



Research Paper

Tagore's *Gitanjali* as a Grand Narration Disseminating India's National Identity

AUTHOR

Abstract

Gitanjali by Rabindranath Tagore has an indomitable place in Indian English literature and the post colonial literature as a whole. It is an extolling of the cultural richness of India, a clear beginning of modernity in Indian literature, art and thought. It is the proclamation of our national spirit, "gathering the past in a ritual of revival", "gathering the present" (Homi K Bhabha) and showing how they can be linked to the necessary future. *Gitanjali* marked the beginning of an international literature from India, with universal acceptance; revered by the Western World as they honoured him with Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. He has been giving new meanings to 'Nation' and 'Individual' beyond their physical existence. *Gitanjali* is a trans-creation of a national allegory, that can be interpreted in different ways; cultural, traditional, spiritual and political statement of a nation in a crucial period of self assertion.

This paper is an attempt to trace *Gitanjali* as a 'narration of national consciousness' and how dissemination of texts and discourses across cultures construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life, as it was theorized by Homi K Bhabha in his essays 'Nation and Narration' and 'DissemiNation'.

Key words: Culture, Tradition, Nation, Narration, Dissemination.

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Rabindranath Tagore who is rightly called as 'Gurudev', is the literary and spiritual leader of modern India. He was extremely versatile and vital personality who spread the light of artistic Renaissance of Bengal all over India and became the torch bearer of the rich and stupendous culture of India to the West. Tagore published *Gitanjali* ('song offering') in Bengali language in 1910, a trans-creation of it in English in 1912. When Tagore was honoured by Nobel Prize for literature; he turned to be the prophet who heralded the voice of new India in world literature.

Rabindranath Tagore came to national and literary scene in a time when the nation was in utter need to specify her identity both inside and outside India: It was a time when the West imperial powers started to lose their territories. The East and African countries were struggling to achieve their political freedom. It was a period of intense confusion worldwide and can be compared to the era of revolution before Romanticism rose in British Literature. With the advent of Modernism West felt the absurdities in their belief systems and expressions and it was also a period that Sanskritarians like William Jones found the richness of Sanskrit scripts, its organized grammar system, vivid literature and objective and systematic critical tradition. In the same way India opened the intensely spiritual and mystic texts to worldwide scrutiny and was proving how universal it is. All that India needed was a testimony of the same, and a spokesperson representative. We found it in Tagore and *Gitanjali*.

Tagore's literary pursuit can be divided in to three phases and *Gitanjali* the paramount contribution also marked Tagore's spiritual phase which was at the same time humane nationalistic and naturalistic phase as well. Indo-Anglian Poetry which can be dated back to 1830's freed itself from imitations and was trying to reach its real soul. Tagore's magnum opus achieved its greatness here.

According to Alexandrile Pushkil "with *Gitanjali* he brought a fresh air into world literature; it was bearing the stamp of a national Character, still having the features of universality". In the same way, poetry and philosophy were mingled so well to create a spiritual harmony. It is simple and lyrical, at the same time, profound and sublime.

Nation the term in its simplicity denote the geographical area with its lived communities sharing a homeland, a culture and if possible a language. Yet nation in the post colonial sense seemed to develop into an intricate idea which connotes a cultural construct rather than a mere geographical or historical entity. It is an excessively metaphoric and subjective idea. It is an abstraction; a land of "imaginary communities" as it was called by Benedict Anderson. It is a part of articulating the spaces in a post colonial culture.

A nation is a soul, an individual, it needs memories to tackle present and to glorify its future. It needs common glories of the past and common will in the present. That glory of past and a common aim for future is well articulated by Tagore in his Gitanjali. Individual aspiration to reach the Divine and the collective national fervor is the same for Tagore, "The time that my journey takes as long and the way of it long.

According to Tagore poetry is the finest form of creative activity. For Gitanjali, he immensely owed to Upanishads, Vedanta philosophy, teachings of Geetha, Bhuddism, ancient medieval Bhakthi tradition, Vaishnava cult, and Adwaita philosophy. He was also influenced by the Brahma Samaj, the modern monotheistic-reformation movement in India. He was much influenced by Upanishads and Vedanta Philosophy and by the Medieval Bhakthi tradition and Vaishnava cult. Like Kabir, Surdas, Mirabai, Thulasidas and Jayadev He considered life as finite. Here is the contemplation of finite about the infinite. The finite self to reach the universal, the supreme power manifests in all. There is no heaven-seated, personified god for Tagore. For him it is an illumination. That supreme power is Brahman and its finite manifestations are Athma/life. We are all manifestations of the same illumination. Athma is in a chain of births and rebirths. Our purpose is to be pure and to be part of the supreme. Upanishads reiterate the principles of samsara, karma, dharma and moksha. With Gitanjali, he is moving from the religious and ritualistic ardor of the Vedas to the spiritualistic tone of Upanishads. 'Upa' means near and 'shad' means 'to sit', to sit near God and to converse with him. In Gitanjali we have that intense conversation.

Gitanjali preaches that there is no need of differentiation as you and me. It based itself more on selfless devotion that makes one intensely subjugated to the will of God. Radha Krishna image is recurrent here. A lover ardently singing and praying for the union with the beloved is a recurrent metaphor in Bhakthi tradition. This is frequently employed by Tagore in Gitanjali.

We can trace the swift move from the individual to the ritualistic to the spiritual in Gitanjali. It is an allegory of moving from the communal to the national and then to the universal. It is well delineated in Gitanjali. He proposed the concept of Viswamanav, disseminating the cultural plurality of India to the West and showing how incorporating it was. Universal brotherhood, individual freedom and nationalistic feelings are complementary in the poem.

This wisdom of Upanishads was taking a universal meaning in Gitanjali. It iterates freedom of spirit, its desire to reach the universal and how it can be achieved from a vision of universal fraternity. There is nothing to differentiate people; no cultural, traditional, ideological or political differences matter as the divine illumination that ignites inside all of us is the same. All are awaiting to be one; the infinite and eternal. According to Tagore "There is some force in me who continually works towards that end, but is not mine alone. It permeates the whole universe. When the universal being is manifested within an individual..."

(Tagore 5)

"cultural difference addresses the jarring of meanings and values generated in between the variety and diversity associated with cultural plenitude; it represents the process of cultural interpretation formed in the perplexity of living, in the disjunctive, liminal space of national society" (Dissemination 312)

Dissemination of a national identity marks the establishment of new forms of meaning and strategies of identification. According to Renan, "Nation is a soul, a spiritual principle... Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present" (Ernest Renan 19)

Tagore says that the possession of a rich legacy of memories, understanding of the rich tradition, and the present consent to live together are the criteria for a community to call it a nation, and to proclaim the world about nationality and nationhood.

I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued my
Voyage through the wilderness of worlds leaving my track ..."

(Gitanjali 12)

In the essay "Nationalism in India" Tagore had clarified the idea or definition of nation. "It (nation) is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power" where "the individuals all over the world get privileges to think clearly, feel nobly and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of noble truth" (Tagore). Tagore wrote in a period that coincides with a political awakening in India and the renaissance of ancient knowledge its richness, depth and integrity.

To him nationalism was the high principle of social co-operation and spiritual idealism. The purpose of nationalism was to establish universal peace and moral culture of brotherhood beyond the

geographical limits. Cultural difference pronounced by India and disseminated in the new world is strikingly different. It is creating a new form of meaning, new strategy for identification, and it continues to implicate in all social, cultural and symbolic systems; always leaving India self-reliant, proud and self-sufficient at the same time open to cultural social and moral universalism.

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