

# Demystification of Religion and Consuetude: A Deconstructive Study of Rabindranath Tagore's "Gitanjali" and Ted Hughes' "Crow"

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## Abstract:

*In the present era, some ideologically and powerfully synchronized people construct the false image of religion, and make concurrent the corrupt ideologies in the consuetude for their vested interests. They do so to keep the marginalized people under their control, and to prove their way of life is far superior to them. By widening the gulf between them they constantly solidify the corrupt ideologies in the society. The false image that assimilated with the religion and the consuetude that is imbued with the corrupt ideologies fabricate the false myth in the society that invariably wash out the common people to envision the right image of religion and consuetude. The main concern of this paper is to highlight the concurrent corrupt consuetude and the false ideologically structured religion that exist in the society for a long time, and how these false images and customs are demystified and deconstructed by Rabindranath Tagore and Ted Hughes in their poems.*

**Key Words:** False image; religion; corrupt ideologies; consuetude; myth; demystification; deconstruction

“Religion stands, the church blocking the sun.”

---Stephen

Spender, *The Landscape near an Aerodrome*

In modern age, human life is considered as the continuous craving for a better and higher existence, but in reality it is an unending craving for money and mechanistic desires devoid of the true moral values, human touch and spirituality. In this world of materialism and physicality, religion assists to keep the moral conduct under the check by implanting the moral values into the hearts of common people. It sows the seed of peace by putting weeds aside from one's life. The bliss of religion befalls on each and every person irrespective of caste, creed, religion, race and social status. But in the present age, some people who wield the position of power-centre determine the true value of each aspect of life incorporating religion, gender, right and wrong. They decide what would be the true religion and what would be the right moral codes in the society renouncing the verses of God's Books. In "The Color Purple", Alice Walker also delineates how the hegemonic and superior temperament of White people provides the white image of Christ to claim their superiority over the Blacks, though in reality there is no any image of God. At present, people do not conform to the right verses of the Holy Books, but fabricate the false code of behaviour prevailing from generation to

generation. In this age, God is suffered from claustrophobia i.e. He is enclosed in the short space - Church, Temple, or Mosque though He is considered as omnipotent and omnipresent. By diverting from the right track of religion, some people develop some false values for their vested interests to continue their dominant position that ultimately corrupted the consuetude. Being socially aware of the absurdity of religion Rabindranath Tagore and Ted Hughes not only demystify the religion but deconstruct the notion of ideologically powerful institution by demystifying the whole social and cultural custom structured by the socially powerful people. Like Jacques Derrida who poses question at the fixed centre prevailing in the structure, Tagore and Ted Hughes pose questions at the corrupt central concept of religion and the corrupt central values prevailing in the societal structure.

In his Nobel Prize winning work *Gitanjali*, Tagore eulogizes God for His blessings and unique creation, but he excoriates the traditional concept of worship in which offering is only confined in the temple. People of the higher social status give the concept of temple and create the rules of offering for their vested interests. In temple, lowly people especially Dalits are not allowed to offer, and it is also believed that God is with them who will worship in the temple. Tagore deconstructs this claustrophobic concept of God by expanding the geographical area of God's places, and delineates that God is not present in the traditional claustrophobic place of temple.

In "LEAVE this Chanting and Singing and Telling of Beads!" by addressing the people Tagore illustrates that it is not necessary to offer the God by means of 'chanting, singing and

telling of beads', and of worship 'in the lonely dark corner of a temple'. God is absent where He is ought to be present. Traditional abode of God is a myth as it renounces the omnipresent trait of God in the enclosed place of temple. Ideologically synchronized temple forbids people to have the direct grace of God what Stephen Spender says in "The Landscape near an Aerodrome" the church (corrupt religion) blocks the sun's rays (God's grace) to fall on the people.

Whom dost thou

worship in this lonely dark corner of a

temple with doors all shut? Open

thine eyes and see thy God is not before

thee! (Tagore 49)

God responds to the offerings of all people irrespective of social status and caste. In traditional social structure, it is observed that the lowly people are not allowed to offer in the temple. The one and only duty of their life is to serve the people of higher class, and toil hard in field and in the most unhygienic places. The omnipotent God has created human beings to serve Him. He has created all other flora and fauna in order to serve the human beings. It means the role of less powerful objects is to serve the most powerful objects. Similar to this archetypal pattern of power, it is believed that the lowly people are born to serve the upper class people. It is also believed that only the high class people are in a position to have a close resonance with God as they spend a lot of money in offering and in construction of temple. Tagore takes into consideration this traditional notion of religion and by deconstructing it he proposes to leave the temple, and to go to the field where the lowly people are doing toiling works of 'tilling

the ground' and 'breaking stones' as God is with them, not in the temple. His place is not the enclosed ornamented temple, but 'He is with them in sun and in shower' and is within the temple all people. Hiranmay Bannerjee quoted from Tagore "God is not away from us, nor in churches. He is within us. He pervades unperceived, life and death, pleasure and pain, sin and piety, union and separation. This earth itself is his eternal temple. This live, conscious, colossal temple is being recreated constantly in a variety of new shapes. There is nothing new in it, there is nothing old in it. There is nothing static in it, everything in it is in constant flux and yet its profound unity, its reality and its abiding character is never lost, because in this flitting diversity an abiding truth is manifest" (Bannerjee 27). To Tagore, God being impersonal takes it abode not in particular place or any particular people, but is manifested in all mankind irrespective of their caste and creed. So people can only have a glimpse of God by serving to all humanity and with these humble people at a time of their liaison with these humble people by putting off their egoistic temperament and their aristocratic dresses. To Tagore, "the true worship of God consists in total identification with ordinary, suffering men, irrespective of self and power. The rich and the proud will never be in a position to understand God because they have no empathy with the poor and hence incapable of commingling with them. The fact is that the allurements of the glittering externals of life blinds the rich to the sorrows and sufferings of the poor" (Sharma, 191).

Meet

him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow. (Tagore 49)

Here Tagore does not only deconstruct the traditional concept of God, but by that he tries to create the pristine bond among all creatures. Tagore delineates that one can find 'Deliverance' only in this pristine bond that connects not only all creations irrespective of caste, creed, religion and social status, but all creations with God.

At last, he views that it is reasonable to adopt the humble life style of lowly people to have a bliss and glimpse of God leaving the meditations and offering flowers in the temple. It is a time to stand beside them and to toil with them, and to join with them "in toil and in sweat o thy brow".

By the process of demystification of religion, Tagore also demystifies the consuetude by striking a hard knock at the power struggle and at the ideologically structured society. The social dichotomy between bourgeois and proletariat is explicitly exhibited through their concerned works of luxurious offering in the temple and manual toiling in the field. The social dichotomy stems from the false ideologies prevailing in the religion and in society. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Indian social system was so much in a messy condition that in the name of integrity, there was only cultural boundary, disharmony and anarchy. The gap between two religions or two castes was like the distance between earth and sky, and their bond like the horizon.

The messy ambient of Indian social system is minutely documented in his poem "Where the Mind is Without Fear". Tagore here prays to God for India to make it an ideal land in which there will be no boundary, superstition, irrationalism, and discrimination on the name of caste, religion and social status that have been corroding the Indian society for past many years. These taboos

are instrumental in breaking down the socio-cultural fabric of Indian society. Through the prayer to God, Tagore demystifies the consuetude of India as from his prayer it is apparent that he prays to God to free India from those social taboos that are brewing in the society. He wants to renovate the social structure of India, and wishes to have a land based on rationality, equality, democracy and empirical temperament. He wishes to have a glimpse of deconstructed image of India, not a society based on irrationality and unconventional tradition. But by means of power, some people for their vested interests make the unconventional tradition the concurrent culture through the help of hegemony. Tagore prays to make India a utopian land of consensus by demystifying the concurrent consuetude. At that time, people were so much obsessed with the murky aspects that they accepted the corrupt culture as an inextricable part of their life that they believed was destined in their fate. Though there is a vast gap between the present culture and that time culture, yet people experience some taboos of that time prevailing in the present age. By excoriating the concurrent culture of India, Tagore prays for a land in which people can live with decorum and dignity by discarding fear of discrimination and torture from their mind, and by holding their heads high. There should be prevailing socialistic and democratic society, and the motto of Indian people would be 'liberty, equality, and fraternity'. There should be no social hierarchy and fear of power-centre. People should possess scientific and empirical temperament, and everybody has to have the right of self-expression. There should be no domestic boundary and discrimination based on religion, caste and creed. The only religion and identity of human beings would be 'humanity'. People

should lead their life on the path of truth, and truth should serve as torch-bearer of whole humanity. Though man is known for his imperfection what Alexander Pope says in his poem *An Essay on Criticism* "To err is human; to forgive, divine." he must strive for perfection. Man should be rational and empirical, and he should not bow down before "the dead habit". Man's mind should be vast like the ocean, not like the well. Man should enjoy all kinds of freedom and liberty without any fear and hesitation.

These values or traits were myth to the Indian people at that time. Therefore, Tagore prays to God to provide the real incarnation of these myths in India. So through prayer and demystification, Tagore here bitterly excoriates the socio-culture system of India and wishes for the deconstruction of whole social structure that is corrupt in nature.

In "DEITY of the Ruined Temple!" Tagore elicits the spiritual barrenness of human beings, and the seed of skepticism that develops in human's heart. Religion is understood in terms of ornamentation or decoration, not the abode of devotion. The old form of temple is now considered as out of fashion, so is incapable of worshipping. In temple –

The

broken strings of Vina sing no more

your praise. The bells in the evening

proclaim not your time of worship. (Tagore 249)

There is no chanting sound of human beings, but the "air is still and silent". The broken temple is full of sweet smell and tranquil air, yet it is a desolate dwelling in which nobody comes to

offer flower. In the materialistic and spiritually barren world, people forget to go to these sacred temples. They are now the abode of ghosts and animals. Here –

Many a festival day comes to you

in silence, deity of the ruined temple.

Many a night of worship goes away

with lamp unlit. (Tagore, 249)

There are many new created and ornamental images of God that are worshipped by thousands of people, but “Only the deity of the ruined temple/remains unworshipped in the deathless/neglect.” (Tagore 249)

In this poem, it is observed that the ruined temple becomes the abode of wanderers or desolate people who are helpless creature in the helpless world. Aristocratic people generally avoid these places and look for new better one. But in the first poem, Tagore has an opinion that for worship place is not matter, but devotion is the sole criterion for deliverance. It can be found everywhere. To Tagore, the revelation of God through worship does not mean “the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in goodness and love” (Tagore, Sadhana, 149). By excoriating the materialistic mentality and deconstructing the traditional notion of religion and temple Tagore suggests that to run after the God, not after the abode of God lest when they will “open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!” (Tagore 49). People should not look for the new images of God or new abodes of the God, but the new faith in the old body then they can find

deliverance. The traditional concept of ruined temple for the rustic and helpless people should be revamped in order to have the true grace of the God.

Unlike Rabindranath Tagore who has demystified the Hindu religion, Ted Hughes has demystified the whole creation of mankind, fall of man and origin of sin under the roof of Christianity. He demystifies not the corrupt religion that is prevailing in the society, but the myth mentioned in the Bible. His critical intention is directed towards the absurdity of God’s creation, not towards the corrupt religion.

In “A Childish Prank” Hughes deconstructs the story of creation of mankind by reversing the myth of creation mentioned in the Bible. In the Bible, it is mentioned that God has created first Adam, and then He has created Eve to make her the all time companion of Adam. God has provided them the free will and the permission to roam all places of the Eden of Garden except to eat the fruit of forbidden tree. But by coming under the trap and temptation of Satan disguised as the Serpent, Eve ate the forbidden fruit, and she also tempted Adam to taste the delicious flavour of the fruit. After tasting the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Adam and eve felt carnal urge in them that urged them to perform the copulative act of sin, “original sin” by violating the command of God. For their disobedience, God punished all the three offenders – Adam, Eve and the Serpent yielding death and woe in their life. On account of their disobedient work, they were debarred from the Garden of Eden, and the seed of discord was sowed in them. But Hughes in this poem altering the creation of mankind proposes that mankind is the process of evolution, not the product of creation. In the process of creation of mankind, Crow possesses

the position of Supreme Being or creator whereas God is only the passive observer, only sleeping. Here Crow, replica of the God, brings Adam and Eve into life from their death-in-life or spiritless stuff by instigating the dormant carnal desire in them. The copulative act that is considered as the sin by God paves the path for procreation in the world in which crow is represented as the real Creator, while the real creator God continues His undisturbed slumber.

“God went on sleeping.

Crow went on laughing.” (Hughes 15)

In “Crow’s First Lesson”, Hughes again deconstructs the story of the fall of man by altering the original story mentioned in the Bible. In this poem, God is striving to teach crow to utter the word “love”, based on which all creations were created. God has created all the creatures to love Him and to love one another. God has endeavoured to bring the crow under the framework of sweet world of love, but His attempt is futile as crow is unable to utter the word.

‘Love”, said God. ‘Say, Love.’

Crow gaped, and the white shark crashed into the sea

And went rolling downwards, discovering its own depth. (Hughes 16)

“Love is the first word God tries to teach Crow because God wishes all creation to be founded on it. But Crow can only express the principle of his own being, which is ‘entire with all the natural cruelty of things’. God curses and weeps, for the effect of a world of sharks, bluflies, tsetses, mosquitos and stifling sexuality upon man” (Sagar 115). In God’s every attempt, Crow fails

to utter the word “love”. But in His third and final attempt, human body comes from his mouth - first time man’s huge bodiless head and second time woman’s vulva, not the word “love”. The female organ falls upon the man’s part and annexes in such a way that God strives to separate them, but fails in His performing attempt. Like the previous poem, here Hughes is also poking fun at the traditional religious beliefs regarding the Creation and the concurrent notion of love and sex. In His lofty attempt to keep man and woman at bay, God fails to detain them from their copulative act that is generally considered as the mark of sin, and the detention of copulation as purity.

In these poems by altering the story of man’s creation, his disobedience and the fall; Hughes has completely deconstructed the myth of creation. Crow is depicted as the real creator of mankind, not the God who is only the passive observer of all the scenes. Crow’s unable to utter the word “love”, but throwing out the disgusting creatures every time like a shark, a bluefly, a tsetse, a mosquito, a man’s head and a woman’s vulva indicates his incapability of assimilating the universal bliss of love. Crow, the incarnation of black part of human beings denotes the false values which the modern Western man has developed in the consuetude. On account of their obsession with the false values, the consuetude becomes corrupted. This corrupt consuetude is demystified and deconstructed by Ted Hughes in order to ameliorate it.

Thus, it is viewed that Tagore demystifies the religion and the consuetude by exposing the false socio-cultural values prevailing as a concurrent customs in the society. He delineates that the concurrent traditional form of offering and religion are corrupt in nature as it is ideologically

structured by some unscrupulous people for their vested interests. In this ideologically structured trap, common people become the victims. They are devoid of all kinds of privileges and graces. Here Tagore deconstructs the traditional corrupt religion and corrupt consuetude, and elicits what would be right religion and right consuetude through the prayer. He documents that it is reasonable to realize the God through serving and love to all humanity; not through mere worship in the temple, and the society should be based on rationality, equality, fraternity, and truth. Ted Hughes also demystifies the religion and the consuetude by deconstructing the story of creation of mankind mentioned in the Bible and by exposing the orthodox religious beliefs regarding love and sex. He exposes the absurdity of God's creation, and deconstructs it by describing it as a myth. The modern scientific and rational people now take the creation of mankind described in the Bible as myth after the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. They believe that man is created by the long process of evolution, not the short process of creation within one day mentioned in the Genesis. He not only excoriates Christian religion but the corrupt consuetude in

which crow, incarnation of wicked part of mankind fails to assimilate love with his life.

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