

POETRY: A VEHICLE OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

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Abstract

Poetry comes from the Greek word poiesis which means "making". It is a form of literary art which uses aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language. It is a collection of emotions or flow of thoughts, expressed imaginatively through language. Wordsworth defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". Like the beads of a necklace words are put together and these beads comprise images, conceits, metaphors, which are used to decorate the poem. They are expressed by the poet independently in all languages. For example, E. E. Cummings, in his poem, "Thank You God" took the poetic license of using the first the letter 'i' in small case to impress the reader and for greater impact. Poetry also plays a vital role in the cleansing of emotions leading to "catharsis". Many poets have used it as a vehicle of religion and spirituality. Since antiquity, poetry has imparted moral values to the society. However, in the present age, poetry is also used to satirize social evils. The paper discusses how poetry serves as a vehicle of religion and spirituality by looking at Basavanna's Vachanas and Tagore's Gitanjali simultaneously.

Poetry paves way for catharsis by depicting emotions, thoughts and feeling. Emotions are imaginatively put into words which resemble the beads of a necklace which is the poem. Poetry is a form of literary art in which language is used for its aesthetic and evocative qualities in addition to its apparent meaning. The two major themes explored in poetry since antiquity are: religion and spirituality.

In the past, poetry was a vehicle of religion and spirituality and in the present, it is a vehicle of satire on the society. The paper discusses the function of poetry by studying Basavanna's *Vachanas* and Tagore's *Gitanjali*. *Vachanas* in Kannada language, hails from the middle Kannada period. It also gave birth to many genres in Kannada literature.

The Kannada *Vachanas* were the first-hand written narrative of *sharanas* and (were also seasoned by the saints) They were also important texts of Veerashaiva/Lingayat movement, as it dealt with "Ideas of caste, creed and religion which combine to operate as worship and the path to spirituality." The poetic form associated with Veerashaivism was first practiced by Jedara Dasimayya and later *Vachanakaras* revised and popularized this form. A. K. Ramanujan, a bilingual poet, linguist and an able translator has been one of the pioneering scholars to render *Vachanas* into English in the *Speaking of Shiva*.

Though the word 'Vachana' literally means 'whatever spoken' it has been used in the *vachana* literature in several senses. *Vachana* as a form of literature means prose, but prose which has the flow and spirit of poetry. Those who write poems have to observe the rules of prosody, but the *Vachanas* are interestingly, free from the rules of poetry such as metrical form or stanzas. They are believed to be the utterances of mystics and saints.

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Mr. Chidananda Murti shows that the Vachanas are metreless and have a *tripadi* base. Tripadi is a popular three-line form of the oral tradition which is used both in folk song and in folk epigram. It contains representation of phrases and ideas.

Vachanas form the backbone of the path of Guru Basavanna. They were primarily targeted at the common person and sought to demystify God as large sections of society had been deprived of access to the texts. The Jangamas played a central role in the propagation of the Vachanas. Basavanna, also known as Guru Basavanna or Basaveshwara, was a philosopher and a social reformer. He is also called 'Vishwa Guru' and Bhakthi Bhandari. His Guru was Jaataveda Muni. He spread social awareness through his poetry known as Vachanas.

He made the Veerashaivas to be identified as wearing the image of the Lingam either in silver or brass around the neck, irrespective of caste, sex or age. It symbolized the oneness of all who worshipped Shiva as the *Ishtadevata* by recognizing all as equal in front Shiva *lingam*. He used the *Ishtalinga* to eradicate untouchability and establish equality among all human beings and as a means to attain spiritual enlightenment and established Anubhava Mantapa to lay down the foundation of social democracy.

Tagore's Gitanjali comprises the devotional hymns of a dedicated soul whose ultimate aim was the realization of the divine. The relation between God and human is the apparent core of all songs. His meditations on God, human being and nature in the *Gitanjali* not only echo the vedantic awareness of the absolute but also transmit the fervor of a Vaishnava *bhakta's* love for God.

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar points out that The Gitanjali songs are mainly poems of bhakti in the great Indian tradition. The current core of India's devotional poetry is melted and minted anew by Rabindranath, but the pure gold shines as brightly as ever, even though the inscription on the coin is in English. The imagery, the conceits, the basic experience, the longing, the trial, the promise, the realization all have the quaintly unique Indian flavor and taste.

It also represents the journey from the finite to the infinite. The songs in *Gitanjali* embrace the whole gamut of tender human feelings such as love, humility, detachment, devotion, affection, dejection and gratitude. Tagore's lyrics are a rare combination of simplicity with sublimity uttered with intensity and spontaneity. He exhales a lyric as spontaneity and naturally as a flower exhales fragrance. Another important characteristic of the lyrics is music and melody.

According to Tagore, spirituality is nothing but the oneness of God and the poor and downtrodden and hence advises the devotee of God:

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy
Flowers and incense ! What harm is there if thy
Clothes become tattered and stained ? Meet Him
And stand by Him in toil and in sweat of thy brow

Conclusion

Basava's Vachanas and Tagore's *Gitanjali* demonstrate how poetry can be a vehicle of religion and spirituality. Both the Vachanas and *Gitanjali* focus on the oneness of God and man. While the Vachanas demystify God for common people the *Gitanjali* talks about the unity between the divine and the poor and the downtrodden. In the present age of strife and violence we need to fall back on such great works of poetry as are discussed in the paper to once again find harmony amidst the endless chaos of modern life.

Works Cited

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