

Gitanjali – Song Offerings

Spiritual Poems of Rabindranath Tagore

An e-book presentation by **The Spiritual Bee**



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Book Summary: “Gitanjali” is one of Rabindranath Tagore’s best known works for which he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Many of the verses in Gitanjali are beautiful prayers written after a gut-wrenchingly painful period in Rabindranath Tagore’s life, during which he lost his father, wife, daughter and a son in quick succession. His unfathomable pain and unshaken devotion to God are captured in the moving prose-verses of Gitanjali, which Tagore dedicated as “Song Offerings”.

For a reader uninitiated in Tagore, it is our humble recommendation that they read the prose-verses of Gitanjali only after gaining familiarity with some of his other works. His books My Reminiscences, Glimpses of Bengal, Sadhana and Nationalism are a great place to start and are available for a free download at our website

www.spiritualbee.com/free-spiritual-books/ - In that way the reader will have gained a fuller perspective and a rich contextual background, to weight Tagore's words against.

When one reads the works of Tagore, one detects a clear stream of spirituality and an intense love for Nature that flows through most of his books. It is no exaggeration that the more works of Tagore one reads, the more one falls in love with this simple and beautiful poet. He shone forth brightly his lamp of timeless wisdom of the East — that this Universe has been created out of pure love, and it is only our love for each other together with peace, justice and freedom that will sustain it.

“The Upanishads say: “From joy does spring all this creation, by joy is it maintained, towards joy does it progress, and into joy does it enter.”

It means that God's creation has not its source in any necessity; it comes from his fullness of joy; it is his love that creates, therefore in creation is his own revealment.”

**- Rabindranath Tagore explaining a verse of the Upanishads, in his book
“Sadhana – The Realisation of Life”**

It is no wonder that in India, Rabindranath Tagore is revered as “Gurudev” — “a teacher embodying God-like knowledge”, a title conferred upon him by Mahatma Gandhi.

We hope that you enjoy reading this masterpiece as much as we did! Since knowledge grows by sharing, do forward this e-book to your friends and family.

Kind regards,

The Spiritual Bee

Acknowledgements

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Painted by Nandalal Bose

GITANJALI

(SONG OFFERINGS)

BY

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

A COLLECTION OF PROSE TRANSLATIONS

MADE BY THE AUTHOR

FROM THE ORIGINAL BENGALI

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

W.B. YEATS

NEW YORK

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1920 EDITION

(FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1913)

TO
WILLIAM ROTHENSTEIN

PREFACE

THESE translations are of poems contained in three books — Naivédyā, Khéya, and Gitánjali — to be had at the Indian Publishing House, 22 Cornwallis Street, Calcutta; and of a few poems which have appeared only in periodicals.

INTRODUCTION

By W.B. YEATS

A FEW days ago I said to a distinguished Bengali doctor of medicine, "I know no German, yet if a translation of a German poet had moved me, I would go to the British Museum and find books in English that would tell me something of his life, and of the history of his thought. But though these prose translations from Rabindranath Tagore have stirred my blood as nothing has for years, I shall not know anything of his life, and of the movements of thought that have made them possible, if some Indian traveller will not tell me." It seemed to him natural that I should be moved, for he said, "I read Rabindranath every day, to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world."

I said, "An Englishman living in London in the reign of Richard the Second had he been shown translations from Petrarch or from Dante, would have found no books to answer his questions, but would have questioned some Florentine banker or Lombard merchant as I question you. For all I know, so abundant and simple is this poetry, the new Renaissance has been born in your country and I shall never know of it except by hearsay."

He answered, "We have other poets, but none that are his equal; we call this the epoch of Rabindranath. No poet seems to me as famous in Europe as he is among us. He is as great in music as in poetry, and his songs are sung from the west of India into Burmah wherever Bengali is spoken. He was already famous at nineteen when he wrote his first novel; and plays, written when he was but little older, are still played in Calcutta. I so much admire the completeness of his life; when he was very young he wrote much of natural objects, he would sit all day in his garden; from his twenty-fifth year or so to his thirty-fifth perhaps, when he had a great sorrow, he wrote the most beautiful love poetry in our language"; and then he said with deep emotion, "words can never express what I owed at seventeen to his love poetry. After that his art grew deeper, it became religious and philosophical; all the aspirations of mankind are in his hymns. He is the first among our saints who has not refused to live, but has spoken out of Life itself, and that is why we give him our love."

I may have changed his well-chosen words in my memory but not his thought. "A little while ago he was to read divine service in one of our churches — we of the Brahma Samaj use your word 'church' in English — it was the largest in Calcutta and not only was it crowded, people even standing in the windows, but the streets were all but impassable because of the people."

Other Indians came to see me and their reverence for this man sounded strange in our world, where we hide great and little things under the same veil of obvious comedy and half-serious depreciation. When we were making the cathedrals had we a like reverence for our great men?

"Every morning at three — I know, for I have seen it" — one said to me, "he sits immovable in contemplation, and for two hours does not awake from his reverie upon the nature of God. His father, the Maha Rishi, would sometimes sit there all through the next day; once, upon a river, he fell into contemplation because of the beauty of the landscape, and the rowers waited for eight hours before they could continue their journey." He then told me of Mr. Tagore's family and how for generations great men have come out of its cradles. "To-day," he said, "there are Gogonendranath and Abanindranath Tagore, who are artists; and Dwijendranath, Rabindranath's brother, who is a great philosopher. The squirrels come from the boughs and climb on to his knees and the birds alight upon his hands." I notice in these men's thought a sense of visible beauty and meaning as though they held that doctrine of Nietzsche that we must not believe in the moral or intellectual beauty which does not sooner or later impress itself upon physical things.

I said, "In the East you know how to keep a family illustrious. The other day the curator of a Museum pointed out to me a little dark-skinned man who was arranging their Chinese prints and said, 'That is the hereditary connoisseur of the Mikado, he is the fourteenth of his family to hold the post.'"

He answered. "When Rabindranath was a boy he had all round him in his home literature and music." I thought of the abundance, of the simplicity of the poems, and said, "In your country is there much propagandist writing, much criticism? We have to do so much, especially in my own country, that our minds gradually cease to be creative, and yet we cannot help it. If our life was not a continual warfare, we would not have

taste, we would not know what is good, we would not find hearers and readers. Four-fifths of our energy is spent in the quarrel with bad taste, whether in our own minds or in the minds of others."

"I understand," he replied, "we too have our propagandist writing. In the villages they recite long mythological poems adapted from the Sanscrit in the Middle Ages, and they often insert passages telling the people that they must do their duties. "



I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the tops of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. These lyrics — which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention — display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes.

A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble. If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which — as one divines — runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads. When there was but one mind in England Chaucer wrote his *Troilus and Cressida*, and though he had written to be read, or to be read out — for our time was coming on apace — he was sung by minstrels for a while.

Rabindranath Tagore, like Chaucer's forerunners, writes music for his words, and one understands at every moment that he is so abundant, so spontaneous, so daring in his passion, so full of surprise, because he is doing something which has never seemed strange, unnatural, or in need of defence. These verses will not lie in little well-printed books upon ladies' tables, who turn the pages with indolent hands that they may sigh over a life without meaning, which is yet all they can know of life, or be carried about by students at the university to be laid aside when the work of life begins, but as the