

MYSTICISM IN FIRST TEN VERSES OF GITANJALI BY R.N.TAGORE

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Gitanjali was published originally in Bengali in 1909. In 1912, receiving the help of English poets and publishers, Tagore was able to bring out his English translation, of *Gitanjali*. He was awarded Noble Prize for literature on the basis of English version of *Gitanjali*. Noble prize was the highest honors that any literary writer could have won. Just before the publication of this work, the British poet W.B. Yeats had carrying its manuscript with him for days, reading in railway trains, on omnibuses and in restaurants but he had often to close it lest someone could see how much he was feeling moved by reading through it. W.B. Yeats writers in this connection:

These lyrics display in their thought a world I have dreamt of all my life long. As the generation pass, travelers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of god a magic gulf where in their own bitter passion may breath and renew its youth.(204)

It is mysticism in *Gitanjali*, which stamps it as a great poetic triumph. The mysticism finds repeated expressions in various ways in these one hundred and three consolidated verses, dedicated to God. Tagore's mysticism finds its expression in the very first poem of *Gitanjali*, "Though hast made me endless, such it thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again and fillets it ever with life" (17).

Mysticism represents spiritual side of human mind and human personality. Man has some quality of beast; at same time has some attributes of God. Man surely has something of Satan in him, at same time angelic and divine in him. Both these sides of man show themselves in his thoughts, desires and in his deeds and actions. In most human being it is beastly or devilish or satanic side which dominates: but there are a few persons in whom spiritual and divine element is predominant (poem 3). Such person are called Mystics. Tagore gifted with these elements mentions in the outsets of *Gitanjali* :

At immortal touch of thy hands my heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable. Thy infinite gifts come to me only one these very small hands of mine. Ages pass and still thou pourest and still there is room to fill.(17)

Mysticism is spiritual force which has always done enormous good to mankind and every religion has had and still has its mystics. Hinduism has its mysticism enshrined in Vedas and Upanishads; Islam has its mysticism in Sufism; and Christianity in the person Jesus Christ and his followers. Mystics have preserved the spiritual heritage of mankind through ages; and among them name of Rabindranath Tagore occupies honorable position. The West began to regard Tagore as Mystic on basis of his *Gitanjali*.

Poems of *Gitanjali* are offerings, prayers, pleadings of traditional Indian devotional poetry, which find their expression in twentieth century, Bhakti movement. In the words of K.R.S. Iyngar :

Gitanjali songs are mainly poems of Bhakti in the great Indian tradition. We have Vaishnava poets and Saiva poets who seek God as a child seeks its mother, as lover

seeks his or her beloved Numerous are these gifted singers ,God intoxicated with the love of divine ,turning this love into pure poetry.

Every poems in Gitanjali is pregnant in the thoughts and feelings of mysticism .In poems No I, “Though hast...fillets it ever with fresh life” (17).

From above it is explicit that human body is mortal while human soul is immortal .The human body has been described as “frail vessel”, which is filled again and again with ever fresh life, after being emptied again and again .Poet conveys that human body is after all weak and it is exposed to all kind frame of his body of its contents but every time after emptying it, God fills it with ever fresh life i.e. soul. What the poet conveys to the readers is that, according to God’s wish, body dies but soul remains immortal ; and once again in the bodily form .In other words a man dies but he is born again because of soul’s immortality which has been conferred by the God.Vyas Maharshi has beautifully assisted the view of immortality of soul in Geetamritam :

Nainam cchidanti shastrani, nianm dahati pavaka!

Na chainam cledayantapo , na shoshayti marutah !! (GEETAMARITAM)

The above quoted lines of *Gitanjali* can also be made for its symbolic interpretation .Here poet compares God to potter and human body to pot. Potter can frame pot in any desired shape .Similarly God infuses soul in human body. Human body is weak and fragile as clay pot. Man dies and born again in transfigured chapel which is again as per the wish of God .All this can be compared to “Leela” of traditional Hindu religious philosophy .The poet conveys that God is giver and man is receiver. Soul the gift of God has infinite possibilities .This gift is never drained out for continuous process of filling it with fresh ligh.K.RS.Iynger view may be relevant in the context:

The human body is temple of soul; the human soul is temple of God .The human soul is naught unless it is inhabited or filled by the spirit. Birth and death are but.....
(111).

The faith in immortality of soul by W.B.Yeats in sailing to Byzantium is worth mentioning, “Caught in the sensual music all neglect, /Monuments of unageing intellect”(stanza 1).

Here W.B.Y EATS has beautifully carried the presence and significance of immortality of soul. He says that under the power of sensual pleasure, young do not pay any attention to significance to soul which is “unageing intellect”. He implies that human soul is first principal of intelligence, which is eternal and every young. Young person live in the world of sense neglecting the invisible immortal soul.

Further in poem No. 1 Tagore goes on describing the Omni- presence of God by comparing himself with flute and God to a musician .It is inspiration and light from God which make poet sing , “ This little flute of reed thou has carried over the hills and dales and has breathes through it melodies eternally new” (14).

God is the master musician and poet is flute. God himself is the supreme authority who reigns this world. It is he who is responsible for producing everlasting and ever fresh melodies in the human flute. What poet conveys is; God radiates its divine message throughout universe. His messages are fresh, inspiring and ever new. God plays his flute everywhere and every time. Songs of the poets have been possible due to divine inspiration and divine impulses showered by God in from of melodies music .So the poet pays his gratitude to God expressing large heartedness, “At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart looses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable”(14).

Tagore further tries to establish communion with God saying that it is only through the poem of dedication and devotion, and praise of God. When the contact has been established, the poet

feels elated. God is in fact creator and Lord. A subsidiary idea that God takes pleasure in poet's composing song of worship and it is only through such song written in praise of God that the poet can dare to approach God, "I touch by the age of the far spreading wings of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach" (16).

Tagore's faith in existence of God is asserted when he says: "Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body ..." (18). God is source of energy and source of life. God is present inside human being in form of eternal and everlasting energy. So to make his life worthy, he prays God to facilitate the purity of mind and the purity of body. Purity of mind means freedom from all kind of sinfulness and vices. By the purity of body poet means resistance to all sorts of temptation of the flesh; spiritual purity means avoidance of all types of evils existing in this world. Even the sage Vikramaditya was caught in sensual desire when the nymph named Meneka appeared before her in full beauty. Range of evils and sinfulness in this world is unlimited and the now which the poets take is difficult to attain. Ajay Singh writes:

In *Gitanjali* Tagore vows to keep his body pure because God is life of life and poet eternally feels that his "loving touch" is always in his body. (188).

Tagore pleads for permanent presence of God which is essential of a mystic. When the poet is not in the association with God his life seems to be distasteful. He wants to enjoy the presence of God first and worldly joys afterwards. This is mentioned in the following lines by Tagore:

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows neither rest nor respite
and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil. (19)

Worldly activities are never going to last. One, who is entangled in worldly duties and responsibilities, will never find an escape from them; but the poet wants to snatch sometime from this busy world to enjoy divine light and peace of mind.

In song No. VI Tagore prays God, "Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! / I fear lest it droop and frap in the dust" (20). In order to render itself to the service of God, poet prays to God that He should accept him as early as He can lest he should be spoiled by making temptations to worldly sensual pleasures. After he had fallen in these allurements, he won't be fit for divine services which are must to be rendered in order to attain perfect proximity to God. At the present stage of his life, his body and soul are pregnant in freshness and energy similar to a young flower. Later on his energy would lose its power and strength for divine purpose; hence forth the poet would be worthless in this world like a withered and faded flowers, fallen to dust. So the poet wants timely engagement in dedication to God. Beside this poet by giving life and soul in all living creatures this faith in universal presence of soul throughout nature is called "Pantheism", which is a part of mysticism.

Poet pleads for simplicity and straightforwardness and exactness in life. True life does not report to false ornamentation. Simplicity and plainness is hall marks of divine life. The use of decorative devices falsifies divinity in a man. Poet is seeking God and wants to pay homage through his song but embellishment would impart only artificiality. So Tagore does not feel proud of his poetry. The poet; looks upon the God as master of all poets and masters musicians because music and poetry flow from him both are the same thing.

My song has put off her adornments; imagery of bride putting off her ornaments and bright dress is vivid and sensuous which establishes closest possible contact between her body and body of her husband. Even though the meaning is spiritual, the poem like many others in *Gitanjali* is an example how mysticism can be mingled with sensuousness. The same meaning can be drawn from the lines extracted from Prayer for My Daughter, "May she be granted beauty and yet no/Beauty to make stranger's eye draught /or her before looking glass" (222).

Here poet, W.B. Yeats prays to God that his daughter may be granted beauty but not that much beauty which can make lover mad with love or mad with pride. What the poet asserts is that, the life of his daughter should be simple, without any decoration or ornamentation for adornments produce pride and vanity which destroy the spiritual relationship between lover and beloved and ruining their whole life. Symbolically spiritual life between man and God is destroyed by the onslaught of vanity and pride. Tagore says: "...ornamentation would mar our union: (20)

Mystical tone of Tagore echoes in the following lines of songs No. X. "here is the and there rest thy feet where live ..." (21). God is nearer to the poorest, the humblest and the companionless people. Proud man does not visit these people. So he can not reach God. The point which is brought home is that the proud man never hopes to attain communion with God. It is explicit now; if we want to worship God; we must be ready to worship the poorest, the lowliest and the humblest.

H.M. Williams points out, *Gitanjali* certainly contains most religious of Tagore's poems, though the religion is lyrical and vague, a type of pantheism, with echoes of Hindu Vaishnavite poetry (love of Radha and Krishna) and even Christian religious feelings for God as Father and Redeemer. But he does, not agree that *Gitanjali* has any mysticism.

A mystic has faith in existence of God and in the immortality of soul. But he cannot prove it by any kind of logic or rational arguments. Tagore perceives existence of God and immortality of soul, within himself and in every living objects. And he does it instinctively. A mystic has these perceptions constantly without feeling doubt about it. He experiences an illumination within his mind and heart by the gift of divine impulse (music). He becomes engrossed with his inner spiritual experience that he loses interest in worldly affairs at that time. Tagore was not mystic in that sense. He did believe in the reason. He did not become indifferent to the world outside. He was mystic in limited sense. He was mystic in longing of his soul for a communion with God, of course, he was mystic in the perception of God in every object in living nature and universe which is known as "Pantheism". He was mystic in teaching lessons of detachment from worldly concerns but he never taught complete renunciation of the world for the sake of one's 'spiritual regeneration'

Tagore's interpretation for the devotee's love of Supreme being in all its multifarious expressions. In the first ten songs it appears as the love of lover for beloved, of friend for friend, of mother and child, of master and servant. As Vivekanand to explain s' "The whole universe is to us a writing of the infinite in the language of finite" (101). Though the life of Rabindranath Tagore was not the life of a mystic, the poems of *Gitanjali* are beyond all doubts, the poems of mysticism.

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