



GITANJALI: AN IDEALIST'S LIFE OFFERING

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Abstract:

The famous book Gitanjali stands as a real mirror of an idealist's life experiences. If God stays as witness to creation of life, it is equally logical to offer life in his own service. The Indian visionary's life adds true meaning to this view point. This book sings songs of opposites in life such as birth-death, bondage-freedom, and union-separation thus completing the order of universal redemption. A sensitive point runs across the book to believe in duty instead of being tied to riches and power in human relations. The constant theme which permeates through the book as its essence is to seek or sacrifice life where the mind remains without fear and words come out from depth of truth.

KEYWORDS:

offering, master, poet, life, death, meeting

PREFACE:

The 19th century polymath, Rabindranath Tagore was a broad-minded humanist and Universalist. He was a litterateur par excellence whose peripatetic life only affirmed his opinion that human divisions were shallow. His views gathered uniform weightage to issues ranging from narrow nationalism to low literacy of masses in India. A universal agreement on different issues in life transformed him into a pacifist and well-rounded personality. His book, Gitanjali is a balanced work full of pages collected from his various other writings. This writing exhibits spiritual and mercurial poetry that has profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse. One can also find a skilled musician in him. He earned from his early years skill and mastery over lyrical Bengali language through his poetry. A natural affinity for songs led him to name his book Gitanjali. This is originally not his biography yet contained his musings that are carefully hand-picked from his many other books. This master book's manuscript is miraculously lost and found in London subway returned by a good samaritan. Rabindranath Tagore took with him one set of manuscript copy to show to his painter friend Rothenstein who in turn gladly handed it over to his poet friend W.B. Yeats. The Irish man of letters instantly developed a liking to the book and generously wrote a word of praise in the book's introduction. The published book was well received by the west and thus saw light of the world earning much fame to the author outside Bengal. It created history by becoming the first book to capture Nobel Prize in Asia. The Swedish committee announced in 1913 that the Anglo-Indian was awarded Nobel Prize for standing as a living example to an idealistic bent of mind.

PROLOGUE:

The poet ever tries to keep his body pure and removes all untruths out of his thoughts thereby showing the truth. He says he ever drives all evils away from his heart thus enabling his mind to reveal the

almighty in his actions

(4th song)*

“Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs...”

In another instance he entreats God to use his service in the same manner as a melodious little flute is used to garland the almighty's worship

(6th song)*

“I fear lest the day end before I am aware, and the time of offering go by...”

He is of simplistic opinion that a child keeps himself from the world being afraid even to move if his dear mother lavishly decorates him with bondage of finery as dress etiquette. In addition he asks her not to keep him shut from healthful dust of earth during a play

(8th song)*

“The child who is decked with prince's robes and who has jeweled chains round his neck loses all pleasure in his play; his dress hampers him at every step...”

The poet says that the song he came to sing remained unsung. He has not seen his master's face or listened to his voice but he has only heard his gentle footsteps from the road before his house. As he has not spread his seat on floor and lights being unlit he can't ask him into his house

(13th song)*

“..I live in the hope of meeting with him but this meeting is not yet...”

The poet has gone begging from door to door in the village path. He humbly says that the God's chariot stopped before him and almighty's glance fell on the poet. when God's hand is stretched before him for alms surprise knew no bounds when kingly jest opened God's palm before a beggar! confused and undecided poet says

(50th song)*

“I bitterly wept and wished that I had had the heart to give thee my all...”

The poet knows nature of God and so he stands apart. This only hides the almighty from his eyes. Also he stands by God's side by not sharing pleasure and pain with all other fellow mortals.

(77th song)*

“I shrink to give up my life, and thus do not plunge into the great waters of life...”

The poet is piqued by his passing days in crowded market place of the world. Even though his hands grow full with daily profits he ever holds belief that he has gained nothing. He says with resigned mind

(79th song)*

“If it is not my portion to meet thee in this my life then let me ever feel that I have missed thy sight-let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours...”

When death as God's servant is at poet's door, the dark night and fearful heart remains with him. He would take up the lamp; open his gates and bows before death for he knows it is God's messenger who

stands at his door.

(86th song)*

“in my desolate home only my forlorn self will remain as my last offering to thee.”

In desperate hope the poet goes searching for his love in all corners of his room and she stays unfound.

(87th song)*

“..But infinite is thy mansion, my lord, and seeking her I have to come to thy door...”

In another place, the poet recalls the day when death will knock at his door

(90th song)*

“..Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life-I will never let him go with empty hands...”

Elsewhere, the poet recounts death as his last fulfillment of life inviting him to whisper in his ears

(91th song)*

“One final glance from thine eyes and my life will be ever thine own...”

PERSPECTIVE:

The aged poet has gathered a large wealth of his ideal feelings from his life in form of melodious songs in his book. His seemingly mesmeric personality, flowing hair, and otherworldly dress earned him a prophet-like reputation in the West. In Indian tradition where poetry and religion is same thing he was a much revered personality in his own lifetime.

The poet having lost his entire family is grief smitten to witness his situation go out of his hands. So he seeks support of a lady to light his life darkened by human fragility

(64th song)*

“maiden, where do you go shading your lamp with your mantle? My house is all dark and lonesome
-lend me your light!”

In last pages of his book he mentions a dear female figure he has lost in his entire life

(87th song)*

“In desperate hope I go and search for her in all the corners of my room; I find her not...”

In another instance he bows to almighty to say that like homesick cranes stock reaching nest he too embarks on a voyage to eternal home of life

(103th song)*

“In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet...”

EPILOGUE:

The poet transcribed his numerous stories, plays, poems, novels in English after his famous work of Gitanjali. In addition to his enviable talent as polymath he showed much ingenuity in music by starting a new school of his own as Rabindra-Sangeet with immensely popular and varied themes, which served as a

source of inspiration to many musicians from the sub-continent. This used Indian classical music and traditional folk music as sources. It is a fact that his legacy left around 2230 songs and composed music to scores of vibrant traditional ballads of ethnic baul music that greatly influenced and inspired the musician in him. He remained the only musician to compose songs that served as national anthems to 2 countries (India, Bangladesh). He started school of his ideals in shantiniketan spending all the money he earned from his master work of Gitanjali, whose central premise was that learning in a natural environment would be more enjoyable and fruitful. Here global educational institution in the form of Vishwa-Bharathi University is established thus cherishing his childhood dream of liberal education unhampered by likes of pedagogy. His unorthodox views on nationalism as room for narrow walls of individual greed projected him as an altruist and torch bearer of universal peace and tranquility. Lastly, it is but no coincidence that both his childhood and old age passed by in the same grand mansion (Jorasanko Palace) of his forefather that marked lofty ideals of freedom in him. In summary, the idealist in poet's blood recounts his future in Gitanjali as an offering to almighty.

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*these reflect song numbers in Gitanjali

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