CONCLUSION

Nurtured in the tradition and atmosphere of the Upanishads and nourished in the formative and maturer years of his life by them, as well as by the Sufi and Vaishnava mysticism and by the songs and experiences of the long line of our medieval poet-prophets, the Tagore of Gitanjali easily imbibed those principles and transmuted them into his own. Indeed, they became the sap and sustenance of his spiritual life, nay the very essence of his inner personality. This unique experience slowly led him to the realization of the Infinite in his own personal man.

To the poet of Gitanjali this Infinite is man's "personality" and it is immortal. He opens his magnum opus: "Thou hast made me endless." Tagore holds that this personality is expressed in life as well as in art. Art, according to this view is a means of self-culture, which consists in making self conform to or harmonize with the Divine. The Upanishads call this atmaasamkriti¹ (as the Aitareya Upanishad has put it)

¹ Niherranjan Ray 361.
or the culture of the self in man.

Tagore views poetry as a means of self culture. It is self-culture that is carried to its perfection in Gitanjali. He feels that in poetry one can sense this self-divinization in a purer and freer manner. With the Tagore of Gitanjali poetry is a means to an end -- the unceasing unfoldment of personality, a continuous culture of the self in tune with the Absolute. It grows with the poet's growth, it changes with his changes.

Gitanjali presents its author's strongest and deepest of thoughts, his burning desire and love for the Infinite and his abandonment to the attitude of worship. Through each and every poem he seeks to realize the Infinite in him, to realize the unity of his individual self with the Universal Self. Tagore's basic conception is that ultimate reality is the person, and reality is but the expression of personality. His is personal humanism, as against the scientific

2 Niharajan Ray 363.
humanism of the positivists or the evolutionary humanism of the biologists.

One of the most important efforts in *Gitanjali* is to transform everything into 'human'. The person in the poet progressively realizes its unity with the Infinite, the Universal or the Supreme Person, as he often loves to characterise it. There is in him an eternal creative longing for the Infinite. Thus for Tagore 'Personality' and 'Creative Unity' are one and the same thing.

Art is an expression of personality. The object of art is the creation of beauty. The poet-artist of *Gitanjali* becomes quite conscious of his infinity and creates from his abundance. This consciousness of the Infinite in him ever strives to make the whole world his own: For the poet it is already the Infinite in him that makes him known to friends whom he did not know, who brings the distant near and makes a brother of the stranger. He is the one companion of his endless life who links his heart "with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar" (LXIII, 42). There is none alien to the poet because he knows full well the Man of his
The poet of *Gitanjali* has "tasted the hidden honey of this lotus that expands on the ocean of light" (XCVI, 63). The lotus as has been already pointed out, symbolises the Infinite residing in the poet. He categorically affirms, "In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play and here have I caught sight of him that is formless" (XCVI, 63). Tagorean mysticism reaches its heights when the poet declares, "My whole body and my limbs have thrilled with his touch who is beyond touch" (XCVI, 64). This consciousness of the constant 'touch' of the Infinite is the conspicuous feature of the mysticism in *Gitanjali*.

Longing, waiting and the realization of the divine touch are the three dominant aspects of the mystical experience which informs *Gitanjali*. The poet's longing and joyful partaking of the immensity and nearness of the Almighty beloved results in a mysterious awareness of His grand play -- the cosmic Lila. This awareness leads to effusions of different moods in the mind of the poet, who is waiting for the long-cherished touch with the Beloved. He longs for him

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3 *The Religion of Man* 68-74.
sometimes in a thrilling intensity and sometimes in
an agonising passion and sometimes suffering from the
agony of separation from his beloved Lord. "If thou
showest me not thy face, I know not how I am to pass
these long rainy hours" (XVIII, 11).

The poet delights in the realization of the
mysterious overlapping of the transcendence and
immanence of his lord who is definitely not nature,
but is in nature -- the play house of the Infinite in
which the poet "caught the sight of him that is
formless" (XCVI, 63). Being the seat of his lord, it
is distinct also as it is the observer of his play and
a partaker of it too.

He also feels a thrill passing through the air
with the note of the far away song floating from the
other shore (XXI, 13). In the poems of Gardener too
the poet longs for the "Great Beyond" and "the keen
call of the flute."⁴ All through Gitanjali the poet
expresses the mystical awareness of a touch, a presence;

⁴ Collected Poems and Plays 93.
"I feel in the air a faint smell of thy sweet presence" and "In the meanwhile the air is filling with the perfume of promise" (XLIV, 26).

Examined from the purely ontological point of qualified monism (Vishishtadvaita) from which the poet looks upon the universe and addresses his lord of love, quite like a Vaishnava saint, the mystical poet feels the living touch of his lord who is the "life of his life, and who has his seat in the inmost shrine of his heart (IV, 3). Often it comes as the revelation of a mystery of perfect sweetness that was so near and his own and "had blossomed in the depth" (XX, 12) of his own heart.

The mystic in the Tagore of Gitanjali rejects the very idea of liberation and asserts the significance of his own identity as the cause and the object of his lord's love. He wonders, "O thou Lord of all heavens, where would be thy love if I were not?" (LVI, 37).

Further, even if he does not pray and surrender himself to his Lord, still he is self-assured of his Lord's love for him: "If I call not thee in my prayers,
if I keep not thee in my heart, thy love for me still waits for my love" (XXXII, 19). This self-confidence becomes the basis of his surrender which in turn brings him the flood of assurance from the Almighty God as the most beloved protector at every step, confirming "I am" (XII, 8).

Very seldom does Tagore make any effort in *Gitanjali* to appeal to our intellect. Rather, almost always, he appeals to our heart -- to our inmost feelings of love and longing for the Supreme Creator as our beloved who transcends this world of man and nature and yet remains immanent in it. His mysticism is neither purely symbolic like that of William Blake, nor esoteric and occult like that of the T.S. Eliot of "Ash Wednesday."

Thus the mysticism in *Gitanjali* is, as noted earlier, the mysticism of the soul's yearning for a deep inner communion with the Absolute, which is in him, which is his own transcended self. His is the mysticism of an enlightened humanist who perceives simultaneously man, Nature and God combining them to
form an integral vision of reality in the inner 'Santiniketan' of his heart. His is a personal religion of love, rooted in the mystical experience of its various moods.

Tagore's way is neither metaphysical, issuing from reason and concept, nor theological deriving from dogma and doctrines of a religious sect, but it is a way of pure mysticism based on simple faith and love. Mystical knowledge is a matter of experience -- a mode of direct perception rather than of inferred knowledge. Tagore's experience is like knowledge given to him through direct intuitive force of insight instead of those that are given by conceptual thought or reasoning.

William James gives an illuminating definition of such an experience. They are states of insight into depth of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain, and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for aftertime.
The 'aftertime' in the case of a mystic who is also a poet (which exactly is the Tagore of *Gitanjali*) comprises the moment of creation in which the poet makes the revelation articulate. Tagore, however, makes such experiences articulate, not as a recollection of a past experience but as a present illumination, thus combining the moment of perception and the moment of creation, and also singing aloud what he felt in the silence of his heart. For the verbal rite of his poetry, he articulates his experiences through images of nature and familiar situations. He communicates his loving contacts with his beloved Deity in a language that is very concrete. The Deity, in turn, is ever responsive to him in myriad ways as a friend, a lover, and as an inspirer of his poetry. And he wishes to win through his "utter defeat" in the game of his undoing.\(^5\)

At the highest level of his surrender, the poet prays to his lord to shatter his "beggar's bowl" and raise him from the still gathering heap of his gifts

\(^5\) *Collected Poems and Plays* 188.
"into the bare Infinity" of his "uncrowded presence." Wordly wealth is an obstruction in the path of the mystic of Gitanjali. The jewelled chain, which symbolises power and pelf, grips his throat and chokes his singing.

In Gitanjali everything that comes to the poet as a direct revelation of a tender feeling is transformed into concrete mystical imagery and the magical melody of a song. What he celebrates in it is the joy that the perceiving mind brings to the 'waiting' soul. There is little effort to understand or to interpret. The truth is known and the relationship between the finite and the Infinite is established.

Nature imagery is generally employed in Tagore's poetry to reflect the poet's feeling of love for the lord of his heart. In most of the poems of Gitanjali and Fruit-Gathering the locus of the poet's experience is the human heart as well as the world of nature, both drawn together in a single orbit. The inner and

6 Collected Poems and Plays 188.
outer worlds often become one. The mystical awareness comes as an intuition of God's presence.

The poet waits for the moment when the joy that hides in his life will meet the joy outside. This is the moment of union which is perceived in all things by their Creator. The poet's beloved lord is his "fellow traveller." To move with Him is to meet Him every moment. Such a mystical communion with the Ultimate Reality pervading the inner and the outer world produces a cosmic consciousness in the poet's mind. And the mystical communion produces intellectual enlightenment and emotional thrill in the poet which raise his individual soul to a new plane of excitement and joy, much higher than that of the ordinary joys of the mundane reality.

Turning of subtle and sad thoughts into sweet songs is the whole secret of Tagore's poetic art in Gitanjali. He affirms, "This unread letter has lightened

7 Collected Poems and Plays 184.
8 Collected Poems and Plays 182.
my burdens and turned my thoughts into songs." The "unread letter" stands for the very mystery of being, inexplicable in terms of logical categories. The poet remains aware of a veil drawn between the Infinite and him. He finds that the veil is sometimes half-drawn and sometimes torn completely to reveal to him that mystery of Being. He finds "a handful of dust could hide" God's signal when he did not know its meaning though it is "painted in petals of flowers; waves flash it from their foam, hills hold it high on their summits."\(^9\)

The Tagore of Gitanjali is a poet of simplicity rather than of complexity. The simplicity of style and thought which is manifest in its verbal texture emanates from the inner simplicity of his heart and is nourished by his vision of simplicity in life. Quite like a saint, the poet looks upon the life of innocence and simplicity of children with a sense of reverence, and admiration.

\(^9\) Collected Poems and Plays 178.

\(^10\) Collected Poems and Plays 178.
This trait is most evident in poem no. 60 of *Gitanjali* [also in the lyrics of *Crescent Moon*] where the symbolic picture of children who "build their houses with sand" and "play with empty shells" even while "Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water" of the sea and "death is abroad", gives a metaphysical, rather mystical, view of life, which teaches the poet to be gay even in the midst of all dangers.

Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even as a mother does, while rocking her baby’s cradle. The poet links the heavenly and the earthly joys in "Baby's Way"11 through the depiction of a child's fond love for its mother. In many of the poems of *Gitanjali* Tagore employs a mythopoeic imagination for creating a familiar situation which can picture innocence and mystery of a child's life. Prof. Iyengar rightly remarks that in these poems "the familiar is touched with beauty and turned into song."

11 *Collected Poems and Plays* 53-54.
For K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar:

Gitanjali is verily a recordation of the Vicissitudes in the drama of human soul in its progress from the finite to the Infinite. And this progress is necessarily conceived as a battle, as a journey and as a continuing sacrifice culminating in a total offering of all one is (atma samarpana) so that by losing one may gain all.\footnote{K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Rabindranath Tagore: A Critical Introduction (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1965) 16-17.}

Each lyric presents a moment of communion with the Supreme.

The lyrics of Gitanjali may be said to be a moment’s monument -- the unique creations of a moment. The individual soul, then either longs earnestly for its union with his Almighty Beloved or catches a glimpse of his face in one or the other form of his play in the open ground of life. Yet they are immortal treasures of human memory, gaining eternity by their
uniqueness. A poet lives after his death even for centuries by his merit of irrereplaceability — his uniqueness which can be imitated, but never surpassed, be it Kalidasa, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare or Tulsidas. Tagore of Gitanjali is inimitable not only as a poet, but also as a mystic. He is therefore, irreplaceable both ways, and hence both ways, immortal.