
Rabindranath Tagore, Ramgarh and Gitanjali

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore, the magnificent poet and a versatile genius had a special fascination for nature and spiritualism. This paper is an attempt to bring back the memory of his association with a small hill town of Uttarakhand 'Ramgarh' where he stayed with his daughter during her illness. Like the great poet William Wordsworth, the poet feels in nature the all-pervading power of the divine speaking through it. Some parts of Geetanjali were written by the poet here and he planned to start another University like Shantiniketan here. Uttarakhand government has taken the initiative to establish the University, and a museum there to fulfill the dream vision of the poet and to make that memorable stay of great saintly poet on that hill town a pride of that place. A glimpse of the great messages of some of the verses of Geetanjali is also added for the erudite readers of this paper.

Keywords: Nature, spiritual experiences, divine, freedom, humanity

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore, popularly known as Gurudev, was born in a family known for its socio-religious and cultural innovations during the 19th and early 20th century Bengal renaissance had the advantage of growing up in an extended joint family along with his own 13 siblings developing diverse talents of musicians, artists and scientists. The tremendous excitement and cultural richness at home allowed the young Rabindranath to learn sub-consciously many of these things to give him an openness to think freely and recreate, later on, a model of the ideal kind of education experimented in his school at Shantiniketan.

I

An outstanding artist of modern Indian sub-continent, Rabindranath Tagore was not only a seer poet but also a great thinker and highly influential in introducing the best of Indian culture in the west and vice-versa. As a humanist, Universalist, and an ardent anti-nationalist, he denounced the British Raj as well as narrow selfishness and orthodox attitudes of his own countrymen. Having inherited from his father, both the wealth as well as spiritualism the young Tagore, soon after his marriage to Mrinalini Devi, started looking after family's estates and entered into a most productive period of writing poetry, plays and short stories. In 1901,

Tagore moved to Shantiniketan where he found an *ashram*, a school based on his concept of ideal kind of education.

The period from 1902 to 1908 was in many ways, a time to face great upheavals in life. The death of his wife and many more subsequent personal tragedies in the poet's life left him devastated but he always coped with grief by going to seclusion away from public gaze in country side or in the natural surroundings coming more and more in contact with divine then again plunging back into his cherished activities realizing his chosen role in the cosmic design. Tagore visited Ramgarh along with his unwell daughter, who was advised Himalayan air and stayed on the lonely hilltop known as the Tagore Top. From this recovery period in the *Kumaon* hills arose the *Gitanjali* phase of songs. The beautiful spectacle of natural surroundings not only purified and soothed the grieved heart and took away the pain and fulfilled heavenly desire of finding union with God. After the death of his daughter, Tagore submitted himself to God. The same is reflected in 'Gitanjali' which is a discussion between him and the almighty. The collection of songs records the Poet's complete surrender to God. The simultaneous deaths of Tagore's closed ones deeply affected him. There are enough references that whenever Tagore was in disturbed state of mind, he always went to lonely countryside or hillside places. Maybe the reason behind him living on a lonely hilltop in Ramgarh was that he wanted his creativity to grow in isolation, in the lap of nature. 'Shishu' is a collection of poems for children written by Tagore. This collection

of poems was written at Ramgarh in 1903 when Tagore was there with Renuka. In one of the poems, Tagore divines the cause of the smile that flickers on baby's lips when she sleeps. He is sure that a young pale beam of a crescent moon touched the edge of a vanishing autumn cloud, and there the smile was first born in the dream of a dew-washed morning. The description with the help of Nature imagery indicates Tagore's state of mind at that point of time. It could be the environment of Ramgarh which influenced him to compose this.

The impact of nature can also be seen in many of his works. He wrote poems, plays, short stories and also a separate group of lyrics in the form of poems for songs under the name of "Prakriti Parjaay", explaining the need to protect nature as well as our mother earth.

II

Although only 30 kilometres away from Nainital, endowed with the captivating scenic beauty, Ramgarh has rarely witnessed the rush of tourists like Nainital. Known as the fruit bowl of Kumaon, due to its verdant orchards of apples, pears, apricots and peaches, Ramgarh is a serene and secluded hill station discovered by the Britishers and has some of the ancestral buildings dating back to that time. However, some magnetic and unique quality of the calm of this place had always been attracting the seers, saints and creative minds, working as a catalyst to inspire great works of art. There is no doubt in the inspiration of this place behind the writings of noble prize-winning verses of *Gitanjali* written by Tagore. The poet got the idea of Vishwabharti University in Ramgarh only.

Ramgarh had been the abode of famous Hindi poet of Chhayavaadi generation, freedom fighter, social activist and educationalist Mahadevi Verma . She had been a pillar of the Chhayavaadi era of the Hindi poetry. She spent a lot of her time here creating awareness among the people and engaged in the creation of famous literary writings like 'Atita Ke Chalchitra' and 'Deepshikha'.

The love of Rabindranath's father for Himalaya's natural landscape and his extremely sensitive reactions to the scenic splendours of it could not find expressions due to his preoccupation with religion and metaphysics. It was left to Rabindranath Tagore who could bring in some measure of that dormant self of great worshipper of God and Nature to the centre of his attention. The unalloyed beauty, serenity and purity informing the presence of Supreme Being of this hilly terrain provided the poet a necessary environment for the creation of great literature.

III

Tagore's poetry was influenced by the Sufi poets Kabira, Ramprasad Sen and Baul folk songs as well as English romantic poets particularly Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. The poet feels that in our realisation of truth of existence we put our emphasis either upon the principle of dualism or upon the principle of unity. But we know the Infinite Soul as the final truth, then through our union with it we realise the joy of our soul. The perfect relation with this world is the relation of union. As the poet says:

"The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day

runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth

in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life.

And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment."

He, however, never turned a blind eye to the problems of society and history nor did he believe in the life of renunciation. Verse 77 of Gitanjali says:

"Deliverance is not for me in renunciation I feel freedom embraced in a thousand bonds of delight."

Verse 11 says:

"Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all forever."

In Verse 4 of Gitanjali, the poet says that God is truth and destroyer of all evils. God only gives the power to act, hence all actions would reveal him only.

If Verse 1 affirms poet's faith that limited human beings can experience the joy of unlimited by the touch of the divine, Verse 3 declares, that God is the greatest singer and musician and poet's vain effort to join God's voice fails. The same humility, meekness and devotion of the poet runs through all the verses of Gitanjali. The songs are in fact poet's dialogues with

God and himself. The God addressed as 'my master', 'my lord' and 'mother' appears in the various forms of nature and joys. In Verse 56 the poet says,

"Thus, it is that thy joy in me is so full. Thus, it is that thou hast come down to me. O thou lord of all heavens, where would be thy love if I were not?"

Thou hast taken me as thy partner of all this wealth. In my heart is the endless play of thy delight. In my life thy will is ever taking shape.

And for this, thou who art the King of kings hast decked thyself in beauty to captivate my heart. And for this thy love loses itself in the love of thy lover, and there art thou seen in the perfect union of two."

It affirms the need of God to work His will through human beings. Verse 57 speaks of the light that scatters flood of joy. It is the illumination of human mind that is the store house of all happiness. Verse 59 re-iterates,

"The morning light has flooded my eyes- this is thy message to my heart. Thy face is bent from above, thy eyes look down on my eyes, and my heart has touched thy feet."

Verse 63 affirms the poet's faith that after knowing the Supreme, no one remains stranger

"When one knows the, alien there is none, then no door is shut."

In verse 65 the poet asks,

"What divine drink wouldst thou have, my God, from this overflowing cup of my life? My poet, is it thy delight to see thy creation through my eyes and to stand at the portals of my ears silently to listen to thine own eternal harmony?"

Thy world is weaving words in my mind and thy joy is adding music to them. Thou givest thyself to me in love and then feelest thine own entire sweetness in me."

It is a clear affirmation of the poet's belief of his own creative endeavour. Verse 82 sings of the God's patience with the devotees, "Days and nights pass and ages bloom and fade like flowers. Thou knowst how to wait."

A vigorous social worker, political activist and a critical thinker who denounced male chauvinism and fought for women's emancipation, Tagore kept Gitanjali almost free from all such sorts of thoughts keeping in consonance with his creative theory:

"This great world, where it is a creation, an expression of the infinite where its morning sings of joy to the newly awakened life, and its evening stars sing to the traveler, weary and worn, of the triumph of life in a new birth across death, has its call for us. The call has ever roused the creator in man, and urged him to reveal the truth, to reveal the Infinite in himself. It is ever claiming from us, in our own creations, co-operation with God, reminding us of our divine nature, which finds itself in freedom of spirit. Our society exists to remind us, through its various voices, that the ultimate truth in man is not in his intellect or his possessions; it is in his illumination of mind, in his extension of sympathy across all barriers of caste and colour; in his recognition of the world, not merely as a storehouse of power, but as a habitation of man's spirit, with its eternal music of beauty and its inner light of the divine presence."(Creative Unity, Pg 505

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