What is the true religion of a poet?

*The poet's faith ought to be fluid and ever accommodating.*

ART & CULTURE | 5-minute read | 24-11-2018

DEEPANSHU MOHAN @prats1810

- *The world is too much with us; late and soon*
- *Getting and spending, we lay waste out powers*
- *Little we see in Nature that is ours.*

—William Wordsworth

Quite often, the value we derive from our work or day-to-day actions remain bound by some logical quest for materialistic goals while staying more acquisitionist to collect things — to make our physical standard of existence more satisfied.

Once a desired thing is acquired (or consumed), we, as insatiable beings keep moving upwards on the straight line to acquire the next goal (a chain reaction of sorts). The mere satisfaction of one desire to another thus emerges as the ‘goal’ of life in a finite way.

At the same time, the experiential process of faith aims at transcending (from the finite goal) towards the realisation of other dimensions that enhance the experience of our life — as the way it is, which can hardly be seen as a ‘goal’ in itself, but more as a way of being.

Cross-quoted from an essay, *The Poet’s Religion* by Rabindranath Tagore, Wordsworth’s lyrical note above, illuminates how the world seems to have grown too familiar upon human beings.

For us, as human beings, the process of over-familiarity with the world, culminates into the act of materially satisfying insatiable desires and preferences, blinding us from seeing the world’s own aspect of ‘creative unity’ — a concept which poets like Tagore and Wordsworth so often talked about.
On creative unity, “all our knowledge of things is knowing them in their relation to the Universe, in that relation which is truth”, as Tagore puts it. The world’s creative unity, emerges as the ultimate truth-lying not in the masses of substance, not in the number of things, but in their “relatedness”.

Quite succinctly, Tagore defines a poet’s religion as: “Creation is the perpetual harmony between the infinite deal of perfection and the eternal continuity of its realisation; that so long as there is no absolute separation between the positive ideal and the material obstacle to its attainment, we need not be afraid of suffering and loss.”

It won't be surprising how those habituated to a rigid belief system or framework of sectarian creeds will find such notion of faith as religion too indefinite or elastic.

Poets like Tagore, say, Wordsworth, PB Shelley see the value of faith lying in the pursuit of this ‘ultimate truth’ of creative unity.

At a time, when our notion and imagination of faith remains marred by some form of impermeable belief layer that is shaped by political colours or as some form of a dogmatic pursuit, it may be pertinent to re-examine the essence of faith and its value, argued from a poet’s lens by Tagore.

A constant practice in the pursuit of logical thought and its application in our day-to-day existence dissolves our natural instinct for faith.

In the poet’s religion, faith is the “spectator in us which finds the meaning of the drama from the unity of the performance”.

However, logic in its rational form lures us into some kind of a greenroom where there is stagecraft but no drama at all.

Faith and its value lies therefore, in facilitating a quest (or drama) for the finite to pursue the infinite — something that lies beyond the physical dimension of logical interpretation.

While the finite denotes the physical/materialistic dimensions (acquired for the necessity of human survival), the search for the infinite helps a human being realise the limitations of the finite (physical) and utilise the physical means to transcend space and time, as part of a spiritual process.
A life led in the maximisation of this experiential ‘goal’ (of seeking the infinite) is what remains lacking in the understanding and practice of faith.

Poetry and art cherish in them the profound faith of (wo)man in the unity of her/his being with all existence — the final truth of which is the truth of personality.

Tagore, Shelley, Wordsworth et al not only saw this ‘final truth’ of faith in the creative unity of one with the universe as a religion of its own, but also one that is directly apprehended and doesn’t qualify as a system of metaphysics for analysis and argumentation sake.

Thus, it is this idea and notion of faith (the finite seeking to pursue the infinite) that may allow us as humans to take our life in realising a deeper, more substantive meaning for her/his existence.

Faith, in the infinite process of creative unity will emancipate us from a higher degree of materialism. This is the plea that Tagore makes and Shelley supports.

What we can infer here from Tagore’s own reflection on a poet’s religion is how the value of faith operates sans doctrines or a rules-based belief system, and is attached with a sense of knowing and seeking for a creative unity. Whereas in dogmatic religious systems (one imposed with rigid beliefs), all questions, are definitely answered and all doubts are laid to rest under a moral compass.

The poet’s religion, on the other end, ought to be fluid, elastic and ever accommodating.

---

Writer

DEEPANSHU MOHAN @prats1810
Assistant Professor of Economics, OP Jindal University; Director, Centre for New Economics Studies; Visiting Professor, Department of Economics, Carleton University