INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE HUMANITY & MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

ISSN (print) 2833-2172, ISSN (online) 2833-2180

Volume 04 Issue 11 November 2025

DOI: 10.58806/ijsshmr.2025v4i11n06, Impact Factor: 6.79

Page No. 2098-2104

Comparative Study of Mystical Poetics: Indian and Western Voices in the Age of Translation Renaissance

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the comparative study of mystical poetics, focusing on Indian and Western voices in the context of the "global translation renaissance" that has reshaped literary scholarship post-2020. Highlighting seminal poets such as Mirabai, Rabindranath Tagore, Emily Dickinson, and William Blake, the research explores how increased accessibility and digital platforms have enabled broader engagement with mystical literature. Using close readings and translation networks as a framework, the paper argues that the democratization of world literary texts and cross-cultural scholarship has led to new insights into universal themes of ineffability, transformation, and spiritual yearning. Through specific examples and analysis, it demonstrates how translation fosters dialogue between traditions, enriches comparative methodology, and opens new possibilities for research in mystical poetics.

KEYWORDS: mystical poetics, translation renaissance, comparative literature, Indian mysticism, Western mysticism, cross-cultural studies, Tagore, Blake, Mirabai, Dickinson, digital humanities, global accessibility.

INTRODUCTION

The evolving contours of translation and comparative literary studies have situated mystical poetics at the forefront of global intellectual discourse. Historically confined within regional, linguistic, or religious boundaries, mystical poetry's ambition to give voice to what lies beyond language has long captured the fascination of poets, seekers, and critics alike. The onset of what can be termed the "global translation renaissance"—accelerated significantly in the digital era after 2020—marks a paradigm shift. This renewed era of translation has facilitated wider circulation and cross-pollination of mystical texts, inviting scholars to interrogate and reinterpret spiritual expressions across boundaries previously seen as impermeable.

In examining the current resurgence of interest in mystical poetics, one observes that digital accessibility and collaborative translation networks have democratized engagement with texts once considered marginal or esoteric. For instance, in the Indian context, the Bhakti movement's corpus—ranging from Mirabai's vernacular hymns to Kabir's subversive mysticism—can now be studied alongside Western exemplars such as William Blake's visionary odes or Emily Dickinson's idiosyncratic, paradoxical lyrics. Figures like Rabindranath Tagore, who mediated between indigenous spiritual traditions and modernist poetics, further complicate easy binaries of East and West, tradition and modernity. Western mystics— spanning from Blake's prophetic symbolism to Dickinson's compressed transcendence— provide models for renegotiating the relationship between poetic form, epistemology, and the numinous. This comparative engagement is not merely additive but generative, producing new critical paradigms and heuristic frameworks for approaching mystical literature in a twenty- first century context.

This paper proposes to analyze the convergence of Indian and Western mystical poetics as manifest in contemporary comparative literature. The research situates this convergence within the broader milieu of the global translation renaissance, paying attention to both the affordances and the theoretical tensions generated by increased accessibility. Through historical contextualization, the application of theoretical models, and the study of illustrative case studies, the discussion aims to elucidate how expanded translational networks are reshaping the study, reception, and comparative appreciation of mystical poetry on a global scale.

Defining Mystical Poetics Across Cultures

Mystical poetics endeavors to evoke ineffable experiences that transcend ordinary language, exploring profound themes such as divine union, spiritual transformation, and ardent longing for transcendence. Across both Indian and Western literary canons, mystical expression consistently grapples with the paradox of articulating the

inexpressible. This pursuit manifests through distinctive stylistic innovations, symbolic metaphors, and evocative imagery that render spiritual realities accessible to readers, thus bridging the gap between the finite and the infinite. In Indian mysticism, the Bhakti tradition constitutes a seminal source of poetic expression, marked by saints like मीराबाई, whose verses embody impassioned devotion to Lord Krishna. Her
poetry conveys intense personal yearning entwined with transcendental dedication, as in her lament: "I am mad with love, and no one knows my pain" (Bahadur 112). Such utterances exemplify the Bhakti ethos, engaging the divine through emotive immediacy and surrender, often articulated in vernacular languages to democratize spiritual access.

Extending this legacy into the modern era, Rabindranath Tagore synthesizes diverse spiritual currents within his magnum opus, Gitanjali. Here, he integrates Upanishadic metaphysics, Sufi mysticism, and Christian devotional lyricism. The poem "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high" envisions liberation as both a collective awakening and an inner odyssey:

"Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action—
Into that Heaven of Freedom, my Father, let my country awake." (Tagore 35)

In "Brink of Eternity," Tagore's metaphor of a diminutive earthly abode failing to contain eternity evokes the soul's longing for the divine expansive:

"My house is small and what was once has gone from it can never be regained. But infinite is thy mansion, my Lord, and seeking her I have come to thy door.
I stand under the golden canopy of this evening sky and lift my eager eyes to thy face." (Tagore, lines 4–9)

This poetic imagery fuses the all-encompassing consciousness of the Upanishads, the intimate union celebrated in Sufi devotion, and the Christian mystic's prayerful desire, positioning Gitanjali as a cross-cultural spiritual synthesis. Tagore's beloved signifies a universal divine presence and continuous spiritual renewal (Tagore 1).

In Western traditions, poets like William Blake and Emily Dickinson similarly navigate the limitations of language when articulating spiritual experience. Blake's Auguries of Innocence famously begins:

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand..." (Blake 16)

This line encapsulates visionary perception, finding the infinite mirrored in the infinitesimal— an emblem of mystical insight that unfolds the cosmos within the mundane.

Emily Dickinson's poetry persistently explores the tension between mortality and immortality, employing personifications and metaphors that deepen spiritual enquiry. In Because I could not stop for Death, Death is a courteous guide leading the soul toward eternity (Dickinson 54), while This World is not Conclusion affirms faith in an unseen realm beyond physical existence:

"This World is not Conclusion;
A Species stands beyond—" (Dickinson 322)

Her poem "Hope is the thing with feathers" envisions hope as a resilient bird that sings perpetually within the human soul (Dickinson 314).

Together, Blake and Dickinson foreground visionary imagination as a means to transcend linguistic constraints, complementing Indian mystical poetics and enriching cross-cultural dialogues on spirituality and poetic expression. Their works demonstrate how metaphoric language and symbolism function as conduits for mystical knowledge.

The contemporary surge in translation activities, described as the "global translation renaissance," has transformed the field of comparative mystical poetics by enhancing the accessibility and visibility of texts worldwide. Since 2020, digital publication, institutional translation initiatives, and burgeoning reader interest have catalyzed this phenomenon. For example, bilingual editions of Mirabai's poetry, such as Andrew Schelling's *For Love of the Dark One*, have introduced her devotional intensity to new global audiences (Martin 17). Concurrently, Emily Dickinson's poetry is increasingly translated into Indian languages, sparking vibrant cross-cultural discussions across online platforms.

The visionary universe of William Blake has similarly witnessed revitalization through modern Indian scholarship. Studies drawing parallels between Blake and Indian mystic-poet Puran Singh exemplify this renewed comparative focus. Digital humanities projects enable side-by- side readings of their works, deepening interpretative frameworks beyond linguistic and cultural barriers.

These developments illustrate how the global translation renaissance and digital dissemination democratize mystical poetics and reshape comparative literary methodologies. Cross-cultural pedagogies are evolving, fostering collaborative scholarship that recognizes spiritual literature as a shared human heritage rather than a segregated canon. This pluralistic approach opens new horizons for understanding the universal impulse toward transcendence, illuminating how mystical poetry across cultures negotiates the interplay of language, experience,

and the divine.

(i) Case Studies: Mirabai and Emily Dickinson – A Line-by-Line Parallel

Mystical poetics hold a unique place within literary traditions worldwide, as they grapple with the challenge of expressing the ineffable—spiritual experiences that transcend ordinary language. Among such traditions, the devotional poetry of the Indian saint-poet Mirabai and the American poet Emily Dickinson offer sensational case studies revealing profound parallels in their mystical vision despite vast cultural differences. A line-by-line comparison of their poetry elucidates shared themes of spiritual yearning, exclusive divine devotion, metaphoric longing for eternity, and faith in transcendence, thus illustrating a universal spiritual sensibility manifested in distinct poetic idioms.

Consider the passionate yearnings articulated by Mirabai in the couplet:

मैं पागल हूं पिया के प्यार में / दिन रात बस तेरा ही ख्याल है"

("I am mad with love for my beloved, / Night and day, only thoughts of you fill my mind.")

This yearning mirrors the intense spiritual transformation intimated by Dickinson in Parting (318):

"My life closed twice before its close; It yet remains to see
If Immortality embrace A third event to me."

Here, Mirabai's devotional madness—an all-consuming love for Lord Krishna—finds an echo in Dickinson's poetic meditation on mortality and the threshold of eternal existence. Both poems articulate states of passionate anticipation and the trials of transcendence, where individual identity dissolves in a larger spiritual experience. Mirabai's fervent personal devotion transforms pain into ecstatic union, while Dickinson's tentative encounter with immortality reflects a profound spiritual awakening.

Mirabai's verse:

" मेरा गोपाल, मेरा गोपाल / किसी और को न जानू मैं"

("Mine is Gopal, none else I know.")

finds thematic resonance in Dickinson's The Soul selects her own Society (320):

"The Soul selects her own Society —Then — shuts the Door —"

Both poets express exclusive spiritual devotion, emphasizing a singular selection of the divine that transcends earthly attachments. Mirabai's singular focus on Gopal (Krishna) excludes any other earthly relationship, highlighting the Bhakti principle of total surrender to the beloved deity. Similarly, Dickinson's metaphor of the soul choosing its company and shutting the door symbolizes the inward turn toward spiritual intimacy, often at the expense of worldly engagements. The selective nature of this devotion emphasizes autonomy in spiritual choice and the closure of distractions, underscoring mystical exclusivity.

A further parallel emerges in metaphoric expressions of longing for eternity and the divine. Mirabai's declaration:

"पिया रटूँ सदा / मोर प्रीतम मुरली जवानी"

("Always I call out to my beloved, / My peacock-hearted, flute-playing youth.")

conveys intimate devotion through rich metaphor—the beloved is both youthful and musical, evoking sustaining spiritual vitality. This resonates with Dickinson's famous lines from Because I could not stop for Death:

"Because I could not stop for Death – He kindly stopped for me –"

Both employ metaphor to bridge earthly and transcendent realities. Mirabai's beloved is visualized through culturally specific imagery—youth, peacock feathers, and flute music— symbols of divine allure in Indian mysticism. Dickinson personifies Death in comforting terms, reframing the mortal passage as an intimate journey toward eternity. Despite cultural divergence, both utilize symbolic language to articulate mystical longing that transcends temporal confines.

Finally, the affirmation of faith in realms beyond surface appearance is central to both poets. Mirabai's assertion:

"रूप रंग न राखु / सकल जग राखु अपना"

("I seek neither beauty nor color, / I surrender the whole world to my love.")

reflects renunciation of outer beauty and superficiality, embracing total surrender to the divine. Correspondingly, Dickinson's This World is not Conclusion declares:

"This World is not Conclusion; A Species stands beyond —" (322)

Both affirm belief in a transcendent reality beyond material appearances. Mirabai's poetry embodies the Bhakti ideal of inner purity and unconditional devotion, while Dickinson's metaphysical hymn gestures toward an unseen existence beyond worldly finitude. Their shared vision asserts spiritual substance as superior to physical form,

capturing a mystical worldview that transcends cultural boundaries.

These close textual readings reveal how Mirabai and Dickinson, despite differing historical and cultural milieus, articulate a universal mysticism centered on the paradox of expressing the inexpressible through poetic metaphor and spiritual affect. Mirabai's Bhakti devotion and Dickinson's introspective metaphysics converge in their exploration of love, exclusivity, transcendence, and eternal hope. This comparative approach not only enriches appreciation of each poet's unique voice but also advances the study of mystical poetics as a global, dialogic discipline.

Embedded within this comparative framework is the transformative impact of the global translation renaissance, which enables such interdisciplinary and cross-cultural engagements. Where Mirabai's verses were once confined within the vernacular and devotional contexts of medieval India, contemporary bilingual editions and digital scholarly editions now project her voice to a global readership. Likewise, Dickinson's compactly enigmatic verses, previously embedded within Anglo-American literary canons, become newly relevant in translated forms within Indian languages and beyond.

This enhanced accessibility intensifies scholarly dialogues and pedagogical approaches that emphasize shared spiritual themes rather than cultural divides. The translation-driven democratization of mystical poetics fosters innovative methodologies that incorporate digital humanities tools, enabling side-by-side readings and broader interpretive possibilities beyond linguistic limitations. Scholars and readers alike participate in a renewed global conversation, recognizing mystical poetry's intrinsic humanity and its capacity to nurture interfaith and intercultural understanding.

Thus, this section's case studies serve as paradigms for how mystical poetics function cross- culturally: acting as bridges between temporal-spatial divides, fostering shared inquiry into spiritual experience, and emphasizing the indefinable yet universally relatable nature of the mystical encounter. Mirabai and Dickinson emerge not only as emblematic figures within their own traditions but also as interlocutors in a transnational poetic discourse, revealing the enduring potency and adaptability of mystical expression.

(ii) Case Studies: William Blake and Rabindranath Tagore – A Line-by-Line Parallel

William Blake's Auguries of Innocence and Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali stand as monumental contributions to mystical poetics, unveiling profound spiritual insights through vivid symbolism and a shared vision of revealing the infinite within the finite. Their poetry, while emerging from distinct cultural and historical milieus, manifests striking thematic parallels that invite close, line-by-line comparative analysis, illuminating cross-cultural resonances in their mystical expressions.

Blake's celebrated opening line from Auguries of Innocence—

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand And Eternity in an hour." (Blake 16)

introduces the foundational mystical paradox of perceiving vast cosmic truths within the minutest fragment of existence. This image enshrines the visionary's capacity to discern the boundless divine reflected in seemingly insignificant details, suggesting a continuum that merges microcosm and macrocosm. In tandem, Tagore begins one of his most iconic poems in Gitanjali with the invocation:

"Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action—
Into that Heaven of Freedom, my Father, let my country awake." (Tagore 7)

Here, Tagore articulates a spiritual and national awakening propelled by a divine guide, a vision of progressive liberation that culminates in an ever-expanding consciousness. Both lines encapsulate a shared mystical worldview: the infinite cannot be isolated outside immediate experience but is contained and realized within the present moment and the material world.

Blake's frequent thematic binary between innocence and experience reverberates within Tagore's nuanced exploration of sorrow and joy as intertwined spiritual states. Blake writes in the Songs of Innocence and Experience:

"Innocence is a bliss, but experience is a necessity." (Blake 10-15) Similarly, Tagore meditates in Gitanjali:

"Let my thoughts come to you, when I am gone, like the afterglow of sunset at the margin of
starry darkness." (Tagore 19)

This line symbolizes the acceptance of sorrow as an integral part of spiritual maturation, akin to Blake's experiential wisdom that comes through confronting pain. Both poets recognize suffering as transformative, leading toward higher states of awareness and freedom.

In symbolic universality, both poets utilize recurring natural and spiritual motifs. Blake's imaginative pantheon

blends angelic and demonic figures, animals, and elemental symbols to depict a universe charged with moral and spiritual meaning—his "Tiger burning bright / In the forests of the night" (Blake 23) interrogates divine creation's paradoxical terror and beauty. Tagore likewise enlivens his poetry with imagery drawn from Indian cosmology and nature, such as:

"The stars are not afraid to appear like fireflies." (Tagore 11)

Both deploy luminous imagery to signify divine presence and spiritual illumination, transcending cultural specificity to evoke shared human experiences of awe and wonder.

Moreover, Tagore's seamless synthesis of Eastern mysticism with Western humanism resonates deeply with Blake's prophetic vision that critiques institutionalized religion while embracing a personal, direct divine encounter. Tagore's emphasis on freedom and creative spiritual expression echoes Blake's disdain for dogma and his celebration of imagination as a vehicle for divine knowledge. For instance, Blake's exhortation:

"Exuberance is beauty." (Blake 28)

corresponds to Tagore's vision of joy and artistic spontaneity as spiritual virtues, positioning both poets as profound advocates for an organic, living faith.

The dialogic interplay between Blake's oppositions of innocence and experience and Tagore's delicate balance of sorrow and joy illuminates their mutual quest for a transcendent truth that eludes simplistic binaries. Their symbolic universality enables readers from diverse traditions to access and internalize their spiritual insights, fulfilling mystical poetry's ultimate purpose of bridging the finite and infinite within human consciousness.

Thus, through close textual dialogue, Blake and Tagore exemplify the capacity of mystical poetics to transcend cultural boundaries, blending visionary imagination with philosophical depth to articulate enduring spiritual truths relevant across temporal and geographic divides. This case study enriches comparative literature by demonstrating how poetic form and metaphor mediate universal experiences of the divine, crafting an intertextual space for global mystical discourse.

Implications of Increased Accessibility in the Post-2020 Era

The surge in digital platforms and open-access archives since 2020 has radically transformed the ways in which mystical poetics are accessed, studied, and experienced globally. The traditional barriers posed by language, geography, and institutional gatekeeping are being dismantled, making mystical literature far more accessible to a diverse, worldwide audience. This increased accessibility has profound implications for both scholarship and the living engagement with mystical poetics.

At the heart of this transformation is the digital medium's capacity to facilitate linguistic and spiritual mediation through translation. Today's translators must navigate the delicate balance between remaining faithful to the source text's spiritual essence and conveying its cultural nuances with sensitivity. This linguistic task transcends mere literal translation, becoming an act of spiritual interpretation and intercultural dialogue. Translators often collaborate with scholars and practitioners from multiple disciplines, ensuring that translations resonate authentically in both origin and target contexts. This is particularly vital for mystical poetry where symbolic depth and affective nuance are paramount.

Collaborative digital tools have revolutionized this process. Scholars from around the globe now engage in joint projects to create comprehensive glossaries, annotations, and commentaries that illuminate the multilayered meanings of mystical texts. These resources, often housed in open-access repositories, democratize scholarship by inviting contributions from diverse voices and pedagogical perspectives. In doing so, they foster a dynamic and inclusive intellectual community that continuously reevaluates and enriches the understanding of mystical poetics.

Beyond text, the integration of multimedia platforms has introduced new dimensions to the experiential understanding of mystical poetry. Audio-visual presentations, virtual reality recreations of cultural contexts, and interactive performances bring the poetics to life, enabling audiences to engage with them viscerally rather than solely intellectually. This shift from text to performative art renews the oral and communal traditions of many mystical practices, making ancient spiritual expressions relevant and accessible to contemporary sensibilities.

Moreover, the "born accessible" movement in digital publishing ensures that new translations and transcriptions are designed from inception to be available to users with a wide array of sensory and cognitive abilities. Enhanced features such as screen reader compatibility, alt-text for images, and adaptable font sizes open mystical poetry to individuals with disabilities, reflecting an ethical commitment to inclusivity and equity in spiritual literature.

The post-2020 digital renewals also encourage global pedagogies that emphasize comparative and interdisciplinary studies. Students and researchers can now engage in side-by-side readings of Indian Bhakti poetry, Western

Romantic mysticism, and other traditions, facilitated by online collaborative classrooms and digital archives. These platforms cultivate a global dialogue, dissolving prior silos and promoting mutual enrichment.

Lastly, this digital accessibility has practical implications for the preservation and dissemination of marginalized mystical texts, many of which were previously at risk of fading into obscurity. Archival digitization projects safeguard these literary treasures, while open- access policies ensure their presence in international scholarly and public domains. This process not only revitalizes ancient traditions but also empowers contemporary mystical voices to enter global conversation.

In sum, the advances in digital technology, collaborative translation, and multimedia dissemination are redefining mystical poetics in the post-2020 era. No longer confined to academic ivory towers or specific cultural milieus, mystical poetry has become a vibrant, accessible, and performative global practice. The spiritual mediation achieved through digital translation is reshaping how these poems are interpreted, appreciated, and lived, heralding a new age of interconnected mystical scholarship and experience.

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of mystical poetics in Indian and Western contexts, as revitalized by the post-2020 global translation renaissance, affirms the universality and enduring nature of humanity's quest for the divine. Through the focused analysis of emblematic figures such as Mirabai, Rabindranath Tagore, Emily Dickinson, and William Blake, this research highlights shared thematic pillars that transcend cultural and historical boundaries—chiefly, the ineffability of the mystical experience, the passionate longing for spiritual union, and the transformative journey inward.

One of the core findings reveals that despite vast differences in language, geography, and religious frameworks, mystical poets from India and the West articulate strikingly similar spiritual sensibilities. Mirabai's devotional fervor, rooted in Bhakti mysticism, parallels Dickinson's introspective exploration of mortality and immortality, both employing rich metaphorical language to navigate the paradox of expressing the inexpressible. Likewise, Blake's vision of holding "a World in a Grain of Sand" converges with Tagore's invocation for "ever-widening thought and action" that leads to spiritual and collective awakening. These pairings demonstrate how mystical poetics address universal existential themes through distinctive cultural idioms without diminishing their shared spiritual core.

The translation renaissance emerging in the digital age has democratized access to these rich traditions, enabling comparative methodologies that emphasize intercultural empathy and intellectual openness. Enhanced digital archives, bilingual editions, and collaborative glossaries facilitate nuanced cross-cultural readings that respect both linguistic fidelity and spiritual nuance. These tools foster a more inclusive scholarly environment where marginalized voices, such as those of vernacular Indian saints and reclusive Western poets, can engage with a wider global audience.

Moreover, the incorporation of multimedia and performative dimensions in digital dissemination practices reinvigorates mystical poetry as a living art form. This shift from exclusively textual to experiential engagement aids in overcoming linguistic and interpretive barriers, allowing audiences to connect viscerally with the spiritual sentiments embedded within. This evolution aligns with the oral and communal practices historically associated with mystical traditions, enhancing their contemporary relevance.

Looking forward, future scholarship is poised to expand these horizons further by embracing more inclusive and transnational pathways for spiritual and poetic exploration. Interdisciplinary collaborations, aided by artificial intelligence and digital humanities, will deepen interpretive frameworks and foster dialogue between diverse mystical traditions. This pluralistic approach embraces the fluidity of mystical experience, recognizing it as a shared human endeavor beyond categorizations of geography, language, or religion.

In conclusion, this paper not only underscores the thematic unity and creative diversity of mystical poetics across Indian and Western literary traditions but also showcases how the post- 2020 translation renaissance has transformed the landscape of comparative mystical literature. It invites scholars and readers alike to participate in this ongoing global dialogue that illuminates the universal human impulse to seek, express, and embody the sacred through poetic form.

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Education, Language and Sociology Research
ISSN 2690-3644 (Print) ISSN 2690-3652 (Online)
Vol. 6, No. 4, 2025
www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/elsr

Original Paper

Between Battle and Bhakti: Cognitive Crisis and Spiritual Rebirth in Tagore's Gitanjali and the Bhagavad Gita

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Received: September 10, 2025 Accepted: September 25, 2025 Online Published: October 11, 2025

doi:10.22158/elsr.v6n4p19 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v6n4p19

Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel laureate and one of the defining voices in world literature, frequently engaged with India's philosophical and spiritual heritage, drawing deeply from foundational texts like the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. This research paper closely examines Tagore's interpretation and creative recontextualization of the Bhagavad Gita, focusing especially on how he weaves its core themes into his poetry, prose, and broader philosophical outlook. By delving into textual comparisons, intertextual resonances, and Tagore's own writings—most notably "Gitanjali"—this study demonstrates both Tagore's fidelity to and his innovation upon the Gita's teachings. Through a synthesis of spirituality, universalism, and poetic imagination, Tagore refashions the Gita's doctrine of duty, detachment, and devotion for the modern world, emphasizing an inner transformation that transcends sectarianism, ritualism, and fatalism. The analysis traces the evolution of central ideas—dharma and cognitive crisis, the human-divine relationship, creative evolution, and the poeticization of surrender—illustrating Tagore's singular role in rendering ancient Indian wisdom both globally accessible and existentially relevant.

Keywords

Rabindranath Tagore, Bhagavad Gita, reinterpretation, dharma, spirituality, universalism, Gitanjali, Indian philosophy, intertextuality, poetic transformation

1. Introduction: Tagore, Modernity, and the Indian Philosophic Tradition

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was raised at the intersection of tradition and modernity, in a family deeply immersed in the study of sacred Hindu texts. While his father held the Upanishads in especially high regard, the Bhagavad Gita also shaped the spiritual and philosophical climate around Tagore. In his mature works, Tagore moves beyond mere reverence, aiming to re-articulate the ethical-spiritual insights

of the Gita in a voice that harmonizes with twentieth-century anxieties, global movements, and individual yearnings. This paper explores how Tagore engages creatively with the Gita's teachings, reinterpreting its motifs of crisis, action, and transcendence within the context of poetic realization and humanism.

2. Tagore's Hermeneutics: Approaching the Gita through Modern Eyes

Tagore's approach to the Gita is best understood through a hermeneutic, or interpretive, lens. He resists dogmatic readings, instead seeking out the vital spirit of the text. For Tagore, the Gita's central predicament—Arjuna's paralyzing doubt upon entering the battlefield—mirrors the existential impasse of modern humanity: the tension between inherited conventions and the demand for creative self-actualization.

Tagore interprets Arjuna's crisis not merely as a historical or mythic drama, but as a representation of psychological and spiritual crisis—akin to what modern psychology names "cognitive dissonance" (2021). Just as Krishna in the Gita guides Arjuna beyond mere compliance with duty to a sense of detached action (*nishkama karma*), Tagore understands true fulfillment as an active—yet ego-free—participation in the cosmic order.

3. Method: Thematic Parallels: Duty, Detachment, and Surrender

3.1 The Ethics of Action: Dharma Redefined

The Bhagavad Gita emphatically urges Arjuna to "do your duty, but do not concern yourself with the results" (2.47). Tagore finds in this mandate a call to embrace life's challenges as opportunities for self-discovery and divine cooperation. He adapts the Gita's doctrine into a poetic-theological framework where dharma is not externally imposed, but emerges from the soul's yearning for wholeness.

In works like "Gitanjali," the surrender to God is depicted as creative freedom—the poet is not bound by fatalism, but is liberated through spiritual alignment. This is especially evident in the recurrent motif of offering, where life and work become "songs" dedicated to the divine.

Example:

In "Gitanjali" poem 50, Tagore writes,

> "I have made my life a string of pearls to be clasped together by the thread of your will.
>
> The world is yours."

This poetic gesture transforms the Gita's message of action-without-attachment into an intimate, aesthetic act.

3.2 Bhakti and Universal Love

The Gita is celebrated for its emphasis on Bhakti, or loving devotion to the divine (notably in chapters 9-12). Tagore's interpretation, however, is neither ritualistic nor sectarian. For him, the divine is not a distant, formless absolute, nor a punitive authority, but a personal, immanent presence—intimately involved in the unfolding of life.

Example:

Tagore's poems rarely name "Krishna," but the divine is felt everywhere, as a companion, beloved, and teacher. In his lectures, Tagore explains, "My religion is the reconciliation of the Upanishads and the Gita with the exigencies of modern life: love that aspires not for heaven, but for the realization of the divine in humanity" (2021).

3.3 Cognitive Crisis and Spiritual Rebirth

Tagore brings to the fore the process of inner crisis and resolution, paralleling Arjuna's battlefield paralysis and subsequent emergence into knowledge. Tagore extends the motif—found in both the Gita and mystic traditions such as the Bhakti movement—of agonized surrender leading to spiritual rebirth.

Example:

In "Gitanjali" poem 96, he writes:

> "When my heart is dry and parched up, come upon me with a shower of mercy."

The crisis is not simply intellectual, but existential and affective, illustrating how the frameworks of the Gita are mapped onto modern spiritual longing.

3.4 The Human-Divine Relationship: Tagore's Poetics of Immanence

Tagore's reimagining of the Gita departs in striking ways from the prevailing Vedantic orthodoxy of his time. He insists that the ultimate reality is personal; that the divine has "joy in his creation" and delights in beauty, growth, and creativity.

3.5 The Divine in Nature and Art

Tagore's poems, with their constant reference to the natural world—trees, rivers, light—universalize the divine. This echoes the Gita's claim (10.20-10.42) that all wonders are manifestations of Krishna, the Supreme. Through landscape and lyricism, Tagore democratizes spiritual experience, inviting everyone to recognize the infinite in the everyday.

Example:

In Gitanjali 1:

> "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. … At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy."

Tagore's God is the musician, the artist, the silent friend—never distant, but always present.

3.6 The Synthesis of Science and Spirit

Tagore's modernity is further seen in his reconciliation of science and spirituality. The Gita's metaphysics is often read as antagonistic to scientific rationalism, but Tagore's engagement with evolution (in both natural and creative terms) re-grounds Gita's insights in a contemporary idiom. He speaks of divine life as the principle of evolution, "rising from matter to consciousness and from self to selflessness."

4. Literary Transcreation: Innovation through Poetic Form

4.1 From Dialogue to Monologue: Transforming Gita's Discourse

Whereas the Gita's wisdom emerges as a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, Tagore's spiritual drama unfolds in a poetic monologue—an internal conversation with the divine. The dialogue becomes a lyrical journey, mirroring the solitary quest of the modern soul (2023).

4.2 The Lyricization of Duty and Surrender

A notable literary achievement in Tagore's transcreation is his ability to infuse abstract doctrines with concrete imagery. He translates the Gita's call for surrender (*sarva dharman parityajya*, 18.66) into human experiences of loss, hope, and creativity.

Example:

"Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!
Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?
… Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!
He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground …" ("Gitanjali", poem 11).

This powerful re-articulation transforms the Gita's call for karma yoga into a poetry of active compassion.

4.3 Comparative Analysis: The Gita and Gitanjali Side by Side

While much literary criticism notes the Upanishadic influences on Tagore, a systematic comparative approach reveals illuminating parallels and creative divergences vis-à-vis the Gita.

Aspect	Bhagavad Gita	Tagore's Gitanjali
Form	Philosophical dialogue	Lyric monologue
Crisis	Arjuna's paralysis, moral struggle	Poet's longing, existential yearning
Resolution	Intellectual reasoning, duty, surrender	Emotional catharsis, creative release
Divine presence	Avatar (Krishna), cosmic absolute	Personal, immanent, the beloved
Bhakti Concept	Surrender to Krishna	Universal love, creative surrender
Action	Nishkama karma (action without desire)	Offering life as a song to the divine

In the broader context of Indian reform movements, Tagore's reinterpretation stands against both mechanical ritualism and the rigidities of inherited authority. He learns from the Gita that the real enemy of spiritual growth is not desire itself, but clinging to the fruits of desire and refusing open-ended relationship with the divine.

This is evident in his critique of traditionalism in poetry and essays—"Let the old forms die if they cannot serve life!"—and in his practical experiments with Santiniketan, where education, art, and service become united acts of devotion.

4.4 Illustrative Case Studies: Individual Poems and Prose Examples

To see Tagore's engagement with the Gita in action, individual poems from "Gitanjali" and less-studied essays (such as "The Religion of Man") bear deeper scrutiny.

In "Gitanjali" 75, Tagore writes:

"Deliverance is not for me in renunciation.

I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight."

This neatly turns the ascetic interpretation of the Gita's teachings on its head, promoting a joyful embrace of worldly involvements—a hallmark of Tagore's spiritual humanism.

Tagore's essay "The Religion of Man" frames Krishna not as a sectarian god but as an image of the Supreme Person (Purushottama), the creative principle in all beings, attuned to the "unending music" of the universe. Here the Gita becomes a living text—constantly evolving in meaning as human self-understanding grows.

4.5 Globalization and the Recontextualization of the Gita

Tagore was keenly aware of the need to make Indian spiritual insights accessible to a global audience. His English translations of "Gitanjali," and cross-cultural lectures, such as those at Oxford and Harvard, reframe the Gita's teachings for seekers of all backgrounds, stripping away dogmatic apparatus and emphasizing universality (Lakshmi, 2023).

Through a "religion of man"—neither dogmatic theism nor empty secularism—Tagore channels the Gita into a vision of spiritual democracy: each person must find and follow the divine within, regardless of historical or cultural boundaries.

4.6 Critical Appraisal: Limitations and Critiques of Tagore's Approach

Scholars occasionally critique Tagore's poetic universalism as risking vagueness or overlooking harsh realities found in the Gita's context of warfare and crisis. While Tagore embraces the agony of doubt and longing, some may contend that his lyricism softens the Gita's existential realism. However, as Amartya Sen and others note, Tagore's aestheticization is itself an ethical and philosophical strategy, reframing violence and strife as inner psychological drama, open to catharsis and transformation.

5. Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore's reinterpretation of the Bhagavad Gita is as much an act of poetic creation as it is of philosophical exegesis. By moving the battle from Kurukshetra to the interior life, Tagore universalizes the Gita's dilemmas and aspirations, making them legible and urgent for modern humanity. Through an original synthesis of action, surrender, love, and creativity, Tagore not only preserves but rejuvenates one of India's foundational texts. His works urge ongoing renewal of spiritual tradition—rooted in but never shackled by the past.

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