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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### ORIGIN AND NEW MEANING ASSIGNED TO THE CONCEPT OF SUPERMAN.

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#### Abstract

Bernard Shaw has written his philosophy of Dynamism of 'Life Force' as an evolutionary cosmic action plan in the 'Prefaces' of his plays and particularly in his play Man And Superman. These prefaces deal with the formative influences on Bernard Shaw of world's great pioneers in relation to his creed of 'Creative Evolution' on which his concept of the superman is based. His theories of "Life Force" and "Creative Evolution" has been discussed in detail in his prefaces. He frankly accepts that the evolutionary appetite on will is not a new idea. He goes back to the great thinkers of the past to trace out the idea from its very origin. His theory of 'Superman' is the result of his deep study of the Greece and German philosophers. This paper attempts to study about influence of various philosophers on Shaw's concept of superman.

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It was Nietzsche's 'ubermensch' that influenced George Bernard Shaw to use dynamism of 'Life Force' in his all creative works. He has frankly admitted it in one of the 'Prefaces'. This concept of the Superman is an outcome of the 'Superman' of various ideas propounded by the thinkers of Europe in different periods and different forms. The theory of 'Superman' starts from Greece and the philosophers began with an inquiry into the essence of the objective world and from external nature they "gradually turned their eye inward on man himself" (Frank 16).

In Greece Paganism it was an advance thought towards superman hood. According to 'Greece Paganism' the shifting of interest from nature to man, led the study of human mind and human conduct. The Greek philosophers like Sophists, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and Epicurus had their faith in "Paganism". Protagoras (c.500-430 B.C) was the first among the Sophists who revealed that "man is the measure of all things" (Frank 57). He stressed that "the first duty of man is to know him" (Frank 58).

Socrates, after whom the humanism of Sophists reached its zenith emphasized, on the quest of inner virtues. His slogan was "Know Thyself" because he believed that 'he who knows himself knows the divine'. It was the religion of the Sophists. St Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas had full faith in self-realization. They believed that "Man's finite nature has a supernatural end" (Frank 190). Power of 'Will' was supreme for them.

Descartes believed that man is important not due to his body but due to his mind and it is mind which can give him perfection. "Kant (1724-1804) likewise made knowledge an unquestionable object; and Fichte (1762-1814 A.D) considered self-consciousness to be the secret of man's existence upon earth" (Kumar 33). The concept of the 'Superman' right from Protagoras (c.500-430 B.C) up to the time of Kant and Fichte (eighteenth century) has an outcome of various ideas propounded by a number of the great thinkers and philosophers. With a brief study of their historical survey we come to know clearly that the philosophers enriched the world with a sense of self-consciousness of knowledge which is purely subjective and also of God as the perfect being and the ultimate Reality. But it is a matter of regret that these philosophers have hardly presented a clear-cut vision as to how man, an

imperfect being, can become perfect, whether such a transition is possible on this earth and what indeed are the different ways and means by which man can reach divinity.

We may have some hope in this direction in the philosophy of 'Superman' from Schopenhauer, a great German philosopher, who gave a new light in this direction. He was the first philosopher among the moderns (here modern means after 18<sup>th</sup> century) who appreciated the enormous practical importance of the distinction, and to make it clear to amateur metaphysicians by concrete instances.

Out of his (Schopenhauer's) teaching came the formulation of the dilemma Voltaire had shut his eyes to. Here it is rationally considered, life is only worth living when its pleasures are greater than its pains (Shaw 20).

Schopenhauer considered the world as Idea and as Will. He explained it and told that what exists in this world is an idea of the man who sees it as the subject. Erwin Edman in his book *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* has explained it in the following words:

What he knows is not a sun and an earth but only an eye that sees a sun, a hand that feels on earth (Erwin 3).

It is the consciousness of the individual which is important and not the objective world he sees or feels the world is identical with his own Will. Schopenhauer has also again divided ideas into three kinds. They are "perception, intuition and abstract ideas". Regarding first (perception) an individual starts from his own body which is for him an immediate object (i.e. immediately accessible by the subject). The German philosopher emphasises on the world "Subject". It covers the whole animated creation, man, animal and even the least developed of the creatures that have understanding, though in varying degrees, of the objective world around them.

Schopenhauer also says that there is a difference between man's consciousness, and that of other animals and fellow creatures. Man's consciousness has the power of reflection with which he takes a resolute step, chooses with profound definiteness between several objectives which confront his will. This perception is man's reason which is its prime mover. Will power gives man knowledge of his own existence. The body is individual's will, for he can make it good or bad, devilish or divine according as he will. It (will) gives him power to stand superior to his body and this 'Will' emerges from 'within', proceeds from the most immediate consciousness of each of us and is thus 'uncaused'.

The nature of "Will" is free and independent and its action blind. The German philosopher thinks that such blind action of 'Will' in man is known as 'stimuli'. Moreover he thinks that 'Conflict' is an essential quality of 'Will'. In nature and in human life 'Conflict' is the power which elevates the inner energy. But it also has its negative effect. The animals are seen destroying each other for their livelihood, they eat plants and are themselves eaten by the bigger animals and even human beings. The nature of "Will" is endless striving.

This "Will" inspire man. He requires knowledge rational as well as sensuous. The real reasoning power inspires him for the self-surrender. He wants to resign and deliver from the world which is the final goal. An artist has extraordinary gift of genius and wins the body. He remains no longer the slave of his passions and miseries and leads to a state of spiritual exaltation and the sublime. He is, now, above the slavery of passion. Now like John Keats he begins to enjoy the true beauty which becomes a joy forever. He begins to realize the inner nature of the world. His realization of the truth is his real "intuition". His "abstract ideas" become a real source of "Will".

It is this 'Will' which supplied the great another German philosopher Nietzsche who influenced Bernard Shaw and he often referred to him in his 'Prefaces'. Will is an endless striving and suffering is the outcome of this effort of satisfying one aim or another and when suffering becomes great, we voluntarily wish to die.

In his play *Man and Superman*, Bernard Shaw has given his conception of his Superman. He wants his contemporaries to proceed incessantly without looking back and as there is no end to the march of evolutionary will, the one species of superman will be superseded by the next generation and soon. In this play he refers to Francois Voltaire, who was a great champion-anti in religion and the playwrights' iconoclasm in religion bears testimony to his association with this great talented man. He is eighteenth century great genius. He used to say:

...if there were no God it would be necessary to invent Him. (Bunyan 167)

But Shaw believes that it is idle to depend on a conventional God, man should realize his 'Inner Self' and try to elevate it.

The dramatist has his full faith that "Life" is not a bed of roses but 'Life is a bed of thorns and a person coming out of the difficulties of life is like an iron which is sent into the fire to become steel. Shaw, hence, wants to say that 'Life' after constant slips and advances, after many trials and errors, arrive at mankind which is no doubt its latest creation, but by no means final. Thus outward beauty, strength or gigantic do not help man to be 'Superman'. His mental superiority is more important than his physical beauty or strength.

Shaw gives more importance to philosophic thinking for a better life than more physical existence based on pleasure hunting. If one has no "Life Power" he is sure to be doomed because without decisive instincts, one has only a hard instinct and, therefore, no self-respect. Such a man can never be a contemplative man and can achieve anything if he simply blindly imitates without using the power of his brain. A self-conscious man will learn about his dormant capabilities which, when he finds out by means of thinking, he will utilize to great advantage.

Shaw has elaborately illustrated his idea of brain as the most important of the divine gifts to mankind. Brain is the lust gift to man by God. It is on point of intellect alone that man has raised at one all his ancestors and imposed himself on all other creature of the world.

It is by virtue of this Gift (Brain) that man has become 'Superman' and has conquered not only birds, animals and other species of the world but also time and space. It is the power of brain that in the present century (The twentieth century as well as the 21<sup>st</sup> century) that man's power of thinking has taught him to work for his own good without depending on God. The playwright thinks that "Superman" will be the product of profound intellectual power, and will dwell permanently in thought as far as possible.

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