

Chapter - I

Introduction

PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: Apropos Vedānta and Buddhism

The recent decades in Europe as well as in India an interest in philosophical anthropology is being widely evinced. Dating back to Kant one notices that the question 'what is man?' is basic than such questions as 'what can I know?' or 'what I ought to do?' (Critique of Pure Reason, P. 830, "Method of Transcendentalism", Chapter II, Section 2. Kant raises the issue in Introduction to logic also). The basic character of the question 'what is man?' is due to the fact that the questions like 'what can I know?' or 'what I ought to do?' can be answered to by rephrasing them as 'what can I know as a man?' or 'what I ought to do as a man?'. The point is that the issue of philosophical anthropology appears to be inescapable.

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 feelings, the relation of man to history, the possibility of human development. Philosophical anthropology, then, is a fundamental science of the essence and essential structure of man. It is the task of philosophical anthropology, say Scheler, to show how from the basic structure of human being all the specific creations and activities of man follow: Language, conscience, ideas of justice and injustice, state, the arts, religion, science and society. It will be readily appreciated by those acquainted with Tagore's thought that he has made a substantial contribution to these themes.

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, in *Janmadine No. 28*, 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 went into the making of his thought. However, in *Sādhanā*, he spoke of the *Upanisads* and *Buddhism* as having left a lasting impression on his thought as "theories of the spirit" (*Sādhanā, Preface, VIII*), and he added that these were not, for him, to be "exhausted by any one system of logical interpretation", rather they were "instinct with individual meaning". In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore alluded to his discovery of *Vaisnava* poems and his coming to know the *Bauls* 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 undercurrent awareness of the spirit beyond the philosophical elite. Of course Tagore thought that the *Upanisadic* 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 the *Upanisadic* (*Vedantic*) 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. Overview of literature, work already done in the area.

The first philosophical work on Tagore was done by Radhakrishnan. This work has been pioneering endeavor. 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 on Bengali sources, and showing his development from the early materialism and nihilism to the final avowal of the primacy of *ananda*. There is a classic study in Bengali by Sashibhusan Dasgupta on the *Upanisadic* 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 most recent study on existential theme has been on the *Gītāñjali* by Jagannath Chakraborty, called *Astitva Viraha*. As regards the case of Buddhism there is only one full-length study by Dipak Kumar Barua. This deserves significant mention.

However, there are two research gaps: (a) Notwithstanding the *Upanisadic* linkage it has not been made clear how much Tagore follows or owes to the classical commentators. A close of Tagore's discourses, collected as *Santiniketan* can be used as a text for that purpose. For example, the very first verse of the *Íśa* as interpreted by Tagore departs widely from *Samkara's* interpretation and comes closely to Sri Aurobindo's way of understanding it and (b) Tagore's Bengali writings on Buddhism have been collected under the title *Buddhadeva*. There is also a translation of some of the pieces in English. The questions remain to be

decided whether Tagore followed *Hīnayāna* or *Mahayāna* version of Buddhism. Is Tagore's interpretation of *brahma-vihar* congruent with the teachings of the *Upanisads* as he claims it to be? How does Tagore understand the concept (or the state) or *nirvāna*? These are specific questions that are significant to be raised, discussed and finally evaluated.

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 Sartrian 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 20th 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. Ethicless human being means man without spiritual value. Without spiritual development he can't 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 is^{born} 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 a region of insight beyond the boundaries of metre and music. Actually poet is the seeker 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".¹ 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*,

Upanisads etc. as well as by his father Maharsi Debendranath 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 any one 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.

Reference:

1. *Visva Bharati* Quarterly, Vol. III (January, 1926).