CHAPTER - V

MYSTICISM OF JOY

Tagore is in communion with Nature because of the supreme joy it imparts to him. Therefore closely allied to Tagore's nature mysticism in Gitanjali comes his mysticism of joy. Ever and anon the poet of Gitanjali has mystic apprehensions of the Divine in Nature and a thrill of joy passes through his entire being. In the fragrant days of sunny April, through the forest paths the God of Nature comes. The golden touch of His feet makes the poet's joy to shine. His heart is glad within as the breath of the passing breeze is sweet. And the poet is only happy to sit in front of his door from dawn till dusk for the happy moment of the divine revelation (XLIV, 26).

The poet experiences a rhythmic dance of joy, which is actually nothing but His own manifestation. He sees a swift dance of joy in all Nature. The on-rush of torrents or the fearful whirl of storms symbolises the swiftness of this dance. Nothing can stop it. And this joy is manifested in the cyclic
changes of seasons which keep rapidly and eternally moving on their rhythmic motion. Colours, tunes, perfumes etc. keep on pouring in an endless torrential on-rush of joy comparable to that of a cascade. In Gitanjali the entire nature overflows with joy, which floods the poet's heart as well. He affirms that the creator also partakes of this joy in creation (XLV, 27).

The Tagore of Gitanjali is a mystic, but his mysticism here is quite different from that of the other mystics. He does not believe in the renunciation of this world, neither does he shun the pleasures of the senses. Real freedom, he holds, does not lie in renouncing the world and its activities. Rather, it results from the discharge of one's duties. Here lies real, spiritual bliss. This creation is like a beautiful cup which God fills continuously with fragrant and sweet-smelling wine for the poet to drink and to enjoy himself. To renounce it would be the height of ingratitude, holds Tagore. He opens lyric number 73 thus: "Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight" (LXXV, 49).
God has created this world for the enjoyment of the poet, and it is his duty to His creator to enjoy the pleasures with which He has blessed him abundantly. The poet giving for the numerous pleasures which he has been provided with. He would enjoy these sensuous pleasures to the full, for such sensuous delight is an expression of God's own delight in the poet and in the whole creation.

Hence the poet again affirms in poem no. 73, "No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight" (LXXIII, 49). So, to Tagore the senses are the carriers of God's delight to him. At the divine touch, the poet confirms, "all my illusions will burn into illuminations of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love" (LXXIII, 49). The method of the yogi who "shuts the doors of his senses" is not the way of Tagore, the joyous mystic in *Gitanjali*. The delights of this world, even if they bring illusions, are not to be shunned. He will be in mystic communion with them and enjoy them as ways and means by which
the Sachidananda comes closer to and communes with him. The desires of life are not to be extinguished. Rather they should be sanctified and consecrated to the Absolute and used in the service of humanity. Thus, the mysticism in Gitanjali has a horizontal and a vertical dimension. As a mystic Tagore is opposed to the Buddhist doctrine of renunciation. Instead he professes the mysticism of joy.

The voice of life and its joy are too strong to permit Tagore to follow the traditional ideal of a holy life. In a poem of good humour in The Gardener, he says, "Reverend Sir, forgive this pair of sinners. Spring winds today are blowing in wild eddies driving dust and dead leaves away and with them your lessons are lost. Do not say, father, that life is a vanity." In another poem in the same collection Tagore writes, "No my friends, I shall never leave my hearth and home, and retire into the forest solitude, if rings no merry laughter in its echoing shade and if the end

of no saffron mantle flutters in the wind, if its silence is not deepened by soft whispers." He concludes the short poem affirming, "I shall never be an ascetic."\(^2\) Tagore is at variance with the mystic who stipulates ascetism as a *sine qua non* of mysticism.

This positive attitude towards mysticism was felt as something new and fascinating to his countrymen. W.B. Yeats in his justly famous introduction to *Gitanjali* reports a distinguished Bengali doctor of Medicine as reporting of Tagore: "He is the first among our saints who has not refused to live, but has spoken out of Life itself, and that is why we give him our love."\(^3\)

In Tagore's *Gitanjali* the researcher finds ideals quite sane and singular. The Infinite is not to be found in a self-chosen seclusion, far away from life's turmoil, but in the joys and sorrows and duties of common humanity and in the bonds of human

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\(^2\) *Collected Poems* 119.

\(^3\) W.B. Yeats, Introduction, *Gitanjali*, viii-ix.
relationships. The poet wants to cull the different strands of joy in one single song and offer it to the Divine Poet. In poem no. 58, one of the most beautiful of lyrics in Gitanjali, the poet prays earnestly:

Let all the strains of joy mingle in my last song -- the joy that makes the earth flow over in the riotous excess of the grass, the joy that sets the twin brothers, life and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter the joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain and the joy that throws everything it has up on the dust and knows not a word (LVIII, 38).

The river of joy flows all through the universe. It is this joy which makes the grass grow over the earth in all its luxuriance and abundance. This universal joy is an expression of God's joy. So to commune with joy means to commune with God, the source
and sustenance of this joy. It is composed of different elements. Life and death are but two aspects of this joy. Therefore, the poet will gather together the different strands of joy in his last song and he will sing it in the service of his Maker.

The poet perceives mirth spreading "from leaf to leaf . . . and gladness without measure" (LVII, 38). The heaven's river has drowned its banks and "the flood of joy is abroad" (LVII, 38). In fact the whole of poem no. 57 is a song of praise. In this lyric, light is the symbol of the joy of God in the act of creation. It is sweet and glorious. It fills the world with beauty, gives pleasure to the eyes and is sweet to the heart. It fills the world not only with beauty but also with joy. There is joy in all nature and this joy knows no bounds. It is as if heaven is overflooded with joy and this flood overwhelms the poet also, just as it overwhelms mother nature.

*Nature's Revenge*, the first drama of importance Tagore wrote, is a vindication of this new view of life. The hero is a *sanyasin* who has been trying to
gain victory over nature by cutting off all the bonds of desire and affection and thus to arrive at the true and profound knowledge of Brahma. A little girl, however, whom he has brought up, brings him back from his dreams of the Infinite to the world and to the bondage of human affection. The sanyasin comes to realize that God is to be found in the naturalness of human life. Tagore writes in The Reminiscences: "This [the play] was to put in a slightly different form the story of my own experience."4 Shortly after this drama was written Tagore got married. Later, when he wrote his 'reminiscences' he looked upon the drama as a prelude to the great themes of all his writings, the joy of attaining the Infinite within the finite. This is poetically and mystically expressed in many of the Gitanjali poems.

In the poems of Kabir, one hundred of which Tagore translated into English, there are several which deal with the same subject. In poem no. 40 of the One Hundred Poems of Kabir we read, "He is dear

4 Reminiscences 238.
to me indeed who can call back the wanderer to his home. In the home is the true union, in the home is enjoyment of life: why should I forsake my home and wander in the forest? If Brahma helps me to realize truth, verily I will find both bondage and deliverance in the home."  

Tagore and Kabir are kindred spirits. The tension between 'bondage' and 'deliverance' is quite clear in both. Sublime truths are often paradoxical. The famous peace prayer of St. Francis of Assisi is a classic example. He concludes it quite paradoxically, "It is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning we are pardoned, it is in dying we are born to eternal life."

Tagore's mystical experiences referred to in the second chapter, enabled him to find "the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side." In his Reminiscences he sums up the significance of the whole experience in a couplet:


6 Reminiscences 216.
I know not how of a sudden my heart flung
open its doors,
And let the crowd of worlds rush in,
greeting each other.

Joy is God's message to the poet. He could read it in all nature.

In a verse from the Upanishads Tagore sums up the inner meaning of Nature, which is its subsistence in joy. The verse reads thus: "From joy are born all creatures, by joy they are sustained, towards joy they progress and into joy they enter." This verse had gripped Tagore so much that he quotes it twice on the same page in Sadhana. Poem no.57 illustrates how light, which as we have already seen, symbolises joy, dances at the centre of his life, strikes the very chords of his love. The sky opens, the wind runs wild and "laughter passes over the earth" (LVII, 38). Along with the poet the whole creation rejoices. The butterflies "spread their sails on the sea of light" (LVII, 38), the sea of joy. Lilies and jasmines

7 Sadhana 86.
surge upon the "crest of the waves of light" (LVII, 38), the waves of joy. The poet again sees light, joy, "shattered into gold" (LVII, 38) on every cloud and it "scatters gems in profusion" (LVII, 38).

Nature mysticism and the mysticism of joy are intertwined in the poems of Gitanjali. Tagore does succeed in weaving the different strands of Gitanjali into its well-defined texture i.e. mysticism.

Sadhana published in 1913, one year after Gitanjali was published, seems to be some sort of a prose rendering of Gitanjali, for some of the ideas enshrined in the Gitanjali poems are found clearly expressed in Sadhana. Hence our justification in quoting a number of passages from it. Quoting the Upanishads Tagore writes on page 86 of Sadhana "The immortal being manifests himself in joy-form" and his manifestation in creation is out of the fullness of his joy. This joy, which is without form, translates itself into forms. "The joy of the singer is expressed in the form of a song, that of the poet in the form
of a poem." In traditional Hinduism the Transcendent is not only 'sat' and 'chit', but also Ananda. He is Sachidananda. True to Hinduism, Tagore presents in Gitanjali a God who is Ananda, Joy. The poet feels that he is a form of God's joy. He affirms in Gitanjali, "Thou hast taken me as thy partner of all this wealth" (LXVI, 37) including joy.

Tagore asserts in Sadhana, "This joy, whose other name is love, must by its very nature have duality for its realization." The poet experiences the tension between 'dvaita' and 'advaita'. Just as the source of the best poetry of Hopkins is the tension between the priest and the poet in him, the tension between 'dvaita' and 'advaita' which Tagore experiences becomes the source of a number of poems in Gitanjali. The following assertion in Sadhana is very revealing:

When the singer has his inspiration he makes himself into two; he has within him his other self as the hearer, and

8 Sadhana 86.
9 Sadhana 86.
the outside audience is merely an extension of this other self of his. The lover seeks his own other self in his beloved. It is the joy that creates this separation in order to realise through obstacles the union.\textsuperscript{10}

The union referred to here seems to be union in joy, union in love. Quoting the Upanishadic question, "Who could have breathed or moved if the sky were not filled with joy, with love,"\textsuperscript{11} Tagore seems to affirm that he lived, moved and had his being in Joy. In \textit{Sadhana} he asserts, "It is through the heightening of our consciousness into love, and extending it all over the world, that we can attain Brahmavihara, communion with this infinite joy."\textsuperscript{12} This is exactly what happens in \textit{Gitanjali} and we qualify it as \textit{the mysticism of joy}.

As we have already hinted, to Tagore love and joy are interchangeable terms. Love, according to him,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10} \textit{Sadhana} 86-87.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} \textit{Sadhana} 89.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} \textit{Sadhana} 89.
\end{itemize}
spontaneously gives itself in endless gifts. But these gifts lose their fullest significance, feels Tagore, if through them we do not reach that Love, which is the giver. To do that we must have love, joy, in our own heart.

He who has no love in him values the gifts of his lover only according to their usefulness . . . . When the want is satisfied, utility becomes a burden, if it still persists. On the other hand, a mere token is of permanent worth to us when we have love [Joy], in our heart.13

No wonder, the poet presents himself in poem no.52 as "searching in the dawn" (LII, 33), after the night of love for some "token" of his Beloved's love. And the Beloved has left him the best token. His "mighty sword, flashing as a flame" (LII, 33). A token is not for any special use. It is an end in itself. As it is for the whole being, it can never tire anyone, much less the poet of Gitanjali.

Joy, for the poet, is an end in itself. Hence it needs no reason for its existence. If so it is the

13 *Sadhana* 89.
final truth. In *The Religion of Man* he asserts, "Satyam is anandam, the Real is joy." The poet of *Gitanjali* knows the Truth, by touching it by the music it gives, by the joy of greeting it sends forth to the truth in him. "This", according to Tagore, "is the true foundation of all religions." This is the essence of poetic mysticism which will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter.

Certainly Tagore's is a "poet's religion." All that he feels about it is from vision and not from knowledge. It is an honest confession and he acknowledges

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14 *The Religion of Man* 113.
15 *The Religion of Man* 113.
16 *The Religion of Man* 66.
17 *The Religion of Man* 66.
18 *The Religion of Man* 58.
that he cannot satisfactorily answer any questions about evil, or about what happens after death. Nevertheless, he is sure that there have come moments in his own experience when his soul has "touched the Infinite and has become intensely conscious of It through the illumination of joy." This confession made in 1931, i.e., more than twenty years after the writing of Gitanjali, reveals to us what exactly happened to the poet when he wrote Gitanjali. Gitanjali is a valid record of the odyssey of his soul which had touched the Infinite and had become intensely conscious of it through the illumination. In other words it is the honest exposition of the communion of the poet with the Infinite, which is Ananda, Joy. In Gitanjali the poet emerges as a prophet of the joy of life.

There is hardly any subject which had given Tagore more inspiration than the gorgeous joy festival, "the love festival, and he is the honoured guest at the

19 The Religion of Man 67.
feast of immortality." In joy, as in love, all the contradictions of existence dissolve and unity and duality are no more at variance. Joy must be one and two simultaneously. The poet's heart ever moves on till it finds joy, love, and then it has its rest. Poem no. 12 opens, "The time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long? (XII, 7). He "has to knock at every alien door to come to his own" and say "Here art thou!" and hear the flood of the assurance "I am" (XII, 8), "joy".

Loss and gain are harmonised in joy. Bondage and liberation are not antagonistic in it. It is the sublime function of joy to welcome all limitations and to try to transcend them all. And joy is the final appeal to Tagore. His lecture on "Realization in Love" in Sadhana ends like a hymn of joy. In spite of its length, it is worth quoting here in full.

And joy is everywhere; it is in the earth's green covering of grass in the

20 Sadhana 94.
blue serenity of the sky; in the reckless exuberance of spring; in the severe abstinence of grey winter; in the living flesh that animates our bodily frame; in the perfect poise of the human figure, noble and upright; in living; in the exercise of all our powers; in the acquisition of knowledge; in fighting evils; in dying for gains we never can share. Joy, is there everywhere; . . .

Tagore expresses the inseparability of joy and love by comparing them to the essentially related human body and soul respectively.

Because of the Buddha, pessimism, life-negation and asceticism became the dominant factors in the religious life of India, though their roots can be traced back to the Upanishads. For, the logical consequences of the doctrines of Atma-Brahma unity and 

maya are life-negation and renunciation. Naturally the Buddha emphasized redemption from karma and samsara.

21 Sadhana 96-97.
Tagore is definitely opposed to the ascetic ideal of life. In his lectures on "Man" he scolds the sanyasi who translate in their lives the philosophy of "I am He" into extreme inactivity and callousness, who shut the doors of their senses in order not to be led astray and be captured by the delights of the world, who torture their bodies in order to cross the boundary of animal existence, and who also discard the independent responsibility of man in their presumption of denying and transcending humanity. Theirs is not the way Tagore recommends. The callousness of asceticism pitted against the callousness of luxury is merely righting one evil with the help of another, "inviting the pitiless demon of the desert in place of the indiscriminate demon of the jungle."22

In Tagore's Gitanjali the infinite is to be found not in a self-chosen seclusion, far away from life's turmoil, but in the joys and sorrows and duties of common human life and in the bonds of human relationships.

22 *The Religion of Man* 111.
When he says, "They are God," one should understand the sentence not only in the mystical sense of the Upanishads that God is immanent in them, but also in the sense of the Gospel that in serving those whom God has given to man, man serves Him. "As long as you have done it to one of these little ones, you have done it to me." A new era with new ideals is dawning on India. The poet exclaims: "O thou distraught wanderer, thou Sanyasin, drunk in the wine of self-intoxication, dost thou not already hear the progress of the human soul along the highway traversing the wide fields of humanity!"

What we have in Gitanjali is a balanced vision. The poet has seen life and has seen it steadily and whole. It is not a bed of roses. It has in it thorns as well. To Tagore Joy and sorrow are the two sides

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23 In poem no. 75 of The Gardener Tagore makes God tell the 'would-be-ascetic' "They are God", referring to his wife and child. (Collected Poems and Plays 141).

24 Matt 25:40.

25 Sadhana 109.
of one and the same coin. Suffering is a God-sent. It is His finest gift to His chosen apostle, the poet of Gitanjali. Hence the next chapter presents the poet's mysticism of suffering, the way the poet transmutes his sorrow into a means by which he enters into communion with the Divine.