

## **Gitanjali – Song Offerings Spiritual Poems of Rabindranath Tagore**

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### **Abstract**

In the world of Indian poets, it goes without saying that Rabindranath Tagore is undoubtedly the most remarkable and well-known figure. As a poet, Tagore appears to have been influenced by ancient Indian works such as the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, as well as mythological texts like as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The fact that he took so much from these revered and renowned books is understandable, and the kind of cosmic vision, spiritual profundity, and honest search for truth that we acquire from them may very well be associated with Tagore's poetry. Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali is a collection of 103 English poetry written in the style of Shakespeare. Gitanjali, which was originally composed in Bengali, literally translates as "prayer offering of song." Gitanjali is a text that is both inviting and engaging in a variety of ways. It is a collection of Tagore's musings on the nature of the relationship between people and the Divine. Each poem communicates in a unique way how God is at the centre of the poet's inspiration, which is at the heart of the divinity-devotee relationship at the heart of these songs. The poet's ultimate purpose is to merge with the Lord, for the Lord has given him the gift of life as well as all else he possesses. It was his desire to sing in his majesty and to keep himself pure for the Lord. The purpose of this research paper is to provide an explanation of the songs offered in Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali poetry.

**Keywords:** Rabindranath Tagore's, Gitanjali, song, offering, God, Divine, nature, spiritual

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Gitanjali, written by Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali, is considered to be his masterpiece. The English Gitanjali, also known as Song Offerings, is a collection of 103 English poetry that are Tagore's own English translations of his original Bengali poems. Gitanjali is a compound word made up of the words git and anjali. Git is a word that meaning song, and anjali is a word that means offering, hence it is translated as "Song offerings." The publication of the English translation of Gitanjali prepared the path for Tagore to enter the arena of English literary criticism. His book, the Gitanjali, was released in 1912 and he received the Nobel Prize in 1913, which was granted by the Swedish Academy.

Gitanjali is a collection of poems by the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, which literally translates as "song giving." The original Bengali anthology, which was released in 1910, contained 157 poems in all. One of the reasons for the general appeal of Tagore's "song offerings" in Gitanjali is the ease and simplicity with which he has portrayed his emotions of anguish following a personal loss, as well as his deep devotion to God. The manner and

language of these prose lyrics are what most affect the reader. The profundity of this poetry, articulated in a straightforward and optimistic manner, is what makes them so appealing. It seems as if these verses permeate into the reader's psyche and leave an indelible mark. In his essay, "In 'Gitanjali,' I found wisdom, lost it, and found it again," Francis Xavier Clooney writes, "...Yet it was in reading Gitanjali, beginning that night in September 1973, that the possibilities of a Catholic realisation of Hindu wisdom shifted from possibility to actuality." Yeats wrote, "I have carried the manuscript of these translations around with me for days at a time, reading it in railway trains, or on the tops of omnibuses, and in restaurants. I have often had to close the book because I was afraid some stranger might see how moved I was by it."

Rabindranath Tagore is principally and pre-eminently known as a lyric poet, and his work reflects this. According to KRS Iyengar, "He authored the greatest number of lyrics ever written by a poet." Tagore wrote around 2000 lines of poetry that are unparalleled in their beauty and purity. Both in terms of substance and form, its lyrics are notable for the delicate blending of harmony of thoughts, sentiments, and world symphony that characterises them.

As a poet, Tagore appears to have been influenced by ancient Indian works such as the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, as well as mythological texts like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The fact that he took so much from these revered and renowned books is understandable, and the kind of cosmic vision, spiritual profundity, and honest search for truth that we acquire from them may very well be associated with Tagore's poetry. We are appropriately reminded that Tagore was greatly affected by such philosopher poets as Chandidas, Nanak, Kabir, and Meera, and that there are positive signs of their impact in his poetry. Tagore's poetry contains positive traces of these influences. Bhakti or devotional poetry has grown and developed over the centuries, with notable poets such as Jaidev, Chandidas, Kabir, Tukaram, and Surdas making significant contributions to the growth and development of the genre. Gitanjali is composed in this tradition. Tagore is a humanist, and his Gitanjali is a work that is deeply rooted in humanity. Gitanjali is, without a question, a religious poetry, yet the greatness of this sacred poem rests in its appeal to the human spirit.

Song Offerings is a collection of Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore's lyrics, which have been translated into English by the poet himself. Song Offerings is frequently referred to be the English translation of Gitanjali, a collection of poetry by poet Rabindranath Thakur that was created between 1904 and 1910 and released in 1910 as a collection of poems. Songs of Praise & Thanksgiving, on the other hand, is an anthology of English translations of poems from Tagore's theatre Achalayatan as well as nine other previously published volumes of Tagore poetry.

### **Tagore's Lyricism**

Tagore's lyricism developed over time in a steady process of development. His songs are a true reflection of his romantic imagination, through which he looked at men, nature, and the human condition in all its manifestations. His early songs, on the other hand, are marked by romantic exuberance (excessive enthusiasm) and are primarily concerned with the many aspects of nature and beauty, which have long been popular themes among romantic poets.

Tagore's lyrics are distinguished not only by the variety of themes that they cover, but also by the manifestation of divinity in all objects and aspects of the universe that they portray. He wrote lyrics about God, love, nature, children, the love of the world and humanity, and a

variety of other subjects, among others. Not even Sarojini Naidu, who has been dubbed "the Nightingale of India," has written lyrics that cover such a wide range of subjects. When Tagore writes a song, he reinterprets the theme and spirit of Indian philosophy, and he brilliantly recreates Indian atmosphere and the impact of Upanishads, Vaishnavas, poets and folk songs from Bengal, among other influences.

The song like nature of Tagore's lyrics is one of the most distinguishing aspects of his writing. There is something peaceful and reflective about them, and they are notable for their spiritual nature. His English lyrics are primarily prose poetry in which he uses musical language and an incantatory tone, as opposed to his Bengali verses.

### **Gitanjali Songs Offering**

Rabindranath Tagore took the luxury of undertaking "free translation" when he translated these 103 poems from their original Bengali language into English. The results are often transcreations rather than literal translations; yet, literary biographer Edward Thomson thought they were "excellent" and "enjoyable." When comparing Rabindranath's method to translating his own poem with that of a professional translator, the reader may see how Rabindranath thought about the task. The first is a line from Song Offering song number one, which was translated by Rabindranath himself.

### **Gitanjali – Poem 1**

Such poetry can be found in abundance in Gitanjali. Let's have a listen to the first song.

#### **Stanza I**

*THOU hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.*

First, the grace of God onto human beings is mentioned in the first stanza. Considering the human body to be a fragile vessel, Tagore believes that God periodically fixes its defects and replenishes it with new life. God is the all-powerful ruler of the human race, and he takes care of his subjects and resolves all of their issues. God's joy is extended indefinitely to man in this manner.

*This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.*

God is described as a magnificent flute player or musician in the second stanza, while the poet is compared to a flute. Breath paid through the flute is heard as a song that is eternally new and lasts for eternity. Tagore may have viewed the poet as a flute, and the poem that comes out of his mouth as an eternal song that is new every time is what he was thinking.

*At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.*

The poet reaches into the unspeakable when it comes to the character of God. Every touch from God touches the poet's heart, filling his heart with overflowing delight and putting him in a condition of tremendous pleasure that cannot be conveyed in words.

*Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.*

Tagore says that God's limitless blessings are only available to him, through his small hands. God will save me, protect me, and bless me. I am confident in this. I will be the same person

no matter how many years pass. My heart serves as a particular storage facility for all of your blessings. God's blessings continue to be poured into the rooms of his heart, yet there is still more room to be filled. God is almighty and omnipresent in the universe.

### Poem 2

*WHEN thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes.*

*All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony – and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.*

*I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence.*

*I touch by the edge of the far spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.*

Tagore claims God inspired his songs in this poem. He is a poet by divine order. It's as if God has chosen him, and his pride is nearly broken. This realisation brings Tagore profound delight and harmony in his life. It is now free of harshness and discord. The divine inspiration he receives drives him to transcend mortal limitations and touch God with his poetry. The idea is that poetry is a noble pursuit. The poet cannot aspire nor enter God's presence as a man, yet through his poetry he can touch God. So his song is better. From one perspective, Tagore is offering and presenting his songs to God. He gets drunk from singing ecstasy. He gives poetry force. Singing makes the poet forget his insignificance. Poetry's uplifting quality is evident. Especially in the last line where Tagore says he may name God his master and friend because of poetry's power. Tagore thus pays brilliant homage to the force and beauty of divinely inspired poetry, while remaining grateful and modest.

Look to thy face: The poet is overjoyed that God has commanded him to sing and inspired him to write poetry, and as he looks up at God, he cries tears of delight and thankfulness.

All that is harsh... across the sea: Everything negative, harsh, unmelodious, and discordant gives way to harmony and lovely melody when God gives us the heavenly inspiration to sing. And the poet's admiration for God blossoms into an unlimited love, bridging the gap between man and God.

I touch aspire to reach: The poet dedicates his art, his poetry, to God. And this is the only way he can communicate with God.

Drunk with the joy... lord: His heart is filled with such unlimited delight as a result of music and divine inspiration that he begins to regard God as a friend rather than a lord and master.

### Poem 3

*I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amazement.*

*The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky.*

*The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.*

With His symphony of love, affection, and care for His creation, God, the divine musician, illuminates the entire world. His love, disguised as pleasant music, is unbounded, as infinite as the sky and Himself. This holy song pours from the infinite to the finite, filling the entire universe with heavenly truth, spiritual understanding, and eternal truth, as well as eternal

light. Sacred music is like a fast-moving stream whose route is unblocked by any rocky impediment. The divine flood of His love continues to flow, conquering all impediments. It has an effect on the stones as well.

God, the divine musician, lights the entire globe with His symphony of love, affection, and care for His creation. His love, hidden behind nice music, is limitless, as endless as the sky and Himself. This holy melody pours forth from the infinite to the finite, flooding the universe with heavenly knowledge, spiritual insight, eternal truth, and eternal light. Sacred music is like a fast-moving brook with no stony impediments in its way. The holy river of His love keeps flowing, overcoming all obstacles. It also has an effect on the stones.

*My heart longs to join in thy song, but vainly struggles for a voice. I would speak, but speech breaks not into song, and I cry out baffled. Ah, thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master!*

The poet longs to sing with God and copy Him. But he is unable to do so. His heart yearns to sing along with the music. He is so enthralled by celestial music that he forgets how to speak. He screams in disbelief and astonishment. Although the poet is also a singer, he feels little in comparison to the great music singer. The insignificance and imperfection of humans in comparison to the divine is thus highlighted. The poet wants to be one with God, but he is unable to do so since he is trapped in this world, or Maya, which is God's never-ending symphony. The poet is kept captive by the lovely melody of God's song, which is constantly heard across the universe. He listens to it with passionate ecstasy and can't seem to break free from its entanglements.

#### **Poem 4**

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

Here, Tagore conveys love in such a unique way. Here, "life of my life" refers to the driving force behind his existence. Only when life is full of love does it become vibrant. One must maintain his body, mind, and spirit pure in order to receive the bliss of love. True love is available to those who maintain their purity.

*I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.*

The ultimate truth is true love. Only when one's thoughts are pure is it possible for a person to experience true love. Evil, greed, anger, and revenge thoughts will only keep him from discovering the ultimate truth. Love, as I already stated, is the ultimate truth. A person who understands this fundamental truth is said to be enlightened. His mentality shifts to a spiritual state. The transition of the mind from uncertainties to solutions is referred to as "the light of reason in my head." A person who understands the truth has no doubts; his ideas are like light, and he can see, feel, and understand the truth for himself. However, in order for this realisation to occur, one must maintain mental purity.

*I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.*

The finest part is still to come. He declares that he will endeavour to keep all negative thoughts out of his mind and to maintain his love in bloom. Tagore claims that he will keep

his love in the form of a flower since love is as delicate as a flower. Love can only be held by a flower. A person's heart is just as delicate as their love. The heart is also quite vulnerable. Love can only exist in a person's heart, and it can't exist anywhere else. However, in order for love to last, all evils must be banished from one's heart.

*And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act.*

This is the apex of this exquisite poetry. Tagore claims that the only way he can show his love is via action. Love can't be expressed in any other way. Only deeds, not words, thoughts, or feelings, will be able to show love. True love is on the move. Knowing the ultimate truth of love empowers Tagore to act. Realizing the genuine meaning of love will inspire a person to take action. Love entails taking action.

### Poem 5

*I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side. The works that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.*

The most exquisite of all indulgences, according to Tagore, is the enjoyment of one's own being. He is devoting himself to such an experience through meditation. There is no greater purpose in

life than to meditate and be with one's own being at this time. When a person realises this, he **realises** that the rest of his work can wait. The only meaningful work is meditation.

*Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows neither rest nor respite, and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.*

Life without meditation, according to Tagore, is live in a state of unconsciousness. I am disconnected from my soul when I do not meditate. Without meditation, I am incredibly restless.

*Whatever I do becomes meaningless. Everything I do becomes endless suffering. Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove.*

In this passage, Tagore writes, "Today, the hour has come, and I have realised the beauty of meditation with great difficulty." My soul has found the music that my heart has been searching for. In my heart, there is peace, quiet, and happiness.

*Now it is time to sit quite, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure.*

Tagore adds, humbly, that now is the time to sit quietly. Not today, but now now, right now, you must sit down quietly. Face your own self-awareness and commit your life song right now. This is a song that must be sung silently. You will only be able to experience the ultimate ecstasy in your silent singing, which will overflow like an ocean.

### Poem 6

*Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop into the dust*

Tagore expresses his pain and need for inner transformation in this poem. Pluck and take this small bloom. Deliver me immediately from the cycle of birth and death. Accept me into your eternal happiness before I droop, get old, and die.



*It may not find a place in thy garland, but honour it with a touch of pain from thy hand and pluck it. I fear lest the day end before I am aware and the time of offering go by.*

Tagore asks that even if I am not yet prepared for such a great jump, please take me and soothe my soul by your grace. I dread that my life will end before I gain awareness, evolve, and know truth. The time I have remaining for life is all I have to contribute. Therefore, please provide me with the truth before I die.

*Though its colour be not deep and the smell be faint, use this flower in thy service and pluck it while there is time*

Additionally, Tagore notes that 'its colour may not be profound'. He asserts that his spirit is not profound, mature, or conscious. However, he continues to beg life to take him into eternal joy and free him from the cycle of birth and death.

### Poem 7

*My song has put off her adornments.*

*She has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union; they would come between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers.*

*My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight. O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet.*

*Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music.*

Tagore is describing how his literary style evolved through parallels and imagery centred on the romantic interaction between a lady and her lover in this stanza. Tagore's style was previously ornate, but has evolved into something more simple and austere as a woman who sheds her ornaments and decorations, abandoning all pride and vanity in her decorations because she understands that her elaborate dresses and ornaments would detract from her union with her lover. Tagore's imagery is evocative in this way. The inference is that Tagore's poetry is similar to a lady, and his songs have abandoned their ornamental parts in order to approach God. This is reminiscent of the belief that one must give up everything, all material possessions, in order to

surrender to God. He also makes use of the tutor-discipline metaphor. He prostrates himself before God, renounces all vanity and pride. Finally, Tagore employs the flute symbol once more. Tagore prays to God that his life will be as straight and simple as a reed, which must be straight in order to be shaped into a flute. And then, in his prayer for God to fill the flute with music, he invokes divine inspiration.

### Poem 8

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

*In fear that it may be frayed, or stained with dust he keeps himself from the world, and is afraid even to move.*

*Mother, it is no gain, thy bondage of finery, if it keep one shut off from the healthful dust of the earth, if it rob one of the right of entrance to the great fair of common human life.*

This stanza continues the need for a simple, austere style of poetry. Tagore asserts that, similar to a kid whose ability to play is harmed by the heavy and intricate dress suited for a prince in which he is dressed, as well as the gold chains and other jewellery he wears, his

poetry is harmed by excessive ornamentation. The toddler likewise comes to a halt, fearful that his elaborate gown would become dirty or ripped. He restrains himself from engaging in play and socialising with others. He is afraid to move at all. Tagore then addresses his mother in the manner of a child, stating that all decorations and ornaments are pointless if they keep the child away from the dust of the earth, the simple life, and close proximity to nature, and if they deprive the child of all joys associated with entering common human life.

Tagore uses the concept of a youngster over-decorated by his mother to promote simplicity in this lyric. On the contrary, this song stresses the importance of a poet living a modest life near to nature and among the people. Like a youngster who cannot play because his clothes and diamonds restrict his movements, a poet who relies on overly expensive, ornamental components cannot produce pure and simple poetry. Tagore compared the poet to a kid and life to a fair. He adds that adorning a child or poet is a waste of time if it prevents them from appreciating the beauties of a fair. Tagore sees worldly prosperity as a hindrance to life.

### Poem 9

*O fool, to try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders! O beggar, to come to beg at thy own door! Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all, and never look behind in regret.*

*Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath.*

*It is unholy - take not thy gifts through its unclean hands. Accept only what is offered by sacred love.*

In this verse, Tagore warns the reader that man is foolish for trying to carry himself and his burdens alone. He is a fool who begs at his own door. God can and will take care of everything if man leaves his cares at His feet. A man who does so will never regret it.

When man is perverted by desire, the light of spiritual life is extinguished. Tagore teaches that gifts soiled by desire, making the hands bearing them impure, should not be accepted. No desire should drive man, but grateful acceptance of God's gifts.

The lyric serves as a warning to mankind. It opens with two paradoxes that accurately characterise man's condition when he refuses to believe in God. It is folly on man's side to imagine that he is strong enough to carry all his obligations himself when God may readily lighten his weight and bear all softly. Another contradiction is that man is like a beggar who comes to beg at his own door and receives nothing in return. Tagore wants to express the idea that God is the supreme master and bears the weight of the entire universe. So man should give up all his anxieties and cares and surrender himself to God, and he will never regret it. All of man's desires are false and wicked, and the human soul must be free of all cravings in order to embrace God's lovely gifts. Man must purify himself; he cannot embrace God's gifts with shaky hands and accept everything he offers with love. The suggestion is that Man should completely surrender to God's control.

### Poem 10

*Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.*

*When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.*

*Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.*



*When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.*

Tagore expresses praises to the Lord who dwells among the poorest and most humble, and laments his inability to be as modest as God is in his humility in living among the lowliest in this poem. Tagore sets his foot on a footstool placed in the habitation of the poorest, lowest, and last while he sings of God's magnificence. He claims that he cannot stoop as low as God's feet rest in the depths of the poorest, humblest, and people who society has abandoned when bowing and praying to God and paying his respect.

God travels among the poorest, lowest, and lost in the most humble garments of these men, and those who are proud can never hope to reach where He walks. The poet then sobs, unable to imagine his heart ever reaching such a place where God walks. His heart would never find its way to this area where God keeps company with the lonely.

Tagore makes an impassioned plea in this song that, because God dwells among the humblest and poorest of people, man should attempt to live closer to them. Only by serving the poorest, lowest, and those who are lost and abandoned by society can one reach God's feet. True piety entails mixing with the impoverished and downtrodden of humanity. Those who are wealthy and proud will never be able to properly serve God; their hearts will never be able to reach God because they will never be able to reach the plane where God rests among the poor and downtrodden. God is a friend to the lonely and loves even the poorest and most despised. Love for God entails love for others.

*"Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!"*

The lines are sufficiently critical, humanistic, and reforming in nature. The tone is critical of individuals who follow Hinduism's vapid inconsequential rituals and traditions. It is pointless to worship idols in temples, to chant and tell beads in the corner of a confined room. This seclusion is a form of escapism. Evasion of the world, society, and humans is fruitless because there is no road to God by this route. If God is inextricably linked to the earth and humans, how can His creation be separated from itself? The poet mocks these stereotypical devotees, telling them to open their eyes and see that there is no God in front of them. The poet criticises the life of renunciation and extols the life of action.

## 2. Conclusion

Because the message conveyed in these songs works on various levels of consciousness, they have the capacity to keep one's mind engaged indefinitely. They were written as pleas to God, but they also carry a powerful message for humanity. God is Tagore's beloved and friend, and this is one of his songs' most distinguishing features. These songs are about his style of singing God's praises, his willingness to surrender selflessly, and his exhortations to fellow humans to avoid worldly pleasures. His vocabulary isn't complicated, full of allusions, or riddled with figurative or metaphorical wording or idioms. Their huge reading is due to the simplicity of old English and few linguistic changes. There are a total of 103 free poems of various lengths, of which 10 are discussed here. Each song has a different message to express and a different presenting style, but Tagore weaves them all together with one invisible

thread: selfless devotion to the heavenly power that created and protects all beings.

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