Chapter 4
The Concept of Divine Love in Tagore and Kabir

“He who, offering the highest love to Me, preaches the most profound gospel of Gita among My devotees, shall come to Me alone; there is no doubt about it.”

Bhagwat Gita

In mystical poetry, love is the central motif for expressing ecstasy of religious experience. In his Bhakti Yoga: The Yoga of Love and Devotion, Swami Vivekananda propounds, “God is love, and only he who has known God as love, can be a teacher of godliness and God to man” (33). Bhakti poetry also sings this awareness of love by extending the human love to a divine proportion, equating (wo)man’s love for the beloved to the soul’s love for the Divine. ‘Prema’ (love) is a very common appearance in bhakti poetry.

The prime atmosphere of bhakti is love in its different forms and relations like vatsalya (parent-child); sakhya (friendship); dasya (servant-master); guru bhakti (teacher-disciple) and sringara or madhurya (erotic love). Kururamma from Kerala is a quintessence of vatsalyabhakti as she saw her Kannan as a child and poured motherly affection on the Lord; Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, like Sudama, had a friendly love for the Lord. Surdas sang songs of dasya bhakti; Tulsidas worshiped his Lord as guru and visualised himself as an ardent disciple; Andal and Meerabai are the epitomes of sringara bhakti, who saw their chosen deity as their Divine consort; Jayadeva’s Geethagovindam is also the archetype of erotic love of Radha and Krishna, which is an expression of the relationship between jeevathma and Paramathma. We find a combination of all these different types of love elucidated in
the 19th Century Tamil poet Subrahmanya Bharathi. His Kannan Paattu (Songs of Krishna) is a much acclaimed effort to depict God as the source and the target of various kinds of human passions. Bharathi’s Kannan songs are an exquisite collection of songs where he depicts the various facets of Lord Krishna’s life and sees the Lord in various relations. These songs depict Krishna at the time of His birth (Kannan Pirapu), His arrival (Kannan Varavu), His praise (Kannan Thuthi), His physical description (Kannamma Angavarannai), Kannan as companion (Kannan yen Thozhan), as mother (Kannan yen Thai), as father (Kannan yen Thandai), as servant (Kannan yen Sevakan), as ruler (Kannan yen Arasan), as disciple (Kannan yen Seedan), as guru (Kannan yen Sadguru), as child (Kannan yen Kozhandai), as a naughty little boy (Kannan yen Villayaattu Pillai), as lover (Kannan yen kaadalan), as Lady Love (Kannamma yen Kaadali), and Krishna as the family deity (Kannan yen Kuladeivam).

_Bhakti_, or the love for the Divine is the key to God-realisation; but the _Bhakti_ Movement was a rebellion against the traditional norms. The Movement, which sprouted in Tamil Nadu as early as the 6th Century, and spread across the Indian subcontinent between the 12th and the 17th Centuries, began in the vein of an unorthodox Movement, as it advocated rebellion against caste distinctions and gender differences in the path of spiritual quest, in the process, disregarding orthodox rituals. The _Bhakti_ saints dispensed with mere exhibition through rituals and supported the cause of the marginalised seekers of the Divine, making them conscious of the power of Divine love in the direction of ultimate realisation and communion with the Divine. A group of teachers or saints like Ramananda, Ravidas, Raidas, Vallabhacharya, Surdas, Tulsidas, Namdev, Dhyaneshwar, Tukaram, Meerabai, Lal Ded, and other mystics, were the leading light in the Movement propagating the importance of love for the
Divine and of the Divine. They taught how a true seeker could shed the barriers of caste, creed and gender and could progress on the path of spirituality, forgetting the encumbrances of rites and rituals, the ignorance of Sanskrit, and the restraining complexities of philosophy, and could attain Divine communion by simple expression of their irresistible love for the Divine. This period brought to the front, a wave of devotional literature in regional and ethnic languages of India. It is in this line of bhakti poets that Sant Kabirdasji and Mahakavi Rabindranath Tagore have also impressed their mark. This chapter will deal in detail, the concept of Divine love as envisaged in these two poets.

Before entering the deep sea of Divine love envisioned by these two poet seers, we must have a brief knowledge of the concept of Divine love in the path of spiritual awakening. At this juncture a specific study of Swami Vivekananda is inevitable. The eight volumes of Swami Vivekananda’s lectures, writings, and letters, through which we find the message of Vedanta unfolding, act as a beacon light to a spiritual aspirant,

… unfolding the potential divinity of man, developing an unshakable faith in oneself, manifesting absolute fearlessness of any kind, and attaining complete freedom of the Spirit now enmeshed in this body-mind complex. To attain to that total freedom even while living is the ultimate goal of human beings. (v)

Through nonchalant and persistent effort and the timely guidance of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Vivekananda’s inner eye opened and he realised the ultimate truth. Through his vision he concluded that there were basically four paths of God-realisation – *Karma Yoga* (The Path of Action), *Gnana Yoga* (The Path of Knowledge), *Bhakti Yoga* (The Path of Devotion), and *Raja Yoga* (The Path of
Meditation). The scholar would like to give a theoretical base for the quest into the concept of Divine love in Tagore and Kabir, basing the research on Swami Vivekananda’s views on *Bhakti Yoga* or The Path of Devotion.

According to Vivekananda, “Bhakti yoga is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing, and ending in love.” (189) He quotes Narada in his explanation of *bhakti* aphorisms where Narada defines *bhakti* as an “intense love of God.” (189) He further adds by recording the definition of *bhakti* by Prahlada, the greatest of *bhaktas*: “That deathless love which the ignorant have for the fleeting objects of the senses – as I keep meditating on Thee, may that love not slip away from my heart!” (189) Vivekananda also quotes a definition from the *Devi Bhagavata* wherein *para bhakti* or higher love is defined thus: “As oil poured from one vessel to another falls in an unbroken line, so when the mind in an unbroken stream thinks of the Lord, we have what is called *para-bhakti*, or supreme love.” (190)

In Swami Vivekananda’s opinion love is the ultimate emotion and is the cause of both good as well as evil:

Whatever in society is good and great and sublime is the working out of that love. Whatever in society is very bad, nay, diabolical, is also the ill-directed working out of the same emotion of love… It is this same feeling of love, well or ill-directed, that impels one man to do good and to give all he has to the poor, while it makes another man cut the throats of his brethren and take away all their possessions. The former loves others as much as the latter loves himself. (*Vedanta* 190)

*Bhakti* yoga guides humans towards the right direction in a scientific manner, directing our love (*para bhakti*) towards the Divine. There are various steps in the
process of the ultimate realisation or communion through Divine love. Vivekananda quotes from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and explains the various stages thus:

At the beginning it was love for the self, but the claims of the little self made love selfish. At the end came the full blaze of light, when that self had become the Infinite. That God, who at first was a Being somewhere, became resolved, as it were, into Infinite Love. Man himself was also transformed. He was approaching God. He was throwing off all vain desires, of which he was full before. With desires vanished selfishness, and at the apex he found that Love, Lover, and Beloved were One. (203, *Vedanta*)

The importance of *bhakti yoga* or the concept of love for the Divine is brought out very vividly in this *doha* by Kabirdas,

> Says Kabir, the wise preceptor
> Has given the know-how anon
> To realize the Supreme Lord, Rama,
> By simple practice of love-devotion. (G N Das 1)

The same idea is envisaged in Tagore’s *Gitanjali* when he sings,

> I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my Heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou Hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart. (19)

God cannot be apprehended by the senses. He is beyond logic and argument and can be seen only through whole-hearted devotion or *bhakti*. The *Bhagavatam* propitiates that the revelation of God to man is the highest boon granted by Him to man. And this can be achieved only through whole-hearted dedication and devotion
coming out of true love and complete surrender of the self-ego. In the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, as quoted in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Narada defines *Bhakti* as

… of the nature of intense love for God. Love culminates in the ultimate communion of the human with the Divine. All love is the result of and results in attachment – worldly love or human love on the one hand is our attachment to our friends, and relatives, or worldly materials and Divine love on the other hand, our attachment towards the Divine. (148 -149)

Love is the innate nature of all human beings and by birth, a child has love for its mother, father, family, friends, society, country, and the list must expand to encompass the whole universe. From this expansion of view, the focus comes back to opening the inner eye, which makes one realise the Divine within one’s self and with that realisation the search ends in the ultimate blissful communion. R K Gupta refers to the importance of love as enumerated by the *Sufi* saints and mentions in his book titled *Yogis in Silence: The Great Sufi Masters*:

The medium of shedding ego is love. It is keeping this in mind that family life has been prescribed in the Hindu scriptures. In family life, one develops love and affection for one’s kith and kin, which gradually expands to take the shape of devotion. Love for all is the love for the Almighty or the devotion. (272)

If this world view of love was understood by all human beings alike, the world would be a better place to live in. All religious scriptures point out to this ideal of loving everyone in a like manner. This notion is very evident from the commentary of Swami Chinmayananda for the twenty-fifth *sloka* of Aadi Sankaracharya’s *Bhaja Govindam*, “In a loveless life of hate and meanness, of littleness of heart and limited viewpoint, there is nothing but suffocation, sorrow, and agitation….” (90)
moment we start loving honestly, sincerely, and unconditionally, love of the same
depth and texture must reach us back. What we receive in the world is but an echo of
our own heart’s cry. What we see in others’ faces is nothing but a reflection of our
own features! (91, *Bhaja Govindam*)

Both Kabir and Tagore have highlighted the importance of looking within for
the Divine presence. Kabir sings of this realisation when he voices in one of his *dohas*
that the Lord whom a seeker is searching for cannot be found in the world outside,
because (s)he is within the seeker just like the sweet smelling musk within the deer,

Like fragrance in the heart of flower
In you the Lord dwells
Musk is lodged in the navel of deer
Like the deer you seek Him somewhere else. (G N Das 6)

Unaware of the dwelling of the Supreme within one’s self, the ignorant seeker
hunts for the Omnipresent in the temples, churches or mosques outside. The same
conception is envisaged in Tagore when he professes in his *Gitanjali*:

The traveller has to knock at every alien door to
Come to his own, and one has to wander through all
The outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the
end. (23)

Here Tagore elucidates the presence of the Lord within the portals of one’s
own heart and not in the sanctum sanctorum of a temple. Tagore voiced his realisation
of the significance of Divine love in the process of God-realisation through many of
his songs and poems. Scholars, critics and other seekers who had a close association
with the great poet have also recorded this notion of his. In his book entitled *Living*
with the Himalayan Masters, Swami Rama has dedicated an entire chapter to Tagore, where he mentions,

Tagore believed that all existences constitute the one organism of the entire cosmos, emitting love as the highest manifestation of its vital energy and having as its soul the center of the spiritual galaxy…. Love of God is a sympathetic and synthetic response. The finite being is as much a requirement for God as God for the finite being. (225-226)

This section of the research will focus on the concept of Divine love as envisioned by the two poet-seers under study. A thorough reading of the One Hundred Poems of Kabir and the Gitanjali bring to light the concept being developed through the following stages – developing love for the Divine; harbouring an intense yearning for the Divine; taking the human love to divine proportions and equating human love to Divine love; shedding of one’s ego; total surrender and the final communion with the Divine; the realisation of the Divine within one’s self and in all the creations in this universe. These are the different stages of Divine love that the poems of Kabir and Tagore take us through in the odyssey of the search for the Divine.

**Developing Love for the Divine**

As propounded by the path of Bhakti yoga, which lays down the nature of the Divine as love, both these poets advocate the concept of love for the Divine and an undying urge to attain Divine communion. God, according to both Kabir and Tagore, is not found in mere abstractions, rites and rituals, but in the observance of love. To quote Evelyn Underhill from her Introduction to One Hundred Poems of Kabir, “He is the One Love who pervades the world, discerned in His fullness only by the eyes of
love; and those who know Him thus share, though they may never tell, the joyous and ineffable secret of the universe.” (xvii) Kabir and Tagore propagate the concept of apprehending God as the Subject and the Object of love. The twin passions of love and joy form the basis of the metaphysical concept of Kabir and Tagore, laying the foundation for God realisation.

Kabir sings out to the seeker to wake up to the fact that God is very close to us and that we must seek the Lord as a lover would seek to unite with the beloved, “Run to the feet of your Beloved: for your Lord / Stands near to your head.” (17) Kabir believes that love is the only path for Divine union and in an archetypal presentation elucidates how the gates of the Divine abode can be opened only through the key of Love. The poet wants mankind to wake up to the ultimate reality and comprehend the fact that one’s ignorance shuts the Divine door which can be easily opened with the key of love.

Kabir professes that if one misses on this realisation of love as the ultimate emotion for God-realisation, then one is losing on a great fortune:

THE lock of error shuts the gate, open it with

The key of love:

Thus, by opening the door, thou shalt wake the Beloved.

Kabir says: “O brother! do not pass by such good fortune as this. (29)

In one of his dohas, Kabir expresses the concept of Divine Love metaphorically in this manner:
Preceptor, the washerman, disciple, the cloth
And Lord’s Name the soap
On the washing stone of love
It is washed to glow superb. (G N Das 2)

The metaphor from a washerman’s life impresses the importance of love upon the listeners of Kabir’s times and social backdrop. He explains how the disciple glows with the radiance of love. Using the parlance of washing, Kabir explains just as the washerman uses soap and stone to whiten his clothes, in a like manner, the devotee or true seeker uses the name of the Lord and love for the Lord in order to radiate his own soul. Thus he urges the seeker to develop an undying love for the Divine in the odyssey towards the ultimate realisation.

In Kabir’s opinion, the different stages of developing love for the Divine are as follows:

The first step is pining for the Lord
Next, craving for His love
Says Kabir, then one may hope, my friend
Love of the Lord to have. (GN Das 12)

Tagore, in his own capacity, has also introduced his readers to a similar strain, where he exclaims the importance of developing love for the Divine. He brings out the importance of the emotion of love and envisages the passion of love to be the ultimate sentiment that will aid the seeker on the spiritual quest. He sings, “I AM only waiting for love to give myself up at last /into his hands.” (26)

Tagore further extends the idea to explain that although one might be engrossed in the worldly affairs throughout one’s youth, during old age one must develop love for
the Divine and pine for union with the Divine. Tagore did that himself. He led a thoroughly worldly life through his younger days but as he grew old, he developed a craving for Divine love. He words this craving very beautifully in his *Gitanjali* thus:

…Ah, love, 
why dost thou let me wait outside at the door all alone? (27)

In another song, Tagore yearns for the kindling of the fire of desire within him, frenzy for the love tryst with the Supreme, leading him from falsehood to truth; darkness to light; death to immortality (*asathoma sadgamaya, thamasoma jyotirgamaya, mrityorma amritam gamaya*). His prayer is, “…Let not the hours pass by in / The dark. Kindle the lamp of love with thy life.” (32)

In his *Song Offering*, Tagore chooses to dedicate his entire life for the love of God, and makes an earnest appeal to the Almighty to take away everything that belongs to him and leave him with only the fetters of Divine love so as to become one with the Supreme Spirit.

LET only that little be left of me whereby I may name Thee my all…. 
Let only that little of my fetters be left whereby I am bound with thy will, and thy purpose is carried out in my life – and that is the fetter of thy love. (35)

Tagore sings about the dawn of realisation where he apprehends Divine love,

YES, I know, this is nothing but thy love, O beloved of my heart - …

The morning light has flooded my eyes – this is
 thy message to my heart. (54)

Realising that God conveys the message of love, Tagore finds himself filled with the consciousness of Divine love and prays to the almighty to drink from his [Tagore’s] cup of life. He attributes his poetic powers to God’s love and joy and remarks:

Thou givest thyself to
me in love and then feelest thine own entire
sweetness in me. (60)

Tagore opines that God’s love resides within each individual and adds flavour to each life:

O thou beautiful, there in the nest it is thy love
that encloses the soul with colours and sounds and
odours. (61)

The poet prays through a verse to perceive the love of God through all his senses and to enjoy the bliss of Divine love: “Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination / of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love.” (65)

As Tagore visualises his last phase of life, awaiting death, he offers all his joys and sorrows, all his hopes, wishes and desires, and all his passions to God through love: “All that I am, that I have, that I hope and all my / Love have ever flowed
towards thee in depth of secrecy.” (76)

Quoting Evelyn Underhill from her introduction to Tagore’s translation of Kabir’s poems,
All is soaked in love: that love which he described in almost Johannine language as the ‘Form of God’. The whole of creation is the Play of the Eternal Lover; the living, changing, growing expression of Brahma’s love and joy...His manifestation is love; His activity is joy. (xix)

Once the seeker develops the emotion of love, the spiritual odyssey becomes smoother. The next step in the direction of Divine communion is naturally, an intense craving for Divine love. Love is realised only if there is extreme craving for the Beloved.

**Harbouring a Craving for Divine Love**

Considering the Divine to be the beloved, for whose love the human life desires, like all mystic poets, Kabir and Tagore also advise the seeker to develop an intense craving for divine communion. Kabir professes thus:

> He who pines for the Lord in heart  
> He can see Him there  
> Like face in mirror He can be seen  
> None can catch Him anywhere. (G N Das 8)

He expresses his eagerness to meet the Lord, “My heart must cleave to my Lover” (*One Hundred, 7*) and continues to communicate,

> Kabir says: ‘Listen to me, friend: he under-  
> Stands who loves. If you feel not love’s longing for your Beloved One; it is vain to  
> adorn your body, vain to put unguent on your eyelids.’ (7)
Kabir chooses to wait for his final union with the Supreme Soul like a passionate lover eagerly waiting the day of union, thereby exhibiting an extreme craving for the union of jeevathma with Paramathma. He urges the seeker to run to the feet of his Beloved (17) and with the same intense longing Kabir sings out:

MY body and my mind are grieved for the want of Thee;

O my Beloved! Come to my house.

....

Then what is this love of mine? I have no taste For food, I have no sleep; my heart is ever Restless within doors and without.

....

Who is there that will carry my news to my Beloved?

Kabir is restless: he is dying for sight of Him.” (26-27)

This is the intensity of craving that the poet advocates to the seeker on the spiritual quest who wishes to go back to Godhead.

Tagore expresses the same intensity in his Gitanjali, when he also sees himself as the lover craving for the rendezvous with his Beloved Lord. He also comprehends love to be the ultimate emotion that will lead a seeker to the Divine. In a poem, he expresses his eagerness for Divine communion by repeating the refrain, “I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands.” (26)

The poet is deeply in love with the Divine and craves for the ultimate bliss of Divine communion in the same way as a lover who is madly in love, awaits the union
with the beloved. Like the blind lover, Tagore is eager enough to go to any extent. The poet makes an earnest appeal and expresses his craving and desperation in such strong terms as,

If thou showest me not thy face, if thou leavest
Me wholly aside, I know not how I am to pass these long, rainy hours.
I keep gazing on the far-away gloom of the sky, and
My heart wanders wailing with the restless wind. (27)

Tagore, the lover, awaits the arrival of Lord Beloved with great patience and perseverance and he is confident of the tryst with the Divine at the end of his life’s journey. Through his continuous effort, endurance and vigil, he aims to achieve the final communion. The poet is certain about the dawn of re-union with the Sublime:

The morning will surely come, the darkness will
vanish, and thy voice pour down in golden streams
breaking through the sky. (27)

He understands the futility of all mundane desires, and experiences an intense craving and love for the Supreme Soul and the ultimate bliss of Divine communion. In song 38 of his collection *Gitanjali*, Tagore prays to the Lord:

THAT I want thee, only thee – let my heart repeat
without end. All desires that distract me, day and
night, are false and empty to the core.
As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition
for light, even thus in the depth of my unconsciusness rings the cry – ‘I want thee, only thee.’
As the storm still seeks its end in peace when it
strikes against peace with all its might, even thus
my rebellion strikes against thy love and still its cry
is – ‘I want thee, only thee.’” (37-38)

The above lines are explicit of Tagore’s extreme craving for the Divine and
his exposition of the one-pointed focus on achieving Divine union at the end of the
spiritual odyssey. The craving of his heart for the Divine communion is so forceful
that he entreats, “I …would wait and weep and wear out my heart in vain longing?”
(40)

The poet exclaims that he was scared of leaving his comfort zone but it was
his love for the Divine that gave him the courage to move on; he sees God everywhere
and expresses his desire not to lose God in the duality of this world. He realises that
his search for the Divine is of lifetimes and registers his intense craving for the Divine
when he sings:

Through birth and death, in this world or in
others, wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the
same, the one companion of my endless life who
ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the
unfamiliar.

….

…Oh, grant me my prayer that I
may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the
play of the many. (58)
The intention of life, particularly human, is to perceive God and to continue unwaveringly till such time his life’s mission is fulfilled. In Tagore’s opinion, the human being is perennially in an unceasing search for the Divine crossing lifetimes, and if he is unable to receive the blessings of divine vision, he should at least feel the pangs of separation. The poet believes that even when his hands are full of material gains, he must never forget that all this is worthless unless he gains the invaluable wealth of the Divine. This deep sorrow of separation is the sign of developing a craving for the Divine which will ultimately lead to the Divine communion:

If it is not my portion to meet thee in this my life
then let me ever feel that I have missed thy sight –
let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours. (68)

The intensity of the poet’s craving for the Divine is expressed thus, “I count months and years/ separated from thee.” (69) He is waiting for God’s grace to unite in love with the Lord and exclaims, “I shall melt and vanish away in …a smile of the white morning,/ in a coolness of purity transparent.” (69)

In the ninety-ninth song of *Gitanjali*, Tagore comes to the realisation that in the voyage of material life, the poet has been at the helm; but now he surrenders himself completely to the Lord and awaits God’s grace:

… Vain is this struggle…

…

I shall be wise this time and wait in the dark,
spreading my mat on the floor; and whenever it is
thy pleasure, my lord, come silently and take thy
seat here. (80-81)

This is the height of craving which the seeker develops in his spiritual
odyssey. Readers can find the equivalence of human love and divine love in the
poems of the two poets under review. This comparison makes the task of
comprehending the concept simpler.

**Human Love to Divine Love**

It is typical of mystical poetry to employ sensuous imagery to explicate the
inconspicuous nature of communion with the supra sensuous. Human consciousness
is committed to comprehending only that which can be perceived by the senses.
Hence a mystic, who wants to communicate Divine love to the common man,
inevitably draws upon its parlance with human love. In the *Upanishads*, the bliss of
*Brahman* is compared with the loving embrace of a beloved woman (S N Dasgupta 147). Dasgupta further elaborates that to love one’s husband and to serve him as God
was regarded from very early times as the only spiritualising duty for a woman.
Hence the notion that ordinary man-woman love could be so perfected as to become a
spiritual force also existed in the Indian mystical firmament. Both Kabir and Tagore
refer to human love in order to express man’s love for the Divine. Kabir expresses his
love for the Divine equating God to a fellow traveller, a *Fakir*. He sings:

TO Thee Thou hast drawn my love, O Fakir!

…..

Kabir says, “Thou hast united Thy heart to my
Heart, O Fakir! (7)
He defines a devout seeker in a verse where he mentions that the whole world is busy carrying out their mundane activities and only a true seeker grasps the true nature of the Almighty, which is a symbol of love. Here Kabir mentions the need to rise above ordinary human love and to rise towards Divine love and emphasises on the importance of detached love. Through his verse Kabir brings one to the realisation that human love is a symbol of attachment whereas Divine love is an epitome of true detachment:

The whole world does its work and commits its errors: but few are the lovers who know the Beloved.

The devout seeker is he who mingles in his heart

The double currents of love and detachment, like the mingling of the streams of Ganges and Jamuna…. (11)

In the same poem, Kabir points out the difference between the ordinary physical level of human love and the sublime consciousness of divine love. He insinuates that human love is basically an expression of lust whereas the love directed towards the Divine is of a nobler nature as it involves no expectations and hence man rises in love with the Divine. The difference between the two is worded thus, “If there be lust, how can love be there? /Where There is love, there is no lust.” (28) Human love is tainted with the passion of lust whereas the love that is directed towards the Divine is true love that has no colouring of lust or material desire in the offing.

Tagore’s versification also generates a similar tone of taking human love to divine proportions and making the seeker realise that (s)he must direct his/her love
towards the Divine. He addresses God as if addressing the beloved thus: “…Ah, love,/ why dost thou let me wait outside at the door all alone?” (27)

In another song Tagore describes the Lord as his beloved coming for a clandestine rendezvous. He allures the Lord to enter his house and spend the night with him:

The woodlands have hushed their songs, and

Doors are all shut at every house. Thou art the solitary wayfarer in this deserted street. Oh my only friend, my best beloved, the gates are open in my house – do not pass by like a dream. (29)

Waiting eagerly for the Lord as his beloved, Tagore sings thus, “WHERE dost thou stand behind them all, my lover,/ Hiding thyself in the shadows?” (39)

In these lines Tagore treats God as his darling, for whom he is waiting long hours, with a lot of flowers to make an offering, but unfortunately, others do not understand that God is the ultimate love and passersby misunderstand him and try to attract him but Tagore has committed his love for the Lord and is sure that the Lord would come some day. Through one of his poems, Tagore brings to light the difference between human love and Divine love thus:

By all means they try to hold me secure who love me in this world. But it is otherwise with thy love which is greater than theirs, and thou keepest me free.

Lest I forget them they never venture to leave me alone. But day passes by after day and thou art not seen.
If I call not thee in my prayers, if I keep not thee
in my heart, thy love for me still waits for my love. (34-35)

This poem clearly demonstrates the difference between human love and divine love. When human love is binding, divine love is free; when human love expects returns, divine love is not demanding; when human love is experienced only in proximity, divine love is always present - regardless of physical proximity; true love, that is, divine love is permanent, perfect and continuous. As Tagore experiences the bliss of divine love, he exclaims:

YES, I know, this is nothing but thy love, O beloved
of my heart – this golden light that dances upon the
leaves, these idle clouds sailing across the sky, this
passing breeze leaving its coolness upon my forehead. (54)

The seeker who realises the importance of Divine love and develops an intense craving for the Divine must now take the first step leading to realisation, which is, shedding of the ego that acts as a veil between the human being and the Divine.

Shedding of One’s Ego

In the path of spiritual quest, the penultimate step towards Divine communion is shedding of one’s ego. After the spiritual seeker develops love for the Divine and comprehends the omnipresence of the Divine, he establishes a craving for the Divine. The inevitable end of craving is satiation but a preliminary requisite for the same is the shedding of one’s ego. It is a mystical concept that the seeker forgets his self and
unites with the Supreme Soul. Kabir has vividly expressed this concept when he sings,

So long as man clamours for the I and the Mine,

his works are as naught:

When all love of the I and the Mine is dead, then

the work of the Lord is done. (4)

In a poem, Kabir calls out the importance of shedding the veil of ego and forgetting all shyness in order to attain Divine communion. In the same manner as for the physical consummation of love, the lover must shed the veil of shyness and unite with the beloved in conjugal love:

…I must not be shy,

if I would enjoy His love.

My heart must cleave to my Lover; I must with-

draw my veil, and meet Him with all my body (7)

Tagore voices the same opinion in a slightly different note. He opines that God speaks to the human soul in whispers which are inaudible when ornaments jingle. Hence pride and vanity must be given up and a life of simplicity and sincerity, devoid of ego, must be achieved in order to establish contact with the Divine:

…Ornaments would mar our union: they would come between thee and me;…

My poet’s vanity dies in shame before thy sight.

O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet. Only let
me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music. (20)

Tagore wakes up to the realisation that he has built a wall of ego around himself; a wall of name, fame, power, prestige and material prosperity. His pride in these material gains cements the wall and builds it higher and stronger, around him, thus obstructing his contact with the Divine. The poet visualises the spiritual conflict between the higher and the lower self in the process of self-realisation. The lower self comprising pride, vanity and egotism obstruct the progress of the higher self towards the Supreme. He feels ashamed of his own ‘little self’ and cries out, “HE whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this/ Dungeon…. I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.” (33)

Once the seeker sheds his/her ego, (s)he experiences total surrender and that unconditional surrender paves way to the final communion in Divine love. All major religions of the world point out ego to be the greatest hurdle on the path of the eternal quest, as A E I Falconar cites in his Sufi Literature and the Journey to Immortality,

He who wishes to become immortal must become his higher self. There is no other way. All esoteric teachings have a similar theme – there is in fact only one Path but there are many ways of describing the journey. All are about getting rid of the false ego, the personality that we have built up since childhood. In this process we must die to that evanescent and unreal personality. (153)

Hence ego is the veil that prevents divine grace from blessing the individual soul with Divine communion. The chosen few, who realise this truth, are prepared to
do away with the ego that governs all humans and are capable of complete surrender at the feet of the Divine.

**Total Surrender and the Communion with the Divine**

The aim of all mystical experience is consummation with the Divine which materialises as a result of Divine love. Kabir advises the spiritual seeker to forget about all paraphernalia and external sights of pilgrimage and surrender one’s soul for union with the Supreme Soul, “Take your seat on the thousand petals of the lotus,/ and there gaze on the Infinite Beauty.” (3) He manifests the concept of total surrender to the Supreme and the ultimate bliss arising out of it thus, “If you merge your life in the Ocean/ of Life, you will find your life in the/ Supreme Land of Bliss.” (14)

In order to attain the Supreme bliss, Kabir advocates complete surrender to the will of the Divine in unblemished love and assures the seeker on the path, the ultimate experience of transcendental bliss:

```
Touch His feet, who is one and
indivisible, immutable and peaceful; who
fills all vessels to the brim with joy, and
whose form is love. (47)
```

The poet explains how more than anything else he cherishes that love in his heart which is limitless, invaluable and also detached. In his opinion, it is very hard to cross the ocean of this material world and with that realisation he sings, “Listen to me, O Sadhu! few there are who have reached its end.” (20) In order to enjoy the ultimate bliss, he is willing to surrender completely to the Divine will and says, “I will offer
my body and mind to my Lord:/ I will give up my life, but never can I forget/ my Lord!” (20)

In one of his dohas, Kabir brings out the mystical experience of communion metaphorically. He says, just as ice melts and mingles with water, in the same manner, the man of devotion who experiences Divine love, unites with the Lord and the seeker’s heart mingles with that of the omnipotent and becomes one with the God.

G N Das provides the translation to Kabir’s doha thus:

If the heart mingles in the Lord’s
There is complete union
As melting ice mingles in water
In God the man of devotion. (12)

Tagore elucidates the consummation of the soul with the Super Soul in his own manner and starts by referring to the need of purity of mind and body as a pre-requisite for Divine communion. Through a verse, he pronounces thus:

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 ever try to drive all evils away from my
heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou
hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart. (18-19)

The poet’s total surrender to the Divine will is expressed when he claims to be living “in the hope of meeting with him…” (24). He says that when death comes to him, he will offer his all and prepare for a complete surrender. Tagore is willing to lay bare before the Almighty, all that he has earned throughout his life. Here the poet also
highlights the truth that one comes to this world empty handed and must leave the world empty handed; all the material gains that one accrues in the interim period are left behind when the individual soul goes on the final odyssey with the Supreme Soul:

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and Summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life will I place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door.” (75)

Finally, in his last song in the *Gitanjali*, Tagore submits completely and bows down to God, surrendering all his senses, his mind, his songs, his life, everything, at the feet of the Divine Master. As the cranes that are homesick fly night and day back to reach their abode in the mountains, the poet’s ideas and ideals, hopes and aspirations, his entire being, will fly to the eternal home – back to Godhead. The poet finally realised the Divine through complete surrender of his thoughts and feelings, his will and action, at the feet of the Divine:

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet

Like a rain-cloud July hung low with its burden of unshed showers. Let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.

(103)
Kabir and Tagore thus demonstrate the path of Divine realisation through love and any seeker on the spiritual quest can, to begin with, have a form of God in mind and direct his/ her love towards that form. As Sri Swamy Sivananda says in the *Essence of Bhakti Yoga*:

Love for God can never be the type of love cherished towards wife, children and property. There is much difference, though; even love for God is given an earthly colouring like that of son, husband, father, friend, etc., by some devotees who find it difficult to break all earthly connections at a stretch. (4)

This explains how Andal and Meerabai thought of the Lord as their bridegroom; Bhattatiri looked at God as the panacea for all illness; Jeyadeva sang the glories of the *Rasa krida* of the lord, perceiving the Lord as Divine Beloved; Subrahmanya Bharathi saw Kannan in all and all in Kannan. Divine love makes each soul unique. The ties of Divine love are stronger and more inclusive than mere family ties. It has the power to hold a wide variety of people together. Since man emanates from the Supreme, Divine love is ingrained in him by nature; just like the sweet fragrance dissipates from the rose, so is it natural for the soul to radiate the sweet fragrance of Divine love. In Swami Vivekananda’s opinion, as envisaged in his *Religion of Love*,

Sufficient unto him [the lover] is the ideal of love, and is it not self-evident that this universe is but a manifestation of this love? What is it that makes atoms unite with atoms, molecules with molecules, and causes planets to fly towards each other? What is it that attracts man to man, man to woman, woman to man, and animals to animals, drawing the whole universe, as it were, towards one centre? It is what is called love. Its manifestation is from
the lowest atom to the highest being: omnipotent, all-pervading, is this love.

(99)

The seeker on the spiritual odyssey who has gone through the various stages of Divine love towards the final communion with the Divine ultimately realises the Divine and comes to the awareness that there is a single Supreme Spirit that pervades the entire universe and also resides within one’s self.

**Realisation of the Divine within One’s Self**

The radical nature of the Divine as visualised by the *bhakti* poets was to perceive God in humanity and not as a mere text or idol or any other traditional symbol, as against the orthodox belief of traditional religious sects. The poet-seer-philosophers of the *bhakti* tradition sang in the common man’s language so that the lay man could comprehend the omnipresent in every human being thus sowing the seeds of religious tolerance and forbearing. Both Kabir and Tagore articulate the *Upanishad*ic concept of the need to look inward to understand the various states of awareness and consciousness. In Tagore’s translation of Kabir’s poem as it appears in *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*,

THE moon shines in my body, but my blind eyes cannot see it:

The moon is within me, and so is the sun.

The unstruck drum of Eternity is sounded within me; but my deaf ears cannot hear it…. (4)

Kabir clearly had the realisation that the Supreme was within each individual soul and one only had to wake up and become conscious of the ultimate truth. After
waking man up towards the search for the Divine within the walls of one’s own heart, Kabir voices his view that when there is grace from the Sublime it is then that an individual realises the Supreme Soul that is manifest in oneself and that is not visible otherwise:

…The Supreme Soul is seen within the soul,
The Point is seen within the Supreme Soul,
And within the Point, the reflection is seen again.
Kabir is blest because he has this supreme vision! (5)

Through these lines, Kabir highlights the importance of God’s grace for the ultimate realisation. In the very next poem, Kabir reiterates the presence of the omnipotent within the core of each individual heart thus:

WITHIN this earthen vessel are bowers
And groves, and within it is the Creator:
…..
Kabir says: “Listen to me, my friend! My be-loved Lord is within.” (5-6)

True to the nature of mysticism and philosophy, Kabir also sings paradoxically about the evasive nature of the Supreme in song 9:

…If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed:
If I say that He is without me, it is falsehood.
He makes the inner and the outer worlds to be Invisibly one;…
There are no words to tell that which He is. (6)

In another poem Kabir assumes the role of both the teacher and the disciple and through a string of questions and answers the poet tries to show the path of realisation to the true seeker and sings thus:

TO what shore would you cross, O my heart?...
There, there is neither body nor mind: and where
Is the place that shall still the thirst of the
soul? You shall find naught in that emptiness. (17)

The poet asks these rhetorical questions to catch the attention of the seeker on his spiritual quest. As a mystic himself, who has experienced the bliss of Divine vision, Kabir answers his own questions in the following manner, “Be strong, and enter into your own body: for/ there your foothold is firm. Consider it/ well, O my heart! go not elsewhere.” (18) In song 43, Kabir summarises his views for the seeker of the Divine and reiterates the spiritual seeker to open his inward eye and to look within in order to find the Supreme Soul within one’s own soul:

I LAUGH when I hear that the fish in the
Water is thirsty:
You do not see that the Real is in your home, and
you wander from forest to forest listlessly!
Here is the truth! Go where you will, to Benares
or to Mathura; if you do not find your
soul, the world is unreal to you. (32)
Kabir imparts the realisation that the seeker of the Divine need not travel in search of the Supreme outside, in places of pilgrimage. He instigates the seeker to look within. Kabir equates the search of the seeker for the Divine in holy places to the fish remaining thirsty inspite of living in water. This explains how mankind is living in and is surrounded by the Divine presence and yet is continuously engaged in a futile pilgrimage in search of God.

Tagore echoes the same thought of looking within one’s own soul to find the Supreme which is emanating within. He talks about the spiritual seeker on his spiritual odyssey thus:

THE time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long,….

It is the most distant course that comes nearest to thyself,…

my eyes strayed far and wide before I shut them and said ‘Here are thou!’ (23)

To impress upon the reader the desire to look within one’s self for the omnipresent, Tagore records in his Gitanjali:

ON the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying, and I knew it not…. I knew not then that it was so near, that it was Mine, and that this perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart. (28)
These verses vividly bring out the presence of the Lord within one’s inner sanctorum and also the ignorance of this truth on the part of the human being. Kabir compares the seeker to the musk deer who wanders around the forest in search of the source of the sweet scent; similarly Tagore mentions the seeker as searching for the blossom of the Divine lotus, little knowing the fact that the lotus is blooming within one’s own heart and nowhere outside. Both these poets thus urge the seeker to delve deep into one’s own heart to seek the Supreme in full glory and galore.

In song 47 from his collection, Gitanjali, Tagore depicts the predicament of the seeker of spiritual realisation who waits an entire night (the darkness of spirit) and proclaims his fear lest he may fall asleep in the morning (the renaissance of the spirit) when the Lord finally arrives. Tagore further develops the thought towards introspection in search of God, “Let him appear before my sight as the first of all/ Lights and all forms…. And let/ my return to myself be immediate return to him” (44)

Accordingly Tagore sets in the concept of looking within to find the Lord. A very similar idea is conveyed by Kabir when he sings:

The Lord dwells in the heart of men
Like the pupil in the eye
Fools this wisdom never gain
They seek Him far and neigh. (G N Das 7)

In her introduction to Tagore’s translation, One Hundred Poems of Kabir, Evelyn Underhill refers to “…the identity of substance between God and the soul, with its corollary of the total absorption of that soul in the Being of God as the goal of the spiritual life…” and adds that: the soul, in so far as it is real, is substantially identical
with God; and the true object of existence is the making patent of this latent identity, the realisation which finds expression in the Vedantist formula ‘That art Thou’. (xviii)

After setting the spiritual seeker to the realisation that God dwells within one’s own soul and that our soul deserves the same treatment as we would mete out to the Lord himself, both Kabir and Tagore desire to make man realise the ubiquitous nature of Divinity, the fact that the same divinity exists in all others as well, thus bringing out the concept of serving humanity as an expression of service to God (Manav seva, Madhav seva). Thus scholars can read the poems of Kabir and Tagore bearing in mind a sociological approach.

**Realising the Divine in All and Expressing Love towards All**

On the spiritual path, it is imperative to understand the unity of all creations and various seer-philosophers have expressed this variedly. To quote Eknath Easwaran from his book titled *Love is God: Nurturing Devotion for God Everyday*,

In the traditional interpretation, the Way of Love is a path toward love of God. But I don’t think it is any exaggeration to say that its essence is simply to love. As St. John says, if we fail in love of others we cannot say we know God, for God is love. Even to love another person completely, our consciousness has to be united, which is the very essence of the spiritual life. (32)

After realising the presence of the Divine within one’s own soul, the seeker learns to perceive the Divine as omnipresent and residing in every individual soul. Both Kabir and Tagore, as poet-seer-philosophers and mystics, experienced this ubiquitous nature of divinity and voiced the concept through their verses. Kabir claims God to be “the breath of all breath” (1)
He Himself is the tree, the seed, and the germ.
He Himself is the flower, the fruit, and the shade.
He Himself is the sun, the light, and the lighted.
He Himself is Brahma, creature, and Maya.
He Himself is the manifold form, the infinite space;… (5)

Kabir propounds the path towards God realisation to be one which combines bhakti yoga and gnana yoga – that is, love (or devotion) and wisdom. He accentuates the absolute necessity of a combination of love and wisdom by explaining the indivisible nature of the two:

THE river and its waves are one surf:…
Within the Supreme Brahma, the worlds are being told like beads:
Look upon the rosary with the eyes of wisdom. (9)

Kabir talks about realising the radiance of God as love and points out the importance of that realization, “O brother! He who has seen that/ radiance of love, he is saved.” (9)

While Kabir sang out to the seeker to realise the Vedantic notion of the omnipresent, omnipotent and the omniscient God, Tagore, who is closer to the modern times, realised the importance of serving the weaker section of the society as a mark of serving God. Tagore had in his mind the larger social purpose of helping the poorest section of the society. In order that the truly religious and spiritual seekers divert their energies towards assisting the downtrodden in the society, Tagore
introduces the thought that God resides with the marginalised and evokes the more fortunate individuals to lend a helping hand to the less fortunate:

HERE is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where
Live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost…

thou keepest company with the companionless among the
poorest, the lowliest, and the lost. (21-22)

The poet further establishes the presence of the Lord with the common man as against the orthodox notion of an Almighty Supreme residing in a heavenly abode and surveying the happenings on the earth below. He criticises all orthodox rites and rituals and cries out to the spiritual seeker to realise God in the common man and help the ‘Harijan’. Tagore reiterates that the Almighty dwells with the poorest and the weakest and appeals the seeker to look for the Divine in the humble dwellings:

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard
ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones.

He is with them in sun and in shower, and his
garment is covered with dust. (22)

Through these verses he appeals to the seeker of the Divine to leave the higher status that he has assumed and to come down to the level of the downtrodden and to find the Divine in service to mankind, “Put off thy holy/ mantle and even like him come down on /the dusty soil!... Meet him and/ stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.” (22-23)

After realising the presence of Divinity in the weakest section of the society, Tagore makes an appeal to the true seeker to assist the lowliest and thereby reach
closer to God. To set an example in this direction, he prays aloud to the Supreme soul to give him the knowledge and the courage to walk in the path of service to mankind:

   THIS is my prayer to thee, my lord – strike, strike at
   The root of penury in my heart.
   Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and
   Sorrows.
   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.
   Give me the strength to raise my mind high above
   Daily trifles.
   And give me the strength to surrender my strength
   To thy will with love. (36-37)

Tagore opines that the Almighty is one among us and that the best service to the Lord is by serving the society. He proclaims the human’s ignorance and the lack of understanding whereby he is unable to perceive God among his own weak brothers around him. It is with deep pain and shock that Tagore wakes up to the realisation that while the Almighty was so close to him in the form of the downtrodden brethren, he was spending his earnings at the temple. With this realisation he wakes up from the slumber and decides to help the poor of his vicinity, rather than donating money to temples, “Thou art the Brother amongst my brothers,/ but I heed them not, I divide not my earnings with them,/ thus sharing my all with thee.” (67)
Through these lines Tagore brings to light the socialistic ideal and through piety, he highlights the need for developing love for the Divine. The realisation of Divine love inevitably leads to light at the end of the spiritual odyssey.

Owing to the didactic nature of the topic under review, the researcher comes to the conclusion that each one of us is unique in the eyes of God and before Him, all are alike - no individual is big or small; high or low. This fact was understood by great poet-seer-philosophers like Kabir and Tagore and they expounded the fact for the benefit of the common mankind. These poets make one realise the presence of the Supreme in each individual soul and hence to become aware of the Super consciousness within, making each individual a unique reflection of the Absolute. The spiritual seeker is in the eternal quest for this uniqueness of the soul and this quest leads to introspection. This in turn, leads to the awareness that the best way to manifest the uniqueness is through Divine love, through the ability of pure and unconditional love. When the spiritual seeker understands and practices this, it makes the path much easier. Once the seeker experiences Divine love that flows through the individual from the Divine, it gives radiance to life that nothing else on earth - no riches, no powers, no glories, and no sensual pleasures – can give. This lesson was taught by the two great poet-seer-philosophers, Kabir and Tagore, who were unconventional in their own merit when they wrote these poems. They enlightened the ordinary people to realise the ultimate truth that God was not the private property of the priestly class and that He did not understand only Sanskrit; on the other hand, a person born into any caste, creed or religion could achieve Divine communion through developing Divine love and accepting all as God’s creation and thus seeing the Supreme Soul in all individual souls.