On the Seashore of Endless Worlds

Chapter 2
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2.1. Introduction

Attempting an evaluation of the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore is a bewildering task for a student of Literature. He is a veritable giant in the world of poetry; "the most brilliant creative Genius of the Indian Renaissance," declares Ketaki Dyson (17). His unfathomable genius and the great vault of romantic imagination alone make him peerless. Rabindranath Tagore is, perhaps with the exception of Kalidasa, the best known face of Indian Literature.

This chapter proposes to trace the poetic development of this great poet. It also proposes to evaluate how far his poetry can be designated as mystical. Then the study moves on to investigate the salient aspects of Nature Mysticism in his poetry.

Being born in a family which was unusually talented and deeply rooted in God, Rabindranath Tagore was blessed to be a poet, seer and mystic from his early childhood. Creativity was admired and applauded in that family. Combined with this was his sensibility towards Nature from the early childhood. The poet himself says in The Religion of an Artist:

Most of the members of my family had some gift- some were artists, some poets, some musicians and the whole atmosphere
of our home was permeated with the spirit of creation. I had a deep sense almost from infancy of the beauty of Nature, an intimate feeling of companionship with the trees and clouds, and felt in tune with the musical touch of the seasons in the air. (13)

He started writing poetry at an early age. Even before he was eighteen he had written about 7000 lines of verse. “Banphul” (The Wild Flower) written in Bengali is his first verse narrative. Tagore himself maintained that some of his earlier writings could not be considered poetry at all. But critics do not agree with this view. Krishna Kripalani points out that “Sandhya Sangeet (Evening Songs) is the first work of Rabindranath to bear the unmistakable stamp of his genius. He had also discovered his form and could write as he pleased, unfettered by any examples of the past” (46). The next volume, Prabhat Sangeet (Morning Songs), as the name itself indicates, was quite different from the earlier one. They, according to Kripalani, “mark a considerable advance over his previous work, not only in the healthiness of the poet’s mood and outlook but in the mastery of language and metre” (51).

To trace the evolution of the poetic life of Tagore, a broad classification has been generally done. There are three phases observed. First is the pre- Gitanjali phase which begins with Sandhya Sangeet(1882)
and ends with Kshanika (The Flitting One, 1900). The Gitanjali phase started with Naivedya (Offering, 1901) and culminated with Balaka (The Geese in Flight, 1916). Palataka (The Fugitive, 1918) marks the beginning of the third phase i.e., Post- Gitanjali period. This is the longest phase which extends up to the publication of Janmadine (On the Birthday, 1941).

Life in the family estates in Northern Bengal and Orissa was another turning point for Tagore for this was the first time he came out into the real world, a world of poverty, misery and simple joys. This period can also be termed as that of his close communion with Nature. This was a much fruitful period in his literary life. He wrote a large number of poems, songs, and short stories along with some essays that smack of political vigour. The first collection of his poetry, Songs and Poetry belongs to this period. Other major works of poetry of this period are Chitra (The Multi-Coloured, 1896) and Chaitali (The Last Harvest, 1896).

The ensuing years can be termed as the darkest years in the life of the poet. A succession of bereavements began in the Gitanjali period. Smaran (In Memoriam 1903), the only one collection of Tagore with a personal note of bereavement, belongs to the period of bereavements i.e., when he lost his wife (1902), his daughter (1903), his father (1905) and his son (1907). The death of his dearest ones might have induced him to greater depths of Spiritualism and Mysticism.
Gitanjali (Song- Offering) was composed in Bengali in 1909-10 and in 1912 Tagore went to England with the translation of Gitanjali. There he came into contact with a galaxy of great personalities like, George Bernard Shaw, H.G.Wells, Galsworthy, C.F.Andrews, Masefield, Robert Bridges, W.B.Yeats and Ezra Pound. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Gitanjali in 1913 and Knighthood in 1914.

The post-Gitanjali period was exceptionally fruitful and busy in terms of literary pursuits. He wrote Purabi (An Evening Melody, 1925), Parishesh (The End, 1932) and Punascha (The Post-Script, 1932), all collections of beauteous lyrics among novels, plays and essays. In a collection, titled Prantic (The Borderland, 1938), his genius soared to mystical heights and as some critics remark, there were hints at death which the poet was anticipating of late. He brought out the last collection of stories and verse, Galpa Salpa (Stories and Verses, 1941), before his demise on August 7, 1941.

The fact that Tagore was born into an atmosphere of deep religious reverences which was remarkably free from any kind of orthodoxy or parochialism might have played a great part in making him a mystic with deep religious experiences.
2.2. Tagore’s Mystic Vision

Most of Tagore’s poems are perforated with a perception of Reality which is associated with mystic illumination. Tagore’s religion as he was fond of ascertaining, is the religion of a poet. Therefore he says, “all that I feel about it is from vision and not from knowledge” (RA 17). This vision, according to him, lights up not only what we are looking at, but the entire universe.

Time and again one finds references to this illumination which conditioned his spiritual life. The poet considers this as a message from God. During his life time Tagore experienced the mystic vision twice: the first one occurred in the boyhood when he felt that the morning sun revealed all human relationship in the radiance of the soul. The second vision happened during a later stage. Tagore describes the experience thus in The Religion of Man:

. . . I stood for a moment at my window, overlooking a market place on the banks of a dry riverbed, welcoming the first flood of rain along its channel. Suddenly I became conscious of a stirring of soul within me. My world of experience in a moment seemed to become lighted and facts that were detached and dim found a great unity of meaning. (66)
Both the visions as described by the poet show that these visions occurred unexpectedly and spontaneously like those of the great mystics, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Catherina of Genea. These experiences did not last for long and the light vanished “in the squalor of everyday life” (OM 73). But the impact it had on the poet’s mind was permanent. These transformed his life forever. He ardently hoped for a recurrence of this experience so that he might witness again, “the whole of humanity illuminated by the light of that one soul” (OM 72). But the transitory experience could lend a mystical touch to all his poems and songs.

In a letter addressed to a student Tagore explains the nature and feature of mystical realisations:

One cannot say anything definite about mystical realisations. They are like the nature of our sense perceptions – ineffable...Consciousness has many facets, just as white light contains many perceptible colours. Some people cannot see red, others cannot see blue: some see one colour more strongly, others another colour. These days I am painting pictures, and my mixing of colours is distinctive, the reason being that my palette expresses the colours as perceived by my consciousness. I do not see all colours with equal intensity. I am partial to some – who can say why? Why do
the leaves of a tree strike us as green? and why are its blossoms seen as red? Mystical perceptions, likewise, are not of only one kind but come in many varieties. This diversity cannot be properly described because it cannot all be seen with the eyes. If one calls the perceptions of some poets mystical, that is because they have the language to articulate their perceptions – which is what makes them poets. Kabir and the other old ascetic poets had this gift of language. But in order to understand them, one must to some extent share their feelings...(SL 408)

2.3. Tagore’s God-Concept

God, for Tagore, is the one Supreme Reality. He is omnipresent and he is in the joys and sorrows, in the battles and struggles of life. The world may be divided into fragments, but a harmony or a Supreme Meaning holds it together. Even if a fraction of it is lost, it is not the whole. Every part is necessary to make the whole. Tagore defines religion thus:

It is the vision of reality in which the world is seen in all its pain and pleasure, struggles and conflicts. The world seen merely as the world does not reveal that Supreme meaning which runs through and across it as warp and weft together, outgrowing it on all sides . . . that is . . . the apprehension of
the supreme meaning of reality in all its completeness. (OM 26)

God, for Tagore, is love itself. Every being in the world is an expression of God’s love. This aspect is similar to the Christian concept of God. If love is God, love involves not only joy and happiness but sufferings and pains. Therefore, he says:

The religion we acquire from popular scripture never really becomes one’s own religion. It is only a bond of habit that links us with it. To awaken religion in oneself is Man’s eternal quest. It is to be brought to life through extreme pain. I want to animate it with the blood of my veins, then whether I obtain happiness in life or not, I can die fulfilled in joy. (OM 33)

Another important aspect of the God-concept of Tagore is its strong affinity with Christianity. Tagore shares the Christian concept of the individual’s worth and dignity. Therefore, Tagore claims: “Nobody has exalted man more, in every sphere, than Jesus Christ has done” (qtd. in Kannath 73).

Tagore’s God is a personal God with infinite qualities. His God is immanent, as well as transcendent. He is the centre to which humanity and the universe are related. The universe is thus a visible expression of the Invisible. He is all-pervading and the innate good in all. Some critics are of
the opinion that Tagore’s God, especially in *Gitanjali*, is a person and is a Christ-like God.

God is thus omnipresent, omnipotent, the light, love of life and perfect knowledge. So, He is the Brahma in the Vedas and the Upanishads; God, the Father of Christianity; the most beloved of the Sufi poets and the ‘Man within’ of the Baul singers. The immanence of God amazes him and he realises Him everywhere:

Spirit of Beauty, how could you, whose radiance overbrims the sky, stand hidden behind a candle’s tiny flame? How could a few vain words from a book rise like a mist, and veil her whose voice has hushed the heart of earth into ineffable calm? (CPP 265)

Human soul, the finite, seeks union with the Infinite. As God is Transcendent, his realizations of God remain unsure:

I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice; only I have heard his gentle footsteps from the road before my house....I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this meeting is not yet. (G XIII)

The God of Tagore’s poems has several facets. He is a combination of Satyam (Truth), Sivam (Goodness) and Sundaram (Beauty). Like the acclaimed Indian mystics, Kabir and Mira, Tagore also had a peculiar
relation with God. God is the master, lover, friend and teacher to the mystic. His poetry is abundant with exultations of such multifarious aspects of God as in the following lines:

My whole world
has found its inner harmony in you.
No one knows, not even I,
that your melodies reverberate in my songs.
You are the poet within the poet’s heart. (IG 136)

The melody that reverberates in the poet’s song is that of God. He is the Master Poet within the mind of the poet. The poet claims that it is easy to understand the speech of his Master, but not of those who talk about Him. This simple speech is manifested in the voice of the stars and the silence of trees. That is why the poet sings in Fruit Gathering:

Your speech is simple, my Master, but not theirs who talk of you.
I understand the voice of your stars and the silence of your trees.( GW 749)

2.3.1. God as his Master and King

The relationship between the Master and those who render service to him is that of give-and-take. To the birds He gave songs and the birds gave him songs in return. He made the winds light so that they are “fleet in their
service.” From the poet He demands “the harvest of his life.” Poet’s response to God is:

The harvest of my life ripens in the
sun and the shower till I reap more
than you sowed, gladdening your heart,
O Master of the golden granary. (GW 755)

The enchanting notes of the flute of his Master draw his servant out of his lodging:

. . . while I listen I know that every step I take is in my
master’s house. For he is the sea, he is the river that leads to
the sea, and he is the landing place. (GW 780)

The poet would like to have an audience with God, the King, in his chamber. During daytime when his courtyard was bustled with the crowd and confused, he could not find the King. So he prays:

I ask for an audience from you, my King, in your solitary chamber. Call me from the crowd . . . Now when at night they take up their lanterns and go by different roads to their different homes, allow me to linger here for a moment, standing at your feet, and hold up my lamp and see your face.

(GW 790-1)
2.3.2. God as Friend

God is treated as a close friend, a comrade, a playmate by the poet. The address "you" in many poems is an indication of his intimacy with God as a friend. They meet on equal grounds. The poet acknowledges the Supreme Power: "I am certain that priceless wealth is in thee, and that thou art my best friend" (G XXVIII).

The poet converses with God without any reservation. Good friends can understand not only what is spoken, but also the meaning of silence: "Dear friend, I feel the silence of your great thoughts of many a deepening eventide on this beach when I listen to these waves" (GW 598).

On a stormy and dark night, when the sky "groans like one in despair," he yearns for the company of his dear friend: "Art thou abroad on this stormy night on thy journey of love, my friend?" Time and again he opens the door and looks out on the darkness for his friend. Where is he?

By what dim shore of the ink-black river, by what far edge of the frowning forest, through what mazy depths of gloom are thou threading thy course to come to me, my friend?

(G XXIII)

2.3.3. God as the Divine Lover

God is the poet's best beloved. He celebrates his love to God in poem after poem. God is seen as love everywhere. The poet longs for his
tryst with this Eternal lover: “I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands” (G XVII). The much awaited union with his Darling lights the lamps of his life:

Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light!

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life; the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love; the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth. (G LVII)

This is quite illustrative of the bliss of a mystic at union with God. It is the pure ecstasy of divine love. He sings: “Lay down your lute, my love, leave your arms to embrace me/ Let your touch bring my overflowing heart to my body’s utmost brink” (CPP 419). In poem XLVII of Gitanjali, the beloved has been waiting for the divine–lover the entire night in vain. She is afraid that he might suddenly come when she falls asleep. So she bids her friends to leave the way open for him. Her words brim with the thrill of union:

Let him appear before my sight as the first of all lights and all forms. The first thrill of joy to my awakened soul, let it come from his glance. And let my return to myself be immediate return to him.
The poet cannot live without God’s love. God’s love is different from man’s love because it leaves man free. It is not bondage as worldly love is. It is emancipation.

2.3.4. God as Brother, Mother and Father

Those who do not have faith fail to realize that God is near to them in moments of despair. “The Child” is an expression of this fact. When in pain they search for God, or, at least a signal from God, never realizing that He is by their side:

There on the crest of the hill stand the Man of faith

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when the clouds thicken and the nightbirds scream as they fly, he cries, Brothers, despair not, for Man is great.

But they never heed him,

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When beaten and wounded they cry, ‘Brother where art thou?’

The answer comes, ‘I am by your side.’ (GW 815)

In Fruit Gathering, the poet is like a child who calls out to his mother just for the pleasure of calling her:

I will utter your name. . . . . .

I will utter it without words, I will utter it without purpose.
For I am like a child that calls its mother an
hundred times, glad that it can say “Mother.” (GW 756)

2.3.5. God as the Solitary Wayfarer

God is the solitary wayfarer, the eternal traveller of the Universe.

For the poet who wants to live close to the earth, salvation is the journey itself. Salvation is attained when one walks with God every step in light and in darkness. In “The Wayfarer,” the poet implores:

O great Wayfarer,

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You have no temple, no heaven

No final end.

With every step you touch holy ground.

Walking with you, O restless One,

I find salvation

In the treasure of the journey. (LP 88-89)

Life is envisaged as a journey where God is at the helm. It is God who guides his voyage.

All these relationships and the various names with which the poet addresses his God is a pointer to the intensity of his love towards God. Various shades of these relationships bear testimony to the fact that God
can never be contained or limited to a single particular alliance. Various names are necessary to describe His attributes and qualities.

2. 4. Tagore’s Mystical Consciousness

A reflective reading of Tagore’s poems throws light on his Devotional Mysticism, Nature Mysticism and Humanism. The mystical strain in Tagore’s poetry is long known and widely acknowledged. In fact, Tagore has not propounded any novel philosophy or strand of Mysticism through his poems.

Oneness with the Supreme Being has been central to Tagore’s mystical creed. Like all other great mystics of India, he sang to glorify that all-pervading Master. He offers complete loyalty and service to Him. His poems illuminate a very rich spectrum of powerful feelings, surprising tenacity and enduring mysteries. His romantic imagination, dreamlike quality of his verse, his ideals like humanism, love, devotion and universal brotherhood, originality of theme and universality in appeal render uniqueness to his mystical poetry.

In Devotional Mysticism, which is termed also as the Mysticism of Love, the conative element is dominant. Intuitive emotions acquire greater significance in Devotional Mysticism. But it should not be confused with sentimentalism. Whole-hearted love leads the mystic to a blessed state of the soul. This deep love for God is termed as bhakti or devotion.
Tagore had his first experience of mystical awakening at the age of eighteen. This illumination gave him an insight into the Being of the Universe and thus changed his life forever. This experience detached him from the gloomy and egoistic past and freed him to a world of lightness and joy. With an audacity that only youth can achieve, he had questioned and challenged whatever that appeared to him unreal. But when truth hits him hard, he accepts it with heartfelt humbleness. In the early poems one can observe a strain of rebellion tinged with self-centeredness and egoism which were shattered all of a sudden. He admits this in the following lines from Poem no. XXIII of *The Crossing*:

I struggled in my pride against your current only to feel
all your force in my breast.
Rebelliously I put out the light in my house, and your
sky surprised me with its star. (CPP 274)

This mystical experience had awakened him to the consciousness of a new life. The dawn of this new life can be seen in many poems. During the initial stages of his realisation of God, the poet feels an awakening of intense joy that is beyond expression: “The Awakening of the Waterfall”, a poem from *Prabhat-Sangit* evinces this experience:

And I – I will pour of compassion a river;
The prisons of stone I will break, will deliver;
I will flood the earth, and, with rapture mad,
Pour music glad.
With dishevelled tresses, and gathering flowers,
With rainbow wings widespread, through the hours
I shall run and scatter my laughter bright
In the dear sunlight.
I shall run from peak to peak, and from hill
To hill my leaping waters spill,
Loudly shall laugh and with claps keep time
To my own steps' chime. (qtd. in Ray, Artist in Life 92)

The mystical encounters help him develop a deep insight into the mysteries of Nature and the meaning of human life. The poet describes this experience later:

The very day the poem, "The Awakening of the Waterfall," gushed forth and coursed on like a veritable cascade. The poem came to an end, but the curtain did not fall upon the joy aspect of the Universe. And it came to be so that no person or thing in the world seemed to me trivial or unpleasing. A thing that happened the next day or the day followed seemed especially astonishing. (REM 228-9)
When the soul is lifted up to experience the Supreme Being, it is invariably followed by a spiritual unrest stemming from the discernment of the imperfections of the self:

Take me back
once more to that refuge, remove that hurt
of separation that throbs from time to time

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I rush out to receive the entire outer world
within myself: sky, earth, river-nestled
heaps of calm white moonlight. But I can't
touch anything and just stare at an emptiness
in utter despondence. Take me back
to the centre of that wholeness, whence continually
life germinates in a hundred thousand ways... (IG 91)

Occasionally he feels that God is playing hide and seek with him. In such moments of darkness when God is not near him, the poet feels that God has abandoned him. Here the mystic in the poet expresses his pensive yearning to be one with the Whole; to be admitted to that world of wonder and mystery. He yearns for the mystical experience again and again. He is ready to purge his heart of all impurities. He is eager to surrender his soul,
but in vain. So the poet experiences a bitter pain of loss. This mood is observed to be repeated in many of his later poems.

During the phase of purgation in his mystical experience, the poet realises that the limitations of his own self stands in the way of its progress towards union with God. Detachment from the world is necessary to achieve Union with God. The vision of eternity shows the worldly pleasures as transitory and unworthy. So, in the poem "Evermoving," he exhorts his mind:

Leave behind all desire, fear and grief—
The river of creation
Is but the endless flow of destruction.

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When the chariot of farewell sweeps past,
Forgetting self, make free the path,
Singing paeans of victory.
In the little earth you possess
Grieve not for what lies beyond—
It exists in the heart of the universe,
If not in one form, then in another. (LP 41-42)

These preliminary stages of mystical experiences give way to more profound experiences of later life. These later developments in his mystical
consciousness are illustrated in his poems which culminate in Gitanjali. He was going through a series of bereavements and other personal sorrows during this period. Of course, all these had their bearing upon his mind. It was certainly the Dark Night of the Soul, as mystics term it. The poet is in utter despair and desolation, unable to bear the separation from God:

Light, oh, where is the light? Kindle it with the burning fire of desire!

There is the lamp but never a flicker of a flame, - is such thy fate, my heart? Ah, death were better by far for thee!

Misery knocks at thy door, and her message is that thy lord is wakeful, and he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of night. (G XXVII)

The burning desire for God-realisation is not fulfilled easily. God is still far away. But the poet feels God’s existence in his Soul, which leads him on. If God is to be found, it is necessary to “kindle the lamp of love with thy life.” But his loneliness is painful. He is plunged into gloom:

Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens. Ah, love, why dost thou let me wait outside at the door all alone?

In the busy moments of noon tide work I am with the crowd, but on this dark lonely day it is only for thee that I hope.
If thou showest me not thy face, if thou leavest me wholly aside, I know not how I am to pass these long, rainy hours. I keep gazing on the far-away gloom of the sky, and my heart wanders wailing with the restless wind. (G XVIII)

He patiently waits for the morning which will shatter the darkness that envelops him. Surely enough the illumination comes to him and it comes unbidden:

The day was when I did not keep myself in readiness for thee; and entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment of my life. (G XLIII)

Finally the poet reaches the ultimate goal of his quest – he becomes one with God. With this union, the self of the poet vanishes. It is not real and so it recedes. The newborn “I”, the new self is free, detached and at peace. Tagore writes in “A Sheaf of Songs”:

The “I” that floats along the wave of time,

From a distance I watch him.

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He is always on the surface,

Tossed by the waves and dancing to the rhythm

Of joy and suffering.
The least loss makes him suffer,
The least wound hurts him-
Him I see from afar.

That "I" is not my real self;
I am still within myself,
I do not float in the stream of death.

I am free, I am desireless,
I am peace, I am illumined—
Him I see from afar. (LP 80)

The poet's parting words to his fellow beings is that what he has seen and experienced is unsurpassable. He has tasted the divine honey of lotus, i.e. he has experienced the ecstasy of divine love and so he is eager to leave this world:

In this play house of infinite forms
I have had my play and here have
I caught sight of him that is formless.
My whole body and my limbs have
thrilled with his touch who is
beyond touch; and if the end comes here,
let it come- let this be my parting word. (G XCVI)
Perception of the Absolute can be achieved through the senses or without the senses. The starting point of this kind of realisation is *Sravana* or listening to God. The fascinated poet listens to Him in amazement. He recognizes that God's music runs from horizon to horizon:

I know not how thou singest, my master!
I ever listen in silent amazement.
The light of thy music illumines the world.
The life breath of thy music runs
From sky to sky. (G III)

Even when the poet is alone, without the company of others, he finds “it is sweet to listen for thy footsteps” (GW 639). Communion with God is possible only when the symbols of sanity and pride are discarded. Ornaments of any kind would be an impediment:

The poet now feels that his allegiance to God should be expressed in words. His only passion now is to sing Him songs. This aspect of Devotional Mysticism is termed as *Kirtana* or praising God. He is at God's service as a singer.

It has fallen upon me, the service of thy singer.
In my songs I have voiced thy spring flowers, and given rhythm to thy rustling leaves.
I have sung into the hush of thy
night and peace of thy morning.
the thrill of the first summer rain has
passed into my tunes, and the waving of the autumn harvest.
Let not my song cease at last, my Master,
when thou breakest my heart to come
into my house, but let it burst into thy welcome. (CPP 282)

With the humbleness of a true devotee the poet seeks for a quiet corner in the world of God. He has no other work to do except to sing his songs. To Tagore, realisation of God comes even through music. This is nadarchana or realisation of God through music and singing:

I am here to sing thee songs. In this hall of thine I have a corner seat.

In thy world I have no work to do; my useless life can only break out in tunes without a purpose.

When the hour strikes for thy silent worship at the dark temple of midnight, command me, my Master, to stand before thee to sing. (G XV)

Smarana or recollecting God’s words, deeds etc. is another element of devotion. The devotee thankfully remembers God’s beauty, benevolence, affection and joy:
Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill. (G I)

After listening to him, praising him, the poet touches the holy feet of God. He becomes ready to serve Him and His people. This is termed as padaseva (serving the Holy Feet of the Lord).

The morning light has flooded my eyes – this is thy message to my heart. Thy face is bent from above, thy eyes look down on my eyes, and my heart has touched thy feet. (G LIX)

Another aspect of the Devotional Mysticism is Sakhyam or treating God as a friend. Here the poet attains oneness with God through companionship. God, the eternal comrade is very much loving and considerate:

Beyond the shores of Life and Death,
Oh Friend, you are waiting for me.
In the silent sky of my heart,
Your throne is flooded with light-
With what hope and joy I turn
With outstretched hands towards it. (LP 80)

A visibly clear aspect in the mystical journey of Tagore is that of atmasamarpana or complete dedication to the Absolute. He surrenders himself totally to God. In this kind of contemplation, the soul becomes one with God or gets lost in God. The pure bliss of an enhanced sense of unity is all the more evident. This could be called the culmination of the poet’s love for God.

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet.
Like a rain-cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.(G CIII)

2.5. Tagore’s Concept of Nature

The poet in Tagore was very much inspired by the mighty and magnificent Nature. Nature was at the centre of his existence. God to Tagore was also a Musician of this universe. The poet offers his Song to
the master Musician whose music echoes in the blooming flowers or rustling leaves. He expresses this view in a letter he wrote to C.F. Andrews:

When I came to this world I had nothing but a reed given to me which was to find its only value in producing music. I left my school, I neglected my work, but I played with my reed and I played on it 'in mere idle sport'. But all along I had my one play mate who also in his play produced music among leaves, in rushing water, in silence of stars, in tears and laughter rippling into lights and shadows in the stream of human life. While my companion was this eternal piper, this spirit of play, I was nearest to the heart of the world, I knew its mother tongue, and what I sang was caught up by the chorus of the wind and water and the dance master of life. (SL 257)

Nature, irresistible, forms the theme of many of his poems. Images of Nature abound in his poems. But he was not a mere Nature poet who sang of the simple beauties in Nature.

Nature is the dwelling place of God. He is omnipresent. Tagore saw God in Nature, like William Wordsworth, who perceived: "O'er the wide earth, on mountain and on plain,/ Dwells in the affections and the soul of man/ A Godhead..." (Sonnet 14, 376). Tagore says that the beauty of the
objects in Nature has not imprisoned him. It rather liberated his sense enabling him to reach beyond himself. When the poet becomes one with Nature, he becomes one with God. The anguish of the adorer, the glorification of the Beloved slowly gets transformed into the bliss and rapture felt by a mystic. In the poem below he tells the readers how, contemplating on the beauties of Nature, he meets the “Eternal Stranger”:

I have looked on this picture in many a month of March when the mustard is in bloom—this lazy line of the water and the grey of the sand beyond, the rough path along the river-bank carrying the comradeship of the field into the heart of the village.

I have tried to capture in rhyme the idle whistle of the wind, the beat of the oar-strokes from a passing boat.

I have wondered in my mind how simply it stands before me, this great world: with what fond and familiar ease it fills my heart, this encounter with the Eternal Stranger. (CPP 430)

2.6. Tagore’s Nature Mysticism

Tagore’s life is a quest to discern the Timeless and the Unchangeable Being in all beings, to see the Infinite in the finite and the Divine in the human. An awareness of the invisible God in the visible Nature and human life fills the poet’s mind with joy. When the narrow
walls of the self dissolve, it can share the mighty secrets of the universe. Man is then no longer a stranger on earth. The entire universe is an expression of God’s love. Clouds, stars, rivers, flowers, birds, leaves and grass speak of God, His beauty, power and his eternal love. Thus, “through your stars you gaze deep into my dreams, / you send your secrets in moonbeams to me, and I muse and my eyes dim with tears” (GW 643).

Nature is the milieu in which the poet and the Infinite meet. In The Religion of Man, the poet writes, “the first stage of my realisation was through my feeling of intimacy with Nature....” (10).

Even as a boy he was enchanted by Nature. It is evident that Nature, vibrant with its own inner spirit, was stamped in his memory.

I remember my childhood when the sunrise, like my play-fellow, would burst in to my bedside with its daily surprise of morning; when the faith in the marvelous bloomed like fresh flowers in my heart every day, looking into the face of the world in simple gladness; when insects, birds and beast, the common weeds, grass and the clouds had their fullest value of wonder; when the patter of rain at night brought dreams from the fairyland, and mother’s voice in the evening gave meaning to the stars. (CPP 281)
Everything in Nature was his companion, his play-mate, who gave meaning to life. A tree becomes a vehicle for the poet to load profound insights of God’s communion with man through Nature and also human spirit’s triumph over death:

    By mixed magic, blue with green, you flung
    The song of the world’s spirit at heaven
    And the tribe of stars. Facing the unknown,
    You flew with fearless pride the victory
    Banner of the life-force that passes
    Again and again through death’s gateway. . . (SP 91)

A great number of Tagore’s poems are alive with descriptions of Nature manifesting the love, truth and joy of the Creator. Nature becomes an incarnation of all His attributes. When one is not bound by the narrow limits of self, it loses its significance. He finds joy in the truth that unifies everything:

    The rains sweep the sky from end to end. In the wild wet wind
    the jasmines revel in their own perfume.
    There is a secret joy in the bosom of the night, it is the joy of
    the veiled sky in its hidden stars, the joy of the mid-night
    forest in its hoarded bird-songs.
Let me fill my heart with it and carry it in secret through the day. (GW 643)

God is immanent in Nature. So there is a unity underlying every being in Nature – because blades of grass, leaves and flowers etc. throb with the same life. Man and Nature together form a perfect entity which makes the poet declare:

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers. It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow. I feel my limbs are glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment. (G LXIX)

In “Sandhya Sangeet”, for the young and the lonely poet solace is in the arms of Nature. The poet beseeches the evening to come nearer:

Come, Evening, gently gently come!

Carrying on your arm your basket of dreams!

Humming your spells,
Weave your garland of dreams!
Crown my head with them!
Caress me with your loving hand! (qtd. in Ray, Artist in Life 89)

The melancholy which pervades the poems in Sandhya Sangeet fades out in the poems of Prabhat Sangeet (1883). This change comes simultaneously with a change in his concept of Nature. The poet is engulfed with an overwhelming joy. "The Awakening of the Waterfall" bears testimony to this awareness of a new life in Nature. Thus the quest for the Ultimate ends with the discovery that the Divine envelops not only his self but also all the objects of the universe. This identification with Nature is much intensely realized in the later poems.

Even the smallest being made him wonder about the Infinite. The poet, like any other human being, has his limitations and his failures. But that is not the case with the elements of Nature. This makes the poet plead:

Free me as free are the birds of the wilds,
the wanderers of unseen paths.
Free me as free are the deluge of rain,
and the storm that shakes its locks and rushes on to its unknown end.
Free me as free is the forest fire, as is
the thunder that laughs aloud
and hurls defiance to darkness. (CPP 276)

The true romantic fervour is reverberated all through these lines and so the
readers of these lines are reminded of Shelley's lines: "If I were a dead leaf
thou mightest bear; / If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;" (330).

His rapport with Nature, its boundless beauty and its terrible moods
find ready expression in lyric after lyric, that too in an exquisite manner. A
sensuous pleasure in Nature's beauty and charm slowly develops into a
mystic apprehension of Nature. The intense yearning to become one with
Nature then manifests in different forms in different poems. Indeed he feels
that this complete identification and sense of belongingness had been with
him for ages. In The Fugitive, he writes:

I feel as if I had belonged to you ages before I was born. That
is why, in the days when the autumn light shimmers on the
mellowing ears of rice, I seem to remember a past when my
mind was everywhere and even to hear voices as of play-
fellows echoing from the remote and deeply veiled past.

(CPP 431)

He felt a strong fascination for the mighty mountains, rain and
rivers, trees and clouds. Communion with the Divine is possible if there
exists a harmony between the individual and Nature. In other words
communion with the Divine is accomplished through a communion with Nature. As B.C. Chakravorty rightly observes:

Tagore regards Nature as the primal storehouse of life out of which humanity has evolved through countless ages and births. He feels sad at the thought that his human birth has cut him off from the vaster life of Nature and he wants to merge himself again into this universal life. (47)

In another poem the poet speaks of a message that exhorts him to come across the worn-out track of age, through the gates of death. The eternal truth shall meet him again and again in the voyage of life from shore to shore.

Manasi (The Lady of the Mind, 1890) established the evolution of a mature poet. It had every indication of the gradual development of his poetic genius. Love, Nature and Death become the recurrent motifs of these poems. "Unending Love" is a fine example:

I seem to have loved you in numberless forms,

numberless times,

In life after life, in age after age forever,

My spell-bound heart has made and re-made

the necklace of songs

That you take as a gift; wear round your neck
in your many forms

In life after life, in age after age forever. (SP 49)

In the words of Niharranjan Ray, the poems in Manasi suggest:

Nature and Man . . . . are one; they breathe the life and feel
the same joys and sorrows and passions. What man feels of
beauty and love is echoed back from depth of Nature’s spirit;
man and Nature together indeed form the wonderful and
perfect whole which inspires the poet with grand and beautiful
visions. (Artist in Life 123)

This is true of the whole Nature poetry of Tagore. The poet at the top of his
creative moments draws spiritual nourishments from Nature. In Gitanjali,
he prays to God:

I am like a remnant of a cloud of autumn uselessly roaming in
the sky, O my sun ever glorious! Thy touch has not yet melted
my vapour, making me one with thy light, and thus I count
months and years separated from thee.

If this be thy wish and if this be thy play, then take this
fleeting emptiness of mine, paint it with colours, gild it with
gold, float it on the wanton wind and spread it in varied
wonders. (LXXX)
Gitanjali renders wider dimensions of the poet's Nature Mysticism than the earlier poems. The whole world contains the pervading spirit of the Infinite:

Thy gifts to us mortals fulfill all our needs and yet run back to thee undiminished.

The river has its every day work to do and hastens through fields and hamlets; yet its incessant stream winds towards the washing of thy feet.

The flower sweetens the air with its perfume; yet its last service is to offer itself to thee.

Thy worship does not impoverish the world

From the words of the poet men take what meanings please them; yet their last meaning points to thee. (LXXV)

Love for Nature and love for children are closely associated. Children, with their intuitive understanding, stand closer to Nature and to God. This reminds the readers of Wordsworth. But in the treatment of children Tagore surpasses him both in depth and width. Like a true romantic, he sees children as the representatives of God and of man's inborn innocence. Tagore's infinite tenderness towards them can be discerned in his collection of poems, The Crescent Moon.
...On the seashore of endless
worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.
They build their houses with sand and they play
with empty shells. ...
They know not how to swim, they know not how to
cast nets... (CPP 51-2)

2.7. Tagore's Humanism

Humanism is an important characteristic of Tagore's mystical creed. He sees Nature as intimately related to God and man. He was aware of the miseries and sufferings of the humanity. He was not soaring in heights of self alienation. Love of Nature and God immanent in Nature leads him to the love for human beings, the manifestations of God. Niharranjan Ray endorses this view in his essay, titled, "Rabindranath Tagore and the Indian Tradition", when he 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... Not for a moment did he forget that he arose out of his soil and was linked with his roots" (231).

The compassion and affection Tagore feels for children are quite unparalleled. He always considered children as messengers of God; a manifestation of the mystery in Nature. Childhood is a condition of perfect harmony with Nature. The child has an inherent awareness of an inner life
throbbing in Nature. So the world of the child, Nature and God are intertwined. He dwells in a land of bliss where there are no conflicts or struggles. The adults do not belong to this world. Khalil Gibran also shares this opinion when he writes:

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you,

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow

Which you cannot visit, not even in your dream. (16)

Still one can long for a quiet corner in the world of children. Tagore wants to know the secret communion of the baby with God. He wants to be taken in for this mystical experience. This yearning is visible in “Baby’s World”:

I wish I could travel by the road that crosses baby’s mind, and out beyond all bounds;

Where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms of kings of no history;

Where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies them, and Truth sets Fact free from its fetters. (CPP 58)

One of the marked differences between grown ups and children is that children cannot be tied down. Tagore believes that children have a severe
longing for freedom and their power of communication is tremendous. “Children with the freshness of their senses come directly to the intimacy of this world. This is the first great gift they have. They must accept it naked and simple and never lose their power of quick communication.”

Tagore claims, in *Towards Universal Man*, “the founding of my school had its origin in the memory of that longing for freedom” (291).

*The Crescent Moon* depicts the child with his endless imagination, infinite capacity for love, his innocence, and his sentiments. Most of them are addressed to the mother. It unveils the child’s feelings. An understanding of the child’s close communion makes the poet consider the child as nearer to God. The following lines from “The Judge,” not only render unusual understanding of a child’s world, but underline the need for a more sympathetic treatment as well:

> Say of him what you please, but I know my child’s failings.
> I do not love him because he is good, but because he is my little child.
> How should you know how dear he can be when you try to weigh his merits against his faults?
> When I must punish him he becomes all the more a part of my being.
> When I cause his tears to come my heart weeps with him.
I alone have a right to blame and punish, for he
only may chastise who loves. (CPP 59-60)

The poet asserts, “deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel
the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight” (G LXXIII). He
has no existence away from this world, where sorrows abound. God resides
not in the “lonely dark corner of a temple with all doors shut” (G XI). He
is by the side of the tiller and the path maker. Likewise Tagore’s art is with
the destitute and the poor. His song, he says:

. . . has put off her adornments. She has no pride

of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our
union; they would come between thee and me; their
jingling would drown thy whispers. (G VII)

Images that are at once sublime and simple flourish here. He 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.

Europe, according to Hiren Mukherji, was witnessing a “perilous
spiritual lull which preceded the storm of World War I” when Gitanjali
made its appearance in the Western world (1). In some way or other, the
recurring subject of many poets at that time had been emptiness, void,
stagnation and the state of being decayed. Tagore’s poems are in sharp
contrast to this. No wonder Ezra Pound perceived “a saner stillness”, in
Tagore’s poetry (296). The experience of the war artist Paul Nash is in conformity with the general impression of Tagore’s poems as tranquillizing and spiritually uplifting:

I am glad to find my confused thoughts and feelings expressed so clearly and so beautifully that I have sometimes laughed for joy, sometimes felt tears come . . . I would read *Gitanjali* as I would read the Bible for comfort and for strength. (qtd. in Som 107)

Only a few poets can stand a match to the deep optimism, spiritual insight and tranquility expressed in his poems. His poems ring of unlimited joy because he is sure of the reassuring presence of God in his life:

In this laborious world of thine tumultuous with toil and with struggle, among hurrying crowds shall I stand before thee face to face.

And when my work shall be done in this world, O King of kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face. (G LXXVI)

Nearly thirty books of verses were written after the *Gitanjali* which were to pursue his mystical consciousness to new heights. Poem no. 5 in “Balaka” was written in 1914 when the First World War was raging on. This poem was translated into English in *Fruit - Gathering*:
The Boatman is out crossing the wild sea at night.

The mast is aching because of its full sails filled with the violent wind.

Stung with the night's fang the sky falls upon the sea, poisoned with black fear. . .(CPP 196-7)

Where this boatman is headed braving all the elements? What treasure is he trying to transport when the storm shrieks? He brings with him a single white rose and a song on his lips. When the boatman arrives at the shore 'blessed shall be the dust and the heart glad./ All doubts shall vanish in silence. . . (197). This is poetry at its powerful best. The same tone is extended to other poems as well, says B.C. Chakravorty:

"Balaka" or the flight of swans symbolizes the eternal march of humanity towards perfection. The ideas and aspirations of mankind of one age are realized in the succeeding ages. But the realization of some ideals gives rise to higher aspirations and the march continues for endless progress. (74)

The poet was very much aware of the conflicts, the anguish and the hatred in this world. But he firmly believed that they could be conquered by peace and love. He was convinced that the world, with the light and life – the gifts of the Infinite, could be found in the finite:
I have heard your call there
Where man stands humiliated,
Where the light dies in the heart of the afflicted,
And the prisoner cries in his dungeon;
Where the stone foundations totter,
Where buried fire shakes the earth
And the fetters of Ages lie shattered. (LP 37)

His great insistence on the wellbeing of man does not deter him
from condemning the lust for money and power, and gross materialism.
The humble life or the struggle for existence can be dignified, but not the
mad flight after power or money, driven by selfishness. So he prays:

O Serene, O Free,
in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness wipe away all
dark stains from the heart of this earth.

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

Man’s heart is anguished with the fever of unrest,
with the poison of self-seeking,
with a thirst that knows no end. (GW 798-9)

At the same time, he had firm faith in the future of Humanity: “I shall
not,” he said in his last speech, “commit the grievous sin of losing faith in
Man, accepting his present defeat as final. He continues:
Perhaps the new dawn will come from this horizon, from the east ... The hour is near when it will be revealed that the insolence of might is fraught with great peril; that hour will bear out in full the truth of what the ancient sages have proclaimed, 'By unrighteousness, man prospers, gains what seems desirable, defeat enemies, but perishes at the root. (Towards Universal Man 357)

The poems that Tagore wrote during the last ten years of his life are mainly prose-poems. The exuberance of youth is over; the assurance of the vision in the mature years is still there. It was a near encounter with death in 1937 which led him to the composition of Prantik, a collection of 18 unrhymed poems. Naturally, all the poems deal with death and triumph of life over death:

The body is mine-
the carrier of the burden of a past—
seemed to me like an exhausted cloud
slipping off from the listless arm
of the morning.
I felt freed from its clasp
in the heart of an incorporeal light
at the farthest shore
of evanescent things. (qtd. in Ray, Artist in Life 292)

It should be noted that it is not towards darkness that he walked but towards a shore where everything is illuminated with the light of consciousness. He is not afraid of death as he is going back to the abode of his Father. This attitude towards death can be discerned in Gitanjali also:

In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play and here I have caught sight of him that is formless. My whole body and my limbs have thrilled with his touch who is beyond touch; and if the end comes here, let it come—let this be my parting word. (G XCVI)

This is not the resignation to death, but an expression of contentment at the realization of God. The later poems depict a more intense feeling for union with God who is immanent in Nature:

Walking with you, O restless One,
I find salvation
In the treasures 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)
Even when life gave Tagore the hardest blows he was not desperate and dejected. It has been pointed out by many critics that his last four books of verses, Rogshajyaya (From the sick-bed, 1940), Arogya (Recovery, 1941), Janmadine (On the Birthday, 1941), Sheshlekha (The Last Poems, 1941) reaffirm his faith in the divine spark of life. In poem 28 of "Janmadine", Tagore is seen as exploring his existence in Nature. He says, "This life of mine's been nurtured by a river." The mysteries of birth and life are pondered further thus:

Ambassadress of the cosmos, that river,
she who brings the far near, bids us greet
the unknown at our doorsteps,—it was she
who wove the day of my birth. And for ever
on her streams, untied, my mobile home
drifts from bank to bank. (IW 220)

This is perhaps the most illustrious expression of Eastern Mysticism regarding Man's existence in Nature.

2.8. Diction, Symbols and Imagery:

The words used by the poet are simple, easy and highly suggestive. His language is closely knit with the everyday language of man. Words like 'flute', 'lotus', 'shrine', 'clouds', 'birds', 'sun', 'rain' etc. are copiously used by the poet. Words evoking pictures of the seasons,
orchards and landscapes pour forth in his poetry. The cowherd boy, women fetching water in pitchers by the pool, weaving of garlands and burning of earthen lamps recreates an atmosphere of agricultural society. His use of archaisms like 'thee' and 'thou' lend an additional charm to this environment of the ancient past.

Symbols have been used as significant tools by mystic poets to reveal the latent meaning of divinity in Nature. The most common objects of Nature are used in different contexts to symbolize the yearnings, the passion and the ideals of man. Nature, with its freshness of existence becomes symbol of the Eternal. The metaphysical qualities of these symbols are noticeable. Human body is most symbolically spoken as the 'frail vessel'. This body is emptied again and again to be filled with fresh life. Even though the body perishes the soul goes on forever. Clouds, storm, thunder, lightning and rainfall suggest the desire, the longing and the hope for the Union with the Divine:

The rain has held back for days and days, my God, in my arid heart. The horizon is fiercely naked - not the thinnest cover of a soft cloud, not the vaguest hint of a distant cool shower.

Send thy angry storm, dark with death, if it is thy wish, and with lashes of lightning startle the sky from end to end.(G XL)
Flower is another recurring symbol in Tagore's poetry. The little flower is an offering at the feet of the Divine. The sweet fragrance and the vibrant colours bursting out of the flower symbolize spiritual freedom and the yearning for unification with the Absolute.

On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying, and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded.

Only now and again a sadness fell upon me, and I started up from my dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the south wind.

That vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to me that it was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion.

I knew not then that it was so near, that it was mine, and that this perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart. (G XX)

"The Borderland-9" is a poem that deserves special mention here. Light or the dawn symbolizes the dispelling of darkness, that is, separation and alienation from God. The sun is also a manifestation of God. In light, the poet sees the Person who is everywhere in the Universe:
Fused with endless night. I came to rest
At the altar of the stars. Alone, amazed, I stared
Upwards with hands clasped and said: ‘Sun, you have
removed
Your rays: show now your loveliest, kindliest form
That I may see the person who dwells in me as in you.’

(SP 107)

The stars, distant and shining denote immortality. The clouds and
the sky stand for the joy, freedom and mystery of life. Another favourite
symbol of the poet is that of the bird. The bird denoted the intense longing
of the soul soaring towards freedom. “Time for the bird to go/Soon its nest,
stripped, dislodged, song – silenced, will slip to the dust in the forest’s
tumult”(IG 210).

The boatman or the traveller signifies God. The sailing of the boat is
the journey of life and on the other end of the shore is Immortality. In
Poem No 46 of Shesh Saptak (The Last Melodies, 1935), this is all the
more clear:

Today I shall free myself
Beyond the sea
I can see the new shore before me.
I won’t tangle it with
baggage brought from this shore.

On this boat I'll take no luggage at all

Alone, I'll go

made new again, to the new. (IG 188)

The child is a dear symbol to all mystic poets. Tagore also uses this symbol abundantly. The child is the representative of God on Earth. He is nearer to the Supreme Reality than the grown ups. The occasional illumination of the soul of a mystic is, to the child, a permanent state of bliss. Like Blake, Walter de la Mare and Wordsworth, Tagore believes that the child is a mystic who is near to heaven. So in the poem “Benediction” he sings, “Bless this little heart, this white soul that has won the kiss of heaven for our earth.” (CPP 83)

The images used by Tagore lend his poems a sense of unity. An epithet, a metaphor or a simile constructs a powerful image. Tagore’s imagery enhances the spiritual intensity and beauty of his poetry. It provides clarity and concreteness to his feelings and thoughts. The imagery used by Tagore can be broadly divided into three – direct images such as ‘frail vessel’ or ‘flute of reed’; figurative images in which he discloses his visions or emotions using metaphors, similes or personifications. For instance: “All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony – and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight.
across the sea” (G II). The poet also uses reciprocal images in which the general meaning and vehicles reciprocate. For example, in many poems both the poet and God appear to be singers, the poet and God offer flower as an expression of love.

The discussion on the imagery and symbols of Tagore’s Nature poetry can best be concluded with the comment of W.B. Yeats in his celebrated introduction to Gitanjali:

Flowers and rivers, the blowing conch shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or the parching heat, are images of the moods of that heart in union or separation; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing upon a lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself. A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image, as though we had walked in Rosetti’s willow wood, or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as a dream.
2.9. Conclusion

That Tagore is a mystical poet is rather an established fact. Some even consider him as a saint representing the great Wisdom of the East. But how does the poet devote his verse in his life-long seeking of God is not an equally well known fact. His enchanting, exquisite verse holds an attraction to the reader far beyond what words can draw. What Heidenstam, the Swedish poet and a member of the Nobel committee that awarded Nobel Prize to Tagore, wrote about *Gitanjali* can be applied to the whole poetry of Tagore: “The hours they gave me were special, as if I had been allowed to drink from a fresh and clear spring” (qtd. in Som 114). The mystic experiences charge his poetry with a new vitality. Let the poet’s own words vouchsafe this contention:

To the uninitiated it might appear that a flower has arrived all of a sudden: the story of its journey from a seed remains unknown [...] The same is true of my poetry, such has been my experience....He produces the tunes but the melodies are all in the custody of the perennial musician. Like this verse:

I was telling you my tale
I was telling you so many stories of my life
You put them to flames
You drowned them in your tears
That is how you rebuilt me

As an image after Your heart.

I guess this verse conveys that I set out to write what was straightforward and simple, something just for myself, but it is God’s melody which transformed its meaning from the personal to the universal. It is I who put a first stroke on the canvas but it is He who filled it with colours I did not possess. (MLW 85-86)