

Tagore, a Hindu Mystic Writer, on Love and Sufism

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Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali Nobel laureate, spread his philosophy of love through his works. I start with his book *Gitanjali*, which drew the attention of the Western world in 1913. *Gitanjali* is saturated with his love for humanity, which takes a special form: It is only attainable through one's realization of Brahman which in Hindu philosophy refers to the feeling or sensation of a divine presence in the entire universe. This is not a rigid or dogmatic principle of the divine, but one that sees the divine in every human soul, a spiritual realization that can only be accessed through love. The form of love that one feels for each human in the universe evokes Sufi mysticism in terms of this form of love where one feels it in each human being in the universe. This paper will define the nature of love which resonates with my feeling of my oft-quoted chapter, "Conclusion: Political Sublime" from *Humanitarian Identity and the Political Sublime*:

the earth peacefully with each other as human beings focused on our humaneness and primitive instinct, and this I also define as the "political sublime," where there is no difference between your pain and my pain; I as a human being share your pain, and you as a human being share mine. I love and respect you and you love and respect me and we do not compete and race as animals. We truly discover our ontological roots nationally, internationally as well. We become truly global. (133-134).

I would like to refer to my book *Virtual Diaspora: Postcolonial Literature and Feminism*, in which I express my passion for the universal love expressed in Tagore's works through the Baul philosophy of Bengal, which connects with Sufi philosophy: Tagore writes, "I felt that I had found my religion at last, the religion of Man, in which the infinite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and tethered to any co-operation" (96). So, my claim is that Baul mystic philosophy and Sufi philosophy flourished concurrently and they overlapped.

The Connection with Infinity and Love in Hindu Mystic Philosophy

I call Hindu philosophy a mystic philosophy as it is grounded in the concept of infinity and a zeal to connect the finite with the infinity. It also intersects with Sufi philosophy, as Tagore expresses in his works. I reiterate that the discussion of mysticism must start with infinity, a key concept in Hindu spirituality. What is infinity and what is mysticism? Infinity and mysticism overlap and

intersect. “*Bahe nirantara Ananda dhara.*” The eternal flow of bliss is continuously flowing, as the song in Upanishadic verse says, “*Anandhadeva khalimmani jayante*”—the entire universe originates from bliss.

In my first monograph, *Jouissance as Ananada: Indian philosophy and Feminist Theory and Literature*, I noted, “The literal meaning of *ananda* could be translated as bliss or joy, but it is far more complex than that this transcendental happiness is grounded in the material worldThe theory of *ananda* also suggests that when the unification between the material and the transcendental world take place, the ego could be transcended” (4). Thus, the concept of bringing the finite into infinity can be achieved only through a form of ego-transcendence that leads to the realization of *Brahman*, or infinity in the human soul. As long as one is trapped in ego, one can feel neither infinity, consciousness, nor *Brahman*. And according to Tagore’s version of Hindu philosophy or poetic vision, it could be reached only through Nature and common men, as he experienced through the Baul singers of Bengal. While poor and homeless, they spread the message of love through their songs.

Realization of God through Nature

I start with Tagore’s poems in his book *Gitanjali* (“Song Offerings”), which earned him the Nobel Prize in 1913. Let us look at poem no. 95.

When in the morning I looked upon
The light I felt in a moment that I was
No stranger in this world that the inscrutable without name and form had taken me in its
arms in the form of my own mother. (87)

The one word that best delineates this experience is “ineffable.” Tagore described this feeling in his book *The Religion of Man*, distinguishing what he learned as Hindu religion from his family and what he felt as a Hindu spiritual vision. The Gayatri mantra that he was supposed to chant in every morning as the son of a Hindu Brahmin family did not appeal to him or lead him to the spiritual realization of *Brahman*. Instead, nature played an instrumental role in his realization of *Brahman* or God, which I define as Hindu mysticism. We see this in his observation in the chapter, “The Vision,”

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. (94).

This sense of spirituality brings to mind the Bengali poet, Jagadish Chandra Das whose poetry I used in my last monograph *Virtual Diaspora, Postcolonial Literature and Feminism* (155) to explicate Hindu spirituality, Upanishadic concepts, and the concept of *Brahman*. I discussed the following poem in my last monograph:

This inner essence of language will rise from the soul and has been enunciated by the modern Bengali poet in the following way: “*Sabda matrai gan*—any sound is identical with music,” meaning that poetic sound can be prophetic and musical. Let me translate the poem *Savitri’s Madhukar* (Savitri’s Honeybee)”:

Any sound is song and harmony
I heard that in nature
That flowers bloom
That leaves quiver
Crow’s sound, rivers’ flow
Even in the mundane world’s cacophony
I have heard a magical and unique song
Which awakens the mind
Like the whistle of the train, sound of the storm and the sound of the rain
Thunderstorm
Everything lures me to that subtle unknown world. (*Savitri’s Madhukar (The Honeybee of Savitri* 80)

The song of the subtle world evoked by the poet’s words could be conceived of as the soul language that Sri Aurobindo and Tagore aspire to.

Tagore’s Mysticism and Love

What is striking to me about Tagore’s mysticism is how he positions himself in the world in song 16 in *Gitanjali*:

I have had my invitation to this world's
Festival and thus my life has been blessed. (16)

He expresses similar sentiments in song 17, "I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands." (14)

But he not only sees the world through the vision of the seer in Upanishad "*madhu bata ritayate, madhu kharanti sindhva, mardhinya parthva rja*—the whole world is surrounded by air of honey, the sky is pouring and the entire world is pervaded dust with honey"), but with the vision of a follower of *Viswaprem* (universal love or love for humanity) This can happen only when one's eyes are smeared with love for humanity, as we can experience simultaneously in his poems in *Gitanjali* and the *Religion of Man*. Let us look at song 22:

In the deep shadows of the rainy July,
With secret steps, thou walkest, silent as night, eluding all watchers.

...

The woodlands have hushed their songs, and doors are all shut at every house. You are the solitary wayfarer in this deserted street. Oh my only friend, my best beloved, the gates are open in my house—do not pass by like
A dream. (22)

In the next poem, the journey is described as that of a beloved for their lover, as in the relationship between the deities Radha and Krishna. Tagore was deeply influenced by Vaishnav theosophy. We know that from a young age he wrote many songs on the separation and union of Radha and Krishna, and he explained his passion for Vaisnav philosophy in *The Religion of Man*. He expresses these sentiments in song 23:

I have no sleep tonight. Ever and
Again I open my door and look out on the darkness, my friend!
.....
By what dim shore of the ink-black river
By what far edge of the frowning
Forest, through what mazy depth of gloom art thou threading thy course
To come to me, my friend? (18-19).

One can achieve delight only when one unites with the infinite or supreme. This is a form of love that is not selfish, egocentric, or geared towards personal gain, as stated in song 32 of

Geetanjali: “By all means they try to hold me/ secure who love me in this world. But/ it is otherwise with thy love which is greater than theirs, and thus keepest/free” (25). Thus, he explains the Religion of Man, in which the mind is fluid and can only attain infinity or sublimity through Yoga. He explains *adaivtam* or non-dualism or the coalescing of the finite with the infinite) as the way to achieve bliss or *anandam*. Sri Aurobindo calls this the achievement of the supramental level of consciousness through ego-transcendence, but Tagore simply calls it yoga and suggests that to be united with the God or infinity is *anandam* or bliss. Tagore furthermore expresses in *Gitanjali* an intimate encounter with God:

...
O thou lord of all
Heavens , where would thy love if I
Were not. (52)

Tagore and Baul and Syncretic Sufi Philosophy

Tagore expresses this relationship with God, which extends to common human beings, through his many poems and through the Religion of Man, by alluding to a sect of singers called the Bauls.

About this time, one day I chanced to hear a song from a beggar belonging to the Bail sect of Bengal.... But what struck me in this simple song was a religious expression that was neither grossly concrete, full of crude details, nor metaphysical in its rarified transcendentalism. At the same time, it was alive with an emotional sincerity. It spoke of an intense yearning of the heart for the divine which is in Man and not in the temple, or scriptures, in images and symbols. (110)

So, what is this central theme of Baul philosophy? Let me offer here a quote from one of the literary sources on Baul philosophy. While narrating about Bauls’ spiritual commitment and reflexivity, a Baul from the Burdwan district of West Bengal sang--

Being a human, respect other humans
Being a human, know other humans
Being a human, discover other humans
Human is the eternal treasure, search for that ‘human’ (the man of my
heart)
To search for the man of the heart is the destination by itself.

Respecting (or worshipping), caring, as well as being human, is a continuous and lifelong journey for the Bauls. In other words, teachings of the Bauls fundamentally seek to pose questions as to our perception, preoccupation and inconsistencies towards searching for transformative avenues. (*Religions* 2019, 10, 335).

At this point in the discussion of Tagore's connection with Sufism, it is important to highlight the connection between Sufi and Baul philosophy. Tagore published the poems of the Baul poet Lalan Fakir, whom he met while in Shelidah in undivided Bengal/India. So, what is the connection between Baulism and Sufism? It is a very intimate connection indeed. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a great proponent of Vaishnava philosophy, and under his tutelage, the Bauls and the Sufis of Bengal joined hands. As Prithwindranath Mukherjee stated in *Sahajia: Quest of the Innate*, "After Chaitanya's passing, the Sufis (Dervishes or Fakirs) of Bengal, along with their Hindu and Buddhist brothers...experienced a marvelous blossoming" (18). One must note here that Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a great Vaishnav philosopher. It is interesting to note that Chaitanya was also a proponent of Baul sect of Bengal. Another important thing to remember is that in the 13th century, the low-class Hindus and Buddhists who went to Tibet and Nepal embraced the Muslims of Bengal, which helped Sufism flourish because of the Sen dynasty's passion for the Vaishnavite philosophy of Radha and Krishna. Ultimately, this morphed into a philosophy of love and Kabir, a disciple of Hindu Guru Ramanuja, was inducted into Sufi philosophy. In his article "Rabindranath Tagore's Syncretistic Philosophy and the Persian Sufi tradition," Leonard Lewisohn made the following observation:

The sources of Tagore's religious and spiritual thought are multi-faceted, varying from the Hindu Vaisnav tradition to the reformist Brahmo Samaj movement, as well as native Bengal mystical teachings such as those of the Bauls, and Unitarian Christianity, along with various western literary, philosophical, and religious traditions and doctrines. Although Persian Sufi ideas constitute a significant feature of Tagore's philosophical and mystical thought, these features are generally disregarded by critics of his writings. (8)

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When Bengal was first conquered over eight centuries ago in 1206 by the Turkish Muslim ruler Mohamed Khilji, Persian became the first language of the state. For the next 150 years, Persian culture continued to permeate the country. The golden age of Persian literature in Bengal commenced during the ensuing Tughlid era. ...During the Husayni Shai period (1494-1538), Persian continued as the official language of Bengal. Mir Syed Ashraf Jahangir Simnani (d. 808/1405), an important Sufi author who

flourished around the time of Hafiz, noted that there were no town or village in Bengal where Sufi saints had not settled. (9)

The impact of Sufi philosophy is so strong that all of Tagore's publications were permeated with the philosophy of love that merges the Vaishnava philosophy of love between Radha and Krishna, along with the Vedanta philosophy of love in terms of Brahman. It also coalesces with the Baul philosophy, in which love is not bound by any religion and transcends all boundaries and prejudices. As I mentioned in my chapter "Conclusion: Political Sublime," this paradigm of love, which I call "political sublime," could be attained through ego-transcendence and by merging the sublime and the beautiful, deconstructing Kant. Immanuel Kant or the Western philosophy per se, preaches that the sublime, which represents a greater level of consciousness and beautiful which represents the sensory level of consciousness, cannot be synthesized. The West believes in the dualism and I dismantle that through the theory of Sri Aurobindo, who advocates for a subliminal plane of consciousness that could be brought down to the mundane plane of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's theory of supramental consciousness, rooted in ancient Vedanta philosophy, preaches that the dualism between matter and spirit and between immanence and transcendence can be overcome by conquering one's ego, which Tagore calls as *adaivtam anandam* ("non-dualism is identical to bliss"). To simplify this further, we could say that as long as you can realize the sublime or the *Brahman* in every being in the universe, you can achieve the political sublime, which Tagore calls "man of my heart" "It spoke of an intense yearning of the heart for the divine, which is in Man and not in the temple, or scriptures, in images and symbols. (110)

In *Humanitarian Identity and the Political Sublime*, I discussed this concept of "political sublime" through Salman Rushdie's novel *Shalimar the Clown*, in which Hindu and Muslim families strive for unity and harmony through inter-faith marriage, a custom in Kashmir. This is obviously a Sufi practice and dates back to the 16th century, when King Akbar was a practitioner, as my student cum research assistant brought to my attention through the film *Jodha Akbar*.

Tagore and Kabir

It is interesting to note that Tagore translated and published Kabir's poems in 1915, only two years after the publication of *Gitanjali*, and Kabir's poems portray Sufism by defining the

relationship between *Brahman* and human being also how reason has shortcoming. We hear in poem no. xcvi from *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, “One love it is that pervades the whole world, few there/ are who know it fully/ they are blind who hope to see it by the light of reason, / that reason which is the cause of separation / The House of Reason is very far away” (95). I cannot help mentioning here my discussion in *Humanitarian Identity and the Political Sublime*, in which I critique the limitation of reason: “My rationale for bringing Sri Aurobindo into my paradigm of the “political sublime” is to extend the argument that reason alone might not be adequate to resolve the problems of the world, and we might need a greater dimension of consciousness to resolve all the problems. This greater dimension of consciousness Sri Aurobindo describes as the “religion of humanity” is grounded in the true knowledge of the soul” (142). It is also important to allude to Sri Aurobindo’s observation in *the Human Cycle*: “The truth is hidden from the rationalist because he is supported by two constant articles of faith, first that his own reason is right and the reason of others who differ from him is wrong ...the collective human reason will eventually arrive at purity....reason cannot grasp all truth in its embrace because truth is too infinite for it” (112-113). In short, a rational mindset is narrowminded and does not allow for any pluralistic option.

Alternately, look at the following poem no. vii in Tagore’s *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*: “So from beyond the Infinite, the infinite comes; and from /the infinite the finite extends,” which reminds me of Tagore’s song, “*tomaro asime prano mano laye jatadure ami dhai/ khotao dukkha, kothao mrityu, kotha bicchedo nai* (Rabindrarachanabali, Song no. 539)” (If I connect with the infinity, there is no sorrow, no death, and no separation in life). So, according to Kabir, *Brahman* is infinite as he chants in poem no. vii in Tagore’s *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*: “He himself is Brahma, creature and Maya./...He himself is the limit and the limitless: and beyond both/ the limited and the limitless is he, the Pure being.” (7)

Tagore and Hafiz

Hafiz’s verses were constantly on the tongue of Tagore’s father, Maharashi Debendranath Tagore, who chanted his poetry every day in his evening meditation. And such a great devotee of Hafiz’s poetry was the founder of the Brahmo, Samaj Raja Rammohun Roy, that he quoted Hafiz frequently as well. In his gift to the Unitarians, he stated, “The article on Syncretism states, that

because of Tagore's interest in Iran and Zoroastrianism, his admiration for Persian literature and Hafiz and his urge to find common ground in the religious ideals of Islam and Hinduism, he accepted the invitation from Reza Shah Pahlavi to visit Persia on April 11, 1932 at the age of seventy."

Thus, long before Tagore's visit to the Iranian poet Hafiz's tomb in 1932, Tagore expressed his Sufi vision of love through his career and writings. Or one could claim that it was because of Persian literary soiree culture in Calcutta, which started in 1206 and continued till 1897, his father's fascination and love with Persian poetry, and Brahmo Samaj affiliation and dedication that Hafiz surreptitiously entered his poetic discourse.

In this context, I would also like to discuss or give a reference to his short story "Hungry Stones," which has the marks of Sufi mysticism in it. The love that we encounter in this story resembles that between a lover and beloved aroused by eternal separation. But one must understand that this love has a symbolic connotation: It also represents the love for the supreme lord. It evokes what we encounter in the Iranian poet Hafiz's book *Divan*. The same article, "Rabindranath Tagore's Syncretistic Philosophy and the Persian Sufi Tradition," remarks, "In fact, Persian remained the official language of Bengal until 1837, when the British replaced it with English...in fact, the earliest ever printed edition of Hafiz's *Divan* appeared under the imprint of the East India Company in Calcutta in 1791...A host of Persian poets flourished in Calcutta, the cultural capital of Bengal during the nineteenth century which rivaled and more often than not outshone Dhaka (the capital of present day Bangladesh)" (11)

Muslims in the Middle East regarded Bengal as the easternmost haven of Indo-Iranian culture. Let us start cherishing a few lines from *Divan*:

...
 Art thou with grief afflicted, with the smart
 Of absence, and is bitter toil thy part?
 Thy lamentations and thy tears, oh Heart,
 Are not in vain!
 Last night the wind from out her village blew
 And wandering all the garden alleys through.
 OH rose, tearing thy bosom's robe in two;
 'Twas not in vain.

And Hafiz, though thy heart within thee dies,

Hiding love's agony from curious eyes,
 Ah, not in vain thy tears, not thy sighs,
 Not all in vain! (71)

These stanzas from *Divan* evoke the pain of an Iranian woman and her tax collector lover in the story “The Hungry Stones,” where she appears in his semi-conscious mind as a ghost. The hero of the story, who had just been appointed as the tax collector in Barich, chooses to live in a 250-year-old palace inhabited by a Mughal king and learns that many beautiful women were abducted from Iran and forced into the king's harem. Thus, many women were tortured there; the story portrays the one of these women, who was very unhappy and was punished by death for falling in love with the hero of our story, a love that reaches back through a multiple reincarnation.

On some evenings, I would light two lamps either side of a large mirror and carefully dress myself like a prince. Suddenly next to my own reflection in the mirror the spectre of that same Persian girl appeared for a moment. She would bend her neck and direct her deep black eyes at me, full of a fierce, plaintive passion, while unspoken phrases hovered on her moist beautiful lips. Then nimbly twisting her buxom body round and up in a light and exquisite dance, she would vanish into the mirror-smile, gaze, ornaments, pain, longing, confusion flashing like a shower of sparks –whereupon a wild gust of wind, scented with woodland plunder, blew out two lamps....I felt murmurs in my ear, perfumed breath on my brow, and the end of a delicate veil fragrantly brushing my cheeks.... (“The Hungry Stones” 239)

You could sense Hafiz here in the reflection of this Persian beauty, but most importantly, this love is manifest in separation. It hints that she may have a soul connection and she may have had a lover, but she is a captive, not knowing her fate. The nuance is that the hero of the story, the tax collector, may have had some connection to her in a previous incarnation. As such, this slave girl started appearing to him every night as an apparition, beautifully dressed as if a reminder of their relationship in their previous life. The author describes these encounters as in Arabian nights. In his adventures every night, she calls him to a certain part of palace and asks him to rescue her. It is at these times that our hero imagines that she has been stolen and he somehow was connected to her. Again, this could be compared to the separation that Radha suffered in absence of Krishna or the pain suffered by a devotee until she or he reaches his or her supreme lord. Such fulfillment was not portrayed in the story. As I said in *Jouissance*, “the best

way to understand the connection between *jouissance*, *ananda*, and love would be to say that *ananda*, which is considered to be the source of life, could be approached through *prema*—love which is both immanent and transcendent” (22). But the love seen here could not reach the level of transcendence, as the lovers were victims of the king’s lust and torture.

‘Who was I? How could I rescue her? Which lovely, drowning projection of desire should I drag ashore from a whirlpool of swirling dreams? Divinely beautiful, where and when did you live? By which cool spring, and in which palm-shade, and to which desert nomad were you born? To which slave -market were you taken to be sold, crossing hot sands, riding on a lightning horse, torn from your mother’s lap by a Bedouin brigand, like a flower from a wild creeper? Which royal servant studied your blooming bashful beauty, counted our gold mudras, took you overseas, placed you in a golden palanquin , gave you to his master/s harem ?Did you o desert flower, float away on that stream of wealth so horribly gleaming, so fraught with conspiracy,... to meet a cruel death or to land on an even more regal , even more abominable shore? (240)

The mention of robbers in “The Hungry Stones” evokes Hafiz’s poetry again. But most importantly, we must acknowledge here that Tagore’s passion for romantic love is the idea that love is transmitted across the centuries through several lives, allowing us a glimpse of eternity. This is how the apparition came to our tax collector. “I distinctly felt on that cloudy moonless night, in the jet-black darkness of the rooms, that a woman was lying face-down on a carpet at the foot of a bed...The storm went on all night, and the weeping too...There was no one anywhere; no one that I could comfort. Who was it who was so distressed? Where was the inconsolable grief coming from? (242). I would also refer to the great Oriental Scholar Sir William Jones’ translation and interpretation of Hafiz’s poem at this juncture to perceive this intense emotion and sadness captured in these lines where we encounter unearthly and celestial appeal as embodies in Tagore’s “The Hungry Stones.” Let me quote from Jones’ translation of Hafiz to show the similarity between Tagore and Hafiz’s thoughts: “Tell them their Eden cannot show/ A stream so clear as Rocknabad./ A bow’r so sweet as Mosellay/ O when these fair perfidious maids,/ Whose eyes our secret haunts infest,/ Their dear destructive charms display; Each glance my tender breast invades, and robs my wounded soul of rest,/...In vain with love our blossoms glow;” (*Hafiz and his Divan* 35). The same kind of restlessness and pining was expressed in our hero’s encounter with the apparition of this Persian woman in that haunted

palace. Here he caught her almost in a vision like flashes of lightning dressed in saffron pajamas with a red cap on her head with a fringe of golden tassels. She drove him insane in passion and he roamed around in his fantasy realm each night in search of her. The stream that is depicted in Hafiz's *Divan* also seems to be an inspiration of Tagore's portrayal of the river Sushta in "The Hungry Stones" where the protagonist felt the silent footsteps of beautiful Persian women, "I had a clear impression of a crowd of jubilant women rushing down the steps this summer evening to bathe in the Sushta" (235). I notice a strong resemblance of Rocknabad with Sushta.

Let us ruminate a little bit more on Hafiz's *Divan*:

Look upon all the gold in the world's mart
On all the tears the world has shed in vain
Shall they not satisfy thy crowning heart?
I have enough of loss and enough of gain?
Mine is the joy of her companionship
Whose healing lip is laid upon my lip—
This is enough for me! (73)

As the poem of Hafiz from *Divan* observed, while the world has shed many tears pursuing material prosperity, the poet does not care for material prosperity or gain. All he cares about is love as he boldly articulates, "Mine is the joy of her companionship/ Whose healing lip is laid upon my lip." (73).

Let us look at another exhilarating stanza from Hafiz's *Divan*:

When to my grave thou turnest thy blessed feet,
Wine and lute thou shalt bring in thine hand to me,
Thy voice shall wring through the folds of my winding sheet,
And I will arise and dance to thy minstrelsy.

....

Rise up! Let mine eyes delight in thy stately grace!
Thou art the goal to which all men's endeavor has passed.
And thou the idol of Hafiz's worship; thy face
From the world and life shall bid him come forth and arise! (119)

One must note that this is not a mere love poem, but something much deeper. It evokes love on two different planes: love at the human level and love at the level of divinity. The love between lord Krishna and his beloved Radha could be conceived of as the longing for the

supreme in every person's life. But I want to draw attention to the most interesting and significant fact that in 1932, Tagore was invited to Iran by Reza Shah Pahlavi and had a realization while meditating in Hafiz's tomb. When he opened *Divan*, which was given to him by the steward of the tomb, he encountered the following stanzas. "...as the "tongue of the invisible" responded to the Bengali poet's rumination over the evils of religious puritanism in India and Iran with these verses" (26):

Will it ever come to pass again
That they will fling open the tavern doors?
Shall they ever loosen
The knot of our entangled affairs?

Although they bolt up the doors for sake
Of the bigot's egomaniacal heart
Take faith, don't lose heart, since for
God's sake these doors shall part.

("Rabindranath Tagore's Syncretistic Philosophy and the Persian Sufi Tradition" 26)

Look at his own comment about this visit:

My pilgrimage would have been incomplete without the visit, especially when this ancient [Persian] people has been reborn and is feeling an irresistible urge of creative activity, and moving to complete fulfillment of the grandeur and freedom of a positive self-expression. It is a source of inspiration in my life. This evening of my life has been filled to the brim.

This is the message he received from Hafiz. What is interesting to notice here is that he went to Iran in 1932, but he published his novel *Gora* in 1924, which I want to refer to today for our discussion of Tagore's implementation of the concept of transcendence over all religious binaries. In novel after novel, poem after poem, play after play, starting from the *Home and the World*, *King of the Dark Chamber*, *Red Oleanders* to *Gora*, meaning white, his poetic theme has been transcendence over the narrowmindedness of religion. That is his reason for writing *The Religion of Man* and is also addressed in his work *Sadhana*. The story of the *Gora* is that of freedom from religious bigotry. The titular character Gora is the son of an Irish couple but was abandoned at birth by the death of his mother at the doorstep of a Hindu. She had been fleeing from the Sepoy Mutiny following the death of her soldier husband and gave birth to her son on the doorstep of a rigid Brahmin family. The Hindu family adopted him and named him Gora, meaning "white," but they never revealed his identity to him till the end. Interestingly, the boy

grew up practicing strict Hinduism until the father, Krishnadayal, revealed the truth on his deathbed. Gora, who had staunchly refused to tolerate any religion besides Hinduism, woke up and transcended his ego. Anandamayai, the mother who had raised him, gave up her Hindu principles and took food cooked by a maid of a lower Hindu. Thus, Tagore that shows how love, not blind adherence to religion, is what we need. The impact of Baul spirituality is clear in the song in the opening chapter of the book:

Into the cage flies the unknown bird,
 It comes I know not whence,
 Powerless my mind to chain its feet,
 It goes I know not where. (*Gora* 20)

The spiritual implication of the poem is very powerful and resonates with Baul spirituality. As his novel the *Home and the World* shows, Tagore's primary focus was to portray human love as transcending all religious discrimination. He also believed in the notion of love transcending ego boundaries and religious divisions, as sung by the Baul minstrels. Another thread running through the novel is Tagore's portrayal of the Brahmo family. *Brahmo Dharma* was founded by Raja Rammohun Roy and Tagore's father, Devendranath Tagore, was a collaborator or cofounder of that group. They believed both in Sufism and Unitarian Christianity and were devotees of Hafiz. His father chanted Hafiz's lines in his evening prayer every day. The mission of the Brahmo religion was to free Bengal cum India from religious division. Thus, in the novel *Gora*, Krishnadayal introduced Gora to a Brahmo family, since Gora, unlike his mother, was prejudiced, and Krishnadayal wanted Gora to choose one of the girls from the Brahmo family as his wife. Gora's transformation materializes finally and notice his remarkable conversation with the father, Paresh Babu (Bengalis address gentlemen as Babus):

“why?” inquired Paresh Babu.
 “it is you who have the mantram of freedom,” explained Gora. “Make me your disciple! Today give me the mantram of that Deity who belongs to all, Hindu, Mussulman, Christian and Brahmo alike—the doors to his temple are never closed to any person of any caste whatever—He who not merely the God of the Hindus, but who is God of India herself!” (407)

I end on the note of love and peace as the modern singers Sourendro & Soumyojit combined deftly Tagore's spiritual song "*Chirosakha hey cherona*" (Dear lord, never leave me alone)¹ with Sufism and calls it "Sufi meets Tagore."

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYVXCzec8ng>

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