



Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali 50 and 103: Poetic Surjection, Introspection, and Soulful Surrender

Arunava Roy

M.A in English (1st Class), 4 Times NET, Mahila College, Pakur, Jharkhand, India

* Corresponding Author: **Arunava Roy**

Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 06

Issue: 03

May - June 2025

Received: 05-04-2025

Accepted: 06-05-2025

Page No: 1786-1788

Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore, the myriad-minded polymath is known as the World- Poet for his magical poesy, orchestration of language, manifestation of powerful imagination and the verbosity of musical cadences. Gitanjali means tribute of songs poeticized by the poetic soul (jivatma) yearning to mingle with Supremo (Paramatma). In Gitanjali 50, the poet is a beggar, begging alms from door to door. Soon he is spellbound by the appearance of a golden-chariot in front of him. A king in majestic grandeur descends from the chariot and asks begging from the poet. The confused poet doesn't realize the matter and he gave the king a grain of corn from his bag and the king departs. Returning home, the poet, in his utter bewilderment finds a piece of golden corn among the heap of begging. In Gitanjali 103, the poet pays his heartfelt veneration, soulful surrender to the lotus feet of God. He surrenders his senses, mind, and inner soul completely to the feet of God. The poet's regret (in the poem 50) for not offering the whole alms he has begged gets fulfilled in the last poem (Gitanjali 103) through the unconditional surrender of the poetic soul to His lotus feet. The journey from finite to infinite, possession to surrender, illusion to ultimate truth and surjection to surrender is reflected through these poems.

This paper aims to study Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali 50 & Gitanjali 103 poem from varied perspective. How does the poetic regret get pacified in soulful surrender to the Almighty? How does the poetic introspection transcend the self to merge with the immanent spirit? This paper examines Tagore's spiritual offerings through lucid imagery, symbolic language and musical cadences blended with devotional effluence.

Keywords: Tribute, Surrender, Soul, Truth, Regret, Verse

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore, India's poet laureate is one of the greatest poets of the century and the stalwart figure in modern Bengali Literature. The poetic oeuvre of Rabindranath Tagore is marked with abundance of natural beauty, orchestration of language, mastery of tongue, brilliant depiction of varied themes, lyrical cadences of musicality, manifestation of love in its fullness. Tagore is not only a poet of the world, but also short-story writer, novelist, essayist, and lyricist. Tagore has transformed old legends myths and ancient tales to poetic texture through his mythopoeic imagination. Tagore is greatly influenced by the philosophy of Vaishnava. The literature of Vaishnava sect, known as "Vaishnava Padavali" upholds the divine love of Sri Radha and Krishna. The spiritual dalliance of Radha- Krishna, different phases of love, the depth and sensation of love and ultimately the interplay of jivatma and Paramatma are the main theme of Vaishnava Padavali. Tagore was greatly inspired reading the Padavalis of Vidyapati,

Jayadeva, Chandidasa and Gobindadasa. Tagore translated and adapted Jayadeva's

"Geeta-Govinda" into Bengali language titled "Radhar Madhava". Tagore's concepts of love are critical—love for fellowmen; love for Nature; love for country and ultimately love for God. The poetic soul transcends the earthly love and progresses from finite to the infinite to mingle with the Divine being.

The voyage of souls, the thirst of his heart and the sensation to be one with the Supremo culminate in the unconditional surrender (atma-smarpana) to the lotus feet of God. Sri Arobinda says:

“One of the most remarkable peculiarities of Rabindranath’s genius is the happiness and originality with which he has absorbed the whole spirit of Vaishnava poetry and turned it into something essentially the same and yet new and modern.”

Outwardly, in the poems of Gitanjali (1912), Gitimalya (1914) and Gitali (1914) the poet expresses natural love; courtly love between lover and the beloved but inwardly the poem philosophizes the poetic manifestation of Jiban-devata; yearning of human soul (Jivatma) to unite with Him (Paramatma). The first part of Gitanjali reflects his quest of God and the second part the realization and surrender to God. The Gitanjali opens with the appraisal song for magnificence of God’s love; reflects the mystic relationship of man and god; then realizes omnipresence of the omnipotent; laments for the separation from God; then as the poems progress, the poetic yearning for union with God intensifies; then the poet expresses his exuberance as he unites his God avoiding earthly illusion (maya); the poet hails the unavoidable death as he has met with ultimate truth of life; and at last Gitanjali ends with the soulful surrender to the feet of Almighty. Gitanjali is enriched with the sweet spirit of emotional passion; delicacy of lyrical diction; spontaneity of spiritual feelings; inundation of Bhakti bhava; presence of profound serenity; subtlety of earnest ardour and the perfection of lovable adoration. Through every single flower of the beautiful lyric, the poet pays his homage, internal veneration to the Eternal one. The constant yearning of poet (jivatma) to be united with lord (paramatma) expressed in Gitanjali makes it a “mighty piece of prayer, pleading and exaltation.” Reading Gitanjali, a renowned critic Abbe Bremond opined that “such poetry is half a prayer from below and half a whisper from above, the prayer evoking the response, or the whisper provoking the prayer, and always prayer and whisper chiming into song.”

Tagore was awarded Nobel prize, the first non-European winner in 1913 for Gitanjali, a source of mystic fascination. The poems of Gitanjali attune a mantric quality; the poet as a pure devotee chants to adore the creator of the universe. Gitanjali is flourished with the plethora of images and symbols which connote spiritual significance. Love, devotion, ecstasy, separation, yearning for reunion, aestheticism, self-purification, atonement, and surrender. There are many themes Gitanjali has woven in one thread. Tagore as a devotee sometimes disguised as a beggar; sometimes a beloved; musician or a poet; somewhere as a traveler— but the ultimate aspiration remains the same.

In the Gitanjali poem No-L— “I HAD gone a-begging from door to door”, the poet speaker disguises himself as a beggar, going from door to door to beg alms for livelihood.

Suddenly, a ‘golden chariot’ appears before him. The poet becomes spellbound at the dazzling splendor of ‘the King of all kings.’ The poet is happy thinking that by this king’s grace, his bad days will come to an end. With keen expectation, he stands glaring at king’s alms. The gracious king—smile in his face descends from that golden chariot. The poetic hope flies high. But unexpectedly, the king stretches his right hand asking— “what hast thou to give to me?”

The beggar poet in utter surprise exclaims—

“Ah, what a kingly jest was it to open thy palm to a beggar to beg!” Here the poet is unaware about the identity of the king and his objective of begging. The bewildered poet hesitatingly gives a ‘little grain of corn’ from bag. At the end of the day, when the poet pours down his bag in the floor, he becomes astonished finding “a least little grain of gold” in the heap of grains. The poet weeps in convulsion and regrets— “I had had the heart to give thee my all.”

The Indian values of charity and sacrifice is reflected in the poem. Renunciation of possession and self-abnegation lead to the way of spirituality. This lyrical poem reminds us a legendary story of Krishna—Sudama, the boy-hood friend. Sudama and his wife, Kuchela Devi struggled with chill penury. His wife suggested his husband Sudama, a poor Brahmin to meet his bosom friend, Krishna—the king of Dwaraka. When Sudama asked for gifts for his friends, there was nothing left in the hut to offer Krishna. Kuchela Devi begged a small bag of stuffed rice and Sudama went to meet his Royal Friend hiding that bag under his arms. Krishna, the indweller of the universe welcomed his bosom friend; adored him; embraced him and asked for the gift. Sudama ashamed how could he offer stuffed rice to his Royal king. But the stubborn Krishna snatched the bag and expressed joy in amusement. That stuffed rice became wet from the hearty tears of Sudama.

Krishna, the God of Devotees relished the rice and each morsel he took, there turned magical events. Krishna did not give Sudama a penny but bid him adieu cordially. On reaching, home, Sudama in utter astonishment found his tattered hut turned into a Royal palace and his wife Kuchela, clad with golden jewelries.

In Shrimad Bhagavad-Gita, chapter 9, Sloka 26, Sri Krishna says:

“Whatever a man offers to me, whether it Be a leaf, or a flower, or fruit, or water, I Accept it, for it is offered with devotion and purity of mind.”

God, the ocean of mercy is manifested not for them who are materially flourished, but for them who are cordially enriched with a heart full of love, emotion, and devotion. This lyric poetry has a philosophical interpretation too. The chariot symbolizes our body and king symbolizes the soul (Jivatma)—the infinitesimal part of Paramatma. In this poem, the last line is significant. The repentant beggar-poet cries as he has failed to identify the God. The poet rues that though he is not capable enough to give alms, to God, but if he would generous to offer everything to God. Vaishnava poet laments that Supreme, the Friend of pauper had come to me graciously to offer your spontaneous blessings that is rarest to the hermits meditating since time immemorial. But he is an abject pauper bounded with mundane illusion has not identified HIM. The poet feels a prick of conscience as he has not identified his Creator. The poetic convulsion is deeply embedded in lyrical tone.

In the Gitanjali last poem-CIII— “In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet,” the poet’s spiritual sublimity is on the acme of perfection. The poet’s spiritual quest culminates in this poem offering everything to the God’s lotus feet, which ascetics worship since time out of mind. Delving deep into spiritual contemplation, he surrenders his senses. Mind and poetic self to the lotus feet of supremo. The poet uses brilliant simile to express his surrender to God.

The poet salutes Almighty offering his heart to the lotus feet.

The devotee-poet bends down his mind at His feet just as a rain-cloud of monsoon bending low with “unshed showers.” The poet wishes to unite all his lyrical songs into a single tune which resonate unto cosmos; the poet cherishes to generate a spiritual reverberation through his musicality. It has a deeper significance too. Just as a stream flow into the sea, similarly the poetic soul (jivatma) wishes to mingle with the God (Paramatma). Again, the poet salutes Him wishing to be with Him as he is out of earthly illusions. Just as ‘the homesick cranes’ returns to their nests at the end of the day, the poetic soul seeks for that abode of Eternity. The poet’s regret (in the poem L) for not offering everything he begged gets fulfilled (in the last poem) through the unconditional surrender of the poetic self to His lotus feet.

Tagore’s spiritual journey reminds us of “Navadha Bhakti” (Nine-fold Devotion) as described in Srimad Bhagavatam (7.5.23):

- Shravana (hearing about God)
- Kirtana (chanting His Name)
- Smarana (Remembering the God)
- Pada Sevana (serving His Feet)
- Archana (pure adoration with love and devotion)
- Vaandana (obeisance to Him)
- Dasya (serve him)
- Sakhya (Befriending Him)
- Atma Nive dāna (unconditional surrender to his lotus feet)

“Atma Nive dāna” is the ultimate step of devotion and Tagore has done so— tributing his last lyrical song to God.

In Srimad Bhagavad-Gita: chapter 18, verse 66 when Arjuna gets bewildered in the war field of Mahabharata seeing his near and dear ones against him, Krishna instructs:

“Sarva-dharman parityajya mam ekam sharanam Vraja Aham tvam sarva-papebhyo mokshajishyami ma shuchah”

“Abandon all varieties of dharmas and simply surrender unto Me alone. I shall liberate you from all sinful reactions; do not fear.” (English Translation)

Tagore has weaved a garland of flowery lyrics with his heart-felt devotion and tribute to the lotus feet of Almighty.

Conclusion

In the Introduction to Gitanjali, W.B. Yeats said— “...to read one line of Tagore’s Gitanjali is to forget all the irksome problems of the world.” The literary journey from finite to infinite, possession to liberation, illusion to ultimate truth, and surjection to surrender is sung through Gitanjali. Approaching the apex of the philosophy of life, the lyrical manifestation of poetic devotion culminates in soulful surrender to the lotus feet of the God— Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent.

“Leave all thy burdens on His hands who can bear all, and never look behind in regret.”

References

1. Tagore R. Gitanjali. Translated by Radice W. London: Penguin Classics; 2012.
2. Paul SK. Gitanjali of Rabindranath Tagore: With Critical Evaluations. India: Notion Press Publishing; 2020.
3. Laxmiprasad PV. Rabindranath Tagore as a philosophical voyage - a critical study of Gitanjali. London: Academic Press; 2021.

4. Sikder A, Saraswat V. A Critical Study on Gitanjali with Special Reference To Rabindranath Tagore. Ilkogretim Online - Elementary Education Online. 2021;20(6):2895-2906. Available from: <http://ilkogretim-online.org> doi: 10.17051/ilkonline.2021.06.269
5. Wikipedia contributors. Gitanjali [Internet]. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia; [cited 2023]. Available from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gitanjali>
6. Mukhopadhyay A. Tagore's Gitanjali: A Critical Appraisal. IIS University Journal of Arts. 2014;3(1):12-20.
7. The Bhagavad Gita. Chapter 18, Verse 66 [Internet]. [cited 2023]. Available from: <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/18/verse/66>
8. Sen S. GITANJALI - RABINDRANATH TAGORE: A Critical Evaluation. Unique Publications; 2020.