

Vol. 2, No.2, July - December 2013

ISSN 2277 - 1786

DJ

THE DAWN JOURNAL

Reforming Beliefs

**NOBLE THOUGHTS OF NOBEL LAUREATES: SPIRITUAL SALVATION IN
*GITANJALI AND THE WASTE LAND***

Dr. M. Muthukumar

“Spirituality is the true basis of all our activities in life.” (I: 52)

“Salvation means knowing the truth.” (I: 512)

- Swami Vivekananda

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the theme of spiritual salvation in R.N. Tagore’s *Gitanjali* and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Of hundred and five Nobel Laureates in Literature, these two—from the East and the West, awarded Nobel Prize in 1913 and 1948 respectively, express their noble thoughts of spiritual realization—the final solution to solve all the problems in the world. Tagore’s *Gitanjali* contains the devotional hymns of a dedicated soul whose ultimate aim is the realization of the Divine. In his voyage through life, the poet realizes Divinity in man in a spirit of complete surrender. T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* recommends the wisdom of India for the spiritual salvation of modern humanity as a way to spiritual regeneration. He reminds humanity of the teachings of the Upanishads.

Spiritual salvation is the highest state and quality represented by God attained by man through a life of dedication, consecration and sacrifice. The various activities bring only restlessness and misery, if they do not have a goal that is beyond the realm of ordinary desires. The trouble at present is that more importance is given to the body and material needs than to the spirit and spiritual salvation. But a mystic has the direct intuitive experience of the Ultimate Reality. Rabindranath Tagore from the east and T. S. Eliot from the west are such mystics who realized that spirituality is the highest level of life that gives solutions to all the worldly problems.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861. He believed in the one invisible God, the supreme spirit, whom he found in the teachings of the Upanishads, whose creative energy has

spontaneously overflowed in the form of the world. Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913. The publication of *Gitanjali* in English, a crowning achievement of his life, took the English-reading public by the excellence of the content and the beauty of the language. The English pieces are prose renderings of a selection of poems from the Bengali *Gitanjali*, *Naivedya*, *Kheya*, *Gitismalaya*.

T. S. Eliot was born in 1888. He, as a classicist, a traditionalist, a great innovator, a critic, a social thinker, a journalist and editor, a philosopher and a mystic, had a complex and many-sided personality. His period of active literary production covers over 45 years, during which he wrote poems, plays, literary and social essays, in which he sees life in its naked realism with the most prosaic and commonplace subjects. He learnt Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy at Harvard University and spent one year in studying the philosophy and metaphysics of Patanjali.

The word *Gitanjali* means *the offering of songs*. It represents unity in diversity and a synthesis of the material and spiritual life in hundred and three poems. "It lifts the veil of commonplaceness from life and shows us the divine foundations of life and thus gives 'a new life to life itself'" (Sastri 166). Tagore seeks his realization of God through his songs by receiving the glimpses of the infinite in the midst of the finite. Iyengar says, "*Gitanjali* is verily the recordation of the vicissitudes in the drama of the human soul in its progress from the finite to the infinite" (16-17). God is to be realized not only in the heart of the devotee, but also in the outside world, for the Divine resides everywhere.

Tagore's realism is free from crude materialism. He rejects alienation from common humanity. So, he sings, "Only let me make my life simple and straight (Tagore 7)," and he says, "Deliverance is not for me in renunciation" (73), because God rests his feet "where live the poorest, and lowest, and lost" (10). His humanism is free from the narrow limits of nationalism. As a mystic, he has a direct communion with the divine. "The mystic vision of light as Tagore elucidates in *Gitanjali* is an unparalleled strategy Tagore shows a new avenue of self-preparation and boosts the morale of the baffled self to enkindle 'the lamp of love' that will promise life with the perfume of the mystic fragrance of fulfillment" (Chakrabarthi 83). To him the worship of God becomes true and real only through man's love of his fellow men. His poems attempt to express man's relation to his fellowmen, to Nature, and to God. *Gitanjali* proves that

Tagore is really a writer of spirituality and mysticism.

Tagore's mysticism is free from the false spirituality of escapism. God is love that derives out all evil passions from the heart of the poet. He calls God "Life of my life" (Tagore 4), "Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well" (67). His interest is "silently to listen to thine [God's] eternal harmony" (65). Soul sets out in quest of the Creator. Hence Tagore is "a quasi-mystic more romantic than religious" (Ghose 45). His poems tell that the ultimate aim of life is the realization of the Divinity in man in a spirit of complete surrender.

Tagore suggests the ways in which his soul can reach the Reality. God could "draw the veil of darkness" and "remove shame and poverty" (Tagore 24) to realize his original identity. Since no struggle is necessary for realization, he says, "Let me not force my flagging spirit..." (25) and "I surrendered my mind without struggle ...' (48). His understanding of the Reality bears a close resemblance to Wordsworth's perception of the divine. He expresses in the last few poems how he has attained his spiritual salvation. He says, "I have come to the brink of eternity from which nothing can vanish (87)," "I have got my leave. ... A summons has come and I am ready for my journey (93), and "In one salutation to thee, my lord, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet (103)"

Eliot's *The Waste Land*, an important landmark in the history of English poetry, was published in 1922. According to Gupta, "The Waste Land (1922) is the poetic manifestation of Eliot's intense crisis of conscience" (Gupta 60). It has five parts namely, a) The Burial of the Dead, b) A Game of Chess, c) The Fire Sermon, d) Death by Water, and e) What the Thunder Said. The first part states that the contemporary world is a life in death. Man has lost faith in spiritual values. Love has degenerated into lust. The second part symbolizes the sexual perversion in the world. The third and the fourth parts give the causes of spiritual death and degeneracy. Sexual perversion has led the world to meet the spiritual Death. In the last part, *What the Thunder Said*, he gives a remedy – a promise of regeneration. In Gupta's point of view, "Life has lost all meanings and hopes. Love means barren mechanical sexuality" (61). The present condition of the world is given as,

He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience (Eliot V: 328-330)

Here is no water but only rock
Which are mountains of rock without water (Eliot V: 331-334)

Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down (Eliot V: 425-426)

'The falling of 'London Bridge' signifies the spiritual and social disintegration in the wasteland. Different wastelands of the past are woven together with the modern wasteland, and the wisdom of the east and the west is offered as a solution for the ills of the present age. T.S. Eliot's way of spiritual re-birth is based on the wisdom of India for the spiritual salvation of modern humanity as a way to spiritual regeneration.

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder
DA
Datta: what have we given? / ... /
DA
Dayadhvam: I have heard the key / ... /
DA
Damyata: The boat responded / ... /
To controlling hands (Eliot V: 395-422)

Eliot gives three fold way of Salvation: The first Da (Datta) means to give, which refers to martyrdom; only such dedication is a great spiritual satisfaction and achievement. The second Da (Dayadhvam) means to sympathize. It refers to the spiritual harmony with others. We can

achieve our salvation only if we regain our sense of community. The third Da (Damyata) means self-control and discipline. It denotes control over sensuous desires. The spiritual health can be regained only through penance, suffering, and self-discipline. The poem ends with "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. / Shantih shantih shantih" (Eliot V: 432-433). Shantih signifies 'the peace which passeth understanding.'

The spiritual journey of Tagore and Eliot shows the same point of spirituality for the betterment of humanity, though they differ in culture and other things. "Life is a battle, a journey and a search, and as a progressive sacrifice: such is the dynamic of spiritual struggle and realization" (Iyengar 17). They express their noble thoughts of spiritual realization as a final solution to all the problems in the world, for 'yet there is time' (Tagore 82) to make the world peaceful. Chakrabarti expresses, "The mystic askance obviously surpasses all earthly experiences" (80). The East and the West have tried their best to see the world at peace. Hence the Noble thoughts of the Nobel Laureates always influence and inspire the world.

"Time is endless in thy hands, my lord. There is none to count thy minutes" (*Gitanjali* 82)

REFERENCES

- Chakrabarti, Mohit. **Rabindranath Tagore: A Quest**. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1995. Print.
- Eliot, T.S. **The Waste Land**. Madras: Macmillan India Limited, 1982. Print.
- Ghose, Sisirkumar. **Rabindranath Tagore**. New Delhi: SahityaAkademi, 1986. Print.
- Gupta, N. Das. "T.S. Eliot." **Literature of the Twentieth Century**. Gualior: Kitab Ghar, 1967. 55-67. Print.
- Iyengar, K.R.Srinivasa. **Rabindranath Tagore: A Critical Introduction**. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1987. Print.
- Kenner, Hugh ed. **T.S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays**. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.:Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962. Print.
- Lokeswarananda, Swami. **Practical Spirituality**. 2nd ed. Culcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1986. Print.

Matthiessen, F.O. **The Achievement of T.S.Eliot**. 3rd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1958. Print.

Sastri, K.S. Ramaswami. **Sir Rabindranath Tagore: His Life, Personality and Genius**. Delhi: Akashdeep Publishing House, 1988. Print.

Tagore, Rabindranath. **Gitanjali**. Delhi: Macmillan, 1974. Print.

Vivekananda, Swami. **Pearls of Wisdom**. Culcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1986. Print.

Yatiswarananda, Swami. **Meditation and Spiritual Life**. 3rd ed. Bangalore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1989. Print.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. [Prof.] M. Muthukumar has been teaching English Language and Literature for more than 15 years. He has published many research papers and articles in reputed journals. As an active Research Supervisor, he is guiding the research scholars leading to their M.Phil. and Ph.D. Formerly, he had a commendable teaching career at the Department of English, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya College of Arts and Science and at present, he is teaching in the Post-Graduate and Research Department of English, Govt. Arts College, Coimbatore. He is interested in American Literature, Indian Writing in English, Research Methodology etc.