CHAPTER V

MYSTICISM IN TAGORE'S POETRY AFTER GITANJALI

I

An attempt has been made in the previous chapters to evaluate the poems depicting the development of Tagore as a mystic-poet. Furthermore, I have discussed elaborately some of the poems of Gitanjali to show how each poem is pregnant with mystic-ideas. In the following pages an effort has been made to present a systematic and a clear exposition of the mysticism of Tagore's later poetry.

A deep spiritual aspiration has been the governing idea of India's rich cultural history, its guiding spirit and shaping force right from the Vedic times. In India, the interest of philosophy is in the self of man (Atmanam Viddhi); self-realisation and God-realisation are regarded as the supreme spiritual ideal; and to pursue that ideal under whatever conception or form, to attain it by inner realisation, to live in it in intuitive consciousness is held to be of central importance. Spirituality, as understood by Indian and Western thought, is a recognition of something greater than mind and sensuous life, the aspiration to a consciousness pure and
divine beyond our normal mental nature, a rising of the self in
man out of the finitude of his lower being towards a greater
Being.

Mysticism implies that the divine reality, the "One" may be
realised directly. This is the greatest claim of the mystics of
different faiths. According to the upholders of Videha-Mukti
(emancipation of the spirit from all bodies, gross and physical)
on the other hand, direct and immediate communion with the
Reality is not possible "here and now", since one cannot be
completely free from the influence of bodily and mental changes
so long as one is embodied. Man's body is finite and is the
product of ignorance and as such he has to die to get rid of this
finitude. If it is held that the aspirant attains "mukti" while
retaining the body, there arises a problem. The body and the
actions performed by the body are due to ignorance, and when
knowledge dawns, ignorance must disappear being very much
opposed to knowledge. If the material cause disappears, the
effect can no longer persist; and hence, if the body persists,
that shows that ignorance still persists and that liberation has
not been attained. Thus only self-knowledge (vidya) can dispel
ignorance (avidya). And if avidya is capable of being dispelled
by **vidya,** then it can be effected "here and now", that is, while we are still in the body. If it happens at some other time and in a different place, it will not serve the purpose. As Kabir says:

"O Friend! hope for Him whilst you live, know whilst you live, understand whilst you live: for in life deliverance abides. If your bonds be not broken whilst living, what hope of deliverance in death. It is but an empty dream, that the soul shall have union with Him because it has passed the body."1

The *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad* (IV.4.7.) explicitly states:

"When all the desires that dwell in the heart are cast away (yada sarve pramucyante kama veyya hrdi sritah), then does the mortal become immortal (atha martyo arto bhavati), then he attains Brahma in this body (atra Brahma Samasrute)."

Lord Krishna similarly assures us saying,

"He who is able to resist the impulse of desire and anger even here before he quits the body - he is a yogi, he is a happy man."2

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In An Idealist view of Life, (p. 304), Radhakrishnan writes:

"In the symposium Plato gives us the doctrine of a timeless existence attainable here and now by an escape from time and form. Islam describes the bliss of saints as consisting in union with God, a state which the mystics ... wish to attain even in this life. The Neo-Platonists and Spinoza and the mystics of Christianity adopt a similar view and have spoken in one voice that if one dissociates oneself from the vicissitudes of the mind, senses, etc. then it is possible to have direct union with the supreme Reality 'here and now'."

Tagore had, throughout his poetic career, always felt that he had a communion with a divine being and this spiritual consciousness hovers round all his works and a net of mysticism is cast all round. In fact, like most of the mystics, Tagore believes that union with the Almighty could take place in two ways: first through love and faith and second, through perception. He, therefore, in his poetry, enunciates the blessings of love and the consequent union with the beloved.

The period following Gitanjali began with a spiritual experience. Describing this experience he says that one morning
he was gazing upon the sun when all of a sudden:

"a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side. The radiance pierced in a moment through the folds of sadness and despondency which had accumulated over my heart and flooded it with universal light."3

Before this experience he had seen the world only with his eyes, and eyes alone. However, he now began to see with the whole of his consciousness. All his writings of this period express the joy of attaining the Infinite within the finite. It is the poet's new voyage of spiritual exploration. The poems of this period are composed mainly on four themes:

i) God and the human soul,

ii) God and Nature,

iii) Nature and the soul and

iv) The soul and humanity.

Tagore's songs derive their substance from the emotional experiences of one whose soul yearns to feel intuitively the "soul of existence" through love and faith in this "world's festival." The restless "wanderer" in the poet is keen to establish the relationship with the "Great Beyond" as he calls him in song V of The Gardener. If mysticism's genuine strength is the strength of its psychology in the original sense of the term, that is, "autology, the science of self", to use Prof. Ghose's words, by which he means,

"the art and science of human becoming, his possible evolution." 4

Tagore's poetry turns out to be a genuine representation of the mystical values. In the words of S.B. Mukherjee:

"Tagore's poetry, in its integrity, its totality of multitudinous facets, is a vast philosophical poem." 5

Tagore therefore sings at the discovery of his identity:

Yet I know the endless thirst in your heart for sight of me, the thirst that cries at my door in the repeated knockings of sunrise.

(Fruit-Gathering, LXXX, p.216).


The Crescent Moon (1913), The Gardener (1913), Songs of Kabir (1915), Fruit-Gathering (1916), Stray Birds (1916), Cycle of Spring (1917), Lover's Gift (1918), Crossing (1918), The Fugitive and Other Poems (1921), Fireflies (1928), Sheaves (1932) all reveal the maturity of Tagore's spiritual vision after the Gitanjali phase. The collection The Crescent Moon elaborates the love between mother and child in such a fashion that it attains metaphysical heights; similarly The Gardener takes up the wonderous design of love between man and woman; the details of the ceremonial love, with the "Divine-she" at the centre of the universe which reminds one of the great sufis-poets. Tagore expounds that which is offered by sacred love alone should be accepted as it offers innumerable possibilities for a man to rise above himself— from body to spirit, from finite to infinite. Once this continuity is believed into existence, the rapturous delight and spiritual illumination fills the whole earth, and the poet experiences immortality in all the mortal things. It is love that flows through the creation and imparts its glow even to the blade of grass. The last note in Stray Birds is:

Let this be my last word, that I trust in thy love.

(cccxxv, p. 329)
At this juncture of the mystical experience the poet says:

Thy breath comes to me whispering an impossible hope.

(The Gardener, V, p. 93).

The hope promises immortality, the union with the eternal. Consequently the mystery of death loses all meaning. The poet happily encounters it. He says:

And then I think of death, and the rise of the curtain and the new morning and my life awakened in its fresh surprise of love.

(Crossing, LXI, p. 281).

In fact, in Tagore’s The Gardener death is the divine messenger who merges the soul with the Lord. Kabir then says:

The inward and the outward are become as one sky, the infinite and finite are united. I am drunken with the sight of this All.

(Poems of Kabir, XVII, p. 30).
Tagore’s conception of love thus assumes spiritual significance. Humayun Kabir writes:

"Tagore’s love for man unconsciously and inevitably merged into love of God … For him God was essentially love. The love of the mother for her child or the love of the lover for the beloved are only instances of the Supreme love, that is God. And this love expresses itself not only in the ecstatic devotion of the mystic but also in the routine of everyday life of the common man." 6

He spiritualises love. His spiritual concept of love shows the influence of Vaishnava love poetry which centres around Radha and Krishna. The secular longing for the lover becomes the spiritual longing of the human soul for union with the God. In the introduction to Creative Unity, Tagore writes:

"In love we find a joy which is ultimate because it is the ultimate truth. Therefore it is said in the Upanishads that the advaitam is anantam - 'the one is infinite'; that the advaitam is anandam, - 'the one is love'." 7


In Tagore one finds two types of mysticism: Nature mysticism and Devotional mysticism. He himself says:

"During the discussion of my own religious experience I express my belief that the first stage of my realisation was through my feeling of intimacy with Nature..." 8

For him, Nature, which is a medium of spiritual communion, is the manifestation of God. The supreme person manifests Himself in the elements of Nature as well as in the consciousness of man. He sings:

I woke and found his letter with the morning.

... ... ...

When night grows still and stars come out one by one I will spread it on my lap and stay silent. The rustling leaves will read it aloud to me, the rushing Stream will chant it, and the seven stars will sing it to me from the sky.

(Fruit-Gathering, IV, pp. 177-178).

He resounds on the same lines in the Creative Unity saying:

"This great world, where it is a creation, an expression of the infinite ... has its call for us." 9

For Rabindranath, God is immanent in nature. The immanence of God has to be realised in the objects of nature. The storm and the sea, the sun and the moon, the hills and the rivers are outbursts of the divine Reality. The relation of man to nature, according to Tagore, is one of interdependence. God creates nature and man in and through whom He manifests Himself:

O Nature
So long as I did not love you
Your light
Failed to find its wealth.

(Balaka. XVII, p. 9).

When my heart did not kiss thee in love, O world, thy light missed its full splendour and thy sky watched through the long night with its lighted lamp.

(Crossing, LXXII, p. 281).

The same idea is expressed in Fruit-Gathering:

Day after day you buy your sunrise from my heart, and you find your love carven into the image of my life.

(LXXVII, p. 214).
God is thus the immanent spirit which controls and guides everything in this universe. Tagore finds his God existing in every form of life. His idea of God is beautifully expressed in his short poem:

At midnight the would-be ascetic announced:
'This is the time to give up my home and seek for God.
Ah, who has held me so long in delusion here?'
God whispered 'I', but the ears of the man were stopped
With a baby asleep at her breast lay his wife,
Peacefully sleeping on one side of the bed.
The man said, 'who are ye that have fooled me so long?'
The voice said again, 'They are God', but he heard it not.
God sighed and complained, 'why does my servant wonder to seek me, forsaking me'.

(The Gardener, LXXV, pp. 140-141).

Tagore thus discovers God within the life of man. Not only human beings, but every object of nature is the manifestation of God — the Supreme Being.

The "Awakening of the self", the first and the most significant stage in the mystical experiences, occurs when the poet feels the mystical presence around him that makes him uneasy. The experience, so overwhelming, overpowering and new, confirms that the orthodox ways of "worshipping God in this lonely dark corner
of a temple with doors all shut" will lead him nowhere. This new knowledge of the unity in all things, including the opposites like day and night, spring and autumn, life and death, finite and infinite, fills him with joy. He reaches the mystical consciousness through the transfigured senses of taste, sound, odour, touch and sight, and celebrates the knowledge gained through them in his poetry. So, unlike the oriental mystics he glorifies the senses and asserts: "I will never shut the doors of my senses" as they are the source of the "consciousness of Divine Reality" - to use Underhill's phrase. In one of the songs of The Gardener he says:

No, my friends, I shall never be an ascetic,
whatever you may say.

(XLIII, p.119)

The experiences through the sense gradually intensify the poet's inner awakening. His expanded self includes life of all kinds outside self, of all emotional states, all conditions and situations and excludes nothing.
Once this experience is attained, even the world outside unfolds new meanings. The sunrise and sunset, clouds and stars, flowers and leaves, each and everything renders new messages. The whole world becomes an open letter of the Lord:

... home has become no home to me, for the eternal Stranger calls.

*(Fruit-Gathering, VII, p.179)*

He pledges to,

learn all that must be learnt.

*(The Crescent Moon, "The Land of the Exile", p.66)*

He communicates with the elements and understands the language of the cosmos:

What language is thine, O sea?

The language of eternal questions.

What language is thy answer, O sky?

The language of eternal silence.

*(Stray Birds, XII, p.288)*
When these sort of experiences extend the boundaries of "self" he enters the next important stage in the mystical experiences, that is of "the Purification of self". The poet accepts all—the humble and the great—with equal warmth. The intuitive knowledge of the intrinsic structure of the universe dispels all doubts and delusions, and removes distinctions between the degraded and the ennobled. In other words, through his belief that:

"Seeing, hearing and feeling are miracles... as such as are faculties of the soul", 10

he grows more receptive towards the world and acquires the virtue of desired himility. The world is now the unread letter of the Lord:

Thrustling leaves will read it aloud to me, the rushing stream will chant it, and the seven wise stars will sing it to me from the sky...

(Fruit-Gathering, IV, p.170).

When God's mystery unfolds itself even in the handful of dust, the message enlightens his inner faculties and turns "my thoughts into songs". His newly developed self realises that the riches of the world are "chains" and the body is "the person of clay". The idea is symbolically conveyed in the following lines through the voice of the odour that flutters within the bud:

... Ah me, the day departs,
the happy day of spring, and
I am a prisoner in petals!

... ... ...
Do not lose heart, timid thing!
The perfect dawn is near when you will mingle your life with all life and know at last your purpose.

(Fruit-Gathering, LX, p.207).

If Tagore's way of experiencing the presence of the "Master" is unconventional, for which he is discarded by the "wise" men, nothing dissuades him from his path as "You held me fast" and "their cry became louder everyday". To meet "Life within me" he enters into another stage of his mystic way that which is termed "Illumination" by Underhill and which bursts forth with the "knowledge of Reality ... the Divine Reality."11 Tagore

11. Ibid., p. 205.
exhibits intuitive insight when he proclaims:

I understand the voice of your stars and the silence of your trees. I know that my heart would open like a flower; that my life has filled itself at a hidden fountain.


This insight gives him a sense of existing outside time and space, which adds an all-inclusiveness to his vision and to his emotional realizations. A large number of Tagore's songs imbibe the ecstasy of illumination, for instance sections I and II of song LXXXIII in *Fruit-Gathering*:

I feel that all the stars shine in me.  
The world breaks into my life like a flood.  
The flowers blossom in my body.  
All the youthfulness of land and water smokes like an incense in my heart; and the breath of all things plays on my thoughts as on a flute.

(p. 217)

Such experiences cannot be apprehended rationally and appreciated logically. Hence the expositions "I know not", "I feel". Their prolific impact finds an abounding expression thus:

In the lightening-flash of a moment I have seen the immensity of your creation in my life - creation through many a death from world to world.

With this Tagore enters into another stage of the mystical experience, that is, "The Dark night of the soul". If the:

"consciousness which had, in illumination, shunned itself in the Divine presence, now suffers under an equally intense sense of the Divine Absence..."12

The poet feels a great desolation; believing that the Divine has abandoned the soul, he experiences a strange, fleeting emptiness in himself. His soul plunges into the dark night and he grows desperately aware of his sinfulness. The trials during the dark night of the soul shrink his pride to ashes; even the pangs of separation accelerate the desire to "proceed ahead to meet thee". His submission to God's will lights the "lamp" inside him as the last two songs of Fruit-Gathering present:

My master has bid me, while I stand at the roadside, to sing the song of Defeat, for that is the bride whom He woos in secret.

(Fruit-Gathering. *The Song of the Defeated*. LXXXV, p.220)

12. Ibid., p. 206.
As the new vistas of knowledge and understanding unveil themself, the poet is filled with a sense of "intense certitude", "peaceful joy" and "enhanced powers" to use Underhill's expression. He says:

... I am thankful that my lot lies with the humble who suffer and bear the burden of power, and hide their faces and stifle their sobs in the dark... And the morrow is theirs.

(Fruit-Gathering, Thanksgiving, LXXXVI, p.221).

All doubts are repudiated and an appreciation of the ways of God to man characterizes his position.

THE pain was great when the strings were being turned, my Master! Begin your music, and let me forget the pain; let me feel in beauty what you had in your mind through those pitiless days.

(Fruit-Gathering, XLIX, p.202)

The transcendental knowledge - that is the knowledge of the inwardness of things - makes "life and death" the play of the same endless music. It opens the flood gates of hope and love which impart abundant faith. And together they hold the promise
of the infinite possibilities of the union with "The Great Unknown", that is the final destination of all the mystics of all the schools of thought. When Tagore reaches this stage of the mystical experience, his poetry shares the harmony and music that throbs at the heart of Nature and the Universe. It becomes to quote Ezra Pound's words, "a quite proclamation of the fellowship between man and the gods; between man and nature". He knows that the time has come to offer his "silent salutation" to the Transcendental Spirit. Consequently, the mystery of death loses all its meaning. In a song from Stray Birds, he beautifully assigns the positive role to death:

The night kisses the fading day whispering to his ears. "I am your death, your mother. I am to give you fresh birth."

(CXIX, p. 302)

Thus, love is the sustaining force that uplifts the mortal individual towards immortality. It operates both ways:

God kisses the finite in his love and man the infinite.

(Stray Birds, CCCII, p. 326).
Hence, the belief that:

Trust love, even if it brings sorrow.
Do not close up
your heart.

(The Gardener, XXVII, p. 109).

It is therefore primarily believed that love leads to
immortality, as the song of Stray Birds emphasize:

THROUGH the sadness of all things I hear the crooning of
the Eternal Mother.

(CCLXX, p. 321).

Let the dead love the immortality of fame,
but the living the immortality of love.

(CCLXXIX, p. 323).

LET me feel this world as thy love taking form ...

(CCC, p. 325).

The poet holds an unwithering hope and faith in the perfect
union of man and God. He says:

I SHALL die again and again to know that
life is inexhaustible.

(CCLXXXI, p. 323).
These quotations from the text explain how deeply the thought of union impinges on the mind of the poet. Its intensity is so overpowering that its expression seems adequate. In "The End" the poet concludes by saying:

He is in the pupils of my eyes,
he is in my body and in my soul.

(The Crescent Moon, p. 81).

The oneness between the "Unknown", "Divine Reality" and the "individual self" is established through perception also. God's matchless beauty pervades everywhere—in the stars as light, in the morning as the golden glow, in the evening as peace. Its "stainless white radience" spreads everywhere in day and night form and colour. The rapture and abundance of feeling is conveyed repeatedly:

A sweet fountain springs up from the heart of my heart. My eyes are washed with the delight like the dew-bathed morning, and life is quivering in all my limbs like the sounding strings of the lute.

(Fruit-Gathering, LXXIII, p. 212).
Tagore perceives that the Universal spirit is reflected in all the creations. A complete identification with Him makes the poet feel that:

All the stars shine in me.

*(Fruit-Gathering, LXXXIII, p. 217).*

The poet often employs the images of stars and light to convey the brilliance of the Supreme which transforms the world into "the house of feast". The record of the experiences after crossing the bar through death is given thus:

My mind crossed the dark and stood among the stars and I saw that we were playing unafraid in the silent courtyard of our King's palace.

*(Crossing, LVII, p. 279).*

Though the poet has the conviction and confidence that God too has "an endless thirst for the sight of me", it does not take away the curiosity of meeting Him face to face and heart to heart. The soul that strives constantly for its "perpetual promotion" attains the oneness at a given moment.
No mystery beyond the present; no striving for the impossible; no shadow behind the charm; no groping in the depth of the dark.

(The Gardener, XVI, p. 103).

At the moment of Union, "the mystery of the Infinite is written on this little forehead of mine". (The Gardener, XXXII, p. 112).

And the perpetual call, an invitation from the "Manifold Magnificence" to the victorious boatmen is a source of strength:

Come to me across the worn-out track of age, through the gates of death. For dreams fade, hopes fail, the gathered fruits of the years decay, but I am the eternal truth, and you shall meet me again and again in your voyage of life from shore to shore.

(Lover's Gift, XL, p. 260).
Rabindranath Tagore is a mystic, but his mysticism is simple and beautiful, not obscure. He sees the wonder and beauty and goodness through and beyond all that he actually sees and touches, and it fills him with the spirit of worship, of self-consecration and aspiration. He is an idealist, but not one who sighs after the unattainable, because, although his ideals are of the highest, they are not born of his imagination. They are born of this sense of the real beauty and goodness which his mind sees in all things. He, in fact, searches out hidden ideals with clear, unflinching eyes, and follows them with dauntless and unwavering courage:

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.

(Crossing, LXXIV, p.282).

Though sometimes self-consecration may find a peaceful way, he does not shrink from it when it leads him through trouble and pain. In the poem on God's trumpet, he describes how he was tired after "the day's dusty toil" and was on his way to
the temple seeking rest, when he found the trumpet "lying in the
dust". He had thought his wanderings were over, but God's
trumpet must not be so dishonoured, and therefore, though "his
heart beat in pain", he prays for help to put on his armour, and
takes up and sounds the trumpet, for sometimes pain must be
borne in darkness with faith and courage:

The pain was great when the strings were being tuned, my
Master! Begin Your music and let me forget the pain; let
me feel in beauty what You had in Your mind through those
pitiless days.

(Fruit-Gathering, XLIX, p. 202).

And sometimes self-consecration must face the pain of "utter
defeat" without shrinking or losing courage:

You have set me among those who are defeated. I know it is
not for me to win, nor to leave the game. I shall stake all
I have and when I lose my last penny I shall stake myself,
and then I think I shall have won through my utter defeat.

(Fruit-Gathering, XXIX, p. 188).

For only then can the poet know the thrill and joy of having
been given this greatest honour by God, the honour of being
entrusted with a burden too great for others.
Tagore does not think that self-consecration should lead to asceticism. It should mean readiness to give up everything that God calls for, but it does not necessitate the refusal of God's gifts. These can be returned to God in "fruits of love."

Tagore does not only feel the joy of being with children. It is something sacred, holy and divine for him. He has no sympathy for the ascetic who renounces his wife and children merely because he thinks that any act of renunciation must be pleasing to God. Divine love has been given to men by God, and in receiving it and enjoying it as His gift, they can please Him, by rendering true and faithful service. Tagore beautifully pictures the ascetic refusing to see God in the holy ties of his home, and leaving it, while God sighs and complains:

Why does My servant wander to seek Me, forsaking Me?

(The Gardener, LXXV, p. 140).

Tagore has a passionate love for nature. To his mystic mind all beauty in nature is the living touch of God's love which glows and responds to his, filling him with an ecstasy of joy. One of
the most beautiful of his poems shows how this joy of the mystic
can only find its consummation in worship:

Yes. I know, this is nothing but thy love, 0 Beloved of my
heart — this golden light ... these idle clouds ... this
passing breeze. Thy eyes look down on my eyes, and my heart
has touched Thy feet.

(Gitanjali, LIX, p. 28).

In fact, some of the poems on nature are quite simple, as the
one of "the bird of the morning," who sings with glad faith,
because the messenger out of the east has found his way into its
dream "through the twofold night of the sky and the leaves"
(Fruit-Gathering, XXV, p. 186). But almost all are enriched with
that mystical insight that adds a throbbing beauty to them, as
when he describes how the life-sap stirs in the bud when God
"gives it a glance," and how the flower "spreads its wings and
flutters in the wind" at His breath (Fruit-Gathering, XVII, p.
183), and how the poet himself can understand the voice of God's
stars and the silence of His trees (Fruit-Gathering, XV, p.
182), and when he begs to find his own fire of worship kindled
in the lights of God's stars (Crossing, LIV, p. 278). And then,
there is a morning prayer:

I have come to thee to take Thy touch before I begin my day. Let Thy eyes rest upon my eyes for awhile. Let me take to my work the assurance of Thy comradeship, my friend ... ... ... Let Thy Love's sunshine kiss the peaks of my thoughts and linger in my life's valley where the harvest ripens.

(Crossing LIII, p. 277).

To a mystic the smallest things are never uninteresting or insignificant, that are never really small. A leaf is full of beauty, full of wonder, full of mystery. And the quickest thought, a mere flash in the mind, is worth a moment's arrest, that its spark of light may add its tiny beam to the illumination of the soul. In the volume called "Stray Birds", Tagore catches some of these thoughts, these flashes in the mind. In fact, some of them sink deep down and open up new trends of thought, while others appear to be just simple, happy little beams that may cause a momentary smile of pleasure. But the simplest little beam has in it something eternal and is never lost again, and is therefore worth catching. These thoughts that come to the poet, of all kinds of things in the world he loves so, he calls "stray birds", "yellow leaves", and
"little vagrants", asking them to leave their footprints in his words.

In many of Tagore's happiest thoughts, in "Stray Birds", as in "Fruit-Gathering", and "Crossing", there is a touch of pathos, a pathos that is seldom absent from earthly things. Sometimes the pathos is at its highest:

I hear some rustles of things behind my sadness of heart, 
- I cannot see them.

(Stray Birds, CXXXI, p.303).

And sometimes the happiness nearly hides the pathos:

In the dusk of the evening the bird of some early dawn comes to the nest of my silence.

(Stray Birds, CLXIV, p. 308).

And sometimes the two aspects are so intertwined that it is difficult to distinguish them:

Sorrow is hushed into peace in my heart like the evening among the silent trees.

(Stray Birds, X, p.288).
Thy sunshine smiles upon the winter days of my heart, never doubting of its spring flowers.

(Stray Birds, CCCI, 326).

Love! when you come with the burning lamp of pain in your hand, I can see your face and know you as bliss.

(Stray Birds, CLXII, p. 307).

Thus a close examination of the above pieces from, "The Crescent Moon", "The Gardener", "Fruit-Gathering", "Lover's Gift", "Crossing" and "Stray Birds", would prove that, to Tagore religion meant the very breath of life. He has no defined religion of any particular caste or creed, but it is one that illuminates all his thoughts. His religion sheds its divine light in order to show the real value of things, it inspires him with faith and courage, it is the source of his deepest longings and aspirations, and it makes death beautiful. The consciousness of God dominates his every thought, and pervades his being, bringing his mind into a perpetual attitude of worship. And it is not a one-sided attitude. He does not exclude other things from his life. His senses are keenly alive, and appreciative of all things that surround him. But he takes these into his embrace, and draws them with him into this attitude of worship.
At the same time he keeps a well-balanced sense of the worth of things, as he depicts in the story of the Brahmin who begged of Sanatan, and when he was given a "precious stone", mused until the sun went down, and then throwing the stone into the river, said to Sanatan, "Master, give the least fraction of the wealth that disdains all the wealth of the world." (Fruit-Gathering, XXVII, p. 188). Spiritual things are of greater value to the poet than material things. Sudas, the gardener thought that he would get the best price for his last lotus, if he took it to Lord Buddha, but when he arrived and looked at Buddha's face, he put the lotus at his feet and bowed his head to the dust. Then Buddha smiled and asked, "What is your wish, my son?" Sudas cried, "The least touch of your feet." (Fruit-Gathering, XIX, p. 184). To learn the true proportion of the value of things will often cost much pain, but the lesson is worth the cost, and we shall never be overwhelmed if we remember the pitifulness of the divine Teacher. As human beings, we have a number of weak and harmful desires, but God saves us from them by "hard refusals", and therefore, day by day he makes us more worthy of simple and
great gifts:

Day by day Thou art making me worthy of thy full acceptance
by refusing me ever and anon, saving me from perils of weak,
uncertain desire.

(Gitanjali, XIV, p. 8)

Tagore's faith and courage are indomitable because he is one of
those who have had a vision that nothing coming afterwards can
efface. He has felt that he has seen God's face and that is
enough to satisfy him:

I felt that I saw your face, and I launched my boat in the
dark.

(Crossing, LXXVII, p. 283).

But Tagore has his troubled thoughts as others have. Sometimes
he is oppressed with the seeming unworthiness and futility of
man's life, but that is natural looking at it from the human
point of view. But when the poet sees it from God's angle he
knows that all must be well:

I weep at my unworthiness when I see my life in the hands
of the unmeaning hours, - but when I see it in your hands I
know it is too precious to be squandered among shadows.

(Fruit-Gathering, L, p. 202).
The almighty can take our life which we offer to Him as "a voiceless instrument", and "fill its hollowness with (His) songs". (The Fuqitive, Part II., 20). And He can give us the strength for all things, but sometimes the very burden of the divine strength makes us fear because of the challenge it brings with it, as when a flower was looked for as a token of His love, and in its place His mighty sword, with its responsibility, was found. But the fear is cast off very soon, in the joy of the faith. (Gitanjali, LII, p. 26).

Tagore also feels the loneliness that all must feel at times, and therefore prays not only for God's voice but for His touch (Fruit-Gathering, LIX, p. 206), but he rarely loses the courage and the high spirit that come from his sense of God's companionship:

To move is to meet you every moment, Fellow-traveller!

(Fruit-Gathering, XIII, p. 182).

He does feel the sadness of the passing years, but the mellowing
influence of life's experience brings a great peace too:

Now that youth has ebbed and I am stranded on the bank,
I can hear the deep music of all things, and the sky opens
to me its heart of stars.

(Lover's Gift, XXXVIII, p. 260).

And as his experience ripens he prays for the cool, pure love
that is more lasting than the passionate desires of youth:

Send me the love that keeps the heart still
with the fulness of peace.

(Fruit-Gathering, LXIII, p. 208).

He knows the sorrow of separation by death, but even then his
faith in God teaches his love a beautiful way of loving still:

Her night has found its morning and thou hast
taken her to thy arms: and to thee I bring my
gratitude and my gifts that were for her.

(Fruit-Gathering, XLVI, p. 201).

Though sometimes he has a feeling of awe, he has no real fear of
death. Death is only the crown of this life, a step up to fuller
life, where the sun will break out from the clouds "in the summer of the unknown flowers" (Crossing, I, p. 271), and he felt no stranger as he crossed the threshold into this world and found himself in the arms of his mother, and therefore as he crosses the threshold of death, he feels that "the unknown will appear as ever known" to him. (Gitanjali, XCV, p. 44).

Thus, one observes that, through all things, through all joys and sorrows, through all his varying moods, one thing and one thought grips him, i.e., his consciousness of God. The poet sees all things, he does all things, within that consciousness. And in that consciousness his heart becomes childlike in its trustfulness, and he is satisfied:

The wise rebuked me and bade me be gone,
for I had not come by the lane.
I turned away in doubt, but you held me fast, and their scolding became louder everyday.

(Fruit-Gathering, XVI, p. 183).

The poet does not wish to be led by others, lest he misses the
opportunity of God waiting to lead him:

My portion of the best in this world will come from your hands: such was your promise. Therefore your light glistens in my tears. I fear to be led by others lest I miss you waiting in some road corner to be my guide.

*(Fruit-Gathering, XIV, p. 182).*

The poet's longing for God is stronger than his longing for anything else. He longs "not only for the gift of love, but for the lover Himself" *(Crossing, LII, p. 277)*. This consciousness of God bows him in worship. To go amongst all that is sordid, poor, bad and not lovely, amidst such surroundings, to keep pure, loving and compassionate is, perhaps, the holiest way of worshipping God. Jesus Christ hallowed this way and made it beautiful by following it Himself. The "Friend of publicans and sinners" never shrank from the poorest or the most unclean, and showed to all men how it was possible to "keep unspotted from the world", not by holding aloof from it, but by carrying to it such a beneficent influence of loving sympathy as would awaken around itself all that was beautiful, pure, good and banish all that was base and shameful. It is a way of worship one can but
faintly follow, but never can sound the holiest depths of it which Jesus Christ reached alone. Sometimes one can but worship humbly standing before God face to face, "with folded hands" (Gitanjali, LXXVI, p. 36). But at the end of all worship, prayer, longing, aspiring and striving, there must always remain for man the great need of God's mercy and grace. And then, God, who is merciful and unexactimg, never fails in His tender and patient love. One may fritter away his time, one may fritter away his gifts to all those who clamour for them, until perhaps one only has "one little flower of love" to give in exchange for all that God showers on him, but even then He will receive it. (Crossing, X, p. 272). One, even may have nothing left at all:

Now that the day has waned, and they have taken their dues and left me alone, I see thee standing at the door. But I find I have no gift remaining to give and I hold both my hands up to thee. (Crossing, LI, p. 277).

But then, God takes them, empty into His, and looks down on him with His love that has waited for this. The most important thing in developing this kind of relationship with God, is that one
must have the courage to pray. And the prayer should be:

Give me the supreme courage of love, this is my prayer -
the courage to speak, to do, to suffer at thy will, to
leave all things or be left alone. Strengthen me on errands
of danger, honour me with pain, and help me climb to that
difficult mood which sacrifices daily to thee.

(The Fugitive, Part III, XXXVII, p. 450).

III

Rabindranath Tagore is primarily concerned with the divine
nature of man in most of his poems after Gitanjali. Man is God's
highest creation and manifestation. The poet, therefore, deems
man to be the representative of the creator. He writes:

Man as a creation represents the creator and this is why of
all creatures it has been possible for him to comprehend
this world in his knowledge and in his feeling and in his
imagination, to realise in his individual spirit a union
with a spirit that is everywhere.13

1949, p. 29.
Man is superior to any object of creation for man has a direct mission to fulfil:

To the birds you gave songs, the birds gave you songs in return. You gave me only voice, yet asked for more and I sing. To all things else you give; from me you ask.

(Fruit-Gathering, LXXVIII, p. 214).

And this distinct mission is for the attainment of the Supreme Being. The poet has felt the music of the Divine Being in his heart and therefore his whole being wishes to go beyond the limits of his own self and be one with the Supreme, the Lord of his life. Although he bears the voice of the Supreme Being, he imagines that he is limited by his own finite self:

O farthest end, O the keen call of thy flute; I forget, I ever forget that the gates are shut everywhere in the house where I dwell alone.

(The Gardener, V, p. 93).

Here Tagore compares the liberated soul and the finite self with two birds. The liberated soul is like a bird moving in the sky, singing the songs of the wood. The finite self is like a bird in
the cage which cannot move and fly in the vast blue sky or sing freely the songs of the wood. It sings only the word that it has learnt from others. But it has a sincere desire for union with the liberated being. In the words of Tagore:

Their love is intense with longing,
but they never can fly wing to wing.
Through the bars of the cage they look, and Vain is their wish to know each other.

They flutter their wings in yearning, and sing 'come closer my love'.
The free bird cries 'it cannot be,
I fear the closed doors of the cage'.
The cage bord whispers, 'Alas!
my wings are powerless and dead.'

(The Gardener, VI, p. 94).

As the two birds - the bird in the cage and the bird in the sky - can never fly together, so too the soul in bondage wishes to be one with the free soul, but it is impossible for it to be so. As the bars of the cage confine the bird, the greed for material things make the life of man confined to the material world. Those who are attached to these things they can never transcend the limits of matter, for they are guided and controlled by the 'Aham' - the ignorant ego. The liberated soul, on the other
hand, spends its life in the service of mankind and never desires an escape from this world but tries to improve it. Such a soul does not depend on any external cause for his actions are expressions of his inner inspiration. His actions are, as those of the Divine Being, devoid of self-interest and his works are inspired by his inner joy and happiness. Tagore thus gives immense importance to human action for the realisation of the Supreme Being. He writes:

The soul is to dedicate itself to Brahma through all its activities. This dedication is the song of the soul, in this, is his freedom. Joy reigns when all work becomes the path to the union with Brahma; when the soul ceases to return constantly to its own desires; when in it our self-offering grows more and more intense. Then there is completion, then there is freedom, then in this world comes the kingdom of God. 14

Man is apparently composed of the body and the soul. But the body which we perceive is, like any material object, merely an illusory appearance. When this fact is realized, the reality that remains is the soul which is nothing other than God. The

saying That-thou-art means that there is an unqualified identity between the soul, that underlies the apparently finite man, and God. It is quite true if one takes the word thou in the sense of the empirical individual limited and conditioned by its body, and the word that as the reality beyond the world, there cannot be an identity between thou and that. One has to understand, therefore the word thou to imply pure consciousness underlying man and that also to imply pure consciousness which forms the essence of God. Between these two, complete identity exists as is taught by the Vedanta. An identity judgement like, "This is that Devadatta" (Which one passes on seeing Devadatta for a second time) makes the above point clear. Identity judgement is neither tautological nor impossible, because it serves the purpose of pointing out that what are illusorily taken as different are really one. The identity that is taught between man and God is a real identity between terms which appear as different. Being identical with God, the soul is in reality what God also really is. The soul appears as the limited finite self because of its association with the body which is a product of ignorance. The association with the body leads to egoism and this
factor obstructs our spiritual harmony with God and offers a great danger to our development as real personalities. The desires of the body limit the scope of our self-realisation. Tagore says:

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath. It is unholy — take not thy gifts through its unclean hands. Accept only what is offered by sacred love.

(Bitanjali, IX, p.6).

However death draws the veil on many of our earthly possessions. It offers an opportunity for the change of life. It is an occasion of marriage of the soul with God. Tagore asks for the happy wedding ceremony with the fullest decoration and happiness in death. There should be a beautiful decorated chariot for the wedding of the soul with God is a rare spiritual occasion. Tagore says:

Why do you whisper so faintly in my ears, O Death, my death? When the flowers droop in the evening and cattle come back to their stalls, you stealthily come to my side and speak words that I do not understand.
Is this how you must woo and win me with the opiate of drowsy murmur and cold kisses. O Death, my death? Will there be no proud ceremony for our wedding? Will you not tie up with a wreath your tawny coiled locks? Is there none to carry your banner before you, and will not the night be on fire with your red torch-lights. O Death, my death? Come with your conch-shells sounding, come in the sleepless night. Dress me with a crimson mantle, grasp my hand and take me. Let your chariot be ready at my door with your horses neighing impatiently. Raise my veil and look at my face proudly, O Death, my death!

(The Gardener, LXXI, p. 144).

Death and life are bound together by a single chain. The same chain binds those that are alive and those that are dead. All of us are mere travellers and our final goal lies far off. Referring to death as his beloved wife, the poet says:

Dying, you have left behind you the great sadness of the Eternal in my life. You have painted my thought’s horizon with the sunset colours of your departure, leaving a track of tears across the earth to love’s heaven. Clasped in your dear arms, life and death united in me in a marriage bond. I think I can see you watching there in the balcony with your lamp lighted.
Where the end and the beginning of all things meet.
My world went hence through the doors that
you opened – you holding the cup of death to
my lips, filling it with life from your own.

(Lover’s Gift, LIII, p. 264).

In a poem entitled Mrityurpare (After Death) in Chitra, the poet likens life and death to wakefulness and sleep. As sleep does not break the identity of the sleeping person, death cannot extinguish the life-force. As one’s states of wakefulness and sleep are immaterial to the maintenance of self-identity, life and death are mere phases of the manifestation of the same life-force, which is immortal and deathless. As the bud blossoms into the flower and the flower mature into fruit, life too ripens into death. The poet boldly assures us saying:

I know that this life, missing its ripeness in love,
is not altogether lost.
I know that the flowers that fade in the dawn, the streams
that strayed in the desert, are not altogether lost.
I know that my dreams that are still unfulfilled, and my
melodies still unstruck, are clinching to some lute strings
of thine, and they are not altogether lost.

(Crossing, XVIII, p. 273).
The poet thus conceives that death is the force of mobility. Because of death things around us move on, grow and decay. Had there been no death, everything would have remained in the same static and untransformed form and the universe would have been narrow, obstructed and hardened. Death has thus lightened the tremendous pressure of this bare identity and granted to the universe a wide scope to move on. Tagore thus perceives the onward march of the life-force through the gateway of death.