Mysticism has many varieties. Only some of these are traceable in Gitanjali. In as much as a classification will help us in this line, this chapter outlines the various types of mysticism.

Historically the word mysticism is associated with the mystery religions or mystery cults which flourished in the Graeco-Roman world in the early centuries of the Christian era. Eleusinian, Dionysian and Orphic mysteries attained to great popularity, attracting thousands of spiritually hungry devotees to their esoteric rites and ceremonies. The mystic (mustes) was the initiate who in an oath of secrecy swore to be silent or, literally, to keep his mouth shut (muein) about the inner working of his new-found religion. In its original meaning, then, mysticism is associated with mystery and secrecy and the occult.
The word mysticism, like much of the terminology of the mysteries, passed into neo-platonism where it was associated with secrecy of another kind. Then it implied a deliberate shutting of the eyes to all external things, a practice central to neo-platonic meditation. One excludes the world in order to rise up to the One and to be alone with Him. The neo-platonists, Plotinus and Proclus, use the root muo, "to close" to refer to the closed eyes of one who is rapt in profound contemplation. While the eyes of the body are closed, the inner eye opens and searches for wisdom.

Mysticism is the most vital element in all religions. In a sense it is the highest expression of religion. In most men there is "an eternal longing for spiritual satisfaction and beauty." Among the many forms of experience, mysticism conforms most to the claims of religion. The mystic aspires to an


intimate union with the Divine, in whom he finds the object of his love. He penetrates into the Divine and his individuality, with all its modes of acting, thinking and feeling, disappears in the divine substance.

Mysticism, writes Coventry Patmore, is the science of the ultimates. It is a science in an absolute sense as it is a passionate and all-consuming quest for the ultimate Reality, which philosophy calls Truth and theology acknowledges as God. It is a quest for supreme and perfect knowledge of the Infinite. The brief, transforming sensation, the shattering moment of vision, can transfigure and elevate, however fleetingly, the most ordinary human life. These visionary flashes partake of an inexplicable otherness. They briefly upset the tranquil, undemanding rhythm of man's everyday life. The joy that disturbs, that disrupts and throws into sharper and often disquieting relief the pettiness of man's self-centred existence,

is indeed a component of true mystical experience. And this demands a new response from man.

Religious thinkers like Bergson, Martin Buber and Teilhard de Chardin consider mysticism as the very core of authentic religious experience. It is the key to the understanding of the religions of the East. Certainly mysticism is the highest expression of religion. It is union with God. As E.G. Browne, the great Orientalist says:

There is hardly any soil, be it ever so barren, where it (mysticism) will not strike root, hardly any creed, however stern, however formal, round which it will not twine itself. It is indeed the eternal cry of the human soul... and so long as man is less than an angel and more than a beast, this cry will not, for

4 Johnston 9.

5 E.G. Browne is a great oriental scholar. A Year Among the Persians is his celebrated work.
a moment fail to make itself heard. 6

The mystic in all cultures apprehends a truth that is beyond the grasp of the rational intellect. His consciousness is extended so that in a state of inexplicable sublimity, he grasps the abiding unity of all things, perceiving the co-immanence of the eternal and the temporal. For the religious mystic this apprehension becomes the direct experience of the presence of God. This is the simplest as well as the most profound definition of religious mysticism. It is very succinctly expressed by W.R. Inge: "Mysticism means communion with God, that is to say, with a Being conceived of as the supreme and Ultimate Reality." 7

Like poetry, mysticism too depends a lot on paradoxes and unusual use of language. It is not a philosophical system though philosophies may lead to or flow from it. It is rather an attitude of mind, an innate tendency of the human soul which seeks to


transcend reason and to attain to a direct experience of God. The mystic realizes God as the *raison d'être* of his being. He passes out of all that is merely phenomenal, out of all lower forms of reality, and becomes one with Being. To the transcendental theistic mystics this union is the union of love between man and God. They too seek to realize the unfelt natural presence of God in creation. Again, they conceive the object of their search as the Beloved, and themselves as lovers, yearning for the consummation of their love in the communion with the one they love. To the monists it is identification between the *Jivatma* and the *Paramatma*.

The mystic's communion implies far more than a mere emotion. It is to be understood in its deepest and fullest sense, as the ultimate expression of the self's most vital tendencies, the deep-seated desire and tendency of the soul towards its source. Love, to the mystic, is the active expression of his will and his desire for the absolute and also his innate
tendency to that Absolute. 8

It is love that enables the mystic to pass from here to the hereafter, from time to eternity, from earth to heaven and look upon the Unchangeable, Eternal Light, to realize that he is one with that Transcendental Ideal, the Supremely Real. So, to be a mystic means to participate here and now in the divine life in the fullest way possible to man. It is also to share as a free and conscious agent in the joyous life of the Universe, in its mighty onward sweep through pain and glory to its home in God. The mystical act of union, that joyous loss of the transfigured self in God, that crown of man's conscious ascent towards the Absolute, is actually the individual's contribution to the destiny of the cosmos.

II

Union or Yoga is the essence of any mystical experience. To the Christian mystic, mysticism means

union with God. In nontheistical contexts it points to union with some principle or other. It is, then, a unitive experience with someone or something other than oneself. In Huxley's case it was union with and direct experience of three chair legs, grey flannel trousers, and, by extension, with all natural object within his vision. According to the Vedantin doctrine man is identical with the Absolute. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad categorically affirms, "I am Brahman." But this experience has nothing to do with visions, auditions, locutions, telepathy, telekinesis or any other natural phenomenon.

In strictly religious mysticism, whether it be Christian, Hindu, Muslim, or Sufi, the whole purpose is to concentrate on an ultimate reality, to the complete exclusion of all else. By "all else" is meant the phenomenal world, or as the theists put it, all that is not God. This means a total and absolute


10 *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10 (aham brahmasmi).
detachment from Nature, an isolation of the soul within itself, either to realize itself as God or to enter into communion with Him.

In his *Varieties of Religious Experience* William James outlines four principal characteristics of mystical experience. They are not absolute categories. But they do serve as a useful starting point in the attempt to define the mystical experience. First of all it is ineffable. An ineffable experience is one that is incapable of verbal description. It is, literally, unutterable. This is the supreme and fundamental disadvantage under which the mystics labour. Their experiences are ineffable and the human language is utterly inadequate to communicate to others their direct apprehension of the Divine. To them reality of that apprehension is beyond all doubt. Still it remains true that their mystical experience of God's presence is, by its very nature, incommunicable. Nevertheless, the attempt to express the inexpressible is nearly always made.
Mystical experiences are "states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect." However, the use of the term "intellectual" does not imply an act of logical, rational analysis. Rather, it implies that knowledge can be grasped by intuition and insight. It reflects the meaning of the Latin word "intellectus". He is granted a wholeness of vision denied to logical scientific deduction or to the analysis of sensory experience. The mystic perceives truths, even experiences them, directly. This capacity is described as "noetic quality." His faculty for intuitively penetrating the veil of temporal reality seems to be activated by a source beyond himself.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the mystics lived in a kind of "ecstatic continuum." To most mystics it was often a passing phenomenon as in the case of Tagore. Mystical experiences rarely last long. That is why scholars on mysticism speak of the "transiency" of the mystical experience. Of course,

their significance and effects are out of all proportion to their duration. And by single-minded devotion to spiritual exercise they can be controlled and regulated and be made frequent. St. John of the Cross, one of the greatest of all catholic mystics, speaks of the soul's ability to abandon itself to the sweet sleep of love.

Mystical experiences, almost always, bring with them the feeling of something granted, something given. At the highest level of his experience the mystic feels overwhelmed by a stronger will than his own, which subsides temporarily into abeyance. Some mystical experiences dawn unbidden. They are often some sudden illuminating moments of transformation. The resulting state is truly "passive."

But there are cases where the mystics prepare themselves actively to receive the mystical experience. The "purgative way," involves both the endeavour


13 The Purgative way or the purgative life is "the process whereby the mystic detaches himself from the tyranny and distortion of the senses" (Cox, A Handbook 28).
and the determination to quieten the mind and to insulate it from all distractions in the attempt to be conscious only of God's presence. The mystics convert the crude received material into a living whole, into an idea or image which can be communicated. They have contributed a number of symbols, ideas and images of which the spiritual world is constructed. The writers often take the topography from them at second hand and easily forget the sublime adventures immortalised in those phrases like -- "the Divine Dark", "the Beatific Vision", "the Eternal Beauty", "Ecstasy", "Union", "Spiritual Marriage", and the rest. 14

III

The mystics have actually created another artistic world from that language which men have actually

14 Evelyn Underhill, "The Mystic as Creative Artist", UM. 402.
evolved to describe and deal with the time world. They have always tried to give the world the key to it, to induct the world into its mysterious delights. Certainly, they had to struggle hard to body forth the realities by which they were possessed and to make their fellowmen sharers of their vision, to make them live for a moment, in communion with the Divine.

Any man communicates the result of his personal contacts with the Divine to other minds by description and by suggestion. And his best successes are those in which these two methods are harmoniously blended. His suggestions are appeals to the imagination; those two ways of telling the news -- oblique suggestion and symbolic image -- practically govern the whole of mystical literature. The span of this literature is wide. At one end of the scale is the vivid, prismatic imagery of the Christian Apocalypse\(^{15}\) and at the other, the fluid, ecstatic poetry of some of the Sufi Saints.

\(^{15}\) Apocalypse comes from a Greek Verb meaning "to disclose". It refers to the "revelation" of the future granted to St. John, the Apostle, on the isle of Patmos. It is called the Book of Revelation in the New Testament.
In his suggestive and allusive language the mystic artist often approaches the method of music. His statements, instead of imparting any information, operate a kind of enchantment which dilutes the consciousness of the hearer to a point at which it is capable of apprehending new aspects of religious experience. In his descriptive efforts he proceeds by way of comparisons. Yet often these comparisons, like those employed by the great poets, are more valuable for their strange suggestive quality than for any exact parallels which they set up between the mystic's universe and the external world. Thus when Clement of Alexandria compares the Logos to a "New Song," when Suso calls the Eternal Wisdom a "sweet and beautiful wild flower", when Dionysius speaks of the "Divine Dark which is the Inaccessible Light", or Ruysbroeck of "the unwalled world", what is really emphasized is the flash of the creative imagination.

16 Evelyn Underhill, "The Mystic as Creative Artist", UM 403.

17 A Greek father of the Church, probably born at Alexandria.

18 Evelyn Underhill, "The Mystic as Creative Artist", UM 403.
It evokes a truth far greater, deeper and more fruitful than the merely external parallels it suggests. So too with many of the common metaphors of the mystics -- the Fire of Love, the Game of Love, the Desert of God, the Marriage of the Soul, which succeed because of their interior and imaginative appeal.

IV

Before we wind up this preliminary discussion, we must outline some of prominent variants of mysticism. This will particularly help us in analysing the varieties of mystical experience deducible from Gitanjali. For the sake of convenience we may broadly divide mysticism into religious mysticism and nature mysticism. Of course a religious mystic may be a nature mystic and vice versa. With regard to the "mysticism in Gitanjali" this point will become crucial. Vedic, Upanishadic, and the related monistic Buddhist and Christian types are outlined under religious mysticism. Nature mysticism includes mysticism of
joy, aesthetic mysticism, and poetic mysticism. These are found in abundance in Gitanjali and are presented singularly and simultaneously.

Vedic mysticism is implied in the Vedic hymns which are a record of some of the outpourings of the Vedic seers who were called Rishis. They were more in tune, in communion, with nature. And they were always aware that behind the phenomena of nature there was something more, something looming over the whole world of existence. They perceived this as powers behind the natural phenomena of wind, rain, the sun, the moon, growth, decay. They are the deities in the Vedas (devas and devatas) with whom men on earth could enter into communion, for these were taken to be partners in the living movement of life on earth. The earth was taken to be the mother and the sky as the father.

The Rishis developed means of communication with these deities and lived an inner life which spilled out and overflowed into their outer existence. Herein
we have the essence of Vedic mysticism. The Vedic mystics organized their mystical life around the institution of sacrifice, *yajna*. True sacrifice in the spiritual context is a movement of joy.

When a spiritual sacrifice is made, there is always a feeling of elevation and it is this movement of joy which was symbolised in the act of *yajna*, the central institution of the Vedic people. One might trace the source of the mysticism of *yajna* Tagore presents in *Gitanjali* to this conception of joy in the Vedas.

Upanishadic or Monistic mysticism points to the absolute identity between *atman* and *Brahman*. "I am Brahman" and "What thou art, that I am" amply illustrate this point. Both the affirmations point to the realization of oneself as Brahman. Tagore confesses in his preface to *Sadhana* that he has been brought up

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20 *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1:4:10 (*Aham Brahmasmi*).

21 *Kausitaki Upanishad*, 1:6 (*yas tvam asi so ham asmi*).
in a family where texts of the Upanishads are used in daily worship. No wonder, Upanishadic mysticism seems to form a genuine bridge between the theistic aspect of mysticism as it is understood by Tagore on the one hand and nature mysticism on the other in Gitanjali. The identification of the individual soul with the world soul exemplified in the celebrated, tatvam asi\textsuperscript{22} or "thou art that" formula is what could be called monistic mysticism. Sankara and his followers also establish complete identity between the human soul and the Absolute.

Hindu mysticism emphasizes a doctrine on the self, Atman. In its place Buddhism teaches anatman, the doctrine of "no-self". It shows that the mystery of Reality escapes all rational understanding. Our human constructions, definitions, philosophies and names of God are seen for what they are viz. human constructions. Nirvana is "letting go" of these human efforts to grasp, freeze and contain Reality. It is a process of

\textsuperscript{22} Chandogya Upanishad, 6:10.
stopping the craving, letting go of desire. In positive terms it is a transitional mystical state. It is a release from the human cravings. Buddhism is a mystical religion with mysticism's mistrust of words. The Buddhist mystic, freed from impossible cravings, lives in the state of **nirvana**. He has attained enlightenment (**satori**). Lest this enlightenment should sound selfish and cold, we must note the ideal of compassion developed in the Buddhist tradition -- the **bodhisattva** ideal. The ideal of compassion found in many of the poems of **Gitanjali** may have its inspiration from here, *Bodhisattva* is enlightened, but he postpones the peace of **nirvana** in order to show others the path. Buddha got up from under the **bodhi** tree to bring his Fourfold Noble Truth to others. The first three Noble Truths give the disease, the cause and the cure. The fourth Noble Truth is the doctor's prescription, the Eight fold Noble Path to Enlightenment. The first two steps, Right Understanding and Right Attitude of Mind call

for commitment. The next three, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood, propose an ethics. The last three cover the mystical dimensions -- Right Effort, Right Awareness and Right Concentration.

Enlightenment does not come cheaply. Commitment must be translated into action. It finds expression in a moral life of "Right Speech" and "Right Action." Commitment expressed through moral action prepares the person for the mystical experience. "Right Effort" stresses the constant vigilance needed to remove the cravings, compulsions and habits, that produce anxiety and sorrow, from one's life. With "Right Effort" a person can practise "Right Awareness". "Right Concentration" is the state of nirvana where the individual ego ceases in its surrender to the stream of Life. This is the final step of Buddhist mysticism. And according to Tagore, Buddha has developed the practical side of the teaching of the Upanishads.  

24 Stevens 106-109.

25 Sadhana 15.
In Christian terminology mysticism means union with God. It is direct experience and apprehension of God. The Christian mystic knows that God is in and with him, that his body has literally become a "temple of the Holy Spirit." The individual soul becomes "oned" with God, having "a radical commitment to God,"\(^{26}\) to borrow a phrase from *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Here there is only union, no unity, as we find in the Vedantin experience, which, as has already been hinted, is one of absolute identity with Brahman.\(^{27}\)

The Sufis express the essence of their theistic mysticism in the two key words -- fana and baqa, the 'destruction' of the individual soul to God and its 'survival' in God and as God.\(^{28}\) There is no fana without baqa. It is necessary for the corruptible to put on the incorruptible so that man might share in the life of God.\(^{29}\) However, as Sufism degenerated, the


\(^{27}\) Zaehner 33.

\(^{28}\) Zaehner 194-95.

\(^{29}\) Zaehner 195.
achievement of ecstasy as such became the Sufi's goal regardless of whether such ecstasies proceeded from the hand of God or not. And the later Sufis came to assume that all ecstasy was divine. With Abu Yazid in the ninth century we find Indian monism invading the Muslim mystical world, and Abu Yazid is, for this reason, as interesting as Rimbaud in that he is torn between the classical Sufi technique of love and the Hindu monistic dogma that the soul is in fact "identical with God."

The nature mystic attempts to identify Nature with God, having experienced Nature as being one with himself. He accepts unquestioningly the Deus Sive Nature, "God or Nature" of Spinoza. For him God and Nature are interchangeable terms. In the mystical approach to Nature, its various phenomena -- a beautiful flower, the sun rising at early dawn, the thunder and rain -- are all viewed as revealing the majesty of the Ultimate. In and through the multiplicity of phenomena, the nature mystics perceive the truth of an underlying reality. In the state of mystic ecstasy,
the nature-mystic is not oblivious of the inspiring phenomena of nature. Rather, his mystic vision floods nature with an illumination which adds to the new dimensions and meanings. He finds the ultimate truth not within himself as the monistic mystic, but as manifested in the outer universe.

Mystics often rely on intuitive experience and it pertains to the realm of aesthetics. Intuitive experience is often nothing but aesthetic experience. Here the intellectual and the sensible faculties operate jointly on the part of the subject and the sensible and non-sensible elements unite and on the part of the aesthetic mystic the union of joy takes place.

The mystic's preoccupation is with himself and God. He is in or tries to enter into communion with the Divine. When in the process the mystic presents himself as a poet and God as the Master poet, we call it poetic mysticism. It is not something very common in mystic literature. But it is very pronounced in *Gitanjali*. So we include it here and bring it under
nature mysticism.

In the mysticism of joy the subject and the object find themselves on an equal ground ready for union and bliss. It is "a union of kindred things", "a perception of the soul by the soul." The effect of such a natural and intimate union is necessarily joy. It is pure joy of heart, and it is not to be confounded with superficial pleasure. This joy springs from the freedom of the spirit. Man attains the real truth of things when he experiences joy. According to Tagore the test by which reality is apprehended is joy. The joy in experience is something profound, something personal and participates in the qualities of the true person who goes outside the narrow limits of his self in order to establish sympathetic union with all.

Humanism is a system or mode of thought or action in which man, his interests, values, and dignity are taken to be of primary importance. The humanistic mystic tries to synthesise humanism and mysticism, and to 'deify' man. This could be termed the inner
dimension of humanistic mysticism. The humanistic mystics tend to show a deep concern for human problems and human heroism. This might be qualified as the outer dimension of humanistic mysticism. This thesis does affirm humanistic mysticism in the poems of Gitanjali as well. The next short chapter will outline Tagore's mystical experience and place him in his proper milieu and moment.