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## Aesthetics of Spiritual Nationalism in Rabindranath Tagore's *Sadhana- The Realization of Life*

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### Abstract

*Tagore's views on soul, God, beauty, action, dharma, salvation, nation etc. represent the concept of spiritual nationalism. Like Gitanjali, Tagore's creation under discussion constitutes one of his precious gifts to the nation. For the students of spiritual nationalism, this creation is a guiding star as it reflects on the meaning of the esoteric experiences that our rishis felt for themselves and expressed for the benefit of the seekers after truth. Impressed by his spiritual depth discernible in Gitanjali, WB Yeats says, "I read Rabindranath Tagore every day, to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world.... He is the first among our saints who has not refused to live, but has spoken out of life itself, and that is why we give him our love." (Introduction to Gitanjali V-VI) This paper aims to highlight the concept of spiritual nationalism dwelt upon by Tagore in Sadhana-The Realization of Life.*

**Key Words** : God, Soul, Action, Love, Beauty, Realization, Liberation, Nation

**Aesthetics of Spiritual Nationalism in Rabindranath Tagore's *Sadhana- The Realization of Life***

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Tagore's prime objective of writing *Sadhana-The Realization of life* ( hereafter referred to as SRL), as he himself asserts, is to provide the western readers, "an opportunity of coming into touch with the ancient spirit of India as revealed in our sacred texts and manifested in the life of today."(SRL,3) Tagore is of the view that the aim for which the ancient Indian sages lived in forests was to expand their consciousness by growing with and growing into the surroundings. They wanted to harmonize between man's spirit and the spirit of the soul and this work, they believed, was possible only through identification with the objects of nature. Man's superiority in ancient India consisted not in the power of possession but in the power of union between soul and super soul. To achieve this power, those who were once meat eaters gave up taking animal food as a mark of sympathy and love for life. Having experienced the presence of the divine in their heart, they were free of all selfish desires and having seen God in all activities of the world had attained calmness, got united with all and entered into the life of the universe. This sublime state is considered by Indian sages and rishis as the ultimate end of all human activities. Enveloping soul in a dead cell of callous habits amounts to spiritual death for them. Man's spirit can comprehend all and this faculty of comprehension leads him to love all as members of one family. Such a loving person attains the supreme goal of union with God and is in perfect harmony with man' nature. On the contrary, those who believe in the power of possession thoughtlessly and aimlessly accumulate wealth. Having inflated ego and a deep sense of pride in illusionary possessions, they close for themselves all doors to the kingdom of God. They fail to expand their consciousness and miserably lose the golden opportunity of finding connection with the Light of God which is imminent in space as well as in our spirit. As Tagore says, " He is all

conscious in space, or the world of extension, and he is all conscious in soul or the world of intension.”(SRL, 15) The rishis of India asserted emphatically, “To know him in this life is to be true; not to know him in this life is the desolation of death.” (SRL, 16) These rishis felt that the same energy which vibrates in the limitless forms of the world manifests itself in our inner being as soul. They considered birth and death as life in its aspect of appearing and in its aspect of departure. William Wordsworth puts forth an identical concept of life and death in these lines of his famous poem ‘The Immortality Ode’,

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;  
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar.

To develop broad outlook towards life, we should realize some central truth. This is what the Upanishads lay emphasis on when they say, “ know thine own soul”, and this is what is needed for establishing a contact with deeper reality hidden in every men . The key to contact with super consciousness lies in the consciousness of soul. To detach our soul from the limited self is the first step towards realizing the cosmic consciousness. To achieve success in this objective, one need not renounce the worldly life and the great teachers of India have never preached for the renouncement of the world. Gautama Buddha says to Sadhu Simha,” It is true, Simha, that I denounce activities but the activities that lead to the evil in words, thoughts or deeds. It is true, Simha, I preach extinction, but only the extinction of pride, lust, evil thought and ignorance and not that of forgiveness, love, charity and truth.”(quoted inSRL,21) The limiting of consciousness within the boundary of personal self creates ego and thus becomes the source of all evils. When we succeed to shake off our limited self and attain the expansion of consciousness, we can achieve Bodhi and become Buddha. As Tagore ruminates, “When the heat and motion of blind impulses and passions distract soul on all sides, we neither give, nor receive anything truly. But when we find our center in our soul by the power of self-restrain, by the force that harmonizes all warring elements and unifies those that are apart, then all our isolated impressions reduce themselves to wisdom and all our momentary impulses of heart find their completion in love, then all the petty details of our life reveal an infinite purpose, and all our thoughts and deeds unite themselves inseparably in an internal harmony.”(SRL, 23)

Suppression of worldly desires and deep passion for connection with God consciousness is the key to the realization of soul. Hence, the sincerest prayer that has arisen from the human heart says, "O thou self-revealing one, reveal thyself in me. We are in misery because we are creatures of self- the self that is unyielding and narrow, that reflects no light, that is blind to the infinite. From unreality lead me to the real, from darkness to the light, from death to immortality." (SRL, 25-26) The devotee in Tagore prays to God for sweeping away all his sins which invariably cloud the purity of consciousness. Sin makes man go with the finite at the cost of his connection with the infinite that is in him. This deviation is the defeat of his soul by his sinful self. In sin we run after fleeting pleasures which, although undesirable, appear as desirable because of our wrong perception of the reality and the pressure of passions. This false projection of temporal priorities breaks the harmony of life with the result that we miserably lose that which is good, the good which is the daily bread of our souls. In sin we are confined to ourselves but in the good we belong to all. Righteousness is our divine food which can help us in our movement towards the eternal. As regards the genesis of misery, Tagore says, "The real misery of man is in the fact that he has not fully come out, that he is self- obscured, lost in the midst of his own desires."(SRL,27)The longing for merger into God is more deeply inherent in the soul of man than his hunger and thirst for bodily sustenance, his lust for wealth and high position. It is through his thirst for this merger that man's self attains ultimate meaning which lies in the realization of soul. Such a man's soul seems to watch the Creator in the very act of creation of a new world, when his soul draws her heavy curtain of self aside, when her veil is lifted and she is face to face with her eternal lover. Before he attains this sublime state, his life remains a life of habits and appears to him as a machine to be mastered when it is useful and to be guarded against when it is dangerous.

In the chapter titled 'The Problem of Evil' Tagore emphatically points out that evil is not a problem but a necessity to maintain balance. It is like the firmness of earth that hurts the falling child who is learning to walk. Human life is like the river whose banks give its water an onward motion. In the depth of human experience what appears as imperfect is nothing but the manifestation of the perfect. Evil is like the shutting of eyes which does not count. What counts is the opening of eyes. Good is what constitutes our expanded self. To run the life of goodness is to have love for others. As Tagore says, "Pleasure is for one's own self, but goodness is

concerned with the happiness of all humanity and for all times.”(SRL,35) The life of the self is undesirable and if lived in accordance with the universal law, life is desirable. As he puts it, “It is our life of the self that causes conflicts and complications everywhere, upsets the normal balance of society and gives rise to miseries of all kinds.”(SRL,38) In order to be good and happy, we have to surrender our individual well to the sovereignty of the universal will and that is why true freedom lies in the freedom of surrender to the will of God.

Man has two selves- collective and individual. His collective self has to acknowledge the rule of universal law and submit to the dictates of his surroundings. But his individual self, being separate from all, stands alone as an incomparable and unique despite the tremendous gravitation of all things. The annihilation of individual self is the highest ideal of humanity. That is why the ideal of selflessness is taught with all fervor in all faiths. Selfishness is the result of our ignorance. When we make self the ultimate object of our life, “we are doomed to disappointment like the man who tries to reach his destination by firmly clutching the dust of the road. When a man exclusively arranges for an enjoyment of the self, he has fire but has no dough to make bread with.”(SRL, 42) All wise men tell us, “Set yourself free from *avidya*; know your true soul and be saved from the grip of the self which imprisons you.”(SRL,42) The highest idea of self is to reveal itself and become perfect like a flower that has blossomed out from the bud, pouring its sweetness all around. Self is like a lamp which when lighted finds the meaning of its existence and its relation with all things around it is established. As long as it does not sacrifice its fund of oil, it keeps itself dark. But the purposeless sacrifice is what the enlightened persons like Buddha have never taught. Sacrifice for the widening of love leads to self-abnegation and herein lies the true meaning of the Vedic teachings. The freedom of self lies in working for love regardless of pain it may cause and herein lies the essence of the teachings of the Gita. The meaning of self lies in the realization of yoga, of union with God and His creation and not in separateness or individuality which symbolizes *maya* or illusion. In its finite aspect the self is conscious of its separateness and is persistent in its attempt to become better than others. But in its infinite aspect it desires to connect with its source and as a result of divine connection it attains perfection. Thus, the annihilation of selfishness leads to illumination and revelation of infinite joy by the light of love. To seek union with the infinite is the true end of self. To realize this end, it must bend its head low in love and humility and take its stand where

the infinite and the finite meet. “It has to gain by loss and rise by its falling to the feel of God. We must know that it is only the revelation of the infinite which is endlessly new and eternally beautiful in us, and which gives the only meaning to our self.” (SRL, 52)

The fifth chapter titled ‘Realization in Love’ talks of the co-existence of the infinite and the finite, God and soul. According to some of our philosophers, “There is no such thing as finite; it is but *maya* or illusion. The real is the infinite and it is only *maya*, the unreality which causes the appearance of the finite.”(SRL,53) These philosophers unanimously accept the fact that the world in its essence is a reconciliation of pairs of opposing forces. These forces, despite acting from opposite directions, act in harmony. The principal of harmony in the diversity of nature is the mystery of all mysteries which is at the back of all our delights. Outwardly, nature is busy and actively at work but has a secret chamber within the heart where the noise of her factory is heard like music. These two antithetical aspects of nature make us feel astonished at its working. Externally, she is restless but internally she is all peace and silence. We see her restlessness when we see her external aspect but within her is a limitless silence. The tragedy of man is that he is focused on the external natural upheavals, oscillations and variations and is totally unaware of the gems of creative and all sustaining joy, underlying the visible aspect of nature. That is why our seers say, “From joy are born all creatures, by joy they are sustained, towards joy they progress, and into joy they enter.” (SRL, 58). It is the nature of abounding joy to manifest and realize itself in forms which represent world of law. While the joy with form is law, the joy without form is love. No doubt, we are separate but this separation is not absolute otherwise there would have been absolute misery and unmitigated evil in the world and we could never find a medium through which we could unite with our Creator. Our soul has been separated from God because of the fullness of love and that is why it can not only defy sufferings and evils but also transform them into beauty. Since its separation from God, soul is on its journey from law to love, from discipline to liberation. The love which is the ultimate meaning of everything around us is the feeling of joy which is at the root of all creation. Love induces us to attach greater importance to the giver than to his gifts. While our body and mind which are gifts are within boundaries of law, our spirit being love has the power to transcend the limits of law.

The ideal of desirableness taught by Gautama Buddha finds expression when Tagore says, “It is our desires that limit the scope of our self-realization, hinder our extension of consciousness, and give rise to sin, which is the innermost barrier that keeps us apart from our God, setting up disunion and the arrogance of exclusiveness. When we look at the world through the prism of our desires, we make it small and narrow, and fail to perceive its full truth.”(SRL, 62). Man’s true freedom lies in his association with the whole world. As Tagore puts it, “ When man feels the rhythmic throb of the soul life of the whole world in his own soul, then is he free, then he enters into the secret courting that goes on between this beautiful world bride, veiled with the veil of the many colored finiteness and the bridegroom in his spotless white. Then he knows that he is the partaker of this gorgeous love festival, and he is the honored guest at the feast of immortality.”(SRL,63) Like God, joy is everywhere. It is “inthe earth’s green coloring of grass, the blue serenity of the sky. Joy is the realization of the truth of oneness, the oneness of our soul with the world of the world soul, with the supreme lover.” (SRL,65).Like joy that expresses itself through law, soul expresses itself through action. To release itself from the mist of vagueness, soul creates fresh fields of action and remains busy devising new forms of activity even such as are not needed for the purposes of its earthly life. The Upanishads say, “In the midst of activity alone will thou desire to live a hundred years. The realization of the infinite without the world of action is not possible. Our great teachers warn us, “ to work we must live, to love we must work; life and activity are inseparably connected.”(SRL,69). Like the body that despite remaining busy with its inside activities seeks external objects for its fulfillment, our soul lives on its internal feelings and imaginations and at the same time is in the need of external objects to feed its inner consciousness. Thus, true spirituality stands for balance in the co-relation of the within and the without. That is why Tagore puts forth the view that the true striving in the quest of truth, of dharma, consists not in the neglect of action but in the effort to attune it closer and closer to the external harmony. Tagore is also of the view that joy reigns supreme when all work leads to God and the union of soul and God is not possible without action accomplished with devotion to God. He who thinks to reach God by running away from the world cannot expect to meet Him anywhere. He exhorts us to be able to say that we are reaching Him here in this very spot, now at this moment. We must be able to assure our self that as in our actions we are realizing ourselves, so in ourselves we are realizing Him who is the self of self. We must be able



to say, “ In my work is my joy, and in joy does the joy of my joy abide.” (SRL, 78) Since we fail to give ourselves joyously and entirely to our work, we fail to find our work as holiday like the river finds its holiday in its onward flow, the fire in its outburst of flame, the scent of the flame in the permeation of the atmosphere. As regards the realization of beauty Tagore holds the view that unless we develop the ability to see harmony and truth everywhere and in every object, we cannot understand the beauty of things which actually lies at the core of things irrespective of their external aspect and requires us to have penetrating eye. As he says, “ The more we comprehend the harmony in the physical world as well as in our soul, the more our life shares the gladness of creation and our apprehension of the blissfulness of the spirit becomes universal. This is the ultimate object of our existence.”( SRL,78)

The subject of the realization of the infinite has been treated by Tagore as the most important issue of human life. Life without this realization, according to him, is meaningless. As he puts it, “ Man becomes true if in this life he can apprehend God; if not, it is the greatest calamity for him.”( SRL,78) Tagore is highly critical of those people who look to God as an ally to favor them in politics, warfare, money making or in social obligations and put Him in the same list with their summer houses, motor cars, or bank balance. When we know that whatever we have is His gift, we realize the giver in the gifts. Hence, our possessions have significance not in themselves but in relation they establish with God. The realization of God does not lie in attainment of something like worldly objects. Instead, it lies in losing our own self. The Upanishads say, “Be lost altogether in Brahma like an arrow that has completely penetrated its target.”(SRL, 82) Echoing this sense, Tagore says, “ Our daily worship of God is not really the process of gradual acquisition of Him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union.”(SRL, 82) We seek infinite pleasures infinite things and herein lies the tragedy of human life. When we know that our soul is above the worldly possessions, we become free from their bondage. Our abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving ourselves up to what is greater than ourselves. The desire for getting belongs to our finite self but the side of existence whose direction is towards the infinite seeks not wealth but freedom and joy. In the region of materialism which is the region of diversity we grow by getting, but in the spiritual region which is the region of unity we grow by losing. Our life is like a stream which says, “ I shall become sea.”(SRL,86) On both sides of its banks it has numerous fields and forests,

villages and towns; it can serve them in various ways but it can have only partial relation with these because it has its affinity with the water of sea and finds its finality when it reaches the sea. The truth of our soul is that she must ever be getting closer and closer to God and that all her movements should be modulated by this ultimate idea. The truth is to be realized by soul, by joy, by love and not by intellect. Love brings about union whereas intellect sets us apart from the things to be known. The Upanishads say, "he who knows Brahma, the true, the all-conscious and the infinite hidden in the depths of the soul, which is the supreme sky (inner sky of consciousness) enjoys all objects of desire and union with the all-knowing Brahma. When soul feels connected with God, she considers the world as her own household by the right of knowing the Master of the world as her own lord. It is only then that all her services become sacrifices at the altar of love, all her trials and tribulations become the sweet will of God. So long as she remains in dark, lifts not her veil and does not recognize her lover, she weeps in sorrow and "passes from starvation to starvation, from trouble to trouble, from fear to fear."(SRL, 90) Unable to get rid of this predicament by her efforts she inconsolably cries, "take me across to the other shore."(SRL,90) Like a child dissatisfied with its dolls, her heart pathetically utters, "Not this, not this."(SRL, 90) But what is the other? Where is the further shore? In truth this and the other shore is one and the same in God, waiting to be recognized in love. Indeed, she is taken across to the other shore the moment she is able to say that this home of mine is thine, that all my work is thine.

As is evident from the above discussion, Tagore is a spiritualist, a realist, a nationalist a writer- all rolled into one. The timeless work under discussion is an invaluable gift to the nation and the entire universe at large. His reflections on soul, God, religion, nation, evils of life, beauty of creation and realization raise him to the position of a rishi steadfastly devoted to the cause spiritual nationalism.

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