

The Dissimilarities of Gitanjali and the Wreck of the Deutschland

Dr. Kangabam Chanu Lembisana
Associate Professor, JMCE

I. INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore and Gerard Manley Hopkins have similarities in their poetic treatment but at the same time they have their dissimilarities too. Man's craving for union with God has been treated by both the poets in their respective poems, and Tagore does it in his own way. Following the Vaishnavite tradition, Tagore, in **Gitanjali** projects himself as a love and God, the Almighty as a lover. As the beloved of God, he will keep his (her) body pure and chaste. His mind will be free from evil thoughts and malice, for God resides within him. It is an erotic (Vaishnavite) tradition but Tagore exploits it effectively in his own way. Whereas Hopkins' treatment of a devotee's craving for union with God has no touch of eroticism. The chief nun in **The wreck of the Deutschland** craves union with God and it is presented in the thirty first stanza of the poem. She undergoes sufferings and ordeals for the safety of the fellow passengers and makes a confession of her sufferings and wish. At last her confession reaches heaven and she attains death and is united with God. A sincere devotee's desire of union with God is the same but it is presented in two different ways by the two poets.

Man has his burdens of life and hence his sufferings. Owing to ignorance, man is under the misconception that he can solve by himself all his problems in life. He who thinks that he himself could solve his problems will be the worst sufferer. Tagore in the ninth song of **Gitanjali** says this. Man cannot solve all his problems, and therefore he should leave his problems to the care of God. God, the Almighty alone can solve all our problems. It is a new and different view Tagore presents in his poem which one cannot see in Hopkins. Undoubtedly Hopkins is a religious poet but he speaks of the evil impact of rationalism on man. At times man is carried away from God by rationalism and on such occasions, the Gospel of Christ is the only way out for man. On reading the Gospel, man, like a pendulum, swings back to theism. Both the poets sing of God's glory and man's surrender to Him but it is with a difference.

The dissimilarity in Hopkins is the touch of rationalism. It is through rationalism man can approach God. Rationalism is a negative experience for man. Man has his desires and ambitions throughout his life. On completion of one ambition, man goes in for the fulfilment of another ambition. Likewise, it continues till his death. Tagore in the fourteenth song of **Gitanjali** contends that though man has many ambitions, all of them are not fulfilled in his life. Some of them are fulfilled and some of them are never fulfilled. Why is it so? God is always benign and he'll always do good for man. If so, why many of man's ambitions are remain unfulfilled. Tagore says that if all the ambitions of man are fulfilled, man may forget God. Therefore to make man remember God, God himself does not fulfil all the ambitions of man. Only some of them are fulfilled so that man will remember God. Hopkins' approach is a little different. He says that to make man remember God, though benevolent, at times, God will have to use His might or strength. The rebellious human beings should be severely dealt with by God for their being defiant to Him. Hopkins observes:

Be adored among men,
God, three-numbered form;
Wring thy rebel, dogged in den,
Man's malice, with wrecking and storm (9. 1-4)

Realization of God is one of the major themes of both Tagore and Hopkins but it is presented in two different ways. In Tagore's poetry, God himself in a benign manner makes man remember Him, whereas Hopkins portrays that at times God should be malevolent also. Hence the difference between the two writers.

As a poet, Tagore thinks that he should serve God by writing verses in a simple language so that even an ordinary reader can understand the glories of God presented by Tagore in his poems. There can be no loftiness in the employment of language and no place for high diction and literary devices. According to Halldor Laxiness:

In my country, as elsewhere among western readers, the form and flavour of the Gitanjali had the effect of a wonderful flower we had not seen or heard of before; its great attraction was a direct stimulus for many poets to undertake new experiments in lyrical prose. (332) In the seventh and eight songs of Gitanjali Tagore emphasizes the idea with a poetic simile. What a lover expects of his beloved is her pure love and not the gold and diamond ornaments. Similarly what an ordinary reader expects from a poet and his poetry is the

glorification of God in a simple language which he could easily understand, and not the ornate style which will remain shibboleth to him. Tagore observes:

MY song has put off her adornments. She has no
pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would
mar our union; they would come between thee and
me; their jingling would drown thy whispers.

My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight.
O master poet I have sat down at thy feet. Only let
me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of
reed for thee to fill with music. (7)

Hopkins is contrary to Tagore in the employment of the language. Loftiness is the hallmark of Hopkins' language in the poem and his sprung rhythm heightens the reader's poetic experience further. The metaphors, images, similes, symbols and such other literary devices, no doubt, contribute to hasten the action of the poem, but the Tagorian simplicity of language is absent in **The Wreck of the Deutschland**. It is the strength of Hopkins and at times, it is his weakness as well. It is his weakness, because, for an ordinary reader, owing to loftiness, the poem remains a riddle, a puzzle. According to R.A. Jayantha, **The Wreck of the Deutschland** is an astonishingly successful performance. That Hopkins had not written any poem but for a few presentation pieces during the preceding seven years, would redouble one's astonishment over his remarkable achievement in this poem. A closely-meshed poem of intricate design and workmanship, it exhibits the discipline of a tightly organized verbal structure, of unity of form and theme, of thought, feeling and image, and of lyrical utterance of great intensity and dramatic narration. Therefore, notwithstanding its apparent obscurities, idiosyncrasies and stylistic complexities, the poem achieves a remarkable degree of integrity of form and meaning, although admittedly it seems to be baffling at first. (5)

God is always benign and therefore the good in this world is the creation of God. God never does bad and it is the handiwork of man. However in this world, the good and the bad live together. The good is concomitant with the bad. To substantiate this idea in the twentieth stanza of **The Wreck of the Deutschland**, Hopkins presents a simile. St. Gertrude, the Catholic saint representing the good was born in Eisleben, a German village wherein was also born Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism. For Hopkins, Martin Luther represents the bad because Hopkins was a Catholic. Hopkins says:

But Gertrude, lily, and Luther, are two of a town,
Christ's lily and beast of the waste wood:
From life's dawn it is drawn down,

Abel is Cain's brother and breasts they have sucked the same. (20. 5-8)

Hopkins' is a bold comparison, for both St. Gertrude and Martin Luther were Christians. However one remains a sinner. Tagore does not present such a concept in his **Gitanjali**. He does not condemn anyone and indeed, as a disinterested poet, he keeps himself off religion, though his is also a divine poem. In the delivery of the message also both Tagore and Hopkins differ from each other. While Tagore is overt in conveying his message, Hopkins is covert. Man's life is only an illusion but he has to live it. Death is a gateway for man to the other world where he is united with God. This message Tagore presents in **Gitanjali** explicitly. Whereas Hopkins touches upon the message only at the end of the poem, in the last stanza. Only Catholics alone will have salvation, and if the people of England don't embrace Catholicism, they cannot attain salvation. This message is subtly presented at the end of the poem. The dissimilarity between the two writers is quite evident even in their method of conveying the message.

II. CONCLUSION

Both Tagore and Hopkins are divine poets and in their respective poems, they present a message for the salvation and redemption of man. Quite naturally, they have their similarities and dissimilarities. In their portrayal of the attributes of God, a devotee's desire for union with God, in their treatment of the subject matter and theme, they have their similarities. But in their glorification of the greatness of God, in their concepts of the good and the bad in the world, in their treatment of language and style and in their delivery of message, they have their dissimilarities. Notwithstanding dissimilarities, both Tagore and Hopkins remain great divine poets.

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