

## Spiritual Humanism In Tagore's Gitanjali

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### Abstract:

*Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest Indian English poet, possessed a deep spiritual philosophy. He achieved international fame and recognition after writing Gitanjali which is a "transcreation" of the Bengali original. He has given a spiritual message in Gitanjali. It was for this work that he was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature. Indianness has a universal significance in his poetry. Tagore has exhibited that Indian sentiments, thoughts, emotions and imagery can also be expressed in English like any other India language. He has meditated deeply, observed very closely the behaviors of man in society, numerous phenomena of nature, manifestations, movements and actions of God with man. He has a very clear picture of position of man with respect to society, Nature and Almighty God. This paper focuses on Tagore Spiritual humanism in Gitanjali.*

**Key Words:** *Tagore, Gitanjali, Spiritual, Humanism, Universal.*

Tagore believes that detachment, asceticism and deliverance are counter balanced with the love of humanism. But he does not believe in renunciation of World of senses. He is of the opinion that relationship of soul with God is not possible without relationship of soul with man. Tagore says that God lies among human beings. He is in you, me and every living being. Consequently, to love everyone in this world is to love the Almighty and to serve mankind is to serve the God. God is not to be found in the temple but with the tiller, the stone-breaker and honest Labourers. He says in song no. 11 of Gitanjali, He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in rain and in

shower, and his garment is covered with dust.

He castigates the idolatory and the blind worship and advises the priests to give up their counting of beads, their singing and chanting of Mantras, and the worship of God in a secluded corner of the temple, with their eyes half-shut. He criticizes these things in song No. 11 when he says, "Leave this chanting and 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 God is before thee". Tagore thus glorifies the life of humble labour, and rejects the ascetic way of life. God lives in the company of companionless. The richness and artificial living do not have any impact on God. They rather take a man away from the God. This is what the holy Bible says; "Blesses are the poor for thy shall see the God." Tagore does not believe in deliverance from the bondage of birth and death through renunciation of life. He says that deliverance is merely an illusion He says in Song No 11,

*'Deliverance ? Where is this deliverance to be found ? Our master*

*has joyfully taken upon him the bounds of creation ; he is bound with us for ever.'*

He says that God Himself is not free as he has voluntarily bound Himself to the work of creation and to the objects he has created. How can then man ever hope to be free from bondage ? Deliverance is a mere illusion and the ascetic should accept life and perform the humble duties of life. Tagore differs from other mystics. His song "I shall never be an ascetic" embodies the firm resolve of the poet never to turn ascetic : " No my friends, I shall never leave my heart and home, and retire into the forest solitude If rings no mercy laughter in its echoing shade and if the end of so saffron mantle flutters in the wind with his fellow-men". Thus as a true humanist and spiritual realist, Tagore advocates an acceptance of life and its activity, not its rejection.

Songs of Gitanjali show that Tagore is a great poet of man. Many of his songs express his spiritual humanism and his sense of oneness with the poor and the downtrodden. N. K. Gupta opines : "Tagore is in direct line with those bards who sang of the spirit, the

falsehood and ugliness of a merely mundane life and lived in the underlying delights and beauties of a diviner consciousness.” Tagore believes that all human beings are creation of God. All human beings, irrespective of their religion, Nation, caste, colour or social status are brothers among themselves. Energy and strength of the same God runs in the veins of all humans. Humble humanity must not be viewed as ‘untouchable’. They must be given a supportive hand. A person in distress or misery must be co-operated with and helped. He castigates the India tradition of exclusiveness and isolation and criticizes the discrimination. He believes that man can not ignore his fellow-men for God is with needy and poor rather than with priest and Prince. Tagore’s spiritual humanism is further reflected in song no 35 of Gitanjali where he prays for his country’s redemption. He prays to God for an ideal state of living and development of his country. He prays that the citizens of his country should be fearless and should have a life of self-respect and dignity. There should be freedom of expression and there should be no division of humanity into caste, creed or nationality. He prays for

spiritual freedom, freedom from fear, narrow-mindedness and evil desires prevailing in the society. In this song Tagore says;

*“Where the mind is without fear and  
the head is held high;*

*Where knowledge is free;*

*Where the world has not been broken  
up into*

*Fragments by narrow domestic  
walls;*

*Where the words come out from the  
depth of truth;*

*Where the tireless striving stretches  
its arms towards perfection;*

*Where the clear stream of reason has  
not lost its way into the dreary desert  
sand of dead habit;*

*Where the mind is led forward by  
thee into ever-widening thought and  
action-*

*Into that heaven of freedom, my  
Father, let my country awake.*

The theme of humanism in itself covers the hollowness of Indian traditions and rituals. In song no 64, the poet expresses uselessness of religious rituals which are characteristic of Hinduism. True worship of God lies not

in the performance of rites and ceremonies but in extending a helping hand to the suffering and the needy. The poet's house is dark and lonely and he desperately wants to enlighten it. At dusk, he meets a girl on the desolate river bank with a lighted lamp in her hand and begs her to give him the lamp as he is in dire need of it. But the girl refuses to do so saying that she must float it on the river as required by customs and traditions. The poet sees it 'uselessly drifting' on the tide. In the same way he is refused a lamp which is "dedicated to the sky" and the poet sees it "uselessly burning" in void. Similarly many lamps are uselessly lighted to celebrate the festival of lamps but the poet's house remains dark. He pleads the girl to enlighten his house but she is busy with hollow rites of dedicating lamps to river and sky. The rich people dedicate their lamps to the empty sky and let them uselessly burn in the open air whereas the poor are bound to live in darkness as they can not afford even the light. Tagore through this song, brings out very poignantly the hollowness of Hindu orthodoxy and satirizes the pomp and callousness of the upper middle class who are quite indifferent to the

sufferings of their poor brethren. God lives among the poorest, the humblest and the lowliest and we must search him there. If a man worships God and discards the poor, the humble, his worship of God is not accepted and he can never find God. Service to the poor is accepted by God as his worship. Mingling with humble humanity on the terms of equality and participation in their day to day humble activities is the true worship of God.

The most dominating spirit of Gitanjali is the quest of God. But man realizes him only after spiritual illumination. Man is "frail vessel" whose own existence is short-lived and God fills it with fresh life. His immortal touch enrills the man with joy. Man should try to make himself worthy of union with God. Self-purification is essential for this mystic union with the God, which is also the starting point of his voyage for union. He wants to be in the company of God for a moment and feels restless when he is away from God. The man knows that the communion with humanity and participation in ordinary human activity is essential for spiritual growth and enjoyment. The man feels

His presence and wishes to meet Him but he finds himself chained with sensual pleasures. His little self which is proud assertive, arrogant and egoistic, is a barrier between his lofty individual soul and the infinite. He makes efforts to crush that little self to let his lofty soul grow in power and place it firmly before completing this earthy pilgrimage. There two parts make the man pass through two stages. One gives Joy and sorrow, parting and meeting and the other one gives the joy of spirituality and detachment. These two parts can not be parted as they are like light and shadow. It is very difficult to get rid of the little self which forms the ego of a person Tagore says in song no 30 of Gitanjali, "I came out alone on my way to my tryst. But who is this that follows me in the silent dark ? I move aside to avoid his presence but I escape him not.

*He makes the dust rise from the earth with his swager;*

*he adds his loud voice to every world that I utter.*

He is my own little self, my lord, he knows no shame; But I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company."

A man's ego is an obstacle in the way of his spiritual guest, It must be relinquished before attaining spiritual salvation. The root cause of everything that binds man is 'ego' which gives one the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. It can be got rid of only by enquiry and meditation.

Tagore says in song no 10

*"Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes of humble among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost".*

He makes it clear that those who shun the poor and the humble, can never find God. The true worship of God means mingling with humble humanity. The rich and the proud can never find God, for they keep aloof from the poor and the down-trodden. Wealth and consequent pride are obstacles in the way of communion with God. The poet wishes for freedom from wordly temptations and his grief is due to separation from God. But when the sudden illumination comes to him, he comes to know that God is always there in him, beside him and he is also a part of this Almighty.

All His creation is His part separated from Him. God is in every object. He is there in clouds, leaves, streams, golden light of sun and chirping of birds. This self-revelation, realization of God's presence in him is the spiritual illumination which makes his way very easy from the sea of eternity.

The song no 50 in Gitanjali stresses the virtue and power of charity and self-sacrifice. This song expresses Tagore's message that one gets in proportion to what one sacrifices. The poet in the guise of a beggar goes from door to door for alms. Suddenly he beholds a prince in a glorious chariot. The poet expects to get big amount in alms from the prince. But the poet is shocked at the act of the prince when he himself extends his palm towards the poet and asks him what he has to give him. The poet gives him the smallest grain of corn from his wallet. But when he returns home, he is surprised to find a little grain of gold in his wallet. He repents and realizes the value of giving. The message is that man must sacrifice and renounce his all. Then only he can realize God. The one who gives all, gets all. Total surrender to the will of God, complete self-sacrifice,

Perfect charity, and absolute renunciation of all our possessions- is the only way that leads to God. This song is a poetic version of the mythical story of Lord Krishna and his boyhood friend Sudama. Sudama, the friend of lord Krishna in the miserable state of poverty, remembers his friend and visits him in his rags. He offers Krishna some rice he carries with him. Krishna eats them with great pleasure and the each morsel that Krishna takes, makes Sudama wealthier. On reaching home, Sudama finds him flooded with wealth and splendor.

Tagore has attempted to 'visualize' God in man. Happiness of man is the happiness of God. Man should be kept in priority above God. God is Almighty and does not need worldly wealth and luxuries. It is rather man who needs materialistic growth to lead his life. It is raising the helping hand towards the needy, the weak and the humble which gives happiness to God and man gets His grace in return. Certainly, Rabindranath Tagore, with his sublimity and the theme of spiritual humanism, has surpassed the mankind with human touch and grace

and has made Gitanjali, the spiritual vendor to the entire world.

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