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Rabi Baul's *Gitanjali* is a confluence of Opposites

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Abstract:

Tagore's *Gitanjali* inspired by the Bauls of undivided 'Banga' is the culmination of his poetic achievement. The paper tries to point out the rare quality of Tagore who dealt the contradictory ideas with equal ease and endeavour. He himself is the product of dependent India. Indians were dominated more by the dogmas, traditions and superstitions in an ambiance of ignorance in dependent India rather than the colonizers. Tagore simplified the constitution of poetry to deal with the age old problems of the country in an easiest possible way. Blake wrote in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* "without contrary, no progression". Through his compositions, Tagore imbibed and assimilated the essence of all petty rustle of race and religion of a region and tussle of colour and culture of a country. And as an end product he was able to deliver the nectar of his life to those poor Indians and tried to emancipate their ragged and bagged souls just like Lord Shiva. Therefore, this paper aims to highlight his earnest attempt to dilute the deadly jolts of ambiguity. The paper also pinpoints his pangs especially those areas where he struggles to bring a solution and bugles at last the victory of humanity through his compositions.

To evaluate the soul above materialism, to establish a perfect communion between men, his surroundings and the ultimate reality, the *Gitanjali* poems hold mirror to the poet's mystical experiences. The central theme of *Gitanjali* is devotion. As the name of the book suggests that these songs are an offering to the supreme- the Almighty God. Each flower of beautiful lyric is a symbol of love and pure devotion towards the eternal one. The constant and intense yearning of the poet, the reunion between the individual soul and the Infinite makes *Gitanjali* a mighty piece of prayer, pleading and exaltation. The present paper is an illustration of Tagore's genius which includes all the binaries for the sake of a creation which is bountiful by nature and beautiful in essence. For the purpose, the research paper attempts to showcase the same through three steps namely the binaries of soul and self, God and Nature or physic and psyche; East and West Bengal and East and West.



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First:

According to Tagore, man is a part of this inscrutable, Immanent God. The finite is a part of the infinite when God has created after putting a barrier in Him. Man should be lost in the grief of separation because ultimately he has to meet his creator- the father of mankind. Man is the coloured shadow of God who is the impelling source in man. He is the 'innermost one' who awakens my being within his deep hidden touches'. But man forgets about his truth and seeks Him everywhere with an unsatisfactory feeling and insatiable soul.

The human soul, which is part of the Divine forgets this very fact and tempted by worldly possessions and affections. The human soul has no significance unless it is fulfilled by the spirit of God. Birth and Death are but filling and emptying of soul by the supreme soul and in this way human soul is immortal. The lifeless reed comes into life when Lord Krishna plays upon it. He is the guiding spirit- the source of illumination, enlightenment and courage. The God is the impelling source rather force who moves man to the raptures of joy and sorrow.

As man pines for and craves for God, He, too, hankers after man. This mutual desire is one of the chief characteristics of Tagore's mysticism. The concept of God takes many forms in *Gitanjali*. The poet considers God as the 'father of creation' and prays him to make his country an ideal one. Tagore also sees God as his mother because mother showers her affection on her child and expects nothing in return. Again, the poet considers the innocence of the children as an inspiration and means to understand the secrets of God's creation.

Nature and God, Tagore says, as in Vedic terminology is '*Prakriti*' and '*Purusha*' - the two aspects of the Absolute. Meditation and contemplation for Nature lead to realization of the God. God expresses himself through various forms of nature. Nature is the source of joy and the expression of God's love and affection for mankind. Thus, the best form of worship and the process of ultimate realization are parallel to enjoy the beauties of Nature. Hence, God and man remain bound in one dissoluble tie and the truth of one is not different from that of the other.

God, for Tagore, is eternal, all pervasive, immanent, inevitable, omnipresent and omnipotent spirit. The poet here takes God to be the perfect singer and his creation as his song. Mankind is like a flute through which he sings His eternal songs:

I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amazement. 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. My heart longs to join in thy song, but vainly struggles for a voice. I would speak, but speech breaks not into song, and I cry out baffled. Ah, thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master! (Poem no 3)

Tagore beautifully enmeshed the contradictory concepts of life i.e. creation and death i.e. destruction. The mystery of life and death, he depicted, is taken from common human lives to solve the riddle of obscure human truth:

And because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well. The child cries out when from the right breast the mother takes it away in the very next moment to find in the left one for the consolation. (Poem No 47)

There are hardly handfuls who can express the inexpressible through the help of such a common experience. It is nothing but his uniqueness which magnifies to make an eye opening research. He views that destruction is the base for reconstruction. Constant movement embodies the spirit of life. But when the river signifying life gets stuck towards the end of its journey, it needs the flow of relishing rain to reach towards confluence. Similarly, a ragged, shattered and battered person also needs the enthusiasm, energy and ebb and tide to enable him to end the course. According to him, death is not the negation of life rather a gateway to appear for the race of new beginning of life. Main is the spirit i.e. soul. Body is the container only. It may change according to the situation and condition. It is rather prone to change but the spirit bears the vitality of life. He says "Death belongs to life, as birth does". In his life he has undergone a series of deaths. Bereaved poet tries to comprehend the devastation and the consequent depravity done through death. But surprisingly he in the process perceives a poignancy of positivity i.e. death itself the deliverer. He sings: "Oh! thou last fulfilment of life, Death, come and whisper to me!"

His creation gets a sense of completeness through death. Death is nothing about loss. Death is deathless, it is a process of renewal of life that moves unnoticeably. That is why Tagore was quite overshadowed by the theme of death. A bunch of poems are simply preoccupied with the throbbing thrill of death so much so that sometimes he is haunted by a sudden sense of self annihilation. He writes:

On the day when death will knock at thy door what will thou offer to him? Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life- I will never let him go with empty hands. All the sweet of all my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life I will place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door. (Poem No 90)

He invariably understood that journey i.e. is life is meaningless without rest i.e. death rather journey gets a



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culmination through rest.

Unlike Hardy, Donne or Jibanananda Das who always pinned the gloomy and the shadowy aspect of death, Tagore celebrates death. His philosophy is very simple. His lyrics are a perfect combination of simplicity, sublimity and spontaneity. It is verse which can reach at the bottom of heart which is otherwise unfathomable. Therefore, he can easily unbolt the bolts of spiritual illumination and divine communion. Poem No 38 reflects the same:

That I want thee, only thee- let my heart repeat without end. All desires that distract me, day and night are false and empty to the core. As the Light keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light, ever thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry- 'I want thee, only thee.' As the storm still seeks its end in peace when it strikes against peace with all its might, even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love and still its cry is- 'I want thee only thee.'

Through birth, man descends from the abode of God to complete his incomplete tasks on earth in the form of a child, the emblem of God. After playing his action 'that struts and frets upon the stage' of life 'Signifying nothing', he gets an opportunity to retreat to God only through death. In a different expression death is a kind of "homecoming" to Tagore. Therefore, unlike anybody, Tagore yearns for death for the deliverance.

Tagore's philosophy brings the opposite ideas like illusion and truth to the fore for the purpose of living a life. These are ideally very confusing contradictory ideas. The world which is real is full of illusion. On the other hand, without appearance, reality is meaningless or without illusion truth is baseless. *Maya* is a creation of the absolute. What is great in Tagore is that to solve these binaries, he took recourse to another binary i.e. deathless soul and destructible self. Tagore is of the view that man is also the part of the infinite though he is having a finite existence. Whatever is the existence infinite or finite, the soul is always infinite and imperishable entity because it directly commutes with the creator. Man can feel the infinite even in finite space; he can enjoy the absolute being in a limit. But when he is encompassed by ego, impulse and possession, he alienates himself from the infinite bond. That is why he becomes chained by a busy and hectic schedule and materialistic and selfish life. Subsequently, he becomes a prey to doom and disappointment. Tagore says in Poem No 72:

He it is, the innermost one, who awakens my being with his deep hidden touches. He it is who puts his enchantment upon these eyes and joyfully plays on the chords of my heart in varied cadence of pleasure and pain. He it is who weaves the web of this maya in evanescent hues of gold and silver, blue and green, and lets peep out through the folds his feet, at whose touch I forget myself. Days come and ages pass, and it is ever he



who moves my heart in many a name, in many a guise, in many a rapture of joy and of sorrow.

But if he is able to unveil the shades of illusion layered mainly due to his ignorance, the real nature of the soul begins to experience the touch of divinity and shines in His grace. Human soul, according to Tagore, should aspire for 'thine' but it is *aham* which directs it towards 'mine'. Through this unhealthy clash between atman and aha mot 'mine' and 'thine', fortune decides a decline. Tagore is meticulously pointing out that within 'atman' lives the 'man'. Man should be directed at '*at*'man. The poet says the success of *atman* of the soul lies in diffusing itself with the world and the soul can find its truth when it unifies with others in the world. Poem no 67 is a beautiful illustration of the same:

Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well. O thou beautiful, there in the nest it is thy love that encloses the soul with colours and sounds and odours. There comes the morning with the golden basket in her right hand bearing the wreath of beauty, silently to crown the earth. And there comes the evening over the lonely meadows deserted by herds, through trackless paths, carrying cool draughts of peace in her golden pitcher from the western ocean of rest. But there, where spreads the infinite sky for the soul to take her flight in, reigns the stainless white radiance. There is no day nor night, nor form nor colour, and never, never a word.

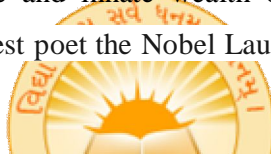
His creation is a type a manifestation. The poet clarifies two opposite sides of his creation. He exemplified through the symbols of flower and sword. The sky in the poem represents the infinite while the nest is an emblem of finite. Man's quest for God is infinite. He cries for the divine soul but does not understand that he himself is part of the infinite. The mystic poet mystifies with his mysticism unlike other mystics who think renunciation to be the only way to be united with God. On the contrary he not only holds back the spirit of renunciation but also makes a way to experience the ultimate reality of the nature and the nature of God. He writes:

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim. My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame and place them before the altar of thy temple. No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight. Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love. (Poem No 73)

Instead of this, he wants to be with God "where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones" (Poem No 11).

**Second:**

It is possible that Tagore, the brightest star in the constellation of poets throughout the world, may be able to detain him from the contemporary folk culture which runs in the blood of Bengalis. The poet is as famous in music as in poetry, and his poems find an overture with contemporary religious and philosophical doctrines. The affinity between Tagore and Bauls of Bangladesh is very common. What is noteworthy is that two different cultures between two different countries within East, difference in religion between Hindu and Muslim, difference of social standards high and low and difference in personality especially regarding education do not affect or move him rather he was moved by their creation. He tries to bridge up the gaps of cultures in all respects. He has had the intuition to find something great out of a very ordinary and commonplace subject and can perceive very well the true knowledge through the eyes of a common man. He is very inquisitive by nature to see the unseen and to know the unknown and inspires those who devote themselves in this pursuit. He roams with a thirsty heart and a pair of untiring eyes though they are mature and philosophical. In order to find pure and innate wealth of undivided 'sonar bangla', he came in association of those Bauls. Bengal's greatest poet the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore wrote about the Bauls:



One day I chanced to hear a song from a beggar belonging to the Baul sect of Bengal...What struck me in this simple song was a religious expression that was neither grossly concrete, full of crude details, nor metaphysical in its rarefied transcendentalism. At the same time it was alive with an emotional sincerity, it spoke of an intense yearning of the heart for the divine, which is in man and not in the temple or scriptures, in images or symbols... I sought to understand them through their songs, which is their only form of worship.

Through his composition "*Amr sonar bangla ami tomai valobasi*" (Swarabitan 46), he not only pays homage to the mother earth but also brings a thread of unison. He heartily accepted those poor music minstrels having no formal erudition of education, identity of religion and colour of culture. What he meant to say is that man himself should be the religion which should be "the religion of man". Therefore, he was deeply seduced by the composition of those singers whose skill on poems, language and rhythmic variety cast a spell on him. It was an eye opening incident to the so called aristocratic educated society of West Bengal. But Tagore's inclination brings about a change. Ultimately Tagore interest in them unties the rigid knot between two countries, cultures, religions and traditions.

**Third:**

The concept of West regarding Tagore was not at all sensitive. Yasunari Kawabata, the first Noble Laureate in literature from Japan considers him as 'sage like poet'. It at once connects with the idea that India is a country of sages and snake charmers. Invariably it is not a respectable term from an Indian perspective. Nevertheless it invites a series of heated discussions among all irrespective of culture, academic and others. Tagore's appearance is typically Indian with long beard and non-western dress. According to the West, he appears to be as 'some ancient Oriental wizard'. Surprisingly after the publication of *Gitanjali* and especially the unique translations of his own compositions sets the West into a whirlwind of debate and confusion inciting a sense of surprise and subsequent shock. The same appearance of Tagore turned out to be colossus after such an incident. Frances Cranford told William Rothenstein that he could now imagine a powerful and gentle Christ. He could never experience it before. It was Ezra Pound who first exclaimed the talent of Tagore to bring humanity to the world at a time of 'war of world'. Under the threatening and terror ridden ambiance, existence seems to be not only meaningless but also odd. But it was Yeats who had gone unnoticed the vibrant intonation of peace under the threat of world war. Here again in such a confusing state of 'war and peace', it is obvious power will dominate and reign. But Tagore could rain the shower of peace under such a critical condition of parched and arid humanity. Tagore wrote:

When the heart is hard and parched up, come upon me with a shower of mercy. When grace is lost from life, come with a burst of song. When tumultuous work raises its din on all sides shutting me out from beyond, come to me, my lord of silence, with thy peace and rest. When my beggarly heart sits crouched, shut up in a corner, break open the door, my king, and come with the ceremony of a king. When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust, thou holy one, thou wakeful, come with thy light and thy thunder. (Poem No -39)

Tagore is such an icon that never leaves any scope of criticism. He is an image that clears its surface after defacing through creation to face another challenge. The mutual appreciation of Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats invited the warmth of Western ideology. In 1935, he faced another face of Yeats who reversed his statement and inferred him the title, 'Damn Tagore'. The cry for affinity and amicability decries the Western perspective. Readers must be aware of the fact that he did not fully shunned off the acceptance of Tagore rather he continued to share logical inputs regarding his prose writing. Amartya Sen beautifully illustrated Yeats' concern of Tagore's writing:

Poetry is, of course, notoriously difficult to translate, and anyone who knows Tagore's poems in their original Bengali cannot be satisfied with any of the translations. Even the translations of his prose works suffer, to some extent, from distortion.

E. M. Forster also noted in one of his reviews of one of the translations of Tagore *The Home and the World*



in 1919: "The theme is so beautiful but the charms have vanished in translation or perhaps in an experiment that has not quite come off". Finally the jolt can be summed up by Amartya Sen. He writes:

Tagore himself played a somewhat bemused part in the boom and bust of his English reputation. He accepted the extravagant praise with much surprise as well as pleasure, and then received denunciations with even greater surprise, and barely concealed pain. Tagore was sensitive to criticism, and was hurt by even the most far-fetched accusations, such as the charge that he was getting credit for the work of Yeats, who had "rewritten" *Gitanjali*. (This charge was made by a correspondent for *The Times*, Sir Valentine Chirol, whom E.M. Forster once described as "an old Anglo-Indian reactionary hack.") From time to time Tagore also protested the crudity of some of his overexcited advocates. He wrote to C.F. Andrews in 1920: "These people ... are like drunkards who are afraid of their lucid intervals."

At last it can be concluded by saying that Tagore is a station where all the parallel and unparallel lines meet together. His *Gitanjali: the Song Offerings* means exactly the same. God can be different in different religions, the ritual or the process may be different and even the language used to chant God may be different but the offering or the urge of offering is same and identical. *Gitanjali* bears such quintessential virtue of offering to the Almighty. It knows no race, religion, ritual and language but offers a sense of sacrifice and oneness to achieve divinity in life. He firmly believed in variety within capacity, sublimity in simplicity and unity in diversity. Therefore, any confusion, contradiction or confrontation does not contaminate him rather culminates the crescendo of his creation. The more he became confused, the more creative he had been. Subsequently, the clash and consequent complexity between self and soul or physic and psyche, between religion and racism of East and West Bengal and the culture and ideology of East and West bring about the real genius in him. As a result, the man of West became an iconic figure for the East through the composition of the national anthem and the same man of East became the only Noble Laureate in literature for his *Gitanjali* and was offered the title "Knighthood" by the West. Therefore, Tagore who bridges the gap between East and West Bengal and East and West, is really a universal poet in the true sense of the term.



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