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**Saints of Literature: (Divine) Love
and Longing in Tagore's *Gitanjali*:
Song Offerings and Gibran's *The
Prophet***

Ervina Bajrami

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Supervisor: Cian Duffy

Abstract

The previous studies that mention Tagore and Gibran together have dealt merely with their lives or the influences they have had to one another. There has not been a comparative study of their works, say *Gitanjali* and *The Prophet*, with the focus on certain themes, such as love and longing. The prose-poems of Gibran and Tagore's songs have been influenced by Sufi poetry on the themes mentioned above more than one could at first assume. The imagery and expressions regarding love for the Divine, other human beings or nature, share a deep spiritual and philosophical relationship with the Sufi narrative. The way their messages are conveyed, furthermore, is profoundly poetic, which in turn has made narrative empathy an ideal theoretical framework to see how their language usage, symbolism, metaphors, and analogies, influence the readers' feelings and compassion. The authors' inclusion of broad subjects in their prose-poems and songs include nature as well, where ecocriticism becomes a perfect tool for analysis. All the above-mentioned theoretical frameworks have been utilized in this essay to seek answers regarding how love and longing, in their different stages, take shape in *Gitanjali* and *The Prophet*. It has been found that divine love is a two-sided experience of love and longing, requires sacrifice and ends with oneness, at least in *The Prophet*; that human love consists of selflessness, service and is not naive or devoid of desires; and lastly, that the idea of deep ecology is deeply imbued in the lines of these prose-poems and songs.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, Khalil Gibran, divine love, human love, non-human love, longing, spirituality, Sufism, narrative empathy, ecocriticism, deep ecology

With a deep sorrow, I dedicate this work to **Palestinians in Gaza**, who for 7+ months (and 75+ years) are experiencing an ongoing genocide, ecocide and scholasticide by the Israeli State. This dedication extends also to **Lund Students for Palestine**, who have been the most courageous, hopeful, and beautiful lights of Lund University in being against the above-mentioned atrocities.

I hope the Lund University official institutions, professors and students, without being too late, follow in their footsteps by answering positively to their demands.

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*Whether you feel divine or earthly love,
Ultimately we're destined for above.¹*

Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi

1. Introduction

The theme of love is as ancient as the human being and as relevant as it always was. For it is one of the most beautiful and useful experiences the human race can have, towards which whenever we have a crisis, be it social, psychological, or ecological, the wise ones turn to remind us about. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a Bengali author, and Khalil Gibran (1882-1931), a Lebanese American, are neither the first nor the last writers who wrote and sang about *love* and its frequent manifestation *longing*. Tagore is considered as a representative of Romanticism mingled with Eastern sensibility in Bengali literature (Shahane 57), often compared with Wordsworth and other Romantic poets. While Gibran's writings are flavours of different Eastern philosophies and Arabic poetry brought into English language and literature.

Considering that both have roots in the Eastern tradition rather than the Western tradition, no matter how much they are influenced by the latter, the experience of *love* and *longing* expressed in their prose and poetry also differs from the majority of Western takes of them. Love in Eastern traditions is neither merely *eros* which deals only with sexual and romantic relationships, nor merely metaphysical or a kind of *agape* which is entirely devoid of sensuality or desire. It is not binary. Rather, it is a paradox; it is both and neither. Furthermore, the concept or the reality of the Divine plays a crucial role in understanding love in most (Middle) Eastern traditions, especially the Arab and the Persian one. And lastly, love is not only pleasurable and joyful but oftentimes it manifests as longing or pain.

Tagore and Gibran, who were also friends, wrote extensively regarding universal human themes such as: love, longing, joy and pain, children, nature etc. *The Prophet* (1923) by Khalil Gibran, which will be analysed here, is a collection of 28 prose-poems, each talking in a philosophical and rather spiritual manner about the themes (and many more) mentioned above. Tagore's *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (1910) on the other hand is a collection of 103

¹ (Rumi, *Masnavi* line 111)

poems or songs² that mainly deal with divine love, longing, pain, and spirituality. Both of these works are rich in metaphors and allegories which mainly are from the natural or the inner world of the poet or writer. So, they are similar in this regard even though one is a collection of prose-poems and the other one of songs.

This paper will be a comparative study of these two works. The devices analysed here are mainly *metaphors* and *allegories*. And the main focus is love and longing. How do these authors portray love and longing in their respective works? The similar questions will be elaborated while focusing on: 1) divine love and longing i.e., how they portray love and longing for God and of God for the human being (a kind of *agape*); 2) human love and longing i.e., romantic or neighbourly love (a kind of *eros* and *philia*); and 3) the love of nature. This research paper will see if there is a distinction between these kinds of love or if they “paradoxically”³ connect with each other. Are they by any means mutually exclusive or not?

Some of the lenses used to interpret different kinds of allegories and metaphors in this study are the theoretical frameworks such as: 1) Sufi poetry; 2) ecocriticism, especially when elaborating on the love of nature; and 3) narrative empathy i.e., how language is used to affect the readers in love and longing.

The way this comparative study is done is by selecting different lines from both works that seem to express the same, similar or the opposite understanding and experience of love and longing and have a close reading of them.

1.1. The Importance of This Research

There are only a few research papers which mention Tagore and Gibran's works in a single study. Some researchers have devoted their works to mentioning their relationship and the influence Tagore had in Gibran's understanding of life, spirituality, and his works; nonetheless, as far as I am concerned, there is a research gap on a comparative analysis between *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* and *The Prophet*. There is a research gap also on the

² The *Song Offerings* (1912) is a translated collection of poems of original work *Gitanjali* (1910) in Bengali by Tagore. This collection has only 103 poems while the latter one has more.

³ I say “paradoxically” since in some religious discourses the love of/for God is understood to be totally separate from the human love or the love towards nature, as if nature or other human beings are entities absolutely separate from the Divine.

subject of love and longing in them, especially taking into account the influence Sufi narrative has had on them. It comes as a surprise that these two works have not been examined more thoroughly from the perspective of ecocriticism and narrative empathy. For this reason, this literary research will not only continue unwrapping on how Tagore and Gibran use Sufi imagery in their texts, thus adding more to the English literature and Sufi literary conversation, but it also will help establish a new discussion between ecocriticism and the spiritual tradition regarding these two works.

The need of this research extends further. In a time of deep materialism, insensitivity, lack of care towards other human beings and the natural world, love is still one of the most powerful cures for us. The disconnection from the sacred, be it our inner-world or the cherishing of the outer-world order has caused many troubles to humanity. Hence, a reconnection with literature such as this, that reminds us of the sacred and increases our empathy towards it, makes us reconnect with love towards humans and non-humans. Hopefully, this is done with the help of narrative empathy and eco-spiritual awareness that literature can grow. Just as Abu Sayem echoing Seyyed Hussain Nasr's eco-philosophy says: "If nature is felt sacred in such a deeper understanding, humans can show their due respect to nature, which will motivate them finally to give more priority for the protection of the environment" (Abu Sayem 277).

2. A Background

Before analysing Tagore's and Gibran's expressions and verses regarding love and longing, it is important to introduce them and their works. An outline of concepts used in this research such as metaphors, allegories, Sufism, narrative empathy, and ecocriticism are given below.

2.1. An Outline of Tagore's and Gibran's Life

The Noble laureate Tagore comes from a Bengali aristocratic family, the members of which were interested in knowledge and wisdom for generations. They were well-versed in philosophy, Upanishads (Hindu sacred treatises), languages, and spiritual traditions. Many of them were well knowledgeable in Bengali, Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic, and Persian. He and his father were lovers of the well-known Persian Sufi poet Hafez; his siblings were poets, novelists, and musicians, while he himself was a polymath who amongst others was a poet, dramatic, novelist, and social reformist (Lewisohn 5). He is also known to have repudiated the

knighthood award in 1915 in protest against the Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre committed by the British colonial powers of the time (Robinson).

Khalil Gibran on the other hand is a Lebanese-American novelist, poet, and artist. At the age of eleven, he migrated to Boston but returned to Lebanon when he was fifteen for several years in order to finish his studies (Naimy 27, 42,43). He wrote extensively in Arabic and English, and was well-read on different philosophies, religious and spiritual traditions of the world, especially on Sufism (the inner spiritual dimension of Islam) and Hinduism. He even studied Sufi poetry during his years in Lebanon (Dance). Regarding Hinduism, he learned extensively from our first author, Rabindranath Tagore. They had close communication with each other and met several times between 1916-1920/1 (Datta 113). The meeting of Tagore and Gibran is coined with the phrase *the blue flame* by Indrani Datta who said that “it highlights the almost telepathic connection that existed between Gibran and Tagore...” (Datta 121). The blue flame is a symbol of the union with God (Datta 121). It is not only used to emphasize their close friendship, but also to point out a very intimate spiritual and intellectual relationship between them.

2.2. Allegory and Metaphor

The differences and similarities between metaphors and allegories here are understood as Catherine Wearing explains them, even though many other researchers give us other definitions with slight differences. According to Wearing, *allegories* are not simply extended metaphors, but they differ from them since they are compounded of **two interpretive threads** i.e., when they are read, they make sense even literally apart from their allegorical or symbolical meanings (Wearing 72). While on the other hand, *metaphors* have **only one interpretive thread** i.e. when read literally they (usually) make no sense (Wearing 71).

One of the reasons why the definition of Wearing is used here is because it is well-defined and not very complicated. Even though this work is a literary research, the primary concerns of it are not scholarly debates on the definitions of these two literary devices, but the concepts of love and longing. Hence a deeper discussion regarding their nature is left to the reader and the field specialists.

2.3. Sufi Poetry

Before outlining what Sufism and Sufi poetry is, it is important to remind the reader that this is not a religious study per se and that deeper studies and debates on the outline below are left to the researchers of the respective fields.

While knowing that different scholars have had trouble giving a precise definition of Sufism or *tasawwuf*, here it will be understood as the inner or metaphysical dimension of Islam which as a primary goal has the spiritual development of the seeker of God. Sufism has diverse and multitude ways on how it is approached amongst its adherents. Some of their practices on their spiritual quest include songs, poetry and ceremonial dances (*sema*) known also as Sufi whirlings. The importance of poetry in Islam stems from the period when Koran was revealed. At that time, Arabic poetry was at its peak, and many of the first people who embraced Islam were quite sophisticated in poetry and they would often become Muslims merely because they found Koran the epitome of any verses they had listened before. With the spread of Islam in other parts of the world, such as Persia, poetry of love, longing, and spiritual wayfaring reached their peak with prominent figures such as Mawlana Rumi, Hafez, Fariduddin Attar, Saadi, just to name a few. Their poetry overflows with diverse symbols, allegories, and metaphors implying to different stages of the seeker in the path of love i.e., towards God, for God is the beloved according to them.

The reader might ask why *The Prophet* and *Gitanjali* should be analysed in the light of Sufi poetry and not in the light of another spiritual tradition such as Hinduism for instance; at the end of the day, Tagore has given numerous sermons regarding Hinduism. There are two reasons for this: 1) Sufis first and foremost aim to be lovers rather than enlightened people (in contrast to Hinduism for instance, which does not have love as the primary focus of its practices) and thus have written extensively about divine love. *Gitanjali* and *The Prophet*, as it will be seen in the analysis, have taken many Sufi symbols, metaphors, and allegories to convey the feelings of the protagonist/poet; and 2) this paper would need more space and research time to include these two vast traditions. Let this be, however, an opportunity for other researchers to delve deeper into *The Prophet* and *Gitanjali* while using the other spiritual traditions' lenses.

2.4. Ecocriticism

Since immemorial times, human beings have depicted natural phenomena and their relationship with it in their art works. They have expressed it in a myriad of forms, be it in crafts, pictures, songs, daggers, religious temples, or caves. Many traditions have seen that the natural world is not separated from the human being and thus have held a sacred relationship with it. While some others, found in Western traditions for example, have held the hierarchical idea that the human is on top and everything else is under as subjugated objects or subjects under human control. The latter idea, together with industrialization, materialism, colonialism, and capitalism, have had drastic climate consequences and injustices, especially in regard to animals and to the poor or colonised peoples. The ecological crises and the points mentioned above (and many more that are beyond the scope of this essay) have created the need and space for ecological studies in the literary field. Thus, around 1990s, ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary field between, amongst others, literature, philosophy, and environment, was born (Westling et al 2).

In ecocriticism, we find the deep ecology movement that is different from the environmentalist movement on their approach. Environmentalists “argue for preservation of natural resources only for the sake of humans, deep ecology demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature” (Garrard 21) i.e., deep ecology advocates for an ideological shift as well as an outward shift on preserving nature. According to deep ecologists, we need to move from the human-centred set of values to the nature-centred ones, thus opposing “almost the entirety of Western philosophy and religion” (Garrard 21).

It is worth noting that ecocriticism as a literary field is established during the 1990s, but different authors of the past, for instance Romantics, have written widely about the importance of nature at the same time opposing the industrialisation of the time. For this reason, Tagore and Gibran are relevant to be studied using this theoretical framework even though they have lived in the beginning of the 20th century.

2.5 Narrative Empathy

Narrative empathy explores how different ways of narration affect the reader's empathy. According to Keen, narrative empathy is “the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking, induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition” (Keen 53). Many researchers and psychologists have hypothesized that reading

produces empathy (Lindhé 20). This is known by the name of altruism-empathy hypothesis. The hypothesis, however, has not lived without being criticized and questioned. Some have raised the question if it is a response of empathy on the reader's part when they are empathic to one character “*at the expense of another*” (Lindhé 20). Lindhé has a thought-provoking article⁴ on this issue. But for our present work, as it will be seen, the increasing empathy for the protagonist at the expense of the antagonist, for example, does not raise a problem since *The Prophet* and *Gitanjali* do not contain, at least, human antagonists. As a last point worth mentioning is that the response of the reader is not a passive one. In order for empathy to increase, the reader must participate actively to nourish that emotion.

3. Love & Longing

Even the most profound scholars and sages of different traditions have had problems in defining the experience of love. Many Sufis would say that it is an experience that transcends the faculty of reason, and Shelley would come to agree with them that it transcends speech as well (Reno 3). Jalaluddin Rumi, the great Persian Sufi master, in his *Masnavi* says: “The pen would smoothly write the things it knew / But when it came to love it split in two” (Rumi, *Masnavi* line 114). In other words, the faculty of speech, recorded in writing, ceases to function. It does not give love its proper measure. However difficult to define it though, the human race has never ceased talking about this phenomenon or experience, if it may be called so.

What is important here is to make a distinction between love and sensual desires, to investigate if these two coincide with each other in *Gitanjali* and *The Prophet* or not. This distinction is made owing to the fact that different religious and spiritual traditions tend to leave the sensual desires and senses aside in order to experience love and especially divine love, which is deemed to be a metaphysical experience (Greek etymology meta = beyond; physika = physical).

Longing and desire, however, are also very similar in nature. In this paper, longing will be understood as an experience of missing something or someone, a yearning desire towards the beloved, whoever or whatever that may be. It is also sometimes hard to distinguish between longing and love since longing springs from love. At times it can be said

⁴ See bibliography.

that it is a manifestation of different stages of love. It is worth noting that, many a time longing is mentioned allegorically as thirst in our two respective books.

It is also of great importance to note that this paper will discuss terms and experiences, which even though they have distinct names, still at times their meanings merge. For example, there are instances when longing is simply an expression of love and vice-versa. The same issue comes fourth when discussing different levels of love, namely the divine, human, and non-human love. Even though they differ in practice, in essence, at least according to one of our authors and to Sufi tradition, they are inseparable. So, the reader is expected to notice some inseparable usages between these concepts and terms too.

3.1 Divine Love & Longing for Creation vs. Love & Longing for the Divine

The Divine love or longing in this research is to be understood as God's love and longing towards His/Her/Its creation i.e., the human being, as in contrast to love and longing *for* the Divine, which means the human's relationship with the Divine.⁵ Even though these two, at least according to Sufi tradition, ultimately merge into one by realizing that the human being cannot love God but only God loves God *through* the human being.⁶ Nonetheless, most of the time, Sufi poets together with Tagore and Gibran tend to distinguish them when they are mentioned.

3.1.1 *The Prophet*

There are passages and lines in *The Prophet* that by using symbolic imagery denote to a relationship of love and longing between the human being and the Divine. Also, the path towards loving the Divine is shown to be one of sacrifice ending with union or oneness where

⁵ In the essence, the Divine is genderless; however, it can be argued that Tagore switches between these two at times. The capital letter will be used to describe the Divine regardless with which pronoun it is mentioned.

⁶ This is a simplification of a very long and deep discussion and argumentation in Sufi doctrine. For more on this, one could explore the book *Alone with the Alone* by Henry Corbin, and especially the chapter, "The Twofold Dimension of Beings".

the lover is not distinguished from the attributes of the Divine Beloved. All of these will be elaborated below.

In the Farewell's story in Gibran's novel *The Prophet*, where Almustafa is saying his last words to his people before he takes the journey towards the ocean, which is an allegory of his passing away, he utters these words:

whenever I come to the fountain to drink I find the living water itself thirsty;
And it drinks me while I drink it. (Gibran 104)

Water is an inorganic substance which according to modern biology is not considered alive, even though, ironically, all life depends on it. Here, Almustafa is talking about the “living water” that has the attribute of “life” and the ability to “drink”. So, he is using anthropomorphism in order to enable the listener to imagine that water senses thirst for the human being. In this manner, he creates the impression of a very dependable relationship between the human being and this living water.

In Sufi poetry “water is always a symbol of the Divine” (Schimmel 76). Jalaluddin Rumi mentions it in different manners, one of which is as “the water of life”, which is very similar to Almustafa's phrase “the living water”. In one of the cases, Rumi mentions it when he explains the Eternal Dimension of Being or God (Chittick 71). While thirstiness, on the other hand, is a metaphor for longing. So, God's Being is in a state of longing and love. Almustafa says, “it drinks me”, i.e., the Divine experiences Almustafa or the human being, “while I drink it”, that is, at the same time as I (the human being) experience It.

In another story, namely, “Good and Evil”, Almustafa gives his sermon saying:

Surely the fruit cannot say to the root, “Be like me, ripe and full and ever giving of your abundance.

For to the fruit giving is a need, as receiving is a need to the root”. (Gibran 76)

Here one notices the expression of anthropomorphism again, where the fruit talks to the root and the root listens to the fruit. However, there is no anthropomorphism in the religious sense as it will be shortly elaborated. If “the fruit” is concluded to be the metaphor of the Divine that showers the root with love, then “the root” can be understood as a metaphor of the recipient human creature who is nurtured with the Divine Love. That the fruit “cannot say” means that the root can never be the fruit, just as the creature can never be the Creator. At

least in this instance, Gibran does seem to align with Sufi's understanding that the relationship between the Divine and creation is not pantheistic in its nature. It is rather a relationship between the nourisher and the nourished, the lover and the beloved. The only instance when “be like me” would make sense taking the Sufi glasses on is if one understands it that the human being is required to be Godly (not God!), i.e., is sought to be filled with God's holy attributes, for example with rahma. Rahma is the attribute of loving mercy, one that lovers of God are required to embody or manifest in the world. God is said to be in love with His image, with His essential quality and when the creature is filled with this attribute, then a relationship of love can occur.

“Need” is a term which is not precisely used when talking about God in general, be it in Sufi doctrines or other religions, since that would mean that God is not All-Powerful⁷; however, one could understand it as the yearning desire, the longing of the Divine Head to manifest His colours in the human being. For, how could otherwise the formless be understood in the realm of forms?

On another sermon when asked about “Self-Knowledge”, Al Mustafa answers:

Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights.

But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge. (Gibran 17)

Here, the poetic language of Almustafa is noticed again, especially when he attributes knowledge to the heart, and thirst to the ears. Regarding the heart: in Sufi-Muslim tradition, the metaphysical heart is said to be the focal point where love and longing is experienced. It is even expressed that God resides in the heart of the lover for only the heart can carry the Divine, who is infinite, thus alluding to the lover's heart infinity as well. In this context, the metaphysical heart, allegorically speaking, is the room where the bride and the bridegroom make love (to put this in terms of St. John of the Cross, where the bride is the lover creature and bridegroom is the Divine). This is an intimate form of putting it; nonetheless, it is one of the ways to explain what Almustafa means with the first line.

The second line says, “your ears thirst...”. Here, he has used metaphoric synaesthesia which is a device that ascribes the ability of one sense to the other. In this case, he has attributed thirst to the ears. In the normal sense, ears do not thirst. However, in the

⁷ According to one of Rumi's sermons, however, *need* is a concept that could be attributed to God in relation to His lovers, not others (Rumi, *Discourses* 95).

imagination of the reader, this evokes the activation of two senses: hearing and taste. Which makes the metaphor twice as powerful; hence, it becomes more intimate for the careful reader. And this is how the author invites the reader to sense the longing for the Divine in the human's side. He expresses it metaphorically as “thirst”. Interestingly enough, knowledge in our context does not pertain only to the usual meaning of knowledge i.e., book knowledge, but it is rather an experience of love, since the heart is the container of love and its knowledge pertains to love.

In another passage, Almustafa says: “In your longing for your giant self lies your goodness: and that longing is in all of you” (Gibran 77). This “giant self” is the self which the Sufis, and not only them, are very concerned. As for Sufis, this is directly connected to the well-known prophetic saying: “Know thyself so that you know God”. So again, according to our protagonist, human beings have this longing for the Divine installed in themselves even if one does begin by desiring to know themselves. The powerful Divine torrent drives him or her on all this journey.

All this relationship elaborated until now ends with discipline and the sacrifice of the lover's ego in order to achieve oneness with the God's holy attribute of life. When Almustafa elaborates on love, he expresses his idea thus:

For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning. (Gibran 2)

The metaphors here are rigorous and powerful. Love is seen as a force that has the ability to act to that degree that it can kill. So, it becomes more alive than simply an abstract idea; it becomes a dangerous experience. Crucifixion is bloody but at the same time it reminds one of Jesus' sacrifice, so it becomes holy. The careful listener of these words, who in a way is addressed directly with the generic *you*, realizes that the lover of love needs to have the quality of courage and sacrifice in order to experience and cultivate it. The lover also needs to be able to be disciplined. This is shown in the second sentence when Almustafa makes it clear that love will not kill the lover entirely, but the crucifixion mentioned before is some kind of cutting from the harmful aspects the lover can have. To express this, he takes the allegory of the plant or the tree that in order to grow, it needs to be pruned. Needless to say, this sacrifice is well known among the Sufi poets that is repeatedly mentioned in their verses, quoting the prophet: “Die before you die”. This is exactly the same idea mentioned by Almustafa.

The upcoming passage and simultaneously the last one for this section tries to convey the concept of oneness:

People of Orphalese, beauty is life when life unveils her holy face.

But you are life and you are the veil.

Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror.

But you are eternity and you are the mirror. (Gibran 88)

“Life” takes here the human attributes; anthropomorphism is again used. “Life” can veil and hide, can unveil and make something visible. It also has a face. Almustafa not only brings this quality to life in the listener's ears and imagination, but it makes it mysterious as well as holy. Mystery grows the desire to know, especially when it is elaborated with words that mean beauty, such as a “holy face”. One wonders, what kind of face can that be? Almustafa gives the answer immediately by saying that “you are” that “face”. Again, using the generic *you* he invites the reader to participate in the conversation and simultaneously tries making them realize that they are not only part of life, but the quality of life, which is also beautiful, is embodied in them. He continues making another anthropomorphism or personification using the metaphor of beauty and the mirror. The personified “beauty” not only has the ability to gaze at oneself, but it also is “eternal”. Both of these characteristics are qualities of the Divine head in the Sufi poetry. In fact, they are one of the most important qualities. And with a similar turn he answers, “but you are [that]”. The repetition becomes lovely and once more it invites the reader to participate in what is being said. Once more the reader is invited to realize that there is something in themselves which is beautiful and eternal.

From the last passage one can conclude two things: Gibran is either trying to elaborate oneness that resembles *monism* or *pantheism*, or it takes the Sufi teachings that say: “God is beautiful and God loves beauty” and “Creation is a mirror of God”. The latter one is slightly different from monism or pantheism.⁸ However the case, the creature is invited to participate wholly in the experience of love and beauty even if these two belong utterly to the Divine.

⁸ For further discussions on this, one can read or listen materials by William C. Chittick or Seyyed Hussain Nasr, just to name a few.

3.1.2. *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*

Just as in *The Prophet*, in *Gitanjali* one can find lines that indicate, symbolically, to the relationship of love and longing between the human lover and the Divine. The path of the lover is seen to be painful, one of self-criticism, emptiness, and spiritual death that eventually ends with a kind of union which compared to *The Prophet* is a union that distinguishes the lover from the Divine Beloved.

In Gibran's prose poetry, our protagonist Almustafa is a prophet who by his tone seems to know the reality of things, has wisdom to offer even in his last moments before his passing away, and does not seem confused since he hides or does not show very much his inner longing and love. In contrast to him, the first-person in Tagore's songs, more often than not, is a confused lover who undergoes pain and longs for the love of his Divine Beloved. His preaching, if there is any, is mostly done by mirroring his own inner state of affairs.⁹ One of such reflections is his confusing, questionable, and longing state when he sings these lines for his Beloved (song XVIII):

Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens. Ah love, why dost thou let me wait outside at the door all alone?

...

I keep gazing on the far-away gloom of the sky, and my heart wanders wailing with the restless wind. (Tagore 26)

“Love” is his Divine Beloved, and this is clarified with the allegory in the ending line when the lover gazes “the far-away gloom of the sky”. The sky, not only in Sufism but in many other religious and spiritual traditions, apart from literally being considered an infinite space of awe and wonder where people often raise their hands towards in order to pray to their Lord, it is also a symbol of the kingdom of heaven or the heart. From this, we know that our protagonist is not talking about a human beloved for instance but rather a divine one. Furthermore, this imagery gives the reader the impression of expansiveness. Which in turn makes the reader feel that the one the poet is looking for can hardly be found.

He is left waiting “outside at the door alone”, which is an allegory that points to being neither present nor in some kind of ecstasy i.e., not feeling the presence of love in himself. In

⁹ The pronoun “he” is used due to Tagore being a man. However, in poetry one may often be flexible regarding pronouns.

Sufism this experience would be described as God manifesting His contractive attribute (al-Qābid) where the heart of the creature, allegorically, is contracted or becomes narrower, thus feeling pain, loneliness, and longing. This however, just as with the material heart, comes right before God manifests His expansive attribute (al-Bāsit), where the heart expands, which again allegorically speaking, denotes to a feeling of presence or ecstasy and of an experience of love, beauty, and joy. From his own experience, the lover knows about these two reciprocal states that come each after the other, and this is expressed in another song (XIX) thus: “I will keep still and wait... with patience. The morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish...” (Tagore 26). “The morning” is an allegory for expansion where the presence of love is felt. The Beloved here has the quality of light that once S/he comes, the darkness of absence will vanish.

The lover in Tagore's songs is one who experiences pain, longing, and love for the Divine Presence, however, he is not faultless. At times, he makes mistakes and does not welcome the presence of the Divine Beloved in his heart as it should be welcomed. In song XXVI, there is a line that goes like this: “He came and sat by my side but I woke not. What a cursed sleep it was, O miserable me!” (Tagore 30). Here one notices God's desire to be near His lover by “sitting on his side”, but at the same time, one of the reasons behind all this dramatic experience of longing and separation is the lover's sleep, i.e. the lack of his proper attention.

God's love for His poor and forlorn creature is expressed even in song XLIX:

You came down from your throne and stood at my cottage door.
I was singing all alone in a corner, and the melody caught your ear...
Masters are many in your hall, and songs are sung there at all hours. But the simple
carol of this novice struck at your love. (Tagore 43)

“You” has kingly attributes, so the poet here is addressing a king. With the use of imagination, the reader could think that whoever came down from the throne, that one lives in a palace-like place, with rules, power, and richness. In Sufi poetry, the king often is used to describe God, since one of the ninety-nine beautiful names of the Divine is Al-Malik, meaning the King, the Owner of Dominion. “My cottage door” can be taken as an allegory of the poet's heart since one's house in Islamic mysticism is usually denoted to be one's heart. “The cottage door” leaves the impression that the speaker is rather poor compared to his king, for the cottage is associated with simplicity. From narrative empathy's lenses, the reader could

almost feel the contrast between this lover and his beloved. One could simply imagine the difficulty of a simple man marrying a princess for instance. Hence, the metaphor becomes more tangible even if it speaks for a metaphysical reality.

“I was singing”: in many religious or spiritual traditions, singing is one of the forms of devotion. This song, which is portrayed as a “simple carol”, eventually caught the king's attention such that he went to the house of the singer i.e., allegorically these devotional songs, even though modest for the king's worth, brought the Divine presence in the singer's heart. And not only that, but the singer won the love of the king.

The two upcoming last paragraphs go hand in hand with Almustafa's sermons discussed above where not only the lover is in love with the Divine but also the Divine is in love with the lover or the creature. Also, it touches upon the concept of the heart as a container of presence and love. Yet, is there any need on the Divine Beloved's part of Tagore's songs as it is in Gibran's? And is there any consequence that stems from this love apart from longing?

In *Gitanjali*, it does not seem to be a need on the Beloved's part as in Gibran's *The Prophet*. However, there is a purpose in the relationship between the Divine and the creature, and this is expressed in song LVI when the poet asks: “O thou lord of all heavens, where would be thy love if I were not?”(Tagore 48). One can say that this is a very direct and curious question on the creature's part; however, there is a gap of interpretation here, and it can very easily indicate a rhetorical question instead which basically means that without him He would not have anyone to share His love with i.e., it seems that the poet, in this case, is alluding to something that shows the human being as a vessel of the Divine manifestation of love.

However, the lover experiences many more feelings and states, such as emptiness and pain expressed in song XCVIII:

I surely know my pride will go to the wall, my life will burst its bonds in exceeding pain, and my empty heart will sob out in music like a hollow reed, and the stone will melt in tears. (Tagore 71)

Anyone who is familiar with Rumi's *Masnavi* can decipher the words above, for it opens with the same imagery, that of the reed. The “hollow reed” is a symbol of the human being who is empty of his lower self, ego, or nafs if we use the Sufi terminology. Only the one who is empty of his lower self, which is that part of the human being inclined towards lust and evil,

can “sob out in music” as the poet expresses it. To sing properly, to sing the song that the king (as in the previous lines) is marvelled by it one needs to conquer his lower self or, metaphorically speaking, get rid of it, die from it. The reed flute releases a very melancholic and sad tone from its body. If the reader is familiar with the tune, they will understand that it evokes sad feelings. That is why it is allegorically compared with the sound of the sad heart when it is not honoured with the Beloved's presence. This emptying or dying from the lower self is expressed more explicitly in song XCVII when the singer sings the line: “Nothing will be left for me, nothing, whatever, and utter death shall I receive at thy feet” (Tagore 71). This death is the same emptying, or put differently, is a cut of bonds with worldly interests:

Thou hast left death for my companion and I shall crown him with my life. Thy sword
is with me to cut asunder my bonds...

For now I leave off all petty decorations. (Tagore 46)

Where the bonds and petty decorations are the profanities of the world.

In contrast with *Almustafa* in *The Prophet*, the poet in *Gitanjali* always distinguishes himself from the Beloved. There is almost always an indication of “the other” which is expressed with the pronoun “You” or “Thou”. If there is any union in Tagore's verses, then there is a union that does not melt in homogeneous unity but it is as if the lover and Beloved stay in one place, or room and contemplate one another, as it is expressed here (song LXXV): “With humble heart shall I stand before thee face to face” (Tagore 59).

3.2. Human Love

The human-love encompasses a broad array of relationships beginning with family, friendships, romantic-relationships, and social ones. The lack of human love has caused misunderstandings, all kinds of injustices, wars and almost all the tragedies the human species has had the fate to go through. Tagore and Gibran have not spared their songs and prose-poems from discussing this kind of love.

How does Tagore and Gibran elaborate on human love? What form does it take? Does it include sense-desires or is it a kind of monasticism where the desires that come through senses are suppressed or ignored? How do they try to convey their message? All of these questions will be addressed in this section.

Song XXXVI in *Gitanjali* is a prayer to the Lord, some of the lines of which are:

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might. (Tagore 35)

Many of the lines of this song begin with the same phrase “give me the strength”, thus making use of anaphora. The usage of anaphora and the choice of direct words emphasizes the importance of asking for strength, and it also gives rhythm to the prayer. With this emphasis, the poet shows the need to embody love in the form of service, which is usually understood to be a service towards humanity but not exclusively. The prayer continues by asking for strength against those in power who might use it as a means for oppression, by saying to not let him “bend [his] knees before insolent might”. The analogy of bending the knees indicates to sit on the knees, to submit before someone usually in power, just as the peoples of the past would kneel before their kings or leaders. So, the human love should not be a naive or a submissive one, but rather one that takes the form of voluntary service.

Song LX describes the innocent children's nature which is similar to the Romantic idea of the child:

... they [children] know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets. (Tagore 50)

Tagore is known to have loved and worked with children; but here I argue that he is not (only) talking about children, but rather he is using it as a metaphor of the inner-child, the inner innocent dimension of the human being. “Pearl fishers” is an analogy of those who go after luxury, “while children gather pebbles and scatter them again” i.e., while the innocent inner dimension of the human looks after simplicity rather than luxury. The last phrase is a very child-like expression which makes the listener imagine their own games during childhood, and how carefree they were. It makes one wonder about the child's sense of freedom, especially if one is feeling tense after pursuing material means. Here again, the poet makes the use of anaphora by repeating the phrase “they know not how to cast nets”, which is an analogy of people who do not use trickery to others for their selfish interests. It is emphasized in order to make this attribute a valuable one towards the love of others.

Even though the verses that seem to be more romantic in *Gitanjali* are assumed to be made mostly for the Divine Beloved elaborated above, there are some lines that indicate a romantic or human intimacy too. However, these lines leave room for other interpretations as well. In song LXXIII the poet utters this:

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation... No, I will never shut the doors of my senses.

The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight. (Tagore 58)

Here comes the theme of whether love is deemed to be only a metaphysical one that does not pertain to the material senses or if it includes the material body as well. Tagore answers clearly by singing towards Divine Love and at the same time praising the experiences through senses. “I will never shut the doors of my senses” makes “the door” a metaphor of the activation of senses. For example, the door of the sense of sight is the eye, for the hearing is the ear and so on. This gives the impression that these doors can be closed if one wills so. However, the poet does not want to close them for a good reason. His beloved or even the Divine Beloved is seemed to be experienced via them echoed in, “[they] will bear thy delight”.

Compared to *Gitanjali*, *The Prophet* touches more on relationships and social life; hence, there is much more material regarding the human-love. Only a few passages, however, will be addressed here.

In the chapter called “Marriage”, Almustafa talks on his idea of romantic relationship or marriage. He puts an emphasis on partners not having bonds and on having space between them.

Love one another but make not a bond of love:

Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. (Gibran 16,17)

Love is taken to be “a moving sea” which is a metaphor that gives the impression of expansive, majestic, and powerful entity. Almustafa is giving some lessons on how this love should be manifested, indicating on the individual's freedom when he mentions the movement of the sea, which is the elasticity of the relationship. Almustafa further on says: “[T]he oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow” (Gibran 17). The different trees are mentioned to indicate the different persons in the relationship or marriage while “the shadow”

is the analogy of control or authority. So, he is again advising the lovers to take hold of their own personalities and not be subjugated to their beloveds.

In the “Giving” sermon, Almustafa explains the idea and practice of giving:

You often say, “I would give, but only to the deserving.”

The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture. (Gibran 24)

“Giving”, in this context, relates to the act of giving to human beings, for only they can be deserving or not. One can give love, money, care, service towards humanity, knowledge, just to name a few. Almustafa answers by taking an analogy that nature, the trees and the flocks give from their products, such as fruits and milk, even when we are undeserving. Just as nature gives us in that manner, we must give similarly as well. The reason why nature is taken into account is because Almustafa calls us towards our own generous human nature which does not discriminate and has no selfish interests in giving. Thus, implicitly saying that the act of giving can be self-centred as well – and that is advised to be avoided.

3.3. Non-Human Love

The last section of this research deals with non-human love i.e., all forms of affection and love regarding nature and its inhabitants. Narrative empathy will be applied to see the way how Tagore's and Gibran's writing help the readers increase their affection and appreciation towards nature; how do they perceive and present nature?

On page 12, the imagery of water was addressed. It was said that the passage in hand gives the impression of a very dependable relationship between the human being and the living water. This does not only lead to creation of empathy but also to a deep ecological awareness that nature and humans are mutually dependent with one another. Almustafa does not only implicitly mention the deep ecology concept of interconnectedness, but he also invites the listeners to actively practice being conscious of it. For example:

And when you crush an apple with your teeth, say to it in your heart,

Your seeds shall live in my body,

And the bonds of your tomorrow shall blossom in my heart. (Gibran 27)

Almustafa becomes very specific towards the act of eating when he says, “crush an apple with your teeth” and when he advises to talk with the heart. Again making use of anthropomorphism makes it a lively organ that understands and listens. The last line is a description of digestion but in a poetic way, saying that the apple will not disappear, but it will be transformed and it will have functions that will be lovely to the heart i.e., no matter what form this material or natural world takes, the interconnectedness and love will endure.

In comparison with Gibran, Tagore in general has another approach in mentioning natural world. Oftentimes, he uses metaphors from nature to emphasize an emotion or a spiritual reality, thus making it inseparable part of the poet's whole physical and metaphysical experience. For instance:

The butterflies spread their sails on the sea of light. Lilies and jasmines surge up on the crest of the waves of light. (Tagore 49)

These two sentences are composed by names of natural beings: butterflies, sea, flowers, waves, and light. The butterflies have sails instead of wings. This is done to make a bridge towards the concept of the sea. The same method is applied with the flowers having the ability to “surge up” as waves, instead of having the ability to grow up. This is a method to make the reader connect easier with two natural creatures or entities even if they naturally do not do so. The butterflies have no intimate connection to the sea, as let us say, the fish. However, there is a hidden connection when it is seen as a whole. That is why the metaphors can function. Much can be said about these lines but here only the ecological connection is being analysed.

The same goes for the second and the concluding example from *Gitanjali*: “Let all the strains of joy mingle in my last song — the joy that makes the earth flow over in the riotous excess of the grass...” (Tagore 49). Joy is an emotion that frequently emanates from love. One can argue if animals feel joy or not, which I think at least some do, but it is an undisputable fact that humans experience it; they are moved by it. Here the earth is said to experience joy too, and because of joy it gives us abundance. One could say that here the author has used pathetic fallacy in order to make human beings and the earth connected also in emotions with each other. This again points out and invites the readers to have a deep ecological awareness of the interconnectedness between human beings and the natural world.

4. Conclusion

This essay has in detail explained that *Gitanjali* and *The Prophet* have widely discussed about the divine, human, and nature love (including longing when applicable). This, they have done by utilizing symbolism that can be found excessively in Sufi narrative and poetry. Narrative empathy takes a crucial place in these two works also, mainly in forms of metaphors and allegories. Furthermore, Gibran and Tagore, as many Romantics or writers of the past, have shown that the deep ecology ideas are essential to the kind of relationship we should have with the nature around us.

Divine love and longing in these works are two-sided experiences, i.e., they are experiences from the Divine and the human lover's part. Moreover, this love and longing is not only joyful, but it requires pain and sacrifice of certain lowly qualities on the part of the lover. Tagore's and Gibran's take on these two experiences are very similar; however, they differ towards the end stages of love where Gibran expresses some kind of unity between the Divine Beloved and the human-lover, while Tagore keeps the duality alive.

Human love in *Gitanjali* is found to be one of service and selflessness but not naive. It is also not seen to have a monastic nature where renunciation of senses is required. The same is found to be in *The Prophet* too, where Almustafa talks extensively about the act of giving, or of marriage.

Non-human love or the love of nature in *The Prophet* and in *Gitanjali*, with the use of metaphors, allegories and narrative empathy, implicitly share much of the deep ecologists' ideals of how nature and the human beings are one organic whole and how they share a deep relationship with one another.

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