

# *Chapter – I*

## *Introduction*

In recent decades in Europe as well as in India an interest in philosophical anthropology is being widely evinced. One notices that the question ‘what is man?’ is more basic than such questions as ‘what can I know?’ or ‘what ought I to do?’ However, the phrase ‘Philosophical anthropology’ was introduced in one time and the task of the discipline outlined by Max Scheler. The problem is handled by Scheler in many of its aspects: the specific nature of human feeling, the relation of man to history, the possibility of human development. It will be readily appreciated by those acquainted with Tagore’s thought that he has made a substantial contribution to these themes. We have prefaced our study by saying that Rabindranath is principally a poet but his poetry is imbued with high philosophy. The question assails us: Can poetry be philosophy? Philosophy need not be the cold and hard speculations of logic. There was a time when philosophy was struggling hard to save herself from the clutches of logic. The worship of intellect was the only desired aim of philosophers. But today old intellect has made room for new and fresh institution. The watchword is no longer more logic but less logic. Once philosophy has taken refuge under spreading and expanding institution, the barrier between poetry and philosophy is dissolved. One flows on into the other and the aims of the two become more or less the same. Poetry aims at life and philosophy, divorced from life, becomes barren; but Rabindranath’s philosophy is based on the foundation of life. The eternal throbbing and pulsating life-force permeates the whole of his philosophy. Again poetry is the worship of Reality in its aspect of beauty while philosophy is the worship of the same Reality in its aspect of truth. Acharya Radhakrishnan said, “The poet worships God as the spirit of beauty, while the philosopher pays his homage to God as the ideal of truth. Philosophy is the temple of truth, while poetry is the shrine of beauty. The two are not opposed, as truth is beauty and beauty truth.”<sup>1</sup>

It will not be dogmatic to assert at the very outset that Rabindranath has drunk ancient Indian lore to the useful part. His mind is an eastern product and he champions the cause of oriental literature and philosophy. In his writings nowhere has he expressed his indebtedness to Greek or European philosophy. On the other hand, in various places, he has mentioned how deeply the *Upaniṣad*, Buddhism and *Vaiṣṇava* lore have affected the formation of his mind. Rabindranath grew up in an atmosphere pulsating with the truths of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Vedānta*.

In talking about Tagore's contributions one should take into account the formative influences on his thought. At three places Tagore himself has given testimony to them. In a poem written in the last decade of his life, he compares his life as having been nurtured by a river. In his arteries flow the gifts of varied mountain peaks, its fields have been shaped by many alluvial layers, mysterious vital juices from diverse sources have spread themselves in harvests upon harvests. From the east and the west networks of song-streams lull its sleep and wake. On this score, it has to be admitted that Tagore has been so transcreative a genius that it becomes well-nigh difficult to isolate as well as identify the so called influences that may have gone into the making of his thought. However, in *Sādhanā*, he spoke of the *Upaniṣads* and Buddhism as having left a lasting impression on his thought as "theories of the spirit", and he added that these were not for him, to be "exhausted by anyone system of logical interpretation," rather they were "instinct with individual meaning." In the '*Religion of Man*' Tagore alluded to his discovery of *Vaiṣṇava* poems and his coming to know the *Bāuls* as having exerted a sea-change in the realm of ideas. In his presidential address to the Calcutta Session of Indian philosophical congress in 1926 he spoke about "the philosophy of our people", meaning thereby the grassroots under

current awareness of the spirit beyond the philosophical elite. Of course Tagore thought that the *Upaniṣadic* wisdom was lost between the schools of interpretation, but went sub-soil to rejuvenate and fertilize the native mind down through the ages.

On the testimony of what he says in the preface of *Sādhanā*, it is worth one's while to investigate into the exact nature of *Upaniṣadic (Vedāntic)* heritage in Tagore, along with that of Buddhism. Our study in this context will be textual and hermeneutical. We propose to take into account the corpus of Tagore's works both in Bengali and English as well.

The first philosophical work on Tagore was done by Radhakrishnan. This work has been pioneering endeavour. Radhakrishnan felt much of Tagore's pulse rightly but missed a lot, since he confined himself to the then available English works of Tagore, which were only a fragment of his vast amount of writings in Bengali. It goes to the credit of V.S. Narvane to have produced the first full length study of Tagore's philosophical ideas based in Bengali sources, and showing his development from the early materialism and nihilism to the final avowal of the primacy of *ānanda*. There is a classic study in Bengali by Sashibhusan Dasgupta on the *Upaniṣadic* linkage of Tagore, and it still remains to be bettered. There have also been significant papers on a similar theme by Bishnupada Bhattacharya and Abu Syeed Ayyub, dealing largely on the problem of evil. The book is entitled: '*Astitva-Viraha*' by Sri Jaganath Chakraborty is the result of the recent study on existential theme as embedded in the *Gitāñjali*. As regards the case of Buddhism there is only one full length study by Dipak Kumar Barua. This deserves a significant mention.

All his philosophical discourses in *Śantiniketan*, *Dharma*, *Sādhanā*, Creative Unity, *Sañcaya*, *Mānuṣer Dharma*, Man, the Religion of Man and Personality are deeply influenced by the *Upaniṣadic* teaching. The Religion of Man, Man and *Mānuṣer Dharma* he has mingled other truths with those of the *Upaniṣads* but in *Śantiniketan*, *Dharma* and the rest, he is a frank champion of the *Upaniṣads*. In the preface of *Sādhanā* Rabindranath himself confesses: “The writer has been brought up in a family where texts of the *Upaniṣads* are used in daily worship; and he has had before him the example of his father who lived his long life in the closest communion with God while not neglecting his duties to the world or allowing his keen interest in all human affairs to suffer any abatement”<sup>2</sup>. Again, somewhat later he observes: “To me the verses of the *Upaniṣads* and the teaching of Buddha have ever been things of the spirit and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth”<sup>3</sup>.

**In the present work the following problems can be raised:**

First, an effort will be made to highlight the contribution of Tagore while interpreting some of the Buddhist texts like *Dhammapada*, *Suttanipata* etc. In some of the essays Rabindranath has given his own observations on Buddhists philosophical position. Sometimes the Buddhist position seems to be clearer in Tagore’s interpretation which is really an original contribution of Tagore to the development and understanding of Buddhism. An effort will be made to point out these points.

Secondly, Tagore and Buddha have welcomed misery/ suffering in the form of death etc. due to their some positive value of purification. Does it really purify? If an individual is burnt with the fire of sorrow during his own life, can he do anything positive in his life? Suffering, if

limited, can rectify an individual, but not always. Unlimited suffering makes a man crippled after closing all doors of improvement, which is not at all acceptable.

Thirdly, Rabindranath has found something 'extra' (Surplus' as coined by Tagore) in an ordinary man. To him a man is an 'unmeasured one' which has been described by him as *Maner mānuṣ* as admitted by the *Bāuls* etc. An effort will be made to explore whether such notion available in *Sahajiyā* cult is found in Buddhism or not.

Lastly, the theory of 'change' as found in Buddhism and Rabindranath is subject to logical scrutiny. For Buddhism this theory is not uncalled for, because the theory of momentariness is one of the presuppositions of Buddhist philosophy. But how Rabindranath will justify the permanent self as found in the *Upaniṣad* and related issues like permanent value etc. Normally Rabindranath is taken as an interpreter of the *Upaniṣad* and believer of achieving some sort permanent type of bliss as evidenced from his poems – '*Jagateānandayajñe āmār nimantraṇa*' ; *Tāi tomār ānanda āmār par*' etc. There may be debate whether his interpretation is similar to that of Saṃkara or Ramanuja or something of mixed type, but it is true that his philosophy is grounded on basic features of the *Upaniṣads*. To him the presupposition of momentariness as possible by the Buddhists who do not believe in *Vedās* or *Upaniṣads* has hardly any room. However, his gratitude to Buddha is confined to certain aspects like respect to humanity, moral values, and methods of eradication pains from our life.

No research work covering the above mentioned problems has been done so far. Some works have been done in a fragmented way. Professor R. Ghosh has worked on Rabindranath

and Buddhism, from the gender perspectives in his book – “Facets of Feminism”. These philosophical problems, if not solved, may create some conceptual haziness, which is not proper. Hence, this work is proposed to be undertaken.

One of the recurring nests of problems in philosophy is associated with the concept of man. Considering the problem many research works have been carried out on the concept of ‘Man’ in the East and also West. In Western philosophy J. Paul Sartre has discussed about humanism and it is an excellent concept. But by virtue of being an atheist God or Super power does not find any room in Sartrean Philosophy. So his ‘man’ always suffers from anxiety and overcomes this anxiety by way of taking shelter under ‘bad faith’. In Greece Protagoras perhaps at first had discussed about ‘man’ and he had given some value to man. Before him the contemplation on the concept of man was neglected and the philosophers were engaged and interested to discuss about the universe.

India is a country of religion and ethics from the very beginning as per the historical account. Actually in this last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> Century we are so busy for our material gain that our spiritual side is totally neglected. But only one-fourth of an individual resides in this phenomenal world and three-fourth part i.e. spiritual side resides in noumena. Without the spiritual outlook it is impossible to define a human being. Man now a days has lost his values i.e. human values. There is no ethics of any kind of service, business and also politics. Individual gain is the only goal to them. Ethicsless human being means man without spiritual value. Without spiritual development he cannot be considered as a complete man. He always suffers from deficiency. What he claims as his religion, actually is nothing but a collection of customs and culture.

Religion is used here in a wrong sense. So it is necessary for us to clarify what should be the actual religion of man. If there is no common religion for all then this so-called religion will destroy the human race at all. The true humanism should be human religion, because it comes from the nature of man.

There are so many eminent personalities in Indian history. Among them Rabindranath is the pioneer who is philosopher on the one hand and poet on the other. Truly speaking, he is the multidimensional personality and also one of the few representatives of the universe to whom the future of the world belongs. He was born of a family, which is reputed for its high culture, art, music, education and philosophy. When he was thirteen, he had started his literary career and had been continuing his creative activity for 67 years. The east will remember this singer of man as the torchbearer and west for his endless love and for his immortal work called *Gītāñjali* amongst the various creations. Basically he was a poet but his poetry was closely related with philosophy, which leads the reader to region of insight beyond the boundaries of metre and music. Actually poet is the seeker of beauty of beauty while the aim of a philosopher is truth. There is no contrast between the “Truth and ‘Beauty’, because the two lead us to the same Supreme Reality. Rabindranath, in his presidential address to the Indian Philosophical Congress, said: “In India, philosophy ever sought alliance with poetry because its mission was to occupy the people’s life and not merely the learned seclusion of scholarship”<sup>4</sup>. With the help of various poems, prose, narratives, philosophical discourses and musical compositions Tagore expressed his mission. All are the metaphysical and artistic creations. He was born in a country where he got a classical religious tradition and culture. His family was a distinguished one for the culture and education. So he was influenced by the *Vedic* religion, *Gītā*, *Upaniṣads* etc. as well as by his

father Maharsi Debedranath Tagore. For this he sought the beauty and truth in every stage of his life through his creation. He did not believe in the traditional so called religion. To him Brahman is the Supreme authority and man is not totally different from Him. Potentially every individual possesses the super quality and he can reach the Brahman through spiritual exercise and love.

If anyone can understand Rabindranath properly then, I believe, it will be easy for him to understand the essence of Indian culture, religion and man. To him there is no special religion for man, which does not come from his nature. The main source of religion is love by which it can easily bind the good and bad within a man. There is not a single being in this universe that is totally unfit for love. So Tagore's theory of religion can be considered as universal and his concept of man has received a global attention. He is the singer of man on the earth.

Like many other philosophers Rabindranath in and through his numerous writings aimed at the clarification and solution of a single question – what is the exact relation between the finite and the Infinite? This broad problem has been the query of eternity and all through the ages, seers have been attempting at answers. In the '*Jīvanmṛti*' the poet writes. "Seems me, there is only one grand tune of all my compositions and if may adequately be styled as the union of the Infinite with the finite in finiteness"<sup>5</sup>.

**Reference:**

- 1.S.Radhakrishnan – *The Philosophy of Rabindranah Tagore*, P-160, Baroda.
- 2.Tagore Rabindranath—*Sāadhanā*, Preface, VIII, MacMilan pub. 2000.
- 3.Ibid.
- 4.*Viśva-Bhāratī Quarterly* Vol. III (January, 1926).
- 5.Tagore Rabindranath—*Jīvanmṛti*, P.241(1<sup>st</sup> Ed.), Viśva Bhāratī Pub. 1351 Bangābda.