Chapter - 4

Philosophical Thoughts: The Realisation of Life
The Philosophical thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore consist in them the concept of Ultimate Reality, the concept of world or nature, the concept of soul, the death and immortality and the concept of liberation. In his philosophical thoughts, humanism also plays an important role along with his concept of God, nature, death, salvation etc. Wherever Rabindranath Tagore leads his readers, ultimately they reach to mean who is Godly and great in his possible achievements. Actually, there is a vain debate among the critics of him that whether Rabindranath Tagore is a philosopher or not. It is certain that Rabindranath Tagore is not a philosopher in the academic sense of the term - in the sense that one writes or discusses on as an academic discipline or earns one’s livelihood by it. Rabindranath Tagore has never been a philosopher in this sense, and he has never claimed so, either. He has very modestly said that he is neither a scholar nor a philosopher.

Rabindranath Tagore also humbly tells that his religion is a ‘poets religion.’ All that he feels about it is from vision and not from knowledge. Here is his claim to be an original philosopher. The mysteries of man and of vast universe have opened themselves before his vision. Thus the truth he has realized, rushed out of him in his philosophical thoughts.

Rabindranath Tagore, like the others who follow Upanishads, believes that ultimately the Reality is Bramhan. He is Sat, Chit and Ananda or Truth, Consciousness and Bliss. But it is seen, though Rabindranath Tagore accepts the vedantic conception of Ultimate Reality, he does not go to the extremes like the vedanties who said that everything else is unreal.

Rabindranath Tagore always compromises between the extremes. To describe the nature of the Ultimate Reality, Rabindranath Tagore says that the Infinite has both negative and positive aspects. But in its positive aspect it is not
only denial of finitude, but the unity of all. “The truth that infinite dwells in the ideal of unity. The infinite and the finite are one as song and singing are one.” (Sisir Kumar Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol-II, 369).

Here one should understand that Rabindranath Tagore’s Absolute or Brahman is not only unity of all, but also He is the acting reality. Rabindranath Tagore in *Creative Unity* says, “Brahma in his negative qualities is quiescent. Brahma, in his positive qualities acts upon all time. He is a poet, he uses mind as his instrument, he reveals himself in limits, the revelations which come out of his abundance of joy and not from any outside necessity.” (371).

In this way Rabindranath Tagore conceives neither an Absolute Transcendental Being as only reality nor a personal Immanent God as only reality, but he reconciles and synthesizes both the conceptions and describes both as the two aspects of one Reality. But as there cannot be any personal or close relationship with a passive transcendental Reality, Rabindranath Tagore is more concerned with immanent, personal aspects of God.

Rabindranath Tagore wants to argue that man has the tendency and strength to become God. He is not a meticulous philosopher and doesn’t want to discuss philosophical problems with logic. He conceives truth in a flash of intuition and expresses there is a plain form. He doesn’t want to put forth any traditional proofs for the existence of God. One has to feel His existence in one’s heart. So, in ‘*Personality*’ he exclaims, “These world movements are not mere blind movements, they are related to the will of a Supreme person.” (371).

Rabindranath Tagore describes God as the idea that exists in one’s mind. So he says in ‘*Sadhana*’, “The idea of God that man has in his being is the wonder of all wonders. He has felt in the depth of his life that what appears as
imperfect is the manifestation of the perfect.” (298). So, every human has a God in himself and all humans if they come on one platform that is Universal God.

When a conversation took place between Einstein and Rabindranath Tagore on ‘The Nature of Reality’, the former said, “If nobody is in this house yet that table remains where it is”, Rabindranath Tagore replies, “Yes it remains outside the mind, but not outside the universal mind. The table which I perceive is perceptible by the same kind of consciousness which I possess.” (Sisir Kumar Das, The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Vol-III, 912). Thus according to Rabindranath Tagore all objects in the world exist in the universal mind.

Therefore Rabindranath Tagore says man tries to find himself in his truth and beauty through the society. In this large life of social communion man feels the mystery of Unity, as he does in music. From the sense of that Unity, man comes to the sense of their God. In this way man’s mingling with society proves the existence of God. Though Rabindranath Tagore agrees the existence of both personal and impersonal forms of Infinite, he rather tends to offer more essentiality to personal aspects of the Absolute, which can be certainly accepted by the Hindu religion. Therefore, like any Christian or the Hindu, he too feels a God, who is near a man and man can form a personal relationship with Him.

In this very context Rabindranath Tagore is not in a position to accept the idea that the Absolute in India is totally a passive being. So he says to know God in this life one has to be true and not to know him in this life is the dissolution of death. Hence, Rabindranath Tagore narrates ‘God a Superman’. This leads to the idea that to make God personal is to make him finite. But Rabindranath Tagore doesn’t want to accept this idea either. Rabindranath Tagore believes that there is no difference between God’s personality and infinity. The absolute possesses a
personality, which tells that He has infinite power, bliss and goodness. These are not just attributes but essences of reality. Thus Rabindranath Tagore in ‘Personality’ says, “It is not in my own individual personality that reality is contained, but in an infinite personality too.” (Sisir Kumar Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol-II, 372). So Rabindranath Tagore’s idea of personal God is of a God with whom finite beings can have personal belonging.

The most important thing is that Rabindranath Tagore has not described God in negative term as the Advitins did. He has seen love in God like Visnavas. Rabindranath Tagore describes God as the divine lover who plays hide and seek with humans. In this sense in “Creative Unity” Rabindranath Tagore says that in India God with people is not a distant God, He belongs to their homes as well as to their temples. They feel His nearness to them in all the human relationship of love and affection, and in their festivities. He is the Chief Guest whom they honour.

Thus one gets the concept of loving God from Rabindranath Tagore; it is not so important that He has infinite strength, but it is important that He has bound Himself with finite beings. He also craves for getting love from them whom He loves. As God is living in nature, He expresses Himself through His creation, which is actually His sacrifice. But this act of self-sacrifice, He does it out of joy, as “In love, loss and gain are harmonized. In its balance-sheet, credit and debit accounts are in the same column, and gifts are added to gains.” (324).

God loses Himself constantly in his creation so that He can gain Himself in love. God is never passive but active, and He acts out of His unbounded happiness and there is no outer force necessary behind His action. Again, if God were absolutely free, there would be no creation at all. So God Himself willingly
has accepted the bondage in the form of creation. The lover God wants love from his created beings. Hence, the only motive behind the creation is His joy. The immortal being himself in joy form (Anandarupamaritamayad Vibhati). The joy which is without any form, must create, must translate itself into forms.

In this way God has expressed Himself in creation. So to find love one doesn’t have to go beyond the world or meditate. Thus through nature, through the finite beings, He has expressed Himself. So, according to Rabindranath Tagore God is expressed in the whole creation but He has not expressed Himself in equal amount in everything; there are degrees of reality. Even though, the whole universe is His expression, different beings express God in different planes. One expresses in a higher degree than the other. In the material world, man expresses God in a higher degree than the animals.

So there is certainly highness of degree in the creation, man being at the highest degree in the measurement. As Rabindranath Tagore says that the revilement of the Infinite in the finite, which is the motive of all creations, is not seen in its perfection in the starry heavens, in the beauty of flowers. It is in the soul of man. So, in the objects of nature Brahman is revealed, but he is most perfectly revealed in humanity.

Rabindranath Tagore accepts what Upanishads say that three realities are three - God, world and man. Before looking into Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy of nature, one has to know what he says about ‘Maya’. According to former philosophers like Shankaracharya, this world or nature is “Maya” or unreal since Brahman and nature cannot be real at a time. But Rabindranath Tagore never dismisses the world as “Maya” or unreal.
He argues that the world or ‘Maya’ does never indicate the world absolutely independent of the creator. So world is real as a part of the Absolute. It is absurd to think that the world has independent existence. “The world-song is never for a moment separated from its singer; music and the musician are inseparable.” (337). So world is not ‘Maya’ and it is as real as the absolute. Both are together and thinking each independent on the other is not correct and it never leads one towards the goal. One must treat both in terms of reality.

**Concept of Soul or Atman:**

The Indian Philosophy gives maximum preference to the essential part of man and it is called ‘self or soul’. In some systems, it is considered as an independent reality and in other systems it is conceived as identical with Brahman and again according to some it is a part of Brahman. The finite self as Rabindranath Tagore says is free and real. In this connection Rabindranath Tagore says that it is one, and though unmoving, is swifter than mind; organs of sense cannot reach it, which standing it progresses beyond others that run; in it the life inspiration maintains the fluid forces of life. Therefore, one’s senses of organs, mind and body all are limited in capacity and they are changing and contradictory in nature. But besides all these diversities of life one is conscious of a unitary principle in one which combines all and it is called “atman’ or ‘soul’ in one which is beyond body mind and senses. This soul is beyond any material possessions which bind and limit the real soul. It wants to get rid of all these.

Hence, when the soul is bound by selfish desires of narrow self, the soul loses its significance. Then why is there this ‘aham’? Rabindranath Tagore gives pat answer that ‘aham’ is created so that man can dedicate it. God is creator, and for creation, He doesn’t require any external object. But soul, who also likes what the Infinite wants to give, requires some material which it can dedicate. If it
can call something ‘mine’ only then it can be given. ‘Aham’ is there which collects the material on its own, and by arranging the collection in a special way it requires the right to call it ‘mine’. So God has given man right to call anything ‘mine’ and enjoy pride so that when it gives, it can feel the joy of giving something which is its own.

Rabindranath Tagore very nicely has compared the ‘atman’ and the ‘aham’ with flame and lamp, respectively. The lamp collects oil for it and keeps it with great care. So, it is distinct from the rest of objects and very miserly in nature. But when it is lighted, the flame expresses the real nature of it - to illuminate and to establish the relationship with all objects far and near. Then it crosses the limit of the lamp, and enters into the world. One’s self is also like a lamp which collects material objects and holds them carefully but then it contradicts the real nature of it. The lamp must give up its oil to the light and thus set free the purpose it has in its hoarding.

In this way, the ‘atman’ gets success by diffusing itself through the whole world. Thus the real air of one’s soul is to unite itself with the world; the soul can find its truth; soul is to unite itself with the world; the soul can find its truth when it unites with others. So when it does perceive the unity and harmony which is present between the soul of man and the world, then the true nature of soul is revealed; it gives up itself for the love of mankind and when the soul realizes its unity with the world, then ‘one’ intuitively feels that the same ‘One’ is present in all human beings. One’s truth is hidden, when one lives the life of self, but Rabindranath Tagore says that when one knows that this one in him is one in all, and then his truth is revealed. Then one knows that one’s soul is not an abstract one, but it is truer when it feels its own presence in other souls. This feeling of realization that one’s soul can be seen in other’s souls is the real start of
humanism in spirituality. Thus man feels his presence in others as well as the worldly things around him.

In this manner one can see Rabindranath Tagore’s concept of soul being an independent reality and unity of souls with the greater soul, world and other souls are the base of his humanism. So, human soul is not only a mere part of the Divine but also free and independent being. Hence, human soul is absolutely great. The greatness is sanctioned so that it may freely and wontedly wants to love and try always to unite with the greater soul. So the great God willingly makes Himself limited for getting love of human soul. This soul, getting liberty does never want to limit itself, but wants to dedicate itself and to unite itself with other souls and the world.

Accordingly Rabindranath Tagore says that salvation doesn’t mean the destruction of one’s individuality. So one has to reduce one’s egotic nature, but not self. One has to mingle one’s self with other selves and thus become free or liberated. Thus one is freed from the finite nature and raise above his ego and then one’s life becomes God centered. Then there won’t be any obstruction from realizing the love of God.

Rabindranath Tagore’s salvation is not in renunciation of the world, but in making the human personality perfect. When one spots the divinity in one, automatically one gets salvation within this worldly frame. Rabindranath Tagore wants to make it clear that ‘salvation’ is an eternal process of perfecting the human personality. So man never merges in God.

Thus the ‘soul’ never loses its individuality in the abundant joy also it feels, seeks and enjoys all the liberties along with the super soul. This is a sort of
mutuality and not at all a merger. After all, merger is suicidal and the Ultimate never encourages suicidal tendency.

**Rabindranath Tagore’s method for realization of salvation:**

One’s senses are created by God so that one can enjoy the form, colour, beauty, taste which are revealed in the nature. Some philosophers and moralists preach sensual enjoyment to be sin, but Rabindranath Tagore says that with the help of the finite senses only, one can touch the Infinite. He fearlessly says that through these forms only one can reach the formless. One has to go beyond senses only with the help of senses. Thus, Rabindranath Tagore has never rejected the importance of body or senses. He rejected all ways of causing troubles for the body or senses in worshipping the God. Henceforth, Rabindranath Tagore wants to tell that the whole creation is self-sacrifice of the Supreme Being. He is sacrificing himself in various forms, colours and beauties in which lie His joy and His freedom. Automatically, man’s freedom also lies in expressing himself through the creation with his inner creative skills. So, the world - the creation of God with all its beauties calls the creator in man also, continuously communicating that here in the world, he is God’s partner.

Rabindranath Tagore says with excitement that, this great world where it is a creation, an expression of the Infinite - where its morning songs of joy to the newly awakened life, and its evening stars sing to the traveler, weary and worm, of the triumph of life in a new birth across death -has its call for us. The call has ever roused the creator in man, and urged him to reveal the truth, to reveal the Infinite in himself. It is ever claiming from us, in our own creation co-operation with God, reminding one of one’s divine nature which finds itself in freedom of spirit. So, all the beauties in the world are not created for man’s enjoyment only, but they awake the Infinite in means. So only, man is superior to all animals
since he is a creator. Through finite, man attains infinity, when like the Infinite’ he is engaged himself in creative activities. In this way, art is response of man’s creative soul to the call of the real. So only, in ‘personality’ Rabindranath Tagore says, “In art the person in us is sending its answer to the Supreme Person, who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across the lightless world of facts.” (Sisir Kumar Das, The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Vol-III, 89).

It is an accepted fact that man has two aspects of personality; one is finite which contains One's emotional and biological needs. But man certainly has another aspect of his personality, which is not at all satisfied with the materialistic possession. It is Infinite in nature and so needs to create something innovative. This is the creation of beauty. From the eternal joy which flows from within, he creates beauty in many forms, sometimes through poems or arts to express his true being in himself which is infinite in nature.

Most of the moralists may not accept Rabindranath Tagore giving more stress on joy and expression and not on self control and austerity. Rabindranath Tagore says firmly that the language of joy is expressed by beauty. He asks one not to confuse joy with pleasure and beauty with mere prettiness. He says pleasure is finite in nature and joy is divine and infinite in nature. It is the outcome of detachment from self and lies in freedom of spirit. Beauty is that profound expression of reality which satisfies our hearts without any other alternatives but its own ultimate value.

One can express one’s feeling clearly in music because it is the best among all art-forms. Music is always more powerful than verbosity. The infinite too expresses Him through finite forms and it is like silent music. Here Rabindranath Tagore says that, the sun, the moon, the stars and planets; each and
every part adds its own unique note to the cosmic song. Music is the best of all forms of art because it at once reveals the feeling of the creator and it never separates itself from the musician.

The painter, who tries to express himself through painting, has to wait for brush, canvas and colours. When the painter starts painting, the idea of completeness of it is not expressed in it, and when the picture is complete, the creator is separated from it. But we see the signer does not have to depend on any external object for expressing himself. His idea and his expression are brother and sister; very often they are born as twins. In music, the heart reveals itself immediately; it suffers not from any barrier of alien material.

At every step music expresses itself in wholeness, it is never separated from the musician, with the departure of him, and music also remains no more. Here rises one question that why man wants to express himself through creation? The answer is as simple as ‘because he can feel more strongly than other creatures in the universe’.

Moreover man’s personality is revealed in his creative acts. “When our heart is fully awakened in love, or in other great emotion, our personality is in its floodtide. Then it feels the longing to express itself for the very sake of expression. Then comes art, and we forget the claim of necessity, the thrift of usefulness, the spring our temples try to kiss the stars and the notes of our music to fathoms the depth of the ineffable.” (Sisir Kumar Das, The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Vol-II, 366). It can be described as the base of human progress as it proclaims in an unmistakable fashion the place of pride that man occupies in the scheme of things.
The next question is how personality plays its role in creation? Strictly speaking personality plays threefold part in any creative art. Firstly the creator exhibits his personality in his art. Secondly the spectators or the audiences also personally are involved since his personality is awakened by hearing the good art. He enjoys it and identifies himself in it and also gets lost in it. Thus his personality plays an important part in enjoying the art. Thirdly, from the highest purpose of art and also most important criterion of it is that it must be the communication of a person to a person. A piece of art is said to be perfect only if it becomes meaningful to others. So, Rabindranath Tagore says that a poet is a true poet only when he can make his own personal ideas joyful to all men.

Thus human personality plays an important role in art. For Rabindranath Tagore art should be molded and created by the heart of the artist. He believes that emotions such as love, bliss, joy, sorrow, or pain are at the root of any art. Therefore he accepts the superiority of human personality over objects. The emotion does not be in the object, but the artist’s mind lends the emotion, to the art process.

Rabindranath Tagore says that the emotional surplus in man seeks the outlet in the creation of art. So, to express the inner joy or ideation which arises in artist’s mind in perceiving some object is more important than to object which arises the particular emotion. In art man reveals himself and not his objects.

Thus, Rabindranath Tagore gives emphasis to humanity and its personality. Man is superior to other beings not only because he can ‘feel’ but he can express it in creation also. A feeling cannot be transferred into art, if it is not expressed properly. The whole world itself is the expression of the inner joy of the absolute.
In *Personality* Rabindranath Tagore says that the principle object of art is the expression of personality and therefore, it necessarily uses the language of pictures and music. If one finds order, harmony and rhythm in the world created by the Ultimate, the same should be seen in man’s created art also. Birds repeat a single note or a very simple combination of notes, but man builds his world of music and establishes ever new rhythmic relationships of notes, which reveal to him a universal mystery of creation.

The hidden joy of man needs something in the outside world for expressing itself. And through the formidable work which he has willingly done, man expresses himself. “The soul of man is ever freeing itself by its own folds by its activity, had it been otherwise, it would not have done any voluntary work.” (326). The work which has been done out of necessity, binds one, but what is done out of joy and willingness is not ‘bondage’ but ‘freedom’. Rabindranath Tagore also counts to tell that when one gives one’s self away, he can really know that all are enveloped in the world by God. Rabindranath Tagore doesn’t instruct one to give up the worldly duties nor to forbid one to enjoy the worldly beauties, but he gives a piece of advice that one must not enjoy the world by knowing it the ultimate end; on the other hand, one should not disengage the worldly ties by force and deprive the soul, its bliss.

**Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy of religious synthesis:**

Now-a-days a modern man is in need of a religion which is capable of fulfilling the religious urge of all persons in the world. Because of ‘globalization’ man has become closer to the other and in the multi-religions concept it is not applicable in many ways. This may be otherwise said that man may accept any one of the existing religions fit for all people of the world or to have a synthetic outlook and find the internal unity in the various regions. Or to evolve a
comprehensive universal religion in which all the existing religions like Hinduism, Christianity etc. find their proper place.

Rabindranath Tagore doesn’t want to accept any of the above ideas. His standard statement is that every religion aims at finding the supreme truth and all religions have common base. But when religions are influenced by sectarianism the problem becomes more complicated. This is the reason why believers of one religion become enemies to the believers of the other religions. He knows pretty well that a universal religion cannot be evolved by extracting the merits from all the existing religions.

So, his method is to rise above this level where religion is identified with religious beliefs and sects and he wants to put religion in the life of man. He is in the search of a religion which can be called the ‘Religion of Man’. This will be able to solve the problems and satisfy every person on the earth. So, Rabindranath Tagore tries to synthesize all religions and propagate the Religion of Man.

Throughout his life Rabindranath Tagore has never accepted only one religion. He believed all religions and argued that the essence of religions is to stress ‘humanity’. He never has followed any religious system blindly just because it has been the ritual. Unbiased he has studied and analyzed all existing religions and doesn’t rigidly support any particular conventional religion. He says, “It was through an idiosyncrasy of my temperament that I refused to accept any religious teaching merely because people in any surroundings believed it to be true… Thus, my mind was brought up in an atmosphere by freedom - freedom from the dominance of any creed that had its sanction in to definite authority of some organized body of worshippers.” (Sisir Kumar Das, The English Writings
of Rabindranath Tagore, Vol-III, 88-89). His religion is the outcome of his own deep thinking, personal experience or vision and self-realization.

He discusses the lives and preachings of different religious preachers like Shankaracharya, the Buddha, the Christ etc. and shows universal elements in their preachings. He found, what they advised men to do are for common good of all people. In this regard, their preaching is similar though their doctrines of good or some other dogma differs. So, he says that it is significant all great religions and their historic origin in persons who represented in their life a truth which was not cosmic and unmoral but human and good. He rescued religion from the magic strong hold of demon force and brought it into the inner heart of humanity; into a fulfillment not confined to some exclusive good fortune of the individual but to the welfare of all men. This was not for the spiritual ecstasy of lonely souls, but for the spiritual emancipation of all races. Rabindranath Tagore certainly has maximum belief in the universality of the higher religious; his aim is to go for a spiritual unity which can link the whole of mankind.

Rabindranath Tagore has no point in discussing the philosophical thoughts of the religious preachers like ShankaraCharya, The Buddha or even the Christ, but he has pointed out that all these preached the people to treat man as man. Rabindranath Tagore says all these preachers are great because they never part people by the narrow thought like cast or creed. The Buddha taught Ahimsa (non-violence), Shankara Charya taught Advita (no duality) and Christianity also valued humanity.

All these preachers preached one common thing that is love your neighbor as you love they self. He says that Jesus abused ritualistic religion of the Jews and declared the spiritualistic religion. In the same way Mohammed also preached monotheism which according to Rabindranath Tagore can be accepted
alike by the people of the world. He discusses the life and preaching’s of the prophet Zarathustra, who also gave the religion a moral code of conduct and direction. “Zarathustra… emancipated religion from the exclusive narrowness of the tribal God, the God of the chosen people and offered it to the Universal Man.” (80).

Finally for Rabindranath Tagore religion means personal religion, where religion goes direct from heart to heart, from soul to soul between man and his making. This strong belief in personal religion has made him to reach that level of religion and it has become the religion of ‘man’. It is based on his vision and not knowledge. He says that his religion is a poet’s religion. He says, “Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channel as does the inspiration of songs. My religious life has followed that same mysterious line of growth as has my political life.” (91).

But he says, “Nevertheless, I am sure that there have come moments in my own experience when my soul has touched the Infinite and has become instantly conscious of it through the illumination of joy.”(91). For Rabindranath Tagore religion is not a theology but personal experience. God becomes more personalized to him. He has discovered the infinite bond between man and God, finite and Infinite. In his ‘Sadhana’ he has made an attempt to interpret India’s spiritual attitude.

This spirit of Rabindranath Tagore is the belief that he welcomes different religious traditions. Since his religion speaks out personal relationship of man and God, it is both universal and external in its scope and application. He indicates the proper aim, nature and function of this religion of man. He tells about this Religion to Einstein, “My religion is into reconciliation of the super personal man, the Universal human spirit in my own individual being.”
‘The Religion of Man’ is not a religion by group, sect, race or particular country. It is due to this cause that this religion can appeal to all human beings. He says as long as man deals with his God as dispenser of benefits, he makes him limited to his own seat. But when, “… directly the moral nature that is to say, the humanity of God is apprehended, man realizes his God is no longer an outsider to be propitiated for a spiritual concession. The consciousness of God transcends the limitation of race and gathering together all human beings within one spiritual circle of Union”. (Sisir Kumar Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol-III, 79).

Rabindranath Tagore says there is place for intellect in religion. Man should not follow all religious rituals without questioning. He has to apply his reasoning and decide whether certain injunctions are to be followed or not. But, if man’s intellect is neglected means; it is an insult to man, and also an insult to the supreme creator who has created man with intellect.

When man follows his intellect means he follows his real nature because it believes in equality and unity of all men as a whole. So Rabindranath Tagore says, “Science may include in its field of knowledge the starry world and the world beyond it, philosophy may try to find some universal principle which is at the root of all things, but religion inevitably concentrates itself on humanity which illumines our reason, inspires our wisdom, stimulates our love, claims our intelligent service.”(113). “For the accurate knowledge of things we depend upon signs that represents the rational mind of the universal man.” (91) So the object of religion is to make one’s life successful and complete from all sides. There are sacrifices, enjoyments, intelligence, imagination, work, thought-out, beauty and hardmess everything in man’s religion.
In Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘Viswabharathi’, pupils belonging to all sects can meet. Actually it is a place where traditional religion has not been given importance or people are not distinguished on the basis of religion. Rabindranath Tagore describes his school as “We never try to gain some kind of outward uniformity by weeding out the differences of nature training of our members. Some of us belong to the Brahma Samaj sect, and some of other sects of Hinduism and some of us are Christians. Because we do not deal with creeds and dogmas of sectarianism, therefore this heterogeneity of our religious beliefs does not present us with any difficulty whatever” (Sisir Kumar Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol-III, 115). Thus, for all practical purposes Rabindranath Tagore’s religion passes through many stages; his search for a synthesis of religion at last reached him to his *Religion of Man*

Rabindranath Tagore’s message of universalism makes one aware of the inherent unity between man and man, man and nature, and man and the absolute. The social philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore shows ideal form of society. The ideal society is that which gives the scope for the fulfillment of one’s material as well as spiritual needs. The base for this will be individual dignity and freedom of man. Democracy, socialism and secularism will be its main principles.

In the field of international ties, Rabindranath Tagore’s message of unity, educational and cultural co-operation among the countries to make a happy and prosperous world. Rabindranath Tagore’s ideal of human unity, universal peace, and internationalism should be the ideals of all races of all countries. This gives scope to form a heaven on earth. The ‘Religion of Man’, Rabindranath Tagore’s ideal can truly fulfill the need of modern man which has all above-mentioned qualities for the ideal religion suited to the present century.
In other words, as Rabindranath Tagore quotes the words of John Keats, one understands that the aim of one’s existence is to obtain knowledge that beauty is truth, and truth beauty. It is music, according to Rabindranath Tagore which is the most direct expression of beauty in art and at the same time the most finite form of the manifestation of the Divine. It is the poets who are the best seers who reflect the beauty of the infinite through the song of their hearts.

In every movement of Nature, Rabindranath Tagore identifies the music and harmony of creation, as in the fall of rain, the child’s first utterance, and the starry constellation etc. He sums up beautifully the music of his body at night when he is fast asleep—the heart will throb, the blood will leap in the veins, and the millions of living atoms of my body will vibrate in tune with the note of the harp-string that thrills at the touch of the master. In his last discourse on ‘The Realization of the Infinite’, Rabindranath Tagore speaks about the nature of attainment of God.

At the outset he categorically states that God is not a material possession like money, or house or car. All these earthly objects manifest but one truth and that is they have their meaning not in themselves but only in their relation with the Infinite. Desire for man is endless but once he realizes that worldly possessions are not the end, but he has to outgrow his desire for them, then that very moment his soul takes to the path of the eternal.

Rabindranath Tagore puts forward the proposition that God cannot be possessed; rather, He is to be experienced. In the finite world man is to fulfill his necessities of food, clothing etc, that satisfies a particular need of his. But once his self seeks joy and freedom beyond the finite existence, and then he no longer wants to get but only to be one with the Brahman. Rabindranath Tagore draws the analogy of the river which joins the larger body of water, the ocean, but
cannot become the ocean. Similarly man’s soul though yearns to become one with the Infinite, however cannot become the Brahman Himself.

Brahman is Brahman, he is the Infinite ideal of perfection but MEN are not what THEY truly are; they are ever to become true, ever to become Brahman. There is the eternal play of love in relation between this being and the becoming; and in the depth of this mystery is the source of all truth and beauty that sustains the endless march of creation. Rabindranath Tagore also uses the analogy of the poem to speak about the progress of the soul, which once realizes the Infinite, is filled with joy and meaning, like a perfect poem.

Another important factor regarding the nature of realization is that it can happen not through intellectual knowledge but only through joy and love. Brahman can be known only by the soul, by her joy in him, by her love. Man comes into relation with Him only by union of the whole being. The soul is likened to a bride by the poet and hence the union is a marriage of the atman with the paramatman. When the soul-bride understands this well, her heart is blissful and at rest.

She knows that she, like a river, has attained the ocean of her fulfillment …she knows the world as her own household by the right of knowing the master of the world as her own lord. Then all her services become services of love… But when the soul fails to recognize her lover then she is the handmaid that is swayed by dejection and sorrow. It is in the very heart of his activities that man seeks to unite with the lord, not from being relieved of all his works or responsibilities of life.

Rabindranath Tagore appropriately ends by saying ‘therefore in the midst of our home and our work, the prayer rises, lead me across for here rolls the sea,
and even here lies the other shore waiting to be reached—yes, here is this everlasting present, not distant, not anywhere else’. The philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, as he presents in his work *Sadhana*, thus, is a comprehensive one that at once includes the idea of a happy reconciliation between service and renunciation, action and seclusion, between self and soul, the finite and the infinite, the individual and the world.

As S. Radhakrishnan rightly says, “Rabindranath Tagore gives an eloquent expression to his thirst for social betterment. Man as a member of society has to offer himself entirely and exhaustively to the service of one’s fellows.” (S.Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy*, 79-80). The soul filled with the infinite love spends itself in the service of man, which otherwise would be an abstract barren negative. To quote Radhakrishnan: “The philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore is an absolute idealism of the concrete type… Rabindranath Tagore’s is a wholeness of vision, which cannot tolerate absolute divisions between body and mind, matter and life, individual and society, community and nation, empire and the world.”(177).

Though *Sadhana* is a collection of discourses offered at various times it still represents the fine thread of Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy that forms the connecting link between all these lectures - that of the purpose of human life i.e., the realization of Brahman in man’s every thought, man’s every word and his every action on this earth. This universe which is but a manifestation of the Infinite, in terms of joy and love, *Sadhana*, means rigorous practice, and the subtitle being *Realization of Life* clearly states the mission of Rabindranath Tagore, that the poet-saint has been striving endlessly to realize his purpose in life in all its glory.
Rabindranath Tagore himself is a fine example of this philosophy, for he has truly been a man of the world in fulfilling his worldly duties as a family man on the one hand and on the other he has been a man of the world in his service to society at large as Rabindranath Tagore who rendered his work in joy and love, in propagating the oneness of Being, so as to be united with the Paramatman.

The Upanishads say that Man becomes true if in this life he can apprehend God; if not, it is the greatest calamity for him. But what is the nature of this attainment of God? It is quite evident that the Infinite is not like one object among many, to be definitely classified and kept among one’s possessions, to be used as an ally specially favouring one in one’s politics, warfare, money-making, or in social competitions. One cannot put one’s God in the same list with one’s summer-houses, motor-cars, or his credit at the bank, as so many people seem to want to do. One must try to understand the true character of the desire that a man has when his soul longs for his God. Does it consist of his wish to make an addition, however valuable, to his belongings? Emphatically no! It is an endlessly wearisome task, this continual adding to his stores. In fact, when the soul seeks God she seeks her final escape from this incessant gathering and heaping and never coming to an end. It is not an additional object that she seeks, but it is the \textit{nityo nityanam}, the permanent in all that is impermanent, the \textit{rasanam rasatamah}, the highest abiding joy unifying all enjoyments.

Therefore when the Upanishads teach man to realize everything in Brahma, it is not to seek something extra, not to manufacture something new. \textit{Ichavasyamdiam sarvam yat kincha jagatyanjagat} \textit{Know} everything that there is in the universe as enveloped by God. \textit{Tana tyaktena bhunjithama gridhah kasyasviddhanam} Enjoy whatever is given by him and harbour not in your mind the greed for wealth which is not your own. (Sisir Kumar Das, \textit{The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore}, Vol-II, 94) When man knows that whatever
there is, it is filled by Him and whatever man has is His gift, then man realizes the Infinite in the finite, and the giver in the gifts.

Then one knows that all the facts of the reality have their only meaning in the manifestation of the one truth, and all man’s possessions have their only significance for him, not in themselves but in the relation they establish with the Infinite. So it cannot be said that man can find Brahman as he finds other objects; there is no question of searching from him in one thing in preference to another, in one place instead of somewhere else. He does not have to run to the grocer's shop for his morning light; he opens his eyes and there it is; so he needs only give himself up to find that Brahman is everywhere.

This is the reason why the Buddha admonished man to free himself from the confinement of the life of the self. If there were nothing else to take its place more positively perfect and satisfying, then such admonition would be absolutely unmeaningful. No man can seriously consider the advice; much less have any enthusiasm for it, of surrendering everything one has for gaining nothing whatever. So, man’s daily worship of God is not really the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering himself, removing all obstacles to union and extending his consciousness of him in devotion and service, in goodness and in love. The Upanishads say: *Be lost altogether in Brahman like an arrow that has completely penetrated its target.*

Thus to be conscious of being absolutely enveloped by Brahman is not an act of mere concentration of mind. It must be the aim of the whole of man’s life. In all his thoughts and deeds he must be conscious of the Infinite. Let the realization of this truth become easier every day of his life, that *Ko hyevanyat kah pranyak yadesha acacha anando na syat* none could live or move if the energy of the all-pervading joy did not fill the sky.
In all man’s actions let him feel that impetus of the infinite energy and be glad. It may be said that the Infinite is beyond man’s attainment, so it is for him as if it were naught. Yes, if the word attainment implies any idea of possession, then it must be admitted that the Infinite is unattainable. Man must keep in mind that the highest enjoyment of man is not in the having but in a getting, which is at the same time not Sadhana.

Man’s physical pleasures leave no margin for the unrealized. They like the dead satellite of the earth, have but little atmosphere around them. When one takes food and satisfies one’s hunger, it is a complete act of possession. So long as the hunger is not satisfied it is a pleasure to eat. For then his enjoyment of eating touches at every point the infinite. But, when it attains completion, or in other words, when the desire for eating reaches the end of the stage of its non-realization, it reaches the end of its pleasure.

In all man’s intellectual pleasures the margin is broader, the limit is far off. In all the deeper love getting and non-getting run ever parallel. In one of the Vaishnava lyrics the lover says to his beloved that he fees as if he has gazed upon the beauty of thy face from his birth, yet his eyes are hungry still: as if he has kept thee pressed to his heart for millions of years, yet his heart is not satisfied. This makes it clear that it is really the infinite that one seeks in his pleasures. His desire for being wealthy is not a desire for a particular sum of money but it is indefinite, and the most fleeting of his enjoyments are but the momentary touches of the eternal.

The tragedy of human life consists in his vain attempts to stretch the limits of things which can never become unlimited, - to reach the infinite by absurdly adding to the rungs of the ladder of the finite. It is evident from this that the real
desire of man’s soul is to get beyond all his possessions. Surrounded by things she can touch and feel, she cries, she is weary of getting; ah, where is she who is never to be got.

One sees everywhere in the history of man that the spirit of renunciation is the deepest reality of the human soul. When the soul says of anything, ‘I do not want it, for I am above it, she gives utterance to the highest truth that is in her. When a girl’s life outgrows her doll, when she realizes that in every respect she is more than her doll is, then she throws it away.

By the very act of possession one knows that one is greater than the things he possesses. It is a perfect misery to be kept bound up with things lesser than oneself. Thus it is that Maitreyi felt when her husband gave her his property on the eve of leaving home. She asked him, ‘Would these material things help one to attain the highest?’ - or, in other words, ‘Are they more than my soul to me?’ When her husband answered, ‘They will make you rich in worldly possessions,’ she said at once, ‘then what am I to do with these?’ It is only when a man truly realizes what his possessions are that he has no more illusions about them; then he knows his soul is far above these.” (Sisir Kumar Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol-II, 340).

Thus man truly realizes his soul by outgrowing his possessions, and man’s progress in the path of eternal life is through a series of renunciations. That one cannot absolutely possess the infinite being is not a mere intellectual proposition. It has to be experienced, and this experience is bliss. The bird, while taking its flight in the sky, experiences at every beat of its wings that the sky is boundless, that its wings can never carry it beyond. Therein lays its joy. In the cage the sky is limited; it may be quite enough for all the purposes of the bird’s life, only it is not more than is necessary. The bird cannot rejoice within the limits of the
necessary. It must feel that what it has is immeasurably more than it ever can want or comprehend, and then only can it will be glad.

Thus man’s soul must soar in the infinite, and she must feel every moment that in the sense of not being able to come to the end of her attainment is her supreme joy, her final freedom. Man’s abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than him, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God. They make it easier for him to part with all that he has, not expecting his life. His existence is miserable and sordid till he finds some great idea which can truly claim his all, which can release him from all attachment to his belongings.

The Buddha and Jesus, and all great prophets, represent such great ideas. They hold before man opportunities for surrendering his all. When they bring forth their divine alms-bowl one feels one cannot help giving, and one finds that in giving is one’s truest joy and liberation, for it is uniting oneself to that extent with the Infinite. Man is not complete unless he gives up everything.

In what man is small, and if one could conceive he is stopping there for eternity, one should have an idea of the most awful hell that man can imagine. In his to be he is infinite, there is his heaven, his deliverance. His ease is occupied every moment with what it can get and have done with; his to be is hungering for something which is more than can be got, which he never can lose because he never has possessed. The finite pole of man’s existence has its place in the world of necessity. There man goes about searching for food to live, clothing to get warmth. In this region it is his function to get things.

The natural man is occupied with enlarging his possessions. But this act of getting is partial. It is limited to man’s necessities. One can have a thing only
to the extent of one’s requirements, just as a vessel can contain water only to the extent of its emptiness. One’s relation to food is only in feeding; one’s relation to a house is only in habitation. One calls it a benefit when a thing is fitted only to some particular want of one’s.

Thus to get is always to get partially, and it never can be otherwise. So this craving for acquisition belongs to one’s finite self. But that side of one’s existence whose direction is towards the infinite seeks not wealth, but freedom and joy. There the reign of necessity ceases, and there our function is not to get but to be. ‘To be what? To be one with Brahma’. For the region of the infinite is the region of unity. Therefore the Upanishads say: If man apprehends God he becomes true.

Here it is becoming, it is not having more. Words do not gather bulk when one knows their meaning; they become true by being one with the idea. Though the West has accepted as its teacher him who boldly proclaimed his oneness with his Father, and who exhorted his followers to be perfect as God, it has never been reconciled to this idea of one’s unity with the infinite being. It condemns, as a piece of wickedness, any implication of man’s becoming God. This is certainly not the idea that Christ preached, nor perhaps does the idea of the Christian mystics, but this seem to be the idea that has become popular in the Christian west. But the highest wisdom in the East holds that it is not the function of one’s soul to gain God, to utilize him for any special material purpose.

All that one can ever aspire to is to become more and more one with God. In the region of nature, which is the region of diversity, one grows by acquisition; in the spiritual world, which is the region of unity, one grows by losing oneself, by uniting. Gaining a thing, as one has said, ‘is by its nature partial and it is limited’ only to a particular want; but being is complete, it
belongs to one’s wholeness, it springs not from any necessity but from one’s affinity with the infinite, which is the principle of perfection that one has in one’s soul.

Yes, one must become Brahman. One must not shrink to affirm there. One’s existence is meaningless if one can never expect to realize the highest perfection that there is. If one has an aim and yet can never reach it, then it is no aim at all. But can it then be said that there is no difference between Brahman and one’s individual soul? Of course the difference is obvious. Call it illusion or ignorance, or whatever name one may give to it, it is there.

One can offer explanations but one cannot explain it away. Even illusion is true an illusion. Brahman is Brahman; He is the infinite ideal of perfection. But one is not what one truly is; one is ever to become true, ever to become Brahman. There is the eternal play of love in the relation between this being and the becoming; and in the depth of this mystery is the source of all truth and beauty that sustains the endless march of creation.

In the music of the rushing stream sounds the joyful assurance, ‘I shall become the sea.’ It is not a vain assumption; it is true humility, for it is the truth. The river has no other alternative. On both sides of its banks it has numerous fields and forests, villages and towns; it can serve them in various ways, cleanse them and feed them, carry their produce from place to place. But it can have only partial relations with these, and however long it may linger among them it remains separate; it never can become a town or a forest. But it can and does become the sea.

The lesser moving water has its affinity with the great motionless water of the ocean. It moves through the thousand objects on its onward course, and its
motion finds its finality when it reaches the sea. The river can become the sea, but she can never make the sea part and parcel of herself.

If, by some chance, she has encircled some broad sheet of water and pretends that she has made the sea a part of herself, one at once knows that it is not so, that her current is still seeking rest in the great ocean to which it can never set boundaries. In the same manner, one’s soul can only become Brahman as the river can become the sea. Everything else she touches at one of her points, then leaves and moves on, but she can never leave Brahman and move beyond him.

Once one’s soul realizes its ultimate object of repose in Brahman, all its movements acquire a purpose. It is this ocean of infinite rest which gives significance to endless activities. It is this perfectness of being that lends to the imperfection of becoming that quality of beauty which finds its expression in all poetry, drama and art.

There must be a complete idea that animates a poem. Every sentence of the poem touches that idea. When the reader realizes that pervading idea, as he reads on, then the reading of the poem is full of joy to him. Then every part of the poem becomes radiantly significant by the light of the whole. But if the poem goes on interminably, never expressing the idea of the whole, only throwing off disconnected images, however beautiful, it becomes wearisome and unprofitable in the extreme.

The progress of one’s soul is like a perfect poem. It has an infinite idea which once realized makes all movements full of meaning and joy. But if one detaches its movements from that ultimate idea, if one does not see the infinite rest and only see the infinite motion, then existence appears to one a monstrous evil, impetuously rushing towards an unending aimlessness.
Rabindranath Tagore remembers in his childhood he had a teacher who used to make pupils learn by heart the whole book of Sanskrit grammar, which is written in symbols, without explaining their meaning. Day after day they went toiling on, but on towards what, they had not the least notion. So, as regards their lessons, they were in the position of the pessimist who only counts the breathless activities of the world, but cannot see the infinite repose of the perfection when these activities are gaining their equilibrium every moment in absolute fitness and harmony. One loses all joy in thus contemplating existence, because one misses the truth. One sees the gesticulations of the dancer, and one imagines these are directed by a ruthless tyranny of chance, while one is deaf to the eternal music which makes every one of these gestures inevitably spontaneous and beautiful. Actually these motions are ever growing into that music of perfection, becoming one with it, dedicating to that melody at every step the multitudinous forms they go on creating. And this is the truth of one’s soul, and this is her joy, that she must ever be growing into Brahman, that all her movements should be modulated by this ultimate idea, and all her creations should be given as offerings to the supreme spirit of perfection.

There is a remarkable saying in the Upanishads: **Naham manye suvedeti no na vedeti vedacha** *I think not that I know him well, or that I know him, or even that I know him not.* By the process of knowledge one can never know the infinite being. But if one is altogether beyond one’s reach, then one is absolutely nothing. The truth is that one knows him not, yet one knows him. This has been explained in another saying of the Upanishads  **A Yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha anandam brahmano vidvan na vibheti kutacchana.** *From Brahman words come back baffled, as well as the mind, but he who knows him by the joy of him is free from all fears.*
Knowledge is partial, because one’s intellect is an instrument, it is only a part of one, it can give a piece of information about things which can be divided and analyzed, and whose properties can be classified part by part. But Brahman is perfect, and knowledge which is partial can never be acknowledged of him. But he can be known by joy, by love. For joy is knowledge in its completeness, it is knowing by one’s whole being.

Intellect sets one apart from the things to be known, but love knows its object by fusion. Such knowledge is immediate and admits no doubt. It is the same as knowing one’s own self, only more so. Therefore, as the Upanishads say, mind can never know Brahman, words can never describe him; he can only be known by one’s soul, by her joy in him, by her love. Or, in other words, one can only come into relation with him by union - union of one’s whole being.

One must be one with one’s Father; one must be perfect as He is. But how can that be? There can be no grade in infinite perfection. One cannot grow more and more into Brahman. He is the absolute one, and there can be no more or less in him. Indeed, the realization of the paramatman, the supreme soul, within one’s antaratman, one’s inner individual soul, is in a state of absolute completion.

One cannot think of it as nonexistend and depending on one’s limited powers for its gradual construction. If one’s relation with the divine were all a thing of one’s own making, how should one rely on it as true, and how should it lend one support? Yes, one must know that within Him one has that where space and time cease to rule and where the links of evolution are merged in unity. In that everlasting abode of the ataman, the soul, the revelation of the paramatman, the supreme soul, is already complete.

Therefore the Upanishads say, “Thou shalt gain by giving away, thou shalt not covet.” (Sisir Kumar Das, The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Vol-II, 288). The union is already accomplished. The paramatman, the supreme soul, has himself chosen this soul of one’s as one’s bride and the
marriage has been completed. The solemn mantram has been uttered: Yadetat hridayam mama tadastu hridayan tava Let thy heart be even as my heart is. There is no room in this marriage for evolution to act the part of the master of ceremonies. The eshah, who cannot otherwise be described than as This, the nameless immediate presence, is ever here in one’s innermost being. “This eshah, or This, is the supreme end of the other this” (Eshasya parama gatih); “this, This is the supreme treasure of the other this” (Eshasya parama sampat); “this, This is the supreme dwelling of the other this” (Eshasya paramo lokah); “this, This is the supreme joy of the other this.” (Eshasya parama anandah).

This is because the marriage of supreme love has been accomplished in timeless time. And now goes on the endless lila, the play of love. He who has been gained in eternity is now being pursued in time and space, in joys and sorrows, in this world and in the worlds beyond.

When the soul-bride understands this well, her heart is blissful and at rest. She knows that she, like a river, has attained the ocean of her fulfillment at one end of her being, and at the other end she is ever attaining it; at one end it is eternal rest and completion, at the other it is incessant movement and change. When she knows both ends as inseparably connected, then she knows the world as her own house hold by the right of knowing the master of the world as her own lord. Then all her services becomes services of love, all the troubles and tribulations of life come to her as trials triumphantly borne to prove the strength of her love, smilingly to win the wager from her lover. But so long as she remains obstinately in the dark, lifts not her veil, does not recognize her lover, and only knows the world dissociated from him, she serves as a handmaid here, where by right she might reign as a queen; she always in doubt, and weeps in sorrow and dejection.

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