

Chapter - IV

Influence of Baul, Sufi Saints and Kabir on Tagore's Philosophical Anthropology

Listen, O brother man,

The truth of man is the highest of truths;

There is no other truth above it.

(*‘Sunaha mānush bhai sabar upare mānush satya tahār upare nai’* – Chandidas)

(Rabindranath Tagore, the humanistic philosopher, and the mystic poet was influenced a lot by the unsophisticated philosophical sects of Bengal i.e. *Baul*. *Bauls* don't believe in on any particular forms of religion and they never use to go to any Church, temple and Masque. It is better to call them the self-learned person who is wandering for *maner manush* or the man of the heart. They form a way of life without any complicated religious bindings. They believe in man alone which is metaphorically expressed as - '*Achin pakhi*' or 'self'.)

Tagore was well acquainted with the *Baul* sects in his childhood. Every year there has been a fair at Bolpur and *Baul* sects use to gather to sing the *Baul Sangeet* (one kind of song composed by **Lalon Phakir**). Those *Baul* songs influenced him. Tagore was the first person who had collected folk songs and had drawn the attention of educated society to the folk songs and it's literary and cultural value.

Bauls are the lower in status from the both Hindu and the Muslim communities of Bengal. Economically and socially they belong to the

poorest sections. They had their basic outlook anchored in the *Ujaansadhana* or *Ulta-sadhana*. It evlosizes the philosophy of the reverse path and this is the fundamental tenet of all the `sahajiyā' traditions in Bengal and else where. They like to proceed to an opposite direction from that where is followed by the general people. They avoid all kinds of formal & institutional religion in which the natural pity of the soul is over shadowed by the useless paraphernalia or ritualism and ceremony on the one hand and pedantry and hypocrisy on the other. That is why the *Bauls* and other *sahajias* call their parth *ultasadhana* (i.e. the reverse path). They use to say that their process is a kind of spiritual advance as because it the method of movement against the current i.e. *ujaan-sadhana*. It can be understood by their own composed song.

Reverse are the modes and manners

of the man who is a real lover

of the true emotional life'.

The main purpose of the *Bauls* for their *Ulta-Sadhana* or reverse journey is to return to one's own self which is *Sahaja* or inborn in nature. It is one of the path like other atheistic philosophy. (i.e Sankarachariya, Ramanuja etc.) It is the path which is not so complicated and artificial but the easiest path of self-realisation. This reverse journey of the *Bauls* for self-realisation is *Sahija* (easy) not because the path is easy to travel but because it is the most natural part to reach the ultimate reality.

Unsophisticated theology of *Bauls* and the simple ways for self-reñisation of the *Baul* had impressed Tagore very much. He was against the socalled traditional institutional religion. Tagore had described how, he was attracted to one of the basic philosophical features of the *Baul*

songs. While he was stumbling upon the formal constraints of the monotheistic Brahmo Church, he wrote in his *'The Religion of Man'* - I came to discover that in my conduct I was not strictly loyal to my religion, but only to the religious institution. After a long struggle with the feeling that I was using a mask to hide the living face of truth. I gave up my connection with our church. About this time one day I got a chance to hear a song from a beggar belonging to the baul sect of Bengal. What struck me in this simple song was a religious expression that was neither grossly concrete full of crude details, nor metaphysical in its rarified transcendentalism. At the same time it was alive with an emotional sincerity. It spoke of an intense yearning of the heart for the divine who is in man and not in the temple or scriptures, in images and symbols. The worshipper addresses his song to man, the ideal, and says:

*Temple and mosques obstruct the path,
and I fail to hear thy call or to move,
when the clerics and priests angrily crowd round me.*

He did not follow any tradition of ceremony, but only believed in love. According to him, love is the magic stone that transmutes by its touch greed into sacrifice. He said:-

*'For the sake of this love
Heaven longs to become earth
And God to become man'*

Man possesses all the quality and most important thing that he is alive. Man amongst all the animal can raise his head and has the authority to say *'sōham'* i.e. I and my father are one. There is union between you and me. All the man in any caste, region and sect

possesses this quality to say 'sōham'. Tagore recognised the same thing from the Baul's song, which are represented in an unsophisticated way. Kshitimohan Sen collected most of the *Baul's* songs and one of the songs which changed the mind and made more thoughtfull is:-

Jibe Jibe chairya dekhi

Sabi ye tar abatar

O tui nutan lila kee dekhabi

Jar nitya lila chamatkar

The English rendering of the song is as follows:

Seeing the God's creature

All are his prophets

You get nothing to show

As because always he is showing

The human beings are showing his proficiency through his daily works. People are showing it in the form of wisdom, love and sacrifice. Tagore himself realized this in his childhood and he expressed these through his 'prabhat sangeet' and 'prabhat utsab'. One of those are given below:

My heart opens to day

All the world come and meet on my heart and hug me.

All the human beings which reside on the earth comes to me and enjoy themselves. This is the wave of the heart of all human beings. They are having love devotion and affection within themselves. *Bauls* realize

and express their feeling in a easiest way which makes Tagore more curious.

The chief philosophical theme in *Bauls* are the man which are called '*Maner Manush*' or the Man of the heart. The same philosophy of life can be noticed in the other sects, like *Vaishnava*, *Sufi* and *Kabir's* school. The *Baul* conception of man of the heart brings in the question of its similarity or dissimilarity with *Vaishnava* conception of love. The *Vaishnava* formulation is based on a principle of duality, theological, but not metaphysical. Theologically the *Vaishnavas* have conceived a kind of duality between God and the individual and this principle of duality invites the question of *Saguna-bhakti*. It culminates in the concept of passionate love. In the metaphysical point of view the relation between God and man is incomprehensible – a relation of dualism in non-dualism. But the *Bauls* have a non-dualistic approach between them.

The *Bauls* have criticised the view of the *Vaishnava* followers. They use to raise the question in the following manner;-had these *Vaishnavas* proper understanding of the duality they would have known it in a better way than that *Candidas*, *Vidyapati* and others were good *Vaishnava* poets, simply because they had glimpses of '*Sahaja ideas*'. But are their followers competent to understand their messages? They took the idea of *Radha* from us, but have dragged her down to the level of their low desires. Devoid of the realisation of the simple, their minds obsessed with the complexities of their literature fail to do justice to the wealth they have inherited. At best they make an attempt at simplicity and naturalness in their songs and festivals, but in their lives, their temples their religious observation, they are unable to get free of the shackles of their scripture. They have made a jumble of love and desire, the working of the spirit and the want of the senses. Once the *Bauls* were asked by

the *Vaishnavas* as to whether they are aware of the different kinds of love as classified in the *Vaishnava* scriptures. *Baul* answered them by singing a song:

'A goldsmith, I think, has come

into the flower garden.

He would appraise the lotus

By rubbing it on his touchstone!

Oh the fun, what a pity!'²

But *Bauls* have a soft corner toward *Chandidas* and his philosophy of man. Tagore mentioned in his '*The Religion of Man*' that *Chandidas* reached the mountain in the philosophy and literature. It also always brings a positive feeling in the *Bauls'* mind and they song out.

Listen, O brother man,

The truth of man is the highest truths

There is no other truth above it.³

The *Baul's* '*maner manush*' or 'the man of the heart' gets transformed into '*Jiban devata*' of Tagore. God in his philosophy has been humanised. Tagore did this without being anthropomorphic in the undesirable sense. He does not mean humanisation in the sense of God. It also means that it is the God in man.

In 'The Religion of Man' Tagore says that –

For the sake of this love

Heaven longs to become earth

*And gods to become man.*⁴

Jivan-devata, to Tagore is the God as immanent in man. That can be compared with the Vedantic doctrine of 'Tat Tvam Asi'(i.e. I and you are identical.) 'Thou' as '*Jivan-Devata*' is identical with 'Tat' as God. It is not a complete and unqualified identify, because '*Jivan-Devata*' is 'God in man'. It is like the panentheism in Greek philosophy. But in Greek theism every thing is in God and man has no separate room. In Tagore's theism, God comes down to this world from the heaven and resides in the human heart.) There is no inconsistency in this relation of identity in difference, because it is possible to comprehend such a relation even in ordinary experience as for example in the experience of love. Tagore said- "in love, at one of its poses you find the personal, and at the other the impersonal. At one you have the positive assertion – there I am; at the other the equally strong denial – I am not. Without this ego what is love? And again with only this ego, how can love possible?⁵ He added more "In love all contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost. Only in love is unity and duality not at variance. Love must be one or two at the same time".⁶

(So, it is better to say that '*Jivan-Devata*' is God in man. The *Devtas* or gods always find completeness in the human ideal form. Tagore said more "I felt sure that some being who comprehended me and my worlds was seeking his best expression in all my experiences".⁷

Prof. D.S. Sarma remarks that, "This being (*Jivan Devata*) is not exactly God, but rather his own higher self not the universal consciousness, but a special centre of that consciousness.

In this context prof. B.G. Ray regards '*Jivan Devata* as a *Viśva Devatā* the universal deity'.⁸

In the '*Brihadāran yaka Upanisad* the relation between man and the deity or God are cleared by this hymns:

Attha yōnyam devatam upaste

Anyōsan anyōham asmī

Na Sa Veda, yathō pasurevōmsa devānām .

In *Rachanavali*(collection of his writing) Tagore said the man who worshiped the external God and thought the dual existence of them can be compared with a beast, by keeping his deity outside of him. He condemned himself by his own God. The Baul expresses the Upanisadic thoughts in a very easy and natural way by the songs- *Moner manush moner majhe koro anwesan.* (Find out your own God with-in your self.)

Sufi and Kabir's influence: Besides the *Bauls* the poet was influenced by the mystic Sufi and Kabir's song also. Tagore perhaps heard the songs of Sufi from his father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and his father's friend Sri Kantha Singh.

Maharshi Debendranath at the time of spiritual exercise recited from the collection of Sufi poets *Dewan Hafez* in a very loud voice. Debendranath got inspiration during his journey on the hill or on the way to Simla. So it is natural that Tagore was deeply influenced by the

Sufi theism. The Sufism was enriched by accepting the other modern unorthodox religious views and combining them with the Islam. They never neglected any particular view but the main thing of their philosophy of life was unlimited love. Here knowledge and love come together and emerges as a new religion. The main thing of the sufism is to realize the soul at first and then together a sound knowledge of the individual (subject). Through this way the propagaters of Sufism gathered knowledge of single supreme authority. So, it is a kind of monism and non-qualified (i.e. Advaita) monistic theism. The Sufistic overview in this regard can be located in Aliraja's Sufi text '*Jñāna-Sagar*'. There it is said that God in his absoluteness could relise his love and a second or dual was required as the beloved. The absolute, therefore, created a dual out of its ownself. The '*Jñāna-Sagar*' upholds that the universe had its origin in love, and the chaos was systematised into the cosmos through the bondage of love. Man is the microcosm in which all the attribute of the absolute are united. Man thus synthesizes two aspects of existence within his nature.

In *Sufism*, two aspects of man are called '*Nasut*', which is his human personality and the '*lahut*' which is his divine personality. In the *Upanisad* the some thing is ascribed as the '*Jivātman*', the human soul and the '*paramāUman*' the Divine soul. But while the *Upanisads* speak of the love between the Divine personality and the human personality. The whole emphasis of the *Sufi* is on love. Here the *Sufis* come closer to the *Baul*'s conception of the man of the heart. So, the Sufis and *Bauls* find a happy blending of the finite and infinite being. The *Bauls* express their view rightly with the help of their famous song.

'Khanchar bhitar achin pakhi kemne ashe jai'

How does this unknown bird or *Achin Pahki* come into the cage and then fly away?

It may otherwise be explained as follows. How our 'man of the heart' metaphorised as unknown bird is perceived to be playing the eternal game of self-manifestation and returning once more to itself.

It is compared with the Sufi song:

The bird of my heart is a holy bird,

The ninth heaven is its dwelling

How Tagore was influenced by the Sufism can be evidenced from a letter which he had written to a devoted Hindu lady on 20th Asar (Bengali 3rd month), 1317 *Bangabda*. The letter runs as follows:

'If you read the devotion for love in Sufism then you can see that how sophisticatingly they blend love with wisdom. Their love does not come from nothingness. That is very realistic and intimate. They did not mix up any fictitious garbage with their theory'.⁹

Influenced by Kabir, the mystic Saint: Kabir, the fifteenth-century mystic saint, is one of the few poets who believed in the religion of love. He is the child of 'Allah and of Ram' as he called himself. He achieved a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim elite and freely used symbols from both religions in his poetry. Tagore, the saint of the 21st century, was influenced by Kabir's mystic poems and songs and he himself translated so many poems in English. Kabir had enriched himself from the surrounding and contemporary religious views and it is one of the outstanding characteristics of Kabir's genius that he fused all the views in one. We can see a wide range of mystical emotion as present in all his poems. From the loftiest abstraction the most otherworldly passion for

the finite to the most infinite and personal realization of God, expressed in homely metaphors and religious symbols drawn in differently from Hindu and Muhammedan belief it is impossible to say of the author of the poems that he was Brahmin or Sufi, Vedantin or Vaishnava. He sings:

"Mo ko kahan dhunna bande

O servant, where does thou seek me?

Lo! I am beside thee.

I am neither in temple nor in mosque:

I am neither in Kaba nor in Kailash:

Neither am I in rites and ceremonies nor in yoga and renunciation.

If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see me:

Thou shalt me in a moment of time

Kabir said, O sadhu! God is the breath of all breaths."¹⁰

Tagore said more on Kabir's poem in his 'The Religion of Man'.

"I close not my eyes stop not my ears nor forment my body.

But every path I then traverse

Becomes a path of pilgrimage

And whatever work! Engage in becomes service;

This simple consumption is the best.¹¹

In his *Geetanjali* Tagore said the same thing

“Leave this changing and singing and telling of beads!

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!”^{1,2}

Therefore the whole apparatus of piety, Hindu and Muslim alike all the religious places, temples, mosque, Churches, idol, holy water are nothing but the external symbols. These are the empediment to our unity and making love with each other.

Kabir said- ‘*Tirath men to sab pani hai*’ there is nothing but water at the auspicious holy bathing places; and I know that they are useless as I have bathed in them.

The images are all lifeless they cannot speak. I know for I have cried aloud to them.

The *Purāna* and the *Koran* are mere words; lifting up the curtain, I have seen. Kabir gives utterance to the words of experience; and he knows very well that all other things are untrue.

How easily Kabir expressed his view like the *Bauls* and *Sufi* saints.

He said Brahma never be found in abstractions. He is the one love who pervades the world, discerned in this fullness only by the eyes of

love; and those who know him thus share, though they never tell the joyous and ineffable secret of the universe. The soul's union with him is a love union, a mutual inhabitation. This dualistic relation which, all-mystical religion expresses not a self-emergence, which leave no room for personality. The eternal distinction, the mysterious union in separation of God and the Soul, is a necessary doctrine of all same mysticism. Besides the *Bauls* Kabir and Sufist the other mystic saints like Dadu, Rabidas, Nanak etc. always had similar thinking. Under influence of those mystic saints, Tagore introduced his own conception of religion, the elements of mysticism and simplicity.

Reference:

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