

**A Study of the Un-gendered Human Identity in Sufism, Christianity, Baul songs and Ancient Hindu Philosophy: A Step towards Preparing Teachers for Addressing Diversity in Modern Society**

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**Abstract:** The world today is torn apart by various disjunctive forces and human identity is being continuously renegotiated. Patriarchal hegemonic discriminations are increasingly being questioned as the need to address diversity, especially in education, is being realised. The western hegemonic praxis of equalising or homogenising the human identity and defying diversity is now coming under the scanner as new identities defying the traditional social constructs are coming to the forefront. Be it a minority or a third gender issue, the need for acknowledging and addressing diversity in the society and preparing the students and teachers for the same is the cry of the hour. Instead of looking to the west for guidance a look back to the Sufi Vision reveals how close it comes to Christian, ancient Hindu and Bengal's baul traditions of addressing diversity and locating a central unity of human identity in it. Tagore's profound forays into this territory would also be discussed in this context. This paper proposes to explore specimens of each category to show the resemblance of vision and how significant this might be for developing teachers for a better inclusive society in the true sense of the term.

**Key words:** Sufism, Christianity, Hindu vision, baul, Tagore, diversity, human identity, teacher education

### **A Study of the Un-gendered Human Identity in Sufism, Christianity, Baul songs and Ancient Hindu Philosophy: A Step towards Preparing Teachers for Addressing Diversity in Modern Society**

The yearning for certitude as a quest stretches through the sensuous, emotional and intuitive modes of cognition, for a conceptual fixity that the intellect attempts to register in some sort of hypothetical totality and contingent closure of linguistic constructs. The exactitude of a conceptual absolute, however, remains elusive and the frustrated verbal modules evolve continually in an attempt to grasp a perceptual clarity deferred perpetually. What appears to be 'absolute' and definite gradually emerges as a point of profound perplexity. Umberto Eco, in *Inventing the Enemy* asserts that an idea of a perceptual 'absolute' is in itself quintessentially undefinable. He says –“An expression like absolute...does not suggest descriptions, definitions and classifications; we cannot think of any instructions for producing anything corresponding to it...” (p.26). This human tendency to codify the essentially undefinable and volatile into a certitude of definitiveness, usually granted by the sense of an absolute, Eco believes, might perhaps emanate from an intrinsic fear: “As we are contingent beings... we desperately need to think there is something to fasten onto that will not perish” (p.26). Hence the continual attempt at compartmentalization and stereotypes.

Against this backdrop the apparently absolutist distinctions between gender emerges as an essentially discursive formation – an essentially social and positional construct, conditioned by cultural bearings and often subjugated to the repressive reign of the prevailing. Judith Butler argues in the chapter 'Subject of Sex/Gender/Desire', the traditional or conventional societal imposition of differences between genders is but an effect of a given version of a 'representational politics' (p.3). The world today is torn apart by various disjunctive forces and human identity is being continuously renegotiated. Patriarchal hegemonic discriminations are increasingly being questioned as the need to address diversity, especially in education, is being realised. The western hegemonic praxis of equalising or homogenising the human identity and defying diversity is now coming under the scanner as new identities defying the traditional social constructs are coming to the forefront. Be it a minority or a third gender issue, the need for acknowledging and addressing diversity in the society and preparing the students and teachers for the same is the cry of the hour. Instead of looking to the west for guidance a look back to the Sufi Vision reveals how close it comes to Christian, ancient Hindu and Bengal's baul traditions of addressing diversity and locating a central unity of human identity in it. Tagore's profound forays into this territory would also be discussed in this context.

A series of systematic researches published by Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA P9 Eurydice) as *Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes: Study on the Measures Taken and the Current Situation in Europe*(2010) reveal that the European nations have already taken into cognizance the necessity of inclusion of the gender issue in mainstream education as the centrality of human identity must transcend the frontiers of stereotyping of gender in the modern world today. The issue is emerging as a matter of central significance against the backdrop of the emerging new gender identities that had so long been concealed and repressed by social hegemonic structures. Mainstreaming of gender too is emerging as a crucial aspect of modern education that must prepare human beings to address and accept diversity as the way for holistic progress. The importance of developing teachers assumes significance in this area as these trained teachers play a vital role in educating thousands of future

citizens of nay nation . Teacher education must then be exposed to such systematic explorations of gender diversity and equity in terms of a central human identity beyond stereotypes for a truly inclusive and free society. Some countries include the topic of gender among general issues of equality which form an integral part of initial teacher education. This is the case in Belgium (Flemish Community), Sweden and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland). In Belgium (French Community), Denmark, France, Austria and the Netherlands, the gender dimension as such has to be taken into account in teacher education. This is included in the gender mainstreaming policy (Austria), in competence requirements of teachers (the Netherlands), in the decree on initial teacher education (Belgium - French Community), in the bachelor programme for Folkeskole-teachers (Denmark) or in gender equality missions of teacher education institutions (France). In Spain, Luxembourg and Portugal, the various action plans on gender equity and not equality, currently in place provide for the inclusion of the gender dimension in initial teacher education. In Spain, the 2008-2011 Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities includes, as its first objective, the promotion of the appropriate initial training for teachers and other educational staff in co-education, prevention of gender-based violence and harassment and equal opportunities. To achieve these objectives, a series of guidelines are proposed, for instance: encouraging the creation of departments of gender studies aimed at the specific training, research and elaboration of didactic material in the faculties of education, teacher training colleges and in-service training centres; promoting the creation of postgraduate courses with a specialization in equal opportunities for women and men in education, coeducation, non-sexist education and prevention of violence against women; and incorporating gender-equality-related themes in recruitment processes. In Portugal, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2007-2010) envisages, as a strategic area of intervention, the promotion of the integration of a gender dimension not only in the specifications of competence profiles but equally in the training profiles of educational professionals, namely teachers, teacher assistants and those responsible for educational and professional guidelines. In Finland, a research project was started in 2008 focussing on the 'Equality and Gender-Sensitivity in Teacher Education' (TASUKO) which aims at providing future teachers with more theoretical and practical information on how they can promote gender equality and how they can act in a more gender-sensitive way in their work. Within the project, curricula and methodologies will be developed as well as a research programme and research results will be incorporated into teacher education.

In India however, gender does not seem to have a prominent place within any teacher education program. Its inclusion depends on individual institutions as well as individual student motivation to attend courses covering this topic. Some countries have, however, plans to give the gender dimension more room within teacher education. The situation is similar for CPD activities for educational staff. In many countries, CPD provision is highly decentralized and a large variety of public and private providers exist. It is therefore very difficult to know what types of courses are available. Gender as a topic of in-service training courses or seminars provided by public institutions seems to be rather sporadic. Only Malta reports on compulsory CPD activities for teachers which cover gender aspects. Gender is often included in activities linked to general equality topics. The contribution of NGOs is here again particularly important in Central Eastern European countries. In Austria for example, gender mainstreaming is also applied to in-service teacher training centres. In Spain and Portugal, gender equality plans also envisage the inclusion of the gender dimension in CPD for educational staff.

It is interesting to note how our ancient philosophies like the Sufi thoughts had already added a philosophical dimension to the perception of human identity beyond stereotypical gender-specific identities imposed by narrow and mostly western praxis. An exploration of Sufi, Vaishnav, Christian and indigenous baul visions expressed in Tagore's poetry reveal the depths of gender perception in our own culture that transcends the straitjacket of stereotypes and proffers a new inclusive human identity based on devotion, love, compassion and profound philosophical insights. Sufi mysticism too appropriates gender fluidity in a passionate portrayal of the transcendental as the male beloved that the ardent devotee longs to reconcile to in an ecstatic embrace. "My Lord, eyes are at rest", sings the eighth century Sufi mystic Rabia al-Adawiyya, "the stars are setting, hushed are the movements of birds in their nests...My Lord, each lover is now alone with his beloved, and I am alone with Thee".<sup>1</sup> "All that I am, that I have, that I hope and all my love", sings Tagore in Song 91 of Gitanjali, "have ever flowed towards thee in depths of secrecy...the flowers have been woven into the wedding garland in my heart/Waiting for the day when you would come dressed as the bridegroom with a silent smile...I would lose my own place that day and unite with you like the bride with her bridegroom in the solitude of the night"(p.258). The resonances are evident. The subverted position of the gendered subject constituted in the projective field of conventional sexual bipolarity is intriguingly close. Margaret Smith in the introductory chapter of her *Readings from the Mystics of Islam* delineates the centrality of gendered love and passion in the Sufi perception of the divine:

The stages and stations [for complete communion] with their resultant qualities included repentance(tawba), Patience(sabr), gratitude(shukr), hope(raja), fear(khawf), poverty(faqr), renunciation(zuhd), meaning for the personal will in the Will of God(tawhid), dependence and trust in God(tawakul), Love(mahabba) including passionate longing for God(shawq), intimacy with Him(uns) and satisfaction with all He desires...of Love the Sufis have much to say: it is the "wine of life"...this is "pure love"...much of this is symbolical and expressed sometimes in sensuous form...earthly love may be used as a type of the divine Love.(pp.1-3)

Margaret translates Qurrat Al-Ayn also called Janab-i-Tahira (1852) whose perception of the divine as a male warlord comes strikingly close to Tagore's portrayal of the divine male beloved who leaves behind a dazzling sword. "Attraction to Thee and longing for Thee are factors", says Tahira, "which have bound all Thine afflicted lovers with the chains of grief...I will surely rise up to His sword and I will be satisfied with what pleases Him". Tagore's perception of God in form of a divine beloved inflicts pain in a similar fashion for the human lover who is expressly identified as "naari" or woman in Song 52 of Gitanjali :

I thought I should ask of thee-but I dared not – the rose wreath thou hadst on thy neck...Ah me what is it I find? What token left of thy love? It is no flower, no spices, no vase of perfumed water. It is thy mighty sword, flashing as a flame, heavy as a bolt of thunder...The morning bird twitters and asks, "Woman, what hast thou got?"...I sit and muse in wonder, what gift is this of thine. I can find no place where to hide it...it hurts me when I press it to my bosom. Yet shall I bear in my heart this honour of the burden of pain, this gift of thine.(p.153)

It is interesting to note how the Sufi perception identifies the parts the parts of the human body as free from sexist particularities and gives the body of flesh a totally different dimension capable of realising the

divine through self-less love and devotion. It is generally thought that the human body contains only one subtle center of consciousness: the mind or brain. But the elder Sufis, through their spiritual experiences, discovered additional centers of perception or inner senses which they referred to as *lata'if* (singular: *latifah*). They further concluded based on their *kashf* (intuitive insight) that there are ten such *lata'if*. The origins of the *lata'if* reflect the origins of the universe as a whole. According to Shaykh Ahmad Faruqi Sirhindi (r.a.), the Indian master from whom the Mujaddidi lineage descends, God created the universe in two stages. First came 'alam'iamr (the world of God's command), which emerged instantly when God said, "Be!" Then God created 'alam'ikhalq (the world of creation) through a process of evolution that lasted many years. After 'alam'ikhalq, God created the human being. God blessed this new creation with certain inner faculties or points of light; the *lata'if*. Five of the *lata'if* – nafs (self), bad (air), nar (fire), ma' (water), and khak (earth) – were part of the world of creation. The other five – qalb (heart), ruh (spirit), sir (secret), khafi (hidden), and akhfa (most hidden) – were part of the world of God's command. The *lata'if* were luminous initially. When God connected them to the body, their light started to be filtered through the influences of the physical world, including human beings' tendency to identify with materiality. The dimming of our natural inner radiance is reflected in the Qur'anic passage, "Surely We created the human being of the best stature, then We reduced him to the lowest of the low, except those who believe and do good works, for they shall have a reward unfailing." (Qur'an 95:4-6). Through practices that involve concentrating on the *lata'if* the Sufi aspirant becomes able to use them as means to greater awareness of the Divine Presence. The more the seeker develops this ability, the less the light of knowledge is obscured. Like the faculty of memory, the *lata'if* are faculties that we may sense and experience, yet have difficulty explaining. Different Sufi orders have associated the *lata'if* with various locations on the body. The Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi order places the five centers of the world of God's command (the *lata'if* of 'alam'iamr) in the chest. The heart or qalb is on the left side of the body, while the spirit, ruh, is in the corresponding position on the right side of the chest. The subtle center known as secret, or sirr, is on the same side as the heart, but above the breast. Hidden (khafi) is on the right above the breast. Most hidden (akhfa) is in the middle of his chest, between the heart and spirit. Shaykhs of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi order guide the salik (spiritual traveler) in enlightening the *lata'if* one by one. This is accomplished primarily through *muraqabah* (meditation). While sitting, the student makes an intention (*niyah*) to pay attention to a particular subtle center. He or she focuses first on the heart (qalb), then, in sequence, the other *lata'if* of the world of God's command: spirit, secret, hidden, and most hidden (ruh, sirr, khafi, and akhfa). When these are fully enlightened, the individual can pay attention to the *lata'if* associated with the world of creation ('alam'ikhalq). Of the subtle centers connected with the world of creation, only the self or nafs is regarded as corresponding to a particular point on the human body. Its location is in the middle of the forehead. It is the first of the *lata'if* of 'alam'ikhalq that one refines, for it is considered the sum total of all the others. After concentrating on the self for some time, the student is guided next to focus on the four gross elements of which the body is constituted – air, fire, water, and earth (bad, nar, ma', and khak). When these are infused with light, every pore of the body becomes illuminated and starts to remember God. The socially and biologically sexed human body then is brought close to the elements of nature and unsexed philosophically in realisation of the divine. This in itself is a very interesting way of addressing diversity in form of the third gender and similar other gender issues that a teacher must be well educated

in in order to open the closed windows of his/her mind and prepare students for an inclusive violence-free society.

The ancient Indic literature comes very close to this Sufi perception of a gendered human identity. The Creator, the Omniscient One or the Absolute Consciousness in such a cultural polyphony, has time and again been conceived as an androgenic totality, and yet a concomitant recognition of the female sensibility- the devotion and yearning of a female psyche as a powerful agency, has enjoyed central significance. The feminine becomes a part of the divine in a glorious union and it is in this very union in which the creator-created, God-human relation assumes the sexed gender dimension of the male-female union, that the realms of the highest spiritual experience becomes tangible. It is through such a union that the Transcendental can be touched. Gender-specific identities are thus problematized and an intriguing fluidity is suggested in the Indic cultural “stereophony”. Gender division as a formative principle of sexed identities, merges in a strikingly harmonious whole in the literary discourse of ancient Indian literature. The division is arbitrary and for the sole purpose of procreation. In the second canto of Kumarsambavam the gods address Brahma the Creator, as the original source that had willfully divided itself into male and female forms – the source in which the arbitrary gender forms merge in a perfect harmony:

Stree-pungshabatmovagoutevinnomurtehshishukkhaya

Prasutivajohswargosyatobebopitorousmitrou.

[you have divided yourself into the male and the female who are the parents of this creation]

Again in the same canto –

Twamanastiprakritingpurushartho-prabartinim

Taddorshinamudasinongtwamebopurushongbiduh.

[the enlightened ones say that you are the prakriti- the source of creation and the all passive witness –the purusha]

The first canto of Raghuvangsham too refers to the union- the blending of the male and female forces that must emerge in a totality – even as the word and meaning in a poetic module merge to form a coherent whole:

Bagarthabibosampriktoubagarthaprotipatyaye

JagatohpitoroubondeParvotiparameshwarou

[for the right comprehension of words and their senses, I salute Parvati – the mountain’s daughter and parameswara – the supreme lord, the parents of the universe, who are perpetually united even as words and their meanings are].

This invocation of the image of the Ardhanariswara, the cultural icon of the androgenic identity, interestingly, defies the conventional bipolarity of the genders. That the gender fluidity and androgenic totality is an integral part of the Indic cultural and literary mosaic is revealed in the variety of ancient motifs from different parts of the country. Ardha-yuvatiswara of Assam, the motif of 'dehardo-ghatana' of Mahimanastava composed in the Gupta period, the Gourishwara of the Vishnu dharmottara, the Vedic composite figure of Yama-Yami, the androgynous cosmic 'Purusha' of the Brihadakaranya Upanishad who divides his own self into male and female forms for generating life, the Shwetastwara Upanishad defining Rudra or the antecedent of the Puranic Shiva as the creator of life and the original source of all male and female principles, the iconographic 16th century work Shilparatna, the MatsyaPurana and South Indian Agamic texts like Amshumadbhedagama, Kamikagama, Supredagama and Karanagama describing the iconography of androgenic Ardhanarishvara, Kashmiri Shaivism as well as the Mahabharata [Book XIII] with Upamanyu praising Shiva's androgenic form as the source of all creation in tandem with the LingaPurana, VayuPurana, Vishnu Purana, SkandaPurana, KurmaPurana, and MarkandeyaPurana projecting the Ardhanarishvara form of Rudra (identified with Shiva) among many more, are reflections of the heritage of an androgenic totality.

Tagore's essays like 'Naronari', 'Mon' and 'Akhondota' published initially as Diary in the magazine titled Sadhona and later as an anthology titled Panchobhoot reveal that Tagore is deeply committed to the basic oneness of 'purusha' and 'prakriti' in the androgenic icon of the ancient Indian tradition. In 'Nawronari', he identifies 'purusha' or the male as essentially a hermit – an all-relinquishing passive consciousness, while 'prakriti' or the female is identified as the relentless flow of activity manifested in the kaleidoscopic variety of manifestation in universe. The Samkhya philosophy resonant with echoes of the Rigveda and the Shvetashvatara Upanishad, dear to the poet's heart, provide the philosophical support. The Samkhya system classifies the universe into two categories – Purusha and Prakriti, the former being the pure consciousness that is absolute, independent and beyond the grasp of finite verbal cognition, while Prakriti is the ever-active imperceptible in which all material manifestations are implicitly embedded with immense potency. The Purusha is the perceiver, the 'Bhokta' - the passive observer, the enjoyer while the Prakriti is the 'Bhogya' or the enjoyed. The Samkhya philosophy identifies each sentient being as a fusion of both. The Prakriti interacts with the Purusha in the same body and an evolutionary process is triggered causing the worldly manifestations. Both the Samkhya philosophy and the Upanishads recognize a cardinal purpose of such a process to be the enjoyment and liberation - the Purusha and Prakriti unite and evolve as an indivisible whole. In his essay titled 'Akhondota' in Panchobhoot, Tagore mentions the same analogy. His overt identification of the female with Prakriti acts as an intriguing prelude to a striking identification of his own creative consciousness with Prakriti. He asserts -

Prakritirmotoiramanir ache kebolmatroichchshakti...manushermodhyedutoangsho ache – aktaachetan, brihot, guptoebongnisheshto, arektasachetan, sokriyo, chonchol, poribortonshil.

[women have only will power like prakriti. In the human body there are two parts-one is vast, passive, unconscious and the other is active, restless and in a flux].



In Chhinnopatraboli, he echoes the ancient philosophy that perceives a totality in the ultimate merging of the Purusha and Prakriti. The devotee must yearn for a communion with the Transcendental like the Prakriti longing to be united with the Purusha. In letter no. 64 of Chhinnopotro and letter no. 70 of Chhinnopatraboli he describes the state of yearning and active evolution with a fascinating metaphor of germinating life in the process of the union with the eternal and Absolute consciousness. Interestingly he identifies himself with the fertile earth – the productive potency of Prakriti, essentially female, infused with the rays of the autumn sun – the radiant ‘purusha’ that penetrates the earth:

Aksomoyjokhonamiaeprithibirsongeakhoyechhilum, jokhonamaroporsobujghasuthto, sarat-eraloportto, surjokiron-e amarsudurbistritoshyamolongerprotyekromkupthekejoubon-ersugondhiuttaputthitohotethakto, amikawto...deshdeshantor-erjolshtolparbatbyaptokoreujjolakash-er niche nistobdhoshuye pore thaktum, tokhonsaratsurjalok-e amarbrihotsarbange je ektianondoros, ektijibonishoktiottyontoobyaktoardhachetanebongottyontoprokandobrihotvabesancharitohotethakto tai jyanokhaniktamone pore – amaraei je mon-ervaab e jyanoaeiprotiniyotoonkuritomukulitopolakitosurjosnataadimprithibirvaab.

[once when I was the same as the earth and green grass sprouted from me as the autumn sun rays brought out the fragrant heat of youth from every pore of my vast green body, I used to lie silent under the bright sky and the golden sun infused my body with a strange powerful bliss and life-force..my present state of mind is like that of the germinating, flowering, ancient earth bathed in the sun].

It is this identification and express act of gender subversion that in a sense reveals the philosophy behind his worship of the divine as a male or Purusha consciousness. The female position of Prakriti is necessary to evolve towards that degree of self surrender that would lead to the ultimate communion – a harmonious blending of the finite and the transcendental, the word and the meaning, the rhythm and the melody.

The urgency of assuming the role of ‘prakriti’ or the more feminine idiom of surrender as an essential prelude to the ultimate merging into the Absolute androgenic totality also relates to the ancient and medieval Indic literary history of gender subversions arching over the Vedas, Puranas, Vaishnabite ideology, Sufism, Shaivism, Christian influences, folklores and ethnic cultural overtones, that infused the poet’s assimilative consciousness from an early stage. The Vaishnabite influences on Tagore have received scholarly attention in multiple contexts, but what is particularly significant in the present context, is the evolution of the theory of Radha as an embodiment of the metaphysical essence and power of Lord Krishna, the Transcendental Absolute. Song no. 34 in the “Pooja” phase projects the poetic self as exulted with an anticipation of the union with the beloved as his self proceeds dressed as a bride for her ‘swayambar’ or selection of her beloved as her bridegroom: “Tomayamaymilonhobe bole /Joog-e joog-e bishwabhubantol-e /Poranamarbodhurbeshecholechiroswayambara [in every century my heart proceeds dressed as a bride in this universe to accept you for our union]. The Transcendental Absolute is yearned for in the form of male “pranesh”/lord of life, “parampati”/the Lord or husband, “pranonath”/Lord of life, “swami”/Husband, “Prabhu”/Master, “chirobanchhito”/the one always longed for, or “priyo”/beloved,



with the poet assuming the feminine tone of deep devotion like Radhika. Song no. 47 depicts a divine union in the sublime darkness of a silent night where the poet sings – “Amar sondhyaphoolermodhu/ Ebar je vogkorbebnodhu”[now my beloved will enjoy the nectar of my evening blossom]. One is reminded of the ancient Samkhya dichotomy of Purusha and Prakriti as “Bhokta” and “Bhogya”. Song no. 68 again addresses the divine as “jibanoballabho”[lord of life], “nityopremerdham-e amarporompoti”[my husband/Lord in the abode of eternal love] and “probhu”[Master] that are typically male identities with the poetic voice assuming a gender specific tone of the ladylove.

The metaphor of Radhika dressed as the bride for the Lord in Song 34 brings to mind the Christian tradition of the bride of Christ and there are interesting culturally established lines of coherence. Dr. Aronson in Rabindranath through Western Eyes argues that Tagore seemed to be “more Christian than Christians”(p.85). Christ, in the Book of Isaiah (Chapter 54), is the divine bridegroom of the Church and again in the ‘Book of Ruth’, the “bride of Christ” is said to wash herself with the Word, anoint herself with oil and dress in the fine linen of good works: Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. [Rev.19:7-8]. The gender projection is but denotative of the spiritual yearning for the ultimate communion, the preparation signifying faith and spirituality akin to what Tagore identifies as “sadhana”. In ‘Corinthians’, 11:2-3 (King John’s Version), Paul informs the Christians that he has “espoused” them to Christ: “I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ.” Chastity here refers to unadulterated devotion and the Scriptures [Matthew.22:1-14] attach shame to Christians who have not for themselves a wedding garment of good deeds. Tagore’s response to the closeness between the Vaishnava philosophy and the Christian perception of the essential God-man relation comes out in The Religion of Man: “Nobody has exalted man more in every sphere than Jesus. The divinity of man is stressed by Jesus as by Vaishnava saints.”(p.52)

The sentiment of “biroho” or estrangement traditionally associated with Radha, is delicately woven through the texture of most of the songs of the ‘Pooja’ as the eternal longing for the union with the beloved is deferred perpetually. Song no.63 depicts the typical Vaishnavite yearning for the One who can never be grasped fully: “Mukher pan-e takate jai, dekhidekhidekhtenapai”(I try to look at his face and yet can never perceive). Radhika yearns for Krishna as he leaves for Mathura never to return again. This yearning encompasses the poet’s entire consciousness as he urges his beloved to return to his embrace amidst his smiles, tears, coyness or “chcholon” and love or “ador” in a song composed on 29th August 1894: “Amar chirobanchchitoesho/Amar chirosonjitoesho/ ohechonchol, hey chironton, vujobondhone fire esho...Amar mukherhasiteesho/Amar chokhersolil-e esho/amarador-e, amarchcholon-e, amarobhiman-e fire esho.” [come back my beloved in my tears and smile and hugs].The frequent use of the image of the flute traditionally associated with SriKrishna who entices and mesmerizes Radhika with his divine melody, is significant too. Radhika abandons her domestic security and rushes to meet her beloved with ardent devotion, attracted by the melody of the flute. Song no. 96 depicts an identical yearning that compels the poetic self to relinquish all material bondage for the magical melody that fills the firmament: “bashabandharbandhonkhanajaknatute/ Obadhpothersunnyeamicholbochchute/ Sunyovoratomarbnashirsur-e sur-e/ Hridoyamarsohojsudhaydaonapur-e”[let the bondage of domesticity be severed, I will run to thee as the universe resonates with the melody of thy flute, fill my heart with the

beauty of that music]. When the “monermanush” (lord of the heart) leaves the slumbering self, the dark night is spent in estrangement on the “anchol” spread on the cold floor, the dark opacity pierced with the compelling call of the magical flute. The surrendering self longs for the eternal union with the beloved. Song no.93 asserts—“Sob bandhon-e tomarsathebondikoromor-e/Oheyamibnadhon-kami” [Imprison me with yourself O Lord, I pray for such bondage]. This union is an intrinsic union in the form of a complete realization of the infinite in the finite frame. The incessant play of pleasure, longing, love, estrangement, sentimental complaints or unconditional self-surrender is a necessary prelude to a quest for self-realization that, in its turn, reconciles the self with the Absolute in a meaningful totality.

The GaudiyaVaishnabite philosophy perceives Radha as an intrinsic part of the Supreme Creator Krishna. Radika is identified as the “hladinishakti” or the pleasure principle inherent in the metaphysical self of the divine Lord Krishna. She is the “paramananda” or the divine bliss that transcends the frontiers of material pleasure and is an eternal source of power. Krishna can be realized with His full potency only through the love of Sriradha. The “lila” or the material manifestations of the “hladini-shakti”, mandatory for the complete realization of the power of the unitary form, being impossible in a single body, the arbitrary “Bheda” or differentiation into male and female entities is necessary. Sri Chaitanya, the greatest devotee of Krishna, has been perceived as the mortal manifestation of the conjoined form of the male and female facets of the Absolute. SashibhusanDasGupta in Sri RadharKromoBikash, quotes a sloka from the Bhagobad which identifies the form of Sri Chaitanya as a morphological blend of the dark Krishna and the fair Radhika, divided in the same body and seared with an intense longing for the ultimate union: “Krishna barnangtwishakrishnang/sangopangastroparshadam/jaggoisangkirtanprayoi /jarjontiheesumedhasah.” SashibhusanDasgupta quotes SwaroopDamodar in support.

The Baul folklores that created a deep impact upon Tagore’s creative self appropriate a similar contingency of the gender position. In the process of realizing the infinite divinity, the conventional notional confines of the sexed body are continually problematized. In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore refers to the Baul tradition of identifying the divine as the “monermanush” or the lord of the heart whom the self unites with through pure love; “For the sake of this love”, quotes Tagore, “heaven longs to become earth and gods to become man”. In the Introduction to Mohammed Monsuruddin’s anthology of folk songs *Haramoni*, Tagore relates the Baul perception of the ardent quest for the “monermanush” or the beloved with the Upanishadic philosophy urging the soul to realize only the ultimate ‘Purusha’ without whom life is but the agony of death—“Tang bedyangpurushongbedyangbedo ma bomrityuhporibiyathah”. The divine is imagined as the male beloved. In *Creative Unity*, Tagore points out—“He [the Baul] feels himself like a flute through which God’s own breath of love has been breathed: My heart is like a flute he has played on...My lover’s flute is dear to Him...” (p.25). The Absolute is conceived as a “lover” that the devotee seeks to unite with. This union of genders would take place in a single body that then may be said to transcend the restrictive sexed dimensions. Tagore’s essay ‘An Indian Folk Religion’ in *Creative Unity* records his appreciation of the ethnic modality of negotiating the frontiers of the traditional gendered discourse: “These Bauls have a philosophy, which they call the philosophy of the body...the underlying idea is that the individual’s body is itself the temple, in whose inner mystic shrine the divine appears before the soul...” (p.24) Interestingly this reminds one of the Christian conception of the body of Christ as a temple

endorsed in Colossians 2:9-10. Three Cappadonian monks, Basil (329-379 AD), Gregory of Nazianzus(325-390 AD) and Gregory of Nyssa analyzed the Holy Trinity as the union of three 'hypostates' in one 'ousia', the Greek words signifying the characteristic and the generic respectively. Pope Leo, at the Council of Chancelton in Asia Minor in 451 A.D. explained the Son or Christ the Logos as being homoousious with both the Father and mortal man. The body of blood and flesh as assumed by the Son of God, thus assumed the status of a temple that enshrined the divine. Tagore's vision comes close to this concept of the meeting of immanence and transcendence in one body, in Song no. 39. The beloved husband lies asleep in the innermost chamber of the heart as the mortal self sings ardently in anticipation of a divine union:

morHridoyergoPONobijonoghor-e/ Aykelaroyechchonirobosoyonopor-e/Priyotomo hey  
jago/Ruddhodwarerbahirednarayeami/Arkotokalemon-e katibe  
swami...Milabonoyononoyonerosathe/Milabo e hat tobodakkhino hat-  
e...Hridoypatrosudhaypurnohobe/Timirknapibegobhiroaloro rob-e

[in the secret chamber of my heart thou sleepestsilerntly O my beloved, wake up my husband/master, how long should I stand alone outside the closed doors...our eyes will meet and our hands will touch...my heart will overflow with the nectar of bliss as the dark night would tremble in the passion and sound of profound illumination]

Again in Song no.85 the poet depicts the blissful love of the divine and the immanent in the single mortal body-"Aponaretumidekhichchomodhurrosh-e/ Amar majharenijerekori-yadaan"[ you observe yourself in bliss by putting yourself in my immanent self]. The divine presence in the mortal frame had been anticipated by the Greeko-Roman and Judeo-Christian ideology of the intrinsic presence of the One or the inner resplendent "logos endiathetos" –the later Christian the inner Word, and the external articulated "logos porphorikos" or human speech that continually strive to harmonize with the inner Word of God. From Epictetus, Chryssipus and Plotinus to Saint Augustine, the paradox of the One in many and many in One resonates with the same ideological paradox as in the Indian philosophy.

The ultimate communion reflected in the ancient figure of the Ardhanariswara - the supreme androgenic form, the union of Purusha and Prakriti in the Samkhya philosophy and the Vedanta, or the Vaishnaba ideal of Sri GourangoChaitanya – all reflect a totality beyond the gender dichotomy, beyond a bipolarity willfully created to experience the most intense level of yearning or devotion necessary for a complete realization of the power inherent in the conjoined unit. The beginning and the end may be the eternally tranquil harmonious composite, the divine beyond gender specifications, but the full realization of its own potency necessitates an infinite play of intriguing gender subversions in terms of devotion. As Umberto Eco argues in *Inventing the Enemy*, "we ourselves enter to become part of the Absolute, since the Absolute...would be the indissoluble unity of the conscious being and of such things that were once considered extraneous to the individual."(p.23). Thus be it the Sufi philosophy that treats the body as a potent means of realising the One divine power and resorts to wilful gender subversion in its devotional songs to show the gender qualities being denotative of intense yearning for the divine and transcending petty and elusive material details, or the BAishnab or Christian or baul perceptions htat Tagore explores in his own poetic formulations, one thing is apparently very clear. These all collectively point to the

redundancy of violence and disruptions in the name of discriminations. Be it Malala Yusuf in our neighbouring country or the girl in our own hamlets, be it the threatened Nirbhaya in Delhi or the third gender taboo that rocks the nations today, the obsession with a gendered body increasingly creates gaping chasms in the society and leads to violent erosion of values. Teachers can develop young minds and inclusion of Sufi texts in tandem with such indicative ones from other religions and cultures as discussed above, may be significant in developing a more inclusive understanding of the issue. Life skill education may be integrated with a systematic exposure to such texts. Teacher education may be conceived of in a way that allows training in broadening of mental horizons by getting back to these gems of our own polyphonic assimilative culture that teaches us the true nature of human identity that goes beyond the sexed or gendered body and ultimately aspires to perfection through a selfless surrender to the divine.

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