

Mysticism in Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali



Dr. (Smt.) Z. Z. Khan

Coordinator, P. G. Studies
Shri K. A. Lokapur Arts, Science
and Commerce College, Athani
Dist: Belagavi

Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore is known as the Bard of Bengal. Tagore was the first Asian to become Noble Laureate when he received the Noble Prize for Gitanjali in 1913. The present paper is an attempt to study mysticism in Tagore's Gitanjali. The preface of Gitanjali was written by W. B. Yeats in 1912. He gave his views on Gitanjali as follows-he expresses admiration for Tagore's poetic vision, which is deeply spiritual and intensely

personal. He also goes to the extent and praises Tagore highly. Further, an attempt is made to analyse the central theme of mysticism in Gitanjali. It contains all of the components of mysticism. Gitanjali collection of poems contains 103 devotional songs selected and translated from the Bengali to English version by Rabindranath Tagore himself.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, Mysticism, Gitanjali, God, Devotional mysticism, Nature mysticism

Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore, (born May 7, 1861- died August 7, 1941, Calcutta) was a Bengali poet, short-story writer, song composer, playwright, critic, essayist, philosopher, painter, humanist, and a great patriot. He was a multi-faceted Indian "a Renaissance



polymath”, who contributed conspicuously in the field of Indian Literature, music, art and social reform. Tagore who lived from 1861-1941 his era of writing is known as Bengali Renaissance. He established the Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, West Bengal in 1921 and aiming to enrich a integrate Eastern and Western learning. Tagore was often referred by various titles as Gurudev, Kobiguru and Biswokobi. The researcher picks up his works a few at random: *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings)-1910 (Bengali), 1912 (English translation), *Gora* (1910), *Dak Ghar* (1912), *Ghare-Baire* (1916), *Balaka* (1916), *Sadhna* (1913) and *The Religion of Man* (1931). He composed thousands of songs known as Rabindra Sangeet. He gain recognition, as he was the first Asian and first non- European to receive prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for *Gitanjali*. Rabindranath Tagore is a multifaceted personality. He has an “ extraordinary nexus of talents and gifts” (Raj 2). Tagore was a multi- talented and iconic figure in Indian cultural renaissance. Tagore’s creativity was remarkable in the field poetry, fiction and drama. As a poet, he first, wrote in his mother tongue Bengali and then he himself rendered his work *Gitanjali* into English version. Tagore has with a huge desire to learn new things. His contributions to music, literature and several other works are remarkable.

Gitanjali:

Rabindranath Tagore a notable Bengali poet, Nobel laureate and great philosopher. Tagore’s *Gitanjali* it is collection of poems. The original Bengali *Gitanjali* comprises 157 poems published in 1910. Tagore later translated into English version *Gitanjali or Song Offerings* which was published in 1912, it contains 103 English poems. In 1913 Tagore was the first non-European to win the award the Nobel Prize for Literature. The etymology of the word ‘*gitanjali*’ is derived from two Bengali root words “*git*” (meaning “song”) and “*anjali*” (meaning “offering”), and which means – “song offering”.

The component of mysticism is blended in each and every section of *Gitanjali*’s work. The songs in *Gitanjali* reflect the poet’s meditation on God, humanity, and nature. The leading theme of *Gitanjali* loops around understanding divine through love, self-purification, persistent prayer, dedication, bhakti and complete surrender to God by serving humanity and it reveals the relationship between the human soul and the divine being, it reflects Tagore’s blend of Indian and Western philosophies. In brief *Gitanjali* is the soul’s voyage to immortality. The whole work is impregnated with the divine presence. The *Gitanjali* starts with a sequence of songs in glorify of the holy divine.



To quote K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar : The Gitanjali songs are mainly poems of bhakti in the great Indian tradition. We have Vaishnava poets and Saiva poets who seek God as a child seeks its mother, as a lover seeks his (orher) beloved. Numerous are these gifted singers-god-intoxicated, intoxicated with the love of the Divine, turning this love into the purest poetry. The current coin of India's devotional poetry is melted and minted a new by Rabindranath, but the pure gold shines as brightly as ever, even though the inscription on the coin is in English. The imagery, the conceits, the basic experience, the longing, the trail, the promise, the realization- all have the quaintly unique Indian flavour and taste. Its familiarity was its recommendation to India; its apparent novelty was its recommendation abroad. It was anyhow poetry unmistakable. M. Abbe Bremond once declared that pure poetry aspires to a condition of prayer. Such poetry is half a prayer from below, half a whisper from above: the prayer evoking the response, or the whisper provoking the prayer, and always prayer and whisper chiming into song. *Gitanjali* is full of such poetry. (1984: pp110-111).

Mysticism :

“ Mystic is a person who tries to become united with God and so reach truths beyond human understanding”- Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary. Through the meniscus of mysticism, *Gitanjali* can be perceived as a bridge between the temporal and the eternal, and the personal and the universe. Mysticism is a profound spiritual force that has brought immense benefits to mankind. It inspires individual to seek a sense of inner peace, unity and purpose. It connects people with higher truths and divine wisdom, mysticism has played a significant role in shaping moral values and enriching human lives. Hinduism's mysticism is enshrined in Vedas and Upanishads, where the pursuit of spiritual Knowledge and unity with the Divine. *Gitanjali* prosper on Hindu mysticism and reveals complex of thoughts. Tagore tries to establish an indivisible union between individual soul and greater soul.

Mysticism depicts the inner self of the “human Personality” and the “human mind”. Man certainly has something of Satan in him, but man has at the same time, something genuinely angelic and Godly in him. There have been persons in whom the ethereal qualities are influenced who are known as mystics. A mystic thinks himself he is capable of establishing closed relationship with Almighty God, or at least he is able to see the God or a relationship with enables him to catch glimpses of the Divine Spirit. A mystic sees Divine within himself in the form of light or he sees a God at the same time or Divine spirit and specifically in the numerous objects of nature, in the various experiences of nature and in the several process of nature.



Mysticism in Tagore's Gitanjali:

Mysticism is "The belief that there is hidden meaning in life or that each human being can unite with God". -Cambridge Dictionary

Two forms of mysticism we discover in Tagore's Gitanjali: Nature mysticism and Devotional mysticism.

- **Nature mysticism** in Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali can be found in the poems where he uses natural elements as metaphors to illustrate divine connection and spiritual truths. These myths often illustrate the forces of nature or express spiritual link between human and the natural world. For instance:

Thy gifts to us mortals fulfil all our needs and yet run back to thee undiminished. The river has its everyday work to do and hastens through fields and hamlets; yet its incessant stream winds towards the washing of thy feet. The flower sweetens the air with its perfume; yet its last service is to offer itself to thee. Thy worship does not impoverish the world. From the words of the poet men take what meanings please them; yet their last meaning points to thee. (Gitanjali 75).

The essence of realization is frequent here. The poet reflects on fundamental truth, the truth of our origin. Everything originates from the universal soul, and each individual is an integral part of it. It serves its goal and again runs back to the God. The eternal gift of god for human being in the form of nature- river, wind, flower and light everything has its birth from the Immanent, Almighty one. The river serves the purpose of nourishing the earth and runs back to its source, the creator. Likewise human, a part of universal soul will eventually meet his source his origin after serving his purpose of mankind, devotion, love and sacredness.

- **Devotional mysticism** is a prominent theme where the Tagore intertwines spiritual devotion with Mythological elements. The very beginning lines of the poem reveal Tagore as a mystic.

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptyest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life. This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new". (Gitanjali -1).



Tagore mentions that God has created human as infinite spirit. Frail vessels is reference to human beings where God fills with life repeatedly. It gives us a glimpse of mysticism or Indian philosophy of life and rebirth. Divine empties the vessel again and again and feel it with new life. He empties the mankind of their trouble. Little flute of reed is once again referred to human beings are fragile as the reed of a flute. The word “flute” here reminds of Lord Krishna and the poet compares himself to a flute. It is the breath of God that flows through the flute that it creates eternal melodies. Tagore says that it is through God, through his inspirations he creates these songs of offering. Gitanjali is a collection of spiritual prayers that shows the relationship between man and God, as revealed in the songs.

Tagore is of the belief that Almighty can be experienced not only in the heart of the devotee but also in the nature, for the Divine lives in every place.

Gitanjali symbolizes the soul’s journey from the limited, material world to the infinite Divine domain. The songs in Gitanjali contain a broad spectrum of delicate human emotions, including devotion, affection, submissiveness, love, gratitude, detachment, affection and rejection.

This is my prayer to thee, my Lord- Strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart. Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows. Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service. Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might.”(Gitanjali 36).

In this poem it reflects Tagore’s mystical philosophy of service, strength, and humility. It reflects Tagore’s mystical vision where spirituality is intertwined with action, humility and self devotion. The poet prays for strength not for personal gain but to dedicate himself to the service of others. The poet’s focus on spiritual growth and the purify of the soul to align with divine will. This poem embodies the Vedantic philosophy prevalent in Tagore’s works, which emphasizes the unity of the soul with the supreme consciousness. Some poems like (Gitanjali 10 and 11), Gitanjali, Tagore’s masterpiece, proceed towards the infinite glory of Divine through numerous finite centres.

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost... (10) Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!... (11).



Tagore's belief is that Almighty God lives in the hearts of human being. Instead of in the temple, he further encourages us to refrain from chanting and rosary recitation. God is everywhere; his feet are found among the lowest, the neediest and the poorest. Tagore in these poems he says that we cannot earn spirituality unless we first give up vanity and pride, he further add that God is present among those who are tilling the ground and those who are breaking stones. In concluding Tagore believes that God can be visible not only in the heart of the devotee but also in the surrounding nature. The poems evoked a wide range of mystical elements.

Rabindranath Tagore magnificently elaborated the connectivity of the soul and Creator.

Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well. O thou beautiful, there in the nest it is thy love that encloses the soul with colors and sounds and odors.

(Gitanjali 67)

This lines highlights that God is both eternal and finite. The eternal aspect of God is symbolized by the sky and finite one by the nest. By such poems, Gitanjali develops into everlasting meditation on the God's existence in every aspect of life.

Time is endless in thy hands, my lord. There is none to count thy minutes. Days and nights pass and ages bloom and fade like flower. Thou knowest how to wait. (Gitanjali 82)

The poem imparts us to adopt patience and surrender to the God's timeless plan. It reminds us while human life is short and hasty, Divine's work transcends time is filled with infinite care and purpose. It's an request to trust in the divine process and let go of the anxiety tied to human notions of time. The poem concludes with an encouraging note that God's gate remain open, symbolizing the ever-present opportunity for spiritual connection.

Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali endures as a timeless radiance of light, leading towards the path of self-awareness and spiritual fulfillment. The poems in Gitanjali convey to a great extent metaphysical outlook discussing about a union with the "Supreme". The major theme in Gitanjali is devotion to God. It guide its readers into direct connection with the Infinite. The poet's prayers are not for fragile or commodity. But they endeavor to live a enriched life. As per W. B. Yeats, these songs arose from enormous sadness and extreme emotion. Every or



single line of poetry may make anyone forget about the world's hurdles. Gitanjali's songs can help us clean our bodies and minds so as to grow closer to Divine.

Reference

Tagore, Rabindranath: Gitanjali, New Delhi, Rupa& Co., 2002.

Tagore, Rabindranath. Gitanjali, translated by the author; with an Introduction by W. B. Yeats (1912)

Jadhav, L. G., "M. K. Naik as A Critic". A. B. S., Varanasi, (2013). ISBN: 978-93-81549-40-7

Tagore, Rabindranath. Collected Poems and Plays (1936)

A Tagore Reader, edited by Amiya Chakravarty (1961)

Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa. 'Indian Writing in English'. New Delhi. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2013.

Page no. 110-111.

Raj, G. V. Tagore. New Delhi: Sterling Publisher, 1983.

