

A Tagore Testament: An Analysis Of *Geetanjali* As Exhibition Of Mysticism

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Abstract

Mysticism is a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined in different traditions. The term 'mysticism' has western origins, with various, historically determined meanings. Derived from the Greek meaning 'to conceal', it referred to the biblical, liturgical and the spiritual or contemplative dimensions in early and medieval Christianity and became associated with 'extraordinary experiences and states of mind' in the early modern period. In modern times, 'mysticism' has acquired a limited definition, but a broad application as meaning the aim at the 'union with the Absolute, the Infinite or God'. This limited definition has been applied to include a world wide range of religious traditions and practices

Key words: mysticism, tradition, spiritual, foster, immortal, dominant, eschews.

Introduction

Mysticism represents the spiritual side of the human mind and the human personality. Man surely has something of Satan in him, but has at sometime something truly angelic and divine in him. There have been people in whom the spiritual element is dominated who are called mystic. A mystic believes himself to be capable of seeing God or at least establishing a close relationship with God, a relationship which enables him to have a vision of God or to catch glimpses of divine spirit. A mystic sees God within himself in the form of light or some kind of illumination but at the same time he also sees a God or the divine spirit and more particularly in the various objects of nature, in the various phenomena of nature and in the various processes of nature. Mysticism is a spiritual force which has always been an enormous God to mankind through the ages, and among them the name of Rabindranath Tagore occupies an honorable position. His writings got him noticed globally, his fame comparable to that of Gandhi. Tagore began writing poetry at the younger age of eight and was published by the time he was sixteen. He was a strong proponent of Indian independence and his teachings are still the core institution he founded in Santhinikethan- the Viswa Bharathi University.

His own religion evolved in his mind through a variety of experiences. These experiences are reflected in his poetry and essays as well as in his speeches. These expressions trace continuous writings, both various phases of the growth of Tagore's religious experiences to maturity. Because of this characteristic, his works spring from a unity of inspiration: his quest for a form of union with the infinite being which pervades creation providing such unity. According to him, the quest is for the contact of the infinite in the finite which is man's mind. Tagore says that the search is for the discovery of a poet's religion and neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian. The inspiration for spiritual self-realization as also for his poetry, being the same what he discovered at the end of his lifelong quest was truly a poet's religion. This incident provides us with a unique case of the

literary artist and the pious man in Tagore undertaking joint search. What his heart felt in the pursuit of spiritual realization was given expression through poetry by the artist in him. This close collaboration between his two lives, if one might say so, has been poetically described by Tagore as a life in wedlock where two different entities live in harmony and accord. The fact that these two parts of his life were tracing a parallel course remained for a long time undiscovered to Tagore himself. This period he refers to, again poetically, as a period of betrothal.

The quest for his religion started with nature which was his first love. His sensitive mind used to react vigorously to nature even during his early childhood. Tagore's spirituality and self realization was initiated through the hand of nature, not nature as subject of knowledge but that aspect of it which stimulates the imagination through the harmony of forms, colors, sounds and movements. In words, he started his journey as a poet of nature. He himself observes, "the first stage of my realization was through my feeling of intimacy with nature". Tagore's poem on nature pulsates with the thrill he experienced on contact with her various moods. But they are not just impressive descriptions of emotion aroused by whatever is striking and beautiful in nature. They raise questions about the hidden spirit beyond and, at a later stage, even betray a strong yearning for physical contact with it.

At the immortal touch of the hands my little heart
loses its limits in joys and gives birth to utterance
Ineffable (Tagore 17)

In the opening verses of *Gitanjali*, Tagore follows the Indian tradition of the Mangalaslōka, the first introductory verses should be a hymn in praise of the poet's Ishtadevata or the 'chosen idol'. It should express the dominant note in the poet's singing. So in this verse, Tagore acknowledges his gratitude to God for filling his finite mind with the infinity of his joy. He compares himself to a hollow reed plucked from the wayside which the immortal singer fills with his enrapturing music he then likens himself to a string in an instrument which the divine player strokes and there produces a tune that transcends all imagination. The string itself is the slender and fragile and the master who plays on it is omnipotent, but the master's touch is of the gentlest and the music that issues is the sublimest in these lines the poet defines the relations between himself and his divine master and we may remember that the whole of *Gitanjali* is an exposition of this relationship in the colors of the rainbow.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my
thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has
kindled the light of reason in my mind (Tagore 19)

The poet wakes up to the fact that God is imminent in him. It is God's power that works in him and his duty is only to function as a willing and efficient instrument in his hands. Since God is purity, it is necessary that the devotee keep his own body pure, for purity to work through him. Again, man is distinguished from animals by virtue of his capacity to think it is his power of reason that makes man superior to all other creatures, but this reason he owes to God who is truth. It is the divine truth that shines in man as his intelligence. Therefore, it is necessary that we should eschew all untruths which are really ungodly. The poet points out that man are men only insofar as he is a reasoning animal. Bereft of reason, man loses his human nature, but his power of reason is only a manifestation of divine truth. Hence, untruth is on humans. Whatever Tagore went in the East or West, he took with him the mysticism and the wisdom of the ancient seers of the Upanishads whose living words he clothed in Bengali literary idioms which were to become a "balm of air in a world the grip of agnosticism, cynicism, materialism and horrors of the world wars. This lyric poetry thus consists of universal things which are and have been everywhere and transforms it into a bird eager to sing from every branch."

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be
found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon
him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all forever (Tagore 22)

This is the keynote poem in the *Gitanjali*, the Hindu way of life prescribes four values or purusharthas-dharma or righteousness, artha or prosperity, karma or permitted pleasures and moksha or liberation. The first three values are considered to be only preparatory to the crowning value of liberation. Conventionally, moksha is supposed to involve the renunciation of leaving behind the other values, but Tagore vigorously rejects this approach. He says that liberation is not to be sought in a selfish union with God. The reason is that the whole world is God's lila or sport and we are all his companions in the play. God is not an impersonal entity and throne above himself everything, big and small. God has created and never thinks of isolation himself from them. If, therefore, we are to be one with him, we have also to be one with all creation. There is no point in chanting and singing and telling beads or worshiping him from behind closed doors of the shrine. If you open your eyes, you can see God is not there. He is aware of where the tiller is tilling, the hard ground and path maker is breaking stones. The true devotee must discard his holy robes and come and stand beside the common man in weal and woe, for it is through the common man that he enjoys his play. Hence, the poet underlines that deliverance is not from him in conventional renunciation. This is the characteristic of the vaishnavite approach to reality. God himself is the servant of the devotees and the true aspirant must deem himself, and work as the servant of the servants of the lord.

Thus we see that the impact of a great poet in literature is a creative medium of cross culture communication fostering both ways of transfer of ideas and thoughts of different races and people which has become the common heritage of mankind and a prime necessary input to the contemporary world. While our country has a rich literary tradition from ancient times, it was often unable to reach the world arena mainly because of the language barrier. Tagore was very much aware of this fact. He knew that his genius could blossom only through his writing in his mother tongue but to reach the world public he would have to cross the language barrier. Hence, his attempt is to translate and recreate his verses of *Gitanjali* from Bengali into English. It is not an easy task for one who felt his creative power was best expressed in his mother tongue. But the force and versatility of his talent was of such magnitude that his pioneering attempt brought him the honor of being a Nobel laureate, the first Asian to be so honored. Thus, Indian literature in a new way made a triumphant entry in the map of world literature.

The long history of Tagore's religious experience and his quest for a suitable form of religious expression from early life presents an interesting study. His own religion evolved in his mind through a variety of experiences. These experiences are reflected in his poetry and essays, as well as his speeches. These expressions trace continuously in writings, both various phases of growth of Tagore's religious experiences to maturity. Because of these characteristics, his works spring from a unity of inspiration, his quest for a form of union with the Infinite Being which pervades creation providing such unity. According to him, the quest is for the contact of the infinite in the finite which is man's mind. Tagore says that the search is for the discovery of a poet's religion and neither that is neither an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian. The inspiration for spiritual self realization as also for his poetry, being the same what he discovered at the end of his life-long quest was truly a poet's religion. This incident provides us with a unique case of the literary artist and the pious man in Tagore undertaking a joint search. What his heart felt in the spiritual realization was given expression through poetry by the artist in him. This close collaboration between his two lives, if one might say so, has been poetically described by Tagore as a life in wedlock where two different entities live in harmony and accord. The fact that these two parts of his life were tracing a parallel course remained for a long time undiscovered to Tagore himself. This

period he refers to, again poetically, as a period of betrothal. He records, “Its touch comes to me though the same unseen and reckless channel as does the inspiration of my songs. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetic life”

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