Flight of the Alone

Chapter 1

Flight of the Alone

1.1. Introduction

The mystery of life and the relation between the soul and the Absolute have fascinated and intrigued human beings across various cultures, countries and continents. There have been very many approaches to unveil this mystery. It may be the ways of the scientist, the mystic or the philosopher, the continuous effort to realize the truth, the unity, beauty and love, is valid and significant.

Mysticism in Literature is a vast arena and its analysis as such is out of the scope of the present study. So the investigation is curtailed into a compendious survey of English Poetry. Among the various literary genres that we read today, Poetry with its musical quality, intentness and attention to the details leave a powerful impression on us. The mystical ideals of love, devotion, sacrifice, salvation etc. find their most perfect expression in Poetry. Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost hold an inimitable position with regard to the respective Literature of their countries. The infused knowledge and love of God which Tagore expresses in his poems is very sublime and glorious. The ease with which he pours out his heart in his poems is awe-inspiring. For him Nature is an expression of the Infinite and it helps him to reach out towards his God. Like Tagore, Robert Frost is one
of the most beloved and popular poets of his country. Nature in its many forms and manifestations constantly fascinates him and helps him to make contact with the Absolute. Though separated by space, language and culture, Nature-mysticism as expressed in their poems reveals a "flight of the alone to the Alone" (EE IX:84). This study proceeds on the basis of the hypothesis that their poetry takes the readers to new heights of consciousness regarding Nature and God.

1.2. Aims and Objectives

One of the aims of this study is to identify the various phases of mystical consciousness manifested in the poems of Tagore and Frost. In tracing the phases of evolution of these creative minds there seems to be a process of growth. To trace the evolution of this growth is another objective of the study. An exploration of how the perception of the Divine in Nature helped them to break down the barriers that existed in different forms is also attempted at. How a life long conscientious seeking could instill in both the poets an unshakable faith in Man and God is also examined.

1.3. Methodology

The method followed is chiefly analytical with special reference to themes taking into consideration the characteristics of Mysticism in general and Nature Mysticism in particular. Both Tagore and Frost wrote
profusely on nature. A selective approach of those poems which reflects the different stages of mystical consciousness of their poetical compositions is given the main thrust. In order to make a critical evaluation and assessment of the analysis, besides the primary sources, books and articles on the poets also are referred to.


Tracing the history of Mysticism is a difficult task when one can rely only on written records. Mysticism indeed existed even before it was put on record. Thus it is to be admitted that it is not possible to give a complete or continuous account of its development. Moreover, whatever has been documented reveals that it differs from person to person and religion to religion. “Mystical experience”, it has been pointed out, “is as old as humanity, is not confined to any one racial stock, is undoubtedly one of the original grounds of personal religion . . .” (EE IX:83).

Mystic thought can be discerned in every religion, culture and civilization. William James affirms: “Mystical states of mind in every degree are shown by history, usually though not always to make for the monistic view” (Pragmatism 151).

This chapter tries to examine how far the mystical creed has been a determining factor in Literature. A deliberation on the various definitions and perspectives of Mysticism along with its characteristics and influences
is central to such an enquiry. After a brief survey of mystical elements in the sacred texts of world religions, Mysticism as manifested in Literature is also explored. This chapter is also an attempt to trace the development of Mysticism with special reference to Nature – Mysticism, its relevance and its manifestations in Literature.

The first task before the investigator is to define the much familiar concept of Mysticism. This is not easy as an all-comprehensive definition of Mysticism is not possible. Each mystic perceives and expresses his experience in accordance with his own religious background. W.R. Inge, in 1899, has listed some twenty-five definitions of Mysticism. Some of the most commonly accepted definitions are being analysed here. They seem diverse in every aspect. Yet some underlying similarities can be detected.

According to Otto Pfleiderer, “Mysticism is the immediate feeling of the unity of the self with God” (EP5:420). Edward Caird defines Mysticism as “that attitude of mind in which all relations are swallowed up in the relation of the soul to God” (420). Richard Nettleship says, “True Mysticism is the consciousness that everything that we experience is an element and only an element in fact, i.e. that in being what it is, it is symbolic of something else” (420). To Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism is “the art of union with Reality. And a “mystic is the person who has attained that
union in greater or lesser degree” (qtd. in Kannath 2). In the words of W.R.Inge:

Mysticism means communication with God, that is to say with a Being conceived as the supreme and ultimate reality. If what the mystics say of their experience is true, if they have really been in communion with the Holy Spirit of God, that is a fact of overwhelming importance, which must be taken into account when we attempt to understand God, the world, and ourselves. (qtd. in M.Cox 21)

But with the passage of time the term ‘Mysticism’ acquired new shades of meaning. Tracing the etymology of the word perhaps proves how different interpretations came into existence. The word mystic is associated with the mystery cult of ancient Greece. The word mystery is derived from the Greek verb μυτίν which means ‘to shut’ i.e., to close the lips in secrecy. In ancient Greece “one who was initiated into the mysteries of existence and esoteric knowledge of the realities of life and death was known as μυτής (mystic)” (Kannath 1). During the initial stages of the development of Mysticism in the West, mystical insight was invariably associated with the Christian Theology. It was under the influence of St. Augustine, that the western community accepted it as a subjective state of mind. Jean de Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Sorbonne in the fifteenth
century defined Mysticism as "the experimental knowledge of God through the embrace of unitive love" (ER 10:246).

"Mysticism", says Hal Bridges, "is different from magic, occultism, spiritualism, para psychological phenomenon, New Thought, and mental healing"(6). Germans make such a distinction between the word mystizimus and mystik. Mystizimus is used to denote psychical or occult phenomena while mystik stands for Mysticism. So Mysticism is:

- a fundamental consciousness of a beyond, of a Reality, changeless and eternal, that permeates and gives meaning to the world and experiences of finite creation. The mystic in all cultures apprehends a truth that is beyond the grasp of the rational intellect: his consciousness is extended so that, in a state of inexplicable sublimity, he grasps the abiding unity of all things, perceiving the co-immanence of the eternal and the temporal. (M. Cox 21)

A comprehensive explanation of Mysticism seems possible in the light of this discussion. Apart from subtle differences, all streams of Mysticism unite in the final supposition that the mystic path leads to the Realization of the Divine Immanence. It is beyond the temporal and the familiar.
Mysticism may also be defined as the spiritual effort of the mind to transcend the impediments of the sensory world and to surrender itself to the Ultimate Reality. Thus Mysticism is about the union with God. It is a reality beyond all realities.

Mystical experiences are transcendent, passive and beyond description. They provide an all-encompassing vision and it varies from individual to individual. Thus it can be safely concluded that Mysticism is a quest for an all embracing vision which takes the seekers of God to new heights of being. It helps them to keep alive a consciousness which liberates them from what is ordinary and prosaic. This consciousness may not be a solution to every problem that humanity faces, but it is the salient voice of sanity.

1.5. The Characteristics of Mysticism

In 1902, William James published The Varieties of Religious Experiences. Though he has several other books to his credit it was The Varieties which made him an authority on Mysticism. In this book he sorts out four characteristics of mystical experiences. In addition to the characteristics listed by William James, several other aspects of the mystical experience have also been pointed out by different authors. From the most dominant characteristics of mystical consciousness might emerge
a picture which is fairly acceptable. A few salient characteristics are as follows:

1.5.1. Ineffability

Mystical experiences are ineffable because they cannot be described or uttered. Mystical experience or God-realisation by its very nature is incommunicable. According to St. John of the Cross:

> It is impossible to speak of God Himself so as to convey any idea of what He is — because it is God Himself who communicates Himself to the soul now in the marvelous bliss of its transformation. In this state God and the soul are united, as the window is with the light, or coal with the fire, or the light of the stars with that of the sun, yet, however, not so essentially and completely as it will be in the life to come. The soul, therefore, to show what it received from the hands of God in the cellar of wine, says nothing else, and I do not believe that anything could be said . . . *(Spiritual Canticle)*

1.5.2. Noetic Quality of the Experience

Noetic means of ‘the intellect’. Mystical experiences, according to William James, are “states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect” (qtd. in M.Cox 25). Here intellect is not synonymous
with logic. As Cox points out "it infers that knowledge can be grasped by
intuition and insight, which reflects the meaning of the Latin word
intellectus – perception. The mystic perceives directly; he is granted a
wholeness of vision. . . " (25-26). This is a state of being when higher
Truths are felt in an exalted state of mind by means of higher intellect.
Mystical experience does not take place in a state of mental torpor as is
commonly perceived. It involves the active participation of mind, which is
often beyond the scope of ordinary men. It is a kind of divine
enlightenment, when the divine light enters the soul and illuminates the
intellect. Ramakrishna Paramhamsa, a nineteenth century Indian mystic
and saint, delineates his mystical revelation as taking place in the substance
of consciousness. He has been working as a priest in a temple of Kali (the
Divine Mother) in Calcutta when he experienced the vision. This is how he
describes his experience:

The Divine Mother revealed to me that... it was she who had
become everything . . . that everything was full of
consciousness. The image was consciousness, the altar was
consciousness . . . the door-sills were consciousness . . . I
found everything in the room soaked as it were in bliss – the
bliss of God. . . That was why I fed a cat with the food that
was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived
that all this was the Divine Mother – even the cat. (qtd. in Stace 77)

1.5.3. Transiency

This is another important characteristic of Mysticism. Mystical experience does not last for a long time. It is a mistake to think that a mystic lives always in a state of ecstasy. But these “sudden partings of the conceptual veil,” as Evelyn Underhill states, do not last for long (Practical Mysticism). No mystic can remain for a long time in an enhanced state of consciousness. Even though the mystical experiences of all mystics are transient in nature, their impact extends over their whole life. The experience of Henry Suso is quite illustrative of this fact:

This overpowering rapture lasted about an hour and a half; but whether his soul stayed in his body, or was parted from it, he knew not. When he came to himself again, he was altogether like a man who has come from another world. . . his soul and mind were full within of heavenly marvels. The heavenly glances came again and again in his innermost interior, and it seemed to him as if he were floating in the air. (Knox 10-11)

1.5.4. Passivity

It is one of the distinct characteristics of mystical experience. The mystic feels “as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as
if he were grasped and held by a superior power” (Bridges 14). The mystic is the ‘chosen’ one and thus the mystical experience is fortuitous. In this sense, mystical experience is God-given at His will. But what is imperative is the preparation on the part of the ascetic. The deeper realms of his consciousness are kept empty, calm and receptive for the action of God. The Maitri Upanishad describes this as the highest state of mind:

By the calming of consciousness,
One kills action, both pure and impure:
With self calmed, resting in the self,
One wins unfailing bliss. (Bk IV: 6)

1.5.5. Unitary Consciousness

This characteristic can rightly be called as the real goal of mystical quest for it envisages union with God. What Evelyn Underhill remarks in this regard is quite note-worthy:

The movement of the mystic consciousness towards this consummation is not merely the sudden admission to an overwhelming vision of Truth: though such dazzling glimpses may from time to time be vouchsafed to the soul. It is rather an ordered movement towards ever higher levels of reality, ever closer identification with the Infinite. “The mystic experience,” says Récéjac, “ends with the words, ‘I live, yet
not I, but God in me.’ This feeling of identification, which is the term of mystical activity, has a very important significance. (*Mysticism: A Study*)

The Maitri Upanishad describes this as a mental condition which is beyond all expression and understanding:

The bliss that is the stainless consciousness, washed by concentration,

May have when it has been brought into the self

Cannot be described by speech:

It is experienced directly through the inner organ. (Bk IV: 6)

1.5.6. Consciousness of Oneness in All Things

An awareness of the presence of the Supreme Soul in every being is central to this concept. This realization raises the level of understanding and one begins to perceive the whole in the part, the self in every object and God in the Universe. Almost all streams of religious Mysticism uphold this union with the higher reality. The Upanishads depicts God as someone inseparable from the material universe. He is present in everything and the ignorant do not perceive this Oneness. According to the Katha Upanishad:

What is here is there:

What is there is here too.

The one who sees things here as various
1.5.7. Non-spatial and Non-temporal Quality

Another element in common with all mystical experiences is its timeless quality. It is not bound to the past or the future. It is an eternal and dynamic now. It can happen anywhere. The frequency of experience is also equally unpredictable. But as the attainment is not temporal or fleeting, its impact remains the same throughout the mystic’s life. The intensity of mystical experience does not depend on its frequency or number. D.T. Suzuki describes this feature in the following words:

In this spiritual world there are no time divisions such as the past, present and future; for they have contracted themselves into a single moment of the present where life quivers in its true sense...The past and the future both rolled up in this present moment of illumination, and this moment is not something standing still with all its contents, for it ceaselessly moves on. (148-9)

Mystical experiences are timeless and space-less as they are non-individualistic. In other words, they transcend all barriers of the seeming reality in its passage to the ultimate Reality. Acclaimed Sufi –poet Jalaluddin Rumi sings:

Past and future veil God from our sight;
Burn up both of them with fire. How long

Wilt thou be partitioned by these segments like a reed? (qtd. in Aurobindo, *Perennial Philosophy* 216)

**1.5.8. Moral Transformation**

The mystic who is in constant communion with God naturally remains pure and sinless. As he becomes one with God, he shares His grace too. His thoughts and deeds are governed by ‘pure love’ flown from Godhead. He offers himself to God in service of the whole universe. Thus, according to Steiner, mystic can:

... no longer err, no longer sin. If he seems to err or sin he must illuminate his thoughts or his actions with a light in which that no longer appears as error and as sin which appears as such to the ordinary consciousness. (121)

**1.5.9. Paradoxicality**

Mystical conceptions are largely governed by a looming paradoxicality. This is because of the incapability of the manners of expression to impart the mystical experience. Naturally it causes discord in expression and results in paradoxes. Evelyn Underhill attributes this to “the huge disparity between his unspeakable experience and the language which will most nearly suggest it” and to “the great gulf fixed between his mind and the mind of the world” (*Mysticism: A Study*). Fritjof Capra in his
interesting book *The Tao of Physics* explores in detail the parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism. His observation regarding the language used by Modern Physicists and mystics is noteworthy:

The problem of language encountered by the Eastern mystic is exactly the same as the problem the modern physicist faces...Both the physicist and the mystic want to communicate their knowledge, and when they do so with words their statements are paradoxical and full of logical contradictions. These paradoxes are characteristic of all Mysticism, from Heraclitus to Don Juan, and since the beginning of this century they are also characteristic of Physics. (54)

1.5.10. Feeling of Peace, Happiness and Bliss

A mystic who has attained union with God, draws eternal happiness from Him. He drinks deeply from the perennial fountain of happiness. Drawing boundaries for such a soul is impossible. He finds God's love shining upon all and feels deep in himself an indescribable peace. Kabir says:

If you merge your life in the ocean of Life, you will find your life in the Supreme Land of Bliss.
What a frenzy of ecstasy there is in every hour! And the worshipper is pressing out and drinking the essence of the hours: he lives in the life of Brahma. (trans. by Tagore, GW 839)

1.6. Various Stages of Mystical Experience

A mystic moves towards his goal through certain stages of experiences which are traceable in the case of every famous mystic. A comprehensive series of these stages is envisaged by many critics and scholars. A survey of these phases will lead the readers to a better understanding of Mysticism.

1.6.1. The Valley of Quest or the Way of Purgation

The first of these stages is an Awakening of the Self to a consciousness of Supreme Reality. This intimate experience of Divine Reality makes the devotee excited while listening to Him, speaking to Him, and remembering Him:

Let me see your face,
Let me hear your voice,
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is comely. (Holy Bible NKJV. Song Sol, 2:14)
The seer is filled with an intense yearning to seek God and to surrender to His will. The self becomes aware of its own imperfections and other short comings as a result of its association with God. Underhill terms this stage as a period of self purification because the Self subjects itself to all sorts of mortifications to eliminate the impediments in the road towards union with God. Thus Purgation is a state of self-inflicted pain also.

1.6.2. The Valley of Love or the Way of Illumination

Illumination, the second stage, is a state of happiness. It involves a certain perception of the Infinite. After the Purgation, the Self becomes more detached and fresh for the awakening to Reality. This stage is essentially contemplative. The awareness of the Divine Presence becomes a source of wholesome happiness. The devotee's soul becomes passive and prepared for the next stage, i.e. Union with God. Some characteristics of this stage of mystical experience are as given below:

1. Immense patience and endurance while experiencing dark night of the soul.
2. Detachment from worldly pleasures.
3. Insatiable thirst for God.
5. Ardent desire for union with God.
6. Delight in praising God and His attributes.

7. Deep rooted and everlasting faith in God.

8. Following the footsteps of God.


The Psalmist expresses his dark night experience thus:

O God, thou art my God, I seek thee
My soul thirsts for thee;
My flesh faints for thee,
as in a dry and weary land
where no water is. (Ps 63:1)

1.6.3. The Way of Union

Union with God is the absolute aim of any mystical exploration. It is not a mere perception of Reality or the Absolute Truth, but becoming an integral part of it. This becoming of one with God is known as the Way of Union. This union sometimes is pictured as the union of lover and the beloved, as depicted in the poem of St. Theresa of Avila:

Into the very arms of Love
My stricken soul forthwith was thrown.
Since then my life’s no more my own
And all my lot so changed is
That my Beloved one is mine
And I at last am surely His. (qtd. in Kannath 14)

The bliss attained by Union is not temporal or fleeting, but perennial and perfect. Kabir considers God as his Beloved Lord and eagerly waits for union with him. He sings:

This day is dear to me above all other days, for to-day the Beloved Lord is a guest in my house;
My chamber and my courtyard are beautiful with His presence.

.....................................................

I wash His feet, and I look upon His Face; and I lay before Him as an offering my body, my mind, and all that I have.

What a day of gladness is that day in which my Beloved, who is my treasure, comes to my house! (GW 861)

The Rig-Veda also compares the relationship between God and devotee to that of the bridegroom and the bride.

1.7. Kinds of Mysticism

Mysticism is classified as Religious and Non-religious, Natural (acquired) and Supernatural (infused); Extrovertive and Introvertive; Mysticism of Introspection and Mysticism of Unifying Vision, based on several principles. The experiences resulting from psychedelic drugs or pathological psychic conditions like hysteria were also treated as mystical
by some. But by general agreement there are two principal varieties of mystical consciousness: God Mysticism and Nature Mysticism.

1.7.1. God Mysticism

Basically, God Mysticism or the experience of the Absolute is of two types: Devotional Mysticism and Intellectual Mysticism. Devotional Mysticism is marked by the undemanding and selfless love and devotion of the mystic towards God. The psalmist sings of unflinching faith in God Almighty:

Truly my soul silently waits for God;
From him comes my salvation.
He alone is my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense; (Ps 62: 1-2)

The ultimate goal of the devotee is to become one with the Supreme Being. For this he has to undergo very tiring and trying experiences.

Intellectual Mysticism denotes the idea that actions in the sphere of intellect also form an essential path to the realisation of God. Attaining knowledge of God, which is essentially a mystical act, is done by means of cognitive approach. The mystical concepts of the Upanishads can be classified as Intellectual Mysticism. The Prasna Upanisad says:

Knowing the arising, the arriving, and the place
And the pervading in five ways
Of the breath in relation to the self,

One attains immortality:

Knowing, one attains immortality. (3:12)

1.7.2. Nature Mysticism

Down the history lane, Nature Mysticism has been formulated, influenced, restructured and re-discovered several times by mystics and litterateurs across time and space. Even then there is an underlying unity of opinion regarding the essence of Nature Mysticism. Nature Mysticism is union with the immanent God in Nature. Omnipresence of God is given emphasis in the mystical consciousness of Nature. In that sense, Nature Mysticism is not fundamentally different from God Mysticism.

Nature enchants and bewilders man most with her mysteries of existence. Much of it is beyond reason and logic, inaccessible to the understanding. "A mystic is the one who invariably pursues the inexplicable desiring for a direct experience of the Ultimate Reality" (Dhar 1). This experience might occur in various fields in varying degrees characterized by a sense of beauty or sublimity, enchantment by music, close companionship with Nature, an insight into the meaning of the Ultimate Truth and the awakening into a love for all Beings etc.

It might be intermittent or it might occur only once in a lifetime. But its impact upon the experient is perpetual. It changes the whole perspective
of the concerned person. One cannot go back and be the old self. Life attains a new meaning and dimension. A harmony with cosmos is experienced. R.M.Bucke describes such a one-time experience, which never again occurred in his life:

I had spent the evening in a great city, with two friends reading and discussing poetry and philosophy. . . I had a long drive home in a hansom cab to my lodging. My mind . . . was calm and peaceful. . . all at once, without warning of any kind, I found myself wrapped in a flame coloured cloud. For an instant I thought of fire . . . somewhere . . . in that great city; in the next I knew that the fire was in myself. Directly afterward there came upon me a sense of exaltation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. (qtd. in Stace 78)

But the experience was sufficient enough to “re-orient his life and thought. It was this single momentary flash of cosmic consciousness which caused him to collect and study patiently all the records he could find of other people’s similar experiences and to reflect on them and to publish his conclusion about them in his book” (Stace 78).
This cosmic consciousness or sense of transcendence might be caused by the tiniest or the mightiest of Nature or by an underlying principle of Nature as a whole. Richard Jeffries is most remembered for his mystical descriptions of Nature. This is one of his descriptions:

In the rush and roar of the stormy wind, the same exaltation, the same desire lifted me for a moment. I went there every morning, I could not exactly define why; it was like going to a rose bush to taste the scent of the flower and feel the dew from its petals on the lips. But I desired the beauty— the inner subtle meaning—to be in me, that I might have it and with it an existence of a higher kind . . . After the sensuous enjoyment always came the thought, the desire: That I might be like this; that I might have the inner meaning of the sun, the light, the earth, the trees and grass, translated into some growth of excellence in myself, both of body and mind; greater perfection of physique, greater perfection of mind and soul; that I might be higher in myself. (qtd. in Bennet 186-7)

Howard Thurman's mystical experience can be considered as another representative study. His experience is different from that of R.M.Bucke or Richard Jeffries because, as a black he endured many cruel blows of racial discrimination. His inner life, he believes, gave him the
strength to overcome the cruelties of racial discrimination. A description of one of his experiences is as follows:

As a child I was accustomed to spend many hours alone in my rowboat, fishing along the river, when there was no sound save the lapping of the waves against the boat. There were times when it seemed as if the earth and the river and the sky and I were one beat of the same pulse. It was a time of watching and waiting for what I did not know—yet I always knew. There would come a moment when beyond the single pulse beat there was a sense of Presence which seemed always to speak to me. My response to the sense of Presence always had the quality of personal communion. There was no voice. There was no image. There was no vision. There was God.

(qtd. in Bridges 54)

Rabindranath Tagore writes of a visionary experience during his early childhood that transformed the ordinary world into the extraordinary. The barriers of the finite vanished though the vision lasted only for seconds:

One day when I was a boy the light of the morning son ventured down what path of its rising I know not, and of a sudden illustrated all human relationship before me in the
radiance of the soul. Although before very long the light was to vanish in the squalor of everyday life, still I hoped that one day before retiring from this world I would witness the whole of humanity illuminated by the light of that one soul.

(OM 72-73)

All these experiences reveal certain common characteristics that can be conveniently classified under Nature Mysticism. Firstly, Nature Mysticism is an implicit statement of the relationship between God and Nature. "The Book of Genesis" proclaims God as the creator of both man and the universe. Thus Man and Nature have their origin in the Almighty and naturally, are the manifestations of Him. That is why St. Bernard says: "what I know of the divine sciences and Holy Scripture, I learnt in woods and fields" (Aurobindo, Perennial Philosophy 82).

The second characteristic of Nature Mysticism is the envision of the Transcendent in Nature which seems to be above-all and beyond all. This is often the first phase of mystical experience. Then the objects of Nature that were considered trivial or even ugly seem basked in divine grace. Even the meanest flower or a blade of grass seems to be the manifestation of the Great and Powerful One. A mystic realizes the meaning of the simplest things in creation. This sentiment is echoed in Tennyson: "Little
Flower—but if I could understand/What you are, root and all, and all in all, / I should know what God and man is” (482).

Thirdly, Nature educates the mystic of high ideals through mystical experiences. God effects an Illumination in the soul of the mystic by means of Nature. Lasting happiness and satisfaction ensues. William Wordsworth, a true Nature mystic clearly experienced it and so describes it as a “presence that disturbs me with the joy/Of elevated thoughts.” He sees the Sublime Being in Nature:

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts,
And rolls through all things. (243)

Finally, the union with Nature is nothing other than the Union with God. Here the mystic “becomes progressively less aware of his environment and of himself as a separate individual. He speaks of being merged in, identified with, and dissolved into the One. The subject-object distinction vanishes altogether” (EP 429). In this state of pure bliss, all consciousness of the phenomenal world is left behind.
A Nature Mystic believes that Nature has a life of its own. He is aware of the harmony that exists in Nature. W.T. Stace says:

Nature Mysticism is a dim feeling or sense of a “presence” in nature which does not amount to a developed mystical experience but is a kind of sensitivity to the mystical which many people has who are not in the full sense mystics. (80)

The mystical awareness of Nature is not a mere admiration or glorification of Nature. It is much more than that. As Rudolf Otto puts it:

Nature Mysticism is the sense of being immersed in the oneness of Nature, so that man feels all the individuality, all the peculiarity of natural things in himself. He dances with the motes of dust and radiates with the sun, he rises with the dawn, surges with the wave, is fragrant in the rose, rapt with the nightingale: he knows and is all being, all strength, all joy, all desire, all pain in all things inseperably. (93)

The highly developed sensitiveness to Nature was termed as ‘Expansions’ by William James. According to him: “such feelings of expansion are indeed very common in Indian Mysticism, e.g. becoming Sarvam, the All-being, and knowing one’s self as the All” (qtd. in Otto 94)

1.8. Mysticism and the Sacred Writings

Mystical thought is closely associated with religion. But mysticism does not belong to any single religion or sect. Seeking self realisation and union with God is common to all religions. Thus mysticism forms an integral part of all the sacred writings of the world. Mysticism, Margaret Smith observes:

... is to be found, in a highly developed state, in the early religious doctrines of the East; in the Vedic Literature; in Buddhism both in India and in China; in a form strangely attractive..., in Sufism, the mysticism of Islam, ... in Judaism and finally, as we have seen, in Greece and in the West. (19)

1.8.1. The Bible

“The Old Testament” delineates a gradual and orderly development of the mystical concept of Christianity. The conception that man is made in God’s image, the visions and mystical experiences of Prophets and believers like Abraham, Jacob and Moses who had close interaction or
communion with God and God’s messages to the ‘chosen ones’ can be considered as the main phases of this development.

In the Psalms, the intense yearning of the Psalmist for union with God is depicted in a language and style which was later to become typical of mystical literature:

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation.
Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for You I will pray.
My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up.

(Ps 5: 1-3)

The New Testament gives the mystic experiences of St. Paul. His purgation, illumination and final union with God are clearly illustrated in the Pauline Epistles.

1.8 .2. The Upanishads

In the East, Mysticism and the concept of self are closely related. An understanding of the concept of the self or Brahman or the Infinite Being as expressed in the Upanishads is essential to understand the mystical thought of the East. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad describes some serious discourses on the Self: “The self is the overlord of all beings, the king of all beings . . . so all beings, all gods, all worlds, all breaths, all
selves are held together in the self” (II.5.15). The Taittiriya Upanishad defines Brahman thus:

The one who knows brahman
As truth, as knowledge, as the endless,
Hidden in the secret place and in the highest heaven
Wins all desires,
With brahman, the wise one. (Bk II: 1)

The mystic elements of The Upanishads appeal to the intellect.

1.8.3. The Bhagavat-Gita

The composition of The Bhagavad-Gita (the Song Divine) can be dated back to second century A.D. Unlike the Upanishads, it appeals to the emotions. Nirad C. Chaudhuri observes:

For the first time in any Hindu text the nature of bhakti is also fully communicated, both intellectually and emotionally... no doubt is left as to the nature of the devotion which is expected and what the devotees are expected to be. (262)

The Krishna of The Bhagavad-Gita demanded no rituals or rites to be performed for him. “He wanted only one thing—total self surrender and love” (Chaudhuri 265). Lord Krishna tells Arjuna: “for them, whose minds are set on me, verily I become, ere long, O Partha, the saviour (to save them) out of the ocean of finite experience, the Samsara” (XII:7)
1.8.4. The Holy Quran

The Holy Quran, the sacred text of Islam envisages the world as one of rewards and retributions, based on “justice tempered with mercy.” Quran contains a comprehensive view of man, universe and God. Complete surrender to the will of God is essential for God realisation.

Quran also gives:

An insight into the universe reveals to man order and harmony, purpose and design, pointing to the wisdom and providence of the Creator. The object for which He created the world is known to Him alone but its design provides for its conservation and shows proportion, beauty and justice leading us to the concept of a creator (Khaliq) and preserver (Rab) who is gracious and merciful (Rahman and Rahim) (qtd. in Husain 66)

1.8.5. Buddhist Mysticism

Buddhism denies the existence of a personified God. The ultimate aim is nirvana (extinction of existence), which is often identified as the final stage in the mystical experience. This is an instance of Soul Mysticism. The following anecdote, recounted by Jawaharlal Nehru, will tell the reader more about the mystical nature of the teachings of Sri Buddha:
Once, it is said, he took some dry leaves in his hand and asked his favourite disciple Ananda, to tell him whether there were any other leaves besides those in his hand. Ananda replied: ‘The leaves of autumn are falling on all sides, and there are more of them than can be numbered.’ Then said the Buddha: ‘In like manner I have given you a handful of truths, but besides these there are many thousands of other truths, more than can be numbered.’ (130)

1.8.6. Sufi Mysticism

For the Sufi poets ‘Love’ is the essence of Godhead. They yearn to feel God with the zest of a lover seeking his beloved:

When my beloved appears,

With what eyes do I see Him?

With his eyes, not with mine

For none sees Him except Himself. (qtd. in Agarwala 111)

1.9. Mysticism and Literature

Mysticism and Literature are linked together integrally. Attempts to define and describe the mystical experiences had its reflection in Literature as well. While the mystics enriched their literature by describing their deep mystical experiences, poets and others added charm to mystical experience and mystical thoughts through their works.
The Literature of the mystics needs special attention. It is persuasive in its sparseness, restraint and lack of indulgence for elaboration. It is the language of silence and introspection. At the same time it seems to be contradictory and baffling:

O how may I ever express that secret word?

O how can I say He is not like this, and He is like that?

If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed:

If I say that He is without me, it is falsehood.

He makes the inner and outer worlds to be indivisible one;

The conscious and the unconscious, both are His footstools.

He is neither manifest nor hidden,

He is neither revealed nor unrevealed:

There are no words to tell that which He is. (GW 835)

The mystics enriched their languages with unique and exquisite similes and metaphors. ‘The cloud of the unknowing,’ ‘the divine dark,’ and ‘the marriage of the souls’ are a few powerful utterances to quote. Aurobindo reinforces this concept when he says: “Mystic poetry has a perfectly concrete meaning much more than intellectual poetry which is much more abstract” (Future Poetry 353). A mystic is a poet apart from a visionary and a practical psychologist. Thus the effective use of poetry can
be attributed as one of the causes of the all-pervading influence of Mysticism.

Kenneth Burke renders a very interesting reading of Mysticism in poetry in his essay, "Mysticism as a Solution to the Poet’s Dilemma", which he begins in a lighter vein by pointing out that people respond spontaneously to anything that is labelled mystical and "an ounce of mystery is worth a ton of argument." He further explains:

Poetry deals, above all, with the language of sensation, of the concrete and positive, whereas Mystery is of the spirit. Mysticism arises in Poetry in so far as the ‘things’ of the poet’s sensory experience are felt to be infused by a hierarchical spirit. Empirically, things just are; but mystically, things stand for. Mystical poetry is thus forever using the language of things to point beyond things, to the ultimate invisible, intangible order (the realm of hierarchy) by which they are infused. (105-6)

Exploring the chief manifestations and general characteristics of Mysticism as expressed in Literature of the East and the West is rewarding to a certain extent. This helps the readers to have a better perception of the Mystical poems of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost. So a probe into
Mysticism as expressed in English, Indian and American Literature will not be out of place at this juncture.

1.9.1. English Literature

In England it was during the fourteenth century that Mystical Literature flourished the most. It was an age when “England was drained of manhood and wealth by never-ending wars; and far worse, the plague of the Black Death” (Hopkinson 59). Mysticism then acted as a stabilizing force. The writings of mystics like Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle and Lady Julian of Norwich came to be widely read. Imagery drawn from music was a hallmark of Rolle’s mystical experience. Rolle wrote beautiful and simple lyrics. Another fourteenth century English mystic who left his powerful, individual imprint on mystic Literature was the unknown author of The Cloud of Unknowing. This devotional classic as well as the works of Walter Hilton and Lady Julian seems to be liberally drawn from the literature of mystical theology.

The seventeenth century saw the blooming of the Mystical verse. Many poets belonging to the school of Donne, known popularly as the Divine Poets of the seventeenth century wrote poems that “reveal a sensibility akin to the mystical. Intensely and intimately involved with the object of their devotion, they sing invariably in the language of the
mystics” (Dhar 7). George Herbert, Richard Crawshaw and Henry Vaughan are some of the notable poets among them.

1.9.1.1. **John Donne** (1572-1631)

Donne was deeply concerned with the metaphysical puzzles of sin, death and union with God. An intense desire of the soul to be purged and saved by God is expressed in the language of Mysticism, in his religious poems. He wants Christ to punish him for his impurities so that he may be restored in the image of his Creator:

- - - and thou look’st towards mee,

O Saviour, as thou hang’st upon the tree;

I turne my backe to thee, but to receive

Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave

O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,

Burne off my rusts, and my deformity:

Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,

That thou may’st know me, and I turne my face. (89-90)

1.9.1.2. **George Herbert** (1593-1633)

Herbert was perhaps the most dedicated one among these religious poets. He firmly believed that one should dedicate all gifts to God, including that of versification. As a true mystic, his poems are conversations with God, not meant for any audience:
Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see,
And what I do in any thing,
To do it as for thee: (345)

1.9.1.3. Henry Vaughan (1622-1695)

Mystic poems of Vaughan are simple, direct and rich in symbolism. The central metaphor of his poetry is light, which stands for consciousness of God.

I saw Eternity the other night,
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright:--
And round beneath it, Time, in hours, days, years,
Driven by the spheres,
Like a vast shadow moved; in which the World
And all her train were hurl’d. (125)

1.9.1.4. Richard Crashaw (1612-1649)

Crashaw’s poems are well known for their deep mysticism and Christian symbolism. He deals with love and death in his “Prayer: An Ode”:

Delicious Deaths; soft exalations
Of soul; dear and divine annihilations;
A thousand unknown rites
Of joyes and rarefy'd delights;
A hundred thousand goods, glories, and graces,
And many a mystick thing
Which the divine embraces
Of the deare spouse of spirits with them will bring
For which it is no shame
That dull mortality must not know a name. (31: 77-86)

1.9.1.5. Thomas Traherne (1637-1674)

Seventeenth century, which is generally known as the age of reason, also produced a rich array of mystics and religious philosophers including Traherne, John Smith (1618-1652), Henry More (1614-1687) and Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688). Excitement and ecstasy mark the mystical poems of Traherne:

A native health and innocence
Within my bones did grow,
And while my God did all his Glories show,
I felt a vigour in my sense
That was all Spirit. I within did flow
With seas of life, like wine;
I nothing in the world did know
But 'twas divine. (42:17-24)
1.9.1.6. William Blake (1757-1827)

Romantic age saw the soaring of two eminent mystic-poets, William Blake and William Wordsworth. Gifted with "sacramental perception" Blake saw the Infinite in all beings. Apart from being a visionary, philosopher, and a great Romantic, Blake was a Mystic who could perceive "the world in a grain of sand,/ And a heaven in a wild flower" (1-2). He discerns, in "Auguries of Innocence," a universal joy in nature, which is the manifestation of the Supreme Reality which binds the universe together:

Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine;
Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine. (9-12)

1.9.1.7. William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

Wordsworth is undoubtedly a Nature Mystic. A large body of his verse is contemplative in mood and in a number of his poems, especially "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" and The Prelude, the meditative and mystical element is dominant. He was "well pleased to recognize" that his mystical consciousness is shaped by "Nature and the language of the sense." The whole canon of Wordsworth's Nature Mysticism is concerned with the
trinity: God, Man and Nature. Discerning the Spirit of the Universe is a veritable mystical experience to him:

- - - that blessed mood,

In which the affections gently lead us on,-

Until, the breath of this corporeal frame

And even the motion of our human blood

Almost suspended, we are laid asleep

In body, and become a living soul:

While with an eye made quiet by the power

Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

We see into the life of things. (242)

1.9.1.8. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

Shelley’s mysticism is marked with a desire to be one with the deep and ineffable truth. His contemplations on the unidentifiable One are essentially mystical:

The One remains, the many change and pass;

Heaven’s light forever shines, Earth’s shadows fly;

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,

Stains the white radiance of Eternity. . . (467)
1.9.1.9. John Keats (1795-1821)

Keats' motivations remained in the Idea of Beauty. A passage in “Endymion” describes how a vision can transfigure and exhilarate:

Feel we these things? – that moment have we stept
Into a sort of oneness and our state
Is like a floating spirit. (74)

1.9.1.10. Robert Browning (1812-1889)

Among the Victorians, there were Robert Browning and John Henry Newman who wrote exquisite lyrics steeped in mysticism. The exceptional desire to experience God finds passionate expression in Browning:

And what is that I hunger for but God?
My God, my God! let me for once look on thee
As tho’ nought else existed: we alone.
And as creation crumbles, my soul’s spark
Expands till I can say, ‘Even from myself
I need thee, and I feel thee, and I love thee;
I do not plead my rapture in thy works
For love of thee—or that I feel as one
Who cannot die—but there is that in me
Which turns to thee, which loves, or which should love.’ (101:11-20)

1.9.1.11. John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

Cardinal Newman is best known as the author of the world renowned lyric, “Lead, Kindly Light.” He passionately entreats God to be with him when his strength fails:

Lord, in this dust Thy sovereign voice
First quicken'd love divine;
I am all Thine,—Thy care and choice,
My very praise is Thine.
I praise Thee, while Thy providence
In childhood frail I trace,
For blessings given, ere dawning sense
Could seek or scan Thy grace;
And such Thy tender force be still,
When self would swerve or stray,
Shaping to truth the forward will
Along Thy narrow way.
Deny me wealth; far, far remove
The lure of power or name;
Hope thrives in straits, in weakness love,
And faith in this world's shame.

1.9.1.12. Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

Hopkins resumed his vocation of writing poems only to highlight the glory of God. The poet hails Him in his poignant poem, "The Wreck of the Deutschland":

Thou mastering me
God! giver of breath and bread;
World's strand, sway of the sea;
Lord of living and dead;
Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee. (5)

1.9.1.13. Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)

Dylan Thomas is a twentieth century English poet who identified himself with the mysterious powers of the universe. He saw the Divine Presence in the universe as all humbling darkness which controls life and death:

Never until the mankind-making
Bird beast and flower-
Fathering and all humbling darkness
Tells with silence the last light breaking
And the still hour
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness. (122)

1.9.1.14. W.B Yeats (1865-1939)

W.B Yeats who weaved a very complex poetic system with his symbolism, use of mythology and concepts like *Spiritus Mundi* and antithetical self, was a mystic poet too. He sings of his desire to be one with Eternity in "Sailing to Byzantium." He wants to be absorbed into Eternity:

O sages standing in God’s holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity. (12)

1.9.2. American Literature

It has been pointed out by many that spirituality is not a term usually associated with the United States of America. Somehow the
people of America are considered to be the epitome of materialism. They are the preachers of practicality. "It is assumed that" Rufus Jones remarks "we are dollar-chasers, pure and simple, and are interested only in what we can get our hands on, to have and to hold." He goes on to assert that indeed there has always been "an important mystical strand in the life and thought of America" (qtd. in Bridges 143).

Mysticism was established in America with the coming of Puritan settlers of New England. In Calvinist Theology it was not given much importance. It was treated suspiciously. The experiences that were beyond the control of church were distrusted. The congregation checked it. These experiences were not met with much encouragement. Orthodox Literary Mystics were not given much prominence and they slowly faded into oblivion.

As Raymond Nelson points out: "The history of Mysticism in America, then, at least as a literary phenomenon, is in one sense the history of the transformation and diffusion of a discipline rather than of transmission to successive generations"(5). But the mystic creed has undergone great many changes and adaptations in the course of time. Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane, Thomas Wolfe, Henry Miller, Thomas Merton, Brother Antoninus, Kenneth Patchen and Theodore Roethke are
some of the writers whose writings show a deep inclination towards Mysticism. All of them were influenced by Nature and its several manifestations. Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman were greatly influenced by the oriental mystical texts like The Upanishads and The Bhagavad-Gita. It was very much appealing to their transcendental imagination.

Edgar Allan Poe’s preoccupation with the notions of ideal beauty can be related to Neo-Platonic Mysticism. But both Eliot and Poe are more concerned with questions related to sin or the fallen state of humanity.

As the study limits itself to Mysticism in poetry, the emphasis is given to the works of some major poets.

1.9.2.1. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Emerson’s reflections and musings about Nature and God can be treated as a starting point of Mysticism of the New England Heritage. He was a transcendentalist who believed in the concept of Universal Self. All individual beings are parts of One Being. The ecstasy of the soul joining the Over-Soul is the highest mystical experience. His poems propound his concept of fundamental unity. He writes in his celebrated poem, “Brahma”:

If the red slayer think he slays,

Or if the slain think he is slain,

They know not well the subtle ways

I keep, and pass, and turn again. (161)
1.9.2.2. Walt Whitman (1819-1892):

It has been held by general agreement that the mysticism of Whitman is basically Vedantic in the sense that it propounds a non-dualistic Cosmic Soul. The intuitive and transcendental knowledge that springs up from the realisation of God is an experience of illumination for the poet:

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge
that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers. . . (27)

1.9.2.3. Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Emily Dickinson is another American poet who wrote lyrics with deep mystical undertones. The immense breadth of her mystic vision included love, life, Nature and Eternity. She has a formidable faith in the existence of the Absolute:

I know that he exists
Somewhere, in silence
He has hid his rare life
From our gross eyes. (48)
1.9.2.4. **Edgar Allan Poe** (1809-1849)

Poe’s concept of ideal poet led him to contemplations on heaven or blessedness and earth or worries and cares:

Yes, heaven is thine; but this
Is a world of sweets and sours;
Our flowers are merely—flowers,
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
Is the sunshine of ours. (185)

1.9.2.5. **T.S.Eliot** (1888-1965)

T.S.Eliot is a poet much concerned with the relation between time and eternity, the past and the present and man and God. “The Dry Salvages” of his *Four Quartets* is an expression of the longing of mankind which may “never here to be realised.” It is the longing for a union with eternity and a salvation from the circle of time:

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is incarnation.

Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled,
Where action where otherwise movement
Of that which is only moved
And has in it no source of movement –

Driven by daemonic, chthonic

Powers. And right action is freedom

From past and future also. (136)

1.9.2.6. Robert Frost (1874-1963)

Robert Frost, one of America’s most beloved poets, is generally termed a Nature poet. But the contemplative mood and revelations as the culminating statement render a unique pedestal for his poems. Each of his poems slowly unmasks a gentle, meditative and universal poet. Even an insignificant thing like a tree lives a life of its own. The picture of the “Tree at My Window” is sharp and penetrating. There is a fellow feeling between the poet and the tree:

But tree, I have seen you taken and tossed

And if you have seen me when I slept,

You have seen me when I was taken and swept

And all but lost. (FP 251)

His empathy is so great that he pleads, “let there never be curtain drawn /

Between you and me” (FP 251).

But when “life is too much like a pathless wood” he would like to get away from the earth. What makes Frost different from the romantics is that his desire to escape is momentary.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love
I do'nt know where it's likely to go better. (FP 121-2)

When observed from a different angle, one can take the poet as the symbol of human soul. The swinging of the birches is the attempt of the soul to touch the Divine, and the birches are the good deeds of man that help him to reach heaven. For the poet would certainly "...like to go by climbing a birch tree, / And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk/ Toward heaven..."(121-2).

The predicament of a traveller in choosing between the familiar and the mysterious finds a place in his poetry. Selecting a road "less travelled" is quite typical to the Mystic Way. All conventions and precedence are broken or ignored.

A revival of interest in Mysticism can be observed even in the writings of twentieth century. The writings of Charles A. Bennet, Howard Thurman, Rufus M. Jones, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Merton, and Philip Kapleau bear testimony to this fact. Mystical writings added a new dimension to the lives of Americans. Though their influence might not be dominant, it made its presence felt.
A careful purview of the development of Spiritual Literature leads one to the conclusion that the basic features of Mysticism in Literature are the same everywhere. If phrased more generally, it can be argued that mystical traditions are manifested in all religions, Philosophy and Literature. At times its role was marginalized and occasionally it constituted the mainstream of literary world.

1.9.3. Indian Literature

Apart from the sacred books, Indian Literature, in general, has a very rich tradition of mystical expressions. The life experiences and contributions of renowned mystics Kabir and Mira Bai deserve special mention in the history of the development of Indian Mystical tradition.

1.9.3.1. Kabir (c. 1440-1518)

Kabir had a very sound and all encompassing mystical vision deeply rooted in the Indian ideals. He is also acclaimed as a great poet. He sang of a religion of love and of the ultimate Union with God: “my teacher gave me the Lord’s Light/ And now to his heart I leap” (Lesser 14). His songs or Dohas were remarkable for the ecstasy Kabir derived from his mystical experiences.

1.9.3.2. Mira (c. 1498-1547)

Mira is the fifteenth century mystic singer who is acclaimed for her selfless love and devotion to God. She spent her life singing of God and
longing for union with Him. She sings passionately: "My body is the lamp,/ The awareness is the oil,/ My love for Him is the burning wick" (qtd. in Mataji 209). The well known mystic poets among the Indian writers in English are Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu.

1.9.3.3. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)

Aurobindo needs no introduction as a mystic poet. He is a celebrated mystic whose mystical experiences revealed to him the Eternal, all pervading Supreme Spiritual Reality that is One. The dawn of the Divine Consciousness on man to redeem him enables man to see beyond the mysteries:

I would hear in my spirit's wideness solitary

The Voice that speaks when mortal lips are mute:

I seek the wonder of things absolute

Born from the silence of Eternity. (Last Poems 13)

1.9.3.4. Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949)

Sarojini Naidu's poems emanate a deep mystic fervour. The intense yearning to learn the ways of God is expressed in one of her renowned mystical poem, "The Soul's Prayer."

Spare me no bliss, no pang of strife,

Withhold no gift or grief I crave,
The intricate lore of love and life
And mystic knowledge of the grave. (377: 9-12)

The poet comes to know that these are the various manifestations of God. The vision of God brings the ultimate revelation to her: “Life is a prism of My Light, / And Death the shadow of My Face” (377: 27-8)

1.9.3.5. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

A dreamer, a poet and a romantic at heart, Rabindranath Tagore upheld the great Indian tradition of spirituality. His quest for identification with the Invisible reaches its culmination, perhaps in the Gitanjali.

It was not the grandeur or beauty of Nature that attracted him the most; it was the life in Nature. Life is a revelation of His mystery and the poet is wonderstruck by it.

There comes the morning with the golden basket in her right hand bearing the wreath of beauty, silently to crown the earth.

And there comes the evening over the lonely meadows deserted by herds, through trackless paths, carrying cool draughts of peace in her golden pitcher from the western ocean of rest.

But there, where spreads the infinite sky for the soul to take her flight in, reigns the
stainless white radiance. There is no day
nor night, nor form nor colour, and never,
ever a word. (G LXVII)

1.10. Conclusion

Having examined the various aspects of Mysticism, its development
and also its manifestations in Literature, the study now proceeds to
ascertain whether the two poets—Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost—
possess mystic strains in their poetry.

Thus, even though they are the poets of the East or of the West, by
choosing the “less travelled road” they merged the personal with the
universal and the specific with the general. Their poems are a commentary
on the Human world, Nature and the Supernatural. An acceptance of
mystery in the existence comes quite naturally. With this comes the
conviction that “Heaven gives its glimpses only to those/Not in position to
look too close” (FP 248).

The relevance of Nature Mysticism in the present day world is that it
helps one to be free from the narrow constraints of the self. Selfishness and
greed have greatly reduced the divine qualities in man. The significance of
the songs of Tagore and Frost is enhanced in such a world because they are
within the easy reach of the layperson as well.
To have an integrated picture of the Nature Mysticism in the poems of these poets, their poetry has to be scrutinized and analyzed in detail. This will also bring out the similarities and distinctiveness of these poets. The following two chapters are devoted for the critical examination of the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost respectively.