

Tagore's Conception of Man

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Abstract

Review Article

The capacity of man is finite. Man cannot with all its vigor and talent overcome the nature. It is dependent upon nature. The untamed umpteen endeavors of man pay a great dividend which elevated man above animal. Discussion would be carried out on Tagore's concept of man. Tagore believes in infinite aspect of man in the sense of underlying spiritual power in mankind as well as eagerness to live infinite. Discussion would be carried out spiritual aspect of man and desire of freedom prevalent on instinct of man. Even though the distinction between the soul and the body is retained, the body is given a reality of its own. It is in the body itself that spirituality has to be awakened and developed.

Keywords: Tagore, finite, infinite, freedom, spiritual, physical.

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INTRODUCTION

Man has unveiled many mysteries but has perhaps been unable so far in unveiling the mystery of his own nature. Great thinkers like Comte, Niebuhr, Sartre, Marx, Gandhi and many others have made attempts to understand human nature, but perhaps none of them has been able to understand it perfectly. Hinduism has taken the soul within man, which is really his essence, as the divine spark within him. The Advaita doctrine takes human soul Brahman as identical. The Mahabharata says that there is nothing higher than man on earth. Jainism holds that in the soul of man lies the potentialities of attaining infinite or good hood. Christianity tells us that man was made on the last day of creation and God made him in his own image. Similarly in Judaism man's relationship to God is presented in the following verse:

He glories in me, He delights in me.
My crown of beauty, He shall be.
His glory rests on me, and mine on Him.
He is near to me, when I call on Him.

The Islamic belief in the greatness of man is often expressed by the statement: Khuda ka noor usme hai.

Tagore's Concept of man is formulated essentially in the light of such religious beliefs. He took man's nature in a very exalted and idealized form. However, he did not completely ignore the animal aspect of human nature. He realized that man is a mixture of both animal and spiritual forces and

therefore the presence of the animal traits in him could not be denied. He gives man a special dignity and uniqueness. Tagore is often called a philosopher of humanity. This may be on account of the fact that in his philosophy man occupies a very high status. Man has been viewed as the crown of creation. Tagore tries to give importance to both the physical and the spiritual aspect of Man. Tagore never degrades the status of Man. To him man is at the apex of creation.

Analysis

Finite aspect of man

Man is finite and thus dependent on nature. Man is much like animals. Man is influenced and determined by the environment surrounding him. He has the instinct of self-protection within him and he is guided by the motive of self-satisfaction. Though finite, man is superior to other living beings. He refuses to accept and surrender to the forces of nature like other living beings. He evolves methods for controlling them and so he is superior to the other finite beings even as a finite self. Man, as social beings, has a feeling of sympathy for others. He is not satisfied with his own attainments. He relentlessly tries to excel himself in every field. It is the tendency of man to maintain his own uniqueness. He is always eager to show himself as distinctly superior to other beings.

Infinite aspect of man

Tagore calls the infinite aspect of man by various terms like the universal in man, the surplus in man, the element of divinity in man and so on. The

infinite in man relentlessly strives for achieving higher and higher goals. There is no goal which can be said to be final for him. There is no task which he regards as impossible. This element present within him is the infinite or the surplus in man. Because of this, man is found to be making constant attempts to achieve what appears to be absurd or impossible. The element of creativity in man also gives evidence of his infinite nature. Creativity for him is the capacity of giving expression to novel ideas. It is the power of having new and original visions. Though man is finite selves, there is an inherent creative capacity in him to express himself in new and fresh ways. Another important characteristic that constitute the infinite in man is freedom, freedom to go beyond the limits of the finite body and to aspire for realisation of the universal within the individual. The yearning for immortality present in every individual is a testimony of the infinite in human being. It is only human beings who aspire for immortality. They know that death is inevitable and yet they have the feeling that death is not the end of life. Many of their actions are based on this conviction. Tagore believes that in the finite self lays the root of the infinite. It is the finite that grows and develops into the infinite. Therefore, it is not proper to think that the finite in man is in conflict with the infinite in him, rather they go together.

Man as spiritual

According to Tagore man is finite in its expression and infinite in its principle. He is 'earth's child but heaven's heir.' Though this picture of man appears as a spiritual, Tagore's emphasis is always to both 'infinity' and 'finiteness'. To make a realistic conclusion 'finite' approach of man is essential. Man is always growing through the process of evolution and with the advent of man evolution itself strikes a different note. The course of evolution is controlled by several factors like, the physical forces, the mechanical laws of aggression, adjustment, coordinated heredity etc. The limited resources are under the control of those which has most competitive edge over the others. Thus, in the material world selection is almost mechanical and this creates the environment for the appearance of man.

With the appearance of man, the course of evolution changes from 'determination' to 'freedom'. Tagore says, "Before the chapter ended Man appeared and turned the course of this evolution from an indefinite march of physical aggrandisement to a freedom of more subtle perfection [1]". This change, according to Tagore, is also attributed to the presence of 'surpluses in man by which man goes beyond himself. Tagore says, "The most important fact that has come into prominence along with the change of direction in our evolution, is the possession of a spirit which has its enormous capital with a surplus far in excess of the requirements of the biological animal in Man [2]". It is because of this surplus that man transcends his present possessions, and is capable of reaching spiritual heights.

There is always a sense of dissatisfaction prevail in man even amidst lots of material comforts and luxury. He never is satisfied with his possession, with his comfort or with fulfillment of his physical needs. According to Tagore the real desire of human soul is to get beyond all their possessions.

The greatest evidence of man's spiritual nature lies in his 'yearnings' for 'mukti'. Man have been able realise that the short span of life cannot be the "whole" of existence. This realisation has impelled them to explore the nature of their ultimate destiny, has led them to lead life much above the life of just sensuous existence. That speaks of their spiritual nature.

Man and freedom

Freedom is a predominant trait of man. It encompasses both physical and spiritual freedom. Freedom consists in going beyond the limitations of ego. Any confinement to the physical realm, or, for that matter, every ego-activity that makes the ego central, is bondage, because it prevents man from realizing his essential affinity with the outside nature and men, and thus is a limitation to his freedom. Tagore, so insists that true freedom consists in going beyond the life of the ego.

CONCLUSION

Tagore conceived man as divine, in so far as God reveals himself in man and in a special manner. Man always feels that he is meant for something higher; the apparent sensuous nature of man does not represent man's ultimate nature. Emphasis on the spirituality of man should not ignore or suppress bodily aspects of man. In the last analysis even the bodily is spiritualised. In the initial stages the empirical self is not to be rejected, as it is, in this self that spirituality has to be awakened. According to Tagore body is the temple of the Divine. He recognised the dynamism in man as natural and spontaneous. It is inherent in man's nature to be active. He clearly asserts that man is finite-infinite. There is no reason to discard finite aspect of man, in spite it is to be elevated and perfected. Human being is an infinite-finite being one and at the same time. In other words, Tagore sees the infinite-finite nature of the finite individual. He, however, does not mean that human being is primarily a finite being who rises to realise the infinity. He does not speak of ascending from the finite state to the infinite. Rather, he believes in the divine principle at work in human being. The divine principle is not to be found outside human beings. It is in them. Freedom is the unique characteristic of man and means both physical and spiritual freedom. Complete freedom is his ultimate destiny.

Tagore has come to realise that it is foolish to dismiss the body as unreal. He gives to it a significant place in his account of man. Even though the distinction between the soul and the body is retained, the body is

given a reality of its own. It is in the body itself that spirituality has to be awakened and developed.

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