One of the most striking features of Tagore's *Gitanjali* is the sublime role nature plays in it. The poet experiences the living touch of God's love in the beauties of Nature. The smiling flowers, the flowering grove, the thick forest and the green grass, "the ever wakeful blue sky", "the night with starry vigil", the spring with its flowers, the woodlands, the sea, "the shore of the ink-black river", "the frowning forest", the singing birds, the child decked with prince's robes, children playing on the sea-shore, the mud-stained traveller, the parched earth in summer, the blooming lotus, the drooping lotus, torrential rain, and the "lashes of lightning" -- all these are intimations to the poet from immortality, alerting him to the Infinite immanent in Nature. Nature also forms the background in which the poet enjoys mystical experience.

Many of the descriptions of Tagore's mystical
vision clearly indicate that natural scenery was the medium through which the poet experienced the sudden advent of the vision. Tagore stands before Nature with his senses fully open and receptive.\(^1\) The medieval Indian mystic Dadu seems to have influenced him a lot. Dadu holds that in creating the senses God did not intend them to be starved. And so the eye is to be feasted with colour, the ear with music, the palate, with flowers, wondrously provided. His imagination receives stimulation from the "harmony of forms, colours, sounds and movements"\(^2\) displayed by Nature.

Poem no.5 reveals how all the creatures of nature, the poet being one among them, are making their humble offerings of love and devotion to their Maker. The summer comes with its pleasant scenes and sights. Soft breezes blow with a soft sighing sound and there is the sweet music of the streams flowing with a murmuring

\(^1\) The Religion of Man 12.
\(^2\) The Religion of Man 12.
sound. The bees sing sweetly in the grove of flowering trees. To quote the relevant passage, "Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and the bees are Plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove" (V, 4). The contemplation of this beauty and glory of the Divine turns the poet's thought to his Maker, and he yearns for the divine presence. Nature overflows with peace. At such a moment of peace and leisure, the poet longs to dedicate his life to the service of the Divine. Contemplation of peace, harmony and beauty of nature, in "a mood of wise passivity", according to Wordsworth, brings the human soul into harmony with the soul of Nature, the Universal Soul.

Poem no.21 illustrates how the waves of the sea call upon the poet loudly to launch his boat. And the poet assures that he would do so without delay, for he hears the sound of sweet music coming to him on the wind from the other shore. The sound of music thrills him. The waves call him. He strongly feels that he must promptly sail. The urge for reunion with the
Lord is very strong within him and he can delay no longer. The river symbolises the ocean of eternity which the poet has to cross, before he can be united with the Infinite. Of course, the singer who sings far away and whose distant song the poet hears may be the Jivan Devata or the Lord of the poet's life, or he may be Krishna of the Vaishnava love poetry, whose call Radha cannot resist.

The poet presses nature into his service to illuminate his mystical concepts. He affirms, "The spring has done its flowering and taken leave. And now with the burden of faded, futile flowers, I wait and linger" (XXI, 13). In the company of Nature the poet waits for the Divine. Poem no. 22 illustrates how "in the deep shadows of the rainy July, with secret steps", God the Beloved walks "silent as night, eluding all watchers" (XXII, 13). The sky is overcast and the night is dark and stormy. The east wind blows loudly and continuously. No birds sing in the woods. There is no light of day. It looks as though a thick veil were drawn across the sky. All the doors are
closed. Nevertheless, the poet recognizes his "only friend" his "best beloved" as "the solitary wayfarer in this deserted street" (XXII, 13).

Poem no. 27 also presents how in absolute darkness and in the continuous downpour of rain the poet hears the sound of sweet music floating to him through the darkness of night. And his heart is illumined by momentary flashes of love, like lightning. Clouds, darkness, rain and thunder symbolise the dangers and difficulties which lie in the path of the mystical poet. He affirms, "her [nature's] message is that thy lord is wakeful, and he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of night" (XXVII, 16). Of course, a sincere soul like Tagore who attempts to live a mystical life, can overcome these as the fire of divine love burns in his heart constantly and brightly. Love of the Divine enables the poet to see his way clearly and surely even through the darkness of night.

Tagore's God in Gitanjali is all pervasive and immanent in Nature. He comes through the forests in the form of "perfume" (XLIV, 26), in the sunny April,
the month of spring, and in the form of rain and thundering clouds in the dark month of July (CIII, 68). God is there in the sun and in the stars as He is in the poet. "The faint smell" "perfume" etc. symbolise of the approach of the Almighty. They are symbols of the mystical apprehension of His near presence (XLV, 27). An enthusiastic surrender to the spontaneity of natural scenery leads the poet to his Beloved, God. He would then lie exposed to all the winds that blow "from above". The divine light, then, would flood his soul, the divine music will ravish it and the soul will express its joy by humming the "hymn of the universe."

Poem no. 54 is wholly symbolic. The perfume of the babla flowers coming from the bend of the road symbolises the emergence of the poet to meet his Beloved. Poem 57 is a song of praise, a hymn to light, which is the symbol of the joy of God in the act of creation. It is sweet and glorious. Divine light illuminates the poet's soul with wisdom, understanding and love. This light fills the world with joy and beauty. The poet stresses that Nature is overflooded
with Divine joy. It is the manifestation of His greatness and glory. Heavens proclaim His glory.

The entire creation is beautiful and its beauty is an expression of the love of God for the poet as well as God's greatness and glory. The golden light playing upon the leaves, the clouds moving lazily across the sky and the pleasant breeze flowing against the cheeks of the poet are different expressions of God's love for him. He asserts, "Yes I know, this is nothing but thy love, O beloved of my heart -- this golden light that dances upon the leaves, these idle clouds sailing across the sky, this passing breeze leaving its coolness upon my forehead" (LIX, 38-9). Again, the poet stresses, "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" (LIX, 39). The poet has had this beautiful mystical experience when the morning light "flooded" his eyes. The splendour of a beautiful dawn has ever been a source of inspiration to India's Rishis and Munis. The message is quite clear to the poet.
The poet is greatly inspired by the sight of innocent children who go on playing and shouting and dancing during their play, unconcerned about the vast motionless sky spreading over their heads and over the tempestuous water of the ocean. Nature is their mother, as it is to the poet, and they are not afraid of her unpleasant aspects. They love her when she smiles upon them, they love her even when she frowns and is angry. The roar of the destructive sea waves is sweet to them like a mother's lullaby. The poet's feelings are identified with the feelings of children and he enters into a mystical intimacy with mother Nature.

To the poet of *Gitanjali* the Infinite objectifies Himself through the countless objects and phenomena of Nature, through her countless forms and shapes. He is the Universal Soul -- as Wordsworth puts it, and according to our poet the soul of man and the soul of nature are derived from this Universal Soul. That is why he says that the same life that runs through his veins also runs through the veins of the countless objects of nature. Poem no.69 opens, "The same stream
of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures" (LXIX, 46).

Divine Life finds a joyful melodious expression through the sounds of nature. The entire creation is a multi-coloured, gorgeous show, an eternal drama in which the poet is always seeking the sublime and the sublime is ever seeking him. In the mysticism expressed in Gitanjali, the Infinite is as eager to unite Himself with the poet as he is to unite with the Infinite. It is God who awakens the poet to the beauty and enchantment of His creation. And he feels that the whole creation is God's Lila and God, like, the poet, takes joy in its beauty, as a child takes joy in his toys. The All Beautiful plays with the beautiful colours, light and shade of this creation, feels the poet of Gitanjali.

The poet very strongly feels that the All-powerful is behind all the activity that goes on in nature. It is He who makes the seeds sprout, buds blossom into flowers and flowers ripen into fruits. In poem no.81
he writes, "Hidden in the heart of things thou art nourishing seeds into sprouts, buds into blossoms, and ripening flowers into fruitfulness" (LXXXI, 54). This is indeed a beautiful passage which reveals Tagorean nature mysticism very vividly. Communion with the One "hidden in the heart of things" enables the poet to begin anew and find his "garden full with wonders of flowers." The Divine created the universe by dividing Himself, separating parts of Himself and giving them innumerable beautiful shapes, colours and sounds. So what we perceive through the senses are so many different parts of the Supreme Soul. Nature mysticism often tends to be pantheistic.

In the glory and splendour of the myriad forms of the universe, the poet sees the reflection of the greatness and glory of God who is formless and infinite. He has really experienced the pleasure of his 'touch' and his whole body has been thrilled by it. After experiencing such ineffable bliss he is content to die even.

The multi-coloured beauty of Nature had a great
fascination for Tagore. He confesses, "I had a deep sense almost from infancy of the beauty of Nature." He had a 'longing' in him, when young, to run away from his "own self and be one with everything in Nature." To him Nature was something living and kindred. He felt close companionship and harmony with it. It was "living" to him, "intimately close to his life" and "permeated with a subtle touch of kinship." He had "an intimate feeling of companionship with the trees and clouds, and felt in tune with the musical touch of the seasons in the air." He was often in communion with them in a mystical way.

The chasm between the human and the non-human, life and non-life is bridged and it results in a living communication between the human (the poet) and the natural. No longer does Nature appear to him as mute.

3 The Religion of Man 13.

4 The Religion of Man 107.

5 The Religion of Man 62.

6 The Religion of An Artist 13.
Rather he feels himself in communion with it. This communion arouses his sensibility and prepares him for deeper visions.

The living communion between the poet and Nature proves that they are no longer alien to each other. In *Sadhana* Tagore writes, "We could have no communication whatever with our surroundings if they were absolutely foreign to us." He also emphasizes that there is a regular commerce between man (here the poet) and the things of Nature. And this, according to him, "shows there is a rational connection between him and nature, for we never can make anything our own except that which is truly related to us."  

Tagore rejects the western accent on a sudden inexplicable break between natural and human realms. He feels that "it is like dividing the bud and the blossom into two separate categories, and putting

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7 *Sadhana* 5.
8 *Sadhana* 6.
their grace to the credit of two different and antithetical principles.  

The Indian mystical mind recognises its unbroken relationship and kinship with Nature. Tagore himself writes in *Creative Unity*:

> India has saturated with her love and worship the great Nature with which her children are surrounded, whose light fills their eyes with gladness, and whose water cleanses them, whose food gives them life, and from whose majestic mystery comes forth the constant revelation of the Infinite in music, scent, and colour, which brings its awakening to the soul of man.

The items referred to here, cleansing and giving life, refer to two of the activities of the Absolute.

The poet clearly states that from the majestic

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9 *Sadhana* 7.

10 *Creative Unity* 62-63.
mystery of these experience in Nature he has the continuous revelation of the Infinite in its various aspects such as scent and clour and music and this Infinite also brings its awakening to all the souls. Tagore asserts that "the kinship of man with conscious and unconscious creation alike" is the idea running through the dramas of Kalidasa. In the short story *Hungry Stones*, Tagore attributes hunger even to inanimate stones.

It is with an understanding eye that Tagore looks at Nature. He rejects the hard and fast demarcation between the external world of Nature and the world of spirit. This opens the way for a spiritual interpretation of Nature. The self attains new dimensions by breaking its own circumscribed limits and realising its kinship with the Vast Nature beyond itself. In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore asserts that he felt a larger meaning of his own self when the barrier vanished between him and what was beyond himself. Nature is an external

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11 *Creative Unity* 5.

12 *The Religion of Man* 62.
manifestation of the immanent divinity which is a principle common both to the outer world and in Tagore's being.

Nature's function, according to Tagore, is "to impart the peace of the eternal to human emotions." The inspiring aspects of Nature stimulate his heart to break through the envelopment of darkness and to read the great message of the Almighty revealed through His creations. In his mystical vision, Nature is transformed and assumes wider meanings. Referring to his mystical ecstasy Tagore says, "The invisible screen of commonplace was removed from all things and all men." The experience arises from "the drifting trivialities of the commonplace life." But during the period of ecstasy the vision is free from the "disguise of the obscurity of an ordinary fact."

Tagore's perception is not confined to what is

13 Creative Unity 51.
14 The Religion of Man 58.
15 The Religion of Man 59.
16 The Religion of Man 58.
supplied by immediate sense perception. The vast Nature he apprehends is far in excess of the data received by his normal senses. Even the ordinary facts are revealed with a deeper significance. His world of experience in a moment seemed to become lighted, and facts that were detached and dim found a great unity of meaning. What the Tagore of Gitanjali perceives is Nature in its entirety, Nature as the Divine, and not merely as the isolated objects of sense perception. His immediate surrounding is transfigured and the vast nature emerges with a meaning wider than what is ordinarily apprehended. Everything that appears before him is bathed with an inner illumination which clothes them with deeper meanings usually missed in mere sense awareness.

In Gitanjali Nature is invested with a dignity. Certainly the natural surroundings perceived through physical senses are not ignored, but are viewed as cues inspiring the dawn of a wider vision. The poet's

17 Whupendra Nath 41.
mystical vision floods Nature with an illumination which adds new dimensions and meanings to it.

Nature has been a source of inspiration to many in their mystic quest. The Rigvedic seers had a sort of quasi vision of the Supreme Truth in the midst of natural phenomena and to them nature was a living inspiration, with which they always remained in direct communion.\(^\text{18}\) There is Malwida von Meysenburg, the German Idealist who confesses, "I was alone upon the seashore as all these thoughts flowed over me, liberating and reconciling: . . . Earth, heaven and sea resound of as in one vast world encircling harmony."\(^\text{19}\) Thomas Traherne is clearer. He affirms:

Your enjoyment of the world is never right till every morning you awake in Heaven; sea yourself in your Father's Palace, and look upon the skies, the earth, and the air as Celestial Joys, . . . you never enjoy the world aright till the Sea itself floweth into your vein, till you are clothed with the


\(^{19}\) Qtd. in R.C. Zaehner 38.
heavens and crowned with the stars. 20

Nature occupies a very prominent place in the mysticism of St. Francis of Assisi. As W.R. Inge remarks, he loves to see all around him the "pulsation of one life, which sleeps in the stones, dreams in the plants and wakens in man." 21 Other French mystics Fenelon and Francis de Sales write gracefully about the footprints of the Divine Wisdom and beauty which may be traced everywhere in the world around us. In Zen meditation the human soul finds an affinity with and "penetrates into the heart of Nature, not her active agitated aspects, but the Purity and serenity pervading the universe." 22

According to the Sufi mystic Jalaluddin Rumi, God has set His likeness on all things. To him:

The world is God's pure mirror clear.
To eyes freed from the clouds within.
With love's eyes in that mirror peer,


21 Inge, 302.

And see God in thine own self, kin.  

The Tagore of *Gitanjali* may be ranked among the leading mystics for whom Nature has always been a source of inspiration and a manifestation of the Infinite. In fact, it emerges with deeper significance. Tagore's position, however, may be distinguished from those nature mystics who hear a divine voice in the outer universe, but miss its vibrations in their inner soul. Nature's majesty makes a deep impression on the Tagore of *Gitanjali*, but it is not allowed to obscure the truth of his inner being. The mystic illumination which brightens the world of Nature also sends its reflections to dispel the darkness from within the poet. Splendours of Nature aid him in the realization of the inner enlightenment. In the beauties of Nature he reads a message which enables him to realize the truth of his own inner being.

No Indian poet since the Vedic times has felt so intensely the presence of God behind the phenomena of

Nature, and it is just in this nature-mysticism that the originality of Tagore is to be found. Prima facie the statement might seem quite startling. And someone could very well ask, is not this nature mysticism the very core of the Upanishadic teachings, which emphasize the identity of the spirit of man and the spirit of the universe?

Certainly, Tagore is in accordance with the doctrines of the Upanishads and the Gita when he rejoices in the kinship between the spirit in all things and his own soul and the infinite spirit in the universe. He does repeatedly refer to the sayings of the Upanishads and at times even annotates them. Just to cite one instance, he writes in Sadhana, "The Upanishads say with great emphasis, know thou the One, the Soul. It is the bridge leading to the immortal being." The conclusion of the sentence leading to the above statement reads, "... all the petty details of our life reveal an infinite purpose, and all our thoughts and deeds unite themselves, inseparably in
an internal harmony."\(^{24}\)

The Bhagavad Gita must have been a very potent influence on Tagore. He affirms in Gitanjali, "The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world" (LXIX, 46). One finds in the Gita, doctrines which undoubtedly corroborate his point. In chapter seven there are some very striking statements. Stanza no.4 of chapter seven reads, "Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind and understanding and self-sense -- this is the eightfold division of My nature.\(^{25}\) Stanza seven to ten seem to annotate the fourth stanza. In the seventh stanza we find, "There is nothing whatever that is higher than I . . . . All that is here is strung on me as rows of gems on a string."\(^{26}\) Here the reference is to the essential oneness between the Infinite and the finite natures.

The following three stanzas make the point clearer.

\(^{24}\) Sadhana 29.

\(^{25}\) Gita 7:4.

\(^{26}\) Gita 7:7.
I am the taste in the water . . . . I am the light in the moon and the sun. I am the syllable 'Aum' in all the Vedas, I am the sound in ether and manhood in men. I am the pure fragrance in earth and brightness in fire. I am the life in all existence and the austerity in ascetics. 27

The tenth stanza of the Gita too is very revealing. Krishna tells Arjuna, "Know me . . . to be the eternal seed of all existences. I am the intelligence of the intelligent, I am the splendour of the splendid." 28 Tagore entitles his "precious life blood" Gitanjali, most probably, because he was so much influenced by the Gita.

The influence of the Upanishads and the Gita on Tagore's Nature mysticism in Gitanjali is obvious as he rejoices in the relationship between the spirit in all things and his own soul and the infinite spirit in the universe. Nevertheless, there is a difference.

27 Gita 7:8.
28 Gita 7:10.
The Atma-Brahma identity presented in the Upanishads is not learnt from Nature, though a few hints are there in the early scriptures. Even in the Gita it appears only in the doctrine of the divine immanence. Again they do not present the passionate love for nature and the joy in the life of the world and the discovery of the Infinite behind the finite phenomena of Nature and entering into mystical communion with Him, so characteristic Tagore's poetry in Gitanjali.

The only clear parallel in Indian poetic horizon is Kalidasa. Obviously, Kalida's passionate love for Nature and his longing and admiration for the tapovana have made deep impressions on Tagore. Many a time Tagore refers to Kalidasa in his writings. But the religious element in Tagore's writings is absent in Kalidasa's love of nature, in spite of his intense love and accurate knowledge of mountains, trees and flowers. He had sympathetic insights into Nature. He did interfuse the workings of Nature with human

29 The Religion of Man 103-104.
feelings, but he does not seem to have a vision of the Universal Spirit behind it. He sings of the harmony between man and Nature, but not of man's realization of God through nature.

Perhaps the cardinal doctrines of *maya* (illusion) and *karma* which postulate equivalent retribution for the actions in *Samsara*, which results in the transmigration of souls, had been strong forces in operation, hindering such a development. These doctrines, each in its own way, will prevent a really religious love for Nature. If the world is a mere illusion caused by *avidya* which religious soul will develop a religious love for it?

A religious view of Nature and a love for it can combine only if these doctrines lose their grip on the human heart. This is what has happened in the case of the Tagore of *Gitanjali*. He took from the *Upanishads* just as much as was in agreement with his own personal conviction. He accepted such ideas as the unity of the human soul and the Universal Soul.
The doctrines of *maya*, *karma* and *samsara* influenced him the least as his mind was steeped in western education and culture. In conclusion, the nature mysticism in the poems of *Gitanjali* is the end product of a harmonious confluence. Tagore's passionate feeling for the glories of Nature, found in the oldest strata of the Vedas comes first. His belief in the affinity of the human with the Divine Spirit discernible in the Upanishads comes next. His own original "sacramental vision" of Nature, conspicuous in many Christian mystics is yet another.

The poet of *Gitanjali* is overpowered by the joy in the life of the universe. His nature mysticism here, is, thus, closely associated with his mysticism of joy. Therefore the next chapter will deal with the mysticism of joy.