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THE SIMILARITIES OF *GITANJALI* AND *THE WRECK OF THE DEUTSCHLAND*

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ABSTRACT

This paper makes an attempt the similarities study of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* and Gerard Manley Hopkins' *The Wreck of the Deutschland* as divine poems. Both the poets are two renowned poets who lived in different periods of time and in different countries. But in spite of these geographical and time related differences, both the poets have certain similarities. They present the ways and means of attaining salvation and redemption of man.

Key Words: Almighty, Salvation & Redemption

Both the poems of Rabindranath Tagore and Gerard Manley Hopkins are essentially religious and they have their similarities. As divine poems, the two pieces have a common goal — salvation and redemption—but man's endeavours to attain it are different, according to the two writers. Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* is mainly a collection of devotional songs and in it the relationship between God and Man has been looked at from different angles – Master and Servant, Lover and Beloved, Boatman and Traveller, Musician and Listener, Seer and Seen, Father and Son. The world is God's visible raiment; the stars and planets are his handiwork. He is the abode of peace and the source of bliss. The subject matter of *Gitanjali* is highly elevated and its form is most appropriate to it.

Hopkins is as great as the Nobel laureate, Tagore. Hopkins is, above all, a religious poet and *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is his most religious poem. It is significant that he broke his long silence as a poet through it, feeling compelled to write upon the tragedy in which five nuns belonging to the Franciscan order were drowned one wintry night at the very mouth of

the Thames. It was a stirring story of abiding faith and consequent heroism and Hopkins wanted the world to know it and understand its true significance. According to Jibesh Bhattacharya, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* presents a powerful picture of the real and active sea, which has no parallel even in the description of the sea in *Beowulf* or *The Seafarer* or in any other poem describing the raving sea.(35-36) As a comparative critique, this article throws light on the similarities of the two poems, and now the similarities are analysed in detail.

Of all the factors in a divine poem, it is the subject matter which occupies the most important place in a critical analysis. The subject matter of a divine poem should be lofty and ideal, and it has to establish the supremacy of God, the Almighty in every respect. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a divine poem in this respect. No doubt, it is the story of Adam and Eve but God, the Almighty is projected as the greatest in the universe. God does not make his presence anywhere in the poem but his presence is felt throughout.

Similarly the subject matter in Tagore's *Gitanjali* and Hopkin's poem is lofty and ideal. They

portray the supremacy of God. Tagore's *Gitanjali* presents man's existence in this world, his relation with God (in his existence in the world), his sufferings and ultimately his acceptance of death as an inevitable truth of life. Hopkins also presents more or less the same subject matter: sufferings of man in this world, death as a reality, redemption and salvation for man. As in *Paradise Lost* in both the poems, God does not make His presence but his presence is felt throughout.

In a divine poem, naturally God, the Almighty is made the central character. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam is the hero but everything in the poem is under the control of God. The fall of Satan, Adam and Eve is the handiwork of God. So is the portrayal of God as the protagonist in *Gitanjali*. All objects, both living and non-living are blessed by God. Every moment, every occasion, every action in man's life is decided by God. The human soul craves union with God. The arguments Tagore puts forth establish God as the protagonist. Hopkins also does the same in his poem. From the beginning till the end, the omnipotence of God is shown. The deportation of the nuns, the wreck of the ship, the sufferings of the stranded passengers, the supreme sacrifice of the sailor and the death of the five Franciscan nuns and few others are wrought by God. Nothing could take place without God's consent. In both the poems God is the protagonist responsible for the development of action till the resolution at the end.

A divine poem always conveys a serious message which would be a solution to the problems of man in his earthly life. Tagore contends in *Gitanjali* that realization of God will be the supreme achievement of man, and this, he could achieve through self-realization. It is through self-purification, sincerity, perseverance, dedication and universal love, man can realize God:

LIFE of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing, that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower,

knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act. (4)

These are the criteria which constitute Tagore's message in *Gitanjali*.

Hopkins' message in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is rather implicit. Universal love, sacrifice and suffering are the ways to realize God. God's mercy is infinite and it is like a boat which will save not only the sincere and the pious, but also the sinners:

With a mercy that outrides The all of water,
an arkm For the listener; for the lingerer
with a love glides Lower than death and the dark;

A vein for the visiting of the past-prayer, pent
in prison, The-last-breath penitent spirits-
the uttermost mark Our passion-plunged
giant risen, The Christ of the Father
compassionate, fetched in the storm of his
strides. (33. 1-8)

Hopkins seems to be reticent about his message in the poem but the last stanza loudly speaks of his mind.

The sensibility of Tagore and Hopkins is alike when they write about the attributes of God. Tagore says that the Infinite in emanant but man does not understand this. He searches for him and at last finds out that He is within himself. God is there in every object of Nature and man has to realize it. Similarly in the thirty fourth stanza of Hopkins' poem, he observes that God is omnipotent in the world, in the universe and the shipwreck is an example for it. The wreck of the ship called *Deutschland* is a manifestation of God's presence, Christ's presence in the world. The poet appeals to Christ to light the world. Christ is both human and divine. His visit to the world in the form of the shipwreck has neither the dazzle of the Doomsday nor the darkness in which he came to the world. The sensibility of both the poets is the same and it is well-proven.

God, the Almighty is a universal belief whom man could only feel but his very presence cannot be scientifically proved. However man

desires to meet him. In the fifth song of *Gitanjali* Tagore expresses his wish to meet God, sit beside him and sing songs. He wants to dedicate himself to the service of God through singing. In the twenty eighth stanza of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, Hopkins expresses a similar idea like the wish of Tagore. The stranded passengers on board *Deutschland* desire to "see" Christ appearing before them whom the Chief nun alone could "see:"

But how shall I . . . make me room there:
Reach me a . . . Fancy, come faster – Strike
you the sight of it? look at it loom there,
Thing that she . . . there then! The Master,
Ipse, the only one, Christ, King, Head: . .
(28.1-5)

A sincere and conscientious devotee's divine desire is expressly presented by both the poets.

Sacrifice is the only way for man to reach God, the Almighty and both Tagore and Hopkins present the idea in their respective divine poems. In this earthly life, man has to face many difficulties. Sufferings alone will make a man real man. Suffering for the sake of others will lead man to sacrifice. Man can expect peace when he returns to his eternal abode and it could be reached through sacrifice only. Hopkins expresses the same idea in the sixteenth stanza of his poem. A sailor is safe in the rigging but he jumps into the sea-waters and saves a drowning young woman with her infant child. But unfortunately a breaker carries him away in the process and dashes him against the bulwarks of the ship and he attains an instant death. It is a case of supreme sacrifice. In the portrayal of sacrifice, both the poets remain equal to each other.

In presenting the glories and greatness of God, both Tagore and Hopkins have their similarities. God is not only beautiful but at times, he has his terrible aspects also. God is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. In some of the moods of destructive aspect, God appears more beautiful, Tagore says:

BEAUTIFUL is thy wristlet, decked with stars
and cunningly wrought in myriad-coloured
jewels. But more beautiful to me thy sword
with its curve of lightning like the
outspread wings of the divine bird of

Vishnu, perfectly poised in the angry red
light of the sunset.

It quivers like the one last response of life
in ecstasy of pain at the final stroke of
death; it shines like the pure flame of being
burning up earthly sense with one fierce
flash.

Beautiful is thy wristlet, decked with starry
gems; but thy sword, O lord of thunder, is
wrought with uttermost beauty, terrible to
behold or to think of. (53)

Hopkins also presents the same idea in the ninth stanza of his poem. God is all inclusive and man has to worship him in all His three aspects of the Trinity. God is terrible while dealing with the rebellious. He is destructive and protective as well. He is both cold and warm; he is a punisher and a comforter. He is most merciful and wrathful also. In their portrayal of the glories of God, both Tagore and Hopkins are equal.

The theme of death is a major factor treated by both the poets. In the eighty sixth song in *Gitanjali*, Tagore discusses the concept of death. Death is terrible but inevitable. The poet (and every man) must receive him since he is the servant of God. The poet will offer him (death) his body. Tagore is nearer to Shakespeare when he describes death as a "lover's pinch: it hurts and is desired," says Satyanarian Singh (35-36). Death is not an end in itself, rather it is a commencement of life in the next world. When man dies, he is offering himself to God. Tagore observes:

DEATH, thy servant, is at my door. He has
crossed the unknown sea and brought thy
call to my home. The night is dark and my
heart is fearful—yet I will take up the lamp,
open my gates and bow to him
my welcome. It is thy messenger who
stands at my door.

I will worship him with folded hands, and
with tears. I will worship him placing at his
feet the treasure of my heart.

He will go back with his errand done,
leaving a dark shadow on my morning; and
in my desolate home only my forlorn self
will remain as my last offering to thee. (86)

Hopkins in the eleventh stanza of the poem presents the aspects of death. Death has many instruments at its disposal to destroy man. Death can come to man in any form – death by sword, fire, floods, storm etc., Man has to prepare himself to meet death at any time. But unfortunately man does not realise death and thinks that he is safe and secure while others die. This is a fallacy. One day or the other, man has to die. Therefore he has to prepare himself to meet death. Hopkins observes:

'Some find me a sword; some
The flange and the rail; flame,
Fang, or flood' goes Death on drum,
And storms bugle his fame.
But we dream we are rooted in
earth—Dust!
Flesh falls within sight of us, we, though our
flower the same, Wave with the meadow,
forget that there must The sour scythe cringe,
and the bleak share come. (11.1-8)

Both the poets have effectively treated the concept of death in their respective poems.

All creations have been effected by God and therefore there is a constant yearning in all things to be united with God. So says Tagore in the eighty fourth song of *Gitanjali*. There is a craving in man for union with God. Since all the things are separated from God, a pang is caused in every creation for union with God and this is the cause of all activities in the world. Hopkins also presents the same concept in the twenty ninth stanza of his poem. The chief nun alone could see Christ appearing before her and she wants to be united with Him. It is Christ who controls all events in this world including the wreck of the ship, Deutschland. Even in the event of death or danger, the nun contends that her faith in God and Christ cannot be changed and she wants to be united with Him. Her faith in Christ is as strong as the Tarpeian Rock in Rome. Union of the human soul with God is a universal theme and both Tagore and Hopkins have treated it in a manner similar to each other.

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