

THE REFLECTION OF SPIRITUAL ELEGANCE IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S GITANJALI

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) popularly known as 'Gurudev' was a Bengali poet, composer, philosopher, painter and social reformer. Tagore opposed imperialism. He reshaped Indian literature and music, as well as Indian art with Contextual Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His ideas, philosophy and works have inspired people throughout the world. In 1913, he became the first non-European as well as the first lyricist to win the Nobel Prize in Literature for his masterpiece 'Gitanjali' which is an overwhelmingly sensitive and beautiful verse. Tagore's poetic songs are intensely spiritual, lively and sagacious. His prose is elegant and thought-provoking and his poetry is magically heart-touching. He is sometimes referred to as 'the Bard of Bengal'. Tagore modernized art by disdaining rigid classical forms and resisting linguistic strictures. His novels, poems, short stories, songs, dance-dramas, and essays were based on political and personal topics. The poem-collection 'Gitanjali (Song Offerings)' (1912), the novel 'Gora (Fair-Faced)' (1880) and the novel 'Ghare-Baire (The Home and the World)' (1916) are his best-known works. His short stories, poems and novels were praised for their colloquial language, lyrics and natural touch with deep contemplation. His compositions were chosen as national anthems by two nations: India's 'Jana Gana Mana' and Bangladesh's 'Amar Sonar Bangla'.

As a humanist and Universalist, Tagore denounced the British Raj and advocated independence from Britain. As an exponent of the Bengal Renaissance, he advanced a vast collection of his works that comprised sketches, paintings, and hundreds of texts, and some two thousand songs. His legacy is still there in the institution 'Visva-Bharati University' founded by him. Tagore wrote poems for various moods: love, patriotism, devotion, pleasure, sorrow, sympathy, bliss, grief, joy, even realism. Internationally, Gitanjali is Tagore's best-known collection of poetry, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Tagore was the first non-European to receive a Nobel Prize in Literature. We human beings are actually spiritual beings having a human experience and not the other way around. So we are immortal and eternal beings on a never ending journey.

Literature is one of the fundamental media to reflect the spirits of life. When we think about literature, the poetic works which spontaneously come to our mind is Rabindranath Tagore's 'Gitanjali'. All these poems which attained great popularity and success in their times, have the common theme of 'Spirituality' preaching human beings the doctrines of life, religion,

humanity, natural world and worship. This fact poses a question: Aren't people mostly interested in learning the philosophy of life to end their worries and attain salvation?

This question inspired me to explore the most applauded poems from 'Gitanjali' of Bengali Modern poet Rabindranath Tagore. He is also known to have contributed prolifically to the spiritual literary treasure. Gitanjali is one of Tagore's most famous works. It was Gitanjali which made Tagore the first Asian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. Gitanjali embodies the essence of Tagore's poetic spirit. While the Bengali Gitanjali had 183 poems, the English version contained 103 poems.

The meaning of the term 'Gitanjali' explains the nature of the book. The term comes as the merger of two words 'geet' meaning 'song' and 'anjali' meaning 'offering'. Thus, 'Gitanjali' means 'Song Offerings'. Gitanjali is a book to feel and cherish. Tagore had written his Gitanjali (song offerings) in Bengali, and after he learned from William Rothenstein of Western interest in them, he translated them into English. This poem shows the charm of humbleness. It is a prayer to help the poet open his heart to the Divine Beloved without superfluous words or gestures.

Gitanjali is an immortal work of art, poetry and philosophy. In it, Indian thought, culture and tradition are so lyrically and beautifully written that it charms and wins the appreciation of anyone who goes through its lines. Though the poems in the collection of 'Gitanjali' are clubbed together as untitled pieces, the poems are strongly emotional and sentimental and captivate the reader's heart and mind.

"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience." — Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Our 'Gitanjali' conveys the message of spirituality, divinity and humanity. What makes them alike is the thread of peace and harmony. Gitanjali talks of peace through the union of human soul with the Supreme Soul 'God', and for this necessitates the liberation of soul from the materialistic point of view. Tagore equates spiritual force with eternal force of the universe and looked at man and nature as the images of God.

Spirituality is the broad concept of belief in something beyond the physical self. It is the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to materialistic or physical things. It may involve religious traditions centring on the belief in the Supreme Power. It may also entail holistic belief in connection to others and to the world as a whole. To be spiritually enlightened, one needs to be conscientious. To understand the concept of spirituality, let us envision a house-garden with a flowery plant. If the soil, sunlight or stem of the plant are uncared about, the plant won't yield flowers. We have to be meticulous about those things. Similarly, if we nurture our body, mind, emotions and energies scrupulously spirituality blossoms within us. When our rationale is immature, our mind doubts everything. When our rationale matures, our mind sees everything in a completely different light. Spirituality typically involves a search for meaning in life. It is a universal human experience that touches all. A spiritual experience can be elucidated as a deep sacred sense of aliveness and interconnectedness.

Spirituality offers a worldview that suggests there is more to life than just what

people experience on a sensory level. Spirituality connects all beings to each other and to the universe itself. It also proposes that there is ongoing existence after death and strives to answer questions about the meaning of life, how people are connected to each other, truths about the universe, and other mysteries of human existence. Spirituality and religious activity have been a source of comfort and relief from stress for multitudes of people. We realise that those who are more religious or spiritual and use their spirituality to cope with challenges in life experience many benefits to their health and well-being. Some may find that their spiritual life is intricately linked to their association with a church, temple and mosque. Others may pray or find comfort in a personal relationship with God or a higher power. Spirituality is about a transpersonal vision of goodness, beauty, perfection, generosity, graciousness, and sacrifice. It centers on respect for self, others and the dignity of life. Love, compassion and empathy are its foundation leading to sympathetic joy and equanimity. Spirituality is about integrity. It helps us to find meaning in life, provides a foundation of our values to guide us in the way we behave with self, others and the world around us. Spiritual consciousness may elicit the relaxation response, along with feelings of hope, gratitude, and compassion—all of which have a positive effect on overall wellbeing

Importance of spirituality:

1. Spirituality helps us to find purpose and meaning of life.
2. Spiritual experience assists human minds to cope with feelings of stress, depression, and anxiety. Having a strong spiritual outlook may help us tackle difficult circumstances in life.
3. Spirituality contributes in restoring hope and optimism□
4. Spirituality can induce feelings of calm and clear-headedness and can improve concentration and attention.

Tagore's Gitanjali is a spiritual quest for the divine, for the supreme power or Almighty God who is the supreme guiding force in nature and human life. The poet seeks for the infinite and all powerful God in the finite things viz. nature, human beings, days and

nights, and seasons of the year, in the temple, in the river, and the mountains and at his door steps. Thus the search becomes romantic and idealistic at the same time. He can realize God through his universal sense of humanity and love for all creatures. To comprehend the divine, he merges his individual self with the universal.

Tagore's supplication to God with a very endearing language and tone produces a deep sense of compassion and understanding between the poet and God. It is the deep reverence of the poet for the ultimate power which instigates him to submit himself entirely to God to acquire peace and bliss. The poet is filled with pleasure for God's presence in his life in his joys and grief, every time and everywhere. The spiritual fervor of Tagore is immense in presenting God in every sphere of his life as if God were caressing him all the time. Tagore presents God sometimes as a father, sometimes as a reconciler and sometimes as an intimate friend. Sometimes, Tagore behaves as if he has mingled with the divine. The poet's search for God is meant for peace, for the fulfillment, for unity and for discovering meanings of life and death. God's presence around the nature and around his existence provides him peace, as if the poet were never alone in the world. So the poet surrenders and prays to the Omnipotent and finds peace through his acquiescence and prayers.

Gitanjali is replete with Tagore's creative spirit of spirituality. Though lacking any formal structure, this collection reflects his inclination towards God in a unified form. Tagore believed that true knowledge perceives the unity of all things in God. Gitanjali reflects this belief through immortal verses. Tagore's approach to spirituality in 'Gitanjali' is pantheistic which emphasizes the presence of the divine or God in every finite thing, Pantheism is the doctrine that says 'everything is God or God is present in everything'. Throughout all poems in 'Gitanjali', Tagore proposes that God is the transcendent reality, of which, the materialistic world and human beings are manifestations. Tagore, while addressing God in poems of Gitanjali, submits to an all powerful, all pervading God with full devotion and prays Him for peace and good of

all. Gitanjali reflects clearly a humanistic spirituality. Tagore talks to God in Gitanjali poems as if God were with him all the time, not only in the day and night when he is awake but even in his dream in sleep. Tagore realizes God's presence in his life and the life of other human beings in terms of love and sympathy.

In nature, in the game of light and shade, in the rainy season, in the lighting and the thunderbolt of the sky, in day and night, in the moonlight night, in the road or in the temple, like a stranger, the poet feels the presence of God and talks to Him and questions Him with compassion and love. The poet complains to God against His being so slippery in His appearance and disappearance like a shadow behind him. He, God, is formless. But Tagore says he feels His presence everywhere. This is slightly Tagore's pantheistic approach in dealing with the spirituality of his poems. Sometimes, Tagore expresses his satisfaction with God's attitude to him; God's game of hide and seek with the poet. The poet has, sometimes, no complaints and he is satisfied with his life and death question.

For Tagore, this world is the manifestation of the Almighty, and hence he derives pleasure from it. He believes that by dwelling in the beauty of the nature with purity of soul one can easily unite with God. Gitanjali celebrates this joy of creation.

In the quest and yearning for union with God, Tagore considers himself to be a beloved waiting for his lover to come and meet him and leave a token of his love.

V. Ramamurthy, in his introduction to Gitanjali states:

"One cannot 'Love' the Infinite but one can love Krishna or Christ as remembered in one's own mind. There are so many approaches to the divine. But the highest and the most intimate is that of a beloved for her lover."

Tagore's spirit of holiness stretches further as he observes the divine Lord in different roles and in finite and infinite forms like:

1. *a lover "who walked with secret steps, silent as night, eluding as watchers"* (Gitanjali, Song XXII),

2. a king, "who came down from the throne and stood at the poet's cottage door (Gitanjali, Song XLIX),
3. a poet "who gets delight in seeing this own creation through poet's eyes and stands at the portal of his ears silently to listen to His own eternal harmony" (Song LXV)

Another very important moral preaching conveyed by Tagore through his devotion towards God is the lesson of universal brotherhood. Tagore firmly believes and preaches that the divine dwells in the heart of the poor: "He loves those who work hard in the muddy fields and earn bread with the sweat of their forehead."

Towards the end of Gitanjali, Tagore refers to Death as a messenger which would take him to meet the Ultimate, his Lord, the creator and benefactor. Death is his inseparable companion, and for him, embracing death implies consummation like that of a groom and bride, 'Gitanjali' ends with a note of complete surrender at the feet of the God leading to his supreme union with the Almighty:

"Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee." (Song CIII)

As far as Tagore's 'Gitanjali' is concerned, it is a volume of lyrics devoted to God. The central theme of Gitanjali is devotional. It expresses the yearning of the devotee for re-union with the divine. The verse focuses on the all-pervading presence of God. Tagore proclaims that God is neither an abstraction, nor an incarnation, but an ever-present force and an all-pervasive influence. Tagore appeals us to visualize God in the various forms of nature including humans. He says that God reveals his beauty in all his creation so that man may be forever in love with it and thereby with him.

The present thesis critically analyzes both the above works and compares the authors' approach to spirituality in them.

Tagore was deeply attached and dedicated to the divine power i.e. God, and in the course of his reverence for spirituality, he started envisioning every living being as an incarnation of God i.e. spiritual power.

"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual

beings having a human experience." — ***Pierre Teilhard de Chardin***

Though, both 'The Prelude' and 'Gitanjali' convey the message of spirituality, both the texts are penned in different environments with different motives. What makes them alike is the thread of peace and harmony. The Prelude talks of peace through harmonious relationship among men by self-exploration. Gitanjali talks of peace through the union of human soul with the Supreme Soul 'God', and for this necessitates the liberation of soul from the materialistic world. Wordsworth makes spiritual interpretation of Nature as a living identity, by following whose principles one can get rid of the eternal problems of misery and wretchedness. Tagore equates spiritual force with eternal force of the universe and looked at man and nature as the images of God.

As far as Tagore's poem 'Gitanjali' is concerned, it propounds that God and Nature are not distinct entities; they are one unified whole. When we observe Nature, we see the divine manifestation of unity and purity, a giving and receiving between all beings. Within Nature, trees are perfect role models for unity and purity. While also teaching us selflessness and sacrifice, the poem enlightens us with the knowledge of immortal relationship between the three entities God, Nature and Man. Tagore's approach to spirituality in 'Gitanjali' is pantheistic which emphasizes the presence of the divine or God in every finite thing, Pantheism is the doctrine that says 'everything is God or God is present in everything'.

Throughout all poems in 'Gitanjali', Tagore proposes that God is the transcendent reality, of which, the materialistic world and human beings are manifestations. Tagore in his 'Gitanjali' clearly appeals to the Absolute becomes more personal as well as universal throughout the poem. Tagore is a romantic mystic who losses himself in his contemplation of nature and gets into direct communion with the infinite. He realizes oneness with the Super Power and loses his consciousness of the material forms under which life appears. He merges himself in Nature considering Nature as the adobe of God. Summing up Tagore's views on God,

Nature, and Man as we get them in his poems, songs and verses, we can remark that his universe is man-centered and God and Nature form the periphery.

His poetry is influenced by the theme of tripartite Universe which is the harmony of the three entities God, Nature, and Man. Tagore sees Nature and Man as the artistic act of creation of God, and considers Man as the highest creation of God. Man is greater than nature because he is blessed with reason and will. Man has to learn discipline, doing good and harmony from nature. He must enjoy her beauties as things created by God for inner-communication. Tagore's verse is the zenith of his common observational and other common spiritualist encounters, of his natural confidence in the central solidarity of all creation. Tagore through his *Gitanjali* preaches and urges the necessity of reverence for nature and the spirit world.

In their poems one can unearth a spiritual aspect of nature, divinity, righteousness and their philosophy of life. In his poems his language is spiritual and divine as nature to him appears as a connecting force between man and God. His poems help us understand his devotion and affection towards humanity and nature. Tagore had a strong affinity with the divine power. He considered God the Ultimate Being which can create, heal, nurture or destroy. For Tagore, all the elements of the natural world seemed to be the manifestation of God. Tagore had a strong love and empathy for all plants, animals, human beings, and all the creatures. Tagore's poetry uses heart touching diction reflecting incomparable dedication to Nature and God.

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