

Book Received and Reviewed

Jeevandeavata: Rabindra Rachana Sankalan

Edited by Rajat Kanta Ray

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This collection of writings on Tagore's concept of *Jeevandeavata* is an engaging encounter with Tagore's unique concept of inspiration and love within his poetic career. Beautifully produced with numerous plates of Tagore's paintings on this subject, this book is embellished with a fine introduction by the noted historian and Tagore scholar Rajat Kanta Ray. Ray is not the first to note the theme of *Jeevandeavata* as a recurring motif in Tagore's writings. Ajit Kumar Chakraborty and Mohitchandra Sen had also explored the issue but Ray brings out the finer nuances within this motif in Tagore's poetry.

Ray distinguishes between Tagore's notion of *Visvadeavata* (the lord of the world; derived from the Upanishadic *Brahma*) and *Jeevandeavata* (derived from the same source but peculiar to the poet himself). Indeed, this notion of the *Jeevandeavata* seems to incorporate the transcendental and the unique range of finite experiences peculiar to the poet. One also locates within this *Jeevandeavata* the fusion of the inspirational Muse that lies at the root of Tagore's aesthetic consciousness. Thus the notion of the infinite engages with the finite range of love, devotion, grief and emerges as a beacon for creativity. Ray is fascinated by the engendering of the *Jeevandeavata* as the female (indeed numerous poems of Tagore, including his translations visualise the veiled woman as a protagonist). Ray locates the emergence of this figure within the three women in Tagore's life each of whom left him with unfulfilled relationships. Thus a sense of

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incompleteness and aspiration haunts his writings. Tagore also uses the image of the rowing woman recurrently as indicative of the potential of *Jeevandeavata* to move within the infinite, finite and the creative. Ray locates the images of *Jeevandeavata* as a composite of death, infinite *Brahma*, veiled woman and the illuminated lord of life. What Ray does is to sift through the volumes of Tagore's poetry, prose, songs, pictures and letters to locate references to the various aspects of *Jeevandeavata*.

This volume will prove invaluable to Rabindranath researchers due to its raising of several reasons. How did Tagore's spirituality interact with the range of his experiences? Does, at any point of time the veiled woman embody his nationalist phase? How does his concept of Nature interact with the notion of *Jeevandeavata*?

The one problem of this book is the absence of references to the English translations of Tagore's poems on the subject. It would have been fascinating to locate Tagore's translations of the images and the process of his thought within the translated poems.

This is one of the most engaging books on Tagore for quite a while. In the recent spate of writings to read Tagore politically, this is a work that reminds us of the complex imagination that brought together the spiritual, the personal and the creative.

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