

EMERGENCE OF DIVINITY IN MAN THROUGH BIO-COSMOLOGICAL EVOLUTION

Jitendra Nath SARKER

Abstract. *The term divinity refers to an immutable state of consciousness in which one perceives the living earth as nothing other than the expression of loving God. This paper, therefore, explicitly aims at the exploration of the achievement of divinity in human life as an outcome of bio-cosmological evolution. The emergence of life in the evolutionary process of the cosmos is very significant mainly because of the various stages of consciousness that life attains and innumerable properties of soul are being irresistibly evolved.*

Along with natural physical growth humans share intellectual development with some other higher animals. But it is spiritual uplift alone that enables a few super-humans to surpass even the homo-sapiens and places them in the hierarchy of evolutionary process – an undeniable as well as inseparable event of the total bio-cosmic evolution. In spite of the fact, a man of spiritual hierarchy "ceases to exist as a separate person" – a wonderful paradox aimed to be explored as well in the present paper.

Without thorough knowledge of whole ecosystem, modern medical science cannot work successfully. The evaluative conclusions of medical science, which are expressed in value judgments such as healthy or diseased, immature or developed are meaningful as well as useful if and only if we can restore and preserve ecosystem in its undisturbed natural form, because no organism can live a pleasant life nor can it survive on earth without a sound ecological balance conducive for living.

According to British scientist James Lovelock and American biologist, Lynn Margulis *the earth itself is a living organism* and they preferred to entitle the entire system *Gaia*¹ after the Greek Goddess of the earth, like some medical practitioners who often like to call their clinic or hospital *Appollo* after the name of Greek god who in ancient Greece was believed to save man from diseases. Gaia hypothesis from empirical point of view may be considered as metaphor; nevertheless even the world of senses has been directly realized through intuition and thereby claimed by Swami Vivekananda, a spiritualist of the 19th century India, as the living expression of Loving God.

His spiritual guide, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa taught Vivekananda that in every form of being whether organic or inorganic there is life and everything (living or non-living) of the world is therefore, the expression of God Himself. The disciple is then advised to love God through the service of all forms of life, on earth. But neither the disciple nor the guide was a mere pantheist, both of them were panentheists as well, because as the sincere adherents of the Vedas and the Upanishads they believed that all is in God but God is not merely these all. He is transcendent of and immanent in the world and the earthly things. But as a finite self a man can achieve divinity through the service of all living beings around him, because God cannot be conceived apart from

¹ James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* O.U.P. Oxford, 1979, and *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of our Living Planet*, O.U.P. Oxford, 1988.

them. He is above the finite spirits and in the finite spirits as well. The world has come into existence through the evolutionary process according to God's will. So, as the cause of the world God must be above it.

In order to interpret the cosmological evolution of the world a nice simile is given in the Vedas, "That eternal One breathes out this universe and breathes it in." So, after the Vedas Vivekananda says, "God is the manifester of the universe".² He writes, "Here is a series of waves rising and falling and God is directing this eternal process."³ In describing the creative evolution he quotes from Rig-Veda, "When there rolling over darkness, what existed?" 'Prana' then existed without vibration – there was no motion in it. 'Prana' means primal energy, which is combined and recombined with 'Akasha' (similar to the modern idea of *ether*) and forms the elements of this world out of their combination.

According to holism also the universe itself is a biological organism. This theory resembles with the organic theory of Whitehead who holds the view that the universe as an organic whole is composed of innumerable smaller organisms.⁴ J.S. Halden, a British physiologist maintains that inorganic can ultimately be resolved into organic phenomenon and like Henderson, a bio-chemist of Harvard University he also thinks that "the whole world is biocentric, centering about the production of life."⁵ It is, however, an accepted view among biologists that the organic has arisen from inorganic by a slow process of evolution. But it is not generally accepted view that evolution has come about by chance, rather there is a purposive action in all evolutionary process – a creative process common to inorganic, organic, mental and social evolution as well. Like Aristotle General Smuts, a contemporary advocate of non-mechanical evolution believes in an operative factor or an efficient cause which organizes, integrates and synthesizes everything in the world. The world, as if, tends towards a whole such as atoms, molecules, cells, plants, animals, humans and their personalities: each of which is not an aggregate of parts but a system of units.

It is needless to say that the non-mechanical view of evolution is called vitalism according to which life originates from non-material force called vital principle. It goes back to Aristotle who thought of the soul as the vital principle or the source of life. This view does not seem to be fundamentally different from the creative evolution of Henri Bergson. According to him matter is frozen or arrested life. Consciousness enters into material body as soon as the brain is evolved by *Elan Vital*. Mind or consciousness, therefore, surpasses life of an organism. *Elan Vital*, according Bergson, is the one vital urge which is undifferentiated in the beginning but differentiates or manifests itself into 'new forms of existence'. Bergson, therefore, often calls his 'Elan Vital' *evolving God*, which is different from personal God. Matter, life, living organisms of all forms, and their minds, intelligence and multiple traits of their personality are nothing other than evolved forms of the creative vital

² The complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. II, Advaita Ashrama Kolkata, 2007, p. 427.

³ Ibid, p. 428.

⁴ Joad, "Guide to Modern Thought", P.III.

⁵ Patrick, "Introduction to philosophy, G. Allen & unwin Ltd. London, 1961, p. 105.

urge. The process of evolution, according to Bergson, is never complete. Evolving God, is ever-expanding, ever-creative surge of life.⁶

Bergson's creative evolution is no doubt an eminent form of vitalism. The recent revival of vitalism in the contemporary circle of biological science is very significant. Hans Driesch, a German biologist, was the leader of this movement. According to him life cannot be explained on a mechanistic ground. "Life", he says, "is not a specialized arrangement of inorganic events ... Life is something apart and biology is an independent science".⁷ He believes that life originates from something non-material factor to which he gives the name 'Entelechy' after the terminology of Aristotle. A surprising number of contemporary biologists, zoologists and paleontologists adopts more or less fully the neo-vitalistic position"⁸ in spite of opposite belief of some other thinkers.

Difference among the views of Aristotle, Bergson and Vivekananda:

Swami Vivekananda believed in cosmic evolution after Sankhya Philosophy. And as a spiritualist he also believed in both macrocosmic and microcosmic evolution of living beings on earth. He believed not only in evolution, he had to believe after the Vedas in the process of involution as well and as such expounded the causal relation between God and His manifestation as the created world. Now let us minutely follow his interpretation of the processes of evolution and involution. Vivekananda says that "every evolution is preceded by an involution. He agrees with the modern sense and use of both the term 'evolution'. The coming out of the fine form and becoming a gross one is called evolution in modern times. The fine forms of life slowly come out and become grosser and grosser until they reach their limit. This process of becoming grosser in form out of the finer one is called evolution. He exemplified it with the growth of a tree from a seed. Seed as the finer form is the cause of a tree. "The seed" he says, "produces the tree. Tree produces the seed, which again comes up as another tree ... there is no end to it."⁹ In the empirical world "which we call plants, animals or men are being repeated ad infinitum, rising and falling. Rising means evolution, and falling means involution – going back to the original finer form or the cause. 'What is involved?' – a question he asks and replies he himself, that it is "God, the supreme *intelligence*, or Protoplasm"¹⁰ – the everliving seed of life. "Intelligence", he says, "must be the Lord of creation, the cause". He says more, "At the beginning that intelligence becomes involved and in the end that intelligence gets evolved".¹¹ Swamiji's interpretation of the double processes of evolution and involution bears close affinity with those of Aristotle. Aristotle thought of the world as a great process in which matter is taking on form, or structure or in organism. And this process is nothing other than what Vivekananda calls evolution. The reverse process is also

⁶ *Creative Evolution*, p. 15-18.

⁷ *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, Gifford Lectures, 1908, P. 142.

⁸ Patrick, *Introduction to Philosophy*, G.A. & Unwin Ltd. London, 1961, p. 107.

⁹ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*”, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, Vol-2, 2007, P. 206.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 208.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 209.

found in the philosophy of Aristotle which Patrick has nicely interpreted. He says that, “we can go back from living organism to cell, and from cell to molecule, and from molecule to atom – and finally to a mere wave-packet”.¹² This retroactive process admitted in the philosophy of Aristotle as interpreted by Patrick is similar to the process what Vivekananda calls involution, but which is completely denied in the bio-cosmological philosophy of Bergson, because his *elan vital* or “God is ever-expanding, ever-creative surge of life”.¹³ Because evolutive creation of life “goes on forever”¹⁴ and never goes back to the origin Bergsonian theory, therefore, contradicts with the common-sense-view that *whatever has a beginning must have an end*. Again Vivekananda differs from Aristotelian belief that in the retroactive process or involution, “we are getting away from reality – not towards it”.¹⁵ If Patrick’s interpretation of Aristotelian bio-cosmology is correct then Aristotle seems to contradict himself, because he admitted God, or the “First mover” as the basic reality of cosmological evolution. While Patrick writes that to Aristotle “the real things are organisms”.¹⁶ If so, Aristotle can be accused of degrading what he calls the ‘First Mover’. Vivekananda, on the other hand, believes in equal reality thought not equal divinity of both God and the entire bio-sphere in which He manifests Himself.

Again Stace holds the view that “Hinduism ... has its doctrine of evolution. But it has no philosophy of evolution.”¹⁷ That is to say according to him doctrine of evolution and philosophy of evolution are two different things. “The modern doctrine of evolution” says Stace, can only develop into a philosophy of evolution by giving a rational basis for the belief that some forms of existence are higher than others”.¹⁸ And it is meaningless to talk of higher and lower except in relation to an end. So, to have a philosophy of evolution, it must be teleological”.¹⁹ To be philosophy of evolution, a doctrine therefore, must have an end. Stace argues that Hinduism believes in pantheism, a doctrine according to which the world and all the earthly things (animate and inanimate) are the expressions of God – all are divine. Pantheistic attitude induces them to *worship cows and snakes*. This practice, according to Stace, *places all things on a par as equally divine*.²⁰ Nevertheless, Stace, admits that the Hindus believe in the higher and lower forms of life; and that all men are not equal in their spiritual achievement or status. Therefore, Hinduism suffers from contradiction. In this context Stace says, “The thought that all is God, and the thought that there are higher and lower beings are ... opposed and inconsistent

¹² Patrick, *Introduction to Philosophy*, G. Allen & Unwin London, 1961, p. 112.

¹³ Jadunath Sinha, “*Introduction to Philosophy*”, New central Book agency Ltd, Calcutta, 1998, p. 150.

¹⁴ Patrick, *Introduction to Philosophy*, G. Allen & Unwin London, 1961, p. 115.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 112.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 112.

¹⁷ *A critical history of Greek Philosophy*, Macmillan Press Ltd. London, 1772, p. 313.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 309-310.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 311.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 312-13.

theories.”²¹ But he has admitted the necessity of accepting both the theories. “And it is the business of philosophy”, says Stace, “to find a reconciliation. This Aristotle does, but Hinduism fails to do.”²²

Now I would like to explain after Vivekananda the emergence of divinity in man through the bio-cosmic evolution on earth and thereby to prove that Stace was not sincere enough to study minutely the Hindu philosophy of evolution. The whole series of evolution, according to Swami Vivekananda, which begins with the lowest manifestation of life and reaches up to the highest, the most perfect man, must have been the involution of something, the involution of God, It is here to be noted that human beings have been admitted by the scriptures of all religions as the highest form of life on earth. Even Aristotle regarded bio-centric nature as a hierarchy in which “plants exist for the sake of animals and brute beasts for the sake of man.”²³ Like in social life humans belong to different stages of hierarchy according to their spiritual achievement. In this context let us hear from Swamiji himself. He says,

The perfect man, the free man, the God-man, who has gone beyond the laws of nature and transcended everything, who has no more to go through this process of evolution, through birth and death, that man is called the ‘Christ-man’ by the Christians, and the ‘Buddhaman’ by the Buddhists and the ‘Free’ by the yogis – the perfect man who is at one end of the chain of evolution was involved in the cell of protoplasm, which is at the other end of the same chain.²⁴

Divinity of godly-man cannot be achieved in a span of one life – life after life is required to achieve it through utmost sacrifice and strenuous efforts. So, the Hindus, the Buddhists, the spiritualists of all other religions as well believe in transmigration of soul. According to Swamiji the soul migrates and dwells in so many bodies one after another and each thought a man thinks and each deed he does are stored in its imperceptible finer form of body (composed of mind, intellect and ego) which never ceases to exist until he completes the circle and becomes free. Gautam Buddha, for example, is said to have taken five hundred births to reach the highest culmination of divinity. He was not born as man always; he had to take various kinds of animal bodies as well. Swamiji says,

Thus from body to body it will go, sometimes to a heaven and back again to earth, becoming man, or some lower animal. This way it will go on until it has finished its experience and completed the circle.”²⁵

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 313.

²² *Ibid*, P. 313.

²³ Quotation borrowed from Peter singer’s *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge University press, New York, 1993, p. 267.

²⁴ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*”, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, Vol. II, p. 209.

²⁵ *A critical history of Greek Philosophy*, p. 223.

This theory of reincarnation successfully explains why some men are happy and others are not, why some people are born-blind or physically or mentally retarded by birth.

Like Hinduism Aristotle believes in pantheism as well as in the scale of values. He did not believe in transmigration of soul. But the Hindus do. To deny the philosophy of evolution of the Hindus Stace must prove that their doctrine is not based on rational foundation and it aims at no end. But he took no convincing attempt to do it. Again with regard to their worship of animals a superficial remark has been passed that Hinduism “easily slides into the view that all is equally divine”.²⁶ The Hindus may worship cows and snakes; but it does not necessarily mean that *their doctrine of pantheism places all things on a par as equally divine*. A father, for example, loves all his sons and daughters; but it does not necessarily mean that he loves them equally. So, the belief in pantheism does not necessarily contradict with the belief in the scale of values – the higher and the lower forms of life on the cosmos. Rather the Hindus’ doctrine of transmigration of soul firmly based on ‘*Karmavad*’ or their belief in successive incarnations that the soul is said to mount higher and higher till it rejoins Brahman – the common source of all things, is an admirable philosophical attempt to have reconciliation between pantheism as a theory and the actual experience of evil or inequalities found in social environment of mankind as well as in the entire biosphere.

In the highest stage of spirituality a man surpasses, according to Hinduism, all other men because of his achievement in spiritual evolution. In other words, every man belongs to different stages of spiritual hierarchy. The highest stage of spirituality achieved by a few of enlightened souls like Gautam Buddha or the Christ or someone like them lives with God, his wish merges with the wish of the Almighty or the Absolute Brahman. Such a man finds no distinction between himself and all other living beings. He sees everything divine and identifies himself with all others around him. So, it is often said that such a man “ceases to exist as a separate person”, his personality or ego dissolve into or merges with the Pure Consciousness In this context a verse of the Isha Upanishad is remarkable. The Upanishad says:

“One who beholds all living beings in himself and himself in all living beings, cannot hate or kill anybody”²⁷, because he ceases to exist as a separate person and identifies himself with all forms of life.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 313.

²⁷ *The Upanishads*, Atul Ch. Sen (ed.), Harap Prakashani, Kolkata, 2000, p. 12.