

THEME OF LOVE & DEATH IN TAGORE'S *GITANJALI***T. LATHA, M.A.M.Phil.**

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Abstract: Rabindranath Tagore [1861- 1941] was a significant contributor to the emerging history of Indian Literature in English. His famous work Gitanjali gave him worldwide recognition. It won him Nobel prize for Literature in 1913. It was appreciated for its creativity by W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and many other European critics. The songs in Gitanjali are the Poet's meditation on God, Man and Nature. This work Gitanjali_ expresses his keen sense of observation ,his lively curiosity, his humour, humanity, his Philosophies of love, life and God.

Tagore's Gitanjali has been celebrated as a great poem on the divinity of love. Love lights the inner world of human feelings and sensibilities, and one of the oldest as well as Universal emotions, and it is also the most complex and versatile of all emotions. The spirit of love is advocated by religions and celebrated in Literature. Apart from man - woman relationship, love between father and daughter, mother and son, man and God, has been a recurrent subject for Literature. The treatment of love in Indian Literature dates back to Classical Literature. Here, an attempt is made to analyse the theme of love in Tagore's Gitanjali.

Key Words: *Worship, yearning, Pangs of separation, Union with the Infinite, Tagore's views on Death and Heaven of Freedom.*

Theme of Love in Tagore's *Gitanjali*:

V.Ramamurthy, in his introduction to *Gitanjali* states: One cannot "Love" the Infinite but one can love Krishna or Christ as remembered in one's own mind. There are so many approaches to the divine. But the highest and the most intimate is that of a beloved for her lover. This is known as "Gopibhav" or "Madhurabhav". [11].

The name of Radha, Krishna's dearest Gopi, is not to be found only in the Bhakti lyrics but also in the works of Jeyadev, Vidyapati, Chandidas and Tagore.

Tagore's *Gitanjali* is at once personal and Universal. According to Tagore," It cannot be otherwise because relationship becomes perfect only when it is that of love." [Personality, 158].

Unlike most love poets, Tagore is able to present both the male and female points of view in love. The Physical love between man and woman, the sacred love between man and God, and the human love between man and man, and other living things.

The Physical Love between Man and Woman:

Love between man and woman is a favourite theme of the writers of the world. Tagore also uses this theme. He imagines God as his beloved. In song XLIX, Tagore presents God as a king who has many master musicians in His court to delight Him, and yet when He heard the "plaintive little strain of the poet singing in a corner of his humble cottage," God came down from His throne and stood at his cottage door. Delighted by the song of the poet, God presents the poet a flower as a prize for the poet. The poet expresses his joy thus:

Masters are many in your hall and songs are sung there at all hours. But, the simple carol of this novice struck at your love.

One plaintive little strain mingled with the great music of the world, and with a flower for a prize you came down and stopped at my cottage door.

[*Gitanjali* -XLIX].

Interestingly, God offers the poet, a flower which gives pleasures to him. Here, Tagore is yearning for physical touch and pleasures. He addresses God as:

*Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure,
knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.
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.*

*I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my
love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of
my heart.*

*And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it
is thy power gives me strength to act. [*Gitanjali* --IV].*

Tagore tries to keep his body pure and yearns for the touch of the Eternal.

The Sacred Love between Man and God:

Pangs of waiting and yearning for union are common motifs in love poetry. The beloved expresses her longings thus:

The woodlands have hushed their songs, and doors are all shut at every house. Thou art the solitary wayfarer in this deserted street. Oh, my only friend, my best beloved, the gates are open in my house – do not pass by like a dream. [Gitanjali –XXII].

This lyric may be taken as an expression of the yearnings of the human souls for reunion with the divine. While all other doors are shut, the poet beloved has kept her doors open and she exhorts the divine lover not to pass by her doors, “like a dream”. He should come in and accept the beloved waiting and yearning for him.

The pangs of separation linger in the minds of the lovers in wakeful hours and are sometimes taken to the dream state. The beloved in *Gitanjali* expresses her pangs thus:

*When my rooms have been decked out and the flutes
Sound and the laughter there is loud, let me ever feel
That I have not invited thee to my house--
Let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this
Sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours. Gitanjali- [LXXIX].*

Even in dream and wakeful hours, she thinks only about her lover. The sense of dissociation with the God often makes the unison rather bleak and remote.

Another motif exploited very often in love poetry is the lovers tryst and their wait for their partners. The delay in one meeting the other at an appointed hour becomes a subject for poetry. Waiting for the beloved is waiting for moments of union and illumination. Love holds the key to this union of mind and the heart. Distance only draws each other nearer and nearer. The long waiting for the beloved has a new dramatic significance. This technique is used by Tagore in the following poem:

*I came out alone on my way to my tryst. But, who is this that follows me in the silent
dark?
I move aside to avoid his presence but escape him not.
He makes the dust rise from the earth with his swagger; he adds his loud voice every
word that I utter.
He is my own little self, my lord, he knows no shame;
but I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company. [Gitanjali --xxx].*

Theme of Death:

Death is not a painful thing for the lovers. When, they are choked with sufferings, they consider Death as a sweet release from all pangs of life in this world. In Gitanjali, Tagore has already offers his soul to his lover [God] and now he is ready to offer his life to Death. According to Tagore, Death is not the negation of life, but it is the gateway through which life constantly renews itself. He welcomes Death and “Death thy servant is at my door. He has crossed the unknown sea and brought thy call to my home..” Gitanjali LXXXVI].

To Tagore, Death is the messenger of God, and so when he comes to the poet, crossing the sea of eternity, the poet will welcome him with folded hands. He also says that he will give to Death his life and all else that he possess but he will keep his soul to God.

Apart from physical and spiritual love, the third kind of love Tagore presents in his works is human love. Love for one’s fellow being is termed as humanism. Humanism is an attitude of mind attaching prime importance of man and human values.

The Human Love between Man and Man:

Tagore knows the value of humanism and he expresses the value of humanism in an interview:

I am a man of India as to my origin, training and outlook, but I am a human being, a man of humanity. Humanity will be perfect only when diverse faces and nations shall be free to evolve to their distinct characteristics, while all are attached to the stem of humanity the bond of love. [The Times, July 13].

Brotherhood of men is one of the great principles incorporated in Tagore’s Visvabharati. In Gitanjali, Tagore says, “ ...Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.” [LXIII].

Humanists believe that service to fellowmen and love of them is the highest form of worship. They also believe that God is to be found with the poor and the labourer. This idea is expressed by Tagore in Gitanjali. Tagore says that true worship of God means mingling with the humble humanity on terms of equality, and participation in their humble activities. It reminds us of Swami Vivekananda’s words,

*The poor, the illiterate
The ignorant, the afflicted
Let these be your God,
Know that service to
These alone is*

The highest religion [62]

According to Tagore, the rich and the proud can never find God, for they keep aloof from the poor and the downtrodden. He opines, pride can never approach to where those walk in the clothes of the humble among the poorest, the lowliest and lost. [Gitanjali –X].

Tagore also preaches the lesson of universal brotherhood:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!

Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?

Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones.

He is with them in Sun and in Shower, and his garment is covered with dust.

Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil! [Gitanjali –XI].

It shows that God lives in the company of those who toil in Sun and Shower and whose clothes are soiled with dust. God loves the humble tiller despite his dirty and tattered dress. God is to be found with the poor and the humble who earn their bread with the sweat of their brow.

In one of his songs in *Gitanjali*, Tagore prays to God for the spiritual emancipation of his country. True freedom lies in a full and virtuous living. Therefore, he prays to God that the men of his nation may be fearless, truthful, rational, God-fearing, noble and generous.

He wishes them to acquire free and live in a world free of all divisions of caste, creed or nationality.

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].*

It is to be noted that “heaven of freedom “ for which Tagore prays is not a heaven of political or economic freedom but of spiritual freedom from fear, narrow mindedness and evil desires. This lyric is a fine instance of Tagore’s spiritual humanism.

To sum up, Tagore’s *Gitanjali* describes human love for man, for his country, for land, for nature and for life itself. *Gitanjali* embodies the various modes of worship like ‘lover and beloved’ and ‘Finite and Infinite’. To Tagore, love becomes a metaphor for the longing of the soul for its epipsyche, of the soul for the self and he attempts to reconcile the ideal with the real.

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