Chapter 1

Introduction

“To those, who are ceaselessly united with Me and who worship Me with immense love,
I lovingly grant that mental disposition (Buddhi – yoga) by which they come to Me.”

*Bhagwat Gita*

Literature is the representation of life and down the ages various writers have penned down their impressions and interpretations of life and these works have been preserved for the benefit of the posterity. On the one hand literature exposes all the aspects of life and on the other, influences its multifarious facets and through the numerous intrinsic descriptions and interpretations, adds to the meaning of life. The spell that literature casts on life and the influence that life exercises on literature is an inherent, complex pattern that gives immense scope for research. In the modern world of globalisation, literature has far-reaching influence. The present times are bringing to light - although not in the spiritual sense of the term - the ancient Upanishadic concept of ‘*Vasudeva kutumbakam*’ - visualising the entire Universe as a single family – the so-called ‘Globalisation’ in modern terminology. Literature has widespread consequences in this regard and it plays a poignant role in bringing together the diverse cultures of the world. Litterateurs around the world perform a crucial role in revealing and recording for the posterity, their particular cultures, thoughts and beliefs. In response to this, critics and ordinary readers worldwide have endeavoured to comprehend, analyse, and comment upon these great masters and their writings. This brings us to the sphere of translation studies and comparative literature. Comparative literature as a genre of study brings together diverse cultures
of the world and gives a scope for the yoking together of multifarious traditions, languages, religions, and social systems on some common grounds.

Comparative literature as a field of literary analysis depends primarily on tracing the theoretical and historical origins of diverse literary genres, Movements and Ages across the globe. It also includes a thorough reading of the similarities and dissimilarities of different literary texts on the basis of narrative techniques, themes, ideas, concepts, choice of vocabulary, symbols, images, metrical rhyme, rhythm, etc., as adopted by various authors in different parts of the world. The endeavour of comparative study is chiefly the analysis of one author or work in relation to another, thus making it accessible to the readers of two different cultures, ages, social, religious, ethnic, or economic standings. It not only makes the text accessible to the readers of two different milieus, but also ventures to yoke two variants together, either national or international. Delineating the theory of Comparative Literature, Susan Bassnet has recorded the significance of comparative studies by way of moving out of mere nationalistic thinking, when she says, “Comparative Literature seems to have emerged as an antidote to nationalism, even though its roots went deep into national cultures” (21). The present study intends to juxtapose two such poets: Kabir, a 15th Century Bhakti saint from Benaras, and Rabindranath Tagore, the 19th Century poet from Calcutta. This is primarily a thematic analysis aiming to look into ‘the concept of divine love’ in select poems of Kabir and Tagore. Comparison becomes inevitable since two authors are involved; but the tools of comparison are not applied per se in this context.

This project aims at making a thorough exploration into the philosophies, the visions and the various concepts, particularly the concept of Divine Love, in select poems of two great visionary poets from India – Kabir and Tagore. The study has
been narrowed down to these two Bhakti poets because they talk about a God beyond name and form, and such a concept is highly pertinent to the modern world of skepticism on the one hand and narrow fanaticism on the other. The study will also 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 will begin by establishing the presence of mysticism, especially the aspect of divine love, in literature in general and these two poets in particular. The scholar’s study also endeavours to expose the Hindu-Bhakti tradition of India since Kabir is pronounced a Bhakti-Sufi poet and Tagore has also upheld the Bhakti tradition in his Gitanjali. It is also the objective of the scholar to analyse the poetry of Kabir and Tagore by focusing on their distinct themes, variations and similarities in their purposes, the philosophy and the visions of these two poets.

In a dissertation of this nature it becomes mandatory to conduct a profound study of the theory of Mysticism. The concept of Mysticism and the analysis of love poetry have formed the subject matter for research far and wide. Although the subject has been quite often researched both universally and perennially, an in-depth survey of literature brings to light the fact that not much work has gone into the search for ‘Divine Love’ in Tagore’s poems. Kabir, being a Hindi poet, extensive work has not been recorded in English on this Bhakti-Sufi poet, and the scholar’s search does not find any research work on the concept of ‘Divine love’ as incorporated in these two great poets of two entirely different times, religious backgrounds, social statuses, and language backdrops.

Radhika D. Pandya has published a research thesis report on A Comparative Study of the Poetry of Rajendra Shah and Verses from Gitanjali by Rabindranath
Tagore. Indu Dutt’s *A Tagore Testament* gives the translation of Tagore’s works and also points out the difficulty in translation, Tagore’s position as a great poet, as a lyrical poet, his influence on language, his portrayal of life as a pattern of sensuousness and austerity. In this book, the author also brings out Tagore’s discovery of life as God’s greatest gift of love. In a research paper published in *The Journal of Hindu Studies*, “Where he lies, I lie: Tagore meets Kabir”, Makarand Bose has compared the two great poets. Joseph Vattakalam, has published his study on the Mysticism in Tagore’s *Gitanjali*, basing his study on Eastern and Western mystical concepts. Reenu Kumar speaks about the philosophical elements in the poems of these two poets. She further establishes the power of Beauty and draws the parallel between Beauty and Divine Truth. She throws light on the essence and beauty of the verses of these two stalwarts. Her paper also examines the imagery and philosophy of Divine union expressed in their poems. Parker Eudy from Rice University, Houston carried out a study project and recorded his findings in the report entitled, “Listening to Kabir: Pluralism, Paradox and the Kabir Panth”. Muhammad Hedayetullah, in his book titled, *Kabir: The Apostle of Hindu-Muslim Unity*, gives a detailed biography of Kabir, lists out the poet’s works and their various interpretations available, gives his own interpretation of Kabir’s poetry, and expounds the poet’s influence on the society of his times. The literature survey brings to light the fact that the previous studies have been done on aspects like their philosophy, mysticism or nature of their poetry. The existing articles, papers and thesis reports written on Tagore and Kabir either individually or in comparison, do not ponder over the concept of ‘Divine love’ in their poems, that too, through a sociological perspective, hence this enterprise on the part of the scholar.
In spite of the fact that Tagore was of high and noble birth and lived a thoroughly worldly life and Kabir was of humble birth and led a saintly life, they display a set of curious similarities. Even though both the poets lived in different times - separated by five centuries - and lived in an entirely different social milieu, it is remarkable to note that they were akin in their thoughts. It is evidently seen that they were perturbed by the inequalities in their particular societies and the pettiness of human mind. Both have clearly voiced their views on human’s relationship with the Divine; shedding of ego to attain Divine communion; impediments on the path of a true seeker; the necessity of humanitarian emotions for attaining union with the Divine; the futility of rites, rituals and similar practices; the folly of searching for the Divine outside one’s own self in external forces; the pining for the Divine Union; love as the ultimate emotion; the journey of love and the realisation of God in the form of a friend or a lover.

An academic venture of this nature requires a considerable knowledge about the life and works of the poets under consideration. Kabir (1440 – 1518), the great Bhakti-Sufi poet of the 15th Century, is well-known as a mystic, poet, seer, saint, gurupir or preacher. It is believed that he experienced the divine presence and did not contain it to himself, instead, passed it on to posterity through his dohas and songs. Kabir’s life is veiled in mystery and there are various versions to his birth, life and even his death and the cremation thereafter. Various literary texts record conflicting details regarding his birth. The Kabirpanthis attribute an unbelievably long life as a remarkable feature – claiming his span to be as long as 300 years; some records mention a lifespan of 120 years, stating that he was born in 1398 and died in 1518. He lived most of his life in Benaras. Hearsay holds that Kabir was born to a Brahmin (priestly caste of Hindus in India) widow and fearing the society’s stings, she
abandoned the child in a basket, placing it in the river to be swept away from his place of birth. A Muslim weaver couple – Neeru and Neema – found the basket carrying the child and took him as a divine blessing as they were themselves childless. In compliance with the Islamic tradition, they chose his name to mean ‘the Great One’ - Kabir or al-Kabira. This name is one among the ninety nine names of God as decreed in the Quran. Kabir was perhaps not introduced to formal education as he was brought up by his poor illiterate foster parents. Much information about his life and also the songs attributed to the great poet, are not unambiguous as they have found their way down memory lane through karnaparampara and lack the stamp of a proper written record or authenticity. As recorded by Winand Callewaert in The Journal of Indian Philosophy, “Interaction in the oral tradition and corruption in the scribal tradition act like fog and pollution, creating a nebulous environment wherein it becomes very difficult to find the original version of the songs of 15–17th century Bhaktas” (26: 406, 1998).

In his Kabir: The Apostle of Hindu-Muslim Unity, Muhammad Hedayetullah expresses the difficulty of ascertaining the biographical facts about the saint’s life thus:

Since there seems to be some uncertainty and confusion about Kabir’s life and works, it is deemed necessary to deal at first with the nature of the materials that we have at our disposal pertaining to Kabir. The necessity arises from the fact that the legendary accounts of Kabir are so mixed up with the facts that often it is not even easy to disentangle from them the true story of his life (132).

Over the centuries, the oral tradition has perhaps manipulated the truth to suit the private interests of the multifarious sects. Hence, in spite of a considerable amount of research in this field, the facts about Kabir’s birth and life cannot be authentically
established. But there is no doubt regarding Kabir’s poetry as most of his songs relate his name ‘Kabira’ either in the beginning, middle or the end. Most of Kabir’s songs end with the tag – ‘Kahat Kabeera suno bhai sadho…’ – meaning ‘so says Kabir, listen dear fellow….’ This is a signature expression found invariably in all of Kabir’s songs - similar to the ones of Surdas, Thulasidas, Meera, and Andal.

The One Hundred Poems of Kabir is a poetic tribute of Tagore to the great mystical poet Kabir, whom Tagore looked up to as a great unifying force of the 15th century North India, which was a seat of numerous sects and sub-sects and the resultant religious diversity and intolerance. A weaver by profession, Kabir, who has been celebrated by both the Hindus as well as the Mohammedans, unequivocally holds a high standing among the greatest poets not only in India, but across the world.

The fact that there are more than five hundred verses by Kabir in the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of the Sikhs, further establishes the non-sectarian, all-comprehensive, transcendental idea of the Supreme that Kabir stood for. Kabir’s songs and dohas, like all mystical poetry, also aim at taking the seeker on a journey to the eternal Supreme and attaining immortality through the final Divine communion.

Kabir’s works were not written by himself; in fact they were recorded later by his disciples. To quote Hedayetullah, “There is a general dearth of information about Kabir, partly because he himself, being an unlettered person, left nothing in written form” (132). A collection of his sayings, The Bijak is reported to have been compiled almost fifty years after his death.“The compiler may have been Bhagvan Das, and the compilation was not made till somewhere about 1600” (Hedayatullah132). The Bijak (meaning Account Book or Invoice) is acknowledged as the most authoritative record of Kabir’s teachings. It is written in the local dialect of Hindi as spoken in and around Benaras. This use of the vernacular dialect is significant as Kabir intended to
popularise religion among the common people of his society and for doing so, Kabir is “regarded as the father and pioneer of Hindi literature” (Hedayatthulla 134). There are several printed editions of the Bijak – by Maharajah Bishwanath Singh, the Rajah of Rewah (1868); by Baba Puran Das of Burhanpur (1905); by Rev. Prem Chand of the Baptist Mission (1890); by Rev. Ahmad Shah of Kanpur (1911). Another compilation of Kabir’s songs is the Sakhi; but a lot of variations are seen in this collection in its different editions. The two most acclaimed editions are – one by Puran Das and the other by Rajah of Rewah. As per the orders of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru of Sikhism, the Sikh scripture, Adi-Granth was compiled in 1604. In addition to the compositions by the Sikh Gurus, starting from Guru Nanak up to the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, poems of other bhaktas have also been included. Namdev and Kabir are the most prominent among those bhakti poets whose compositions have found their way into the Adi Granth; Nanak respects them as his spiritual precursors. The Kabirpanthis also have a considerable collection of literature passed on through generations. Of these, a few authentic records are – Kabir Kasauti; the Bharat Khanda cha Aravachim Kosh and the Bhakta Vijaya.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941) was the youngest son of Maharishi Debendranath Tagore. His father was the pioneer of the Brahmo Samaj, which strived to bring into the society, a monistic view of religion. It was a very significant religious movement in the 19th Century Bengal. The votaries of this sect were Hindu Brahmins, and the objective of the Samaj was to stimulate the idea of dharma as envisaged in the Upanishads. A vivid reflection of this ideology can be seen throughout Tagore’s works. He was chiefly a social reformer, whose aim was to create a change in the ideologies of the general public and he endeavored to shed the walls of nationalism, in a tone similar to Robert Frost’s: “Something there is that
doesn’t love a wall” (Mending Walls). Tagore offered his collection of song offerings in the form of mystical and devotional songs to the Almighty. The same was published in the form of Gitanjali in Bangla, in the year 1910 and was translated by Tagore himself into English in the year 1912. This collection earned him much acclaim in the East and the West alike and won for him, the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in the next year (1913). It is worthy to note that even after hundred years, India cannot boast of another Nobel Prize in Literature. This makes a study on Tagore all the more relevant. Kabir and Tagore share the common thread of love for the Divine in their poems and the fact that both of them are distant in time and other physical aspects make them unique and diverse. Hence the scholar zeroed in on such a study.

A brief reckoning of the works of Tagore is indispensable as an introduction to the author. Modern Bengali literature knows the first half of the 20th Century as the Age of Tagore in modern Bengali literature. The versatility and depth of his talent is obvious from the wide range of poetry, drama, novels, short stories, essays and paintings to his credit. He translated Shakespeare’s Macbeth and Kalidasa’s Kumarasambhavam into Bengali. A poem entitled “Dvadas Barsia Balak Racita Abhilas” was published anonymously, when Tagore was twelve. Then he wrote a heroic poem entitled “Prithviraj Parajay”. His first signed poem was “Hindu Melar Upahar”. Tagore’s literary life may be divided into three phases – the childhood, the adolescent and the mature periods. During his childhood period or ‘the Beginning’ (1878-1881) the lyrical dramas and dramatic lyrics like Rudracanda (1881), Valmiki Pratibha (1881), and Kalmrgaya (1882) were written by Tagore. Saisab Sangit (1884) was a collection of poems published during this period.
In the adolescent period, he composed *Bhanu Simha Thakurer Padabali* (1871) which is a studied imitation of medieval *Vaishnava* poetry. In the period between 1882 and 1886, Tagore shifts from romantic imagination to realism. It is during this period that he became a full-fledged poet. This period witnessed the publication of *Sandhyasangit* (Evening Song, 1882), *Prabhatsangit* (Morning Song, 1883), *Chabi O Gan* (Picture and Song, 1884) and *Kadi O Komal* (Sharp and Flat, 1886).

The next six years are regarded as the best period of Tagore’s poetic career. To quote Asit Bandyopadhyay from his article titled “Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist” in a volume edited by Mohit. K. Ray, “The harmony of art-form, and the emotion, romanticism and profound conviction that characterise the poetry of this period are hardly repeated in any other period” (11). *Manasi* (1890), *Sonar Tari* (1894), *Citra* (1896) and *Caitali* (1896) were published during this period. Later, he wrote a few more excellent collections of poems – *Naibedya, Kalpana, Kahini*, and *Balaka*. This was the period which exposed Tagore’s original poetic creation and profound philosophical realisations. His *Manasi* is explicitly eloquent about love and nature. *Sonar Tari* (Golden Boat, 1894) is monumental in Tagore’s career. His theory of poetic ideal begins to surface from this poetical work. *Citra* (The Variegated), published in 1896, is the creation of Rabindranath’s most mature mind – a masterpiece in the history of literature. In this collection there is a clear expression of the union between the poet and his Ideal Beauty. Through these poems the poet expresses the continuous interaction between his smaller self and the much greater Being. In *Citra* he expresses the unified vision of the external and the internal, the limited and the limitless, the unity and the variety. *Caitali* (Final Harvest) published
one year after *Citra* expresses the intense joy of life lived in fullness; it takes the reader through imaginary expeditions into the ancient India.

Between 1900 and 1910, ten poetic publications came from Tagore’s pen. These are – *Katha* (1900), *Kahini* (1900), *Ksanika* (1900), *Noibedya* (1910), *Smaran* (1902-1903), *Utsarga* (1904), *Sisu* (1906) and *Kheya* (1910). Further phenomenal works enumerating the ancient Indian history and way of life include *Katha* (*Stories*), *Vahini* (*Narratives*) and *Kalpana* (*World of Imagination*). Some of the lyrical poems and sonnets of *Naibedya* (*Offering*) reveal the rise of a newfound India, alongside the meditative peace of ancient India, and primarily, the intimate bond between the poet and the Supreme Being. Later he composed *Smaran* (*In Memoriam*), an elegy on the death of his wife. *Sisu* (*Child*), the poetic work published immediately after it, is also worth mentioning. The poems in this collection were intended to appeal to children who are naturally fond of fairy tales. His next publication was *Kheya* (*Ferry*) – shortly before the publication of this collection, the poet had been passing through a crisis of faith. He was experiencing a period of much stress both on the personal front in his family life as well as the political front, with his involvement in the Movement marking the Partition of Bengal.

From his earlier rebellious stand, Tagore sets on a voyage with his small boat (*Kheya*) in a figurative journey to the Infinite. By now the poet retreats from all kinds of active politics and discovers the precious treasure buried deep in the inner sanctum of a heart filled with sorrow. Now comes a period of enlightenment in his life when the poet leaves the world of love and beauty and sets off on a spiritual journey to the radiant world of austerity. This period is known as the *Gitanjali* Period in the poetic career of Tagore, when he wrote *Gitanjali* (*Song Offering*, 1913), *Gitimala* (*Garland of Songs*, 1914), and *Gitali* (*Small Songs*, 1915). In his *Kheya*, the poet leaves the
external world of matter and goes on a voyage of pilgrimage to the world of the mind within (like Aurobindo’s integral yoga). His *Gitanjali* unravels the mystery of that inner world. The poet realised the indwelling spirit through different human relations such as lover, friend, and lord of the heart, depicted in multifarious forms and sentiments.

The final Mature Period of the poetic career of Tagore is also known as the *Balaka* period which witnessed the publication of *Balaka* (1916), *Purabi* (1925) and *Mahua* (1929). These works very grippingly exhibit a kind of openness to life, enlightened intellect and an implication of the vast expanse of the world. During the period between 1930 and 1941, Tagore composed twelve poetical works. *Punasca* (1932), *Bicitrita* (1933), *Sessaptak* (1935), *Bithika* (1935), *Patraput* (1936), and *Syamali* (1936) – he was attracted towards the broken images of daily life. A few light, humorous poetical compositions like *Kapchada* (1937), *Chada O Chabi* (1937), and *Prahasini* (1939) were also composed by Rabindranath Tagore in this period. The last few poetical works of the Final Period of his poetical career were *Prantik* (1938), *Sejuti* (1938), *Akaspradip* (1939), *Nabajatak* (1940), *Sanai* (1940), *Rogsayyay* (1940), *Arogya* (1941), *Janmadine* (1941) and the posthumously published *Chada* (1943) and *Seslekha* (1941). It is a colossal task to enlist all the works of a versatile and prolific writer like Rabindranath Tagore, and hence only a brief list of his poetical compositions have been provided, bearing reference to the scope of the present study.

At a time when man seems to have forgotten his roots and severed the umbilical cord that connected him with the Supreme spirit, it is in fact extremely pertinent to make such studies that endeavour to bring mankind closer to the transcendental. Among the various ways of attaining union with the Supreme, the Divine love or ‘*Bhakti Marga*’ is of paramount importance. Kabir is a predominant
personality in the *Bhakti* Movement and Tagore, who is generally hailed as a nationalistic poet and a poet with a romantic strain, has also penned down his share of devotional poetry. Thus these two great poet-philosophers share the element of *Divine love* as a common ground for comparison. The scholar therefore aims to further the research in the field and relate the study to the modern day love-starved world. An awakening and a realisation of this concept contributes to universal brotherhood and Swami Vivekananda’s dream of a Universal Religion.

Any study in this sphere calls for an extensive understanding of the term ‘Mysticism’ and its significance in literature. Mysticism is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “The belief that knowledge of God and of real truth can be found through prayer and meditation rather than through reason and the senses.” The etymology of the term leads us to the ancient Greek word ‘*mystes*’ meaning ‘one initiated into the mysteries’. The Greek verb ‘*mvien*’ means ‘to keep silence’. A mystic is a person who is initiated into the awareness of the Supreme, has experienced the presence of the Divine consciousness, has perceived the imperceivable, and has even achieved union with the Supreme Soul. It is believed that the mystical experience or the communion with, awareness of the ultimate reality, divinity, spiritual truth, etc. is achieved only by the very few who generally shut themselves away from the outside material world and enter the inner world of Spirituality.

Mysticism can be defined as “the way of life of a mystic”. This brings us to the question – who is a mystic? Oxford English dictionary defines a mystic as “a person who tries to become united with God through prayer and meditation and so understand important things that are beyond normal human understanding.” The characteristic features of a mystic arise from the fundamentals of realisation. In the western world, the Greeks were the initiators of the scholastic genre of pursuing
mystical knowledge. E. Caird, in his *Mysticism in Religion*, remarks, “Mysticism is religion in its most concentrated and exclusive form. It is that attitude of the mind in which all other relations are swallowed up in the relation of the soul to God.” (qtd. in Judd 10). In his book *The Inner Eye of Love*, William Johnston points out, “…mysticism is a human experience limited to no one religion: it is, I believe, the high point in man’s search for fulfillment, authenticity and self-realisation.” (61) He also mentions, “…every religion has its holy books which are the source of its mysticism.” (43). In an essay on the nature and meaning of mysticism, Margaret Smith declares, “Mysticism is not to be regarded as a religion in itself, but rather as the most vital element in all true religions…. (20). There is consensus with regard to writers and scholars of Mysticism – that although Mysticism and Religion are closely related terms, they are not synonymous. The aspiration of every religion is union with Divine and the zenith of all mystical experience is also Divine communion.

The English literary world shows signs of mysticism in the 16th century with the Metaphysical School of John Donne. The concept of mysticism in literature brings forth the idea that Divine consciousness dwells in each individual soul and it is this consciousness which guides the seeker to truth and the path of righteousness, and goodness. The pious humble their selves before the Supreme Spirit and this invariably gives rise to sincerity and love in the heart of the individual, which in turn creates peace, amiability and understanding among human beings. The search for the Supreme Spirit leads the seeker on the path of spirituality. Mystical experience is an eternal quest for realisation. To quote Enid Starkie, Mysticism is “an eternal longing for spiritual satisfaction and beauty.” (422)

The present study focuses on the visions and themes of Kabir and Tagore, in particular, the concept of Divine love. Both these poets possess a non-sectarian notion
of devotion and hence a study of this nature requires an understanding of the concept of spirituality also. Spirituality may be defined as the non-sectarian concept of religion. It is not the mere observation of rules and regulations of religion without caring for humanity at large. Spirituality leads one towards the realisation of the purpose of life and highlights the necessity to move towards the Divine, to remain at peace with one’s spirit, nature, and all other spirits of the universe. It helps the seeker in his quest for Truth and tryst with one’s own consciousness. The awareness of spirituality enables man to practice goodness and to shun all evil and despicable activities. A spiritually inclined person becomes completely simple and sincere and leads a very transparent life, without any pretentions, pomp and show, giving up all greed and temptation for wealth and worldly procurement. A vivid comprehension of spirituality aids in the purging of the mind and soul and the uplifting of the soul through this purgation. It helps one be disillusioned and view all as emanating from the same Supreme Spirit and reflective of Divinity. Opposite to the didactic religious bifurcation of the society, a true sense of spirituality builds bridges and demolishes the walls of religious segregation. In the present day world, religion has become the cause of fanatic intolerance leading to gruesome destruction of both life and property. Hence the need for the day is a true knowledge of spirituality that will enhance humanity in mankind, thus enabling a life of peaceful co-existence.

A righteous life enlightened by spirituality spreads the kind of peace and comfort that delivers man off all duality and enhances tolerance and love for all fellow beings. If people around the world had this spiritual bent of mind and if they were aware of the futility of meaningless sectarian rigorous pursuits or ideologies and moved forward embracing the path of pure spirituality, the world would be a ‘paradise regained’. Such a world encompasses all alike and propagates tolerance, love, and
endearment. The spiritual quest welcomes any practice that is not merely ritualistic, but that strengthens love and affection between human beings of different dispositions. Any other practice that creates tension, negative feelings, hatred, suspicion, separation and detest towards our fellow beings is nipped in the bud. One can aim at reaching the spiritual destination only if one is aware of the Divine consciousness pervading the entire universe. That awareness leads to an individual being open to all creatures and attaining a universal, cosmic comprehension. Such a life entertains no differences of any sort and a true spiritual seeker has the heart and the mind to think of every creation of the Almighty as one’s own kith and kin, in fact as one’s own self, or as the reflection of the Supreme Self. This sort of a world view is possible only if one’s mind is open and one sees the universe through the lens of spirituality. The essence of all religions is definitely Love, but perhaps there have been some errors in the human interpretations of the same, over the ages. In the words of His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama:

I see compassion, love and forgiveness as common ground for all different religions, irrespective of tradition or philosophy. Although there are fundamental differences between different religious ideas, such as the acceptance of an Almighty Creator, every religion teaches us the same message: be a warm-hearted person. All of them emphasize the importance of compassion and forgiveness. (Jinpa 78)

It is in this great spiritual quest that saints like Kabir and poets like Tagore are inspirational. Although Kabir has been acknowledged and acclaimed as a mystic, there may be a doubt regarding the mystical standing of Tagore. Here the scholar would like to base the argument on the words of V K Subramanian, who, in the introduction to his book 101 Mystics of India, states, “…continuing the unbroken
In the process of research in this direction, it would be appropriate to take a close look at other related literature and record the words of some other poets who have ventured on a similar path. For eons, Man has manifested the inner urge to know the Unknown and in his spiritual quest has left his philosophical meanderings permanently recorded in artistic or literary forms that have survived the vagaries of time. Poets like Donne, Crashaw, Herbert, Blake, etc. (belonging to the Western tradition); Rumi, Attar, Sadi, Sanai, Moinuddeen Chishti, etc. (representing the Sufi tradition); Andal, Meera, Kabir, Jayadeva, Narayana Bhhattathiri, Alwars and Nayanmars, Bharathiar, Tagore, etc. (marking the 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, they all share a common platform. All these poets have been a monumental influence in effecting a change in the minds of the people of not only their times and geographic settings, but also across physical boundaries and across generations and centuries, down to the present age.

The poets of the Hindu Bhakti tradition, such as Andal, Sri Chaitanya, Meerabai, Chandidas, Ravidas, Ramprasad and Vidyapati (Vaishnava tradition) and Akka Mahadevi, Basavanna, Allama Prabhu (Shaiva tradition) were great devotees of their chosen deities, and they ardently sang in praise of their Lord and expressed their
intense craving for union with their Beloved (their chosen God). For instance, Jayadeva’s *Gita Govinda* is the symbolic representation (through the poetic rendering of the story of Radha and Krishna’s Divine Love) of the individual Soul seeking the Supreme Soul through the expression of love. Attracted by the magical flute of Krishna, Radha abandons all her human cares and ties and runs into the arms of her Divine consort. This union leads to Divine bliss that is attained by the human spirit in confluence with the Divine spirit. The poet sings thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
  yadi \ hari-smarane sarasam mano \\
  yadi vilāsa-kalāsu kutūhalam | \\
  madhura-komala-kānta-padāvalēm \\
  shrunu tadā jayadeva-sarasvatim ||
\end{align*}
\]

“Dear audience! If your mind is permeated by mellows of ever-fresh loving attachment while hearing the pastimes of Sri Hari, and if you are curious to know about his ingenuity in the amorous arts, may you become immersed in bliss by listening to the mellifluous, tender and endearing verses of this collection of songs by the poet Jayadeva.” (*Gita Govinda*)

‘*Narayaneeyam*’ is a condensed version of the *Bhagavata Purana* into one thousand and thirty six verses, divided into one hundred *dasakas*, or cantos. It holds a very high position in the world of Sanskrit literature, not only because of the exemplary literary merit, but also due to the indomitable devotional zeal. This seminal work is a dedication of Meliapthur Narayana Bhattatiri to the Lord (Guruvayurappan) on behalf of his guru. Cantos 96 and 97 highlight the expression of *bhakti* – the verses in these two cantos voice the adoration, love and service that the poet offers towards his Lord, thus losing his self in the ecstatic joy of Divine love. He proclaims *bhakti* to
be a self sufficient discipline in the way of spiritual practice. A detailed expression of some other bhakti poets is provided in the next chapter.

Such a research endeavour is the outcome of the realisation that the present day world 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 paramount significance. The modern world calls for us to give up all those doctrines and religious practices that lead to separation. The need 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 should not prevent one from extending tolerance and understanding towards the people of other faiths. Love and affection is undoubtedly the key to unearth the ultimate meaning and Truth in life. Love is that anchor that enables one to be attached to the Divine and be inspired to appreciate the presence of the Divine in all. Such a realisation can come to pass only if the seeker moves out of the shackles of ritualistic religion, towards the path of spiritual awakening. It is in this context that the poet-seer-philosophers like Kabir and Tagore have played a vital role by making the people of their own times venture into a pursuit of truth. In the present time, a re-reading of such stalwarts of spiritual awakening is indeed a rewarding study as it helps one uphold social values. Literature down the ages has been endorsing not only the aesthetic sensibility but also didactic or moralistic purpose.

In this paradigm, the great Sages’ advice act as pearls of wisdom and they are the beacon light that lead the common man in the journey towards the spiritual path. Saints are a treasure chest of knowledge and following their advice will undoubtedly lead us in the spiritual odyssey across life times towards the Supreme. In this context
the works of seers like Kabir and poets like Tagore become very relevant research topics and their experience in the spiritual quest is thus shared with the posterity through these works.

The humankind achieves spiritual consciousness by realizing love, tolerance, generosity, kindness, mercy, compassion, sympathy, empathy, and all other positive traits and shunning hatred, jealousy, envy, and other such negativities. Nature is munificent enough to provide for the needs of man and helps satiate his greed as well. But mankind must understand the importance of love and affection for the sustenance of peace and tranquility in the universe. To love is to give without any expectations; to accept the other’s faults as one’s own; never to lose temper even in the face of unpalatable situations. Spiritual consciousness starts when one gets initiated into the task of cleansing one’s inner being in the process of purifying the utensil (one’s physical body) to hold the holy water (elixir of spirituality). A conscience that is clear can be the sure seat of the Supreme Soul. A mind that is inclined towards spirituality is like a rudder that will save man from the turbulent currents of the worldly life. Spirituality is that anchor which holds the mind calm even in the turbulent sea of worldly affairs. The twists and turns of life lead man through very tough times and during such times of doubt, it is always Divine Love that comes to the aid of the suffering man. Love is that sustaining, life-giving force that enables man to forget all the negativities and helps look forward towards the bright light at the end of the dark tunnel of material life. Love is a chaste and sublime concept and no villainous force in the world can shatter or bring it down. Love is as gentle and at the same time, as powerful as the water of a river that can make smooth, even the hardest rock; true love can win over even the hardest heart. The most deadly enemy will find himself unarmed in front of a heart full of love. Such is the strength of love and it is for sheer
want of this knowledge that human beings fight over petty worldly matters and end up gaining nothing.

Man is born with an innate sense of spirituality and it is generally believed that children are closer to God. As one grows, one’s concept of God and religion also undergoes changes according to the surroundings and upbringing. Each individual has two different notions of religion – one that he believes in private, in his inner conscience, and the other concept of religion which he sees his parents and others around him following and is himself compelled by the circumstances, to follow. Most of the practices are developed as a habit rather than a deeply understood, appreciated and accepted notion. Most of the time, the religion one follows is more dogmatic than pragmatic. This invariably leads to dissatisfaction and misgivings. But at the core, all the beliefs and customs of any religion are simply guidelines to regulate one’s moral life by setting certain code of conduct and norms of behaviour lest one goes astray and becomes anti-social.

For the sake of convenience, the scholar shall consider the three major religions of the world, that is, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam (in alphabetical order). The Christian belief is that God created Adam and Eve to enjoy their life on Paradise but they fall prey to the temptation offered by the Satan and owing to their own disobedience of the Lord’s commandments, they were expelled to lead their life on Earth. They were later redeemed as they repented for their mistake and God takes them to heaven, the garden of God. Hinduism or Sanathana dharma expounds ‘advaita’ or non-dualism. It shows how man can follow certain austerities and finally unite with the Supreme Soul and enjoy the bliss (paramananda) of the final communion. Islam asserts of a Divine that has no form and is known by the name, ‘Allah’ and answers the prayers of the ardent devotee. They believe that the Divine
Allah must not be personified in any image or be defined in any form. He is not an imaginary ‘God’ who is awed and worshipped. On the contrary, he is a Compassionate and Merciful Being. The Holy Book is Allah’s message to the Prophet (Mohammed Nabi). The followers of Islam believe that this life is a test of their conduct and the staunch followers of Allah’s path with good conduct would beget a place in heaven, whereas those with evil demeanor would be discarded to hell. All religious traditions vouch that ‘desire’ is an inherent part of human psychology and non-fulfillment of desires leads to disappointment and distress. Importance is given to control and cease desires. Such men of grit and power, who can control desires, possess a strong personality and are unwavered by any temptations of the world. Whenever the world faces the dearth of such strong-willed individuals, and the society faces the threat of disintegration, it becomes crucial for it to strengthen the moral filament, and during such times, religion acts as the anchor hold. As mentioned in the Bhagwad Gita, where Krishna promises, “Yada yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavathi Bharathe, abhyuththanaam adharmasya thadhathmanam srijamyaham”. Meaning, “whenever a decrease of righteousness exists, and there is a rising up of unrighteousness, Then I manifest Myself” (Gita, Ch 10)

Austerities on the spiritual path for self realisation lead to strong moral consciousness, which in turn leads to strengthening the moral fibre of the society. This spiritual quest led to an off-shoot in the Islamic tradition called Sufism. For them the search for the Divine and communion with the Divine was imperative and the followers of this path were in constant relation with the Divine as their friend or beloved.
As Peeran mentions in *A Journey of a Sufi: Sufism and Poetry*:

Sufism is all about the purification of the soul, from all the animal tendencies of anger, lust, jealousy, capriciousness, lying, fraud, deception, greed, covetousness and other despicable and pervert tendencies. To become morally sound with the courage of conviction and adopt truth with humility, simplicity and sincerity is a way of life. This is the basic teaching of Sufism. It further teaches one to earn one’s bread with one’s own efforts, to be charitable, gracious, forgiving, loving, and become a perfect gentleman; to evolve and elevate the soul to divine consciousness by consciously realizing and practising the qualities of the Lord; to colour oneself in the colour of the Lord Almighty of mercy and compassion by total reliance on the Lord and practice patience and fortitude; to be thankful and be satisfied at all times; and to be grateful for all the gifts received from nature created by the Lord, the merciful and loving. (135-136)

Search for truth, love and ahimsa have been the key expressions in Buddhism also. Search for truth and the attainment of self realisation have been the quest of a true Buddhist seeker. In the Buddhist religion the ultimate realisation or communion with the Supreme is referred to as ‘Nirvana’ and the same is termed ‘Moksha’ in Hinduism. In Sufism, the term denoting the merging of the soul and the Divine consciousness is ‘Fana’ and ‘Baqha’. The Sufis believe that the supreme consciousness is not a separate entity. It is one with the individual soul. One of the most important tenets of Sufism is that a Sufi merges with the Divine consciousness through relentless practice and meditation. A true Sufi seeker aims to move on the path of love and goodness by dispelling ego and evil from the individual soul.
As R K Gupta comments in the *Yogis in Silence*:

> The soul is always pure, pious and free from all bondage. In spite of lying under sheaths, the soul is always boundless and absolutely free but its light gets obstructed due to these sheaths. The moment sheaths are removed, the light of the soul also spreads all over. The soul is a part of that Absolute and to get back to that Absolute is in fact the real salvation. (272)

India has been a land that is hallowed and sanctified by innumerable mystics. In subjects connected with spirituality, India can boast of a rich heritage. Since times immemorial, it has been giving a glorious lead to the world in matters connected with spirituality, divinity and transcendental phenomena. Countless saints, seers and seekers of the ultimate truth have risen from this sacred soil in order to fulfill their pre-ordained missions. Some of them established a branch of philosophy or religion, some engaged in the creation of a monumental work of art like an epic, some expressed their mystical experience by composing devotional lyrics set to melodious music, and some of them observed inspiring silence which sparked spiritual awakening in devotees (Subramanian, *101 Mystics*... 11). At regular intervals one comes across engrossing accounts of the accomplishments and achievements of Indian gurus and god men – slowly coming to dominate the spiritual scene in almost all parts of the globe. We have had the proud privilege of an extensive list of truly initiated visionaries. Such holy personages are not to be found only in the remote recesses of the great Himalayas, the inaccessible thickets of the tropical forests, or the numerous sacred places of pilgrimage, but even in ordinary hamlets, villages and townships – Kabir and Tagore are archetypes proving this fact.
Ever since man started thinking about life, he has been pondering over the questions as to where lay his origin, what is the reason behind his existence, and what is his destination? Prophets, sages and seers have asked the same questions and owing to their deep knowledge and as a result of their austerities and penance, have experienced the ultimate truth (mystical experience). Unlike the greedy common man who hoards all wealth unto himself, these saints and sages thought of the larger good of mankind and have unequivocally tried to lead other seekers towards the ultimate destination. The word Guru in Sanskrit means, ‘one who dispels darkness’; thus, a guru is a beacon light who shows the path towards the ultimate consciousness and if the disciple is ready to follow the difficult path, struggling against all hurdles that he comes across, following the guidance, he can ultimately reach the goal and come directly in contact with the sublime Truth. It is the Spirit within man that is capable of realising the Truth, the external agencies can only point towards and guide along the path to that realisation. It is a universal truth that God has sent His Messengers during times of need, to guide and enlighten man, to instruct him and show him the way that would lead him to God Himself, the ultimate truth. Kabir is one link in this long chain of mystics. Tagore, through his translation of Kabir’s songs and also through his own merit as a poet, also acts as a guiding light to the striving seeker on the spiritual odyssey.

Hindu philosophy exemplifies four ways of attaining Divine communion: gnana yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, and bhakthi yoga. Gnana yoga is the intellectual approach to God through the discrimination between the real and the unreal; a yogi on this path analyses all transient phenomena in this world and comes to the realisation that they are not long-lasting and hence, rejects them for the superior gain of the ultimate truth, discarding the ephemeral for the real. Hence through the continuous
process of elimination, the gnana yogi realises the Supreme (Shankaracharya’s philosophy of ‘neiti neiti’). Raja yoga demands exceptionally keen intellect. It is the approach through intensive rigorous practice and meditation. This path calls for unwavering concentration and control of the senses. Karma yoga is the approach to God through selfless action – action that is performed without any desire for the result thereof. A karma yogi practices altruistic action with no desire for personal gain or apprehension of unpleasant consequences. Such a path is generally followed by serving one’s fellowmen in the society who happen to be, unfortunately, less privileged. Such devotion calls for extreme vigour, tremendous humility and excessive patience. The path of Devotion (Bhakti yoga) is the approach to God through love. The bhakta makes a continual conscious effort to love God and to realise the love of God. To this end, he starts off by the chanting of God’s name 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; it is his true 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 forms of yogas, Bhakti yoga is easy to follow by anyone as it requires an individual to just understand and appreciate the quality of love. Love is the divine quality which connects man to the Supreme Soul; it is that 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.
A common belief among all mystics (Islamic, Christian, or Hindu) is that the vision of God and His grace is attained when the seeker treads on the path of devotional fervor zealously and experiences divine communion. Popular devotional mysticism is the approach towards God, shedding aside all worldly fetters while still continuing to perform normal allotted duties - the lives of both Kabir as well as Tagore are an expression of this concept. The noblest life is the one that is lead in pure unison with the Divine through Love.

The idea of love for God has been recorded in the early Sanskrit literature. The ancient Hindu Vedic hymns that are monotheistic in nature expose the concept of sharing an intimate and personal relationship of love with the deity of one’s choice. Buddhist literature also mentions Buddha implying love as a path to realisation. Vishnu Purana mentions the story of Prahalada’s devotion towards the Lord. Through pure concentration and continuous recital of the name of his chosen deity with love, Prahalada united with his Lord. Narada Bhakti Sutra also emphasises the significance of devotion (bhakti) in the form of love as a contemplation of God. Such contemplation necessarily implies love of God. The Bhagwad Gita proclaims self surrender and blind love for the supreme as the path leading to the contemplative union. Sufism also proclaims love to be the ultimate path leading to union with the Divine. In an article titled “Sufi Elements in Ahmed Ali’s Poetry”, which was published in The Journal of Indian Writing in English, Aliarian Mohaghegh remarks,

They [the Sufis] love all the creatures of Almighty and really they are merciful and generous as they know that the essence of human beings is the same and from God which gives them an eternal joy and satisfaction. (4).
Hence the concept of Divine love has been a subject for writing as well as analysis over the ages. Poets have written about it and philosophers have pondered over the concept, its expression and necessity to the human race for eons.

The present study is a humble attempt to delve deeper into the concept of Divine Love as revealed in select poems of Kabir and Tagore.