

## THE IDEA OF SOUL-CONSCIOUSNESS AND SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN TAGORE'S PHILOSOPHY

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### Abstract

Innumerable difficulties are experienced when one tries to discern the philosophy of a poetic figure for whom 'The principle of art is the principle of unity'. Philosophy typically involves the collection of evidences and drawing logical conclusions, but a versatile author like Rabindranath Tagore was a visionary whose artistic inspiration are centred on the principle— 'It is for the artist to remind the world that with the truth of expression we grow in truth.' Tagore's writings, poems, short stories, novels, musical compositions, and paintings are deeply imbued with his insights and the realization of truth. For him, art is a mean to express the artist's relationship with the universe, thus he says, 'Whenever I feel the unity of the creative power within myself, I also feel connected to the infinite creativity of the universe.' The logical interpretation of such a thought may not be very accurate. Hence, in order to grasp the vision, it is the task of a student of philosophy to dive deep into the poet's mind by delving beyond the poetic imagery and this is the aim of this paper.

Key Words: Tagore, artists, infinite, creativity, universe, philosophy

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Innumerable difficulties are experienced when one tries to discern the philosophy of a poetic figure for whom 'The principle of art is the principle of unity'<sup>i</sup>. Philosophy typically involves the collection of evidences and drawing logical conclusions, but a versatile author like Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)– 'the Indian Goethe', as Albert Schweitzer called him– was a visionary whose artistic inspiration are centered on the principle– 'It is for the artist to remind the world that with the truth of expression we grow in truth.'<sup>ii</sup> Tagore's writings, poems, short stories, novels, musical compositions, and paintings are deeply imbued with his insights and the realization of truth. For him, art is a mean to express the artist's relationship with the universe, thus he says, 'Whenever I feel the unity of the creative power within myself, I also feel connected to the infinite creativity of the universe.'<sup>iii</sup> In *Ātmaparichay*, he notes, 'I have come to see myself as part of [the universe] ... To understand that nothing, not even an atom, can survive without me.'<sup>iv</sup> The logical interpretation of such a thought may not be very accurate. Hence, in order to grasp the vision, it is the task of a student of philosophy to dive deep into the poet's mind by delving beyond the poetic imagery. Because, 'The meaning of the living words that come out of the experiences of great hearts can never be exhausted by any one

system of logical interpretation. They have to be endlessly explained by the commentaries of individual lives, and they gain an added mystery in each new revelation'<sup>v</sup>. Despite this tension, Tagore's vision has been interpreted within the academic philosophical frameworks, not just in India but worldwide. The present study deals with his idea of soul-consciousness and self-consciousness (man as the boundless and man within the bounds) and its comprehensive and intense reflection on his concept of inter-personal (I and thou) and intra-personal relationship (I am thou) by following the principle of fullness of life in every human soul in an idiosyncratic dimension, by undergoing these subsections– Section I: Tagore's interpretation of the Reality and God, Section II: The nature of man and his *dharma*, and finally, Section III: Soul consciousness and Self-consciousness.

#### SECTION I: TAGORE'S INTERPRETATION OF THE REALITY AND GOD

Human beings, like all other living beings, constantly struggle for survival from the very beginning of human race. While lower forms of life are driven by their instinct, the higher ones use their reasoning in order to face day-to-day challenges. However, human existence, in particular, is always marked by a sense that there is something more to this mundane world, and this sense of incompleteness drive him for

the quest of the meaning of life and existence, and thereby to find the answer of such questions— 'who am I', 'what is the purpose of my life' and 'what is the ultimate meaning of my existence.' In order to explore the answers of these questions, divertive approaches of different schools have been developed in the field of Indian philosophy. Thus, the term philosophy, in Indian context, has been used as an alternative of the term *Darśana* which means the vision of the real. Here, 'Philosophy was not the fad of intellectual circles that indulged in these metaphysical gymnastic for mere intellectual satisfaction or for the purpose of whiling away their idle hours. It was, on the contrary, the earnest quest of truth'<sup>vi</sup> In Tagore's philosophy we see a profound reflection of these lines. He is a poet, though not a philosopher in so called sense, whose poetic insights, more or less, are the insights of a truth seer, who expresses his realization of truth through his various forms of art. In his book, '*Religion of man*', Tagore aptly puts it as, 'I have already made the confession that my religion is a poet's religion. All that I feel about it is from vision and not from knowledge. Frankly, I acknowledge that I cannot satisfactorily answer any question about evil or about what happens after death. Nevertheless, I am sure that there have come moments in my own experience when my soul has touched the Infinite and

has become infinitely conscious of it through the illumination of joy.'<sup>vii</sup>

When an artist creates something, the process of creation uplifts him from a mere being to a personal man, and brings him a universal enjoyment through which he realizes the absolute— the 'artist-par-excellence' as a unity of *Satyam-Śivam-Sundaram* i.e., truth, goodness and beauty, and thereby transcends the corporeal world which is busy with the account of gaining or losing. Tagore's adherence to this concept of infinite personality and creative existence of man also reveals a constant emphasis on his humanistic philosophy and spiritual conviction. For him, 'When a man does not realize his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison-house whose walls are alien to him. When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects, then is he emancipated for then he discovers the fullest significance of the world into which he is born; then he finds himself in perfect truth, and his harmony with the all is established.'<sup>viii</sup>

In the light of this, it can be noted that in Tagore's philosophy, the notion of the absolute is not fundamentally different from *nirguṇa Brahman* i.e., formless and featureless ultimate reality as described in *Advaita Vedānta*. However, the notion of 'personal God' suggests something more, which brings God a little closer to man emphasizing the divinity within humanity. For him, 'Just as the physiology of our

beloved is not our beloved, so this impersonal law is not our God'<sup>ix</sup> and that is why, he put emphasis on the supreme principle of love and faith, where the lover has an emotional urge, he wants to see his God with a form, wants to talk to him and feel him with a longing heart. He cannot take an active interest, and even does not want the knowledge of the formless absolute reality which is unapproachable. 'In sorrow and in suffering, when 'existence becomes tasteless and unmeaning', when man feels acutely the need of consolation, love and strength — he looks towards the Supreme Person. His God is his last hope, and it is this hope that sustains his life and gives him strength. Therefore, the object of his love — his God must be one with whom an emotional relationship a relationship of hope and love and faith is possible.'<sup>x</sup> Here we find the influence of the Baul culture of rural Bengal. The Baul singers, without professing anything about the formless ultimate reality, repeat the name of 'the man of his heart' i.e., 'মনের মানুষ' with intense love and sing his glories— "Where can I find him, the one who is the person of my heart? I lost that person, and for him, I wander far and wide. I am burning in the fire of love; how do I extinguish it? How can I live without him, seeing my heart torn apart?"— আমি কোথায় পাব তাকে, আমার মনের মানুষ যেরে, হারিয়ে সেই মানুষে তার উদ্দেশে দেশ বিদেশে, আমি দেশ বিদেশে বেড়াই ঘুরে... আমি

প্রেমানলে মরছি জ্বলে, নিভাই কেমন করে, ও তার বিচ্ছেদে প্রাণ কেমন করে... দেখ না তোরা হৃদয়ে চিরে॥ This relationship can't be developed through any kind of philosophical reasoning, but rather emerged naturally in the consciousness which suddenly become clear through a direct vision i.e., *Darśana*. The most unique part in Tagore's philosophy is, here the relationship between the 'lover' and the 'beloved' is intensely 'personal' and hence, it can easily be said that the concept of '*antarataram yadayamātmā*' i.e., the innermost soul in the *Upaniṣadic* mantra, '*tadetatpreyaḥ putrūt, preyo vittāt, preyo'nyasmātsarvasmāt, antarataram, yadayamātmā* /<sup>xi</sup>, i.e., this Self is dearer than a son, dearer than wealth, dearer than everything else, and is innermost, has been designated as a personal God, the one who resides in his innermost being— his *Jīvan Devatā* in Tagore's philosophy. Thus, he writes, "My lord, have you drunk enough of me? I have crushed my breast like vineyards, filling your cup with my joys and sorrows"— ওহে অন্তরতম, মিটেছে কি তব সকল তিয়াষ, আসি অন্তরে মম? দুঃখ সুখের লক্ষ ধারায় পাত্র করিয়া দিয়েছি তোমায়, নিষ্ঠুর পীড়নে নিঙাড়া বক্ষ দলিত দ্রাক্ষাসম! কত যে বরণ, কত যে গন্ধ, কত যে রাগিণী, কত যে ছন্দ, গাঁথিয়া গাঁথিয়া করেছি বয়ন বাসর শয়ন তব,— গলায়ে গলায়ে বাসনার সোনা প্রতিদিন আমি করেছি রচনা তোমার ক্ষণিক খেলার লাগিয়া মুরতি নিত্যনব! আপনি বরিয়া লয়েছিলে মোরে না জানি কিসের আশে! And the same becomes 'the man of his heart' i.e., 'মনের মানুষ' in Baul culture that

sings, "The man of my heart lives here— within myself... So, I find him in whatever I see... In my eyes— in the fountain of dancing light... So, I never lose his sights... thus, I see him wherever I see— here... there... and everywhere..."— আমার প্রাণের মানুষ আছে প্রাণে তাই হেরি তায় সকল খানে, আছে সে নয়নতায়— আলোকধারায়, তাই না হারায় — ওগো! তাই দেখি তায় যেথায় সেথায়, তাকাই আমি যে দিক-পানে॥ In this metaphysical position, where, the supreme personality is humanized, and from an impersonal and abstract concept it becomes a concrete ideal of individual's life and aspiration, and thereby reconciles the metaphysical demand and emotional need, becomes the meeting point of absolute Brahman and the personal God. Radhakrishnan aptly remarks, 'To Rabindranath God is not a being seated high up in the heavens, but a spirit immanent in the whole universe of persons and things.'<sup>xii</sup> Through this supreme principle of love, when the truth unites with goodness and goodness with the beauty, the infinite meets the finite and all the differences fade away. 'In love at one of its poles you find the personal, at the other the impersonal. At one you have the positive assertion 'here I am', at the other the equally strong denial, I am not', with-out this ego what is love? And again, only with this ego how can it be possible?' These lines, in a direct way, express the meeting point where, not only the finite personality meets with infinite

personality but also the individual meets with the 'other' and that is the ultimate end of man. In Tagore's view, truth lies in the consciousness of the whole, but it is just a distorted perception of the world that obscures the guiding presence of the supreme being. Just like as a Sitār that possesses the capacity to produce both discordant notes and melodious music. By striking the strings everybody can produce a sound, however, a few people, endowed with special skill, can play upon it. But it doesn't mean, the Sitār is manufactured for producing discordant sounds. Similarly, due to the limited viewpoint, one fails to recognize the creative and unifying power which itself is the living principle of joy, amidst all the conflicts and divisions in this mundane world. Hence, in *Sā dhanā*, Rabindranath notes, 'In love the sense of difference is obliterated and the human soul fulfils its purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself and reaching across the threshold of the infinite. Therefore, love is the highest bliss that man can attain to, for through it alone he truly knows that he is more than himself, and that he is at one with the All'<sup>xiii</sup> In order to make this clearer it would be better to determine the nature of man in Tagore's thought.

## SECTION II: NATURE OF MAN AND HIS RELIGION

Basically, in Tagore's philosophy the idea of personal God and the universal man go together. The perfection of man i.e., universal man can only be attained through the expansion of the finite personality. Tagore believes that every individual possesses an innate power which allows him to realize his deep connection with the whole mankind. He has the capacity to go beyond the physical forces, to go beyond himself. At this point, human differs from other animals. Tagore calls it a little spark of the same divine that he has to realize, until that the purpose is not fulfilled. 'The most important fact that has come into prominence along with the change of direction in our evolution is the possession of a spirit which has its enormous capital with a surplus far in excess of the requirements of the biological animal in man.'<sup>xiv</sup> This brings light to the two essential aspect of the nature of human being— the physical or lower nature which he continues to live with, and the spiritual or higher nature which makes him unique. After analysing the nature of evolution of man Tagore comes to find that with the advent of man the evolution process itself marks a significant change by going beyond the mechanical and physical forces and enters into the spiritual realm, there he realizes an inner power to transcend his own limitations and reaches the absolute. With this self-surpassing nature, termed by

Tagore as the surplus in man, human appears on earth. He combines in himself the finite personality with which he himself is able to exit and move into this world and the infinite personality which indicates the element of divinity present in man— the universal in man. "He is earth's child but heaven's heir." Tagore describe this as, 'At one pole of my being I am one with stock and stones. It is there I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies, deep down below...But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable.'<sup>xv</sup> In his finite existence, man shares some of the characteristics of animal world. Like other lower species, here, his actions are guided by his desires and the feeling of pleasure and pain, he surrenders himself to the natural forces and quarrels with others in order to satisfy his needs. For this desire of acquisition, no amount of wealth and power can quench his thirst. Whenever he succeeds in procuring something for himself there comes a desire for more, which is the reason for his bondage and sufferings. However, in Tagore's view, the finite existence, although appears to be somewhat inferior, represents a real aspect of man. The individual self, in spite of its material desires, aloofness and

ego-centric tendency, indicates the spiritual potentialities of man, it is in and through the ordinary man that the universal man is realized. Because, the desire for more and more, in a different sense, can widen the limits of one's own limited existence. On the other hand, the infinite personality, although difficult to define precisely, can be experienced through the creative energy, expressions of joy and the deeper feeling of kinship with nature. Whenever there is an urge for doing good to others, for realizing the truth and beauty, the divine in man is realized. For this account, man breaks the shackles of the finite body, conquers the fear and pain and yearns for *Mukti*. For him, 'The human soul is on its journey from the law to love, from discipline to liberation, from the moral plane to the spiritual.'<sup>xvi</sup>

Therefore, interesting point is, some of his poems give interesting results by revealing a delectable mystery through the artistic surrender to the infinite. For example, in *Antaryāmi* he says, "What's this whimsy of yours my capricious one! Why don't you let me say my bit? Seated inside me all the time you speak stealing my word and I forget mine and speak only what you wish me to. I'm being swept away by the surging waves of my lyrics"—এ কী কৌতুক নিত্যনূতন ওগো কৌতুকময়ী, আমি যাহা কিছু চাহি বলিবারে বলিতে দিতেছ কই। অন্তরমাঝে বসি অহরহ মুখ হতে তুমি ভাষা কেড়ে লহ, মোর কথা লয়ে তুমি কথা কহ মিশায়ে আপন সুরে... রাখো কৌতুক নিত্যনূতন

ওগো কৌতুকময়ী। আমার অর্থ তোমার তত্ত্ব বলে দাও মোরে অয়ি। আমি কি গো বীণাযন্ত্র তোমার, ব্যথায় পীড়িয়া হৃদয়ের তার মূর্ছনাভরে গীতবাংকার ধ্বনিছ মর্মমাঝে? আমার মাঝারে করিছ রচনা অসীম বিরহ, অপার বাসনা, কিসের লাগিয়া বিশ্ববেদনা মোর বেদনায় বাজে?... যদি অন্তরে লুকায়ে বসিয়া হবে অন্তরজয়ী, তবে তাই হোক। দেবী, অহরহ জনমে জনমে রহো তবে রহো, নিত্যমিলনে নিত্যবিরহ জীবনে জাগাও প্রিয়ে।

Here, we find an interesting poetic surrender to the mysterious presiding deity of his life. But when he talks about *Mukti*, the individual self does not dissolve at the highest stage of religious experience. *Mukti*, for Tagore, doesn't indicate the destruction of the real, rather removing the obstacles that obscure the vision of truth, that is to say, in this harmony individuality remains distinct, does not merge with the supreme being. Thus, he sings, "On this harp of finitude you play the tune of Infinite, O Boundless!... hence your joy in me is so sweet... The perfect union of us two lets down all bars, and the world with its ocean and sky becomes rampant in mirth your crystal luster is a formless halo, in the confines of my finite comprehension, it assumes various forms, and to it my tears impart exquisite beauty, so sweet is your revelation in me!"—সীমার মাঝে, অসীম, তুমি বাজাও আপন সুর। আমার মধ্যে তোমার প্রকাশ তাই এত মধুর.. তোমায় আমায় মিলন হলে সকলি যায় খুলে, বিশ্বসাগর ঢেউ খেলায়ে উঠে তখন দুলে। তোমার আলোয় নাই তো ছায়া, আমার মাঝে পায় সে কায়া, হয় সে আমার অশ্রুজলে সুন্দরবিধুর ॥

### SECTION III: SOUL CONSCIOUSNESS AND SELF CONSCIOUSNESS

When we see the Sanskrit word *mukti* means liberation or freedom, the next logical question that comes in our mind, is: Freedom from what kind of bondage? In his essay, *Pathway to Mukti* Tagore begins by comparing the approach following the Eastern and Western philosophical traditions. The true purpose of Western philosophy is to transform people to a higher level of consciousness—Wisdom; whereas in India, the aim is to achieve the self-knowledge not only through inculcation of Sastras rather the rich poetic tradition through its poetry and songs expresses the deep philosophical thought for the rich as well as for the marginalized ordinary people. Even today, this musical tradition in the form of devotional music, is not restricted to the temples or churches, but as something common in everyday life. Hence, Tagore says, 'That may not be remarkable in itself, but when we find that these songs are not specially meant for some exclusive pandits' gathering, but that they are sung in villages and listened to by men and women who are illiterate, we realize how philosophy has permeated the life of the people of India, how it has sunk deep into the subconscious mind of the Country.'

That's how, he suggests that when we seek to express our true selves, we're drawn to mediums like music, which embody harmonious unity and our desire to express the Universal Man gives rise to art and literature. That's why it is said that, In India, poetry and philosophy live in a joint family.

For Rabindranath Tagore, the concept of Jivan-devata is the guiding principle of life, side by side, it became a pathway to realizing the supreme lord. Here, the term Devata does not refer to any god, but a source of inspiration towards the beauty and goodness. In fact, all human beings are Devata, it is the power of manifestation which helps a man to transcend. Tagore finds Jivan-devata as a unique expression of the universal entity which accompanied him throughout his life and believed that a loving relationship could be established with it. He values individual freedom and recognizes love as a choice. In the journey from Self to Soul, the freedom of self-will has to be negated, for that purpose Tagore lays great emphasis on love. This idea has been expressed as: 'মরে গিয়ে বাঁচব আমি, তবে আমার মাঝে তোমার লীলা হবে। সব বাসনা যাবে আমার থেমে মিলে গিয়ে তোমারি এক থেমে, দুঃখ সুখের বিচিত্র জীবনে তুমি ছাড়া আর কিছু না রবে.'

<sup>i</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: 'What is Art,' Personality, from Rabindranath Tagore Selected Essays, New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2004, P— 189

<sup>ii</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: The Religion of an Artist, Rabindranath Tagore Selected Essays, P— 302.

<sup>iii</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: Atmaparichay, P— 14-16, translated by Uma Das Gupta as 'My Life in My Words', New Delhi, Penguin Books India, 2006, P— 322-323

<sup>iv</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: Atmaparichay, P— 14-16, from Das Gupta's My Life in My Words, P— 322-323.

<sup>v</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: Sāadhanā: the realisation of life, Macmillan &Co., London, 1954, P—viii

<sup>vi</sup> Mukherjee, Satkari: The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux, Kolkata, The University of Calcutta, 1935, P— xxxix

<sup>vii</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: The Religion of Man, P— 107

<sup>viii</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: Sāadhanā, in The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore (Vol. 2)

<sup>ix</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: The religion of man, P— 114

<sup>x</sup> Lal, Basant Kumar: Contemporary Indian philosophy, Motilal Banarasidas Publishers, Delhi, 1973, P— 52

<sup>xi</sup> Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 1.4.8

<sup>xii</sup> Radhakrishnan, Sarvapalli: The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, P— 54

<sup>xiii</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: Sāadhanā, P— 291

<sup>xiv</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: The Religion of Man, P— 43

<sup>xv</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath: Sāadhanā, P— 69 or 306

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid. P—175