



Glimpse into the Study of Tagore with Special Reference to Gitanjali

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Abstract:

This study is intended to have a glimpse into the study of Tagore with certain poems/songs of 'The Gitanjali'. 'The Gitanjali' unmistakably paves a way mainly to piety comprising one hundred and three songs of praise. As regards the diction /style, the language is simple and lucid. Almost all poems are in free-verse form. Though free verse, the devotional poet has not emulated any rhyming order in general. The poems, strictly speaking, run in prosaic form except for a few. He has used old English words, like 'thy' 'thou', 'the' 'thee', 'thine', 'ye' etc., and shortened auxiliaries, etc., and shortened auxiliaries here and there. No difficult words; almost all are common words. No Latin words are found. Because of the use of simple language, we can go through Gitanjali easily and comprehend the songs of praise. The theme of devotion coupled with love is made in a clear-cut way. The poetic volume exhorts us all to cultivate the habit of developing devotion. For it is sure to instill in us supernatural power to overcome any hardships and heralds peaceful life.

Keywords: devotion, mankind, god, spiritual, literary, creative, supreme being, peaceful, prayer, power.

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Introduction

I do not think that there is anyone among the multitudes of Indian students without hearing or reading the thought-provoking devotional, thrilling, and inspiring name of Rabindranath Tagore in the realm of Indian as well as in Indo-Englian literature. Born with a silver spoon in his mouth in Calcutta in 1861 to Maharshi Devendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi; he was married to Mrunalinidevi. He was trained so well by religious, philosophical, and spiritual-minded Biharilal Chakrabarthy and Vidyavathi that he could make anything religious, philosophical, and divine. The term 'Tagore' alludes to the family name which originated from the Bengali word 'Tacara' meaning great. He was the seventh one among nine sons and one daughter among the children of the parents of Maharshi Devendranath and Sarada Devi.

He started his career first as a child poet. He also comprehended Indian epics, Bhagavad-Gita, Mahabharata, Upanishads, etc. probing thoroughly. He is a multifarious artist for which he is rightly deemed a 'Literary Genius'. His literary skill is remarkable and appreciable in the aspects of poetry, prose, drama, novel, and short story. Before coming to his 'The Gitanjali', it is our bondduty, to go through in brief something about his prose, drama, novel, and short story to understand his multifarious literary skill in his creative art.

Poems/songs

In certain poems/songs of 'The Gitanjali', Tagore pin-points that the almighty God has offered mankind several gifts, of which he has picked up only two-river and a flower. At the same time, he vividly and beautifully elucidates in a nut-shell how they serve human beings in different ways. He points out that the river provides water for drinking not only for men but also to other dumb, helpless/despaired creatures like birds and animals, etc.; it also provides water for all sorts of crops and plants, etc. as soon as its service is over, it lastly flows into the sea-God to become one with him showing its sense of gratitude. Likewise, the flower also renders its kind and sincere service to almost all creatures without expecting anything in return differently. Men especially women make use of it by placing it in

their pigtails etc. It is used for some decoration purposes in marriage and divine and birth-day function etc. resting in different creeper and plant, in parks and garden, it adds some more beauty to it. Yet it provides food in the form of honey to any insects; it is used in cookery (especially the tamarind flower) its petal especially the petal of the rose is being eaten by some people. It also finally reaches God and becomes one with him in the form of pooja.

Prosaic aspect

As regards his prosaic aspect, we have for instance 'My boyhood', 'Home Coming' and 'a wrong man in workers' paradise', 'the voice of humanity' and 'Subha' etc. of these, the first one offers its readers the glimpses of childhood days and an account of the city of Calcutta of his time. The second one deals with a fine character- a sketch of a teenage ring leader and country-lad Fathik Chakrabarthy. This is in fact, a pathetic story of a fourteen-year-old boy who undergoes sufferings mainly due to a lack of a proper understanding of his mother, aunt, and his teachers. The third one gives us a beautiful picture of a conflict between the busy and the idle. 'The voice of humanity', an extract from Tagore's 'personality' refers to an address by the poet in Milan and Italy. The last one offers us a very nice portrait of a lass Subha whose literal meaning converses with people pleasingly with some devotion.

The spiritual and dramatic aspects

His spiritual and dramatic aspect can best be illustrated from 'the post office' and 'Chitra' etc.; the first one offers readers the disposition of a sick bed-ridden lad who receives messages from God and passes on the same to the people who throng him anxiously like a post-office to the people who gather around it. The second embodies an exemplary epic character of a very charming, young lady, Chitrangada (the story about 'the Mahabharata'), daughter of Chitra vahana- king of Manipur and also her unforgettable chaste love with Arjuna, a Pandava warrior, and a world-renowned archer. This happens on the way to the great Himalayas for a great bow, Pasupathasra from the lord by



penance. In his return, he takes her as his spouse through Gandharvavivaha (Marriage in god's world) and shows the cause of the fulfillment of his desires. Moreover, he pinpoints at the close of the play whole-heartedly with self-content 'Beloved my life is full.

His novel 'the home and the world' is one of the best-known ones dealing with a young typical couple in a family. The narrow-minded wife Bimala who is confined to the house symbolizes the home which is not as spacious as the world, the broad-minded husband Nikhil stands for the vast material world. Being narrow-minded the wife always misunderstands and picks up a quarrel with her broad-minded fine spouse. Besides this, the frequent visits of Sandip and some lawyers add fuel to the fire instead of ushering in family harmony with some mutual understanding. The novel thus presents vividly a domestic problem like a popular English novelist, Jane Austen's novel 'pride and prejudice' etc. for which it may rightly be called a domestic novel.

Short stories

'The post master', 'The babus of Nayananjore', and the 'The wreck' etc. are the best instances of his short stories. Of these the first one portrays something about expected amity between the post-master of a place in Bengal and a neighboring lass and the latter's silent love and her uncontrollable bereavement for the former's accidental separation from her on his inevitable transfer from the place, the second offers a thrilling picture of the greatness of the life of the landlords of the town of Nayananjore and their pitiable life in the days of the later period. The third story is principally kin to the wreckage of an ill-fated ship that separates a young couple and their companions. It also delineates the unexpected survival of some characters like Ramesh caught in despair.

Poetic composition

Concerning his creative work of devotional art, we can say that he is a distinguished poet of our century. His poetic composition 'Gitanjali' is well-known and the best one comprising one hundred and three songs penned in 1910 and dedicated to God. The title itself reveals the sense:

' a series of songs/poems of dedication'. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913 for his mastery of literature and the volume is also deemed to be a 'masterpiece' in the realm of Indo-Anglian literature.

The poet remarks sincerely, wholeheartedly, and devotionally in one of the songs that the almighty god can be seen in land-tiller, path-maker and stone-breaker, and so on. This is what he means; the Supreme Being, God-head is noticeable only in poor and hardworking, sweating men day and night. One of the songs referring to the pre-independence period displays lucidly a miserable and pitiable plight of our motherland. Observing the mean bondage of our Indians under the rule of the Britishers, the poet felt sorry and made a sincere supplication to the omnipresent, and omnipotent omniscient God for the emancipation of the mother-land remarking as follows in the song/poem of thirty-five with bhakti and grief revealing patriotism:

'Into that heaven of freedom
My father let my country awake'

This is what the poet Tagore means. He prays to God with unbearable grief to allow the country to rise and move into that place where there is happiness and full freedom with no slavery.

In a poem which runs with 'thy gifts', he pinpoints that God has offered mankind several gifts among which the poet has chosen only two gifts river and flower. Thinking deeply that the said are available freely and easily in this vast nature. Tagore might have pointed out in his Gitanjali. He remarks that the river serves all the creatures like men, animals, birds, etc. providing pure water to quench their thirst and also keeps itself useful to all kinds of plants and trees, finally flows it flows calmly and beautifully and reaches the sea-God. Likewise, the flower also serves men, especially women by making use of it in their pigtailed and different functions for decoration. It also adds some beauty by standing in different creepers and plants in gardens, parks, and forests providing honey to insects like butterflies, etc. It also ultimately becomes one with God serving Him in the form of pooja ceremony etc.



His 'Viswabharathi' a flourishing educational institution established in 1901 is rampant like a gigantic banyan tree. He spared the said Nobel prize's money worth 1,37,400 crowns for the uplift of Viswabharathi. The Oxford university awarded him the title of 'Doctor of letters' in 1940 and honoured him for his literary profundity. The poet whom we call 'Gurudev' spent most of his life in the peaceful and serene atmosphere of 'Shantinikethan' by meditating on God. The school is also regarded as 'the darling of my heart' by him. It was he who named Gandhi 'Bapu' for keeping aloof from politics.

He has been read extensively in Swedish academy in the Bengali language itself by a student of Prof. APM Tregner. C.F. Andrews, an English writer comments on Shantinikethan education 'such living education can never be dull'.

Though the devotional book 'The Gitanjali' of Tagore comprises one hundred and three poems/songs eulogizing the supreme almighty god in different ways especially three parts of the poems take more significance. The first part of the poem runs as follows expressing the great piety with some spiritual aspects and philosophy etc. and also the love for nature of the poet.

'Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. The frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life. This little flute of reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new..... ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still, there is room to fill.'

The first part of the poem deals with thanks offering one in which the poet speaker Tagore conveys his sense of gratitude to the omnipotent supreme being. He does so because God revives his mortal life with no end by filling his frail being with infinite gifts. It also alludes to the bliss of God in the pastime of the creation of the world. Coming to the second part of the poem is as follows: praising the omniscient Supreme Being 'When thou commandest me to sing, it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes..... Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord.'

This poem also refers to the poet speaker's prayer to the lord with some praise. Yet it comes under Kirtana, one of the nine kinds in which piety is expressed. Moreover, here the poet speaker Tagore is rather intoxicated forgetting himself in the bliss of eulogizing God. When he goes on praising the lord, it completely makes his heart swell with pride; but immediately humility and tender feelings of some sense of gratitude take over and tears from his eyes are unknown.

The third part of the poem goes as follows praising the Lord as the supreme singer.

' I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amazement.....ah, thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master.'

In this poem of praise, the poet speaker, Tagore laments his inability to ape/imitate the divine melody of his master. Besides this poem also reveals some master-pupil kinship, it in some way appears to bind the poet to the omnipotent lord. Apart from these aspects, the poem brings to our minds the picture of the ode to 'To a skylark' by Shelley, one of the romantic poets. We are also reminded of John Keats's poem 'ode to a nightingale' one of the five odes of the poet.

Criticism

As regards criticism of 'The Gitanjali', it is, in fact, a garland of prayer poems/songs, poems of bhakthi penned intrinsically in Bengali, published in 1912. Yet the devotional poetic book may be deemed to be a twentieth-century manifestation of the great bhakthi tradition. Our beloved, late Prof. Dr. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, commented that this is poetry which is 'half a prayer from below, half a whisper from above: the prayer and whisper chiming into song' Edward Thompson remarks 'it brings us very close to the religious experience which is universal and yet intensely individual. His poems have led him to God. His sorrows and failures have shown him, God. 'The Gitanjali' may be named a little epic in the realm of Indo-Anglian literature because of the delineation of god's power, ways, action, etc. the composition



is yet in prosaic order with no rhyming; but conveys the great sense of infinite immanent supreme being's mysterious and inscrutable power and actions.

Conclusion

'The Gitanjali' unmistakably paves a way mainly to piety comprising one hundred and three songs of praise. As regards the diction /style, the language is simple and lucid. Almost all poems are in free-verse form. Though free verse, the devotional poet has not emulated any rhyming order in general. The poems, strictly speaking, run in prosaic form except for a few. He has used old English words, like 'thy' 'thou', 'the' 'thee', 'thine', 'ye' etc., and shortened auxiliaries, etc., and shortened auxiliaries here and there. No difficult words; almost all are common words. No Latin words are found. Because of the use of simple language, we can go through Gitanjali easily and comprehend the songs of praise. The theme of devotion coupled with love is made in a clear-cut way. The poetic volume exhorts us all to cultivate the habit of developing devotion. For it is sure to instill in us supernatural power to overcome any hardships and heralds peaceful life. Keeping in mind Tagore's devotion, better to take for the best instance, the profound Sri Rama Bhaktha Hanuman, who crossed a thousand yojanas of the great Indian Ocean.

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