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# Religion, Science and Literature: An Integrated Vision of World Peace

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## Abstract

Religion, being lamp of soul is one of the potent primordial instincts in human beings, finds expression in divergent ways in literature. Literature not only nurtures and promotes this religious instinct but simultaneously it also saves it from the dross of superstition and ostentation, consequently by adopting the process of purification and filtration it reflects its real nature. All literary bards of the East and the West in their literary compositions have reflected upon religion in their own way. The universe with its cosmic nature also reveals this religious feeling in a peculiar way as the divine postulate embedded within its structure. Refined and filtered religious feeling has its roots in rationality and scientific thinking; therefore, the great scientists, philosophers, poets, saints and seers also build a bridge between science and religion. Religious light comes from the innate divinity with positive, constructive and altruistic outlook to life which ultimately takes us to world peace with love and sympathy towards human and non-human world. Thus literature is the powerful expression of real religion with overt sentiments and covert reasoning and rationality, hence it may be instrumental to promote world peace, progress and happiness; consequently it may lead the world to bright and better future in 21st century.

The present paper intends to surface the real nature of religion with scientific thinking embedded in the works of some eminent literary bards. The religious undercurrent in the sublime literary works reflecting true spirit of religion may pave a way to world's unity, peace and fraternity.

**Keywords**: Culture, materialism, morality, rationality, religion, science, spirituality.

Covering a long journey from Stone Age to Space Age mankind has presently reached the most inspired age of the science to enjoy this wonderful world by liberating itself from the tyranny of the environment. But the proper adjustment and meaningfulness of life in this new world requires liberation from the tyranny of our inner nature

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through the realization and training of the spiritual self. The crowning achievement of the modern scientific culture is that it has created in man a rational and intellectual being, but this image of man is not its real dignity as it has inherent weakness which is sure to destroy this most advanced and beautiful civilization one day in the near future as Pratibha Ray, the recipient of the Bharatiya Jnanpith's Moortidevi Award in 1993, articulating her voice in *Yajnaseni* through Draupadi says:

> From lord Vyas I have heard that five thousand years from now man will reach the pinnacle of achievement of civilization, culture and science. With the help of science he will establish contact with planets and stars. Then if, because of a wrong decision, power hungry persons launch a great war, what a terrible situation will arise on account of the weapons created by that very science. (396)

We have come to this world in human form to love and create, not to hate and destroy. Therefore, the most challenging task of the day is how to transform this rational and intellectual man accomplished with techno-science knowledge into spiritual and moral being by eliminating all kinds of baser passions from its nature. Socrates was also of the considered opinion "that there could not be fulfillment of human personality without adequate attention to the spiritual dimension of man." (Radhakrishnan 1976, 14) Alexander when he invaded India was also impressed by the austerity of the majestic wisdom of spirituality as he realized that natural desires like thirst and hunger are quenched by water and food but the craving for possession, being an artificial one, can never be satisfied, therefore shortly before his death he celebrated a banquet inviting nine thousand people and prayed for peace, for the partnership of all peoples of the world to live in amity and concord. Ashoka was also impressed by the spiritual power as he realized that real victory could not be established by war and violence but by the power of *dharma*, therefore after Kalinga war he made a declaration that hence onward the drums of *dharma* would be beaten in place of the drums of war. So far as the impact of spirituality is concerned, it won't be an exaggeration to state that the hoary wisdom of ancient Indian culture emerging out of the minds of its sages, saints and seers not only shaped the mind of her people, but also influenced the mind of Asia, and in turn Asia influenced the mind of Europe and the world as a whole.

Religion is not a dogmatic conformity or ceremonial piety, but is an insight into the nature of Ultimate Reality and mystery of the world. It is the state of awakening according to Buddhists, and change of consciousness according to Christians. It is self discovery or recovery, the soul's dialogue with itself. It is self-scrutiny, inner cleaning with a change of heart. Moreover, it is a science of life with a set of values and standards. With the true spirit of religion a person conquers the self and that conquest is greater than the conquest of the world as M.K. Gandhi asserts that "To conquer the subtle passions seems to me to be harder far than the physical conquest of the world by the force of arms." (511) Hence religion in its high ideal is a spiritual adventure taking all beings in the fold of one family. Sankaracharya, *advaitavadi*- a non-dual philosopher, the great prophet of reconciliation and universal harmony, takes religion to the supreme stage stressing on spiritual and ethical exercises for the happiness

of the world by articulating its goal –*bahujana hitaya, bahujana sukhaya*. Hence, the thinkers of the East and the West have felt the need of integrating scientific and spiritual life for the great future of humanity. Literature may be the best refinery for the purgation of religious feeling with logic, reasoning and rationality. R.N. Tagore in the poem "False Religion" ridiculing false religion implores God to save mankind by destroying it:

> O Lord, breaking false religion,
> Save the blind!
> Break ! O break
> The altar that is drowned in blood
> Let your thunder strike
> Into the prison of false religion. (30-35)

'Knowledge gives us power, love gives us fullness' (Radhakrishnan, 1984:171) and the mingling of the moral power of love and the vision of the spiritual unity forms the higher nature of man which solves all problems of the existence. Science and technology can save humanity from degrading conditions by adding comforts, health and enjoyment but the true dignity of spiritual wholeness can be provided only by religious dialogues through sublime literature. The ideal of truth, goodness, love and beauty are the expression of our spiritual self, therefore, *The Bhagavadagita says* that "of all types of knowledge the knowledge of the self is the most important" and Radhakrishnan also rightly asserts that "Religious life is the life lived in the power of Being." (Radhakrishnan, 1984:99,101) Therefore, the fulfillment of man's life lies in spiritual experience in which man's being is raised to its highest point. When we realize the innate dignity of the soul, we are impelled to think that the science of the self is the greatest of all sciences.

Human beings are in the '*fallen state'* and are living in *'the fallen world',* therefore, worldly considerations and temptations corrupt the great ideals in the world., consequently human mind becomes badly crippled in religious thinking. But Indian idealism has a ray of hope as it projects the world under moral laws wherein man's life being *dharma kshetra* becomes the scene of moral choice. But it is also right as *The Bhagavatagita* states that "It is the law of spiritual world that whenever evil and ignorance darken human affairs, morality and wisdom will come to our rescue." (IV, 7-8). Therefore what is needed most today is that our minds should have spiritual freedom. They should be free from bigotry, and superstition, dogmas and rituals, and emphasize the central simplicities of religion. The Indian culture best known to the outer world is that of *tat tvam asi- the eternal is in one's self.* Thus religious pursuit becomes the goal of life putting all human beings on equal footing regardless of caste, creed, culture, religion and nation as the death-bed statement of Socrates shows, "I am not an Athenian or a Greek but a citizen of the world" (Radhakrishnan 1984:112).

Science and technology have made the world not only a unified world community by removing all kinds of physical barriers but they have also placed great powers in our hands which may lead mankind to better and bright future if they are used in the

right way or may push to chaos and destruction if they are misused. The destructive power of this progress is so terrifying that the whole world may be destroyed within a few minutes by pressing a button, hence the material, economic, political, scientific and technological advancement can not materialize the dream of world solidarity in the real sense. Therefore, if mankind is to be saved with sustainable development, we must take the spiritual coherence as the axis of our thought and action. We should not think that religion is against the spirit of the science, though it is true that any religion which is insensitive to human ills and social crimes, and creates division, discord and disintegration and fails to promote unity, understanding and social harmony is not the real religion. The spirit of science contributes to the refinement of religion as Albert Einstein opines that "science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." (Einstein 46) In his book *The World As I See It,* Einstein observes that the scientist's 'religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. This feeling is the guiding principle of his life and work, in so far as he succeeds in keeping himself from the shackles of selfish desire. It is beyond question closely akin to that which has possessed the religious geniuses of all ages.'(qtd. Radhakrishnan 1984:10) Religion is not only intellectual conformity or ceremonial piety; it is spiritual adventure in which latent possibilities are realized as the being moves from imperfection to perfection.

Religion is not an escape from social struggle as spiritual wisdom and social affairs are inextricably connected to each other. It also teaches us to raise our voice and fight against injustice and degradation. To make people morally and spiritually strong is also the duty of a religious person. Gandhi along with political freedom also fought a religious battle of freedom as he said, "A fallen and prostrate India will not be of any help to herself or to the World. A free and enlightened India can be of help to herself and to the World". And he also stated, "I want my country to be free so that one day, if necessary, she may die for the sake of humanity". (Radhakrishnan 1976:104-5)

Such was the enlightened religious vision of Gandhi who regarded religion as a positive force and weakness as a sin and connected religion to altruism. He also believed that if we have brute forces within us we can not be human beings in the true sense. Taking non-violence in positive and broader aspect he connected it to the largest love and the greater charity. With his true religiosity he provided a new color and meaning to education and science. To him education is not only confined to life-adjustment but more than this it is life-enhancement. He also saw the superiority of human spirit to the material world in the light of science. Nehru followed Gandhi's religiosity in a more positive and constructive way. Mahatma used to say, "I wish to wipe every tear from every human eye." (Radhakrishnan 1976:122) Nehru was fond of repeating the statement that by the application of Science and Technology to the reconstruction of our social order, he would remove the suffering of the people. So he adopted science and technology to promote the welfare of the masses and decided to use nuclear energy only for the peaceful purposes. He also regarded narrow nationalism

a form of political bigotry, hence he wanted to establish a state based on science and socialism and not on fanaticism and monopoly. He was of the opinion that two currents of thought are essential for a balanced development of the youth—scientific and spiritual because the mere study of science without humanities may lead to dehumanization. Therefore in developing science and technology man should be half creator and half god. In this way Nehru taught us to practice morality in state affairs as often he followed the statement: *dharma rakssati raksatah* —'If we protect *dharma,* it will protect us. If we neglect *dharma*, we will also be neglected by *dharma.* He was also of the opinion that if our economic and political interests come into conflict with our spiritual interests, we must throw away our economic and political interests for the sake of our spiritual interest. On the historic day 14th August, 1947, looking into the past, present and future history, he said, "I have come to the conclusion that it will not be possible for us to regain our past glory unless we observe certain moral principles." (Radhakrishnan 1976:124) Both Nehru and Radhakrishnan were of the opinion that the rational man should grow into the spiritual man for the welfare of the humanity.

In Marxian ideology, a religious or righteous person works for the society in which man can be free and fearless, a subject, not an object. He fights against all kinds of terror, cruelty and injustice. Such a person becomes the voice of the voiceless and stands by the outcasts and refugees. Religion in this sense becomes the binding force that deepens the solidarity of human society. Faith without wisdom, without tolerance and respect for others' in life is a dangerous thing. Religion is not blind faith; therefore those people who commit crimes against humanity in the name of religion are irreligious as Tagore in the poem "False Religion" articulates:

> Those who in the name of Faith embrace illusion,
> Kill and are killed. (1-2)
> ……..
> The bigot insults his own religion
> When he slays a man of another faith,
> Conduct he judges not in the light of Reason,
> In the temple he raises the blood stained banner
> And worship the devil in the name of God. (8-12)
> ……
> All that is shameful and barbarous through the Ages,
> Has found a shelter in their temples. (14-15)

Herbert Spencer also doesn't see any justification for blind religious faith. A blind and self-righteousness in any religion may be in the name of Holy War is a sin in the name of God. Radhakrishnan rightly asserts: "A religion which brings together the divine revelation in nature and history with the inner revelation in the life of the spirit can serve as the basic of the world order, as the religion of the future." (Radhakrishnan 1984:18) Gandhi, stressing on the tolerance, also said, "I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. A friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty." In non-Christian system of thought or worship or conduct as Plato, Zoroaster, Buddha and Confucius conceive

that the same divine light is visible by which man is enlightened — the wisdom of all human traditions. Professor Arnold Toynbee also stresses the same point when he writes that he would, "express his personal belief that the four higher religions that were alive in the age in which he was living were four variations on a single theme and that, if all the four components of this heavenly music of the spheres could be audible on each simultaneously, and with equal clarity to one pair of human ears, the happy hearer would find himself listening not to a discord, but to a harmony" (Toynbee 428). It is of course, identical to Plato's vision of an irresistible harmony with the deepest reality of the world inspired and sustained by the spiritual in us what William Wordsworth experiences in contemplative and meditative mood in the lap of nature. The ascending movement of spirituality reaches its climax when the poet surpassing the matter-of-fact observation beholds cosmic vision with mystical insight as he articulates:

> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky and in the mind of man;
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. (Tintern Abbey: 93-102)

Spiritual truth is far more sublime and greater thing than contained in scriptures. The Upanishads and Plato regard man as a celestial plant. The Veda is a record of inspired wisdom and deep inner experience stressing on *tat tvam asi* — the Supreme is in the soul of man as Radhakrishnan writes:

> Religion reflects both God and man. As religion is a life to be lived, not a theory to be accepted or a belief to be adhered to, it allows scope and validity to varied approaches to the Divine. There may be different revelations of the Divine but they are all forms of the Supreme. If we surround our souls with a shell, national pride, racial superiority, frozen articles of faith and empty presumptions of castes and classes, we stifle and suppress the breath of the spirit. The Upanishads are clear that the flame is the same even though the types of fuel used may vary. (Radhakrishnan 1984: 25-26)

*Yog-sutra Bhasya* says that the stream of mind flows in two directions, the one leading to virtue, the other to vice: *citta- nadi nama ubhayanto vahini , vahati-kalyandya vahati ca papaya.* (*Rig Veda* 12. 1 12) With the help of religion man is to overcome the conflict and integrate the personality. In order to descend into the world of spirituality, man has to close his physical eyes to the external world in order to visualize reality with the opening of the inner eye—the eye of knowledge as we see Wordsworth's articulation in 'Tintern Abbey':

……., we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things. (46-50)

The *Katha Upanishad* also says that man is turned outward by his senses, thereby loses contact with his own deepest self, consequently the soul is immersed in external things, in power and possessions, therefore it loses in place of gaining as Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* speaks through Gratiano that those who have, "much respect upon the world. They lose it that do buy it with much care" and Antonio makes it clear when he says that "I hold the world but as the world" (Act—1, Sc-1:78-79).

In order to hear the sweet melodies of the spirit, we must shut off the noise of the world as John Keats in the poem "Ode on Grecian Urn" articulates: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter" (11-12). It is possible through the opening of the inner eye to spiritual reality to capture the sound coming from the spiritual world. The reflection of true religious life comes through love which aims at the equality and unity of all beings including human and non-human world as Wordsworth in the poem "Nutting" imparts a powerful message to mankind through his dear sister Dorothy:

I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky
Then dearest Maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand.
Touch- for there is a spirit in the woods. (52-56)

Coleridge in "The Ancient Mariner" through the Mariner also imparts a powerful message of eco-centric or bio-centric world which is the real religion and divine postulate of this universe:

He prayeth well, who loveth well,
Both men and birds and beast.
He prayeth best, who loveth best,
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. (613-620)

Gandhi also says that "To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself." (510)

True religion is far away from ostentations. Bead necklaces, rosaries, triple paint on forehead, or putting on ashes, pilgrimages, baths in holy rivers, image worship cannot purify a man as duty, service and love to fellow creatures can do, as Tagore in *Gitanjali* striking the point articulates:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open

thy 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 in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on thy dusky soil. (Song - XI)

Non-violence, mercy, self-control and enlightenment which are supposed to be the strong pillars of religion also find expression in literature in varied ways. Tulsidas articulates that mercy is the main root of religion and Shakespeare regards the quality of mercy as a divine postulate of the universe. T.S. Eliot in his epic-poem *The Waste Land* also highlights *data, damyata and dayadhvam* as the cardinal principles of religious conduct. Jaina Religion emphasizing on self control declares that one who gets control over the self is *Jina or Mahavira,* one who has battled with his inward nature and has got triumph over it. Buddha directs us to be *Bodhi* through enlightenment in order to enjoy peace and happiness in the world as Sarojni Naidu in her poem "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus" articulates:

LORD BUDDHA, on the lotus throne,
With praying eyes and hands elate,
What mystic rapture dost thou own
Immutable and ultimate?
What peace unravished of our ken,
Annihilate from the world of men? (1-6)

Religions direct us to regenerate and enlighten our nature to replace *avidya,* ignorance*, by vidya, wisdom.* The dream of the world peace and unity can be achieved through religion replete with scientific thinking. Ashoka who became a convert to Buddhism, repenting bitterly over the carnage involved in the conquest of Kalinga, taught his people to love one another, to be kind to animals, to respect all religions. If scientific advancement is not integrated with spiritual values the day is not far away when a great danger will threat the peaceful co-existence of the so-called civilized and advanced modern world and the picture in the absence of spiritual and moral values will be as Matthew Arnold in the concluding lines of the poem "Dover Beach" depicts, "And we are here as on a darkling plain/Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, Where ignorant armies clash by night". (25)

Religion is the hope of man and can sustain the world if it is saved from fanaticism and the persons of fixed ideas who are the enemies of truth. In the present global scenario we have such a mingling of peoples, races, cultures and religions that has ever witnessed in the history of the world. We want to utilize the powers of advanced science and technology for human welfare but it is possible only if we can conquer our inner nature. Science can get control over the physical nature but the task of conquering and reshaping the inner self is assigned to the discipline of religion. The brute within man may also be more powerful by the advances in science and technology. In the scientific age incredible dogmas are not acceptable but must commend to the spirit of reason and for the world unity religion must have universal outlook as

Radhakrishnan thinks, "I feel that there is no opposition between religion and science, between religion and highest social morality, between religion and cooperation among religions." (1984:54) In the cosmic evolutionary process religion takes us from the world of intellect, the world of divided consciousness with its discords, dualities, to a life of harmony, of freedom, of love. Being an active participant in this cosmic evolution man with his creativity rises above the world to defy nature and moves from intellectuality to spirituality. Religion brings a spiritual change, an inward transformation within resolving all kinds of discords and dualities because all religions are human attempts to reach the Ultimate Reality.

The sublime and lofty aim of literature is to kindle the flame of true religion in the soul of human beings so that the children of the earth should live with love as one family. No doubt in this world we are in 'fallen state': hence we possess the image of God only potentially and not actually. Therefore, it is essential to create a new man and a new world by shaping the soul in the light of true religion for which literature may be the most effective means as it can awaken the truth latent in our spiritual consciousness. Since man is incomplete and unfinished and is in the process of becoming to achieve perfection and completeness, therefore his inner nature should be trained in such a way not directly by religious dogmas but through creative literary writings that it can achieve its goal. Literature has the power to harmonize and synthesize the different religions of the world in an idealistic frame of universality for the bright future of mankind in the world and beyond. The cross fertilization of ideas among the prevailing faiths of the world through literary writings replete with scientific thinking is sure to foster and enrich spiritual values which ultimately will contribute to shape man a spiritually, morally and socially creative being in the world for peaceful co-existence.

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