

SPIRITUAL IMAGES IN TAGORE'S *GITANJALI*

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Gitanjali is Rabindranath Tagore's best known poem for which he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Many of the verses in *Gitanjali* are beautiful prayers written after a gut-wrenchingly painful period in Rabindranath Tagore's life, during which he lost his father, wife, daughter and a son in quick succession. His unfathomable pain and unshaken devotion to God are captured in the moving prose verses of *Gitanjali* which Tagore dedicated as "Song of Offerings".

Image means an expression evocative of an object of sensuous appeal and it usually serves to make an impression more precise. It carries the mind from too close a dwelling on the original thought. It is the little world picture used by a poet or a prose writer to illustrate, illuminate, and embellish his thought. Image is a description of an idea by comparison or analogy, stated or understood. Image transmits to us through the emotions and it arouses something of the wholeness, the depth and richness of the way the writer view's conceives or has felt what he is telling us.

Imagery is all pervasive in Tagore's poetry and it gives a kind of unit to it. An epithet, a metaphor or a simile may create an image. Imagery constitutes the main charm in poetic composition. In absence of image, poetry is dull and monotonous and fails to move and thrill the Readers. Images are like a series set at different angles so that as the theme move on, it is reflected in a number of different aspects. Images are magic mirrors they do not merely reflect the theme but they give it life and form. It is their power to make a spirit visible. Tagore's poetry is distinguished by the use of numerous beautiful images, romantic metaphors and suggestive symbols which are worth nothing for their mystical depth, romantic beauty, exotic, freshness and sheer poetic beauty. It gives concrete expression to the poet's emotions and contributes to the poetic charm of his poetry that is already touching and emotionally powerful.

The most prominent string in *Gitanjali* is man's relationship with God. In song -1 Tagore expresses that the immortal touch of thy hand God's hand fills the poet's heart with limitless joy which can be ineffable. The poet compares himself with frail vessel and a little flute of a reed. Tagore's prayers are unusual that he never asks for power for himself or other Tagore's imagery is functionally illustrative, decorative, evocative and emotive. It imparts clarity, pictures queerness and concreteness to his thought and experience. Poem 01 "Thou Hast Made Me Endless" the poet categorically says that spiritual life is the emancipation of consciousness. It is through this that we get immediate response of soul everywhere. When the Almighty touches the devotee, his whole being is transported into another world which is beyond description. Then in the poem 02 - "When Thou Commandest" the devotee expresses great pleasure because he feels that when God commands him to sing, his heart overflows with pride and pleasure. In the exuberance of joy he forgets that God is his lord and forlorn he calls him as his friend. Again in

the next poem no. 03 - "I know Not How Thou Singest" the poet is baffled by the Almighty's singing prowess. The divine music breaks through all obstacles and barriers and mesmerizes him. The music makes him a slave in the hands of God and he fondly loves his state of slavery. In poem 10 - "Here is Thy Footstool" the poet dearly declares that the Lord is always present among the poorest, lowliest and lost section of the humanity. The message is loud and clear that service of humanity is the service of God

In poem 11 - "Leave This Chanting and Singing" he again exhorts all to look for the presence of God, where the tiller is tilling the ground and the path maker is beating stones, meaning thereby that God is where work is and he is not to be found in the closed precincts of a temple. Tagore explicates that God stands by the poor and the down-trodden and God wears humble clothes and shares the problem of the poorest, lowliest the lost. Again the message is loud and clear that "Work is worship". Do your part of work honestly and that is the greatest form of worship. The poet also deliberates upon deliverance, he strongly opines that deliverance can also be attained in the toil and sweat of one's own work. In poem 12 - "The Time That My Journey Takes", the poet again talks in spiritual terms. He feels that sometimes people treat their God in the same way as in some forms of government the King is treated, who has traditional honour but no effective authority. The true meaning of God has remained vague because our consciousness of the spiritual unity has been thwarted. Lastly when the devotee is uncertain about the presence of God but after sometime realizes that the Lord is omnipresent. In poem 14 - "My Desires are Many", the devotee laments that his desires and wishes are many and the lord was justified in refusing many of them. He is gratified by the gifts of God that he has endowed on all of us without anybody's asking - Day by day thou art making me worthy of the simple, great gifts that thou gravest to me unasked this sky and the light, this body and the life and the mind - saving one from perils of overmuch desire".

In the poem 30 - "I came out Alone on My way to My Tryst" underlines all pervasive presence of God every time. "I came out alone on my way to my tryst. But who is this that follows me in the silent dark ?" It implies that the devotee always has feeling that he has constant company of someone, and this someone is God himself, who is always with his devotees in thick and thin. This has echoes of 'The Waste Land'.

In song -35, he asks for freedom not from foreign yoke, but from narrow domestic wall and dead habit. In song -36, he appeals to God to strike at the root of penury in his heart to raise his mind high above daily trifles and to give him the mental strength to resist tyranny. In song-38, he resists 'desires and distract' repeatedly says that 'I want thee, only thee'. In song-39 he prays to God to come with the shower of mercy when his heart becomes 'hard and parched up' to come with his 'light and thunder' when desire deludes him to give him peace and rest' as he is surrounded by din and tumult on all sides. Briefly, in Tagore's poems one could observe that Tagore prays for spiritual awakening in himself and in the world.

Tagore's *Gitanjali* is one of the masterpieces of Indian English poetry and it is a song of offering to the Deity. The following is suggestive of the poet's spiritual intensity and the sheer uselessness of material possessions which abstract spiritual fulfilment in *Gitanjali* song -28. 'Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when I try to break tem. Freedom is all I want, but to hope for it I feel ashamed. I am certain that priceless wealth is in thee, and that thou art my best friends, but I have not the heart to sweep away the tinsel that fills my room. The shroud that covers me is a shroud of dust and death; I hate it, yet hug it in love. My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy, yet when I quake in fear lest my prayer be granted'.

One can find the following types of images in Tagore's poetry: (i) Direct images: The Poet's visions, dreams and fancies are expressed by means of picturesque and concrete fancies; in (*Gitanjali* Song I). "This Frail vessel thou emptiest again and again and fills it ever with fresh life" (ii) Figurative images: The poet expresses his visions, emotion and experiences through metaphor, simile, and personification and mythological or legendary images. (*Gitanjali* Song no. 2) "All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea." (iii) Reciprocal images: The poet reveals himself through images in which the tenors and vehicles reciprocate for instance; in *Gitanjali* both the poet and God appear to be signers. Both are related to music imagery (*Gitanjali* Song no. 2) "I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a signer I come before thy presence. I touch by the edge of the for-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach. Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friends who are my lord".

There is a profusion of Nature imagery in Tagore's poetry. Most of the illustrative poetic images are drawn from nature. The imagery that the poet repeatedly uses consists of images of Flower, Bird, Light, Darkness, River, Sea, Cloud, Evening, Boatmen; Beggars, Travelers on the road and shepherds with the Flutes. "Flowers and Rivers, the blowing of conch shells, the heavy rain of Indian July or the parching heat are images of the moods of the heart in union or in separation and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing on a flute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself.

Nature imagery is expressive of Tagore's instance love of nature and his minute observation of its beauties and charms. It also imparts a pastoral touch and freshness of his poetry. In 40 verses we find a union of cloud, storm, shower, rain, lightening, heat etc. The images explain the whole scientific process of the formation of clouds and rainfall. Tagore's heart has become a stranger to the feelings of divine love and service of the fortunate and the helpless. He uses the draught rain to depict his spiritual state. His feelings and deeds are like a state of drought in his heart cloud and rainfall symbolizes the soul's thirst for the eternal its struggles and the feelings of hops for reunion with him. The abstract mystical feeling has been expressed in highly picturesque and suggestive images in *Gitanjali* song – 21, Tagore says - "The rain has held back for day and days, my God, in my arid heart the horizon is fiercely naked not the vaguest hint of distant coal shower. Send thy angry storm, dark with death if it is thy wish and with lashes of lightening startle the sky from end to end".

Rabindranath Tagore gives the beautiful image of man. The Poet is a traveller. He is going to his journey and the path of his like had come to its end and the path was closed. His life had come to an end and so it was time for the traveller to recite to take rest at some safe place where nobody knows him. The Boatman symbolizes God or Death. The sailing of the Boat is the journey of life, and the other bank of the river stands for the unknown, which can be attained only through death. In *Gitanjali*, song - 37, Tagore gives the imagery of death. "I thought that my Voyage had done to its end as the last limit of my power-point the path before me was closed that provisions were exhausted and the time comes to take shelter in a silent obscurity. But I find that thy will knows no end in me. And when old world die out on the tongue new melodies break forth from the heart and where the old tracks are lost new country is revealed with its wonders."

Indian classical mythology greatly influenced Tagore and derived most of the images in *Gitanjali* and the other works from it. God is the lover or the Bridegroom coming from afar or waiting outside for the pride or the beloved. He plays on flute. He is the eternal Krishna and Radha cannot resist his call. The 'Vaishnava poets' and the 'Gita' provide Tagore a rich and

varied treasure of imagery. Deeply influenced by the 'Gita', Tagore thinks that the human body is the temple of the soul; the human soul is the temple of God. His immortality expresses in the verse *Gitanjali* song - 1 "This little Flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales and hast breathed through its melodies eternally new". All these images combine the abstract conception of the Vedantic, Absolute and it does create manifestation. The poet through these mytho-mystical symbols creates the play of love and beauty and thus strives to express and absolute truth and beauty beyond the scope of imagery.

There is a profusion of imagery and symbolism in the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore which are evident from the abundance of illustrations from *Gitanjali*. It should be noted that the poet does not use them deliberately for any specific purpose. They come to him automatically and spontaneously. These images and symbols not only lend grace but also help the reader to comprehend the poet's mind and heart easily. They concretize the abstract, familiarize and unfamiliar and spiritualize the sensuous and the material. Rabindranath Tagore achieves a rare blending of simplicity and sublimity.

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