

### INTRODUCTION

Nature is as frequent and recurrent a theme in Rabindranath Tagore's 'Gitanjali' as death or God. It is not only in 'Gitanjali' but in other poetical works also that Nature plays a significant role. Tagore is, without doubt, a great lover of Nature. His love for Nature is not Wordsworthian—it is different. To Rabindranath Tagore Nature is a medium to see, recognize and reach God. Tagore's feelings for God are mostly expressed through the objects of Nature. The greatness, glory and immensity of God is captured and conveyed through Nature.

We cannot forget that Rabindranath, the youngest of his parents' fourteen children was, from the early age of four or five years, separated from his mother, brought up by the household servants in their rooms, away from his mother's rooms in the big family house. He was confined to a first-floor room of the servant incharge and was denied any opportunity to mingle with other children of his age group. The only contact young Rabindranath had from the outside world was through the first floor room-window. The young boy would spend hours looking out wistfully at the sky with clouds, birds, trees etc., which were his only companions. The world of Nature enchanted him.

### NATURE'S SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE

Very early in his life (as has been mentioned above) Rabindranath was fascinated by Nature when he viewed it from the window of his house. But soon he was to come into closer contact with it. His father, Maharishi Debendranath Tagore noticed his youngest son's reclusive nature and he entrusted his son with the administrative management and supervision of the landed property of the family in Bengal and Orissa. Thus the young poet had to live away from home for long periods. He lived on a boat on the river Padma. It was here that the young poet came into direct contact with Nature and discovered how wonderfully beautiful was Nature. What the poet called the "Great Awakening" was an encounter of one soul with another, vast and intangible. It was the first momentous event in the spiritual life of the poet. The soulful communion with Nature had an impact on the poet's personality which was strong, deep and ennobling. For Rabindranath Tagore every aspect of Nature is a symbol of beauty, and has special meaning and message. To the poet Nature is a part and parcel of God. Nature and God, according to Vedantic philosophy, are Prakriti (प्रकृति) and Purush (पुरुष), the two aspects of the Absolute. Nature in Tagore is the very core of the spirit, not an imposition.

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**LOVE FOR GOD**

The poet's deep love for God leads him to identify himself with Nature :

"Messengers, with tidings from unknown skies, greet me and speed along the road. My heart is glad within, and the breath of the passing breeze is sweet.

"From dawn till dusk I sit here before my door, and I know that of a sudden the happy moment will arrive when I shall see."

— Song No. XLIV

**FAITH IN GOD**

The poet reveals his faith in the Magnanimity of his Lord in terms of the beauty of Nature :

"The morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish, and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky.

"Then thy words will take wings in songs from every one of my birds' nests, and thy melodies will break forth in flowers in all my forest groves."

— Song No. XIX

The poet is a mystic. He loves God and his happiness is reflected in Nature. The poet has faith in God. But the poet's love for his Creator is not one-sided. It is mutual. God is as keen as the poet is. This reciprocity of love is also reflected through Nature :

"Art thou abroad on this stormy night on thy journey of love, my friend ? The sky groans like one in despair.

... ..

"By what dim shore of the ink-black river, by what far edge of the frowning forest, through what mazy depth of gloom art thou threading thy course to come to me, my friend ?"

— Song No. XXIII

**THE POET'S FEELINGS ARE MANIFEST IN NATURE**

For a mystic, as the poet is, communion with God is not easy. There are all sorts of hardships and impediments which fill the poet's heart with the gloom of despair and despondency and at such times the poet needs the bright light of divine enlightenment :

"Light, oh where is the light ? ... ..

"The sky is overcast with clouds and the rain is ceaseless. I know not what this is that stirs in me — I know not its meaning.

"A moment's flash of lightning drags down a deeper gloom on my sight, and my heart gropes for the path to where the music of the night calls me.

"Light, oh where is the light ! ...

It thunders and the wind rushes screaming through the void. The night is black as a black stone. Let not the hours pass by in the dark. Kindle the lamp of love with thy life."

— Song No. XXVII

And similarly, when the poet is happy the Nature reflects the poet's happiness :

"... and I know that of a sudden the happy moment will arrive when I shall see.

"In the meanwhile I smile and I sing alone. In the meanwhile the air is filled with the perfume of promise."

— Song No. XLIV

### NATURE — THE MAIN SOURCE OF IMAGERY

Nature is such an integral ingredient of Tagore's poetry, especially in 'Gitanjali', that it is impossible almost to discuss it in isolation. Really, in doing so we will "murder" the very spirit of poetry if we dissect the lyrics to isolate the Nature-element in them. Therefore, it should be sufficient to state that Nature in Tagore's poetry is essential as the break is for life. When Nature is so pervasive it is not surprising that it is one of the chief sources of imagery in Rabindranath Tagore's poems in 'Gitanjali'. Our observations, comments, inferences and illustrations here are, quite obviously, based on and drawn from 'Gitanjali'.

### WATER IMAGERY

The rain, the streams, the rivers, the ocean, the shore, the bank, the boat etc., belong to this group. The illustrations are :

"When the heart is hard and parched up come upon me with a shower of mercy."

— Song No. XXXIX

"The rain has held back for days and days, my God, in my arid heart. The horizon is fiercely naked — not the thinnest cover of a soft cloud, not the vaguest hint of a distant cool shower.

"Send thy angry storm, dark with death, if it is thy wish, and with lashes of lightning startle the sky from end to end."

— Song No. XL

"On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous ...

"They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. ...

"They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. ...

"The sea surges up with laughter and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach. Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children ...

"... Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play. ...."

— Song No. LX

"Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into one single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee."

— Song No. CIII

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**SKY IMAGERY**

The birds, wings, the sky, the clouds, the lightning, the storm etc. or the height to reveal God's loftiness, all belong to the group of sky imagery (for our convenience). Many of the illustrations can be found in the illustration already given above and a few others are given below:

"Messengers, with tidings from unknown skies greet me and speed along the road. ...."  
— Song No. XLIV

"In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds he comes, comes, ever comes."  
— Song No. XLV

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

"I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach."  
— Song No. II

"Like a rain-cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.  
... ..

"Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee."  
— Song No. CIII

**MISCELLANEOUS IMAGERY**

There are all sorts of Nature imagery in the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. Prominent among these are the imagery of light and dark which is recurrent:

"This is my delight, thus to wait and watch at the wayside where shadow chases light and the rain comes in the wake of the summer."  
— Song No. XLIV

"Light, oh where is the light? ....  
... ..

"A moment's flash of lightning drags a deeper gloom on my sight, and my heart gropes for the path to where the music of the night calls me."  
— Song No. XXVII

Another recurrent group of imagery is that of flowers, leaves, seasons, and other elements of Nature. Although some have already been quoted under different heads because the imagery is also not a preplanned thing. It comes spontaneously and with no thought of its nature, a few are given below:

"Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop into the dust."  
— Song No. VI

"On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying, and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded."  
— Song No. XX

"... I wish not to be recalled from my sleep by the clamorous choir, of birds, by the riot of wind at the festival of morning light. ...."

— Song No. XLVII

"The morning sea of silence broke into ripples of bird songs; and the flowers were all merry by the road side; and the wealth of gold was scattered through the rift of the clouds ...  
... ..

"... Withered leaves danced and whirled in the hot air of noon ... .."

"... All honour to you, heroic host of the interminable path ! ...

"The repose of the sun-embroidered green-gloom slowly spread over my heart. ...."

— Song No. XLVIII

As we have seen and pointed out also, at several occasions the imagery of one kind fuses into that of another kind; and there is no dearth of such illustrations as may be evident from the illustrations already quoted.

### CONCLUSION

To Rabindranath Tagore God and Nature are one :

"Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well.

"O thou beautiful, there in the nest it is thy love that encloses the soul with colours and sounds and odours." — Song No. LXVII

Tagore loves Nature for her purer beauties. To him Nature is suffused with the presence of the Divine.

There are some affinities between Tagore and Shelley in the depiction of the dynamic aspects of Nature. Like Shelley, Tagore also loved the vast expanse of the sky and the light of the sun, the storm, the cloud, the river and the sea-waves. Tagore had a full view of the rest without losing sight of the ideal :

"But there, where spreads the infinite sky for the soul to take her flight in, reigns the stainless white radiance. There is no day nor night, nor form nor colour, and never, never a word."

— Song No. LXVII

Tagore's "pictures reveal a close and detailed observation of Nature, and considered from this point of view, he has greater affinity with Keats and Tennyson, than with Shelley." (B.C. Chakravorty)

Rabindranath Tagore describes Nature in all her different aspects. Sometimes Nature, in Tagore's poetry, is divine, as it is in William Wordsworth, sometimes it is dynamic, as it is in Shelley; and at other times, he describes the beauties of Nature as Keats and Tennyson do. His poetry, in original Bangla, is a very happy blend of the musical and the pictorial and this gives it a very distinctive and characteristic quality.