

Chapter - IX

Mukti or Freedom (Salvation)

The question concerning freedom of man is prominent one in the contemporary Indian tradition. The answer is sought in various terms e.g. freedom through rational self-realization (K.C. Bhattacharya), freedom through a de-schooling of reason and consciousness (Krishna Murti), freedom through a creative participation in the world amidst the fellow beings (Tagore) etc. The traditional meaning of freedom is free from some bondage. Bondage is the first criteria for salvation or freedom. But in the Tagore's philosophy it is used in a different way and it carries a special significance. In Indian philosophical system and also in the west it is described as Freedom, Salvation, *Kaivalya*, *Nirvāna*, *Amṛta*, *Apavarga*, *Moksa*, *Apunarāvṛtti*, *Sārūpa-Prāpti*, *Brahma-prāpti* etc. But Tagorian concept of *Mukti* is unique in character. In the hand of Tagore it acquires a special value. He accepts bondage as a pre-condition of freedom. In *Sādhanā* he said – “As a matter of fact, where are no bonds, where there is the madness of licence, the soul ceases to be free”.¹

In the Vedic philosophy *Ātmā* or soul is equivalent to '*Brahman*' and realization of the soul which resides in the individual man is called salvation. The Vedic seers could realize this, so they advised to the fellow to search for the Ultimate Reality not in the phenomena but with himself. Realizing individual is to realize the *Brahman* and it is called *Moksa*. We hear the echo of the *Upanisad* in Tagore's words: “Salvation is to look into the matter though timely after ignoring the bondage of selfishness, ego etc., to act timely what we are doing to remain timely where we are in where we are staying”.²

Tagore conceived man as a spiritual being. But Tagore's conception of the Man is radically different from the ancient Indian conception of Man. Although the picture of Man that he draws is basically spiritual, Tagore as unrelated to the world never conceives Man's spirituality. The self^{on} spirit from Tagore's standpoint is a life force and not a substance.

On the *Religion of Man and Creative Unity* he has interpreted the evolution of Man from his physical, biological level to a spiritual Creative level of existence in terms of the ontological principle called 'Surplus in Man'. The 'Surplus in Man', according to Tagore is indicative of man's uniqueness, creativity and transcendence from bondage to freedom. The surplus is the inner urge of Man that takes him beyond what is immediately given to him as a fulfilment of some need, utility or pleasure. In this sense the 'Surplus' has a moral dimension too. Also man's surplus means man's freedom from the objective, fact-ridden world. It signifies a 'freedom' to unity, togetherness and communion with the world.

Man is composed of two aspects - finite and infinite. As long as man is concerned with the finite aspect, he is not free but as long as he is concerned with the infinite aspect, he becomes free. The finite aspect of man is his individual aspect, where as his infinite aspect consists in the universal in him. Every individual has his own peculiarities, which he can never share with anybody else. On account of these peculiarities he is different from other individuals. This constitutes his individual character. But over and above these he has a character, which he shares with all and by dint of which he is one with all. This constitutes his universal aspect. According to Tagore, in every human being truth abides in its universal form, and alongside with it has also its individual aspect. The infinite nature of Man is revealed in his capacity to go beyond his individual bondage and limitations, man has that capacity within himself.

to go. The contradiction between these two selves of man is described by Tagore as that between *Choto ami* (limited self) and *Boro ami* (universal self).

A philosophical explication of Tagore's concept of man and freedom, therefore, has to be grounded on the ontological principle of 'Surplus' and man's conscious realization of its various forms of activity.

Tagore reflected extensively and deeply on the meaning of man in distinctive dimensions and the disclosure of the meaning in relation to nature, work, art and the other humans. His play '*Raktakarabi*', for example, portrays the alienation of man from other human beings, nature, and work, and an emancipation from the alienated being of man through an upheaval brought about by '*Ranjan*', - the hero of the play.

While freedom, for Tagore, is a freedom from this kind of bondage created by alienation, freedom is essentially a freedom to. It is stated especially in his *Manuser Dharma* that 'I' does not refer to 'ego'. Freedom, in fact, is the dissociation from the ego-sense. Tagore says the punishment we suffer in solitary confinement consists in the obstruction to the relationship between the world of reality and the real in ourselves, causing the latter to become indistinct in a haze of inactive imagination.

Hence Tagore's concept of freedom can be envisaged only by looking at his holistic approach to man with man and in unity with the rest of the reality. One of the major dimensions in terms of which Tagore's concept of man is explicated is freedom. While the concept of freedom is to be understood in a holistic manner as inclusive of both "freedom from" and "freedom to", it needs elaboration with reference to man's (1) physical action in the context of evolutionary process, (2) his moral action, and (3) his creative and imaginative adventures.

- (i) From the time of the emergence of the first living cell to the first appearance of man, evolution has been on the physical level. It was a mechanical process of cells multiplying themselves by aggregation, adjustment and co-ordination. When man appears on the earth, the course of evolution takes a turn from determination to freedom. Tagore refuses to accept any deterministic and causal account of evolution so far as the significance to humanity is concerned. He believes that this change from determinism to freedom in the evolutionary process with the emergence of man is because of a speciality in man – the ‘surplus’ in him, which is the capacity of going beyond oneself. To him man is not satisfied with what he is in his nature limitations; he irresistably feels something beyond the evident fact of himself, which only could give him worth.

The change in the physical make-up of man also facilitates it. Unlike the animals man stands erect, his hands too are free to manipulate and do all sorts of things which cannot be imagined with regard to animals. His physical constitution and ability to stand erect on two legs gives his eyes a priviledged position; they occupy a height and man’s vision becomes far-reaching. Thus man’s physical actions are indicative of his ‘surplus’, his freedom to.

- (ii) Since man has a mental freedom i.e. the capability to think, to imagine, to judge etc. He manifests his surplus also in taking decisions and choosing to act in a certain way which is not conditioned by the ‘desirable’. Tagore makes a distinction between ‘*Śreyā*’ and ‘*Preya*’. Since man has the capacity to go beyond his immediate impulses, inclinations and desires, he is capable of performing actions, which have a moral worth and related to his ‘freedom’. When a good work of an individual comes from his

intrinsic goodness, it has a moral worth according to Tagore. His position is like that of Kant who maintained that good will, in its moral sense, is good without qualification, and must be dissociated from its results, and individual's inclinations and desires.

- (iii) Morality, for Tagore, is not meant to suppress the creative spirit of man. Nor is it to take a puritan approach to human living. On the contrary, it is an expression of man's freedom "Goodness is the freedom of ourself in the world of man". Man is as creative in his moral decisions as he is in his artistic creations and enjoyment. In this context Tagore made a distinction between 'construction' and 'creation'. While 'construction' has a utilitarian connotation, the concept of creation is indicative of man's freedom and urge to go beyond the immediate necessities of this world.

Tagore's view of human freedom can be called 'magical' in the sense that it is counter-factual. It signifies man's transcendence from his self-enclosed being to a unity of his being with the rest of world, from the world of facts and information to a world of expressions and forms, from 'having' to 'being'.

According to *Upanisad* there are three conditions to be free i.e. Knowledge, Love and action or *Karma*. The *Advaitins* emphasised on knowledge. This Knowledge is the true knowledge of *Brahman*, i.e. self. M. Hiriyanna says in his 'Outline of Indian philosophy' that, "Such Knowledge (Knowledge of Brahman) is the sole means of liberation. Neither moral perfection nor religious acts are required as direct side to it. The cultivation of the will and the purification of the affections are of course necessary, but they are only aids to *Jñāna* (right knowledge), not to *moksa*".

Like the same tone of the *Vedantins*, Tagore admitted that to realize the real nature of self is *Mukti* or salvation. But he said that to realize the self it needed the three-condition like-knowledge, love and action. Knowledge does not help us to lead the real nature of Brahman but it helps us to know Him. Love alone takes us to Him. Without action that love will not find its meaning.

Tagore have already been accepted us a humanistic philosopher and his religion is not the traditional so called religion, but human religion which comes spontaneously from his nature. Does he accept the traditional concept of *moksa* in Indian philosophy? To answer this question we have to know the nature of reality and the means for its realisation.

Knowledge is highly necessary to understand the ultimate reality. Here we have to notice that the knowledge of reality and realization of it are two different affairs and hence, they should be distinguished from each other. Now a question may arise how do we know the reality? Is it by intellect or intuition? Tagore has preferred intuition as a means but not intellect. The truth or ultimate reality is always revealed to him in a flash of intuition, but to express them he takes recourse to intellect. In *Santiniketan* he wrote: "*Brahman* can not be known by debates. It is to be known only through *Anandam*".³ In the *Sādhanā* he said – "Intellectual knowledge is partial because our intellect which is an instrument is only a part of us. It can give us information about things which can be divided and analysed and whose properties can be classified part by part. But Brahman is perfect and knowledge, which is partial, can never be the knowledge of Him. So Brahman can be known by joy, by love. For joy is knowledge in its completeness, it is known by our whole being. Intellect sets us apart from the things to be known, but love knows its object by

fusion. Such knowledge is immediate and admits no doubt".⁴ When and how the truth reveals to him, he writes in his *Jivan Smrti*: "One morning, I stood on the balcony of Calcutta residence and looked at the gardens of trees and I looked on. Suddenly I felt as if a veil was removed from my eyes. I saw an ineffable beauty. I felt an inexplicable joy within the depths of my own being and I found the whole universe soaked in it. My discontent and disappointment vanished instantaneously and a universal light flooded my entire being. That very day, I wrote the poem, *Nirjharer Swaphabhangā*".⁵

Aje a prabhate rabin kar

Kemone poshelo praner par

Ore Aj kee gan geyechhe prakhi

Aseche rabin kar.

Not only his essays but also his poem, songs and music, the poet realized the truth by immediate process. In this context again in *Jivan-Smrti* he wrote: "Music begins where words end. Music reigns supreme in the region of the inexplicable. Music tells us what words cannot tell".⁶ Tagore refers music intuition through his all artistic creation and prefers music-intuition. "Music is the purest form of art, and therefore the most direct expression of beauty, with a form and spirit which is one and simple, and least encumbered with anything extraneous. We seem to feel that the manifestation of the Infinite in the finite forms of creation is music itself-silent and visible".⁷

The poet was seeking his God through his songs. In the *Gītāñjali* most of the songs are devoted to the feet of his Allmighty: "Ever in my life have I sought thee with my songs. It was they who lead me from door to

door and with them have I felt about me, searching and touching my world”.

Tagore said through his songs in another place at the end of his life –

“But now when in the evening light

I see the blue line of the shore,

I know my songs are the boat that

has brought me to the harbour across

*The wild sea”.*⁹

But now the second issue is how to realize the Infinite? Tagore said the Infinite can be realized through love alone. We have already seen in the “*Lover’s Gift and Crossing*” that the relation between man and God is the relation of love. In the *Gitānjali* the poet sings –

“Thou settest a barrier in thine own being and then

Callest they severed self in myriad notes. This they

*Self-separation has taken body in me”.*¹⁰

Now question may be raised – Is the poet’s love of Infinite only a feeling? Does *Karma* or action play any role to realize the Infinite being? Tagore says his process is not only inactive feeling. Action or *Karma* plays an important role in Tagore’s philosophy of salvation or *Mukti*. His *Mukti Tattva* (theory of Salvation) is totally different from the traditional speculative Theory. In our day to day life we see action is the course of bondage. It may be questioned how it is possible to be free from the attachment of worldly affair. Tagore gave a simple solution in his ‘*Karma*’:

“There may be two kinds of action. One comes from want and the other from availability i.e. surplusness. The first is from need and the second is from pleasure. The action which is done out of need is called bondage and the action which is done from availability or surplusness is not called bondage and it is called *Mukti* or Salvation”.¹¹ Again in his *Tyaga* he said “Be free to be a *Kartā* or worker. For this ‘*Gītā*’ advocates the ‘*Karmayoga*’ where we have done some action which is from renunciation. If we do something from detachment then we have a right on that action. Otherwise we will be attached with that action and be a part of it To do something we have to leave all kinds of selfishness”.¹² In his philosophy *Vyarāgya* or renunciation is not accepted. The traditional meaning of this term is actionless of interested type.

He did not accept the traditional meaning of *Vyaragya*. In the *Naivedya* he says –

“I do not believe in salvation which comes through the Path of detachment. I would like to have the taste of Freedom amongst innumerable bondages. To close the doors of sense organs for attaining this is not desirable to me.”¹²

In this context we notice that Tagore and Sartre believe the freedom in the same sense. Both declare that freedom spreads through all our life and action. Sartre said –

“For I declare that freedom, in respect of concrete circumstances, can hate no other and aim but it self”.¹⁴ Tagore said, ‘the action of single ‘me’ is bondage, and action of all is freedom”.¹⁵ Though Sartre had a

different ideology but he also said the same words in his 'The Problem of Method' in this way: "And in thus willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely upon the freedom of others and the freedom depends upon our own".

We have noticed that love and action play an important role to realize the Brahman or self. Now the question is: does knowledge play any role to be free or realize the *Brahman*? In this context it can be said that he does not accept knowledge as an only process like *Advaita Vedānta*. To him harmony is the main thing and no other theories will be the only path to be free. So, love, *Karma* (action) and knowledge are the means of attaining Salvation.

In the *Sāmānjasya* Tagore said –

"His *Brahman* is not of his own, not of the wise, not of the devotee, but his *Brahman* is of the whole world. Hence it is essential to remember Him, to realise Him, and to surrender oneself to Him through one's sincerity, action etc. We can associate ourselves with Brahman with the help of the excellence of the humanity. It is our *Sādhanā* to associate ourselves to Him and to associate Him with us. It is necessary to realize Him with our body, mind and soul and to strengthen our body, mind and soul through His realisation. It is our noble duty to follow the path of harmony, Harmony brings as perfection which is desired by the sages".¹⁶

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