

THE PORTRAYAL OF HINDU MYSTICISM IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S GITANJALI

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Abstract:

This paper aims to analyse Tagore's Gitanjali which thrives on Hindu mysticism and presents complex of thoughts. Rabindranath Tagore is an eminent scholar, writer, artist, poet, philosopher and social reformer. The opening lines of Gitanjali reveals Tagore as a mystic. Gitanjali is a collection of lyrics in which man is continuously in converse with the eternal, in tune with the Infinite. Mysticism is a different experience which gives joyful mood and eternal bliss rather than a doctrine or philosophy of life. The mystic's experience expresses that the Supreme Soul and God is one and the same, but it takes various forms. In Gitanjali, Tagore attempts to establish a bond between the Individual Soul and Great Soul-God. He portrays the intense yearning of the human soul for reunion with the Infinite-God. This deep yearning makes the Gitanjali, a masterpiece of prayer, pleading and exaltation. The human body is the temple of the soul and the human soul is the temple of God. In the long history of men, there have been great poets and great mystics. The mystical life is a different life in which an individual feels a complete detachment from all worldly matters and pursuits. But a mystic does not need to renounce the world completely but a detached attitude is necessary. The main objective of this research is to examine and explore the Hindu Mysticism in Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali. Analysis of collected data is used to bring out the descriptive and analytical study of this research. The qualitative methodology of this research will be carried out through texts, journals and articles written by scholars. Tagore perceives the presence of God in the nature around him. He addresses God by praising the beauty of nature which is the reflection of God Himself. Tagore's mysticism is seen in his principle of love, unity, oneness, peace and harmony.

Keywords: Soul, Mysticism, Nature, Man, God, Unity, Infinite.

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Introduction

THOU hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure.

This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and

fillest it ever with fresh life. (Gitanjali-I, 1)

Tagore is one of the greatest devotional poets of the world and his *Gitanjali* is mainly a collection of the devotional lyrics which created a sensation not only in India but all over the world, made him into a world poet. He is also an ardent thinker and has philosophical ideas on a variety of subjects. He depicts his opinion about Man, Nature and God. Tagore has faith in the principle of unity, love, peace, harmony and the service of human beings.

Gitanjali was first published in English in 1913. From English it has been translated into many languages of the world and great poets and critics like W.B. Yeats have written of it in glowing terms. *Gitanjali* reflects Indianness, open-air atmosphere, simplicity and reality of a folk-song are the main factors which account for its personal appeal.

“Only man must dedicate himself completely to the service and love of God, and it is then indeed, that he will realize that unbroken perfection is over all (71-78) But the sense of separateness is also the cause of sorrow which is a part of man’s heritage and the most poignant truth in his life.” (*The Great Sentinel*, 120)

The devotional songs of *Gitanjali* are offerings of the poet at the feet of God. These poems express the different moods, personal feelings, thoughts, desires, bitter experiences and disappointments of the poet. Sometimes the poet perceives the pain of separation and reflects his sense of sorrow and anguish in tunes of melancholy melody. At other times, he approaches his Lord and tells his complaints, “*He comes, he comes, he ever comes.*” Tagore believes that God comes to him through different natural objects like rain, sunshine, spring and also through his happiness and sadness.

“Tagore prays to God to remove his weaknesses so that he may substantiate his vision of a peaceful world. His prayer is not for his own uplift and spiritual enlightenment but his fellowmen, too, who lack spiritual courage and who cannot hold their heads high. He prays to the heavenly Father to lead his country into the “heaven of freedom” not in political terms but spiritual and humanitarian sense

also.” (*Rabindranath Tagore’s Tryst with the Divine: A Critical study of Gitanjali*, 32)

In *Gitanjali* Tagore depicts human beings should tune with the infinite. The poet analyses the relationship of God and the human soul. God is seen to be an all-pervasive concrete presence throughout Tagore’s *Gitanjali*. The whole work of *Gitanjali* is suffused with Divine presence. The individual soul is longing for reunion with the Great-soul. He further presents that the unity of man, God and Nature is very important.

“The poet is naturally eager to unite him-self to God, and poems 14, 36 deal with his eager waiting and the obstacles that handicap him. The State of separation is a darkness, but it is in darkness that God comes like a lover to woo the poet’s soul which is like a bride.” (*The Great Sentinel*, 119)

The reading of *Gitanjali*, gives pleasure and the readers forget all the troubles and pains of the world. All discord, conflict, dispute and disharmony are resolved into unity, harmony, understanding, peace and love. It comforts, solaces, soothes and strengthens the human soul.

The human soul comes to the world from the Eternal and assumes a particular form, after death it still lives on in the Eternal and may take different forms. It is the fundamental principle of Tagore’s view of life.

Hindu Mysticism

“The chief features of the passionate devotion for God described in the last lecture are its spontaneity and its transference of human relations and emotions to God through the medium of the Krishna legend described in the Bhagavata Purana. It presupposes the theory of the incarnation of God as man, which makes it possible to think of God in human relations and in human ways. The idea of God as father is indeed as old as the Vedas.” (*Hindu Mysticism*, 141)

Hindu mysticism is a different experience which gives joyful mood, happiness and eternal bliss rather than a doctrine or systematized philosophy of life. It gives pleasant temperament and joyous mood which express the communion between the human soul and Great-Soul. Manikkavasagar says in *Pirarththanai Paththu, Thiruvvasagam*:

“Kudikkudi unnadiyar kulippar chirippar kalipparai
Vadi vadi vaziyatten vattal marambol nitpeno?
Udi udi udaiyayodu kalandhul urugip perugi nekku
Adi adi Anandham adhuve aaga arul kalandhe.”

In *Gitanjali*, Tagore attempts to establish a bond between the Individual Soul and God. He depicts the intense yearning of the human soul for reunion with the Infinite-God. This deep yearning makes the *Gitanjali*, a masterpiece of prayer, pleading and exaltation.

Tagore depicts that the human soul like a traveller seeks its divine lover which is God. This soul's quest began long ago with the beginning of creation. The soul travels through many stars, various spaces and planets – and gain various experiences, before it perceives the truth that God is omnipresent and pervading through the universe. These lines explain about this idea:

“THE time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long.

I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued my voyage through the wildernesses of worlds leaving my track on many a star and planet.” (*Gitanjali* -XII , 7)

The Supreme Soul and God are one and the same, according to the mystics' experiences, but it takes numerous forms that animate man and various natural objects. All the songs of *Gitanjali* are offerings of Tagore at the Feet of God, who is the Guru or divine Master of him. Tagore expresses his yearning of communion with God. He has deep love to mingle with Great-Soul and enjoy his eternal bliss. He divulges the various feelings, thoughts, desires, hopes and disappointment of Tagore who calls God as his friend, lover, the Lord and his Guru.

A mystic has different attitudes and views about corporal world and divine world. A mystic is anti-scientific and anti-rational in temper and he mistrusts reason and intellect. He sees God in every object with different perspectives, which is the only reality for him. He realises the truth not by reason but by intuition, inspiration with his mystical experiences.

The individual soul comes to the earth from the Eternal world and it presumes different forms in different ages. After death it still lives on in the Eternal and may assume various forms. This is also the strong faith of *Plato*, and this has always been the belief of mystics. It is also the basis of Tagore's perspective of life.

Rabindranath Tagore and *Gitanjali*:

The effectiveness of poetry depends, then, upon latent impressions of feelings which once go through. In 1912, Tagore visited England and America, translated his best-known collection of poems, *Gitanjali*, into English and read these translations to distinguished gatherings on both sides of the Atlantic. From all reports, the audiences are spell-bound.

Rabindranath Tagore is basically a poet. It is in this way that he is widely recognized and his quality as a philosopher has been much less emphasized. Tagore had no professional training, nor any academic degree, in philosophy. He does not construct any philosophical system, nor does he think of himself as a philosopher. This poet-philosopher polarity, indeed suspect that Rabindranath the poet is no more philosopher. And certainly, do not find him employing any of the 'philosophical methods' that have found favour in modern Anglo-American academic circles.

In Tagore's writings, certainly, one finds none of the hair-splitting logical or conceptual analysis lampooned. But certainly, only according to a narrow and rather recent conception of philosophy that analysis and reasoning are essential and essential components of the philosophical enterprise.

It is striking, and obviously relevant when discussing Tagore's thought, that the nearest Sanskrit equivalent to 'philosophy' is *darshan* or 'vision'. The term suggests a view of philosophy as a kind of seeing, of finding new perspectives and hence fresh and fruitful ways of talking about, to say, the relation of human beings to their environment and to one another.

Mysticism in *Gitanjali*:

"Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God; yet for ever and ever the influx of this better and universal self is new and unsearchable. Ever it inspires awe and astonishment. How dear, how soothing to man, arises the idea of God, peopling the lonely place,

effacing the scars of our mistakes and disappointment!" (*Essays and English Traits*, 151)

The emphasis on the individual relationship with the divine as well as the role of symbolic conceptions in mysticism is important to our study of poets who place great value on their mystical and lyrical contents. Given its esoteric nature, mysticism finds a gracious temperament in poetry that trust heavily on symbolism and codified expression.

Tagore has his oscillations between simultaneous claims of mystical trust and what he would consider modern rationality. Although he is prone to synthesise these two conflicting sensibilities within him, yet the struggle leaves its marks in his work, however overshadowed by the mood of piety that often prevails over it. By embodying such pious moods, *Gitanjali* belies the conflicts and contradictions that at times accompany Tagore's mystical faith. Tagore had been engaged in exploring the deeper unity of religious thoughts and mystical practices of various kinds.

Soul's Communion with the Infinite.

"But though these prose translations from Rabindranath Tagore have stirred my blood as nothing has for years, I shall not know anything of his life, and of the movements of thought that have made them possible, if some Indian traveller will not tell me.' It seemed to him natural that I should be moved, for he said, 'I read Rabindranath every day, to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world.'" -W.B. Yeats

In *Gitanjali*, Tagore focuses on the relationship of human soul and Great soul which is God. The Supreme Soul is omnipresent, seen to be an all-pervasive concrete presence throughout Tagore's "Song Offering" to his Lord. Tagore's poetry consoles, strengthens and soothes the human soul. The unity of Man, Nature and God is repeatedly emphasized, all discord, conflict and disharmony are solved into unity and harmony. That is why the poet emphasize the people to read the *Gitanjali* is to forget all the troubles and pains of the world.

Tagore confesses the benignity of Nature and the harmony of the world. He has strong faith in the unity of man, external universe and God. Meditation on Nature leads to realize, achieve and attain God. Nature is the melody of God which gives euphony man who is fully

bound up with nature. The human soul urges for liberation and freedom. Tagore tells that rhythm and harmony are essential for mankind.

In *Gitanjali*, there is a harmonise the of opposites life. It presents that man wants to be free from all bondages, struggles and conflicts in life. God is bound to the universe of His own creation, if he were absolutely free, there will be no creation at all. God is infinite and everlasting, but His infinity and eternity are achieved in time and space through numerous forms.

God is pervading through the universe. He suffuses man's body, heart and mind. So, man should keep himself clean, clear and free from all evils. His body may be the temple of God. The poet tells that God as his life, his maker and he is the origin of his life and soul. His Lord's touch bestows life and vitality to his body, mind and soul. These lines express Tagore's ideas:

“LIFE of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.” (*Gitanjali* -IV, 3)

Tagore expresses that God is love, so he retains his love in his heart in full blossom. He wants to drive out all his hatred, angry, and other evil passions. Only then his heart becomes the temple of God.

“I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.” (*Gitanjali*-IV, 3)

In this poem the poet narrates that soul faces many obstacles in the way of its union with the divine. The poet compares his song to a bride who likes to meet her lover. He further says about her dress and ornaments, which are the symbols of vanity and pride, come in the path of the union of the lover and the beloved. The beloved should divest herself of all dress and ornaments which hinder absolute union with her lover or husband. Likewise, the poet also divests his songs of poetic ornaments, to commune with His Maker. Simplicity is very important for communion with God.

The poet is a suitable-musician to sit at Lord's feet. The poet is able to sing the lyrics only through the inspiration of the Divine. But this singing can be possible only when his life is simple and honest, he compares his life to a reed which must be simple and straight. Simplicity and honesty are

essential to experience God's eternal bliss and realize the divine power. These are the mystics real experiences.

Poetic ornaments are rhetorical tinkle which mirrors the soft, gentle whispers in which God speaks to man. Simplicity is essential for communion with God. All his vanity and egotism die away slowly when he mingles with God.

“My song has put off her adornments. She has no
pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would
mar our union; they would come between thee and
me; their jingling would drown thy whispers.” (*Gitanjali* -VII, 4-5)

This is one of the most meaningful lyrics of Song-offering. The poet gives an offering of all that he has at the Holy feet of God. He reveals a sensation of his absolute and final surrender and he feels ultimate satisfaction and joy through a numerous experience over the ages. He bows down at the divine's door, offers everything he has at His feet, just as a cloud in July, full of rain bends over the world and showers its rain. Just as stream flows into the sea, so also all his songs unite to form a single stream which flows into the Eternal sea. This final magnificent lyric is the poet's ultimate offering of himself, and of all that he has, at the feet of the Supreme-God. It is a suitable conclusion to the poet's *Gitanjali - Song-offering*. These lines express Tagore's feelings clearly.

“IN one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and
touch this world at thy feet.

Like a rain-cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed
showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to
thee.....

... Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to
their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home
in one in one salutation to thee.” (*Gitanjali* – CIII, 67-68)

Mysticism and Modernity:

“But souls that of his own good life partake,
He loves as his own self; dear as his eye
They are to Him: He'll never them forsake:
When they shall die, then God himself shall die;
They live, they live in blest eternity” – Henry More

By coupling the concepts of mysticism and modernity, it intends to revise a complex of critical positions regarding the various distributions of the ideas associated with these terms applied to these poets. As indicated, the ascription of mysticism to Tagore in Western scholarship has been deemed problematic by critics who are mostly Indian background, betraying their preference for modernity, particularly of a rational and secular-humanist orientation.

It is with this modernity that they often associate Tagore on order to see him as on a par with the great modern writers and thinkers of the West. For all the validity of such connections, they are often made at the expense of Tagore's deeply felt mystical orientation, which is written off as, if not completely secular, then at least ambiguous enough to make a secular reading of his works possible. Elsewhere, he wonders how an atheist reader like himself can identify with the Tagore of *Gitanjali* and finds relieving that a collection only a small number of poems are purely devotional.

Tagore's mysticism and modernity are so closely intertwined that considering one of these aspects separately from the other creates a picture somewhat of "poetry and imagination." of the poet. The intention to use the righteous phrase "mystical modernity" is not to treat the first term as qualitative to the second, but to give equal emphasis to both.

Mysticism is thus distinct from religious and philosophy for its predilection for going beyond or defying the limits of religious doctrines and philosophical reasons. Mysticism thus entails an awareness of God or a spiritual consciousness which is not theoretical but experiential and personally realised.

Oneness of Man Nature and God

“Lord, I have loved Your sky,
Be it said against or for me,
Have loved it clear and high,
Or low and stormy.” - Robert Frost

Tagore feels that Nature as a friend to man. He is a strong believer in the unity of Man, Nature and God. According to Vedantic philosophy Nature and Man are considered *Prakriti* and *Purusha*. Man is completely bound up with nature. In ancient time people meditates and prays Nature to experience God. Tagore acknowledges the power of Nature and its unity and harmony with human beings. According to him, Nature is the melody of the Divine Lord.

Nature is humanized- and it exhibits the joys and sorrows of the people, and the human feelings are increased. Nature in Tagore's poetry, is presented as sympathetic to the moods of men. It takes on their different feelings and moods to identify with them. In this way their Love is universalized. When the lovers meet with their joy and finds its expression in the joy of nature. It dances with joy. When they are separated, Nature itself reflects their suffering. Hence the nature is brought into close harmony with the human situation and in this way human moods, joys and sorrows are expressed. At times, the sentiments of love, specially its happiness and sufferings, provide different ideas to the poet on the facts of life and death, and the treatment of love thus mingles with his philosophy of life.

Walt Whitman and Rabindranath Tagore (The Prophets of America and India)

“I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.
Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass,
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's name,
..... for ever and ever.” (Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself* 48)

Whitman and Tagore have dedicated their lives to passing on this loyalty and impulse to future younger generations and molding them into global citizens. Their works created a new pattern of living. Both the poets believe that physical unity and economic interconnectedness. are not by themselves sufficient to produce a universal community.

A human consciousness of community and a sense of personal relationships among men are very important. Walt Whitman and Tagore have evolved their concepts, thoughts, ideas and sentiments through their literary works which would empower men to build up a new world community with new visions and missions.

Gitanjali, Tagore's magnificent, optimistic work which organically combines the finest tradition of Indian culture and fearless innovation, which has given realistic content to the literature of Indian peoples and has contributed to the development of a progressive, democratic trend in it, evokes

tremendous interest and admiration all over the world. First introduction to American readers was through six poems from *Gitanjali*, published in book form by 'India Society' in London. They were published in Poetry, a newspaper in Chicago. "Tagore's true biographer says Tagore loved Whitman."

The effectiveness of poetry depends, then upon latent impressions of feelings which go through. Rabindranath Tagore is a Hindu mystic poet, deeply influenced the pantheistic spiritual values of the popular Indian Epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and the antique Hindu holy books, especially *Upanishads*.

Tagore has grown up under the influence and influence of Christian and Muslim literatures and cultures. However, it must be stated here that Rabindranath Tagore is the most remarkable literary genius of the Bengali literature, even at present especially due to the official over-care of Calcutta, Dhaka and Delhi. But Tagore's popularity with the average reader continued to decline.

Conclusion

Gitanjali is an immortal work of art which is the real experiences of the poet's soul. It is this humanism that makes *Gitanjali* unique. Tagore is one of the greatest lyric poets and genius of the world. In *Gitanjali*, Tagore expresses that man is constantly in converse with the Eternal, in tune with the Infinite. The poetry is a collection of sacred and divine lyrics which deal with Man, Nature, and God. *Gitanjali* reflects many themes, different concepts and ideas, but its main theme is devotional.

Gitanjali is a mystical, still there is a difference which distinguishes it from the Western Mysticism, which has full of abundance of cheerfulness. The mysticism does not come from solitary asceticism but from the resourceful life of human beings in this world. Hindu Mysticism is over flows in *Gitanjali*, which makes it unique in all literary master pieces. It is a sacred and divine poetry which presents Hindu mysticism and complex of thought. It reflects the longing of the human soul for mingle with God.

Gitanjali focuses on the soul's liberation and its urge to attain and mingle with God. It is a master piece of prayer, pleading and exaltation which aspires a condition of prayer. They are hymns chanting by the poet who is a true devotee to his God, the Supreme. They are the prayers which convey the poet's thirst for re-union with God.

Tagore is a true mystic and he always yearns for the union with the Infinite. *Gitanjali* has the conception of *Bhagavad Gita* that soul is immortal and everlasting. God has benignity, compassion

and benevolence. He waits at the door of the heart of human souls. Self-realization is the highest wisdom of man, which can be attained through various experiences in different births, over the ages.

Tagore trusts that human beings and God do not belong to different orders. *Gitanjali* gives simple introduction to this new approach of the concept of Divine. It searches an absolute and real order of human existence. Tagore explores the nature of life, the mystical bliss and his personal experiences with Infinite.

Tagore accepts life as it is, and enjoys it with the beauty of nature. He is a mystic who has different concepts from other mystics in as much as he never promotes an abdication of worldly life. God is found through love and service of the mankind. He has humanised with spiritual ideas and believes of spiritualism.

Spirituality is beyond words-it is an experience. The devotees cannot savour its sweetness without going beyond the intellect to the heart. Once supreme love for God has awakened in the seeker's heart, the various constraints and observances are no longer essential. Before divine love, all restrictions and barriers disappear. For a true devotee who possesses that love, there is only God. Throughout the whole universe, such a seeker experiences only God. The seeker, the universe itself- all is God.

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