

DIVINITY IN MAN IN TAGORE'S GITANJALI

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"knowing others is wisdom, knowing yourself is
enlightenment"

- Rajneesh

We live in a world where many encounters take place between 'science' and 'spirituality', in the form of confrontation or conciliation, as exalting one at the cost of the other or finding a harmony. This paper seeks to stress the positive aspect of this encounter and suggest how thoughtful spiritual aspirants could live in man. The quest of such a spiritual seeker will be: how to lead a life based on spiritual truths and values in the world dominated by science and technology on the other hand, and by the tension of mounting material needs and greed, hatred and fear, violence and terror, in a world distracted and dehumanized. The manifestation of the divine in himself, and realization of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible for Man on earth. In that way, the aim of life, of Nature is to fulfil the human aspiration of God, Light, Freedom, Peace, Bliss, and Immortality.

Tagore lays focus upon realization of God in the heart of humanity and puts stress on the essential unity of man, God, and nature. All discord and disharmony get resolved into unity and harmony. His mystic vision lies in purifying the soul and realizing the inherent unity with all. Tagore aimed at the mystic vision of the spiritual unity of mankind getting himself averse to all that was narrow, parochial or dogmatic with the sole intention of transforming the kingdom of earth into "a genuine blissful kingdom of heaven". The theme of *Gitanjali* is the realization of God through self-purification, love, constant prayer and devotion, dedication and surrender to God through service to humanity.

Much of Tagore's ideology come from the teaching of the Upanishads and from his own beliefs that God can be found through personal purity and service to others. Through Tagore's *Gitanjali* one can get a glimpse of the poet's true nature and his spiritual feelings. Tagore explained in *Gitanjali*, "Song Offerings", how mankind can be united by the religious bond of love and compassion. It

exhorts people to liberate themselves from vanity and hunger for power. He asserts that spiritual bond of love and worship should ultimately culminate in service to humanity. The poet considers everyday activities are service to God. His work resonates the philosophy of Upanishads, Gita, Vaishnavism, Brahmosamaj, Bauls etc. His assertion in God, the Supreme Being is neither a creed nor a philosophy but a practical and realistic way of looking at the world with a pure soul.

The very opening line of *Gitanjali* reflects the inner harmony that the poet has experienced. The words are an outburst endeavouring to articulate the intense pleasure that the poetic experience has conferred upon him. "*Thou hast made me endless such is thy pleasure*"(1). According to humanist school of thought, man is the measure of everything and he is the means to reach the Divine. The relationship between 'I' and 'thou' holds an important space in this domain. Tagore became an epitome of the conduct of this belief. He saw men as men, devoid of the caste, colour, sex, race or national distinctions. Through his poetry, therefore, he explored the relationship of Man with God, of Man with Nature and that of Man with Man. The presence of divine spirit in man granted him a status above the ordinary. According to Tagore, every man was endowed with an ethical responsibility of serving other men at large for serving men was serving God. He advocated dedicating one's life to the growth and flourishing of mankind through the path of love, knowledge and selflessness.

Man has a body of gross matter and mind of subtle matter, but he is their operator and master. His outer dimensions keep on changing, with a beginning and an end; but his inmost core, the spiritual dimension is unchanging, whole, timeless, free and independent. His personality, which is dominated by his body and senses and the primitive urges of lust, greed, hatred, fear, selfishness, and ignorance, which is subject to disease, aging, death, bondage and suffering, constitutes his higher nature. Imperishableness, knowledge, purity, freedom, joy, selflessness, love and compassion characterize his higher nature. It is not reasonable to speak of human nature only

in terms of his weaknesses, errors, and the ugly side of his lower or brutal level. He can and does function on the higher plane also, manifesting his higher or divine nature, with all its strength, enlightenment, beauty and nobility.

“When one realizes God, he grants knowledge and illumination from within; one knows it oneself. In the fullness of one’s spiritual realisation one will find that he who resides in one’s heart, resides in the hearts of others as well- the oppressed, the persecuted, the untouchable, and the outcast”. (Sarada devi 52)

Swami Vivekanantha stated that the fundamental basis of all religion was belief in the soul which is the real man, and something beyond both mind and matter, and proceeded to demonstrate the proposition. The existence of things material is dependent on something else. The mind is mortal because changeable. Death is simply a change. The soul should be made conscious of its powers. The mass of our people believe in the individuality of the soul. “Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal”. (Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda - 61)

Tagore says that man cries out of his ignorance and asks “Oh, where is God?” It is only through wisdom gained after long and varied experience that his question is answered. Then he is assured of the fact that God is within him and that God is in every object of nature. Man gets real happiness only when he realizes the presence of God within himself and others. “Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord” (37).

According to Tagore, the finite ideals will have to be transmuted into the infinite before the soul can get perfect satisfaction through them. In human experience, there is nothing that equals the joy of love. For Tagore, God is love. The love of the mother for the child or the love of the lover for the beloved is only an instance of the supreme love, which is God. And this love expresses itself not only in the ecstatic devotion of the mystic but also in the routine of everyday life of the common man. Tagore declares that God is to be realized in the common realities of life and in the daily work which sustains the world.

Tagore described the other aspect of human nature as ‘Universal’ in man, the ‘surplus’ in man, the infinite ‘I’, the element of Divinity present in man, and so on. The obvious characteristic of the infinite aspect of man is that it constantly inspires the individual to go beyond, to surpass itself. The infinite aspect of man is about an ideal; about discovering the very best in himself. Divinity is Truth, pure

consciousness, and pure bliss. Divinity resides in one’s own self. “Let man have light, let him be pure and misery will end” (Tagore 8). Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal.

Spiritual is the essence of humanism. Manifestation of personality depends upon the self realisation and the spiritual knowledge of individual. Man, the highest conscious form of life upon earth, a ‘transitional being’ is destined to exceed his limitations as a mental being and become a superamental being. This change can be brought about through a methodised effort towards self-perfection in which the individual seeks to enter into contact and union with Divine through aspiration and self surrender, opens himself to the divine consciousness and force which descend into him and gradually transform his mind, life and body.

“Man is a transitional being. He is not final. The step from man to superman is the next approaching achievement in the earth’s evolution. It is inevitable because it is at once intention of the inner spirit and logic of nature’s process” (Sri. Aurobindo 54)

The human soul must make a prolonged and genuine effort to attain a communion with God. There are many obstacles in the way of the spiritual development with God; and one cannot hope to attain a communion with God too easily. The poet would like to join God in God’s heavenly singing but finds it impossible to do so, because of his inadequacy. He feels bewitched by God’s music the light of which illumines the world.

The light of thy music illumines the world.
The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.
my heart longs to join in thy song, but vainly
Struggles for a voice.....(3).

This poem *Gitanjali* emphasizes the need of purity in this world, the purity of the body and the purity of the mind. The poet wants to keep himself bodily pure and also to keep himself mentally and spiritually pure. It is necessary for him to keep his body and his heart pure because he knows that God dwells within him. The body must not be allowed to soil itself by indulgence in sensuality; and the mind must not be allowed to harbour sinful thoughts and desires.

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.(4)

The poet expresses his intense desire to attain a communion with God. Worldly activities know no end. The poet would like to spend time in close proximity to God and to offer his homage to God. It requires a certain amount of sacrifice of worldly duties and responsibilities to be able to spend some time in God's company because only then can one find any peace of mind. "Now it is time to sit quite, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing grove".(5)

The physical body has its own ambitions, desires, and goals, but the soul definitely knows its purpose within this life. If both the body and soul reach a sufficient level of harmony, then the soul will be in control and can use the body in an efficient, practical, trustworthy, and positive manner. This will enable it to accomplish its mission.

"Your will cannot be firm because it is constantly affected by the material or spiritual factors; thus you have anguish, confusion, contradiction, doubt, fear, etc. God's will absolutely trustworthy and unshakable because it overrides all material and spiritual factors; thus, you have clarity, confidence, courage, peace, etc., but you need to have total discipline in order to follow God's will".(VuTuan 66)

A spiritual communion with God is possible only after hard and prolonged efforts. God does not dwell at any particular place but is to be found everywhere and more particularly within oneself. Tagore was a true seer and sage who believed in the all-pervasive Divine Spirit with which the soul of man seeks a union because the human soul is itself a part of the divine spirit.

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.(12).

One cannot attain a communion with the divine spirit just by wishing for it. Many sacrifices have to be made and much effort has to be put in before one can hope to see a vision of God. Indian seers and sages spent years and years doing penance before they could see a vision of the divine spirit. All worldly desires and all worldly attachments have to be renounced, and a lot of meditation too is

necessary. The poet confesses his inadequacy and, therefore, his lack of the needful spiritual ripeness to be able to claim the right of a spiritual communion with God. "I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice; only I have heard his gentle foot-steps from the road before my house" (13).

A desire for worldly goods and riches keeps growing instead of diminishing. With the decline of a desire for worldly goods, a man may then begin to turn to God and may think of improving himself spiritually. A detachment from the world would thus encourage a man to develop himself spiritually. "My desires are many and my cry is pitiful, but ever didst thou save me by hard refusals; and this strong mercy has been wrought into my life through and through"(14).

The poet's heart felt the ache of his longing for God but the poet did not see him anywhere. At last the poet found God in the depths of his own heart where he had previously failed to notice. For a long time Tagore had not been aware of the fact that God dwelt within himself and need not therefore be sought outside. " I knew not then that it was so near, that it was mine, and that this perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart"(20).

There is in man a higher self and the lower self. The higher self of man takes him towards good deeds and to the service of mankind as well as of God, while the lower self tempts a man with material wealth and prosperity which can come only through foul means and sinful actions. The poet prays to God to destroy all that part of his mind, his heart, his desires, and his self which is materialistic, egoistical, and worldly. The poet wants to retain only that part of himself which is spiritual, holy, and pious.

Let only that little of my will whereby
I may feel thee on every side, and come to
thee in everything, and offer to thee my love
every moment (34)

Nobody can approach God without first shedding all pride and all feelings of self-importance. Complete submission to God is absolutely essential if one wishes to get close to God. Tagore's heart would like to join God in his divine music but finds it impossible to do so because the distance between God and human soul is very long. Because the human soul has to struggle a lot in order to attain a communion with the divine spirit. Tagore's desire to join God's music is intense, but he feels frustrated in his efforts to attain his desire. From Tagore's perspective, man is constantly evolving, and there is more to his external

identity. Therefore, one must not forget that this is not a day journey but a gradual evolution for the soul to discover eternity. After awakening the consciousness to know the "true being" it is important for soul to go through the "Law of Detachment" "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"(Gitanjali, 38.1.1-3). Therefore, Tagore prays for "When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust, O thou holy one, thou wakeful, come with thy light and thy thunder"(Gitanjali, 39.5.10-12).

After passing deeper experiences, it appeared to him that realisation of God on a personal plane was somewhat difficult to achieve. Tagore in his submission to God, makes a confession of his spiritual inadequacy and prays to him a balanced state where joys and sorrows mean the same to him. "He wants to surrender before God, but never before "insolent might". It is his wish to be morally and spiritually strong and have noble heart craves to serve his fellow men with love and sympathy: Give me the strength to make my love fruitful service" (13).

Just as Tagore identifies man the tiller, stone-breaker and labourer with God, Whiteman sees God in man and so identifies with God. In "Song of myself" Whiteman says:

I see something of God each hour of the
twenty-four, and each moment then,
in the face of men and women I see God, in my
own face in the glass. (Leaves of Grass 74)

At present people are being guided by egoistic feeling and they are confined within their narrow self. Today human values have been deteriorated, human beings are being treated as machine, and communalism has captured the whole world in the name of religion. So, at this state, the study of Rabindranath and Upanishads are certainly saviour of this human civilization. Tagore's view on the divinity of man, the inner strength of personality bears relevance at present, when the people have surrendered themselves to the power of the state, to the power of the greed. "When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust, O thou holy one thou wakeful, come with thy light and thy thunder" (39).

Life is mighty challenge and every one of us has the mighty to accept it fully. In conclusion the vision and philosophy of existence of Rabindranath Tagore finds expression in *Gitanjali* etched with universal appeal. It is an indicator of the need for introspection and inner journey. Apart from having great aesthetic appeal, *Gitanjali* projects his deep understanding and the subsequent vision about the immense possibilities and potentialities of attaining sublime ideals in one's life. He asserts this attainment is the beginning of human beings emancipation beyond the self and societal bonds. In the present materialistic world where people are drifting away into vanities leading an aimless life of transient pursuits, Tagore monumental work brings with it the rays of robust outlook and positive attitude to architect a society "where the mind is without fear where the head is held high, where knowledge is free...into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake" (Tagore -81).

References

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