



IMPACT OF EASTERN PHILOSOPHY REFLECTED IN
WHITMAN'S 'LEAVES OF GRASS' AND TAGORE'S
'GITANJALI'



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ABSTRACT

Walt Whitman and Rabindranath Tagore transformed this short-lived but recurring and haunting vision into beautiful poems pregnant with occult meaning, collected in their "spiritual autobiography", *Leaves of Grass and Gitanjali*, a mighty piece of prayer pleading and exaltation.

The attempt has been philosophical outlook in factors that spurred mystical Whitman's turning eastward in visible impact of Eastern mysticism of Tagore on his makeup of their personal life. Spring from the inner stirrings important element in Whitman's provided not only a solid base to dimension to it.

KEY WORDS: *Leaves of Philosophy, Walt Whitman,*

INTRODUCTION

Radhakrishnan says, the artist or any man is to give us function of all such people to help us to understand that the future is something that is amendable to our treatment. Walt Whitman and Rabindranath Tagore, spokesman of their age. Their poetry reflects the nation as well as the people.

Philosophical search, thus, either in the West or East strives for a search of within and without. . S. T. Coleridge also says, 'No man was yet a great poet without being at the same a profound philosopher.' Philosophy is a study that seeks to understand the mysteries of existence and reality. It tries to discover the nature of truth and knowledge to find what is of basic value and importance in life. It also examines relation between humanity and nature and between individual and society. We often find parallels between two philosophical systems or ideas of two thinkers. Walt Whitman and Rabindranath Tagore, both the poets endowed with highest gifts and the vision and faculty divine.

The effort has been made to unveil '*Leaves of Grass*' and '*Gitanjali*' with a view to distinguish the kind of oriental influence that enriched the poetry and gave a new dimension to it. It seems that Whitman's "*Leaves of Grass*" and *Gitanjali* have their mystical roots in the Indian soil.

Walt Whitman and Rabindranath Tagore are two towering poet- philosophers revealing the nature and purpose of man in his earthly existence though their approach is different. Both the poets' sing melodiously in the same tune of man's life and breathe the spirit of joy. The main theme of *Leaves of Grass* and *Gitanjali* is 'the search for identity' reflects in the progressive evolution of self as well as in the growth of



made to bring to light the Whitman and Tagore with the quest and the reasons behind his quest and put into words the Philosophy and of Hindu poetry. It deals with a general Poetry and mysticism both of man. Mysticism is an and Tagore's poetry that their poetry, but also gave a new

Grass, Gitanjali, Poetry, Rabindranath Tagore.

function of any philosopher, any faith in the future. It is the

their poetry. '*Leaves of Grass*' and '*Gitanjali*' are the strongest compound of transcendentalism mysticism, humanism, philosophy, wisdom, wit, folly. According to Walt Whitman poetry must represent reality and to Tagore the chief function of poetry is to emancipate man's soul from materialism. Tagore is unable to conceive poetry without God. The true principle of poetry is the principle of unity. The value of poem depends upon its ability to portray life. The poem enables one to look in the mirror as the mirror reveals the inner life. Reality is one of the most important concepts to be studied in relation to their philosophical writing. The Ultimate Reality is called 'Satchitananda,' because it is 'Sat' or pure existence 'Chit' or pure consciousness, and 'Ananda' or pure bliss which unites us with all things through the relationship of love. Rabindranath Tagore maintained the domain of the three: the truth, the fact, and the reality are different though they are all united with infinity. Rabindranath Tagore and Walt Whitman seek to establish an immediate and intuitive relationship of existence, knowledge and love with the inner, ultimate reality. The supreme One reveals its infinity in our love and joy.

"Whatever our heart touches the One, in the small or the big, it finds the touch of the infinite."

Tagore Rabindranath: Creative Unity (Macmillan 1962) p. 4

To some extent the world-view of ancient Vedanta philosophy is mystical. Both the poets aspire at achieving oneness with divine and all creation. This belief in the Oneness of all creation is the philosophy of Gita. Whitman and Tagore believe in trans-like states of exaltation, awakening and enlightenment. There is certain kinship between the mystical view and the ancient Indian conception of 'Maya' or illusoriness of external realities.

Whitman in Leaves of Grass says,
"I sing myself I celebrate myself
Every atom belongs to me is belong to you."
Song of myself

Like Whitman, there is no doubt that Tagore's poetry has high philosophical content and the broad tendency of philosophy is mystical. Broadly speaking a mystic believes that ordinary world of sense perception is not real, and that behind this visible world there is a moral real world which can be apprehended spiritually and not through philosophy, the medium of the senses.

According to the highest thoughts of Hindu philosophy the ever blissful Brahma resides in every heart Right from Vedic days India has been singing to the glory of the Supreme Being. Kabir, Nanak Chaitanya, Tagore all sang to the glory of infinite supreme power the essential unity of all creation is the fundamental doctrine of Indian philosophy. In Indian mystical thought Rabindranath Tagore offers a system in which he theism of the Bhagawad Gita, the metaphysics of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the mysticism of the bauls and the philosophical principles of Vaishnava and Sufism exist in synthesis. His *Gitanjali* is harmony of thoughts complete oriental to the roots presented to a new world

According to Yeats, Tagore's discovery of the soul and his surrender to it in *Gitanjali* may be compare to the Indian civilization itself. India unlike Western Countries can claim a rich spiritual tradition and a rich spiritual heritage. Whitman seems to regard India as a treasure house of the Philosophical thoughts. India has been called the land of seers, sages and numerous holy men. It is the land of the Vedas and the Upanishads, where the saint, mystic and the divine have been held in the highest respect. The Western countries with their Christian religion can claim similar treasures and their own proud possessions. But it has all a question of degree. The West has always been more materialistic than spiritual, While India has always believed in spirituality more than in material advancement.

Whitman's Philanthropic spirit is essentially Christian and its centrifugal forces distract his thoughts of himself to a diffused consideration of universal neighborhood. But Tagore's philanthropism is profound

influenced by Buddhism, which sees universal well being in directing one's full concentration to one's own self and thus by a simpler force seek to correct and elevate the whole humanity.

The mystic poets Rabindranath Tagore and Walt Whitman, who are undoubtedly, influenced poets unlike most of other mystics. Tagore doesn't advocate dissociations from everyday life. Like Walt Whitman, he doesn't reject sense experience but makes it medium of spiritual experience. Their mysticism is thus counter balanced and kept in place by his intense humanism.

Tagore and Albert Einstein met several times. It is interesting to mention the topic of their discussion mainly on the nature of reality and its relationship to man. It is clear from the beginning of their conversation that neither Tagore nor Einstein believed in any kind of divinity isolated from the world. Tagore said as solid matter is composed of protons and electrons with gap among them, similarly humanism is composed of individual and their inter-connection of human relationship that gives solidarity to the human world. The central thought behind Tagore's literature is that the entire universe is the human universe.

Sitnsu Ray says, 'The Tagore concept of Reality is Man in the universe'

The creation of *Leaves of Grass* and *Gitanjali* was the highest achievement of their feelings, filled with spiritualism. Spiritualism is the science of the theists while science is universally considered "a humanist par excellence"

One of the most important aspects of Walt Whitman is fusion of the spiritual East and materialistic West. Tagore's philosophy is his broad-mindedness and liberalism with respect to the meaning of spirituality in East and West. It should be noted that Tagore believes that material value has been the driving force of any great civilization.

The age in which Tagore was born was an age of cultural transition. The renascent India experienced a change of spirit and a reorientation of outlook through a splendid blending of the old and the progressive cultural treasures of the 19th century west. If, on the one hand there was the religio – intellectual movement led by Raja Rammohon Roy, there was the ignorance of the blind believers of the unjust and human creeds. This exercised a powerful impact upon the expanding intellectual horizon of Tagore.

In America as well the Civil War had disrupted the normal life of the nation at all levels. It was an age of turbulent changes in America. Thus, both, Tagore and Whitman happen to encounter an age marked by the crisis of values and cultural deadlock. Though it did affect Tagore greatly, yet, both the writers continued to pour down their delightful thoughts in the form of lyrics

CONCLUSION:

Walt Whitman and Rabindranath Tagore transformed this short-lived but recurring and haunting vision into beautiful poems pregnant with occult meaning, collected in their spiritual autobiography, 'Leaves of Grass' and 'Gitanjali' a mighty piece of prayer pleading and exaltation. The attempt has been made to bring to light the philosophical outlook in Whitman and Tagore with the factors that spurred mystical quest and the reasons behind Whitman's turning eastward in his quest and put into words the visible impact of Eastern Philosophy and of Hindu mysticism of Tagore on Whitman's poetry 'Leaves of Grass'. According to Walt Whitman poetry must represent reality and to Tagore the chief function of poetry is to emancipate man's soul from materialism. Like Whitman, there is no doubt that Tagore's poetry has high philosophical content and the broad tendency of philosophy is mystical.

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