



Perennial Relevance of Indian Spiritual Tradition in the Light of Shrimad Rajachandra's Agya-Bhakti

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Abstract:

In Indian discourse of spirituality, there are divine instances that hold the potential to deconstruct superficial Derridean play of language and, as its resultant, possess the capacity to demystify all linguistically enabled identities. Their spiritual road not only unravels the psychological rupture of modern concept pertaining to the 'self' but also presents the critique to the idea of individual freedom and its associated limitation. This old frame which is deemed as a mere discourse of Hindu religiosity, has been undermined in terms of its meta-potential of spirituality and inner-self-finding technology. The preaching of Shrimad Rajachandra falls into this category. On one hand it tries to incorporate the significance of submissive devotional tradition i.e., Agya-bhakti and simultaneously it simplifies the esoteric tradition of Jain, Sankhya and Nath ascetism in the light of Self-Realization. The order it follows takes into account the significance of the Word along with its practice as per the advice of the Siddha. Because of this intricate yet simplified frame, it is observed that the spiritual discourse espoused by this enlightened soul comprises the element of inter-performative/ inter-textual tradition, and hence, requires a meticulous attention to achieve the intellectualized comprehension. The present paper is an attempt to look at these facets embedded in some of the core letters along with two poetic creations written by Shrimad Rajachandra to comprehend various agencies along with influences visibly felt on the spiritual practice of this modern Sage. Apart from that, the paper also exerts an attempt to critique Foucault's concept of discursive identity by resorting to the concept of siddhanubhuti.

Keywords: *Agya-bhakti, Guru's Word and action-oriented tradition.*

1. Introduction

In the bhakti tradition of India, Shrimad Rajachandra is a bright star whose spiritual light perpetually guides the seeker towards the path of attaining the non-doer state. He incorporates many trends of devotion in his innovative methodology of attaining the liberation and the spiritual significance of his writings is immense. Hence, it requires special attention.

As far as his background is concerned, his original name was Shri Raichandbhai Mehta and he was born in 1867 C.E. at Vavania of present-day Saurashtra. He belongs to a well-known merchant family. Right from his childhood, he gives many testimonies of his spiritual prowess which includes experiment of memory feat aka Avadhan and compositions of some of the rare poetic creations of spiritual nature.

His stages of sādhanā primarily includes three places wherein the highest spiritual experience i.e., Siddhanubhuti takes place during his stay in Idar which is a small town of North Gujarat situated in the midst of Arwalli Hills. As far as his spiritual journey is concerned, it charts out a very innovative and yet easily approachable path. In order to understand his path-breaking method of attaining the inner

peace, one needs to look at some of the core features pertaining to his spiritual revelation. It is by looking at them, one will be able to grasp the true nature of 'Self' which lies beyond the post-structuralist comprehension of 'discourse'.

2. Nirgun and Sagun Bhakti in Shrimad Rajachandra's Creations

In devotional tradition, sagun bhakti is often expressed as adoration for the beautiful form of the deity or as intense personal love. On the other hand, nirguna bhakti stressed inner search and repetition of the divine name. Kenneth Bryant suggests that a good way to appreciate sagun and nirguna poetry is to recognize the first as poetry of form (rupa) which has association with Sanskrit poetics and the latter as poetry of name (nama), which does not follow a specific poetic tradition. The first appeals to imagination, while the second asks the audience to listen and understand. (Bryant: 67).

However, when one looks at the spiritual compositions of Shrimad Rajachandra, it becomes clear that the Sagun form of devotion is regarded as the prerequisite for the attainment of pure Nirgun form. In one of his letters, he mentioned that the requirement of an enlightened person (atmagyani) as the master is the precondition to enter into the realm of bhakti. Once the seeker achieves the higher love for once Guru which he terms as 'Paroksha Shraddha', the inner gate of formless 'Self' will get opened up by Him. Thus, the faith in Guru becomes the first condition whose blessings ultimately uncovers the innate faith in the 'Self' which he terms as 'Pratyaksha Shraddha'. Moreover, the 'Self' and the Guru are regarded by him as one. Hence, the sagun and nirgun ultimately remains interchangeable terms as far as his form of devotion is concerned.

3. Incorporation of Jainism and Mahapanth

If one pays closer attention to the verbal structure of Shrimad Rajachandra's preaching, it becomes clear that his verses are basically in dialogue with different traditions such as Jain school of philosophy, Nath asceticism along with some other traditions. This point leads one to understand the intertextual as well as inter-performative nature of his works. The more one looks at the agencies that operate behind the hold of its significance, the better clarity in terms of its structural pattern becomes evident. In this context, his compositions, primarily his letters, follow a design that is very lucidly in line with the mentoring a disciple. The disciple here implies anyone who approaches these words with agnostic curiosity. Besides, these letters are regarded as his 'Agya-Deha¹'. One who takes resort to this body of works can enter into the zone of spiritual awakening. However, the very deciphering of these words demands tremendous potential because it has direct link with the dialogic spiritual tradition of Indian Darshans. Having looked at this background, it is important to analyse the significance of Guru-Agya² as the deconstructing force of all discourses.

4. Michel Foucault's Concept of Discourse and Guru-Agya

According to the post structuralist philosopher- Michel Foucault, the governing force of all the social and cultural identities lies in different discursive traditions. He suggests that certain set of socio-cultural rules, practices and belief system generate a particular sense of a self. Thus, according to him, every identity is either a social or cultural or political construct. (Foucault: 143) However, while propounding this concept, he might have downplayed the exegeses of Indian spiritual tradition, because it categorically divides the Self into two parts namely the Real (Isha) and the Transitory (Mithya). Apart from that, there are different methodologies of yogic nature which can deconstruct all the discursive layers of identity and can lead one to subsume into one's Real Self. This form of Self is bereft of all discourses since it is self-governed and self-illuminated form of perennial bliss. One of such methodologies to achieve this Real State is Guru Agya which is highlighted by Shrimad Rajachandra in his writings. According to him, without Guru's command, the meeting with one's true

¹ It literally means a body of Guru's command. All his letters along with his spiritual poetry are regarded as an alive body of his command. One who follows them can liberate oneself from the false sense of selfhood.

² A Guru Agya is a Sanskrit origin word which literally means a command of Guru for the disciple.

form is not possible. In his letter no. 267, he clearly states that however hard a seeker may try, but the first condition to merge with oneself is to search the person who is spiritually enlightened soul. Such person is the one who has already freed oneself from all karmic imprints of eight types and hence his spirit becomes pure enough to get merged with the Soul. The word that comes thru such enlightened person are spontaneous or **sahaj** and therefore, are tremendously powerful to bring sea-change in the life of a seeker. Thus, without this external agency of Guru-Agya, the process of sādhanā remains contaminated by individual ego.

However, this meeting can only be fruitful if the seeker is qualified. He regards him as Mumukshu (one who intensely craves for the liberation). A qualified seeker will have a tremendous faith which is based on not reason but 'Unreason'. This 'Unreason' is regarded by him as an element of faith or Shraddha. If the seeker accepts the command of the Guru with firm will without an iota of doubt, only then, the miraculous changes can be observed in seeker's life and personality. (Rajachandra: 220)

5. Importance of Sahaj as Core of His Preaching

The idea of Sahaj is very much at the centre of Shrimadji's spiritual writings. In almost all letters, this word recurs frequently. The Guru who has attained this state can initiate any qualified seeker into the process of becoming one with him. The Guru is no more his body but a higher state of the 'Self'. Therefore, under his divine guidance, a qualified seeker can reach the inner peak of enlightenment. The concept of 'sahaj' is interwoven in his core verse regarded as 'Sahajatmaswarup' which connotes the Guru sitting inside oneself.

The concept of 'Sahaj' is prevalent in the Mahapanth of Saurashtra. This is an offshoot of Nath asceticism and its presence has been in the region of Saurashtra since 13th century. The core aim of Mahapanth is not just to have merely sight of the Divine State, but is to become permanently established in it. At the advanced stages of sādhanā, sadhak reaches uninterrupted state of spontaneous (sahajā) experience of the Union with Higher Self in all dimensions of his life, without undertaking any efforts for it. S/he becomes established in this state so firmly that s/he goes beyond the three normal states of consciousness: deep sleep, dream-sleep and awakened states, and even beyond of the fourth state namely Turiyā. S/he transcends the ideas of the time and space, and goes beyond all other physical laws guiding the universe. However, even during this stage, the sadhak remains in one's routine of day-to-day life and performs all the chores of everyday life. But the core of her consciousness lies always attached outside the state of mundane life. This is something peculiar about this tradition since it unites the two and thereby eliminates the duality. (Rajyaguru: 195) Apart from that, the word 'Sahaj' also recurs in Dadu tradition of Rajasthan and even in Guru Nanak's verses. (McLeod: 43) Thus, traces of inter-textuality become visible in the letters of Shrimad Rajachandra's letters.

6. Three Forms of Disciples/ Seekers and Importance of Anubhuti³

In his letter no. 51, he clearly holds the view that action is very much important as far as this path is concerned. The knowledge of scriptures will be of little use as far as the spiritual progress is concerned. Here, he appears to be closer to Dadu Dayal. He also says that words are of little importance in the real dialogue of Guru and disciple. The Guru speaks in silence with one's true disciple, in gestures with one's beloved disciple and in words with an ordinary disciple. (Rajachandra: 62) Thus, language is regarded as an obstacle and all the knowledge available in the realm of language is treated as of little importance. It is only the anubhuti and action-oriented devotion of the seeker that helps one achieve the higher summit of inner voyage. The cramming of scriptures is undermined as a mere act of vain glory. One who is intensely involved in observing the things as they are without getting attached to them can become worthy of receiving complete grace of one's Guru. The biggest obstacle in the spiritual expedition is a constant run behind fame and name.

³ A spiritual experience of one's true self.

7. Three Questions for the Beginners

Apart from this, the spiritual preaching also includes greater room for those who are not qualified seeker. For them, Shrimadji explains the way to become so and for that the first thing one should do, as he advises, is to meditate on three core questions as raised by him in his letter no. 151 and they are as follows:

1. What is the root of one's paribhraman⁴?
2. What is the true nature of one's self?
3. What is the worth of worldly joy?

By looking at these questions with agnostic zeal, it becomes possible to initiate pondering over oneself. The deconstruction of false idea of self begins to get shattered with such pure thinking. One who keeps doing this practice, can slowly and gradually attains the status of qualified seeker. In the same letter, he also insists that the root of paribhraman lies in one's false affinity with external realities and worldly objects which will ultimately perish and will certainly depart from the person. A true self will alone remain and even the body is also regarded by spiritual master as a 'guest-house'.

8. Emphasis on Egoless State of Mind

In letter number 73, Shrimada Rajachandra emphasizes two important aspects as the weapons to decode the vain glorious self. The first among the two is leaving the desire of respect and the second is the constant thinking of the nature of the material objects including the body and its related associations. The former is given greater emphasis and in order to highlight its significance, he writes, "If there was no craving for fame and respect in this world, the liberation was possible overnight." On the other hand, he also informs his followers about the importance of secrecy in *sādhanā*. One who really wants to achieve the Ultimate Sit of Knowledge, must leave the worldly gatherings and need to observe the company of oneself in the constant meditation on the secret mantra given by the Guru. At many instances, he lashes out on the deviations that take place within the Jain tradition.

9. Critique of Jain Traditions

In his famous "Atmasiddhi Shashtra" literally means a science of the soul, he says that the real dharma of Lord Mahavir lies in doing nothing. One who does everything with a sense of non-doer state is on the path of Arihant⁵. He further states, "The real dharma of Atma⁶ lies nowhere but in one's Atma." (Rajachandra: 108) In letter number 118, he informs that this Gachcha (a type of religious groupings in Jain tradition) and Mata (dissenting views) are human inventions. The true knowledge of the Self lies in itself. As long as there are worldly desires and mundane thoughts, the person will remain away from one's true form. The ultimate goal of life is to become free from all thoughts and eight forms of karma which he calls Niravikalpa state (Thoughtless State). Here, he appears to be closer to Jacques Lacan- a famous post-structuralist psychoanalyst of France. In his prophetic words, he reverses the whole Western set of Cartesian understanding wherein he says, "I exist where I think not." (Lacan: 74).

10. Radical Understanding of Dharma by Underplaying the Role of Scriptures:

In his one of the verses of "Atmasiddhi Shashtra" he writes, "the theories of knowledge propounded in different scriptures is nothing but tricks of poets. And all four Vedas and Puranas are nothing but the products of vain-glory." (Rajachandra: 65) Thus, similar to Narasinha Mehta, he underplays the significance of scriptural discourse and regards it as of no use in the yogic process of self-illumination. Apart from that, he also gives a radical understating of Dharma. According to him, Dharma is nothing but inner peace. As long as one remains in peaceful state of mind, he is practising Dharma. The moment inner peace gets disturbed, it is called an absence of Dharma.

⁴ A belief of cyclic life of Sanatan dharma wherein the soul keeps rotating among four dimensions namely the Heaven, the Human world, the Animal world and the Hell.

⁵ One of the name for 24 liberated spirits of Jain tradition known as *Tirthankaras*.

⁶ In Hindu Darshan, it is a real form of self which is closer to the Western concept of the soul.

Apart from that, he suggests that religion is the spiritual quality of the soul. It is embedded in human nature in visible or invisible form. By religion we are able to know the duty of man, by it we are able to know our relations (or kinship) with other living beings. But all this requires the capacity to know one's true self. If we do not know ourselves, we cannot know others in rightful manner. By religion one can know himself. According to him, such form of religion/dharma should be selected from wherever it is found.

In his well-known verses of "Apurva Avasara", he writes, "The stage of experience which the All-seeing Mahavir saw in spiritual knowledge, He could not himself describe in full. I meditated on that very stage of spiritual experience but I found that I was also incompetent to describe it. I have a desire to describe it in full but at present it has remained only as my cherished desire." (Rajachandra: 69) Thus, the inability of language remains the biggest abatement to express that is above the realm of all signs. The only signifier that can convey it is the silence of the Guru which can be achieved thru the means of Guru's Agya.

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