

7. *Gitanjali* is verily the recordation of the vicissitudes in the drama of the human soul in its progress from the finite to the infinite—Discuss.

Or

Describe Rabindranath Tagore's mysticism with special reference to *Gitanjali*.

Or

The theme of *Gitanjali* is the revelation of the relation of love between the Absolute and the individual-self. Discuss with illustrations.

A mystic has apprehensions of a world of divine reality behind and within the ordinary world of sense perception. He feels that the external universe, which lies open before his eyes and ears, speaks to him, through his sense, to his soul. He wants to know who is it that speaks to him in this way. He comes to the conclusion that the external world must be animated by a soul or life of its own. Whence comes this life or soul of nature? Its source may also be the same as that of the soul of Man. In other words, the mystic feels that the Supreme Soul or God is one and the same, but it assumes different forms. It animates Man as well as the different objects of nature. Thus the mystic believes not only that all Nature is alive but also that there is essential identity of Being between Man, Nature and God. A mystic is thoroughly a tri-rational and anti-scientific in temper. He distrusts reason and intellect; the world of sense perception has no meaning for him. He looks beyond it and through it, at the divine which is the only reality for him. He realises this truth not by reason but by intuition, by inspiration and by his mystic experiences. When the mood is upon him, he has sudden "flashes of illumination" in which he sees into the heart of things and realises the truth of the Divine animation of Nature. It is all a matter of faith and experience, for if asked the mystic can give no reasons for his conviction. His vision is intuitive, and he feels that all can have this vision through contemplation and meditation. Communion with the soul of nature is possible, for it is basically the same as the soul of man. A mystic is also convinced that the human soul is eternal. It is the body which dies; the soul lives on. Death for him is merely a transformation or the only gateway to the eternal. The soul comes to the world from the Eternal and assumes a particular form; after death it still lives on in the Eternal and may assume some different form. This was also the faith of Plato, and this has always been the faith of mystics. It is also the basis of Tagore's view of life.

Tagore mysticism is seen in his firm faith in the principle of unity, rhythm and harmony. Matter and life are not different, but inter-related. This unity or inter-relatedness operative in the universe is perceived only by the human mind. The consciousness of this law of unity, of this essential truth, is spiritual. The world of matter by itself is empty of significance; it becomes true, beautiful and full of significance only because of human perception.

From this follows the universal law that man can achieve fulfilment by union with something else lying beyond it. Thus even the most selfish of men, one who desires nothing but the gratification of his personal desire, must give up some of his present and immediate pleasures in order to gain his ends the better in the future. In other words, he is conscious of the unity of the present, the past and the future. He thus extends his consciousness in time. In the same way it is also necessary that he should extend his consciousness in space. As Tagore once wrote in the *Sadhana*, "It is the very characteristic of life that it is not complete within itself; it must come out. Its truth is in the commerce of the inside and the outside". Union of the soul with something external is essential for self-fulfilment.

It is not merely that man has commerce with other men, but the body requires light and air, and so daily commerce with the material universe is also essential. The view that the universe is hostile and indifferent, and that man is separate from it is wrong. The scientist has to understand the universe and what we understand becomes a part of ourselves, a part of our personality. It no longer remains separate from us. According to Tagore, "The principal feature of human personality is that it is transcendental, that it fulfils itself by reaching forward to what lies beyond itself, to what should be and what might be. The finite looks forward to the infinite, and individual to the universal. It is man's consciousness that he is potentially greater than what he is at present, that he is related to the universal life, which is the foundation of morality. The fervour of human desire acquires loftiness only when "boisterous outbreak of passion is shown against a background of universal life". Human soul, the finite, seeks fulfilment through union with the universal soul or the divine the Infinite, and is filled with bliss whenever such a union takes place. Such mystic communion with the Infinite not only overwhelms the human soul with ineffable bliss, but also irradiates the soul with the dazzling light of truth and wisdom.

Though Tagore is a firm believer in the union of man and God, he has no faith in absolute Identity. He is a dualist who believes in a mysterious identity in difference. The duality is there but in his view it is not the final truth. Rhythm and harmony is the universal law governing all matter and all life, and this faith enables Tagore constantly to reconcile and harmonise the opposite of life. In his poetry there is a constant synthesis of opposites. Thus freedom means freedom from bondage, but it can be realised only through bondage. Just as the string is bound to the harp and it produces music, so also life realises its freedom in the midst of bonds, just as the string and the harp realise it in being bound to each other. God is bound to the universe of His own creation, if he were absolutely free there will be no creation at all. "He is apart from it but also in it: His freedom is being constantly expressed through the fetters. He is forging, God is infinite and eternal, but His infinity and eternity are achieved in time and space through endless forms".

—(Sen Gupta)

Tagore also pleads for a synthesis of Being and Becoming. Brahma is Brahama or the Supreme Being, but we have also to become Brahma. Like a river we should Become and lose ourselves in the sea of Being (Supreme). This process of Becoming and mingling with the Supreme Being is everlasting like the everlasting flow of the river towards the sea. This is also *Lila* or the constant manifestation of the Supreme Being. Mutability is the law of life, and there is unity in diversity everywhere.

Similarly, he also harmonises the opposition between illusion and truth, rather it is in truth that illusion merges itself. "Even illusion is true as illusion". The world may be *Maya* but it is also essential, for without appearance reality cannot exist, and without illusion truth itself will be empty. Truth derives its significance from the existence of illusion, appearance or *Maya*. World may be *Maya* but its illusoriness is its reality, it is what it seems to be, and what it seems to be it is. It is through the illusory world that the Supreme expresses itself, and it is by reaching forward to the Absolute that illusion justifies its existence. Life manifests itself through the dance of *is* and *is not*, of reality and illusion, and the synthesis of the two is achieved through the rhythm of this dance.

Similarly, Tagore harmonises Death and Life. Death has its own place in the scheme of life. Death is not a negation of life, but it is the gateway through which life constantly renews itself. In Nature, there is the never ending rhythm of birth-death and re-birth. Rabindranath had to suffer bereavements, one after another in quick succession, but he was not dismayed, for he felt that death was swallowed up in the victory of life over death. After the death of Jyotindranath's wife, he realised that his sorrow only enabled him to view the beauty of nature in a more correct perspective. His attachment to the world was relaxed. Death gave him a sense of freedom, and he came to realise the deeper meaning of the beauty of the world. He realised that death is the fulfilment and completion of life, that in death nothing is lost, and that it is the channel through which life ceaselessly flows and renews itself.

Life is harmony, and the law of principle which governs its rhythms is the principle of love and joy. According to the scientist the law of unity is the mechanical chain of cause and effect, of means and ends, but Tagore rejects such mechanical unity. In Tagore's philosophy the finite and the Infinite meet in an embrace of love and joy. Union of the individual with other men or with things external to himself is a union of love. It has no ulterior motives and its effect is one of joy. A man can know the truth about himself only through inter-relatedness with other men and with the external universe, this relation frees him from the burden of selfishness; it is a relation of love and so it gives him joy. Thus there is unity in diversity which constitutes the harmonious rhythm of life. It has its basis in love which according to Wordsworth is, "the impassioned expression in the countenance of all science", it is the ultimate truth.

Love is truth; it is also beauty. The aim of art is not the expression of Beauty but the expression of the unity of life which is the highest truth.

Beauty and truth are intimately related, and one completes the other. To quote Tagore himself, "The stream which comes from the Infinite and flows towards the finite—that is the True, the Good; it is subject to laws, definite in form. Its echo which returns towards the Infinite is Beauty and Joy, which are difficult to touch or grasp, and so make us beside ourselves." Beauty also must observe this rhythm, for it is the product of Joy which is disciplined and restrained, and not wild or extravagant. Joy is to be held in check by penance, and it must pass through a process of self purification through suffering before it can reach fulfilment. Thus a mother's joy reaches its fulfilment in her child after she has undergone the pangs of labour. Emotion must be controlled and disciplined before it can produce beauty, and give joy and peace. This is true of life as well as of artistic activity.

Like all mystics, Tagore also uses symbolism and imagery to increase the expressive range of his language. His images are graphic, picturesque and drawn from the common everyday objects of nature, and in this way the mystical, the abstract and the spiritual is made concrete and communicated to the readers with a rare lucidity and clarity.

First and foremost of such images is that of the Jivan-Devata. The concept of Jivan-Devata appeared not in one phase of the poet's career as is commonly supposed, but continued to appear all through his career upto the very end. This Jivan-Devata or Lord of life is intensely personal, but it also transcends the poet's self. The doctrine finds its first expression in the poem written in the early nineties, but it also appears in such poems as *Gitanjali-65*, *Fruit-Gathering-41* and in *Lover's Gift-39*. He referred to it in the course of a lecture delivered in 1930, as also in the poem written on his impending death:

In front lies the Ocean of peace
Launch the boat, Helmsman:
You will be the comrade ever,
Take, O take, him in your lap.

Both in sentiment and imagery these lines are reminiscent of the earlier Jivan-Devata poems. "It is one of the distinctive features of Rabindranath's view of life that he looks upon the Supreme Person as comprehending the individual and the universe, and the Supreme Person manifests Himself in those yearnings of the individual which connect him with the larger world lying behind, the intimations of immortality being only radiations from the centre to the circumference. The Lord of the poet's life shades off into the Lord of the universe, and the Boatman comes from the other shore, crossing the wild sea to meet her who watched alone at night with her lamp burning. This *Jivan-Devata* is the guide of the poet's life, who is joyfully leading (the poet) through all its obstacles, antagonisms and crookedness, towards the fulfilment of its innermost meaning. But Rabindranath who is a believer in unity or harmony and in love as the principle of harmony, does not look upon the guide as distinct from the human self. "There is," he says in *My Reminiscences*, "a duality in man. Of the inner-person, behind the outward

current of thoughts, feelings and events, but little is known or reached; but for all that he cannot be got rid of as a factor in life's progress." It is the apotheosis of this inner self which may be called Jivan-Devata or the Lord of Life.

This *Jivan-Devata* works within and through the individual soul, making it yearn for union with the Infinite. It also works within the Divine making it yearn for union with the finite. Says **Sen-Gupta**, "Not only does the human soul aspire for union with God, but God too has the same feeling for the individual human being as the bridegroom may have for the bride or the boatman for the passenger he ferries across the river. The universe is God's lila in the sense that He delights in it as a player in his sport, but it is also a work of art through which God, the artist, is constantly expressing Himself."

Rabindranath's poetry particularly *The Gitanjali* has such a universal appeal because of its (a) open air atmosphere, and (b) its affinity with the fundamental things of life. Says **Sen-Gupta**, "Although not lacking in sublimity of thought and feeling and richness of diction and imagery, this poetry is allied to folk-poetry in its insistent references to common things and common people—flowers and fruits, rivers and ferries, clouds and rains, the sky and its stars, boatmen and beggars, travellers on the road and shepherds with their flutes. Not only does Rabindranath draw on natural objects for descriptive images but he also finds human significance in the physical universe. As a poet he has discovered the secret of the world and revealed the reason why the lily is pale for the moon's love and the lotus draws her veil aside before the morning sun (*Lover's Gift-17*). (For him, the meaning of life lies in a universal inter-relatedness) and he has not merely shown the secret affinity between one object in nature and another, but looked upon the commonest physical things as symbols of man's passions, and longings and ideals".

The simplest example of creative vitality in nature is the flower which grows and fades and then renews itself in the dust. Why does it grow, for it serves no useful purpose. *Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop into the dust.*" The flower thus symbolises the vast mystery of creation. Since no reason can be given for its growth, the poet supposes it is the embodiment of the dreams of the grass. The flower finds its fulfilment in the fruit, and this symbolises the longing of the individual soul for union with the Infinite, which will be the soul's fulfilment. It grows in an environment of thorn and this symbolises the triumph of beauty and joy over pain and ugliness. It symbolises love and the power of love, and that is why the bridegroom is welcomed with flowers, and man worships God with flowers. The flowers have been woven and the garland is ready for the bridegroom. After the wedding the bride shall leave her home and meet her lord alone in the solitude of night. Its hundred petals symbolise life's many-sidedness and expansiveness. It is born and it dies, and this symbolises the rhythm of life or cycle of birth, death and re-birth. It symbolises the perpetual

renewal of life, in ever new forms of beauty. The flower is apparently simple, but even its sensuous appeal is extremely complex. It is soft, beautiful and fragrant; and although it is tuneless, it carries in its silence God's own melodies. Its beauty is possibly God's answer to the theory that phenomenal life is *maya*, for earth's flowers of illusion are kept eternally fresh by death. The odour coming out of the flower is a symbol not merely of love and joy but also of freedom.

light Another important symbol in Tagore's poetry is light. It represents the spirit of freedom. It represents the triumph of life over death, of freedom over bondage. It is the negation of death. Though light is a symbol of freedom, darkness is not to be rejected as a mere symbol of bondage. Darkness symbolises the mystery of creation, for it is in darkness that light loses itself. Darkness perpetually renews itself in light thus symbolising the renewal of life through Death. Darkness ceaselessly marches towards light so the poet calls it beautiful Queen and imagines her riding in her chariot across the sky to meet light.

darkness The dark night symbolises the mystery of life, it also provides a suitable background for the meeting of the bridegroom and the bride. Not only is darkness mysteriously beautiful, but it is also terrible, and that is why the Destroyer is imagined as hiding himself behind the veil of the night, and the storm is God's own signal. The opposition between darkness and light, between the terrible and the fails is not the final truth, because they are only part of the rhythm of life and contribute to the ultimate impression of harmony.

*The morning will surely come, the darkness will
vanish, and thy voice pour down in golden
streams breaking through the sky.*

The chief glory of night is in its stars which illuminate darkness and look like anklets of light.

Stars 'The stars have wrought their anklets of light to deck thy feet'. The stars symbolise freedom, love and joy; they are like flowers blossoming in the sky, and they seem to pour forth God's own melodies. With their vastness and antiquity they are fit symbols of immensity and eternity. They are heaven's lamps which resemble earthen lamps and are yet different from them. When man's frail lamp is broken they continue to give him light; but when they are hidden behind clouds, man's frail lamps continue to dispel darkness and give light. In their mingling of light and darkness, they symbolise the rhythm of life and death. They seem to be fixed and the space between them symbolised the periods of separation.

*It is this sorrow of separation that gazes in silence
all night from star to star.*

But they are known to be constantly moving towards each other, and this symbolises the attraction of love and the human yearning for re-union with the Infinite.

The horizon symbolises the meeting of the finite and the Infinite. The blue sky symbolises the infinitude, the majesty the tenderness of God, and Death may be said to symbolise the passage from the known to the unknown skies. The floating clouds and the winds symbolise the joyous vagrancy and freedom in which lies the real significance of life. The flight of birds in the sky symbolises the yearning of the human soul for that freedom which it ever fails to attain. But the wings of a home-seeking bird in the dusk symbolise for the poet the sweeping energy of human love. God is symbolised both by the sky and the nest. "Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well."

A flock of birds flying swiftly symbolise the passion for speed which is in the heart of the universe. The world is ever on the move seeking for a home or place of rest in the far away. A number of images symbolise this ceaseless flow. It is symbolised most frequently by a current of water, and life is often symbolised as the Eternal Fugitive. — *who escapes from captivity or is in hiding.*

The morning sea of silence broke into ripples of bird songs, and the flowers were all merry by the roadside, and the wealth of gold was scattered through the rift of the clouds while we busily went on our way and paid no heed.

The river frequently symbolises the journey of Life or Death or God is said to be the Boatman. This boatman started his job long ago and he has been doing it ever since. This symbolises the permanence of the common place occupations of life as contrasted with the impermanence of empires. He also symbolises the *Jivan-Devata*, the Lord of his life, who attracts man with the lure of the far away, for it is he alone who knows the secret of the other shore. This very idea is also symbolised by the open road which leads to strange countries and makes the heart wistful for the unknown. The traveller hears the call of the unknown and starts on the journey. Where do the boatmen and the travellers go? This is the eternal question which has never been answered.

The question and the cry 'oh, where?' melt into tears of a thousand streams and deluge the world with the flood of the assurance 'I am!'

Tagore is a spiritual realist. He has humanised spiritualism. He seeks union with God through union with his fellow-men. This is the unique feature of his mysticism; in this respect he stands alone among mystics.