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Humanity and Poetic Witness in Selected Poetry of R.N.Tagore

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ABSTRACT: Rabindranath Tagore's poetry and thought present love as the main way of being in the world, beauty as a moment of deep inner insight, dignity as both social and spiritual freedom, and truth as a balance between inner awareness and universal order. Tagore's idea of art is at the same time spiritual, human, and ethical. Love opens a person to beauty; beauty leads to truth; truth supports dignity. The paper places Tagore in the Indian artistic tradition and the global modernist world, and consider what his ideas might mean for today's views on humanism.

KEYWORDS: Tagore, Gitanjali, love, beauty, dignity, truth, Indian aesthetics, humanism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Rabindranath Tagore holds a unique place in modern world literature. He was a poet, thinker, musician, social critic, and teacher whose writings joined deep spiritual feeling with a broad human outlook. His most famous work, the **English Gitanjali** — translations and new versions of his Bengali poems — won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 and introduced readers around the world to his gentle, lyrical spirituality. Tagore's works often return to four linked ideas: love, beauty, dignity, and truth. Together these form the heart of this moral and artistic vision. To read Tagore is to meet a poet who brings together the personal and the universal, the inner and the outer, the beautiful and the ethical, in ways that cannot be separated. Standard studies of Gitanjali and Tagore's major reputation give clear summaries of these themes.

Methodology

This study uses close reading and comparison of different texts. The main works examined are selected poems from **Gitanjali**, songs and lyrics, and well-known poems such as "**Where the Mind Is Without Fear**," along with chosen essays and speeches. Secondary sources include research papers, digital archives, and reliable reference summaries.

Tagore and Indian Aesthetics

Tagore's writings draw heavily on classical Indian ideas about art and beauty (such as Rasa, Dhvani, and Alaukika), though he gives these ideas a more modern and personal meaning. Many scholars point out that Tagore reshapes the old belief that aesthetic experience (rasa) is not just enjoyment but a deeper moral and spiritual insight. He often says that feeling beauty helps us see harmony in the world and discover a moral order within ourselves. This shows how he links art with ethics. Recent studies and teaching materials also explain how Tagore tries to bring together both Eastern and Western views of art, highlighting his interest in moral imagination.

Tagore's Writings on Art and Truth

Tagore wrote several essays on art and education in which he describes artistic imagination as a path to "truth"—not only factual truth but also deeper, spiritual truth. In his essays and talks, he often says that a receptive mind allows the artist or poet to see inner order of creation and the harmony in existence. Many scholars describe Tagore's idea of art as a form of spiritual humanism: it avoids strict dogma and instead focuses on inner discipline and moral responsibility.

I. Love: The Foundational Mode

Tagore sees love as having many forms—romantic, family-based, social, humanistic, and spiritual. But in his later poems, especially in



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Gitanjali, the main form of love is devotional. This kind of love is both personal and spiritual. For Tagore, love is the main doorway through which a person meets both the world and the divine.

1.Devotional Love as Dialogue In poems where the poet speaks to God as a beloved (often using simple homelike images), love becomes a kind of conversation built on humility and letting go of pride. The divine is not far away or unreachable, but close and present, something one can approach with gentle respect. This type of devotional love turns longing into moral humility: the lover gives up the ego to join a larger, deeper love. Many commentators describe this as Tagore's way of "humanising the divine."

2.Love as Social Commitment Along with spiritual meaning, Tagore's idea of love often includes a social responsibility: love for people, for one's country, and for nature. Poems like "Where the Mind Is Without Fear" (a prayer for the nation) and many of his songs ask for a compassionate social vision that values dignity and freedom. This kind of civic love requires courage and responsibility, not just private devotion.

3.Erotic and Aesthetic Love

In his early poems, Tagore sometimes writes about erotic love, but even these images rise into a devotional and artistic space. Human desire becomes a sign of a deeper, universal union. Scholars note that these sensual images often act as symbols for the soul's longing for the divine. This connects Tagore to a long tradition of spiritual poetry where human love leads toward mystical unity.

Synthesis on Love: For Tagore, love is not just a feeling. It is the guiding force of moral life and artistic vision. Love breaks down rigid self-centeredness and makes the heart open to beauty and truth.

II. BEAUTY: ONTOLOGY AND REVELATION

In Tagore's writings, beauty is not just decoration. It is a way of revealing truth – a way the world shows itself as meaningful, harmonious, and morally alive.

1.Beauty as Unity and Harmony

Tagore's often describes beauty as a kind of harmony – harmony between human feeling and nature, between form and inner order. In his essays, he suggests that seeing beauty is like sensing a law within creation. Because of this, beauty guides the mind and will towards a moral connection with the universe. This idea matches certain Indian aesthetic views that see beauty as revealing the deeper order of the cosmos.

2.Imaginative Perception

In many lyrical moments, Tagore uses simple sensory images (light, river, garden, household objects) and lifts them into something more spiritual. Ordinary things become gateways to the sacred. His imaginative eye turns everyday scenes into experiences of beauty, and this way of seeing shapes his sense of truth. Some critics say Tagore practices a kind of "domestic mysticism," where the sacred appears in daily life.

3.Beauty and Ethics

Because beauty shows harmony, it also calls for moral attention, restraint, and responsibility. Tagore often warns that commerce progress should not lose sight of human dignity or spiritual value. His idea of "grace" highlights the belief that a life without aesthetic and ethical balance becomes spiritually poor. Beauty, therefore, acts as a reminder and a correction against overly mechanical or utilitarian thinking in modern society.

Synthesis on Beauty: For Tagore, beauty is an existential call: to see beauty is to be invited into a moral way of living. It is both a deep experience and an encouragement to act.

III. DIGNITY: SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL AUTONOMY

Dignity in Tagore's work appears in two connected ways: **1.**the dignity of each person's inner self – the sense of inner freedom and selfrespect that comes from knowing one's own worth, and **2.** Social dignity- the respect fairness, and freedom that every person should receive in society.



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1. Inner Dignity

In poems that speak of inner freedom and courage, Tagore praises the self that learns to be morally brave. His well-known line, “**Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers, but to be fearless in facing them,**” shows his belief that real dignity comes from meeting truth and difficulty with an honest and steady heart. This inner dignity rises from the gentle, uplifting strength of love and beauty.

2. Dignity as Political Ideal

Tagore’s criticism of narrow nationalism – his worry that nationalism can reduce human dignity – shows his belief that political freedom must go hand in hand with moral growth. In essays like **Nationalism in India** and others talks, he warns that material progress without moral values harms human dignity, while a truly dignified nation must grow through culture, ethics, and a sense of beauty. Many scholars point out that this idea runs strongly throughout his social writings.

3. Dignity and Education

Tagore’s educational work at Visva-Bharati was based on the idea that dignity grows through creative learning, freedom of mind, and respect for each student’s individuality. For him, education was not just job training but a way to nature human dignity through art, imagination, and moral insight. Many writers who study his educational ideas point out how closely he connects teaching with growth of dignity.

Synthesis on Dignity: Dignity is the social and spiritual result of seeing beauty with a loving mind and staying loyal to truth, even when it is difficult.

IV. TRUTH: LAW, HARMONY, AND THE POETIC WITNESS

Tagore’s idea of “truth” is more poetic and philosophical than strictly logical. For him, truth is what creates harmony between the human heart and the wider universe – something we understand through a deep sense of beauty and feeling.

1. Truth as Law and Harmony

Tagore often links truth with kind of law – the moral or cosmic order that shapes all life. To know truth is to see this order both in the world around us and in our own moral self; understanding it helps us gain control over outer and inner forces and leads to real freedom. This idea appears in his writings on art and religion, and many scholars note how often he connects truth with beauty in his work.

2. The Poetic Witness

For Tagore, the poet is someone who sees and shares truth: by sharpening his vision through imagination and devotion, the poet uncovers deeper connections in life. Many poems in **Gitanjali** show the poet discovering a truth that feels both personal and universal. Critics point out that Tagore often expresses big spiritual ideas through simple, everyday images – a key feature of his poetic style.

3. Truth and Epistemic Humility

Tagore’s idea of truth is never rigid or harsh. He approaches truth with humility, believing it should be met with openness rather than forced on others. This gentle way of seeking truth fits with his humanism: truth should respect the many different experiences people have, not be pushed as a strict rule. Modern scholars often highlight how Tagore rejects fixed, absolutist ideas and instead supports openness, dialogue, and a plural way of thinking.

Synthesis on Truth: For Tagore, truth is discovered through loving and attentive awareness; it grows out of relationships rather than simple statements. Truth expresses harmony, not just a match between facts and words.

Interconnections: The Cycle — Love → Beauty → Truth → Dignity

Tagore’s four ideas are not separate; they form a repeating cycle. Love helps us notice beauty; beauty helps us see truth; truth gives us dignity; and dignity leads us to act with love again. This cycle appears in many of his poems and songs: the poet’s act loving surrender opens his eyes to the beauty in everyday life, which then offers a moral insight and finally strengthens a free and responsible way of living.

For example, in a **Gitanjali** poem, when the poet gives himself to beloved (**love**), he suddenly finds deep meaning in a simple household scene (**beauty**). This moment teaches him a moral or spiritual lesson (**truth**), which then creates humility and an ethical attitude (**dignity**). Many critics note that this pattern is at the heart of Tagore’s humanism.



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1. Gitanjali (selected lyrics)

Many poem in Gitanjali's use simple everyday images – like lamps, pots, and boats – to express deep spiritual longing. The speaker often talks to the beloved or God with the closeness of a lover, yet also stresses moral qualities such as humility. This blend of ordinary life and the divine shows Tagore's approach: turning simple things into something spiritually bright. Scholars often describe this as a kind of “democratic mysticism” in Gitanjali.

2. “Where the Mind Is Without Fear”

This poem-prayer expresses the civic side of Tagore's thinking: a hope for a nation where freedom, dignity, and truth guide people's lives. Its final appeal – that human life should be free and unhindered – shows dignity as both social and spiritual. Critics often read the poem as an ethical statement that places beauty and truth in clear opposition to any form of oppression.

3. Essays on Nationalism and Education

In his essays and speeches, Tagore clearly connects the growth of beauty and art to the well-being of a nation. He argues that a society that gives up beauty and moral growth for money and material success loses both its dignity and its sense of truth. This social warning reflects the practical side of the ideas expresses in his poetic work.

Discussion: Tagore between Tradition and Modernity

Tagore's joining of love, beauty, dignity, and truth places him between two worlds: the older Indian spiritual-aesthetic tradition and the modern changes happening around the globe. He uses classical Indian ideas (like *rasa* and the sense of the sacred in everyday life), but he also responds to modern problems such as nationalism, industry, and colonial rule with a hopeful, human-centered outlook. Because of this mix, Tagore appeals both to readers who value his culture roots and to those who admire his broad, universal ethics. Recent scholars study this balanced approach, showing how Tagore avoids strict ideologies and supports a form of cosmopolitanism that is firmly connected to culture.

V. CONCLUSION

Rabindranath Tagore's writings steadily point toward a unified moral and artistic vision: love deepens our awareness; beauty shows the hidden harmony in life; truth is the guiding moral order; and dignity is the lived result of these forces. These ideas are not just theories in Tagore's work but real experiences shown through his poems and essays, which stress the moral importance of seeing the world with a sensitive, aesthetic eye. Tagore's humanism – both devotional and democratic, spiritual yet engaged with the world – remains meaningful today as we think about the place of art in public life. Reading Tagore again encourages us to ask how poetry's power to awaken feeling might help heal social disconnection and bring fresh wonder to everyday life.

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