

Love and Devotion to the Divine: A Cross-Cultural Exploration of  
'Nayagan - Nayagi Bhava' in Tagore's *Gitanjali* and Meera's  
*Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal*

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**ABSTRACT**

Comparative Literature is the study of literary texts which are linguistically different. Comparative Indian literature is advocated by Indian comparatists to understand the unity that runs through the seemingly diversified kinds of literature of modern India. The chief objective of Indian comparative literature is to trace the similarities among the writers of various regional languages, and thereby equate their underlying similarity to Indianness which is an indispensable part of all Indian literature. Tagore and Meera are writers of modern poetry and are influenced by the pattern

of Western poetry. Tagore's *Gitanjali* and Meera's *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal* are composed in the same genre, prose poems. Also, the dominant idea in the texts, as has been asserted by many critics is love. This research article aims to ascertain the nature of parallel elements in the art of senior poet Tagore from Bengali and the later-day poet Meera from Tamil Nadu. The physical aspect of love that runs through *Gitanjali* is metaphysical and mystical. Tagore can present both male and female points of view in love. Meera's *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal* seems to glorify physical love. But it also contains much of spiritual elements. Abdul Kather, a Tamil poet and researcher states "Meera's *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal* reveals his devotion for his lady love." (74). It shows that Meera is worshiping his ladylove as his God. This analysis reveals many parallels between Tagore and Meera. Both Tagore and Meera present the physical love between man and woman, and the sacred love between man and God, While the first category dominates in Meera, the second dominates in Tagore. In both the poems, 'nayagan -nayagi bhava' of worshiping God as lover and beloved is seen. It shows their longing for reunion with their Soul.

**Keywords:** Tagore, *Gitanjali*, Meera, *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal*, God, love, lover, beloved, Life, Parvati, and Divine.

## Introduction

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationship between the literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief such as arts, philosophy, history, and social science, religion, etc. on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human experience. (H.H. Remak,1)

Comparative Literature is the study of literary texts which are linguistically different. The Indian Renaissance awakened the spirit of nationalism and it also paved the way for religious, cultural, and literary revivals. Humayun Kabir says, "The English Romantics have influenced the Bengali Romantics to a considerable degree, who in turn have influenced the Tamil Romantics . . ." (125). Indeed, a new desire for liberty and a sense of revolt against authority which informed the

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works of English Romantics stirred the younger generation of the Bengali literary world, and as a result of this, a new note of individualism and revolt was born: Tagore and Meera. Considering Meera's book as good as Tagore's *Gardener*, Ki. Raja Narayanan praised the poet: "I wish to call you, 'the Tagore in Tamil Nadu.'" (221).

Tagore was born on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1861 in Calcutta. Tagore was a significant contributor to the emerging history of Indian Literature in English. He expressed himself responsibly to the twin worlds of the English Romantic poets, and Indian devotional poetry in general. His poem, *Gitanjali* won him the Nobel prize for Literature in 1913. The songs in *Gitanjali* are the poet's meditation on God, Man, and Nature.

Meera (Mee. Rajendran) was born on 10th October 1938 in Sivaganga, a small town in the Southern District of Tamil Nadu. Apart from being a Principal and Senior Professor, he was also the editor of a Tamil monthly magazine 'Sakthi'. His poem, *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal* reflects the ideas of *Gitanjali*. This article investigates a parallel study of *Gitanjali* and *Kanavukal + Karpanaikal = Kakitankal*. It is a thematic comparison of the physical and metaphysical facets of love.

Meera's *Kanavukal+ Karpanaikal=Kakitankal* was an instant success. Reception to Meera's poetry and the popularity of *Kanavukal+ Karpanaikal=Kakitankal* could be understood from the fact that more than 14 editions of the book have been issued so far. In terms of form and theme, both Tagore and Meera have been applauded as unique and great by scholars and critics. At the same time, Meera himself accepts the fact that he has been influenced by Tagore in his own inimitable style. He explained it as:

In my early days, Mahakavi Bharathi and Bharathidasan influenced me more than any other. When, I lost my heart to Gibran and Tagore, my friends and critics started telling me that my poetry sounded more of these two. (58).

Meera himself has acknowledged Tamil poets and Gibran and Tagore from outside. This study is not an influence study. The investigation is devoted to a parallel study of both the texts *Gitanjali* and *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal*.

Love lights the inner world of human sensibilities and draws man nearer to man. The treatment of love in Indian Literature dates back to classical Literature. There is a pattern, a formula in most of the literature that traces the theme of love. Jaya Dev and Vidyapathi in the West and Andal and Mira (the Hindu mystic poet who sang devotional songs for Lord Krishna) in the South have enriched literature with fine poems of love that are termed as, ‘nayagan - nayagi bhava’ in poetry. V. Rama Murthy, in his introduction to *Gitanjali* states, “One cannot “Love” the infinite, but one can love Krishna or Christ as remembered in one’s mind. There are so many approaches to the divine but the highest and the most intimate is that of a beloved for her lover. This is known as “Gopibav” or “Madhurabhav.” (11). The name of Radha, Krishna’s dearest Gopi, is not to be found only in Bhagavath Purana but also in the works of Jeyadev, Vidyapathi, and Chandidas. In Jeya Dev’s Gitagovindam, Krishna and Radha are shown as lovers. Chandidas is still remembered for his treatment of romantic love. Vidhapathi’s songs are remarkable for their lyrical charm, erotic propensity, and devotional fervour.

The Bhakti movement is very important one in the literary history of the Tamils. Andal, the only woman poet among the Alvars, was found as a baby in a flower garden by Periyalvar and brought her up. When she grew up, she chose Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam for her bridegroom. She boldly says, “If anyone talks about a man as my husband, I will not live.” (10). She offers herself fully to God. Her strong faith in God won for her the love of the Lord. Mirabai, the former queen of a small Rajput principality, who gave up her all for her Girdhar that is Krishna, is a poet of a high order.

I have planted the vine of love and irrigated it  
Again and again with tears  
I have cast away the fear of the world. What can  
Anyone do to me?

Come what may. Mira’s love for God is fixed. (Harish Trivedi - 86)

Tagore in Bengal and Meera in Tamil are modern Indian poets who have enriched contemporary Indian poetry. Unlike most love poets, both Tagore and Meera presented male and female points of view in love.

Though in the larger frame, *Gitanjali* seems to be a pure poem of spiritual love, the physical aspect of love is not absent. In Meera's *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal*, the poems very often seem to deal with the physical passions, but they achieve a metaphysical property in their total effect. Hence, Abu Sayeed Ayyuh says, "Gitanjali- Gitimalya – Gitali are quite obviously poems of songs of love and God." (81). However, the sense of physicality of love is not totally absent. The physical aspect of love that runs through *Gitanjali* is metaphysical and mystical. This has been affirmed by many writers. Humayun rightly says,

... for him (Tagore) God was essentially love. The love of the mother for her child or the lover for the beloved are only instances of the supreme love, that is God. And this love expresses itself not only in the ecstatic devotion the mystic but also the routine of everyday life of the common man." (75-76).

Meera's *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal* seems to glorify physical love. But it also contains much of spiritual elements. Abdul Kather, a Tamil poet and researcher states, "Meera's *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal* reveals his devotion to God and it is also devotion for his lady love. (74). In song 66 of *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal*, the protagonist pleads to his lady love: "My Parvati! Shatter not your disciple!" (66). Here the poet distances himself as a disciple.

However, critics differ on the precise nature of the love theme in *Kanavukal+Karpanaikal=Kakitankal*. Another Tamil critic Ilavenil, accuses Meera of confusing his readers: "It is confusing whether he is singing the invisible God as his lover like Tagore or he is singing about his girlfriend who is singing his joys and sorrows. (quoted in Abdul Kather- 264)" As if to answer such questions, Meera quotes as an epigraph the words of Emerson: "Our love of beautiful things on earth is due to the search by our soul for the absolute." (1). The metaphysical slant in the poem is highlighted by the epigraph.

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In his introduction to the poetry collection entitled, Streaks, Dr. Bala, a Tamil Poet and Critic says,

...There is a tradition of love poetry in Tamil dating to the distant past. This tradition has been recently enriched by a new eclectic approach exemplified by the neo-criticism of Kannadasan, the veiled social criticism of Meera, and the more open social awareness of Bharathidasan. These poets have made use of love as theme but with ulterior motives. (IV).

Bala, in the above words, seems to stress the fact that there is no pure love poetry, and many love poems tend to become poems on public themes as well.

There are many parallels in the motifs that structure the poems of Meera and Tagore. The Tagorean model is seen in Meera's compositions, particularly in situational structures. In both poems, the lover is yearning for physical touch and pleasures. The pleasures of touch providing strength to 'life' is a recurrent idea in both Tagore and Meera. Tagore considers God, his lover as the source of his powers and the cause of his actions. He addresses God as, the "Life of his life." He says that he will try to keep his body pure so that it may be worth of his touch for it. He feels that it is His touch alone that gives life and vitality to the different parts of his body.

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure.  
Knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.  
I shall never try to keep all untruths out from my  
Thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has  
Kindled the light of reason in my mind  
I shall ever try to drive all evils away from heart  
And keep my love in flower knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost  
shrine of my heart  
And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions,  
Knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act. (*Gitanjali-IV*)

Tagore yearns for the Lord's touch in *Gitanjali*. And as in *Kanavukal +Karpanaikal =Kakitankal*, Meera considers himself impure and he says that the touch of his ladylove will purify him. There is an echo of Tagore in Meera's poem.

I know  
Your hand  
Will purify everything.  
Touch  
My body  
Which hides  
Sin and evil things.  
And make me pure. (*Kanavukal +Karpanaikal =Kakitankal -20*).

Tagore in some of the poems, shows the protagonist as a man and portrays God as a bride.

Thus, it is that thy joy in me is so full. Thus, it is that  
Thou hast come down to me. O thou lord of heavens,  
Where would be thy love if I were not?  
Thou hast taken me as thy partner of all this wealth.  
In my heart is the endless play of delight. In my  
Life thy will is ever taking shape. (*Gitanjali-VI*).

“Where would be thy love if I were not”? suggests his possessiveness. A reversal of this idea is seen in Meera. In *Gitanjali*, Tagore considers God as his life partner whereas in Meera the narrator considers his lady love as his God. He worships his beloved as if she is God incarnate and calls her, ‘his Parvati’. In Meera's poem, *Kanavukal +Karpanaikal =Kakitankal*, the images he used are reflections of his experience. His images are taken from the world of nature, arts, literature, and tradition. The poet narrator prays to God to immerse him in the vast ocean of eternity, so that he may once again enjoy the sweet touch of his beloved and see her face. He expresses it as:

Are you going to bid farewell  
And disappear like  
The plough of water in the ocean  
That appears as the trail of the ship. (*Kanavukal +Karpanaikal =Kakitankal -79*).

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## Summation

The objective of Literature is to provide poetic pleasure to the reader. The poetic pleasure is gained by appealing to the emotion of a reader. Tagore and Meera worship God through their poems and delight the readers by using the 'nayagan -nayagi bhava' motif.

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