

# TAGORE'S VIEW ON LIBERTY OF CHILDHOOD: A CLOSE STUDY ON GITANJALI

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Rabindranath Tagore is one of the illuminating stars in the world of excellence. There is not a single genre in arts where Tagore did not present his mastery. Perhaps all the scholarly questions for all the era took shelter in his pen. Spreading the principle of 'universalism' he is rightly called "The World Poet"(Visva Kabi). He had a keen insight in the deep theoretical doctrines in literature,education,philosophy,mythology, dance, painting. However very few scholars could show keen observation on life like Tagore. Tagore possessed also the romantic notions on nature,world,human and he advocated their assimilation in his literary pieces. In this regard he is often compared with the romantic literary scholars like Wordsworth,Coleredge,Blake. On that point he like Blake glorified the 'innocence' and worried on the coming of 'experience'. Such a type of mental and physical emancipation from the burden of 'experience' is exemplified in his Nobel Prize winning piece "Gitanjali: Songs Offerings"(1912).*

**Keywords:** Children, Education, Freedom, Innocence, Nature.

Before discussing the point on selected lyrics of Gitanjali, we should mention the family life and childhood of Tagore in Jorasanko Thakurbari that made the background of his literary career. In his "My Reminiscences" Tagore asserted that during his childhood in Thakurbari he was growing up under the supervision of personal servants. Sometimes he was compelled to stay long time within a boundary (gaandi) in his room. But hours after hours he gazed at nature and the daily village life in nature by the open window and longed to assimilate with the open sky. He said in "My Reminiscences", "Ringed round as I was near this window I would spend the whole day peering through the drawn Venetian shutters, gazing and gazing on this scene as on a picture book." (Ch 3, With in and With out.) . From that point he realized the necessity of mental liberty of a child who should not be confined with in a four wall room. During schooling he again heard the calling of nature and thus abandoned school going. Home teaching was arranged for him. He advocated the living of children in the lap of nature without having any concern about the problems and struggles of matured life. Thus the child mind will be grown up with playing in nature and will be learnt in natural way. They should be curious about the wonders of nature. Rabindranath thought that man has come out of nature. So union with this 'mother nature' is possible that influence human soul. Tagore's such a desire took real form in his founding of Santiniketan in Bolpur, a heritage school where students are being taught in open air, open nature, under the trees. There is no mental bondage for children, but only the bondage of nature. This was later converted into Visva-Bharati, a central university of India having national importance. He said about Santiniketan in his eponymous poem, "SHE IS OUR own, the darling of our hearts, Santiniketan. Our dreams are rocked in her arms. Her face is a fresh wonder of love every time we see her, for she is our own, the darling of our hearts. In the shadows of her trees we meet in the freedom of her open sky."

Now we should discuss the point from the lyrics of 'Gitanjali'. In poem number 8 of the collection, Tagore said,

"THE CHILD WHO is decked with prince's  
robes and who has jeweled chains  
round his neck loses all pleasure in his play;  
his dress hampers him at every step."

This is very significant as the poet advised the mother not to decorate her child with royal dress and jewels like 'king'. He also advised to keep the children away from mundane wealth, power that is the symbol of 'experience' or adulthood. These expensive ornaments are the burden for a child to play freely with his fellow mates. There is a dual meaning, in one sense those ornaments are too heavy for a child to carry during playing, and on the other hand it will distinguish him from other children as a wealthy 'king' that is an obstacle for this free assimilation with them. Wealth should not be given chance to divide the children. This royal-dressed child may hesitate to play with others. He will be busy in maintaining his royal posture instead

of playing innocently. Thus humanity will be disappeared from his heart. So he advised the mother to let her child to play in open sun and mud. He said,

“Mother, it is no gain, thy bondage of finery,  
if it keep one shut off from the healthful dust of the earth,  
...to the great fair of common human life.”

It is the world of nature where all children are same, where all can enjoy themselves, that is the beginning of actual moral learning to be ‘one’ among ‘all’. His experiences in Jorasanko planted the seed of freedom in learning in his mind. He realized that the empathy, sensitivity of children should be developed with an intimate rapport with own cultural and natural landscapes. So he did not allow any narrowness to be born in mind that can separate human from human. To mingle with manhood is the original education for children. He thought that learning should offer freedom of communion with human spirit and moral world. So he said, “I try to assert in my words and works that education has its only meaning and object in freedom— freedom from ignorance about the laws of the universe, and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world (Ideals of education, 1929).” There should be naturalness in relationship. Here Tagore is different in his treatment of mother nature from Wordsworth. In “Lucy poems” Lucy’s “Mother Nature” is somehow ‘experienced’ who will govern Lucy under strict surveillance. Lucy in nature is unanimated who can not play, move, talk or at all express herself. She had no mate for playing. We can quote from the poem,

“This child I to myself will take  
She shall be mine, and I will make  
A Lady of my own.” ( Three years she grew in sun and shower).

But here is the mastery of universalism of Tagore where in the world of nature children are totally free. If he is deprived of taking such enjoyments with fellow mates he will face the spiritual decay.

Once the poet wrote-“Nature’s forms, fragrance and beauty, the pulsations of life on earth — all combined to give birth to a large half-recognized being Who used ever to accompany me in various forms.” In poem no 60 of Gitanjali, Rabindranath wrote,

“ON THE seashore of endless worlds  
children meet. The infinite sky is  
motionless overhead and the restless  
water is boisterous”.

The children are playing in the sea shore of the world that is vast for them. Here the sea is their companion and the sky over their head who have enough time for them. There is no one to hurry up them for the conclusion of game. The children enjoyed their infant game in the blue water of the sea that again glorified their infancy. They do not know the of the sea, it’s only their play mate. This sort of game may be trivial to the external world, but it’s the reality for them by which they can learn to build to home of sands, blow empty shells, float boats made of leaves. Tagore highlighted the innocent creativity of children that they learnt while playing with nature. They have no interest in the fulfilled and unfulfilled desires of the grown-up life. They are satisfied with themselves. In the next para, the poet said that they don’t think like ‘experienced’, so they do not know how to swim, how to catch fish. For them, sea is not profitable in business purpose. They don’t intend to take profit from sea, they can only take the enjoyments and nothing else. Like the they are not aware that this sea contains pearl, jewels, wealth inside it. It’s only their play mates and they are satisfied with collecting the stones from the sea-shores. It’s more important to them than the pearl inside the sea. They have no concern about earnings and making wealth for livelihood. He said,

“They seek not for hidden treasures,  
they know not how to cast nets.  
The sea surges up with laughter,  
and pale gleams the smile of the sea-beach.”

This is the stage to be detached from materialistic worldly possession. Tagore thought that learning should be availed from the surroundings in natural and human kingdom. He wished such simplicity in Santiniketan where children can sit on hand-woven mats under the tree where they can climb and play. He prescribed the learning from doing and activities not only bookish syllabus. Now Tagore treated sea as the ‘Mother nature’ who gives accompany to her child. The tempest’s roaming is not horrible to the children, but it brings a melody to him. The sea offers the cradle to her child for playing. There is no difference between the simplicity of child and nature that reminds us the case of “The Lamb” of Blake.

Not only the physical liberty, but Tagore wanted mental emancipation so that children can travel freely in their imagination in the world of nature. His lyric no 61 celebrates the innocence psychology of children that

is absurd for grown up men. In that poem the baby enjoyed a magic sleep that comes from the buds of fairy village, it comes to kiss the eyes of the children. Here Tagore lost in imagination as he wrote,

“...in the fairy  
village among shadows of the forest  
dimly lit with glow-worms, there hang  
two timid buds of enchantment. From  
there it comes to kiss baby's eyes.”

The smile that flickers from his lips is also special and natural that originates from pious touch between ‘child moon’ and ‘autumn-cloud’. Again Tagore makes a connection between nature and mother as the source of the child’s tenderness. However, the blessings for the baby comes from the beauty of several Bengali months. Here Rabindranath discussed the necessity of imagination and having dream for children. It enhances their creative faculty also. He suggests, “since childhood, instead of putting the entire burden on the memory, the power of thinking, and the power of imagination should also be given opportunities for free exercise” (Tagore, Shikshar Herpher).

Tagore’s lyric no 62 is somewhat different from his others lyrics on childhood. Here he mentioned the dual parents of child, one his biological parent who give birth and his ‘mother nature’ who nourishes him. Here the biological parents offer everything to their child-toys, songs, sweets, kisses to please their baby. But mother nature also arranged the same in natural way. Instead of giving any worldly toys and nature gives colorful clouds, flowers with which he can play. Nature arranges the wave’s sound and the chorus of leaves to offer melodious sounds. The child may taste the sweetness of flower – honey, fruit, and water while his parent offer sweet to eat. The sky and the air also kiss the sweet face of the innocent baby.

Here the poet’s message was that beside offering the mundane worldly pleasure the children should get the chance to avail the natural adore of their ‘original’ father, unless life will be dry and materialistic. In his “Tapaban” (“The Forest”, 1910), he emphasized a child’s spiritual relation with nature. The true education is the realization of universe by spirit, volition and mind. So this spiritual universalism in the ultimate truth of life, not commercialism. In reality his Santiniketan is the pure spiritual ‘tapaban’. He said, “ Our true education is possible only in forest, through intimate contact with nature and purifying austere pursuit”. (“Dharmashiksha” -Religious Education, 1911),”

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