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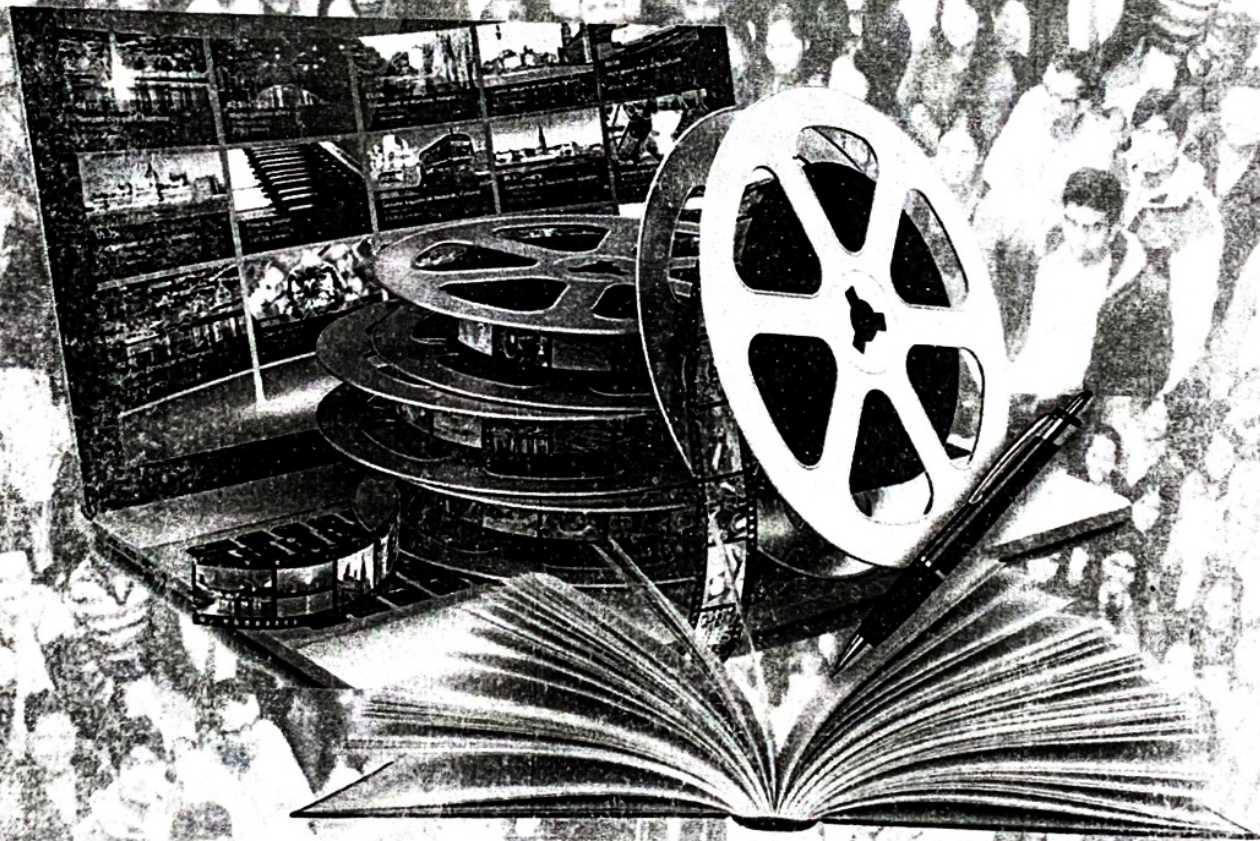
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## Literature : Culture, Society & Media Adaptation



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## ILET: Tagore's Spiritual Humanism- A Select Poems From 'The Gitanjali'

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### Abstract :

*Indian Literature in English Translation (ILET) is rapidly becoming an indispensable component in literature and cultural study in India. In the literary history of the Indian Sub-Continent, translation has played as vital a role as it is now playing. The emergence and growth of Indian English literature has contributed to the growth of ILET in two important respects. In the first place, creative writers have invented modes of representing Indian turns of speech, shades of sentiments, and ways of feeling and social manners, thus creating a ready language to be used by the translators. The second contribution is that many Indians writing in English have been able translators too. Among them are Sri Aurobindo, R.C. Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Nizzim Ezekiel, Raja Rao, R.K., Narayan, P. Lal, Dilip Chitre, Kamala Das and Khushwant Singh. Still the fact is that no Indian poet has been translated in to English as extensively as Rabindranath Tagore has been. This paper therefore highlights Tagore's Spiritual humanism in "Gitanjali" a collection of poems originally in Bengali and afterwards translated in English in 1912.*

**Keywords:** ILET, Tagore, Spiritual Humanism, Gitanjali,

Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest creative genius of the Indian mind and who played a vital role in the history of Indian renaissance in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and who possessed a deep spiritual philosophy, belonged to the nationalist phase (1902-1929) of ILET. His *Gitanjali* is the only outstanding work of 'transcreation' which was highly acclaimed throughout the world. The richness of his songs took him beyond the traditions. Their translation in English vibrated with such a romantic appeal to the English speaking world that at once it saw a link between Tagore and the Bible. They were overwhelmed to such an extent that they proposed a Nobel Prize for the creator. With the Nobel Prize the poet, first among the Asians to win it in literature, became suddenly so popular that he was enthused to reach the larger audience almost under compulsion, and translation was almost the only way to reach them even in India, beyond Bengal. He became a great bilingual writer in the world. We can legitimately say that the works translated by Tagore form part of Indian writing in English.

'The Gitanjali' means 'song offering' and in the words of Dr. Radha Krishnan "the poems of Gitanjali are offerings of the finite to the infinite". It is the poetry of highest order, poetry which very nearly approaches the condition of prophecy. Whereas T.S. Eliot opines that it is a great poetry which "expresses in perfect language permanent human impulses," and thus brings strange consolation to the human heart. In such works poetry becomes a revelation, an incantation, that flashes open the inner quality. It is poetry in which men converse with eternity. It's hundred and odd lyrics explore (i) the relationship of God and human soul; (ii) of God and Nature; (iii) of Nature and the human soul; and (iv) of the individual soul and humanity. Such a number of themes and ideas are woven together to make up its complex texture.



The central theme of the Gitanjali, however, is devotional; it expresses the yearning of the devotee for re-union with the divine. It is in the tradition of the devotional poetry of India, but it finds a new and original treatment. Apart from the sense of devotion, there is an element of human approach in **Gitanjali**. Tagore expresses that service to man is service to God. He is of the opinion that relationship of soul with God is not possible without relationship of soul with man. He says that God lies among human beings. He is in you, me and every living being. Consequently, to love everyone in this world is to love the Almighty, God. God is not to be found in the temple but with the tiller, the stone-breaker and honest laborers.

He says in **song no. 11** of the **Gitanjali** "*leave this chanting*" He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in rain and in shower and his garment is covered with dust. Throughout this song Tagore condemns '*isolation*' in an ivory tower of the ascetic way of life, and makes a forceful plea for participation in the daily activity of humble humanity. In this poem, the poet is a humanist and a rare spiritual realist. The humanistic approach, here, is at its height.

Tagore's spiritual humanism is further reflected in **song no-35** of **Gitanjali**. '*Where the mind is without fear*' which reveals his concern for the motherland, for his fellow countrymen, and for the society in general. In this song he prayed to his father, to raise the people of his country to a perfect man, so that out of all turmoil, depravities and narrowness his country might be ready for a struggle towards perfection; ready to stand on its own feet as a country, marching towards the heaven of freedom. The urge and appeal in it to God, the earnest aspiration of the poet was to see India free with its people perfectly humane so it could stand among the nations holding its head high. To the poet freedom lay not in physical acquirement of the country but in becoming free in spirit and status. This lyric too, is a fine instance of Tagore's spiritual humanism.

The humanistic element is also seen in **song no-36** of **Gitanjali** '*This is my prayer to thee, my lord*' here Tagore prays to God, his maker, to remove his spiritual poverty. He also prays for strength to bear easily the joys and sorrows with love and sympathy. He wants to serve fellow human beings.

Each poem of Tagore translated into English is packed with a beautiful thought. The assurance of God to human life, the shelter from the restless Journeys is described in **song no -63** of **Gitanjali** '*Thou hast made known to friends*' expresses his faith in the reincarnation of the soul after the death of the body, as well as his faith in the oneness of all, in the total identity of man, God and Nature. The lyric provides a direct and clear statement of the poet's spiritualism.

The theme of humanism in itself covers the hollowness of Indian traditions and rituals. In **song no-64** of the **Gitanjali** '*on the slope of the desolate river ....*' Tagore exposes the uselessness of religious rituals which are so characteristics of orthodox Hinduism. True worship of God, according to the poet, lies not in the performance of rites and ceremonies, but in extending a helping hand to the suffering and the needy. The repetition of the word 'useless' here, drives the point home as by a hammer stroke.

Another poem i.e. **song no.50** of **Gitanjali** '*I had gone a-begging from door to door ----*' stresses the virtue of power and charity and self-sacrifice. According to the poet man must sacrifice and renounce his all only then he can realize God. Total surrender to Will of God- complete self-sacrifice, perfect charity, and absolute renunciation of all our possession-is the only way that leads to God. He further asserts the fact that one who gives all, gets all.



The anthology concludes with an appropriate poem ending with 'Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life...' (Gitanjali-103) Tagore's yearning for the eternity was not the spiritual goal, but his apprehension of death, a physical conclusion of life, usually.

#### To Conclude

Thus, the Bengali bard, Tagore, is a lyricist with a rare humanistic approach. He glorifies the potentials of man, and depicts the exploitation of the poor. He stands for equality, fraternity, and liberty. He advocates the need of helping mankind to enable them to achieve spiritual liberation. It is because he is acknowledged as a spiritual humanist. Due to uniformity of thoughts and ideas, with his sublimity and the theme of spiritual humanism, **The Gitanjali** has acquired a unique feature among all his works. To sum up, Tagore's humanism is in tune with the renaissance humanism, the central focus of which is quite simply human being.

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