

# Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali : Longing for Universal Life Force

Dr. Seeta Rani  
Department of English  
J.K.P. (P.G.) College  
Muzaffarnagar (U.P.)

## ABSTRACT

Humans are the integral part of the society and the literature has always been a mirror of it. This paper deals with unveiling the wealth of spiritual wisdom and a wonder that have been proficiently incorporated by Tagore in his poem, Gitanjali. This poem is the story of soul's liberation to meet the divine Lord. It is an anthology of devotional lyrics which blend a number of themes and ideas along with providing the poet an opportunity to explore the relationship between Man and God, between individual and humanity. Everyone wants peace and happiness in one's life and it is possible through meditation and prayer of God. Tagore's poem lights the inner world (peace) of human feelings and sensibilities. This poem depicts the universal truth of death as Gitanjali reveals that death is not the end of life rather it is the renewal of the life. Tagore is a true mystic and he always craves for the union with the creator. The poem Gitanjali has the concept of Bhagavad Gita that soul is eternal and immortal. Man's prime strength is in religion and his humanity is spiritual. Self realization is the highest wisdom, which can be achieved through a varied experience over the ages. This paper unfolds how human sensibility of reunion with God travels in the mind of the poet to get the attention of his readers.

\*\*\*\*\*

Rabindranath Tagore is the first Indian poet who first gained for modern India a place on the world literary scene for his English Gitanjali. It is an immortal work of art. The poem is the voice of his own soul. It is an anthology of devotional lyrics which mainly deal with God and the Human soul, God and Nature and Nature and the Soul, and the Individual Soul and Humanity. The poem is self-contained and bears the impact of Upanishadic thoughts. This poem has universal truth that human life is the most precious gift of God to man on this earth and the aim of this gift (birth as a man) is to use it in a perfect way. The poet has a

deep longing for a union with the divine. He has neither peace nor rest in the absence of the divine. He wants to sit face to face with his creator and sing songs in His praise. The work of the world appears to him a constant, never ending drudgery of the immense sea of life. There is no doubt that Tagore is a devotional poet and Gitanjali is the best example of his devotion. Gitanjali is a new song of the soul of the universe. The songs in the poem are in a form of prayer.

This poem is the realization of God through self-purification, love, constant prayer and devotion, dedication and surrender to God through service to humanity. The title of the poem is perfect and suitable to the theme. It is made by the combination of two words Gita + Anjali. Here the word Gita denotes that Tagore's influence of Vedas especially in the Gita. The word Gita means songs too. And the word Anjali means a tribute to his Creator. So the title Gitanjali denotes that these songs are an offering to God. It shows the great influence of the Upanishads and the Gita on Tagore. The songs are pure and holy. Through the poem "Gitanjali", the poet is addressing his Maker and expresses his gratitude for giving the poet the divine inspiration to sing.

The lyrics in Gitanjali have a total unity. The sequence of thematic unities runs through love of God, love of nature and love of humanity. It is the story of soul's liberation, a tale of soul's wait to meet with eternal. At the very outset of the song he sings in praise of God who is the creator of this world. For example:

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure.  
This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest  
it ever with fresh life.

(Stanza 1)

This song has the concept of the Bhagavad Gita that the soul is eternal and immortal. It is the will of God that it should be so human body is like a weak vessel, which can be easily broken. God fills this again and again constantly renewed. Man dies and is born in another form. This implies the theory of incarnation of soul after death. In this regard the line of the Bhagavad Gita is given below:

"As a human being puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accept new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones."

These lines are remarkable to show God's kindness on human being because the soul has the ability to reach God, only after begin born in a human soul. Souls get body only after involving through an infinite number of births as lower species.

Here the words "frail vessel", "emptiest", "fillest", and "fresh life" are effectively employed by the poet. Human body is compared with "frail vessel". The word "emptiest" is used for death of body and the word "fillest" and "fresh life" is applied to new birth. In this respect the poet alludes to the Hindu belief and the doctrine of the transmigration of soul. He wants to give message to his reader about the supremacy and kindness of God. God gives a fresh life to the human soul every time a man dies.

Exhorting human beings Tagore shows his firm faith in divine wisdom, love and charity. According to him we should entirely put ourselves in His hands and should not worry about result. He tells people;

Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear  
all, and never look behind in regret.

(Stanza IX)

Here he again comes very close to the teaching of Bhagavad Gita that "you have a right to perform your duty prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty."

In his opinion, desires are wicked. They are born of ignorance and they put out the lamp of reason, wisdom and spirituality in human soul. The following lines present his views perfectly about his views on desires:

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the  
lamp it touches with its breath. It is unholy—take not thy  
gifts through its unclean hands. Accept only what is  
offered by sacred love.

(Stanza IX)

Tagore's views about desires and their futility come very close to the preaching in Bhagavad Gita. The lamp image in this stanza is taken from Gita Lord Krishan says, "It is desire, it is wrath, begotten by the quality of motion: all consuming, all polluting, know thou this as our foe here on the earth."

Tagore calls his maker, the eternal flute player, Krishana, of Vrindavan. He says that he is a flute of God and God is playing this flute. He wants to say that he is singing only due to the inspiration of God. God is spreading His gifts to humanity in the form of melodious music from His flute. The immortal touch of God's hands makes him forget his worldly limitation. He unions with God through his music and forget about his physical limitations. In such moment of union with divine he feels immense joy, which cannot be expressed through words. The following lines are highly meaningful.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart  
loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance  
ineffable.

(Stanza I)

God is the creator of this universe and the poet longs to unite with Him. He knows it is only through music and song that the human soul can become one with the divine. God is immortal and His gifts are infinite too but man is mortal and his hands are too small to hold the gifts. Human soul is not vast enough to enjoy the abundant measure of the divine bliss. He says: "The infinite gifts come to me only on these every / small hands of mine." (Stanza I) These lines are remarkable to show the greatness of god on man. Man requires great wisdom to enjoy God's gifts.

The poet has a deep desire for a union with the divine and passes some time with his maker. The poet's yearning for the divine is so acute that he feels neither peace nor rest in the absence of the divine. When he is not meditating upon his creator, his heart feels miserable and desolate. He uses very beautiful image of "a shoreless sea of toil" to convey the idea of the drudgery of the world. He says:

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest  
nor respite, and my work becomes an endless toil in a  
shoreless sea of toil.

(Stanza V)

Tagore's poetry also shows a deep concern for a number of human problems, human sufferings and human heroism and his humanism which is based upon a deep devotion to human interests without caring of caste or creed. It covers every aspect of human life. He has the vision of unity with his creator (God). He expresses his vision of universal brotherhood and the essential oneness of the humanity. According to him man is the image

of God. There is nothing untouchable in the great body of God, the world of men. The poet has full faith in God who is kind, magnanimous and omnipotent. He firmly believes that he can establish relationship with God by union through love with humanity itself. In his poetry Tagore sings of the whole humanity. His song is the lyre of Heaven, emitting out the note of Eternity; it is the voice of all mankind, like the murmuring breeze of spring dawn, Tagore's poetry soothes and embalms the heart of humanity.

His humanism is best seen in his songs "Here is thy footstool" and "Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads." (Stanza XVI) These lines shows that he is a spiritual realist and through these lines he advices to the priest that true worship of God does not lie in sitting quietly in some corner of a temple and counting the beads of a rosary. God lives with the tiller and the path maker who breaks stones in the sun and shower. The heart of the poor workers is His temple.

In the end of the poem, the poet depicts the universal truth of death that it is not the end of life rather it is the renewal of the life. He is not afraid of it but greetings it in his life because it is the gateway through which he reunions with his maker. It is the last fulfilment of his life. Death is represented as a traveller, a businessman, a boatman and a bride etc. He compares his life with a bride and death with bridegroom. As a bride eagerly waits day after day for her bridegroom in the same way he yearns of his death. He says:

O thou the last fulfilment of my life, Death, o my death,  
 come and whisper to me!  
 Day after day have I kept watch for thee; for thee  
 have I borne the joys and pangs of life.

(Stanza XCI)

This song shows his optimistic attitude towards death. Death is a guest who must be welcomed with an open hand. He further says that death will make no difference to this world and its activities will continue as usual. Here he has drawn a very realistic picture of life, death and situation after death that life goes on unconcerned.

His lyrics are universal in appeal because they deal with impulses that are universal to mankind. They reveal emotions and feelings which are true to all ages and climates. The song "When The Warriors Came Out" is a good example to show the universal truth that when man comes into this world he brings nothing with him, and similarly, when he leaves this world he takes nothing with him. Through this song, the poet gives message to his

readers that all worldly possessions are useless because they are left behind in this world when death comes. The wish of soul is only to get peace and the wish for peace is fulfilled only after he goes back to God. The human soul cannot find peace away from the divine soul.

Thus it is clear that Tagore is a realist and spiritual humanist. Through the Gitanjali, he gives true picture of the journey of human life. His philosophy of death is remarkable. His message to his readers about the realization of God through self-purification, love, constant prayer and devotion, dedication and surrender to God, is valuable. There is no doubt that Gitanjali, an immortal work of art.

### References

- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Gitanjali*. (New Delhi: Rupa & Co. 2002).
- Prabhupada, A. C. *Bhagavad Gita, As It Is*. (Bombay: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1987).
- Radhakrishnam, S. *The Philosophy of Rabindranth Tagore*. (London : Macmillan and Co., 1999).

