

## Indian Knowledge Systems and Tagore

Dr. Anupam R Nagar

Honorary Provost (Arya Kanya Gurukul) & Principal,  
Gurukul Mahila Arts & Commerce College, Porbandar, Gujarat, India

The Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) have codified the concept of *darshan* at various levels. *Anubhuti* (Experience) and *Nirikshan* (Observation) have been the guiding lights for writers down the ages. However, not many, like Tagore have selectively assimilated and accommodated IKS-*darshan* through their Oeuvre. I propose in this paper to decipher some of the illustrious IKS writings through one of Tagore's most popular compositions in world literature – *Where the Mind is without fear*.

*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.*

(Gitanjali: 35)

1. The first line *Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high* encodes the idea of Fearlessness at the mental level in absolute affinity with what Lord Krishna advises Arjuna in the **Bhagavad Gita**:

सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं त्रज |  
अहं त्वां सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः || 1

“Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear.” (18: 66)

Tagore quite understood the need to transfer knowledge to the new generation in a language that they were familiar with. At the same time it was mandatory to re-contextualize and re-critique and therefore concepts emanating from *Vedanta* and the *Upanishads* have been rephrased. *Abhaya* is a necessary mental state for both *Gyana* and *Nirvana*. Of the 26 Divine treasures of a virtuous human being, Lord Krishna mentions the **absence of fear** as the very first essential virtue. It is only when one is mentally fearless that he would be able to practice *Dharma*. One's head can only be held high when one possesses the courage, the boldness, the guts and the will to tread on the path of goodness and godliness.

**How to cite this paper:** Dr. Anupam R Nagar "Indian Knowledge Systems and Tagore" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-7 | Issue-5, October 2023, pp.458-460, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd59950.pdf



IJTSRD59950

Copyright © 2023 by author (s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



The Upanishad rightly declares, *Detachment, faith, fear, Raga, shyness, modesty, shame. etc.*, are only in the mind. Fear is a product of ignorance or *Avidya*.

2. The second line *Where knowledge is free* encodes the typical Indian philosophy of education. In fact, the etymological meaning of the word *Veda* is knowledge – of two types. One type is subject to time, space and person, and the other is realization of Self, independent of all subjections. The former is called *aparajana*, relative knowledge, because it is related to objects, while the latter is called *parajana*. True knowledge simply flows. It cannot be limited. Truly, Absolute knowledge or Bliss is synonymous with realizing God and that which is eternal and blissful for all time can never be bound. True knowledge flows freely from one age to another, one period to another. In fact, *Gyana* is *Speech - sabda* which is *brahmayi* (whose essence is *Brahman*), *characharmayee* (Where the World is *Brahman*), *vangmayee* (An Incarnation of Goddess Saraswati), *Srimayee* (An Incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi). Thus, true knowledge emancipates and is transcendental in character.

3. The Third line *Where the world has not been broken up into fragments/By narrow domestic walls* resonates with the idea of वसुधैव कुटुंबकम्,<sup>2</sup> which is a thought from the **Maha-Upanishad**. The entire world is one family and hence there should be no room for fragmentation of any kind. In fact, Synthesis and harmony have been the watch-words in the Indian Intellectual tradition. All through history one observes how the Indian civilization has always aimed to connect, to join, to coalesce multi-faceted forms of knowledge systems and synthesize them as per the needs of the time. In fact, Tagore is reiterating and advocating the philosophical concept of Universal brotherhood and the interconnectedness of all human beings. In other words, the collective well-being of the state has to be prioritized over the needs of the individual or the nucleus family.
4. The fourth line *Where words come out from the depth of truth* echoes the verses from the **Taittiriya Upanishad**: सत्यं वदा; धर्मं चर<sup>3</sup> (Speak the Truth and Abide by your Dharma) Tagore's Ideal citizen would adhere to the path - *marga* of Truth and Righteousness. In fact, truth is a form of reverence to the Divine. The core ideas of the first three lines – Fearlessness of mind – *Abhaya*; Love of Knowledge – *Gyana* and Fraternity (Love of Mankind) – *Sangh-Neeti* would invariably lead a *sadhak* to only give voice to *Satya* (Truth). His words (*Vak*) would amount to obedience to the will of God. Rightly it is said, Where there is Truth, there is Dharma; where there is Dharma, there is Light; Where there is Light, there is Happiness. Conversely speaking, Tagore wants us to shun falsehood (*Asatya*) and unrighteousness (*adharma*).
5. The fifth line *Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection* is directly proportionate to the *Ashtanga Marga*<sup>4</sup> propounded by Gautam Buddha. Right Action (*Samyak Karma*) leading to perfection would only find realization through Right View (*Samyak Drishti*), Right Resolution (*Samyak Sankalp*), Right Speech (*Samyak Vak*), Right Livelihood (*Samyak Jivan*), Right Thought (*Samyak Vichar*), Right Effort (*Samyak Shram*) and Right Mindfulness (*Samyak Mana*). The wheel of *Karma* quintessentially is the wheel of tireless action or dynamism. A nation could only progress if its citizens stand united in their pursuit of perfection. Quintessentially, Right Action prevents the birth of evil and disagreeable states of mind. It is a supra-mundane state that eventually leads to Right Mindfulness. Tagore echoing Buddha emphasized upon goodness in action (*samyak-karma*). The mark of good action is harmony in thought, word, and deed. When there is no such harmony, the action contradicts what is said or thought. Rightly, Buddha went on to declare that good action is conducive to good spiritual progress (*samyak-sadhana*).
6. The sixth line *Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way/ Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit* reverberates with the thoughts and works of Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda appropriately said *All reasoning ends only in finding Unity; so we first use analysis, then synthesis. This is the heart and soul of Vedanta Philosophy, the Alpha and the Omega.*<sup>5</sup> Behind the apparent diversity of existence there is a fundamental Unity and therefore Tagore supports the thought that there is only One reality and consciousness that transcends all definitions. Rig veda too states *The Truth is one; Sages name it Various* - एकम सत् , विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति.<sup>6</sup> Man's reason has to remain as steady and as unaffected as the *sthit-pragna* mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita. Tagore shunned orthodoxy (dead habit) of every kind. The stream of reason driven by **Fearlessness, Truth, Right Thought, Right Knowledge and Right Effort** cannot ever lose its way or degenerate into inconclusive states of mind.
7. The seventh line *Where the mind is led forward by thee/Into ever-widening thought and action* codifies the *Navadha bhakti* spoken about in the Ramayana. श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम्। अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम्<sup>7</sup> The ninth form of bhakti – *Atma-nivedanam* (Total/complete surrender) is an important principle in the growth and development of the true self. Man should perform his prescribed duties in a spirit of renunciation and surrender to the will of God and without reservation of any kind. When surrendering to God we resolve to give up all external & internal complexities of the world. This is imperative for attaining to the ever-widening state of Thought and Action. In fact, this is a form of **Trust** in the belief that it is God alone who can direct our mind and deliver us from the misery, the trial and tribulations of the world. Thus the process envisages a reduction in our earthly burdens wherein God would take care on our behalf. Ego consequently has to be put aside to attain spiritual growth.
8. The ultimate line *Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake* is no different from the idea of **Ram-Rajya**, Plato's **The Republic**,

Voltaire's **Eldorado**, Thomas More's **Utopia**, Sidney's **Arcadia** or Aurobindo's **Supra-consciousness**. Almost every civilization has had an ideal state to realize. Tagore codifies the idea of transcendence which can be attained to *here and now*. Whether it is self-realization for the self or for the country it is a process that has to be initiated in a spirit of fearlessness.

Accordingly, a number of texts of the Indian Intellectual Tradition ranging from **the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Bhagavad Gita**; a number of ideas from Buddhist philosophy, Swami Vivekananda, Sri

#### References:

- [1] <https://www.speakingtree.in/allslides/content-361143/28/09/2023>
- [2] <https://school.careers360.com/hi/vasudhaiva-kutumbakam-essay-in-hindi-essy/28/09/2023>
- [3] <https://upanishads.org.in/upanishads/7/1/11/1/28/09/2023>
- [4] <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eightfold-Path/28/09/2023>
- [5] <https://vivekavani.com/swami-vivekananda-quotes-unity/#:~:text=This%20is%20the%20corner%20%E2%80%93%20stone,the%20Alpha%20and%20the%20Omega.&text=All%20reasoning%20ends%20only%20in,first%20use%20analysis%2C%20then%20syntesis.&text=In%20the%20heart%20of%20things%20there%20is%20Unity%20still/28/09/2023>
- [6] <https://jagrayam.com/?p=21619/28/09/2023>
- [7] श्रवण (परीक्षित), कीर्तन (शुकदेव), स्मरण (प्रह्लाद), पादसेवन (लक्ष्मी), अर्चन (पृथुराजा), वंदन (अक्रूर), दास्य (हनुमान), सख्य (अर्जुन) और आत्मनिवेदन (बलि राजा) - इन्हें नवधा भक्ति कहते हैं। रामचरितमानस (अरण्य काण्ड) में नवधा भक्ति. भगवान् श्रीराम जब भक्तिमती शबरीजी के आश्रम में आते हैं तो भावमयी शबरीजी उनका स्वागत करती हैं, उनके श्रीचरणों को पखारती हैं, उन्हें आसन पर बैठाती हैं और उन्हें रसभरे कन्द-मूल-फल लाकर अर्पित करती हैं। प्रभु बार-बार उन फलों के स्वाद की सराहना करते हुए आनन्दपूर्वक उनका आस्वादन करते हैं। इसके पश्चात् भगवान राम शबरीजी के समक्ष नवधा भक्ति का स्वरूप प्रकट करते हुए उनसे कहते हैं कि-

नवधा भक्ति कहउँ तोहि पाहीं।

सावधान सुनु धरु मन माहीं।।

प्रथम भगति संतन्ह कर संग्गा।

दूसरि रति मम कथा प्रसंग्गा।।

गुर पद पकंज सेवा तीसरि भगति अमान।

चौथि भगति मम गुन गन करइ कपट तजि गान। (चौपाई - दोहा 35)

मन्त्र जाप मम दृढ़ बिस्वासा।

पंचम भजन सो बेद प्रकासा।।

Aurobindo and many more emanate from the texture of this prayer – *Where the mind is without fear*. The poem also illustrates the theory of Comparative Literature and has a layer of meaning that could be discerned and decoded by the learned – superior reader.

#### Work Cited:

1. Tagore, Rabindranath, "Gitanjali 35" from Gitanjali (Song Offerings): A Collection of Prose Translations Made by the Author from the Original Bengali, intro. by W. B. Yeats (London: MacMillan, 1913). Public domain.

छठ दम सील बिरति बहु करमा।

निरत निरंतर सज्जन धरमा।।

सातवँ सम मोहि मय जग देखा।

मोतेँ संत अधिक करि लेखा।।

आठवँ जथालाभ संतोषा।

सपनेहुँ नहि देखइ परदोषा।।

नवम सरल सब सन छलहीना।

मम भरोस हियँ हरष न दीना।। (1-5 चौपाई दोहा 36)