

GITANJALI : EXPRESSION OF 'PREM' AND DEATH

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the prestigious Nobel prize for Gitanjali, a collection of poems on the myriad hues of 'love' and 'death'. This work is more special to the Indians because this is the first work of literature in India, to have achieved the highest point of recognition. The original work is in Bengali, but the poet had to translate the poems into English, suggested by none other than W.B. Yeats, his friend, in order to reach the outside world. The Bengali collection of Gitanjali comprises 157 poems, whereas the English translations number 103.

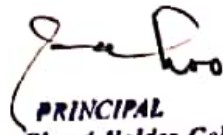
The original version was first published on 14th August, 1910, followed by the English translations in 1912 by the India Society of London. It contained translations of 53 poems from the original Gitanjali and 50 from *Achalayatan*, *Gitamalya*, *Naivedya* and *Kheya*.

Gitanjali is a railway junction, says Buddhadeb Bose, where many parallel lines converge. Scholar Prof. Mukherjee says that there are 4 types of world in the text : God and Nature, Nature and the soul, the soul and the humanity, God and human soul.

The main outlook in Gitanjali is that of a metaphysical one, in which the poet talks about the union with the Supreme.

"Prem" is an integral part of Gitanjali. But this love is all encompassing. Sometimes, it reads like the sensual love between a man and a woman, sometimes the love of a mother for her child, love of a votary for the Goddess and all other manifestations of love.

The concept of death is another integral part of Gitanjali. The span of life from birth to death in Tagore's eyes, is a phase of temporary separation


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from the Highest and Only Truth and its re-unification after death with Him. He describes the different passages of life as different stations, each carrying a different moral challenge, whose ultimate desire is to re-unite with the Heavenly Father. Depiction of fervent love is to express the depth of feeling between man and God.

Life is a pilgrimage of joys and sorrows, of pains and pleasures, of losses and gains. To go on this pilgrimage, to the altar of God, one must abandon all pride and ego.

There can be observed certain differences between Tagore and other religious poets of India : the old poets know and sing of the spirit alone but Tagore speaks also about the senses, loves and sufferings, nature and man, delights of the world etc. (pantheism) Moreover, he finds God everywhere, in and around, in the very heart of men (Swami Vivekananda) The struggle to reach god and the pain of separation are two very dominant themes in Gitanjali.

The foundations of Gurudev's philosophy is to be found in the Upanishads. He was also very fond of Sufism and Iranian poetry by Sadi, Hafez and Rumi. His works are those of freedom. He believes that beauty and love lead to truth and truth guides man towards freedom. We find in his writings, a yearning to spiritually transcend to break free of all human bondage, like the Sufi poets.

The Baishnab poets feel God as an emotional figure with a shape and outline, but the God that Tagore worships, appears and disappears in his soul mysteriously. His shape is elusive, his outlines ever varying, the poet does not know in what secret heaven he lives. Heinz Mode writes in his


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biography of Tagore that the connotations of the term religion in Tagore, are much broader and cannot be fully covered by the associations of the word. The religious element here, is a kind of visionary idealism which arises from minute observations of the world. Awakening of the consciousness---Tagore's concept of religion and not rituals.

The Mysticism in Tagore can be compared with Kahlil Gibran, a contemporary of Tagore as a religious poet. Love for Nature and God, resulting in a union.

The concept of the infinite world and infinity that lies at the centre of this seminal work, is reflected in almost all the poems of *Gitanjali*.

The overall impression that one gathers after reading this work, is one of largeness, transcended space and ethereal feeling.

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