

Chapter - III

Tagore's Concept of Man:

In the Light of Buddhism

Before the birth of Rabindranath, Tagore's family was well known and few of them were influenced by Goutam Buddha. Rabindranath Tagore grownup in such kind of multi-cultured circumstances. But "*The Sanskrit Buddhist literature of Nepal*", by Rajendralal Mitra, made him more keen to Buddhadeva and Tagore wrote a lot of dramas, poems and stories on the basis of that book.

In 1914, Tagore visited Buddhagaya to pay his gratitude and Pranam toward Buddha and his attitudes toward Buddha was same as it was before. He visited Buddhagaya after 19 years of his first visit (1933) and declared "I come to pay my gratitude in an auspicious occasion of *Vaishakhee Purnima* to the man whom I consider the superior of all on this Earth".¹

In his essay *Buddhadeva* Tagore said "if I were in the time when the Buddha was roaming with his physical appearance and purified the earth with the touch of his feet, then I would be very happy".²

From the above statements it is clear to us that how he was influenced by Buddha. Buddha was the only man in the cultural heritage of India, who influenced Tagore deeply.

Actually Tagore liked Buddha's ethical teaching and attitude towards His fellow. Their import is fundamentally practical. It will be clear if we follow the lines from the *Sutta Nipāta* -

*" If you know your own good
And know where peace dwells
Then this is the task:
Lead a simple and frugal life
Uncorrupted, capable and just,
Be mild, speak soft, eradicate conceit,
Keep appetites and sense calm.
Be discrete and unassuming,
Do not seek rewards,
Do not have to be ashamed
In the presence of the wise.
May everything that lives be well!
Weak or strong, large or small,
Seen or unseen, here or else where.
Present or to come, in height or depths.
Have that mind for all the world,
Get rid of lies and pride,
A mother's mind for her baby,
Her love, but now unbounded.
Secure this mind of love,
No enemies, no obstructions,
Wherever or however you may be!
It is sublime, this, it escapes birth and death,
Losing lust and delusion,
And living in the truth!"*

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Buddhās teaching is based on the simple and practical truth i.e. *Karmavada* or as we do, so we become.

Buddha believes on *Karma* and rebirth according to their *Karmaphala*. From Buddhist points of view their teachings are part of the *karmic* reduction of suffering and of reaching better rebirths or final enlightenment. In the present context, the search for common Buddhist conviction is an integral part of grasping *Mahāyāna Buddhist* ethics by those who lack the experience as available in Buddhists Literature. The quest for common Buddhist moral teaching is a small, but vital part of the humanistic quest for a minimal common denominator ethic of human survival and co-operation on this planet of swiftly depleting resources.

COMMON BUDDHIST MORAL TEACHING:

Buddha never preaches about the supernatural power or God who come and saved the sufferer human community, but he firmly believes on *paṭiccasamuppādatattva* or dependent origination. It is difficult to understand what is the exact nature of this dependence. The question as *Samyuttā Nikaya* has it with which the Buddha started before attaining Buddha-hood was this: in what miserable condition are the people! they are born, they decay, they die, pass away and are born again; and they are totally ignorant about this process.

Buddha had a quest in his mind that how they escape from this misery of decay and death. He came to know that the decay and death depending on what they come. It occurs only when there is birth (*Jāti*), so they depend on birth, what being there, is there birth, on what does birth depend? Then is occurred to him that birth could only be if there was

previous existence (*bhava*). But on what does this existence depend, or what being there is their *bhava*. Then it occurred to him that there could not be existence unless there were holding fast or *upādāna*. But on what did *upādāna* depend? It comes from desire (*Tanha*) on which *upādāna* depends. There must be *upādāna* if there is desire. But what being there can there be desire? To this question it occurred to him that there must be feeling (*vedanā*) in order that there may be desire. But on what does *vedanā* depend, or rather what must be there, that there may be the feeling? To this it occurred to him that there must be a sense-contact (*Sparśa*) in order that there may be feeling. If there should be no sense contact there would be no feeling. But on what does sense contact depend? It depends on consciousness. If there were no conscious there would be no *Namrūpa* or sense contact. That kind *Sankara* or conformation will continue if ignorance (*avijja*) is there. So to stop the cycle of dependence of existence (*Bhavacakra*) and suffering, individual should follow prescribed moral codes which will save himself as well as it's effect fall on the rest of the society. No religious activity, rituals, sacrifices are needed to reach the heaven. Human being can make their heaven here in this world. These morals are discussed in the following way:-

- (i) Ten Buddhist commandments.
- (ii) Virtues like liberality (giving *dāna*) and four unlimited virtues i.e. *brahmavihāras* of compassionate equanimity.
- (iii) Value emphasis such as caste equality; and lastly
- (iv) The fourth Noble Truth i.e. means for attaining enlightenment.

Ten Buddhist commandments: This ethical emphasis conquers with Winston King's belief that from the *Teravadins Buddhist* point of view, including that of its monastic elite, the five Buddhist precepts "may

be inwardized into attitudes and further extended by more positive ethical qualities....”⁴ like the Hindu, Islam and Buddhist unlimited virtues of compassionate equanimity. In Buddhism, not only man, even the neglected animals also get a prestigious position. It is reflected in the *Jatak tales* where Buddha took birth again and again in the form of deer, peacock, cow etc. and with the virtue of ten commandments or divine rules (i.e. *Dana, Śīla, Karma, Niskarma, Prajñā, Virya, Satya, Adhiṣṭhāna, Maitrī, Upekṣā*), he liberated himself.

The Theravadins believed that the five precepts were externally binding on everyone. But only the saint could really observe them.⁵

Other five precepts are covetousness, slander, wrong views, hatred or insult, and idle talking. All those group of *Silas* are called *daśa-śīla* (ten precepts) from humanist, social and activist view points all of these norms may seem self-centered or negative unless they are surveyed in the wider context of Buddhist virtues and values.

Virtues:

Beside those precepts, there are other virtues in Buddhism. These virtues or qualities are considered as crucial for the path to better rebirths or enlightenment. These are presenting or liberality (*dāna-śīla*; sharing without clinging) and the four unlimited virtues (*brahmavihāras*) of *maitrī* or benevolence, *karunā* or compassion, *muditā* or sympathetic joy.

Value emphasis:

Values exist in both the *Teravadin Buddhism* and *Mahāyāna Buddhism* and five offences are judged especially grave. They prohibit killing one's mother, father an *Arhat*, a *Buddha*, or harming the

community of monks. In addition to the virtues of compassionate equanimity, therefore, one begins to discern a more concretely expressed Buddhistic ethos of non-injury (*ahimsā*). In humanistic terms and at a glance, therefore, common Buddhist morality does not seem to offer moral precepts, virtues or value emphasis inferior to other religious and human traditions.

The four Noble Truth:

The last factor in the fourfold Noble Truth, which concerns the means for attaining enlightenment is the practice of the eightfold path which involves qualities of correct seeing, and entails correct doing. These are:-

- (i) faith (*samyag dr̥ṣṭi*)
- (ii) right resolve (*Sankalpa*)
- (iii) right speech (*vāk*)
- (iv) right action (*Karmānta*)
- (v) right living (*ājīva*)
- (vi) right effort (*vyāyāma*)
- (vii) right thought (*smṛti*) and
- (viii) right concentration (*Samādhi*)

Correct behaviors or 'Śīla' for both laity and monks (the *sangha*) prohibit killing, stealing, lying, adultery and the use of intoxicants. These precepts are contained already in Hindu, Islam and other religious ethics. We have to collect those Śīla in our practical life and exercise them in our daily life. These are the means to our Salvation or *Nirvāna*. It helps us to build our character. Character or *Caritra* is a means, which help us to reach our end or goal. Śīlas are assets of our journey.

Buddha has generated a variety of codes for ethical conduct. These codes are not only a commandment but these are accepted as training principles. The most common formulation of a Buddhist ethical code is the list of five precepts, which are followed by the Buddhists.

- (i) I undertake not to kill.
- (ii) I undertake not to take what has not been given.
- (iii) I undertake not to engage in sexual misconduct.
- (iv) I undertake not to lie.
- (v) I undertake to avoid intoxicants.

These precepts are intended as a support to our spiritual training and also a way of helping people to transform every dimension of their daily lives, their body, speech and mind. These can be expressed in the positive way.

"With deeds of loving kindness, I purify my body.

With open-handed generosity, I purify my body.

With stillness, simplicity and contentment, I purify my body.

With truthful communication, I purify my speech

With mind fullness, clear and radiant, I purify my mind"⁶

We transcend ourselves by practicing those precepts and in this way kindness, generosity, contentment, honesty and clarity purify our mind as well as our body.

The basic question of philosophical anthropology which, was raised before i.e. what I ought to do as a man? Has a great appeal to Buddha as well as Rabindranath Tagore.

In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* it is said -“First he will diligently foster the thought that his fellow creatures are the same as himself. All have the same sorrows, the same joys, as I and I must guard them like myself. I will cease to live as self and take as myself my fellow-creatures. We love our hands and other limbs a member of the body then why not love other living beings as members of the universe? By constant use man comes to imagine that his body, which has no self-being is a ‘Self’, then why should he not conceive his ‘self’ to lie in his fellows also?... Then, as you would guard yourself against suffering and sorrow, so exercise the spirit of help fullness and tenderness to the world”.⁷

The question, if I am only for myself, what I am? And not now, when? Influenced Buddhadeva and Rabindranath Tagore .So, they were not satisfied with themselves. It forces them to go forward and do some thing for the total human being.

In the *Ātmaparichya* Tagore said about the human religion, “It is the religion that concealed in his mind to create himself. It is the inherent life forces that create the living being of the animal kingdom. The animal need not know anything about this life force. But man has another entity, which is bigger than his sentient being i.e. his humanism. This creative force with in his life is his religion”.⁸

Tagore himself worked untiringly spent a lot of money to relieve the distress due to food and famine, poverty, ill health and want of education in his own villages of Bengal. He also brought the message of the global brotherhood to the world’s citizen.

Buddha gave emphasis on human power and potency, which lies within him. “Buddha did not beg help and kindness from the heaven but he raised it out from the inner world of human being”.⁹

In this way with the help of love, respect and devotion, Buddhadeva established the inward wisdom, power and generosity of human being and gave him a special status.

Tagore's philosophy was developed from his poetic expression, which grew out of his genuine concern for the wellbeing of humanity. He clearly stated that his main subject was the idea of humanity of our God, or the divinity of man.

Tagore said that if we want to know religion, we have to go through our lives and observe them through our lives. Buddhism at first gave the special status of human being and saw the man as a being bigger than he is. In the dance drama *Candālikā* Rabindranath had emphatically shown that an ordinary lady's transformation from untouchable position to a honored one. *Candālikā* by virtue of her accidental birth in the family of a *Candāla* (lower cast) was neglected by each and every person belonging to the so-called upper caste, even by the hawkers of bangles and seller of curd. She was untouchable to other social members. Her much neglected nature was apparent, because it was imposed by the society and hence it was not her real character. She has got back her real character or realized her own character, when a Buddhist monk had accepted her hospitality by way of drinking water offered by her. The monk did not treat her as untouchable, but has offered her the honour of humanity (manaver samman). It is rightly pointed out by the Buddhist monk that she is after all a human being and the blood of a human being is flowing through her veins. Hence she should not censure herself as belonging to the race of *Candāla*. ("*Tini bale gelen āmāy nijere nindā karo űa, mānaver vamśa tomār mānaver rakta tomārnaḁie*"). The property of beng *Candāla* is an imposed one having no actual reality and hence there does not arise any question of untouchability. If *Candālatva* were

imposed on the dense cloud spread over the sky in the month of *Śrāvana*, would it be treated as *Candāla* and its water be impure? (*“śrāvaner kālo ye megh tāre yadinam dāo Candāla, to bale ki jāt ghucive tār, aśuci have kei tar jal”*). In other words, we cannot call the black cloud *Candāla*. Even if it is called, it is an extraneous factor, which is to be imposed on it. Hence it can never be ascribed as *Candāla* and for this reason its water can never be impure. This honour of humanity conferred on *Candālikā* is a transformation from artificiality to naturality. The descriptions like *Candāla* etc are given by the social beings in a particular situation, but they have no reality. On account of this these are called *aharya* or imposed properties, which are artificial. As soon as there is transformation, it is towards the state of naturality, which is describes as a new birth. It is achieved by her through confer of the honour to her by quenching thirst of the monk (*“ e natun janma nutun janma nutun janma āmār āmāke dīlen sahasā mānusera trsnā metāno sammān”*) She was in the realm of falsity, which is demolished through the arrival of truth (*“bhanglo e janmer mithyā”*). Rabindranath has taken the word *“Candāla* as someone who does not devote his life for welfare of the mass (*Vahujanahitāya*). Such person having no desire for doing public welfare, *maitri, karuna* etc are available even the family of the so-called Brahmins. As the *Candālikā* has performed a moral work by way of providing water to a thirsty Buddhist monk, she cannot be said as *Candala* (*“Dvijer vamśe Candāl kata acche āmi nai candali”*). Each and every person has got mud or dust in her heart and it is essential to remove this by transformation to the heavenly region, which is metaphorised as pure as flower, *Candālikā* has transformed to this stage and she thinks herself fortunate. Just as a flower is auspicious as it is used in the service of the God, *Candālikā* also thinks herself pious as her birth is utilized in the service of a thirsty human being. (*Phul bale dhanya āmi dhanya ami matir pare, devatā ogo tomār sevā āmār ghare’*,

'*Dhūlir dhanke karo svargīya*', '*nāi dhūli mor antare*'). This state of *Candālikā* is her real nature. This is true about all women and men who are neglected in our society due to some artificial character imposed on them. The transformed stage is the natural one, which has to be achieved by the human being. Man could able broke out this natural boundaries with the embodied appearance of wisdom and kindness. Buddha got salvation or *nirvāna* but remained in this world just for show the light of wisdom to the sufferers.

Buddhism had maintioned the three tier system like:-

- (i) Buddha
- (ii) Dharma, and
- (iii) *Sangha*

Here Buddha means devotion, *Dharma* means wisdom and *Sangha* means *Karma*. These three doctrines give the completeness in Buddhism.

This three-tier system is also found in Tagore's ideology. He did not agree with the renunciation in action. He gave more emphasis on action. It can be seen in his *Gitāñjali*, poem no. XI.

"..... Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut' Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stone. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil".¹⁰

We can see touch of wisdom every where in his creation. Tagore did not believe the society where man is neglected and religious rituals and *mantras* make the human life more complicated. His drama 'Achalayatana' and novel 'Gora' make us clear that *Jñāna Yoga* or wisdom plays an important role in salvation.

Not only action and wisdom but also devotion to God or super natural soul helps us to get salvation. It reveals in his Drama 'Candālikā' and all the poems of 'Naivedya'. All the three doctrines reveal in the poem 'Mukti'

"... Meditation by blocking all avenue is not my path.

Thy blissful joy rests amidst

The lust of my life will go up with flames of salvation

My love will flow as devotion to thee

The joys and pleasures of sight, fragrance and melody".¹¹

Tagore says in the *Gītāñjali* the same thing in other way

Where thou art in union with the multitude

I shall seek union with thee

Neither in the forest not in solitude

Nor inside my own mind

But where thou art the beloved of every body

Thou are my beloved too.¹²

Tagore could find out the harmony of *Jñāna*, *karma* and *devotion*. So far as the *Hīnayāna* Buddhism concerned prayer and devotion are absent in it. On the other hand devotion, hymns and wisdom are found

every where in *Mahāyāna* sect of Buddhism. The only aim of Buddhism is to practise those teaching in personal life. Love does not come from nothingness and with love all relations get its completeness.

Like all other positive mental states, the clarity of mind which Buddhist ethic enjoys can be consciously cultivated. One of the most direct means of doing so is through the practice of meditation.

Buddhism is not against joy and pleasure. But it suggests that the dulled state of intoxication is actually unpleasant and we only choose to enter into it because it seems to offer some temporary respite from the pain of ordinary existence. Instead of trying to just blot out of pain of our daily lives, Buddhism suggests that we can consciously cultivate states, which are not painful. A clear mind, aesthetic appreciation, the love of nature, mediation, kindness and friendship all these bring about skillful mental states in dependence on which ever-greater joy arises.

Like Buddha, Tagore also gives a spiritualistic interpretation of human religion. Religion involves a sense of humanness in it. It is an expression of essential and inner aspect of man. Tagore says "if it is the human aspect of this truth which all great personalities have made their own in their lives and have offered to their fellow beings in the name of various religions".¹³ It is clear that religion implies the acceptance of spirituality. "Tagore remarks that religion is the spiritual truth".¹⁴ So, spirituality is the core of religion. Human's religion, according to Tagore, essentially makes him aware of a communication which is beyond the physical universe. This leads him to have faith in spiritual order.

Spirituality plays an important role in the philosophy of Buddha. He himself always went on his wondering with a close companion. Most

of the time he was accompanied by his cousin cum friend, Ānanda. One-day a dialogue was opened on spirituality.

Ānanda:

“Lord I’ve been thinking, you know, spiritual friendship is at least half of the spiritual life.

The Buddha replied:

Say not so Ananda, say not so, spiritual friendship is the whole of the spiritual life”.¹⁵

This is the way in which the Buddhist tradition has preserved the teaching for the last two and a half thousand years. Teachers have passed on their knowledge and experience to their disciples in an unbroken chain of spiritual friendship, which reaches back to the Buddha himself. Without those friendships it would not be possible for the vast majority of us to tread the path of enlightenment. ‘Virtual’ spiritual friendships are indispensable.

Spiritual friendship gives one a context for self-transcendence, an opportunity to put another’s needs beyond one’s own. It is all very well to insist that our sense is ultimately illusory and that therefore we should care no more for ourselves than for others, but it is very much harder to put this into practice. In the case of spiritual friendship however, one can come to feel so strongly for one’s friends that one naturally wants to put their needs about one’s own. We should cultivate spiritual friendships with one another. This is no easy matter and is not something, which can simply be left to chance and the working of Buddhist goodwill. Gone about in that short of way, one or two people might find themselves sufficiently drawn to one another to begin to forge stronger links between one another, but most will find that their relationships with one another

stay at a more or less superficial friendly level. For most people, spiritual friendships need to be consciously cultivated. Like all things, spiritual friendships come about only in dependence upon the right condition.

Edward Thomson, Tagore's first Western interpreter, introduces the collection of spiritual love song where relation between the divine and finite reveals. Among them one is given below:

God of the silent soul

awake, alone,

Today I will open a door

and be known.

Whom do I seek all day

in the swift outside,

I will learn the holy word.

of eventide.

I light the lamp of my life

with your life's light

O priest, in quite I will make

my gift tonight

Where the cosmos has taught

a world to pray

I too of that radiance

will hold a ray.

In *Sadhāna*, Tagore says how much he is influenced by *Upanisad* as well as the great teacher Buddha. "To me the verses of the *Upanisads* and the teaching of Buddha have ever been things of the spirit, and

therefore endowed with boundless vital growth; and I have used them, both in my own life and in my preaching, as being instinct with individual meaning for me, as for others and awaiting for their confirmation, my own special testimony, which must have its value because of its individuality".¹⁶

The magnetic character for the personality of Lord Buddha had its own towards its positive and negative prescriptions. There were many other influences too, which in their own ways determined the nature of Tagore's religious philosophy. But the main thing about Tagore's ways of thinking is that he moulds and shapes all the sources from where he was influence and he creates them in accordance with his own realisation and visions.

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