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Mystical Consciousness in the Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost with special reference to Nature Mysticism

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Doctor of Philosophy

By

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Mystical Consciousness in the Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost with Special Reference to Nature Mysticism”, submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of bona fide research carried out by the candidate under my supervision and that no part of the thesis has been submitted for any degree before.

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DECLARATION

I, Saumya P.Suseel, part-time Research Scholar at the Research Centre for Comparative Studies in English, Mercy College, Palakkad, affiliated to the University of Calicut, hereby declare that the thesis, entitled “Mystical Consciousness in the Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost with Special Reference to Nature Mysticism,” has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title, or recognition.

Palakkad
12 August 2009


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ABSTRACT

This is an account of the part-time research on “Mystical Consciousness in the Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost with special reference to Nature Mysticism.” Mysticism, though not easy to define, is a subject of interest to writers, thinkers, believers and non-believers alike. The present concern for environment and peace of mind has a lot to imbibe from a Mystical Consciousness of Nature.

Even a casual reading of the poems of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost would reveal their awareness of the profound harmony which exists in Nature. The aim of this research is to determine the Mystical Consciousness in their poetry with the focus on Nature Mysticism. The study has 4 chapters.

Chapter 1 makes an attempt to analyse the various definitions of Mysticism, its characteristics, and its manifestations in Literature, especially English, American and Indian Literature. Various stages of Mystical Consciousness are also discussed in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a survey of the relevance and manifestations of Nature Mysticism in Literature.

Chapter 2 traces the development of the Mystical Consciousness in the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. It also discusses Tagore’s mystical

vision, his God-concept and his concept of Nature. The prime characteristics of Nature Mysticism in his poetry are analysed.

Chapter 3 endeavours a similar evaluation of Frost's poetry, his views on God-realisation, concept of Nature and the Mystical Consciousness of Nature as manifested in his poems.

Chapter 4 compares and reviews the findings. The study comes to the conclusion that despite the subtle differences, the poetry of both Tagore and Frost is a quest for the Ultimate Reality and it is based on a Mystical Consciousness of Nature.

As the investigation adopts a thematic approach, thrust is given to the poems which best reflect the Mystical Consciousness of the two poets.

Abbreviations

- LP : The Later Poems of Rabindranath Tagore.
- IG : I Won't Let You Go: Selected Poems of Rabindranath Tagore.
- SP : Selected Poems of Rabindranath Tagore
- CPP : Collected Poems and Plays of Tagore
- FP : Poetry of Robert Frost
- GW : Great Works of Tagore
- OM : Of Myself by Rabindranath Tagore
- PK : Poems of Kabir
- G : Gitanjali (in Collected Poems and Plays)
- RA : The Religion of an Artist by Rabindranath Tagore
- RM : The Religion of Man by Rabindranath Tagore
- SL : Selected Letters of Tagore
- EE : Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics
- ER : Encyclopedia of Religion
- EP : Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- REM : Reminiscences
- MLW : My Life in My Words by Rabindranath Tagore

Chapter 1

Flight of the Alone

1.1. Introduction

The mystery of life and the relation between the soul and the Absolute have fascinated and intrigued human beings across various cultures, countries and continents. There have been very many approaches to unveil this mystery. It may be the ways of the scientist, the mystic or the philosopher, the continuous effort to realize the truth, the unity, beauty and love, is valid and significant.

Mysticism in Literature is a vast arena and its analysis as such is out of the scope of the present study. So the investigation is curtailed into a compendious survey of English Poetry. Among the various literary genres that we read today, Poetry with its musical quality, intentness and attention to the details leave a powerful impression on us. The mystical ideals of love, devotion, sacrifice, salvation etc. find their most perfect expression in Poetry. Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost hold an inimitable position with regard to the respective Literature of their countries. The infused knowledge and love of God which Tagore expresses in his poems is very sublime and glorious. The ease with which he pours out his heart in his poems is awe-inspiring. For him Nature is an expression of the Infinite and it helps him to reach out towards his God. Like Tagore, Robert Frost is one

of the most beloved and popular poets of his country. Nature in its many forms and manifestations constantly fascinates him and helps him to make contact with the Absolute. Though separated by space, language and culture, Nature-mysticism as expressed in their poems reveals a “flight of the alone to the Alone” (EE IX :84). This study proceeds on the basis of the hypothesis that their poetry takes the readers to new heights of consciousness regarding Nature and God.

1.2. Aims and Objectives

One of the aims of this study is to identify the various phases of mystical consciousness manifested in the poems of Tagore and Frost. In tracing the phases of evolution of these creative minds there seems to be process of growth. To trace the evolution of this growth is another objective of the study. An exploration of how the perception of the Divine in Nature helped them to break down the barriers that existed in different forms is also attempted at. How a life long conscientious seeking could instill in both the poets an unshakable faith in Man and God is also examined.

1.3. Methodology

The method followed is chiefly analytical with special reference to themes taking into consideration the characteristics of Mysticism in general and Nature Mysticism in particular. Both Tagore and Frost wrote

profusely on nature. A selective approach of those poems which reflects the different stages of mystical consciousness of their poetical compositions is given the main thrust. In order to make a critical evaluation and assessment of the analysis, besides the primary sources, books and articles on the poets also are referred to.

1.4. Mysticism: A Few Definitions.

Tracing the history of Mysticism is a difficult task when one can rely only on written records. Mysticism indeed existed even before it was put on record. Thus it is to be admitted that it is not possible to give a complete or continuous account of its development. Moreover, whatever has been documented reveals that it differs from person to person and religion to religion. “Mystical experience”, it has been pointed out, “is as old as humanity, is not confined to any one racial stock, is undoubtedly one of the original grounds of personal religion . . .” (EE IX:83).

Mystic thought can be discerned in every religion, culture and civilization. William James affirms: “Mystical states of mind in every degree are shown by history, usually though not always to make for the monistic view” (Pragmatism 151).

This chapter tries to examine how far the mystical creed has been a determining factor in Literature. A deliberation on the various definitions and perspectives of Mysticism along with its characteristics and influences

is central to such an enquiry. After a brief survey of mystical elements in the sacred texts of world religions, Mysticism as manifested in Literature is also explored. This chapter is also an attempt to trace the development of Mysticism with special reference to Nature – Mysticism, its relevance and its manifestations in Literature.

The first task before the investigator is to define the much familiar concept of Mysticism. This is not easy as an all-comprehensive definition of Mysticism is not possible. Each mystic perceives and expresses his experience in accordance with his own religious background. W.R. Inge, in 1899, has listed some twenty-five definitions of Mysticism. Some of the most commonly accepted definitions are being analysed here. They seem diverse in every aspect. Yet some underlying similarities can be detected.

According to Otto Pflieger, “Mysticism is the immediate feeling of the unity of the self with God” (EP5:420). Edward Caird defines Mysticism as “that attitude of mind in which all relations are swallowed up in the relation of the soul to God” (420). Richard Nettlehip says, “True Mysticism is the consciousness that everything that we experience is an element and only an element in fact, i.e. that in being what it is, it is symbolic of something else” (420). To Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism is “the art of union with Reality. And a “mystic is the person who has attained that

union in greater or lesser degree” (qtd. in Kannath 2). In the words of W.R.Inge:

Mysticism means communication with God, that is to say with a Being conceived as the supreme and ultimate reality. If what the mystics say of their experience is true, if they have really been in communion with the Holy Spirit of God, that is a fact of overwhelming importance, which must be taken into account when we attempt to understand God, the world, and ourselves. (qtd. in M.Cox 21)

But with the passage of time the term ‘Mysticism’ acquired new shades of meaning. Tracing the etymology of the word perhaps proves how different interpretations came into existence. The word mystic is associated with the mystery cult of ancient Greece. The word mystery is derived from the Greek verb *muw* which means ‘to shut’ i.e., to close the lips in secrecy. In ancient Greece “one who was initiated into the mysteries of existence and esoteric knowledge of the realities of life and death was known as *mystes* (mystic)” (Kannath 1). During the initial stages of the development of Mysticism in the West, mystical insight was invariably associated with the Christian Theology. It was under the influence of St. Augustine, that the western community accepted it as a subjective state of mind. Jean de Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Sorbonne in the fifteenth

century defined Mysticism as “the experimental knowledge of God through the embrace of unitive love” (ER 10:246).

“Mysticism”, says Hal Bridges, “is different from magic, occultism, spiritualism, para psychological phenomenon, New Thought, and mental healing”(6). Germans make such a distinction between the word *mystizimus* and *mystik*. *Mystizimus* is used to denote psychical or occult phenomena while *mystik* stands for Mysticism. So Mysticism is:

a fundamental consciousness of a beyond, of a Reality, changeless and eternal, that permeates and gives meaning to the world and experiences of finite creation. 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. (M. Cox 21)

A comprehensive explanation of Mysticism seems possible in the light of this discussion. Apart from subtle differences, all streams of Mysticism unite in the final supposition that the mystic path leads to the Realization of the Divine Immanence. It is beyond the temporal and the familiar.

Mysticism may also be defined as the spiritual effort of the mind to transcend the impediments of the sensory world and to surrender itself to the Ultimate Reality. Thus Mysticism is about the union with God. It is a reality beyond all realities.

Mystical experiences are transcendent, passive and beyond description. They provide an all-encompassing vision and it varies from individual to individual. Thus it can be safely concluded that Mysticism is a quest for an all embracing vision which takes the seekers of God to new heights of being. It helps them to keep alive a consciousness which liberates them from what is ordinary and prosaic. This consciousness may not be a solution to every problem that humanity faces, but it is the salient voice of sanity.

1.5. The Characteristics of Mysticism

In 1902, William James published The Varieties of Religious Experiences. Though he has several other books to his credit it was The Varieties which made him an authority on Mysticism. In this book he sorts out four characteristics of mystical experiences. In addition to the characteristics listed by William James, several other aspects of the mystical experience have also been pointed out by different authors. From the most dominant characteristics of mystical consciousness might emerge

a picture which is fairly acceptable. A few salient characteristics are as follows:

1.5.1. Ineffability

Mystical experiences are ineffable because they cannot be described or uttered. Mystical experience or God-realisation by its very nature is incommunicable. According to St. John of the Cross:

It is impossible to speak of God Himself so as to convey any idea of what He is — because it is God Himself who communicates Himself to the soul now in the marvelous bliss of its transformation. In this state God and the soul are united, as the window is with the light, or coal with the fire, or the light of the stars with that of the sun, yet, however, not so essentially and completely as it will be in the life to come. The soul, therefore, to show what it received from the hands of God in the cellar of wine, says nothing else, and I do not believe that anything could be said . . . (Spiritual Canticle)

1.5.2. Noetic Quality of the Experience

Noetic means of ‘the intellect’. Mystical experiences, according to William James, are “states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect” (qtd. in M.Cox 25). Here intellect is not synonymous

with logic. As Cox points out “it infers that knowledge can be grasped by intuition and insight, which reflects the meaning of the Latin word *intellectus* – perception. The mystic perceives directly; he is granted a wholeness of vision. . . ” (25-26). This is a state of being when higher Truths are felt in an exalted state of mind by means of higher intellect. Mystical experience does not take place in a state of mental torpor as is commonly perceived. It involves the active participation of mind, which is often beyond the scope of ordinary men. It is a kind of divine enlightenment, when the divine light enters the soul and illuminates the intellect. Ramakrishna Paramhansa, a nineteenth century Indian mystic and saint, delineates his mystical revelation as taking place in the substance of consciousness. He has been working as a priest in a temple of Kali (the Divine Mother) in Calcutta when he experienced the vision. This is how he describes his experience:

The Divine Mother revealed to me that... it was she who had become everything . . . that everything was full of consciousness. The image was consciousness, the altar was consciousness . . . the door-sills were consciousness . . . I found everything in the room soaked as it were in bliss – the bliss of God. . . That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived

that all this *was* the Divine Mother – even the cat. (qtd. in Stace 77)

1.5.3. Transiency

This is another important characteristic of Mysticism. Mystical experience does not last for a long time. It is a mistake to think that a mystic lives always in a state of ecstasy. But these “sudden partings of the conceptual veil,” as Evelyn Underhill states, do not last for long (Practical Mysticism). No mystic can remain for a long time in an enhanced state of consciousness. Even though the mystical experiences of all mystics are transient in nature, their impact extends over their whole life. The experience of Henry Suso is quite illustrative of this fact:

This overpowering rapture lasted about an hour and a half; but whether his soul stayed in his body, or was parted from it, he knew not. When he came to himself again, he was altogether like a man who has come from another world. . . his soul and mind were full within of heavenly marvels. The heavenly glances came again and again in his innermost interior, and it seemed to him as if he were floating in the air. (Knox 10-11)

1.5.4. Passivity

It is one of the distinct characteristics of mystical experience. The mystic feels “as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as

if he were grasped and held by a superior power” (Bridges 14). The mystic is the ‘chosen’ one and thus the mystical experience is fortuitous. In this sense, mystical experience is God-given at His will. But what is imperative is the preparation on the part of the ascetic. The deeper realms of his consciousness are kept empty, calm and receptive for the action of God. The Maitri Upanishad describes this as the highest state of mind:

By the calming of consciousness,
 One kills action, both pure and impure:
 With self calmed, resting in the self,
 One wins unfailing bliss. (Bk IV: 6)

1.5.5. Unitary Consciousness

This characteristic can rightly be called as the real goal of mystical quest for it envisages union with God. What Evelyn Underhill remarks in this regard is quite note-worthy:

The movement of the mystic consciousness towards this consummation is not merely the sudden admission to an overwhelming vision of Truth: though such dazzling glimpses may from time to time be vouchsafed to the soul. It is rather an ordered movement towards ever higher levels of reality, ever closer identification with the Infinite. “The mystic experience,” says Récéjac, “ends with the words, ‘I live, yet

not I, but God in me.’ This feeling of identification, which is the term of mystical activity, has a very important significance. (Mysticism: A Study)

The Maitri Upanishad describes this as a mental condition which is beyond all expression and understanding:

The bliss that is the stainless consciousness, washed by
concentration,

May have when it has been brought into the self

Cannot be described by speech:

It is experienced directly through the inner organ. (Bk IV: 6)

1.5.6. Consciousness of Oneness in All Things

An awareness of the presence of the Supreme Soul in every being is central to this concept. This realization raises the level of understanding and one begins to perceive the whole in the part, the self in every object and God in the Universe. Almost all streams of religious Mysticism uphold this union with the higher reality. The Upanishads depicts God as someone inseparable from the material universe. He is present in everything and the ignorant do not perceive this Oneness. According to the Katha Upanishad:

What is here is there:

What is there is here too.

The one who sees things here as various

Gets death after death. (Bk IV :10)

1.5.7. Non-spatial and Non-temporal Quality

Another element in common with all mystical experiences is its timeless quality. It is not bound to the past or the future. It is an eternal and dynamic now. It can happen anywhere. The frequency of experience is also equally unpredictable. But as the attainment is not temporal or fleeting, its impact remains the same throughout the mystic's life. The intensity of mystical experience does not depend on its frequency or number. D.T. Suzuki describes this feature in the following words:

In this spiritual world there are no time divisions such as the past, present and future; for they have contracted themselves into a single moment of the present where life quivers in its true sense...The past and the future both rolled up in this present moment of illumination, and this moment is not something standing still with all its contents, for it ceaselessly moves on. (148-9)

Mystical experiences are timeless and space-less as they are non-individualistic. In other words, they transcend all barriers of the seeming reality in its passage to the ultimate Reality. Acclaimed Sufi –poet Jalal-uddin Rumi sings:

Past and future veil God from our sight;

Burn up both of them with fire. How long

Wilt thou be partitioned by these segments like a reed? (qtd.

in Aurobindo, Perennial Philosophy 216)

1.5.8. Moral Transformation

The mystic who is in constant communion with God naturally remains pure and sinless. As he becomes one with God, he shares His grace too. His thoughts and deeds are governed by ‘pure love’ flown from Godhead. He offers himself to God in service of the whole universe. Thus, according to Steiner, mystic can:

. . . no longer err, no longer sin. If he seems to err or sin he must illuminate his thoughts or his actions with a light in which that no longer appears as error and as sin which appears as such to the ordinary consciousness. (121)

1.5.9. Paradoxicality

Mystical conceptions are largely governed by a looming paradoxicality. This is because of the incapability of the manners of expression to impart the mystical experience. Naturally it causes discord in expression and results in paradoxes. Evelyn Underhill attributes this to “the huge disparity between his unspeakable experience and the language which will most nearly suggest it” and to “the great gulf fixed between his mind and the mind of the world” (Mysticism: A Study). Fritjof Capra in his

interesting book The Tao of Physics explores in detail the parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism. His observation regarding the language used by Modern Physicists and mystics is noteworthy:

The problem of language encountered by the Eastern mystic is exactly the same as the problem the modern physicist faces...Both the physicist and the mystic want to communicate their knowledge, and when they do so with words their statements are paradoxical and full of logical contradictions. These paradoxes are characteristic of all Mysticism, from Heraclitus to Don Juan, and since the beginning of this century they are also characteristic of Physics. (54)

1.5.10. Feeling of Peace, Happiness and Bliss

A mystic who has attained union with God, draws eternal happiness from Him. He drinks deeply from the perennial fountain of happiness. Drawing boundaries for such a soul is impossible. He finds God's love shining upon all and feels deep in himself an indescribable peace. Kabir says:

If you merge your life in the ocean of Life, you will find your life in the Supreme Land of Bliss.

What a frenzy of ecstasy there is in every hour! And the worshipper is pressing out and drinking the essence of the hours: he lives in the life of Brahma. (trans. by Tagore, GW 839)

1.6. Various Stages of Mystical Experience

A mystic moves towards his goal through certain stages of experiences which are traceable in the case of every famous mystic. A comprehensive series of these stages is envisaged by many critics and scholars. A survey of these phases will lead the readers to a better understanding of Mysticism.

1.6.1. The Valley of Quest or the Way of Purgation

The first of these stages is an Awakening of the Self to a consciousness of Supreme Reality. This intimate experience of Divine Reality makes the devotee excited while listening to Him, speaking to Him, and remembering Him:

Let me see your face,

Let me hear your voice,

for your voice is sweet,

and your face is comely. (Holy Bible NKJV. Song Sol, 2:14)

The seer is filled with an intense yearning to seek God and to surrender to His will. The self becomes aware of its own imperfections and other shortcomings as a result of its association with God. Underhill terms this stage as a period of self purification because the Self subjects itself to all sorts of mortifications to eliminate the impediments in the road towards union with God. Thus Purgation is a state of self-inflicted pain also.

1.6.2. The Valley of Love or the Way of Illumination

Illumination, the second stage, is a state of happiness. It involves a certain perception of the Infinite. After the Purgation, the Self becomes more detached and fresh for the awakening to Reality. This stage is essentially contemplative. The awareness of the Divine Presence becomes a source of wholesome happiness. The devotee's soul becomes passive and prepared for the next stage, i.e. Union with God. Some characteristics of this stage of mystical experience are as given below:

1. Immense patience and endurance while experiencing dark night of the soul.
2. Detachment from worldly pleasures.
3. Insatiable thirst for God.
4. Complete effacement of the ego.
5. Ardent desire for union with God.

6. Delight in praising God and His attributes.
7. Deep rooted and everlasting faith in God.
8. Following the footsteps of God.
9. An awareness of the Immanence of God.

The Psalmist expresses his dark night experience thus:

O God, thou art my God, I seek thee
 My soul thirsts for thee;
 My flesh faints for thee,
 as in a dry and weary land
 where no water is. (Ps 63:1)

1.6.3. The Way of Union

Union with God is the absolute aim of any mystical exploration. It is not a mere perception of Reality or the Absolute Truth, but becoming an integral part of it. This becoming of one with God is known as the Way of Union. This union sometimes is pictured as the union of lover and the beloved, as depicted in the poem of St. Theresa of Avila:

Into the very arms of Love
 My stricken soul forthwith was thrown.
 Since then my life's no more my own
 And all my lot so changed is
 That my Beloved one is mine

And I at last am surely His. (qtd. in Kannath 14)

The bliss attained by Union is not temporal or fleeting, but perennial and perfect. Kabir considers God as his Beloved Lord and eagerly waits for union with him. He sings:

This day is dear to me above all other days, for to-day the
Beloved Lord is a guest in my house;

My chamber and my courtyard are beautiful with His
presence.

.....

I wash His feet, and I look upon His Face; and I lay before
Him as an offering my body, my mind, and all that I have.

What a day of gladness is that day in which my Beloved, who
is my treasure, comes to my house! (GW 861)

The Rig-Veda also compares the relationship between God and devotee to that of the bridegroom and the bride.

1.7. Kinds of Mysticism

Mysticism is classified as Religious and Non-religious, Natural (acquired) and Supernatural (infused); Extrovertive and Introvertive; Mysticism of Introspection and Mysticism of Unifying Vision, based on several principles. The experiences resulting from psychedelic drugs or pathological psychic conditions like hysteria were also treated as mystical

by some. But by general agreement there are two principal varieties of mystical consciousness: God Mysticism and Nature Mysticism.

1.7.1. God Mysticism

Basically, God Mysticism or the experience of the Absolute is of two types: Devotional Mysticism and Intellectual Mysticism. Devotional Mysticism is marked by the undemanding and selfless love and devotion of the mystic towards God. The psalmist sings of unflinching faith in God Almighty:

Truly my soul silently waits for God;

From him comes my salvation.

He alone is my rock and my salvation;

He is my defense; (Ps 62: 1-2)

The ultimate goal of the devotee is to become one with the Supreme Being. For this he has to undergo very tiring and trying experiences.

Intellectual Mysticism denotes the idea that actions in the sphere of intellect also form an essential path to the realisation of God. Attaining knowledge of God, which is essentially a mystical act, is done by means of cognitive approach. The mystical concepts of the Upanishads can be classified as Intellectual Mysticism. The Prasna Upanisad says:

Knowing the arising, the arriving, and the place

And the pervading in five ways

Of the breath in relation to the self,

One attains immortality:

Knowing, one attains immortality. (3:12)

1.7.2. Nature Mysticism

Down the history lane, Nature Mysticism has been formulated, influenced, restructured and re-discovered several times by mystics and litterateurs across time and space. Even then there is an underlying unity of opinion regarding the essence of Nature Mysticism. Nature Mysticism is union with the immanent God in Nature. Omnipresence of God is given emphasis in the mystical consciousness of Nature. In that sense, Nature Mysticism is not fundamentally different from God Mysticism.

Nature enchants and bewilders man most with her mysteries of existence. Much of it is beyond reason and logic, inaccessible to the understanding. "A mystic is the one who invariably pursues the inexplicable desiring for a direct experience of the Ultimate Reality" (Dhar 1). This experience might occur in various fields in varying degrees characterized by a sense of beauty or sublimity, enchantment by music, close companionship with Nature, an insight into the meaning of the Ultimate Truth and the awakening into a love for all Beings etc.

It might be intermittent or it might occur only once in a lifetime. But its impact upon the experient is perpetual. It changes the whole perspective

of the concerned person. One cannot go back and be the old self. Life attains a new meaning and dimension. A harmony with cosmos is experienced. R.M.Bucke describes such a one-time experience, which never again occurred in his life:

I had spent the evening in a great city, with two friends reading and discussing poetry and philosophy. . . I had a long drive home in a hansom cab to my lodging. My mind . . . was calm and peaceful. . . all at once, without warning of any kind, I found myself wrapped in a flame coloured cloud. For an instant I thought of fire . . . somewhere . . . in that great city; in the next I knew that the fire was in myself. Directly afterward there came upon me a sense of exaltation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. (qtd. in Stace 78)

But the experience was sufficient enough to “re-orient his life and thought. It was this single momentary flash of cosmic consciousness which caused him to collect and study patiently all the records he could find of other people’s similar experiences and to reflect on them and to publish his conclusion about them in his book” (Stace 78).

This cosmic consciousness or sense of transcendence might be caused by the tiniest or the mightiest of Nature or by an underlying principle of Nature as a whole. Richard Jeffries is most remembered for his mystical descriptions of Nature. This is one of his descriptions:

In the rush and roar of the stormy wind, the same exaltation, the same desire lifted me for a moment. I went there every morning, I could not exactly define why; it was like going to a rose bush to taste the scent of the flower and feel the dew from its petals on the lips. But I desired the beauty- the inner subtle meaning-to be in me, that I might have it and with it an existence of a higher kind . . . After the sensuous enjoyment always came the thought, the desire: That I might be like this; that I might have the inner meaning of the sun, the light, the earth, the trees and grass, translated into some growth of excellence in myself, both of body and mind; greater perfection of physique, greater perfection of mind and soul; that I might be higher in myself. (qtd. in Bennet 186-7)

Howard Thurman's mystical experience can be considered as another representative study. His experience is different from that of R.M.Bucke or Richard Jeffries because, as a black he endured many cruel blows of racial discrimination. His inner life, he believes, gave him the

strength to overcome the cruelties of racial discrimination. A description of one of his experiences is as follows:

As a child I was accustomed to spend many hours alone in my rowboat, fishing along the river, when there was no sound save the lapping of the waves against the boat. There were times when it seemed as if the earth and the river and the sky and I were one beat of the same pulse. It was a time of watching and waiting for what I did not know—yet I always knew. There would come a moment when beyond the single pulse beat there was a sense of Presence which seemed always to speak to me. My response to the sense of Presence always had the quality of personal communion. There was no voice. There was no image. There was no vision. There was God.
(qtd. in Bridges 54)

Rabindranath Tagore writes of a visionary experience during his early childhood that transformed the ordinary world into the extraordinary. The barriers of the finite vanished though the vision lasted only for seconds:

One day when I was a boy the light of the morning sun ventured down what path of its rising I know not, and of a sudden illustrated all human relationship before me in the

radiance of the soul. Although before very long the light was to vanish in the squalor of everyday life, still I hoped that one day before retiring from this world I would witness the whole of humanity illuminated by the light of that one soul.

(OM 72-73)

All these experiences reveal certain common characteristics that can be conveniently classified under Nature Mysticism. Firstly, Nature Mysticism is an implicit statement of the relationship between God and Nature. “The Book of Genesis” proclaims God as the creator of both man and the universe. Thus Man and Nature have their origin in the Almighty and naturally, are the manifestations of Him. That is why St. Bernard says: “what I know of the divine sciences and Holy Scripture, I learnt in woods and fields” (Aurobindo, Perennial Philosophy 82).

The second characteristic of Nature Mysticism is the envision of the Transcendent in Nature which seems to be above-all and beyond all. This is often the first phase of mystical experience. Then the objects of Nature that were considered trivial or even ugly seem basked in divine grace. Even the meanest flower or a blade of grass seems to be the manifestation of the Great and Powerful One. A mystic realizes the meaning of the simplest things in creation. This sentiment is echoed in Tennyson: “Little

Flower- but if I could understand/What you are, root and all, and all in all, /
I should know what God and man is” (482).

Thirdly, Nature educates the mystic of high ideals through mystical experiences. God effects an Illumination in the soul of the mystic by means of Nature. Lasting happiness and satisfaction ensues. William Wordsworth, a true Nature mystic clearly experienced it and so describes it as a “presence that disturbs me with the joy/ Of elevated thoughts.” He sees the Sublime Being in Nature:

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts,
And rolls through all things. (243)

Finally, the union with Nature is nothing other than the Union with God. Here the mystic “becomes progressively less aware of his environment and of himself as a separate individual. He speaks of being merged in, identified with, and dissolved into the One. The subject-object distinction vanishes altogether” (EP 429). In this state of pure bliss, all consciousness of the phenomenal world is left behind.

A Nature Mystic believes that Nature has a life of its own. He is aware of the harmony that exists in Nature. W.T. Stace says:

Nature Mysticism is a dim feeling or sense of a “presence” in nature which does not amount to a developed mystical experience but is a kind of sensitivity to the mystical which many people has who are not in the full sense mystics. (80)

The mystical awareness of Nature is not a mere admiration or glorification of Nature. It is much more than that. As Rudolf Otto puts it:

Nature Mysticism is the sense of being immersed in the oneness of Nature, so that man feels all the individuality, all the peculiarity of natural things in himself. He dances with the motes of dust and radiates with the sun, he rises with the dawn, surges with the wave, is fragrant in the rose, rapt with the nightingale: he knows and is all being, all strength, all joy, all desire, all pain in all things inseparably.(93)

For a Nature mystic, everything in Nature is a manifestation of the Divine. Nature Mysticism is often confused with Pantheism. But the difference is much wide and clear. A pantheist reveres Nature as the Supreme Being. In Nature Mysticism, Nature is only a manifestation of the Infinite. Nature is a means to reach the final destination-God.

The highly developed sensitiveness to Nature was termed as 'Expansions' by William James. According to him: "such feelings of expansion are indeed very common in Indian Mysticism, e.g. becoming Sarvam, the All-being, and knowing one's self as the All"(qtd. in Otto 94)

1.8. Mysticism and the Sacred Writings

Mystical thought is closely associated with religion. But mysticism does not belong to any single religion or sect. Seeking self realisation and union with God is common to all religions. Thus mysticism forms an integral part of all the sacred writings of the world. Mysticism, Margaret Smith observes:

. . . is to be found, in a highly developed state, in the early religious doctrines of the East; in the Vedic Literature; in Buddhism both in India and in China ; in a form strangely attractive..., in Sufism, the mysticism of Islam, . . . in Judaism and finally,as we have seen, in Greece and in the West.(19)

1.8.1. The Bible

"The Old Testament" delineates a gradual and orderly development of the mystical concept of Christianity. The conception that man is made in God's image, the visions and mystical experiences of Prophets and believers like Abraham, Jacob and Moses who had close interaction or

communion with God and God's messages to the 'chosen ones' can be considered as the main phases of this development.

In the Psalms, the intense yearning of the Psalmist for union with God is depicted in a language and style which was later to become typical of mystical literature:

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation.

Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God,
for You I will pray.

My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the
morning I will direct *it* to You, and I will look up.

(Ps 5: 1-3)

The New Testament gives the mystic experiences of St. Paul. His purgation, illumination and final union with God are clearly illustrated in the Pauline Epistles.

1.8 .2. The Upanishads

In the East, Mysticism and the concept of self are closely related. An understanding of the concept of the self or Brahman or the Infinite Being as expressed in the Upanishads is essential to understand the mystical thought of the East. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad describes some serious discourses on the Self: "The self is the overlord of all beings, the king of all beings . . . so all beings, all gods, all worlds, all breaths, all

selves are held together in the self” (II.5.15). The Taittiriya Upanishad defines Brahman thus:

The one who knows *brahman*
 As truth, as knowledge, as the endless,
 Hidden in the secret place and in the highest heaven
 Wins all desires,
 With *brahman*, the wise one. (Bk II: 1)

The mystic elements of The Upanishads appeal to the intellect.

1.8.3. The Bhagavat-Gita

The composition of The Bhagavad-Gita (the Song Divine) can be dated back to second century A.D. Unlike the Upanishads, it appeals to the emotions. Nirad C.Chaudhuri observes:

For the first time in any Hindu text the nature of *bhakti* is also fully communicated, both intellectually and emotionally. . . no doubt is left as to the nature of the devotion which is expected and what the devotees are expected to be.(262)

The Krishna of The Bhagavad-Gita demanded no rituals or rites to be performed for him. “He wanted only one thing—total self surrender and love”(Chaudhuri 265). Lord Krishna tells Arjuna: “for them, whose minds are set on me, verily I become, ere long, O Partha, the saviour (to save them) out of the ocean of finite experience, the *Samsara*” (XII:7)

1.8.4. The Holy Quran

The Holy Quran, the sacred text of Islam envisages the world as one of rewards and retributions, based on “justice tempered with mercy.” Quran contains a comprehensive view of man, universe and God. Complete surrender to the will of God is essential for God realisation. Quran also gives:

An insight into the universe reveals to man order and harmony, purpose and design, pointing to the wisdom and providence of the Creator. The object for which He created the world is known to Him alone but its design provides for its conservation and shows proportion, beauty and justice leading us to the concept of a creator(*Khaliq*) and preserver (*Rab*) who is gracious and merciful(*Rahman* and *Rahim*)(qtd. in Husain 66)

1.8.5. Buddhist Mysticism

Buddhism denies the existence of a personified God. The ultimate aim is *nirvana* (extinction of existence), which is often identified as the final stage in the mystical experience. This is an instance of Soul Mysticism. The following anecdote, recounted by Jawaharlal Nehru, will tell the reader more about the mystical nature of the teachings of Sri Buddha:

Once, it is said, he took some dry leaves in his hand and asked his favourite disciple Ananda, to tell him whether there were any other leaves besides those in his hand. Ananda replied: 'The leaves of autumn are falling on all sides, and there are more of them than can be numbered.' Then said the Buddha: 'In like manner I have given you a handful of truths, but besides these there are many thousands of other truths, more than can be numbered.'(130)

1.8.6. Sufi Mysticism

For the Sufi poets 'Love' is the essence of Godhead. They yearn to feel God with the zest of a lover seeking his beloved:

When my beloved appears,

With what eyes do I see Him?

With his eyes, not with mine

For none sees Him except Himself. (qtd. in Agarwala 111)

1.9. Mysticism and Literature

Mysticism and Literature are linked together integrally. Attempts to define and describe the mystical experiences had its reflection in Literature as well. While the mystics enriched their literature by describing their deep mystical experiences, poets and others added charm to mystical experience and mystical thoughts through their works.

The Literature of the mystics needs special attention. It is persuasive in its sparseness, restraint and lack of indulgence for elaboration. It is the language of silence and introspection. At the same time it seems to be contradictory and baffling:

O how may I ever express that secret word?

O how can I say He is not like this, and He is like that?

If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed:

If I say that He is without me, it is falsehood.

He makes the inner and outer worlds to be indivisible one;

The conscious and the unconscious, both are His footstools.

He is neither manifest nor hidden,

He is neither revealed nor unrevealed:

There are no words to tell that which He is. (GW 835)

The mystics enriched their languages with unique and exquisite similes and metaphors. ‘The cloud of the unknowing,’ ‘the divine dark,’ and ‘the marriage of the souls’ are a few powerful utterances to quote. Aurobindo reinforces this concept when he says: “Mystic poetry has a perfectly concrete meaning much more than intellectual poetry which is much more abstract” (Future Poetry 353). A mystic is a poet apart from a visionary and a practical psychologist. Thus the effective use of poetry can

be attributed as one of the causes of the all - pervading influence of Mysticism.

Kenneth Burke renders a very interesting reading of Mysticism in poetry in his essay, "Mysticism as a Solution to the Poet's Dilemma", which he begins in a lighter vein by pointing out that people respond spontaneously to anything that is labelled mystical and "an ounce of mystery is worth a ton of argument." He further explains:

Poetry deals, above all, with the language of sensation, of the concrete and positive, whereas Mystery is of the spirit. Mysticism arises in Poetry in so far as the 'things' of the poet's sensory experience are felt to be infused by a hierarchical spirit. Empirically, things just *are*; but mystically, things *stand for*. Mystical poetry is thus forever using the language of things to point beyond things, to the ultimate invisible, intangible order (the realm of hierarchy) by which they are infused. (105-6)

Exploring the chief manifestations and general characteristics of Mysticism as expressed in Literature of the East and the West is rewarding to a certain extent. This helps the readers to have a better perception of the Mystical poems of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost. So a probe into

Mysticism as expressed in English, Indian and American Literature will not be out of place at this juncture.

1.9.1. English Literature

In England it was during the fourteenth century that Mystical Literature flourished the most. It was an age when “England was drained of manhood and wealth by never-ending wars; and far worse, the plague of the Black Death” (Hopkinson 59). Mysticism then acted as a stabilizing force. The writings of mystics like Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle and Lady Julian of Norwich came to be widely read. Imagery drawn from music was a hallmark of Rolle’s mystical experience. Rolle wrote beautiful and simple lyrics. Another fourteenth century English mystic who left his powerful, individual imprint on mystic Literature was the unknown author of The Cloud of Unknowing. This devotional classic as well as the works of Walter Hilton and Lady Julian seems to be liberally drawn from the literature of mystical theology.

The seventeenth century saw the blooming of the Mystical verse. Many poets belonging to the school of Donne, known popularly as the Divine Poets of the seventeenth century wrote poems that “reveal a sensibility akin to the mystical. Intensely and intimately involved with the object of their devotion, they sing invariably in the language of the

mystics” (Dhar 7). George Herbert, Richard Crawshaw and Henry Vaughan are some of the notable poets among them.

1.9.1.1. John Donne (1572-1631)

Donne was deeply concerned with the metaphysical puzzles of sin, death and union with God. An intense desire of the soul to be purged and saved by God is expressed in the language of Mysticism, in his religious poems. He wants Christ to punish him for his impurities so that he may be restored in the image of his Creator:

- - - and thou look'st towards mee,
 O Saviour,as thou hang'st upon the tree;
 I turne my backe to thee,but to receive
 Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave
 O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
 Burne off my rusts, and my deformity:
 Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
 That thou may'st know me, and I turne my face. (89-90)

1.9.1.2. George Herbert (1593-1633)

Herbert was perhaps the most dedicated one among these religious poets. He firmly believed that one should dedicate all gifts to God, including that of versification. As a true mystic, his poems are conversations with God, not meant for any audience:

Teach me, my God and King,
 In all things thee to see,
 And what I do in any thing,
 To do it as for thee: (345)

1.9.1.3. Henry Vaughan (1622-1695)

Mystic poems of Vaughan are simple, direct and rich in symbolism. The central metaphor of his poetry is light, which stands for consciousness of God.

I saw Eternity the other night,
 Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
 All calm, as it was bright:--
 And round beneath it, Time, in hours, days, years,
 Driven by the spheres,
 Like a vast shadow moved; in which the World
 And all her train were hurl'd. (125)

1.9.1.4. Richard Crashaw (1612-1649)

Crashaw's poems are well known for their deep mysticism and Christian symbolism. He deals with love and death in his "Prayer:An Ode":

Delicious Deaths; soft exalations
 Of soul; dear and divine annihilations;
 A thousand unknown rites

Of joyes and rarefy'd delights;
 A hundred thousand goods, glories, and graces,
 And many a mystick thing
 Which the divine embraces
 Of the deare spouse of spirits with them will bring
 For which it is no shame
 That dull mortality must not know a name. (31: 77-86)

1.9.1.5. Thomas Traherne (1637-1674)

Seventeenth century, which is generally known as the age of reason, also produced a rich array of mystics and religious philosophers including Traherne, John Smith(1618-1652), Henry More(1614-1687) and Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688). Excitement and ecstasy mark the mystical poems of Traherne:

A native health and innocence
 Within my bones did grow,
 And while my God did all his Glories show,
 I felt a vigour in my sense
 That was all Spirit. I within did flow
 With seas of life, like wine;
 I nothing in the world did know
 But 'twas divine. (42:17-24)

1.9.1.6. William Blake (1757-1827)

Romantic age saw the soaring of two eminent mystic-poets, William Blake and William Wordsworth. Gifted with “sacramental perception” Blake saw the Infinite in all beings. Apart from being a visionary, philosopher, and a great Romantic, Blake was a Mystic who could perceive “the world in a grain of sand,/ And a heaven in a wild flower” (1-2). He discerns, in “Auguries of Innocence,” a universal joy in nature, which is the manifestation of the Supreme Reality which binds the universe together:

Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine;
Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine. (9-12)

1.9.1.7. William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

Wordsworth is undoubtedly a Nature Mystic. A large body of his verse is contemplative in mood and in a number of his poems, especially “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” “Ode on Intimations of Immortality” and The Prelude, the meditative and mystical element is dominant. He was “well pleased to recognize” that his mystical consciousness is shaped by “Nature and the language of the sense.” The whole canon of Wordsworth’s Nature Mysticism is concerned with the

trinity: God, Man and Nature. Discerning the Spirit of the Universe is a veritable mystical experience to him:

- - - that blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,-
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things. (242)

1.9.1.8. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

Shelley's mysticism is marked with a desire to be one with the deep and ineffable truth. His contemplations on the unidentifiable One are essentially mystical:

The One remains, the many change and pass;
 Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
 Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity. . . (467)

1.9.1.9. John Keats (1795-1821)

Keats' motivations remained in the Idea of Beauty. A passage in "Endymion" describes how a vision can transfigure and exhilarate:

Feel we these things? – that moment have we stept
 Into a sort of oneness and our state
 Is like a floating spirit. (74)

1.9.1.10. Robert Browning (1812-1889)

Among the Victorians, there were Robert Browning and John Henry Newman who wrote exquisite lyrics steeped in mysticism. The exceptional desire to experience God finds passionate expression in Browning:

And what is that I hunger for but God?
 My God, my God! let me for once look on thee
 As tho' nought else existed: we alone.
 And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark
 Expands till I can say, 'Even from myself
 I need thee, and I feel thee, and I love thee;
 I do not plead my rapture in thy works
 For love of thee—or that I feel as one
 Who cannot die—but there is that in me

Which turns to thee, which loves, or which should
love.’ (101:11-20)

1.9.1.11. John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

Cardinal Newman is best known as the author of the world renowned lyric, “Lead, Kindly Light.” He passionately entreats God to be with him when his strength fails:

Lord, in this dust Thy sovereign voice
First quicken'd love divine;
I am all Thine,—Thy care and choice,
My very praise is Thine.
I praise Thee, while Thy providence
In childhood frail I trace,
For blessings given, ere dawning sense
Could seek or scan Thy grace;
.....
And such Thy tender force be still,
When self would swerve or stray,
Shaping to truth the forward will
Along Thy narrow way.
Deny me wealth; far, far remove
The lure of power or name;

Hope thrives in straits, in weakness love,
 And faith in this world's shame.

1.9.1.12. Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

Hopkins resumed his vocation of writing poems only to highlight the glory of God. The poet hails Him in his poignant poem, “The Wreck of the Deutschland”:

Thou mastering me
 God! giver of breath and bread;
 World’s strand, sway of the sea;
 Lord of living and dead;
 Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
 And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
 Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
 Over again I feel thy finger and find thee. (5)

1.9.1.13. Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)

Dylan Thomas is a twentieth century English poet who identified himself with the mysterious powers of the universe. He saw the Divine Presence in the universe as all humbling darkness which controls life and death:

Never until the mankind-making
 Bird beast and flower-

Fathering and all humbling darkness
 Tells with silence the last light breaking
 And the still hour
 Is come of the sea tumbling in harness. (122)

1.9.1.14. W.B Yeats (1865-1939)

W.B Yeats who weaved a very complex poetic system with his symbolism, use of mythology and concepts like *Spiritus Mundi* and antithetical self, was a mystic poet too. He sings of his desire to be one with Eternity in “Sailing to Byzantium.” He wants to be absorbed into Eternity:

O sages standing in God’s holy fire
 As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
 Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.
 Consume my heart away; sick with desire
 And fastened to a dying animal
 It knows not what it is; and gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity. (12)

1.9.2. American Literature

It has been pointed out by many that spirituality is not a term usually associated with the United States of America. Somehow the

people of America are considered to be the epitome of materialism. They are the preachers of practicality. "It is assumed that" Rufus Jones remarks "we are dollar-chasers, pure and simple, and are interested only in what we can get our hands on, to have and to hold." He goes on to assert that indeed there has always been "an important mystical strand in the life and thought of America" (qtd. in Bridges 143).

Mysticism was established in America with the coming of Puritan settlers of New England. In Calvinist Theology it was not given much importance. It was treated suspiciously. The experiences that were beyond the control of church were distrusted. The congregation checked it. These experiences were not met with much encouragement. Orthodox Literary Mystics were not given much prominence and they slowly faded into oblivion.

As Raymond Nelson points out: "The history of Mysticism in America, then, at least as a literary phenomenon, is in one sense the history of the transformation and diffusion of a discipline rather than of transmission to successive generations"(5). But the mystic creed has undergone great many changes and adaptations in the course of time. Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane, Thomas Wolfe, Henry Miller, Thomas Merton, Brother Antoninus, Kenneth Patchen and Theodore Roethke are

some of the writers whose writings show a deep inclination towards Mysticism. All of them were influenced by Nature and its several manifestations. Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman were greatly influenced by the oriental mystical texts like The Upanishads and The Bhagavad-Gita. It was very much appealing to their transcendental imagination.

Edgar Allan Poe's preoccupation with the notions of ideal beauty can be related to Neo-Platonic Mysticism. But both Eliot and Poe are more concerned with questions related to sin or the fallen state of humanity.

As the study limits itself to Mysticism in poetry, the emphasis is given to the works of some major poets.

1.9.2.1. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Emerson's reflections and musings about Nature and God can be treated as a starting point of Mysticism of the New England Heritage. He was a transcendentalist who believed in the concept of Universal Self. All individual beings are parts of One Being. The ecstasy of the soul joining the Over-Soul is the highest mystical experience. His poems propound his concept of fundamental unity. He writes in his celebrated poem, "Brahma":

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again. (161)

1.9.2.4. Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

Poe's concept of ideal poet led him to contemplations on heaven or blessedness and earth or worries and cares:

Yes, heaven is thine; but this
 Is a world of sweets and sour;
 Our flowers are merely—flowers,
 And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
 Is the sunshine of ours. (185)

1.9.2.5. T.S.Eliot (1888-1965)

T.S.Eliot is a poet much concerned with the relation between time and eternity, the past and the present and man and God. "The Dry Salvages" of his Four Quartets is an expression of the longing of mankind which may "never here to be realised." It is the longing for a union with eternity and a salvation from the circle of time:

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is incarnation.
 Here the impossible union
 Of spheres of existence is actual,
 Here the past and future
 Are conquered, and reconciled,
 Where action where otherwise movement
 Of that which is only moved

And has in it no source of movement –
 Driven by daemonic, chthonic
 Powers. And right action is freedom
 From past and future also. (136)

1.9.2.6. Robert Frost (1874-1963)

Robert Frost, one of America's most beloved poets, is generally termed a Nature poet. But the contemplative mood and revelations as the culminating statement render a unique pedestal for his poems. Each of his poems slowly unmask a gentle, meditative and universal poet. Even an insignificant thing like a tree lives a life of its own. The picture of the "Tree at My Window" is sharp and penetrating. There is a fellow feeling between the poet and the tree:

But tree, I have seen you taken and tossed
 And if you have seen me when I slept,
 You have seen me when I was taken and swept
 And all but lost. (FP 251)

His empathy is so great that he pleads, "let there never be curtain drawn / Between you and me" (FP 251).

But when "life is too much like a pathless wood" he would like to get away from the earth. What makes Frost different from the romantics is that his desire to escape is momentary.

May no fate willfully misunderstand me
 And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
 Not to return. Earth's the right place for love
 I do'nt know where it's likely to go better. (FP 121-2)

When observed from a different angle, one can take the poet as the symbol of human soul. The swinging of the birches is the attempt of the soul to touch the Divine, and the birches are the good deeds of man that help him to reach heaven. For the poet would certainly “. . . like to go by climbing a birch tree, / And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk/ *Toward* heaven. . . .”(121-2).

The predicament of a traveller in choosing between the familiar and the mysterious finds a place in his poetry. Selecting a road “less travelled” is quite typical to the Mystic Way. All conventions and precedence are broken or ignored.

A revival of interest in Mysticism can be observed even in the writings of twentieth century. The writings of Charles A. Bennet, Howard Thurman, Rufus M. Jones, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Merton, and Philip Kapleau bear testimony to this fact. Mystical writings added a new dimension to the lives of Americans. Though their influence might not be dominant, it made its presence felt.

A careful purview of the development of Spiritual Literature leads one to the conclusion that the basic features of Mysticism in Literature are the same everywhere. If phrased more generally, it can be argued that mystical traditions are manifested in all religions, Philosophy and Literature. At times its role was marginalized and occasionally it constituted the mainstream of literary world.

1.9.3. Indian Literature

Apart from the sacred books, Indian Literature, in general, has a very rich tradition of mystical expressions. The life experiences and contributions of renowned mystics Kabir and Mira Bai deserve special mention in the history of the development of Indian Mystical tradition.

1.9.3.1. Kabir (c. 1440-1518)

Kabir had a very sound and all encompassing mystical vision deeply rooted in the Indian ideals. He is also acclaimed as a great poet. He sang of a religion of love and of the ultimate Union with God: “my teacher gave me the Lord’s Light/ And now to his heart I leap” (Lesser 14). His songs or *Dohas* were remarkable for the ecstasy Kabir derived from his mystical experiences.

1.9.3.2. Mira (c. 1498-1547)

Mira is the fifteenth century mystic singer who is acclaimed for her selfless love and devotion to God. She spent her life singing of God and

longing for union with Him. She sings passionately: “My body is the lamp,/ The awareness is the oil,/ My love for Him is the burning wick”(qtd. in Mataji 209). The well known mystic poets among the Indian writers in English are Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu.

1.9.3.3. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)

Aurobindo needs no introduction as a mystic poet. He is a celebrated mystic whose mystical experiences revealed to him the Eternal, all pervading Supreme Spiritual Reality that is One. The dawn of the Divine Consciousness on man to redeem him enables man to see beyond the mysteries:

I would hear in my spirit's wideness solitary

The Voice that speaks when mortal lips are mute:

I seek the wonder of things absolute

Born from the silence of Eternity. (Last Poems 13)

1.9.3.4. Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949)

Sarojini Naidu's poems emanate a deep mystic fervour. The intense yearning to learn the ways of God is expressed in one of her renowned mystical poem, “The Soul's Prayer.”

Spare me no bliss, no pang of strife,

Withhold no gift or grief I crave,

The intricate lore of love and life

And mystic knowledge of the grave. (377: 9-12)

The poet comes to know that these are the various manifestations of God. The vision of God brings the ultimate revelation to her: “Life is a prism of My Light, / And Death the shadow of My Face” (377: 27-8)

1.9.3.5. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

A dreamer, a poet and a romantic at heart, Rabindranath Tagore upheld the great Indian tradition of spirituality. His quest for identification with the Invisible reaches its culmination, perhaps in the Gitanjali.

It was not the grandeur or beauty of Nature that attracted him the most; it was the life in Nature. Life is a revelation of His mystery and the poet is wonderstruck by it.

There comes the morning with the golden
basket in her right hand bearing the wreath
of beauty, silently to crown the earth.

And there comes the evening over the lonely
meadows deserted by herds, through trackless
paths, carrying cool draughts of peace in her
golden pitcher from the western ocean of rest.

But there, where spreads the infinite sky for
the soul to take her flight in, reigns the

stainless white radiance. There is no day
 nor night, nor form nor colour, and never,
 never a word.(G LXVII)

1.10. Conclusion

Having examined the various aspects of Mysticism, its development and also its manifestations in Literature, the study now proceeds to ascertain whether the two poets—Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost – possess mystic strains in their poetry.

Thus, even though they are the poets of the East or of the West, by choosing the “less travelled road” they merged the personal with the universal and the specific with the general. Their poems are a commentary on the Human world, Nature and the Supernatural. An acceptance of mystery in the existence comes quite naturally. With this comes the conviction that “Heaven gives its glimpses only to those/Not in position to look too close” (FP 248).

The relevance of Nature Mysticism in the present day world is that it helps one to be free from the narrow constraints of the self. Selfishness and greed have greatly reduced the divine qualities in man. The significance of the songs of Tagore and Frost is enhanced in such a world because they are within the easy reach of the layperson as well.

To have an integrated picture of the Nature Mysticism in the poems of these poets, their poetry has to be scrutinized and analyzed in detail. This will also bring out the similarities and distinctiveness of these poets. The following two chapters are devoted for the critical examination of the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost respectively.

Chapter 2

On the Seashore of Endless Worlds

2.1. Introduction

Attempting an evaluation of the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore is a bewildering task for a student of Literature. He is a veritable giant in the world of poetry; “the most brilliant creative Genius of the Indian Renaissance,” declares Ketaki Dyson (17). His unfathomable genius and the great vault of romantic imagination alone make him peerless. Rabindranath Tagore is, perhaps with the exception of Kalidasa, the best known face of Indian Literature.

This chapter proposes to trace the poetic development of this great poet. It also proposes to evaluate how far his poetry can be designated as mystical. Then the study moves on to investigate the salient aspects of Nature Mysticism in his poetry.

Being born in a family which was unusually talented and deeply rooted in God, Rabindranath Tagore was blessed to be a poet, seer and mystic from his early childhood. Creativity was admired and applauded in that family. Combined with this was his sensibility towards Nature from the early childhood. The poet himself says in The Religion of an Artist:

Most of the members of my family had some gift- some were artists, some poets, some musicians and the whole atmosphere

of our home was permeated with the spirit of creation. I had a deep sense almost from infancy of the beauty of Nature, an intimate feeling of companionship with the trees and clouds, and felt in tune with the musical touch of the seasons in the air. (13)

He started writing poetry at an early age. Even before he was eighteen he had written about 7000 lines of verse. “Banphul” (The Wild Flower) written in Bengali is his first verse narrative. Tagore himself maintained that some of his earlier writings could not be considered poetry at all. But critics do not agree with this view. Krishna Kripalani points out that “Sandhya Sangeet (Evening Songs) is the first work of Rabindranath to bear the unmistakable stamp of his genius. He had also discovered his form and could write as he pleased, unfettered by any examples of the past” (46). The next volume, Prabhat Sangeet (Morning Songs), as the name itself indicates, was quite different from the earlier one. They, according to Kripalani, “mark a considerable advance over his previous work, not only in the healthiness of the poet’s mood and outlook but in the mastery of language and metre” (51).

To trace the evolution of the poetic life of Tagore, a broad classification has been generally done. There are three phases observed. First is the pre- Gitanjali phase which begins with Sandhya Sangeet(1882)

and ends with Kshanika (The Flitting One, 1900). The Gitanjali phase started with Naivedya (Offering, 1901) and culminated with Balaka (The Geese in Flight, 1916). Palataka (The Fugitive, 1918) marks the beginning of the third phase i.e., Post- Gitanjali period. This is the longest phase which extends up to the publication of Janmadine (On the Birthday, 1941).

Life in the family estates in Northern Bengal and Orissa was another turning point for Tagore for this was the first time he came out into the real world, a world of poverty, misery and simple joys. This period can also be termed as that of his close communion with Nature. This was a much fruitful period in his literary life. He wrote a large number of poems, songs, and short stories along with some essays that smack of political vigour. The first collection of his poetry, Songs and Poetry belongs to this period. Other major works of poetry of this period are Chitra (The Multi-Coloured, 1896) and Chaitali (The Last Harvest, 1896).

The ensuing years can be termed as the darkest years in the life of the poet. A succession of bereavements began in the Gitanjali period. Smaran (In Memoriam 1903), the only one collection of Tagore with a personal note of bereavement, belongs to the period of bereavements i.e., when he lost his wife (1902), his daughter (1903), his father (1905) and his son (1907). The death of his dearest ones might have induced him to greater depths of Spiritualism and Mysticism.

Gitanjali (Song- Offering) was composed in Bengali in 1909-10 and in 1912 Tagore went to England with the translation of Gitanjali. There he came into contact with a galaxy of great personalities like, George Bernard Shaw, H.G.Wells, Galsworthy, C.F.Andrews, Masfield, Robert Bridges, W.B.Yeats and Ezra Pound. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Gitanjali in 1913 and Knighthood in 1914.

The post-Gitanjali period was exceptionally fruitful and busy in terms of literary pursuits. He wrote Purabi (An Evening Melody, 1925), Parishesh (The End, 1932) and Punascha (The Post-Script, 1932), all collections of beautiful lyrics among novels, plays and essays. In a collection, titled Prantic (The Borderland,1938), his genius soared to mystical heights and as some critics remark, there were hints at death which the poet was anticipating of late. He brought out the last collection of stories and verse, Galpa Salpa (Stories and Verses,1941), before his demise on August 7, 1941.

The fact that Tagore was born into an atmosphere of deep religious reverences which was remarkably free from any kind of orthodoxy or parochialism might have played a great part in making him a mystic with deep religious experiences.

2.2. Tagore's Mystic Vision

Most of Tagore's poems are perforated with a perception of Reality which is associated with mystic illumination. Tagore's religion as he was fond of ascertaining, is the religion of a poet. Therefore he says, "all that I feel about it is from vision and not from knowledge" (RA 17). This vision, according to him, lights up not only what we are looking at, but the entire universe.

Time and again one finds references to this illumination which conditioned his spiritual life. The poet considers this as a message from God. During his life time Tagore experienced the mystic vision twice: the first one occurred in the boyhood when he felt that the morning sun revealed all human relationship in the radiance of the soul. The second vision happened during a later stage. Tagore describes the experience thus in The Religion of Man:

. . . I stood for a moment at my window, overlooking a market place on the banks of a dry riverbed, welcoming the first flood of rain along its channel. Suddenly I became conscious of a stirring of soul within me. My world of experience in a moment seemed to become lighted and facts that were detached and dim found a great unity of meaning. (66)

Both the visions as described by the poet show that these visions occurred unexpectedly and spontaneously like those of the great mystics, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Catherina of Geneva. These experiences did not last for long and the light vanished “in the squalor of everyday life” (OM 73). But the impact it had on the poet’s mind was permanent. These transformed his life forever. He ardently hoped for a recurrence of this experience so that he might witness again, “the whole of humanity illuminated by the light of that one soul”(OM 72). But the transitory experience could lend a mystical touch to all his poems and songs.

In a letter addressed to a student Tagore explains the nature and feature of mystical realisations:

One cannot say anything definite about mystical realisations. They are like the nature of our sense perceptions – ineffable...Consciousness has many facets, just as white light contains many perceptible colours. Some people cannot see red, others cannot see blue: some see one colour more strongly, others another colour. These days I am painting pictures, and my mixing of colours is distinctive, the reason being that my palette expresses the colours as perceived by my consciousness. I do not see all colours with equal intensity. I am partial to some – who can say why? Why do

the leaves of a tree strike us as green? and why are its blossoms seen as red? Mystical perceptions, likewise, are not of only one kind but come in many varieties. This diversity cannot be properly described because it cannot all be seen with the eyes. If one calls the perceptions of some poets mystical, that is because they have the language to articulate their perceptions – which is what makes them poets. Kabir and the other old ascetic poets had this gift of language. But in order to understand them, one must to some extent share their feelings...(SL 408)

2.3. Tagore's God-Concept

God, for Tagore, is the one Supreme Reality. He is omnipresent and he is in the joys and sorrows, in the battles and struggles of life. The world may be divided into fragments, but a harmony or a Supreme Meaning holds it together. Even if a fraction of it is lost, it is not the whole. Every part is necessary to make the whole. Tagore defines religion thus:

It is the vision of reality in which the world is seen in all its pain and pleasure, struggles and conflicts. The world seen merely as the world does not reveal that Supreme meaning which runs through and across it as warp and weft together , outgrowing it on all sides . . . that is . . . the apprehension of

the supreme meaning of reality in all its completeness. (OM 26)

God, for Tagore, is love itself. Every being in the world is an expression of God's love. This aspect is similar to the Christian concept of God. If love is God, love involves not only joy and happiness but sufferings and pains. Therefore, he says:

The religion we acquire from popular scripture never really becomes one's own religion. It is only a bond of habit that links us with it. To awaken religion in oneself is Man's eternal quest. It is to be brought to life through extreme pain. I want to animate it with the blood of my veins, then whether I obtain happiness in life or not, I can die fulfilled in joy. (OM 33)

Another important aspect of the God-concept of Tagore is its strong affinity with Christianity. Tagore shares the Christian concept of the individual's worth and dignity. Therefore, Tagore claims: "Nobody has exalted man more, in every sphere, than Jesus Christ has done" (qtd. in Kannath 73).

Tagore's God is a personal God with infinite qualities. His God is immanent, as well as transcendent. He is the centre to which humanity and the universe are related. The universe is thus a visible expression of the Invisible. He is all-pervading and the innate good in all. Some critics are of

the opinion that Tagore's God, especially in Gitanjali, is a person and is a Christ-like God.

God is thus omnipresent, omnipotent, the light, love of life and perfect knowledge. So, He is the Brahma in the Vedas and the Upanishads; God, the Father of Christianity; the most beloved of the Sufi poets and the 'Man within' of the Baul singers. The immanence of God amazes him and he realises Him everywhere:

Spirit of Beauty, how could you, whose radiance overbrims
the sky, stand hidden behind a candle's tiny flame? How
could a few vain words from a book rise like a mist, and veil
her whose voice has hushed the heart of earth into ineffable
calm? (CPP 265)

Human soul, the finite, seeks union with the Infinite. As God is Transcendent, his realizations of God remain unsure:

I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice; only I
have heard his gentle footsteps from the road before my
house.....I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this
meeting is not yet. (G XIII)

The God of Tagore's poems has several facets. He is a combination of Satyam (Truth), Sivam (Goodness) and Sundaram (Beauty). Like the acclaimed Indian mystics, Kabir and Mira, Tagore also had a peculiar

service.” From the poet He demands “the harvest of his life.” Poet’s response to God is:

The harvest of my life ripens in the
 sun and the shower till I reap more
 than you sowed, gladdening your heart,
 O Master of the golden granary. (GW 755)

The enchanting notes of the flute of his Master draw his servant out of his lodging:

. . . while I listen I know that every step I take is in my
 master’s house. For he is the sea, he is the river that leads to
 the sea, and he is the landing place. (GW 780)

The poet would like to have an audience with God, the King, in his chamber. During daytime when his courtyard was bustled with the crowd and confused, he could not find the King. So he prays:

I ask for an audience from you, my King, in your solitary
 chamber. Call me from the crowd . . . Now when at night
 they take up their lanterns and go by different roads to their
 different homes, allow me to linger here for a moment,
 standing at your feet, and hold up my lamp and see your face.
 (GW 790-1)

2.3.2. God as Friend

God is treated as a close friend, a comrade, a playmate by the poet. The address “you” in many poems is an indication of his intimacy with God as a friend. They meet on equal grounds. The poet acknowledges the Supreme Power: “I am certain that priceless wealth is in thee, and that thou art my best friend” (G XXVIII).

The poet converses with God without any reservation. Good friends can understand not only what is spoken, but also the meaning of silence: “Dear friend, I feel the silence of your great thoughts of many a deepening eventide on this beach when I listen to these waves” (GW 598).

On a stormy and dark night, when the sky “groans like one in despair,” he yearns for the company of his dear friend: “Art thou abroad on this stormy night on thy journey of love, my friend?” Time and again he opens the door and looks out on the darkness for his friend. Where is he?

By what dim shore of the ink-black river, by what far edge of
the frowning forest, through what mazy depths of gloom are
thou threading thy course to come to me, my friend?

(G XXIII)

2.3.3. God as the Divine Lover

God is the poet’s best beloved. He celebrates his love to God in poem after poem. God is seen as love everywhere. The poet longs for his

tryst with this Eternal lover: “I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands”(G XVII). The much awaited union with his Darling lights the lamps of his life:

Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light,
heart-sweetening light!

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life; the
light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love; the sky opens,
the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth.(G LVII)

This is quite illustrative of the bliss of a mystic at union with God. It is the pure ecstasy of divine love. He sings: “Lay down your lute, my love, leave your arms to embrace me/ Let your touch bring my overflowing heart to my body’s utmost brink” (CPP 419). In poem XLVII of Gitanjali, the beloved has been waiting for the divine –lover the entire night in vain. She is afraid that he might suddenly come when she falls asleep. So she bids her friends to leave the way open for him. Her words brim with the thrill of union:

Let him appear before my sight as the first of all lights and all
forms. The first thrill of joy to my awakened soul, let it come
from his glance. And let my return to myself be immediate
return to him.

The poet cannot live without God's love. God's love is different from man's love because it leaves man free. It is not bondage as worldly love is. It is emancipation.

2.3.4. God as Brother, Mother and Father

Those who do not have faith fail to realize that God is near to them in moments of despair. "The Child" is an expression of this fact. When in pain they search for God, or, at least a signal from God, never realizing that He is by their side:

There on the crest of the hill stand the Man of faith

.....

when the clouds thicken and the nightbirds scream as they fly,
he cries, Brothers, despair not , for Man is great.

But they never heed him,

.....

When beaten and wounded they cry, 'Brother where art thou?'

The answer comes, 'I am by your side.' (GW 815)

In Fruit Gathering, the poet is like a child who calls out to his mother just for the pleasure of calling her:

I will utter your name.

I will utter it without words, I will utter it without purpose.

For I am like a child that calls its mother an
hundred times, glad that it can say "Mother." (GW 756)

2.3.5. God as the Solitary Wayfarer

God is the solitary wayfarer, the eternal traveller of the Universe. For the poet who wants to live close to the earth, salvation is the journey itself. Salvation is attained when one walks with God every step in light and in darkness. In "The Wayfarer," the poet implores:

O great Wayfarer,
.....
You have no temple, no heaven
No final end.
With every step you touch holy ground.
Walking with you, O restless One,
I find salvation
In the treasure of the journey. (LP 88-89)

Life is envisaged as a journey where God is at the helm. It is God who guides his voyage.

All these relationships and the various names with which the poet addresses his God is a pointer to the intensity of his love towards God. Various shades of these relationships bear testimony to the fact that God

can never be contained or limited to a single particular alliance. Various names are necessary to describe His attributes and qualities.

2. 4.Tagore's Mystical Consciousness

A reflective reading of Tagore's poems throws light on his Devotional Mysticism, Nature Mysticism and Humanism. The mystical strain in Tagore's poetry is long known and widely acknowledged. In fact, Tagore has not propounded any novel philosophy or strand of Mysticism through his poems.

Oneness with the Supreme Being has been central to Tagore's mystical creed. Like all other great mystics of India, he sang to glorify that all-pervading Master. He offers complete loyalty and service to Him. His poems illuminate a very rich spectrum of powerful feelings, surprising tenacity and enduring mysteries. His romantic imagination, dreamlike quality of his verse, his ideals like humanism, love, devotion and universal brotherhood, originality of theme and universality in appeal render uniqueness to his mystical poetry.

In Devotional Mysticism, which is termed also as the Mysticism of Love, the conative element is dominant. Intuitive emotions acquire greater significance in Devotional Mysticism. But it should not be confused with sentimentalism. Whole-hearted love leads the mystic to a blessed state of the soul. This deep love for God is termed as *bhakti* or devotion.

Tagore had his first experience of mystical awakening at the age of eighteen. This illumination gave him an insight into the Being of the Universe and thus changed his life forever. This experience detached him from the gloomy and egoistic past and freed him to a world of lightness and joy. With an audacity that only youth can achieve, he had questioned and challenged whatever that appeared to him unreal. But when truth hits him hard, he accepts it with heartfelt humbleness. In the early poems one can observe a strain of rebellion tinged with self – centeredness and egoism which were shattered all of a sudden. He admits this in the following lines from Poem no. XXIII of The Crossing:

I struggled in my pride against your current only to feel
all your force in my breast.

Rebelliously I put out the light in my house, and your
sky surprised me with its star. (CPP 274)

This mystical experience had awakened him to the consciousness of a new life. The dawn of this new life can be seen in many poems. During the initial stages of his realisation of God, the poet feels an awakening of intense joy that is beyond expression: “The Awakening of the Waterfall”, a poem from Prabhat-Sangit evinces this experience:

And I – I will pour of compassion a river;

The prisons of stone I will break, will deliver;

I will flood the earth, and, with rapture mad,
 Pour music glad.
 With dishevelled tresses, and gathering flowers,
 With rainbow wings widespread, through the hours
 I shall run and scatter my laughter bright
 In the dear sunlight.
 I shall run from peak to peak, and from hill
 To hill my leaping waters spill,
 Loudly shall laugh and with claps keep time
 To my own steps' chime. (qtd. in Ray, Artist in Life 92)

The mystical encounters help him develop a deep insight into the mysteries of Nature and the meaning of human life. The poet describes this experience later:

The very day the poem, "The Awakening of the Waterfall," gushed forth and coursed on like a veritable cascade. The poem came to an end, but the curtain did not fall upon the joy aspect of the Universe. And it came to be so that no person or thing in the world seemed to me trivial or unpleasing. A thing that happened the next day or the day followed seemed especially astonishing. (REM 228-9)

When the soul is lifted up to experience the Supreme Being, it is invariably followed by a spiritual unrest stemming from the discernment of the imperfections of the self:

Take me back
 once more to that refuge, remove that hurt
 of separation that throbs from time to time

 I rush out to receive the entire outer world
 within myself: sky, earth, river-nestled
 heaps of calm white moonlight. But I can't
 touch anything and just stare at an emptiness
 in utter despondence . Take me back
 to the centre of that wholeness, whence continually
 life germinates in a hundred thousand ways. . . (IG 91)

Occasionally he feels that God is playing hide and seek with him. In such moments of darkness when God is not near him, the poet feels that God has abandoned him. Here the mystic in the poet expresses his pensive yearning to be one with the Whole; to be admitted to that world of wonder and mystery. He yearns for the mystical experience again and again. He is ready to purge his heart of all impurities. He is eager to surrender his soul,

but in vain. So the poet experiences a bitter pain of loss. This mood is observed to be repeated in many of his later poems.

During the phase of purgation in his mystical experience, the poet realises that the limitations of his own self stands in the way of its progress towards union with God. Detachment from the world is necessary to achieve Union with God. The vision of eternity shows the worldly pleasures as transitory and unworthy. So, in the poem “Evermoving,” he exhorts his mind:

Leave behind all desire, fear and grief—
 The river of creation
 Is but the endless flow of destruction.

 When the chariot of farewell sweeps past,
 Forgetting self, make free the path,
 Singing paeans of victory.
 In the little earth you possess
 Grieve not for what lies beyond—
 It exists in the heart of the universe,
 If not in one form, then in another. (LP 41-42)

These preliminary stages of mystical experiences give way to more profound experiences of later life. These later developments in his mystical

consciousness are illustrated in his poems which culminate in Gitanjali. He was going through a series of bereavements and other personal sorrows during this period. Of course, all these had their bearing upon his mind. It was certainly the Dark Night of the Soul, as mystics term it. The poet is in utter despair and desolation, unable to bear the separation from God:

Light, oh, where is the light? Kindle it with the burning fire of desire!

There is the lamp but never a flicker of a flame, - is such thy fate, my heart? Ah, death were better by far for thee!

Misery knocks at thy door, and her message is that thy lord is wakeful, and he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of night. (G XXVII)

The burning desire for God-realisation is not fulfilled easily. God is still far away. But the poet feels God's existence in his Soul, which leads him on. If God is to be found, it is necessary to "kindle the lamp of love with thy life." But his loneliness is painful. He is plunged into gloom:

Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens. Ah, love, why dost thou let me wait outside at the door all alone?

In the busy moments of noon tide work I am with the crowd,
but on this dark lonely day it is only for thee that I hope.

If thou showest me not thy face, if thou leavest me wholly
aside, I know not how I am to pass these long, rainy hours.

I keep gazing on the far –away gloom of the sky, and my heart
wanders wailing with the restless wind. (G XVIII)

He patiently waits for the morning which will shatter the darkness
that envelops him. Surely enough the illumination comes to him and it
comes unbidden:

The day was when I did not keep myself in readiness for thee;
and entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common
crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of
eternity upon many a fleeting moment of my life. (G XLIII)

Finally the poet reaches the ultimate goal of his quest – he becomes
one with God. With this union, the self of the poet vanishes. It is not real
and so it recedes. The newborn “I”, the new self is free, detached and at
peace. Tagore writes in “A Sheaf of Songs”:

The “I” that floats along the wave of time,

From a distance I watch him.

.....

He is always on the surface,

Tossed by the waves and dancing to the rhythm

Of joy and suffering.

The least loss makes him suffer,
 The least wound hurts him-
 Him I see from afar.
 That "I" is not my real self;
 I am still within myself,
 I do not float in the stream of death.
 I am free, I am desireless,
 I am peace, I am illumined—
 Him I see from afar. (LP 80)

The poet's parting words to his fellow beings is that what he has seen and experienced is unsurpassable. He has tasted the divine honey of lotus, i.e. he has experienced the ecstasy of divine love and so he is eager to leave this world:

In this play house of infinite forms
 I have had my play and here have
 I caught sight of him that is formless.
 My whole body and my limbs have
 thrilled with his touch who is
 beyond touch; and if the end comes here,
 let it come- let this be my parting word. (G XCVI)

Perception of the Absolute can be achieved through the senses or without the senses. The starting point of this kind of realisation is *Sravana* or listening to God. The fascinated poet listens to Him in amazement. He recognizes that God's music runs from horizon to horizon:

I know not how thou singest, my master!

I ever listen in silent amazement.

The light of thy music illumines the world.

The life breath of thy music runs

From sky to sky. (G III)

Even when the poet is alone, without the company of others, he finds "it is sweet to listen for thy footsteps" (GW 639). Communion with God is possible only when the symbols of sanity and pride are discarded. Ornaments of any kind would be an impediment:

The poet now feels that his allegiance to God should be expressed in words. His only passion now is to sing Him songs. This aspect of Devotional Mysticism is termed as *Kirtana* or praising God. He is at God's service as a singer.

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.

I have sung into the hush of thy

night and peace of thy morning.
 the thrill of the first summer rain has
 passed into my tunes ,and the waving of the autumn harvest.
 Let not my song cease at last, my Master,
 when thou breakest my heart to come
 into my house, but let it burst into thy welcome.(CPP 282)

With the humbleness of a true devotee the poet seeks for a quiet
 corner in the world of God. He has no other work to do except to sing his
 songs. To Tagore, realisation of God comes even through music. This is
nadarchana or realisation of God through music and singing:

I am here to sing thee songs. In this hall of thine I have a
 corner seat.

In thy world I have no work to do; my useless life can only
 break out in tunes without a purpose.

When the hour strikes for thy silent worship at the dark
 temple of midnight, command me, my Master, to stand before
 thee to sing. (G XV)

Smarana or recollecting God's words, deeds etc. is another element
 of devotion. The devotee thankfully remembers God's beauty,
 benevolence, affection and joy:

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill. (G I)

After listening to him, praising him, the poet touches the holy feet of God. He becomes ready to serve Him and His people. This is termed as *padaseva* (serving the Holy Feet of the Lord).

The morning light has flooded my eyes – this is thy message to my heart. Thy face is bent from above, thy eyes look down on my eyes, and my heart has touched thy feet. (G LIX)

Another aspect of the Devotional Mysticism is *Sakhyam* or treating God as a friend. Here the poet attains oneness with God through companionship. God, the eternal comrade is very much loving and considerate:

Beyond the shores of Life and Death,

Oh Friend, you are waiting for me.

In the silent sky of my heart,

Your throne is flooded with light-

With what hope and joy I turn

With outstretched hands towards it. (LP 80)

A visibly clear aspect in the mystical journey of Tagore is that of *atmasamarpana* or complete dedication to the Absolute. He surrenders himself totally to God. In this kind of contemplation, the soul becomes one with God or gets lost in God. The pure bliss of an enhanced sense of unity is all the more evident. This could be called the culmination of the poet's love for God.

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out
and touch this world at thy feet.

Like a rain-cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed
showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one
salutation to thee.(G CIII)

2.5. Tagore's Concept of Nature

The poet in Tagore was very much inspired by the mighty and magnificent Nature. Nature was at the centre of his existence. God to Tagore was also a Musician of this universe. The poet offers his Song to

the master Musician whose music echoes in the blooming flowers or rustling leaves. He expresses this view in a letter he wrote to C.F.Andrews:

When I came to this world I had nothing but a reed given to me which was to find its only value in producing music. I left my school, I neglected my work, but I played with my reed and I played on it ‘ in mere idle sport’. But all along I had my one play mate who also in his play produced music among leaves, in rushing water, in silence of stars, in tears and laughter rippling into lights and shadows in the stream of human life. While my companion was this eternal piper, this spirit of play, I was nearest to the heart of the world, I knew its mother tongue, and what I sang was caught up by the chorus of the wind and water and the dance master of life.(SL 257)

Nature, irresistible, forms the theme of many of his poems. Images of Nature abound in his poems. But he was not a mere Nature poet who sang of the simple beauties in Nature.

Nature is the dwelling place of God. He is omnipresent. Tagore saw God in Nature, like William Wordsworth, who perceived: “O’er the wide earth, on mountain and on plain,/ Dwells in the affections and the soul of man/ A Godhead...”(Sonnet 14, 376). Tagore says that the beauty of the

objects in Nature has not imprisoned him. It rather liberated his sense enabling him to reach beyond himself. When the poet becomes one with Nature, he becomes one with God. The anguish of the adorer, the glorification of the Beloved slowly gets transformed into the bliss and rapture felt by a mystic. In the poem below he tells the readers how, contemplating on the beauties of Nature, he meets the “Eternal Stranger”:

I have looked on this picture in many a month of March when
the mustard is in bloom—this lazy line of the water and the
grey of the sand beyond, the rough path along the river-bank
carrying the comradeship of the field into the heart of the
village.

I have tried to capture in rhyme the idle whistle of the wind,
the beat of the oar-strokes from a passing boat.

I have wondered in my mind how simply it stands before me,
this great world: with what fond and familiar ease it fills my
heart, this encounter with the Eternal Stranger. (CPP 430)

2.6. Tagore’s Nature Mysticism

Tagore’s life is a quest to discern the Timeless and the Unchangeable Being in all beings, to see the Infinite in the finite and the Divine in the human. An awareness of the invisible God in the visible Nature and human life fills the poet’s mind with joy. When the narrow

walls of the self dissolve, it can share the mighty secrets of the universe. Man is then no longer a stranger on earth. The entire universe is an expression of God's love. Clouds, stars, rivers, flowers, birds, leaves and grass speak of God, His beauty, power and his eternal love. Thus, "through your stars you gaze deep into my dreams,/ you send your secrets in moonbeams to me, and I muse and my eyes dim with tears" (GW 643).

Nature is the milieu in which the poet and the Infinite meet. In The Religion of Man, the poet writes, "the first stage of my realisation was through my feeling of intimacy with Nature...." (10).

Even as a boy he was enchanted by Nature. It is evident that Nature, vibrant with its own inner spirit, was stamped in his memory.

I remember my childhood when the sunrise, like my play-fellow, would burst in to my bedside with its daily surprise of morning; when the faith in the marvelous bloomed like fresh flowers in my heart every day, looking into the face of the world in simple gladness; when insects, birds and beast, the common weeds, grass and the clouds had their fullest value of wonder; when the patter of rain at night brought dreams from the fairyland, and mother's voice in the evening gave meaning to the stars. (CPP 281)

Everything in Nature was his companion, his play-mate, who gave meaning to life. A tree becomes a vehicle for the poet to load profound insights of God's communion with man through Nature and also human spirit's triumph over death:

By mixed magic, blue with green, you flung

The song of the world's spirit at heaven

And the tribe of stars. Facing the unknown,

You flew with fearless pride the victory

Banner of the life-force that passes

Again and again through death's gateway. . . (SP 91)

A great number of Tagore's poems are alive with descriptions of Nature manifesting the love, truth and joy of the Creator. Nature becomes an incarnation of all His attributes. When one is not bound by the narrow limits of self, it loses its significance. He finds joy in the truth that unifies everything:

The rains sweep the sky from end to end. In the wild wet wind
the jasmines revel in their own perfume.

There is a secret joy in the bosom of the night, it is the joy of
the veiled sky in its hidden stars, the joy of the mid-night
forest in its hoarded bird-songs.

Let me fill my heart with it and carry it in secret through the day. (GW 643)

God is immanent in Nature. So there is a unity underlying every being in Nature – because blades of grass, leaves and flowers etc. throb with the same life. Man and Nature together form a perfect entity which makes the poet declare:

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are glorious by the touch of this world of life.

And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment. (G LXIX)

In “Sandhya Sangeet”, for the young and the lonely poet solace is in the arms of Nature. The poet beseeches the evening to come nearer:

Come, Evening, gently gently come !

Carrying on your arm your basket of dreams!

Humming your spells,

Weave your garland of dreams!

Crown my head with them!

Caress me with your loving hand! (qtd. in Ray, Artist in

Life 89)

The melancholy which pervades the poems in Sandhya Sangeet fades out in the poems of Prabhat Sangeet (1883). This change comes simultaneously with a change in his concept of Nature. The poet is engulfed with an overwhelming joy. "The Awakening of the Waterfall" bears testimony to this awareness of a new life in Nature. Thus the quest for the Ultimate ends with the discovery that the Divine envelops not only his self but also all the objects of the universe. This identification with Nature is much intensely realized in the later poems.

Even the smallest being made him wonder about the Infinite. The poet, like any other human being, has his limitations and his failures. But that is not the case with the elements of Nature. This makes the poet plead:

Free me as free are the birds of the wilds,

the wanderers of unseen paths.

Free me as free are the deluge of rain,

and the storm that shakes its locks and

rushes on to its unknown end.

Free me as free is the forest fire, as is

the thunder that laughs aloud
and hurls defiance to darkness. (CPP 276)

The true romantic fervour is reverberated all through these lines and so the readers of these lines are reminded of Shelley's lines: "If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear; / If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;" (330).

His rapport with Nature, its boundless beauty and its terrible moods find ready expression in lyric after lyric, that too in an exquisite manner. A sensuous pleasure in Nature's beauty and charm slowly develops into a mystic apprehension of Nature. The intense yearning to become one with Nature then manifests in different forms in different poems. Indeed he feels that this complete identification and sense of belongingness had been with him for ages. In The Fugitive, he writes:

I feel as if I had belonged to you ages before I was born. That is why, in the days when the autumn light shimmers on the mellowing ears of rice, I seem to remember a past when my mind was everywhere and even to hear voices as of play-fellows echoing from the remote and deeply veiled past.
(CPP 431)

He felt a strong fascination for the mighty mountains, rain and rivers, trees and clouds. Communion with the Divine is possible if there exists a harmony between the individual and Nature. In other words

communion with the Divine is accomplished through a communion with Nature. As B.C.Chakravorty rightly observes:

Tagore regards Nature as the primal storehouse of life out of which humanity has evolved through countless ages and births. He feels sad at the thought that his human birth has cut him off from the vaster life of Nature and he wants to merge himself again into this universal life. (47)

In another poem the poet speaks of a message that exhorts him to come across the worn-out track of age, through the gates of death. The eternal truth shall meet him again and again in the voyage of life from shore to shore.

Manasi (The Lady of the Mind, 1890) established the evolution of a mature poet. It had every indication of the gradual development of his poetic genius. Love, Nature and Death become the recurrent motifs of these poems. “Unending Love” is a fine example:

I seem to have loved you in numberless forms,
 numberless times,
 In life after life, in age after age forever,
 My spell-bound heart has made and re-made
 the necklace of songs
 That you take as a gift; wear round your neck

in your many forms

In life after life, in age after age forever.(SP 49)

In the words of Niharranjan Ray, the poems in Manasi suggest:

Nature and Man are one; they breathe the life and feel the same joys and sorrows and passions. What man feels of beauty and love is echoed back from depth of Nature's spirit; man and Nature together indeed form the wonderful and perfect whole which inspires the poet with grand and beautiful visions. (Artist in Life 123)

This is true of the whole Nature poetry of Tagore. The poet at the top of his creative moments draws spiritual nourishments from Nature. In Gitanjali, he prays to God:

I am like a remnant of a cloud of autumn uselessly roaming in the sky, O my sun ever glorious! Thy touch has not yet melted my vapour, making me one with thy light, and thus I count months and years separated from thee.

If this be thy wish and if this be thy play, then take this fleeting emptiness of mine, paint it with colours, gild it with gold, float it on the wanton wind and spread it in varied wonders.(LXXX)

Gitanjali renders wider dimensions of the poet's Nature Mysticism than the earlier poems. The whole world contains the pervading spirit of the Infinite:

Thy gifts to us mortals fulfill all our needs and yet run
back to thee undiminished.

The river has its every day work to do and hastens
through fields and hamlets; yet its incessant stream
winds towards the washing of thy feet.

The flower sweetens the air with its perfume; yet its
last service is to offer itself to thee.

Thy worship does not impoverish the world

From the words of the poet men take what meanings

please them; yet their last meaning points to thee.(LXXV)

Love for Nature and love for children are closely associated. Children, with their intuitive understanding, stand closer to Nature and to God. This reminds the readers of Wordsworth. But in the treatment of children Tagore surpasses him both in depth and width. Like a true romantic, he sees children as the representatives of God and of man's inborn innocence. Tagore's infinite tenderness towards them can be discerned in his collection of poems, The Crescent Moon.

...On the seashore of endless
 worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.
 They build their houses with sand and they play
 with empty shells. ...
 They know not how to swim, they know not how to
 cast nets. . . (CPP 51-2)

2.7.Tagore's Humanism

Humanism is an important characteristic of Tagore's mystical creed. He sees Nature as intimately related to God and man. He was aware of the miseries and sufferings of the humanity. He was not soaring in heights of self alienation. Love of Nature and God immanent in Nature leads him to the love for human beings, the manifestations of God. Niharranjan Ray endorses this view in his essay, titled, "Rabindranath Tagore and the Indian Tradition", when he states emphatically that Tagore's "intimacy with the collective psyche of the Indian people was always very close, much closer than any of his predecessors . . . Not for a moment did he forget that he arose out of his soil and was linked with his roots" (231).

The compassion and affection Tagore feels for children are quite unparalleled. He always considered children as messengers of God; a manifestation of the mystery in Nature. Childhood is a condition of perfect harmony with Nature. The child has an inherent awareness of an inner life

throbbing in Nature. So the world of the child, Nature and God are intertwined. He dwells in a land of bliss where there are no conflicts or struggles. The adults do not belong to this world. Khalil Gibran also shares this opinion when he writes:

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you,

.....

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow

Which you cannot visit, not even in your dream. (16)

Still one can long for a quiet corner in the world of children. Tagore wants to know the secret communion of the baby with God. He wants to be taken in for this mystical experience. This yearning is visible in “ Baby’s World”:

I wish I could travel by the road that crosses baby’s
mind, and out beyond all bounds;

Where messengers run errands for no cause between
the kingdoms of kings of no history;

Where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies

them, and Truth sets Fact free from its fetters. (CPP 58)

One of the marked differences between grown ups and children is that children cannot be tied down. Tagore believes that children have a severe

longing for freedom and their power of communication is tremendous. “Children with the freshness of their senses come directly to the intimacy of this world. This is the first great gift they have. They must accept it naked and simple and never lose their power of quick communication.” Tagore claims, in Towards Universal Man, “the founding of my school had its origin in the memory of that longing for freedom” (291).

The Crescent Moon depicts the child with his endless imagination, infinite capacity for love, his innocence, and his sentiments. Most of them are addressed to the mother. It unveils the child’s feelings. An understanding of the child’s close communion makes the poet consider the child as nearer to God. The following lines from “The Judge,” not only render unusual understanding of a child’s world, but underline the need for a more sympathetic treatment as well:

Say of him what you please, but I know my child’s failings.

I do not love him because he is good, but because he is my little child.

How should you know how dear he can be when you try to weigh his merits against his faults?

When I must punish him he becomes all the more a part of my being.

When I cause his tears to come my heart weeps with him.

I alone have a right to blame and punish, for he
only may chastise who loves.(CPP 59-60)

The poet asserts, “deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight” (G LXXIII). He has no existence away from this world, where sorrows abound. God resides not in the “lonely dark corner of a temple with all doors shut” (G XI). He is by the side of the tiller and the path maker. Likewise Tagore’s art is with the destitute and the poor. His song, he says:

. . . has put off her adornments. She has no pride
of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our
union; they would come between thee and me; their
jingling would drown thy whispers.(G VII)

Images that are at once sublime and simple flourish here. He would not go for form at the cost of content. But this strong stand in the least marred the exquisite beauty of his poems or his high imagination and romantic ideals.

Europe, according to Hiren Mukherji, was witnessing a “perilous spiritual lull which preceded the storm of World War I” when Gitanjali made its appearance in the Western world (1). In some way or other, the recurring subject of many poets at that time had been emptiness, void, stagnation and the state of being decayed. Tagore’s poems are in sharp contrast to this. No wonder Ezra Pound perceived “a saner stillness”, in

Tagore's poetry (296). The experience of the war artist Paul Nash is in conformity with the general impression of Tagore's poems as tranquillizing and spiritually uplifting:

I am glad to find my confused thoughts and feelings expressed so clearly and so beautifully that I have sometimes laughed for joy, sometimes felt tears come . . . I would read *Gitanjali* as I would read the Bible for comfort and for strength. (qtd. in Som 107)

Only a few poets can stand a match to the deep optimism, spiritual insight and tranquility expressed in his poems. His poems ring of unlimited joy because he is sure of the reassuring presence of God in his life:

In this laborious world of thine tumultuous with toil and with struggle, among hurrying crowds shall I stand before thee face to face.

And when my work shall be done in this world, O King of kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face. (G LXXVI)

Nearly thirty books of verses were written after the Gitanjali which were to pursue his mystical consciousness to new heights. Poem no. 5 in "Balaka" was written in 1914 when the First World War was raging on. This poem was translated into English in Fruit - Gathering:

The Boatman is out crossing the wild sea at night.

The mast is aching because of its full sails filled with
the violent wind.

Stung with the night's fang the sky falls upon the
sea, poisoned with black fear. . .(CPP 196-7)

Where this boatman is headed braving all the elements? What treasure is he trying to transport when the storm shrieks? He brings with him a single white rose and a song on his lips. When the boatman arrives at the shore 'blessed shall be the dust and the heart glad./ All doubts shall vanish in silence. . . (197). This is poetry at its powerful best. The same tone is extended to other poems as well, says B.C.Chakravorty:

"Balaka" or the flight of swans symbolizes the eternal march of humanity towards perfection. The ideas and aspirations of mankind of one age are realized in the succeeding ages. But the realization of some ideals gives rise to higher aspirations and the march continues for endless progress. (74)

The poet was very much aware of the conflicts, the anguish and the hatred in this world. But he firmly believed that they could be conquered by peace and love. He was convinced that the world, with the light and life – the gifts of the Infinite, could be found in the finite:

I have heard your call there
 Where man stands humiliated,
 Where the light dies in the heart of the afflicted,
 And the prisoner cries in his dungeon;
 Where the stone foundations totter,
 Where buried fire shakes the earth
 And the fetters of Ages lie shattered. (LP 37)

His great insistence on the wellbeing of man does not deter him from condemning the lust for money and power, and gross materialism. The humble life or the struggle for existence can be dignified, but not the mad flight after power or money, driven by selfishness. So he prays:

O Serene, O Free,
 in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness wipe away all
 dark stains from the heart of this earth.

.....

Man's heart is anguished with the fever of unrest,
 with the poison of self-seeking,
 with a thirst that knows no end.(GW 798-9)

At the same time, he had firm faith in the future of Humanity. "I shall not," he said in his last speech, "commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man, accepting his present defeat as final. He continues:

Perhaps the new dawn will come from this horizon, from the east ... The hour is near when it will be revealed that the insolence of might is fraught with great peril; that hour will bear out in full the truth of what the ancient sages have proclaimed, 'By unrighteousness, man prospers, gains what seems desirable, defeat enemies, but perishes at the root.

(Towards Universal Man 357)

The poems that Tagore wrote during the last ten years of his life are mainly prose-poems. The exuberance of youth is over; the assurance of the vision in the mature years is still there. It was a near encounter with death in 1937 which led him to the composition of Prantik, a collection of 18 unrhymed poems. Naturally, all the poems deal with death and triumph of life over death:

The body is mine-
 the carrier of the burden of a past—
 seemed to me like an exhausted cloud
 slipping off from the listless arm
 of the morning.
 I felt freed from its clasp
 in the heart of an incorporeal light
 at the farthest shore

of evanescent things.(qtd. in Ray, Artist in Life 292)

It should be noted that it is not towards darkness that he walked but towards a shore where everything is illuminated with the light of consciousness. He is not afraid of death as he is going back to the abode of his Father. This attitude towards death can be discerned in Gitanjali also:

In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play
and here I have caught sight of him that is formless.

My whole body and my limbs have thrilled with his
touch who is beyond touch; and if the end comes here,
let it come—let this be my parting word. (G XCVI)

This is not the resignation to death, but an expression of contentment at the realization of God. The later poems depict a more intense feeling for union with God who is immanent in Nature:

Walking with you, O restless One,

I find salvation

In the treasures of the journey.

In light and darkness,

In ever-new pages of creation,

In each new moment of dissolution

Echoes the rhythm of your dance and song. (LP 89)

Even when life gave Tagore the hardest blows he was not desperate and dejected. It has been pointed out by many critics that his last four books of verses, Rogshajyaya (From the sick- bed, 1940), Arogya (Recovery, 1941), Janmadine (On the Birthday, 1941), Sheshlekha (The Last Poems, 1941) reaffirm his faith in the divine spark of life. In poem 28 of “Janmadine”, Tagore is seen as exploring his existence in Nature. He says, “This life of mine’s been nurtured by a river.” The mysteries of birth and life are pondered further thus:

Ambassadors of the cosmos, that river,
 she who brings the far near, bids us greet
 the unknown at our doorsteps,--it was she
 who wove the day of my birth. And for ever
 on her streams,untied,my mobile home
 drifts from bank to bank. (IW 220)

This is perhaps the most illustrious expression of Eastern Mysticism regarding Man’s existence in Nature.

2.8. Diction, Symbols and Imagery:

The words used by the poet are simple, easy and highly suggestive. His language is closely knit with the everyday language of man. Words like ‘flute’, ‘lotus’, ‘shrine’, ‘clouds’, ‘birds’, ‘sun’, ‘rain’ etc. are copiously used by the poet. Words evoking pictures of the seasons,

orchards and landscapes pour forth in his poetry. The cowherd boy, women fetching water in pitchers by the pool, weaving of garlands and burning of earthen lamps recreates an atmosphere of agricultural society. His use of archaisms like 'thee' and 'thou' lend an additional charm to this environment of the ancient past.

Symbols have been used as significant tools by mystic poets to reveal the latent meaning of divinity in Nature. The most common objects of Nature are used in different contexts to symbolize the yearnings, the passion and the ideals of man. Nature, with its freshness of existence becomes symbol of the Eternal. The metaphysical qualities of these symbols are noticeable. Human body is most symbolically spoken as the 'frail vessel'. This body is emptied again and again to be filled with fresh life. Even though the body perishes the soul goes on forever. Clouds, storm, thunder, lightning and rainfall suggest the desire, the longing and the hope for the Union with the Divine:

The rain has held back for days and days, my God, in my arid heart. The horizon is fiercely naked – not the thinnest cover of a soft cloud, not the vaguest hint of a distant cool shower.

Send thy angry storm, dark with death, if it is thy wish, and with lashes of lightning startle the sky from end to end.(G XL)

Flower is another recurring symbol in Tagore's poetry. The little flower is an offering at the feet of the Divine. The sweet fragrance and the vibrant colours bursting out of the flower symbolize spiritual freedom and the yearning for unification with the Absolute.

On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying, and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded.

Only now and again a sadness fell upon me, and I started up from my dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the south wind.

That vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to me that it was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion.

I knew not then that it was so near, that it was mine, and that this perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart. (G XX)

“The Borderland-9” is a poem that deserves special mention here. Light or the dawn symbolizes the dispelling of darkness, that is, separation and alienation from God. The sun is also a manifestation of God. In light, the poet sees the Person who is everywhere in the Universe:

baggage brought from this shore.

On this boat I'll take no luggage at all

Alone, I'll go

made new again, to the new. (IG 188)

The child is a dear symbol to all mystic poets. Tagore also uses this symbol abundantly. The child is the representative of God on Earth. He is nearer to the Supreme Reality than the grown ups. The occasional illumination of the soul of a mystic is, to the child, a permanent state of bliss. Like Blake, Walter de la Mare and Wordsworth, Tagore believes that the child is a mystic who is near to heaven. So in the poem "Benediction" he sings, "Bless this little heart, this white soul that has won the kiss of heaven for our earth." (CPP 83)

The images used by Tagore lend his poems a sense of unity. An epithet, a metaphor or a simile constructs a powerful image. Tagore's imagery enhances the spiritual intensity and beauty of his poetry. It provides clarity and concreteness to his feelings and thoughts. The imagery used by Tagore can be broadly divided into three – direct images such as 'frail vessel' or 'flute of reed'; figurative images in which he discloses his visions or emotions using metaphors, similes or personifications. For instance : "All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony – and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight

across the sea” (G II). The poet also uses reciprocal images in which the general meaning and vehicles reciprocate. For example, in many poems both the poet and God appear to be singers, the poet and God offer flower as an expression of love.

The discussion on the imagery and symbols of Tagore’s Nature poetry can best be concluded with the comment of W.B.Yeats in his celebrated introduction to Gitanjali:

Flowers and rivers, the blowing conch shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or the parching heat, are images of the moods of that heart in union or separation; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing upon a lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself. A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image, as though we had walked in Rosetti’s willow wood, or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as a dream.

(12)

2.9. Conclusion

That Tagore is a mystical poet is rather an established fact. Some even consider him as a saint representing the great Wisdom of the East. But how does the poet devote his verse in his life-long seeking of God is not an equally well known fact. His enchanting, exquisite verse holds an attraction to the reader far beyond what words can draw. What Heidenstam, the Swedish poet and a member of the Nobel committee that awarded Nobel Prize to Tagore, wrote about Gitanjali can be applied to the whole poetry of Tagore: “The hours they gave me were special, as if I had been allowed to drink from a fresh and clear spring” (qtd. in Som 114). The mystic experiences charge his poetry with a new vitality. Let the poet’s own words vouchsafe this contention:

To the uninitiated it might appear that a flower has arrived all of a sudden: the story of its journey from a seed remains unknown [...] The same is true of my poetry, such has been my experience....He produces the tunes but the melodies are all in the custody of the perennial musician. Like this verse:

I was telling you my tale

I was telling you so many stories of my life

You put them to flames

You drowned them in your tears

That is how you rebuilt me

As an image after Your heart.

I guess this verse conveys that I set out to write what was straightforward and simple, something just for myself, but it is God's melody which transformed its meaning from the personal to the universal. It is I who put a first stroke on the canvas but it is He who filled it with colours I did not possess. (MLW 85-86)

Chapter 3

Further Ranges

3.1. Introduction

Amy Lowell paid a glowing tribute to Robert Frost with the following lines:

Majestic, remote, a quite beautiful pose,
 (Or escape, or indulgence, or all three, who knows?)
 Set solidly up in a niche like an oracle
 Dispensing replies which he thinks categorical.

 Yet note, if you please, this is but one degree
 Of Frost, there are more as you'll presently see,
 And some of them are so vexatiously teasing
 All this stored heat is needed to keep him from freezing.

Robert Frost has been described as a pastoral poet, Nature poet, modern poet, a poet of democracy and much more. But reading and rereading Frost leads one to the conclusion reached by Amy Lowell- "this is but one degree of Frost, there are more." He is still one of the most widely read poets of America, even though different critics attribute different reasons for that. In his poetry there is always an easy image, a

familiar image and people speaking every-day language with which the reader quickly identifies himself.

Despite this popularity, Frost and his poetry has always baffled the critics and the readers alike. Almost all aspects of the poetry and poetic creed of Frost like diction, tone, rhyming, metre, sensibility, approaches and perceptions were subjected to very strict scrutiny. Even after all these comprehensive discussions, Frost, just like an ice berg, is visible only partially.

His poetry is, by general apprehension, a persistent quest for the truth, revealing the isolation, alienation and limitations of man in this vast universe. It has transcended the boundaries of time and place with metaphysical significance and modern exploration of human Nature in all its beauty and contradictions. Poet Octavio Paz's observations will perhaps serve as an introduction to the discussion of Frost's philosophy and vision. In an interview with the American poet in 1945, the Mexican poet says:

. . . he looked like an ancient sage, the kind who prefers to observe the world from his retreat. But there was nothing ascetic in his looks, rather a manly sobriety. There he was, in his cabin, removed from the world, not to renounce it but to see it better. (2)

This chapter endeavours to analyse Frost's views on God-realisation and the Mystical consciousness of Nature as manifested in his poems. The mutual relation and influence of Man, Nature and God have been generally acknowledged as the hallmarks of Frost's poetry. At times being bitter-sweet, sometimes ironic, or simply marvelling at his surroundings, one can see autobiographical details in Frost's work.

3.2. Frost's Mystic Vision

It is not a well known fact that Frost had moments of illumination which had its reflections on his poetry. Rabbi Victor E. Reichert, Frost's neighbour and long-time friend, writes of one such revelation that the poet told him.

“Did you ever have a revelation?” Robert asked once in walking about Bread Loaf.

“What about you?” I countered.

.....

Then at last Frost said, “I've had insights that have come to me when I was riding high. Call them 'nature favors.' An owl that banked as it turned in its flight made me feel as if I'd been 'spoken to—favored.' ” The poems “Dust of Snow” and “A Passing Glimpse” flashed through my mind. (424)

“Dust of Snow” is a short poem in which the poet recounts the change of mood caused by a crow shaking down the dust of snow on him. It was an unexpected and pleasant experience from an unlikely source. The incident, according to the poet:

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued. (221)

Young Robert might have been considerably influenced by his mother’s mystical beliefs. Lawrence Thompson recounts a curious incident of Frost’s childhood:

He was still a child in San Francisco when he began to hear voices. If left alone in a room for some time, he was often simultaneously fascinated and terrified by hearing a voice, which spoke to him. . . .When he told his mother about these perplexing experiences, she seemed to understand them better than he did. Sympathetically she hinted that he shared, with her, mystical powers; (21)

Jay Parini, another biographer of the poet corroborates this fact. He quotes one friend of the poet as saying:

To the end of his life, Robert believed that he could hear voices, real voices. His poems came to him like voices from nowhere. He liked to be alone just to listen, to communicate with the spirit-world. (15)

3.3. God-concept of Frost

Whether Frost believed in God is a frequently asked question in interviews with the poet. Much debate has taken place in this regard. The poet's daughter Lesley Frost regards this question as "quite superfluous." She refers to an interview in which the poet has remarked, "I despise religiosity. But I have no religious doubts. Not about God's existence, anyway" (313).

Frost's approach towards God who created this universe and the ways of God are noteworthy. Though he was baptized in the Swedenborgian church by his mother, he quit it in his later years. He does not side up with any religious doctrine but at the same time he has faith in God, the Creator of this universe. In a letter to Louis Untermeyer, he writes:

I was brought up a Swedenborgian. I am not a Swedenborgian now. But there's a good deal of it that's left with me. I am a mystic. I believe in symbols. (qtd. in Bagby 380)

The spontaneous sermon Frost delivered at the Rockdale Avenue Temple throws more light to his concept of religion and God. He began by saying wisdom is better than bravery. He explains:

Now religion always seems to me to come round to something beyond wisdom. It's a straining of the spirit forward to a wisdom beyond wisdom ...the fear of God always has meant the fear that one's wisdom, one's own wisdom, one's own human wisdom is not quite acceptable in His sight...Always the fear that it may not be quite acceptable. That, I take, is the fear of God, and is with every religious nature, always.

(Reichert, Faith of Frost 420)

Frost believes in the existence of an Almighty, an invisible power which gives an order to the universe. Through reason alone one cannot understand God. The close relation between matter and spirit or soul reveals the essence of life:

And God has taken a flower of gold
 And broken it, and used therefrom
 The mystic link to bind and hold
 Spirit to matter till death come. (FP 21)

To understand the God of Frost, an understanding of the streak of mirth in him is essential. Nothing is closer to truth than the reply made by

Bishop Henry W. Hobson to a man who said that Frost was an atheist. Reichert remembers the bishop's words: "Robert Frost was no atheist. What you don't understand and Frost did was that God has a sense of humor!" Reichert terms this relationship of the poet with God as "the playful intimacy of a naughty grand child" (Faith of Frost, 416). The poet is able to promise to God: "Forgive, O Lord, my little jokes on Thee / And I'll forgive Thy great big one on me" (FP 428).

Frost never resorts to any categorical statements in his conception of God. It is typical of him to be playfully serious in his concept of God. Marion Montgomery emphasises this point thus:

He does not choose to make any sweeping statements about God any more than he does about nature or man. This has occasioned the belief among some critics that Frost is at best agnostic. But Frost feels that Heaven "gives its glimpses to those/Not in position to look too close."(141)

It has been pointed out that transcendentalism influenced Frost's God-concept very much. The scope of transcendental ideas which had become a powerful movement in America was much expanded and thus included, among many ideals, Swedenborgianism and Oriental Philosophy. Frost was also attracted by the concept of 'Brahma' as propounded by

Emerson. God according to him transcended the limits of human knowledge. Yvor Winters points out:

Frost has said that Emerson is his favorite American poet, and he himself appears to be something of an Emersonian. Emerson was a Romantic pantheist: he identified God with the universe; he taught that impulse comes directly from God and should be obeyed, and that through surrender to impulse we become one with God; he taught that reason is man-made and bungling and should be suppressed...Frost believes in the rightness of impulse, but does not discuss the pantheist doctrine. . . (60)

His perception of God is quite different. He firmly believed that God's ways are mysterious and beyond the scope of human survey. He had a strong opposition against empirical methodology or sensory impressions practised by the modern society in search of God. Guy Rotella opines thus:

Frost thought that there are no validations, or that if there are, they are inaccessible to human consciousness. Any appearance of external validation for human meaning results from metaphoric impositions of pattern where none demonstrably exists, and from the human tendency to take those impositions as fact or gospel. (58)

Frost's father was a puritan. Puritans also believed in the existence of a transcendental God who is the guarantor of the universe. For them Nature was a composition of God which could be read for His presence, His truth. So the poet writes in "Time Out":

It took that pause to make him realize
 The mountain he was climbing had the slant
 As of a book held up before his eyes
 (And was a text albeit done in plant). (355)

Whether this text is understood or not depends upon the observer. But what Nature does is to provide its moments for reflections.

The poem, "Kitty Hawk," according to Dorothy Hall, "is a crucial statement of Frost's belief" (325). To Lawrence Thompson, the poem is "a partial autobiography of his early life and the philosophy of his maturity" (Biography 419). The poet envisages man as the creation of God. Therefore he should follow God's demonstration:

But God's own descent
 Into flesh was meant
 As a demonstration
 That the supreme merit
 Lay in risking spirit
 In substantiation. (FP 435)

The question as to what is the meaning and nature of this ‘demonstration’ and ‘risk’ has caused several interpretations of the poem. A deeper penetration of the mysteries of life and the universe can be attained by charging the material world with the spiritual. The poet himself speaks of the poem:

My theme is that the only ‘event’ in all history is science plunging deeper into matter. . . . In taking us deeper and deeper into matter, science has left all of us with this great misgiving, this fear that we won’t be able to substantiate spirit. (qtd. in Dorothy Hall, Frost 64)

Though an exploration for Absolute Truth is a constant theme in many of his poems, it was in his later poems that he expressed much about his views of God. The two masques, A Masque of Reason and A Masque of Mercy are explorations and evaluations of man’s relation to God and God’s relationship to man. Man with his limitations is not able to comprehend God. The book keeper in A Masque of Mercy laments, “We were not given eyes or intellect/ For all the light at once the source of light -/For wisdom that can have no counter wisdom.”

But the human perception is not able to figure out the Eternal Wisdom. The keeper is only able to perceive “A light that falls diffused

over my shoulder/And is reflected from the printed page/And bed of flowers so as not to blind me” (515). Similarly,

In our subscription to the sentiment

Of one God, we provide He shall be one

Who can be many Gods to many men,

.....

’ Twas said the lesser gods were only traits

Of the one awful God. Just so the saints

Are God’s white light refracted into colors. (515-6)

If one is cognizant of this white light, the rough zones will vanish. So “Meditate nothing. Learn to contemplate/Contemplate glory. There will be a light/Contemplate Truth until it burns your eyes out” (517). This contemplation might lead to glimpses of heaven sometimes. When there are no glimpses, man is a solitary figure isolated from a universe he cannot comprehend proclaiming that ‘I have been acquainted with night’ or that he is scared of his own desert places.

To sum up, Frost’s God is an Almighty who endows this universe with a divine order. He cannot be conceived through logic or reason. He is the Eternal Wisdom. He is transcendent.

3.3. Mystical Consciousness in the Poetry of Frost

Frost has proclaimed himself as a mystic. As quoted above in this study, he also declares that he is a believer in symbols. But it seems that there are very few pronouncements of Frost as a mystic poet. Nonetheless many critics have pointed out in Frost's poems a pattern of revelation and concealment as in The Bible. The notion of mysticism needs to be rescinded to analyse the poetry of Robert Frost.

Literature, like all spiritual discourses, is a manifestation of the experience of God. Joyce Carol Oates says:

Out of the spontaneous mystical experience of the individual, we have, gradually, inevitably, the intellectualization of that experience—religion, philosophy, science, formal art, civilization itself. (4)

In Frost, this experience as well as its manifestation in poetry is slow and gradual. In his early poems he is reticent about the 'ways of God.' But he did move away from this state to that of sight and then to insight, the phases of which are quite discernible in his poetry. The very first few lines of 'Astrometaphysical' simply state how he has loved the changing skies of His Lord.

Lord, I have loved Your sky,
Be it said against or for me,
Have loved it clear and high,

Or low and stormy; (FP 388)

The Poet's prayers do not demand anything. They only seek the strength to live in the present. "A Prayer in Spring" is an example. One need not be unduly worried about the harvest. It is of no use because man is not in control of the harvest. It is uncertain. In the larger scheme of things our hopes may or may not be fulfilled. It is not that the poet is unconcerned about tomorrow, but it is wiser to focus attention on today and this is love, love towards God also. So he says:

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers today;

And give us not to think so far away

As the uncertain harvest; keep us here

All simply in the springing of the year.

.....

And make us happy in the darting bird

That suddenly above the bees is heard,

The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,

And off a blossom in mid-air stands still.

For this is love and nothing else is love,

The which it is reserved for God above (FP 12)

Occasionally, in a state of contemplation man perceives something in the cosmos that beckons him to a truth beyond. This can be described as

a preliminary stage of illumination. The speaker in “For Once Then Something,” describes how he saw deep down in a well “a shining surface picture.”

Once, when trying with chin against a well-curb,
 I discerned, as I thought, beyond the picture,
 Through the picture, a something white, uncertain,
 Something more of the depths—and then I lost it. (FP 225)

A drop of water from a fern created a ripple and it was blurred and blotted out. The speaker is now left wondering, “. . . what was that whiteness/ Truth? A pebble of quartz?” He recognizes that it is what it is for once and it is then something. The wholeness of vision is denied to the speaker-narrator. The sudden illuminating moment is lost forever. The words like “something white”, “uncertain”, “blurred” etc. are quite suggestive. These suggestive qualities, richness of meaning and mystic haze are found in Frost’s mystic poems.

The well into which the poet gazes can be a symbol of one’s own self, one’s own consciousness. Piercing the mystery, he sees something white. Mario L. D’Avanzo rightly remarks that “While ‘Birches’ aspire upward, ‘For Once, Then, Something’ gazes downward to a mystical essence” (89). The ‘whiteness’ perhaps indicates a vision of the Absolute Truth.

Guy Rotella's analysis of this poem is significant:

In a sense, this poem is a version of the story of the Fall ...*Once*, human beings had access to truth and could discern it through the world's transparent surface. But then some drop, some fall, occurred. The world became opaque, so that now it gives us back no more than the image of ourselves, our projections. Still, the memory of that one-time penetrating glimpse keeps us kneeling religiously, heroically at well-curbs, writing poems or philosophies, seeking the something "deeper" we may never see. (84)

Mystical experiences are usually short-lived. Occasionally an experience becomes a moment of sudden illumination. The focus of the poem, "Happiness Makes up in Height for What It Lacks in Length," is such an experience in the life of a couple. Here the man is surveying his past life which was dominated by tragedies and sorrows. He wonders from where he got the lasting sense of happiness to survive and he remembers one perfect day they had:

When starting clear at dawn

The day swept clearly on

To finish clearly at eve.

I verily believe

My fair impression may
 Be all from that one day
 No shadow crossed but ours
 As through its blazing flowers
 We went from house to wood
 For change of solitude. (FP 333)

This radiant experience, though it did not last for long changed everything for them. The couple was rapturously happy for one single day. But the intensity of happiness makes up for what it lacked in duration. As W.G.O'Donnel points out, this experience "transfigured everything and acted as an insight into the strength of man's spirit that can suffer evil yet remember good" (54).

This poem resembles "Going for Water" in A Boy's Will. In both pieces the central characters are a couple who live in solitude and go towards wood. The couple in "Going for Water" shares the joy of youth and companionship. The following lines indicate it: "We ran as if to meet the moon/ That slowly dawned behind the trees" (18). But the couple in "Happiness Makes Up in Height" speaks with Knowledge of experiences, the experiences tempered with the tragic discoveries of life. The transition from innocence in the early poems to knowledge in the later poems is vivid. Lawrance Thompson asserts:

. . . From his early lyrics in A Boy's Will (Such as, for example "A Prayer in Spring") to his last major poem "Kitty Hawk" Frost makes representations of the venture of spirit into matter, in ways best understood if interpreted as expressions of worship, even as expressions of prayer. His basic point of departure (and return) is a firmly rooted belief in both Nature and human Nature as at least poetically relatable within a design which has its ultimate source in a divine plan . . . (Theory of Poetry 32)

Once being reassured of the mystic experience, the poet searches for some solutions to the human problem. Certainly he is seeking a brief interval away from this "pathless wood." Very fervently he expresses his wish: "I'd like to get away from earth awhile / And then come back to it and begin over." (FP 122)

But his yearning to go beyond this world is accompanied by a fear of death. The sense of mystery behind this fear is also note worthy. But what is more notable is the poet's desire to come back to this earth to "love." Mystical experience, for him, is not an escape from this world.

In "Wild Grapes", the terrified little girl does not 'let go' of the branch she clings to. She pays no attention to her brother's coaxing. The brother tries to console her and finally finds a way out to rescue her. He

bends the tree down and she touches the ground again. The brother mocks her for being such a weightless creature that even the birches can swing her into space. But the lesson that she should have learned, ‘the first step in knowledge’ is that she should learn to ‘let go’ and that she shouldn’t cling onto things precious for her. But she is like the majority who vainly wish that they could let go with the heart, with the mind and discover that it is next to what is impossible.

The plight of the little girl is that of the common man who cannot give up little things. But he hardly realizes that his possessions actually restrain him. It separates him from others and from God. Freedom is when one learns to ‘let go’ and lets go everything. The undertones of Eastern mystical thoughts, especially the transitoriness of worldly gains or the concept of *Maya* are quite clear. This is also an indication of the phase of purgation in which the self realises the impediments which stand in its way towards God.

Man’s attempt to understand the world around him may not succeed always. “The Trial by Existence” explains how the soul in its earthly journey retains no memory of the other world. Only through struggles and sufferings on earth one can get rid of pride. So God says to the soul which has willingly chosen the life on earth:

. . . the pure fate to which you go

Admits no memory of choice

Or the woe were not earthly woe

To which you give the assenting voice. (FP 21)

Thus the soul in Frost's poem is much unlike Wordsworth's, which proclaims "trailing clouds of glory" of the other world (247). The human mind at birth is entirely blank. So the poet asserts that even the bravest who are slain will discover in Paradise that "the utmost reward of daring should be still to dare" (19). Marion Montgomery in her penetrating study of the poem suggests:

It is futile to attempt a complete explanation of why there are so many difficulties to prevent man's taking in and building his garden in the world. Man's real virtue, it argues is to dare, to seek to build the wall which allows the garden to flourish for a time. (143)

In his essay "On Grief and Reason," Nobel Laureate Joseph Brodsky, lists "Acquainted With The Night" among the poems "dealing with the dark nights of the soul" (17). The poem presents a city of night. Life in the city is artificial, away from Nature. As in many other poems of Frost, whenever man is away from Nature, he is lonely and anguished. The poet-speaker goes out of his home and returns while it is raining. He casts a glance at the "saddest city lane" and passes the watchman on his beat. He

suddenly hears a cry from another street. This cry from far off enhances the awfulness of the scene. He stood still to listen to that sound. The poet then moves further and hears the “luminary clock” that stood “still at an unearthly height” proclaiming the time that was “neither wrong nor right.” In the mechanical, impersonal world of the city the clock at the “unearthly height” has no sense of good or evil. The poem begins and ends with the statement “I have been one acquainted with the night” (FP 255). The repetition enhances the darkness that pervades the poem. As Manorama Trikha observes:

Each man has to be acquainted with the “night” on his own; the night sets the image for the entire poem and “I” implies every man. Theologically speaking, the night may stand for ignorance of evil; symbolically, it represents the sadness that life has to offer. (154)

The poem “Sitting by a Bush in Broad Sunlight” is a typical example of intellectual mysticism. It is a religious poem. The intuitive faculty of the poet makes him a supervisor of “faith” and “life.” God withdrew from the world, after declaring that He was true. Even though God has withdrawn the tokens of evidence of Himself, one must not scoff about His existence. The universe is still charged with the grandeur of God. Critics are of the opinion that the bush by which the poet sits is the burning

bush of Moses. It no longer burns now because the revelation has been given. All life, all creations persist from that one revelation. Thus the poem ends with a positive note of affirmation of faith:

God once spoke to people by name.

The sun once imparted its flame.

One impulse persists as our breath;

The other persists as our faith. (FP 266)

Metaphoric language is one of the prime attributes of Frost's poetry. It renders an unusual depth to his mysticism. The poet's own words vouchsafe this:

There are many other things I have found myself saying about my poetry, but the chiefest of this is that it is metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority. . . every poem is a metaphor inside or it is nothing. (FCP 786)

A fine example for such poems that require a symbolic interpretation is "Neither Out Far Nor in Deep." It asserts the deep mystery of Nature and the limitation of man's vision. The people looking towards the sea "cannot look out far" and they "cannot look in deep" (FP 301). Their vision is limited only to the surface. The poem, according to Reginald Cook, "is the continued image of human limitation" (289). But this does not mean that

they should not look towards the sea. D'Avanzo calls it "A calmer search for vision." He adds that the poem expresses "religious affirmation and the Emersonian idea that nature mirrors the eternal" (101-2)

This haunting lyric lends itself to several interpretations. The people standing on the seashore have their backs turned to the land and are looking towards the sea. The land symbolises the world of change and flux while the sea represents the perfect world of imagination. Thus the quest for the mysterious, the far-off and the unknown is communicated by means of symbols. Man is very small and unimportant in this vast, changing universe. But still he continues to watch and hope for the truth wherever it may be. What is laudable is man's courage in facing an unpredictable universe.

The delight of remembering something as expressed in the line, "I didn't know I knew" is quite different an attitude from the early Romantics or the late Moderns (FP 301). Frost is always able to acknowledge the limitations of human knowledge. But at the same time he tirelessly continues his quest for truth. This is visible in "The Secret Sits." The poet says, "We dance around in a ring and suppose/But the Secret sits in the middle and knows" (FP 362).

"Directive" is considered to be one of his most philosophical poems. Written with a rare combination of humour and matter of fact acceptance,

this many-layered poem becomes memorable for several reasons. The opening lines direct the reader to another world, to a “time made simple by the loss of detail, burned, dissolved and broken off” (FP 377). Nothing is certain but the journey.

For the traveller, the journey is an ordeal. But it is noteworthy that the destination is the life-giving brook. After the strenuous and demanding journey, when you reach the brook: “Here are your waters and your watering place / Drink and be whole again beyond confusion” (FP 379). In closeness to Nature, confusions are allayed. Perhaps John Le Vay has put it most aptly when he claims: “Frost as the creedless (though not faithless) ‘guide,’ ‘only has at heart (our) getting lost’ that is losing our confused, fragmented artificial self; find our ‘simple,’ ‘whole’ natural self” (43). This can be called the culmination of the mystical consciousness in Frost.

3.4. Concept of Nature

Frost’s attitude to Nature also has been much debated upon. Most of the readers readily agree that Frost is a Nature poet as they come across flowers, woods, trees, snow, spring, butterflies etc. in his poems. Many of the critics also share this view. But this is just a surface evaluation of the poet. He was not just a bard who sang of the wonders of flowers and mountain streams. He is a Nature poet with a difference like Wordsworth. Robert W. French comments on the Nature element in the poetry of Frost:

Rightly or wrongly, Robert Frost has achieved a reputation as a poet of nature; and it is true that one tends to think of him posed against the landscapes of rural New England. He may in his poems be looking at birches, or stopping by woods on a snowy evening, or picking apples, or listening to the thrush or the ovenbird; wherever he is, he seems to be participating in the life of nature, deriving sustenance from it, and finding in it a deeply satisfying source of pleasure.(155)

It is true that Nature is the subject of most of Frost's poems. But his concept of Nature is fundamentally different from Nature as conceived by the romantics. Nature is not merely a fountain of endless beauties. To Robert Frost, Nature is invariably connected to man. He places equal emphasis on man and his attitudes towards Nature. He is perhaps reiterating this aspect when he claims in an interview, "I guess I'm not a Nature poet. I have only written two poems without a human being in it" (Montgomery 138).

A survey of the poems of Robert frost from A Boy's Will to the last untitled poem "In Winter in the Woods Alone," published in In the Clearing, reveals that Nature remains an enchanting phenomenon for the poet. At times, man experiences a brief harmony with Nature. Invariably something else intrudes as if to establish that everything cannot be

explained by reason alone. Some times it seems that the poet is stating what is obvious. When he does so, he has some other design also. An event, an object or the backdrop of Nature gradually acquires greater significance. It begins to offer a range of interpretations. A tree at the window, the tuft of flowers or blueberries reveals several layers of the reality of life. His meditations on Nature mark a clear departure from the traditional notions.

Over the years, the concept of Nature Poetry has undergone rapid changes. For a long time, Nature Poetry was interpreted from the Romantic's point of view. Poetry, with a philosophical view of Nature was considered Nature Poetry. Robert Frost's concept of Nature is quite different from that of the Romantics. Like a true Nature-mystic he wistfully yearns for this world of perfection, where man is in harmony with all life. He explores Nature and in his journey of exploration he almost always comes across a sort of veil between the soul of Man and Nature. When this veil is lifted, even if it is only for a moment, man has a glimpse of heaven, a world of perfection. Brodsky tries to connect this exploration with the quest for self realisation when he says: "Nature for this poet is neither friend nor foe, nor it is the backdrop for human drama; it is this poet's terrifying self portrait" (8).

Frost observes and records whatever he sees in Nature. He finds spiritual echoes in it but at times it is impersonal and baffling. While the nineteenth century poets had a highly serious attitude to Nature, Frost is half serious, half playful, in his approach to Nature. One of his later poems is of particular interest here. It seems to state something about his poetic technique also. The poet himself warns the readers not to take him too seriously: “It takes all sorts of in—and outdoor schooling /To get adapted to my kind of fooling” (FP 470).

Nature constantly fascinates him. Whether it is the dark lovely woods, a songbird, a butterfly or the falling of snow, images drawn from Nature pour forth incessantly. “Birches”, “Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening”, “The Tuft of Flowers”, “A Minor Bird”, “A Hillside Thaw”, and “The Tree at My Window” are just some of the examples. “A Hillside Thaw”, gives a captivating picture of how the sun shines on the snow on hillside. It is like:

Ten million silver lizards out of snow!

As often as I’ve seen it done before

I can’t pretend to tell the way it’s done.

It looks as if some magic of the sun

Lifted the rug that bred them on the floor . . .(FP 237).

For him Nature is both benevolent and intimidating. “Nothing Gold Can Stay”, “Leaves Compared with Flowers” and “Our Hold on The Planet” are some poems which illustrate this aspect. For Frost, “Nature is at once harsh and mild. Man’s relation to Nature, as to his fellows, is both together and apart” (Gerber, Frost 132). Even if Nature has her darker moods, man has an advantage over her. At least, the poet thinks so, for he writes in “Our Hold on The Planet”:

There is much in nature against us. But we forget:
 Take nature altogether since time began,
 Including human nature, in peace and war,
 And it must be a little more in favor of man . . . (FP 349)

As John F. Lynen points out “there is bleakness in his landscape and a sharpness of outline in imagery quite foreign even to Wordsworth’s Cumberland. . .” (Nature and Pastoralism 125). “Desert Places” gives a picturesque description of snow fall and night fall in deep woods. Everything is under a heavy blanket of snow: “A blanker whiteness of benighted snow/ With no expression, nothing to express” (FP 296). The stark whiteness of the snow against total darkness of the woods is quite frightening. Its indifference (“no expression”) and lack of interest (“nothing to express”) are almost smothering. The emptiness of the

landscape is similar to the desolation that the speaker feels within him. What is more disturbing is the emptiness felt in his mind. Thus Nature and its moods acquire great significance in the emotional landscape of the poet.

Any discussion on the concept of Nature of Frost will not be complete without mentioning his famous letter to The Amherst Student. He writes:

There is at least so much good in the world that admits of form and the making of form. And not only admits of it, but calls for it. . . . In us nature reaches its height of form and through us exceeds itself. . . . The artist, the poet, might be expected to be the most aware of such assurances, but it is really everybody's sanity to feel it and live by it. (Sel Letters 418)

A concern with the form of poem becomes part of poetic activity itself. So the poet declares, "Let chaos storm!/Let cloud shapes swarm!/I wait for form" (FP 308). This contention invariably leads to a discussion on the Nature Mysticism of the poet.

3.5. Nature Mysticism

In Frost's poetry the relation between man and Nature is an extension of the relation between self and Nature. Usually, with a glint of

humour the poet chooses the specific to embody the universal. His attitude towards Nature varies from poem to poem. Mystical consciousness of Nature or rather a sense of oneness with Nature elevates man to a higher level. "A Tuft of Flowers" serves as an example. Nature, like a true companion leads him out of gloom and loneliness to a state of happiness. Someone had mowed the grass before the poet reached his workplace to turn the hay. A bewildered butterfly was looking for the tuft of flowers on which it rested the day before. Suddenly it flew towards 'a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook' unnoticed by the poet. The poet understands that the mower had left it as an expression of his own love of Nature.

The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
 By leaving them to flourish, not for us,
 Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him,
 But from sheer morning gladness at the brim. (FP 23)

The poet now feels a kinship with the mower, his loneliness vanishes and he experiences happiness within. Thus when he seeks the mower for lunch he states, "Men work together, I told him from the heart/ Whether they work together or apart" (FP 23). The beauty of the poem comes not only from this wisdom but from the drawing out of a gloomy self to an affiliation, a communion with Nature and men. Thomas March and Harold Bloom write:

Frost frames the mower's moment of noticing as an opportunity to come to understanding by means of reflection. It is also a moment of choice between facile dreams of ease and the more rejection of such dreams in favor of an appreciation of the mystery of the moment and the speculation it engenders.(54)

An analysis of his poems from the early collection A Boy's Will to his later collection A Witness Tree reveals that when man remains distant and detached from Nature, his loneliness intensifies. When he is one with Nature, he is at home with the world. "A Prayer in Spring" from A Boy's Will, demonstrates this. Otherwise the loneliness can be quite frightening. "The Most of It" displays this isolation in a shocking manner. Man, in his ignorance might think that "he kept the universe alone" But at the same time he yearns for a response from Nature. What he wants is not a mocking echo of his own

He would cry out on life, that what it wants

Is not its own love back in copy speech,

But counter-love, original response

And nothing ever came of what he cried. (FP 338)

The buck crashing down the cliffs, swimming across the lake, which lands pouring like a waterfall does not hold the desolate man's attention.

His self-centered loneliness thus deserves pity. He is so immersed in himself that he fails to appreciate even the best that Nature can offer.

“The Most of It” is an impressive poem in many ways. Yvor Winters comments:

Frost’s buck has much the same kind of symbolic grandeur as the apocryphal beast in “The Second Coming” by Yeats, and he has the advantage of greater reality; the style combines descriptive precision with great concentration of meaning and at the same time is wholly free from decoration, ineptitude, and other irrelevancy... In this poem especially and to some extent in “Acquainted with the Night” the poet confronts his condition fairly and sees it for what it is, but the insight is momentary: he neither proceeds from this point to further understanding nor even manages to retain the realization that he has achieved.(79)

However this is only partially true. Even though the lyric lays emphasis on man’s isolation, it also brings out the magnificent in Nature. If man is not able to recognize the spiritual strength that rests in Nature, it is his limitation. Randall Jarrell considers “The Most of It” as a pointer towards Frost’s ‘stubborn truthfulness.’

...if the universe never gives us either a black or a white answer, but only a black- and -white one that is somehow not an answer at all, still its inhuman not-answer exceeds any answer that we human beings could have thought of or wished for.(91)

Amelia Klein comments on the poem's spiritual significance as follows:

'it' may be the incarnation of some abstract meaning, spirit risked in substantiation . . . yet if 'it' gestures toward a meaning beyond itself, it is most striking in its massive, crashing and splashing corporeal presence. It does not prove human, nor does it prove that nature contains or complies with human intelligence. . . (367)

The natural world is magnificent and impressive. But at times it shines brighter because of the blackness of its background. Possibilities of danger always lurk beneath the calm surface. "Spring Pools" as the title indicates, begins with a beautiful description of the pools in forests which reflect "the total sky almost without defect" and the flowers that grow beside them. But there are grim realities also. "The trees that have it in their pent up buds/ To darken Nature and being summer woods . . . is a good example (245). The pools like the flowers beside them will disappear.

They will be sucked up by the roots of the trees to aid summer growth. This vision of beauty almost at once followed by fearful realities enhances the loveliness of Frost's Nature Poems. Beauty and terror are thus two sides of the same coin. To appreciate the beauty, one has to bear with the darker forces of the universe.

Attempts to identify himself with Nature are present in many of his poems. Many critics conclude that the poet at the last moment withdraws.

Philip L. Gerber comments:

When Frost considers individual frustrations and joys, or when he writes of his "lover's quarrel with the world", he does not hesitate to probe deeply and offer explicit statements of his findings. But as he approaches the boundary between things of this world and the next, that thin line "beyond which God is", his approach is more timorous. (Frost 141-2)

But a close reading of his poems reveals that this is not so. Most of his Nature Poems are contemplative in mood and therefore, mystical in character. Nature inspires and motivates the poet in him. Perfection is hard to achieve. Even if Nature achieves it, it does not last for long. An eight line lyric "Nothing Gold Can Stay" illustrates this. Nature's first green is gold but it is the hardest hue to hold. It holds only for a short time. Change is inevitable in the scheme of things. Thus the fall of man was

unavoidable. Dawn has to give way to the harsh reality of day. Whatever is pure, innocent and simple cannot stay. This perception, culminating in an understanding of the transience of the universe is essential for spiritual growth. It is this wisdom that makes his poems essentially mystical.

Nature holds its own secret that goes beyond man's intellect. "A Passing Glimpse" gives us a pleasant picture of the flowers the poet often saw from a passing car or train. They are gone before he can even recognize it. He tries to name those flowers but fails. No vision of the ideal can last long. May be the truth is that "Heaven gives its glimpses only to those/ Not in position to look too close" (248).

"The Pasture" is a short poem that serves as a prologue for A Boy's Will. Perhaps it held a special value for the poet because he used this as an introduction to his collected edition and The Complete Poems. On the surface level the poem is simply an invitation:

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;

I'll only stop to rake the leaves away

(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):

I shan't be gone long—You come too. (FP 1)

But critics point out that this apparent invitation to the reader contains many levels of meaning. The preparations to clean the pasture spring are noteworthy. The poet has to rake the leaves, most probably dead and

decayed leaves, away. Then he has to wait and watch for the water to clear. In one's search for the Eternal Truth and Wisdom what is dead and decayed should be swept away. The real Truth will then reveal itself.

Ronald Bieganowski in his study of "The Pasture" points out that the poem "conveys the movement toward an inner life" (31). He asserts that the poet invites the readers to "come too" as a "spiritual companion" (31). Frank Lentricchia maintains that "The Pasture" deals with "a type of salvation". He elaborates:

And salvation means, in Frost's world, that particular moment when "mature," self-conscious, and complex awareness is suppressed, and when single, naïve vision- a return to the Edenic innocence of unself – consciousness within a physically soothing pastoral scene – is encouraged. In the redemptive moment – and in Frost it is often not much more than a moment – we transcend our isolation and the perplexities of our human condition, as we are released from the "siege of hateful contraries". (25)

Thus Nature provides him with an insight that helps him to penetrate deeper into the mystery of his own being. A spiritual illumination about the life of man thus comes from the life of Nature. It is a revelation, mainly a self-revelation. As Donald J. Greiner correctly notes: "Faced with

an experience which has traditionally ended in elegy or prayer, Frost turns it into an opportunity for knowledge” (232).

3.6. Frost’s Humanism

Nature, for Frost, is filled with paradoxes. This paradoxical character of Nature is a pointer towards the paradoxes in man. Man creates barriers around him. He can survive if he accepts Nature with all its paradoxes and inconsistencies. Apparently Frost considers Nature as “a little more in favour of man” (FP 349). Philip L. Gerber comments:

In keeping with his legacy from Emerson, Frost visualizes man always cradled within nature, totally immersed in environment. Nature is first of all the open book with lessons on every page awaiting the sensible reader. The need for self-reliance and individualism becomes apparent to the least perceptive....Beyond this, man learns his limitations, another lesson for survival. What man can do and cannot do; where he is allowed to stray and where he is prohibited; the length, breadth, height and depth of his domain: these recognitions must be absorbed...Frost illustrates man’s refusal to accept decreed limits. (Frost 132-3)

Even in the midst of terrible sorrows, life can be faced fearlessly if one has faith in God. “Bereft” is a Nature poem where the speaker

willingly admits that he has no one left but God. The sorrow and the loneliness felt by him get reflected in the dismal landscape. The somber clouds and the hissing leaves that blindly struck at his knee complete the picture of isolation. Therefore, he says:

Word I was in the house alone
 Somehow must have gotten abroad,
 Word I was in my life alone,
 Word I had no one left but God. (FP 251)

When everything around him turns hostile he still has God with him. This ray of optimism, though not explicitly stated, can be found in many other poems. Salvation is possible only when one has absolute faith in God. Man might feel that many injustices had been done to him. But he should go on with courage, “To overcome the fear within the soul/ And go ahead to any accomplishment” (FP 521). God’s mercy will assuage all the injustices imposed upon him:

And I can see that the uncertainty
 In which we act is a severity,
 A cruelty, amounting to injustice
 That nothing but God’s mercy can assuage. (FP 520)

Thus Frost's God is one who deeply cares for man "and will save him, no matter how many times or how completely he has failed" (qtd. in Montgomery 145).

A life of harmony can be attained only if one can rise above one's limited egocentric view of life. In "A Minor Bird" the poet describes how he tried to drive away a bird that sang by his house all day. He even clapped his hands to scare it away. But then he suddenly realised:

The fault must partly have been in me.

The bird was not to blame for his key.

And of course there must be something wrong

In wanting to silence any song. (FP 251)

Harmony and poise can thus be attained by accepting one's own faults, by expanding one's mind, so as to accommodate "a minor bird" to the totality of the world.

"Two Look at Two" is one of Frost's best Nature poems that explore man's mysterious relationship with Nature. A young couple, out for an evening walk, has climbed part way up a wooded hillside when "they were halted by a tumbled wall" (FP 229). Besides, it is getting dark and they can go no further the "failing path" because it would be dangerous, so they say, "Good night to woods." But their journey does not end there. A doe and after her a buck appear on the other side of the wall,

stare at them and pass on unscared. The couple dare not stretch a proffering hand, for it would break the spell. They feel:

“This *must* be all.” It was all. Still they stood,
 A great wave from it going over them,
 As if the earth in one unlooked-for favor
 Had made them certain earth returned their love. (FP 230)

In the world of existence, everything is a mystery. To solve the mystery, one must become a part of it; accept it. When the couple accepts the world of Nature as it is, a gift of understanding comes. They feel certain that the “earth returned their love.” A contemplation of mystery becomes a way of knowledge and the pursuit of complete knowledge reveals the discernment of a mystic.

According to John F. Lynen “For Frost, nature is really an image of the whole world of circumstances within which man finds himself. It represents what one might call ‘human situation’ ” (Pastoral Art 162).

The quality of revelation is another feature of mysticism in poetry. “Desert Places” is one example for this. Man, in his surveillance of Nature becomes more enlightened. During the winter when the snow falls, everything takes a deserted look. A feeling of isolation engulfs the poet when he looks around him at the lonely fields covered with snow. But then he suddenly realises that the deserted places on the earth or in the sky

between the stars cannot frighten him. The reason is simple: he has his own desert places to scare him and it is more frightening.

Lionel Trilling's assessment of Frost as a "terrifying poet" compels the readers to take a second look at Frost's poems. Truth can be apprehended only if the terrifying aspect of life is also taken into consideration. "Frost's lyrics," Greiner emphasizes, "are now often read as fearful expressions of darkness, alienation and uncertainty" (213). "Storm Fear" vividly portrays this alienation. It pictures a man, his wife and child gazing at the blizzard outside. As time passes the man becomes more and more concerned about his family's safety. Their isolation becomes complete as cold creeps in and the fire dies out. The storm still rages on. The father is now doubtful whether they can escape unaided. Whether they survive or not the reader is left uncertain to conclude. But the helplessness of this small group against the elements of Nature is truly terrifying. John F. Lynen aptly remarks:

Admittedly he can and does enjoy nature. His flowers, trees and animals are all described with affection, yet none of the nature poems is free from hints of possible danger; under the placid surface there is always the unseen presence of something hostile. (Pastoral Art 149)

Though Frost is often plagued with doubts about the harmony that can be attained between man and the universe, he is never a poet of despair. Nature, of course, has her hidden truths that attract him. He remains fairly taciturn about the visionary gleam that Wordsworth sang of. But at the same time he is acutely aware of the complexity of the universe. He subtly uses the technique of understatement. How insignificant man is in the total scheme of things is powerfully illustrated in poems like "On Going Unnoticed", "The Most of It" and "Once by the Pacific". Occasionally the poet does have a glimpse of the ideal, but the ideal remains a dream. An evasion or withdrawal into that world cannot last for long. Reality has its own worth and finally "We love the things we love for what they are"(FP 119).

3.7. Diction and Style in Frost's Poems

Of the many factors attributed for the popularity of Robert Frost, a chief one may be his disinclination towards modernist experiments. He never belonged to the experimental groups out to invent new language and new forms. He was not ready to discard the metre, rhythms and traditional rhymes. He was equally against all kinds of abstractions in poetry. If he ventured to any experiments at all, they were very careful and entirely personal.

Frost's poetry is well known for its 'deceptive simplicity.' This simplicity has been the central question of his poetry since the publication of his first anthology, A Boy's Will, approximately a hundred years ago. In fact this simplicity and familiarity of language and poetic action help to establish a peculiar relationship between the poet and the reader. The bald statement of his poems seems to discard possibility of ambiguity or 'immeasurable depths,' which immediately attracts the readers. But ultimately the reader reaches the depth or newness of the theme as well as approach. This achievement might have been the product of exquisite craftsmanship.

Frost once said in an interview in "The Paris Review" that in the literary circles he was once referred to as: "Oh, he's that fellow that writes about homely things for that crowd, for those people" (7). This is perhaps a befitting description of his poetic principles and of his readership. Frost's language was not merely simple and direct, it was a spoken language as opposed to a written language; it was colloquial and vernacular. The tone also is conversational, casual and intimate.

A very special feature of his poetry is the variety of the tones of voice. He says of his concept of a poem:

And the things you can do in a poem are various. You speak of figures, tones of voice varying all the time. I'm always interested. . . in the way I *lay* the sentences in them. I'd hate to have the sentences all the same in the stanzas. Every poem is like that: some sort of achievement in performance. (Paris Review, 30)

Frost has woven a very complex system of symbols and images around his poetry that the critics are unanimous in calling him an intricate craftsman. His poems employ a language of subtle suggestions quite befitting to mystical poetry. His symbols and images are drawn from the most common and familiar objects around life. But their suggestive quality is accounted for the mystical depth of his poems.

On the superficial level the reader feels quite comfortable with the symbols and images because what he encounters is roads in woods, brooks, farm walls, trees, birds, stars etc. But as a great master of concentrated symbolic vision, Frost skillfully makes use of them to convey the transcendental Reality of life. About twenty of his poems deal with astronomy. He was preoccupied with the question of 'our place among infinities.' Thus the stars symbolize the desire of the poet to comprehend the eternal mysteries of the universe: "O Star (the fairest one in sight), /

We grant your loftiness the right / To some obscurity of cloud—”(FP 403).

Light, in his poems, is a symbol for life, its order and meaning. When this order and meaning fade, darkness envelops earthly existence or being. Darkness, night and winter, predictably, stands for death. Thus “An Old Man’s Winter Night” contains very profound musings on life and death. The faint light highlights the meaninglessness of the old man’s existence: “A light he was to no one but himself / Where now he sat, concerned with he knew what, / A quiet light, and then not even that” (FP 108).

A road that diverges in a wood takes the poet to metaphysical reflections on life, its influences and inevitabilities: “way leads on to way, / I doubted if I should ever come back.” (FP 105). Path and traveller are the favourite symbols of the Mystics. The predicament of choices and the mystery of life are pictured here.

The neighbour in the “Mending Wall” is narrow-minded and conservative. So it seems to the poet that: “He moves in darkness as it seems to me, / Not of woods only and the shade of trees.” (FP 34). Darkness, here acquires the darkness of symbolic meaning.

The water running down the brook becomes the symbol of life and vitality. Snow is described as reflecting the light from heaven and winter

becomes a symbol for death. The wood is his most recurring symbol for the unknown as well as the temples of Gods.

3.8. Conclusion

Robert Frost's poems bear the stamp of the agony, the confusion of the modern world. He is a mystic poet, not in the ordinary sense of the word. Unlike other Nature Poets, he sang not about the harmony between man and Nature. He perceives something that comes in between the harmonious relationship between man, Nature and God. Nature, for him, is the ladder to reach the Ultimate Truth. He differs from other poets in the fact that he has an abiding sense of reality. It provides profound insights into the value and limitations of the relationship between man, Nature and God.

Yvor Winters may try to classify him as a spiritual drifter; Malcolm Cowley might criticize him for not reaching out toward society. But a serious study of Frost's poetry will lead one to the conclusion that his impressions of the universe around him are more humorous, more compassionate and more humble than others.

Frost is acutely aware of the defects and drawbacks of human beings in perceiving the infinite. But the poet persists in his effort to communicate the incommunicable. He realises that when the gulf between man and Nature is bridged, a mystical vision of the Ultimate Reality is possible.

Whenever there is a veil between man and Nature, the yearning for complete perception intensifies. Even if one may not achieve complete knowledge, the effort, the struggle to achieve it, is sublime and infinitely noble.

Chapter 4

Wanderers of Unseen Paths

4.1. Introduction

Mystical consciousness of many a poet finds one of its closest correspondences in Nature. The poet's level of consciousness differs from that of the ordinary man. He tries to interpret his vision, his glimpse of the burning bush to others by means of his poems. Almost always it becomes difficult for him to convey to others his vision of the ideal. Still the effort goes on and an attempt to understand their world expands the boundaries of one's own self. This chapter is an attempt to find the relationship of the mystical consciousness in the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost.

Tagore and Frost are worlds apart in terms of time, language, sensibility and tradition. All these play a vital role in the shaping of their poetic minds. Despite this, many factors bind the two poets together. The study becomes more interesting when some astonishing similarities and reconcilable differences emerge from a close survey of their backgrounds along with their prolific poetic output.

In manners quite different, poetry of both the poets was quests for the Ultimate Reality and these quests were based on a mystical consciousness of Nature. Therefore the chapter is an attempt to weave the

similarities and differences in the mystical concepts in general and concepts of Nature Mysticism in particular of the poets into a cohesive fabric. The religious, literary and social backgrounds of these poets have been taken into consideration in this endeavour.

A brief sojourn into the poetic life, literary background and the various influences on the lives of poets are necessary to understand the development of the poetic sensibilities of both Tagore and Frost better. There are many striking similarities in their lives at the outset. Both of them had a long literary career. Tagore was born in Calcutta on May 6, 1861 and lived up to the age of eighty. Frost was born in San Francisco, California, on March 26, 1874 and died at the age of eighty eight. Formal education failed to attract them both. Though Frost was enrolled as a freshman at Dartmouth College he left soon “insisting that he had had enough of scholarship.” (Thompson, Frost 11) Both the poets were initiated into literature at a fairly early stage by their parents. Young Robert might have inherited his mother Isabella Moodie Frost’s fondness of writing verse and religious mysticism, while Debendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath, intensified the poet’s mystical leanings.

Despite the loss of many dear ones, Tagore was not pessimistic or dejected. Many of his later poems radiate his optimism and faith in life.

Poetry was the sole refuge to Robert Frost also when he was severely hit with the deaths of his dear ones. Frost felt that these shocks were rendered to make him learn the higher truths of life. Many of his later poems reveal the new found inner strength of the poet.

4.2. Literary Background

Tagore was born into an era when Bengal itself was in transformation. He writes about this in The Religion of an Artist: “I was born in 1861. That is not an important date of history, but it belongs to a great epoch in Bengal, when the currents of the 3 movements had met in the life of our country.” (1) Those three movements are: Political, Socio-Religious and Literary.

Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Dinabandhu Mitra and Michael Madusoodan Dutt were at the helm of the world of letters in Bengal. Critics give credit to Bankim Chandra Chatterji for the refinement of Bengali prose and Madusoodan Dutt for enriching “Bengali poetry with English, Latin, Greek and Italian influences” (Artist in Life 21). It can be fairly assumed that Tagore drank deeply from this rich fountain of Bengali Literature.

The birth and growth of Robert Frost from 1874 to 1914 similarly coincided with a milieu of progressive movements in social, intellectual and political circles: “it was a period of renaissance, but it was

unmistakably a period of decadence also as the thoughtful minds were equally aware of the promises unfulfilled, and the questions unanswered or partially answered”(Tripathi 11). It was a time when the creative mind of the nation was at loggerheads with the growing materialism and soulless mercantilism. Still, the voices of great masters like Emerson, Whitman and Poe reverberated at large in the literary firmament of America. This may account for the influence of these poets in Frost’s poetry.

4.3. Influences

Poets, it is needless to assert, are the products of their age. Their art and artefacts invariably belong to their age. Accordingly it will be timely and proper here to explore the lasting influences on these great poets.

Being the fourteenth child of a large family, Tagore had his moments of utter loneliness. His mother was more or less an invalid and young ‘Rabi’ was not allowed to go out of the house. He wrote of it later:

. . . I was a lonely child, I had no friends to play with. But I had this great big visible world to keep me company. I could almost imagine this world outside to be lonely child like me - sitting by the great big window of the sky, looking towards the distant horizon. (qtd. in Devi Prasad 70)

At a young age itself Tagore's father took his youngest son along with him for his Himalayan sojourns. Nature in its entire majesty and grandeur might have left its indelible impressions upon his receptive mind:

My eyes had no rest the livelong day, so great was my fear lest anything should escape them. Wherever, at a turn of the road into a gorge, the great forest trees were found clustering closer, and from underneath their shade a waterfall trickling out, like a little daughter of the hermitage playing at the feet of hoary sages wrapt in meditation, babbling its way over the black moss – covered rocks, there the *jhampan* bearers would put down their burden, and take a rest. Why, oh why, had we to leave such spots behind, cried my thirsting heart, why could we not stay on there for ever? (REM 101)

The Upanishads and the Vedas had a very strong influence on Maharshi Debendranath, which he passed on to Rabindranath. In his essays and addresses, time and again Rabindranath returns to them and interprets them. The old Vaishnava poems of Bengal also influenced him a lot. Though a truant he studied Kalidas in Sanskrit and he translated parts of Macbeth into Bengali. Sufism, as a way of life flourished in Bengal at the time of Tagore. His father, Maharshi Debendranath initiated Tagore into the world of Sufi Mysticism when it was flourishing in Bengal.

Another early influence to be taken into consideration is the Bengali poet Biharilal Chakravarti. Niharranjan Ray points out that he was only a minor poet but:

he had introduced two elements into Bengali poetry which were new: one, a romantic attitude towards Nature and two, a lyrical note which, was neither objective nor conventional but purely personal . . . Tagore entirely unaffected by the famous Bengali poets of contemporary times was fascinated by the vaishanava lyricists, the English romantic poets and Biharilal . . . (Artist in Life 31)

He was also greatly influenced by Buddhism which played a decisive part in shaping his outlook and spiritual leanings. His dance-dramas like *Natir Puja*, *Chandalika* etc. reveal this influence. More over, the two great epics of India, - the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and also the classical works of Kalidasa moulded his sensibility. Even the poems and songs of his mature years show the influence of Valmiki and Kalidasa. He was much attracted by the wandering Bengali mystics known as *Baul* singers. Their concept of God as “The Man of My Mind” can be traced in his mystical poems.

Christianity wielded a strong influence over Tagore. The concept of God he presents in Gitanjali can said to be identical with the Christian

concept of God. Tagore, to use Dr. Aronson's words, "seemed to be more Christian than the Christians" (Kannath 111).

Tagore's close interaction with the West and Christianity contributed a lot to make him a great mystic poet in whom Mysticism of the East and West perfectly blended. As Dr. Radhakrishnan says, "He is a Vedanthin, a thinker who draws his inspiration from the Upanishads. If we believe the other, he is an advocate of a theism more or less like, if not identical with Christianity"(2). Many intellectuals of the western world were his friends. He travelled extensively in Europe and America. Thus he got a first hand insight into the life and culture of so many civilizations. All these developed his sympathies and sensibilities.

Frost also had a lonely childhood, marked by such events like 'jumping schools,' long out door wanderings and finally the death of his father.

The exceptional popularity enjoyed by Frost as a poet has given rise to very serious discussions on the influences worked on him and his poetry. Critic Yvor Winters, for example, calls him "an Emersonian Romantic" (58). Frost himself has admitted his indebtedness to Emerson. As some of the critics suggest, Emerson's "Self-Reliance," might have been Frost's Bible.

Lawrance Thompson points out that the fascination for the correspondence between the visible and the invisible in nature poetry was passed on to Frost by his mother. Thompson adds that:

A poetess herself, and a Swedenborgian poetess, Mrs. Frost made her children feel by example, rather than by precept, that romantic nature poetry was at its best when it suggested correspondences or analogies between the seen and the unseen world. . . . Of these three poets to whom his mother had first exposed him -- Emerson, Wordsworth, Bryant—his favourite was hers, Ralph Waldo Emerson. (Biography 38)

Frost's attitude to Nature was much influenced by Thoreau. Like Thoreau, Frost also detached himself from 'contemporary' ways. He expressed his indebtedness to Thoreau for that. The lasting influence of Thoreau on Frost's attitude to Nature is attested by a critic in the following words:

Thoreau's concept of duality in nature contributes significantly in Frost's poetic vision. The recognition that nature is wild yet benevolent but, on the whole she is impersonal, unfeeling and the other, led both of them to investigate the relationship between wilderness of nature and cultivation of men. (Triksa 36)

Another vibrant influence on Frost and his poetic vision was that of William James, illustrious philosopher and brother of novelist Henry James. Frost was attracted to the ideas like pluralism and pragmatism of James. Some of his poems reflects James' observation that: "The cosmos is not a closed and harmonious system; it is a battleground of cross-currents and conflicting purposes; it shows itself, with pathetic obviousness, as not a uni- but a multiverse" (Durant, 515). In fact James influenced Frost in more than one way. Lawrence Thompson observes in this regard: "Like James, Frost wanted to be 'pluralistic,' in the sense that he could combine naturalism and idealism, physics and metaphysics, skepticism and mysticism" (Biography 108).

Henri Bergson's philosophy also had a great impact on Frost writings. Robert Bernard Hass in his essay, "(Re) Reading Bergson: Frost, Pound and the Legacy of Modern Poetry," explains:

Bergson argued that nature's essential character was one of processional flux, irreducible to rational formulation...By avoiding our habitual scientific practices, and by resisting the impulse to reduce complexities to simple formulae, we can transcend positivist analysis and become more receptive to a direct communion with immediate experience. (58)

Lawrance Thompson also points out how Bergson's influences found expression in many of Frost's poems. He identifies "West Running Brook" as one such poem. He writes:

To Frost, one of the most important elements in Bergson's highly poetic philosophy was the denial of essentially deterministic elements in the Darwinian theories. In his gently contrary manner, Bergson insisted that the human spirit has the freely willed power to resist materialism through creative acts that pay tribute to God.(Biography 310)

4.4. Similarities

Having surveyed the striking similarities in the biographical details of the two poets and the various influences on them, the study now proceeds to explore the similarities and differences in the mystical consciousness and Nature Mysticism in their poetry.

4.4.1 God Concept

As it has been discussed in the previous chapters, the philosophies of the East and the West have exerted a deep influence in shaping the God concept of both Tagore and Frost. The introspective spirit in these two poets finds in the universe a Divine meaning or an order. It has inspired and guided them through their creative endeavour. God of both these poets

can not be limited to any single theological contention or religious convention.

They believed that truth, beauty and goodness are closely associated with God. Man needs God's mercy, His love and His protection. The seeking for God is an integral part of their poems, beneath the surface-level contradictions. To them, Nature is the dwelling place of God.

The influence of The Bible can be discerned in the concept of God of both the poets. Tagore envisages God as Love as in the Bible. Accordingly one of his concepts of the relationship between God and man is that of father and his children. Many of Frost's poems like "The Masque of Mercy," "Masque of Reason" and "Sycamore" chose biblical themes of salvation and God's Mercy as their themes.

The limitations of human knowledge in understanding God were matters of concern for both the poets. Tagore writes:

Know that you are but a child in this vast world,
 in the cradle of infinite time, in the sky's playground:
 you think you know it all, but you know nothing!
 Pick it up—with faith, humility, love-
 that grand toy—coloured, musical, scented-
 which your mother's given you. Well, maybe it's dust!
 So what? Isn't it dust beyond compare? (IG 94)

The constant efforts to wall in God to different sects and creeds imply lack of faith in Him. Frost's metaphor of child also points to the limitations of human beings in understanding God. Accordingly he writes in "A Concept Self-Conceived":

The latest creed that has to be believed
 And entered in our childish catechism
 Is that All's a concept self-conceived,
 Which is no more than good old Pantheism.
 Great is the reassurance of recall.
 Why go on further with confusing voice
 To say God's either All or over all?
 The rule is, never give a child a choice. (FP 427)

Poems like "I Will Sing You One-O," "An Unstamped Letter in Our Rural Letter Box," "One More Brevity," and "Take Something Like a Star" can be said to put forward a comprehensive picture of the God Concept of Frost.

The poem "I Will Sing You One- O," for example, propounds an affirmation of a God. Frost believed that man's understanding of God, like that of Nature, is limited. The pastoral artist that is Frost now expands himself to a cosmic poet. He explores the sky, the stars, the novas and the

constellations with the vigour of a mystic poet. The anticipation of God behind all these becomes all the more explicit in the poems:

The sigmas and taus
 Of constellations.
 They filled their throats
 With the furthest bodies
 To which man sends his
 Speculation,
 Beyond which God is; (FP 219)

In Tagore also the readers can witness an evolution of God concept from early musings to later consummate vision. In this process the poet becomes more interested in deeper spiritual aspirations than the life around him. His probing leads him to awareness where:

I expand my consciousness
 Into endless time and vast earth;
 I absorb the huge detachment of nature's own meditations
 Into my own mind; (SP 110)

The mystic vision of God and of the fusion of man and the Divine can be discerned in Tagore. The self or the finite rises into the unity of the Infinite, for self-realisation:

When I stood at this window and stared
 At the southern sky, a message seemed to slide
 Into my soul from the harmony of the stars,
 A solemn music that said, 'We know you are ours-
 Guest of our light from the day you passed
 From darkness into the world, always our guest.'(SP 91)

The fusion of man and the Universe can be quite revelatory. Frost believes that self-realisation is nothing other than finding the meaning that he was long seeking:

The star itself—Heaven's greatest star,
 Not a meteorite, but an avatar—
 Who had made an overnight descent
 To show by deeds he didn't resent
 My having depended on him so long,
 And yet done nothing about it in song.
 A symbol was all he could hope to convey,
 An intimation, a shot of ray,
 A meaning I was supposed to seek,
 And finding, wasn't disposed to speak. (FP 421)

There is no need to reiterate that the God- concept of Frost is very complex as it is an amalgamation of many influences like the Puritan,

Swedenborgian, transcendental etc. Nevertheless, he believed in the design of God. God controls and presides over the course of life of the universe. His presence fills the world with a new life. All that man should do is to:

To go with the drift of things,
 To yield with a grace to reason,
 And bow and accept the end
 Of a love or a reason? (FP 30)

4.4.2. Mystical Consciousness

The various stages in the development of mystical consciousness are dealt with in detail in the first chapter of this study. They are:

1. The Way of Purgation
2. The Way of Illumination
3. The Way of Union

A discursive perusal of the poems of Tagore and Frost disclose a kinship in the development of their mysticism. But the general estimation is that third phase of the mystical journey, the Way of Union is not discernible in Frost.

The first phase, the Way of Purgation or the seeking of God is visible in both the poets. Frost seeks God when he felt the mystery of a ‘shadow’ behind him:

In the thick of a teeming snowfall
 I saw my shadow on snow.
 I turned and looked back up at the sky,
 Where we still look to ask the why
 Of everything below. (FP 303)

But Tagore, like a true devotee, seeks his Beloved ardently:

Where dost thou stand behind them all, my lover,
 hiding thyself in the shadows? They push thee and pass thee
 by on the dusty road, taking thee for naught. I wait here weary
 hours spreading my offering for thee, while passers-by come
 and take my flowers, one by one, and my basket is nearly
 empty. (CPP 19)

Life is generally depicted as a long journey. Only those who have a mystical vision are able to seek and find God; others pass Him on the road, without recognizing Him.

In the second stage there is a feeling of happiness, resulting from an illumination, or a certain perception of the Infinite. This happiness finds its expression in their poems. Tagore sings of the feeling thus:

It dances today, my heart, like a peacock it dances, it dances.
 It sports a mosaic of passions
 Like a peacock's tail,

It soars to the sky with delight, it quests, O wildly

It dances today, my heart, like a peacock it dances. (SP 66)

Even a butterfly marks the beginning of a new consciousness for Frost. He writes of the bliss that is visible in him and the universe around him in “My Butterfly”:

Since first I saw thee glance,

With all thy dazzling other ones,

In airy dalliance,

Precipitate in love,

Tossed, tangled, whirled and whirled above,

Like a limp rose-wreath in a fairy dance.

When that was, the soft mist

Of my regret hung not on all the land,

And I was glad for thee,

And glad for me, I wist. (FP 28)

The poet, here, seems to suggest that Nature also feels the same joy he experiences. It can be assumed that deep insights into ‘the ways of God’ and the functioning of the universe first dawned on the poets with this mystical experience. But the similarity between these poets’s mystical consciousness seems to end here.

Both Tagore and Frost embarked on the mystical path as part of the look out for the meaning of the existence. The earlier poems in Sandhya Sangeet followed by Prabhat Sangeet mark the beginning of this quest in the poetic career of Tagore. The young poet's effort to understand the mystery and meaning of life is significant; that in turn leads him to the question of death. Death is nothing but life renewing itself. "Endless Death" in Prabhat Sangeet enunciates this idea:

Life: is it then a name for a handful of deaths-
 an aggregate of dyings?
 Then a moment's cluster of a hundred trivial deaths-
 so much fuss over a naming!
 As death grows, so will life:
 minute by minute we shall ascend the sky
 to the very dwelling of starlight.(IG 73)

Existing in a time-bound world, life also is divided into segments of time. The world is torn by inner conflicts. In "The Times Table" Frost writes in a matter of fact tone:

A sigh for every so many breath,
 And for every so many sigh a death.
 That's what I always tell my wife
 Is the multiplication table of life (FP 263)

Thus a close scrutiny of the poems of both Tagore and Frost reveals a progression of the various stages in the mystical consciousness. A spiritual awakening of the self, an awareness of the barriers in the path towards God-realisation, the dark night of the soul, the way of illumination etc. can be found, of course with some modifications, in both the poets. In Tagore the quest reaches its culmination in his poems of union with God whereas for Frost the final destination is his poems of self-realisation.

4.4.3. Concept of Nature

Both Tagore and Frost were widely acclaimed as great nature poets. A great number of their poems have Nature as their subject matter. Still a greater number of poems are inspired by Nature. Harmony of Man with Nature is a dear theme to both of them. They were not only aware of the benign and benevolent nature but also of the dynamic and darker forces of nature. The immediate themes may seem trivial or casual. But these poems are impregnated with great truths, ideas and visions.

They take keen pleasure in even the minutest aspects of nature. They were able to see a larger design behind every movement in Nature. The mutual relation of man, Nature and God is a part of this grand design. The Nature Mysticism of these poets is an extension of this recognition.

4.4.4. Nature Mysticism

Absorption and expansion of the self is the central question of the Nature Mysticism of Tagore and Frost. Nature becomes a mediator between man and God. When they are lost in a reverie about Nature, meaning of existence emerges in a flash of moment and it becomes an affirmation of life. Throughout the poetry of both the poets there are correspondences between man and Nature. An exploration into the mysterious in Nature leads to a deeper understanding of human beings which in turn leads to a better perception of his creator.

The uniting contraries of a West-Running Brook lead Frost to queries about the origin and existence of this universe. The brook reinforces the idea that man's existence is also a union of paradoxes:

The brook runs down in sending up our life.
 The sun runs down in sending up the brook.
 And there is something sending up the sun.
 It is this backward motion toward the source,
 Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,
 The tribute of the current to the source.
 It is from this in nature we are from
 It is most us. (FP 260)

This discerning of the harmony among the opposites in the universe is present in Tagore also. The realisation of creation as a balancing of centripetal and centrifugal force is inherent in Nature:

Accept my homage, Earth, as I make my last obeisance
of the day,

Bowed at the altar of the setting sun.

You are mighty, and knowable only by the mighty;

You counterpoise charm and severity;

Compounded of male and female

You sway human life with unbearable conflict.

The cup that your right hand fills with nectar

Is smashed by your left; (SP 99)

The poet in Tagore was very much inspired by the mighty and magnificent nature. Tagore's concept of nature to a large extent is shaped by the spiritual tradition of India. This tradition puts emphasis on an apprehension of the inner spirit of Nature and a harmony between the spirit of Nature and man. A realisation of this harmony helps in establishing a close communion and union with God. Life becomes a journey of realisation:

Walking with you, O restless One,

I find salvation

In the treasure of the journey.
 In light and darkness,
 In ever-new pages of creation,
 In each new moment of dissolution
 Echoes the rhythm of your dance and song. (LP 89)

In his essay on “The Religion of the Forest,” Tagore lays stress on how pilgrimages were meant to be a journey into the heart of Nature and to God. He comments: “Here man is free, not to look upon Nature as a source of supply of his necessities, but to realise his soul beyond himself . . .” (GW 510).

Frost’s “Into My Own” can be described as a journey of self-realisation. The poet-narrator is determined in his decision to enter the dark woods. No one can deter him from his decision. If his friends meet him again in his journey, “They would not find me changed from him they knew-/ Only more sure of all I thought was true.”(FP 5). Manorama Trikha comments:

He recognized the real value of loneliness, which enables one to peep into oneself and to see one’s own image in “a slanting mirror,”(perhaps of the soul), . . . In “Into My Own” entrance into the dark woods gives the poet an opportunity to examine

his thoughts dispassionately and when he comes out he is more sure of himself. (59)

“Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter” is another poem by Frost where the unseen adds meaning to an otherwise silent and still nature. Once in summer when the poet passed through the place he had heard a bird singing:

A bird with an angelic gift
 Was singing in it sweet and swift.
 No bird was singing in it now.
 A single leaf was on a bough,
 And that was all there was to see. . . (FP 233)

The poem is significant because it ends on a different note. New meanings emerge out of the still life:

A brush had left a crooked stroke
 Of what was either cloud or smoke
 From north to south across the blue:
 A piercing little star was through. (FP 233)

For both the poets the trees and the stars and the blue hills appear as symbols aching with a meaning which can never be uttered in words. Divinity can be observed in the very act of creation. When man’s soul

draws the heavy curtain of self aside and when the veil is lifted he is face to face with the Eternity.

Their circumstances had many similarities: utter loneliness, early bereavements, failures and frustrations. The direct result of all these is an increased love towards Nature. Loneliness of man increases when he is away from Nature in spirit. Both of them believe that life with all its delights and agonies, beauty and ugliness deserves acclamation. As it has been already discussed in the previous chapters, a firm grip on reality is their greatest achievement and their poetry is the poetry of affirmation and acceptance.

A mystical awareness of cosmic harmony is another meeting point of the nature mysticism of the two poets. Tagore was proud of the fact that India had a cultural heritage quite different from that of the west. He reiterates this in many of his writings. "The West," he writes, "seems to take a pride in thinking that it is subduing Nature, as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything we want from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things." But in India things are quite different. "The Indian mind," he asserts, "never has any hesitation in acknowledging its kinship with Nature, its unbroken relation with all."(GW 374)

Frost also discerned a basic difference in the attitude of the West and the East towards Nature. It is clear that Frost, like Tagore, rejects the idea of Nature being conquered by man.

Lawrance Thompson writes about a lecture that Frost delivered at Kenyon College, Ohio thus:

Frost began by delineating what he considered a fundamental human dichotomy. On one side there was “the Western idea that we must master nature, and get such a grip on it that we can make ourselves all happy and make the universe a brotherhood of unconflicting love.” In opposition to this, he said, was the Eastern belief that “nature is too much for us, and that we may as well throw ourselves on God and Christ or some saviour.” His own inclination, he freely admitted, was “toward Asia.”(Biography 438)

To sum up, both Tagore and Frost view Nature as a means for self realisation. Invariably this is the journey towards God. They saw Nature as the rendezvous of man and God. Nature provided examples of Greater Realities for them. In his spiritual endeavours man can learn many a lesson from nature.

4. 4. 5. Humanism

Nature Mysticism of Tagore and Frost have their firm foot in humanism. The love of nature leads them to love of man and love of God. It is manifest as love for fellow beings, suffering humanity, the poor and children. They were by no means poets of ivory tower. They were beacon lights of hope for the world.

Apart from this rare visionary outlook into nature, which Tagore and Frost shared, they had much more in common. Frost, in his “Remarks on the occasion of the Tagore centenary,” the transcription of a talk given on April 19, 1961, to celebrate the centennial of Tagore, analyses the view points and notions that both of them shared. He declares both of them to be nationalists. “I’m a terrible nationalist myself – formidable. I can’t see how one can be international unless there are some nations to inter with. And the clearer and distincter the better.” (qtd. in Greiner 276)

Nationalism and internationalism are no more political concepts. They denote a spiritual awakening as they are ideas formulated by perceptions. Tagore’s prayers are the prayers for the awakening of India. But he is not a nationalist in the current sense of the word. He dreams of a world “that has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls.” Here “the tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection; ...the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action”

(CPP 16). This vision is certainly not utopian or the mere fancy of a poet. They are attainable.

Self realisation, to Tagore, was not through Nature alone. Mankind also has enchanted him. He says: “Mankind with his intelligence and mind, his affection and love . . . is liberating me; it has made me reach out beyond myself” (OM 13).

Tagore was not ready to be content with the thinking that all was well with his country and countrymen. He rebelled against the orthodox customs and superstitions. Meek submission to what was unjust annoyed him the most. He could not stand fatalism of his countrymen either.

Niharranjan Ray in his essay, “Rabindranath Tagore and the Indian Tradition”, states emphatically that Tagore’s “intimacy with the collective psyche of the Indian people was always very close, much closer than any of his predecessors from Ram Mohan onwards or of his contemporaries, older and younger. Not for a moment did he forget that he arose out of his soil and was linked with his roots” (231).

The focus of Frost’s poems may at first glance seem to be on everyday occurrences like mowing, mending walls, going for water, apple-picking or the putting in of a seed. But in fact they also reveal the spiritual dilemma of man. “Mending Wall,” one of the best loved of Frost’s poems is a typical example for this. When two people build or mend a wall, they

are walling in themselves. Each stays on his side and builds his own prejudices. This is the predicament of man today. He is so much absorbed in himself that he has only a limited view of the harmony that exists in the universe.

Occasionally, he realises this and recognises that something in nature does not love a wall. While the narrator observes a wall between them, the neighbour sees a fence. The neighbour seems to have a more constructive attitude. A fence is something which can be seen through or climbed over easily. If the wall represents the lack of understanding between them, by doing repairs on it each year they are again and again constructing barriers between them. "We keep the wall between us as we go" (FP33). Like the narrator, the neighbour too has a limited comprehension. They go by what is ordained by the older generation. Creativity or free thinking is unknown to them. Man is a stranger to his brother: "He moves in darkness as it seems to me." The poet thus observes both men, against the backdrop of nature, in a quiet, non-judgmental manner.

It also becomes evident in both these poets, that man, if he aligns himself with the laws of nature, can transcend the narrow interests imposed upon him by social structures. It is his own prejudices and conditionings that prevent man from acquiring self knowledge. Absolute freedom or an

egoless state is possible only if one can pierce all these barriers. Nature, by breaking a wall, is perhaps pointing to the great truth that man can achieve his goals without causing disharmony around him.

4.4.6. Style and Diction

Another point of similarity that can be found in their poems is a startling simplicity and directness of expression. Both made rich use of colloquial idioms and phrases. Images that are at once sublime and simple flourish in their poetry. The recurring symbols and images of these two poets are discussed in the previous chapters. Vividness of imagery combined with sincerity of feeling intensifies the mystical consciousness of both these Nature Poets.

Their symbols and images are drawn from the familiar objects in and around them. These symbols have a special driving force.

Tagore would not go for form at the cost of content. But this strong stand in the least marred the exquisite beauty of his poems or his high imagination and romantic ideals. This can be stated of the poetry of Frost also. But he was a little more conscious of form.

4.5. Dissimilarities

After surveying the similar aspects of the mystical leniencies and traits of Nature Mysticism in the Poems of these two poets, an enumeration of the dissimilarities is also essential.

The most striking difference is regarding the concept of God. To Tagore, God is both immanent and transcendental. Frost believed that God is transcendental. He rejects the proposition that God is omnipresent. To him God is beyond man's conception.

The mysticism of Tagore is devotional mysticism. He seeks God with the ardent spirit of a devotee. To him, God is a lover, friend, master etc. The poet yearns for a Union with Him. The dominant element in his poetry is the deep love or *bhakti* to God. But the analysis of Frost's poetry has rendered his mysticism as intellectual. His mysticism is concerned with cognitive domain. God realisation can be attained through wisdom. Frost resorts to impersonal pronouns such as 'something' or 'someone' for his God. He uses the term God also in several of his poems. No varying hues of relationship as in Tagore can be observed here. He wants to know God; he anticipates the existence of God as a Supreme Power. Tagore's God is Omnipresent and Omnipotent, where as Frost's God is transcendent, beyond ordinary perception.

No expression of an ultimate union with God can be found in the mystical journey of Frost. This may be a reasonable explanation for the general contention that the mystical experience of Frost is not as consummate as Tagore's.

A subtle difference can be traced in diction of these two poets. Much has been said about the universally acknowledged 'simple style' of Frost. Tagore's language is also simple. But it is suffused with the pleasant hue of deep mystical experience. While Tagore's language and style is more melodious and picturesque, Frost's language is more sharp and to the point. Here again what becomes plain is the difference between a devotional mystic and an intellectual mystic.

A remarkable trait visible in the mystical journey of Tagore is that of complete dedication in the Absolute. In this period of contemplation, the soul is ready for its union with God. The pure bliss of an enhanced sense of unity is all the more evident:

My heart, the bird of the wilderness, has found its sky in your eyes.

They are the cradle of the morning, they are the kingdom of the stars.

My songs are lost in their depths.

Let me but soar in that sky, in its lonely immensity.

Let me but cleave its clouds and spread wings in its sunshine.

(CPP 111)

Thus, Tagore's poetry gives a clear and orderly picture of the development of the mystical mind and its expression in poetry. The poet

experiences union with God in its fulness. "If you are only the haven, as they say, then what is the sea? /Let it surge and toss me on its waves, I shall be content. / I live in you whatever and however you appear"(GW 780). His exquisite poetry is the expression of the ineffable joy of this Union.

But a reader can not trace such joy and thrill in Frost's poems. Even though he is able to enter deeply into the mystery of God, it is done at an intellectual level. Perhaps this can be designated as the singular remarkable difference in the mystical consciousness of the two poets, as it has already been pointed out.

4.6. Conclusion

Analysis of the similar and dissimilar aspects of the poetry of Tagore and Frost suggests that these poets have much in common than their differences. Both of them are mystical poets par excellence. They opened up new vistas in mystical poetry. At the core of their mystical poetry is Nature Mysticism. Tagore believed that God is everywhere in Nature. To Frost, Nature is the manifestation of God who is transcendent.

Tagore can rightly be called as one of the greatest poets of humanity. He has been hailed by many as a mystic poet, a poet of humanity, a realist and so on. Anyhow, it is rightly pointed out by B.C. Chakravorty that: "His realism is free from crude materialism, his mysticism is free from the

false spirituality of escapism and his humanism is free from the narrow bonds of nationalism”(109).

Robert Frost was a poet who gave comfort to his readers with his fresh and apparently simple poems. This freshness and simplicity endeared him to a large reading public. In His dedicatory prayer to Frost, Rabbi Victor E. Reichert writes:

Let the youth of tomorrow, as they saunter here, in these Green Mountains Frost loved, find in this sampling of Frost’s poems a faithful portrayal, not alone of Nature’s woods and brooks, of flowers and song of thrush; but the subtler and deeper implications of the meaning and mystery of life. May they not miss the wisdom and the mirth, the playfulness and the sorrow, as well as the quiet and often devastating irony and scorn directed at human pretension and vanity. (Frost I Knew 122)

In the din and doom of the present day world, in a world that has lost its direction, the works of these two poets mirror an unruffled serenity. Their voices are to be nurtured and cherished. What Srinivasa Iyengar says of Tagore is true of Frost also: “he came as a harmonizer and strove to build a durable bridge of understanding between man and nature, man and

machine, man and God”(104). Their poetry can rightly be called as the epitomes of the deep optimism, spiritual insight and tranquillity.

Both Robert Frost and Rabindranath Tagore were singers of humanity, lovers of freedom and poetry, who were always intrigued by the relationship between man and man, man and nature, and of course man and God. They sought to pierce the veil between man and God through Nature. They believed that self-effacement and complete identification with Nature can lead one to the Ultimate Reality. The charm of their poetry has lent a unique quality to their Mysticism. What is regional and purely personal with its strange simplicity rise to the level of universal. Yet they are different in their approach to the subject matter. Tagore yearned for a union with the ‘beyond,’ while Frost observed and comprehended what is ‘beyond’

While Frost’s narrator tends to be ironically humorous, the genteel verbiage of Tagore is rather meditative, philosophical and rhapsodic. Whatever they sang had deep roots in reality. Thus it can be observed that despite the vast differences in social, political or cultural environment, what they sang remains true and contemporary for the whole world. What is the legacy left by these great poets? The inference reached by Reichert about Frost befits Tagore also:

For this, his legacy to us, of sight and insight, of affirmation and dedication, of refusal to go into the dark and lament, of courageous but not vaporous optimism, as one 'who had a lover's quarrel with the world'-may these hard-won lessons endure to strengthen us upon our way. (Frost I Knew 122)

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