

The Multifaceted 'Gitanjali' of Tagore

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'Gitanjali' which is Rabindra Nath Tagore's book of devotional songs, has made this Nobel Laureate an immortal singer throughout the world. These bhakti songs are not ordinary songs of devotion; they contain the poet's passion, his zeal and his zest for that immeasurable ardent desire for the unknown, for the freedom of soul and for the selfless dedication to the Lord of Creation which finds no parallel in the whole literature of mankind. The prayer songs are more than one hundred in number. had so great. an impact on the Irish poet W. B. Yeats that he heaped praises on them when he wrote:

"But as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway, and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find in murmuring, them it's youth." this love of God a magic gulf wherein bitter passion may bathe and renew.

Indeed so deep is the devotional sense of Tagore to God, so unflinching in his faith in his Master Creator that none who has even a slight sense of gratitude feels untouched and unaffected by this wealth of pure dedication. in Him, can

"Gitanjali' is an embodiment of the sense of fearlessness that man (Tagore) feels when he is totally prostrate at the feet of his Maker. The sense that so fills the poet expresses itself so profusely in the very first outburst of Tagore:

"Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure". What is this but the gift of Abhaya (fearlessness), the sure promise of immortality! The Lord willed that man shall be immortal? This little heart of man, little though it be

still, can transcend its human limitations and taste pure ananda (joy). What is here finite is frail, little, limited, small, yet the touch of the Infinite makes it fresh, eternal, immortal, and ineffable. Man "hunger is infinite, and the Lord 's grace is equally infinite Tagore sings." Ages pass, and still thou pourcent, and still there is room to fill."

'Gitanjali' says that God is man "friend and lover and protector." As Laxman writer: What an enviable god, this god of Tagore: the great friend - the Beloved, the lotus flower, the unknown man playing the lute in the boat yonder. on the river! A god akin to Tagore can be found in the Jewish Biblical poetry belonging to the Mediterranean basin"

'Getanjali' is verily the recordation of the vicissitudes in the drama of the human soul in its progress from the finite to the infinite. This progress is regarded as a journey and as a continuing sacrifice culminating in samarpan (surrender) or total dedication. There is a sudden invasion of darkness and man must cry. "Light, oh, where is the light"? Immediately comes the answer to this question: "Kindle it with the burning fire of desire". There is dryness or indifference to God and thunder and downpour of God's mercy alone can make the wasteland of heart leap to life again; "When the heart is hard and parched up Come -upon me with a shower of mercy..."

"Gitanjali' contains the prayer songs but songs are touched with man's real need I for enlightenment which can dawn upon us only when we are ready to receive God's blessings with our hearts open and arms spread with humility, and a sense of openness: "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? chanting The poet sings of humility, of the need for feeling for the low, the lowly, and the lost. God is always in the hearts of the down-trodden, the hard-working and the diligent. "He is there where is the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in the shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and ever like him come down on the dusty soil." Indeed God is the inseparable companion of the poor.

‘Gitanjali’ is a humble tribute to God’s munificence and mercy. It is a long, unending prayer for God’s grace, His benevolence, and His liberality in granting all to man. It is a self-abnegated prayer humble to God for keeping man in His own control. Does Tagore not ask, like John Donne in the Sonnet. ‘Batter My Heart’ for eternal bondage so that man might feel free?

"Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight?"

Again: "In one salutation to thee, my God, let my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet."

The traditional vashanava element is clear enough in many of the ‘Gitanjali’ songs. The poet approaches God as a son approaches his father, as a subject his king, and as a woman her lord. He sees with his soul. The refrain of such a song is “He comes, comes ever comes” And when He has come indeed the words leap to a dance of abandonment:

"Light, my light, the world-filling light! light, heart-sweetening light! Ah! the light dances at the center of my life!

Besides, there is in ‘Gitanjali’ the essence of the Brahmo spirit, - the distrust of asceticism, the castigation of mere form. Tagore was moved by the spirit of rebellion in many matters while the influence of the English Romantic poets made him hanker after that ‘heavenly freedom’. But the purest element of all is the note of self-suffering mystic experience: The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in the rhythmic measure. I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life." Gitanjali sings of the oneness of soul, eternal life, death of the body, and permanence of soul. Death has no terror for Tagore and “because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well." The endless cycles of change are lost in the Infinite, the varied chords are lost in the Silence, the many forms

are lost in the. The sentiment of patriotism also figures prominently in 'Gitanjali'. Tagore nourished glorious dream of an Independent India and cherished golden hopes of seeing a politically free India with men and women free in heart and mind. In song number 10 in 'Gitanjali' Tagore visualizes the free India of his dreams thus: _ .

"Where the mind is without fear, Where the head is held high; Where the world has not been broken into narrow domestic walls, Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary, desert sand of dead habits. Where knowledge is free; Into that heaven of freedom, My Father, let my country awake". Truly has William Butler yeats said of "Gitanjali". "A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, have been taken up into this imagination". One important characteristic of 'Gitanjali' is that Tagore is the worshipper of Truth and Beauty. Aldoux. Huxley for has praised Homes for his love of Truth and Beauty. What Huxley wrote about Homer can perhaps equally be said about Rabindra Nath. Tagore commanded universal respect as he continued in his search for Truth Eternal. He, indeed, was an explores of Truth and Beauty. According to a critic: "The West could feel the greatness of Tagore's mind and soul. Tagore's search. for Truth made him believe in the ultimate respect for and confidence in humanity. The Upanishadic thought which influenced him profusely made him think in terms of internationalism. That is why the crux of the whole Tagore literature after a deep analytical study makes a reader firmly convinced of the deep spiritual interest that Tagore took in the writing of his songs in 'Gitanjali' and elsewhere which shows how he was a voyager on the sea of spirituality. Notice, for example, the following Lines from 'Gitanjali':

"But, there, where spreads the infinite sky for the soul to take her flight in, reigns the stainless white radiance. There is nor day. nor night, nor form, nor color and never, never a world."

Throughout his life, Tagore had worshipped the idea of beauty. "Gitanjali" consists of poems, in addition to other poem collections like "Getali", "Gitmalya' and 'Nibedya', an appreciation and adoration of Truth. Almost each poem in "Gitanjali" is a prayer

song. The poet sings in them to the glory of beauty. Tagore does not adore the beauty of any woman, as most poets do. He adores only the abstract beauty which he has personified. According to Dr. Thompson, the eminent Western critic. "Gitanjali" is perhaps, the greatest lyric book in the whole of Bengali literature and probably the most unalloyed and perfect worship of Beauty that world literature contains. The appreciation of Beauty in Tagore is just like that of a devotee. This beauty eternal is different from that described by Browning who says that he cannot feed on beauty for the sake of beauty alone. Beauty in Gitanjali is more or less a description of beauty like Shelley's Hymn which is in adoration of Intellectual Beauty.

“spirit of Beauty, that does consecrate

With thine all thou dost shine upon of human thought or form, where art thou gone?”

For Tagore beauty is that is Truth i.e. Satyam Sundaram. Notice the lines in poem number 53 in Gitanjali" :

“Beautiful stars and myriad - is the wristlet, decked with cunningly wrought in colored jewels”.

In Tagore desire mars beauty. A woman indeed is a serene picture of beauty sans desire. Serene -beauty is abstract A woman whose beauty is admired does not earn this admiration for her bodily charms. She does it because she is abstractly an icon of beauty. As Amiel says, "Woman should be loved without reason, without analysis; not because she is beautiful. or cultivated, or gracious, or spiritual, but because she exists". As such a woman's beauty is abstract and absolute. It is beyond anybody's reach. Only explorers of truth run after such a beauty. The nearer the explorer goes to Truth, the more the bliss eternal flows onto him. This beauty is beyond the reach of desire. This cannot be enjoyed in the physical sense; it can be enjoyed only in spirit untinged by selfish desire. Such beauty can only be worshipped. Tagore treats Almighty as beautiful woman who treads on everything. This conception of beauty is almost identical with the conception of beauty by the Sikh Gurus. Notice the following lines of the 5th. Guru Arjun Dev:

ताप पाप संताप बिनासे ॥
 हरि सिमरत किलबिश्च सब नासे ॥ २॥
 अनद करहु मिलि सुंदर नारी ॥
 गुरि नानकि मेरी पैज सवारी ॥ २ ॥३ ॥ २२ ॥

According to Tagore the whole of God's creation is beautiful, hence true. This is as John Keats puts it in his Ode To A Grecian Urn"; "Truth is Beauty, Beauty Truth!" Tagore also sings of this below: "With myriad stars in the blue Thou gleamed,

With boundless joy in the bower Thou beamest,

Earth and sky thou treadest, I spy,

With Thy steps too soft and free!

Swift-footed maiden I salute Thee!"

In 'Gitanjali', as in other collections of songs, we find a happy blending of faith, Love and Beauty. Just like Kalidas's description of Love at the first sight between Dushyant and Shakuntla, Tagore gives a beautiful description of the first meeting between Arjun and Chitrangda. Even the poet's "own meeting with Invisible God in poen number 38 in 'Gitanjali' where love is the main theme, exhibits Tagore's true concept of Beauty adored with love. Here is with dancing -arm in arm with Beauty. The poet again prays to God to light now a fire of suffering in his heart. He thinks that only suffering can purify his heart of all its grossness and impurities. Just as a goldsmith purifies gold with sublimation, or just as John Donne purifies his desire for his Divine Love in his poem Batter My Heart, Three Personed God", Tagore too prays to God for purifying his heart. Perhaps his eager prayer was granted, for later on we find Tagore giving a description of the serene touch of the beautiful. He felt the touch of truth. From the core of his heart the poet sang. thus:

"Sanctified are my limbs's

And blessed is my soul.

My Love, O Beautiful one!"

There is hardly any description of Truth and Beauty, so serene, so sweet and so deeply spiritual in any other writer. Another great feature of Tagore's" poetic writing in Gitanjali' is his Mysticism. Here he stands as a mystic as does Aurobindo Ghosh, another great Indian poet-philosopher. The poet who wrote the following song in Gitanjali, no doubt, is a mystic poet:

"In the playhouse of infinite form I have had my play and here have I caught sight of Him that is formless my whole body and my limits have thrilled with His touch who is beyond touch."

A mystic is he who experiences such spiritual powers as have hidden meaning and such experienced spiritual powers cause awe and wonder. This mysticism is a belief that knowledge of God and of real Truth may be obtained through transcendental meditation or spiritual insight independently of the mind and the senses. Keeping this in view we can safely call Tagore a poet of mysticism. His songs and his prayers in Gitanjali are nothing but reflections of their author's meditative moods. These songs contain the very essence of Tagore's experiences which are based on the poet's meditations on God and God's creation from which he draws thrill and which send him to ecstasy not to be expressed in words. W. B. Yeats writes in his "Foreword to the English version of "Gitanjali: The traveler in the red-brown clothes that he wears that dust may not show up on him the girl searching her bed for the petals fallen from the wreath of her royal lover, the servant, or the bride awaiting the master's home-coming in the empty house, are images of heart turning to God_images of the mystic world of mind, formed the essence of his songs? The songs in Gitanjali" (for example song no. 18) embody in them the feeling which T.S. Eliot calls strange Consolation. These songs express, in Eliot's " words again" " in perfect language some permanent human impulse". But perhaps these words are inadequate to explain or define the

mystical quality, for the songs bring something more Springing from intuitive experience, suffused with vision, irresistibly appeal to the depth of the spirit. These poems are divine songs like H. W. Longfellow's poem 'A Psalm of Life'. They strike not Merely like the noisy winds over the soul at the major passions of man but at the very roots of life, at the vital experiences that sustain it and give grace and truth to life's unquiet and disturbing dreams. These Gitanjali songs convey mystical sense which communicates that truth which excites personal and private agonies of a poet who had borne dire misfortunes with astonishing courage; they convey something universally true. In the words of W. B. Yeats'. "All men will more and more be convinced that

poetry is revelation of hidden life. the only means of conversing bith Eternity, left to man. Truly so, because the songs in Gitanjalé go back to the ancient character of poetry, that is it flushes open the inner reality by writing mystical words. In mystical words the these songs diction and image spring directly from the soul and like softly flowing flames there soups light up the hidden life, the inner reality.

Let's turn to a couple of poems in Gitanjali to illustrate the fact that "Gitanjali" is a solid proof of Tagore's mystical vision that permeates through the inner reality of all things. Take the dance poem 8 of the 'Gitanjali'. A bright autumn morning of chequered light and shade on the green paddy fields; the snow-white clouds sailing idly over the azure sky; the light-buzzing bees, forgetful of the flowers and the honey. buzzing about; a flight of birds jostling gaily on the river bank, the simplest diction, and image, build up a serena sunlit rural scene. But one would miss the poem if one failed to take in the breathless vision that permeates into the inmost sanctuary of Nature and grasps with hushed wonder the thrill and the mystery and the mystical joy that quivers in the bosom of Nature. Here you find another Wordsworth; here is poetry dipped in mystery and drunk with visionary power. The diction and the image become magic incantations that reveal with a flash the invisible and the mystic world. of the spirit.

Let us take poem no. 67 of the Geetanjali: "Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well..."

This poem throws open a soul-stirring calm, a deep fullness that ripples deep within and reveals the world of contrasts which are built up slowly. This song reveals the sphere of the infinite sky for the soul to take her flight in God's love. Here God's love encloses the soul with colours, sounds and odours. Mysticism here presents God as formless, colorless, and wordless. Here we are reminded of Guru Nanak Dev's words in which Nanak defines God as Nirbhav, Nirvair, Akal Murat Ajuni, Saibhang.....

(God is fearless, free from jealousy, timeless, formless, unborn, etc.)

Like Guru Nanak, Sant Kabir, Tuka Ram, and such other Sufi poet Tagore touches the springs of the soul which gushes forth the waters of immortality. There is nothing more mystic than death. And Tagore sings in the glory of this mystic world of death.

"The evening star will come out when my voyage is done and the plaintive notes of twilight melodies are struck up from the King "gateways."

Man occupies the central place in today's literature and Tagore is first and last, like all the past and contemporary poet, the poet of man. Today man, indeed, is her in all the global dramas. A thorough change has taken place in social outlook and man is acclaimed as the manifestation of divinity. Tagore always and in all his writings has sung to the glory of man. Man is the hero in almost all his songs. In keeping with the true spirit of Indian culture and her heritage and philosophy Tagore assigns a very high place to Man. Like Sri Ramkrishan Param-hans who said: "Man is God (Jiva is Shiva) and like Swami Vivekanand who wrote: "Oh where do you search God? Leaving before the images of the living ones".

Tagore too yearns to associate himself with Man. His deep love for international harmony and human understanding flows throughout. -Tagore wishes to have his salvation in the midst of numerous human bondages. He wants to enjoy life to the brim with the world pitcher filled with honey of human love and the universe with all her

natural flora and fauna. Tagore wants to light millions of candles with the fire of love throughout the universal family of Man. In one of his songs, the poet sings:-

“Today at the sacred moment of the new dawn of humanity. the new sun on the whole horizon greets the new Man. The march reaches its goal The unknown is conquered.”

In songs from the original Bengali 'Getanjali' Tagore has expressed his deep love for Man, Nature, and their affectionate touch and has even lamented how he would miss them after his death Tagore writes:

"I have loved the world. And have wrapped it within my heart in numberless folds, heart The light and shadow of night and morn Have flooded my consciousness, fill my life and world have become one".

Tagore" deep love for all men made him occasionally revolt against social injustice and political exploitation. This is reflected in many of his poems. In one of his masterpieces in Original "Gitanjali Tagore gives a clarion call to the people to be ready for the reaction of the downtrodden, the depressed and the exploited. In Geetanjali Tagore says those whom you have insulted and those whom, you have oppressed will certainly not pardon you. Those whose plight you. have ignored, whose human dignity you have usurped will soon come into power". In still another memorable writing which appears both in the English version of "Geetanjali" and in "Bharat Tirath" Tagore describes India as the holy pilgrimage and asks the people of the world to come to the blessed soil and join in tune with the harmonious symphony, the spirit of which is unity in diversity - the spirit of the Indian culture.

Tagore's love for Man in relation to society is clearly visible in his prayer - poem to God when in Gitanjali he expresses his heartfelt desire to see the dawn of free India with the light of free society rid of all the artificial barriers of caste, colour and creed Dignity of Man lies in this equality with his fellowmen, in his brotherhood and in his true freedom. Tagore prays to God that India should wake up from its darkness of

political slavery into the light of casteless morning. The reputed song, as already mentioned begins light like this: Where the mind is without fear..."

All the above said words show the direct perception of humanity as an objective truth that rouses a profound feeling of the uplift of all the nations of the word love for Man, his passion for world and his ardent desire to see Man as the true image of God is crystal clear in his songs, not only included in 'Gitanjali' but also in his other works of prose and vesse alike. Notice Tagore's desire for freedom, faith and abhorrence for hatred in the following lines: "

Come, young nations proclaim the fight for freedom, raise up the banner of invincible faith, Build bridges with your life across the gaping earth blasted by hatred, and march forward."

Very important Wordsworthian love of Nature is Tagore's another paramount feature in his "Gitanjali". His love of Nature can be best understood if we read Yeat's words: "An innocence, a simplicity that one does not find elsewhere in literature, makes the birds and the leaves seem as near to him as they are near to children. In the nature poems that form a part of 'Gitanjali' there are three concepts which stand out as distinctive of Tagore's modes of imaginative approaches. The first concept is aesthetic, the second metaphysical and the last spiritual. Pain and yearning in the heart of Nature objectively conceived is a concept that first came up in other poems than those which appeared in "Gitanjali

in the Gitanjali too which is an offering of song, Nature pulshing with is joy; it is socked with forry and too often swayed with pain. But these varying moods of Nature are not. fleeting but lasting. These are the traits of Nature's soul revealed to the vision of the poet. The metaphysical concept of Nature is one that is familiar to the Romantics and the idealists of the West. Nature, here, is the emblem of mon "own spirit. In Tagore's 'Gitanjali' metaphysical concept of Nature is one that is familiar to the Romantics and the idealists of the West. Nature, here, is the emblem of man's own

spirit. Nature in Tagore wears a vivid, concrete, mystical garb that bears out the intensity of the vision. Notice the following lines of the song number 58:-

"Be silent and look around,

Behold, it is your soul that blossoms

enchancingly on yonder flower trees?"

Nature assumes different shapes and roles when man looks at it. It appears as per the moods of the lookers-on. Like Coleridge Tagore too loves to see different themes in different shapes and forms of Nature. For example, describing the sea-waves, the poet writes in one of his songs:-

"The indomitable wind is roaming,

Ungovernable in strength, Beating its thousand wings.

The poet sees violent Nature when he finds some evil designs in Nature Like Frost. Tagore describes this terrible aspect of Nature thus:

"Darkness veils the eyes of the Universe

The lightning flashes and threatens, the foam fields hiss

The sharp white terrible mirth of the brute Nature."

Nature, as it was to Wordsworth, a fountain of joy, a perennial source of glee to the poet. Its dancing flowers and breaking ripples

in the lake thrilled him to ecstasy. The rapturous floating clouds in the sky, the showers of rain sweeping across the cloudy horizons the croaking frogs in rainwater

and the fields submerged in torrential waters of the rain fascinated Tagore who danced like a peacock with thrill:-

"The clouds rumble from sky to sky, the shower sweeps horizons,

the doves shiver in silence in their nests

the frogs creak in the flooded fields;

and the clouds rumble? But Tagore's Nature is the abode of Divinity. Like our pantheist Wordsworth, Tagore too sees the figure of God in the shoper objects of Nature. Look at the following lines which occur in poet's number 53 in Gitanjali' where Tagore visualises the divine figure of Vishnus vehicle, Garur, in the sunlight :-

"Beautiful is thy wristlet, decked with stars and cunningly wrought in myriad-colored jewels But more beautiful to me thy sword With its curve of lightning like the outspread wings of the divine bird of Vishnu."

Tagore's love for Nature is his love for God whose dust under His feet, a slight touch of which can enlighten his soul and transform his spirit into Divinity incarnate are the poet's cherished vision of heavenly bliss. Mark the lines below:-

"There is love in each speck of earth and joy in the spread of the sky.

I care not if I become dust, for the dust is touched by it's feet"

And finally let us join the ecstatic poet when in one of the songs in praise of God, he describes his mystical tryst with Nature and through it his rendezvous flight to Almighty's alode.

"Thou art a glimmer of gold form

the dawn of my life's shore, a dew drop on the first white flower of autumn

Thou art a rainbow from the distant sky bending over the dust, a dream of the crescent moon

touched with a white cloud

Thou art a secret of paradise.

revealed by chance to the earth."

Not in songs and prayer poems alone, even in other verse and prose works does Tagore reveal his love of Nature His novels like Gora, his short stories like Caubliwalla", his other prose writings including his philosophical musings disclose the poet's extraordinary attachment with Nature and its objects.

"Concludingly it can be fairly said of Tagore that he is the mighty-mouthed divine like flute that emits thousands of harmonies that thrill the poet and his audiences and move them to celestial ecstasies.

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