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“GITANJALI” AND “THE GARDENER” BY RABINDRANATH
TAGORE: PECULIARITIES OF STYLE

Rabindranath Tagore became a world known figure after his English version of *Gitanjali*, an anthology of religious lyrics, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. His English works are considerable part of his creative heritage (the last edition of Tagore's English works comprises almost 2000 pages). Thus Tagore's literary contribution can be considered as valuable interconnection between Western and Eastern cultures.

A prominent Russian artist and scholar Nicholas Roerich, who lived for a long time in India, wrote: *“When I am thinking about unbroken energy, about blessed enthusiasm, about pure culture, the image of so trusted friend of mine Rabindranath Tagore always arises before my eyes. The potential of his spirit must be great to execute untiringly the fundamentals of a true culture. For Tagore's songs are inspired calls to the culture, his praying for a great culture, his blessing to those who seek for the way upwards”* [Перих 1992, 167]¹.

Rabindranath Tagore is undoubtedly the most towering figure of modern Indian and Bangla literature. His contribution was various in genres. It included novels, plays, poems, short stories, essays as well as educational books and articles. A prominent modernist poet Ezra Pound, one of Tagore's admirers, wrote about collections of poems *“Gitanjali”* these words:

“The hundred poems in the present selection are all songs to sing. The tunes and the words are knit together, and Oriental music would seem to fit this purpose better than our own... The next easiest things to note are the occasional brilliant phrases, now like some pure Hellenic, in “Morning with the golden basket in her right hand,” then like the last sophistication of De Gourmont and Baudelaire. But beneath and above it all there is this spirit of curious quiet. We have found our new Greece, suddenly. As the sense of balance came back upon Europe in the days before the Renaissance, so it seems to me does this sense of a saner stillness come now to us in the midst of our clangour of mechanisms...” [Pound 1913, 26].

It follows thence that writers belonging to different literary trends admit Tagore's point of view and his talent. Even modernists highly appreciate his more traditional manner of writing. Thus we can make a logical assumption: if different writers brought Tagore's works to the forefront, he obviously required the reputation of a first-rate poet. All abovementioned prove his bright individuality and talent, and also mean that he managed not only to demonstrate skilfully the wisdom of the age-old traditions but also adjust them to contemporary literature. His works apparently have traditional features and yet they remain relevant up to nowadays.

Why have Western writers and poets paid so much attention to Tagore's works? The answer is he wasn't only an outstanding poet, but had a number of other talents. His contemporaries couldn't forget his charming inimitable voice. Tagore sang his songs sometimes as ancient Indian tradition demands — when poetry is inseparable from music. Thus Tagore's lyrics in his own performance acquired originality spellbinding his listeners. As May Sinclair (in a letter to R. Tagore) wrote: *“May I say now that as long as I live, even if I were never to hear them [poems. – K.G.] again, I shall never forget the impression that they made. It is not only that they have an absolute beauty, a perfection as poetry, but that they have made present for me forever the divine thing that I can only find by flashes and with an agonizing uncertainty ... You have put into English which is absolutely transparent in its perfection things, it is despaired of ever seeing written in English at all or in any Western language”* [Pound 1913, 25].

The final aim of the article is to trace and classify the most specific characteristics of Tagore's poetic style in order to highlight their role in conveyance of the author's message.

Proceeding from this aim the following tasks have been set:

- to study different elements of Tagore's poetry, which create specific atmosphere of the poems;

- to define characteristics of specific rhythm of the poems;
- to define main forms of the poems;
- to denote the influence of artistic images of traditional Indian poetry on Tagore's poetic works and to study the role of nature description in the poems.

The given article is based on contextual analysis of the collections of poems "Gitanjali" and "The Gardener"; elements of comparative and descriptive methods are also used.

The collections of poems "Gitanjali" (1912) and "The Gardener" (1913) have been chosen for the analysis not at will. The first reason to chose them is the fact that these works yielded the author his Nobel prize and evidently played an important role in his literary carrier. Thus "Gitanjali" could be considered to be a key point of Tagore's creative heritage. In addition, one could notice a unified system of symbols here especially from the point of view of bhakti literary tradition. Though the poems' English versions were created approximately at the same time, Tagore had collected their Bengali originals from absolutely diverse sources. Thus it would be necessary to take a brief review of the history of English translation of both "Gitanjali" and "The Gardener" as Tagore's carrier as a bilingual poet and writer goes back just to the translation of "Gitanjali" (though Sisir Kumar Das noticed that, to be precise, "the history of English translations of Tagore began as early as around 1890 when he himself translated a poem 'Nisphal Kamana' (Fruitless desire). This is however, a stray and solitary example without follow-up" [Tagore 2001, II]).

Tagore had been planning to visit England in May 1912, when he was 51 year old already, but because of his illness he had to postpone his voyage. He settled in his estate and as he wrote in the letter to his niece Indira Devi: "...I had not the energy to sit down and write anything new. So I took up the poems of 'Gitanjali' and set myself to translate them one by one... The pages of a small exercise book came to be filled gradually, and with it in my pocket I boarded the ship. The idea of keeping it in my pocket was that when my mind became restless on the high seas, I could recline on a deck-chair and set myself to translate one or two poems from time to time. And that

is what actually happen" [Tagore 2001, II]. This is how genesis of the "Gitanjali" English version looked like. While staying in England later, since June to October, 1912, Tagore translated many of his poems later published under the title "The Gardener".

Sisir Kumar Das came to a conclusion that neither "Gitanjali" nor "The Gardener" was brought together according to any particular plan or scheme. Hence it is necessary to indicate the Bengali books which contained poems originally written in Bengali:

GITANJALI (the total number of poems – 103) – *Caitali* (1896) – 1, *Kalpana* (1900) – 1, *Naivedya* (1901) – 16, *Smaran* (1903) – 1, *Sisu* (1903) – 3, *Kheya* (1906) – 11, *Gitanjali* (1910) – 53, *Acalayatan* (1912) – 1, *Gitimalya* (1914) – 16, *Utsarga* (1914) – 1.

THE GARDENER (the total number of poems - 85) – *Kadi o Komal* (1886) – 3, *Mayar Khela* (1888) – 3, *Manasi* (1890) – 3, *Sonar Tari* (1894) – 8, *Citra* (1896) – 6, *Caitali* (1896) – 7, *Kalpana* (1900) – 13, *Ksanika* (1900) – 26, *Kheya* (1906) – 4, *Prayascitta* (1909) – 1, *Gitanjali* (1910) – 1, *Raja* (1910) – 1, *Utsarga* (1914) – 6, miscellaneous – 3.

One could notice that "Gitanjali" shows greater unity than "The Gardener". Yet one could see that many English translations for both collections came from the same sources, e.g. the poems from *Caitali*, *Kalpana*, *Kheya*, *Gitanjali* and *Utsarga* are either in "Gitanjali" or in "The Gardener". Thus if we presume, that Tagore tended to translate his best pieces of poetry, "Gitanjali" could be considered the most successful from the point of view of the author. Another reason for this choice could be its relevancy to the European poetic tradition; Tagore might have chosen the most adequate or "universal" in its content poems.

Thus coming up directly to the style studies we begin with the formal analysis. "The Gardener" and "Gitanjali" as well as the most of Tagore's English poems consist of two main forms:

- **prose poem** and
- **free verse**.

If one applies to the theoretical source he can find that "*prose poem* is a composition printed as prose but distinguished by elements common in poetry, such as elaborately

contrived rhythms, figures of speech, rhyme, assonance, consonance and startling images. Aloysius Bertrand (1807–1841) appears to have been one of the first writers to establish it as a minor genre” [Cuddon 1979, 145]. C. Baudelaire, A. Rimbaud, O. Wilde and T.S. Eliot were among the writers who have attempted the prose poems.

Speaking about *free verse*, it is a kind of poetry that does not conform to any regular meter and depends on natural speech rhythms; the pattern is often based on repetition and parallel structures.

The above mentioned forms should not be confused with:

- blank verse which does observe regular meter in its unrhymed lines
- poetic prose, which strives to the verse in the use of different devices, rhythm and probably a kind of meter and usually is employed in brief passages in long works to achieve a specific effect.

Though the origins of *free verse* are involved in obscurity one can find its features in the Bible Psalms and the Song of Songs as well as in the poems of H. Heine and J.W. Goethe, V. Hugo and C. Baudelaire, W. Blake and M. Arnold. An American writer

“The Gardener”

*Day after day he comes and goes away.
Go, and give him a flower from my hair, my friend...
He sits on the dust under the tree.
Spread there a seat with flowers and leaves,
my friend.
His eyes are sad, and they bring sadness to
my heart... [Tagore 2001, 94].*

The other lines can be quite long (one sentence is one line):

“The Gardener”

*A wandering madman was seeking the
touchstone, with matted locks, tawny and
dust-laden, and body worn to a shadow,
his lips tight-pressed, like the shut-up
doors of his heart, his burning eyes like
the lamp of a glow-worm seeking its
mate... [Tagore 2001, 114].*

The above passages remind us beautiful pieces of prose. We can also observe the combinations of long and short verses alternating each other and creating a specific intense rhythm, based on contrast of line length, as following:

W. Whitman seems to make a considerable contribution to this form in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century many poets employed it including E. Pound, T.S. Eliot and P. Laurence.

P.F. Baum in his book “*The Principle of English Versification*” distinguishes the following main kinds of free verse “*according as verse or prose predominates as (1) irregular unrhymed meter, (2) very free blank verse, (3) unusual mingling of meter and (4) mere prose printed as verse, or what may be called free-verse par excellence*” [Baum 1969, 154].

The both forms – *prose poem* and *free verse* (following Baum’s classification the poems may be regarded as “*free-verse par excellence*”) - are performed in “*The Gardener*” and “*Gitanjali*” nearly equally. Each of them is characterised by a particular inner rhythm and peculiar melody. “*It lacks rhyme, though the poetic effect is based on the individual sensitivity to the music of natural speech rhymes*” [Morner, Rausch 1991, 89]. The author obviously often plays on the length of lines. Sometimes the lines are relatively short and quite equal at length, and are used mainly for meditations or descriptions as one can see here:

“Gitanjali”

*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 arm
towards perfection... [Tagore 1999, 20].*

“Gitanjali”

*If the day is done, if birds sing no more, if
the wind has flagged tired, then draw the veil
of darkness tick upon me, even as thou hast
wrapt the earth with the coverlet of sleep and
tenderly closed the petals of the drooping
lotus at dusk [Tagore 1999, 14].*

"The Gardener"

Why did the lamp go out?
*I shaded it with my cloak to save it from
the wind, that is why the lamp went out.*
Why did the flower fade?
*I pressed it to my heart with anxious love,
that is why the flower faded.*
[Tagore 2001, 107].

Thus, different form of poems, combination of lines' lengths as well as alternation of strong and weak words are evidently the means that serve not only to convey the main ideas but also to create peculiar rhythm and melody [See also: Богомолов 1988; Гаспаров 1999; Тянянов 1999].

The rhythm generally plays an important role in "The Gardener" and "Gitanjali". S.Tulyaev stated on this in his article on Tagore's poems: "*The rhythm lends real importance to those things, which are usually of no importance or no consequence. Thus amorphous crowd, that suddenly started dancing, is turned into a unity by the rhythm*" [Тюляев 1973, 165].

The whole collection of poems consists of verses expressing a wide range of emotions and, as it seems, written in different musical

"The Gardener"

*Beauty is sweet to us, because she dances
to the same fleeting tune with our lives.
Knowledge is precious to us, because we
shall never have time to complete it.
All is done and finished in the eternal
Heaven...*
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice
[Tagore 2001, 117].

The other question one should pay attention to is that Tagore in his works expressed the point of view unusual for his contemporary writers and poets. Those who belonged to different modernistic trends voiced the ideas of chaos, total loneliness, crisis and gloomy prospect of future. Unlike them R. Tagore armed by his inveterate optimism brought out the eternal principles of goodness and justice, beauty and love.

Furthermore Tagore's style preserves the characteristics of the folk poetry. Repetitions become one of the most frequent devices used by the author. So inimitable author's rhythm can be observed alongside with the exceptional atmosphere of his verses:

"Gitanjali"

Prisoner, tell me who was it that bound
you ?
*'It was my master,' said the prisoner. 'I
thought I could outdo everybody in the
world in wealth and power, and I amassed
in my own treasure-house the money due
to my king...'* [Tagore 1999, 17].

keys. However both collections have some unified atmosphere and common melody, which is going to be developed and varied. Tagore describes his inner state, his eager spirit opens his doors before the reader in some verses. In other ones he chants the praises of Divine love, portrays a beloved couple. Still whatever line we read, we feel deep inside that magic author's words are turning up our souls. And so the reader can comprehend that personages are just masks for the author's views and thoughts.

A reasonable question that arise is in what way Tagore managed to achieve the harmony and beauty permeating his poems? The only answer which seems to be possible is – through description of harmony, which includes beauty, knowledge and joy as its elements:

"Gitanjali"

Prisoner, tell me who was it that bound
you ?

«Gitanjali»

*Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as
well.
O thou beautiful, there is in the nest of thy
love that encloses the soul with colours
and sounds and odours.
There comes the morning with the golden
basket in her right hand bearing the
wreath of beauty, silently to crown the
earth* [Tagore 1999, 45].

“The Gardener”

This love between you and me is simple as a song.

No mystery beyond the present; no striving for the impossible; no shadow behind the charm; no groping in the depth of the dark.

This love between you and me is simple as a song [Tagore 2001, 92].

Together with language simplicity, repetitions purify the ideas expressed by the author; make them vivid and transparent, as can be clearly seen here:

“The Gardener”

...The name of our village is Khan-jana, and Anjana they call our river. My name is known to all the village, and her name is Ranjana.

Only one field lies between us. Bees that have hived in our grove go to seek honey in theirs. Flowers launched from their landing-stairs come floating by the stream where we bathe...

The name of our village is Khan-jana, and Anjana they call our river. My name is known to all the village, and her name is Ranjana [Tagore 2001, 93].

Another function of this device is to create some rhythmical pattern, which lays stress on the most important part of the poem.

When examining the poems' form one can also see a number of dialogues – the fact that is unusual for lyrics in general and can be regarded also as one of the Tagore's style peculiarities. Moreover stylistic brilliance of the dialogues is also brought about by repetition (as underlined):

“The Gardener”

– Trust love even if it brings sorrow. Do not close up your heart.

– Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them.

– Pleasure is frail like a dewdrop, while it laughs it dies. But sorrow is strong and abiding. Let sorrowful love wake in your eyes.

– Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them [Tagore 2001, 97].

“Gitanjali”

Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes.

Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes.

Many song have I sung in many a mood of mind, but all their notes have always proclaimed, 'He comes, comes, ever comes [Tagore 1999, 26].

“Gitanjali”

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, lowliest, and lost.

When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest and lost.

Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes of the humble among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost [Tagore 1999, 45].

“Gitanjali»

– Maiden, where do you go shading your lamp with your mantle? My house is all

dark and lonesome - lend me your light!..

– I have come to the river to float my lamp on the stream when the daylight wanes in the west...

– Maiden, your lights are all lit – then where do you go with your lamp? My house is all dark and lonesome – lend me some light... [Tagore 1999, 42].

All the thoughts are expressed by words combining characteristics of everyday speech and exquisite poetry, that got mixed up and became indivisible. Still poetic images used by Tagore were based not only on his imagination but became a sophisticated mixture with truthful reality.

Dialogues are also used in the meditative poems alongside with monologues, conversations and rhetorical questions:

“The Gardener”

*Is that your call again?
The evening has come. Weariness clings
round me like the arms of entreating
love.
Do you call me?
I had given all my day to you, cruel mis-
tress, must you also rob me of my night?*
[Tagore 2001, 114].

“Gitanjali”

*Day after day, O lord of my life, shall I
stand before thee face to face?
With folded hands, O lord of all worlds,
shall I stand before thee face to face?
Under the great sky in solitude and si-
lence, with humble heart shall I stand
before thee face to face?* [Tagore 1999,
50].

To produce deep impact upon the reader the author recurrently uses elements of traditional Indian poetry. He refers to the realia, which are well known to everybody, but everyday things and objects are transformed and poeticised.

“The Gardener”

*«Have you not lit the lamp in the cow-
shed?
Have you not got ready the offering basket
for the evening service?
Have you put the red lucky mark at the
parting of your hair; and done your toilet
for the night?
Oh, bride, do you hear, the guest has
come?
Let your work be!* [Tagore 2001, 88].

“Gitanjali”

*«The leaves rustled overhead; the cuckoo
sang from the unseen dark, and perfume
of babla flowers came from the bend of
the road...
The morning hour is late, the bird sings in
weary notes, neem leaves rustle overhead
and I sit and think and think* [Tagore
1999, 35].

Sections of dress or decorations are also presented in detail and assort with the natural phenomena such as dew, pearls or jasmine.

Still Tagore is not disinterested to the ordinary life; he finds beauty in everything, especially in nature. Relations between people become essential elements of natural harmony. Feelings acquire metaphorical brightness, vividness, and even silence creates particular atmosphere of adoration and sympathy. Everything, that surrounds the poet acquires new characteristics, gets new shades of meaning, and becomes alive. It is generally assumed that Tagore skilfully employs nature description of either his native Indian nature or nature in general:

“The Gardener”

*Over the green and yellow rice-fields
sweep the shadows of the autumn clouds
followed by the swift-chasing sun. The
bees forget to sip their honey; drunken
with light they foolishly hover and hum.
The ducks in the islands of the river
clamour in joy for mere nothing* [Tagore
2001, 125].

“Gitanjali”

*The morning sea of silence broke into
ripples of bird songs; and the wealth of
gold was scattered through the rift of the
clouds...
The sun rose to the mid sky and doves
cooed in the shade. Withered leaves
danced and whirled in the hot air of noon.
The shepherd boy drowsed and dreamed in
the shadow of the banyan tree...* [Tagore
1999, 28].

One can also find a good example of Tagore’s nature description of his motherland – Bengal in his letters 1885–1892 [Tagore 1921].

The author's descriptions are never indefinite but always emotional. Tagore's own attitude towards the nature is most clearly expressed in his use of epithets, metaphors and especially personifications. Furthermore he endues the nature with divine force which reflects traditional Indian concepts. Concerning this features Ezra Pound remarked: "*Let me deny that Mr. Tagore has an emotional contact with nature, an intuition more beautiful, in its own peculiar way, than any I have yet found in poetry. I do not mean to say that there are not other beauties just as beautiful. I do not mean to say that his sense of the life-*

"The Gardener"

*I remember a day in my childhood I floated a paper boat in the ditch.
It was a wet day of July; I was alone and happy over my play.
I floated my paper boat in the ditch.
Suddenly the storm clouds thickened, winds came in gusts, and rain poured in torrents [Tagore 2001, 117].*

Other poems are presented from a woman's point of view:

"The Gardener"

*When I go alone at night to my love-tryst, birds do not sing, the wind does not stir, the houses on both sides of the street stand silent.
It is my own anklets that grow loud at every step and I am ashamed... [Tagore 2001, 87].*

"The Gardener"

*I asked nothing, only stood at the edge of the wood behind the tree...
Under the banyan tree you were milking the cow with your hands, tender and fresh as butter. And I was standing still. I did not say a word. It was the bird that sang unseen from the thicket...
The morning wore on and I did not come near you [Tagore 2001, 90].*

flow and sun-flow is more beautiful than the mythopoetic sense. It is different.

It is by virtue of this sense that his poems, his poems translated as they are now into French and English have a certain place in world-literature, a place quite different from that which the originals, furnished with all sorts of rhyme and technical fineness, hold in the literature of contemporary India" [Pound 1913, 27].

It is interesting to trace that poems are often written from different points of view (This is an important feature of "*The Gardener*"). Some of them are traditional, being presented from the poet's side:

"Gitanjali"

*The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day.
I have spent my days in stringing and in unstringing my instrument.
The time has not come true, the words have not been rightly set; only there is the agony of wishing in my heart [Tagore 1999, 8].*

"Gitanjali"

The day was when I did not keep myself in the readiness for thee; and entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment of my life [Tagore 1999, 25].

"Gitanjali"

*This is a prayer to thee, my lord – strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.
Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.
Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.
Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knee before insolent might... [Tagore 1999, 20].*

And sometimes it seems that this is not the author who presents his poem but his Muse herself:

“The Gardener”

None lives forever, brother, and nothing lasts for long. Keep that in mind and rejoice.

Our life is not the one old burden, our path is not the one long journey.

One sole poet has not to sing one aged song.

The flower fades and dies; but he who wears the flower has not to mourn for it forever.

Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice
[Tagore 2001, 116].

“Gitanjali”

O fool, to try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders! O beggar, to come to beg at thy own door!

Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all, and never look behind in regret.

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath.

It is unholy – take not thy gifts through its unclean hands. Accept only what is offered by sacred love [Tagore 1999, 5].

The presented analysis of style peculiarities of the *“Gitanjali”* and *“The Gardener”* collections of poems led us to the following inferences.

Yet *“Gitanjali”* and *“The Gardener”* have been made up of different Bengali sources, some poems are presented in both collections. Though the collections differ in dominant genre, thematic integrity and main images they still possess the same style, forms, atmosphere and philosophical background.

According to the principles of versification all poems consist of two main forms:

- free verse
- prose poem.

One should also pay attention that despite of the fact that Tagore’s both collections are world famous, it’s still hardly to find Tagore’s name in any Literary Encyclopaedia or Literary Terms Dictionary in regard of his contribution into development of both above mentioned forms of versification.

All poems are characterised by specific rhythms and melodies. As they are written in the forms of *free verses* or *prose poem*, their poetic impact is based on the individual poet’s sensitivity to the music of natural speech rhythms, combination of line lengths, alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables or accented and unaccented words in the sentence. R. Tagore does not stick to one rhythm pattern, he creates a new poetic form for each poem, so his poems demonstrate rhythmic flexibility and variety.

Speaking about the free verse form, the following remark by Sisir Kumar Das should be mentioned:

“Tagore’s experimentations with what he named gadya-kabita (prose-poems) in Bengali can be taken as an example. Gadya-kabita is a new poetical structure introduced by Tagore around 1931–32 in Bengali, which provides the closest approximation to what is normally known as ‘free-verse’. They are written in a rhythmic prose in which the syntactic units, such as prefaces and short clauses, are changed as in verse. Tagore confesses in the preface of Punasca (1932) that the idea of such poetic structures occurred to him while preparing the English Gitanjali. He considered the possibility of creating the similar effect in Bengali prose and experimented ten years later in Lipika (1922) [Tagore 2001, 27].

Simplicity of the language on the one hand and numerous repetitions on the other hand give a possibility to notice that Tagore’s style preserves some characteristics of folk poetry. Another its peculiarity is that the combination of everyday speech and exquisite poetic images in Tagore’s works, that got mixed up and became indivisible.

There are numerous examples of descriptions in the poems. Tagore uses elements of traditional Indian poetry abundantly in them. One can also find that the author tends to universality of images in his descriptions. Harmony and beauty are also achieved through descriptions. Everything that surrounds poet, is poeticised, acquires

new characteristics and gets new shades of meaning.

The other important characteristic of “*Gitanjali*” and “*The Gardener*” is that the poems are often written from different

points of view. It helps to understand the inner emotional experience, thoughts and reflections of different personages. Still quite often the personages are just masks being used to express the author’s views.

¹ Here and further translated from Russian by K.G.

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