

How Death is in Tagore's Thoughts

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of death presents a nuanced, spiritual perspective rooted in Indian Vedantic traditions, viewing death as a transition rather than an end, akin to a doorway into higher consciousness or divine union. His writings depict death as a natural, rhythmic part of the universe's eternal cycle, emphasizing acceptance, inner spiritual growth, and the unity of life and death within the cosmic whole. Tagore perceives death as a friend, a purifier, and a call for spiritual awakening, encouraging individuals to transcend fear through love, faith, and self-awareness. His thoughts are heavily influenced by Upanishadic ideas of the immortal soul (Atman) and Moksha, advocating that death ultimately leads to reunion with the divine, symbolizing renewal and rebirth. While his poetic and philosophical approach offers comfort and a transcendent understanding, critics argue that it may overlook the raw emotional realities and societal complexities of death, such as grief and physical suffering. His emphasis on spiritual continuity might risk minimizing personal pain or cultural differences in death rituals. Nonetheless, Tagore's conception invites us to see death not as an obstacle but as an integral part of the universal rhythm, fostering hope, moral integrity, and the pursuit of higher truth amidst life's ephemeral nature.

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1. Introduction: Death is an eternal question for everyone, from the very beginning of life. The death is an indomitable truth to living beings. Endless curiosity remains there of it. It is an eternal fact that no living being can win death or escape from death. No means of science or no practice of philosophy can resist the rodent shallowness of death, however strong or wise or wealthy or popular or pleasant the living may be. The living, once upon a time, are to surrender to death. Age after age the *Death* is really a very basic and important concept of human life. There is no example of any other creature thinking about death except humans. Literature, philosophy, religion, and even science have been developed around death. Death makes all people think, regardless of place and time, and in fact, it is difficult to find people in the world who have not thought about death. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) has thought deeply about various aspects of human life throughout his life in a poetic and even philosophical manner and has also expressed it in various forms of literature. However, the interesting thing is that his thoughts on death are full of various dialectics. To say the least, they are quite mixed. First of all, it is worth noting that Rabindranath Tagore was a true devotee of Upanishadic thought, and indubitably the essence of Upanishadic philosophy is hidden in all his thoughts - '*Isha basya midang sarvam yat kincha jagtang jagat*' (i. e. whatever moving thing there is in this dynamic world, think them as the residence of God). The innermost secret of this philosophy is revealed in poetry, prose, essays, and songs. That is, in all parts of thought, he was upright, the essence of which reached the essence of Vedanta. Tagore welcomes death privately, and accepts it as a friend, thinks of it as a special companion and lover. Sometimes, he called death extremely low, ungenerous, all-consuming, and selfish. However, what is important is his perception of the end of life, which is full of philosophical skepticism, rather vague, hesitant, and somewhat reluctant, like a tired traveler.

2. Death equals to desired lover:

Sometimes, Tagore thinks, death as equal to the desired lover. In the verses of Bhanusingh (*Bhanusingher padabali*), he says to death, "*moronre tunhu mor shyam saman/ Shyam tonhari nam,*" '*Death, / Shyam is your name. Ever-returning, merciless Madhav, / You do not fear me, my left / My eyes are very shaky, /Chiro bisaral job nirdoy madhaba/ tunhu no bhaibi mor bam/akul Radha-rih ati jorjor,/ jhore noyon- dou anukshon jhor jhor/ tunhu momo Madhaba, tunhu momo dosora,/ tunhu momo tapa ghuchao.*" Death is a generous friend like Shyam, a lover-like friend who guides the path of the unarmed Radha and gives

courage to love the lover who is angry, on the stormy path of path of the beloved. Before death, we must think about birth. Because birth has given us the opportunity to taste death, to receive the blessings of all the phases of life, and to spread our thoughts and cast a web of various colors of thought on reality.

Tagore thinks, our entry through the main gate of life may seem like an uninvited one. This journey began with great devotion, like an unknown stranger; some power threw everyone into this vast mystery like a bud in the great forest at midnight. In the poem 'Birth' (janmo) of 'Naivedya', the poet writes, 'When the eyes meet and hold the unblinking light / The world, adorned with the unblinking light of happiness and sorrow - then this unknown mystery is immense.' Tagore's initial understanding of the world was quite clear, but gradually clouds began to gather on that crystal concept. Vagueness surrounded the vastness of the world and some unresolved questions. So, this is true - soon after, he expressed a different feeling in the poem 'Death'. He felt that death is unknown, the body trembles at the thought of it, the chest trembles with fear, and tears come to the eyes to farewell the world. People want to stop this farewell with both arms. But this life and world are temporary and momentary. Hence, Tagore asserts with metaphor that death is not death, when a child is transferred from one breast to another, some discomfort arises, and temporary pain is felt. But 'the moment is assured and the child goes to the other breast'. Perhaps the moment between birth and death is just as uncomfortable.

3. Death equals to traveler towards unknown space: In the poem '*Birth and Death*' (*Jonmo O Moron*), Tagore's feelings are a little different.

He expresses the unique excitement and emotion of love through an unknown traveler and shows the first perception of life as emptiness, and says that the mind is like a blank sheet of paper, where every day is colored with new experiences and love. This feeling is full of depth of experience and emotion, which draws attention to the original nature and duty of human life, where it teaches us to understand and experience life anew. This thought of the poet inspires us to experience the purity of the first appearance of man and life in a new way. The death of a traveler with empty hands but tears suddenly approaches the unknown space. Suddenly, the traveler who floats in the air gradually finds his place in his own, new songs, new excitement, expanding himself in the pull of new love. Tagore's feeling of the death is much like that of an empiricist thinker, John Locke. In the first appearance of a person, the mind is like an unwritten white paper; day by day, various attempts at new experiences are

written there. Here, he reminds us of the duties and necessary work of a person. In his poem '*Mrityunjaya*', Tagore has brought death beyond fear and developed a friendly relationship with it, where he has understood that death is the ultimate truth of life, but for him, death is also a peace, an end, which puts an end to all the mistakes and arguments of life. He believes that if we do not fear death but develop a cordial relationship with it, the fear of life is removed, and death is the refuge of ultimate peace. The poet wants to show with this understanding that the real greatness is not the instability of our life, but peace and surrender to death is the real greatness of our life.

In his last writing, Tagore left the unknown question to human thought. He said, 'You (God) have made the path of your creation narrow in a web of various deceits'. This path of creation is very unknown, because every person in the world is faced with a great philosophical question: What is the meaning of life? What is at the end of the path? Where is its end? Etc. That is why Rabindranath has been called one of the world's philosophers. Jean-Paul Sartre said, 'Man does not believe in emptiness. Only his skepticism saves him from atheism.' On the other hand, scientist Carl Sagan says, 'Truth is often misleading. It inspires us to grasp at certain things, it may be counter-intuitive, it may be deeply anti-reform. What we strongly accept as true may not be true at all. In fact, our actions cannot determine the real truth. It would be natural to say that doubt is the amplifier of knowledge. A skeptical person is the bearer of knowledge. Rabindranath Tagore accepted that in the end. His thought about death has a deep connection with his pantheistic philosophical understanding, where he found the inherent unity of the relationship between all phenomena in the world based on the Advaita thought of Vedanta. He felt that birth and death are intertwined and that the evaluation of every moment of this life is very important, because this love is the truth, which remains unfading and constant even after death. These thoughts of his teach us to feel the deep meaning and unity of life in our hearts, where the message of the permanence of truth and the greatness of love after death is clear.

4. Grief:

In Tagore's view, sorrow is the one inescapable and incomprehensible part of human life, which is understandable, but not incomprehensible. When we are sad, we are angry, we are bound by this inevitability, and only we are the ones who understand this inevitability. Tagore, in his poetry, accepts the suffering as a whole. For him, sorrow is complex, deep, and multifaceted. Therefore, we accept the suffering as a whole, and the sweetness of suffering is

the natural state of human existence. As the wind blows on the life of man, so the wind blows on the life of man. We know that we are suffering, but we do not know how to deal with it. Rabindranath Tagore does not accept suffering as a companion of the world, but rather as a grave in the market. But the sorrows of man are like a deep grave, and the sweetness of the world is like a deep grave, and the sweetness of the world is like a deep grave. Tagore, the world is not full of sorrow, but the world is full of joy. His philosophy suggests moving forward without denying the sorrows and deaths of life, where he speaks of the strength to move forward by accepting the unpleasant realities of life. His writings say that sorrow and death are part of life, but we must move forward with confidence, because we have to fight against them and achieve victory. This thought of Rabindranath inspires us to maintain courage and hope even in difficult times of life, where he acknowledges the unpleasant aspects of life, but encourages us to find the strength to move forward.

Tagore's thought of death has been realized in the multifarious way expressing in musical form sometimes as "*Jakhon Porbe Na Mor Payer Chinha Eyi Banke*" or "*Sheemar Majhe Asheem Tumi Bajao Apon Sur*" or at phases he awaits for his unidentified Lord of Universe to cast an eye on him and prepares himself; and ultimately he succumbs to that sublimation "*Jeebono Moroner Shimana Charaye Bondhu Je Amar Eshechho Daraye*" and when this realization awakens amidst the agony of deaths, he submits to the peace in himself "*Nayane Sanmukhe Santir O Parabar*". It reflects a soul's journey through anticipation of divine acknowledgment, enduring personal loss, and ultimately surrendering to a higher power, as seen in lines like "*Jeebono Moroner Shimana Charaye Bondhu Je Amar Eshechho Daraye*," illustrating the transcendence of worldly suffering and finding peace within oneself, culminating in a serene acceptance of life's ephemeral nature amidst the agony of death.

5. Death is the highest power of the universe: Death is the supreme power in the world; no one can overcome it. In Rabindranath Tagore's poem "*Mrityunjaya*", the poet expresses the courage and faith to conquer death by facing the inescapable truth of life. The poet says that it is possible to conquer death not by fearing death, but by understanding the value and greatness of life. In this poem, the poet expresses his belief in the immortality of the soul and his trust in spiritual power, where he finds permanence even amidst the transience of life.

According to Rabindranath Tagore, humans can become more powerful than death—the supreme power of the universe—through the cultivation of spiritual strength, inner wisdom, and a deep connection with the divine. Tagore believed that while death is an inevitable physical reality, the human soul possesses an infinite, immortal essence that transcends mortality. He emphasized that true power lies in the human capacity for love, faith, and the pursuit of higher truth, which can elevate the human spirit beyond the limitations of physical existence. In his poetry and philosophical writings, Tagore advocates for a life rooted in spiritual consciousness, where the soul's union with the divine grants a form of eternal vitality that surpasses death's finality. This transcendence is achieved through self-awareness, artistic expression, and a heartfelt connection with the divine, allowing individuals to realize their divine nature and attain a form of eternal life through the spirit. Thus, according to Tagore, humans can become more powerful than death when they awaken to their spiritual essence and realize their divine potential, transforming their understanding of mortality into a pathway for eternal life.

6. Death is unwanted: Sometimes Tagore expressed contradictory feelings about the death, and it is the gist word of every heart of living beings that man does not want to die. Man is born on earth with death, and death stands silently waiting behind every human activity. But man on earth unknowingly wants to immortalize himself with his talents and deeds. Of course, one day, leaving all the works, all the achievements, and creations, man has to return to the house of death. Death is eternal, death is a constant truth. All people know that they are temporary guests of the world because of their boundless love for life. He loves this magical world made up of trees, vines and leaves, light, fountains, mountains, seas, animals, insects, soil, and humans. He wants to receive love and wants to give love. In this relationship created by giving and receiving, he finds the completeness of his life, gets his own joyful taste. Every particle of dust accumulates a lot of debt. The soil provides him with food. The sky provides light. The air provides oxygen, the river provides water. The rain falling from the sky and the intoxicating fragrance of the sun fill his mind with sweetness. The greenery of the wilderness and the lush greenery of the forest fill his eyes with mascara. Gazing at the dewy grass or the newly blossomed flowers, he finds the indescribable joy of life. He sees the pure expression of this joy in the eyes, in their close affection and closeness. He does not want to leave such a blissful closeness and go anywhere else. Therefore, from the depths of his heart, the words "I do not want to die in this beautiful world" constantly resound and echo.

7. Philosophical analysis:

Rabindranath Tagore, an idealist philosopher, possessed a profound and nuanced understanding of death, which is deeply rooted in his spiritual outlook, cultural background, and philosophical inquiries into the nature of existence. There are some notable points of his concept of death, such as--

a) Death is a transition, not an end--

Tagore viewed death not as an absolute cessation of life but as a transition from one state of existence to another. He believed that the soul is eternal and that physical death merely signifies the departure of the soul from its earthly vessel. In his poetry and writings, Tagore often depicted death as a passage to a higher realm or a different plane of consciousness. For example, in his poem "Death," he describes it as "a door opening into the infinite," emphasizing the idea that death leads to a larger, more encompassing reality beyond the material world. Tagore portrays death as a peaceful and joyful event, a welcome rest from the struggles of life. He encourages embracing death with an open heart, as it is a necessary part of the journey

This perspective aligns with his spiritual worldview, where the soul is immortal and continuously evolves through various incarnations or states of consciousness. Tagore's understanding encourages one to see death as part of the natural cosmic cycle, a necessary step in the soul's journey towards realization and unity with the divine. Tagore likens death to the close of a day or the shedding of old garments, emphasizing its naturalness and inevitability. He suggests that death is simply a transition, not an annihilation.

b) Death as a Manifestation of the Eternal Rhythm of Life--

For Tagore, death is an integral element of life's eternal rhythm, akin to the changing seasons or the ebb and flow of waves. He regarded life and death as complementary forces, both essential to the ongoing process of creation and renewal. In his philosophy, the universe is governed by a divine rhythm, and death is not an anomaly but a vital component of this cosmic harmony. He expressed this idea beautifully in his poetry, suggesting that death is as natural and necessary as birth. By embracing this rhythm, human beings can attain serenity and acceptance in the face of mortality. This understanding helps individuals transcend fear

and despair associated with death, recognizing it as a vital aspect of the universe's perpetual dance.

c) Death as a Call to Inner Realization and Spiritual Growth---

Tagore saw death as an awakening—a summons to turn inward and seek the eternal within oneself. He believed that contemplating death can serve as a catalyst for spiritual awakening, prompting individuals to reflect on the transient nature of worldly attachments and to focus on their inner divine essence.

In his writings, Tagore emphasizes that the awareness of mortality should inspire a pursuit of spiritual knowledge and love. Death, in this sense, becomes a reminder to live authentically and ethically, aligning one's life with higher spiritual values. His poetry often encourages embracing mortality as a means to deepen one's connection with the divine and realize the immortal Self within.

d) The Unity of Life and Death in the Cosmic Whole--

A central philosophical point in Tagore's thought is the unity of all existence—life and death are interconnected and part of a singular cosmic reality. He rejected the Western dichotomy that sharply separates life from death, instead proposing that they are different expressions of the same eternal truth. This unity implies that death does not sever the individual from the universe but re-integrates the soul into the cosmic consciousness. In his view, the essence of life persists beyond physical death, maintaining continuity within the infinite fabric of existence. Recognizing this unity fosters a sense of cosmic belonging and diminishes the fear of death, as it is seen as a return to the universal source.

e) Death is an Opportunity for Creative Transformation--

Tagore regarded death as an opportunity for spiritual and creative transformation. While he acknowledged the pain and grief associated with loss, he also saw in death the potential for rebirth—both metaphorically and spiritually. He believed that through death, the soul is freed from the limitations of the physical body and worldly attachments, enabling it to attain higher states of consciousness or enlightenment. This process of transformation is akin to the perennial cycle of growth and renewal found in nature. For Tagore, death is not an end but a pivotal moment that can inspire new beginnings, fostering hope and a sense of eternal continuity.

f) Cultural and Philosophical Context--- Rabindranath Tagore's perspectives on death are profoundly rooted in Indian philosophical traditions such as Vedanta and the Upanishads, which posit the eternal nature of the soul (Atman) and view the material world (Maya) as transient and illusory. Tagore believed that death is not an end but a transition to a higher spiritual existence, emphasizing the soul's immortality and unity with the divine. His poetry and writings reflect a humanistic and universal outlook, urging acceptance, reverence, and a sense of wonder towards the mystery of death, seeing it as a natural part of life's cycle that leads to spiritual awakening and liberation (Moksha). This perspective underscores his belief in the interconnectedness of all life and his deep respect for the spiritual continuity beyond physical demise.

g) Ethical and Moral Dimensions--

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy emphasizes that confronting death inherently prompts individuals to lead ethical and meaningful lives, as it underscores the transient nature of existence. In his works, he advocates for a life rooted in love, compassion, humility, and self-awareness, viewing these virtues as essential for spiritual growth and moral integrity. Tagore believed that awareness of mortality serves as a moral compass, encouraging individuals to transcend selfish pursuits and cultivate a deeper connection with others and the universe. This perspective is reflected in his poetry and essays, where he often portrays death not as an end but as a reminder to live authentically, embracing kindness and humility, thus fostering a life aligned with spiritual and ethical values.

h) Death is a Union with the Divine---

Rabindranath Tagore's perspective on death as a union with the Divine is rooted in his spiritual philosophy, which emphasizes the soul's journey towards divine unity. Tagore views death not as an end, but as a transition that facilitates the soul's reunion with the Divine, suggesting a continuity of existence beyond physical life (Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 1910). In his poetry, he often portrays death as a soulful merging, where the individual ego dissolves into the universal consciousness, exemplified when he writes, *"Death is not the end, but a passage to the divine"* (Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 34). His philosophy aligns with Vedantic ideas of Moksha, where the soul's ultimate goal is reunion with Brahman, the divine source (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 1931). For Tagore, this union signifies the soul's awakening to its true nature, transcending worldly limitations and experiencing divine bliss, encapsulating a profound understanding that death is a spiritual reunion rather than a tragic cessation (Tagore,

The Religion of Man, 92). This view emphasizes that death completes the spiritual cycle, elevating the soul to its divine origin, and underscores his belief in the eternal unity between the individual soul and the Divine.

i) Death as a Cycle of Renewal--

Rabindranath Tagore, the eminent Bengali poet, philosopher, and Nobel laureate, often reflected on the interconnectedness of life and death, emphasizing that death is not an end but a vital part of the eternal cycle of renewal. In his poetic and philosophical works, Tagore portrayed death as a transition rather than a termination, illustrating that it serves as a gateway for rebirth and new beginnings. Drawing from Indian spiritual traditions and his own worldview, Tagore believed that life and death are intertwined in a continuous flow, where each ending paves the way for a new beginning, akin to the seasons transforming seamlessly from one to another. He saw death as a natural process that purifies and rejuvenates the soul, allowing it to evolve and merge into the larger cosmic consciousness. This perspective aligns with the Indian concept of Samsara—the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth—highlighting that death is an essential component of life's ongoing renewal. Tagore's poetry often celebrates this eternal cycle, urging humanity to embrace mortality with a sense of acceptance and hope, recognizing that through death, life is renewed, and the spirit continues its journey beyond physical existence. This philosophical outlook fosters a sense of harmony with nature's rhythms and underscores the transformative power inherent in the cycle of life and death, inspiring individuals to view mortality not as an end but as an integral part of the universal process of renewal and spiritual evolution.

Critique: Tagore's idea that death is just a normal part of life, and that it can break down barriers, means he isn't worried about the fear and pain people feel when they die. He is more interested in the spiritual side of death, which could make us forget about the real physical and emotional difficulties that people go through when they face death. Rabindra Tagore has an equal conception of death like the Upanishad, and similar questions may arise against Tagore's idea relating to death. Such as—i) Tagore's poetic and philosophical exploration of death tends to emphasize its spiritual and transcendental dimensions, viewing it as a transition rather than an end, which can indeed be seen as an idealized or simplified perspective that may overlook the raw emotional realities and societal complexities associated with grief and loss. ii) Tagore's concept of death as a "bridge" or a "gateway" to another realm could be misinterpreted as a denial of the finality of death. Some may argue that his focus on the

spiritual aspects of death can be used to downplay the very real and painful aspects of physical death. iii) While Tagore emphasizes the universal nature of death and its place in the natural cycle of life, it may be argued that his approach ignores the very personal and often unique human experiences associated with dying and death. The individual struggles, pain, and emotional turmoil of facing mortality might be overlooked in his more abstract and universal view. iv) Tagore's views on death, which often emphasize the spiritual and philosophical aspects, might be seen as conflicting with scientific perspectives that focus on the biological and physical processes of death and dying. Some may argue that his approach lacks the rigor and scientific grounding found in modern discussions of death and dying. v) When death is seen primarily as a spiritual journey or transition, individuals may focus more on preparing their souls for the afterlife rather than on improving worldly conditions. For example, a person who believes that their primary duty is to ensure their spiritual salvation might neglect efforts to address social injustices, such as poverty or inequality, because they see these issues as less urgent compared to preparing for the next life. This perspective can lead to a decreased sense of moral responsibility in the present, as the ultimate accountability is believed to lie beyond earthly existence, potentially diminishing the motivation to work towards societal betterment here and now. Tagore's portrayal of death as a spiritual transition may inadvertently lead individuals to deny or suppress their grief, believing that death is merely a passage to a higher realm, thus neglecting the natural emotional response to loss. For example, a person who loses a loved one might feel pressured to remain spiritually hopeful and focus solely on the soul's journey, rather than allowing themselves to mourn and express their pain. This suppression can delay emotional healing, increase mental distress, and weaken social bonds, highlighting the potential danger of viewing death solely through a spiritual lens without acknowledgment of human pain and grief. vi) Besides, Tagore's emphasis on the spiritual continuity of the soul reflects a perspective rooted in certain Indian and Western mystical traditions, which see death as a transition rather than an end, exemplified in Hindu beliefs of reincarnation and Christian notions of eternal life. However, in many cultures, such as Japanese Shinto, death is viewed as an entry into the ancestral realm, and some indigenous traditions perceive death as a natural part of life's cycle rather than a spiritual journey. Imposing a singular spiritual view risks marginalizing these diverse beliefs; for example, in Islamic traditions, death signifies the final transition to the afterlife with specific rites, emphasizing submission to God's will, which may contrast with Tagore's more fluid spiritual continuity. Recognizing this diversity is crucial to respecting different

cultural and religious practices, preventing spiritual exclusion, and fostering inclusion in dialogues about mortality.

In spite of all the objections relating to his concept of death, it can be asserted that Tagore somehow accepts the death as a loving spouse, somehow course of life, and somehow phobia; but these are his poetic feelings and emotions.

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