

In India, philosophy has ever sought alliance with poetry because its mission is to occupy the people's life and not merely the learned seclusion of scholarship. The poet is the seeker of Beauty while the philosopher's aim is Truth. The two paths of Beauty and Truth lead to the same supreme Reality.

In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Rabindranath's philosophy is "a sigh of the soul rather than a reasoned account of metaphysics; an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy."

Rabindranath's philosophy is an artist's creation and as such it is to be understood as a flower is understood. In the following pages Sri Benoy Gopal Ray has tried to understand the Philosophy of Rabindranath in this sense, that is, in its exposition he has kept logical analysis subservient to understanding and appreciation.

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

BY

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*To*  
*The First Day*  
*When I saw Rabindranath*

## P R E F A C E

Rabindranath Tagore, the myriad-minded poet of the East was born at Calcutta in the year 1861. He comes of a family which is reputed for its high culture in arts, music and philosophy. Both by heredity and environment he imbibes a tendency which is at once literary, philosophical and musical. He begins his literary career at the early age of thirteen and for full sixty-seven years of his crowded life, floods the world-culture with numerous poems, prose narratives, philosophical discourses and musical compositions. The East will always remember him as the torch-bearer and champion of the Eastern mind and the West for his gospels of love and peace.

Rabindranath is principally a poet but his poetry is so imbued with philosophy that it must lead the reader to a region of insight beyond the boundaries of metre and music. Besides the poems, his philosophical writings command the highest value. There are some who are sceptical about the possibility of philosophy lurking in poetry. But the two are not opposed to each other. The poet is the seeker of beauty while the philosopher's aim is truth. The two paths of beauty and truth lead to the same supreme Reality. Rabindranath has mingled poetry with philosophy, for his poetic rapture is soaked in his quest for the Beyond. In his presidential address to the Indian Philosophical Congress he says: "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."<sup>1</sup>

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

But his philosophy is not the worship of the logical intellect. It is, as Prof. S. Radhakrishnan suggests, "a sigh of the soul rather than a reasoned account of metaphysics; an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy."<sup>2</sup> He has got no philosophy if by it we mean academic philosophy with theories and counter-theories. But philosophy is only an insight into reality and judged by this standard, he is as much a philosopher as he is a poet. His philosophy is the vision of the real and it flows through his poems and other writings. In the following pages we have tried to get a glimpse of this vision and enjoy it sympathetically. Rabindra-philosophy is an artist's creation and as such, it is to be understood as a flower is understood. If understanding does not end in enjoyment, it becomes barren. Generally intellectuals brush aside the claims of satisfaction which, according to them, does not stand the acid-test of logic. But this is undoubtedly a sheer misrepresentation of the case. Satisfaction need not fight shy of the intellect. Whatever Rabindranath believes, let us try to understand and enjoy. Laceration of his beliefs by the whip of logic is not the aim of the present work. Nor does it aim at the presentation of his beliefs in a state of awe and wonder. Attempts have been made to understand Rabindra-philosophy sympathetically where logic has been made subservient to enjoyment.

The entire work has been divided into seven chapters. The object of the first chapter is to find out the sources that have influenced his philosophy. That Vedānta and Vaishnavism have influenced him deeply cannot be gainsaid. Rabindranath is torn between the

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2. Radhakrishnan: *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 6.

two faiths. The second chapter delineates the relation of the finite with the Infinite, which happens to be the kernel of his philosophy. The third chapter has been devoted to the problem of evil and suffering that beset finiteness. The fourth chapter is a discussion of the poet's views on death and immortality. The fifth one embodies his religious views; how he begins with Brahmoism, passes through a liberal Hinduism and finally settles on the universal religion which centres round Man. In the sixth chapter we have discussed his ideas about the path to salvation. Love and love alone, says the poet, leads us to the Infinite. The last chapter has been devoted to a comparative estimate of the poet-philosopher. In short, the whole work is an attempt to elucidate the central metaphysical position of Rabindranath. Philosophy has got the widest connotation including so many topics under its scope, but here, by the philosophy of Rabindranath, we have meant only his metaphysical views.

Regarding references of poems, we have tried to refer to the English writings of the poet as far as practicable. Where translations by the poet are not available we have quoted him in original Bengali. We have also made humble attempts to give the sense of the Bengali quotations in English. It may be mentioned in this connexion that some poems by Rabindranath have been rendered into English by persons other than the poet but we have not made use of such translations.

I express my gratitude to *Adhyapaka* Mohanlal Bajpai of Santiniketan for his help and encouragement.

Santiniketan,  
25-8-49.

BENOY G. RAY.

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## CHAPTER I

### SOURCES OF PHILOSOPHY

To trace the sources of a philosopher's writings is a difficult though not an impossible task. Different writers on Rabindranath uphold different views as to the origin of his writings. Some consider the Upaniṣads and the Vedānta to be the primal sources which have inspired the poet. Others take Vaiṣṇavism and the mediaeval Indian Bhakti cult to be the principal spring, while a third school of thought deems Christianity as the inspirer of Rabindra-Philosophy. Great caution is to be exercised in settling the claims of these diverse schools and greater reliance is to be made on Rabindranath's own confessions as to the problem of the sources.

It will not be dogmatic to assert at the very outset that Rabindranath has drunk the ancient Indian lore to the dregs. His mind is an eastern product and he champions the cause of oriental literature and philosophy. In his writings nowhere has he expressed his indebtedness to Greek or European philosophy. On the other hand, in various places, he has mentioned how deeply the Upaniṣads, Buddhism and Vaiṣṇava lore have affected the formation of his mind. Rabindranath grew up in an atmosphere pulsating with the truths of the Upaniṣads and the Vedānta. His father Maharṣi Devendranāth Tagore was, in his youth, a fashionable dandy, revelling in comforts and luxuries. One day the torn pages of the Iṣopaniṣad flew before him and he read the famous

utter astonishment I found tears trickling down my eyes when I was uttering the Gāyatrī mantra.”<sup>6†</sup> As years rolled by, their significance became clear to him. The significance of that mantra of the *Īsopaniṣad* may be taken to be the guiding motto of his life as it was of his father.

All his philosophical discourses in *Sāntiniketan*, *Dharma*, *Sadhana*, *Creative Unity*, *Saṁchaya*, *Mānuṣer Dharma*, *Man*, *The Religion of Man* and *Personality* are deeply influenced by the Upaniṣadic teachings. In these discourses he has only explained the Upaniṣads. In *The Religion of Man*, *Man* and *Mānuṣer Dharma* he has mingled other truths with those of the Upaniṣads but in *Sāntiniketan*, *Dharma* and the rest, he is a frank champion of the Upaniṣads. We shall see in the next chapter how like a true follower of the Upaniṣads and the Vedānta, he tries to solve the question of the one and the many. In the preface to *Sadhana* Rabindranath himself confesses: “The writer has been brought up in a family where texts of the Upaniṣads are used in daily worship; and he has had before him the example of his father who lived his long life in the closest communion with God while not neglecting his duties to the world or allowing his keen interest in all human affairs to suffer any abatement.” Again somewhat later he observes: “To me the verses of the Upaniṣads and the teachings of Buddha have ever been things of the spirit and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth.”

The truths he preaches in many of his poems and lyrics can be traced to the Upaniṣads. To try to trace each of such poems to the main source is not our job.



The task may conveniently be taken up by future researchers on Rabindranath. We shall be content to show that many of his poems are only translations of the Upaniṣadic texts. As for example, poems 57, 58 and 60 of *Naivedya* embody the truths of the slokas of Śvetāśvatara, Kaṭha and Taittiriya in their original form.<sup>7</sup>

Do we find any indication in his writings of his indebtedness to the four Vedas? The Upaniṣads embody the philosophical aspect of the Vedas and as such a direct acquaintance with the former means an indirect contact with the latter. Pandit Kshiti Mohan Sen Sastri suggests that Rabindranath had the remotest chance of direct contact with the Samhitās though many of his famous poems are in affinity with the passages of the Samhitās<sup>8</sup> Rīg, Sāma, Yaju speak mostly of heaven and the Gods. Atharva Veda extols the earth and humanity, and Rabindranath, the singer of man on earth, bears a strong affinity and maintains the lineal connexion with those sages who compiled the Atharva Veda.<sup>9</sup> One fact about Rabindranath is highly significant. Whenever he interprets the Upaniṣads or the Vedānta or the ancient Indian

7. In *Naivedya* poem 60, the poet sings—

शोन विश्वजन  
शोन अमृतेर पुत्र यत देवगण  
दिव्यधामवासी  
.....आमि जेनेछि ताहारे

शृण्वन्तु विश्वे अमृतस्य पुत्रा  
आ ये धामानि दिव्यानि तस्थुः ।  
वेदाहमेतं पुरुषं महान्तम्  
आदित्यवर्णे तमसः परस्तात् ।  
—श्वेताश्वतर

In *Sadhana*, Rabindranath renders it into English:

"Listen to me, ye sons of the immortal spirit, ye who live in the heavenly abode: I have known the Supreme Person whose light shines forth from beyond the darkness."

8. See *V. B. Quarterly*, Tagore Birthday Number, 1941 (article by K. M. Sen).

9. The Brātyakānda of the Atharvaveda speaks of human values.

lore, he has his own perspective and does not abide by the commentaries. Often the various commentators of the Upaniṣads and the Vedānta hold conflicting views and it is no part of his philosophical discourses to settle the claims of belligerents. As an unbiassed seer, he views the ancient Indian philosophy and interprets it in a plain and simple way. This new angle of vision builds his originality.

Next to the Upaniṣads come Vedānta and the Gītā. There are two prominent schools of Vedānta—the Śamkara-Vedānta and the Rāmānuja-Vedānta. In some of his sermons, he is a thoroughgoing Śamkarite, a believer in absolute monism but in his other discourses and lyrics he seems to follow the truths of qualified monism. That Rabindranath cannot decide between these two factors is a fact and his philosophy oscillates between the two—Advaitavāda and Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda, Śamkara Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism. Critics on Rabindranath circumscribe him either to this or that faith but we shall try to indicate in the succeeding chapter that any such attempt is futile. Hirendranath Datta, the late Vice-President of Tagore's University, paints him as a believer in concrete monism where the one and the many need each other for self-sustenance. Mr Datta opines: "Rabindranath, as far as I know, has never made a detailed study of the controversial aspects of the Vedānta, as we find them expounded by the famous commentators or in such jaw-breaking Vedāntic treatises as *Advaita Siddhi*, but that he is steeped through and through in the spirit of the Vedānta, none will dispute who has made even a cursory study of his works."<sup>10</sup> Somewhat later he observes: "If

10. See *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, Tagore Birthday Number, 1941 (article by H. N. Datta).

one has made a deep study of the Upaniṣads, he must be aware that they are irrigated by two parallel streams of thought: (a) the negative, impersonal, detached, indescribable perception of the ineffable Brahman where the Absolute is spoken of as *Neti, Neti*, as the *a-śabdām*, *a-sparśām*, etc. and (b) the positive, personal, intimate, adorable orison of the Godhead, when Brahman is regarded as a wondrous personality....where He is the sovereign Lord, the supreme person, and is realised as Love..... Naturally it is this latter aspect which appeals to Rabindranath."

The *Gītā* forms the core of many of his lyrical poems. Through all his writings, flowers the eternal Truth: Everything is He.<sup>11</sup> When human beings attain this knowledge, all is *ānandam* or bliss to them. The *Gītā* is a synthesis of the three ways of salvation, viz. knowledge, action and love, though commentators on the *Gītā* are not unanimous on the issue. But Rabindranath believes in the path of love which alone can lead us to the Infinite. Love wins over knowledge and action which are always subservient to it.<sup>12</sup> He idolizes the stage of *Puruṣottama* as depicted in the *Gītā* when the finite surrenders himself completely to the Infinite in pure love. *Sāṃkhya* and the *Yoga* do not uphold the cause of love as a means of self-realization. *Sāṃkhya* is content when it reaches that summit where there is only *Puruṣa* who is changeless and actionless. It is the stage known as *Akṣara* and the *Gītā* calls it by that name. But the *Gītā*'s ideal transcends the *Akṣara* and stops only at the

११. वासुदेवः सर्वमिदम् ।

12. We shall have occasion to speak more on it in the sixth chapter.

**Puruṣottama.** This is why the Gītā does not believe in asceticism, or renunciation of the world and our poet tells us the same thing when he sings:

“Deliverance is not for me in renunciation, I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.”

“No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear Thy delight.”

(Eng. *Gitanjali*)

Besides the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Vedānta and the Gītā, the ancient Sanskrit learning has exerted a momentous influence on Rabindranath, especially in his literary career. The only Sanskrit poet whom he loves to venerate is Kalidasa. In *Chaitāli* he has expressed his deep regards for the poet in the poems entitled *Ṛtusamhār*, *Meghdut*, *Kālidāser Prati*, *Kumar Sambhavgān* and *Mānaslok*.<sup>13</sup> That ancient India in and through her *Sādhana* realized the highest values of humanity is a truism to Rabindranath and he hints at this truth in *Chaitāli*. In *Naivedya* he is more explicit on the point and pines after the ancient Indian ideal of the *Rsis* and *Munis*. Inspired by that ideal, he has founded a University in India which is known as the *Viśva-Bhāratī*. Its aims only bespeak the old oriental philosophy. Its object is “to study the mind of man in its realization of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view.” “...to provide at Santiniketan a centre of culture where research into and study of the religion, literature, history, science and art of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other civilizations may be pursued along with the culture of the West, with that simplicity in ex-

13. It is interesting to note that in a poem entitled *Sekāl* he expresses his eagerness to be in the company of a poet like Kalidasa of immortal fame (See *Kshanikā*). *Sekāl* has been translated in *The Fugitive* (poem 9).

ternals which is necessary for true spiritual realization, in amity, good-fellowship and co-operation between the thinkers and scholars of both Eastern and Western countries, free from all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste; and in the name of One Supreme Being who is Santam, Shivam, Advaitam."<sup>14</sup> The Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata have supplied Rabindranath with mines of themes for lyrics, dramas, essays and other writings. As for example, his *Kathā* and *Kāhinī* are full of it. His reading dramas *Gāndhārī*, *Ībedan*, *Narakkās*, *Karṇa Kuntī Sambād* and his lyrical dramas, *Chitrāṅgadā* and *Bidāy Abhīśāp* are drawn from the Mahābhārata.<sup>15</sup> But one fact about Rabindranath's genius should not be lost sight of. Though he has drawn themes freely from Kalidāsa, the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas and other ancient lore, he has thoroughly assimilated them in his own genius. Nowhere has he expressed the themes in their original form. They are always written from a different, masterly point of view which constitutes his originality.<sup>16</sup>

The second stream of thought in Rabindra-Philosophy is Vaiṣṇavism, and the Bhakti cult of ancient India.<sup>17</sup> Vaiṣṇavism, the cult of the deity and the devotee is a popular religion of the Indian masses. At a tender

14. See *Utsava-Bharati* "Memorandum of Association".

15. 'Mother's Prayer', 'Somaka and Ritvik', 'Karna and Kuntī', See *The Fugitive*.

'Kacha and Devajāni'. See *The Fugitive*.

*Chitra* is the English translation of *Chitrāṅgadā*.

16. See *Jayanti Utsarga* (article by Atul Chandra Gupta).

17. Ernest Rhys writes: "One of his Indian biographers tells us that two master influences helped to decide the bent of his mind: the one he owed to his father, the other to the Vaisnava poetry. It was the spirit as well as the letter and congenial forms of that poetry that helped to mould his poetic character."—*Rabindranath Tagore: A biographical study*.

age Rabindranath came in contact with the music of Vaiṣṇava lyrics which made a deep impression on his mind. Thus he writes in *Jivansmṛiti*: "I came across a copy of *Gīta Govinda* while I was out in the company of my father and was enjoying trips in the Ganges. My knowledge of Sanskrit was meagre then, but I could understand the significance of many words as my knowledge of Bengali was sound. That *Gīta Govinda* I have read so many times and enjoyed."<sup>18</sup> E. J. Thompson had a conversation with Tagore on Vaiṣṇava influences in Tagore's writings and gathered the following: "I found in the Vaiṣṇava poets lyrical movement; and images startling and new . . . . . They gave me form. They make many experiments in metre. And then there was the boldness of their imagery."<sup>19</sup> Rabindranath not only gets the form from the Vaiṣṇavas but also the inner significance of creation and love as a means of salvation. During the early days of his literary career he was so impressed by the beauty of the Vaiṣṇava form that he imitates the Brajaboli in his *Bhānusiṃhaṭhākurer Padāvali*.<sup>20</sup> Here he is after the form and form alone but later on, the spirit of the Vaiṣṇava lyrics forms the soul

18. *Jivansmṛiti*, p. 79. The line

निमृतनिकुंजगृहं गतया निशि रहसि नित्यं वसंतम् ।

(The night, that has been spent in the lonely forest home by Radha.) of *Gīta Govinda* would create in my mind an atmosphere of superb beauty.

19. Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist*, p. 25.

20. *Bhānusiṃhaṭhākurer Padāvali* Rabindranath imitates the Brajaboli (Compare —“ मरण रे तूँहूँ मम श्याम समान ”

In "Kadi O Komal" he writes “प्रति अंग काँदे तब प्रति अंग तरे. ”

We find here the influence of the Vaisnava poet Jñānadās. See the article Vaisnav Sāhitya O Rabindranath by K. N. Mitra (*Prabāsa* 1339).

of his maturer writings. The *Gītāñjali*, the *Gītāli* and the *Gītimālya* are the beads on a Vaiṣṇava rosary. All through this work we shall have occasions to refer to the Vaiṣṇava influences on Rabindranath and especially in the coming chapter we shall realize the depth of his indebtedness to Vaiṣṇavism. The finite feels the pang of separation from the Infinite and the Infinite requires the finite for the fulfilment of love. This central idea which forms the kernel of many of his lyrics is a purely Vaiṣṇava idea. Wordsworth sought for the principle of Reason; Shelley, the principle of Love; Tennyson, the principle of Divine Law; and Rabindranath as a Vaiṣṇavite seeks for the principle of Love and Beauty. The main note of the *Gītāñjali* may be broken up into three sub-notes. Firstly, there exists the *līlā* or play of God in love; secondly, suffering fulfils itself in salvation; and lastly ego-consciousness is a bar to complete union with the Infinite.<sup>21</sup> The first two savour much of Vaiṣṇavism while the last sub-note is Vedāntic in outlook. The Vaiṣṇava conception of beauty has been imbibed by the poet. Beauty and love form the keynote of Rabindranath's writings and most of his lyrics embody either beauty or love or both. He understands the Vaiṣṇava poetry thus. The Infinite and the finite have exchanged garlands of beauty. He has adorned the finite with His own wreath of beauty and the finite has garlanded Him in return. Beauty is the nuptial-knot between Heaven and the earth.<sup>22</sup> While discussing the songs of Vaiṣṇava poetry Rabindranath quotes with approval a song of Jñānadās.<sup>23</sup> To the Deity of beauty the whole world is

21. See *Rabi Rasini* (Paschim Bhāg), p. 87 (Charu Banerjee).

22. See *Rabindra Rachanāvali*, Achalita Samgraha, Pt. II.

२३. “मुरली कराओ उपदेश”

a flute. He blows it and through each hole, a new tune emerges. Kadamba flower, vernal season, cuckoo's song are the different tunes of the flute. The flute says:—"O, Come to me." Hearing the melodies, the finite is restless and he suffers the pangs of separation. In *Fruit Gathering*: "Alas, I cannot stay in the house, and home has become no home for me, for the eternal stranger calls, he is going along the road. The sound of his footfall knocks at my breast; it pains me!

The wind is up, the sea is moaning,

I leave all my cares and doubts to follow the homeless tide, for the stranger calls me, he is going along the road."

What a fine Vaiṣṇava touch! The eternal devotee or Rādhā is out to meet Kṛiṣṇa, the eternal Deity.

The truth that has been preached by the poet in *The Religion of Man* is an echo of the Vaiṣṇava melodies. The finite man is not an insignificant item in the scheme of the Universe. He has a mission to fulfil and in its fulfilment lies the eternal *telos*. Chandidās, the famous Vaiṣṇava singer, says: "Man is the supreme truth, there is no truth greater than this." In one of his essays, the poet explains the philosophy of Chandidās.<sup>24</sup> He is an apostle of love but love is tintured with pain. He says, the fragrance of love is to be extracted by rubbing it against the rock of pain. Pain is there only to rinse the bliss out of love.

The Bauls and the medieval Indian saints have attracted the attention of the poet and left a permanent impression on his mind. He is so impressed by the teachings of these poet-philosophers that he tries to



popularize their cause. He translates one hundred poems of Kabir, the mystic saint of India and all through his writings pays glowing tributes to the memories of Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Rajjab and others of the Indian Bhakti School.<sup>25</sup> The Bauls are the wandering saints who sing in praise of the eternal One. They do not enter any temple, church, or mosque. Nor do they believe in image worship. "According to the cult of the Baul, in order to gain real freedom, one has first to die to the life of the world whilst still in the flesh—for only then, one can be rid of all extraneous claims."<sup>26</sup> The Bauls think of the body as the temple of God and urge to keep it clean. They fervently hope that one day true vision of the finite will flash forth and its union with the Man of the mind will be effected.<sup>27</sup> The Bauls<sup>28</sup> are baptized in the faith of Ahimsā. In each of his philosophical dramas Rabindranath introduces a character which is supposed to be his supreme creation. Needless to say, in its creation he is influenced by the plain living and high thinking of the Bauls. Another trend of ideas that has influenced him in creating such a character is the teaching of Buddhism. Buddhism and the Baul cult have offered him the matter; and his own genius, the form of the character. He has created the ideal of humanity — a man, fearless, out-spoken, God-intoxi-

25. *One hundred poems of Kabir*. Translated by Rabindranath Tagore.

26. See the article captioned "The Baul Singers of Bengal" by Kshitimohan Sen. Quoted in *The Religion of Man* (Appendix).

27. "मनेर मानुष" Gangaram, Bisha and Chhaku Thakur are some of the noted Bauls of Bengal.

28. Rabindranath writes: "Why should we learn the principles of universal love only from the foreigners? Can we not learn them from the Bauls, the beggars at our doors?" See *Rabindra Rachanāvalī*, Achalita Sangraha (2nd Part). p. 134.

cated, truth-seeker, poet-philosopher, singer and friend of the poor. He is the Dhanañjaya Vairāgi of the dramas *Prāyaścitta* and *Muktadhārā*, Ṭhākurdādā or grandfather of *Śaradotsav*, *Dākghar* and *Rājā*, Dādāṭhākur of *Achalāyatan* and Baul of *Phālgunī*.<sup>29</sup>

Next to the Bauls, the Indian mystic saints have endeared themselves to the philosophical mind of Rabindranath. Kabir, Dadu, Rabidas, Nanak and others have added the aroma to his thinking. What an influence Kabir exerts on Rabindranath! The faith of love which he gets from the Vaiṣṇavas is strengthened by the songs of the Bauls and teachings of Kabir and others. Rabindranath sings and he considers singing to be the best art of human beings on earth. In this respect he simply maintains his lineal connexion with the Bauls and the Indian mystics.<sup>30</sup> Evelyn Underhill, the celebrated writer on Mysticism is of opinion that "singing happens to be a rule with the mystics." "St. Francis of Assisi held that the friar should not only pray, but sing; and Catherine of Genoa prized gay music upspringing in the heart as evidence of its union with God."<sup>31</sup> And Rabindranath in Gitanjali: "I know Thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before Thy presence." His translations of Kabir's poems have deeply touched his feelings and in many of his own lyrics, we hear the echoes of Kabir. Kabir and Rabin-

29. *Muktadhāra* (*The Waterfall*, translated by R. N. T.)

*Dākghar* (*Post Office*, trans. by D. Mukherjee)

*Rājā* (*King of the Dark Chamber*, trans. by K. C. Sen)

*Phālgunī* (*Cycle of Spring*, trans. by C. F. Andrews and revised by the author)

*Śaradotsav* (*Autumn Festival*, trans. by R. N. T.).

30. We shall dwell on this point in our sixth chapter.

31. See Review of English Gitanjali in *The Nation*, 16th Nov. 1912, by E. Underhill.

dranath have drunk deep the nectar of love. Kabir says: "If you have not drunk of the nectar of that One Love, what boots it though you should purge yourself of all stains?"<sup>32</sup> Again Kabir sings:<sup>33</sup>

"Subtle is the path of love!

Therein there is no asking and no not-asking,

There one loses one's self at His feet,

There one is immersed in the joy of the seeking:  
plunged in the deeps of love as the fish in the water.

The lover is never slow in offering his head for his Lord's service.

Kabir declares the secret of this love."

Kabir teaches mankind to find God "in the here and now; in the normal, human, bodily existence, the mud of material life." And Rabindranath in *Gitanjali*: "He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and shower and His garment is covered with dust."<sup>34</sup> "Dadu, Rabidas, Kabir and Nanak were not ascetics—they bore no message of poverty or renunciation, for their own sake; they were poets who had pierced the curtain of appearances and had glimpses of the world of unity, where God himself is a poet. Their words cannot stand the glare of logical criticism; they babble like babies of the joy of their vision of Him, of the ecstasy into which His music has thrown them."<sup>35</sup>

These medieval Indian saints were all mystics. Is

<sup>32</sup>. See *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*. Translated by R. N. T. No. LIV.

<sup>33</sup>. *ibid.*, LV.

<sup>34</sup>. Eng. *Gitanjali* No. 11.

<sup>35</sup>. See article by K. M. Sen on Dadu and the Mystery of form —*The Religion of Man* (Appendix).

the mystic does not think that the ultimate reality can be attained merely through speculative philosophy or logic." He continues: "Tagore's mysticism in poetry is the manifestation of his personality as expressed in his conviction of his place in the Universe in relation to his fellow-beings and to nature . . . ." Finally he says: "I call it mystic, because Rabindranath has not formulated it as a result of logical speculation but it has come upon him in poetic enlightenment as it were through the insight of a seer."<sup>39</sup> Judged by this standard, Rabindranath is undoubtedly a mystic but the account of mysticism as given by Dr. Das-Gupta is rather incomplete. A fuller account of the same may be found in Underhill's famous work, *Mysticism*.<sup>40</sup> There are four rules as tests of mysticism. "(1) True mysticism is active and practical, not passive and theoretical. It is an organic life-process, a something which the whole self does; not something as to which its intellect holds an opinion. (2) Its aims are wholly transcendental and spiritual. It is in no way concerned with adding to, exploring, re-arranging or improving anything in the visible universe. The mystic brushes aside that universe even in its most supernormal manifestations. Though he does not, as his enemies declare, neglect his duty to the many, his heart is always set upon the changeless One. (3) This One is for the mystic, not merely the Reality of all that is, but also a living and personal object of Love; never an object of exploration. It draws his whole being homeward, but always under the guidance of the heart. (4) Living union with this One—which is the term of his adventure—is a definite state or form of enhanced life.

39. See *Golden Book of Tagore*, pp. 67, 68.

40. See *Mysticism*, by Evelyn Underhill (4th Ed.).

It is obtained neither from an intellectual realisation of its delights, nor from the most acute emotional longings. Though these must be present, they are not enough. It is arrived at by a definite and arduous psychological process—the so-called Mystic Way—entailing the complete remaking of character and the liberation of a new, or rather latent, form of consciousness, which imposes on the self the condition which is sometimes inaccurately called ‘ecstasy’ but is better named the Unitive State.”<sup>41</sup> If we view the entire life process of Rabindranath from the standpoint of these tests, we at once find that he cannot be called a mystic in the sense in which St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bernard, St. Teresa, Kabir, Nanak and others are so called. Mysticism is never an organic process to his life. Whenever he writes poems, composes music, or delivers sermons in the Mandir,<sup>42</sup> he is temporarily seized with what may be called a mystic mood. So long as the mood continues, he soars high in the heavens, the transcendental and the spiritual. But again he comes down to love this hard soil of mankind. This world with all its variety of form and matter appears to him to be true and he drinks deep the cup of beauty it offers. Unlike the true mystic, he tries to explore the avenues of beauty, truth, and goodness, that are to be found on this earth. His sense of the practical is very keen and Śrīniketan, the vocational centre of the Visva-Bharati, stands as a witness to this side of his nature. Kabir, Nanak and other Indian mystics were all Sādhakas who devoted their lives to meet the changeless One in love. They were not dead but indifferent to the worldly pleasures and pains.

41. See *Mysticism*, p. 96.

42. Place of worship.

Rabindranath possesses these virtues; only, when in a mystic mood, he composes poetry and music, or delivers sermons. Then again, every mystic has to pass through the various stages of the "mystic way". E. Underhill writes of the 'Mystic Way': "This is the 'Mystic Way' in which the self passes through the states or stages of development which were codified by the neo-Platonists as Purgation, Illumination and Ecstasy."<sup>43</sup> Nowhere in the poet's life do we find indications of the above stages.<sup>44</sup> All that can be said of him is that his mysticism is only an affair of mood and never of temperament.

Lastly crops up the claim of the third school of thought which seeks the source of Rabindranath's writings in Christianity. Christianity, the religion of toleration, peace and love has been considered to inspire the songs of *Gitanjali*, *The Gardener*, *Lover's Gift and Crossing*, *Fruit Gathering*, *The Fugitive* and *Crescent Moon*. Needless to say, Rabindranath has preached the gospel of love and peace. Almost all the living faiths of the world preach the same. Truths are very few in number and the different sages and seers of all ages and climes have only elucidated them. The question often assails us whether we have discovered a new truth. Whatever was taught by the ancient Greeks or Hindus is being taught today and shall be taught by the future generations. The Greek thinkers or the Upaniṣadic seers have perhaps told the best truth and the entire knowledge-system of today is an explanation

43. *Mysticism*, p. 112.

44. Ajit Chakrabarty, a powerful critic on Rabindranath, says that in Rabindranath's life we do not come across such stages as Purgation, Illumination and Ecstasy. See *Kāvya Parikramā*, p. 169.

thereof. A. N. Whitehead rightly says that the whole philosophical tradition of Europe consists of "a series of footnotes to Plato".

Peace and Love have been preached by Jesus Christ from a religious point of view, while Lord Buddha teaches the same from an ethical standpoint. Christianity as a religion requires God to be the object of worship but Buddhism has no need of God, for its ethical excellence lies in the elevation of character, in the culture of Maitrī (Brotherhood), Muditā (happiness in everything), Upekṣā (indifference) and Karuṇā (compassion). Salvation is the goal of all religions and philosophies but the paths differ from one another. Some are based on intellect while others on feeling.

But the pertinent query for our purpose here is: Has Rabindranath drawn from Christianity? E. J. Thompson finds much of Christianity in Rabindranath and observes: "When asked about Christian influence in the English *Gitanjali*, he is said to have told an American audience that he had 'never read the Bible'. Yet he has certainly dipped into the New Testament, and there are places in the *Naivedya* where I think that there has fallen upon characteristically Indian thought the memory of some parable or words of Jesus."<sup>45</sup> When the English *Gitanjali* was published, many a Christian thinker tried to link it with the Bible. Thus Rev. W. R. Inge of St. Paul's writes in the *Post*: "Tagore is not a Christian, but his attitude reminds us that there was a time when Christianity was an Asiatic creed—it was the time of the original Gospel. Again and again he seems to be more Christian than the Christians."<sup>46</sup> That the *Gitanjali* is

45. Thompson: *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist*, p. 193.

46. *Boston Evening Transcript* (4-4-1925).

only an offering of songs to the Almighty in love and peace, cannot be gainsaid and in this respect its kinship with the Bible is only obvious. But this does not prove the contention that Rabindranath has borrowed from Christianity.<sup>47</sup> While settling the claims of the school that we are discussing now, let us be guided by the assertion of the poet himself. To an American audience he definitely says that he has not read the Bible and so there is very little chance of his borrowing from it. That Gitanjali and the Bible preach the same truths only foster our previous remark that truths are very few in number and the entire knowledge-system is merely an elucidation thereof. Rabindranath may have read the New Testament sometime in his life and in his later writings, here and there, we come across references to the teachings of Jesus. But such references cannot be said to have influenced the main trend of his thought. In this connexion, perhaps it will not be irrelevant to determine Rabindranath's knowledge of English works, especially poetry. He is never a voracious reader and his knowledge of the Eastern lore is wider and deeper than that of the Western.<sup>48</sup> Thompson writes in his book:<sup>49</sup> "His reading in English poetry has been very casual. First-hand knowledge of Browning came late, and even then, I suspect, was confined to the short pieces. Browning's influence was considerable during his most proli-

47. Professor Radhakrishnan's book on the Philosophy of Rabindranath is a polemic against any view which says that Rabindra-lore springs from Christianity. Dr. M. Winternitz is of opinion that Tagore is not a Christian although Christian elements enter into his views on religion and philosophy. (See *Rabindranath Tagore: Religion und Weltanschauung des Dichters*, Prag, 1936).

48. Of the Bengali writers his indebtedness to Biharilal Chakravarty is the greatest.

49. *Rabindranath Tagore. Poet and Dramatist*, p. 305.



fic period . . . . . He has read and liked some Shakespeare. . . Wordsworth he likes—not enthusiastically, I imagine. He admires the finish of *Sohrab and Rustum*. But his deepest admirations have been for Shelley and Keats, among English poets. That he has done an immense deal of desultory reading in English, his remarkable conquest of the language witnesses.”

School, he extols the Absolute and Absolute alone, disregarding the claims of the finite individuals. Again as a Vedāntin of the Rāmānuja school and even more as a follower of the Bhakti cult or Vaiṣṇavism, he tries to weave a firm organic relation between the Absolute and the finites. The fact that he extols the Absolute at the cost of the finites should not lead us to suppose that he deems the entire world-process as a *māyā*. Nowhere in his writings is this conception welcome. On the other hand wherever occasion has arisen, Rabindranath has vehemently protested against the concept of *māyā*. He writes: "Coming to the theatre of life we foolishly sit with our back to the stage. We see the gilded pillars and decorations, we watch the coming and going of the crowd; and when the light is put out at the end, we ask ourselves in bewilderment, what is the meaning of it all? If we paid attention to the inner stage, we could witness the eternal love-drama of the soul and be assured that it has pauses, but no end, and that the gorgeous world-preparations are not a magnificent delirium of things."<sup>3</sup>

The moot question that arises in this connexion is: What is the real teaching of Rabindranath? Most critics have painted him as a concrete idealist, a Vedāntin of the Rāmānuja school, a follower of Vaiṣṇavism.<sup>4</sup> But how to reconcile the absolutistic teachings of the poet with the cult of the deity and the de-

3. *Thoughts from Tagore*, p. 29.

In the second volume of *Sāntiniketan*, the poet raises the query: Has *māyā* compelled Brahman to express himself? And while answering he emphatically denies any such possibility. He says there is no *māyā*. His manifestation is in *ānandam* or bliss and bliss is his only manifestation. See *Sāntiniketan*, Vol. II, p. 339.

4. See *Kāvyā Rabindranath*, by Viswapati Chowdhury.

votee? The poet himself has suggested that he believes in an organic relation of the Absolute and the finites. He considers *Prakritir Pratīdōh* to be the first real embodiment of his philosophy and later on, in the conception of Jivan-Devatā, even the slightest tinge of absolutistic idealism is effaced. His philosophy may be more likened to that of Hegel. But the absolute idealism which he preaches may be conveniently compared to that of Śaṅkara or Bradley. There are some who opine that whenever he explains the Upaniṣads, he writes in the vein of absolutism but in fact he believes in concrete idealism. But this theory is not founded on sufficient logic, for the Upaniṣads may be explained in both ways. There is no denying the fact that at certain moments, the poet's mind has been seized by the supreme glory of the Absolute. Actuated by such feelings, he degrades the finites of the world to the rank of mere elements whose only mission is to be lost in the Absolute. Nowhere in his writings do we come across a reconciliation of these diverse views. It is true, Rabindranath believes in the concrete form of idealism but nowhere has he adduced a reasoned account of his repudiation of the absolute form. Can it be suggested that he cannot decide between the two? In any case, when the poet has shown his liking for the concrete variety, henceforward, in our discussions, we shall take him as a believer in concrete idealism. In this chapter we shall try to present both the streams of thought but decide his views about the relation of the One and the many in favour of the concrete variety.

Before we launch upon the subject, it will be wise on our part to determine the starting point in Rabindra-philosophy. Wherefrom to start in Rabindranath?

Tagore's philosophical ideas have undergone a regular course of evolution.\* Many a critic has interpreted him in the light of ideas that have evolved.<sup>5</sup>

The poet himself is fully conscious of the tide of evolution that occupies the field of his mind. Thus he writes in a letter addressed to Pramatha Chowdhury on the 24th of May, 1899:<sup>6</sup> "I think, an evolution is going on in the world of my compositions and I wonder how long the course shall run. If I live long, I am sure to reach a firm solid place from where none can displace me."† The starting point in Rabindranath is pessimism. Like those oriental sages who compiled the six systems of Indian philosophy he starts from pain but it is surely not the last word of his philosophy. Sāmkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā philosophies aim at ameliorating the pains and sufferings of the world. Lord Buddha's only mission was to find out the remedy for pains and evils. In *Sandhyā-Saṅgīt* the poet is overwhelmed by pain, sorrow, doubt and disappointment and he finds no relief whatsoever. To him the entire universe is only a mine of infinite sorrow and pain. None-the-less the poet invites them to take possession of his heart which is all alone.<sup>7</sup> If we try to ascertain the root cause that has led to the poet's disappointment, we find that it lies in his narrow perspective. In *Sandhyā Saṅgīt* the poet treats nature as separate from man and he sets up a barrier between man and man. This notion of separateness blurs his vision and leads to sorrows and

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\* By evolution we mean only the change of perspective.

5. See *Kārye Rabindranath* by Viswapati Chowdhury.

6. The letter is in Bengali.

७. "दुःख तुइ आय तुइ आय

नितान्त एकेला ए हृदय " .... *Sandhyā-Saṅgīt*.

disappointments. It should be borne in mind that his pessimism is only a means and never an end while to Schopenhauer it is both a means and an end. Pessimism as means leading to optimism, is a characteristically Indian idea and in Rabindranath we only hear its echo. After *Sandhyā-Saṅgīt* comes *Prabhāt-Saṅgīt* where we get the hint of salvation out of the deep dark ocean of pain and sorrow. The poet sings: "My heart is open and the entire universe flows into it."<sup>8</sup> Again in *Kaḍi-O-Komal* the poet reverts to the note of pessimism and sinks into doubts and disappointments. In *Mānasī* he tries to seize upon something real but the real always eludes his grasp. In *Sonār Tari* he learns for the first time that this life is not unreal and its key-note is not grim pessimism. Some Eternal Person is the director of the life-channel of individuals. In the poem entitled *Viśwa-Nritya* the poet has shown that an ineffable Person has been directing the entire cosmic history in and through trials and tribulations, pains and evils, towards an eternal goal. In *Chitrā* he gets a glimpse of the real, the long wished-for *Jivan-Devatā* who is at once the hope and bliss of the poet's soul. The poet now realizes the values of finiteness, humanity to him is a meaningful item of the cosmic order. This tune continues in *Kaṇikā*, *Kathā*, *Kāhinī*, *Kalpanā* and *Kshaṇikā*. *Naivedya* talks of love for human values and surrender to the Infinite. *Kheyā* teaches us the bliss of subordinating the egoistic existence of the individual to the vast cosmic order.<sup>9</sup> In *Gītāñjali*, *Utsarga*, *Gītālī* and

৮. “হৃদয় আজি মোর কেমনে গেল খুলি

জগত আসি সেথা করিছে কোলাকুলি”...প্রভাতসঙ্গীত

9 . See Rabindranath by Ajit Kumar Chakrabarty, p. 99.

*Gitimālya*, the poet's mind is calm and secure. Optimism rings in and he enjoys the company of Jivan-Devatā in pure love and adoration. The final battle against pain and evil has been won and the victory of bliss achieved.

In most of the philosophies we find that there has been a reasoned account of a flight either from the Absolute to the finites or from the finites to the Absolute. But in Rabindranath we at once start from the Absolute and the finite individuals. He does not start from the one and ascend or descend to the other. At the very outset he emphasizes the finite-infinite nature of the finite individual. He has loved this finite earth with its varieties of colour and sound. He has loved humanity; human values, to him, are in consonance with values eternal. He sings: "I do not like to die in this beautiful world. I like to live amidst men."<sup>10</sup>† He has drunk deep the wine of life, enjoyed this earth to his fullest. But has he considered the mundane values as final? Evidently not. Like Green and Bosanquet he too asserts that the finite individual is torn between finiteness and infinity.<sup>11</sup> Green says, there is a Divine principle at work

10. Vide *Kadi-O-Komal*.

१०. " मरिते चाहिना आमि सुन्दर भुवने  
मानवेर माझे आमि वाँचिबारे चाइ "

११. " ए मर्त्येर लीला क्षेत्रे सुखे दुःखे अमृतेर स्वाद  
पेयेछि ता क्षणे क्षणे  
वारे वारे असीमेरे पेयेछि सीमार अन्तराले

जन्मदिने

† In this mortal region I have tasted the Immortal, in weal and woe, at every moment. Again and again, I have seen the Infinite at the background of the finites.

in man. He has the impulse "to make himself what he has the possibility of becoming, but actually is not, and hence not merely, like the plant or animal, undergoes a process of development, but seeks to, and does develop himself."<sup>12</sup>

Bosanquet insists on the finite-infinite nature of the finite individual who as such tries to fulfil himself because the spirit of the whole is operative in him. The poet also speaks in the same vein when he asserts: "Yes I shall become Brahman. I cannot think of any other idea but this. I will definitely say—I shall become the Infinite . . . . . The river says, I shall become the sea. This is not her audacity but truth and hence humility. And this is why she aspires after an union with the sea."<sup>13</sup> Again in *Sādhana*: "Yes, we must become Brahman. We must not shrink from avowing this. Our existence is meaningless if we never can expect to realize the highest perfection that there is. If we have an aim and yet can never reach it, then it is no aim at all."<sup>14</sup> Here we have the occasion to hear the true Advaita note. The quintessence of Śamkara's teaching is: "I shall become Brahman for I am He."<sup>15</sup> The fact of diversities that we find around us is only phenomenal. Ontologically, there is only one Brahman and I am that Brahman. In *Personality* the poet says: "What is it in man that asserts its immortality in spite of the obvious fact of death? It is not his physical body or his mental organization. It is that deeper unity, that ultimate mystery in him, which, from the centre of his world, radiates towards its circum-

12. See Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 182 (2nd Ed.)

13. *Sāntiniketan*, Vol. II, p. 336.

14. *Sadhana*, p. 155.

ference; which is in the body, yet transcends his body . . . . What is it? . . . . It is the personality of man, conscious of its inexhaustible abundance."<sup>16</sup> This abundance is the Infinite in him. Man is torn between the present and the future, for his present has a *n'sus* to the future. This is also due to his finite-infinite nature. "Man who is provident, feels for that life of his which is not yet existent, feels much more for that than for the life that is with him; therefore he is ready to sacrifice his present inclination for the unrealized future. In this he becomes great, for he realizes truth. Even to be efficiently selfish a man has to recognize this truth, and has to curb his immediate impulses—in other words, has to be moral. For our moral faculty is the faculty by which we know that life is not made up of fragments purposeless and discontinuous. This moral sense of man not only gives him the power to see that the self has a continuity in time, but it also enables him to see that he is not true when he is only restricted to his own self. He is more in truth than he is in fact."<sup>17</sup>

In the scale of evolution, man is not a mean step. Our poet never degrades the status of man for, to him, man is at the apex of creation. He writes: "In the vast evolution of the world we come across the first meaning in life-particles, then in animals and finally in man. The outer doors begin to open one after the other, till we come to the innermost region of man. Here we find the

16. *Personality*, p. 38.

17. *Thoughts from Taore*, p. 200.

His symbolic drama *Dākghar* bears the same echo (this has been translated as *Post Office*). The call of the Infinite has unsettled the mind of Annil. He pines and pines for a letter from Him. He is eager to see Him. His company is the boy's only solace. . . . .

In "*The Gardener*" the poet sings:

"I am restless. I am athirst for far-away things." Poem 5.



finite soaked in the infinite.”<sup>18</sup> He believes in the emergence of newer and newer values in the course of evolution. In *The Religion of Man* the poet writes: “We must know that the evolution process of the world has made its progress towards the revelation of its truth—that is to say, some inner value which is not in the extension in space and duration in time. When life came out, it did not bring with it any new materials into existence. Its elements are the same which are the materials for the rocks and minerals. Only it evolved a value in them which cannot be measured and analysed.”<sup>19</sup> Somewhat later he writes: “As an animal, he [man] is still dependent upon Nature, as a Man, he is a sovereign who builds his world and rules it.”<sup>20</sup> Man to him is the most supreme value that gives a finish to the entire evolutionary process. More than that, he deems man to be the representative of the Creator. “Man as a creation represents the creator and this is why of all creatures it has been possible for him to comprehend this world in his knowledge and in his feeling and in his imagination, to realize in his individual spirit a union with a spirit that is everywhere.”<sup>21</sup> Man is a person and as such, has to realize his personality. “We are not mere facts in this world, like pieces of stone; we are persons. And therefore we cannot be content with drifting along the stream of circumstances. We have a central ideal of love with which to harmonize our existence, we have to manifest a truth in our life, which is the perfect relationship with the Eternal person.”<sup>22</sup> In his lyrics similar ideas have

18. See *Mānuser Dharma*, p. 97.

19. *The Religion of Man*, p. 29.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

22. *Thoughts from Tagore*, p. 19.

been expressed. Man is superior to any object of creation, for man has a distinct mission to fulfil.

"To the birds you gave songs, the birds gave you songs in return.

You gave me only voice, yet asked for more, and  
I sing

. . . . . To all things else you give; from me you ask."<sup>23</sup>

Let us now follow the poet when he discusses the nature of the Absolute. Throughout the length and breadth of the vast Rabindra-lore, only one voice reverberates and that is the Upaniṣadic teaching—Reality is one, non-dual. Nowhere in his works, do we come across any advocacy of dualism or pluralism.<sup>24</sup> Monism happens to be the keyword with the poet and he quotes with approval the Upaniṣadic texts and firmly believes in the Oneness of Reality. There is One but the One becomes many. 'Ekamevādvitīyam' is the keynote of his sermons in the temple.<sup>25</sup> "The Upaniṣads say with great emphasis, Know thou the One, the Soul."<sup>26</sup> "Only those of tranquil minds, and none else, can attain abiding joy, by realizing within their souls the Being who manifests one essence in a multiplicity of forms."<sup>27</sup> But why does the One become many? Śaṅkara, the pronounced

23. *Fruit Gathering*. No. LXXVIII.

24. In a letter he writes: "Previously I remarked that dualism is at the root of creation but the remark is rather incomplete. Creation is the synthesis of dualism and non-dualism." *Pathe-O-Pather* Prānte, p. 63.† By synthesis the poet means only concrete monism.

25. See *Sāntiniketan* Vol. I, p. 146 and p. 165.

26. *Sadhana*, p. 35.

27. *Ibid*, p. 36.

Advaita thinker, adduces the reason to māyā. We have remarked elsewhere that the poet does not favour māyā, but at least one passage can be quoted which recalls the conception of māyā. He writes: "Our self is māyā where it is merely individual and finite, where it considers its separateness as absolute; it is *Satyam* where it recognizes its essence in the universal and infinite, in the supreme self, in Paramatman."<sup>28</sup> To Śaṅkara, māyā is inexplicable but without it plurality cannot be explained. Brahman, cast through the moulds of māyā, becomes Īśvara and māyā is his instrument of creation. "It is the creative power of the eternal God and is therefore eternal; and by means of it, the supreme Lord creates the world."<sup>29</sup> When the veil of māyā is pierced, the finite is no longer finite but Infinite. To become the Absolute is to pierce the veil of māyā. According to Śaṅkara, the Indian absolutistic thinker, in moksha or salvation the Jīva or the finite individual becomes the Absolute. This is a unique conception whose parallel we do not get anywhere. The absolutistic thinkers of the West (Bradley and Bosanquet) extol the Absolute and disparage the claims of finite individuality. According to them the finite individuals are the elements which make up the Absolute, but in it, they are not in their original form. There they are re-arranged and transformed. The final salvation of the individual lies in being transmuted and rearranged in the Absolute. "It may be instructive", says Bradley, "to consider the question [of souls] from the side of the Absolute. We might be tempted to conclude that these souls are the Reality, or at least must be real. But that conclusion would be false, for the

28. *Sadhana*, p. 85.

29. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 572.

souls would fall within the realm of appearance and error. They would be, but, as such, they would not have reality. They would require a resolution and a recombination, in which their individualities would be transmuted and absorbed . . . . The plurality of souls in the Absolute is therefore appearance and their existence is not genuine . . . . To gain consistency and truth it must be merged, and recomposed in a result in which its speciality must vanish."<sup>30</sup> Prof. Bosanquet too tells us that the contents of the imperfect individual have to be "transmuted and re-arranged".<sup>31</sup>

In some of his poems the poet is rather chary of describing the Absolute and this again reminds us of the conception of the ultimate Reality as Śaṅkara accepts it. Śaṅkara's Absolute cannot be described, for it is beyond logic. "Its nature is inexpressible, for when we say anything of it we make it into a particular thing . . . . Every word employed to denote a thing denotes that thing as associated with a certain genus or act or quality or mode of relation. Brahman has no genus, possesses no qualities, does not act and is related to nothing else."<sup>32</sup> We get the same note when the poet sings of the Absolute as "the inscrutable without name and form".<sup>33</sup> It is a formless and featureless unity. In another poem, the poet writes: "There where spreads the infinite sky for the soul to take her flights in, reigns the stainless white radiance. There is no day nor night, nor form nor colour, and never, never a word."<sup>34</sup> In one of his poems named 'Aparūpa' in *Utsarga* he even intro-

30. *Appearance and Reality*, pp. 304-6 (1916).

31. *Logic*, Vol. II, p. 258 (2nd Ed.)

32. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 535 (1st Ed.)

33. Eng. *Gitanjali*, 95.

34. *Ibid*, 67.

duces the idea of 'Anirvachanīya' or the inexplicable. This is purely an Advaita idea and Śaṅkara is its chief propounder. Here the poet says that the Absolute is formless but it manifests itself in forms. We cannot say how it is possible. We cannot say, we know the Absolute, nor can we say, we do not know it. The Absolute is inexplicable or 'Anirvachanīya'.<sup>35</sup>

But this must not be supposed to be the final teaching of Rabindranath for in him qualified monism excels over absolute monism and a Vaiṣṇava ideal is more acceptable than a Śaṅkara-goal. At this juncture, let us elucidate the central ideas of qualified monism and Vaiṣṇavism with a view to determining the trend of the poet's thoughts after those ideals. As they are in affinity with the concrete monism of Hegel, reference to Hegelian philosophy will not perhaps be irrelevant here.

Viśiṣṭādvaita or qualified monism is the teaching of Rāmānuja who "recognizes as ultimate and real the three factors (tattva-traya) of matter (acit), soul (cit) and God (īśvara). Though equally ultimate, the first two are absolutely dependent upon the last, the dependence being conceived as that of the body upon the soul. Whatever is, is thus the body of God and he is the soul not only of inorganic nature but also of souls or Jīvas. It is in this connexion that Rāmānuja formulates the relation, so important in his system, of Aprthak Siddhi or inseparability which obtains between substance and attribute and may be found between one substance and another."<sup>36</sup> The finite individuals in Rāmānuja's philosophy are the vital parts of a whole which may be called the Absolute. The Western Absolutistic thinkers (Bradley and Bosan-

35. See *Rabi Rasmī*, Vol. II, p. 37.

36. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, pp. 398-9.

quet) think of the finites as elements of the Absolute and never as members but Rāmānuja deems them to be members of the whole. The members are the Viśeṣaṇas but they cannot exist by themselves separately. They are the vital points of a whole which is called Viśiṣṭa and hence Rāmānuja's philosophy is Viśiṣṭādvaita or qualified monism.

Prof. Pringle Pattison thinks that the only possible relation that may exist between the Absolute and finites is an organic one. "From the side of the Absolute the meaning of the finite process must lie in the creation of a world of individual spirits; for to such alone can He reveal Himself, and from them receive the answering tribute of love and adoration."<sup>37</sup> And he suggests that the nature of the finite individual lies in being a whole of content, "constituting a unique focalization or expression of the Absolute, and thus making its unique contribution to the life of the whole."<sup>38</sup> The Hegelian Absolute needs the finites as objects of self-expression and needs them most. For Hegel, the finites are the finite manifestations of the Infinite. The whole is in and through the parts and hence the Infinite's existence is in and through the finites. This is the truest organic relation. Rabindranath thinks in a similar way when he considers the finites as love-objects of the Divine. Without the finites, the eternal love-drama comes to a standstill. In the English *Gitanjali* the poet exclaims: "O, thou Lord of all Heavens, where would be thy love if I were not?"<sup>39</sup> There is an eternal thirst in the Absolute's heart for the finites. In *Fruit Gathering*,

37. *Idea of God*, p. 295 (2nd Ed.)

38. *Ibid.*, p. 269.

39. *Gitanjali*, Poem 56.

"I came and you woke and the skies blossomed with  
lights. . . . .

Yet I know the endless thirst in your heart for sight  
of me, the thirst that cries at my door in the repeated  
knockings of sunrise."<sup>40</sup>

Like Hegel, Tagore looks upon the ultimate Reality as Mind. This Infinite Mind is the creator and we are the finite representations of this Infinite Mind. My mind is not separate from yours. Had it been so, no communication between mind and mind would be possible. My mind is universal and though it is circumscribed in my matter, yet it is not thereby segregated.<sup>41</sup> The Indian Gāyatrī Mantra<sup>42</sup> has been explained by the poet thus: "Let me contemplate the adorable splendour of Him who created the earth, the air and the starry spheres and sends the power of comprehension within our minds."<sup>43</sup> The same Reason which is permeating Nature is also in me, the finite individual and this is why it is possible for me to understand Nature. The external Nature and my reason are the expressions of the same Reason.<sup>44</sup> What an affinity with Hegelian thought! When Einstein, the celebrated mathematician asks the poet the question—Does the table exist if nobody is in the house?—the ready answer comes from his lips: "Yes, it remains outside the individual mind but not outside the universal mind."<sup>45</sup> Do we not hear the note of Western objective idealism here?

40. No. LXXX.

41. See *Saṁchaya*, p. 122.

४२. ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ।

43. *The Religion of Man*, p. 93.

44. See *Dharma*, p. 36.

45. Conversation between Einstein and Tagore. See *The Religion of Man*, Appendix ii.

The Absolute or the ultimate Reality, for Rabindranath, is Satyam or Truth. We find the image of this aspect of Reality in laws of nature or Prakriti.<sup>46</sup> He quotes a passage from the Upaniṣad and says that the Lord of the universe has ordained everything for all time to come.<sup>47</sup> These irreversible laws that guide nature form the truth aspect of Divinity. But there is a second aspect of it which may be called ānandam or bliss. The Absolute is Rasa or ānandam.<sup>48</sup> He is also the Śivam or good. From the ānandam, all created objects do arise.<sup>49</sup> He is the good and the quiet (śāntam) because all his ordained laws are in harmony with one another. He is also the Sundaram or the beautiful for we find the image of bliss in beauty.<sup>50</sup> Rabindranath believes that these qualities of Godhead are not contradictory to one another. On the contrary, they lie in Divinity in perfect union and amity. At various points, he has identified the one with the other. "This is the ultimate object of our existence that we must ever know that beauty is truth, truth beauty."<sup>51</sup> In his lyrics, the poet often paints the Ultimate Reality as Beauty and he warns us not to suppose Beauty as mere phantasy. "Beauty is no phantasy, it has the everlasting meaning of reality."<sup>52</sup> Critics have raised a hue and cry about the poet's conception of beauty. Does he believe in abstract beauty or concrete one? This has been the moot

46. Sāntiniketan, Vol. 1, p. 102.

47. Ibid., p. 109, याथातथ्यतोऽर्थान् व्यदधात् शाश्वतीभ्यः समाभ्यः।

48. Ibid., p. 106. रसो वै सः ।

४९. आनन्दाद्ध्येव खल्विमानि भूतानि जायन्ते ।

50. p. 102.

51. *Sadhana*, p. 141.

52. *Creative Unity*, p. 15.



question on which much intellectual labour has been spent. Though our duty here is not to decide between the rival claims of the disputants, yet we venture to decide in favour of concrete beauty by quoting the views of the poet himself on the issue. The poem *Urbaśī*<sup>53</sup> is a priceless gem of poetry in beauty. Some opine that *Urbaśī* stands for beauty in the most abstract and pure form. Some have found in the poem, Shelley's conception of intellectual beauty.<sup>54</sup> But the poet says: "It is not merely abstract. The abstract form must take some material to express itself. The abstract beauty has taken here the matter of a female body in order that it may manifest itself."<sup>55†</sup>

Here he is more an Aristotelian than a Platonist. For Plato, beauty is only a form which has no connexion whatsoever with matter; but for Aristotle, form realizes itself in and through matter.

In the next place, the poet describes the Absolute as an artist *par excellence*. He is the magician of rhythm. The seemingly unsubstantial things are made into substances when the rhythm touches them. "What is this rhythm? It is the movement generated and regulated by harmonious restrictions. This is the creative force in the hand of the artist. So long as words remain in an uncadenced prose form, they do not give us any lasting feeling of reality. The moment they are taken and put into rhythm, they vibrate into a radiance. . . . If the picture were to consist of a disharmonious aggregate of

53. The poem occurs in *Chitra*.

54. See the Poetical Works of Shelley, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty".

55. A letter addressed to Charu Bannerjea (in Bengali). See *Rabindra Rachanāvali*—IVth Volume.

(Grantha Parichaya).

colours and lines, it would be deadly still. In perfect rhythm, the art form becomes like the stars which in their seeming stillness are never still, like a motionless flame which is nothing but movement.”<sup>56</sup>

The Absolute is a singer and the universe is his song. “The infinite and the finite are one as song and singing are one.”<sup>57</sup> In the first volume of *Sāntiniketan*, the poet writes: “The universe in the form of a song is never separated from the eternal Singer. Nor is the song made out of any external stuff. It is His very heart bursting into a melody. The entire cosmic process exists, in Him, in the form of a complete song but its manifestation is not all at once. The expression is subject to the law of evolution but every step therein bespeaks the central note.”<sup>58†</sup>

The Absolute is further described as a lover. This conception of Divine love is a purely Vaiṣṇava ideal and here we should venture to enumerate the main characteristics of such an ideal. The philosophy of Vaiṣṇavism lays emphasis on a firm organic relation between God and man. Its first principle is that everything is God and all the actions of man should be dedicated to Him.<sup>59</sup> To find God in everything and to find in the self, which is God, everything, are the two inveterate habits of a

56. *Thoughts from Tagore*, p. 173.

57. *Personality*, p. 57.

58. See *Sāntiniketan*, Vol. I, p. 53.

५९. “ कायेन वाचा मनसेन्द्रियैर्वा

बुद्ध्यात्मना वानुसृतस्वभावात्

करोति यत् यत् मकलं परस्मै

नारायणायैति समर्पयेत् तत् ॥

Vaiṣṇava.<sup>60</sup> Rabindranath expresses the Vaiṣṇava faith when he says that He permeates the entire universe.<sup>61</sup>

The poet insists on 'at-homeness' in all (sarvānu-bhāti). This attitude is well expressed in the poem Vasundharā in *Sonār Tarī* where the poet likes to spread his own self over all water, land and sky. A feeling of intimate relationship irresistibly draws the poet's self to the wide universe.<sup>62</sup> Vaiṣṇavas say, God is Rasa and that is why He, though One, becomes many. He creates man for playing the game of love with him. The infinite wilfully and gladly allows itself to be caught in the snares of the finite. Our poet mingles his tune with them when he says: "There is One and the One says, 'I shall become many.' The One wanted to appreciate its unity in diversity and the creation began."<sup>63</sup> The Vaiṣṇavas say, God is eternal, man is eternal and love too. In Anantaprem of *Mānasī*, the poet expresses this truth. The lover and the beloved have been loving each other

६०. “ सर्व्वभूतेषु यः पश्येत् भगवद्भावमात्मनः ।

भूतानि भगवत्सात्मन्येष भागवतोत्तमः ।

श्रीमद्भागवत ११।२।४४ ॥

61. See *Thoughts from Tagore*, p. 126.

62. Basundharā from *Sonār Tarī*.

“ आभारे फिराये लह, अथि बसुन्धरे,  
कोलेर सन्ताने तब कोलेर भितरे,  
विपुल अञ्चलतले । ओगो मा मृन्मयि,  
तोमार मृत्तिकामाझे व्याप्त हये रह,  
दिग्विदिके आपनारे दिइ विस्तारिया.

63. See article captioned *Sāhitya Tattva* by Rabindranath Tagore, *Prabāsī* (1341, Vaisākh).

through all eternity.<sup>64</sup> At every birth, this love-drama is being enacted anew. The infinite God and man are bound up in an indissoluble tie and the truth of the one lies in that of the other. The Infinite manifests itself in the finite and herein lies its truth and beauty. The Infinite again needs the company of the finite and the latter aspires after a resolution in the former.<sup>65</sup>

The kernel of Vaiṣṇava-love lies in Viraha or separation. The supreme Lord has separated man from Him so that He may feel the pangs of separation. Though God is one yet He creates within Him a plurality of souls, for, from them He receives love and adoration. It is undoubtedly a limitation of God but a self-imposed one. The fulfilment of Vaiṣṇava Godhead lies in love and this is why He imposes on Him the above-said limitations. There is an eternal thirst in Him for the finite's company. In *Fruit Gathering*:

Day after day you buy your sunrise from my heart,  
and you find your love carven into the image of  
my life.<sup>66</sup>

This eternal love-drama between the Deity and the de-

६४. आमरा दुजने भासिया एसेछि युगल प्रेमेर स्रोते  
अनादि कालेर हृदय उन्स हते ”

६५. “ असीम से चाहे सीमार निविड सङ्ग  
सीमा हते चाय असीमेर भाझे हारा ”

उत्सर्ग

66. No. LXXVII.

Also in Bengali *Gitanjali*.

“ हे मोर देवता भरिया ए देह प्राण  
कि अमृत तुमि चाह करिवारे पान ? ”

(For translation See English *Gitanjali*, 65.)

votée has been amply described by the poet in his conception of Jivan-Devatā. The poet as a devotee feels that he is being led by his Deity along the path of life and death. The relation between the two is the most intimate and is nothing but love. Before we launch upon a discussion on Jivan-Devatā, let us quote the poem itself *in extenso*. It should be borne in mind that the poet's conception of it is not restricted to only one poem but all through his writings, we find copious references to the same topic. Again, this conception of the poet has undergone a regular course of evolution—We shall discuss these points in their due order.<sup>67</sup>

“Thou who art the innermost spirit of my being,  
art thou pleased,

Lord of my life?

For I gave to thee my cup

filled with all the pain and delight

that the crushed grapes of my heart had surrendered.

I wove with the rhythm of colours and songs the  
cover

for thy bed,

and with the molten gold of my desires

I fashioned playthings for thy passing hours.

I know not why thou chosest me for thy partner,

Lord of my life!

Didst thou store my days and nights,

my deeds and dreams for the alchemy of thy art,

and string in the chain of thy music my songs

of autumn and spring,

and gather the flowers from my mature moments  
for thy crown?

---

67. English translation by the poet in *The Religion of Man*.

I see thine eyes gazing at the dark of my heart,  
 Lord of my life,  
 I wonder if my failures and wrongs are forgiven.  
 For many were my days without service  
 and nights of forgetfulness,  
 futile were the flowers that faded in the shade  
 not offered to thee.

Often the tired strings of my lute  
 slackened at the strain of thy tunes.  
 And often at the ruin of wasted hours  
 my desolate evenings were filled with tears.  
 But have my days come to their end at last, Lord  
 of my life,  
 while my arms around thee grow limp, my kisses  
 losing their truth?

Then break up the meeting of this languid day.  
 Renew the old in me in fresh forms of delight;  
 and let the wedding come once again  
 In a new ceremony of life."<sup>68</sup>

All through his writings we find poems of the Jīvan-Devatā group. Even in his last days, he cannot but refer to the Deity of his life. In *Navajātaka*<sup>69</sup> written in 1940—"My play in this world-house comes to an end and now

68. This poem Jīvan-Devatā occurs in *Chitrā*. Other poems of the Jīvan-Devatā group, in this book of poems, are—Antaryāmī, Sādhana, Sindhupāre, Atmotsarga and Sēs-Upahār.

६९. " ए घर फुराल खेला  
 एल द्वार रुधिवार बेला  
 विलयविहीन दिनशेषे  
 फिरिया दाँडाओ एसे  
 ये छिन्ने गोपनचर  
 जीवनेर अन्तरतर "

comes the time when the door of the house shall be closed. O the innermost spirit of my life! come now by my side. Give me the peace of your company at the end of my journey.”†

Critics are divided in their opinions about the question: Is ‘Jīvan-Devatā’ the personal Deity or is He the universal Deity (Viśva-Devatā)? Mr. P. C. Mahalanobis likes to identify Jīvan-Devatā as the personal Deity of the poet’s life but Mr. Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta<sup>70</sup> opines that Jīvan-Devatā is only the Viśva-Devatā in disguise. Dr. Nihar Ranjan Ray says that there is an intimate connexion between the poet’s intuition of Jīvan-Devatā and his feeling of universalism. We get the best proof of it in the first poem of *Mānasī*. This mānasī or Deity in mental imagery is the guiding star of the poet’s life and assumes various forms such as the husband, friend, wife or the beloved lady.<sup>71</sup> Mr. Thompson says, the poet found “a deep and intimate communion with God into which the Jīvan-Devatā feeling merged.”<sup>72</sup> We too like to decide the issue in favour of Viśva-Devatā. That the poet never likes to confine the Jīvan-Devatā within the limits of his own life, will be evidenced by his immortal poems in *Naivedya*. Here we find the Deity permeating the entire world, nay the cosmic whole. The fontal Reality of which he speaks is only the Viśva-Devatā. Taken in an individual perspective, the Viśva-Devatā appears to be the Jīvan-Devatā.

We have already remarked that there has been an evolution in the poet’s conception of Jīvan-Devatā.<sup>73</sup> In

70. See *Rabindranath* by S. Sen Gupta.

71. See in *Kāvīparichiti* the article by Nihar Ranjan Ray, pp. 157-8.

72. *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist*, p. 113.

73. See *Rabindra Kāvya Pravāha* by P. Bisi, pp. 14, 15.

*Sonār Tari*, Jīvan-Devatā has not yet manifested Himself in His proper form. Here we get only hints and indications of His arrival. In the poems entitled *Mānas-sundarī* and *Niruddes-Jātrā* we get a faint vision of Jīvan-Devatā. In the second level of evolution, in *Chitrā*,<sup>74</sup> we get the poem *Antaryāmī* where we get a deeper and clearer vision of the Deity. The poem entitled Jīvan-Devatā forms the third level while in the fourth, we find Jīvan-Devatā as the Viśva-Devatā. It should not be supposed that Viśva-Devatā has emerged out of Jīvan-Devatā or that the former has become the latter in course of time. On the contrary, in Rabindranath, Jīvan-Devatā is Viśva-Devatā and Viśva-Devatā, Jīvan-Devatā.

Let us now sum up our discussions briefly. The poet's Infinite or Jīvan-Devatā needs the finites and needs them most. The relation between the two is one of intimate love and without love Godhead is never fulfilled. The finites are not passing phenomena nor are they unreal. They are as much real as Jīvan-Devatā Himself. A truly organic relation exists between the two—the Infinite and finite, inasmuch as the one exists in and through the other.

We shall now close the chapter but before we do so we should like to discuss one more pertinent problem about the nature of the Absolute. Does the poet's Absolute exist in time? Or, to put it in other words, is his Absolute static or dynamic? Eleatics believe in a changeless Reality and the Indian thinker Śaṅkara says that all changes are illusions. The Heraclitians say that Reality is nothing but change. Bergson's

74. *Chitrā* is the book of poems in Bengali. It should not be confused with English *Chitra* which happens to be the English rendering of the drama *Chitrāṅgadā*.



Reality is changing, the *Élan vital* is ever progressing. James' God is ever growing and the modern schools of neo-realism and neo-idealism denounce in strongest terms the conception of a block universe. They intend to affirm that Reality is a history or an unending process. Our poet does never deny change and movement. *Balākā* is his lyric of change and movement. Mr. Sisir Kumar Maitra finds much similarity of ideas between Bergson and Rabindranath, as the author of *Balākā*.<sup>75</sup>

In *Balākā* the poet describes the change-aspect of Reality. Interrogating the river about change, he writes: "You move on, move on, move in speed. You fly undaunted and seldom do you look back."<sup>76†</sup>

The life-process is moving on and on in an infinite pursuit. Referring to *Hamsabalākā* the poet remarks: The life-process of the cosmos has heard the singular voice which is—not here, not here, but somewhere else. This is why, we find life around us to be fully dynamic. It is progressing, for it has received within it the *nisus* to the Eternal.

If for a moment the life-urge stops in tiredness, at once the universe is filled with matter.<sup>77</sup> This reminds

75. See *Calcutta Review* 1926. Article on Rabindranath and Bergson by S. K. Maitra.

७६. शुधु धाओ शुधु धाओ, शुधु वेगे धाओ

उद्दाम उधाओ

फिरे नाहि चाओ

७७. यदि तुमि मुहूर्तेर तरे

क्लान्तिभरे

दाँडाओ थमकि

अमनि चमकि

us of the philosophy of Bergson whose *Elan vital* always moves on. The onward march of life is the only real thing and if somehow this progressing flow is retarded and consequently there happens to be a backward move, matter arises. What an affinity of ideas between Rabin-dranath and Bergson!<sup>74</sup> But is change the last word of philosophy, is movement the *sine qua non* of Reality? Our poet's answer shall be in the negative. He always believes that the Absolute as such cannot change though it contains within it the manifold of changes. In *Balākā*, he writes, the One is eternal, It is Truth.<sup>79</sup> This One is realizing itself in the many that are in time. The Infinite Self has got a purpose which is being manifested in change and movement. The universe is being governed not by a push but by a pull. The Infinite or the Absolute does not change though He contains histories without number. In contemporary philosophy we find similar ideas in Bosanquet. Bosanquet too solves the problem of the Absolute and time thus: "The foundational nature of all that is, while containing the infinite changes which are the revelation of its inexhaustible life, not confinable within a single direction or temporal career, is not itself and as such engaged in progress and mutation."<sup>80</sup>

उच्छ्रिया उठिवे विश्व पुञ्ज पुञ्ज वस्तुर पर्वते ”

*Balākā*, 8.

78. His symbolic drama, *Red Olvanders*, beautifully describes the strife between life-force and matter. Nandini symbolizes the vital force and Yaksha-king matter. Nandini moves on and on while the king tries to put the clock back. Life pays no heed to matter but matter tries to crush life. In the long run, life supervenes over matter. Nandini wins and the king is won over.

७९. “ सत्य सेइ चिरन्तन एक ” *Balākā*, 37.

80. *Meeting of Extremes in Contemporary Philosophy*, p. 210.

## CHAPTER III

### EVILS AND SUFFERINGS

According to Rabindranath, "the question why there is evil in existence is the same as why there is imperfection, or in other words, why there is creation at all."<sup>1</sup> Granting that there is finite existence, evil is bound to appear. Evil and finiteness are, so to say, intertwined. In Western thought, Prof. Bosanquet holds similar views. Evils, for him, are evils and we should not fight shy of the truth. They exist as the finites do exist and in the life of conscious beings, contradictions, evils, pains and sufferings are felt experiences. So the principal question is not whether there is evil but, is it absolute and ultimate? The poet says: "Pain which is the feeling of our finiteness, is not a fixture in our life. It is not an end in itself, as Joy is. To meet with it is to know that it has no part in the true permanence of creation."<sup>2</sup> Evils and sufferings are not ultimate but, for the finites, they do exist. Let us try to determine the value of evils from the standpoint of the Absolute.

Rabindranath's Absolute is *Sivam* or the good, *Satyam* or the truth, *Śāntam* or the quiet and *Advaitam* or the non-dual. On no occasion can evil cling to the Absolute or the ultimate Reality. How then are we to explain evils and sufferings of the world? Should we take his Absolute as an "omnipotent and impassible creator in the rôle of a mere spectator?" Should we, in

1. *Sadhana*, p. 47

2. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

other words, say that the Absolute has nothing to do with finite evils and sufferings? Our poet never believes in a Reality that can relish the pains of mankind. In the second place, are we to think of his Absolute as a synthesis of evil and good? In that case, the Absolute cannot be styled good, for in the synthesis, the thesis and the antithesis cannot exist in their self-independence. May we then suggest that the Absolute possesses both evil and good but the latter excels over the former? Is there always a balance of good over evil in the Absolute? But such a supposition is simply unwarranted, for his Absolute is only Śivam or the good and anything short of this fails to describe the ultimate One. The absolutistic thinkers of the West are ruthless on the point. Bosanquet says, evil is never an illusion. It is reconciled and readjusted in the Absolute. "What does Bosanquet mean by the expression—readjustment of evil in the Absolute? All that he means is this: In the finite world, we find that evil is opposed to good. There is a sort of antagonistic relation between the two. But in the Absolute they are readjusted. By this, we mean that in the Absolute, evil and good are somehow made to exist in a relation of friendship and amity."<sup>3</sup> Bradley too holds that "evil and good are not illusions, but they are most certainly appearances. They are one-sided aspects, each over-ruled and transmuted in the whole."<sup>4</sup> How does the readjustment take place? Bosanquet has no definite answer to give. Here he is perhaps content with a 'somehow'. The act of readjustment seems to be miraculous and mysterious and cannot be explained on

3. See the author's thesis entitled *Philosophy of Bosanquet* in the Calcutta University Journal of Letters, Vol. XXXIII.

4. *Appearance and Reality*, p. 401. (1916).

any rational hypothesis. Does our poet explain the relation of the Absolute and evil in a similar way? He writes in *Sadhana*: "Error, by its nature, cannot be stationary; it cannot remain with truth; like a tramp, it must quit its lodging as soon as it fails to pay its score to the full. As in intellectual error, so in evil of any other form, its essence is impermanence, for it cannot accord with the whole."<sup>5</sup> Again somewhat later he observes: "Evil cannot altogether arrest the course of life on the highway and rob it of its possessions. For the evil has to pass on, it has to grow into good; it cannot stand and give battle to All."<sup>6</sup> Evil can never exist with the good and hence the question of readjustment or reconciliation of the two is brushed aside. But what does the poet really mean by saying that evil is to grow into good? If evil and good are opposed to each other, how can one grow into the other? Here too, we are afraid, we have to take recourse to a 'somehow'. Somehow, we know not how, evil is baked into good and the whole process seems to be miraculous.

In Bosanquet, we find, evil is reconciled in the Absolute. But can we characterize his Absolute by evil? Bosanquet replies: "There is evil, then, within the Absolute but the Absolute is not characterized by evil."<sup>7</sup> Bosanquet's Absolute owns the evils and sufferings of the world but surely we cannot characterize it by any of these imperfections. But Rabindranath's Absolute does not own the evils and sufferings of the world at all. These are the hazards and hardships of the finites and they exist in the pheno-

5. *Sadhana*, pp. 48-9.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

7. *Value and Destiny of the Finite Individual*, p. 217.

menal region. From the Absolute standpoint, there are no evils, only for the finites they exist. We have already remarked that finiteness and evil are intertwined. But here a question arises. There is no denying the fact that the poet's Absolute owns the finites of the world. His Absolute needs the finites and needs them most and they are not set against Him. He is the totality of a hold on reality and as such the finites have their being in Him. But if the Absolute owns the finites, does He not on that account own the evils of the finites? Why is evil relegated to the finite realm only? Is evil then a piece of illusion or *māyā*? Evidently not. Indeed it is hard to reconcile the poet's Absolute with the existence of evil in the finite-realm.

The next question is: Why are there evils and sufferings on earth? Bosanquet says: "Broadly speaking I suggest, experience indicates that a soul which has never known pain, like a nation which has never known war, has no depth of being, and is not a personality at all."<sup>8</sup> Rabindranath says: "..... It is pain which is our true wealth as imperfect beings, and has made us great and worthy to take our seat with the perfect. He [the true man] knows that we are not beggars; that it is the hard coin which must be paid for everything valuable in this life, for our power, our wisdom, our love; that 'n pain is symbolized the infinite possibility of perfection, the eternal unfolding of joy...."<sup>9</sup> The finite self has to realize his own soulhood or personality and this is why he has to walk through the fire of pain and evil. Perfection is to be achieved and the hard coin of evil is to be paid. In *Dharma* the poet writes: "O, the mighty one,

8. *Principle of Individuality and Value*, p. 245.

9. *Sadhana*, pp. 64-65.

you are leading mankind from untruth to truth, darkness to light and mortality to immortality but the path of salvation lies through pains, evils and sufferings."<sup>10</sup>† The poet expresses his satisfaction at the advent of pain as a corrective. He sings:

"Thou hast done well, my lover, thou hast done well to send me thy fire of pain.

For my incense never yields its perfume till it burns, and my lamp is blind till it is lighted.

When my mind is numb, its torpor must be stricken by thy love's lightning;

And the very darkness that blots my world burns like a torch when set afire by thy thunder."<sup>11</sup>

In the drama *Śraddotsava*, the poet assesses the value of pains and sufferings. The King is out to enjoy the autumn festival in the company of his followers. But he feels all alone and seeks his true companion. The boys are out to share the joys of the autumn season. But Upananda, a boy, is found working in a corner and it is his mission to pay the debts of his master. The King at once exclaims:—"Here I have found the companion after my heart!" Upananda is paying the debt of bliss by the penance of pain. This poignant scene is undoubtedly the sweetest. The entire universe is engaged in realizing the gift it has received from the Infinite and the path of realization lies through pain and suffering. The finite self has to manifest the bliss that is latent in him and the manifestation can be effected only through pain. The truth in bliss has to be realized and he who tries to avoid all pains and sufferings can never attain it.<sup>12</sup>

10. Vide *Dharma*, p. 107.

11. *Lover's Gift and Crossing*, pp. 66-67.

12. See article by the poet, Amār Dharma, *Prabāsi*, 1324 (Paus).

How to wipe out evils and sufferings? The poet says, evil can be made to grow into good. To conquer evil and suffering is to cultivate goodness. What is goodness? The poet answers in *Sadhana*: "My answer is, that when a man begins to have an extended vision of his true self, when he realizes that he is much more than at present he seems to be, he begins to get conscious of his moral nature. Then he grows aware of that which he is yet to be, and the state not yet experienced by him becomes more real than that under his direct experience. Necessarily, his perspective of life changes, and his will takes the place of his wishes. For will is the supreme wish of the larger life, the life whose greater portion is out of our present reach, whose objects are not for the most part before our sight. Then comes the conflict of our lesser man with our greater man, of our wishes with our will, of the desires for things affecting our senses with the purpose that is within our heart. Then we begin to distinguish between what we immediately desire and what is good. For good is that which is desirable for our greater self."<sup>13</sup> In the first volume of *Sāntiniketan* he repeats: real happiness lies in the Great, it can never be found in the limited and the conditioned.<sup>14</sup> Evils and sufferings are conquered when the finite individual sees himself in the Great and the Unlimited, or in other words, when he lives the life of goodness. "To live the life of goodness is to live the life of all."<sup>15</sup> Goodness emerges only when the finite man feels that in essence he is the universal Man. He is one in spirit with the universal Man 'under whose inspiration he engages in expressing his ultimate

13. *Sadhana*, p. 54.

14. "भूषैव सुत्रं नालो सुखमस्ति" Vide *Sāntiniketan*.

15. *Sadhana*, pp. 56-57.



truth.' Goodness lies in the expansion of the self and expansion alone can save mankind from the labyrinth of evils and pains.

When evils and sufferings come, the poet asks us not to lose heart and fly away in sheer cowardice. He directs us to face evils and pains. In a poem in *Jannadine* he asks the suffering man not to forget his own true self. The poet directs: "Come what may, have a strong mooring in your own self. Evils and pains shall come and shake the very foundation of life but never, never lose confidence."<sup>16†</sup>

In *The Gardener* he sings:<sup>17</sup>

"Though the evening comes with slow steps and  
has signalled for all songs to cease;  
Though your companions have gone to their rest  
and you are tired;  
Though fear broods in the dark and the face of  
the sky is veiled;  
Yet, bird, O my bird, listen to me.  
do not close your wings.  
There is no hope, no fear for you.  
There is no word, no whisper, no cry.  
There is no home, no bed of rest.  
There is only your own pair of wings and the  
pathless sky.

१६. " नाना दुःखे चित्तेर विक्षेपे  
याहोदेर जीवनेर गिति याय वारंवार केपे  
यारा अन्यमना तारा शोना  
आपनारे भुलोना कखनो "

जन्मदिने

Bird, O my bird, listen to me, do not close your wings."

What a strong reliance on one's own strength! The gloomy dark days of pain and sorrow should not droop the fluttering banner of soulhood.

Then we hear the poet saying his bold prayers:

"Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers  
but to be fearless in facing them.

Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain  
but for the heart to conquer it."<sup>18</sup>

Again in *Gitanjali* he prays:<sup>19</sup>

"Where the mind is without fear and the head is  
held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into  
fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards  
perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its  
way into the dreary desert sand of dead habits;

Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-  
widening thought and action;

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my  
country awake."

The evils of modern age and nationalism, social evils, evils of machinery—all have received the attention of the poet. He has carefully and skilfully analysed the root causes of these evils and suggested the panacea. The world of today has not paid any heed to what he has said

<sup>18</sup> *Fruit Gathering*, LXXIX.

<sup>19</sup> *English Gitanjali*, 35.

in the strongest terms but, let us hope, time will come when the present blinded age will regain its true sight. Time will come when philosophers again will guide the world-forces and Plato's vision will materialize. Today pacifists are jeered and pelted with stones but the wrong-doers do not know what they are doing and hence they deserve pity. Rabindranath's voice can never be drowned by the taboos of the modern age and sometime in the near or distant future the world will listen in rap' attention to what he has said. The world of today is being shattered by thousand and one evils but only a change of perspective can drive away all evils.

Selfishness and narrowness are the root causes of many a modern evil of our society and State. Instead of improving our within, we frantically attempt to improve our without and the result is disastrous. We fumble about in utter ruin and helplessness. Most of the evils do arise simply because we try to live only in the individual and not in the Universal. There is no real happiness in the little, bliss lies only in the Great. Unless we can break down all barriers and fetters that encircle our self from others, there is no hope of eradicating the evils of the world. Only when a self spreads itself into all others, only when the selfish individual merges in the selfless universal, will evils cease as evils and grow into good. The narrow bigoted perspective of selfishness has blinded our vision and the bounden duty of humanity is to pierce the veil. This has been Rabindranath's reiteration when he talks of nationalism. He does not discourage nationalism if it be purged of its evils, but for nationalism as it exists today in the world around us he has only severe condemnation. Modern nationalism in the West is nothing but greed, avarice and gluttony.

Mutual distrust is the keynote of fear which dominates present-day politics.

He warns Western nationalism: "The West must not make herself a curse to the world by using her power for her own selfish needs, but, by teaching the ignorant and helping the weak, she should save herself from the worst danger that the strong is liable to incur by making the feeble acquire power enough to resist her intrusion. And also she must not make her materialism to be the final thing, but must realize that she is doing a service in freeing the spiritual being from the tyranny of matter."<sup>20</sup>

Then he begins his condemnation: "In these national carnivals of nationalism are not the Western peoples spending most of their vital energy in merely producing things and neglecting the creation of ideals? And can a civilization ignore the law of moral health and go on in its endless process of inflation by gorging upon material things? Man in his social ideals naturally tries to regulate his appetites, subordinating them to the higher purpose of his nature. But in the economic world our appetites follow no other restrictions but those of supply and demand which can be artificially fostered, affording individuals opportunities for indulgence in an endless feast of grossness. In India our social instincts imposed restrictions upon our appetites—may be it went to the extreme of repression,—but in the West the spirit of economic organization with no moral purpose goads the people into the perpetual pursuit of wealth; but has this no wholesome limit?"<sup>21</sup>

In this connexion the poet raises a very important query. Are the so-called free modern nations, really

20. *Nationalism*, p. 110.

21. *Nationalism*, pp. 119, 120.

free? What is freedom? Is mere political freedom, real freedom? "Political freedom does not give us freedom when our mind is not free."<sup>22</sup> "We must never forget in the present day that those people who have got their political freedom are not necessarily free, they are merely powerful. The passions which are unbridled in them are creating huge organizations of slavery in the disguise of freedom."<sup>23</sup>

Once by freedom of nations, Rabindranath meant only political freedom. When we go through his biography, we find that there has been a period when our poet is only a political leader, fighting for political emancipation. In 1905, during the storm of anti-partition agitation in Bengal, Rabindranath took an active part in it. On that occasion, he composed several patriotic songs and addressed numerous public meetings. In 1908 he presided over the Bengal Provincial Conference at Pabna and insisted on Hindu-Moslem unity and the merits of village reorganization. In a paper called *Path O Pātheya*, written in the same year, the poet discourages the terrorist activities in India but admires the patriotism of the misguided terrorists.<sup>24</sup> In 1909 he wrote and published the drama *Prāyaścitta* which teaches the philosophy of Satyāgraha and non-violence (*Ahiṃsā*).

But later on, his ideas have undergone a change. He no longer believes in political salvation but his aims are directed to higher ideals. He now fights for ethical and spiritual emancipation. He writes: "..... Man's truth is moral truth and his emancipation is in the spiritual

22. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

23. *Nationalism*, p. 121.

24. The poet denounces terrorism as a political weapon in his famous novel—*Chār Adhyāy*—written in 1934.

life.”<sup>25</sup> He wants all the nations of the world to be true to their social ideals. “The ideals that strive to take form in social institutions have two objects. One is to regulate our passions and appetites for the harmonious development of man, and the other is to help him to cultivate disinterested love for his fellow-creatures. Therefore society is the expression of those moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature.”<sup>26</sup> The poet is of opinion that if all men of the world can realize the moral and spiritual aspirations of our higher nature, political freedom will automatically come. Each nation will respect the personality of the other and this idea forms the nucleus of his conception of internationalism. His idea of internationalism does not fight shy of nationalism. Rather, it comprehends and goes beyond it. Internationalism, for Rabindranath, is the synthesis of nationalisms and its watchwords are love and sympathy.<sup>27</sup> He asks the downtrodden and the oppressed to cultivate the freedom of the soul, for real salvation is spiritual and moral.

In the poem *The Sunset of the Century*, the poet writes:

“Be not ashamed, my brothers, to stand before the  
proud and the powerful with your white robe of  
simpleness.

25. *Nationalism*, p. 122.

26. *Nationalism*, p. 120.

27. In Rabindranath's internationalism, there is no narrowness. Commercialism and militarism are the worst manifestations of a narrow nationalism. These can be wiped out only if the personality of every nation be respected. The high values of individuality and personality are never to be disparaged. When nationalism grows into internationalism, its worth is to be assessed in terms of cosmic value. See the article by Brojendranath Seal in *Prabāsi*, 1324, Bhādra.

Let your crown be of humility, your freedom the  
freedom of the soul.

Build God's throne daily upon the ample bareness  
of your poverty.

And know that what is huge is not great and pride  
is not everlasting."<sup>28</sup>

Rabindranath dreams of an age when the political and national evils of the day will vanish into nothingness. He writes: "I have no hesitation in saying that those who are gifted with the moral power of love and vision of spiritual unity, who have the least feeling of enmity against aliens, and the sympathetic insight to place themselves in the position of others, will be the fittest to take their permanent place in the age that is lying before us, and those who are constantly developing their instinct of fight and intolerance of aliens will be eliminated. For this is the problem before us, and we have to prove our humanity by solving it through the help of our higher nature. The gigantic organizations for hurting others and warding off their blows, for making money by dragging others back, will not help us. On the contrary, by their crushing weight, their enormous cost and their deadening effect upon living humanity, they will seriously impede our freedom in the larger life of a higher civilization."<sup>29</sup>

Rabindranath raises his organ voice to decry the evils of society, especially as it exists in India today. In India, the social evil is eating into her very vitals and expressing itself in racial and communal differences. The Hindus, Musalmans, Sikhs and other races of India are blinded by narrow bigotry, religious fanaticism and a

<sup>28</sup>. *Nationalism*, p. 135.

<sup>29</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

selfish view on life and for these reasons, one cannot tolerate the other. What is wanted is a thorough change of outlook and unless this is achieved, India's social life is doomed to destruction. In and through his numerous essays and addresses on politics and sociology, the poet has implored his country to shake off narrowness and selfishness. True to his convictions, he has invited every citizen of India to expand himself into the vast humanity. The higher caste Hindus shudder to have social intercourse with the lower caste Hindus, the down-trodden and the oppressed have no other alternative but to brook the insult. The poet says, those who are insulting the humanity of the oppressed, shall be pulled down and levelled with them.<sup>30</sup> The evil of untouchability is a gangrene on the social body of the country and the poet is vehement in its condemnation. In a poem in the Bengali *Gītāñjali* he asks Aryans, non-Aryans, Hindus, Musalmans, Christians, Brahmins and non-Brahmins to participate in a universal festival in honour of the supreme Reality. Let the oppressed and the down-trodden mingle with the privileged classes and let the festival be sweetened by unity and uniformity.<sup>31</sup> The social evils according to the poet can be eradicated only when the mind is pure and free. No amount of outward changes can bring

३०. “ हे भोर दुर्भागा देश, यादेर करेछ अपमान  
अपमाने हते हबे ताहादेर सबार समान । ”

गीताञ्जलि

३१. “ मार अभिषेके एसो एसो त्वरा  
मङ्गल घट हयनि ये भरा  
सबार परशे पवित्र करा तीर्थनारे  
एइ भारतेर महामानवेर सागरतीरे । ”

गीताञ्जलि



about social upheaval and advancement if the minds be in chains. Rabindranath, we have seen, always distinguishes between the wish and the will of an individual. An individual has got only wish when he is selfish and narrow-minded. But he is said to have will when he is broad-minded. To will properly is to acquiesce in the general or universal will. The general will is an organic unity and hence it aims at the common good. Rousseau suggests: "It is that identity between my particular will and the wills of all my associates in the body politic which makes it possible to say that in all social co-operation, and in submitting to even forcible constraint, when imposed by society in the true common interest, I am obeying only myself and am actually attaining my freedom."<sup>32</sup>

In the famous article written in Bengali on the trend of Indian History, (*Bhāratvarṣe Itihāser Dhārā*) the poet has described his socio-political ideals. The truth of all the races of the world can be truly realized only through the truth of one's own. It is fruitless begging if we try to know the truth of others, forsaking our own. Again if we shut ourselves within the four walls of our particular individual truth, we shall be invoking the worst specimen of poverty.<sup>33</sup>

His novel '*Gorā*' exemplifies this. *Gorā* knows that he is a Hindu and as such raises on all his sides walls of conservatism and orthodoxy. Suddenly he comes to know that he is not a Hindu, he is the son of an Irishman and along with this, another piece of knowledge flashes before his mind. He now realizes that he is an Indian. Quite gladly *Gorā* informs Paresh Babu: "What I wanted to be,

32. Vide *Philosophical Theory of the State*, by B. Bosanquet, p. 100 (4th Ed.).

33. See *Rabi Rasmi*, vol. II, p. 329.

now I am. I am an Indian. For me, there is no animosity amongst the different races, Hindus, Musalmans, or Christians. One un-divided India is my race and I shall gladly take food from the hands of all. So long, I was only a Hindu and my mind was narrow and selfish but now I am free and hence gay."† He implores Paresh Babu to baptize him into the faith of universalism, the religion of the one universal Deity.

Next to social evils, arise the evils of the modern industrial age. Despite the fact that modern science has brought the comforts of life within easy reach of all, people of the world are not happy and contented. Why? The poet says, we have not taken science in its true perspective. We have reaped only power from science and that too, we have realized, in a negative and destructive sense. Power today 'has tried to overrule the rule of rhythm' and hence it has committed suicide. The poet asserts: "The principle of Power, of which the outward expression is bulk, is neither the final nor the supreme truth. It has to stop itself to keep time with the rhythm of the universe. Restraint is the gateway of the Good. The value of the Good is not measured in terms of dimension or multitude. He who has known it within himself feels no shame in rags and tatters. He rolls his crown in the dust and marches out on the open road."<sup>34</sup>

It should be borne in mind, in this connexion, that the poet never does away with the machine, the product of modern science. In *The Religion of Man* he says definitely: "Let us know that the Machine is good when it helps, but not so when it exploits life; that Science is great when it destroys evil, but not when the two enter

into unholy alliance.”<sup>35</sup> He likes to welcome machine provided it does not kill life, sap the vital juice. In his own place at Bolpur, he has created a centre for industrial education which is known as Sriniketan, the supplement of Santiniketan. There he has introduced machinery on a small scale and so he has not neglected the fruits of science. On the other hand he has received those fruits and tried to synthesize them and finally weave them into his own philosophy. To him, machine is not a hindrance to life. Properly regulated, machine may be made to encourage the throbbing and pulsating nature of life.

But today the modern world has reaped the worst fruits of science and our poet all through his life has fought against the killing propensities of the Machine-Demon. He denounces in strongest terms the evils that emanate from the gigantic wheels and hates the freezing and stiffening of the life-process. Referring to the West he says: “The civilization of the West has in it the spirit of the machine which must move; and to that blind movement human beings are offered as fuel, keeping up the steam-power.”<sup>36</sup> Again in *Nationalism*: “We must admit that there is a living soul in the West which is struggling unobserved against the hugeness of the organizations under which men, women and children are being crushed, and whose mechanical necessities are ignoring laws that are spiritual and human. . . .”<sup>37</sup>

The strange way in which modern industrialism is behaving, makes the poet’s heart ache in acute pain. In his lecture on “Nationalism in Japan” he is speaking with righteous indignation when he says: “Have you never

35. *The Religion of Man*, p. 164.

36. *Creative Unity*, p. 135.

37. *Nationalism*, p. 88.

felt shame when you see the trade advertisements, not only plastering the whole town with lies and exaggerations, but invading the green fields, where the peasants do their honest labour, and the hill-tops, which greet the first pure light of the morning?"<sup>38</sup>

In his drama *Muktadhārā*<sup>39</sup> the poet has amply described the evils of today, the ill-feeling between the conqueror and the conquered, the feverish anxiety to curb the natural flow of the spirit and the damning of life by sheer mechanical forces. In the drama, the poet deals with the irrational ferociousness of the iron-machine. The machine created by Vibhūti to stop the water supply of a natural spring—*Muktadhārā*—is a challenge to the entire spirit of the locality. The machine stands on the bodies of the people and consumes their blood. The prince to free the affected people of Śivatarāi dies while he dismantles the machine and his death brings back the victory of spirit over machine, life over mechanism.

Thompson says that *Muktadhārā* "is a reasoned though highly allegorical presentation of [the poet's] convictions, as expressed during many previous years, on modern politics. It has many strands of significance woven into it, so that it is like shot silk suggesting many colours;—the play's achievement is that in it he has attained a synthesis of his different convictions and messages. His deep distrust of all government by machinery and of all prostitution of science to serve violence and oppression, his hatred of a slavish system of education, his scorn of race-hatred and of all politics which seek to make one tribe dependent on another instead of risking

38. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

39. *Muktadhārā* has been translated by the poet as *Waterfall*.

the gift of the fullest freedom, his certitude that it is in freedom that God is found,—all these are so prominent that each may with justice be claimed as the play's message. Through all, as a tender under-tone, runs the murmur of the Free Current—a haunting sound in the soul of the boy whose foster-mother she was and whose lifeless body, after he has broken her fetters, her waves are to carry majestically away. There are impressive passages, as where the Machine is seen, sinister against the sunset, crouching over the land and its life, overtopping even God's temple; or where the noise of the breaking dam and the raging waters, is first heard. All through the play sounds the menace of God's gathering anger at the hardness of men's hearts and the sordidness of their hopes."<sup>40</sup>

Again in *Raktakaravī* or *Red Oleanders*, the King, the multimillionaire, is exploiting the labour of the teeming millions. The labourers are digging gold to enrich the untold riches of the King. They are not even persons but robots and their connotations are 47 Ka or 169 Fa. Each is known by his label-mark and never by his individuality. When the entire humanity is thus being pained and insulted, comes the symbol of the very vital principle in the person of Nandini. The huge mechanical organization with the King at its top trembles at the swift gait of Nandini who comes distributing love at every door. She has conquered all and the King is perturbed. Once more the Machine-Demon arises and tries to crush the sweet springs of life here and there. Then calls Nandini: "Come out of the obstacles of man-made organizations and breathe pure air that has been given by the Heavens."

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40. *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist*, p. 284.

The King bends and bends, and lo! Nandini has won. The poet has denounced fear which is the cementing force of modern industrial societies. Fear is never a force that binds, it is a deterrent. On the other hand he stresses love as the only uniting force and, according to him, societies built on it are sure to last long. Nandini never fears the King and this is why the King cannot bring her under his mechanical control. But she loves him and her love is, at first, considered to be a shackle of illusion. Violently the King denies her love-call but he does not perhaps know that the call has already pierced his hardened heart. The King feels all alone even in gorgeous company, experiences utter poverty even in plenty. He cannot ascertain where the wound is aching and Nandini feels sympathy for him. In the long run the King finds the panacea in her. Nandini asks: "What do you find in me?" The King replies: "In you, I find the rhythm of cosmic dance. In you, I hear the joyous cosmic tune." Nandini wins and thus the spirit excels over matter. Nandini deludes all in bliss, she is like sunshine attracting all plants towards her. Mechanism is her direct anti-thesis and she calls it the art of the demons.

In his numerous lyrics too, he has referred to the evils of the modern age, war and mechanization. Everywhere he has condemned the evils but sounded the optimistic note.<sup>41</sup> Everywhere he has seen the vision of an

41. "Eternal charioteer, thou drivest man's history  
 along the road rugged with rises and falls of Nations.  
 Amidst all tribulations and terror  
 thy trumpet sounds to hearten those that despair and  
 droop,  
 and guide all people in their paths of peril and  
 pilgrimage."

age when these evils shall be wiped out and an era of love and non-violence shall begin to rule the world. He has asked Humanity to cultivate the art of 'at-homeness in the whole.' This feeling of 'at-homeness' is the sure remedy for all the evils of the age.

Translation by the poet of the famous national song, 'Jana-gana'. It was composed by him in 1911.

In his later years, he writes in the *Prāntik*,  
 Before retiring from this earth,  
 let me invoke those who are preparing to fight  
 and crush the Demon and the Devil.†

“ विदाय नेवार आगे ताइ  
 डाक दिये याइ  
 दानवेर साथे यारा संग्रामेर तरे  
 प्रभुत हतंछे घरे घो. ”

Vide *Prāntik*, 18.

## CHAPTER IV

### DEATH AND IMMORTALITY

Poet Tagore is one of those philosophers who do not consider death to be the final extinction of soulhood. It is true, death draws the veil on many of our earthly possessions; and even our bodies, which we prize most on this earth, are disintegrated in death. But soulhood or true personality endures and survives the onslaught of time and death and this happens to be a truism to the poet. Not by any careful logical analysis has he arrived at this conclusion but by sheer intuition the whole truth has been revealed to him. The materialists consider death to be the fullstop of the life-process and they argue according to the principles of induction, observation or experiment. But the spiritualists find out the futility of discursive understanding and consider intuition to be the only effective organ of knowledge. Rabindranath in his mystic moods may have realized this knowledge and to him, death is never an extinction. Death, for him, is never a negative principle but a positive one. Unlike a staunch materialist, he sees beyond death, the hazy outlines of a far off land that gradually becomes clearer and clearer to him. Eventually he finds in death only the gateway that leads man from life to fuller life.

All through his writings, we find copious references to the topics of death and immortality but everywhere he keeps true to that same intuition. Every time he has fought like a brave and zealous soldier against the enmity of pains and sufferings, for he well knows that



Day after day have I kept watch for thee;  
 for thee have I borne the joys and pangs of life.  
 All that I am, that I have, that I hope  
 and all my love have ever flowed towards thee  
 in depth of secrecy. One final glance from thine  
 eyes and my life will be ever thine own.  
 The flowers have been woven and the garland  
 is ready for the bridegroom. After the wedding the  
 bride shall leave her home and meet her lord  
 alone in the solitude of night.”<sup>3</sup>

The poet sees in death, the image of the Infinite and the Absolute. He cries out: “O death! to me you are my lord whom I adore.”<sup>4</sup> He prays: “When the trumpet of death sounds in the breast, when life mingles with death in a fine line, O my helmsman! Come and express to me the Dark that is unknown and infinite.”<sup>5</sup>

Death and life are bound together by a single chain. The same chain binds those that are alive and those that are dead. All, all of us are mere travellers and our final goal lies far off. Through many a life and death, have we to pass and we have already traversed countless lives and deaths. Referring to the death of his beloved wife, the poet says:

“Dying, you have left behind you the great sadness  
 of the Eternal in my life.

You have painted my thought's horizon with the  
 sunset colours of your departure, leaving a track  
 of tears across the earth to love's heaven.

Clasped in your dear arms, life and death united  
 in me in a marriage bond.

3. *Īng. Gitanjali*, 91.

४. “मरण रे तूँहूँ मम श्याम समान ।”  
*Thākurer Padāvālī.*

(*Bhānusingha*)

5. See the poem, Karnadhār in *Sāndī*,

I think I can see you watching there in the balcony  
 with your lamp lighted,  
 Where the end and the beginning of all things  
 meet.

My world went hence through the doors that you  
 opened—You holding the cup of death to my  
 lips, filling it with life from your own.”<sup>6</sup>

In a poem entitled *Mrityur pare* in *Chitrā*, the poet likens life and death to wakefulness and sleep. As sleep does not break the identity of the sleeping person, so death cannot extinguish the life-force. As wakefulness and sleep are immaterial to the maintenance of self-identity, so life and death are mere phases of the manifestation of the same life-force which is immortal and endless. In another poem in *Utsarga* the poet likens life and death to the two-fold movement of a swing.<sup>7</sup>

As the bud blossoms into the flower and the flower matures into the fruit, so life ripens into death. The poet sings in the *Gītāñjali*: “O death, my dear death! speak to me. Thou art the fruition of my life, its only fulfilment.”<sup>8</sup> The poet always regards death as the bridge to immortality.<sup>9</sup>

6. *Lover's Gift and Crossing*. *Lover's Gift*, 43.

7. See *Marandolā* in *Utsarga*.

८. “ ओगो आमार एइ जीवनेर शेष परिपूर्णता

मरण, आमार मरण, तुमि कओ आमारे कथा—”

9. Western writers have written in the same vein.

Our life is a succession of deaths and resurrections :

We die, Christopher, to be born again.

—Romain Rolland, *John Christopher*.

Earth knows no desolation

She smells regeneration

In the moist breath of decay.

—Meredith.

Death is the crown of life.<sup>10</sup> Whatever values could not be reaped during the present earthly duration, are not altogether lost. They find their realization in the lives to come. Here is the poet's bold assurance.

"I know that this life, missing its ripeness in love,  
is not altogether lost.

I know that the flowers that fade in the dawn, the  
streams that strayed in the desert, are not altogether lost.

I know that my dreams that are still unfulfilled, and  
my melodies still unstruck, are clinging to some  
lute-strings of thine, and they are not altogether lost."<sup>11</sup>

The poet considers death as the force of mobility. Because of death things around us move on, grow and decay. Had there been no death, everything would have remained in the same static and untransformed form. The universe consequently would become narrowed, obstructed and hardened. It would have been difficult for living beings to bear the burden of eternal stagnation. Death has lightened the tremendous pressure of this bare identity and granted to the universe a wide scope to move on. It is true, the ultimate Reality, for the poet, is the changeless One but His manifestations are all in time. We have seen how he has championed the

10. Keats says, Death is life's high need.

See Sonnets of Keats—Why did I laugh to-night?

11. *Lover's Gift and Crossing, Crossing*, No. 18.

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There is no Death! What seems so is transition;  
The life of mortal breath  
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,  
Whose portal we call death.

---Longfellow, *Resignation*.

cause of dynamic manifestations of Reality.<sup>12</sup> The supreme Reality is all perfect and by virtue of His perfection gives rise to changes that occur within Him. These phenomenal changes again do not in any way disturb the perfectness of the noumenon. In his lyrics, the poet has admirably expressed his ideas about the dynamic life-force. Even a picture of a dead person is not static and dead to him. In it, he finds the onward march of the life-force through the gateway of death. Here is the poem, *Chhabi*.

“Are you a mere picture, and not as true as  
those stars, true as this dust?  
They throb with the pulse of things,  
but you are immensely aloof in your  
stillness, painted form.

The day was when you walked with me,  
Your breath warm, your limbs singing of life.  
My world found its speech in your voice,  
and touched my heart with your face.  
You suddenly stopped in your walk, in the  
shadow-side of the Forever, and I went on alone.

Life like a child, laughs, shaking its rattle  
of death as it runs; it beckons me on, I  
follow the unseen; but you stand there,  
where you stopped behind that dust and those stars;  
and you are a mere picture.

No, it cannot be. Had the life-blood utterly stopped  
in you, it would stop the river in its flow, and  
the foot-fall of dawn in her cadence of colours.  
Had the glimmering dusk of your hair vanished

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12. Chapter II.

in the hopeless dark, the woodland shade of summer  
would die with its dreams....."13

In the second volume of *Śāntiniketan* the poet writes, death is beautiful and sweet and it has made life so easy. Life is like a miser, holding everything under the grip. It is death which has sweetened this ignoble and miserly attitude of life.<sup>14</sup>

The drama *Phalguni*<sup>15</sup> embodies the ideas of the poet on death and oldness in an admirable way. The young, the green, chases the old, the grey. But where is the old? The old, when caught, becomes new again, green again. Oldness and decay are only illusions, phantasmagorias on a gigantic scale. The underlying principle of the cosmos is an eternal newness, a freshness that moves on and knows no stoppage. It is a movement which gathers up the past, present and future in itself but restricts itself to none. Where is the end? That which we call the end is every time the beginning. Addressing Sardar who is at once the old and the new, Chandrahāsa, a character in the drama, says:—"How strange it is! Every time you are the first and at every turn, you are the beginning."<sup>†</sup>

In the above drama the poet has emphasized the truth that if you try to arrest death, you miss it and get only life. But if you try to welcome death, you have it as the fulfilment of life itself. You fear death because you consider it to be an alien factor. The moment you face it with respect, you find it to be a gateway leading you to fuller and fuller life.

13. *Lover's Gift and Crossings, Lover's Gift*, 42.

14. *Śāntiniketan*, Vol. II, pp. 324-5.

15. It has been translated as "Cycle of Spring."

He who has clung to life, has not achieved life and this is why he experiences perennial fear. To enjoy life is to enjoy it in and through the sense of death. This is the keynote of *Phālgunī*.

In an unpublished letter the poet writes: "Every-time life has to be made new through death because life is immortal. On this earth, old age is the back and youth the front and this is why we see youth everywhere. . . . . We die because we have to appreciate life anew."<sup>16</sup>†

Finally comes the crowning remark of the poet. Death is the guest of honour and what presents shall we offer when he comes? The poet says,

"On the day when death will knock at  
thy door what wilt thou offer to him?  
Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel  
of my life—I will never let him go with empty  
hands.

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn  
days and summer nights, all the earnings and  
gleanings  
of my busy life will I place before him at the close  
of my days when death will knock at my door."<sup>17</sup>

Why do people have a phobia for death? We fear death because our field of vision is limited and narrow. We believe death to be the final extinction of life. It is true, the body ends in the present, it has a short duration. But a mobile incompleteness permeates life

16. Quoted by S. N. Das Gupta in *Rabi Dipitā*, p. 30.  
(The letter is in Bengali).

17. Eng. *Gitanjali*, 90.

and goads it to the great possibilities of the greater future.<sup>18</sup>

We fear because we cling to the old. Our old possessions, our homes, families, societies bind us in an endless illusory infatuation. We are deaf to the call of the new because the old always occupies our minds. We forget the Infinite and trust in our limited resources and the result is utter disappointment. Death will be endearing to us only if we think that the Infinite Being is the only old who is enduring through the new. Let us once more rely on the Absolute and believe that He shall guide us and familiarize us with newer and newer abodes. At once we shall find, death is no death to us.

In the *Gitanjali*—

“Thou hast made me known to friends  
whom I knew not. Thou hast given me  
seats in homes not my own. Thou hast  
brought the distant near and made a brother  
of the stranger.

I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave  
my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides  
the old in the new, and that there also thou abidest.  
Through birth and death, in this world, or in others,  
wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same,  
the one companion of my endless life who ever  
linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.

When one knows thee, then alien there is none,  
then no door is shut. Oh, grant me my prayer

<sup>18</sup>. See *Pañchabhūta* (Manusya).

that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one

in the play of the many.”<sup>19</sup>

Death is so dreadful and hideous to us because we have lost our hold in the Infinite. The poet sings:

“When I move on with my life and mind in your infinity, I find no death, no separation. Death assumes the form of death and sorrow becomes intolerable only when I separate myself from you and concentrate myself in me.”<sup>20†</sup>

Let us now pass on to the poet's conception of immortality. The poet has loved this earth, enjoyed it fully. He has drunk its beauty to the very depth. His senses have sucked all the juice that nature has offered unto them. And he says:

“I have had my invitation to this world's festival,  
and thus my life has been blessed. My eyes have  
seen and my ears have heard.

It was my part at this feast to play upon my  
instrument, and I have done all I could.....”<sup>21</sup>

19. Eng. *Gitanjali*, 63.

20. See *Gitanjali*, Vol. 1, p. 231 (2nd Ed.).

“Far as I gaze at the depth of Thy immensity

I find no trace there of sorrow or death or separation.

Death assumes its aspect of terror and sorrow its pain

Only when, away from Thee,

I turn my face towards my own dark self.”

See *Poems*, p. 31 (Posthumously published)

“ मृत्यु से घरे मृत्युर रूप

दुःख हय हे दुःखेर कूप

तोमा हते जेव हइ जे विमुख

आपनार पाने चाइ । ”

21. Eng. *Gitanjali*, 16.



In the *Crossing*,—

“Thou hast given me thy seat at thy window  
from the early hour.

I have spoken to thy silent servants of the road  
running on thy errands,

and have sung with thy choir of the sky.

I have seen the sea in calm bearing its immeasurable  
silence, and in storm struggling to break open its  
own mystery of depth.

I have watched the earth in its prodigal feast of  
youth and in its slow hours of brooding shadows.

Those who went to sow seeds have heard my greet-  
ings, and those who brought their harvest home  
or their empty baskets have passed by my songs.

Thus at last my day has ended and now in the  
evening I sing my last song to say that I have  
loved thy world.”<sup>22</sup>

Again the poet loves death. He does not fear death  
for he believes that death will be as dear to him as life.

“I was not aware of the moment when I first crossed  
the threshold of this life.

What was the power that made me open out into  
this vast mystery like a bud in the forest at mid-  
night!

When in the morning I looked upon the light I felt  
in a moment that I was no stranger in this world,  
and the inscrutable without name and form had  
taken me in its arms in the form of my own mother.

Even so, in death the same unknown will appear as  
ever known to me. And because I love this life,  
I know I shall love death as well.

22. *Lover's Gift and Crossing, Crossing*, 73.

The child cries out when from the right breast  
 the mother takes it away,  
 in the very next moment to find in the left one its  
 consolation."<sup>23</sup>

He likes to live the gay life of this world and also he likes to leave this world for the next one. How can these two contradictory wishes of the poet be reconciled? The poet attempts at a reconciliation. The finite being cannot have his renewal unless he passes through death. At every turn, the finite has to die, every time his form is to be set free by death. If he stops at a place, his elasticity also comes to nothingness. The finite has a great mission to fulfil, he has to express the infinity that is latent in him. If death were the final end, how could the finite expect to fulfil his duty? The same *ānandam* (bliss) which makes this life enjoyable also makes the next one covetable. Death is only the passage through which we pass from *ānandam* to *ānandam*.

This continuity of lives need not be the continuity of the thread of memory. The uniformity of the flow may go on uninterrupted even in spite of many an oblivion. In this world, unity of consciousness has formed the personality of every individual but at death the unity shall be broken. But the form of the pure life-force shall continue and have different organization in the life to come. This is the order of existence. Even form has two sides, one of them is expressed while the other is hidden. That which is hidden must be manifested by the hurting of a powerful force and death is the necessary force.

In *Pañchabhūta*, Rabindranath has made an analysis of the concepts of death and immortality and here we

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23. Eng. *Gitanjali*, 95.

hear Vyoma saying—The only thing that is valuable in the universe is death and hence we establish our eternal hopes and desires in death. Safely to death do we surrender our dearest things whose destruction we can never dream of. Justice may not be administered on this earth but we crave after it in life beyond. Dead matter around us disproves our infinity and immortality but surely we know, this is only an appearance. Matter ends where death begins and in the new realm our happiest, holiest and dearest thoughts are always fulfilled.<sup>24</sup>

Thus we see, Rabindranath finds in death the vista of a new life which is nobler, sweeter and happier than the present one. But the question arises, is the next life final? Are we to believe that through the portals of death, we come to a new universe where justice is administered, desires fulfilled and ends realized? Does the poet believe in Rāmānuja's heaven of all joys? Here is Rāmānuja's conception: ". . . Moksha is conceived as freedom from mundane existence. But over and above this is the idea here of reaching a supra-mundane sphere and there enjoying in the presence of God the highest bliss. The imperfect Prākṛtic body of the Jīva is then replaced by a perfect one, so that release does not mean here a disembodied state as it does in many other doctrines. It is this ideal world—'the Highlands of the blest'—that is constituted out of Śuddha-sattva. Picturesque descriptions are given of the place. There God is seated on his white throne and is served by his consort Lakṣmī—interceding on behalf of man—and by all the souls of the nitya and mukta variety. It is a place of absolute peace and perfection, and the joy of all there

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24. See *Pañchabhāṣita*, p. 222 ff.

lies in following the will of the Supreme. When a bound soul is liberated, it is led to this region and welcomed by all there, it is at last received by God as his very own."<sup>25</sup> But our poet seems to reject such a conception of a ready-made heaven. His heaven is not there but here, not in a supra-mundane realm but in the din and bustle of the earthly region. He writes: "Nowhere has He kept heaven. He has asked men to build heaven, to transform this earth into a perfect heaven."<sup>26</sup>†

In *Lover's Gift and Crossing*—

"Where is heaven? You ask me, my child,—  
the sages tell us it is beyond the limits of birth  
and death, unswayed by the rhythm of day and night;  
it is not of this earth.

But your poet knows that its eternal hunger  
is for time and space, and it strives evermore  
to be born in the fruitful dust.

Heaven is fulfilled in your sweet body,  
my child, in your palpitating heart.

The sea is beating its drums in joy,  
the flowers are a-tiptoe to kiss you.

For Heaven is born in you, in the arms of the mother-  
dust."<sup>27</sup>

How to reconcile the assertions of Vyauma with the poet's ideas of heaven? There is no denying the fact that the assertions of Vyauma in *Pañchabhūta*, which we have quoted, form some of the ingredients of the poet's synthetic mind but the assertions by themselves do not reveal the real philosophy of the poet. They are only particular ingredients which along with others make up

25. M. Hiriyama, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, p. 412.

26. *Śāntiniketan*, vol. II, p. 527

27. *Lover's Gift and Crossing*, pp. 46-7.

beings can attain more and more perfection but in case they attain complete perfection, they become the Infinite Being. As a true Vedāntin of the Śaṅkara school, the poet could have granted full perfection to the finites, for according to Śaṅkara-Vedānta, the finites in full perfection, becomes the Infinite. This is Śaṅkara's conception of eternal life. But eternal life is to be differentiated from mere survival. Śaṅkara is serious on the point. Until eternal life is gained our lives are bound up with the wheel of endless becoming. (Saṁsāra). Survival comes to the lot of all finite souls who are guaranteed future existence in the endless circuit. But true immortality or oneness with the Absolute comes to the lot of those souls who have attained the truth by means of spiritual insight.

But we have seen, the Vaiṣṇava mode of thinking has always compelled the poet to maintain a barrier of distinctness between the finite and the Infinite. If the barrier be removed, the finite and the Infinite become one in perfect union and hence the love-drama comes to an end. In order that the eternal love-drama may go on uninterrupted, the lover and the beloved must maintain their individual distinctness.

This must not lead us to suppose that Rabindranath believes in anything like dualism. He is a champion of monism but the One Reality has imposed on Him a duality for His own manifestation. His manifestation is in love and love is incomplete if there be no duality. The Supreme Reality or Jivan-Devatā has the supreme need of finite beings and consequently in every new life the finite being continues to take part in the Divine love-drama. But through every death the finite is becoming more and more perfect and hence the destiny of the finite

individual is only perfectivity. The aim of human existence lies in the process of perfection and not in perfection itself.

Jivan-Devatā requires the imperfect finites to love and receive from them love in return. As to the nature of Jivan-Devatā the poet writes in *Banga Bhāṣār Lekhak*: "I have experienced the advent of Jivan-Devatā in my life. He has been directing me from port to port along the flowing river of eternal time. He has been guiding me from the past to the future. And he has been propelling my life's boat by the wind of his eternal love."<sup>30</sup>

Again he writes: "Jivan-Devatā connects my present life with the endless lives to come. He is the supreme Energy who has been unifying the multifarious events of my life into a synthetic whole and weaving the various transformations of my life through countless deaths into a single garland."<sup>31</sup>

In the *Gitanjali*—

"Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life."<sup>32</sup>

Rabindranath's idea of immortality is not the endless continuation of the present life with its huge paraphernalia. It is the continuation of the pure life-force through endless deaths. The present life with its surroundings need not be immortalized but the life by itself must be saved. The present environments, societies, bodies—all will end in death but the pure life-force will continue on. This life-force knows no deaths; on the other hand every death makes it fuller and fuller.

30. See *Banga Bhāṣār Lekhak*, vol. 1.

31. See *Rabindra Jivani*, vol. I, p. 301.

32. Eng. *Gitanjali*, 1.

But the question crops up, what does he mean by the pure life-force? It is surely not an abstraction, for our poet never favours thoughts as divorced from the concrete. This life-force must have a form and matter. There are some who say that the matter of an individual is to be immortalized, and the form left behind. In other words, they opine that immortality is the conservation of values and persons in whom values emerge are to be discarded. In the West, Bradley and Bosanquet are very eager to save the 'what' of an individual and actuated by this impulse, they have sacrificed the persons at the altar of the Absolute. They are eager to save only the value at the cost of the persons. Immortality, for them, is only the conservation of values in the Absolute. Here is Bosanquet: "In general, we know that what we care for, is safe through its continuity with the Eternal. In this assurance there is comprised, in principle, all that we long for in the desire for our own survival."<sup>33</sup> Like Bosanquet, Bradley too adopts a disparaging tone towards the finite individuals as persons. The finite individuals are transmuted in the Absolute and this is their final destiny. According to Bradley, separate existence of the finite beings is a defect. "The plurality of souls in the Absolute", says he, "is appearance and their existence is not genuine."<sup>34</sup> Taken together in the whole, appearances as such cease. Then comes his crowning remark: "In the Absolute the individual attains the complete gift and dissipation of his personality" in which "he as such, must vanish."<sup>35</sup>

Does our poet believe in the conservation of values?

33. *Value and Destiny of the finite individual*, p. 261.

34. *Appearance and Reality*, p. 270. (1930).

35. *Ibid.*, p. 419 (passim) (1916).

In his celebrated poem *Sonār Tarī*<sup>36</sup> the poet pleads for the immortality of values. Man is born on this earth and through pleasure and pain, he moves on. As he moves on, he culls values—truth, beauty and goodness. These values fasten him to the ‘ego’ of life and lead him to an inveterate infatuation. He tries to save his own person and with it values, his life’s earnings. One day the Deity of death comes in his boat and the man, the person, tries to get into it. But the helmsman loads the boat with his values and asks: “Have you anything more to offer?” The man replies: “I have given my all and now I pray, take me in.” But there is no room left in the boat and the helmsman quietly steers. His values are conserved in the Absolute and he is left behind. He, the person of name and form, is left on the bank while his values are all taken.<sup>37</sup>

But this does not reveal the real thesis of the poet, for his Absolute cannot remain satisfied only with the

३६. “ ठाँइ नाइ ठाँइ नाइ छोट से तरी  
आमारि सोनार धाने गियेछे भरि  
जादा छिल निये गेल सोनार तरा । ”

सोनार तरी

“The rain fell fast. The river rushed and hissed. It licked up and swallowed the island, while I waited alone on the lessening bank with my sheaves of corn in a heap.

From the shadows of the opposite shore the boat crosses with a woman at the helm.

I cry to her, “Come to my island coiled round with hungry water, and take away my year’s harvest.”

She comes, and takes all that I have to the last grain: I ask her to take me.

But she says, “No”—The boat is laden with my gift and no room is left for me.”

*The Fugitive*, 17.

37. See *Rabindra-Rachanāvalī*, Vol. III. (Granthaparichaya, *Sonār Tarī*.)



values. He requires persons to enact the love-drama, for He is the eternal lover. So, through every death, the person and the values are to be saved and immortalized. But what is this person? Rabindranath never pleads for the immortality of the egoistic person who is confined within narrowness and limitations. He always pleads for the unbroken continuity of a person who is above egoism and narrowness.

Our result so far is this. By immortality Rabindranath means the immortality of persons with values. His life-force is not merely the 'that' or the 'what' but both the 'that' and the 'what'. But by person he never means the person of the present life with his idiosyncrasies and short-comings, egoism and selfishness. It is not the material or social 'me' for whose survival he pleads. It is not our lower nature but the higher nature which constitutes our true personality and the poet is sure about its continuum. He believes, this higher nature of man shall become still higher and higher through every portal of death.

## CHAPTER V

### ON RELIGION

Rabindranath's religious ideas cannot be fully understood unless seen through the vista of an evolution. He begins his life as a Brāhma, passes through a synthetic religion and ultimately stops at the "Religion of Man." To trace the history of this development is an interesting theme which helps one to understand the many-sided personality of the poet. It is almost romantic to learn how the Tagores were once Hindus and one day some of them became Brāhmas. In Bengal it is the Tagores who have experimented with many a religion and culture. Before we give a brief account of Brāhmaism, we shall try to trace its first advent.

Raja Rammohan Roy founded the Brāhma Samāj in 1828 and its first *Mandir* was established in 1830.<sup>1</sup> Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, the grandfather of the poet was an orthodox Hindu but he patronized the new religion of the Brāhmas. The Poet's father, Devendranath was born amidst Hindu surroundings and as he grew up, began to read western philosophers, especially David Hume. Suddenly a religious revolution siezed his mind and he began to disbelieve in idolatry. The Upaniṣads and the teachings of Rammohan fanned the flame and in 1839, Devendranath founded a society known as Tatvaranjanī which later on turned into Tattvabodhinī Sabhā. In 1842, Tattvabodhinī Sabhā began to function as the only organization of the Brāhma Samāj. On the 21st December of the aus-

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1. See *Rabindra-Jīvanī*, vol. I, p. 11 ff.

picious year 1843, Devendranath swore a solemn oath to be a staunch follower of Brāhmaism.<sup>2</sup> Under his leadership, Brāhmaism spread rapidly and *Mandirs* were established here and there. Devendranath's religious school is known in India as Ādi Brāhma Samāj. His eldest son Dwijendranath was an orthodox Brāhma who wrote several essays on Brāhmaism and conducted the religious organ, *Tattvabodhini Patrikā*, for several years. Rabindranath was born in the year 1861 and grew up in a Brāhma environment. Needless to say, the boy Rabindranath grew into the man Rabindranath as a Brāhma.

What is Brāhmaism? This new religion rests on four cardinal truths: (1) In the beginning there was only one Brahman and none else. He created all that we see around us.

(2) He is infinite, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, non-dual, independent and perfect. He is knowledge, goodness and bliss and He cannot be compared to anything else.

(3) Good in this life and hereafter can be achieved only by prayer to Him.

(4) The prayer consists in doing such actions as can please Him.<sup>3</sup>

2. 7th Paus, 1250, B.E.

३. १। ७० ब्रह्म वा एकमिदमग्र आसीत् नान्यत् किञ्चनार्थः। तदिदं सर्वमसृजत्।

२। तदेव नित्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं शिवं स्वतन्त्रं निरवयवंमकेमवार्द्रतायं सर्व-  
व्यापिसर्वनियन्तु सर्वश्रयं सर्ववित् सर्वशक्तिमद् ध्रुवं पूर्णमप्रति-  
ममिति।

३। ऐकस्य तस्यैवोपासनया पात्रिकर्महिकश्च शुभं भवति।

४। तस्मिन् प्रीतिस्तस्य प्रियकार्यसाधनञ्च तदुपासनमेव।

Rabindranath says, Brāhmaism is not a codified metaphysics, as some have supposed it to be. It is not philosophy but religion in its fullest bearings. It is religion because it has always sprung from the life-springs of the devotees. Brāhmaism is not a stagnant lake, it is a flowing, passing river. Philosophies are merely intellectual but religions are suffused with the waters of the sentiment. Had Brāhmaism been only a philosophy, its scope could have been ascertained. But as it is a growing, flowing river, any attempt to determine its limit is bound to end in failure. What then, is the principal mark of Brāhmaism? It can be succinctly put as the hunger for the Great. This hunger has been the principal impulse in the minds of all its religious leaders, beginning from Raja Rammohan Roy to Keshab Chandra Sen. The entire history of Brāhmaism has been a continuous search for the One Principle that can satisfy this hunger.<sup>4</sup> The end of Brāhma religion is the realization of the supreme Reality who is Ānandam (bliss). Satyam (truth) and Śivam (good). He is the eternal Rasa and we know Him as such through the bliss of the devotee.<sup>5</sup>

In 1884, Rabindranath became the secretary of Ādi Brāhma Samāj. During this time it was the high target of adverse Hindu criticisms. Hindus began to cry down the new Brāhma religion and the worship of the one Upaniṣadic Brahman was never welcome to them. As a reaction to this religion, a band of Hindu educated men was formed and they called themselves atheists or positivists. One Mr. Śaśadhar Tarkacūḍāmaṇi invented a new religion called scientific Hindu religion. Two organs named *Navajīvan* and *Prachār* made their appearance and

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4. See the article on Dharmasikṣā in *Saṅchaya*.

5. Vide article on Navayug in *Saṅchaya*.

systematically voiced their protest against Brāhmaism. In these papers, Bankimchandra, the famous Bengali novelist, used to write articles supporting Hinduism.

Brāhma Rabindranath took up the challenge of the Hindus and replied to the articles of Bankimchandra. In an article, published in *Bhāratī*, (*Bhāratī*, 1291, Agra-hāyaṇa) Rabindranath vehemently criticises the position of Bankim and accuses him of killing the very life of religion. Bankim replies back and on goes the wordy duel between the two leaders. It is, however, gratifying to learn that in the long run the two savants forgive each other and amity is established between them. As the secretary of the Samāj, Rabindranath published an article on Rammohan Roy,<sup>6</sup> in which he exposted the true ideals of Brāhmaism. He says, Brāhmaism is the religion of the entire world. It is the best fruit that a particular race has achieved after strenuous sādhanā and it is the duty of that race to offer it to the universe for its welfare. As a staunch Brāhma the poet composed several hymns to be sung in the *Mandirs* during Divine service. They are known as Brāhma Saṅgit and they form an important part of the poet's entire musical compositions.

As a Brāhma, Rabindranath fought against the practice of idolatry in Hinduism. In *Saṅchaya* the poet writes:<sup>7</sup> "When we use our religion, we often defile it by our own pettiness. We talk big of the universality of religion but in practice, we narrow it down to the scope of our own sects. Like other material possessions, religion also becomes the target of our vanity and sectarianism. We set religion against religion and in a spirit of

6. See *Bhāratī*, 1291, Māgh.

7. See the article on Dharmer Navayug.

ugly competition make them run a race in order to determine the winner. We forget that these are due to the inherent vices of our own nature and shamelessly enough, we attribute them to the religions themselves.

We find in history many instances of a group of persons thinking of themselves as the chosen people of God, and setting an insurmountable barrier between their religion and other religions. Fortunately, this sense of separateness is fast coming to an end. Science has been teaching the grand truth that separateness and distinctness of things are illusions. Every item is linked up with every other and this inner relatedness forms the very core of reality. Today we are feeling the necessity of a religion that is not circumscribed to a particular sect of a particular time. Today we need a religion which is not sunk in the labyrinth of outward ceremonies, but a religion which is as wide as the skies."†

In Bengal, it was Raja Rammohan Roy who for the first time thought of the unity of men and harmony of religions. He was born in an atmosphere of idolatry but an inner compulsion made him deny the religion of his birth. He could rise against age-long superstition because he was born with the heart of the universal man. Idolatry is the worship of particular gods in particular settings. An idolater considers his God, religion and ceremonies as essentially separate from those of others. He selfishly considers his religion to be his goal. On no account can others enter into the arena of his religion. It is, for him, private, sacred and personal. An idolater always narrows himself and his God. To him, persons of other religions are untouchables and what is in reality universal is made by him restricted and particular. But Rammohan discovered that truth cannot be a particular

event. It is not individual or racial, it is universal. The Deity who is not the Deity of all is a false god and reliance on such a one ends in nothingness.

Rabindranath believes that worship of idols is thoroughly unnatural. In an article entitled *Sākār O Nirākār*, he adduces reasons to justify this remark of his.<sup>8</sup> If we create images to stir our imagination and concentrate all our attention on them, we find to our utter disappointment, that later on the images have become not means but ends in themselves. Idols are to be taken as means but once we enter into idol-worship, we are hypnotized into it, we cannot come out of it. Again, idols are to actuate our imagination but the Infinite is never an object of imagination. The Infinite is capable of a direct, real comprehension. Why should we take the pains of knowing the Infinite through an unnatural medium like imagination?

The taboos and prohibitions of Hinduism are repugnant to the poet. In an essay entitled *Dharmer Adhikār*<sup>9</sup> he says: "There are two sides of a man's power. One is his 'can' and the other is his 'should'. The man can do certain actions, this is the easy side of his power. But he should do certain actions, this constitutes the utmost exercise of his power. Religion stands on the high precipice of the 'should' and as such, always draws the 'can' towards it. When our 'can' is completely assimilated by our 'should', we attain the most desired object of our life, we attain truth. But those impotent people who cannot act up to this ideal of religion, try to pull it down to their own level. Thus taboos and prohibitions arise."†

In Hinduism, there is a belief that sins can be wash-

8. See *Bhārati*, 1292, Śrāvan.

9. Vide *Saṁchaya*.

ed away by ablutions in sacred waters. Most Hindu widows are denied food and drink on certain days of the month. No obvious reasons can be attributed to these actions but people observing these rules console themselves by referring to taboos and prohibitions. Untouchability the worst product of bigotry is the greatest social evil. In this connexion the poet refers to two of his own experiences. Once a boy of the depressed community stepped on the threshold of a so-called orthodox kitchen and at once the cooked food was thrown away. But no harm ensued when dogs crossed the same threshold. On another occasion a poor diseased traveller was found in a dying state by the road-side. Thousands and thousands of pilgrims passed by that road to wash their sins by a dip in some river but none cared to enquire about the helpless condition of the dying man. Most of them argued--Who knows to what caste he belongs? He may be an untouchable. In these instances we find how low-minded people have dragged religion to this mean level. This is the death of religion.

So far, we have found how vehemently Rabindranath has protested against orthodox Hinduism. We have seen him as a vigorous champion of Brāhmaism. But from now we shall find in him a new change. He is no longer the fighter against Hinduism. He is ever eager to cull the best fruits of this orthodox religion. It is true, he favours Brāhmaism but he is ready to incorporate into it the best spirit of Hinduism. What he now champions is a religion which is the synthetic product of the best of Hinduism and the best of Brāhmaism. Now he believes in such Brāhmaism as is soaked in Hinduism.<sup>10</sup>

In his fiftieth year, the problem arose in the coun-

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10. See *Rabindra-Jivani*, vol. 1, p. 405.



try: are the Brāhmas Hindus? Not all the leaders of the Brāhma Samāj could be unanimous in their answer to this query. Some were not willing to call Brāhmaism a species of Hinduism and their plea was that a Christian or a Musulman when converted to Brāhmaism would refuse to call himself a Hindu. But the poet opined that Brāhmas were Hindus and supporting this view, read a paper in the Sādhāraṇ Brāhma Samāj Mandir under the caption, Ātmaparichaya. The poet says: "Brāhmaism has received its spiritual inspiration from Hinduism, it stands on the broad basis of Hindu culture. Brāhmaism has a universal outlook but it is always the religion of the Hindus. We have thought and assimilated it by the help of the Hindu mind. Today Hinduism must needs open the sacred, secret truth of its own heart. It must preach the gospel of universalism to the entire universe. Today in and through the salvation of Brāhmaism, Hinduism has been fulfilling its own mission."<sup>11</sup>†

It is clear that what he now believed was neither Hinduism nor Brāhmaism but the synthetic product of the two. He did not totally discard the old orthodox religion nor did he accept the new Brāhma religion with enough of zeal. He was now eager to build a synthesis between the two religious systems.

In the drama *Achalāyatan*, the poet preaches the gospel of the synthesis of the old and the new. Everything in the universe moves on. That which is seemingly stagnant is sure to acquire the force of mobility. Indian religious systems have been so conservative in outlook that they have become almost motionless and dead. Hinduism may be compared to a huge changeless man-

11. The article Ātmaparichaya appeared in *Tattvabodhinī* Patrkā. 1319. Vaisākh. Vide *Rabindra-Jivani*, vol. I, p. 500.

sion where imaginary fear of such deity as Ekjatā, taboos, prohibitions, śāstric injunctions and dogmatism of priests are creating havoc. All through its history, religious teachers have been trying to free it from these bondages.

The two brothers, Pañchaka and Mahāpañchaka are the two opposite characters of the drama. Mahāpañchaka is the champion of conservatism and orthodoxy while Pañchaka is out for a revolution and change. Mahāpañchaka takes pride in being a staunch follower of orthodox Hinduism while his brother relishes destroying the old form and replacing it by the new one. There comes the Guru and the tyranny of orthodoxy comes to an end. Motionless walls of the dead mansion tumble to pieces and free air blows everywhere. It seems, Pañchaka has won but the poet has not denied the sincere values of orthodoxy. He has never denied the good spirit that lies in the old school. What is noble in the old school is always welcome to the poet. He is at once the synthesis of Pañchaka and Mahāpañchaka, the new and the old.

Belief in the synthetic religion too happens to be only a temporary attitude of the poet's mind. Now he rises above Hinduism, Brāhmaism or the synthetic religion. His mind is now caught by the "Religion of man." Through diverse poems, essays, and dramas he has been hinting at this new religion but a theory is finally woven only in his famous Hibbert Lectures. In such dramas as *Prakritir Pratiśodha* or *Mālinī* we get early glimpses of the "Religion of man." In the essay entitled *Dharmapracār* the poet gives us a clear idea of it. He writes: "Brahman or the ultimate Reality can be perceived only through human personality. We can know Him and please Him only in and through this medium. In this world our actions amidst human sur-

roundings are the best prayers to the Almighty. We care for human personality and human personality is the Divine Personality."<sup>12†</sup>

The idea of the humanity of God or the divinity of man is the kernel of the "Religion of man." Man is never an insignificant creation. For the poet, man is the representative of God or universal Spirit and this is why it has been possible for man to realize in his spirit a union with Him. In a poem entitled *Vaiṣṇava Kavita* in *Sonār Tari* the poet refers to the same idea. The God in man is the man in God. Life achieves the bliss of fulness when the two come in perfect union with each other. The poet says: "Whatever I can offer to God, I offer to man and to God I give whatever I can give to man. I make God man and man God."<sup>13†</sup>

Rabindranath has never denied the world and man. Always he has emphatically admitted their existence and it is no wonder that his religion should be centred round man. Human personality is not a mean thing, its value is greatest since it can come in union with the Divine Personality. In a conversation with Einstein the poet said: "My religion is the reconciliation of the Superpersonal man, the universal human spirit, in my own individual being."<sup>14</sup>

There are enough possibilities in man, and his religion consists in expressing them fully. The higher self

12. See *Dharma*.

13. *Vaishnava Kavita*

“ देवतारे याहा दिते पारि, दिइ ताहा  
प्रियजने — प्रियजने याहा दिते पाइ  
ताइ दिइ देवतारे, आर पाबो कोथा ?  
देवतारे प्रिय करि प्रियेरे देवता ”

14. Vide Appendix II, *The Religion of Man*.

of man is to be realized and the lower self sublimated. Love is the best expression of the true self and all the virtues that emanate from love are to be welcomed. Kindness is undoubtedly the best virtue<sup>15</sup> and Ahimsa or non-violence brings manhood to Godhood. These good qualities are to be realized through effort and pain.

The poet's "Religion of man" has been amply expressed in the reading dramas, *Gāndhārīr Ābedan*, *Satī* and *Narakbās*.<sup>16</sup> Man has divided his own religion into several sub-sections such as Religion of man, religion of king, religion of society, religion of practice and so on. In *Gāndhārīr Ābedan*, Duryodhan takes pride in killing the "Religion of man" at the altar of the religion of king. But *Gāndhārī* is a worshipper of the true man and for her, religion is always the "Religion of man." Man the temporal is man the eternal and religion consists in this knowledge. Religion of king, society, or practice is an artificial arrangement but religion proper is formed on truth and as such, it is universal and eternal.

In *Satī*—*Amābāi*, the daughter of the orthodox Hindu, *Vināyak Rāo*, is betrothed to *Jīvāji*. On the marriage night she is kidnapped by a Mussalman. *Amā* marries the Mussalman and loves him most dearly. A son is born to them. But *Amā*'s parents deny the inconsistent marriage as it is against the social custom. *Vināyak Rāo* avenges the wrong by killing the Mussalman husband. He asks *Amābai* to forsake her son and come over to his side. But the spirited daughter prefers to remain as the widow of the dead Mussalman.

Here the poet amply describes the clash between the

15. Vide letter in *Chhinnapatra*. Patradhārā, p. 249.

16. See *The Fugitive*.

(a) *Ama* and *Vinayaka* (translation of *Satī*)

(b) *Somaka* and *Ritvik* (translation of *Narakbās*)

(c) The mother's prayer (translation of *Gāndhārīr Ābedan*)

"Religion of man" and the religion of society and makes the former superior to the latter. Love is the eternal "Religion of man" and prompted by it, Amābāi marries a Mussalman. But the social rules do not permit the marriage and her parents believe in the religion of society. But in the long run, love proves to be the strongest force and sustained by it, Amā remains true to herself. Thus "Religion of man" triumphs over religion of society.

In *Karṇa Kuntī Sambād*<sup>17</sup> we hear the same ring. When Karṇa is born, his mother Kuntī does not follow the "Religion of man." Untrue to her own religion, she forsakes the newly-born child and observes the rigid social rules. In later life, Karṇa turns a rebel and when Kuntī wants him back, she is disappointed. But Karṇa is true to his own religion, the "Religion of man." When the mother allures him to the prospect of a throne, he boldly rejects it. Here is the dialogue between the mother and the son:

*Kuntī*: "I did not come with the hope of winning you back to my arms, but with that of restoring your rights to you. Come and receive, as a king's son, your due among your brothers."

*Karṇa*: "I am more truly the son of a charioteer, and I do not covet the glory of greater parentage."

*Kuntī*: "Be that as it may, come and win back the kingdom, which is yours by right!"

*Karṇa*: Must you who once refused me a mother's love, tempt me with a kingdom? The quick bond of kindred which you severed at its root is dead, and can never grow again. Shame were mine should I hasten to

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17. See *The Fugitive*. Karṇa and Kuntī.

In Narakavāsa too the same truth has been preached. King Somaka, in order to follow the religion of the Kshatriyas, kills his own innocent son and expiates his sin by a stay in the hell.

call the mother of kings mother, and abandon my mother in the charioteer's house."

The establishment of such an institution as the Viśva-Bhārati shows how deeply the poet has been moved by the "Religion of man." In the Bengali year 1308 (A.D. 1901) Rabindranath with the permission of his father Maharshi Devendranath founded a small school known as Brahmacharyāśram at Śāntiniketan. At first, the school was a highly orthodox institution where Brahmins enjoyed their privileged rights. Sectarianism ruled there with an iron hand and racial differences were observed with strictness. But gradually the ideals of the institution have undergone a thorough change. Gradually walls of conservatism have fallen off and narrow bigoted vision has made room for universalism and love. Rabindranath dreamed of a liberal, natural and universal institution which was as wide as the skies. Ideas of founding the Viśva-Bhārati, a world institution, began to grow in his mind. The Poet's son Rathindranath writes in his diary (8th October, 1918): "Just before coming down (to Calcutta) while talking with me and Mr. Andrews, Father got excited over the idea of making the Bolpur institution a truly representative Indian education colony, where boys from all the provinces of India would come together to get an education and culture that is national and at the same time modern. The different colonies of boys would keep to their own peculiar customs and manners where they do not conflict with our national ideals, and they would thus get a training from their childhood to respect each other in spite of outward differences. Bolpur institution should not be sectarian or provincial."<sup>18</sup> In 1919,

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18. See *Rabindra-Jivani*, vol. II, p. 137.

Rabindranath wrote an article on the Message of the Forest where for the first time he explained his ideas of the Viśva-Bhārati. In the pamphlet named *The Centre of Indian Culture*, the poet expresses the ideals of the Viśva-Bhārati.<sup>19</sup> There he writes: "On each race is the duty laid, to keep alight its own lamp of mind, as its part in the illumination of the world. To break the lamp of any people, is to deprive it of its rightful place in the world-festival. He who has no light is unfortunate enough, but utterly miserable is he who, having it, has been deprived of it, or has forgotten all about it . . . . In education the most important factor must be the inspiring atmosphere of creative activity. And therefore the primary function of our university should be the constructive work of knowledge. Men should be brought together and full scope given to them for their work of intellectual exploration and creation; and the teaching should be like the overflow water of this spring of culture, spontaneous and inevitable. Education can only become natural and wholesome when it is the direct fruit of a living and growing knowledge. Our education should be in full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual; and our educational institutions should be in the very heart of our society, connected with it by the living bonds of varied co-operations. For true education is to realize at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings."

While concluding the pamphlet, the poet refers to the religion of the Viśva-Bhārati. He likes to make the Viśva-Bhārati 'a wide meeting place where all sects may gather together and forget their differences.' He relies

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19. Vide Viśva-Bharati Bulletin No. 2.

on India's pure culture of the past days. He says: "Our forefathers did spread a single pure white carpet, whereon all the world was cordially invited to take its seat in amity and good fellowship. No quarrel could have arisen there; for He, in whose name the invitation went forth, for all time to come, was Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam . . . . ." What a broad view of religion! The aim of the *Viśva-Bhāratī* is to study the total man and its religion is the "Religion of man." Here the personality of man is respected and held in high esteem. Its object is "to study the Mind of Man in its realization of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view."<sup>20</sup> The culture of the *Viśva-Bhāratī* is the culture of man and its keynote lies in the truth that human personality is not a mean trifle, it is also the Divine Personality.

So far about the evolution of religious ideas in Rabindranath. Let us now elucidate the ideas of the poet regarding the nature of a true religion and the attitude of the truly religious persons. The first question that assails us is: wherein lies the necessity of religion? The poet replies in an article under the caption *Dharmer Artha*.<sup>21</sup> "We eat to satisfy hunger, wear clothes to prevent the cold but why do we seek religion? No specific cause can be attributed to the pursuit of religion for it is at the root of all things. The primal urge is the urge of religion and this is why humanity can never deny it. Here and there a particular individual may deny religion in a debating mood but all mankind can never do so. There is religion in the diverse activities of man, in his needs, successes and failures. Lower creation has no religion and it does not require any. But man can never

20. Vide Memorandum of Association of the *Visva-Bharati*.

21. Vide *Saṅchaya*.



be without religion for religion forms his very nature. Just as the nature of fire is to burn, so man's nature is to seek and fulfil religion. The most supreme need of man is religion and one may deny it only for the sake of argument. This need is not the need of daily bread or clothes but it is deeper and hence more vital. It is the need of man's nature."†

"Religion", writes the poet, "has its genesis in man's desire to be released from the limitation of what is. The crudest magical rites, however weird or meaningless they may appear, have in some vague manner this freedom for their object. Man is the only creature who is a born rebel, never reconciled to the conditions of his existence. In the depth of his nature he carries an instinctive faith in the paradox that the completeness of reality consists in the endless contradiction of what *does* exist and what *should* exist. His literature and art find their inspiration in the ever-present suggestions that come from beyond the boundaries of his senses, and yet seem closer to him than the obvious."<sup>22</sup>

What is a true religion? It is like the morning light, immense and simple. It is God's gift of Himself and hence it is eternal and great. Religion surrounds us, permeates us and to get it, we have only to open our hearts. Religion is the highest ideal of simpleness but unfortunately men today have made it so complex. Innumerable dogmas, artificial ceremonies and taboos have made religion a highly complicated and twisted affair. Instead of following religion, men have today made religion follow them and the result is disastrous. Fanaticism flares up and consumes all directions. We can appropriate anything but religion according to our own needs.

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22. *Thoughts from Tagore*, p. 207.

Religion is as unbounded as the sky and to appropriate it according to needs is to set up artificial barriers inside its scope.<sup>23</sup>

Rabindranath never favours the idea of assigning a particular day of the week or a particular building for religious purposes. Religion, for him, is not an earmarked item, it is universal and as such, all days are auspicious for it and all places are good for it. Arbitrary assignment of space and time leads to an animosity between religious and non-religious practices. People forget, it is not the nature of religion to create differences. Religion is always a unifying force. The poet warns us not to make religion an affair of luxury. Amidst ceaseless enjoyment of the flesh, let us not make just a little room for religion. Such a religion is only an outward show, a mere apology.

Can religion be taught? The poet ruthlessly rejects all plans of teaching religion in the way in which other subjects are taught. "Religion is not a fractional thing that can be doled out in fixed weekly or daily measures as one among various subjects in the school syllabus. It is the truth of our complete being, the consciousness of our personal relationship with the Infinite; it is the true centre of gravity of our life. This we can attain during our childhood by daily living in a place where the truth of the spiritual world is not obscured by a crowd of necessities assuming artificial importance; where life is simple, surrounded by fulness of leisure, by ample space and pure air and profound peace of Nature; and where men live with a perfect faith in the eternal life before them."<sup>24</sup>

23. See in *Dharma* the article, Dharmer Saral Adarsa.

24. *Thoughts from Tagore*, p. 203.

As a truly religious man, the poet has always fought against sectarianism. It is, for him, a religious evil and accordingly it must be wiped out. He writes: "Sectarianism is a perverse form of worldliness in the disguise of religion; it breeds narrowness of heart in a greater measure than the cult of the world based upon material interest can ever do. For undisguised pursuit of self has its safety in its openness, like filth exposed to the sun and air. But the self-magnification with its consequent lessening of God that goes on unchecked under the cover of sectarianism loses its chance of salvation because it defiles the very source of purity."<sup>25</sup>

Last but not least is his protest against conservatism in religion. The attitude of the truly religious man is toleration. In the drama, *Tāser De*,<sup>26</sup> the poet has satirized the old and conservative school of thinking. Here all forms of changeless conservatism have been held up to ridicule. A prince leaves his own place and goes out in search of the new. With him goes the son of a merchant. One day they land in a place which is at once peculiar and funny and this is the land of cards. People there are bound by an inexorable routine, they live, move and have their being according to it. From time immemorial, an old-standing conservative religion has been ruling there. Values of individuals have once been assessed and labelled to their backs. Every order in the kingdom of cards has been going on with mathematical precision and certitude. But with the advent of the prince and his friend, the old order does not function properly. Card-men shiver and a rebellion starts.

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25. *Thoughts from Tagore*, p. 73.

26. *Tāser Des* has been translated as *Kingdom of Cards*. See *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. IV, part IV, Feb. 1939.

People of the kingdom of cards begin to disobey the routine, the mechanical social superstructure shakes and tumbles down. Card-men open their eyes and see the vast sunshine, open their ears and hear the sweet song of birds. Old dilapidated walls of conservatism are brought down and powdered. Once for all people are freed and saved. The poet believes that when the tyranny of conservatism reaches its maximum, a saviour comes and redeems the oppressed.

We shall now close the chapter by offering a few remarks on the poet's "Religion of Man." This Religion of Man can hardly be called religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has no scope for the element of worship which is a predominant feature of any religion. All religions provide for worship and even the Buddhists worship Lord Buddha and every Buddhist house contains a Buddha corner. Can it be suggested that the poet worships man? Such a supposition would be unwarranted.

Religion of Man consists in the reconciliation of the Universal Spirit with the individual. Taken in this sense it can hardly be distinguished from philosophy. Wherein lies the reconciliation? It lies in the knowledge of the true relation between the universal and the individual. Also it implies realization of the knowledge through love. In the succeeding chapter we shall have occasion to refer to the aspects of knowledge and realization in greater detail. But here, it will suffice to say that by introducing the knowledge element in religion, the poet has brought it within the area of philosophy. Again, the poet says that Religion of Man can be best fulfilled by developing the virtues of personality. The latent virtues of man are to be expressed and developed even at a high cost. Here again, we find that the poet is discarding the scope

of religion and entering into the province of ethics. His religion can now be called an ethical excellence. In short, Religion of Man has no clear-cut boundaries, sometimes it passes on into ethics and sometimes into philosophy.

## CHAPTER VI

### WAY TO SALVATION

The preceding chapters have told us the nature of the poet's Reality. The present chapter will be devoted to the consideration of two debatable questions—how to know Reality and how to realize it? The topics of knowledge and realization of reality form the most important part of a philosopher's views and therefore, an elucidation of them is highly necessary for a correct understanding of the philosopher. Mere knowledge of reality and realization of the knowledge are two different affairs and hence, they should be distinguished from each other. Mere knowledge of a thing may be possible but realization of that knowledge is an extremely difficult task. Since the very dawn of human speculation, philosophers have been solving the problems of knowledge and realization. Do we know the reality by intellect or intuition?—this has been the principal query all through the ages. In the History of Philosophy there was a period when people believed that the real could be known fully and thoroughly by the discursive understanding. But today the old order is no more in existence. The reaction from intellectualism is the predominant feature of contemporary philosophy. What is intellectualism? To quote the words of Aliotta, it is "an epistemological system which assigns an autonomous value to the cognitive function." Bergson rejects intellectualism, for its defects are very glaring. "Intellectualism reduces nature and the mind to an inert

skeleton..... It sees nothing in things beyond the aspect of repetition; the irreducible and irreversible element in the successive movements of cosmic evolution eludes it. Mechanical explanations hold good of the systems which our thought has artificially severed from the continuous flux of the universe; but it cannot be admitted *a-priori* that the universe in its totality together with the systems which naturally are found in its image is capable of a mechanical explanation, since in that case time would be useless and devoid of all reality."<sup>1</sup>

Śamkara is of opinion that intuition and intuition alone can lead to the real. But his intuition does not fight shy of intellect. Faith and devotion, study and meditation are intended to train us for this integral experience (*anubhava*). It is the noblest blossoming of a man's reason. It does not come out of the blue. But a sheer misunderstanding of Śamkara's philosophy will ensue if we say that his intuition is only a development of intellect.<sup>2</sup> "Śamkara admits the reality of an intuitional consciousness, *anubhava*, where the distinctions of subject and object are superseded and the truth of the supreme self realized. It is the ineffable experience beyond thought and speech, which transforms our whole life and yields the certainty of a divine presence. It is the state of consciousness which is induced when the individual strips himself of all finite conditions, including his intelligence."<sup>3</sup> For Śamkara, intellect is only necessary for the training of mind. It is only preparatory to intuition.

It is Bradley's settled conviction that thought can

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1. Aliotta, *Idealistic reaction against Science*, pp. 130 ff.
  2. See author's thesis on *Philosophy of Bosanquet*, p. 91 ff Calcutta University Journal of Letters, Vol. XXXIII.
  3. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 510-11.

never do justice to reality. By distinguishing the 'that' from the 'what' it is incapable of disclosing the secret of reality. According to him, when we have any sensation, we have a 'that' which is actually present and a 'what' by which it is distinguished. In immediate apprehension we are not conscious of the distinction between the two aspects. It is a this-what, a process-content. In judgment we distinguish the two, the predicate and the subject, and attribute the former to the latter. But life or reality is a feeling in which the 'that' and the 'what' are inseparable. Does our poet believe in intellect or intuition? In *Pañchabhūt* we get a glimpse of the poet's synthetic but intellectual mind. E. J. Thompson says: "His intellectual powers found a congenial form of expression in the Diary of five elements—air, earth, water, fire and ether. Water and fire are feminine, the other three are masculine. The feminine elements are inquisitive and emotional, the others are conservative and stolid."<sup>4</sup> These five elements and the poet himself form the different aspects of the poet's synthetic mind. Kṣiti or Earth is a realist, believing in nothing but perception. Ap or water is emotional and fights shy of logic. Samir or Air is not content with the relation between mind and matter. He is out for a relation between mind and mind, and believes only in social values. Dīpti or Fire relishes reasonings while Byaum's only aim is to seek spiritual values. All these elements combine and make up a synthetic whole but the whole is of an intellectual character. In *Pañchabhūt* attempts have been made to solve many a problem, material, social and spiritual but no final solutions have been arrived at. The various elements and the poet himself have fought with one

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4. *Rabindranath Tagore—Poet and Dramatist*, p. 105.



another on an intellectual ground but no definite result has been achieved. This shows the incompetence of intellect as a means to unravel the truths. All through his life, the poet has preferred intuition to intellect. The truths are always revealed to him in a flash of intuition but whenever he expresses them, he takes recourse to intellect. The poet disdainfully rejects discursive understanding as a means of knowing the reality. He writes in *Sāntiniketan*: "Brahman cannot be known by debates. He is to be known only through ānandam."<sup>5</sup> Debates lead us nowhere and in the labyrinth of logical inferences, the primal Reality is lost sight of.

In *Sadhana*, the poet finally rejects intellectual knowledge and upholds the cause of immediate knowledge "Intellectual knowledge is partial because our intellect is an instrument, it 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 a knowledge of him. But he can be known by joy, by love. For joy is knowledge in its completeness, it is knowing 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."<sup>6</sup>

It is interesting to note how the poet first feels the advent of intuition in his life. He writes in *Jivan-Smriti*:

5. See *Sāntiniketan*, Vol. II, p. 625.

"From Brahma words come back baffled, as well as the mind, but he who knows him by the joy of him is free from all fears." See *Sadhana*, pp. 158-9.

"यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सह

आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्वान् न विभेति कुतश्चन ।

6. *Sadhana*, p. 159.

"One morning, I stood on the balcony of our Calcutta house and looked at the gardens of Free School. The sun was just rising behind the green branches of trees and I looked on. Suddenly I felt as if a layer 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 Svapnabhanga."<sup>7</sup>† The poet refers to this incident as the first coming of intuition in his life.<sup>8</sup>

The truths that have been revealed to him all through his life are the products of intuition. The towering philosophy of his life has been incorporated in the famous book, *The Religion of Man* and the poet admits that it is only a work of intuition. He writes: "The idea of the humanity of our God or the divinity of Man the Eternal, is the main subject of this book. This thought of God has not grown in my mind through any process of philosophical reasoning. On the contrary, it has followed the current of my temperament from early days until it suddenly flashed into my consciousness with a direct vision."<sup>9</sup>

The sight of trees, stars and rivers leads to the formation of intuition in the poet and he immediately feels the presence of God. He sings in "*Fruit Gathering*",<sup>10</sup>

"Your speech is simple, my Master,  
but not theirs who talk of you.  
I understand the voice of your stars  
and the silence of your trees."

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7. This poem was written in the year 1882. It occurs in *Prabhāt Sangīt*.

8. Vide *The Religion of Man* and *Jīvan-Smṛiti*.

9. *The Religion of Man*, p. 17.

10. *Fruit Gathering*, 15.

Rabindranath believes that intellectual categories can hardly help us in knowing the reality and this is why he lays stress on feeling. Music, which is based on feeling and which has very little to do with words, has been considered by him as the best means of knowing the supreme Reality. He says: "Music is the most abstract of all the arts as Mathematics is in the region of science . . . The pure essence of expressiveness in existence is offered in music. Expressiveness finds the least resistance in sound, having freedom unencumbered by the burden of facts and thoughts."<sup>11</sup> In *Jivan-Smriti* he writes: "Music begins where words end. Music reigns supreme in the region of the inexplicable. Music tells us what words cannot tell."<sup>12</sup>

In this connexion it is interesting to note that the atmosphere of the Tagore family helped to create music-intuition in the poet's mind. The poet's inspirer in the field of music was his brother Jyotirindranath. Jyotirindranath himself was a musician, a pianist of great repute and he kindled in the boy Rabindranath a zeal for his art. In *Jivan Smriti* the poet refers to him most feelingly. The boy Rabindranath imbibed from him a sensibility which flowered into music-intuition in his later life.

All through his writings, Rabindranath refers to music-intuition. Indeed, in one place, he compares the world-order to a piece of music. "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

11. *The Religion of Man*, pp. 140-1.

12. Vide *Jivan-Smriti*, p. 214.

finite forms of creation is music itself, silent and visible.”<sup>13</sup> This world-song is never separated from its singer, the Absolute and the best way to express the world-order is to express it in terms of music.

In his lyrics, the poet considers songs to be the only means of expressing the intimate relation that exists between the finite and the Infinite. In this respect, his methods bear strong affinity with those of a mystic. A mystic does not describe the supreme Reality but bursts into songs. Singing, for a mystic, is the surest way of knowing and expressing Him.

The poet has always sought God in his songs. In the *Gitanjali*—

“Ever in my life have I sought thee with my songs. It was they who led me from door to door and with them have I felt about me, searching and touching my world.”<sup>14</sup>

He knows that God relishes his singing.

“I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence. I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.”<sup>15</sup>

God Himself is a singer and the poet is amazed to hear His songs.

“I know not how thou singest, my master!  
I ever listen in silent amazement.  
The light of thy music illumines the world. The  
life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky.  
The holy stream of thy music breaks through  
all stony obstacles and rushes on.”<sup>16</sup>

13. *Sadhana*, pp. 141-42.

14. *Gitanjali*, English Version, 101. 15. *Ibid*, 2. 16. *Ibid*, 3.

The only offering that he can make to the Almighty is the offering of songs.

“While I walk to my King’s house at the end of the day the travellers come to ask me—

‘What hast thou for King’s tribute?’ I do not know what to show them or how to answer, for I have merely this song. My preparation is large in my house, and many are the claimants.

But when I come to my King’s house

I have only this single song to offer it for his wreath.”<sup>17</sup>

The poet feels that he has done his duty and so relies on his songs to the last.

“It has fallen upon me, the service of thy singer.

In my songs I have voiced thy spring flowers,  
and given rhythm to thy rustling leaves.

I have sung into the hush of thy night and  
peace of thy morning.

The thrill of the first summer rains has passed  
into my tunes, and the waving of the autumn  
harvest.

Let not my song cease at last, my Master, when  
thou breakest my heart to come into my house,  
but let it burst into thy welcome.”<sup>18</sup>

At the end of life’s journey, the poet feels that his songs have brought him to his destination, to the feet of God.

“But now when in the evening light  
I see the blue line of the shore,  
I know my songs are the boat that

17. *Lover’s Gift and Crossing, Crossing*, 64.

18. *Ibid*, p. 74.

has brought me to the harbour across  
the wild sea."<sup>19</sup>

The ultimate Reality is known in a flash of intuition. The next question that crops up is: How to realize the Infinite? Our poet replies, the Infinite can be best realized in love and the salvation of the finite lies in the act of realization. The intuitional knowledge of the supreme Reality is fully apprehended in love. We have already seen in a previous chapter that the relation between man and God is the relation of love.<sup>20</sup> Love constitutes the true nature of God and without it, His existence passes into nothingness. The Deity creates out of Himself a devotee, so that the eternal love-drama may go on unimpaired. We have seen how the Deity and the devotee enter into a firm organic relation with each other. Indeed the fruition of Godhead lies in such a relation of love. In the *Gitanjali* the poet sings—

"Thou settest a barrier in thine own being and  
then callest thy severed self in myriad notes.

This thy self-separation has taken body in me."<sup>21</sup>

Again,

"Thou givest thyself to me in love  
and then feelest thine own entire sweetness in  
me."<sup>22</sup>

Then begins the love-drama, the eternal hide and seek.

"The great pageant of thee and me has over-  
spread the sky. With the tune of thee and me  
all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the  
hiding and seeking of thee and me."<sup>23</sup>

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19. *Lover's Gift and Crossing, Crossing*, 67.

20. Vide Chapter II.

21. *Gitanjali*, Eng. Version, 71.

22. *Ibid*, 65. 23. *Ibid*, 71. (Contd. next p.)

The poet feels that his salvation lies in loving the Infinite. Sometimes as the lover and sometimes as the beloved, he offers his love to God. He thinks that the mission of his life is to live in His love. He sings in *Crossing*,

“Let thy love play upon my voice and rest  
on my silence.

Let it pass through my heart into all my  
movements.

Let thy love like stars shine in the darkness of  
my sleep and dawn in my awakening.

Let it burn in the flame of my desires  
And flow in all currents of my own love.”<sup>4</sup>

And at last, when life ends, he returns love to God.

“Let me carry thy love in my life as a harp  
does its music, and give it back to thee at last  
with my life.”<sup>5</sup>

Is the poet's love of the Infinite only a feeling? Does love negate all actions? The poet's answers to these queries are in the negative. Rabindranath's conception of love is not mere sentimentality. It is both a feeling and an action. To love God is not to bid adieu to all actions and take recourse to emotions. The poet opines that love without activity is no love. Activity is the play of love and this is why he who loves God must also have his activities in Him. Actions play an important role in the philosophy of Rabindranath. In a letter he writes. “True fulfilment of personality is through work. In and through our activities we know man and face the

*Gītāñjali*, *Gītāli* and *Gītīmālya* are the lyrics which describe the love-play between the Deity and the devotee.

24. *Lover's Gift and Crossing*, *Crossing*, 55.

25. *Lover's Gift and Crossing*, *Crossing*, 55.

vast truth that lies around us.”<sup>26†</sup>

But are we free in our activities of love? Rabindranath definitely preaches the freedom of love. “.....We find in perfect love the freedom of our self. That only which is done for love is done freely, however much pain it may cause. Therefore working for love is freedom in action.”<sup>27</sup> The poet prays to the Almighty so that he may surrender his strength to Him in love.

“This is my prayer to thee, my lord—  
strike, strike at the root of penury in  
my heart.....

And give me the strength to surrender my  
strength to thy will with love.”<sup>28</sup>

Again the poet writes with conviction, “Our will attains its perfection when it is one with love, for only love is true freedom. This freedom is not in the negation of restraint. It spontaneously accepts bondage, because bondage does not bind it, but only measures its truth. Non-slavery is in the cessation of service, but freedom is in service itself.”<sup>29</sup>

Here we venture to offer a point in criticism. Speaking from the standpoint of the Absolute, the finites of Rabindra-philosophy do not enjoy any freedom of will. Love is the nature of the Absolute Deity and to consummate it, He creates the finites from whom He receives love and adoration. Love is infused by God into the finites and they return the same to Him. He feels His own sweetness in them and in this sense, all love-activities are His activities. There is hardly any scope for finite initiative. God cannot remain as One for He requires

26. Vide *Patradhārā*, p. 338 (Chhinna Patra).

27. *Sadhana*, p. 78.

28. *Gitanjali*, Eng. Version, 36.

29. *Thoughts from Tagore*, p. 22.



finite beings to enact the love-drama. So interpreted, the finites are highly necessary for Divine life. We have said elsewhere, an organic relation exists between the Infinite and the finites. But the poet does not always obey the entire implications of such a relation. The finites of his philosophy cannot be self-determining agents in actions of love. Only God is self-determining in love.

Anyway, love is the only means of realizing the supreme Reality. But how to attain love? Rabindranath asserts, to have love is to kill the ego. So long as the "I" and the "Me" are prominent in man, love cannot dawn in him. 'Aham' or ego-consciousness blurs the vision and makes us narrow and bigoted. Hence the poet's prayer is: Sink all my egoism in tears.<sup>30</sup> He is ashamed to take his little self to God.

"I came out alone on my way to my tryst. But who is this that follows me in the silent dark? . . . He is my own little self, my lord, he knows no shame; but I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company."<sup>31</sup>

The self in us asserts—this is mine, my possessions, attainments and relations are simply mine. Such a self binds our soul with innumerable fetters. What is wanted is a selfless soul and the poet says that such a soul is blessed with love. The relation between selfishness and love is a relation of opposition. It is true, our physical, material and social "Me" gives us pleasure but not bliss. The wise man makes a distinction between the desirable

30. *Gītāñjali* 1.

“ सकल अहङ्कार हे आमार  
डुबाओ चोखेर जले ”

31. *Gitanjali*, Eng. Version, 30.

and the pleasurable.<sup>32</sup> Mere pleasure entangles us in the vicious circle of pleasure-pain and this is why pleasure is not desirable. Bliss or ānandam is desirable and to attain it is to transcend mere pleasure and pain.

When Yājñavalkya asked Maitreyī to receive her share of earthly possessions, she boldly replied: "What shall I do with these? Indeed they cannot grant me amrita or immortality."<sup>33</sup> She did not want riches or fame which would only satisfy the 'self' in her. What she wanted was a self-less soul, an expanded soul.<sup>34</sup> The poet writes in *Sāntiniketan*: "Lord Jesus has said, 'A rich man can never attain salvation.'" Here riches do not mean only money, it means all our material possessions and fame. In one word riches mean the 'Mine'. So long as this sense of the 'Mine' remains unimpaired, attainment of salvation is an impossibility."<sup>35</sup>

The self is an obstacle to salvation. The central idea of the poet's drama, *Rājā*,<sup>36</sup> is that egoism, selfishness, pride and vanity have prevented the queen, Sudarśanā from seeing the King. So long as the queen has the least pride in herself, she cannot see the King. She sees only darkness, deep, ruthless and cruel. But when utmost humility and resignation come to her lot, she sees Him,

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेतस्

तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः ।

तयोः श्रेयआददानस्य साधु

दोयतेऽर्थात् य उ प्रेयोवृणीते ॥ " See *Mānuser Dharma*, p. 30.

33. येनाहं नामृतास्याम् किमहं तेन कुर्याम ।

34. Vide *Sāntiniketan*, Vol. I, p. 37.

35. Vide *Sāntiniketan*, Vol. I, p. 230.

36. It has been translated as—*The King of the Dark Chamber*.

so beautiful and so majestic. When the "I" in her is effaced, she sees the King in her own heart.

In the poem *Sonār Tarī* the poet says that the material "Me" of the individual cannot be saved, for it is riddled with selfishness and inconsistency. Only the pure soul which is free from the bondage of vices is conserved in the Absolute. The "I" with a name and form is ruthlessly discarded while his values are all taken.

In the celebrated poem, *Śājāhān* of *Balūkā* the poet shows how the ego is left behind and the freed soul marches onward. Emperor *Śājāhān* built the famous *Tājmahal* to perpetuate the memory of his beloved wife. He commanded a vast empire but neither the empire nor the memory of his wife could bind his soul to this earth. The "I" of *Śājāhān* suffered from separation and hence required a *Tājmahal* but the egoless *Śājāhān* was above all wants and wishes. The 'aham' of the emperor was burdened with memories but his freed soul rose above these material and mundane affections. Nothing on earth could prevent the egoless soul of the emperor from marching onwards to the region of the One, the Eternal.<sup>37</sup>

When the soul is freed from the yoke of the self, love appears and emancipation lies in it. Love is the characteristic quality of a man who does not use the world for his own purpose. Pragmatism can never be a

37. "Though empires crumble to dust,  
and centuries are lost in shadows,  
the marble still sighs to the stars,  
"I remember."  
"I remember"—But life forgets,  
for she has her call to the Endless:  
and she goes on her voyage unburdened,  
leaving her memories to the forlorn forms of beauty."  
*Lover's Gift and Crossing, 1.*

standard of love. In the novel, *Ghare Baire*,<sup>38</sup> the poet has skilfully drawn the picture of a person who is under the spell of 'aham.' As a contrast to this, another character has been painted where the ego is powerless. Sandvip is an embodiment of the feeling of the ego and he believes only in the furtherance of his own ideals. He has made all, even Vimalā, means for the realization of his own aims. In the long run he realizes that even his love for the country is encircled by a selfish motivation. He always believes in shocks and never in love. Nikhileś believes in love, that supreme love which goes into the very core of reality. Unlike Sandvip, he is not a pragmatist, he is not satisfied with surface reality. He is not selfish as Sandvip is and the 'aham' has not got any hold on him.

Love is Buddha's Maitrī and is something positive in essence. The poet writes: "When Buddha preached Maitrī—the relationship of harmony—not only with human beings but with all creation, did he not have this truth in his mind, that our treatment of the world is wrong when we solely treat it as a fact which can be known and used? Did he not feel that its meaning can be attained only through love, because it is an expression of love which waits for its answer from our soul emancipated from the bondage of self? This emancipation cannot be negative in character, for love can never lead to negation."<sup>39</sup> The attitude of a man possessing love is Brahma Vihāra. What is Brahma Vihāra? "With everything, whether it is above or below, remote or near, visible or invisible, thou shalt presume a relation of unlimited love without any animosity or without a desire

38. It has been translated as "*The Home and the World*".

39. *Thoughts from Tagore*, p. 105.

to kill. To live in such a consciousness while standing or walking, sitting or lying down till you are asleep, is Brahma Vihāra, or in other words, is living and moving and having your joy in the spirit of Brahma.”<sup>40</sup>

Love generates in us what the poet calls all-consciousness (Sarvānubhūti). It is the feeling of at-homeness in the whole. Critics are of opinion that Sarvānubhūti is the summum bonum of the poet's life. He likes to spread his love over the entire universe, for he feels that his God is not merely a transcendent Reality. Rabin-dranath's conception of God admits both transcendence and immanence. The supreme Reality, for him, is at once transcendent and immanent. To love God is to love the entire creation, human beings, animals and the trees.

A primal unity runs through the diversities. Human beings, animals and trees are not opposed to one another. On the other hand, they are bound together by the same purpose. The same life-force operates in man, animals and trees. In the *Gitanjali*—

“The same stream of life that runs through  
my veins night and day runs through  
the world and dances in rhythmic measures.”<sup>41</sup>

40. *Sadhana*, p. 18.

41. *Gitanjali*, Eng. Version, 69.

In the poem, Skul Pālāno of Akas Pradip,

The same life has been silently infusing force into human veins and fibres of trees. The same rhythm has been vibrating in the atoms of men and trees.

ये प्रथम प्राण

एकइ वेग जागाइछे गोपन सञ्चारे

रस रक्तधारे

मानव शिराय आर तरु तन्तुते

एकइ स्पन्दनेर छन्द उभयेर अणुते अणुते । ”

The poet's intimate relation with animals and trees has become more intimate and cordial in the lyric, *Vana-vānī*. Here trees, creepers, birds and beasts have occupied the innermost core of his heart. Such festivities of Śāntiniketan as Varshāmangal and Vṛkṣaropan are symbols of his universal love. Every year, during the rains, Vṛkṣaropan or the tree-plantation ceremony is performed in Śāntiniketan with a solemn dignity. On such a festive occasion, nature is loved and the spirit of trees respected.

Of all the created objects, man is the most supreme and he stands at the apex of creation. The poet's relation with man is a relation of infinite love and sympathy. Had there been a universal culture of love, most of the troubles, pains and sufferings of mankind would have vanished. In and through his numerous writings, the poet has presented before us the picture of what love should be in its best form. Our love-relation with our fellow beings is often defiled by personal considerations. The poet has always warned mankind not to confuse between love and attachment. Attachment is the quality of the "I" and the "me". Egoism may lead to attachment but never to love. Its worst fruits are greed, infatuation and sensuous satisfaction which mar the purity and serenity of love. Again lust for the body is an evil that emanates from the consideration of the ego.<sup>42</sup> Infatuation centres round it and where body becomes the foremost, soul is lost sight of. Rabindranath's conception of

42. In the drama, *Chitrāṅgadā*,

So long as, Arjuna pines after the body of Chitrāṅgadā, he does not get her. But when love arises in his heart, he sees in her only the soul and not the body. In true love he wins her completely.

See *Rabindra Sāhityer Bhūmikā* by Niharranjan Roy, pp. 94-5. *Chitrāṅgadā* has been translated as "Chitra".

love admits the body but transcends it. Herein he differs from the Sanskritic authors whose estimation is that love is only the attachment for the body. In Sanskrit literature, stress has been laid on the sensual beauty of the body.<sup>43</sup> But our poet has transcended all sensuality. He has gone beyond the body and stopped at the soul.

In the novel *Śeṣer Kavitā*, Rabindranath has distinguished between love and attachment (Prem O Bhāla-bāsā). Here love has been depicted as an ineffable light that illumines itself and all around it. It is the only stable, only real principle amidst changing phenomena. Love, undying love, is true and fixed as the Pole-star. Amit the hero of the fiction is a victim of the ravages of change but when he comes in contact with Lābanya, the heroine, a new change comes upon him. He now realizes that the momentary is only the expression of the permanent. Infatuation or attachment does not stain the purity and simplicity of love. This infinite love can never be circumscribed within the limits of finiteness and this is why Lābanya and Amit have not been tied by the bonds of marriage. Marriage or physical relations are affairs of finitude but love is infinite and eternal. But it should be borne in mind that the infinite love does not deny the shackles of finiteness, it only transcends them.

In the drama *Bāṇsarī*, the poet has admirably expressed the triumph of love over attachment. Love is free and gay whereas attachment is only bondage and sensual appetite. The ideal of Somaśankar, the hero of the drama, is love. He has been baptised into that faith by his preceptor, Purandar. What a wonderful picture of love, the poet has drawn! Love is self-luminous. It effaces all shame, ignorance and sin and flowers into an

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43. See *Rabi Dīpīṭā*, p. 216.

equanimity which is at once peace and truth. Suṣamā, the protagonist of the drama, marries Somaśankar and this has been possible only because she loves Purandar. Here love for the preceptor is so great that she can do all at his bidding.

In *Rājā O Rānī*,<sup>44</sup>

Vikrama has a strong attachment for Sumitrā and this is why he cannot get her fully. But with the death of Sumitrā, the attachment comes to an end and Vikrama realizes the truth in her. In death, he gets her most completely, for the veil of attachment has been pierced and love's face seen.

Love is sublime. It forgives enemies and forgets wrong-doings. The poet sets up a high standard of love in the drama *Mālinī*, where Mālinī the princess is true to her religion of love. When she tries to introduce it into her father's land, people condemn her. She wins all but Kṣemankar who, to the last, fights against her ideal. Supriya, the friend of Kṣemankar, deserts the friend's cause and comes over to the side of Mālinī. Kṣemankar knows about the treachery of the friend but views the whole affair from another perspective. Supriya loves his friend very dearly and so, in the long run, likes to receive punishment from his hands. Supriya is torn between Mālinī and Kṣemankar. Kṣemankar murders Supriya but when the King tries to kill him, Mālinī requests the king to forgive him. She loves Supriya but forgives the murderer of Supriya. This is her ideal of universal selfless love.

Such egoless love binds us with all objects of creation. In it, all contradictions are reconciled and it be-

44. It has been translated as *The King and the Queen. See Sacrifice and Other Plays.*



comes the sure means of realizing the Infinite, the supreme Lover. Rabindranath reiterates, by loving all, you love Him who is the spring from which all love emanates and the sea in which all love ends.

## CHAPTER VII

### RABINDRANATH'S PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

So, we have come to the end of our study. The last chapter we shall devote to determining the place of the poet-philosopher in the History of Contemporary Indian Philosophy. We have prefaced our study by saying that Rabindranath is principally a poet but his poetry is imbued with high philosophy. The question assails us: Can poetry be philosophy? Philosophy need not be the cold and hard speculations of logic. There was a time when philosophy was struggling hard to save herself from the clutches of logic. The worship of intellect was the only desired aim of philosophers. But today old intellect has made room for new and fresh intuition. The watchword is no longer, More Logic but less Logic. Once philosophy has taken refuge under spreading and expanding intuition, the barrier between poetry and philosophy is dissolved. One flows on into the other and the aims of the two become more or less the same. Poetry aims at life and philosophy, divorced from life, becomes barren and useless. Rabindranath's philosophy is based on the foundation of life. The eternal throbbing and pulsating life-force permeates the whole of his philosophy. Again poetry is the worship of Reality in its aspect of beauty while philosophy is the worship of the same Reality in its aspect of truth. Acharya Radhakrishnan suggests: "The poet worships God as the spirit of beauty, while the philosopher pays his homage to God as the ideal of

truth. Philosophy is the temple of truth, while poetry is the shrine of beauty. The two are not opposed, as truth is beauty and beauty truth."<sup>1</sup>

Rabindranath, we have seen, enjoys the mystic moods and rises to poetic rapture or bursts into songs. Most of his lyrics are born under mystic environments. In a mystic mood the poet feels the presence of the supreme Reality and is seized with real joy. In real joy, art takes its birth, poetry and songs do flow. Hence, his lyrics bear the stamp of the Absolute, they are nothing if not philosophies.

Rabindranath is not an academic philosopher. Besides poetry, though he has written many a philosophical discourse, yet he has never schematized his views. He has not built what is called a philosophical system. Contemporary Indian philosophers are mostly non-academic, they care very little for theories, immune from logical errors.<sup>2</sup> They aim at opening their hearts and expressing their feelings. All contemporary Indian thinkers whether academic or non-academic only explain the old Indian philosophy and their originality lies only in matters of explanation. The Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the six systems are being interpreted in newer and newer lights. Besides these, the Purāṇas, Tantras, the Gītā and the religious systems have been the objects of elucidation. Such contemporary Indian philosophers as Rammohun Roy, Devendranath, Keshabchandra, Dayananda, Vivekananda, Rabindranath, Gandhiji and Aurobindo draw inspiration from the ancient Indian Wisdom. In this

1. *The philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 160.

2. There are academic philosophers such as Prof. S. Radhakrishnan, Dr. Surendranath Das Gupta, Prof. Ranade and others.

See *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Edited by Radhakrishnan and Muirhead.

chapter we propose to determine Rabindranath's place in contemporary Indian philosophy by comparing and contrasting him with the thinkers just mentioned. Before we begin the task, we should remember one significant fact about Indian thinking. Most of the above-mentioned thinkers are philosophers as well as religious leaders. Religion happens to be the centre from where Indian thinking radiates. Gandhiji, Rabindranath and Aurobindo are not religious preachers though religion constitutes the core of their teachings.

Rājā Rammohun Roy started the new era in Indian thought. He was born at a time when Hinduism was at its lowest ebb. The Rammohun Devendranath Keshabchandra Rājā visualized the future of India, not as a Hindu India but as cosmic India. His intellectual and spiritual genius found in the conception of the Vedāntic Brahman, the truest synthetic unity. Moreover, he found in it the highest satisfaction of the soul in its search for the ultimate truth. Rammohun founded the Brāhma Samāj and he wished that the Samāj should be a universal house of prayer, open to all. Here the One, the Maker and Preserver of the universe is to be contemplated. But the man who really organized the Brāhma Samāj was the poet's father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore. The Maharshi had the rarest physical and spiritual beauty and an aristocratic perfection permeated the whole of his saintly life. The Maharshi fought against idolatry and passed the greater part of his time in prayer and communion. In the depth of devotion he enjoyed the sublime silence. But he was not dead to the world. He was also wakeful to the flow-tides and ebb-tides of our concrete material life. His life was, in short, a synthesis of Heaven and the earth. He was a great ṛṣi, for he was

at once on this earth and above it. The Maharshi adopted as his coadjutor Keshab Chandra Sen, an irresolute but highly inspired young man who played an important rôle in the history of the Samāj. At first, he was an ardent disciple of Devendranath but later on western ideas and the teachings of Jesus Christ inspired him and he had to deviate from the main camp. "Keshab professed Christ but he denied that he was a Christian. He tried to unite Christ to Socrates and to Chaitanya in a strange way by thinking of each of them as a part of his body or of his mind. Nevertheless he instituted the sacramental ceremonies of Christianity in his Samaj adapting them to Indian usage. On March 6, 1881, he celebrated the Blessed Sacrament with rice and water instead of bread and wine, and three months later the sacrament of baptism, wherein Keshab himself set the example, glorifying the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Finally in 1882 he took the decisive step. The Christian Trinity of all Christian mysteries has always been the greatest stumbling block for Asia, and an object of repulsion or derision. Keshab not only accepted and adopted it, but extolled it with gladness and was enlightened by it."<sup>3</sup>

In 1866 the rupture took place between the teacher and the disciple. On two vital points they differed. The Maharshi sought for Divine communion in silent meditation and he could not make social service, a part of his religion. But Keshab believed that religion was highly necessary for the regeneration of the race. He made religion the basis of social reforms. Secondly Keshab had been introducing the best of Christianity in

3. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, pp. 137-139.  
(Translated by Malcolm-Smith)

his religion but the Maharshi could not like it and hence, he could not remain in association with 'a co-adjutor who based his teaching on the New Testament'. The schism took place. Keshab founded the Brāhma Samāj of India while the Maharshi continued as the leader of the Ādi Brāhma Samāj.

Rabindranath, we know, was born and brought up in a Brāhma environment. In his youth he was an ardent follower of his father's religion and for some time directed the course of the Ādi Brāhma Samāj. But the inherent cosmopolitanism and universalism drove him far away, he could no longer confine himself within a particular religion. Though the Brāhma religion is a highly cosmopolitan religion, yet it is a particular religion and as such, has its own dogmas. But Rabindranath rose above all particulars and embraced only the universal. He accepted the universal religion, the true religion of man and rested in its bosom. His Religion of man is not a particular religion like Hinduism, Christianity, Islam or Brāhmaism, nor is it opposed to the truths of any of them. Each religion has its own tenets, but religion of man is tenetless. It is the reply to the call of man. Man the temporal and Man the Eternal are one.

Keshab Chandra Sen's Brāhma Samāj was in short an attempt at westernization. Against  
**Dayananda** his attempts, his Brāhma Samāj, rose Dayananda Saraswati. He hated the very idea of introducing Christianity in Indian religions and called back the Vedic culture and religion. His revolt was purely a revolt against westernization. An ardent Vedic scholar and a seeker after the ultimate truth, Dayananda founded the Ārya Samāj. He held that the life in the Vedic

ages had reached its highest level in culture and illumination and spent the whole of his life in reviving the Vedic studies and discipline in India. He wanted to preach to modern India the true Aryan culture and religion.

The Ārya Samāj is guided by certain fundamental rules.

“(1) Supreme Being is the spring of all true knowledge. This, again, is the only object worthy of being known.

(2) God is truth. He is the beautiful. He is omnipotent. He is the support of all, the creator and the director of the universe. Worship is due only to Him.

(3) The Vedas are the real scriptures. The knowledge of the Vedas is supreme necessity.

(4) Truth is to be accepted, untruth to be avoided.

(5) Action should follow the law of Dharma.

(6) The prime object of the Arya Samaj is to do good to the world—to promote the physical, spiritual and social good of every sentient being.

(7) Conduct is to be guided by purity, righteousness and justice.

(8) Nescience is to be destroyed; knowledge, scientific and spiritual, must be acquired.

(9) All should abide by the laws of society calculated to promote the well-being of all; but everybody is free to observe the law affecting his individual well-being.”<sup>4</sup>

From the above, it is clear that Dayananda was bent on remoulding the society. Social reforms formed an important part of his religion. Dayananda, as a social

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4. Vide *Eastern Lights* by M. N. Sarkar, pp. 217, 218.

democrat, broke the orthodoxy of the privileged classes and encouraged inter-dining and inter-marriage. Dayananda laid emphasis on Vedic knowledge as a means of salvation. Knowledge and action can grant human beings emancipation. While Dayananda laid stress on knowledge, Rabindranath encouraged love, but it should be borne in mind that his love is not actionless.

Dayananda believed in founding educational institutions to preach the social religion which is Vedic to its very core. He believed in re-introducing the Vedic culture in and through educational centres. The Ārya Samājists have founded the *Gurukula*, a national university whose object is to build true Aryan character by Vedic culture.

Rabindranath, we know, founded an educational centre at Sāntiniketan. He called it Āśrama but he founded this centre not to revive any old culture whether Vedic, Paurāṇic, or Upanishadic. Unlike *Gurukula*, it is only a cultural institution with no religious aim. Here 'the mind of man is studied in its realization of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view.' Rabindranath revered certain habits and customs of ancient times and introduced them into his institution. Such practices as the *Vaitālika*, classes under trees, *Samaveta Upāsana* and the like are the practices that were followed in old Indian Āśramas and the poet introduced them into his educational centre. The Āśramites of old days were seekers after true knowledge and their life was marked by simplicity. Rabindranath too holds that the scholars of his institution should pursue knowledge "with that simplicity in externals which is necessary for true spiritual realization, in amity, good fellowship and co-operation....." Above all the scholars must be "free from



all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste...."<sup>5</sup>

About the time when the Ārya Samājists were founding educational centres to preach Vedic culture, another spiritual genius arose in India, who taught people the Vedāntic religion. He was Vivekananda, inspired by his *Guru* Ramakrishna Paramahamsadeva. Ramakrishna realized the Vedantic truth that the Divine is in the self and the self is in the Divine and handed this truth to his favourite disciple Vivekananda. The disciple got the sole inspiration and illumination from the master and gave a practical shape to Vedānta. According to Vivekananda, the different expressions of the Vedānta are not antagonistic to one another but stages in the final spiritual fulfilment. The philosophical positions of Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Advaita were to him, not absolute systems but stages in spiritual growth. "In these three systems we find the gradual working up of the human mind towards higher and higher ideals, till everything is merged in that wonderful unity which is reached in the Advaita system."<sup>6</sup> Again the Vedānta, for the Swami, is not hostile to the sciences. On the contrary, they maintain common principles. "The first principle of reasoning is that the particular is explained by the general—until we come to the universal. A second explanation of knowledge is that the explanation of a thing must come from inside and not from outside...."<sup>7</sup> The Advaita satisfies these two principles.

Vivekananda's religion is called the universal science

See Visva-Bharati (Memorandum of Association).

*The complete works of the Swami Vivekananda*, Part III, (Third Ed.) pp. 396-397.

*The complete works of the Swami Vivekananda*, Part I, (Fourth Ed.) p. 368 ff.

religion. It is universalism and spiritual brotherhood. His religion is not toleration, it is acceptance but Rabindranath's Religion of man is characterized by the spirit of toleration. Vivekananda wrote: "I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him.... I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? ..... We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future."<sup>8</sup>

Vivekananda's religion makes ample room for the development of human individuality and in this respect his practical Vedānta and the poet's Religion of man are akin. "Whatsoever exists in the universe, is to be covered with the Lord." Like the poet, Vivekananda too believed in this ancient saying of the Upanishads. He said, God is to be found in all living beings and man should develop the Divinity that lies in him. "Each soul", Vivekananda spoke, "is potentially Divine." The goal is to realize the Divine by a thorough control of the nature, inner and outer. This can be achieved by any of the Yogas--Karma, Bhakti, Jñāna or Rāja. Vivekananda laid stress on universalism and spiritual brotherhood. Spiritual brotherhood implies service and love. Vivekananda encouraged love and conceived Reality as love but love with power. Rabindranath's Reality is also characterized by love but it knows no power, for power is not often selfless. Rabindranath's conception of love is akin to Buddha's Maitrī but Vivekananda could not be inspired by it. He believed in love with force and power. He maintained a heroic attitude to life and

8. *The Complete works of the Swami Vivekananda*, Part II, p. 372 (Third Ed.)

his ideal was Lord Krishna who combined in Him love and power.

Rabindranath, we have already seen, founded a cultural centre at Śāntiniketan after the model of Āśramas of the ancient age.<sup>9</sup> Vivekananda built the Ramakrishna Order to revive the monastic culture of the Middle age. Like the poet he too believed in linking up the East with the West, but his methods were different. While Vivekananda believed in spiritual linkage, Rabindranath believes in cultural connexion. Some of the objects of the Visva-Bharati are "to bring into more intimate relation with one another, through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity, to approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia and to seek to realize in a common fellowship of study the meeting of the East and the West, and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the establishment of free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres."

The Ramakrishna Order has got two branches of action. One is Indian. "Maths (monasteries) and Ashramas are to be established in different parts of India for the education of Sannyasins and lay brethren as may be willing to devote their lives to the teaching of others. The second foreign: it is to send members of the Order into countries outside India for the foundation of spiritual centres and for creating a close relationship and a spirit of mutual help and sympathy between the foreign and the Indian Centres."<sup>10</sup> The Sannyasins of Ramakrishna

9. It should be borne in mind that the poet never intends to revive the Upanishadic age.

10. Vide *Life and gospel of Vivekananda* by Romain Rolland, p. 140 (Translated by Malcolm-Smith).

Math lead a monastic life and take the vow of preaching the Vedāntic religion. They also lead a celibate life but our poet never favours celibacy, nor is he a celi-batarian.

Quite in recent times, two more philosophers have arisen in India and have founded two more Āśramas. One is Gandhiji, and the other is Sri Aurobindo, the founder of Aurobindo-Āśrama at Pondicherry. Rabin-dranath's relation with Gandhiji is one of closest friend-ship and with Aurobindo one of veneration. These three savants have lifted India in the estimation of the world. Sri Aurobindo is not yet known most widely but there is no denying the fact that by India outsiders mean only Gandhi and Tagore.

Religion is the keynote of Gandhiji's thoughts and **Gandhiji** all his actions are to be viewed from a religious standpoint. Gandhiji called himself a Sanatani Hindu and a follower of Hinduism. He writes: "I call myself a Sanatani Hindu because—

1. I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, and all that goes by the name of Hindu Scrip-tures, and therefore in Avataras (divine incarnations) and rebirth.

2. I believe in Varnashrama Dharma in a sense strictly Vedic, but not in its present popular and crude sense.

3. I believe in 'Cow-protection' in a much larger sense than the popular belief.

4. I do not disbelieve in 'idol-worship'.

5. I believe implicitly in the Hindu aphorism that no one truly knows the Scriptures who has not attained perfection in Innocence (Ahimsa), Truth (Satya), and Self-control (Brahmacharya) and who has not renounced

all acquisition or possession of wealth.

6. I believe, along with every Hindu, in God and His Oneness, in rebirth and salvation."<sup>11</sup>

Gandhi and Tagore believe in the Vedas but they do not believe in the exclusive Divinity of the Vedas. To them other holy scriptures are equally divinely inspired. But they do not accept every word of the scriptures as infallible. Such truths of the scriptures are acceptable to them as are true to reason and moral sense. Tagore, we know, is more inspired by the Upaniṣads than by the Vedas. His knowledge of the Vedas also is not direct and first-hand.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhiji believed in "Varnashrama Dharma". It signifies the religion of the Hindu caste system. But his idea of caste system was different from untouchability. "I do not believe", says Gandhiji, "that inter-dining, or even inter-marriage, necessarily deprives a man of the Caste status that his birth has given him. The four divisions, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, define a man's calling; they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties; they confer no privileges. It is, I hold, against the genius of Hinduism to arrogate to oneself a higher status, or assign to another a lower status. All are born to serve God's creation—a Brahmin with his knowledge, a Kshatriya with his power of protection, a Vaishya with his commercial ability, and a Shudra with his bodily labour. This however does not mean that a Brahmin is absolved from bodily labour, or the duty of protecting himself and others. His birth makes a Brahmin predominantly a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart it to others.

11. *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas* by C. F. Andrews, p. 35. 12. Vide Chapter I.

There is nothing, again, to prevent the Shudra from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes. Only he will best serve with his body, and need not envy others with special qualities for service. But a Brahmin who claims superiority by right of knowledge falls, and has no knowledge. And so with the others, who pride themselves upon their special qualities. Varnashrama implies self-restraint, conservation and economy of energy."<sup>13</sup> But Rabindranath never believed in the ancient Hindu caste system. He does not maintain the four-fold division of mankind and puts no premium on birth. All men are born equal and fitness is not by birth but by character.

Both Gandhi and Tagore think of the ultimate Reality as truth and love. Gandhiji writes: "To me God is Truth and Love. God is the source of light and life and yet He is above and beyond all these."<sup>14</sup> Gandhiji was as much inspired by Vaishnavism as Tagore and as a true Vaishnava he believed in love and Ahimsā (non-violence). To both the seers, service of humanity was the greatest merit. Here is Gandhiji: "The noblest of all aims is the worship of God and the highest form of worship consists in doing the work of God by living in obedience to the moral law and by disinterested service to humanity."<sup>15</sup> Rabindranath extends his love over the entire creation. Human beings, animals and plants—all receive his answering love. Gandhiji's love also is all-spreading. The dumb animals, the cows and the entire sub-human world are objects of his love. Cow-protection was to him an important aspect of religion.

Gandhi and Tagore believe in God, in His Oneness. But Gandhiji believed in idol-worship which was always

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13. *Young India*, (12-10-21)

14. *Ibid.*, (5-3-25).

15. *Ethical Religion*, p. 62.

Sikhism, Christianity, Islam and the like. But Rabindranath transcends them and weaves the Religion of man. In matters of religion Gandhiji is conservative and does not like to go beyond the existing orders. But Rabindranath goes beyond without disturbing in any way the existing orders. The Religion of man does not run counter to any religion. It is the inner truth of man and appeals to all men for all time to come.

Coming to the issue of Āśramas, we find that the Gandhi-Āśrama is propelled by certain compulsions whereas Śāntiniketan Āśrama is without any. Rabindranath hates compulsions that stiffen life and at Śāntiniketan taboos and prohibitions are non-existent. The only silent rule that guides the inmates of the Āśrama is—Respect the Man in all. But in Gandhiji's Āśrama, every inmate must take certain vows. The first and foremost is the vow of truth. Then is the vow of Ahimsā. It is not merely non-killing. "It really means", says Gandhiji, "that you may not offend anybody; you may not harbour an uncharitable thought, even in connection with one who may consider himself to be your enemy. To one who follows this doctrine there is no room for an enemy."<sup>19</sup> Third is the vow of celibacy. For Gandhiji, those who want to perform national service or lead a religious life must lead a celibate life. Until one has overcome the pleasures of the palate, it is difficult to observe the above vows. Hence the vow of the control of the palate is obligatory. Then, there are the vows of non-thieving and non-possession. There is yet another important vow, known as the vow of the Swadeshi. All the inmates of the Āśrama must follow the cult of the Swadeshi. What is Swadeshi? Gandhiji insists on Swa-

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19. *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, p. 103.

deshi as a religious duty. He defined Swadeshi in his address to the missionaries at Madras: "Swadeshi is that spirit within us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus (i) in the matter of Religion I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion, that is, the use of my immediate surroundings in religion. If I find my religion defective I should serve it by purging it of its defects. (ii) In the domain of politics I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. . . . ."<sup>20</sup> Gandhiji mixes up religion with politics but to Tagore, religion is far above politics. Swaraj, for Gandhiji, has the character of religious duty. But Tagore writes: ". . . . .What is Swaraj? It is māyā, it is like a mist that will vanish, leaving no stain on the radiance of the Eternal. However we may delude ourselves with the phrases learnt from the West, Swaraj is not our objective. Our fight is a spiritual fight; it is for Man. We are to emancipate Man from the meshes that he himself has woven round him, these organizations of national egoism. The butterfly will have to be persuaded that the freedom of the sky is of higher value than the shelter of the cocoon. . . . ."<sup>21</sup>

Another sage who keeps religion on the highest plane, beyond the reach of any politics, is Sri Aurobindo. His Āśrama "is not a political institution; all association with political activities is renounced by those who live here. All propaganda, religious, political or social has to be eschewed by the inmates."<sup>22</sup> Like Śāntiniketan, Aurobindo's Āśrama

20. *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, p. 120.

21. See *Modern Review*, May, 1921. (Also quoted by Romain Rolland in his book—*Mahatma Gandhi*.)

22. See the booklet—*The teaching and the Asrama of Sri Aurobindo*.



obeys no obligatory rules. One dictum however inspires the inmates. It is:—"Love the Mother. Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you; because She is, indeed, always present."

Rabindranath's God is a personal Deity who loves and is loved. He is also satyam, śivam and ānandam (Truth, Goodness and Bliss). He is best realized through love, all-embracing love and love is God. The soul of Aurobindo's Reality is also Ānandam (bliss). The primal Reality, according to him, is the dynamic Divine or Śakti. Its nature cannot be fully described but there is no doubt that it is conscious. Śakti or the ultimate Force is a spontaneous movement. It is also a movement of delight. The dynamic Divine assumes two forms, viz. the transcendent Divine and the Cosmic Divine. "The Cosmic Divine is what is concerned with the actual working out of things under the present circumstances. It is the Will of that Cosmic Divine which is manifested in each circumstance, each movement of this world..... the Cosmic Will is working towards the eventual realization of the Will of the Transcendent Divine."<sup>23</sup>

To realize Śakti is to realize the Transcendent Divine. One must rise above the play and the transfiguration of the Cosmic Will and come in direct contact with the Transcendental Will.

How can this be achieved? Gandhi and Tagore seek salvation from the moral plane. They start from Man and soar up to God. But Aurobindo depends more on the Transcendent Divine than on man, so far as salvation is concerned. Aurobindo is busy in dragging God to man. If Gandhi and Tagore are 'all-too-human', he is 'all-too-divine'. If Gandhi and Tagore long for

23. *The Riddle of this World*, pp. 72-73 (1st impression).

human ascent, he pines after divine descent. His spiritual ideal is the formation of supermen. Aurobindo is singularly original in his conception of supermen. "It is waking of the divinity that is in man. It is, in one word, the divine descent in man and the transformation of the human energies and powers into the Divine."<sup>24</sup> Man can be transformed into superman by yoga. Aurobindo's yoga is complete surrender to the Divine. According to it, one should surrender oneself completely to the Divine so that the supreme Reality may descend on him and divinize him. This "surrender must be self-made and free; it must be the surrender of a living being, not of an inert automaton or mechanical tool."<sup>25</sup>

Gandhi and Tagore, we have said before, seek salvation from a moral plane. But Aurobindo seeks salvation from a supra-moral and supra-mental plane. They rely on physical, vital and mental energies but Aurobindo believes in supra-mental energy. His superman is one in whom there has been an ingress of supra-mental energy.

Again Gandhi and Tagore realize God in love. It is not ordinary selfish attachment but egoless universal love that leads us to God. But to Aurobindo, even this egoless love is an affair of the mental and moral plane.<sup>26</sup> The Superman rises above the moral-mental plane and assimilates in his nature, the supra-mental force, by yoga. For Aurobindo, "all truths below the Supra-mental (even

24. See *Eastern Lights*, p. 289.

25. *The Mother*, p. 8 (1st Ed.).

26. In an unpublished letter Sri Aurobindo writes:

"..... As Supramental truth is not merely a sublimation of our mental ideas, so Divine Love is not merely a sublimation of human emotions; it is a different consciousness with a different quality, movement and substance....." Letter of May 26th, 1930.

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that of the highest spiritual on the mental plane, which is the highest that has yet manifested) are either partial or relative or otherwise deficient and unable to transform the earthly life; they can only at most modify and influence it."<sup>27</sup>

So far about comparison and contrast. History will always remember Rabindranath, for he is a philosopher of man and for man. Indeed in one of his poems he wishes to be remembered as a humanist.<sup>28</sup> He feels and fights for humanity and in his philosophy man forms the central theme. No philosopher has ever accorded such a sublime place to man. He teaches the Religion of man, a religion in humanism.

Secondly, he teaches mankind how to attain salvation through love. The principle of love remains inscribed in the heart of Hindusthan for many thousand years. Lord Buddha and the Vaishnavas had sung love to numerous pining souls of the world. Rabindranath has only sung it anew and the notes have been echoing through the four corners of the world. His love knows no compulsions, no frontiers, no negations. It is pure as the air and simple as the sunshine and hence, its appeal to the common Man is the greatest.

27. *The Riddle of this World*, p. 1.

28. I tune my Sitār and sing again. Let me be known as one for you. Let this alone be my last connotation.\*

“सेतारेते बाँधिलाम तार

गाहिलाम आरबार

मोर नाम एइ बले ख्यात होक

आमि तोमादेरि लोक

आर किछु नय

एइ होक शेष परिचय ” —“*Sanjuti*.”

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