

# Are the sparks of Bhakti in Tagore's *Gitanjali* inherent in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism?

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## *Abstract*

Rabindranath Tagore (1861 - 1941) wrote his illustrious lyric *Gitanjali* (Song-offering), a collection of one hundred and three poems, originally in Bengali and translated later into English himself.

The main tenet of these lyrics is based on *bhakti/prema-bhakti*, i.e., perfect devotion, which found its way since ancient times in the Vedas, Vedānta, Purāṇas (the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, particularly), diverse Vaiṣṇavīc schools (including Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism) and in almost all current regional religious and philosophical literatures in India.

In this paper, the implications of Bhakti in the creative impulses of Tagore - exemplified in a few poems of his master creation *Gitanjali* – with particular emphasis on the four most general philosophical principles of interest are investigated:

. *sṛṣṭi-tattva*, or the principle of creation, sustenance and destruction of the human beings (*jīva*): equivalent to *sambandha* in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism

. *bandhana-tattva*, or how one becomes entangled in the wheels of *saṃsāra*: equivalent to 'delusion of *jīva* by *māyā-śakti*' in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism

. *bhakti-tattva*, or how on being sufficiently tormented, one might search for freedom and be initiated to strive for it through *sādhana-/bhāva-bhakti*: equivalent to *abhidheya* in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and finally,

. *mukti-tattva*, as implied in the multiple interactions (*līlā*) between the infinite/divine and the finite/living beings, as to how one - purified through *prema-bhakti* - may attain freedom/liberation in one's own life and be in a state of perfect harmony with one's own self, the world and the divinity. It is this very realization of freedom, that bestows upon the *jīva* courage and confidence, strength and knowledge necessary to achieve a blissful existence in this world: equivalent to *prayojana* in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.

The above four principles are intermittently brought into comparison with the respective equivalent principles postulated in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, as propounded by Lord Śrī Caitanya (1486 - 1534) in his *acintya-bhedābheda-vāda* (the doctrine of inconceivable, simultaneous oneness and difference). The analogies as well as the differences of both these schools of thoughts are highlighted and discussed, wherever necessary, in some details.

The paper concludes with some remarks on an almost uninterrupted transmission of the very conception of Bhakti as a guiding principle for the human lives in India over the past four thousand years, whereas its implications are modulated by the religious/philosophical waves of the respective schools.