Chapter 5
Conclusion

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity. (Second Coming)

These lines of Yeats very appropriately describe the present day world of delusion, dilemma, division, diversion and desperation. In the modern world of cut-throat competition where human being is willing to go down to any extent, a re-reading of poet-seer-philosophers like Kabir and Tagore is highly significant not only in the spiritual development of the reader’s psyche but also in bringing forth a renaissance in the society. They facilitate awareness and realisation by removing the cataract of delusion. The illuminating and instructing nature of their poems is the merit of their works which has stood the test of time and made them universal with regard to both time and space.

In the vast expanse of the universe, the human race has been eternally seeking the truth that has been omnipresent- yet not seen, omnipotent - yet not felt; and, in their endeavour to attain the omniscient, the seekers have left behind a huge repository of their sublime thoughts for posterity. Although many of them are not a
living presence in today’s world, their spirits pervade and provide spiritual energy even to the modern day seeker. This knowledge and realisation is called spirituality and all paths (or Religions) lead to the same destination (the Supreme Soul). Thus the various human-contrived religions of the world serve as potent vehicles on the odyssey to the spiritual light at the end of the tunnel. The profound teachings of the great Masters of yore have a universal import and are the same on the time line - past, present, and future - and the space graph - here, there, and everywhere.

The wealth of Indian wisdom is obviously seen in the rich haul of our philosophical treatises like the ancient Srutis, Smritis, Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads, The Ramayana, The Mahabharata, all of which stand testimony to the fact that ancient philosophy is the beacon light for the future. Subramanian’s 101 Mystics of India pictures an unbroken continuity of the mystics who graced the Indian sub-continent from 2500 B.C. to the 20th Century A.D., defying the barriers of religion, region, language, gender, and social status. These were the saints and seers who were drawn towards the Godhead, experienced joy and rapture in their spiritual quest, attained realisation and mystical union, and shared their thoughts, philosophy, and experience with the common man through metrical or non-metrical expressions, which were later recorded by their followers or disciples and came to be reckoned as a whole new form of literature.

In the line of such spiritual seekers and attained souls, also fall the great Bhakti saints and Sufi pirs of yore, who sought the Absolute Truth in their own way. They were votaries of the ideology that religion is no bar in the intense craving for the Supreme and that God’s concern is only love and certainly not religion. They lived like ordinary folk, hiding their true self from the others, enumerates R.K.Gupta in his book Yogis in Silence. They believed in leading apparently normal worldly lives, at
the same time yoked to the eternal quest for the Sublime. Kabir was one such soul who trod the path and who acts as a beacon light for those who choose to follow the path of the perpetual quest. Towards more modern times, Tagore also held the torch of spiritual awakening and social reform.

Both Kabir and Tagore, in the line of Bhakti poets, accentuate the quality of love as the highest emotion that is a binding force between the individual, society and the Supreme Soul. Kabir, through his non-sectarian concept of God, kindled a renaissance in the 14th Century Northern India, inspiring the society of his times to throw away the shackles of orthodox rites and rituals and to unite with God through love. Thus Kabir instilled the notion that the downtrodden could sing the name of God and be intoxicated in the frenzy of Divine love. Tagore, far away in terms of age and geographical space from Kabir, is also a master figure who initiated the resurgence of viewing God in the lowest and the most downtrodden of the society and instilled in the minds of the more fortunate people of the society the concept of visualising God in the marginalised. Therefore, both these poet-seer-philosophers brought forth a spirit of enquiry and encouraged the spirit of oneness in society; they were instrumental in bringing to effect, a renaissance in their respective social milieu. The essence of their poetry was an unequaled intuitive and interpretative power that resulted in a revolution of its own kind. To quote Sri Aurobindo, from his great philosophic treatise, *The Future Poetry*:

Therefore the greatest poets have been always those who have had a large and powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of Nature and life and man and whose poetry has arisen out of that in a supreme revelatory utterance of it. Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Valmiki, Kalidasa, however much they may differ in everything else, are at one in having this as the fundamental character
of their greatness. Their supremacy does not lie essentially in a greater
thought-power or a more lavish imagery or a more penetrating force of passion
and emotion; these things they may have had, one being more gifted in one
direction, another in others, but these other powers were aids to their poetic
expression rather than its essence or its source. (32)

This project was initiated with a view to make a thorough exploration into the
philosophies, vision and the various concepts, particularly the concept of Divine
Love, in select poems of these two great visionary poets from India. It was also the
objective of the researcher to ponder over the significance of the topic in the modern
world of chaos and unrest when man is going through a period of strife and struggle
and uncertainty thereof.

The report begins by establishing the presence of mysticism in literature and
tracing the aspect of Divine love in the select poems of these two poets in particular.
Later the Bhakti tradition is expounded and the poetry of Kabir and Tagore are
analysed, focusing on their distinct themes, variations and similarities in their
purposes, the philosophy and their visions. The concept of Divine love, as portrayed
by these two poet-seer-philosophers is highlighted; the development of the perception
being elaborated through the following stages – developing love for the Divine;
harbouring a craving for the Divine; taking the human love for the beloved 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.
In the process of research in this direction, in order to establish and reinforce the chosen theme, it was required to take a close look at other related literature, and record the words of some other poets who too have ventured on a similar path. This quest led to the delineation of the tradition of mystical poets, with particular reference to the Bhakti tradition. It is well-known that the doctrine of bhakti was a great leveler as it “removed all inequalities of caste and social status.” (SN Dasgupta 158) For ages, Man has manifested the inner urge to know the Unknown and in his spiritual quest he has left his philosophical meanderings permanently recorded in artistic or literary forms that have survived the vagaries of time. The Metaphysical poets from the Western mystical tradition, Sufi Pirs from the Islamic tradition, and the Saints from the Shaivite as well as the Vaishnavite Indian Bhakti tradition - although belong to various lands and different ages, including multifarious social, economic, political, and religious milieus - somewhere down the line of mystical thinking, all of them share a common platform. All these poets have effected a significant change in the minds of the people, of not only their times and geographic settings, but also beyond physical boundaries and across generations and centuries, down to the present age.

Such a research endeavour is the outcome of the realisation that didactic tradition of literature is equally significant like the aesthetic aspect. A scholarly discourse analysis has been carried out on the poems of two great poet-seer-philosophers – Kabir and Tagore – distant in time and clime, but very close in their thinking and the mystical ripples that they made in the society. A re-reading of such visionary poets is pertinent to the present day world that is reeking with problems due to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of various religious doctrines. During such times, the vision and philosophy of great spiritual poets like Kabir and Tagore are of supreme significance. The modern world is suffering the consequences of various
doctrines and practices that lead to separation and the clarion call of the day is to sustain a perfect balance in life and not mere demonstration of rigorous orthodox religious symbols on the frontage. Fidelity to the religion that one is born into unfortunately prevents one from extending tolerance, understanding and reverence, towards the people of other faiths. Love and affection is undoubtedly the key to unearth the ultimate meaning and Truth in life. Love is the anchor that enables to establish stronger links with the Divine and sense His presence. This presence of the Divine in all creation is felt only by a true seeker of the ultimate truth who is not tied down by the mere ritualistic tenets of the so-called religion. Such a seeker is not blindly superstitious. It is in this context that the poets like Kabir and Tagore have played a vital role by making the people of their own times venture into a pursuit of truth. During the present time, a re-reading of such stalwarts of spiritual awakening is indeed a rewarding study as it helps uphold social and moral values.

A spiritual seeker is on an eternal quest regarding the origin and the destination of the soul. The blessed few who have had mystical experience of the Divine realisation have shared the path that leads to the Supreme, thus leading the seeker to the ultimate destination. When the disciple is prepared, the guru lights the torch to guide the devotee towards the ultimate consciousness. The human soul is capable of realising the Supreme Soul by following the path of austerities and for eons, seers or saints have travelled the path towards God-realisation and have shared their experience with the seekers, guiding them along the eternal path of the Divine. The Bhakti saints are also a part of this eternal tradition and Kabir is one link in this long chain of mystics. Tagore, through his translation of Kabir’s songs and also through his own credit as a mystical poet, also bears the torch to the striving seeker on the spiritual odyssey.
Kabir’s songs and *dohas* were enlightening not only to the spiritual seekers; they were also revealing, eye-opening, inspiring lessons for the society of his times. In Kabir there was an obvious reformatory zeal and he “never tires of reiterating the worthlessness of all these superstitions of caste, creed, social status, external purity and impurity, penances, asceticism, and all sorts of formalities which passed by the name of religion though in fact having nothing to do with it.” (SN Dasgupta 159)

His teachings came as cool showers to the 14th Century society that was reeking with sectarian conflicts and the inequality of man and also gender bias against women when it came to religion and religious practices. As Muhammad Hedayetullah has mentioned:

The novelty of his teaching was inevitable, for he tried to divert the attention of the Indians of his time to a religion of the universal path above the sectarian level – a road which Hindus and Muslims could tread together. No Hindu or Muslim could take exception to such a religion, or better to say such a piety. (197)

Although Kabir is understood to be a mystic in the true sense of the word, he lived a family life and proved that family was not a barrier to spiritual progress. Kabir sang out his teachings, unmindful of his audience and through his songs he brought out the importance of the realisation of a Supreme Spirit pervading all; the concept of a non-sectarian God; the oneness of God (neither Ram nor Allah); the omnipresence of God; comprehending the human heart as the abode of God; his concept of *bhakti*; and the total submission through love for God that will lead to the final blissful communion.
As exemplified in the Hindu philosophy, of the four paths of attaining Divine communion - gnana yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, and bhakthi yoga - the last mentioned, that is, ‘the path of devotion’ is the approach to God through love. The bhakta in the path of Bhakti yoga, engages in a continual conscious effort to love God and to realise the love of God. To this end, he starts off by chanting the name of God and fixing his mind on some chosen form of the Supreme, but as he advances in his practices, he realises the futility of the form and the name and becomes aware that the God he is worshiping is not in the external world, but within himself; he realises his individual nature and the cosmic nature – in the same frame. In the supreme state of bhakti, the Lord and the devotee become one (Aham Brahmasmi / tat twam asi).

Compared to the other three yogic paths, Bhakti yoga is easy to follow by anyone as it requires an individual to just understand and appreciate the abstraction called love. It is the divine spark that kindles the light within the depths of the human heart. It gives real meaning to life and it is only through love that man sees the Supreme Soul in all souls and thus realises the essence of spirituality and this realisation will undoubtedly lead to a society free of vices.

A common faith among all mystics – the Buddhist, the Christian, the Hindu, the Islamic or any other tradition – is that the ultimate realisation is achieved through a devotional communion with the Divine. Attaining Divine communion through Bhakti propitiates the shedding of all our worldly shackles while still continuing to perform our normal allotted duties. The most ennobled life is one that is completely dedicated to the Supreme and is lived as an offering to God, in pure love. The lives of both Kabir as well as Tagore are indeed a real time expression of this mystical notion. Through their songs and poems, both the poets have endeavoured to make the society
realise the importance of spirituality and have also shown the path towards realisation, connecting it very aptly to social development.

Kabir voiced his radical views against the orthodox beliefs of his times when the marginalised section of the society and women did not have the right to sing the names of God. He pinned down his view that all were equal in the eyes of the Supreme and thus he instilled a renaissance in religious thinking by depleting the strong Brahminic influence on the then Indian society. Amidst the greatest medieval saints of the Bhakti movement, Kabir is of paramount importance as he declared the futility of learning scriptures for God-realisation. He advocated that real knowledge is not the learning of the scriptures or mere imbibing of theoretical knowledge; rather it is the love of the Supreme that makes a man learned. In his poems he considered the Lord as a husband or beloved, for whom man develops a craving and through selfless devotion and love, attains final communion. Seers over the ages have realised this truth and in their own way, have shown the path to the true seekers of the ultimate truth. In the words of Swami Chinmayananda:

Devotion is defined in various ways by the various teachers, but in all of them the one thing that is common is the element of love. A mind totally turned towards God in Love, demanding nothing – not even liberation – is a mind filled with devotion. A constant flow of thoughts in love towards the Supreme is devotion. Longing for nobody else, nothing else and no one else but the Lord – this attitude of the heart is love. This state is called exclusive love (Ananya Prema), and this total love for the Lord is devotion according to sage Narada. (642 Vedanta…)}
The first half of the 20th Century is known as the age of Tagore in modern Bengali literature. It is definitely impossible to specify the achievements of a prolific writer like Rabindranath Tagore whose life, from the age of eight to eighty, was an unending torrent of literary accomplishments. He soars high in the firmament of literature and through experience, finally realises and “fills the transitory moment with permanent beauty through his love of the world and faith in man” (Bandyopadhyay 15). Thus Tagore realised that only the Supreme truth remained finally and thus he retreated from romance and active politics and set off on the spiritual journey through his Gitanjali. This collection marks a plunge in mysticism and unravels the inner mystery of the Divine. He realises the Supreme in different human relations, like a lover, or a friend and the consummation of Divine love is the ultimate blissful experience highlighted by the poet. The Gitanjali may be read as a spiritual classic or religious poetry. Paul Nash refers to it as his second Bible and remarks:

One feels about them [the poems] that they are the thoughts that come to our minds in moments of deep feeling, to some of us quite often, to others rarely, written down for us in the simplest way. And so they delight me: for everywhere I am glad to find my confused thoughts and feelings expressed so clearly and so beautifully that I have sometimes laughed for joy, sometimes felt tears come. There is certainly a music in some of the poems but most of that is lost in translation. As to style, beauty of language, craft of any kind I am not bothered by it. I would read Gitanjali as I would read the Bible for comfort and for strength. (Gitanjali:1903)
Edward Thompson summarises his reading of the *Gitanjali* thus:

> It brings us very close to a religious experience which is Universal, yet intensely individual; an experience which is one with the writer’s life, no alien dress but natural growth of his days. His poems have led him to God. (218-19)

Tagore’s *Gitanjali* is also looked upon by some critics as mere love poetry since the love depicted therein is at times an intimate and loving bond that exists in human relations – between the lover and the beloved, between man and wife or between two friends. These poems are both erotic as well as esoteric simultaneously, the essence being love or *Bhakti*. In the words of Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee:

> Few poets in the long tale of the World’s best in the poetry of love can be said to equal Tagore in his poems dealing with the great sentiment of love in all its manifestations – the dawn of love on either side; the exquisite tenderness of love between a happy husband and wife, who have come to realise their identity of being; the pangs of separation; and the love of an earthly couple which is a reflex of man’s love for God and God’s love for man, as it has been glimpsed or sensed by the mystics of faith. Love is something holy, because it transcends the earth although it is of the earth. In fact, in a way, Tagore’s love poetry and his mystic poetry of Union or commerce with the Ultimate Reality converge in the most profound of his poems. (175)

The two poet-seer-philosophers under study converge and diverge in certain respects. Both of them were reformers and versatile preachers who shared many similar conceptions regarding devotion. They are similar in that both regarded God-realisation as the ultimate aim of humankind; they convey the message that all human
beings had equal rights over the Supreme and could offer their prayers indiscriminate; God is not an entity with a single name or form. He is not bound within the temple, church or mosque alone; every individual soul emanates from the Supreme Soul; scriptural knowledge alone is not sufficient; love is the most important emotion; developing love towards fellow human beings is a mark of expressing love for the Divine; deep love for the Divine leads to a craving for the Divine and pangs of separation; total surrender of the self, devoid of all elements of ego and selfishness; complete unconditional surrender paves the path for the ultimate communion or the bliss of realisation. Both of them unilaterally condemned the blind practices of religious rights and rituals and believed that Divine love was the only sure path towards realisation. Both the poets profess this same spiritual path through their own specific versification.

A deep study of these two poets also highlights their differences. The chief difference was the fact that Kabir was himself a realised soul; whereas Tagore was a seeker on the path. Kabir resorted to the name Ram to refer to the omnipresent; whereas Tagore does not refer to any name throughout his song offerings; Kabir advocates japa also as a means for God-realisation while Tagore chooses the path of love for humanity and service to the downtrodden mankind; the language that Kabir employs is very simple owing to the fact that he himself did not belong to the supposedly intellectual academic clan and neither did the nature of his audience demand it; Tagore on the other hand, himself belonged to the well-read, elite class of the society and also addressed the learned reader.

In spite of their differences, both the poets have achieved their individual goal of bringing about a change in the society of their times. Both acted as social reformers who were the lighthouse for the society of their times to move ‘from darkness to light,
from the unreal to real, from mortality to immortality’ (Asathoma sathgamaya, thamasoma jyothirgamaya, mrithyorma amritham gamaya).

In Sri Aurobindo’s opinion, poetry is not mere versification, but a vision and a mission to transform the society, irrespective of the age and the diversities and complexities of the age:

Therefore it is not sufficient for poetry to attain high intensities of word and rhythm; it must have, to fill them, an answering intensity of vision and always new and more and more uplifted or inward ranges of experience. And this does not depend only on the individual power of vision of the poet, but on the mind of his age and country, its level of thought and experience, the adequacy of its symbols, the depth of its spiritual attainment. A lesser poet in a greater age may give us occasionally things which exceed in this kind the work of less favoured immortals. The religious poetry of the later Indian tongues has for us fervours of poetic revelation which in the great classics are absent, even though no mediaeval poet can rank in power with Valmiki and Kalidasa. The modern literatures of Europe commonly fall short of the Greek perfection of harmony and form, but they give us what the greatest Greek poets had not and could not have. And in our own days a poet of secondary power in his moments of inspiration can get to a vision far more satisfying to the deepest soul within us than Shakespeare’s or Dante’s. Greatest of all is the promise of the age that is coming, if the race fulfills its highest and largest opening possibilities and does not founder in a vitalistic bog or remain tied in the materialistic paddock; for it will be an age in which all the worlds are beginning to withdraw their screens from man’s gaze and invite his experience, and he will be near to the revelation of the Spirit of which they
are, as we choose, the obscuring veils, the significant forms and symbols or else the transparent raiment. It is as yet uncertain to which of these consummations destiny is leading us. (39-40, The Future Poetry)

Like all the Bhakti poets, Kabir and Tagore have also contributed in their own manner to the literary, religious, spiritual, as well as social spheres of human life and their compositions have been recorded for the benefit of posterity. In their spiritual odyssey, they shun the mundane levels of rites and rituals and open new vistas of Divine love and craving for the spiritual communion, leading from darkness to light. Their teachings break the barriers that divide our world and in their precedence, they handhold the spiritual seeker on the divine journey of love and devotion. These poets elevate us to ecstatic heights of spiritual experience through their powerful songs filled with passionate love, potent imagery, and outstanding literary and artistic insights. Devotion (Bhakti) and knowledge (Gnana) are effortlessly mingled in their songs thus leading a true spiritual seeker to the state of supreme bliss (Paramananda). These great poets give us the simplified version of the deepest philosophies underlined in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Brahmasutras, the Bhagawatham, and the Bhagwat Gita. They draw their comparison of Divine love in human love and through amorous descriptions draw the attention of the common man towards the Divine Beloved. Even though India may not be able to boast of being a super power in terms of material prosperity, it is still rich in its philosophical knowledge and spiritual wisdom which is timeless, ageless, still fresh and relevant to the modern times. The works of great philosophers like Kabir and Tagore inspire peace and profundity and offer both intellectual and intuitive insights into the nature of reality. The essence of the Vedas and the Upanishads is conveyed in simple language by
these poets through their poems, wherein they provide a deep sense of meaning to life and a sense of interconnectedness with the entire universe.

In the present world of social inequalities where there is no assurance of permanence and peace, unfortunately, modern man deluded by this malady, has fallen prey to the world of illusion (maya), and seems to have forgotten the umbilical cord connecting him with the Creator, thus moving into oblivion, far away from his true Self. Kabir and Tagore extend their hands for every true seeker to hold and walk on the path of spirituality even while being a part of this materialistic world. Kabir himself continued to weave as he sang these songs of the highest philosophical purport; and Tagore was very much a worldly person, interested in myriad topics of the world. This fact is proof enough to express the notion that the true seeker’s path was not one of escaping the waves, but of crossing the sea of materialism.

The present research work is primarily based on Tagore’s translation of One Hundred Poems of Kabir and his own English translation of the Gitanjali - notwithstanding the fact that both these poets have a huge repository of songs and poems to their credit. This research is limited to the features of Mystical Poetry, and the study does not include Romantic, Theological or Psychological connotations. Since Kabir sang in the local Braj and Awadhi languages, the original work is not recorded and only the later Hindi versions were translated by Tagore; hence this reading is based on works that are twice removed from the original. Since Tagore is a bilingual poet, any discussion of his poetry without a study of his Bangla poems is definitely incomplete, but the thesis does not incorporate any reference from his Bangla texts. Although these poets have been researched extensively, there is still scope for more detailed comparative study based on critical theories of Indian
Aesthetics or other comparative or translation theories. Further research can also be conducted on the challenges faced in translation of such sublime subject matter, or the technical aspects of their styles of versification.

One of the significant contributions of this research is to relocate two great poet-seer-philosophers – one from Hindi and another from Bengali and English literatures - in the pan-Indian Bhakti tradition of poetry. This study redefines the Bhakti marga for Divine communion, highlighting the various concepts as found in the two poet-seers under review, with special reference to the concept of Divine love. Although there have been many studies that point out the element of Bhakti in these two poets separately, this study is definitely the first of its kind to juxtapose them with regard to studying the concept of Divine love in their poetry in a detailed textual/literary analysis method. The predominant stress is on the different stages through which the path of Divine love leads to God-realisation and a detailed study is also conducted on the non-sectarian concept of religion as bestowed by these two stalwarts on their contemporary societies. The scope of the study also includes the significance of these poets in the present multi-cultural milieu.

With a tone of persuasion, the following words of Kabir, with their translation by G.N.Das from his book titled Couplets from Kabir, resonate and consolidate the greatest truth that mankind is certainly in need of knowing:

Pothei padhi padhi jag mua, pandith hua na koy
Dhai akshar prem kaa, padhei so pandit hoy
Reading and reading all the scriptures
None becomes a wise man
Knowing the two syllables ‘Love’
A true understanding of the concept of Divine Love thus inevitably leads to the ultimate realisation of a single Spirit pervading the entire universe and if all human beings could realise this, the world would be a ‘paradise regained’.