



Tagore's Vision in Gitanjali

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses its study on *Gitanjali* and finds it as a mystical text of the tradition of the saint poets in India. It portrays several themes including love, death, life, sorrows, and the world. It is work that reveals the way of man to God. He finds a perfect harmony with God and feels that death is a means to go to the Divine, not to be hated as is in the world. He further says that He is still the same while several people came and went from the world. He is overwhelmed with the beauty of seasons and he enjoys life's mortality.

Keywords: Indian saint poets, love, death, Divine, way to God, perfection, a man in the world, Nature, seasons like summer and rain, etc.

Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore is regarded as one of the great poets in Indian English literature. He is in the category of the saint poets in India, and his place is at the top of it. He is regarded as the poet of the divine and mysticism throughout *Gitanjali* for which he got the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913. Likewise, he is a poet par excellence, and his poems are full of imagination and spiritualism. He used to write both in Bengali and in English. He found himself overhead with different philosophical and mystical approaches. Bengal had been full of new



ideas and a new spirit in religion, literature, and politics. His *Gitanjali* is replete with mystical ideas and full of music and spiritualism.

There are many poets in English literature across the globe, but indeed there is no poet mystical like Tagore. He takes the reader into the clutch of mysticism and gets to feel the world of the Supreme Power that is the Divine. People forget worldly woes and sorrows, coming to the lap of mysticism.

W.B. Yeats writes in the Introduction to Tagore's *Gitanjali*:

"We have other poets, but none that are his equal; we call this the epoch of Rabindranath. No poet seems to me as famous in Europe as he is among us. He is as great in music as in poetry, and his songs are sung from the west of India into Burma wherever Bengali is spoken." Tagore, Rabindranath, 1946. Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, Page viii

Tagore's *Gitanjali* or "The Song Offerings" is considered one of the most immortal songs ever written before. It is a reflection of his consciousness, wisdom and philosophy. The original work was written in Bengali and contained 157 songs. Later, it was translated into English and released in November 1912 by the India Society, London which contained translations of 53 poems from the original Bengali *Gitanjali*. It was published with a long introduction by W.B. Yeats, a great poet of the symbolism movement. In his 'Introduction,' he writes about *Gitanjali* as follows:



“The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same things, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble...” (Introduction, Gitanjali, Tagore, Rabindranath, 1946. Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, page xiii-xiv

Gitanjali has composed conversations between the poet and God and it is full of overhead ideas. Sometimes, the words of God are unuttered. Despite this, the poet speaks of his prayers and feelings. The poet called his countrymen to unite against the evils of their own as well as the foreign rule. In fact, *Gitanjali* was composed in the time of British India when the protest against the foreign rule occurred both in violent and nonviolent manners for securing the freedom of the country. Tagore prayed to awaken his countrymen into the heaven of wisdom. He also prayed for the removal of caste discrimination, which was one of the greatest evils of the time and a large number of people were compelled to live in hellish condition for centuries.

In *Gitanjali*, Tagore prays for a better life, not for mortal or earthly things. According to W.B. Yeats, as said in his ‘Introduction’ to *Gitanjali*, these songs came from great sorrow and deep emotion. A single line of his poetry can make anyone forget all the troubles of the world. W.B. Yeats writes in the Introduction:

“...to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world.” Tagore, Rabindranath, 1946. Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, Page viii



Gitanjali indeed can purify our body and mind to get closer to our Maker. Here, we see that the God of Tagore is the God of beauty, wisdom, and perfection – perfection to the way to God. His God doesn't have any specific image, nor did the poet ever represent his God through any symbols. His God is not in the temple, but in body and the mind – but in the field of the peasants and everywhere.

M.K. Naik writes, “*He is everywhere, the light of his music ‘illuminates the world’; ‘every moment and every age, everyday and every night, he comes, comes, ever comes.’ He is not be found in temple; ‘he is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones.’*” Naik, M. K., 2005, A History of English Literature, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, page 60

Tagore gave us a picture of death – the way which leads to his God. The concept of death for him is a peaceful ocean where he can rest after his mortal life passes. *Gitanjali* has a deep connection with Nature. These songs are mostly in the seasons of monsoon, autumn, or spring. Nature brings her glows to man by decorating the surroundings with new pictures, new lights, and new fruits and flowers. It is a good time to make us new and pure for devoting ourselves to God. How beautifully the poet reveals his ideas in the following lines:

“*Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is there if the clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in the sweat of thy brow.*” Tagore, Rabindranath, 1946. Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, Song no. 11, Page 9



Tagore very beautifully depicts the following lines:

“The lifelong day has passed in spreading his seat on the floor, but the lamp has not been lit, and I cannot ask him into my house.” Tagore, Rabindranath, 1946. Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, Song no. 13, Page 11

Gitanjali is an extraordinary work of art, as said by W.B. Yeats in his introduction to this work. It is not easy work to evaluate Tagore’s ideas in it. In fact, this text depicts the innermost feelings of the poet. Everyone who wants to know Bengali tradition and spiritualism must read this divine song sung by Tagore. It is full of philosophy and Bengali renaissance.

Sampson rightly remarks, *“Tagore was desirous of establishing a new relationship between Western education and Eastern philosophy and founded at Santiniketan, Bolpur, a school, and international university to that end.”* Sampson, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, page 741

Gitanjali is, in a true sense, Tagore’s great work written under divine influence. It is based on devotional songs from India in the Middle Ages. He also wrote music to go with these words. Love is the main theme in it, but some poems also depict the struggle between spiritual longings and earthly desires. Most wonderfully, the images, he uses in it come from Nature, and his mood is mostly quiet.

Mysticism is the main theme in *Gitanjali*. It also brings up a number of other hidden themes. According to ancient Indian philosophy, mysticism has been the highest stage where the human



soul is in direct contact with God. The wide impact of *the Srimad Bhagwad Gita* has on the hearts and minds of Indians. So, a mystic thinks that the world we see with our senses, especially with our eyes and ears, is not real. There is a more real-world behind it that can only be understood spiritually, not through the senses. The man in meditation tries to get in touch with the inner, ultimate reality in a way that is direct and intuitive.

Mundra rightly observes, "*Tagore was a mystic who sought to realise his oneness with the universal soul. But he has opposed all forms of barren asceticism and was lover of life. He was in every sense of term an Indian poet true to his cultural heritage and to the traditions of Sanskrit and Bengali literature.*" Mundra, J.N. & Sahni, C.L., 1991, *Advanced Literary Essays*, Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, page 223

Mysticism cannot be explained logically, because this is a state of mind and imagination, not of worldly senses. All mystics try to make a distinction between the outside world and the world inside it. In fact, mysticism is based on the ideas of renunciation, detachment from the world, and asceticism. Tagore chants:

*"I am here to sing the song. In this hall of thine I have a corner seat,
In thy world I have no work to do; my useless life can only break out in tunes without a purpose.
When the hour strikes for thy silent worship at the dark temple master, to stand before thee to sing."* Tagore, Rabindranath, 1946. Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, Song no. 13, Page 13



Tagore was widely influenced by Khalil Gibran, Whitman, and Sri Aurobindo who were great mystics. Tagore's mysticism is different from these of the above. Tagore has no doubt about what he thinks and what he feels. He seldom tries to get away from real life, but he does enjoy the joy of living whatever he has. He doesn't deny the sense of experience that he witnesses. It reflects a spiritual experience. He has not the slightest desire to be a monk. His strong humanism indeed keeps his mysticism in control and keeps it from getting out of hand.

Gitanjali is indeed a God's prayer – a collection of songs about God and praise for Him. These songs are deeply rooted in the ancient tradition of Indian Vaishnava poetry and have mystical, eternal, and sublime qualities following the Bengali and Indian philosophy containing a wide range of moods and ways of doing things usually. The theme of the way to God runs throughout *Gitanjali*.

Further M.K. Naik observes, "*Tagore sees God as 'unbroken perfection', as the giver of 'simple great gifts' which 'come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages passed and still thou pourest and still there is a room to fill.'*" Naik, M. K., 2005, A History of English Literature, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, page 60

M.K. Naik rightly says, "*The central theme of Gitanjali, Tagore's finest achievement in English verse, is devotion and its motto is 'I am here to sing thee song. (poem no. xv). These songs, firmly rooted in the ancient tradition of Indian saint poetry, yet reveal a highly personal quest for the*



Divine, characterised by a great variety of moods and approaches.” Naik, M. K., 2005, A History of English Literature, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, page 60

Rabindranath was a great humanist and philosopher. So, *Gitanjali* also talks about the relationship between a man’s soul and other men. It stands up for the rights of the poor and humble, who are often denied the most important rights of man. He was quite against the caste system, and he supported the works of Mahatma Gandhi in favour of the Dalits.

“People blame me and call me heedless; I doubt not they are right in their blame.” Tagore, Rabindranath, 1946. Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, Song no.17, Page 14

There are different loves portrayed in *Gitanjali* – love for women, people, humanity, God, nature, death, country, beauty, and the truth. Tagore loves God and religion, and he depicts the truth, happiness, and beauty of the world in his poetry.

“I have got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers! I bow to you all and take my departure.” Tagore, Rabindranath, 1946. Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, Song no. 92, Page 85

Readers witness the theme of death too, in *Gitanjali*, He depicts death, and he does so in many different and artistic ways. But he doesn’t fear death – he doesn’t hate death. He indeed looks towards it with joy because it’s the only way to be with God. He says very beautifully regarding death in the following lines:



“Death, thy servant, is at my door. He has crossed the unknown sea and brought thy call to my home.” Tagore, Rabindranath, 1946. Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, Song no. 86, Page 79

Tagore further chants:

“O Thou the last fulfilment of life, Death, my Death come and whisper to me!” Tagore, Rabindranath, 1946. Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, Song no. 91, Page 83

Conclusion: Thus, we can say that *Gitanjali* is a Divine song. It shows the way of man to God. In it, he depicts mysticism, Nature, love, death, and life in a very spiritual manner. He had a wide influence on Bengali philosophy in this work of art and with a message to the world. It captures the reader and takes to the world unseen but its wide influence. Readers are compelled to think about his ideas when he says that he sits on the roadside in the bitter sun – passersby ask and ask but he does not speak to them – as they do not know what he is doing.

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