TAGORE'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

We all know that Tagore did not attempt to write a systematic treatise on Philosophy or Education as such. The gems and pearls of his philosophical thoughts are scattered all over his literary works and poems. Still there are some books written by him in the latter half of his life express vividly his philosophy of life and education. 'The Religion of Man', 'Sadhana', 'Personality' and 'Creative Unity' etc. may be mentioned in this connection. So Radhakrishnan writes, "We do not find any systematic exposition of his philosophy of life in any of his writings. Even Sadhana is a book of sermons, or mystic hymns, or perhaps meditations. It is a sigh of the soul rather than a reasoned account of metaphysics, an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy. ...... though poetry is not philosophy, it is possible for us to derive from Rabindranath's works his philosophical views."¹

Philosophy of life is understood, in Bengali, as 'Jivan-Darsan'. 'Darsan', the Bengali word, is derived from the Sanskrit root, 'Drish' which means 'to see' and 'Jivan' means 'life'. Hence 'Jivan-Darsan' means 'to see'-life steadily and see it as whole, in other words, to see life in its true 'perspective'. In wider sense, it means to get
a total view of life 'in harmony with all existence.' In English, the word 'philosophy' means 'love of knowledge.' So philosophy of life would mean the 'love of knowledge of life.' Though synonymous the former meaning that is, the Bengali expression, is more vivid and appropriate than the latter.

Tagore's philosophy of life would then mean in the former sense Tagore's view of life 'in harmony with all existence.' We intend to see it in the light of the above meaning. Tagore's life and literary works were distinctly marked by the three factors — Nature, Man and Brahma. These three factors influenced him through three different phases of life, and his life and philosophy were shaped accordingly. Premothanath Bisi in an article in Bengali, 'Rabindranather Tin Jagat' — (Three Worlds of Rabindranath) expresses the same view. He opines that Tagore's love of Nature was developed in him during the period of his living in Calcutta, that of Man during his living at Selaidaha, and lastly during his living at Santiniketan his realization of Brahma became deeper in him and revealed before him many things that were unknown to him before. We think that Tagore's philosophical thoughts on life and education took concrete shape from this period. This is the age of Gitanjali.
which is the best exposition of his philosophy in the form of poems. The major question of philosophy has always been - 'what is man'? So the philosophical queries are concerned with the nature of life, the nature of man, his origin and destiny and the goal of his strivings. We find different answers to these questions. These differences give rise to different philosophies and different religious sects. Tagore in his book entitled - 'The Religion of Man' - says that men have taken several centuries to find out the answers to these queries but they have not been able to come to any conclusion. So we find different philosophies and different religions; but they differ only in their ways and means though the goal - the salvation of soul, is the same in all the schools of thought. Needless to mention that queries as to these questions and attempts to answer them constitute the philosophical attitude towards life. Dewey in his book 'Democracy and Education' - pleading for a practical philosophy says that philosophy aims at achieving a wisdom that influences 'the conduct of life'.

Tagore has given a reasoned-out point of view on these fundamental issues in all the books of prose and poems referred to above. According to Huxley 'Men live in accordance with their philosophy of life, their conception of the world.'
Thus the philosophy of life and conception of the world may differ from man to man. In other words, some persons may belong to one school of thought and some to the other. There are four well-known schools of philosophical thoughts, namely, naturalism, idealism, pragmatism and realism. And there are two main problems of philosophy. In the words of Ross, "Firstly, we have the metaphysical problem concerning the nature of reality itself; secondly, the human problem concerning the nature of man. Views on the former can be labelled as monistic, dualistic, or pluralistic according as reality is conceived to consist of one or two or several substances."  

Tagore was born and brought up in an atmosphere of the confluence of three movements, namely, socio-religious movement led by Raja Rammohan Roy, the literary movement introduced by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and the national movement. In all these three the members of his own family took an active part. Tagore said that his father was the leader of a new religious movement, a strict monotheism based upon the teachings of the Upanishads. It is then quite natural that all the three movements had left a great impression upon Tagore. He, however, said that owing to his idiosyncrasy he did not accept anything totally, simply because people in his surroundings believed it to be true. Besides, his mind was brought up in an atmosphere of freedom,
freedom from the dominance of any creed, because he was a poet, and as such his religion was essentially a poet's religion. In other words, his view of life and reality was the poet's view and naturally it will differ from the men of science and philosophers. He, however, maintained the faith that "there is the fundamental truth of spiritual reality" in all his experience of nature or man. He had also from his infancy the keen sensitiveness which always kept his mind tingling with consciousness of the world around him, natural and human.

Then we find that he believed in the truth of spiritual reality and he had a keen sensitiveness for nature and man. So we can say that his view was based on spiritual monism as opposed to materialistic monism. His consciousness of the world was not materialistic or derived from any material source. His consciousness, he says, has come 'through the illumination of joy' and 'from vision and not from knowledge'. He was, out and out, a spiritualist and not a materialist. He believed that men are essentially spirit and not machines. They are 'the children of the Immortal' as it is said by the wise men of India. He did not believe like the materialists that the universe is a great machine and 'the living beings are merely complexes of atoms and molecules operated on by mechanical laws' and
that 'matter is the stuff of the universe and mind is either a form of matter or a property of matter or both. He did not accept the view of the materialist that mind is the brain and its working and consciousness is a mere by-product. As he believed that man is essentially a spirit or spiritual being, his main aim in life is to develop his spiritual nature. He contends like the idealists that there exists an inner harmony between the soul of man and the heart of the universe. So Tagore's main contention was to establish 'harmony with all existence'. He had a great faith in Platonic idealism which laid emphasis on the philosophy of aesthetics and moral values. Tagore's philosophy of life and philosophy of education owed much to this Platonic idealism. We shall discuss it in detail in a subsequent chapter in connection with his educational philosophy.

Tagore believed that man is the highest of all the animals and has reached the highest form of life. In his words, man is 'the crown of creation'. He further believed in the latest theory of evolution. Thus we can say that he belonged to the school of biological naturalism. He did not accept the naturalistic view of the physical sciences, that starts with external nature and tries to fit man into the picture of the universe as painted by science.
The latter view is almost allied to mechanistic materialism. Tagore was greatly opposed to this view. He, on the other hand, believed in the notion of life force, elan vital. It may be said then that there was a curious blend of both naturalism and idealism in Tagore's philosophical creed. And this creed is principally revealed in his educational thoughts and ideas.

Tagore was a poet of nature as well as a poet of man. His writings, during the period of stay at Silaidaha, in particular, are concerned with humanistic philosophy. In this sense Tagore may be designated as a pragmatist in as much as "pragmatism is essentially a humanistic philosophy, maintaining that man creates his own values in the course of activity." Pragmatists are not in favour of any doctrine fixed and eternal values or absolutism and relativism. Philosophy, in their view, 'must concern less with metaphysics and more with life, more with human interest.' Dewey accepted the traditional subjectmatter of philosophy but insisted on the practical application of answers to philosophical questions. According to him, philosophy will not only be concerned with the problems of 'knowing' or theory but of 'doing' or practice. Tagore, however, went further and held the view that not 'knowing' or 'doing' but 'being' is the most important problem.
Pragmatism is described as a via-media between idealism and naturalism. It is, however, more akin to the dynamic idealism in contrast to the static idealism of Plato. Because it is with the notion that values are man-made and they emerge when experimentation successfully takes place. In Dewey's view philosophy should be concerned with the solution of problems like "the relation of mind and matter, body and soul, humanity and physical nature, the individual and the social, theory or knowing, and practice or doing." 9

Tagore advocated both theory and practice in his philosophical views, and hence he may as well be called an idealist and a pragmatist. His philosophy was, therefore, eclectic or synthetic. He derived the best elements of the different schools of philosophical thought and added to them his innate creative and poetic genius. We shall now proceed to discuss in detail his view of life and reality and see solution he made as to the fundamental philosophical problems.

Notwithstanding his own idiosyncrasy Tagore's philosophy of life was greatly influenced by the three revolutionary movements referred to above and also by the teachings of the Upanishads, the Vaishnava religion and the philosophy of the Bauls of Bengal. But it is undeniable at
the same time that by his innate power of synthesis he developed a coherent view of the reality and human life. He viewed that the truth of our life depends upon our attitude of mind towards it. It may be monistic, dualistic or pluralistic. Tagore believed in the principle of unity and not in the principle of dualism or pluralism. He said in the Introduction to 'The Creative Unity' that it is some untold mystery of unity in him that has the simplicity of the infinite and reduces the immense mass of multitude to a single point. Then he says, — "This one in me knows the universe of the many. But, in whatever it knows, it knows the one in different aspects ... This one in me is creative. Its creations are a pastime, through which it gives expression to an ideal of unity in its endless show of variety .... This one in me not only seeks unity in knowledge for its understanding and creates images of unity for its delight, it also seeks union in love for its fulfilment. It seeks itself in others." Then he refers to the Upanishads where it is said that the 'advaitam is anantam' - the one is Infinite; that the 'advaitam is anandam' - the one is Love. So he concludes that "to give perfect expression to the one, the Infinite, through the harmony of the many; to the one, the Love, through the sacrifice of self, is the object
Then we find that Tagore believed in monism or he had the monistic view of reality. In his words, "the principle of oneness is the basis of all reality" and "that there is one infinite centre to which all the personalities, and, therefore all the world of reality are related. He is "Mahantam parusham", the one Supreme Person; he is 'Satyam', the one Supreme Reality; he is 'Jnanam', he has the knowledge in him of all knowers, therefore he knows himself in all knowings; he is 'Sarvanubhut', he feels in him the feelings of all creatures, therefore he feels himself in all feelings.

But this Supreme person, the centre of all reality, is not merely a passive, a negatively receptive being - 'Ananda-rupam amrtam yad vibhati.' He is the joy which reveals itself in forms. It is his will which creates." He also refers to another teaching of the Upanishads, which expresses the ultimate growth of unity. Its realization leads to the emancipation of our soul. It follows thus —

Ishavasyam idam sarvam yat kinha
jagatyam jagat.
Tena tyaktina bhunjitha ma godhah
Kasyasvit dhanam.

(Know all that moves in this moving world as
enveloped by God; and find enjoyment through renunciation, not through greed of possession.)

Tagore interpreted the above verse in the following way — "The meaning of this is, that, when one knows the multiplicity of things as the final truth, we try to augment ourselves by the external possession of them; but, when we know the Infinite Soul as the final truth, then through our union with it we realise the joy of our soul."^13

He also refers to the saying — 'Yadidam kincha sarman prana ejati nishratam' — (All that is vibrates with life, having come out from life.) His reference to the compound Sanskrit word, Sacchidananda to explain the meaning of reality may be quoted here. It runs thus: "The meaning is that Reality which is essentially one, has three phases. The first is Sat; it is the simple fact that things are, the fact which relates us to all things through the relationships of common existence. The second is Chit; it is the fact that we know, which relates us to all things through the relationship of knowledge. The third is Ananda; it is the fact that we enjoy, which unites us with all things through the relationship of love."^14 He accepted the Indian view that the consciousness of the world, merely as the sum total of things that exist, and as governed by
laws, is imperfect. It becomes perfect when our consciousness realises all things as spiritually one with it.

All these observations referred to above clearly establish Tagore's view of the world and the nature of reality that it is essentially and spiritually one. He believed in oneness or Advaitam. This can be realized at the first glance to the plate on the main gate of Visva-Bharati which at once declares the essence of his philosophy of life and education. The inscriptions stand thus:

"Ekamevadvitiyam - Ananda - rupam
emritam yad vibhati."

Though Tagore believed in Advaitam, he did not accept the world-negating doctrine of the Advaita Vedanta. His ideas were, in the words of Radhakrishnan, 'identical with the ancient wisdom of the Upanishads, the Bhagvat-Gita and the theistic system of a later day.' He did not think that the world is an illusion or maya. His poetic mind did not accept the view that Brahma satya jagat mithya, Brahma is the only reality and the world is an illusion. He viewed the world as the manifestation of Brahma. It is the expression of beauty and love, it is the expression of the Infinite, it is his creation. The idea of maya appears owing to ignorance or avidya. So Tagore wanted
such education as can liberate man from ignorance - 'Sā
vidya ya Vimuktaye' - this idea formed the nucleus of
Tagore's educational philosophy and was deduced from his
philosophy of life - the true deliberance of man is the
deliverance from avidya, from ignorance. In his words -
"Thus it is only avidya which makes the self own fetter
by making us think that it is an end in itself and by
preventing our beings, that it contains the idea that
transcends its limits." So Tagore pleaded that by
Vidya or parama vidya or real education we should try to
save ourselves from the grasp of the self and know our
true soul.

So before coming to the discussion of Tagore's
concept of Brahma, nature and man which formed the central
point of his philosophy of life we want to see in brief
what Tagore thought about the metaphysical problems like
the relation between the self and the soul. We shall
refer mainly to two articles written by him - 'The problem
of the self' and 'Soul consciousness'. Tagore says that
the idea of self comes from the consciousness of separate-
ness, and the separateness of self is considered by man as
his most precious possession but it is his wrong view of
the self. By such consideration the self loses its com-
plete meaning. Ignorance or avidya is the cause of such
limited consciousness. True knowledge of the soul can save man from such narrow idea. So the wise man comes and says - "Let yourselves free from avidya; know your true soul and be saved from the grasp of the self which imprisons you." So it is the first and foremost duty of man to set himself free from 'avidya' or ignorance, secondly, to know his true soul, and lastly, to save himself from the grasp of the self. These ideas constitute the basis of Tagore's philosophy of life and education. What he realizes in life is expressed through his poems and *Visva-Bharati* which is described as a tangible poem. In his view, the meaning of self does not consist in separateness, it lies in union which is called 'Yoga' by Indian philosophers. We may refer to some of his observations in this connection. These are as follows: "We must know that the meaning of our self is not to be found in its separateness from God and others, but in the ceaseless realization of *Yoga*, of union; ...... This is the reason why the separateness of our self has been described by our philosophers as 'maya', as an illusion, because it has no intrinsic reality of its own." Then he holds the view that everything including our self has dualism of appearance and truth, 'maya and satyam'. When our self is separated, that is, when it is individual and finite it
is 'maya' and it is 'satyam' when it is not separated, that is, when it is universal and infinite. In his own words, "Ourself is 'maya' 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 'paramatma'." Thus we find that Tagore accepted the Indian philosophical view that the individual and finite self is 'Jiva-atman' and the universal and infinite self is 'Paramatman'. Not that he accepted the Indian view of the self as finite and at the same time infinite, he also accepted the Christian view of the individual 'I am' and the infinite 'I am'. He refers to the saying of Christ - "Before Abraham was I am." So Tagore observes that "The individual 'I am' attains its perfect end when it realizes its freedom of harmony in the infinite 'I am'. Therein lies its 'mukti', its deliverance from the thraldom of 'maya', of appearance which springs from 'avidya', from ignorance; "its emancipation in cαntαm cιvαm advaitam, in the perfect repose in truth, in the perfect activity in goodness, and in the perfect union in love." Then we find that Tagore's emphasis was on the perfect union and not on the absolute separation. So he concludes his article on 'The Problem of Self' with this observation,
We must know that it is only the revelation of the Infinite which is endlessly new and eternally beautiful in us gives the only meanings to our self."

The Upanishad says — "Know thine own soul". But our egoistic impulses, our selfish desires obscure our true vision of the soul. Again when our soul is detached and imprisoned within the narrow limits of a self it loses its significance. So if we want to know our soul, our egoistic impulses and selfish desires must be removed. But how to remove it? It can be removed, says Tagore, by soul consciousness.

Tagore then comes to another point that the realization of our soul has two sides - the moral and the spiritual. But the two sides are never separated; they are closely related and so they should always be taken together. He explains it in the following way: "The moral side represents training of unselfishness, control of desire; the spiritual side represents sympathy and love. They should be taken together and never separated. The cultivation of the merely moral side of our nature leads us to the dark region of narrowness and hardness of heart, to the intolerant arrogance of goodness, and the cultivation of the merely spiritual side of nature leads us to
a still darker region of revelry in intemperance of imagination." We, therefore, find here that soul is personal and universal at the same time. It is within us and in others as well. It is beyond all boundaries of death. In the Gita it is said that 'the soul is that which cannot be consumed by fire, drenched by water, dried up by air, torn up by any weapon, in a word, it cannot be destroyed by material forces. It is unlike body impregnable, incom- bastingible and imperishable. It only changes bodies which are purely material as man changes his clothes whenever these become dirty and mutilated. It never comes of and dies.' It is as immortal as Brahma. In other words, the Supreme Soul and Brahma are one and the same. This oneness is preached both by the Gita and the Upanishads. As a follower of the Upanishads and the Gita Tagore accepted the concrete view of soul and Brahma. These are not mere abstractions to Tagore. His idea of Brahma will be discussed in the following pages. Now we shall say a few words on his idea of the relation of the soul and the self.

Tagore differentiates the life of self and that of soul in the following manner. He says that 'the life in which the consciousness of separation takes first place and unity the second place is the life of self. On
the other hand, the life in which the consciousness of unity is the primary factor and separateness the secondary one, is the life of soul. So he held the view that "the whole object of man is to free his personality of self into the personality of soul, to turn his inward forces into the forward movement towards the infinite, from the contraction of self in desire into the expansion of soul in love." Thus we find that self is narrower than soul and an obstacle to salvation. So soul-consciousness is very much needed for attaining mukti or deliverance. Again the consciousness of the soul is the key to the cosmic consciousness and God consciousness as well. This is what the Upanishads say. Tagore firmly believed that we are essentially spirit and the sons of the immortal (Amritasva Putra). "So to know our soul apart from the self is the first step towards the realization of the supreme deliverance. .... This we can do by winning mastery over self by rising above all pride and greed and fear, by knowing that worldly losses and physical death can take nothing away from the truth and the greatness of our soul." According to Tagore, self is narrow, it reflects no light and it is blind to the infinite.

In Tagore's view, the difference of the self and the soul disappears in love. Because, "In love the sense
of difference is obliterated and the human soul fulfils its purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself and reaching across the threshold of the infinite. Therefore love is the highest bliss that man can attain to, for through it alone he truly knows that he is more than himself, and that he is at one with the All.

This is an important observation made by Tagore and a cardinal principle of his philosophy of life and education. Thus we find that love constitutes the most important point in his philosophy of life. Because he believed that love is the only means of communion with the universe and God. In his own words, "It is not a mere sentiment; it is truth; it is the joy that is at the root of all creation. It is the white light of pure consciousness that emanates from Brahma. So, to be one with this sarvanubhah, this all-feeling Being who is in the external sky, as well as in our inner soul, we must attain to that summit of consciousness, which is love. ...... It is through the heightening of our consciousness into love, and extending it all over the world, that we can attain Brahma-vihara, communion with this infinite joy." He again thought that it is love which "gives us the testimony of the great whole, which is the complete and final truth of man," and that "we have our greatest delight when we realise ourselves in others and this is the
definition of love. This is in brief Tagore's concept of love. To Tagore, love is truth and joy and God is all love. Truth (Sātvam), beauty (Śundaram) and goodness (Civam) are all mingled in love. Tagore thus advocated one new yoga — the 'Prema Yoga' or 'Ananda Yoga' as it is said by S.C. Sarker. It is a new addition to the history of yogas — Jñāna, Kāma and Bhakti-Yoga. In this respect he differs from the Vaishnava poets and the Bauls of Bengal or other Bhakti cults. The idea of union with the Infinite through the egoless love is Tagore's original contribution, because it is this concept of love in which truth, beauty and goodness are compounded together and it lies at the root of his philosophy of universal humanism or internationalism and also the establishment of an international University like Visva-Bharati. This thus plays the most vital part in his philosophy of life and education.

Tagore fully realized that the love of man and love of God lead man to disinterested work (Niskama Karma). It refrains man from doing any harm to others and fosters the spirit of goodness. So Dr. Benoy Gopal Roy opines thus — "Love generates in us what the poet calls all-consciousness (Sarvanubhuti). It is the feeling of atoneness in the whole. Critics are of opinion that Sarvanubhuti 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. Rabindranath'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. So in the words of S. Radhakrishnan, 'nature and society are the aspects of the Absolute and revelation of the divine spirit.'

Man and Nature then are not opposed to each other to the poet. They are the expressions of God in diverse forms. "The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day", says Tagore, "runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures." He believed in the sayings of the Upanishads that 'the world is enveloped by God. He is in fire and in water. He permeates the whole world. He is in the annual crops as well as in the perennial trees.' So by loving all we can love God who is the spring from which all love emanates.

Tagore's idea of God or Brahma or the Infinite is, therefore, that God is not merely 'a sumtotal of facts.' He is 'a Being who comprehends in himself all things that are human in knowledge, will, and action.' His concept of Brahma was not absolute. So he wrote — "The absolute conception of Brahman which is taught by some interpretations
of the Vedanta is outside the subject of my discussion."31

The subjectmatter of *The Religion of Man* is to state
the divinity of Man and the humanity of God. In his view,
God is there where "the tiller is tilling the hard ground
and where the path-maker is breaking the stones. He is
with them in sun and in shower."32 He lives with 'the
poorest, the lowliest and the lost.' If we want to meet
Him we have to come out of meditations from within the
closed doors and to stand by him in toil and in sweat of
brow. This philosophy of egoless love and toil forms the
nucleus of his educational experiment in rural reconstruc­
tion and upliftment in the premises of Sriniketan. Tagore's
Brahma or God, in the words of Radhakrishnan, "is not a
being seated high up in the heavens but a spirit immanent
in the whole universe of persons and things."33

So in Tagore's opinion, to love God means to love
men and things of nature. He insisted, therefore, on
loving man and nature. He was primarily a poet of man and
nature. His philosophy thus centres round man and nature.
He wanted to see the formless in the ocean of forms and
the infinite through the finitude. He wanted deliverance
through enumerable bondage and not in renunciation. "Deli­
verance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace
of freedom in a thousand hearts of delight."34 He longed
sincerely to live amidst men. He did not like to die in this beautiful world. "This world is sweet; I do not want to die, I wish to dwell in the ever living life of Man." That is to say, the poet advocated the finite-infinite nature of God, the form and formless at the same time. Dr. B. G. Roy makes the same observation. He writes thus — "In most 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 individuals. He has loved this finite earth with its varieties of colour and sound. He has love of humanity; human values, to him, are in consonance with values eternal." Then we find that the enormous superstructure of his philosophy of education and educational experiments stands on the foundation of his philosophy of life that centres round the relation of the finite and the infinite. This is, no doubt, the Kernel of Tagore's philosophy. He sinks deep into the ocean of colours to seek the colourless; he hears the flute of his divine lover in 'the boundless sky'. He does everything with the medium of love. Love is, as it were, the
bridge between the finite and the infinite, man and God and his Jiban Devata and Visva-Devata. So there is no difference between the two. The contradiction, if any, is reconciled in love. Tagore, therefore, wanted to develop in the students of his institutions this universal ego-less love for man and nature and for the infinite and the finite, or God and man through education. Thus his educational philosophy was greatly shaped by his general philosophy. In short, Tagore believed in the saying of the Upanishads that Brahma is Satyam or Truth. He exists for all time to come. He is Anandam or Bliss. He is Santam and Shivam. He is the good and the quiet because all his ordained laws are in harmony with one another. He is Sundaram or the beautiful. He is again Advaitam or the one. It is expressed thus,

"Satya Jnamantam Brahma
Anandarupam amrutam yadvibhati
Santam Shivam Advaitam."

Tagore believed that to love Brahma means to love truth, beauty and goodness and this is the ultimate object of our existence. That is why, Tagore's educational programmes based on these principles of love, truth, beauty and goodness.
Nature and Man are not two irreconcilable realities in his philosophy. In the words of Dr. B.G. Roy, in Tagore's philosophy nature is hyphenated with man as the same eternal Life expresses Himself in both. God, man and nature are thus intimately related to one another. These three factors, as we have said elsewhere, constitute the basis of Tagore's entire philosophy including his educational philosophy.