

# “DIVINITY AS THE MANIFESTATION OF NATURE AND MAN THE GITANJALI”

*Dr. (Mrs.) Rashmi Rana*

*Department of English,*

*M.S. College. Saharanpur.*

मत्तः प्रकृति पुरुषात्मकं जगत् (From me has emerged this world comprising Nature and Man. Durga Saptashati)

Gitanjali means song offering and in the words of Dr.Radha-Krishnan.

“The poems of ‘the Gitanjali’ are offerings of the finite to the infinite.”<sup>1</sup> it is poetry of the highest order, poetry which very nearly approaches the condition of prophecy. In the words of T.S. Eliot it is great poetry which, “expresses in perfect language permanent human impulses”, and thus brings strange consolation to the human heart. In such works poetry becomes a revelation, an incantation, that flashes open the inner reality. It is poetry in which men converse with eternity.

As a matter of fact Gitanjali is a great work of art, and as such a number of themes and ideas are woven together to make up its complex texture. Its hundred and odd lyrics explore (1) the relationship of God and the human soul (2) of God and Nature, (3) of Nature and the human soul, and (4) of the individual soul and humanity. These four themes are not kept strictly separate, they frequently run into each other, fuse and mingle.

The central theme of The Gitanjali is devotional : it expresses the yearning of the devotee for the re-union with the divine. it is in the tradition of the devotional poetry of India, but it finds a new and original treatment. That is why Gitanjali created such a sensation in the west. When it was first published in English, **ABBE BREMOND** declared that pure poetry aspires to a condition of prayer. “Such poetry is half a prayer from below and 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, as in the opening song:

“Thou hast made endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail Vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.”<sup>2</sup>

The human body is the temple of the soul, the human soul is the temple of God. The human the human soul has no significance unless it is inhabited or “filled” by the Supreme. Birth and death are but the filling and the emptying of the soul by the Supreme soul and the individual – insignificant as he may seem to be – in this way partakes of God’ endless life, His immortality. Hence sings Tagore.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new<sup>3</sup>.

“The lifeless flute comes to life when the *Lord of Brindavan* plays upon it-forever piping songs forever new. The human soul is not only God’s temple, it is also krishna’s flute. Life’s vicissitudes are but new melodies played by the Lord.” The poet, therefore, concludes –

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

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass and still thou Pourest, and still there is room to fill.<sup>4</sup>

“The Phenomenal world in which the individual plays his obscure part is really the *Lila or the drama* of the Supreme, and to know this is to participate in the total joy of the cosmic play and give utterance to the joy in ineffable song. Even so is the seemingly little united with the vast, and frail man is filled with the joy, power and glory of the Infinite<sup>5</sup>”

Not only is this realization the source of song, but the song can also guide the devotee along the labyrinthine ways of the world to the very threshold of Reality-

Every in my life have I sought thee with my songs.  
It was they who led me from door to door, and with  
them have I felt about me, searching and touching  
my world.<sup>6</sup>

They guided me all the day long to the mysteries of the country, of the pleasure and pain, and at last, to what palace gate have they brought me, in the evening at the end of my journey<sup>7</sup>?

“The last corner turned, the last vigil over, the devotee is seized with marvellous contentment; and so he will make a final offering of his riches to the Supreme”.

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses  
spread out and touch this world at thy feet<sup>8</sup>.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day  
back to their mountain nests, let all my life take its  
voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee<sup>9</sup>.

“The one hundred odd songs in Gitanjali form a mighty piece of prayer and pleading and exultation”.

In a number of poems devotional poetry mingles with the poetry of nature, poetry in which the poet explores the relationship of God and Nature. Nature is the vast arena across which the Divine and the human eternally seek each other. According to Tagore, Nature is the melody of God. It ennobles man. In his love of nature Tagore is true romanticist. He etherealizes, beautifies and spiritualizes nature. Nature to him is an aspect of God. In Vedantic philosophy Nature and God are Prakrti and Purusha. Rabindra Nath Tagore reaches God through nature. He says, “It was not the beauty of nature that gave him joy and peace, but the life in nature”. The soul of man communes directly with the living soul of nature, that is, with the spirit of God who dwells as life in all. The fusion of God and nature is a recurrent theme in Fruit Gathering Lover’s Gift, Crossing, Geetanjali etc. The natural world is used as a symbol to convey a vision of spiritual order in Tagore’s poetry, The poet prays to God,

“Come to me like summer cloud, spreading thy showers from sky to sky.”

“Come to me like summer cloud, stirring my heart with the promise of hidden life and the gladness of the green.”<sup>10</sup>

There is a joy in nature and nature is the abode of God, according to Tagore, “Hidden in the heart of things, thou art nourishing seeds into sprouts, buds into blossoms and ripening flowers into fruitfulness”.<sup>11</sup>

In many songs in Gitanjali the poet explores the relationship of God and Nature. In it the poet ranges over the immensities of time and space, the eternal and the temporal, and probes into the mysteries of life, of man and of nature, and the poet’s vision is “free, vast and serene”. One of the central themes in Gitanjali is the immanence of God in love and joy in nature’s beauties to woo the human soul. He craves for:

“In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes, comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds he comes, ever comes.”<sup>12</sup>.

Nature is the manifestation of the Divine. Perfect joy reigns Supreme in the realm of nature:

“The morning sea of silence broke into ripples of bird songs; and the flowers were all merry by the road side, and the wealth of Gold was scattered through the rifts of the clouds while we busily went on our way and paid no heed.”<sup>13</sup>.

Many Picturesque and sensuous expressions, as the lines quoted above, occur in Gitanjali. It abounds in beautiful and highly concrete and suggestive images, derived from the infinite treasure of nature. Such nature – images, amplify the poet’s spiritual and mystical ideas and feelings. Common objects of nature symbolise human passions, longings and ideals. They are eternal and they symbolise the eternity and the infinitude of God Himself. The following song in Gitanjali is a superb example of Tagore’s use of nature imagery for soul’s yearning for complete identification with the Supreme:

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

Like a rain – cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers  
let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day  
back to their mountain nests let all my life take its  
voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.”<sup>14</sup>.

Commenting on Tagore’s spiritual conception of nature, S.B. Mukherji writes:

“A vision steeped in wonders, mystery and boundless joy fuses the humanbody and spirit and nature into a harmony. An exalting rapture breathes into a vision of timeless unison – physical as well as spiritual – with nature’s form and phenomena, into the primitive bond of creative unity with the universe; into the sense of oneness with lights and waves, with flowers and fragrance, with the starry sapheres. They blend and merge into a paeon of joy and wonder, into an affirmation welling from inner spiritual apprehension.”<sup>15</sup>

Tagore emphasises the value of simplicity and intimate contact with nature. Man on elevate himself morally and spiritually, if he lives a life of primal simplicity in constant communion with nature. Divorced from nature man is a poor creature. Tagore is a mystic for whom nature is suffused with the divine presence. Nature manifests the glory and greatness of God and while in her midst, man can commune with the Divine. He once said, “We want a place where the beauty of nature and human soul meet in union.” Nature brings hope and consolation to the suffering humanity.

Like wordsworth, Tagore thinks that there is a harmony, between the spirit of nature and the mind of man. Mother-Nature communicates her own thoughts to man and when a man opens his soul to the influences of nature, a complete harmony is established between them. It is this harmony which gives peace to the soul of man. Nature is a moral teacher and guide to man. She counsels him and impels him to goodness and virtue. Nature has joy and ecstasy in her life. Deep calm is at her heart. Nature in Tagore’s poetry is a background in which human beings play various roles, allotted to them. Nature governs human life. In most of the lyrics in Gitanjali nature is not only the background but very closely harmonises with human thoughts and feelings:

“That vague sweetness made my heart ache with

longing and it seemed to me that it was the eager  
breath of summer seeking for its completion.  
I knew not then that it was so near, that it  
was mine, and that this perfect sweetness had  
blossomed in the depth of my own heart.”<sup>16</sup>.

Tagore’s love of God consciously or unconsciously merges with the love of man and nature. In Gitanjali Tagore describes picturesquely the beauty of nature but under the vivid pictorial charm lies spiritual significance:

“The morning sea of silence broke into ripples of bird songs,  
and the flowers were all merry by the road side and the wealth  
of gold was scattered through the rifts of the clouds while we  
busily went on our way and paid no heed.”<sup>17</sup>.

Nature is the abode of God. The various aspects of nature Symbolise Eternity:  
“The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath  
of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of  
thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.”<sup>18</sup>.

God is omnipresent. His presence can be felt both in light and darkness:

In the deep shadows of rainy July, with secret steps, thou walkest, silent as night,  
eluding all watchers.”<sup>19</sup>.

To Tagore Nature, God and man are one. The lyrics in Gitanjali are not independent nature poems mainly concerned with the sensuous presentation of the beauty and charm of nature. In them he stresses the complete identification of man with nature:

“I am like a remnant of a cloud of autumn uselessly roaming in the sky. O sun my sun ever glorious! Thy touch has not yet melted my vapour, making me one with thy light, and thus I count months and years separated from thee.”<sup>20</sup>.

Tagore, as we have seen, is a romantic mystic who “loses himself in his contemplation of nature and gets into direct communion with the infinite.” To him, the whole of the universe is permeated by one life, one soul. In moments of inspiration Tagore realises this oneness and loses his consciousness of the material forms under which this one life appears. The fusion of God and Nature is a recurrent theme in his poetry.

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 her eternal bridegroom, the Divine Lord, A narration of Soul’s pilgrimage and voyage to Heaven of Heavens.”

A sovereign note that recurs again and again in these poems with endless variation is that of “rapturous oneness-yearning for it, joy in contemplating it, bliss in attaining it.”<sup>21</sup>

Tagore expresses his mystical vision of the unison of Man, God and Nature through highly suggestive and picturesque symbols and images. Edward Thompson writes in this connection:

“No poet that ever lived has had a more constant and intimate touch with natural beauty. He can use, at his best, the same images and pictures, the oldest ones in the world, a score of times in as many lines, and each time with freshness and charm. His wealth here is inexhaustible.....”<sup>22</sup>

Tagore’s conception of nature is many – sided and romantic. His imagination transfigures the common objects of nature and glorifies them as the manifestation of Eternity. The central faith that an unbroken chain binds all things in the out ward world, and that the spirit of man can commune with God through Nature – this faith informs all his poetry.

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