

Descriptive study on Rabindranath Tagore's point of view about God and religious thought in *Gitanjali*

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore wrote *Gitanjali* and it is actually a song offering of finite to the infinite. In this famous book the central idea is devotional, it expresses the yearning of the devotee for re-union with the divine. Here Tagore explains the relationship of God and the human soul, of God and nature and the presence of God in this world. *Gitanjali* is the spiritual autobiography of Rabindranath Tagore but when one reads it deeply, it is the voice of our own soul. When one is very keen to know about God, or to search God then this book is a way to reach God. What are the ways to reach God and what kind of life one should live in this transient world. These concepts are very difficult and hard to understand but Tagore has explained them in lucid and in simple terms. The present paper is an attempt to read *Gitanjali* from Tagore's point of view about God and the union of soul with God.

Gitanjali was published in 1912 and it created storm in western world, and also hostile reception, but few intellectuals acknowledged it as a great book and praised Tagore's genius. W.B. Yeats wrote introduction to this book and in glowing terms praised Rabindranath Tagore's genius as Yeats says in introduction "I read Rabindranath Tagore everyday, to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world". Initially there were few European, who eulogise, but with the passage of time everyone now accepted it as a great book and has universal message and appeal. This book is a source of peace and comfort in times of distress and anxiety and its appeal is world-wide. Rabindranath Tagore was very much disturbed because he lost all his near and dear ones, he lost his father, wife, son and daughter and he was in search of peace and rest as he lost almost his entire family. When Rabindranath Tagore wrote he was in search of peace and he wrote *Gitanjali* between 1906 and 1910 in Bengali and himself translated it into English in 1912. He was awarded Nobel Prize for it on Nov. 15, 1913.

In the very first poem the poet begins his song offering in a spirit of absolute humility and addressed God as supreme and powerful. Human body is mortal and subject to decay but soul is eternal and immortal and it is His will. The poet compares human body to a weak vessel, which can be easily broken, God fills this body again and again, human life is constantly renewed. Man dies and is born again in another shape and Tagore explains the faith in the Hindu doctrine of transmigration. Rabindranath Tagore expresses his firm belief in God, the creator of the world and his union with the God. When God inspires the poet, he sings with divine joy and forgets his physical limitations and the mystic union of man and God takes place. God's bounty is so great that it is inexpressable, it cannot be described in words, it is beyond human description. The poet praises the bounty of God and Man has only to look around and he will find that he is plentifully provided by Him.

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again

and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life. At the immortal touch of the hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill (*Gitanjali*-I, p.1).

Rabindranath Tagore was deeply religious and believes in God, The creator and most powerful who is very kind to His devotees and believes in one God. Tagore is of the view that God makes me to sing and it is only under divine inspiration that he can sing. He feels great pride and ecstasy when he feels God is happy with me and inspire me to write religious songs in praise of God. Here Tagore is differing with the ideas of Hindus who believes in various God's and in a moment of happiness he addresses God as friend because He is very kind to him. Tagore explains his belief that when he feels divine presence, he forgets everything and comes close to God, He too allows to meet me face to face.

When thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I looked to thy face, and tears come to my eyes.

I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence (*Gitanjali*-II, p.2).

The poet believes that we must love poor and down trodden and God resides with them. When God loves the poor people, then why we hate them and God is not happy with it. Those who shun the poor and the humble can never find him. He says that the Lord walks in the midst of the poorest the lowest and the lost people who have no hopes and the Lord is there with them to love and take care of them. If we want to worship God and make him happy, we must give up pride and vanity as these are obstacles in the way. The poet explains his

philosophy here that poor and down trodden people are nearer to God and if one seeks God he should seek company of poor and weak people. By loving and serving the downtrodden one can wish to approach God. He himself feels that he has pride and he can never find his way towards the ways of the Lord and he feels he has to become good and try to overcome the pride and only that he can meet the Lord.

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost. When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, the lowliest, and lost.

Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes of the humble among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost. My pride can never find its ways to where thou keepest company with the companionless amongst the poor, the lowliest, and the lost (*Gitanjali-X*, p.10).

The poet criticises the priests who are living ascetic way of life and forcefully advises them to participate in the daily activity of humble humanity. Don't live in dark corners of temple, when you really want to seek God, He is not there. He is with the needy and poor people whom you hate and discriminate. The priests are living in ivory towers and chanting and singing of mantras, and living a secluded life and in this way you are away from God. This poem is the most important poem in entire song offering as it explains tagores view about God and this poem is an eye opener for those who seek God only in temples. There are some temples where dalits are not allowed to enter, and it is considered that by allowing dalits inside the temple, it will become impure. When we hate creation of God, how can we be nearer to God and poet explains in this poem duplicity about priests. We all are human beings having same physical features and God loves all human beings irrespective of caste, creed, colour and sex. When we hate creation of God we actually hate God because God created all humans. We must love all humans and help poor and weak people who are in extreme poverty. God lives with the humble and down-trodden tillers of the fields, the path-makers who work hard at breaking stones. He lives in the company of those who toil in sun and shower, and whose clothes are soiled with the dust. If the priest wants God he must come out of his temple, give up his holy robes, and work with the humble tillers of the soil in rain and sun. Worship in cosy rooms or in secluded corner of a temple is futile. Offering of incense and flowers are likely to serve no purpose and are equally vain. God is to be found with the poor and the humble who earn their bread by working hard in fields. It hardly matters that their clothes are tattered and stained. Here Rabindranath Tagore explains most important idea that one who lives aloof can never find God and one must not give up this world, participation in the activity of life is essential for God-realisation.

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow (*Gitanjali-XI*, p.11).

The poet says that despite his prayer God has not responded but poet will continue to pray and is very optimistic that one day God will respond and will speak to him. The poet is in a state of desparation and suspicion whether He will respond or not but is very hopeful that desparation will end and He will listen my prayer. The poet believes that brightful morning will come and he will be with his Lord. Here poet also gives us message that one must not give up his or her hope when Lord didn't respond to his or her prayers. One must be patient and continue to pray and when Lord is satisfied with your prayer and steadfastness He will listen and respond. We should not immediately seek respond in return, it is His will to respond. One must be truthful and devotee to his Lord and then wait patiently. The poet says that he will be silient till the Lord speaks out. He encourages everyone that after darkness a new day wil surely come and the darkness will flee forever, as poet wrote it in these lines.

If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it. I will keep still and wait like the night with starry vigil and its head bent down with patience.

The morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish, and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky (*Gitanjali XIX*, p-19).

The poet is extremely tired and longs for sleep but is very optimistic that he will find himself in the hands of God with out making any effort on his part. When one is tired one should not worship, rather one should sleep and rest as tired souls are of no avail. Here poet symbolically refers sleep as death, eternal peace and rest when God will meet me. The poet yearns for reunion with eternal but such a reunion is possible only when the chains of this world has been broken. Worldly possessions are of no value and that is the reason poet hates worldly wealth, and yet he is unable to throw it away and clings to it. The poet wants spiritual salvation and it is possible only when one gives up worldly ambitions. The poet trembles when he prays because if his prayer is listened, he will have to give up his worldly ambitions.

Lastly the poet yearns for death for he knows that death is the fulfilment and consummation of life. He compares his life to a bride and death to a bridegroom, just as a bride finds consummation and fulfilment in her union with the bridegroom, so also his life will be consummated by union with Death. The

poet is about to start on his last journey and he requests his friends to wish him good luck. He is not afraid of the long journey he has to undertake, rather he looks forward to the journey with hope and expectation. The path appears to him to be beautiful and he is full of hopes of meeting his beloved bride (God), at the end of the journey.

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