

THE THEMES OF LOVE, SEX AND HOMO-SEX IN TAGORE'S *GITANJALI*: A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING

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As W. B. Yeats states in the Introduction to Tagore's *Gitanjali* that the text can be read from various points of view. Thus, the paper aimed at reading the text from the point of view of the deconstructive theory. The theory has recently been originated since Jacques Derrida's famous paper "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" read at Johns Hopkins University in 1966. Derrida read a text syntactically. He thinks that the meaning of a text is a free play of language. He simply means the real meaning of a text is never achieved. It is always postponed. For this he coined the term 'differance': at every reading the central meaning is postponed and each reading gives a different meaning from the earlier one. By keeping in mind this point of view, I read *Gitanjali*.

The paper does not intend to hurt someone's feelings; neither is it a literary stunt. It is simply an attempt to read the text syntactically and without considering its author, title and the traditional theme. For this purpose only those poems are selected which have the selected themes of this paper. The poet expresses his love and erotic feelings in the poem no. 5, 7, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27, 30, 32, 38, 41, 42, 45, 44, 46, 52, 53, 56, 65, 66, 74, 80, 84, 99, 102 and so on. In these poems the poet is a beloved and expresses her normal desire to meet her lover. The poet, though a male, treats himself as a female beloved of the so called lover to whom he waits for. The traditional reader may consider it the poet's love for Divine (God).

In the poem no. 5, the poet-beloved desires to meet her lover. This desire is constant throughout the poems, since the so called lover does not meet. In the poem no. 7, she says that the ornaments on her body will be the obstacle in the union of two lovers. In the poems no. 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 26 and etc have the same desire of union with the lover. The desire of union is stronger in the poem no. 23. Here in the romantic atmosphere the poet-lover could not control his/her passions and waits in the darkness of the stormy night. In the poem no. 27, the poet-

beloved is trapped in a situation that she must meet him. In 30th poem she avoids her ego and accepts her lover plainly. In 32nd poem she says that the love of her lover is not possessive. The 38th poem expresses the desperate desire of union with the lover. In 41st poem, the poet-beloved considering her own a beggar girl waits for her kingly lover, who will come and satisfy her beggarly desires. The poems 42 to 47 have deep intensity of the arrival of the so called lover and the union with him. In 48th poem the poet-beloved deliberately remains behind near a pond to meet her lover.

The poems 52 and 53 are highly symbolic for the use of 'wristlet' and 'sword' as symbolic gifts by the lover. The poems 56 and 65 state the importance of mutual love. The poet-beloved also confesses that both of them love equally each other. 74th poem has a woman (poet-beloved) filling her pitcher in the river. She is lured by the tune of the flute of the lover. The poems 84, 80, 89, 99 and 100 have the repetition of the feelings of pain and pangs of separation from the lover.

All the above mentioned poems have love and passion for union with the so called lover. Here the poet's feelings are of a female-beloved to her male-lover. If it is accepted that the poet has disguised as a woman to seek mercy and love of God (as it is generally considered about Tagore), then why does the poet searches for 'her' in the poem 87th? In rest of the poems the poet longs for the union with male-lover, but in this poem the poet is in search of a female-lover. He says:

“IN desperate hope I go and search for her in all the corners of my room; I find her not.” (p. 251)

This sudden change in the gender of the poet's feelings clearly shows that all the poems have not the same feelings. It has been so, because they are not a part of a single poem. *This means that Gitanjali has some poems addressed to God, but there are also other poems that are addressed to somebody else.* (Emphasised)

As far as the English version of *Gitanjali* is concerned, we know that the poems are not composed in a sequence. Actually, they are taken from the poet's various earlier poems composed at different times – *Gitimalya, Naivedya, Kheya, Shishu, Chaitali, Kalpana, Achalayatan, Utsarga and Gitanjali*. They are also trans-creations and not translations. Therefore, the poems have variety of themes. It is the poem no. 102 that gives a sufficient room 'to deconstruct' the poems. Here the poet-lover (perhaps answering the critics of his Bengali poems) does not wish to tell the name to which these poems are addressed. He neither wishes to explain the meaning of his love and/or devotional poems. He says:

“I BOASTED among men that I had known you. They see your pictures in all works of mine. They come and ask me, "Who is he?" I know not how to answer them. I say, "Indeed, I cannot tell." They blame me and they go away in scorn. And you sit there smiling.

I put my tales of you into lasting songs. The secret gushes out from my heart. They come and ask me, "Tell me all your meanings." I know not how to answer them. I say, "Ah, who knows what they mean!" They smile and go away in utter scorn. And you sit there smiling.”(p. 287)

This creates doubt and space to read the poems from another point of view, particularly for those readers who read them without knowing the author and his spirituality. Moreover, the words that are used for God (lover) are not capitalised. Furthermore, in almost all the poems the poet-beloved never addresses God directly, rather the poet-beloved uses words for her lover such as ‘friend’, ‘king’, ‘lord’, ‘master’, etc. It is also strange that in India, no male writer addressed God as his male-lover and treated himself as a female-beloved (as far as my knowledge is concerned, no famous writer treated so). Therefore, the language, symbols and settings of some of the poems show the leaning of the poet towards homo-sexuality.

In the writer of the article “Tagore’s Gitanjali as a work in the Bhakti Tradition” says:

‘The God in “Gitanjali” has no name or abode and cannot be identified with any specific Indian God. He has His own form and personality. He is referred to as “you”, “thou” or “thee”’.

Although, the writer of the article tried to prove the poet to be in the stream of Bhakti Tradition, the writer of the article has not given any example of a male writer considering himself God’s Female-beloved. Rather the columnist clearly states that the God in *Gitanjali* is not identified with any of the Indian gods. This also gives room to think that the male lover in the poems is not a God, but a common person treated as a God.

The poems 22nd and 23rd express the (homo-) sexual desire of the poet to unite with the so called lover in the romantic atmosphere. The male-lover is expected to come at night in the stormy atmosphere. The poet will keep his/her doors open for the lover. The poet is sleepless and waits for him. This is a common sexual feeling among any living being, but uncommon among male for another male. In 22nd poem the poet says:

“The woodlands have hushed their songs, and doors are all shut at every house. Thou art the solitary wayfarer in this deserted street. Oh my only friend, my best beloved, the gates are open in my house –do not pass by like a dream.” (P.79)

The paper that made read these poems from a different point of view is the ‘Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity – A New Province of Law for India’ by Hon. Michael D. Kirby, AC CMG judge in Australia, himself a homosexual. Actually a lecture delivered at the series of “TAGORE LECTURES 2013” organised by University of Kolkata, Kolkata. It ends with the reference to the 45th poem from the *Gitanjali*. In it the poet says:

‘He comes, comes, ever comes.

Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes. Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind, but all their notes have always proclaimed, "He comes, comes, ever comes."

In sorrow after sorrow it is his steps that press upon my heart, and it is the golden touch of his feet that makes my joy to shine.’(p. 131)

The writer of this lecture thinks the ever coming of ‘he’ is ever change in social views and laws in case of sexual minorities. The mentioned judge says:

‘Tagore’s poem displays a sense of movement and urgency. Taken from the *Gitanjali*, it indicates a fast trajectory towards new times and new experiences, motivated by love. It is therefore apt to the subject of these lectures, addressed as they are to the law’s response to sexual minorities.’

He read these poems from the point of view of his own. That gave me hint to read these poems from a different point of view.

The poems 52nd and 53rd have two symbolic gifts by the lover: The ‘sword’, analogy with male sexual organ and the ‘wristlet’, analogy with female sexual organ. The former one is more liked by the poet than the latter one. Further, like a virgin girl the poet is fascinated by the ‘sword’ (male organ) and is also afraid of the thought of it.

In a nutshell, the paper does not intend to defame the great Indian author and the Nobel Laureate, Ravindranath Tagore. It is only a trifle attempt to read the text from another point of view. And for that the deconstructive theory provides this opportunity. Of course, Tagore was a great spiritual being, but some of his poems (for example – 22, 23, 52, 53, 45 and 102) are ambiguous. The addressee in these poems is a common friend rather than a divine one. There are still many minor symbols and references that could be paid attention to proving my point. Surely, this paper will help the readers of the text to develop a new approach about poems.

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