

## Chapter - VII

### The Finite and the Infinite

There is an intimate relation between the finite and the infinite in the classical Indian Philosophy and religion. If we deeply think about the finite and infinite then we cannot say that it is a kind of relationship because relationship implies duality or more but the *Upanishadic* thinkers said there is only one *Brahman* but not many. This type of realisation is possible after salvation; so in this practical daily life we should search for the harmony between the finite and the infinite. Like other philosophers Rabindranath had tried to find out the exact relation between the finite and the infinite. He expressed this relation through his artistic creation. In the *Jivansmrti* the poet said : "Messems there is only one grand tune of all my compositions and it may adequately be styled as the union of the Infinite with the finite in finiteness".<sup>1</sup> We can see two distinct sets of ideas whenever we discuss Rabindranath's view regarding the relation between the absolute and finite individuals. Like the Samkara he sometimes highlighted the Absolute and the acceptance of Absolute Reality nullifies the claims of many finite individuals. On the other hand, he has also followed the path of Ramanuja and *Bhakti* Schools. It seems that he has tried to make a firm organic relation between the Absolute and the finite. Now the question may be raised what is the main teaching of Tagorian philosophy? Most of us may call himself as a concrete idealist, an *Visistāvadist* or a follower of Vaisnavism. But the poet himself has admitted that he believes in an organic relation of the Absolute with the finites. We can see that his philosophy is closely related to the Hegel's philosophy. Some followers of Rabindranath state that whenever he explained the Upanishads, he wrote in the vein of absolutism but in fact he believed in concrete

idealism. But this theory is not grounded on strong logic, for the Upanishads may be explained in both ways.

To explain the relation of the external world with the individual the poet sings: "My heart is open and the entire universe follows into it".<sup>2</sup>

In the *Gītā* he got a glimpse of the real, and wished for *Jivan Devata*. The poet philosopher realized the values of finiteness. Humanity to him is a meaningful item of the cosmic order. This same theme is revealed in his different literary works like *Kaṇikā*, *Kathā*, *Kāhinī* and *Kṣanikā*. *Nivedya* talks of love for human being and all Infinite beings. We can notice that poet's mind is calm and secured in *Gītāñjali*, *Utsarga*, *Gītālī* and *Gītimālyā*. He has loved this cosmic world and enjoyed the colour and sound of this earth. He loved the every individual entity and human being of this world. He said in one of his poem: "I do not like to die in this beautiful world. I like to live amidst men".<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the poet also spoke in the same tone that "Yes I shall become *Brahman*. I cannot think of any other idea but this. I will definitely say - I shall become the Infinite..... the river says, I shall become the sea. This is not her audacity but truth and hence humility. And this is why she aspires for an union with the sea".<sup>4</sup> In the *Sadhana* he said: "yes we must become Brahman, we must not shrink from avowing this. Our existence is meaningless if we never can expect to realize the highest perfection that there is. If we have an aim and yet can never reach it, then it is no aim at all".<sup>5</sup>

Samkara has said the same thing - "I shall become Brahman for I am He".<sup>6</sup> To make it more clear we can quote from *the 'Thoughts from Tagore'* - "Man who is provident, feels for that life of his which is not yet existent, feels must more for that than for the life that is with him;

therefore he is ready to sacrifice his present inclination for the unrealized future. In this he becomes great for he realizes truth. Even to be efficiently selfish man has to recognize this truth and has to curb his immediate impulses – in other words, has to be moral. For our moral faculty is the faculty by which we know that life is not made up of fragments, purposeless and discontinuous. This moral sense of man not only gives him the power to see that self has a continuity in time, but it also enables him to see that he is not true when he is only restricted to his own self. He is more in truth than he is in fact.'

### ***Harmony between finite and Infinite:***

India is a land of *Vedānta*, which means that all are one – all are Supreme *Brahman*. But still now this theory remains within the purview of theory. For this our society is suffering from casteism, ritualism and superstition. Thus religion, which dominates Indian life, fails to perform its function of uplifting the living standard and quality of Indian people, and it becomes an intellectual asset of the few, an instrument of exploitation of many. The Global man, Rabindranath, had a special interest on human society. His interest was neither national nor international but universal. His main aim was to reconcile divergent religions by stressing the similarities among them and ignoring their differences, with all their differences, ~~religion~~ they should live together harmoniously. The only basic truth of religion is the divinity of man. 'The kingdom of God is within you'- says Jesus Christ. The goal of spiritual life is to realise this divinity. To Vivekananda, "Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man".

Rabindranath has discussed about the finite and the Infinite and he just tried to make a union among them. In the context of his philosophical ideas '*Philosophy of religion*' should not be taken to imply

the study of conceptual relation between the terms in religious discourse as it is understood now-a-days. Nor should it be taken to mean philosophical enquiry into the religious phenomena as it used to be in earlier decades. Far less it is a systematization of the central tenets of any historical religion. The reasons are not always obvious. Tagore was born in a family, members of which led a movement of religious reforms. For a time, he was also associated with its institutional affairs. But for authenticity's sake, he laid down the office. He loved to describe himself as an outsider or *Vrātya* in respect of the institutional or doctrinal aspects of religion. And yet he invoked religious categories, not only to express his own ideas, but also for commenting upon them extensively. Religious insights, embedded in such scriptures as the *Upanisads*, were to him matters relating to the spirit of man. Tagore's extensive use of the Upanisadic insights and metaphors, in his numerous prose as well as poetry, comprise a body of literature that should be valued for its philosophical content and richness of suggestions.

In this infinite, as Tagore has observed, "there is no partiality and contradiction. Each and every part of Infinite is free from contradiction and hence precious." The contradiction prevails so long that it is not known to us as a part of the Infinite, the embodiment of love. Before the realisation of the Infinite our eye remains infatuated and narrow and hence the absence of harmony among men owing to which superiority and inferiority among a particular section of people can be felt. When the Infinite is realized, the vision or '*Satyadr̥ṣṭi*' in Tagorian phrase arises and due to this the harmony among men of different sections can be felt. This view of Tagore is supported by the *Puruṣasūkta* of the *R̥ig and Atharvaveda*, which speak about the Divine origination of the *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya* etc. It is also said that the whole world is a Divine sacrifice. Here each and every natural phenomenon serves the Divine purpose.<sup>8</sup> As

every man of the world and every object of the nature is the reflection or part of the Divine, there is no contradiction or disharmony among nature and men. In order to realise this truth, “*Satyadr̥ṣṭi*” through the eye of the Divine is essential.<sup>9</sup> The same idea has been expressed in a *mantra* of the *Brhadāranyakopaniṣad* which runs as follows: “*Cakṣuṣaṣcaksuriti*”.<sup>10</sup> Tagore’s experience of the presence of the Divine in natural objects is reflected in different songs and poems<sup>11</sup> composed by him. It appears to us that man, God and nature are three in number, but essentially they are one. From this the underlying harmony among all from the standpoint of the Divinity is known. For this Tagore has said that a man can depend on another man and hence, we, being high, want to make others higher. If a *Brahman* disregards a *Śūdra*, it is disregard to himself. If he were respectful, he would have respected others. For no man is separated and hence one should be given due honour by another man, which indicated the existence of underlying harmony among men<sup>12</sup>, which is supported in the *Īsopaniṣad*.<sup>13</sup>

To Rabindranath there is another type of harmony between the finite and Infinite. This kind of harmony always resides within the Man i.e. individual. The object of this kind of harmony is man’s ego (*aham*) and soul (*Ātmā*). There is a constant fight between two. An individual’s ego wants to bind him in this worldly objects, whereas his soul longs for infinite, which is represented in his poem – ‘*Dui Pākhī*’ i.e. two birds. There one bird who is confined in a cage is narrating its miseries of confinement to another bird who is enjoying the taste of freedom. The miseries of ego are reflected in the dialogue of the confined bird while the freedom of the soul is represented in the words of ‘free bird’<sup>14</sup>. A constant fight is also going on between soul and ego. This is beautifully represented in these lines – “*Dujane Keha Kare Bojhūte nahi pare, bujhate nare apanaya. Dujane eka eka jhapatī mare pakha katāre kahe kache*

*aya*".<sup>15</sup> The metaphor of birds might have been borrowed by Tagore from the *Rgveda* where it is stated that there are two birds: One busy in tasting palatable fruits while another witnessing it.<sup>16</sup> Here two birds are representing ego and soul. They overcome their conflict and exist in a calm harmonious condition. The ego is essential for the fulfillment of the soul, but after the attainment of perfection ego is not at all useless or *Māyā*. To Rabindranath ego is as true as the soul. Here is the real harmony which may be called Identity-in-difference".<sup>17</sup> As an individual's ego overpowers his soul, he becomes selfless due to which he will maintain his individuality as well as will have connection with all with the help of his soul. At this time *Ānanda* which is reflected in the Upaniṣadic *Mantras* like "*Madhu Vātā rtāyate Madhu Kṣaranti Sindhavah*" etc. comes<sup>18</sup> and it seems that they are two birds existing together in a friendly manner due to having bliss.<sup>19</sup> The harmonious picture which comes to our mind is that a man who is enjoying and roaming at the same time endowed with '*Śāntam Śivam Advaitam*'.<sup>20</sup> There are few characteristics of the individual which lead him to austerity and sacrifice is the essence of a man. In a man there are two entities: one is simple man and another is Universal Eternal man. Through this a man can bring Universality in thinking, action etc.<sup>21</sup> Here he exceeds his limitation and reaches the Infinite stage.

It is said that Tagore has a glorified ego. To him ego is an entity through which a man can be united with the Infinite. Due to ego he will have discontent in his mind and in order to get rid of this situation he longs for the Infinite through his soul. After the realisation of the Infinite, the ego, the finite and the Infinite remain together. One will be meaningful if the other exists and every thing will be meaningless if we deny others. So, both are essential for the existence of the both.<sup>22</sup> For establishing this harmony soul remains as a bridge between them, which

will find support in the *Upaniṣadic Mantra*: 'Atha sa ātmā' etc.<sup>23</sup> To Rabindranath this stage of harmony can be said the actual liberation. The importance of the soul can be realised from the analogy of lyre. The string of the lyre can produce tune if it is connected with two poles. Between the two one is finite and another is infinite. This doctrine is beautifully explained in the Tagore's poem named 'Vairāgya'. 'A person, who would like to reach the stage of salvation wants to leave his wife, house, property etc. When he is ready to leave everything, he realizes that God does not exist in the external world, i.e. jungle, Himalaya etc., but in his surrounding objects like his wife, house, property etc. So leaving this earthly objects amounts to leave God.'<sup>24</sup> In the poem 'Svarga hate Bidai' emphasises the same thing.

Now we have to know why Tagore has given more emphasis in bringing harmony in man. The only cause is to check one-pointed development in a man. He observed that in the religious practice the enjoyment and the desire of happiness is discouraged. All these restrictions are put forth to a *Sādhaka* so that he does not destroy harmony after learning too much towards worldly enjoyment.<sup>25</sup> Any type of prohibitory order, either in society or in family, is generally introduced in order to bring harmony in an individual. If any individual wants to take unfair means or is addicted towards some object, he should be warned. If not, he would lean too much towards unwanted object and destroy harmony, which is not desirable to mankind.

It is very important to remember that there is a unity among ego, soul and God but there must be sense of loyalty towards God. It may be argued that, as there is no superiority among men and God due to harmony, there is no question of being loyal to him. In response to it, it may be said from the Tagore's point of view that it is true that there is

unity between men and God, but here God should be looked upon as father. As father's image is reflected in a son, God's image reflects on a man. It can be said in another way that God is manifested in a man as father is manifested in son. As we do not think to disrespect our father, we should be glorified by the Divine, but should not possess courage to disobey Him thinking as equal.<sup>26</sup> Though a man is essentially same as God and for this he should be respected. If we disrespect Him then the harmony will not be attained.

Now we have to see how a man, remaining in ego can realise *Śāntam śivam Advaitam*. The realisation of this hymn gives rise to wisdom, action and love respectively in a man. In Tagore's philosophy action follows from wisdom and love from action. If we can realize the *Śānta*, we easily can realize *Sivam*. And like this from *Sivam Advaitam* can be realized. Each and every nature is co-related with each other. The Divine manifestation of the power is seen in the world. So long-peace or *Santa* is not realised, an individual suffers from fear, doubt etc. When he sees the reflection of *Śānta* in all powers, he gets peace or fearlessness which is similar to the *Upanishadic 'Abhih'*. The word '*śānti*' is related to '*śānta*', who remains in all powers. If power is overpowered through peace or fearlessness, the *Śāntam* or embodiment of peace can be realised everywhere.<sup>27</sup> If we can control the power through peace, we become fearless and able to perform work. This auspicious works can be done due to *Mangala* or *Śiva*. If the *Śānta* nature and *Śiva* nature of the Divine are realised through knowledge and auspicious works respectively, the bondage of ordinary action and ego arising from that ceases due to the engagement in the performance of the auspicious action. At this stage a man can go through the path of love which is started from forgiveness, sobriety etc. leading him to the spiritual perfection.<sup>28</sup> In this way Rabindranath Tagore has pointed out that

wisdom, action and love are essential for having spiritual perfection. Through the actual union or harmony comes after the realisation of the *Advaitam* yet the realisation of *Śāntam* and *Śivam* are equally important in order to reach this stage without paying any attention to the *Śāntam* *Śivam* we can not realise 'Advaita' and it leads us to the land of unsuccess. Like this the absence of wisdom and action leads to the break of mental equilibrium. So, for the betterment of human being *Śāntam* *Śivam* and *Advaitam* are very much essential.

## Reference:

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