

***Bhagvad Gita* and *Gitanjali*: Exploring Consciousness in Tagore**

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Abstract

If there is one music in the *Gitanjali* that resonates above the meter, rhyme scheme and diction of the poems, then it is the music of love in enmity, belief in restlessness and stoicism in sorrow – a pattern of good propensities in the bad that stops not at mishaps and being conscious of the life’s irresolute, death for one, is still more conscious of its resolute that is good. In crisis, when vision is clouded and fear is paramount, liberty takes us away from the beaten path consciously so that we know between good and bad, fear and courage or sorrow and happiness of life’s din and music. *Bhagvad Gita*, the religious text of Hindu thought, says that everyday living can strip us off the consciousness of liberty by the envelope of ‘maya’ – the illusion of truth – so that you mistake riches for happiness, praise for love and loss for sorrow. Life then becomes an endless merry-go-round of falsehoods: lassitude in imbalance between mounting sensations and ability to conquer its relief in death; preoccupation with death; denial of Him, the eternally free and happy; sorrow and the vicious circle goes on. Consciousness as Non-Compromising Good is explored by Tagore in *Gitanjali* as

liberty instantiated when man doesn't compromise with the extremes of mirth, sorrow or delirium; but chooses the mean position, which thoughts will be explored in this essay.

Keywords: Consciousness, *Gitanjali*, *Bhagvad Gita*, Tagore, poems

Background

Tagore's English *Gitanjali*¹ (R. Tagore, *Gitanjali*, Song Offerings) was translated by Tagore himself when he was about to set sail for London, was at *Shelaidaha* resting, and wanted to apply himself to "light work" (R. Tagore, Genesis of English *Gitanjali* 3):

"When the air strikes one's bones, they tend to respond in music; this is an old habit of mine, as you know. Yet I had not the energy to gird up my loins and sit down to write. So I took up the poems of Gitanjali and set myself to translate them one by one."

The letter ends with this line scribbled in English in the poet's own handwriting: "I am able to love my God because he gives me freedom to deny him" – Rabindranath Tagore.²

In freedom to deny *Him* or acquiesce to *Him* or give in to *Him*, there is a question of choice at stake and at stake is the love for the Endower of the freedom. Does man give into *Him* by choosing to follow the beaten path by doing in crisis what others do and give up Liberty, that treasure of love from the Conscious? Does it mean man must bow to *His* 'maya' that accommodates bad times thinking it will pass, for what seems to be true is just an 'appearance of the Truth to the human mind and is therefore human and maybe called *Maya*, or illusion' (E. a. Tagore 23)? Truth, then, is the first thing to bite the dust as falsehoods perpetuate enmeshing him more and

¹ *Gitanjali* – translated into English from Bengali as Song Offerings by Rabindranath Tagore.

² Genesis of English *Gitanjali* – a letter to Indira Devi Chaudhurani, his niece, dated London, May 6, 1913.

more in its fatal grip. Or, does he acquiesce to *Him*, who knows liberty *always* as The Conscious choice for The Good of which *He* is the sole Guardian? That is, when you use liberty – consciously against the bad and not unilaterally for the Good – to go off the beaten path by searching for the good in the bad in you, you ‘perfectly comprehend the Universal Mind’ and therefore Truth, His Non-Compromising Face of Good, is unveiled.

Bhagvad Gita says that ‘The Universal Mind’ is **not** subservient to the three forms of ‘maya’³, rather they are *His* subservient; and so, to bow not to ‘maya’ but extricate from its bondings is to feel *Him* who is The Free.

Rabindranath Tagore (RT): When our universe is in harmony with Man, the eternal, we know it as Truth, we feel it as beauty.

Albert Einstein (AE): This is a purely human conception of the universe.

RT: There can be no other conception. This world is a human world-the scientific view of it is also that of the scientific man. Therefore, the world apart from us does not exist; **it is a relative world, depending for its reality upon our consciousness.** There is some standard of reason and enjoyment which gives it Truth, the standard of the Eternal Man whose experiences are through our experiences. (*E. a. Tagore 22*)

So, that leaves the option to deny *Him* still unexplored. If to be Conscious is to live with *His* ‘maya’ while consciously applying liberty to do what it takes to break out of its smoke-screen and

³ *Bhagvad Gita* says these are the three states of *His* adulation: **Ascetism** found in peace, spartan living, knowledge and rigor; **Pomp** found in exultation, haughty, greed; and **Grief** found in sorrow, adoration, sleep and leisure [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter VII, Verse 12 – 14]. It’s very difficult for the ordinary mortal tied down by the ties of maya to reach *Him* who is the nature of Happiness being free of ‘maya’.

embrace the Good, then to deny *Him* is the unconscious choice of bad without investigating the good in you by applying reason against that search. One is stopped at death (or, whatever is plaguing one as ‘maya’ or say sorrow, that leaves one wallowing in misery). God remains undiscovered and liberty is not explored to its fullest potential.

The ‘standard’ of the Eternal Man: In the Preface to Bengali Gitanjali, Tagore has said: “Some of the poems of this book have been published in a few journals before. But in thinking that the poems which have been created thereafter within short gaps of time have a common thought stringing them together, all of them have been published here together.” (R. Tagore, Gitanjali). Tagore made Gitanjali the offerings of his resurgent life to a heroic Heart – someone who returns in his poems as temperance in ostentation, patience in sorrow, and fearless in unknown. Tagore perceives a pattern in this bigger Life and that is to see very clearly that life doesn’t breakdown when faced with reversals. Primarily, Tagore⁴ mentions grit in sorrow (“in this wide world/the hurt of sorrow is to your heart the chime of veena”), fearlessness in danger (“in deep trouble/you see and smile at a mother’s comely face”), stubborn in hopelessness (“in whose search/you leave behind all to roam here and there”), love in despair (“in whose thoughts/you cry helpless whom you love”), calm in distress (“you have no worries/who is your ally, I think”) and indifference in death (“Indifferent to Death/in which eternal life’s ocean you happily swim”) – this is a ‘standard’ of the Eternal Man reinforcing itself above the suffering heart, whose root to ‘the perfect comprehension of the Universal Mind’ is the liberty to go off the beaten track, and Truth as a non-compromising good is discovered.

When we look back and delve deeper in *Gita*, we find here similarities with thoughts of Tagore, for *Bhagvad Gita* too refers to a standard over a grieving heart, the standard that *He* establishes and

⁴ Author’s translation, Bengali *Gitanjali*, Verse 51.

which Krishna, his *avatar*, superimposes over Arjuna. *He* says to be dissolved into doubts in crisis is not the ways of the True, who have known trouble, and its resolution, in the oneness with the everlasting Soul, always calm, unmoved, intemporal, unstressed and untouched by the senses [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 2, Verse 24]. Men in the start are inexpressible (God's indivisible part), in-between they are expressed (when they follow God's preferred ways and express a sampling of God's nature) and in death, inexpressible (with God again) [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 2, Verse 28]. *Bhagvad Gita* goes on to explain the dutiful, *His* preferred way for a Kshatriya, which Arjuna was, rested in his will to fight; and the 'standard' to the 'dutiful Kshatriya' as one who throws himself in for the protection of justice, self, society, nation, and the subjects fighting wars on the balance of just against unjust. This makes any kind of disavowal of carrying out one's duty a dishonour for a Kshatriya. Standards are established during the catechism between Krishna and Arjuna for the Enlightened [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 2, Verse 55 – 66], the Karmayogi [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 3, Verse 30 – 32], the Liberated [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 4, Verse 34 – 40], the Ascetic [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 5, Verse 3 – 6], the Resolute [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 6, Verse 34 - 37], the Conscious [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 7, Verse 5], the Universal Devotee [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 8, Verse 14 – 19], and so on.

Science (Reason) gives only a preliminary understanding of God: Tagore's God in the Genesis (R. Tagore, Genesis of English Gitanjali 4) is best understood in contrast to **Descartes'** (1596 – 1650) God. Rene Descartes, the father of modern science, signaled God's existence as a 'reality' [truth], same as arithmetical ideas like two and three will always make five, whether you are awake or dreaming. Just as a thinking man perceives the truth of his own existence: "I think, therefore I am" [*cogito ergo sum*] (Descartes), he perceives God's existence: a truth. But, the truth of God's existence and the truth of his own existence are mutually exclusive: one arises from ideas of perfection and infinitude, and the other

from his own thoughts of imperfection and finitude. He being imperfect and finite cannot be the cause of ideas (effects) of perfection because just as it didn't mean truth doesn't exist because a savage is never good, so also a truth exists even without man. Therefore, the truth of perfection comes from a perfect and Infinite Being who exists, from God. On the other hand, only by leveraging his own fractioned self, investigated and released from the "limitations", does Tagore reach a preliminary understanding of "the Supreme Man who has no individual limitations". In the first phase of the reasoning on existence of God, since science "is concerned with that which is not confined to individuals", God becomes an "impersonal" scientific truth. That is, *science is "the impersonal human world of Truths", and God is a non-normalized, non-realized truth rooted in ideas of "individual consciousness" which has no "universal significance"*. In the second phase, man borrows and normalizes by what we value in Life as good to "know Truth [God] as good through our own harmony with it":

We realize the Supreme Man who has no individual limitations through our limitations. Science is concerned with that which is not confined to individuals; it is the impersonal human world of Truths. Religion realizes these Truths and links them up with our deeper needs; our individual consciousness of Truth gains universal significance. Religion applies values to Truth, and we know Truth as good through our own harmony with it. (E. a. Tagore 22)

Literature Survey

There are only a handful of studies dealing with thoughts on Tagore's consciousness. One such study is Ramin Jahanbegloo's "**Tagore and the Idea of Civilization**" where the author wrote: "*For Tagore, 'the human individual is not a helpless victim of fate or necessity,' but rather the co-creator of the reality with the divine. All*

the moral progress made by humanity is because of the capacity of the individual to sit in judgment over things. Therefore, the fundamental assumption is that the reality of the world belongs to Man as it belongs to God. Individuals create their inner worlds, but they must search for harmony with the Universal Mind. This is why Tagore concluded that life is a perpetual consciousness of the infinite in Man." (Jahanbegloo 69). Other studies like Aruna Roy's **Realistic Motif in the Ideology of Tagore** have said that Tagore was an idealist poet because he searched for the "ultimate Truth, Good, Beauty" in the everyday realities (Roy 55), like death: "Tagore often quoted the sayings of the Upanisads, —'the immortality which expressed in the form of joy (*Ananda Rupamamrtam Yadbibhati*)'."; but also Tagore has been made into a spiritual realist "as it[poems and songs] always deals with the sufferings of humanity" (Roy, Realistic Motif in the Ideology of Tagore 55). This essay will fill the gap between Jahanbegloo's nailing Tagore in the realm of *Weltliteratur* (whose life-enforcing strains can be found in the literature of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Tolstoy, says Jahanbegloo) and the other's categorization of Tagore as a Humanist, an Idealist or a Realist, by beginning to understand his consciousness as a piece in the puzzle called The Non-Compromising Good, a standard and an exemplar of *His Nature* as uttered in *Bhagvad Gita* (The Song of the Lord). That is not to say that *Gita* is his template for *Gitanjali*, but to find connections between the two as two tomes we refer to in crisis for solace, peace and happiness.

Gita's Consciousness: In *Bhagvad Gita*⁵, Arjun, the Pandava, asks Lord Krishna, his Charioteer and close confidante, to direct him to the path of right *karma* [action] because his dilemma was that his

⁵ Mahabharata, of which *Bhagvad Gita* is a part, describes the Pandavas and the Kauravas as arraigned against each other for establishment of *dharma* [duty] because the Kauravas are refusing to cede to the Pandavas the share of their kingdom which the Pandavas lost in a game of dice to the Kauravas.

dharma is not to kill his near and dear ones but preserve them. Krishna differentiates between the unconscious and the conscious as 'afraid' to 'unattached' – one prone to change from happiness to tears being attached to a state of bliss which has now deteriorated, and the other, the Unmoved, or the one unattached to anything but a state of Order⁶, and all it takes to be free to establish that state over phases of the mind::

“In Gita, Nature is immobile and the ‘apara’ aspect of God; and conscious Man is called His ‘para’ aspect. If she is divided into and tied down by the eight states of matter: solid, liquid, air, fire, sky, mind, intelligence, and pride, then the other is the living being with the potential of consciousness who is my freedom. Dear Arjuna, by the ‘para’ aspect, the world turns on its axis.” [Bhagvad Gita, Chapter VII, Verse 4 – 5]

When there is 'freedom' to do there is oneness with the Order in disorder and there is perfection of Truth and its reinforcement [Bhagvad Gita, Chapter VII, Verse 7 – 11]

Tagore's Consciousness

Conscious man is anyone who might mull over death but doesn't get frayed by it for in 'deliverance from the thralldom of Maya' of which death is a part and parcel of unhappiness, there is the truth of freedom to seek 'self-affirmation' and 'self-respect' that brings happiness. A man who unites with the world on the basis of this quest is conscious which is a Truth.

RT: Beauty is in the ideal of perfect harmony which is in the Universal Being; Truth the perfect comprehension of the Universal Mind. We individuals approach it through

⁶ “This Soul is indestructible by fire, air, water and weapons. He is regular, omnipresent, still, unmoved, original, inexpressible, indescribable, undeterred.” [Bhagvad Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 24]

our accumulated experience, through our illumined consciousness-how, otherwise, can we know Truth?

AE: I cannot prove, scientifically that Truth must be conceived as a Truth that is valid independent of humanity; but I believe it firmly. I believe, for instance, that the Pythagorean theorem in geometry states something that is approximately true, independent of the existence of Man. Anyway, if there is a reality independent of Man there is also a Truth relative to this reality; and in the same way the negation of the first endangers a negation of the existence of the latter. (E. a. Tagore 23)

Essay Topic: This essay will look into *Gitanjali*'s preoccupation with that which Gita calls consciousness in man – the consciousness of liberty and the perfection of Truth – and which Tagore confirms as the eternal Consciousness – whose footprints are seen in the dry sand of a restless heart as the good, the normal and the resilient.

Tagore sings:

*“When life dries up
Arrive as rains of kindness.
When all sweetness hides
Arrive in the lovely songs’ strains.
When work is bigger than itself
It thunders and clouds everything
At the edges of the heart, Master of Silence
Arrive with peaceful steps.
When making oneself a miser
The mind poor languishes at a corner
Opening the doors, dear generous One
Arrive with the pomp of Kings.
When wants roll in dust*

*Blinding all, fools the unconscious
Dear Pure, Dear Awake
Arrive in the flares of Light.”*

However, having said that we recognize that religiosity has played a cautious role in Tagore’s creations, as he would choose a mean position between excess and deficit of religion by saying in his *Atmaparichay*:

“If there is any religious philosophy in my creations then it is this that there is full and final complicity of love between paramatma and jivatma – this realization is my religious understanding that love has Dwaita (dualism) on one hand, and Adwaita (monotheism) on the other, separation on one hand and union on the other, bondage on one hand and freedom on the other. In whom strength and comeliness have merged, beauty and enjoyment, limit and limitless have become one, that by accepting the world can overcome its limits, and by acknowledging the history of the world can accept the world on its terms, that knows peace in war, auspicious in vile and in variety worships the One.”

Definitions from Inside and Outside *Gita*

Poem: an experience transported into an imaginative space through “*the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*” controlled and compressed using figures of speech, meter, sound and meaning. Since it composes feelings into refined speech, it can be said to follow the ways of communication of Lofty Immortals. Tagore seems to have believed in the power of the compressed word to access the Divine for he would say: “*I touch by the edge of the far spreading wing of my/song thy feet which I would never aspire to reach* (R. Tagore, English Gitanjali Verse 4).”

Law of Opposites: *Gita* says that the Law of Opposites makes death followed by life and life followed by death, just as summer dies into winter and winter dies into summer, or joy disappears into sorrow and sorrow departs in returning joy. Death is not the forfeiture of life, as he wills who never stops in crisis, but an introduction to The Life – who is awake to the virtues of *all times and of all kinds* – therefore, it is an admission to the Truth. The Forgiving has formulated the Law of Opposites.

Life: a measure of bliss versus sorrow as the divide between the action taken having no expectation of a prize versus that having expectations of material gain, like praise or valuables. Thus, one can inculcate the habit of The Virtuous – to stop at nothing, least Death – and establish the Law of Opposites; or exterminate the Law by sinking in sensations that give personal enjoyment and do nothing to eliminate the feeling of nearing Death that will end material excesses, and therefore bring sorrow.

The Sun: a metonym of The Composed One, as *He* has the Sun as *His* one eye where the Other is the Moon [*Bhagvad Gita*]. The invincibility of Light is expressed in its ability to illumine the blackness, or absence of visibility which is equal to disorder, and thereby restore order. It rises every day, come what may, and is the most visible sign of Composure of its owner. It is also the sign of the Beneficence who shines down on the earth with accompanying plentitude everywhere.

Karma Yogi: a state of engagement where the persevering man sees waste in labor (as humans waste in pursuing material benefits) and labor in waste (as humans avoid) so that he is not tied up in thoughts of prize but by work alone. He is the closest to *Krishna*, the avatar, who is untouched by thoughts of the world's labor or any prize thereof, and has descended through the ages to end evil and restore *dharma* its proper place.

God: An agglomeration of virtues, like wisdom, temperance and judgement. Being a vessel of qualities, he is thus indestructible by

fire, water, air or weapons, for what we know as truth is Permanent. He is thus conscious – who is free of indecisiveness between indifferent and doubtful, fearless and affected, and, faithful and distressed.

Why *Bhagvad Gita*? Since Tagore is reticent about any strict religious conditioning of his creations, therefore, before launching into his works and into *Gita* as a mirror of his mind, we should ask ourselves: why *Gita*?

Gitanjali starts by genuflecting to God, or rather to His image of the Free of Temptations (bow my head to your/feet/sink all my pride/in tears/In bestowing myself with honors/I daily hurt myself/in dancing round and round myself/I daily die little deaths/sink all my pride/in tears...⁷). We are then made aware of his subservience to the little things of life which in recognizing their balmy influence rejects all restlessness that is in “excess of wants” (...whatever don I have you without asking/the skies, light, body, mind and life/daily you lift me up/where worthy am I of it/you’re saving me from/the dilemma of excess of wants...⁸). There is spirit in danger that in rejecting all fear and sorrow saves himself from being gutted in the fire of remorse that he forgot dignity of life lived on the edge (save me from danger/this is never my plea/let me not fear its death grip./In the throes of sorrow/ let you not sympathize/but let me win its shallowness...⁹). Tagore speaks of joy in Nature which brings affinity with a Beauty that is strayed from the regular but only for a day “Today, the bees forget to drink honey/as they dance drunk in Light”(today, the paddy fields are in play of light and shade/who sets afloat in blue skies/the white clouds barges./ Today, the bees forget to drink honey/as they dance drunk in light./ Today, for what purpose by the riverside/ storks in twos gather side by side...¹⁰). He

⁷ Author’s translation, Bengali *Gitanjali*, Verse 1.

⁸ Author’s translation, Bengali *Gitanjali*, Verse 2.

⁹ Author’s translation, Bengali *Gitanjali*, Verse 4.

¹⁰ Author’s translation, Bengali *Gitanjali*, Verse 8.

knows stoicism in pain that insists in “sitting by the door/in your hopes” because it is his wish that he not sink in doubts but wait on his orders (clouds stack upon clouds/darkness descends/why do you insist/ I sit alone by the door./ In a workday amidst work/I am with many people/today I am sitting by the door/in your hopes...¹¹). Everything says there is a purpose in every downturn as there is one in an upturn in life: to anchor him more in life’s good. But, more important than not, is exercising the choice to go off the beaten path, that by imposing a ‘standard’ of the Eternal Man above the grieving heart rules ‘the perfect comprehension of the Universal Mind’ and return of the Normal.

Bhagvad Gita claims freedom from ties, be it for oneself or for others, is to be closest to *Him*, God. In support, *Gita* mentions Krishna’s worshippers are four: the distressed, like Draupadi in the Kaurava court; the questing, like King Janak who wants self realization; the covetous, like Sugrib who wants enjoyment of life; and the wise, like Prahlad, who wants to learn God through reading. Of these four, the last is Krishna’s favourite as *He* is to them, for the fourth group is free of covetousness just as *He* would like them to be, and has united with *His Self* and in only *Him*, devoted. [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter VII, Verse 16 – 17]

Secondly, *Bhagvad Gita* puts in his hands the ‘form’ of his heartfelt query – a dialogue which is in the shape of a poem – and by its very nature of enquiry that delved into established knowledge to revalidate established truths given questions in the mind of its listeners, (Arjuna) gave him free hand to explore his own dithers. Thus, most of the poems in *Gitanjali* are internal dialogues with God, and have ‘you’ (thee/thou/thy) mirrored by the humility of the ‘I’, the poet, as he eulogizes, fraternizes, humbles the self, and is deeply inquisitive about the vigilante entity named God on the other side of the conversation. *God* is realized in overcoming the limit (no fear of death) as *He* who has no individual limitations, and the poet

¹¹ Author’s translation, Bengali *Gitanjali*, Verse 16.

aspires to a union of minds, as he begins to resemble *Him* – in *His* full-fledged ecstasy of The Life:

*“To this happy fest of the world
I have been invited
Blessed am I, the requited
In this earthly life, my Lord.
My eyes roam your beauteous Nature
Satiating every wistfulness
My hearing has lost itself
In a sonorous music.
You have given me the role
To play the lute
I string along life’s laughter and tears
to sing songs of you.
Is the time arrived
That I bow to you in your court?
I would hail thee in praise
Is my submission profound!”*¹²

Lastly, the rigorous pedagogy between the thoughtful Arjuna and the artful Krishna, woven into poetry, is an attempt by Krishna to reinforce a standard of the Free on the grieving heart of Arjuna. We see this happen when Arjuna grieves “*I do not see Good in killing my dear relatives in battle (of Kurushetra). Dear Krishna, I do not want to win, I do not want the kingdom, I do not want its enjoyment*” [Bhagvad Gita, Chapter 1, Verse 31]. Then, Krishna doesn’t condole him but rather instills in him a standard who is “wise” (not bemused by the flow of Time and change of corporal body from infant to youth to its end), “balanced wit” (who is unmoved by property-

¹² Author’s translation, Bengali *Gitanjali*, Verse 44.

related joy and sorrow), “well read” (who is witness to both dishonest and honest in himself) and whose embodiment is the soul as the everlasting, the indestructible and the expressible. “*Dear Arjuna*”, says Krishna, “*fight the war. Remember that the Soul is indestructible and the body is temporal, throw away all grieving and do your duty*” [Bhagvad Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 13 – 18]. As Arjuna’s queries on the nature of Knowledge¹³ and what constituted the preferred ways in crisis as *His* choices relooked and validated the accepted truths on the anvil of rigor and directed enquiry, we find its reflection in Tagore’s times which were spectacular with the fast pace of scientific discoveries taking place around a demystified Universe, all buffeted and strengthened by an open clime of enquiry congenial to the nurturing of questing minds. Tagore, who was being opened to new experiences every day that tested his deepest convictions, that made intelligible the unreasonable, and controlled the insubordinate, gave him more reason to fathom the Unknown – God – whose touch could be discovered in inexplicable ways that might not be explained by science(reason) but can be explained by living upto *His* ‘standard’:

*“Anchored am I to riches and relations
Still know that it’s for you my mind pines
You are within, O! Mindful,
Of me, You know better than I
In all happiness, sorrow and forgetfulness
Still know that it’s for you my mind pines
I haven’t been able to give up pride
I roam with pride as my show-off
To let go of it would have been a relief*

¹³ To know the Soul as the indestructible, the everlasting, the never born, and the unspent is the Man who can never kill or kill through other’s hands [Bhagvad Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 21].

*Still know that it's for you my mind pines
Whatever I have it's for you
To take by your own hands
Letting go all, I will gain you
In my heart and mind, it's for you I pine.” (R. Tagore,
Bengali Gitanjali Verse 29)*

Consciousness in Nature's love for life: Tagore consciously tries to overcome his frail existence, which he pejoratively signals - ‘my eyes’ and ‘my ears’, as they are *His* unblemished instruments through which *He* visualizes ‘thy creation’ and *He* listens to ‘thine own eternal harmony’.:” *What divine drink wouldst thou have, my God/ from this overflowing cup of my life?/ My poet, is it thy delight to see thy creation/ through my eyes and to stand at the portal/ of my ears silently to listen/ to thine own eternal harmony?”* (R. Tagore, English Gitanjali Verse 65). On the other hand, there are Tagore's imaginative expressions about God's world being *His* poetic workshop, like the Sun is “*the golden harp*”, or the Sunlight is “*thy voice pour down in/golden streams breaking through the sky.*”, bird's sweet notes are “*thy words will take wings in songs/from every one of my birds' nests,*”, and budding of newborn blooms are “*thy melodies will break forth in flowers in all my forest groves.*” (R. Tagore, English Gitanjali Verse 19).

Tagore wrote in **The Religion of Man:**

“To me religion is too concrete a thing though I have no right to speak about it, but if ever I have come to realize God, or if the vision of God has ever been granted to me, I must have received the vision through this world, through men, through trees and birds and beasts, the dust and the soil. I feel his touch in the sky, in the air, in water, everywhere I feel it. There are times when the whole world speaks to me.”

Thus, if it's God's voice that spills out in sounds of Nature, forever rejoicing in *Him*, then it's *His* consciousness that spills out in songs, differentiating between what is everlasting, Life, and that which is tenuous, death. Tagore's songs are, in this respect, exemplars of *His* consciousness, putting him in one-to-one with God as he says that "*I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come to thy presence.*":

*"When thou commandest me to sing it seems that
My heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face,
And tears come to my eyes.
All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts
Into one sweet harmony – and my adoration
Spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.
I know thou takest pleasure in my singing.
I know that only as a singer I come to thy presence.
I touch by the edge of the far spreading wing of my
Song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.
Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself
And call thee friend who art my Lord."* (R. Tagore, *English Gitanjali Verse 2*)

Consciousness inviting Submission: Tagore's consciousness is never insipid as he vehemently rejects languidness in favor of knowing the Effortless, for it is 'his fleeting emptiness' that *He* will 'paint [it] with colors, gild [it] with gold, float [it] on the wanton wind and spread [it] in varied colors'. Tagore would thus sing – "*I am like the remnant of a cloud of autumn/ uselessly roaming in the sky/O! my sun ever-glorious. Thy touch/ has not melted my vapor....if this be thy wish and/ if this be thy play, then/ take this fleeting emptiness of mine, /paint it with colors, gild it with gold,/ float it on the wanton wind/ and spread it in varied colors*" (R. Tagore, *English Gitanjali Verse 80*).

Again, we submit to Him by making a habit of that Pellucid Nature: “I shall take this harp of my life./ I shall tune it to the notes of forever, and/ when it has sobbed out its last utterance,/ lay down my silent harp at the feet of the silent.” (R. Tagore, English Gitanjali Verse 100).

Just as the *Bhagvad Gita* mentions Lord Krishna advising Arjuna for his submission: “*sarvadharmān parityajya ekān mān sarnān brajo ...*”, [*Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter XVIII, Verse 66] and to take refuge in him, so also the enamored Tagore implores to God in abject submission:

*“I am here to sing thee songs. In this hall of thine
I have a corner seat.
In thy world I have no work to do; my useless life
Can only break out in tunes without a purpose.
When the hour strikes for thy silent worship
At the dark temple of midnight, command me,
My master, to stand before thee to sing.
When in the morning air the golden harp is tuned,
Honor me, commanding my presence.”*
(R. Tagore, English Gitanjali Verse 15)

Consciousness in Light’s Permanency: God is sturdy and Rabindranath repeatedly makes the Sun – a metonym¹⁴ of His Elevated Soul – the composition, the rendition, the outpourings of the Sturdiness of *His* Heart made visible by the Invincibility that is Light. Tagore would consciously reject the impervious of the Dark in favour of permeable Light, that is sometimes the familiarity of mother, sometimes the heartening sight of a friend, sometimes the

¹⁴ Metonymy is the figure of speech that is the thing used in place of the person of which it is an integral, identifiable part, like the Crown used in place of the rule of the King [The Crown has decided to impose taxes on the proletariat].

longing for an unwarranted guest and sometimes the awe for the maestro the poet listens with joy.

The mother is seen ever conscientious of her duties, undefatiguing in the fulfillment of her responsibilities, and yet she is humble to the point of being piteous. Tagore, thus sings:

*“Mother, your kindly feet¹⁵
I espy in the beauty of the dawn’s light.
Mother your death-defying words
Fill up the skies little by little……”¹⁶ (R. Tagore, Bengali
Gitanjali Verse 14)*

If the light be stamped out and darkness rule, then *He* is seen the friend – the Light – finding *His* way through the gloom to reach him as he has always done. In the poet’s heart he knew, as he knew a dear friend wouldn’t abandon him in trouble, that Light is nearing and so be at rest, not restless. In doing so, he will enact the Life of the Masterly Manⁱ whose sign is the composure of his directed thoughts.

*“Art thou abroad on this stormy night on thy
Journey of love, my friend?
The sky groans like one in despair.
I have no sleep tonight.
Ever and again I open my door
And look out on the darkness, my friend!
I can see nothing before me. I wonder
Where lies thy path!
By what dim shore of the ink-black river,*

¹⁵ A married woman or a bride has her feet painted with red *Alta-dye* which is perhaps the source of this imagery.

¹⁶ Author’s translation.

*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?"*
(R. Tagore, English Gitanjali Verse 23)

He is seen the unwarranted guest who had dropped in but, without anyone to welcome *Him*, *He* had left as if in disappointment. When the poet was ready to receive *Him*, *He* had left, never to return leaving the Poet in the throes of grief. Yet *He* wasn't a renegade, *He* followed a pattern of behavior, just that *He* had left disappointed when you weren't awake to receive *Him*:

*"Beautiful, You had arrived this dawn
Bearing the rubeous blooms 'parijat' in hand.
The sleeping mansion silent, not even a traveler on road,
You left unaccompanied in your golden chariot –
Couple of times you stayed leaving, your eager eyes
On my windows.
Beautiful, you had arrived this dawn...." 17*

Consciousness in Eternal Karma and Dharma: Subhash Anand explains, "*Kuru* is the second person, imperative, singular of *kriya* (to do). Hence *kuru-ksetra* is a place where one constantly hears "DO ! " It is the sphere of action (*karma*). If dharma is a major concern of the Gita, then this is equally true of karma. *But these are not two unrelated concepts. Dharma is a formal concept: every man has his duty. By bringing in the concept of karma, a material element is added.*" (Anand) If God is the store of all virtues, then the eternal *karma* (illumine the world wrapped in darkness) is a gift from *Him* whose essence is the eternal *dharma*, The Sun: to awaken the world to work. The world is the field of action as animals, birds and humans live and inhale the air of *doing* what comes to them best

¹⁷ Author's translation, Bengali *Gitanjali*, Verse 67.

– “*butterflies spread their sails, lilies and jasmines surge up, clouds glisten, leaves laugh and poets sing*”. Tagore sings:

*“Light, my light, the world-filling light,
The eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light!
Ah, the light dances, my darling,
At the center of my life;
The light strikes, my darling the chords of my love;
The sky opens, the wind runs wild,
Laughter passes over the earth.
The butterflies spread their sails
On the sea of light. Lilies and jasmines surge up
On the crest of the waves of light.
The light is shattered into gold on every cloud,
My darling, and it scatters gems in profusion.
Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my daring,
And gladness without measure. The heaven’s river
Has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad.”*
(R. Tagore, *English Gitanjali Verse 57*)

Consciousness in Death Sublimated to Life: God is the commingling and conditioning of summer to arrive after winter; joy after sorrow; and birth after death, or overcome the fear of death by wishing Death into a pleasant experience that knows happiness in the arrival of a guest (death) who will stay but briefly marking phases in Life: “*On the day when death will knock at thy door/ what wilt thou offer to him?/ Oh, I will set before my guest/ the full vessel of my life - / I will never let him go with empty hands.*” (R. Tagore, *English Gitanjali Verse 90*). This is the promise of life after death – every sorrow that punctuates the discovery of *Him* and submitting to *His Joy*, as if life after death – where death relieves monotony of this life’s cacophony, while depositing you with the Lord’s

mysteries and magic to be uncovered (“*I will never let him go empty-handed*”). Tagore seems to create an analogy of behaviour: Tagore treats Death as Immortals treat Mortals by never letting them go empty handed in life, as if Death is a brief interlude and an initiation to explore God’s everlasting and overflowing “vessel” of happiness.

The patterns of existence that adhere to *His* ‘standard’ stand out most vividly against *His* pristine nature (“*a stainless white radiance*“ that “*no day or night, nor form nor colour, and never, never a word*” – all those things that we say belong to Life and Death – can depict *His* Irreproachable Touch): “*But there, where spreads the infinite sky/ for the soul to take her flight in, / reigns the stainless white radiance./ There is no day or night,/ nor form nor colour,/ and never, never a word*” (R. Tagore, English Gitanjali Verse 67).

Consciousness in Master Poet Revered: Tagore emphasizes the difference between himself and the God as the difference between a Master and an Apprentice. The Life of the eternal Musician is sometimes that of a wandering minstrel, the Bauls of Bengal; and sometimes that of a Singer, like himself. But, whereas the poet is a musician riddled with defects that inhibits his voice and fetters his heart, the Eternal Song-maker lets free *His* thrilling falsetto – The Eternal Wick, the fountainhead of composed thought – who sees *all* from the centrality of its abode.

Tagore consciously overcomes any feeling of deficit for he is the unformed putty in the Hands of the Mystic Yogin, who allows him “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./ Messengers , with tidings from unknown skies,/ greet me and speed along the roads”. Just as the Eternal Poet has made poetry His second nature, who deep in contemplation always sees, so also will the humble poet will do the same: “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? In the meanwhile I smile and I sing all alone./ In the meanwhile the air is filling/ with the perfume of promise.” (R. Tagore, English Gitanjali Verse 44). Tagore listens to His Song imparted from the portals of the Heavens – the composition that strikes the humble poet with love for the Maestro, as Tagore sings:

*“I know not how thou singest, my master!
I ever listen in silent amazement.
The light of thy music illumines the world.
The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky.
The holy stream of thy music breaks through
All stony obstacles and rushes on.
My heart longs to join in thy song,
But vainly struggles for a voice. I would speak,
But speech breaks not into song, and I cry out baffled.
Ah, thou hast made my heart captive
In the endless meshes of thy music, my master!”*
(R. Tagore, English Gitanjali Verse 3)

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ⁱ *Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter II, Verse 59, expatiates on Action with no expectation of rewards and says that a person who acts with indifference to the prize of his actions is not willful of senses and can be called wise. But even though he is indifferent to gratification of senses, he is still to control the desire for gratification. By surrendering all his senses in trying to know that Definitive Man, he will be able to control the aggrandizing behavior. By knowing the Discerning Man, he will know the important from the unimportant, affection from disinterest and pride from scorn of it. If he is felled, he wouldn't have lost sight of his aim: *The Almighty*. If the mind fancies not what it sees, touches, smells, tastes or hears, material objects are to him useless, and misfortune is but another thing to be overcome.