CHAPTER - II
BERDYAEV'S CONCEPT OF MAN

From the very beginning, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers have been curious to understand the concept of man. Still man remains an enigma. Berdyaev in his personalistic existentialism stresses the fact that man is indeed a riddle. He points out that man is aware of the fact that his essence lies in his being in the world. His unique reality is discovered only in and through the world. And while unravelling the mysteries of the universe, man also finds that there is a hidden principle, a higher reality, which belongs to a different order. Thus, the most profound and fundamental problem is the problem of man. Berdyaev tries to give a novel interpretation of man's essence through his theory of the nature of personality. Berdyaev says that man is the confluence of two worlds - the world of nature and the world of spirit. To him, man "knows himself as the image and likeness of God and as a drop in the ocean of the necessities of nature".¹

Berdyaev points out that man should not be treated as a mere constituent of the world. The secret of the world is born within him and he is capable of transcending the world. Both man and the world are equal in quantity. "Man is not a fractional part of the universe, a fragment of it, but a whole small universe including in himself all the qualities of the great universe, imprinting himself upon it and receiving its imprint upon himself".\(^2\) So, man as a personality is really a riddle.

We can note that the term 'personality' occupies the central position in the philosophy of Berdyaev. He uses the term 'personality' in a unique sense. The term as used by Berdyaev deviates from the popular sense of the term. He does not treat 'personality' as an accumulation of various human traits. On the other hand, he brings it under a spiritual category and uses it as a value term. 'Personality' should not be used to mean a 'substance' in the world or the physical aspect of man. It is not something like a whole,

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 63
constituted of many parts, nor is it a datum present in man. In the parlance of Berdyaev, personality is the ideal to be accomplished by man. Man is the one who makes his own personality. "Personality is like nothing else in the world, there is nothing with which it can be compared, nothing which can be placed on a level with it".  

In explaining this conception of man Berdyaev does not overlook man's relation to society. Man, to Berdyaev, is an integral part of the social structure. An examination of the society, from the primitive to the modern, clearly shows that changes have taken place in the society and it is quite natural that changes have taken place in the individual also. Man, says Berdyaev, often identifies himself with society because he is a socialised creature. But according to Berdyaev, personality comes forth only by resisting society. Hence, it is not necessary that every man has personality. This is what is meant by the words, "...of one man that he is a personality and another that he

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3 - - - Slavery and Freedom. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1944) p. 21
is not, although both are individuals."\(^4\) But this again should not be taken to mean that personality goes hand in hand with egoism. Berdyaev makes it clear that egoism is totally opposed to the realisation of personality. For, he says that "an egocentric man is a slave, his attitude to everything which is non-I is a servile attitude. He is aware of non-I only, he has no knowledge of another I, he does not know a Thou, he knows nothing of the freedom of going out from the I".\(^5\) Berdyaev points out that personality is a force, external to society, and is a factor which maintains social framework. Externally, from a sociological point of view, personality may seem to be subordinate to society. But, when viewed from the existentialist point of view "society is a part of personality, it is its social side, just as the cosmos is a part of personality, its cosmic side."\(^6\)

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\(^4\) - - - . The Destiny of Man. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1937) p. 71

\(^5\) - - - . Slavery and Freedom. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1944) p. 43

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 26
In his book 'Slavery and Freedom', Berdyaev clearly brings out the importance of personality. "Personality is the unchanging in change, unity in the manifold. It strikes us unpleasantly, alike if there is the unchanging in man and not the changing, or the changing and not the unchanging, if there is unity and not the manifold, or the manifold and not unity. Both in the one case and in the other, the essential qualitativeness of personality is disclosed. Personality is not a congealed condition, it breaks up, it develops, it is enriched, but it is the development of one and the same abiding in itself subject. That is its very name. The very change takes place for the preservation of this unchanging, abiding thing as Poulain correctly says".  

Berdyaev emphasises the fact that personality is integral. "It is present as a whole in all the acts of personality, personality has a unique, an unrepeatable form, Gestalt. What is known as Gestalt psychology which regards form as the primary qualitative value is more acceptable to personalism than other systems of psychology". 

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7 Ibid., pp. 22-23
8 Ibid., p. 23
Berdyaev again distinguishes 'Personality' from 'Individual' and clarifies that Individual is a part of society. The individual is an inevitable element in the social whole or society, in the sense that the specific functions performed by each individual in the society keeps the social equilibrium in the best manner possible. The individual can realise his self only in and through society: personality, on the other hand, is not a part of any whole. The individual is influenced both by heredity and by environment, and both the hereditary and environmental factors play an important role in moulding his character, interests, tastes, aptitudes, etc. An individual born in a society is under obligation to obey the social laws, political laws, etc.

The dual aspect of man

In his work entitled 'Freedom and the Spirit', Berdyaev brings out clearly, the dual nature of man. He says, "There is a spiritual man and there is a natural man, and yet the same individual is both spiritual and natural". The natural man is

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conditioned by the psychological environment. He is subjected to the natural laws. He is bound to obey the laws of society. He has certain moral obligations to discharge for the sake of society. He has certain rights and duties. Often the lower sentiments and passions may operate in him, though he is a man of the highest reasoning faculty. The things that happen in the spiritual world are different from those that happen in the natural world. This does not mean that the two worlds are different; they are rather interdependent and interrelated. One has significance and meaning because of the other. The natural man is involved in various types of social relationships. He is subjected to sins and very often man has to endure the punishment. It is observed that even the spiritual man becomes a victim of sin and punishment. Berdyaev points out that immortality can be attributed only to the spiritual life. The spirit alone possesses the quality of eternal life. "Man is personality not by nature but by spirit". What makes man, a personality is the spiritual aspect in him. Both as spirit and as

10 - - - Slavery and Freedom (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1944) p. 21
'personality', man is free. But man as an 'individual' is subjected to necessity. From this it is evident that the essential nature of man is so vast and many dimensional that he cannot be contained within the finite world.

The problem of freedom versus necessity is also an existential problem. It is the dual nature of man that brings out this problem. According to Berdyaev, only personalistic existentialism which takes into account both the natural and the spiritual aspects of man can offer a real solution to this problem. This aspect is dealt with in detail in chapter four.

God, Man and the World

It is clear from the foregoing illustration that to get a real picture of personality it is necessary to take into account the relation between God, man and the world. Man, in Berdyaev's philosophy, plays an active role - as a link that connects the phenomenon (nature) and the noumenon (God). "Man is an appearance, a creature of nature and subject to the laws of this
world. At the same time, man is also 'thing in itself', a spiritual being, free from the powers of this world".11 God and the world are not separate because the world is a creation of God himself. It is man, says Berdyaev, who really completes the work of God, who leaves the world created - yet not finished. Man possesses the artistic talent and creative freedom to accomplish this task.

Man is rooted in spirit. The spiritual element inherent in man makes him free and creative. "If man claims to be free and creative, it is because of the divine spirit in him to which he has access in those rare moments of his life".12 Berdyaev says that man is endowed with a tendency to create God in his own image. Because man is a mixture of both good and evil, he has an inclination to create both the good and the bad. Berdyaev points out that man and God are independent, and yet are also interdependent. He also accepts the view that man is a being created by God in his own image—hence he regards man as the 'other divine'.

11 - - - The Beginning and the End. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952) p. 81

Thus, man is both finite and infinite.

Man has the freedom to realize the divine image implicit in him or he can damage it. "There are two elements in human nature", says Berdyaev, and it is their combination and interaction that constitutes man. There is in him the element of primeval, utterly undetermined potential freedom springing from the abyss of non-being, and the element determined by the fact that man is the image and likeness of God, a Divine idea, which his freedom may realize or destroy". Man has importance and the sense of dignity in him makes him great. This is possible because man symbolises Divinity. The man - God relation can not be adequately grasped by the absolute thought, by intellectual comprehension. It is a mystery. A close scrutiny of the personality of man paves the way for the study of God because personality is the reflection and likeness of the Divine. This is a salient aspect of the existentialism of Berdyaev. Berdyaev's account is one of pantheistic monism because he stresses the fact that

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God is immanent in the world and in man. And the world and man are immanent in God. What all things happen in man, happen in God also. Berdyaev remarks that "man is not only of this world, but of another world; not only of necessity, but of freedom, not only out of nature but from God". Analyzing the nature of man, Berdyaev says that "man's nature is God-worldly and not simply worldly. Man is not only a natural - mortal being, but a divine-mortal being. There is a natural divinity in man; hidden within him is a natural divine element".  

Berdyaev thinks of God-man relation in terms of two movements: from God towards man and from man towards God. He speaks about the birth of man in God, and the birth of God in man. "The kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Divine humanity, in it God is finally born in man and man in God and this is accomplished in the spirit".  

15 Ibid., p. 79  
Berdyaev says that the revelation of God in the world is an eschatological revelation. He further clarifies that this eschatology does not mean a passive waiting for the end of this world, but an active transformation of the world here and now. "To bring belief in God within the bound of possibility and to make it morally possible to accept him, can only be done by recognising the truth that God reveals himself in this world. He reveals himself in prophets, in his son, in the breath of the spirit, and in the uplifting spiritual aspiration of men". 17

Berdyaev observes: "The relation between God and man may be conceived under three different aspects. First, there is the transcendent dualism which subjects the human will to the divine in a purely external fashion. Thus the two natures remain undivided, mutually estranged, and externally opposed to each other. Secondly, there is immanent monism which makes a metaphysical identification between the human and the

divine wills and rejects altogether the independent existence of human nature. It sees in man only a manifestation of the divine life, a transitory moment in the development of divinity. Thirdly, there is what may be called 'theandric anthropromorphism', a creative and Christian standpoint which recognizes the independent existence of the two natures and the reciprocal action of divine grace and human freedom'. Berdyaev thus establishes the relation between God, man and the world, and further explains the possibility of man to transcend his subjectivity for the realization of his personality.

Berdyaev points out that there are two different directions in which such transcendence takes place. (1) the path of objectification (2) the path of self transcendence. Objectification is the principle which accounts for one thing appearing as something different. Man appears as a constituent of the external world, the world of determinism, the world of necessity, that is, he is a part of social organization in the sense that he is involved in the various types of relationships, and discharges the

duties that are entrusted to him for the welfare of society. Here lies the social significance of sympathy, imitation, suggestion, etc.

That is to say, man is thrown into the world of necessity. The man in the world of necessity is subject to the various types of bondage. The natural tendency present in man is to be very much fascinated over the things which give him happiness in life. Egoistic, selfcentered and ambitious, man finds little time to devote his time and energy to altruistic purposes. He is also influenced by dogmas, culture, civilization, etc. Of course, culture serves as an instrument to the spiritual growth of man. It is also observed that what serves as a means very often becomes an end in itself. When we make a thorough observation, we can see that culture very often destroys the creative act of freedom. Of course, as a result of culture and civilization man gets ample chance to be dynamic and active. But in a way, it makes man more mechanised and technical. That is to say, man is really enslaved through culture.
While explaining the fate of the individual, who is placed in a state of objectification, in a world of necessity, Berdyaev mentions the academic spirit in man which also makes him a slave to the standards of science and art.

The second path suggested by Berdyaev is self-transcendence. The term 'self-transcendence' is used in a special sense. It is some thing that takes place in man himself. It is not transcendence towards external things. Man is really imprisoned in a closed circle of subjectivity. He is really in a vicious circle. He is every where in chains, in bondage. Berdyaev himself remarks that the human spirit is in 'prison'. By this, he means the world of necessity.

Man can attain self-realization to the fullest extent only through transcendence. It is really an inward process taking place in the subject-a self-awareness. Berdyaev observes, "It is the path not of objective communication but of existential communion. Personality reaches full realization of itself only on this path". 19 When man transcends himself he gets direct communion with God. It is a state of release

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19 - - - Slavery and Freedom. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1944) p. 29
from the world of necessity and determinism. It is an experience profound and high in the sense that it is inexplicable.

The man who gets release from the world of necessity really enjoys divine bliss. Thus Berdyaev glorifies the importance of freedom also in this context. In Berdyaev's perspective, freedom and slavery are opposed to each other. The man in the world of determinism and necessity is in slavery. He is often governed by emotions and passions, though the highest sentiments may also operate in him. "All forms of egocentricity, from the basest to the most exalted, always denote the slavery of man, the slavery of man to himself, and through that slavery the surrounding world also. The egocentric is a being both enslaved and enslaving". 20

Berdyaev holds the view that the man who transcends himself is victorious. It is the spiritual principle that holds the unity of personality, which is an organized whole or unity. The world of necessity is

20 Ibid., p. 132
only a part. Personality includes the whole world within it. This inclusion takes place only in the realm of the subject world. Personality is really conscious of the fact that it has its origin in the realm of freedom - that is to say, in the realm of the spirit. This really is freedom from slavery. That is a release from the external forces, which resist man in the world of necessity.

**Integral man**

Berdyaev holds the view that the real nature of man can be understood only through philosophical reflection. According to him, there are two aspects of man: (1) the natural, and (2) the transcendental. Berdyaev is of the view that it is only philosophy which makes an earnest attempt to understand the transcendental aspect of man. Such an understanding is really a great help to have a thorough knowledge of the spirit. Berdyaev also echoes the same point of the poet that the proper study of mankind is man. Philosophy, says Berdyaev, "is primarily the doctrine of man, the doctrine of integral man elaborated by integral man. This is the exclusive province of
philosophy, and not of biology, psychology, or sociology". The study of integral man, thus, forms the real focus of philosophical investigation. Both the nature of man and that of the world form the area of investigation of philosophy. The various special sciences have their own areas of specialisation, analysis, abstraction. They confine their attention only to particular fields. They never give us a synoptic view of the universe as a whole. Science never makes an attempt at an ultimate explanation of things. Of course, science has progressed to a very great extent in promoting technological growth in a wide variety of spheres. The invention of machines has changed the whole outlook of man. New avenues are opened. Berdyaev observes: "The dizzying successes of techniques in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries mark the greatest revolutions, in the history of mankind, more profound than all political revolutions, a radical change in the whole rhythm of human life, a breaking away from the natural cosmic rhythm and the appearance of a new rhythm, determined by machines".

21 - - - - Solitude and Society. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1938) p. 29

22 - - - - The Destiny of Man. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1937) p. 244
Berdyaev feels an urgent need for man to centralise his attention on philosophy, because it alone can help man to have a proper evaluation of life. Berdyaev sounds practical when he emphasises the fact that philosophy is not dreaming, but action. He clearly indicates the part played by philosophy in moulding the life of man to attain the final goal. "Philosophy is essentially active and has a useful function to fulfil in ameliorating life, as the great philosophers, the lovers of true wisdom, have always endeavoured to do".23

Philosophy—a creative act

Berdyaev holds the view that philosophy is really a creative act of man. It really brings out the fact that man is endowed with constructive intelligence, logical reflection and creative ability to create something new. "The philosopher is a free man, independent of the world, a man who refuses to adapt himself".24 Berdyaev makes it clear that


creativity and freedom are essentially related. With a view to giving due recognition to the creative act, Berdyaev does not hold on to the view that philosophy is essentially a system, because a system is opposite to creative intuition. Berdyaev observes that man rises against philosophy and it is essential that he should be treated as something more real, more truly being than philosophy. When compared with other beings, man is supreme in the sense that the power of reflection present in him enables him to have a pursuit of the higher values. Man is always curious to welcome the results of the increasing knowledge and skill of other men and it gives him dynamism and spirit to rise above that. He is gifted with the power of self-consciousness. Man is capable of the various creative talents in shaping things and the nature of universe. He is really self-conscious of the fact that he and he alone possesses a concrete and creative understanding of cosmic conditions. Man is placed in the topmost rank in the scale of evolution and he inevitably holds an intimate relation with the whole cosmos. Philosophy is meant for man and man alone. The principles of morality, spiritual knowledge, religious ideals, all these exist and get meaning
because of the philosopher-man behind to preach these and to a certain extent to make these practical. The fact that man is creative is shown again by giving due importance to critical philosophy. True, nature presents problems of different kinds. Man is very often put in problematic situations. As man naturally possesses a problem-solving behaviour, he applies critical philosophy and tries to solve problems. Of course, modern man has to pass through critical doubts. The man, who is engaged in philosophical contemplation, in solitude, gets at the truth of things. In fact, it is through the creative act that man gets the illumination that, behind the material world there is the spirit.

Philosophy enables the modern man to seek the proper way of right living. He is always baffled with pressing problems which admit of no easy solution. At this juncture, man should be made to realize the necessity to lead a peaceful life, a life of happiness, free from tension and anxiety. What is of utmost importance is not to accumulate large income,
popularity, name and fame and a sense of recognition, but to develop a capacity for clear thinking. It is high time that man understand the importance of the fundamental values of truth, beauty, and goodness, which make his life noble and great.

It may be asked: why should man be treated as so important for philosophy? Man is important, because in essence, inherently he is linked up with Being. Naturally, man has a strong desire to know 'Being', which is implicit in man. What he is aiming at in course of time is to make explicit, the desire that is deep-rooted in him. An objective understanding of the meaning of life is not possible for man, because apart from the meaning assigned to it by the spiritual subject, it has no meaning of its own. That is, whatever meaning the object has is unveiled within the Ego in man.
The Personal character of Philosophy

Berdyaev holds the view that philosophical knowledge is essentially personal in character. The goal that it aims at is the knowledge of truth—to get at the exact meaning of Reality. Truth is really value. "Truth is not that which exists, it is the meaning of that which exists, the logos of it; but the meaning is that which, or he who, exists". The personal element present in the philosophy of a philosopher can be clearly seen in the analysis and interpretation he makes. The private life of the philosopher, the social life, the political environment, etc., really reflect the philosophy of a true thinker. Each philosopher is really concentrating upon the significance of the facts. A particular philosopher makes an attempt to understand the view point of his predecessor also. He makes a thorough investigation of facts presented by his predecessor and makes an analysis, both constructive and critical. The final interpretation he arrives at, necessarily reflects the personal character. The Universe in front

25 - - - The Beginning And the End. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952) p. 43
of us, is a great work of art, a design, and no doubt it is represented in one way or other in the philosopher, who tries to interpret it. Different philosophers select different types of philosophy. Berdyaev himself is interested in the philosophy of personalism. The intuitive factor that is present in a philosophy should be given due importance, because it is also a personal aspect which clearly reveals the depth of vision one possesses. The Universe presents a complexity of phenomena. Everything has a proper place and has a significance. So, to find out the meaning and the place of man in the scheme, needs an insight, a real intuitive faculty.

Thus, we find that Berdyaev's thinking originates in an awareness of the nature of man's life. Berdyaev says that knowledge is an activity of the spirit and it plays an active role in the spiritual life. The spiritual life does not mean an abstract, detached existence. It is the spiritual life that unites the two realms-God and the world. "Spiritual life does not mean an intellectual activity that is separate from the concrete, that is, not a study. The spiritual life is concrete and it unites the two, the spiritual and the concrete."

The spiritual experience one attains is also a form of evolution. Whether one attains spiritual experience or not is to be demonstrated in reality. In the words of Berdyaev, "The imprint of a philosopher's personality is already manifest in the choice of problems and in a predilection for one or other of the philosophical types we have defined, as well as in the nature of the philosopher's predominant intuitions, in
the amount of attention he apportions to particular problems, and in the degree of his spiritual experience". Berdyaev is of the opinion that the most important reality in man's life is nothing but the spiritual experience. No empirical evidence is possible to prove the divine that is hidden in him. Personality, according to Berdyaev, is the Divine idea. It is the spiritual life that unites the two realms-God and the world. "Spiritual life does not mean an abstract and indeterminate unity; rather, it is within this life that the concrete, that is to say, qualitative unity is revealed".

Thus, we find that Berdyaev's thinking originates in an enquiry into the nature of man-as personality, as spirit. The spirit is the nucleus of life. Berdyaev says that knowledge is an activity of the spirit and it plays an active role in the spiritual life of man. Freedom of the self lies in loving God

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26 - - - Solitude and Society. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1938) p. 27

with all our soul, strength and energy, because no external force can exert any influence on us. The knowing subject is an existent reality. "Knowledge is a light which springs from Being and within it". Man gets a knowledge of himself. The same procedure he adopts in gaining a knowledge of the universe. "In spiritual experience, we see man's hunger for God. The human soul searches for a higher being, a return to the source of life and to the native land of the spirit. Human life becomes truly terrible when there ceases to be anything above man and when there is no place for the mystery of the divine and infinite".

Berdyaev observes that spiritual life and the mystery of repentance are related. Man can overcome sin; he can escape from sin only through religious repentance. Repentance is really a difficult process. It has both a positive and a negative aspect in it. Repentance helps man to attain a higher grade of spiritual life. That is really a positive aspect of

28 - - - The Destiny of Man. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1937) p. 4

repentance in the sense that it produces very good consequences. Repentance has a negative side in creating darkness within one's own self. Salvation lies in the manifestation of the creative impulse, it gives life and energy and vigour to the fainting spirit. Of course repentance is essential for creativity and creativity enables man to overcome sin. In a strange way, repentance is reborn into creative impulse. The rebirth is implicit in the creative impulse.

As an ethical and religious thinker, Berdyaev elucidates the mystical experience of the spiritual man by pointing out that he transcends the world of necessity. He has no fear of suffering and death. "The mystic is an extra-ordinary artist; he is a creator par excellence. Since he has overcome the fear of suffering and death, creativeness is at its best in his experience. The mystic as a redeemed man has an important place in society. Having attained freedom and inner illumination, he sets out to end the given world and pave the way for the entry of a new aeon".  

It has to be remembered that mystic experience is not something which one attains by his own willpower. It cannot be acquired through the individual's own striving. It is something which can be attained only by the grace of God. No one can predict when one will attain it. It is a sudden inner illumination one gains. The person who experiences such a mystic trance may be labelled as a spiritual or a transcendental man. The term 'personality' really suits him. The mystic alone can experience the real essence of the divine in him. He is a person who gets direct communion with God. He finds new meaning and significance in nature. His own personal life appears to him as totally different from the previous stage, in which he was not a mystic. In the mystic experience, the subject-object duality is transcended. It may be said that Berdyaev's conception of transcendental man is similar to the concept of 'Jivan-mukta' in Indian Philosophy. Berdyaev remarks: "Transcendental man stands outside the division into subject and object, and, therefore, all the theories which are derived from knowledge of the object can tell us nothing about him".  

A simultaneous development in the world is also anticipated by Berdyaev and he justifies it by saying that man carries the image of his creator. Creativity, no doubt, has its root in spirit, which is freedom. Development is nothing but potential existence. "Like Kant and Nietzsche, Berdyaev holds the view that the morally autonomous will is the fundamental aspect in human personality". Berdyaev also establishes the fact that moral will is all-in-all and supreme. "There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely this: Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law". To Kant, autonomy of will is that property of it by which it is a law unto itself. The will is rational in the sense that it belongs to man possessing reasoning power.

32 R. Balasubramonian, Personalistic Existentialism of Berdyaev. (Madras: Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras, 1970) p. 90

Berdyaev's philosophical position can best be described as personalism. It is proved beyond doubt on account of the elucidation he presents on the nature of personality. The special significance he has given to man-personality and its relevance even in God's creation of the world is a novel point emphasised by Berdyaev in his personalistic theory. He brings out the true nature of the personalistic element by making a reference to both God and man as 'Personality'- 'concrete personality' — in the sense that God is a creator. Berdyaev is of the view that only a personalistic doctrine of the world for which every being is personal and original can give significance to the originality of personality.