destruction. It rather gives an explicit comparison between a river and the sea as symbols for the incomprehensible. A river in human mythologies may be considered as something that can eventually be crossed and conquered, while the sea represents an endless array of profundity and secrets: Man can live with the ocean but to master it is beyond human comprehension. The final lines of the poem draw away from pessimism with a suggestion of hope; “Because we have gone on trying;/We, content



at the last/ If our temporal reversion nourish....The life of insignificant soil.” Cast in the beauty of the lines is a sinister meaning: “our temporal reversion” is death, which is good only if we can become “significant soil” that might nurture a tree. By hiding behind such formation of language, Eliot once again retires into the refuge of the poet. He may have failed to master time and experience but he is master of the world that he writes into being.

The last of the four quartets, “Little Gidding”, opens with a description of a sunny winter’s day, where everything is dry and dead yet blazing and alive with the sun’s fire. The scene quickly shifts to the poet walking at dawn. He meets the ghost of some dead master, whom he does not quite recognize because his face was ‘still forming’. The two speak, and the ghost gives the poet the burdens of wisdom: awareness of human folly, expiring sense without enchantment, and shame at one’s past deeds. The spirit tells him that only if he is “restored by that refining fire” will he escape these curses. The spirit then leaves him ‘with a kind of valediction/ And faded on the blowing of the horn.’ (p.195) These lines have a close reference to the Bible from Zachariah 13:9 “And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested.” The final section of the poem brings the spiritual and the aesthetic together in a final reconciliation. It celebrates the ability of human vision to transcend the evident limitations of human mortality

Perfect language results in poetry in which every word and every phrase is “an end and a beginning.” The time-bound and the timeless are exchangeable and in the moment, if one is in the right place, like the chapel at Little Gidding. All will be well when the fire that has the ability to both destroy and redeem come together to form a knot and “the fire and the rose”—divine wrath and mercy—become one.

## Plays

*Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) is a verse drama, written and performed during the Canterbury Festivals in 1935 that portrays the assassination of Archbishop Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170. The book is divided into two parts. Part one takes place in the Archbishop Thomas Becket's hall on 2 December 1170. The tempters in the play are four in number, three of whom parallel the Temptations of Jesus Christ.

The play in its simple appearance is a historical play of struggle for power and the ultimate martyrdom of Thomas Becket. However, a close examination will reveal the profundity of the dramatist's true intentions of writing the play. Eliot had always desired to reestablish verse drama as a viable form of theater. And this long-held desire found its birth in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

The play opens with a Chorus singing, foreshadowing the coming violence. The Chorus as in Greek drama plays a crucial role in commenting the actions and providing a link between the audience and the characters. They introduce the place and the time, the return from a seven-year exile of the archbishop; "Seven years and the summer I over/ Seven years since the Archbishop left us,/ He who was always kind to his people." (*"Murder in the Cathedral"* 19-20) The women of Canterbury instinctively sings of the tragic events that are about to take place in the later part of the play;

Some malady is coming upon us. We wait, we wait,

And the saints and martyrs wait, for those who shall be

martyrs and saint (MIC 240).

One thing that is clear through the Chorus is that, whatever happens to men is not the will of men but the will of God. Eliot confirms this statement in the lines;

Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen:

I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight.

Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the hands of statesmen (Ibid 240).

Eliot makes a very strong Christian statement to his readers/viewers that whatever maybe the plans of a man for his future, yet the ultimate deciding factor is God alone. This idea finds its confirmation in the book of Proverbs 16:9 “A man’s heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.” On arriving at Canterbury, Becket is immediately reflective about his coming martyrdom, which he embraces;

They know and do not know, that action is suffering

And suffering is action. Neither does the agent suffer

Nor the patient act. But both are fixed

In an internal action..... that the wheel may turn and still

Be forever still (Ibid 256).

Becket declares his willingness to sustain the design that God has in mind and is ready to face suffering and persecution, so long as His word is fulfilled. Eliot knows that the path to salvation is not filled with roses but is full of thorns and sufferings. He knows well that once a man decides to follow the path of Jesus, there is no turning back. He himself had gone through this eye opening experience when he converted to Anglicanism. His contemporaries not only did mock and condemn his decision but also critiqued on his later style of writing as “too religious.”

1 Corinthians 3:13 “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” The temptation that Thomas Becket faced was not something impossible for him to overcome because he knew the promise of Word of God. Thus, when he

finally faced the tempters, he could resist them without a second thought. The first tempter enters and reminds Becket of the times when he and the king were in good terms; “When the King and you and I were all friends together?” (246). He tempts him to reconcile his friendship with the King and forget whatever vows he has made towards the church. To which, Becket replies that no matter how many times man is given a lesson, yet he learns very little from others’ experience. He confirms that the future is unknown,

But in the life of one man, never

The same time returns. Sever

The cord, shed the scale. Only

The fool, fixed in his folly, may think

He can turn the wheel on which he turns (Ibid 247).

The tempter being determined to convince Becket offers him the prospect of physical safety. But he sends him away saying he is “twenty years too late.” The first tempter leaves Becket with a threat; “Take a friend's advice. Leave well alone,/ Or your goose may be cooked and eaten to the bone.” (247) and mocks him saying, “I leave you to the pleasures of your higher vices.”(248) The first temptation parallels to the first temptation that Jesus faced after His forty days and forty nights of fasting. Satan knew that the immediate need of Jesus after forty days and nights of fasting was bread. So the devil took the opportunity to strike at the right spot. Likewise, Becket’s tempter knew that the immediate requirement of Becket after his return from the exile was physical protection. To which Becket successfully resisted thus justifying the parallel. The second tempter offers power, riches and fame in serving the King; one that modern men truly crave for and pursue.

To set down the great, protect the poor,

Beneath the throne of God can man do more? (Ibid 249)

Generations and generations of mankind run after this offer, which is the result of bloodsheds and killings around the world. But power, riches and fame bring no peace to anyone but is just an allusion, a deceit in order to bring destruction. Becket overcomes the second tempter by saying;

Temporal power, to build a good world,

To keep order, as the world knows order.

Those who put their faith in worldly order

Not controlled by the order of God,

In confident ignorance, but arrest disorder (Ibid 250).

The third tempter comes not with an offer but a suggestion of coalition with the barons and a chance to dethrone the King. He makes himself sound innocent and straightforward in his business. But his affairs are the same as the previous two, that is, tempt for power and political gains. The tempter declares;

For us, Church favour would be an advantage,

Blessing of Pope powerful protection

In the fight for liberty. You, my Lord,

In being with us, would fight a good stroke (Ibid 251).

The tempter reminds him of the powers he already hold and how with this coalition he can become the supreme head of the church and the affairs of the kingdom. But Becket disappoint the third tempter by declaring that he knows what it feels like to hold these powers because they mean “present vanity and later torment” (252). And pride is the source of all vanity.

The fourth tempter is rather cunning, encouraging Becket to pursue the glory of martyrdom, arguing that he should shun the worldly, political order of the king and focus on achieving sainthood which is eternal glory in the future. The idea of martyrdom is reasonable even to the Archbishop but the reasons for proposing was what put him to a huge dilemma; “to do the right thing for the wrong reasons.” He now realizes that no matter whether he acts or suffers, he will still sin against his religion. He therefore cries out in despair “who are you tempting me with you own desires?” he is enlightened by the thought that if he truly desires sainthood then he must submit himself to the will of God. He is then able to yield to God’s will and surrender his life in the true spirit of martyrdom.

Eliot’s language echoes scriptural injunctions, parables, and situations that reflect his true belief of a Christian way of life. He strongly believed in the Christian call for martyrdom and thus in the interlude, Becket ends of his sermon, “it is possible that in a short time you may have yet another martyr,” (262). We see in the sermon Becket’s ultimate peace of mind, as he elects not to seek sainthood, but to accept his death as inevitable and part of a better whole. Total submission to God for His glory is what every born again Christian truly profess. Eliot too professes this belief and thus through the voice of Becket, “A Christian martyrdom is never an accident, for Saints are not made by accident.... A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways” (261).

Through the above statement it is made clear that whatever happens to us throughout our lifetime is not by chance but by what fate has in stored for us. However, one should not blame God for the calamities one faces, because it should be understood that some things are the outcome of our lifestyle. And that God uses situations to warn us and to lead us back to Him.

Modernism and the effects of the World wars allowed Eliot to experience the battles fought between spiritual power and worldly power. This conflict is seen as one of the major themes of this play. The tempters in the play symbolize worldly power which wields over the everyday world. However, this power is fleeting and temporal, and with the passage of time, loses its effectiveness. Spiritual power on the other hand is a spring that flows from God, which is pure and uncorrupted. This spiritual power is represented through the character of Thomas Becket. Spiritual wisdom when attained by man, guarantees an incomprehensible strength and confidence that no other power can shake or move. Through the communication between Becket and the four knights and with the tempters, we see the power of God manifested in the bishop which gives him the willingness to martyrdom. In a similar manner, Eliot in his lifetime examined and tasted spirituality through different religions but ultimately found his home in Christ.

*The Family Reunion* (1939) is another one of Eliot's verse play that portrays the hero's (Harry) journey from guilt to redemption. Some critics have thought that the play has some autobiographical elements and that the hero might up to some extent be Eliot himself.

Harry Monchensey represents the play's pilgrim who returns to Wishwood after eight years longing for a spiritual rebirth or revival. He is probably the only character in the play that move towards a positive growth, learning the fact that spiritual culmination can only be attained through the way of self-denial. After what had happened in the sea, Harry blames himself that he might have pushed his wife off board. However, the mystery lie unsolved but the sense of guilt continues to haunt him because he did desire for her death. This feeling is the driving force that pursues him to come back to his childhood place to discover and free him from the guilt he had been clinging on to.

The characters in the play have a significant past from which none of them have actually truly moved on. So when Harry and Mary are waiting for the family dinner, Harry says,

I had only just noticed that this room is quite unchanged:  
 The same hangings... the same pictures... even the table,  
 The chairs, the sofa... all in the same positions.  
 I was looking to see if anything was changed,  
 But if it is so, I can't find it (The Family Reunion 305).

In waiting for Harry's return to Wishwood, Amy did not change anything in the house. Everything was kept the way it was when he left. She must have done so because maybe that is how she has always liked things, or maybe because she wanted to remind herself that by keeping things the way it had always been would make her feel that her son is not far away from her. It gave her a sense of hope and comfort. However, this particular act tells us of the inability of the Wishwood family to move on in life. The death of his father and the mysterious death of his wife, who had apparently fallen overboard during a boat trip, are the haunting past from which the family has not yet recovered. But it is also to be noted that the mother does not want Harry to face the truth and instead encourages her relatives to act as if nothing has happened. This also means that neither Harry, nor Amy has been set free of their guilt. For to be able to move on is the true gift of the Holy Spirit which the mother and son are yet to experience. For it says in 2 Corinthians 3:17 "Now the Lord is the spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

In his quest for mental, emotional and ultimately spiritual freedom, Harry finds his escape in Aunt Agatha. When the others quickly try to establish an air of normality, Harry finds their act suffocating and hideous. However, when Agatha gently asks him



for patience with their efforts to understand him, Harry pours out his frustrations and sufferings in an agonized and futile manner. Harry's guilt had taken the shape of the Furies who appear before him in Part 1 Scene 2 of the play. He almost loses his mind when he sees them for the first time:

Why do you show yourselves for the first time?

When I knew her, I was not the same person.

Not any person. Nothing that I did

Has to do with me (TFR 311).

He tries to convince Mary, who is there with him at the time but is unable to see them.

Therefore, he turns on her:

...If I had realized

That you were so obtuse, I would not have listened

To your nonsense. Can't you help me?

You're of no use to me. I must face them.

I must fight them (Ibid 312).

Harry is unaware that the furies are feeding on his guilt. However, he does realize that he needs to face and fight them because that is the only way to free himself from this torment.

The characters in the play are struggling with their guilt and the grudges they have instilled in their hearts against each other, the unspoken truth buried deep within and the cry for redemption. Amy blames her sister Agatha for her ruined marriage; "Thirty five years ago you took my husband away from me" (p.341), and is clinging on to life by sheer willpower. Agatha justifies to Amy that she has been waiting for Harry to pour out her years of struggle:

What did I get? Thirty years of solitude,

Alone, among women, in a women's college,

Trying not to dislike women. Thirty years

In which to think (Ibid 340).

With profound sensibility and clear perception she has helped Harry to spiritual discernment and in so doing has freed herself from the burden of guilt she had been carrying all her life. When Harry's ultimate fear (Eumenides) appears before him, Agatha clears the air of doubt for him:

That you have a long journey. That you have nothing to stay for.

..... You must go (Ibid 337).

Though Eliot had a strong Christian background, yet the Hindu ideas are a reinforcement or reinstatement of his fundamental ideas in his writings. In Hindu philosophy, sin is the outcome of desires untamed or left unattended which leads to evil action and ultimately traps man to a lifetime of guilt. This philosophy leads man to the idea of 'Prayashchit' or repentance that is to feel guilty and resolve to never commit such mistake again, and then start afresh. There is no penalty for those who repent and change their lifestyle. To some extent, the idea of repentance is similar to the Christian idea except where Christians confess their sins to God and receives His grace.

Eliot has successfully dealt with these challenging themes as guilt, sin and expiation, spiritual education and transformation, reflecting a lot on his experiences from different religions. These recurring themes are present in *The Wasteland*, *Four Quartets*, and *Murder in the Cathedral*, and continue to be present in his later works.

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## CHAPTER 5

### COMMUNION OF THE BELIEFS OF TAGORE AND ELIOT

#### **5.1. Communion of the Religious beliefs of Tagore and Eliot**

Both Tagore and Eliot had a strong urge for spirituality and its fulfillment in their souls. This idea is evident through their interest in religion and spirituality. However, they did not confine themselves to just one particular religion while in search of the ultimate fulfillment because this would have given a different approach and prospect to their beliefs. Both studied and understood the principles of their own religion yet also surpassed their limits and cared to widen their understanding and experience to other religion. This ultimately led them to explore religions and texts like Buddhism, Hinduism, Upanishad, and Christianity, which otherwise would not have been a part of their belief. Therefore, this allowed them to explore different areas of religion which later impacted their writings as well.

Understanding the vastness of religions and their different approaches to spirituality, both writers openly accepted, applied and advocated the beauty of these religions and their teachings. For instance, the teachings of Hinduism are quite contradictory compared to the teachings of Christianity. For the things that both these religions preach and believe cannot be intermingled. Hindus worship idols but for Christians, idol worship is an abomination to their God. Hindus believe in karma and reincarnation until the soul achieves moksha, whereas, Christians believe in heaven and hell and so on. But no matter how contradicting the teachings of these religions maybe, yet still there is beauty and oneness lying somewhere.

To understand in depth and to avoid any kind of bias opinion on any particular religion, it is important to know that though there are differences yet there are also

general features that both these religions share. Both religions believe in the incarnation of God as human. The Hindu gods for instance, lived, breathed, ate and betrothed like any human being on earth. Similarly, Christ was born of Virgin Mary, lived, breathed, ate and suffered like any man. The difference though, between them is that Christ was not born of sin, neither did He live in sin, nor did He die in sin but rather died for the sinners.

The Hindus believe that Lord Krishna is the incarnate of God and Christ has mentioned in the Bible that “I and my Father are one.” Likewise, parallel teachings can be seen in the Bible to that of the teachings of Hinduism. In the Bhagavad Gita Ch. 10:11 Lord Krishna mentions, “I destroy the darkness born of ignorance with the shining light of wisdom.” Similarly, Jesus in the book of John 8:12 says, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” These passages describe clearly the supremacy of God in both the religions, which holds dominion over all the worlds. This concept of the divine is made clear in the Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 7:6 and Ch. 10:20 “I am the origin of the whole world and also its dissolution...I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all.” Likewise, in Revelation 22:13 Jesus says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last.”

Apart from the concept of the divine, the concept of the spirit also has similarities. In Hinduism, the spirit of man which is referred to as “atman” dwells within man. This spirit needs to find enlightenment in order to realize “moksha” which will ultimately end the cycle of life and free the soul or spirit of man. Likewise, Christianity believes in salvation that can only be acquired through accepting Jesus as one’s ‘personal savior.’ But in order to do so, one has to encounter Christ personally only then will it

allow the spirit to attain salvation; John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (The Holy Bible 745)

Similar narratives of regeneration run through both religious texts. In the ancient text of Katha Upanishad lie the story of a boy who attained truth taught that were taught in the scriptures and whose father had given him over to die. Accepting his destiny, the boy says: “Like corn, a man ripens and falls to the ground; like corn, he springs up again in his season” (Prabhavananda 14). The boy spends three nights in the house of the King of Death and afterwards receives three boons. In the Gospel according to John 12:24, Jesus recognizes his destiny when he tells his disciples, “...unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.” After His crucifixion, Jesus’ body is then buried in a tomb for three days (the House of death). He then overcomes death and is raised to eternal life on the third day.

The moral and ethical teachings of the Ten Commandments in the *Bible* have some similarities with some of the teachings of the ancient Hindu text. For instance, both religions stress on the need to balance the inner domain of thought with that of the outer domain of action. The Hindus believe in nonviolence (in act and in thought), chastity (in thought, words and action), and not forgetting total surrender and commitment to God. In the Gospel of Matthew 5:21, 22/27, 28, Jesus gives a clear commentary on the commandments including the domains of thought, speech, and action:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’

shall be in danger of hell fire.” “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (THB 665).

In the *Bhagavad Gita* meaning Song of our Lord, the leading incarnate of God, Lord Krishna, is mentioned as the ‘supreme spirit’. While there are striking differences in terms of life, birth and death between Lord Krishna and Jesus Christ, yet, some similarities can be drawn between the two of them. The Gospel talks about Christ as “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), and that, “all things were made through Him.” (John 1:1-3) Likewise, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna is described as the “source and master of all beings, the Lord of Lords, the Ruler of the universe.” (BG 10:15) Christianity teaches that only through Jesus Christ humanity is eternally set free from sin and are no longer slaves of sin: John 8:36 “Therefore if the Son (Christ) makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” Likewise, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna assures: “He who knows Me as the unborn, without beginning, the Lord of the universe, he, stripped of his delusion, becomes free from all conceivable sin.” (BG 10:3) Christianity further teaches that Christ will come to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna: “To protect the righteous, to destroy the wicked, and to establish the kingdom of God, I am reborn from age to age.” (BG 4:7). However, it should not be mistaken that the Second coming of Jesus Christ has not occurred and there is no belief of re-incarnation or re-birth in the case of Jesus. And while Christ is believed to be the “Light of the world” (John 8:12), Krishna is likened to “a blaze of splendor...glowing like the blazing fire, brilliant as the sun, immeasurable” (BG 11:17).

It should be noted that the comparison of these two religions should not be mistaken for trying to reflect inferiority or superiority of either. The comparison is solely to



show the similarities and the varied ways in which these two religions echo each other. The influence of these religions has shown how the communion of the religious beliefs of Tagore and Eliot has ultimately influenced the creation of their greatest works in literature which shall be discussed respectively.

## **5.2. Tagore and Eliot: Similarities and Dissimilarities**

Tagore and Eliot are both 20<sup>th</sup> century modernist writers, yet their approach to modern literature triggers a number of similarities and dissimilarities. Both authors belong to the age of corruption, decay and death of men and the human soul, a time where modern men's spiritual bankruptcy was becoming complacent to them, and men lusted for money and power. Tagore belongs to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Eliot to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century but their method of writing is quite remarkable. Though their themes run close to each other, yet still, their literary techniques have differences. For what is worth noting, Tagore's nationalism and political views, his spirituality and humanistic philosophy are the prime focus for most of his literary works; whereas for Eliot, his philosophy on men, religion, time and literary criticism holds paramount importance in all his literary works.

**Rabindranath Tagore** commonly uses literary devices such as personification, metaphor, hyperbole, satire etc. In Poem 59 of *Gitanjali*, the poet uses the image of light which dances upon the moving leaves: *this golden light that dances upon the leaves*. He then uses the metaphor of clouds that look like boats sailing across the sky: *these idle clouds sailing across the sky*. The next literary device he uses in this poem is hyperbole, in order to intensify his expression of thought: *And my heart has touched thy feet*.

Tagore also incorporates in his writings the relationship between man, nature and God. He is considered to be the finest of Indian Renaissance, who brought the Indian spirit into modern context. Though raised in a rich family, Tagore understood the plight of the poor who lived in slums. His real spiritual inspiration came through nature that surrounded him from his boyhood days. He drew ecstasy from the sight of the first morning dew to the uncorrupted evening sunsets. He could not escape from the thoughts of the scenic view of the Himalayas and the purity of the Ganges river which ultimately influenced many of his poetry. Nature was religion to him as much as the knowledge of the holy book was.

While studying Tagore, one theme that is constantly recurring is the theme of change in nature and season. The idea of germination, blooming, withering and decay is most highly symbolic to life not just in terms of plants and flower but mostly to man and his relationship to his surroundings. Tagore also incorporates the use of opposites in his prose and poetry which can be seen remarkably. He believes that for the earth to exist in harmony, the infinite and the finite, life and death, joy and sorrow, beauty and decay must co-exist side by side. Even more so, life was a gift from the almighty according to Tagore. He believed that human beings need to spend more time in gratitude to God for this gift of life, than to complain about the things not given. And thus he did. He remained rooted to mother earth, reminding himself that the ground he stands is ground that supplies, sustains and nourishes him. He ardently believed that a man can be his true self only when he is surrounded by rustic life away from the modern world.

Tagore might not have had the slightest clue about the spiritual implications of his faith in Mother Nature. Yet, when we dig deeper into its truest core, we will find that nature is as holy and pure as any religion in the world. For him there is only one God

and religion is only a medium by which mankind chooses to worship Him. This might also be the many reasons why Tagore refused to follow any particular religion because he saw God in every image. For Tagore, religion should preach love, unity, oneness, and selflessness. He stood for the philosophy of one world; philosophy that took him to the farthest corners of the world and for which he was also criticized deeply.

Tagore was often accused of being unrealistic. He was often criticized for being ignorant of the harsh realities of life. However, this he proved wrong with his hope of the world becoming one. Tagore was fully aware of the modern world that had lost its sense of harmony and peace. Even in the darkest moments of despair, Tagore is able to translate his hope of something better. We know that Tagore belonged to the time when India was going through a phase of retaliation over the British rule in India. This influenced his poetic writing which he explicitly depicted in many of his poems. He feared for the loss of harmony in the politically discordant world- both in India and abroad. He was fully aware of the evil in the world yet, he was hopeful of its goodness. The thought of death haunts every human being but in the midst of all these negative opinions, Tagore continued to be hopeful and loved life 'because I love the light of the sky enwoven with me.' The intermingling of life and death found its harmony in *Gitanjali*. Here we see how Tagore found his peace in God which ultimately drowned his fear of death: 'And because I love this life, I know I will love death as well.' (4) He now anticipates death to come so that his union with God can ultimately be fulfilled. This we see in the opening poem of *Gitanjali*:

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail  
vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.  
  
This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and

dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in  
joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine.

Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill (Tagore 1).

For Tagore, the touch of his master's hand is more than enough to symbolize purity and love. He could find this satisfaction because the radiance of God's spirit was constantly engulfing him which is mentioned in the whole of the poem. Therefore, he felt it was his duty to keep his life pure both physically and spiritually as it was the dwelling place of his master.

Love for Tagore is beyond the boundaries of the physical world. With the early death of his wife and two children, Tagore did not really enjoy the love of a woman. Physical love was something that he never really longed because he never remarried after the death of his wife. So then, what really is love for Tagore? This question is brilliantly answered in the following poem of *Gitanjali*:

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing  
that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing  
that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my  
love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my  
heart.

And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it  
is thy power gives me strength to act (Ibid 4).

Love for Tagore is purity, sincerity, and devotion. He has long passed the journey of a man's search for spirituality and is already on the go. Every verse in the poem expresses his true and intense love for his God.

Tagore's quest for spirituality has led him close to his love for humanity. He seemed to understand that not just him but the rest of humanity needs to realize the same love and compassion for God as he did. We can confirm the higher level of spirituality that Tagore has gained through his love for mankind. In poem 9 of *Gitanjali* he says:

O Fool, try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders!

O beggar, to come beg at thy own door!

Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all,  
and never look behind in regret.

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath.

It is unholy---take not thy gifts through its unclean hands.

Accept only what is offered by sacred love (Ibid 9).

Tagore's poem is more like an affirmation to the promise that God has given to humankind- a new and a better world. But in order for this to happen, mankind needs to overcome pride and selfishness and offer a total act of surrender.

**Thomas Sterns Eliot** conveys a similar belief about God and the need for mankind to abandon the glitters of the world for a more spiritual call. It is important to note that for Eliot both poetry and drama are a significant source of delivering his piece of mind. While understanding his use literary devices, it is also equally important to keep in mind his versatility. Symbolism is one of the literary devices that Eliot is best known for. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot divides the five sections of the poem with distinct symbolic images. The poet brings out the ugliest picture of the modern world: the

dissolution of spiritual draught, commercialization of sex, thirst for power and money, materialism, death and decay of the spirituality. It should also be noted that Eliot's technique of delivering his message to the world is mostly through his characters.

The similarity that Eliot draws close to Tagore is his deep regard to the Indian tradition as a significant part of his assimilation. Eliot studied the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and Patanjali's Yoga Sutra at Harvard, which left him in a state of spiritual insight. Eliot acknowledges the wisdom of the East, which influenced many of his poetry with Indian thought and sensibility, therefore imparting a profound significance and intensity that is rarely found elsewhere.

For one thing, Eliot for sure is a 'no nonsense' writer. Mainly because of his ability to voice out boldly against the society that was prevailing during his time. He does so through the voice of his characters in the play that portrays man's foolishness. His heroes are real and vulnerable who essentially belong to the society that is fascinated in life's pleasures. But as his plays always progresses in a positive direction. The materialistic beings that were once caught up in life's whirlwind slowly evolve into spiritual beings and emerge as victors at the end. Eliot is able to transform such situations in his plays with profound effect solely because of his religious beliefs- both Eastern and Western.

Drama and poetry were both essential part of the lives of Eliot and Tagore. The body and soul are considered to be one; likewise, Eliot believed that poetry and drama are the expressions of the internal and external. They need each other to fully express the whole. Therefore, Eliot revived poetic drama as a tool in order to intensify the message that he wanted to deliver to the world. As a result of this revival of the poetic drama; *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Renunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, etc. succeeded in achieving dramatic intensity with poetic inspiration.

Religion has been a true source of inspiration in his writing. Though in his later years after his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, his outlook towards life totally changed. Yet, religion as a whole remained his muse that continued to supply him higher level of creativity. All his plays have been subtle demonstration of the relevance of religion to all spheres of life. They also portray the fact that modern man is removed from the sphere of religion and are beyond the reach of any form of spirituality. Just like Tagore, Eliot too abhors the puniness of the modern society and advocates the need for religion to intervene in the society. As much as Tagore feels that the teachings of the Indian philosophy can elevate the lives and living conditions of the Indian society, Eliot also feels that the teachings of Christianity can rectify the loss of morality in the modern world.

Eliot was scorned at when his fellow contemporaries learnt about his conversion. This was a time of true spiritual warfare in the life of the poet himself. The decision must have been quick and easy but the after effects of the action was a blow to Eliot's face. Not only this, but even his after conversion works were critiqued as 'too religious'. However, this did not stop Eliot from doing what was right. He went on further, producing religious and spiritual plays which had ultimately caught the hearts and attention of the readers. He was more or less like Thomas Becket who fearlessly countered back his tempters for the sake of truth and ultimately gave the biggest sacrifice- his life.

Like Tagore, Eliot runs his poems and plays through his philosophy and outlook towards life. He perceives life as important and significant in every aspect and wishes that the rest of the world finds it the same way as he does. Time on the other hand is one of his greatest obsessions mainly because time is connected to life- birth and death. This concept of time is prevalent in some of his poems. Eliot we know

belonged to the period between the pre and post war stage. And so, when we compare his works in these two times, for example, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) and *The Waste Land* (1922), the former was published in the outbreak of war which is only informing the situation because the war is still at the stage when people that are safely away from the frontiers are giving an impractical interpretation, while the latter takes place after the war has come and ended and has had its horrifying global effects. Eliot unlike his contemporaries has touched all aspects of life in his poetry. While some authors explored time as a brief subject matter when exploring other issues such as love, religion and politics, Eliot explored all subjects concerning the issues of the modern age.

Eliot is also best known for his complexity in comprehending his thoughts. He was critiqued often times for taking a topic of discussion and complicating it even when it was not necessary. This however may be presumed as an outcome of the mental health condition of the modern society and the crisis of identity. It is also a known fact that Eliot's poems and plays are the results of the plight of modern man. His only wish for the modern world was to be free from all demoralizing acts and to live a life of purity and chastity.

### **5.3. Communion of the Beliefs in their Works**

Tagore and Eliot are modern writers with different and unique backgrounds. They are considered the pioneers of modern poetry and drama with their vast learning. Their life-long quest for spiritual fulfillment has acquired a peculiar sensibility which is conveyed in the right spirit and language. The merging of the East and West lay in their acknowledgement of the religions these two writers follow, which is ultimately seen in their works. There is beauty in the communion of the religions of the East and



West primarily because of their contradicting teachings. For instance, Hindus do not really believe in the idea of eternity. That may be the reason why they have no word for “heaven” which for Christians is the sense of eternal reward. On the other hand, Heaven for the Hindus is a temporary abode until the soul finds freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Because life brings death, Hindus believe the only way not to die is not to be born at all. The Hindus profess that heaven is punishment for the good deeds done and hell is for the ones who have done bad deeds on earth. Either way, for the Hindus there is no such thing as reward once the process of birth takes place.

Despite the differences in concepts of heaven and hell, there are instances where the holy book of Gita, recommends total surrender to God as the means to win His grace. Even for Tagore, religion was not something the world declared to be true. For him it was the idea of total submission and surrender, which Christians would also agree. He went as far as proclaiming religion as a means of absorption in God and therefore losing his identity. It is almost appealing to the teachings of Christianity, except that Christians believe not in losing but finding ones identity in Christ.

In Poem 7 of *Gitanjali*, Tagore realizes that God is the supreme poet more powerful than him. When vanity and pride hits him, he is humbled at His feet realizing that he can only be a disciple before the master poet, i.e., God the creator: *My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight. O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet. Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music.*(7)

Tagore means to say that a poet is only an instrument, a means through which the divine giver of inspiration. A similar lyric is found in the song of David in Psalm 123:1, 2 *Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens. Behold as the eyes of the servants look to the hand of their masters, As the eyes of a maid to the*

*hand of her mistress, So our eyes look to the Lord our God, Until He has mercy on us.*

Tagore's wish for union with God is portrayed through the lines: *The night is nearly spent waiting for him in vain. I fear....forbid him not.* (77) Here we see a deep influence of the Bible upon the poet. The idea of union here is not just the meeting and greeting the poet wants to encounter, but on a deeper level it is the longing for salvation conveyed through the beloved waiting for the lover.

Both *Gitanjali* and *Psalms* relates to personal life, emotions and experiences of the author and the psalmists. The book of *Psalms* helps us deal with problems of life with refined understanding and shape our minds to walk closer with God. *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God* Psalm 42:1-2, describes the author's thirst for God, just like Tagore in *Gitanjali* whose soul is yearning for God. With the songs and hymns of praises to God, the poet and the psalmist both offer an act of surrender to the almighty before His feet. Therefore, we can see the quest for spirituality through the outburst of both the authors of the East and West.

In Eliot's case, his quest for spirituality was an outcome of the decay and disintegrated modern European society. His love for philosophy took him further in exploring oriental religions like Sanskrit and Pali, Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali's yoga sutra, Rig Veda and above all, Buddhism left an unforgettable impression on his mind. Eliot's later spiritual works, written after their significant religious conversion, in contrast to his earlier jeering secular works, convey a sense of faith and meaning despite the oppressive reality of modern life.

His famous poem *The Waste Land* (1920) is one example that proofs the influence of Indian religions, both Hinduism and Buddhism. The concluding line of the poem *Shantih, Shantih, Shantih* is a chant for peace blessing. In the Indian tradition it is believed that only Upanishads are permitted the triple benediction at the end. Eliot

also switched the order of the shastras (rules) while using the sequence datta (give), dayadhvam (compassionate), and damyata (self-controlled); which is actually forbidden in the Upanishads. According to the Brihadaranyaka- Upanishad, the three kinds of intelligent forms who came to Prajapati (Lord of creatures) as his disciples were gods, anti-gods, and men. All three were victims of one vice each and so Prajapati advised firstly the gods to control themselves, secondly the anti-gods to be compassionate, and finally men to be selfless and giving. This order, Eliot had tempered and so it is understood that the words of Upanishad is therefore not an Upanishad, but simply a Christian retread.

In 1950, in *The Cocktail Party*, Celia Coplestone, guilt-ridden by her adulterous affair goes to Sir Harcourt Reilly, the psychiatrist, for analyses and advice. He tells her:

Go in peace, my daughter.

Work out your salvation with diligence (Eliot 420).

If the concept of Christian salvation is applied to that of the Hindu and Buddhist concept of nirvana, then there is a whole lot of difference between them. Salvation means redemption from sin and the process of self-discovery; nirvana implies extinction of desire, and the attainment of enlightenment. It is difficult to explain how to attain nirvana which means giving up all fleshly desires, when the people in the play are victims of adultery. But in a deeper sense, Eliot actually plays with metaphors and imagery from both Eastern and Western philosophic traditions. The words 'work out' and 'diligence' can suffice the desire for achieving salvation successfully.

Eastern and Western dramas find their similarities in language and verse form, simple enough to capture the minds of the common people. Religious plays were on demand and the actors were actual priests. The church dominated the theatre of the time and

performances were given in sacred buildings. Miracle plays were on increasing demand and the church left no stone unturned to serve the purpose of depicting the whole history of the fall of man and his redemption. The theatre served as a means to evangelize modern men as miracle plays dealt with the plight of man's sinful nature. But the message does not simply end here as the remedial path to achieve heaven is only through discovering of the which had a great impact on Eliot's mind.

### **5.3.1. Pluralism in outlook towards life**

It may be considered that though Tagore and Eliot belonged to a different era as well as religious backgrounds, yet they perceived a pluralistic outlook towards life. This is definitely the influence of the modern era. The concept of hybridization of religion due to the influence of changing times can be taken into consideration. Because we live in a changing world most commonly affected by modernism and brought to us by massive industrialization, one cannot help but notice the change in religious understanding. Human beings have opened doors or rather options in the way they carry their customs and traditions. By adapting the ways and lifestyle from the rest of the world, they are in perfect harmony with one another. This includes religious practices and teachings. Syncretism in religion has brought a number of countless denominations even in Christianity that has led to a fusion of thought and belief.

### **5.4. Common themes**

There are a number of themes that are found similar in the works of these two Nobel Laureates. They are both inclined and influenced towards the teachings of Christ and Buddha. Their themes run mainly towards man and nature, life and death, time and matter, religion and spirituality, mysticism and martyrdom and many more. Both

writers have seen the horrors of the world wars and thus their works have a similar cry of the decade. In Eliot's works we find traces of Tagore's huge influence which marks the biggest proof of the communion of the East and the West. The themes commonly penned by these two writers of different ages will be discussed as follows.

#### **5.4.1. Alienation, isolation and loneliness**

One of the main themes of Eliot's poetry and drama is the theme of isolation and loneliness. Looking back to the modern age, death and pain became so common to men that they withdrew themselves from expressing their emotions. They were unable to reach out for help because everyone was suffering the same fate and the only way to express their inmost feeling was through silence. This has therefore resulted in isolation due to loneliness. In his poem *The Journey of the Magi*, Eliot uses this theme extensive to express his dilemma of being caught between the worlds of physical enjoyment and spiritual elation. The magi in the poem are emperors of the east who have all the luxury and comfort of the world and so when they face actual hardships in their journey, they start to complain and miss their life which they have left behind:

There were times we regretted  
The summer places on slopes, the terraces,  
The silken girls bringing sherbet (Eliot 98).

Eliot very realistically portrays the journey of the magi through the poem unlike the story in the *Bible*, which only focuses on the magi's visit to baby Jesus. However, in the poem, the poet very minutely delivers the sufferings and loneliness faced by the magi and their attendants throughout their journey. After their return from the journey, there is a change in perspective and outlook to life. The magus narrates that the experience was a long time ago and in this experience he has seen birth and death

at the same time. He says that if given an opportunity, he would do it again without a second thought. He narrates that the person he was when he left for the journey and the person he became later, felt like two different human being:

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods (Ibid 99).

In a metaphorical perspective, Eliot here is talking about the feeling of alienation when one does not feel like he fits within the circle. The magi are renewed in the spirit and the old customs and traditions followed by the people, no longer appeal to them. These lines can autobiographically be connected to Eliot's own state of religious conversion. It depicts individuals experiencing alienation after having embraced religious faith in a society with different beliefs and values. The magi who once preferred to travel by night which signifies a lack of spiritual direction, are now inclined towards the light thus bringing spiritual revelation. They are no more interested in embracing old values and systems, but are ready for 'another death' so that it can bring change and a new beginning. This will put an end to the old system which has no meaning in the new life.

Tagore grew up in a family of names, where literature, music and painting were prized. But growing up as a boy, his childhood was somewhat isolated and lonesome. As a result, he was a lonely outcast, a shy young boy who preferred to stay secluded from the world. But in his loneliness, the young Tagore found his lifelong spiritual treasure in the midst of nature. His short play, *The Postmaster*, can be considered the outcome of his own lonely childhood and the child protagonist Ratan represents the positive mindset of the young Tagore himself. The play runs along the theme of hope and aspiration, and the ability to dream even when it sounds quite impossible. In the

play, Ratan is a sickly boy who stays indoors in isolation due to his inability to move around by himself. But the sight of the people passing by his window from where he gazes out and dreams of being free, drives the theme of the play. Loneliness can be scary and intimidating but when looked into it positively it can actually take us to a more creative level. For it is in the state of seclusion that a writer pens down the best of his writings. This play therefore can be said to have the underlying theme of isolation and loneliness.

#### **5.4.2. Identity**

This theme is most common in the works of modern writers simply because modern men are inclined towards individualism and individual identity. This is so because we live in a society where privileges are more accessible to individuals and thus personal identity needs to be safeguarded. The concept of identity differs from person to person, writer to writer. For Tagore, identity means reflection of his soul, and communion with the universe and God. The entire collection of *Gitanjali* revolves around the poet's search for identity with his master which ultimately leads him in finding his soul. In it we find Tagore capturing the mystic self by transcending to a higher level of spirituality in the hopes of finding his identity in the communion with God. However, there are a number of obstacles before one achieves this union. As man is born in flesh, so are the desires of the flesh caught up with him. But the poem gives a positive note of contemplation that man can truly achieve this desire of union in a lifetime if he has the required humility and the power to lose himself for the sake of God.

Unlike Tagore, Eliot's concept of identity has nothing to do with union. He is not inclined towards the need for identity but is more sensitive towards the lack of

identity in the modern world. In his poem *The Hollow Men*, Eliot depicts the emptiness and hollowness of modern men who are equally lost in a barren land. The epigraph of the poem says: *Mistah Kurtz—he dead./ A penny for the Old Guy*. It is taken from Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* suggesting the hollow souls and the emptiness of the people existing in that land. They are not living, breathing human beings but are souls stuffed with straws and leaning against each other for some support: *Leaning together/ Headpiece filled with straw*. (Lines 3-4) These men have half identity and therefore whatever they say or do are left incomplete:

Our dried voices, when  
 We whisper together  
 Are quiet and meaningless  
 As wind in dry grass  
 Or rats' feet over broken glass  
 In our dry cellar  
 Shape without form, shade without colour,  
 Paralysed force, gesture without motion (Eliot 62).

They have qualities like human beings but have actually no meaning to life. They only take the form of shadow because they have no personal identity. They are souls that are afraid of direct eye contact unlike in the land of the living. Their prayers are half sung and their hopes are forever lost. In a simple explanation, it can be said that men who have lost their spirituality to modern world are like these hollow men with no sense of direction and who are forever lost.



### 5.4.3. Religion

It is one of the recurring themes in the works of both Tagore and Eliot. Tagore was influenced by Hinduism and Christianity even though he professed not to have followed any one particular religion. This theme of religion in his work will allow us to discover and unveil the truths about the time when religion was only an ideology to modern man. Tagore's religion is beyond the boundaries of institution. He believes in the values and principles of mankind and calls it the religion of man. Knowing the fact that all religions have their unique way of dealing with the idea of God, Tagore adapted some of the teachings of the west, which can be seen prominently in his Nobel Prize winning poem *Gitanjali*. In it was the drop of healing elixir for the world because right after his poem had gained popularity, the First World War broke out. The publication of this poem served as a source of hope and inspiration to men who were otherwise lost in despair. Life can only truly be understood through the concept of religion. No matter what the world may say in order to create doubt and confusion, yet the fact remains that religion throws light upon the paths of people who are looking for a meaning in life. Therefore, whatever religion it may be, if the focus centers around God and to the meaning of life, then that religion should be taken into consideration. Tagore's approach to spirituality is not a romantic one but is as real as the pores on our skin. For Tagore, religion is something which is transcendental and beyond the realm of the physical. Unless one experiences mystic encounters, the true sense of spirituality will always remain incomplete. It can be said that *Gitanjali* is the product of Tagore's mystic encounters. In his essay, the *Religion of Man*, Tagore describe his first spiritual revelation:

“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 memory a direct message of

spiritual reality. One day while I stood watching at 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 morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy. The invisible screen of the 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. That which was memorable in this experience was its human message, the sudden expansion of my consciousness in the super-personal world of man.” (79-80)

For Tagore, this mystical revelation was not a delusion, nor an unconscious experience. It was a feeling of disclosure, of spiritual reality and unity. Because religion cannot be experienced in confinement, Tagore leaves it open with the experiences of the world.

Eliot like Tagore was also influenced by a number of foreign religions but in 29 June 1927, he was officially converted to Anglicanism. He was greatly influenced by the teachings of Buddhism but doubted his conversion because he could not gather his thoughts upon giving up years of cultural and traditional teachings imparted to him throughout his life. Not only this, but the Buddhist idea of ‘losing the self’ was a contradiction to his beliefs. For him, the Christian teaching of ‘finding one-self’ was a more appealing and confirming belief.

Poems and plays written after his conversion all have the major theme of religion. In the *Journey of the Magi*, Eliot parallels the journey of a man from the physical to the spiritual world and is beautifully depicted in a beautiful lyric form. His long poem *Ash Wednesday* is considered to be his conversion poem, where he truly searches for a spiritual reality. Eliot says in *Ash Wednesday*:

Because I do not hope to turn again

Because I do not hope

Because I do not hope to turn

Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope

I no longer strive towards such things

(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)

Why should I mourn

The vanished power of the usual reign?

Because I did not hope to know again

The infirm glory of the positive hour

Because I do not think

Because I know I shall not know

The one veritable transitory power

Because I cannot drink

There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is nothing again (Eliot 57).

The poet here cries out for the presence of God without which he knows life has no meaning. He finally truly recognizes the futility of earthly glory to which he promises never to go back. He only rejoices in his present condition and hope to stay at it without regretting. We understand the fears in Eliot's prayer when he confesses his fears of backsliding. He cries for help from people who are mature in spirit to support newbies like him and uphold him in their prayers:

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death

Pray for us now and at the hour of our death (Ibid 58).

Eliot ends his poem with the prayer saying, *And let my cry come unto thee.* (p-66) knowing the path that leads to eternity is not easy but full of obstacles as depicted in the poem the *Journey of the Magi*.

The communion of Tagore and Eliot's belief lies not just in the fact that these two writers adapted from other religions but also to the understanding that spirituality to them is beyond specificity of distinct religion and religious teachings. Spirituality which is emergent from one's heart and soul is truer than the pursuance of religion with its outward practices. That is to say, spirituality cannot be taught but can only be attained through ones efforts. It is deeper and more personal than religion and therefore to realize it, one has to venture into the farthest corner of one's inner self.

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## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Religion and spirituality can be considered as two sides of the same coin. This is to say that though they are different in their approach, yet they are definitely interconnected. Religion can be defined as “an institution that impresses upon man certain code of ethics” or “belief in God or gods to be worshipped, usually expressed in conduct and ritual.” On the other hand, spirituality can be defined as “the quality of being non-physical” or “predominantly spiritual character as shown in thought, deeds and way of life.” To put it briefly, religion is a set of customs and beliefs that claim to get a person in a right relationship with God, a Supreme Being or Creator, and spirituality is a focus on a spiritual dimension or world instead of physical and earthly things.

While religion can be considered exclusive, spirituality is more inclusive. However, having said that, one needs to keep in mind the evolving nature of religion and spirituality. That is to say, that both religion and spirituality have evolved over time and cannot be considered the same as how it was decades back. The simplest example can be that of the teachings of the New and Old Testament from the Bible. With the coming of Christ, all laws that bounded man to ritualistic worship of God were broken. Instead of burnt offerings and incenses, Christ directed humanity to Him. This is to say that religion alone is not sufficient for the soul of man to receive salvation. Spirituality is the center of focus in Christ’s teaching and for any believer, the personal relationship with God or Christ is the ultimate source of spiritual fulfillment. The most common misconception about spirituality is that there are many forms of spirituality, and all are equally valid. Modern man define the attainment of spirituality through meditating in unusual physical positions, communing with nature, seeking

conversation with the spirit world, etc., but they are in fact false or misguided forms of spirituality. Because the spirit and the inner soul are distinctly different from each other, spirituality said to have been attained through connecting with the inner being is a misconception. True spirituality is possessing the Holy Spirit of God as a result of receiving salvation through Jesus Christ. True spirituality is the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in a person's life: "But the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Spirituality is all about becoming more like God, who is spirit (John 4:24) and having our character conformed to His image (Romans 12:1-2).

There are also contradicting comments and beliefs on the idea that religion is exclusive and spirituality is inclusive. In the words of Deepak Chopra, "Religion is belief in someone else's experience. Spirituality is having your own experience", which means that spirituality is personal and exclusive and that which cannot be corrupted by the idea of the world. Your spirituality is between you and your God rather than what religion teaches us.

The researcher's findings on the idea of spiritual fulfillment through this dissertation, has brought to light both Tagore and Eliot's thoughts. For Tagore, spiritual fulfillment lies not just in surrendering his will to God: "And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love" (Tagore 36), but also a form of spirituality found in realizing life through nature and the universe; "On the contrary, it meant crossing the limiting barriers of the individual, to become more than man, to become one with the All" (Tagore 5). However, Eliot's approach is more of the Christian virtue of realization and repentance of one's sins that will ultimately direct man to the path of salvation: "And now I know that my business is not to run away, but to pursue, not to avoid being found but to seek" (Eliot 338).



Eliot's religiosity in poetry has been commented upon by many critics. Some considered it as the highest achievement of his life time whereas some considered it as too religious for the sake of literature. Some critics described *Four Quartets* as Eliot's greatest work, a literary and spiritual triumph; Watkins, however, argues that "After Eliot turned to Anglo-Catholicism....in 1928, his poetic power began to wane. Because the subject of his later poetry treats a great and noble religious faith, a believer wishes to regard it as great and noble poetry. And presumably genuine Waste Landers....would like to find in the later poetry not only art but also the end of the search for grounds for belief" (Watkins 53).

A different observation again of interlinked poetic and spiritual development is offered by Toien; he sees Eliot's poetry as a progression "from the barren aimlessness of *The Waste Land* to the highly directed, intensely focused Christian mysticism of his last major work, *Four Quartets*" (Toien 37). Indeed, "religious" themes can be found throughout Eliot's work, not only the plays and poems which have been discussed in this research paper but also some later poems, such as *A Song for Simeon* and others.

Tagore's spirituality is inclusive of nature, mother earth, his homeland, patriotism and of course God. Tagore points out that, "Trees are the earth's endless effort to speak to the listening heaven" (Ray 445), showing us his belief to a kind of spiritual connection between man and nature or nature in itself. Furthermore, his concept of spirituality of the soul finds its home in the concept that the soul has an undivided and inseparable connection with the spirit: "The realization of our soul has its moral and its spiritual side. The moral side represents training of unselfishness, control of desire; the spiritual side represents sympathy and love. They should be taken together and never separated. The cultivation of the merely moral side of our nature leads us to the dark region of narrowness and hardness of heart, to the intolerant arrogance of

goodness; and the cultivation of the merely spiritual side of our nature leads us to a still darker region of revelry in intemperance of imagination” (Ray 90). Tagore assumed that “True knowledge is that which perceives the unity of all things in God.” Tagore through his vast immortal literary works taught us that, the whole world is an expression of God, and that there is no unbridgeable gap between our world and God’s, and that God is the one who can offer the greatest love and fulfillment.

Both Tagore and Eliot are writers of the modern age; an age that saw so many deaths and decay and that not only of the physical but also of the spiritual. This death of the physical and the spiritual world have engraved in them a deep sense of loss but also planted the desire to bring back spiritual rejuvenation to the world they lived in. The accounts of all their works noted and cited in this research are the byproduct of their desires and inner cry. An earnest attempt has been made by the researcher to justify the quest for spiritual fulfillment in their works but also leaving ample space for future research.

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