

Unit-VII INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Poetry (Detailed Study)

Tagore: *Gitanjali*

- ❖ **Rabindranth Tagore (1861–1941)** was born on **6th May 1861** in Calcutta.
- ❖ He was the **youngest son of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore**.
- ❖ He started writing verse composition at the age of nine.
- ❖ He wrote his **first play in Bengali**, *Bhagna Hridaya (Broken Heart)*, most of it was poetry with a very slender love story.
- ❖ He published his **first poetry collection** *Sandhya Sangit* in **1882**, which was welcomed as an important literary event in Bengal.
- ❖ It was followed by *Prabhat Sangit* in 1883. *Chabi O Gan (Pictures and Songs)* in 1884 and *Kadi O Komal* in 1886 (*Sharps and Flats*).
- ❖ The second phase of his poetic career is marked by the publication of *Manasi* (1890), *Sonar Tari (The Golden Boat)*, and *Citra* (1896) *Manasi* opens with a series of love poems in continuation of *Kadi O Komal*; *Sonar Tari* poems deal with the world of dreams.
- ❖ In the year 1901, Tagore published a collection of religions 45 poems *Naivedya*, in which there is a poem ‘*Shatrabdir Surya*’ greeting the New Year.
- ❖ His poetic collection *Chaitali* (1896) has poems with Romantic imagination, extensity discontent with the present, and escape into the golden past.
- ❖ In 1910, Tagore published *Gitanjali*, and in 1912 this volume translated and published in England.
- ❖ Six poems out of *Gitanjali* collection were published in the poetry magazine of Chicago.
- ❖ In 1913 his *Gitanjali* was awarded Nobel Prize.
- ❖ Rabindranath’s collections of poetry such as *Chitra*, *Chaitali*, *Katha*, *Kahani*, *Kalpna* deal with a great variety of themes and moods.
- ❖ In *Chitra*, there are important poems like *Jivan Devata*, which appeal to the In-dweller (*Antaryami*). There is also an urge for the involvement in practical life as well as glorification of the life on the earth, as in *Swarga Haste Biday (Farewell to Heaven)*. *Chaitali* collection presents poems that celebrate nature and simple life around.
- ❖ In *Katha* and *Kahani* there are poems which show the poet’s interest in episodes of Hindu epics and Indian History, especially the tales of Rajput, Maratha and Sikh heroism.
- ❖ In his poetic collection *Kheya*, (*Ferrying Across*), there are poems which express Rabindranath’s yearning for coming face to face with the Divine, and consciousness of the distance yet to be traversed. *Gitanjali* poems appear to be the continuation of *Kheya*. Most of the *Gitanjali* poems are about the sweet sorrow of separation, the offerings to the deity that still eludes him. Apart from a variety of poetry collections, Rabindranath wrote plays, novels and short-stories.
- ❖ His first play, *Chitrangada*, was full of lyricism.
- ❖ He published more than forty plays.

- ❖ His novels Chokher Bali and Nauka Dubi have been filmed.
- ❖ His greatest novel has been Gora, which deals with the theme of patriotism. In his novel, Chaturanga, he explores psychological analysis of human nature. He wrote short stories, which are realistic and close to life.

Gitanjali

- ❖ Tagore is often refers to as **‘the Bard of Bengal’**.
- ❖ Rabindranath’s *Gitanjali* is originally written in **Bengali language**.
- ❖ Tagore introduced new prose and verse forms and the use of colloquial language into Bengali literature.
- ❖ The English *Gitanjali* or **Song Offerings** is a collection of **103 English poems** of Tagore’s own English translations.
- ❖ The word *Gitanjali* is composed out of *git+ anjali*. *Git* means song, and *anjali* means offering, thus it’s meant as **“Song offerings”**.
- ❖ The publication of the English version of *Gitanjali* paved Tagore a way to the world of English literature.
- ❖ It was in 1912 he published the *Gitanjali* and in **1913** he was **awarded the Nobel Prize by Swedish academy**.
- ❖ Rabindranath Tagore is the first writer who brought the Nobel Prize for literature to India
- ❖ KRS Iyengar says “He wrote the largest number of lyrics ever attended by any poet”.
- ❖ Tagore’s lyrics are characterized by the versatility of themes, but it is the manifestation of divinity in all objects and the aspects of Universe. He composed lyrics on God, Love, Nature, Children, Love of the world and humanity and so on.
- ❖ In his lyrics, Tagore recaptures the theme and spirits of Indian philosophy and vividly creates the Indian atmosphere and the influence of Upanishads, The Vaishnava, Poets, The folk songs of Bengal and Kalidas.
- ❖ The Cardinal characteristics of Tagore’s lyrics are their Song like quality. They are meditative, reflective and remarkable for their spiritual character. T
- ❖ agore’s English lyrics are mainly prose poems in which he uses the musical language and the incantatory tone.

Where The Mind Is Without Fear (Heaven of Freedom)

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
 Where knowledge is free
 Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
 By narrow domestic walls
 Where words come out from the depth of truth
 Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
 Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
 Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
 Where the mind is led forward by thee
 Into ever-widening thought and action
 Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Summary

- ❖ When Tagore composed this poem his mind was confined by the chains of slavery like any others common citizens of India because India was under the clutch of the British Rule where freedom was like day-dreaming.
- ❖ This poem is **written in the form of prayer to God**, the true bearer of freedom.
- ❖ He urges God throughout the poem with his mysterious **concept of freedom** from the struggle for awakening to his countrymen.
“Where The Mind Is Without Fear” is a **pre-independent poem** in which the poet sincerely urges to God to awake his fellow beings for the realization that the essential need to live in a free and united country.
- ❖ He wants his countrymen to awake and enjoy the life of full dignity and honor.
- ❖ His countrymen **would not be superstitious or believers of blind faith** rather than they would lead the life of enlightened and educated.
- ❖ He wishes to the people, to **be honest, open-minded and industrious**. Then only they would stretch their **‘arms towards perfection’** and the nation can actually achieve the apex of success.
- ❖ They need to use their reasons over their blind faiths and must be ready to accept new thoughts and ideas.
- ❖ He requests God to free his country from manipulation, corruption, and slavery.
- ❖ He yearns for an awakened country where there would be freedom of the mind and expression of ideas.
- ❖ The poem invokes the deep patriotic feelings. Our country is subjugated by castes, creed, superstitious beliefs and biased ideas.
- ❖ Tagore earnestly appeals to God that a country would be where people’s **‘head is high’** and **‘knowledge is free’**.
- ❖ His country would not be divided and fragmented into pieces due to their narrow thoughts.
- ❖ They should express their words not from the mind but from **‘the depth of truth’** and heart.
- ❖ He urges God to guide his countrymen for moral awakening to fight for their rights against British inhuman rules.
- ❖ He urges God to liberate them from the fear of oppression, repression, and subjugation. He urges God to unshackle the chains of fear and direct them to the paths of progress and prosperity.
- ❖ Tagore wants his country men to be confident not confined.
- ❖ There would not be injustice and inequality in the country on the basis of caste, creed, and gender.
- ❖ Countrymen should be unprejudiced and open-minded accepting the new challenges and changes.
- ❖ They should lead their lives of decency and dignity.
- ❖ To conclude “Where The Mind Is Without Fear” is a poem in which Tagore reveals his personal quest for the Divine and characterized by a variety of original themes both in thought and expression.
- ❖ Therefore, this poem is remarkable to a great extent which expresses the intensity of the feeling of freedom.
- ❖ His poem is universal in its appeal and envisions the ‘heaven of freedom’ and happier future for mankind.

The Child

THE FIRST FLUSH of dawn glistens on the dew-dripping leaves of the forest.
 The man who reads the sky cries:
 'Friends, we have come!
 They stop and look around.
 On both sides of the road the corn is ripe to the horizon,
 the glad golden answer of the earth to the morning light.
 The current of daily life moves slowly
 between the village near the hill and the one by the river bank.
 The potter's wheel goes round, the woodcutter brings fuel to the market, the cow-herd takes his
 cattle to the pasture,
 and the woman with the pitcher on her head walks to the well.
 But where is the King's castle, the mine of gold, the secret book of magic,
 the sage who knows love's utter wisdom?
 'The stars cannot be wrong,' assures the reader of the sky.
 'Their signal points to that spot.'
 And reverently he walks to a wayside spring
 from which wells up a stream of water, a liquid light,
 like the morning melting into a chorus of tears and laughter.
 Near it in a palm grove surrounded by a strange hush stands a leaf-
 thatched hut,
 at whose portal sits the poet of the unknown shore, and sings:
 'Mother, open the gate!'

Summary

- ❖ Rabindranath Tagore's "The Child" was originally written in English in a single night and later translated into Bengali as *Sishutirtha*.
- ❖ The poem is significant as it is Tagore's **only poem written in English**.
- ❖ The poem portrays man's journey from the futility of existence and darkness of ignorance to the sprouting of new life as represented by the child.
- ❖ The first flush of dawn reflects on the dew-dripping leaves of the forest. 'Flush' connotes a strong emotion and a question, the response of which the sky seeks. The light of sky gets reflected in the objects of the earth.
- ❖ Parallel to this phenomenon is the man who reads the skies, forecasts the climate or predicts the future. "Friends, we have come!" Parallel to this is the saying that they have arrived.
- ❖ In response to the earlier question, the ripe corn endeavours to respond reaching to the skies.
- ❖ The companions also have a searching gaze as though they are in a quest. On both sides of the road, one finds the corn. The time is ripe and so is the harvest.
- ❖ The ripe golden corn is the glad golden answer of the earth to the morning light.
- ❖ The corn is ripe and golden, and doubly because sunlight shines on the corn. On both sides of the road, the corn is ripe. In between the current of daily life moves on.
- ❖ 'Current' signifies kinetic as opposed to static.
- ❖ The word 'current' also signifies the latent energy beneath the Life that moves on between the village near the hill and the one near the bank. Here, the high and the low, and the terrestrial and aquatic are abridged. The motion also gives a zig-zag graph that is again representative of current.

- ❖ The word 'daily' makes the affair a quotidian one, and hence mechanical.
 - ❖ The potter's wheel goes round and round, and also symbolizes the routine revolution of the earth. The cow-herd takes his cattle to the pasture, and the woman with the pitcher on her head walks to the well.
 - ❖ However, one fails to fathom where the King's castle is: this quest alludes to the kingdom of God. One fails to dig the mine of Gold, or locate the secret book of magic in this expedition of life. One cannot comprehend where the sage is, who knows love's utter wisdom
 - ❖ With all reverence, the person walks to the wayside spring from which a stream of water emerges. The morning melts into a chorus of tears and laughter. The heterogeneous people are united in their emotions.
 - ❖ The chorus comprises of everything that is high key and low key.
 - ❖ The poet portrays the soul as it unites with the paramatma, and all human emotions are no longer balanced, as one gains precedence over the other. It is in a neutral or inert state.
 - ❖ The light is portrayed as liquid light. Just as liquid can assume the shape of the container it fills; this light suits any person who is in search for it and is kinetic and capable of radiating and generating energy like liquids do.
 - ❖ The poet utilizes the word melting to show how transition takes place smoothly. Adjacent to it, in a palm grove surrounded by a strange hush, stands a leaf-thatched hut. The palm is a symbol of peace and serenity; and the palm branch symbolizes triumph.
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- ❖ At the gateway, the poet of the unknown shore sings to the Mother to open the gate.
 - ❖ The idea of the poet belonging to an unknown shore exemplifies the universality of Motherhood here.
 - ❖ A ray of the morning sun strikes in a slant manner at the door. This signifies a ray of hope that knocks on the door.
 - ❖ The assembled crowd feels in their blood, the raw and elemental chant of creation. They transcend into primitivism or their roots as they do. They come from the Mother, and aspire to go back to her again as they ask her to open the entrance. The gate ultimately opens.
 - ❖ The mother seated with the baby on the straw bed is reminiscent of Mother Mary with the miracle child Jesus Christ. Further, Mother Mary is considered to be the paradigm of Motherhood.
 - ❖ Rabindranath Tagore was considerably influenced by the ideals of Christianity during his lifetime.
 - ❖ Morning star is the name given to the planet Venus when it appears in the East before sunrise (as though heralding the arrival of the morning).
 - ❖ Just like Jesus Christ attributed significance to Mother Mary, the morning star heralds the all-encompassing dawn.
 - ❖ Morning star has also been used to describe the star Sirius, which appears in the sky, just before sunrise. With the metaphor of the star are linked ideas of radiation of energy, and with the dawn the idea of a new beginning and a sense of freshness. "Reach high, for stars lie hidden in you. Dream deep, for every dream precedes the goal."
 - ❖ The sun ray falls on the head of the child like a divine blessing or halo. It may also indicate that this child was meant to be in the spotlight. Not only is mankind waiting for the child for redemption, the sunlight representative of nature and the universe also awaits his being. The poet strikes a lute and sings.
 - ❖ The word 'lute' may have two meanings here. Like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, the poet leads the people to their destination. 'Lute' also means 'Liquid clay or cement used to seal a joint, coat a crucible, or protect a graft.' In such a context, this 'lute' may be the tool or solution to

heal the trials and tribulations of mankind.

He sings: "Victory to Man, the new-born, the ever-living!" This newborn is a representative of mankind that is new-born but never dead connoting the resurrection of Christ. Here also, the idea of a man leading his people to their ultimate destination holds significance.

- ❖ The adjective 'ever-living' applies to God. In such a stance, all distinctions are blurred, all hierarchies seem pointless. The king and the beggar, the saint and the sinner, the wise and the fool all sit and cry. At this juncture, they are united in their act of crying and complete submission to God's will. "Victory to Man, the new-born, the ever-living!"
- ❖ **The poem ends on a note of positivism and a prophetic statement as the old Man from the East asserts: "I have seen!"**
- ❖ The old man from the East may stand for Tagore himself as the poem culminates in this ultimate vision. At another level, the quest may be the pursuit for freedom from the imperial rule, a struggle that had all members irrespective of distinctions take part in it.
- ❖ In such a reading, the old man stands for the Father of the Nation .
- ❖ In such stance, the revelation stands for Gandhi's Ram rajya Nehru's vision: "I have seen!"
- ❖ The child is an emblem of purity, untapped potential and a new beginning. Tagore himself had said: "Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man."

Breezy April

**Breezy April, Vagrant April,
Rock me in your swing of music!
Thrill my branches with enchantment
Of your touch of sweet surprises.**

**In my idle dream by Wayside
You come startling me from slumber,
Wilful in your mood fantastic
Tease me with inconstant courting.**

**Breezy April, Vagrant April,
I live with my lonesome shadows.
I know all your fitful fancies
Language of your flitting footsteps.**

**All my secrets burst in blossoms
At your passing breath of whisper,
And my new leaves break in tumult
Of surrender of their kisses.**

Summary

- ❖ Breezy April is an ode addressed to the breeze in the April.
- ❖ This ode portrays the power of the breeze in the month of April which can rejuvenate the entire nature.
- ❖ This short poem explains the love in the heart of Tagore for nature.
- ❖ Tagore combines romanticism and April using symbolic and metaphoric language.

- ❖ All the destructions made by the winter are reconstructed by the magical power of April.
- ❖ This romantic poem written in very simple language captures the attention of the readers.
- ❖ The rejuvenating April is **personified** in the poem as a powerful being which can provide rebirth to the entire things upon the earth.
- ❖ The poem is **addressed to the month April**.
- ❖ The speaker in the poem makes a request to the month to rock him with its music. By the touch of the breeze, he gets thrilled. The breeze awakens him from his sleep. The mood of the breeze is fantastic. But the same time it courts and teases him.
- ❖ The poet says that he knows the whole fancies of breezy April.
- ❖ The language of the breeze using the movements of the leaves and the footsteps are familiar to the poet. With the blowing of the breeze, all the branches are filled with blossoms. They enjoy the breath and whisper of the breeze. The leaves surrender in front of the breeze with its kiss.
- ❖ The poem describes the power of curing the wounds that nature itself possesses.
- ❖ The breeze has the ability to give the sweet surprise with the enchanted touch. That means the breeze absorbs all the destructions made by the cold weather.
- ❖ Like the romantic poets, Tagore loves the appearance of nature and its beauty along with the entire features. He incorporates all the sensual enjoyments the nature can provide at that time.
- ❖ Nature is provided a kind of spiritual power in this poem. He finds out harmony between the minds of human and nature.