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## Mysticism In Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*: An Overview

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Mystic poetry occupies a significant position in the domain of world literature for it primarily focuses on internal rather than external realities, inner rather than outer truth, spiritual rather than materialistic worlds and metaphysical rather than physical journeys. In other words, it may be described as the spirit of Mysticism is one of the prominent features of Tagore's poetry and his *Gitanjali* is no exception to it. It is an offering of songs to God. In this poem, he simply acknowledges God's greatness and glory. In *Gitanjali*, the communion of man with God, a new understanding of man's relation to the world is conveyed to us in masterly efforts which are intensely mystic. His joyous acceptance of death as the gateway to a fuller life links Rabindranath Tagore again with the greatest mystics of the world. The songs of *Gitanjali*, are songs mainly of the closest personal connection between the poet and Eternal, as lover and beloved, wife and husband, servant and master, as if the poet were trying to approach the reality in a personal way

through personal relationship. This is a unique feature of his mysticism.

*Gitanjali*, one of the most acclaimed works in Indian English Literature has been an evergreen contribution made by Rabindranath Tagore for the Indian society. It was Tagore's personal experience with God that helped him get the inspiration to compose poetry like this. In this regard Edward J Thompson (Tagore's biographer) writes: "What matters in Tagore is his personal experience of God. Of the depth and sincerity of this experience no one who has read *Gitanjali* can doubt. God is strangely close to his thought. He is often more theistic than any Western theist....God becomes more personalized for him, the Indian, in the most intimate, individual fashion....I can only assume that he found it so in personal experience."

*Gitanjali* contains 103 songs of devotion, selected and translated from the Bengali version by Rabindranath Tagore himself. Tagore was profoundly influenced by the philosophy of the Bhakti School of poetry

and the forms of Vaishnava poetry. He popularized for the rest of the world Indian thought at its greatest and best. As a poet Rabindranath Tagore firmly asserted that it was possible to reconcile the opposing claims of flesh/body and the spirit/soul, the human and the divine. He wanted man to realize the beauty around him and to accept the mastery of the divine will in the lives of men. Furthermore, he wished men to acknowledge the oneness of all men. *Gitanjali* also is deluged with poetical elements of love of God. It exhibits the entire range of love, from human love offered to God as total devotion. Tagore uses symbols, images, metaphors and similes to invest essentially abstract concepts with vividness God (variously described as a Friend, Master, King, Light, Lover and so on. Tagore himself adopts several personae to express his relationship with God. For instance, Maiden, Devotee, Beggar, Musician, Traveller, Servant, Friend, Child and beloved. These personifications are used by Tagore to manifest the nine forms of devotion famously known in India, for example, Sravana, kirtana, archana. The compassion of Tagore in describing his emotional involvement with God transmits a universal

appeal to his poetry in general and *The Gitanjali* in particular. He dramatizes the immense love of God, who he asserts, descends to the level of his creation and communicates with all through various forms of love and devotion. Tagore also uses the metaphor of music and musician. As a musician, the poet is invited by God to perform at the festival of life organized by Him. Literary devices such as simile, images, epithet, are used by the poet in the poem to express his devotion for the God. For instance, the evening is presented as the world retiring for the night, the work which happens only at the will of God. The picture of flashes of lightening serves to intensify the contrast of darkness of the night. Likewise, rain is made the symbol of the spiritual life of enlightenment, when the poet's despair filled heart awaits the coming of the rain. The morning with its golden sunshine is pictured in terms of melody and light. The poet experiences the whole world filled with joy at the ecstasy of the experience in being one with God. In the final song of *Gitanjali* the final experience of death is expressed by merging two similes into one. Tagore also makes effective use of dramatic element in these poems which are good examples of dramatic

effect. They are in the form of a colloquy between the poet and God. In one of the songs, the poet is in the role of a beggar awaiting God's chariot to ride by in the form of a king, who happens to be passing through the village. The beggar desires the king to give him alms unasked. But to his great surprise, "the King of all kings"—God, asks him "What hast thou to give to me?" and holds out his right hand to receive it. The poet gives him the least little grain of corn, and at the end of the day, finds to his utter dismay that he has received back a single grain of gold. Therefore, he bitterly weeps for not having given his all to God. *Gitanjali* expresses the poet's aspirations of mankind to communicate with God, and to reach God—"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 I escape him not. He makes the dust rise from the earth with his swagger; he adds his loud voice to 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. This exhibits the most effective use of imagery, dramatic element and personification, direct communication

between the poet and God, used as poetic element by Tagore in *Gitanjali*.

*Gitanjali* is powerful representation of Tagore's extreme aspiration for union with God. In his journey to infinite he faces God in different forms. Each poem displays a moment of communion with the Supreme. *Gitanjali* depicts Tagore's relation to mankind, nature, and God. In Tagore's *Gitanjali* we come across two kinds of mysticism: nature mysticism and devotional mysticism. Nature is the meeting abode of the Eternal lover and the poet. It is also a medium of spiritual communion. To Tagore, the mystic poet, God is immanent in Nature even though He is transcendent. His God is a personal God who is his friend, philosopher, musician, father, brother, and so on. Tagore makes his search for God through the universe which is a visible expression of the invisible. His soul has to travel far and wide before it can realize the truth that immanent or present in the Universe.

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