Wanderers of Unseen Paths

Chapter 4

Wanderers of Unseen Paths

4.1. Introduction

Mystical consciousness of many a poet finds one of its closest correspondences in Nature. The poet’s level of consciousness differs from that of the ordinary man. He tries to interpret his vision, his glimpse of the burning bush to others by means of his poems. Almost always it becomes difficult for him to convey to others his vision of the ideal. Still the effort goes on and an attempt to understand their world expands the boundaries of one’s own self. This chapter is an attempt to find the relationship of the mystical consciousness in the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost.

Tagore and Frost are worlds apart in terms of time, language, sensibility and tradition. All these play a vital role in the shaping of their poetic minds. Despite this, many factors bind the two poets together. The study becomes more interesting when some astonishing similarities and reconcilable differences emerge from a close survey of their backgrounds along with their prolific poetic output.

In manners quite different, poetry of both the poets was quests for the Ultimate Reality and these quests were based on a mystical consciousness of Nature. Therefore the chapter is an attempt to weave the
similarities and differences in the mystical concepts in general and concepts of Nature Mysticism in particular of the poets into a cohesive fabric. The religious, literary and social backgrounds of these poets have been taken into consideration in this endeavour.

A brief sojourn into the poetic life, literary background and the various influences on the lives of poets are necessary to understand the development of the poetic sensibilities of both Tagore and Frost better. There are many striking similarities in their lives at the outset. Both of them had a long literary career. Tagore was born in Calcutta on May 6, 1861 and lived up to the age of eighty. Frost was born in San Francisco, California, on March 26, 1874 and died at the age of eighty eight. Formal education failed to attract them both. Though Frost was enrolled as a freshman at Dartmouth College he left soon “insisting that he had had enough of scholarship.” (Thompson, Frost 11) Both the poets were initiated into literature at a fairly early stage by their parents. Young Robert might have inherited his mother Isabella Moodie Frost’s fondness of writing verse and religious mysticism, while Debendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath, intensified the poet’s mystical leanings.

Despite the loss of many dear ones, Tagore was not pessimistic or dejected. Many of his later poems radiate his optimism and faith in life.
Poetry was the sole refuge to Robert Frost also when he was severely hit with the deaths of his dear ones. Frost felt that these shocks were rendered to make him learn the higher truths of life. Many of his later poems reveal the new found inner strength of the poet.

4.2. Literary Background

Tagore was born into an era when Bengal itself was in transformation. He writes about this in The Religion of an Artist: “I was born in 1861. That is not an important date of history, but it belongs to a great epoch in Bengal, when the currents of the 3 movements had met in the life of our country.” (1) Those three movements are: Political, Socio-Religious and Literary.

Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Dinabandhu Mitra and Michael Madusoodan Dutt were at the helm of the world of letters in Bengal. Critics give credit to Bankim Chandra Chatterji for the refinement of Bengali prose and Madusoodan Dutt for enriching “Bengali poetry with English, Latin, Greek and Italian influences” (Artist in Life 21). It can be fairly assumed that Tagore drank deeply from this rich fountain of Bengali Literature.

The birth and growth of Robert Frost from 1874 to 1914 similarly coincided with a milieu of progressive movements in social, intellectual and political circles: “it was a period of renaissance, but it was
unmistakably a period of decadence also as the thoughtful minds were equally aware of the promises unfulfilled, and the questions unanswered or partially answered" (Trikha 11). It was a time when the creative mind of the nation was at loggerheads with the growing materialism and soulless mercantilism. Still, the voices of great masters like Emerson, Whitman and Poe reverberated at large in the literary firmament of America. This may account for the influence of these poets in Frost’s poetry.

4.3. Influences

Poets, it is needless to assert, are the products of their age. Their art and artefacts invariably belong to their age. Accordingly it will be timely and proper here to explore the lasting influences on these great poets.

Being the fourteenth child of a large family, Tagore had his moments of utter loneliness. His mother was more or less an invalid and young ‘Rabi’ was not allowed to go out of the house. He wrote of it later:

... I was a lonely child, I had no friends to play with. But I had this great big visible world to keep me company. I could almost imagine this world outside to be lonely child like me - sitting by the great big window of the sky, looking towards the distant horizon. (qtd. in Devi Prasad 70)
At a young age itself Tagore’s father took his youngest son along with him for his Himalayan sojourns. Nature in its entire majesty and grandeur might have left its indelible impressions upon his receptive mind:

My eyes had no rest the livelong day, so great was my fear lest anything should escape them. Wherever, at a turn of the road into a gorge, the great forest trees were found clustering closer, and from underneath their shade a waterfall trickling out, like a little daughter of the hermitage playing at the feet of hoary sages wrapt in meditation, babbling its way over the black moss—covered rocks, there the jhampan bearers would put down their burden, and take a rest. Why, oh why, had we to leave such spots behind, cried my thirsting heart, why could we not stay on there for ever? (REM 101)

The Upanishads and the Vedas had a very strong influence on Maharshi Debendranath, which he passed on to Rabindranath. In his essays and addresses, time and again Rabindranath returns to them and interprets them. The old Vaishnava poems of Bengal also influenced him a lot. Though a truant he studied Kalidas in Sanskrit and he translated parts of Macbeth into Bengali. Sufism, as a way of life flourished in Bengal at the time of Tagore. His father, Maharshi Debendranath initiated Tagore into the world of Sufi Mysticism when it was flourishing in Bengal.
Another early influence to be taken into consideration is the Bengali poet Biharilal Chakravarti. Niharranjan Ray points out that he was only a minor poet but:

he had introduced two elements into Bengali poetry which were new: one, a romantic attitude towards Nature and two, a lyrical note which, was neither objective nor conventional but purely personal . . . Tagore entirely unaffected by the famous Bengali poets of contemporary times was fascinated by the vaishanava lyricists, the English romantic poets and Biharilal . . . (Artist in Life 31)

He was also greatly influenced by Buddhism which played a decisive part in shaping his outlook and spiritual leanings. His dance-dramas like Natir Puja, Chandalika etc. reveal this influence. More over, the two great epics of India, - the Mahabharata and Ramayana and also the classical works of Kalidasa moulded his sensibility. Even the poems and songs of his mature years show the influence of Valmiki and Kalidasa. He was much attracted by the wandering Bengali mystics known as Baul singers. Their concept of God as “The Man of My Mind” can be traced in his mystical poems.

Christianity wielded a strong influence over Tagore. The concept of God he presents in Gitanjali can said to be identical with the Christian
concept of God. Tagore, to use Dr. Aronson's words, "seemed to be more Christian than the Christians" (Kannath 111).

Tagore's close interaction with the West and Christianity contributed a lot to make him a great mystic poet in whom Mysticism of the East and West perfectly blended. As Dr. Radhakrishnan says, "He is a Vedanthin, a thinker who draws his inspiration from the Upanishads. If we believe the other, he is an advocate of a theism more or less like, if not identical with Christianity" (2). Many intellectuals of the western world were his friends. He travelled extensively in Europe and America. Thus he got a first hand insight into the life and culture of so many civilizations. All these developed his sympathies and sensibilities.

Frost also had a lonely childhood, marked by such events like 'jumping schools,' long outdoor wanderings and finally the death of his father.

The exceptional popularity enjoyed by Frost as a poet has given rise to very serious discussions on the influences worked on him and his poetry. Critic Yvor Winters, for example, calls him "an Emersonian Romantic" (58). Frost himself has admitted his indebtedness to Emerson. As some of the critics suggest, Emerson's "Self-Reliance," might have been Frost's Bible.
Lawrance Thompson points out that the fascination for the correspondence between the visible and the invisible in nature poetry was passed on to Frost by his mother. Thompson adds that:

A poetess herself, and a Swedenborgian poetess, Mrs. Frost made her children feel by example, rather than by precept, that romantic nature poetry was at its best when it suggested correspondences or analogies between the seen and the unseen world. . . . Of these three poets to whom his mother had first exposed him -- Emerson, Wordsworth, Bryant—his favourite was hers, Ralph Waldo Emerson. (Biography 38)

Frost’s attitude to Nature was much influenced by Thoreau. Like Thoreau, Frost also detached himself from 'contemporary' ways. He expressed his indebtedness to Thoreau for that. The lasting influence of Thoreau on Frost’s attitude to Nature is attested by a critic in the following words:

Thoreau’s concept of duality in nature contributes significantly in Frost’s poetic vision. The recognition that nature is wild yet benevolent but, on the whole she is impersonal, unfeeling and the other, led both of them to investigate the relationship between wilderness of nature and cultivation of men. (Trkha 36)
Another vibrant influence on Frost and his poetic vision was that of William James, illustrious philosopher and brother of novelist Henry James. Frost was attracted to the ideas like pluralism and pragmatism of James. Some of his poems reflects James’ observation that: “The cosmos is not a closed and harmonious system; it is a battleground of cross-currents and conflicting purposes; it shows itself, with pathetic obviousness, as not a uni- but a multiverse” (Durant, 515). In fact James influenced Frost in more than one way. Lawrance Thompson observes in this regard: “Like James, Frost wanted to be ‘pluralistic,’ in the sense that he could combine naturalism and idealism, physics and metaphysics, skepticism and mysticism” (Biography 108).

Henri Bergson’s philosophy also had a great impact on Frost writings. Robert Bernard Hass in his essay, “(Re) Reading Bergson: Frost, Pound and the Legacy of Modern Poetry,” explains:

Bergson argued that nature’s essential character was one of processional flux, irreducible to rational formulation...By avoiding our habitual scientific practices, and by resisting the impulse to reduce complexities to simple formulae, we can transcend positivist analysis and become more receptive to a direct communion with immediate experience. (58)
Lawrance Thompson also points out how Bergson’s influences found expression in many of Frost’s poems. He identifies “West Running Brook” as one such poem. He writes:

To Frost, one of the most important elements in Bergson’s highly poetic philosophy was the denial of essentially deterministic elements in the Darwinian theories. In his gently contrary manner, Bergson insisted that the human spirit has the freely willed power to resist materialism through creative acts that pay tribute to God. (Biography 310)

4.4. Similarities

Having surveyed the striking similarities in the biographical details of the two poets and the various influences on them, the study now proceeds to explore the similarities and differences in the mystical consciousness and Nature Mysticism in their poetry.

4.4.1 God Concept

As it has been discussed in the previous chapters, the philosophies of the East and the West have exerted a deep influence in shaping the God concept of both Tagore and Frost. The introspective spirit in these two poets finds in the universe a Divine meaning or an order. It has inspired and guided them through their creative endeavour. God of both these poets
can not be limited to any single theological contention or religious convention.

They believed that truth, beauty and goodness are closely associated with God. Man needs God’s mercy, His love and His protection. The seeking for God is an integral part of their poems, beneath the surface-level contradictions. To them, Nature is the dwelling place of God.

The influence of The Bible can be discerned in the concept of God of both the poets. Tagore envisages God as Love as in the Bible. Accordingly one of his concepts of the relationship between God and man is that of father and his children. Many of Frost’s poems like “The Masque of Mercy,” “Masque of Reason” and “Sycamore” chose biblical themes of salvation and God’s Mercy as their themes.

The limitations of human knowledge in understanding God were matters of concern for both the poets. Tagore writes:

Know that you are but a child in this vast world,
in the cradle of infinite time, in the sky’s playground:
you think you know it all, but you know nothing!
Pick it up—with faith, humility, love—
that grand toy—coloured, musical, scented—
which your mother’s given you. Well, maybe it’s dust!
So what? Isn’t it dust beyond compare? (IG 94)
The constant efforts to wall in God to different sects and creeds imply lack of faith in Him. Frost’s metaphor of child also points to the limitations of human beings in understanding God. Accordingly he writes in “A Concept Self-Conceived”:

The latest creed that has to be believed
And entered in our childish catechism
Is that All’s a concept self-conceived,
Which is no more than good old Pantheism.
Great is the reassurance of recall.
Why go on further with confusing voice
To say God’s either All or over all?
The rule is, never give a child a choice. (FP 427)

Poems like “I Will Sing You One-O,” “An Unstamped Letter in Our Rural Letter Box,” “One More Brevity,” and “Take Something Like a Star” can be said to put forward a comprehensive picture of the God Concept of Frost.

The poem “I Will Sing You One- O,” for example, propounds an affirmation of a God. Frost believed that man’s understanding of God, like that of Nature, is limited. The pastoral artist that is Frost now expands himself to a cosmic poet. He explores the sky, the stars, the novas and the
constellations with the vigour of a mystic poet. The anticipation of God behind all these becomes all the more explicit in the poems:

The sigmas and taus
Of constellations.
They filled their throats
With the furthest bodies
To which man sends his
Speculation,
Beyond which God is; (FP 219)

In Tagore also the readers can witness an evolution of God concept from early musings to later consummate vision. In this process the poet becomes more interested in deeper spiritual aspirations than the life around him. His probing leads him to awareness where:

I expand my consciousness
Into endless time and vast earth;
I absorb the huge detachment of nature’s own meditations
Into my own mind; (SP 110)

The mystic vision of God and of the fusion of man and the Divine can be discerned in Tagore. The self or the finite rises into the unity of the Infinite, for self-realisation:
When I stood at this window and stared
At the southern sky, a message seemed to slide
Into my soul from the harmony of the stars,
A solemn music that said, 'We know you are ours-
Guest of our light from the day you passed
From darkness into the world, always our guest.' (SP 91)

The fusion of man and the Universe can be quite revelatory. Frost believes that self-realisation is nothing other than finding the meaning that he was long seeking:

The star itself—Heaven's greatest star,
Not a meteorite, but an avatar—
Who had made an overnight descent
To show by deeds he didn't resent
My having depended on him so long,
And yet done nothing about it in song.
A symbol was all he could hope to convey,
An intimation, a shot of ray,
A meaning I was supposed to seek,
And finding, wasn't disposed to speak. (FP 421)

There is no need to reiterate that the God-concept of Frost is very complex as it is an amalgamation of many influences like the Puritan,
Swedenborgian, transcendental etc. Nevertheless, he believed in the design of God. God controls and presides over the course of life of the universe. His presence fills the world with a new life. All that man should do is to:

To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a reason? (FP 30)

4.4.2. Mystical Consciousness

The various stages in the development of mystical consciousness are dealt with in detail in the first chapter of this study. They are:

1. The Way of Purgation
2. The Way of Illumination
3. The Way of Union

A discursive perusal of the poems of Tagore and Frost disclose a kinship in the development of their mysticism. But the general estimation is that third phase of the mystical journey, the Way of Union is not discernible in Frost.

The first phase, the Way of Purgation or the seeking of God is visible in both the poets. Frost seeks God when he felt the mystery of a "shadow" behind him:
In the thick of a teeming snowfall
I saw my shadow on snow.
I turned and looked back up at the sky,
Where we still look to ask the why
Of everything below. (FP 303)

But Tagore, like a true devotee, seeks his Beloved ardently:

Where dost thou stand behind them all, my lover,
hiding thyself in the shadows? They push thee and pass thee
by on the dusty road, taking thee for naught. I wait here weary
hours spreading my offering for thee, while passers-by come
and take my flowers, one by one, and my basket is nearly
empty. (CPP 19)

Life is generally depicted as a long journey. Only those who have a
mystical vision are able to seek and find God; others pass Him on the road,
without recognizing Him.

In the second stage there is a feeling of happiness, resulting from an
illumination, or a certain perception of the Infinite. This happiness finds its
expression in their poems. Tagore sings of the feeling thus:

It dances today, my heart, like a peacock it dances, it dances.
It sports a mosaic of passions
Like a peacock’s tail,
It soars to the sky with delight, it quests, O wildly

It dances today, my heart, like a peacock it dances. (SP 66)

Even a butterfly marks the beginning of a new consciousness for Frost. He writes of the bliss that is visible in him and the universe around him in “My Butterfly”:

Since first I saw thee glance,
With all thy dazzling other ones,
In airy dalliance,
Precipitate in love,
Tossed, tangled, whirled and whirled above,
Like a limp rose-wreath in a fairy dance.
When that was, the soft mist
Of my regret hung not on all the land,
And I was glad for thee,
And glad for me, I wist. (FP 28)

The poet, here, seems to suggest that Nature also feels the same joy he experiences. It can be assumed that deep insights into ‘the ways of God’ and the functioning of the universe first dawned on the poets with this mystical experience. But the similarity between these poets’s mystical consciousness seems to end here.
Both Tagore and Frost embarked on the mystical path as part of the look out for the meaning of the existence. The earlier poems in Sandhya Sangeet followed by Prabhat Sangeet mark the beginning of this quest in the poetic career of Tagore. The young poet’s effort to understand the mystery and meaning of life is significant; that in turn leads him to the question of death. Death is nothing but life renewing itself. “Endless Death” in Prabhat Sangeet enunciates this idea:

Life: is it then a name for a handful of deaths-
an aggregate of dyings?

Then a moment’s cluster of a hundred trivial deaths-
so much fuss over a naming!

As death grows, so will life:

minute by minute we shall ascend the sky
to the very dwelling of starlight.(IG 73)

Existing in a time-bound world, life also is divided into segments of time. The world is torn by inner conflicts. In “The Times Table” Frost writes in a matter of fact tone:

A sigh for every so many breath,

And for every so many sigh a death.

That’s what I always tell my wife

Is the multiplication table of life (FP 263)
Thus a close scrutiny of the poems of both Tagore and Frost reveals a progression of the various stages in the mystical consciousness. A spiritual awakening of the self, an awareness of the barriers in the path towards God-realisation, the dark night of the soul, the way of illumination etc. can be found, of course with some modifications, in both the poets. In Tagore the quest reaches its culmination in his poems of union with God whereas for Frost the final destination is his poems of self-realisation.

4.4.3. Concept of Nature

Both Tagore and Frost were widely acclaimed as great nature poets. A great number of their poems have Nature as their subject matter. Still a greater number of poems are inspired by Nature. Harmony of Man with Nature is a dear theme to both of them. They were not only aware of the benign and benevolent nature but also of the dynamic and darker forces of nature. The immediate themes may seem trivial or casual. But these poems are impregnated with great truths, ideas and visions.

They take keen pleasure in even the minutest aspects of nature. They were able to see a larger design behind every movement in Nature. The mutual relation of man, Nature and God is a part of this grand design. The Nature Mysticism of these poets is an extension of this recognition.
4.4.4. Nature Mysticism

Absorption and expansion of the self is the central question of the Nature Mysticism of Tagore and Frost. Nature becomes a mediator between man and God. When they are lost in a reverie about Nature, meaning of existence emerges in a flash of moment and it becomes an affirmation of life. Throughout the poetry of both the poets there are correspondences between man and Nature. An exploration into the mysterious in Nature leads to a deeper understanding of human beings which in turn leads to a better perception of his creator.

The uniting contraries of a West-Running Brook lead Frost to queries about the origin and existence of this universe. The brook reinforces the idea that man’s existence is also a union of paradoxes:

The brook runs down in sending up our life.

The sun runs down in sending up the brook.

And there is something sending up the sun.

It is this backward motion toward the source,

Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,

The tribute of the current to the source.

It is from this in nature we are from

It is most us.  (FP 260)
This discerning of the harmony among the opposites in the universe is present in Tagore also. The realisation of creation as a balancing of centripetal and centrifugal force is inherent in Nature:

Accept my homage, Earth, as I make my last obeisance of the day,

Bowed at the altar of the setting sun.

You are mighty, and knowable only by the mighty;

You counterpoise charm and severity;

Compounded of male and female

You sway human life with unbearable conflict.

The cup that your right hand fills with nectar

Is smashed by your left;  (SP 99)

The poet in Tagore was very much inspired by the mighty and magnificent nature. Tagore’s concept of nature to a large extent is shaped by the spiritual tradition of India. This tradition puts emphasis on an apprehension of the inner spirit of Nature and a harmony between the spirit of Nature and man. A realisation of this harmony helps in establishing a close communion and union with God. Life becomes a journey of realisation:

Walking with you, O restless One,

I find salvation
In the treasure of the journey.

In light and darkness,

In ever-new pages of creation,

In each new moment of dissolution

Echoes the rhythm of your dance and song. (LP 89)

In his essay on “The Religion of the Forest,” Tagore lays stress on how pilgrimages were meant to be a journey into the heart of Nature and to God. He comments: “Here man is free, not to look upon Nature as a source of supply of his necessities, but to realise his soul beyond himself...” (GW 510).

Frost’s “Into My Own” can be described as a journey of self-realisation. The poet-narrator is determined in his decision to enter the dark woods. No one can deter him from his decision. If his friends meet him again in his journey, “They would not find me changed from him they knew-/ Only more sure of all I thought was true.” (FP 5). Manorama Trikha comments:

He recognized the real value of loneliness, which enables one to peep into oneself and to see one’s own image in “a slanting mirror,”(perhaps of the soul), ... In “Into My Own” entrance into the dark woods gives the poet an opportunity to examine
his thoughts dispassionately and when he comes out he is more sure of himself. (59)

"Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter" is another poem by Frost where the unseen adds meaning to an otherwise silent and still nature. Once in summer when the poet passed through the place he had heard a bird singing:

A bird with an angelic gift
Was singing in it sweet and swift.
No bird was singing in it now.
A single leaf was on a bough,
And that was all there was to see. . . (FP 233)

The poem is significant because it ends on a different note. New meanings emerge out of the still life:

A brush had left a crooked stroke
Of what was either cloud or smoke
From north to south across the blue:
A piercing little star was through. (FP 233)

For both the poets the trees and the stars and the blue hills appear as symbols aching with a meaning which can never be uttered in words. Divinity can be observed in the very act of creation. When man's soul
draws the heavy curtain of self aside and when the veil is lifted he is face to face with the Eternity.

Their circumstances had many similarities: utter loneliness, early bereavements, failures and frustrations. The direct result of all these is an increased love towards Nature. Loneliness of man increases when he is away from Nature in spirit. Both of them believe that life with all its delights and agonies, beauty and ugliness deserves acclamation. As it has been already discussed in the previous chapters, a firm grip on reality is their greatest achievement and their poetry is the poetry of affirmation and acceptance.

A mystical awareness of cosmic harmony is another meeting point of the nature mysticism of the two poets. Tagore was proud of the fact that India had a cultural heritage quite different from that of the west. He reiterates this in many of his writings. "The West," he writes, "seems to take a pride in thinking that it is subduing Nature, as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything we want from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things." But in India things are quite different. "The Indian mind," he asserts, "never has any hesitation in acknowledging its kinship with Nature, its unbroken relation with all."(GW 374)
Frost also discerned a basic difference in the attitude of the West and the East towards Nature. It is clear that Frost, like Tagore, rejects the idea of Nature being conquered by man.

Lawrance Thompson writes about a lecture that Frost delivered at Kenyon College, Ohio thus:

Frost began by delineating what he considered a fundamental human dichotomy. On one side there was “the Western idea that we must master nature, and get such a grip on it that we can make ourselves all happy and make the universe a brotherhood of unconflicting love.” In opposition to this, he said, was the Eastern belief that “nature is too much for us, and that we may as well throw ourselves on God and Christ or some saviour.” His own inclination, he freely admitted, was “toward Asia.” (Biography 438)

To sum up, both Tagore and Frost view Nature as a means for self realisation. Invariably this is the journey towards God. They saw Nature as the rendezvous of man and God. Nature provided examples of Greater Realities for them. In his spiritual endeavours man can learn many a lesson from nature.
4. 4. 5. Humanism

Nature Mysticism of Tagore and Frost have their firm foot in humanism. The love of nature leads them to love of man and love of God. It is manifest as love for fellow beings, suffering humanity, the poor and children. They were by no means poets of ivory tower. They were beacon lights of hope for the world.

Apart from this rare visionary outlook into nature, which Tagore and Frost shared, they had much more in common. Frost, in his "Remarks on the occasion of the Tagore centenary," the transcription of a talk given on April 19, 1961, to celebrate the centennial of Tagore, analyses the viewpoints and notions that both of them shared. He declares both of them to be nationalists. "I'm a terrible nationalist myself – formidable. I can't see how one can be international unless there are some nations to inter with. And the clearer and distincter the better." (qtd. in Greiner 276)

Nationalism and internationalism are no more political concepts. They denote a spiritual awakening as they are ideas formulated by perceptions. Tagore's prayers are the prayers for the awakening of India. But he is not a nationalist in the current sense of the word. He dreams of a world "that has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls." Here "the tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection; ...the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action"
This vision is certainly not utopian or the mere fancy of a poet. They are attainable.

Self realisation, to Tagore, was not through Nature alone. Mankind also has enchanted him. He says: "Mankind with his intelligence and mind, his affection and love . . . is liberating me; it has made me reach out beyond myself" (OM 13).

Tagore was not ready to be content with the thinking that all was well with his country and countrymen. He rebelled against the orthodox customs and superstitions. Meek submission to what was unjust annoyed him the most. He could not stand fatalism of his countrymen either.

Niharranjan Ray in his essay, “Rabindranath Tagore and the Indian Tradition”, states emphatically that Tagore’s “intimacy with the collective psyche of the Indian people was always very close, much closer than any of his predecessors from Ram Mohan onwards or of his contemporaries, older and younger. Not for a moment did he forget that he arose out of his soil and was linked with his roots” (231).

The focus of Frost’s poems may at first glance seems to be on everyday occurrences like mowing, mending walls, going for water, apple-picking or the putting in of a seed. But in fact they also reveal the spiritual dilemma of man. “Mending Wall,” one of the best loved of Frost’s poems is a typical example for this. When two people build or mend a wall, they
are walling in themselves. Each stays on his side and builds his own prejudices. This is the predicament of man today. He is so much absorbed in himself that he has only a limited view of the harmony that exists in the universe.

Occasionally, he realises this and recognises that something in nature does not love a wall. While the narrator observes a wall between them, the neighbour sees a fence. The neighbour seems to have a more constructive attitude. A fence is something which can be seen through or climbed over easily. If the wall represents the lack of understanding between them, by doing repairs on it each year they are again and again constructing barriers between them. “We keep the wall between us as we go” (FP33). Like the narrator, the neighbour too has a limited comprehension. They go by what is ordained by the older generation. Creativity or free thinking is unknown to them. Man is a stranger to his brother: “He moves in darkness as it seems to me.” The poet thus observes both men, against the backdrop of nature, in a quiet, non-judgmental manner.

It also becomes evident in both these poets, that man, if he aligns himself with the laws of nature, can transcend the narrow interests imposed upon him by social structures. It is his own prejudices and conditionings that prevent man from acquiring self knowledge. Absolute freedom or an
egoless state is possible only if one can pierce all these barriers. Nature, by breaking a wall, is perhaps pointing to the great truth that man can achieve his goals without causing disharmony around him.

4.4.6. Style and Diction

Another point of similarity that can be found in their poems is a startling simplicity and directness of expression. Both made rich use of colloquial idioms and phrases. Images that are at once sublime and simple flourish in their poetry. The recurring symbols and images of these two poets are discussed in the previous chapters. Vividness of imagery combined with sincerity of feeling intensifies the mystical consciousness of both these Nature Poets.

Their symbols and images are drawn from the familiar objects in and around them. These symbols have a special driving force.

Tagore would not go for form at the cost of content. But this strong stand in the least marred the exquisite beauty of his poems or his high imagination and romantic ideals. This can be stated of the poetry of Frost also. But he was a little more conscious of form.

4.5. Dissimilarities

After surveying the similar aspects of the mystical leniencies and traits of Nature Mysticism in the Poems of these two poets, an enumeration of the dissimilarities is also essential.
The most striking difference is regarding the concept of God. To Tagore, God is both immanent and transcendental. Frost believed that God is transcendental. He rejects the preposition that God is omnipresent. To him God is beyond man’s conception.

The mysticism of Tagore is devotional mysticism. He seeks God with the ardent spirit of a devotee. To him, God is a lover, friend, master etc. The poet yearns for a Union with Him. The dominant element in his poetry is the deep love or bhakti to God. But the analysis of Frost’s poetry has rendered his mysticism as intellectual. His mysticism is concerned with cognitive domain. God realisation can be attained through wisdom. Frost resorts to impersonal pronouns such as ‘something’ or ‘someone’ for his God. He uses the term God also in several of his poems. No varying hues of relationship as in Tagore can be observed here. He wants to know God; he anticipates the existence of God as a Supreme Power. Tagore’s God is Omnipresent and Omnipotent, whereas Frost’s God is transcendent, beyond ordinary perception.

No expression of an ultimate union with God can be found in the mystical journey of Frost. This may be a reasonable explanation for the general contention that the mystical experience of Frost is not as consummate as Tagore’s.
A subtle difference can be traced in diction of these two poets. Much has been said about the universally acknowledged 'simple style' of Frost. Tagore's language is also simple. But it is suffused with the pleasant hue of deep mystical experience. While Tagore's language and style is more melodious and picturesque, Frost's language is more sharp and to the point. Here again what becomes plain is the difference between a devotional mystic and an intellectual mystic.

A remarkable trait visible in the mystical journey of Tagore is that of complete dedication in the Absolute. In this period of contemplation, the soul is ready for its union with God. The pure bliss of an enhanced sense of unity is all the more evident:

My heart, the bird of the wilderness, has found its sky in your eyes.

They are the cradle of the morning, they are the kingdom of the stars.

My songs are lost in their depths.

Let me but soar in that sky, in its lonely immensity.

Let me but cleave its clouds and spread wings in its sunshine.

(CPP 111)

Thus, Tagore's poetry gives a clear and orderly picture of the development of the mystical mind and its expression in poetry. The poet
experiences union with God in its fulness. "If you are only the haven, as they say, then what is the sea? /Let it surge and toss me on its waves, I shall be content. / I live in you whatever and however you appear" (GW 780). His exquisite poetry is the expression of the ineffable joy of this Union.

But a reader cannot trace such joy and thrill in Frost’s poems. Even though he is able to enter deeply into the mystery of God, it is done at an intellectual level. Perhaps this can be designated as the singular remarkable difference in the mystical consciousness of the two poets, as it has already been pointed out.

4.6. Conclusion

Analysis of the similar and dissimilar aspects of the poetry of Tagore and Frost suggests that these poets have much in common than their differences. Both of them are mystical poets par excellence. They opened up new vistas in mystical poetry. At the core of their mystical poetry is Nature Mysticism. Tagore believed that God is everywhere in Nature. To Frost, Nature is the manifestation of God who is transcendent.

Tagore can rightly be called as one of the greatest poets of humanity. He has been hailed by many as a mystic poet, a poet of humanity, a realist and so on. Anyhow, it is rightly pointed out by B.C. Chakravorty that: "His realism is free from crude materialism, his mysticism is free from the
false spirituality of escapism and his humanism is free from the narrow bonds of nationalism" (109).

Robert Frost was a poet who gave comfort to his readers with his fresh and apparently simple poems. This freshness and simplicity endeared him to a large reading public. In His dedicatory prayer to Frost, Rabbi Victor E. Reichert writes:

Let the youth of tomorrow, as they saunter here, in these Green Mountains Frost loved, find in this sampling of Frost’s poems a faithful portrayal, not alone of Nature’s woods and brooks, of flowers and song of thrush; but the subtler and deeper implications of the meaning and mystery of life. May they not miss the wisdom and the mirth, the playfulness and the sorrow, as well as the quiet and often devastating irony and scorn directed at human pretension and vanity. (Frost I Knew 122)

In the din and doom of the present day world, in a world that has lost its direction, the works of these two poets mirror an unruffled serenity. Their voices are to be nurtured and cherished. What Srinivasa Iyengar says of Tagore is true of Frost also: “he came as a harmonizer and strove to build a durable bridge of understanding between man and nature, man and
machine, man and God”(104). Their poetry can rightly be called as the epitomes of the deep optimism, spiritual insight and tranquillity.

Both Robert Frost and Rabindranath Tagore were singers of humanity, lovers of freedom and poetry, who were always intrigued by the relationship between man and man, man and nature, and of course man and God. They sought to pierce the veil between man and God through Nature. They believed that self-effacement and complete identification with Nature can lead one to the Ultimate Reality. The charm of their poetry has lent a unique quality to their Mysticism. What is regional and purely personal with its strange simplicity rise to the level of universal. Yet they are different in their approach to the subject matter. Tagore yearned for a union with the ‘beyond,’ while Frost observed and comprehended what is ‘beyond’.

While Frost’s narrator tends to be ironically humorous, the genteel verbiage of Tagore is rather meditative, philosophical and rhapsodic. Whatever they sang had deep roots in reality. Thus it can be observed that despite the vast differences in social, political or cultural environment, what they sang remains true and contemporary for the whole world. What is the legacy left by these great poets? The inference reached by Reichert about Frost befits Tagore also:
For this, his legacy to us, of sight and insight, of affirmation and dedication, of refusal to go into the dark and lament, of courageous but not vaporous optimism, as one 'who had a lover's quarrel with the world'-may these hard-won lessons endure to strengthen us upon our way. (Frost I Knew 122)