

**SEM 3 GENERAL LCC (1)-1**  
**PROJECT REPORT**  
**AN INTRODUCTION TO TAGORE'S *GITANJALI***

*Gitanjali*, originally written in Bengali, is a collection of poems and songs, comprising 157 poems, but the English translations number 103.

It was first published on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1910, whereas, the English translations were published 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."

There are 4 types of worlds in the text : God and Nature, Nature and the soul, the soul and the humanity, God and human soul. These four themes are not kept strictly separate, they frequently run into each other, fuse and mingle, painting an elaborate and complete landscape frequented by the Almighty, human beings, Mother Nature and all living entities.

When it was first published in English, ABBE BREMOND declared that pure poetry aspires to a condition of prayer. "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.

*Gitanjali* is full of such poetry, as in the opening song: 2 "Thou hast made endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail Vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life." The human body is the temple of the soul the human soul is the temple of God. The human the human soul has is meaningless unless it is inhabited or "filled" by the Supreme. Birth and death are but the filling and the emptying of the soul by the Supreme soul and the individual –this is the realization of the endless life, the immortality of Lord God. Hence sings Tagore, "This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new." The Phenomenal world in which the individual plays his obscure part is really the Lila or the drama of the Supreme, and to know this is to participate in the total joy of the cosmic play and give utterance to the joy in ineffable song. The one hundred odd songs in *Gitanjali* form a mighty piece of prayer and pleading and exultation.

The philosophy of Tagore is essentially rooted in the ancient Vedic and Upanishadic traditions of India and accentuated by mysticism. All these philosophical schools put nature at a revered position. The Upanishadas impart the central seat to brahman, or the Supreme Being or the Absolute, who creates the universe, nurtures it, destroys it when time comes, and again gives birth to the universe. Thus the cycle of creation, the cycle of life, goes on; and during the ceaseless movement of the cycle, a close bond between the Creator and His creation the universe is established. Ultimately, a human being becomes truly capable of realising the bond between him and the Absolute. This understanding is the foundation of Tagore's philosophy.

Although the Absolute as the Creator and the world His creation might appear to be binary opposite entities, they actually are not. They are not contradictory but complementary entities leading to the totality of the universe. Tagore's philosophy of life offers this 'principle of synthesis'. Delving again into the Vedantic tradition, he considers the concepts of *maya* (appearance) and *satyam* (truth), when he observes that 'our self is *maya* where it is merely individual and finite, where it considers its

separateness as absolute; it is satyam where it recognises its essence in the universal and infinite, in the supreme self, in Paramatman’.

It is a quest of man to attain the Absolute that enables him to taste the divine joy and this quest is an inward journey as well, for this is a quest after man’s own soul as well.

Therefore, knowing the Absolute Self and one-self, the macrocosm and the microcosmic, is a continuous and simultaneous process. The motif of journey is very common in Tagore, especially in numerous of his songs we find them, signifying this quest for union with the Absolute. Being the microcosm of the Absolute, man has the right to taste the divine ecstasy or ananda, but he has to earn it. Tagore holds that the miseries of human life are nothing but stepping stones of attaining the Absolute where He is interchangeable with ananda. Man gets to taste this absolute joy in pursuit of the Supreme Being, throughout his quest for the Absolute. It is through this divine bliss, which Tagore hails as amrita or the life-giving nectar, that a human individual can realise the loving and caring touch of the Absolute.

Man finds ananda, the insignia of the love of the Supreme Being, and through it the Absolute Himself, abounding in nature. To Tagore, Nature is the stage on which the drama of the universal life is enacted in full grandeur of its harmony. Walking the path of pantheism, Rabindranath suggests that it is in Nature that the love of the Supreme Being is reflected and that love, being showered upon every particle of the universe including man, manifests itself as the embodiment of the Absolute Himself.

It goes without saying that nature being placed on the high altar of deeper spiritual understanding on Tagore’s part was but another facet of his profound faith in the Upanishadic philosophy and his integration of the ancient Indian way of life into his individual soul. Originated in and nourished by the forests, civilisation in ancient India imbibed the very distinct qualities nature can teach man.