



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2015; 1(9): 266-269
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 11-06-2015
Accepted: 14-07-2015

Dr. Vitthal V Parab

a) Head, Department Of English, K.M. Agrawal College of Arts, Commerce & Science, Kalyan (West)- 421301.

b) Recognized Ph.D Guide in English (University of Mumbai & J.J.T University, Rajasthan) V.C. Nominee Subject Expert at Interview Panel for Recruitment of Assistant Professors in University of Mumbai

c) Subject Expert at Maharashtra Public Service Commission, MPSC Head Office, Kuparej, Mumbai-400021.

d) Visiting Professor, Post-Graduation & Research Center, R.J. College, Mumbai-400086.

A search for universal love and brotherhood in Rabindranath Tagore's 'Gitanjali'

Dr. Vitthal V Parab

Abstract

A well-known writer Rabindranath Tagore, the minstrel of Mother India, occupies a frontal position in the galaxy of the prophets of Humanism. He became the first-ever Asian writer to be awarded a Nobel Prize in 1913 for translated version of his cycle of song-poems, Gitanjali. It is noteworthy to know that Rabindranath Tagore's creations and activities has a common feeling that is his love for Man in other words his love for humanity by enforcing the values of humanity such as peace and harmony in the nation at large. Tagore's poetry Gitanjali reflects his desperate efforts to see the world to live in peace and harmony in reality. He strives hard and hard to foster the values of humanity and bring the happiness in the land by encouraging the masses to love one another, live in peace and lead a harmonious life full of contentment. Tagore's goal is to channelize the streams of nationalism to the direction of universalism by freeing human soul from all bondage and pettiness of the world and thereby transcending itself into a search for universal love and brotherhood that the Lord provides to the mankind.

This Research paper is an attempt to get a glimpse of Tagore's philosophy of humanism. This paper aims at studying Rabindranath Tagore's Poetry Gitanjali as the poetry that fosters peace and harmony in the Nation at large.

Keywords: Gitanjali, Philosophy, Humanity, Rabindranath Tagore

1. Introduction

A well-known Indo-English writer Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is distinguished for being a man with numerous dimensional personalities and is the most eminent Bengali renaissance poet, philosopher, essayist, critic, composer and educator who dreamt of a harmony of universal humanity among the people of different origin through freedom of mind and spiritual sovereignty. Rabindranath Tagore occupies a fore position in the galaxy of the prophets of Humanism. He became the first-ever Asian writer to be awarded a Nobel Prize in 1913 for translated version of his cycle of song-poems entitled Gitanjali.

Rabindranath Tagore creations and activities has a common feeling that is his love for Man in other words his love for humanity by enforcing the values of humanity such as peace and harmony in the nation at large. He was a passionate Indian, but his nationalism transcendent into universalism, where one may find out a unique unification of the best of the East and that of the West. Tagore played a very important and a noteworthy part in India's freedom struggle and his efforts were appreciated by both Gandhi and Nehru and after independence, India chose a song of Tagore "Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka" as its National Anthem. The citizens of Bangladesh also choose one of Tagore's songs ("Amar Sonar Bangla" which can be translated as "My Golden Bengal") as its National Anthem.

Tagore's most innovative and mature poetry embodies his exposure to Bengali rural folk music, which included mystic Baul ballads such as those of the bard Lalou^[1]. These, rediscovered and repopularised by Tagore, resemble 19th-century Kartābhajā hymns that emphasise inward divinity and rebellion against bourgeois bhadrakol religious and social orthodoxy^{[2][3]}. Tagore reacted to the halfhearted uptake of modernist and realist techniques in Bengali literature by writing matching experimental works in the 1930s^[4]. These include Africa and Camalia, among the better known of his latter poems. He occasionally wrote poems using *Shadhu Bhasha*, a Sanskritised dialect of Bengali; he later adopted a more popular dialect known as *Cholti Bhasha*. Other works Include *Manasi*, *Sonar Tori*

Correspondence:

Vitthal V. Parab

Head, Department Of English, K.M. Agrawal College of Arts, Commerce & Science, Kalyan (West) - 421301.

(*GoldenBoat*), *Balaka* (*Wild Geese*, a name redolent of migrating souls),^[5] and *Purobi. Sonar Tori's* most famous poem, dealing with the fleeting endurance of life and achievement, goes by the same name; hauntingly it ends: *Shunno nodir tire rohinu porī / Jaha chhilo loe gēlo shonar tori*—"all I had achieved was carried off on the golden boat—only I was left behind."

Gitanjali is Tagore's best-known collection internationally, earning him his Nobel ^[6]. *Gitanjali* is Tagore's Poetry which had earned him remarkable success. It is evident that Tagore started writing at a very young age of thirteen and the next sixty seven years were marked by continual and torrential flow of creativity in various forms of literary works. In *Gitanjali* Tagore writes about many things that makes him happy and also the things that make him loose his cool. At the beginning of his literary career Tagore is a romantic and to some extent a spiritualist poet as he is the worshipper of beauty and this is also reflected in his poetry *Gitanjali*. For Tagore anything that is beautiful in nature, the poet feels shuddering of his own self in it and then we see him trying to write down his feeling with the help of the nature. His happiness in the midst of the nature's beauty is obvious when he writes:

Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop into the dust.

I may not find a place in thy garland, but honour it with a touch of pain from thy hand and pluck it. I fear lest the day end before I am aware, and the time of offering go by.

Though its colour be not deep and its smell be faint, use this flower in thy service and pluck it while there is time

(*Gitanjali*- VI, p.20)

The poet seems to be very religious and God fearing person. He is the true follower of his Lord. His Lord has asked him to sing and he is so much touched by the Lord's command that his heart broke with pride and tears starts flowing. The poet feels very much delighted to sing praises unto the Lord almighty and he feels relieved when he sing out his heart to the Lord. He believes that all the harshness which he has in himself is melted into one sweet harmony as soon as he gazes at the Lord's sweet face. We also sees the poet so much drunk and moved in singing praises to the Lord for his grace on him, that he forgets that he is not singing for his friend but to his almighty Lord.

When thou commands me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes.

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.

I know thou takes pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence.

I touch by the edge of the far-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 Friend who art my lord.

(*Gitanjali*- II, p.17)

We often see the poet encouraging and motivating the masses who are the downtrodden in the society and poor. The poet informs us that the Lord is so great that the Heaven is his Thorne and the Earth is his Footstool. He says that the Lord walks in the midst of the poorest the lowest and the lost people who have no hopes and the Lord is there with them to love and take care of them. He himself feels that he has pride and he can never find his way towards the ways of the Lord. He feels he has to become good and try to overcome the pride and only then he can follow the Lord, as his self-pride is seen as a hindrance in his love for the Lord. In one way he tries to address to those people who have pride of wealth and standard to correct them to share the love and be humane to the needy people and let everyone leave in peace and harmony. So the poet writes:

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the Poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost. Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes

of the humble among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

My heart can never find its way to where thou keepest company with the companionless among the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost.

(*Gitanjali*-X, p.21)

Now we see the poet prepares the masses to attain eternal peace and contentment in life. He further says to experience such harmony one has to cross all the wildernesses that exist in the world. The poet says when one come across such difficulties and tuff times in life, and when one feels alienated and cries out to the Lord "Where are you Lord?" Then the poet wants the Lord to flood the world with the assurance that "I am" i.e. I am with you. For He is the Lord who will never forsake us, so the poet writes:

The time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long. I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued my voyage through the wildernesses of worlds leaving my track on many a star and planet.

It is the most distant course that comes nearest to thyself, and that training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune.

The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end.

My eyes strayed far and wide before I shut them and said 'Here art thou!'

The question and the cry 'Oh, where?' melt into tears of a thousand streams and deluge the world with the flood of the assurance 'I am!'

(*Gitanjali*- XII, p.23)

The poet says that he will be silent till the Lord speaks out. He encourages everyone that after darkness a new day will surely come and the darkness will flee forever, which is clearly evident in the following lines in the poem:

If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it. I will keep still and wait like the night

with starry vigil and its head bent low with patience.
The morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish,
and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking
through the sky. Then thy words will take wing in songs
from every one of my birds' nests, and thy melodies will
break forth in flowers in all

(Gitanjali- XIX, p.27)

According to the Tagore, freedom from all the oppressions of the world would enable everyone to live a life full of contentment. This freedom leads to a total whole that is Infinite, which is the consolidation of the best in the finites. This perfect freedom is the key that leads Man from the state of finiteness to identify with the Infinite. The poet says:
Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when I try to
Break them.

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 friend, 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 come to ask for my good, I quake
in fear lest my prayer be granted.

(Gitanjali- XXVIII, p.32)

The poet wants to see India and the whole world to be full of strength to uproot the slavery and bondages from life and attain complete heavenly freedom in life, which is resembled in the following lines:

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 words come out from the depth of truth;
Where 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.

(Gitanjali- XXXV, p.36)

This eternal searching for this perfect freedom is an essential component of humanity. This dimension adds a special aroma to Tagore's philosophy of harmony and humanism. At this stage there is a significant and qualitative change in his poetic exuberance. Now the poet identifies himself as one among his fellows and prays to the Lord to give him strength to make a fruitful service towards the needy people. So he writes:

This is my prayer to thee, my lord - strike, strike at the
root of penury in my heart.
Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and
sorrows. Give me the strength to make my love fruitful
in service. Give me the strength never to disown the poor

or bend my knees before insolent might.
Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily
trifles. And give me the strength to surrender my
strength to thy will with love.

(Gitanjali- XXXVI, p.36-37)

The poet so renowned but still has consideration for the masses, who are being targeted by the social systems. He is also affected by the grief of the masses and can't stand the injustice done to the downtrodden people of India. He thought his voyage has come to an end but he says that the Lord's will for him have not come still, so he has to go on and on till the country is made new by vanishing all the corruptions and evil deeds of the people. So he says:

I thought that my voyage had come to its end at the last
limit of my power, - that the path before me was closed,
that provisions were exhausted and the time come to take
shelter in a silent obscurity.
But I find that thy will knows no end in me. And when
old words 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.

(Gitanjali- XXXVII, p.37)

The poet needs the Lord as the storm needs its peace and as the night waits for the light. He finds all his desires that distracts him are false and empty to the core as well. He wants the Lord to be with him and strengthen him by his presence to make this world a better place for everyone irrespective of class, creed and colour to live in. So he writes:

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 night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for
light, even 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'.

(Gitanjali- XXXVIII, p.37-38)

The poet further writes that when the grace from the world and life of the human is lost, he urges the Lord of Peace to fill himself and the world with his eternal peace which will make everyone's life a harmonious one indeed. So the poet says:

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, O

thou holy one, thou wakeful, come with thy light and thy thunder.

(*Gitanjali*- XXXIX, p.38)

Tagore gave all through his life, through his paradisiacal imagination that envisioned a world of love, equality, honesty bravery, and spiritual unity of all the mankind. He sees the present humanity is infatuated with the greed, wealth and power and further leaves it to those who do evil to turn away from their evil doings and their horrific moral slumber. Tagore prays for India and in turn he prays for the whole Humanity to experience the true peace and harmony in life by giving up evil and taking up good deeds. The Poet longs for deliverance from the evil deeds and wants to enjoy freedom in reality, so the poet says:

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.
Thou ever purest 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.

(*Gitanjali*- LXXIII, p.64-65)

Notes

1. Tagore R, Stewart TK. (translator): Twichell C. (translator) Rabindranath Tagore: Lover of God, Lannan Literary Selections, Copper Canyon Press, ISBN 978-1556591969, 2003, 94.
2. Urban HB. Songs of Ecstasy: Tantric and Devotional Songs from Colonial Bengal, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0195139013, 2001,6-7.
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5. Ibid. 192.
6. Tagore R, Stewart TK, (translator): Twichell C. (translator), 95-96.
7. Tagore R.Gitanjali.
<http://tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowBook.aspx?ct=Verses&bi=72EE92F5-BE50-40B7-EE6E-0F7410664DA3>.
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