

SEARCH FOR 'JEEVANDEVATA' OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE AMONGST THE TANGIBLES AND THE INTANGIBLES: THE SONGS OF "*PREM*" (LOVE) SECTION OF '*GITABITAN*'

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Abstract

In the "Prem Parjay" (Love Songs) of 'Gitabitan', Rabindranath Tagore explores the journey of human love evolving into a divine pursuit, capturing the essence of his elusive "Moner Manush" (Beloved of the Mind). Tagore's love extends beyond personal realms, seeking the infinite and reflecting his fascination with Baul's philosophy, as seen in his reverence for Baul's melodies. His writings indicate that he found a profound spiritual connection in Baul's songs, harmonizing the mystical pursuit of the "Moner Manush" with Upanishadic teachings on the eternal soul. Tagore's work intertwines divine love with Baul's ideals, creating a poetic pursuit of the formless within form, often depicted through metaphors of fleeting beauty and unseen essence. In songs across 'Gitabitan', Tagore's recurring themes of union, separation and the joy of connection highlight a spiritual journey that mirrors the Baul search for the beloved, embodying an endless quest for the divine within.

Key Words: Rabindranath Tagore, Gitabitan, Prem Parjay, Jeevandeavata, Upanishad, Sangitchinta, Baul-Song, Baul's Song, Baul's Philosophy, Moner Manush,

INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore's '*Gitabitan*' is a vast anthology of songs that traverses the spectrum of human emotions and spiritual experiences. Within this compilation, the "*Prem Parjay*" stands out for its exploration of love in its multifaceted forms. However, in Tagore's hands, love is never simply a personal or romantic endeavour; it often serves as a conduit to something far deeper—a spiritual quest for the divine. This journey through love frequently manifests as a search for the '*Jeevandeavata*' (Divine Life Force), a figure who embodies both the Tangibles and the Intangibles, the graspable and the elusive.

Inspired by the Baul tradition and Upanishadic philosophy, Tagore repeatedly expresses longing for the '*Moner Manush*' (Beloved of the Mind) in these songs. This figure symbolises an ethereal presence that sometimes feels within reach but remains elusive, reflecting the complexity of human and divine relationships. Tagore's genius lies in his ability to interweave personal longing with the metaphysical, making his love songs not only expressions of human affection but also meditations on the eternal pursuit of the divine.

This paper seeks to delve into this intricate interplay of the Tangibles and the Intangibles in the "*Prem*" songs of '*Gitabitan*'. By drawing parallels to Baul's philosophy and examining the spiritual underpinnings of Tagore's lyrics, we will explore how the poet masterfully portrays love as a journey toward the divine, where the beloved is always present but never fully possessed.

In the "*Prem Parjay*" (Love Songs) of '*Gitabitan*', Tagore portrays the various sentiments of human love. But, sometimes, this love transcends personal boundaries and moves towards the infinite. Through many songs in this section, human love transforms into divine love. In these songs, the poet persistently seeks his "*Moner Manush*" (Beloved of the Mind). This "*Moner Manush*" often remains elusive, though occasionally, the poet does catch a glimpse of Him. The "Formless Beauty" stirs within the "Cradle of Form" on the throne of the poet's aspirations. The pursuit of the formless within the form, the effort to grasp the ungraspable, is evident in several songs in this chapter. This discussion primarily aims to highlight and analyze these songs

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach, employing a thematic analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitabitan*, with particular focus on the *Prem* (Love) section, to explore the search for *Jeevandevata* (the Divine in Life). The methodology combines textual analysis, comparative studies and interviews to uncover the multifaceted layers of Tagore's portrayal of divine love through his songs.

Methodology Type: Thematic Analysis.

Limitations: The study is inherently focused on the primary texts and their interpretations. Given the spiritual and philosophical depth of Tagore's work, the study recognizes the limitations in fully capturing the transcendental essence of his songs.

STUDY

Let us begin the discussion with an excerpt from the chapter of "*Baul-Song*" of '*Sangitchinta*', written by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, where the poet's special affection for Baul music is evident—

"Those who have read my writings, know that I have often expressed my love for Baul Padavalee. During the time, when I was in Shilaidaha, I frequently interacted and conversed with Baul groups. I have adopted Baul tunes in many of my songs and some cases, knowingly or unknowingly, Baul tunes have blended with other ragas. This shows how deeply Baul melodies and words have permeated my mind at some point. I recall my early youth when a Baul from the Shilaidaha region sang in Kolkata while playing the *ektara*—

"Kothay pabo tare

Amar moner manush je re!

Haraye sei manushe tar uddeshe

Desh-bideshe berai ghure." ¹

Translation:

('Where will I find him, the one who resides in my mind?

I wander across lands and seas, searching for that lost soul'.)

The words are simple, but the tune's addition made its meaning shine with extraordinary brilliance. This same idea is expressed in the Upanishads: 'तं वेद्यं पुरुषं वेद मा वो मृत्युः परिब्यथा: ।' ²

Translation

('Know that very being / Man / Purusha, who is to be known, otherwise, there is the suffering of death'.)

This translates to encouraging one to know or understand the Supreme Person (Purusha) and not to fear or be troubled by death.

The poet said he heard this profound message in a simple language and a rustic tune from that person; which is the pain of not knowing the one worth knowing, like a child crying in the dark because it cannot see its mother. This Upanishadic message, 'अन्तरतर यदयमात्मा' means: 'The Atman is the innermost essence'; or in broad

¹ P. 311, Book Review : Baul-Gan, Sangitchinta, Rabindranath Tagore, Published on behalf of Visva-Bharati Music Society, First Publication: Baisakh 1373, Reprint with Additions: Jaistha 1411, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road | Kolkata 17.

² P. 311, Book Review : Baul-Gan, Sangitchinta, Rabindranath Tagore, Published on behalf of Visva-Bharati Music Society, First Publication: Baisakh 1373, Reprint with Additions: Jaistha 1411, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road | Kolkata 17.



we can say, this conveys the idea that the self (ātmā) is deeply within, referring to the most intimate, essential core of one's being, was expressed by these people as “*Moner Manush*”, which amazed the poet very much. He also said that, many years later, he heard similar Baul songs from the invaluable collection of Kshitimohan Sen Mahashaya, where the simplicity of language, the depth of emotion and the heartfelt tenderness of melody, none can compare—where the essence of knowledge with philosophy, the poetry with devotion and the essence of reverence flows together. As per the opinion of the poet, does not believe that such uniqueness can be found anywhere else in folk literature.¹

In the mentioned song and prose, the poet's deep attraction towards Baul's lyrics, a significant component of folk literature, is evident, where Baul's concept of “*Moner Manush*” aligns with the profound messages of the Upanishads.

The “*Moner Manush*” of Baul's philosophy sometimes reveals himself and sometimes remains elusive despite almost being grasped. In the last lines of the famous Baul song, “Dekhechi Rup-Sagore Moner Manush Kancha Sona” (“I try to grasp him, thinking I've caught him, but when I reach out, he's gone. I've seen my beloved like raw gold in the ocean of beauty”)², we can see that the poet says, “Ekbar Dhorte Pele Moner Manush, Chere Jete Aar diyo Na”³ (“Once you catch the “*Moner Manush*”, never let him go.”). The complete lyrics of this widely popular Baul song, also mentioned by Gurudev Rabindranath in ‘*Sangitchinta*’, want to convey the elusive nature of the beloved, comparing the experience to trying to hold something precious yet slipping away, like raw gold submerged in a vast ocean of beauty.

“Dekhechi rup-sagore moner manush kancha sona.”⁴

Translation

(“I have seen my beloved, like raw gold in the ocean of beauty.

I try to hold him, believing I've finally grasped him, but when I reach out, he's no longer there.

For many days, I've drifted on waves of emotion, floating in countless experiences—

Hoping for the day when I will meet that good soul.

I believed he was mine; I thought he had become my own, but alas, he never truly became mine.

I search for him, longing, and have become a mad wanderer in my pursuit.

Within my heart, a fire burns—one that will never be extinguished!

Let people say whatever they wish—that I cannot survive without him in this separation.

The traveller says, ‘Do not despair,

Dive deep into the ocean of beauty.

1 P. 311-312, Book Review : Baul-Gan, Sangitchinta, Rabindranath Tagore, Published on behalf of Visva-Bharati Music Society, First Publication: Baisakh 1373, Reprint with Additions: Jaistha 1411, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road | Kolkata 17.

2 P. 288, Book Review : Bauler Gan, Sangitchinta, Rabindranath Tagore, Published on behalf of Visva-Bharati Music Society, First Publication: Baisakh 1373, Reprint with Additions: Jaistha 1411, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road | Kolkata 17.

3 P. 289, Book Review : Bauler Gan, Sangitchinta, Rabindranath Tagore, Published on behalf of Visva-Bharati Music Society, First Publication: Baisakh 1373, Reprint with Additions: Jaistha 1411, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road | Kolkata 17.

4 P. 288-89, Book Review : Bauler Gan, Sangitchinta, Rabindranath Tagore, Published on behalf of Visva-Bharati Music Society, First Publication: Baisakh 1373, Reprint with Additions: Jaistha 1411, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road | Kolkata 17.



Sit in solitude and practice the discipline of yoga.’

If once you can catch hold of the beloved of your soul,

Never allow him to slip away again.”)

This song conveys the profound sense of spiritual longing and emotional depth characteristic of Baul's philosophy. The singer is in a constant state of searching and yearning for the "*Moner Manush*"—the beloved of the soul, who represents the divine or the true inner self. The song speaks of the fleeting nature of this beloved, who seems within reach but remains elusive. Despite the separation and struggle, the song urges perseverance in the search and the practice of inner discipline, with the hope of finally finding the beloved and never letting him go. The imagery of "raw gold in the ocean of beauty" emphasizes the purity and preciousness of this beloved, hidden amidst the vastness of the world.

The poet, too, has sought his "man of the heart" ("*Moner Manush*") through his songs. Sometimes he reveals himself, while at other times, he remains elusive. Just like in all other sections of '*Gitabitan*', "*Moner Manush*" of the poet makes constant appearances in the songs of the "Prem" (love) section as well.

In song number 88, we see that he is eager to embrace his "*Moner Manush*" in his heart, "Aha, tomar sange praner khela, Priyo amar, ogo Priyo—" ("Oh Lord, if You come to me, reveal yourself and take shelter in my heart")¹, reflects this longing. Similarly, in song number 230, the line, "Adhara Madhuri Dhorechi Chhandobandhane" ("I have captured the intangible beauty in the bonds of rhythm and harmony")², shows that the beloved or the "*Moner Manush*" is being grasped, though in a more intangible form. But in song number 367, the line "Ekhamo Tare Chokhe Dekhi Ni, Shudhu Banshi Shunechhi" ("I have not yet seen him with my eyes, I have only heard his flute")³, indicates that the beloved remains somewhat elusive here. These songs portray different states of connection with the beloved—sometimes longed for, sometimes captured through rhythm and sometimes only sensed from afar. Just as in other sections of '*Gitabitan*', there are numerous examples in the "*Prem*" (Love) section where similar themes are explored.

The songs in this section often express the deep yearning for union with the beloved, the joy of connection and the sorrow of separation. Tagore masterfully weaves through these emotions, portraying the different stages and forms of love—sometimes the beloved is near, sometimes distant, sometimes Tangible and at other times only a fleeting presence, much like in the examples provided here.

Each of these songs offers a nuanced exploration of love, using rich metaphors, nature and the self to reflect on the beloved's presence and absence.

In song number 86, "Ami chini go chini tomare ogo bideshini" ("I know you, O foreigner")⁴ Some people believe that the song was composed and sung for a beloved foreign woman. But, in his essay "Gaan Sambandhe Prabandha" from the book named '*Sangitchinta*', Tagore's thoughts on this song reveal a completely different perspective. This suggests that the melody takes the words to a place where mere speech cannot reach, indicating that the music transports the emotions to a higher realm of experience, far beyond the literal meaning of the lyrics.

1 P. 307, Prem Parjay, *Gitabitan*, Rabindranath Tagore, First Publish in Three Part: Ashwin 1338, Shraban 1339, Reprint: Magh 1416, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road, Kolkata 17.

2 P. 363, Prem Parjay, *Gitabitan*, Rabindranath Tagore, First Publish in Three Part: Ashwin 1338, Shraban 1339, Reprint: Magh 1416, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road, Kolkata 17.

3 P. 415, Prem Parjay, *Gitabitan*, Rabindranath Tagore, First Publish in Three Part: Ashwin 1338, Shraban 1339, Reprint: Magh 1416, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road, Kolkata 17.

4 P. 306, Prem Parjay, *Gitabitan*, Rabindranath Tagore, First Publish in Three Part: Ashwin 1338, Shraban 1339, Reprint: Magh 1416, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road, Kolkata 17.



In this context, let us highlight Tagore's own words:

"Humming to myself, as soon as I wrote the line, 'Tomar gopon kothati, shokhi, rekho na mone' ('O friend, don't keep your secret within'), I realized that the melody had already carried the words away to a place where they could never have reached by walking on foot. Then it felt as if the secret I was yearning to be revealed was hidden within the greenery of the forest, submerged in the serene whiteness of the full moon night, veiled in the distant blue horizon — as though it was the profound secret of the entire universe. Long ago, in my childhood, I heard a song— 'Tomay bideshini sajiye ke dile!' That single line painted such a wondrous picture in my mind that it still echoes within me. One day, under the spell of that line, I sat down to write a song. The first line I wrote, carried by the melody, was 'Ami chini go chini tomare o go bideshini!' Without the tune, who knows what the song's meaning would have been. But under the spell of the tune, the figure of the foreigner took shape in my mind. My mind whispered, within this world, there is a foreigner who moves about, whose home lies on the distant shore of a mysterious ocean; she is glimpsed in the autumn mornings, the jasmine nights, and occasionally within the heart. I have sometimes heard her voice when I've listened to the sky. The melody of the song led me to the doorstep of this cosmic enchantress, and I said—

'After wandering the world, I have come to your land, I am a guest at your door, O foreigner!' Many years later, someone was singing along the Bolpur road— 'Khanchar majhe Achin pakhi, kamne aase jaay, Dhorte paarle monoberi ditem pakhir paay'. I saw that the Baul song conveyed the same message. Occasionally, the mysterious bird visits the closed cage, speaks of the unknown and the heart longs to hold it forever, but cannot. The silent comings and goings of this mysterious bird can only be conveyed through the song's tune." ¹

The song "Khanchar Majhe Achin Pakhi" mentioned by Rabindranath is a popular Baul song where the "Achin Pakhi" (unknown bird) symbolizes the soul or life force, which is mysterious, invisible and beyond grasp. The "khancha" (cage) refers to the body or the human form and the "Achin Pakhi" represents the soul or the essence of life, which constantly comes and goes, but cannot be caught or held permanently.

In the line "Dhorte parle manoberi ditem pakhir paay" ("If I could catch it, I would tie its legs with the chains of my mind") ², the Baul singer expresses that if he could capture this unseen, mysterious soul, he would bind it with the chains of his mind. However, this soul or life force is beyond the grasp of the mind or body; it is free and moves beyond any fixed rule or limitation.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This Baul song reflects a deep philosophical thought about the impermanence and infinity of life, where the human mind seeks to hold onto that mysterious truth but in reality, it can never be fully grasped. The visionary poet Rabindranath nurtured Baul's philosophy throughout his life. Instead of clinging to the transient truth, he conveyed a message to society, urging people to spend their lives seeking the ultimate, eternal truth.

Moreover, in the aforementioned writing, Rabindranath discusses his profound thoughts on music, the power of musical melody, Baul philosophy, spiritual experiences, and the deep emotions that can only be expressed through the melody of a song. The ideals of the spiritual philosophy of Sufi saints, the simplicity of Baul's

1 P. 23-24, Gan Sambandhe Prabandha, Sangitchinta, Rabindranath Tagore, Published on behalf of Visva-Bharati Music Society, First Publication: Baisakh 1373, Reprint with Additions: Jaistha 1411, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road | Kolkata 17.

[This essay was read by Rabindranath at the invitation of the Bethune Society on 9th Baisakh 1288 (April 19, 1881), in the evening at the Medical College Hall. It was later written by the poet in Baisakh 1319.]

2 P. 24, Gan Sambandhe Prabandha, Sangitchinta, Rabindranath Tagore, Published on behalf of Visva-Bharati Music Society, First Publication: Baisakh 1373, Reprint with Additions: Jaistha 1411, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road | Kolkata 17.



teachings and the profound messages of the Upanishads are reflected in many of his songs and writings. These works attempt to capture the unattainable and seek the formless within the form.

The Baul poet searches for the "*Moner Manush*" through both form and formlessness. The effort to grasp the ungraspable is evident in other songs in the 'Prem' section. Several more such examples are worth mentioning, like in song number 218—

“Dhara se je dey nai, dey nai,
Jare ami aponare sanpate chai.
Kotha se je ache sangopane
Pratidin shato tuchher arale arale.”¹

Translation:

("He has not let himself be caught, Though I wanted to surrender myself to him. Where does he hide, secretly, Every day behind a hundred trivialities?")

In song number 240, it is seen as well—

“Oke dhorile to dhora debe na—
oke dao chere dao chere.”²

Translation:

("He won't let himself be caught— Let him go, let him go.")

In song number 268—

“Kon gohon aronye tare elem haraye
Kon dur janomer kon smritibismritichhaye.
Aaj alo-andhare
Kakhan-bujhi dekhi, kakhan dekhi na tare—
Kon milansukher swaponsagor elo paraye.
Dhora-adhorar majhe
Chhayanater raginite amar banshi baje.”³

Translation:

("In which deep forest did I lose him, In the shadow of some forgotten memory of a distant life? Today, in light and shadow, Sometimes I see him, sometimes I don't— In the joy of reunion, A dreamlike ocean has passed.")

In song number 319—

1 P. 357, Prem Parjay, Gitabitan, Rabindranath Tagore, First Publish in Three Part: Ashwin 1338, Shraban 1339, Reprint: Magh 1416, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road, Kolkata 17.

2 P. 367, Prem Parjay, Gitabitan, Rabindranath Tagore, First Publish in Three Part: Ashwin 1338, Shraban 1339, Reprint: Magh 1416, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road, Kolkata 17.

3 P. 378, Prem Parjay, Gitabitan, Rabindranath Tagore, First Publish in Three Part: Ashwin 1338, Shraban 1339, Reprint: Magh 1416, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road, Kolkata 17.



“Amar mon cheye roy mone mone here madhuri.
Nayan amar kangal hoye more na ghuri.
Cheye cheye buker majhe gunjorilo ektara je—
Monorather pothe pothe bajlo bansuri.
Ruper kole oi-je dole Arup Madhuri.
Koolhara kon raser sarobare Moolhara phool bhase joler 'pore.
Hater dhora dhorte gele dheu diye tay diee je thele—
Apon-mone sthir hoye roi, kori ne churi.
Dhora deoyar dhan se to noy Arup Madhuri.”¹

Translation:

("My mind keeps gazing silently, beholding the sweetness within.
My eyes, like beggars, remain restless, never wandering.
As I gaze and gaze, the sound of the ektara hums within my chest—
On the paths of desire, the flute plays.
In the cradle of beauty sways the formless sweetness.
In a shoreless lake of unknown nectar,
A rootless flower floats upon the water.
When I try to grasp it, waves push it away—
Content in its own world, I do not steal it.
It is not a treasure to be captured, this formless sweetness.")
Who else but Rabindranath could say that "formless sweetness" ("*Arup Madhuri*") is not something to be grasped?

The profound idea that "formless sweetness" ("*Arup Madhuri*") is not something to be captured is something that only a poet like Rabindranath can express. Through his writings, he has shown us that beauty or sweetness is not confined to form; rather, it has a formless aspect that exists beyond the senses, beyond reach. This formless sweetness can be felt, but it can never be grasped or permanently possessed.

CONCLUSION

In Rabindranath's creations, the search for this formless sweetness and the inability to capture it is a recurring theme. He has shown that the deepest beauty, joy or truth in life never reveals itself fully—it can only be experienced but never bound. Such a thought can be expressed by a transcendent thinker like Rabindranath, who has deeply understood the mysteries of life and creation.

The poet, through these songs, expresses the yearning for divine union, the elusive nature of the beloved and the effort to grasp the ungraspable. These songs resonate with the essence of Baul's philosophy, where the search for the "*Moner Manush*" (The Beloved of the Mind) becomes a spiritual journey. Through the "*Prem*"

¹ P. 397, Prem Parjay, Gitabitan, Rabindranath Tagore, First Publish in Three Part: Ashwin 1338, Shraban 1339, Reprint: Magh 1416, Published by Visva-Bharati Publication Department, 6 Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Road, Kolkata 17.



section of 'Gitabitan' the poet invites us to join him in this eternal quest for the divine, where love transcends the personal and merges with the infinite.

It appears that the poet's life deity, who is sometimes the 'Supreme Being' and sometimes the 'Beloved,' provides hints of form amidst the formless. At times, this deity becomes graspable within the poet's inner self. This presence is conveyed through his songs. The poet continues to express the theme of this grasping and elusive nature in his other songs and writings. Therefore, this discussion is never fully complete; here, only a few selected songs have been discussed.

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