

## Gitanjali: A Mystical Journey Of Rabindranath Tagore

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Rabindranath Tagore hailed by Mahatma Gandhi as “The Great Sentinel” as one of those versatile men of his age, who touch and embellished modern Indian life at several points. Poet, dramatist, novelist, short story writer, composer, painter, thinker, educationalist, nationalist, internationalist such were the various roles that Tagore played with uniform distinction during his long and fruitful career as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes,

*“Rabindranath was the poet, the eternal child, the imaging creature of intuition and wonderment; he was the weaver of beauty, the singer of songs, the giver of love and life. As years passed, in his flowing beard and immaculate white robes, he looked more a Rishi of the Upanishadic times than a successful modern poet.”<sup>1</sup>*

Mysticism is the endeavour of humans to apprehend Reality and experience the ecstasy of being in communion with God, by means of personal revelation, transcendentalism and contemplation or meditation of the Divine. It results in the freedom of the mind from the fetters of the senses and from the ordinary restrictions of social existence through the avenue of unexpected revelations. The mystic, being initiated into the mysteries of existence and the esoteric knowledge of the realities of life and death, aspires for afar, yearns for the inaccessible, and searches for the ideal heart’s compassion and the desire to know the unknown. Through the purgation of bodily desires and the purification of profaneness of heart and will power, the mystic discovers the illumination of mind, which enables him to pursue the union with the Absolute, leading to a state of ecstasy, a state of bliss. The experience, thus, is vividly joyous, finely intellectual and entirely divine. It is also distinctly personal and evidently. As. Dr. S.Radhakrishnan writes.

*Tagore as a poet wants to build a bridge between the intangible reality of poetry and the tangible unreality of our matter-*

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*of-fact daily life and his poems help one help one to comprehend not only the love of God and relationship between Man and God but also human love<sup>2</sup>.*

Tagore himself says

**His poetry reaches to the great level of mystic poetry because it is an expression of something felt within the heart which tries to find outside shape as a poem. It is a true picture of what is taking place within<sup>3</sup>.**

Gitanjali is a great mystical work and its mysticism will always endure. Here is one book in which Tagore expresses his firm convictions about God, about the human soul, and about the ultimate goal of human soul. Here is a book free from all kinds of material considerations and worldly desires or ambitions. Here is Tagore seeking a communion with God and feeling sure that he would succeed in his aspiration. The mystical life is a contemplative life and it is a life in which the individual shows a complete detachment from all worldly concerns and worldly pursuits. A mystic need not renounce the world together but an attitude of detachment is absolutely necessary. There is condition for the appreciation of Tagore's mysticism in Gitanjali. All the elements of mysticism are to be found in the poems of Gitanjali. Indeed Gitanjali is steeped in mysticism though really in order to appreciate its mysticism we must set aside our worldly concerns and materialistic preoccupations. The very opening of poem shows Tagore as a mystic. Here Tagore asserts the immortality of the human soul even though the human body is mortal.

*"Thou has made me endless,*

*Such is Thy pleasure"(Gitanjali,15)*

*In the III poem, Tagore says to God*

*"The light of the music illumines the world,*

*My heart longs to join in Thy song. " (Gitanjali,16)*

And Tagore adds that God's Music has made a captive of his heart. In the next poem Tagore, as a mystic acknowledges the need of purity in life and in one's conduct and it is this realization which makes his promise to God that he would always try to keep his body pure, to keep all untruths out of his universal at the same time, which sets in a

life of reception, transformation, transfiguration and continuous living in that state of rhapsodic exaltation. The mystic shuts the doors of fleeting senses and passing passions, and remains self-evident, self-sufficient and self-luminous.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger opines

*Gitanjali is a spiritual journey towards the Supreme Soul. His poems as not poems of exclusion but of all inclusion. It is a jewel even a jewel of English religious poetry<sup>4</sup>.*

The mystic is essentially a transcendentalist, who integrates all the forces of mind into a unity and reconciles himself with the community and with the totality of the experience as a spiritual system. Self transcendence is a determining feature of all mystical experience. As A Srinivasa Raghavan says -

*Mysticism posits eternal values such as Truth, Beauty and Goodness, which are all infinite, and which transcend any system of human relations, but it finds these actualized in concrete human situations and experiences. God as Truth safeguards society's pursuit of knowledge and broadens the horizon of human concepts, attitudes and affections. God as Beauty assures the promotion and conservation of values in the world of art. God as Goodness and Love guarantees man and society all that is worth maintaining and developing in social life and relations. God as the Person of Persons conserves the supreme values of personality in all men and in all human situations. Finally, God as the Transcendent Being or the Real Self stands for the conjunction of the values of Truth, Beauty and Goodness. Mystics.....can alone offer ways of accommodation and synthesis to an individual or community faced with the problems of tension and conflict of these ultimate values of life<sup>5</sup>.*

To study Rabindranath Tagore is to know the essence of mysticism in his poems, Indian artistic traditions, to thought and to drive away all the evils from his heart, As the poem follows, Tagore expresses a strong desire for God's company. He says to God:

**"Now, it is time, to sit quite.**

**Face to face with thee"(Gitanjali, 11)**

In Gitanjali Tagore's longing for communion with God proves mysticism in the poem. Poem after poem Tagore looks forward to meet God, to stand before God or to have a spiritual communion with God. There are many poems in which he expresses this longing, this hope and even this conviction. For instance, in one poem Tagore asks if the time has come when he may see God's Love and offer to him his silent salutation. In the next poem Tagore says,

***"I am on the waiting for love to give mysey up at  
last into his hands:***

In the next poem Tagore says to God,

***If you showest me not thy face.***

***I know not how I am to pass***

***These long, rainy houses. " (Gitanjali, 18)***

In the poem which follows, Tagore says in the moving words to God:

***If thou speakest not, I will feel.***

***My heart with my silence and endure it. " (Gitanjali, 19)***

In those poem, Tagore discovers that a perfect sweetness has blossomed in the depth of his heart. This sweetness has undoubtedly been caused by God's proximity to him. In other words, here Tagore emphasises the divinity within him. Tagore expresses his certainty that God loves him, and so he says that even if he does not call God in his prayers and even if he does not keep God in heart, God's love would still wait for his love. Tagore says that God. has been coming nearer and nearer to him ever since the beginning. All those utterances are the utterances of a mystic. Further Tagore says that he Wants God to appear before his eyes or the first of all the lights and all the forms, Thus shows his beginning for a visit from God. Tagore says to God:

***"Thus it is that Thy joy in me is so full " (Gitanjali)***

And he further says that God loves for him has lost himself in his love for God, so a perfect union between them has taken place. Tagore's heart here overflows with mystic fervour internally.

Mystic experiences are said to be unique for each individual; yet we find there is a marked resemblance between the experiences of mystics, not merely of the same race or cult but also of diverse social

orders and religions. Plato, Plotinus, St. Augustine, Eckhart, Jacob Boehme, John Donne, George Herbert, William Wordsworth, W. B. Yeats and of course William Blake can rightly be termed as some of the great mystics of English literature. Similarly, some of the litterateurs of Indian English literature like Sri Aurobindo, Toru Dutt, Ramesh Chander Eiutt and Rabindranath Tagore are also mystic poets. The mystic views of these poets are quite evident in their poetic Works. While exploring the nuances of mysticism, we cannot, therefore, lose sight of the aforesaid seers and visionaries. Blake and Tagore have not basked in instantaneous critical acclaim. The world has taken its own time to understand and appreciate their variegated poetry. Max Plowman in his Work *Introduction to the Study of Blake* (1927), states that Blake is essentially the poet of the human soul – a theme that shapes all his works. S. Foster Damon's *William Blake; His Philosophy and Symbols* (1924) treats Blake's mysticism as the key to his thoughts and the 'raison d'etre' (reason of existence) of what Blake wrote. The grandeur of Tagore's poetry has won over the reticent recalcitrance and, therefore, one has to wade through a formidable array of critical Writings like Sisir Kumar Ghose's *The Later Poems of Tagore* (1961), Mulk Raj Anand's *The Volcano: Some Comments on the Development of Rabindranath Tagore's Aesthetic Theories and Art Practices* (1967), *Amiya Chakravarty's A Tagore Reader* (1961) to assess, evaluate and appreciate the status and stature of Tagore as a poet. The search for a supersensible existence beyond the phantasmagoria of the senses has remained the mission of these mystic poets. In this paper, the English poet William Blake and the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore are taken into consideration, for a comparative study of their poetic Works related to the context of mysticism.

Though Tagore is a firm believer in the union of man and God, he has no faith in absolute identity. Tagore is a dualist who believes in a mysterious identity in difference. That is Why in his poetry, there is a constant synthesis of opposites. Thus freedom means freedom from bondage, but it can be realized only through bondage. Just as the string is bound to the harp and it produces music so also life realizes its freedom in the midst of bonds, just as the string and the harp realise it in being

bound to each other. See, how nicely the very idea is expressed in the following sweet lyric from Gitanjali.

***“DELIVERANCE is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.***

***Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim. My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame and place them before the altar of thy temple.***

***No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.***

***Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love”. (Gitanjali, 27)***

The poet feels and enjoys the delightful presence of God, in the material objects of life which can be seen and heard and touched. So all his illusions turn into illumination of joy which is the final truth of life.

Similarly Tagore harmonizes the opposition between illusion and truth, rather it is in truth that illusion merges itself. The World may be Maya but it is also essential, for Without appearance, reality cannot exist and without illusion truth itself Will be empty. We find Tagore giving a beautiful shape to this idea in his lyrical drama “Chitra” Where he describes the evolution of human love from the physical to the spiritual. Arjuna says to Chitra, in a confused state, trying to catch the truth about her:

***“Illusion is the first appearance of truth.***

***She advances towards her lover in disguise. ,***

***But a time comes when she throws off her ornaments and veils and stands clothed in naked dignity “,***

That is why even after knowing that the physical beauty of Chitra is only an illusion, Arjuna loves her, but this time his love is not towards her body but towards her soul. So he says in the end.

***“Beloved, my life is full. “***

Likewise, Tagore harmonises Death and Life. Death is not a negation of life, but it is the gateway through which life constantly renews itself.

Tagore realised that death is the fulfilment and completion of life that in death nothing is lost, and that it is the channel through which life ceaselessly flows and renews itself. Just as in the rhythm of life, death has its place, so also evil and imperfection and ugliness have their own necessity and significance. Creation is a ceaseless process which is constantly perfecting itself. Thus, Tagore's view of life is tremendously optimistic.

Tagore is of the conviction that deliverance has to be "sought and won" not in the otherworld, but in this world, not after death but in this very life.

*"If I leave my home I shall not reach thy home; If cease my work I can never join thee in thy work".....*

Therefore in the midst of our home and our work the prayer rises, *"Lead me across; For here rolls the sea, and even here lies the other shore waiting to be reached - yes, here is this everlasting present, not distant, not anywhere else"*.

This is what Tagore says in "Sadhana". That's why according to Tagore the joys of earth are not to be rejected in the process of deliverance.

Tagore says-

**We have minds that we desire a greater harmony. This harmony is not possible in the sphere of the universe-nature. It is only possible in the sphere of mankind, in the multitude<sup>6</sup>.**

Tagore is a mystic but he differs from the other mystics in as much as he never advocates a renunciation of life. Rather he accepts life and enjoys the manifold beauties of life and nature enthusiastically, His view of life is not that of an ascetic. His advice to the priest is to leave his singing and chanting and seek God-where the tillers are tilling the soil or pathmakers are breaking the stones. So he asks the devotee of God to come out of his temple and meet God in the presence of tillers and pathmakers in this Way:

*"LEAVE this chanting ana' singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?  
Open thine eyes and see thy Goa' is not before thee!*

*He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard  
ground and where the patlz maker is breaking stones.  
He is with them in sun and in shower; and his  
garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy  
mantle and even like him come down in the dusty soil!*

*Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found ?  
Our master himseh” has joyfully taken upon him the  
bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for even*

*Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy  
flowers and incense! What harm is there Q” thy  
clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him  
and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.”*

*(Gitanjali, 39)*

What we find in it is stern realism but no trace of asceticism. But it is not that realism which regards material enjoyment as the he all and end all of life. God is not to be found in the temple or through the seclu0ded life of an ascetic but through love and service of our fellowmen. Partici-pation in the humble activities of daily life is essential for God realisation, The whole mankind should offer a Salutation to this philosophy of Tagore and this is the perennial charm of his mysticism.

Tagore is a spiritual realist. He has humanised spiritualism. He seeks union with God through union with his fellowmen. This is the unique feature of his mysticism. In this respect he stands alone among mystics. He had a creative view of life. In him the poetic, philosophic and religious sentiments got moulded into one. Inevitably, he has come out to be one of the leading mystic thinkers of the East in modern times; his mysticism flows into poetry; his poetry bathes in mysticism. For him love is the ultimate meaning of everything around us, but essentially God-love it is. In The Gardener (poem no. 50), he appeals in the following Words: ‘Where is this hope for union except in thee, my God?’(2007, p. 85). In Gitanjali



(2011, p.20) the expression is quite vivid and inspiring:

*The morning light has flooded my eyes -this is thy message to my heart. Thy face is bent from above, thy eyes lookdown on my eyes, and my heart has touched thy feet. (Gitanjali)*

Further,

*The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me. (Gitanjali)*

Eventually after all, Tagore was also a man of firm faith in the basic spiritual values of life. He tried ceaselessly to express the infinite, the Supreme Soul or the spirit of the universe. For him love leads to joy, which is, in a sense, *the realisation of the truth of oneness, the oneness of our soul with the World and of the World-soul with the supreme lover*. He observed that “the fundamental unity of creation was not simply a piece of philosophical speculation for India; it was her life-object to realise this great harmony in feeling and in action. Therefore, the yearning; ‘I want Thee, only Thee’ (Gitanjali), which led time and again to flashes of the mystical height:

*You have come, Radiant One, You have broken upon the door*

*May Victory be yours*

*Victorious Hero, with the dawn of a new day . . .*

*Let my bondage break,*

*Victory be yours*<sup>7</sup>. (*A Tagore Testament: 1984, p.67*)

Tagore’s spiritual vision is embodied in all his works - novels, plays and paintings - but especially in his poetry. As a poet of the Indian Renaissance, he has noted that man has a feeling that he is truly represented in something which exceeds him. His poetry in English is as much Indian as it is universal. In Indian mystical thought, Tagore offers a system in which the theism of the Bhagavad Gita, the metaphysics of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the mysticism of the Bauls and the philosophical principles of Vaishnavism and Sufism exist in synthesis. Tagore was also influenced by the English Romantics. Although he received inspiration from different sources, he never belonged to any

religion. His concept of religion is apparent in the following lines:

*My religion is essentially poetis religion. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channels as does the inspiration of my music. My religious IU'e has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life (Tagore, p.25)<sup>8</sup>.*

Like all mystics, Rabindranath was a firm believer in the essential unity of humans and Nature. He seeks union with God through union with his fellowmen. This is the unique feature of his mysticism. He explains in his poetry that the real purpose of human life is to attain the kinship of the Almighty. He believes that God lives amongst us, not in tombs and temples. The poet wishes to unite with the Almighty and want to attain oneness with him. Tagore's Gitanjali and his other works act as a bridge between the Oriental and Occidental, mysticism and romanticism, the mortal and the immortal. He opines God cannot be grasped by reason and logic. This implies not only that the Divine is immanent in creation but also that the creation itself is a manifestation of the Divine. Tagore sees a harmonious relationship among God, human beings and nature. For Tagore, the World order may be compared to music. He feels that the Infinite manifests Himself through finite forms through a silent music. There pulsates all through a rhythm of *prana*, deep Within the universe, and music is its resultant emotion felt Within one's heart. The sun, the moon, the stars and planets, trees and plants ~ each and every part supplements its own unique note to the cosmic song.

### References

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6. *Rabindranath Tagore, A Tagore Testament, p.41.*
7. *Rebindranath Tagore, A Tagore Testament p.67.*
8. *Rebindranath Tagore, A Tagore Testament p.25.*