



Rabindranath Tagore:

An Infinitely Versatile Lyricist

Dr. Reji George





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Dedicated to
My guiding beacon of light,
My husband
Mr. Mathew Joseph

Foreword

I am personally and professionally related to the author since 1999 when she carried out her doctoral research under my supervision. Amidst her hectic schedules, she manages to devote time for research activities, and has a number of publications to her credit. Although she has been working as assistant professor in English at universities abroad for almost two decades, her passion for Indian English literature is remarkable. The present work is a gallery for the author to display her deep knowledge in the variety, the abundance, and the dynamism in the lyrics of Rabindranath Tagore.

It has been my great privilege for many years to teach English literature to graduate and postgraduate students of SKM University, and I have been greatly enriched by the works of both – Indian as well as the Western writers. With my prolonged experience and exposure to reading and interpreting literary works, I find Reji's work fascinating and interesting to read.

This inspirational and motivational book deals with the quality, the quantity, and the infinite variety of Rabindranath Tagore's lyrics that have made him one of the world's greatest literary artists, perhaps the greatest since Shakespeare. It also portrays Tagore a Renaissance figure; one of the makers of modern Indian literature, who strived for the renewal of human mind and society. I find Reji's work relevant in the literary world because, she has been successful in depicting Tagore as a complete man, who combines in himself the gifts of a philosopher, a poet, a musician, a mystic, a social reformer, an actor, an educationalist and a veritable man of action. There is a vivid description of Tagore's notable contributions to the cultural revival of India.

This book is fascinating to read because it illustrates vivid pictures of nature's loveliness: the breath of the wind as it rustles through the parted foliage; the rippling sounds of water; the soft fragrance of the nameless flowers; the drone of the honey-laden bees; the light trembling on the water in the blazing sun, the deep dark waters of the lake darkened evermore by shady trees around and catching the last rays of the setting sun. It is an enormously useful guide that describes Tagore not only as a poet, but also as a social reformer.

The author believes that the pleasure and significance of this book lies not only in its intrinsic value, but also, the intellectual climate in which it will be received by the readers. It is the fruit of her hard work, research, dedication, extensive experience, and knowledge in the field of English literature. I expect the book to be enormously useful for the students, researchers, learned, as well as for those who read just for pleasure and delight. It will prove to be a rich resource for non-Bengali readers in India and abroad, especially students and younger intellectuals who do not have easy access and understanding of Tagore's reading in original Bengali, Reji's quest will undoubtedly satiate their intellectual thirst.

I congratulate Dr. Reji George for her inspiring work. I bless her to keep on walking on her chosen path with more vigour to be able to produce more such works.

Prof. S.K Singh

Principal, Barharwa College

SKM University, Jharkhand

Preface

It is not possible to do justice to the great poet of modern India in a short chapter or a book. By the Midas touch of his genius, Rabindranath Tagore turned to gold all that he, with his fabulous productivity, did in his long life of eighty years (1861 - 1941). Poems, plays, stories - long and short, novels, essays, reviews, nursery rhymes, ballads, and paintings flowed from him until the world marvelled at his exhaustlessness. Two generations grew up in his all-enveloping shade; not a writer escaped his influence. The quality, the quantity, and the infinite variety of his writings have made him one of the world's greatest literary artists, perhaps the greatest since Shakespeare. His poems are sweet and unique, dazzling and imperishable in beauty; they offer us a large variety of moods and subject matter.

Looking back, one is struck by the variety (*vaichitrya*), the abundance (*prachurya*), and the dynamism (*gatimayata*) in the works of Rabindranath Tagore. He continued to grow till the end, and his death at eighty, as someone said, was premature. His creative output, in its great variety was prolific; he is a pure lyricist, an unapproachable master. We are yet to know of any other poet who has to his credit such poignantly beautiful lyric poems, and in such profusion. We think of Shakespeare's songs and sonnets, of the fragments of Sappho, of Villon and Pushkin, Shelley and Heine. Excellence is found in all, profusion in some, but this reckless abundance, this scattering of all the world's riches on the wayside for any casual traveller to come along and pick up - this is unique to Tagore. He is not just one of the makers of modern Indian literature, he was also a maker of the modern Indian mind and civilization. He has been called 'a Renaissance figure,' 'a complete man.'

From a speck of dust to stars in heavens, everything is the manifestation of truth and beauty, joy and immortality. Both, beauty and joy are guiding concepts in Rabindranath's idea of art; but beauty, as he sees it, does not depend on just external form or symmetry, structure or design, which can give only visual pleasure. He considers beauty to be the bridge between the self and nature outside. Rabindranath did not have any rigorous formal training in either philosophy or the history of the arts, but he was deeply involved in them, both as a creative writer and as a leading intellectual of his time. He had a natural impatience towards all formalism: he did not formulate his methods of literary analysis in precise terms, nor did he identify his critical tools with any objectivity. His approach to art was intimately linked to his philosophy of life; and like his philosophy, his view of art was free from rigidity, never aspiring to the condition of a system.

Writing about Rabindranath Tagore is extremely stimulating and enlightening. Myself, being a non-Bengali, many might wonder as to what prompted me to write about Rabindranath Tagore; it is nothing, but the award-winning *Gitanjali* bound by the central thread of the devotional quest, exhibiting great variety and form. The present book entitled *Rabindranath Tagore: An Infinitely Versatile Lyricist*, arose from the researchers own curiosity to discover the key elements in Tagore's poetry: that is, love for divinity, love for humanity and love for nature. The book is designed to resolve into five chapters for convenience of study and easy access.

The first chapter portrays Rabindranath Tagore as a poet of infinite variety and theme. Tagore's poetry is very vast, various and voluminous; it appears as if, there are two Tagore, one in English and the other in Bengali. Tagore's literary work is characterized by immense variety and abundance. In the course of

his long period of active production, covering over sixty years, he published more than three hundred volumes of poetry, drama, short stories, novels, discourses on history, religion, politics, philosophy, etc. He has left behind him more than twenty million lines of poetry, a number larger than that of many other poets of the world. Throughout his literary works, Tagore strived for the renewal of human personality and society; he sang to the glory of man, man was the hero of all his songs. He has poems to suit every taste, every passing mood; sure enough, different persons admire his poetry for different reasons.

Poetry was Tagore's oldest love and whatever his other 'dates' with other muses, to this one he constantly came back. He comments emphatically, "The joy of writing one poem far exceeds that of writing sheaves and sheaves of prose." His poems glow with passion, it is passion suffused with, and subdued by reflection. His lyric poetry presents a unique combination of the poet's sincerity of feeling and vividness of imagery accompanied by the rhythmic flow of words. Tagore's *Gitanjali* is a thrice born poem - it is an offspring of Indian saint (*Vishnavite*) mystic poets of Hindi, of Bengali, and of the lyrical poetry of England. It is a railway junction where many parallel lines converge: love of nature, love of mankind and love of God constitute the triveni that sustains the *Gitanjali*.

The second chapter describes Tagore as an indefatigable God-seeker. Tagore's philosophical and spiritual thoughts transcend all limits of language, culture, and nationality. To have a closer look at Tagore's concept of religion, I have divided eighty years of his life into five equal parts: the early years, the youth and early adulthood, the *Gitanjali* period, the period of mature reflection, and the final years.

His childhood and early boyhood days at home was a life within walls -walls of concrete as well as walls raised by socio-religious do's and don'ts. The child felt that beyond these walls there lay a world, rich in possibilities that was being denied to him. This 'beyond' created in him a deep sense of mystery and aroused in him an earnest desire to get in touch with it. Although the second phase was characterized by a state of bewilderment, gradually it passed away, and Tagore's search for the 'beyond' began to take a definite shape. He moved from a mere 'something' to a 'someone' to center his life and love on, someone who could fill the emptiness of his heart. In the third phase (Gitanjali period) the poet is able to enter more deeply into the mystery of the divine and arrive at a more personal and profound understanding of that reality. In the fourth period, Tagore's understanding of God is something very personal. By the close of this period we find that Tagore has a feeling that the time is short and he has reached the evening of his life, the time is running out for him, and that he has much to do yet to gain the object of his longing. In the last fourteen years of his life (final years), Rabindranath wrote and spoke more than ever on humanism. The common theme that runs through most of his writings of the period is 'man' and the emphasis is on humanism and related subjects.

The third chapter deals with Nature lyrics, a portrayal of spiritual communion with nature, God and man. Rabindranath Tagore is a great nature poet and it will not be wrong to say that nature exercised the most potent influence in making him a poet. Tagore's love for nature made his work appealing to humanity. He was basically a universalist first and a nationalist after. He found oneness among every living creature or plant. His identification with nature was the keynote of all his literary works. The poet himself said assuredly, "The language of harmony in nature is the mother tongue of our own soul." He regards nature as the

primeval storehouse of all life, and hence is constantly identifying himself with nature, and constantly using nature to illustrate the human and the abstract.

The fourth chapter illustrates Rabindranath Tagore as the greatest love poets of the world. The essence of his literature is love – the love that stands the test of time, the love that gives invincible strength to undergo extreme sacrifice. It produces an unending rhythm of truth, beauty and bliss. Tagore's poems on love and nature are highly sensitive and full of passion and life. The lover's agony in his spellbound heart is far an idea than a person. This love is of a rare kind, a bodiless love in the end, an eternal confession of the world's love-born. Such type of love continues age after age, life after life. Tagore depicts love with extraordinary subtlety, he analyses the different moods, and captures the ardent passion, which lovers feel for each other.

The final chapter talks about Tagore's influence on Indian culture and civilization. The impact of Rabindranath Tagore on Bengali Literature was so strong that the tone of Bengali culture was changed entirely. He attained the stature of an all-Indian writer and made an extraordinary impact on every regional literature. He is the inspirer and molder of the literature of the whole nation, more particularly of Bengal. The wide range of creative disciplines that went into the making of Tagore's intellectual percept, and multiplicity of his interests, were indeed amazing. Tagore's gift to Renaissance of Indian culture is manifold; his contribution mainly lies in trying to harness the great gift of music to the service of poetry and literature.

All said and done, Tagore was superbly, the organ-voice of India and the symbol of her immense aeonic vitality. His mind being rooted in India, his genius was like a noble tree, the

benignity of its branches touching every age and clime, a truly universal spirit that gloried in the visible world of man and nature, and well apprehended.

The book aims to help you develop a thoughtful and principled approach to Tagore's vast body of immortal literary works that reveal his perfect communion with God, Nature and Man. I strongly believe this book will stimulate the readers, particularly the youth to embrace nature and human being as the integral part of the universe, to fall in love with nature and give our Mother Earth a reason to smile.

The pleasure and significance of this book lies not only in its intrinsic value, but also, the intellectual climate in which it will be received by the readers. I do hope that the book will successfully address Rabindranath Tagore as a supreme lyricist of infinite variety, form and theme; and it would inspire students and researchers of English literature.

Dr. Reji George

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Indeed, the process of writing this book has been laborious; but the gains in having brought it to a successful ending far outweigh the pains. In the process of writing, I have benefitted from the insights and directions of several people and I use this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to all those who supported me for the successful completion of this study.

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I record my sense of gratefulness to the librarians and staff of Tagore's own library – Visva Bharati, Santiniketan; the national library, Kolkata; the British library, Kolkata and the state library, Dumka. I also wish to extend my thanks to a large number of Indian Institutions, Librarians and individuals for help in various forms. Special thanks to all the authors for their scholarly contributions.

I register my gratitude to my dearest mother for her encouragement and prayerful support in this arduous endeavor. I gratefully remember my brother, Fr. Thomas Pampady who always inspires me to do my best, and celebrates my success. I also thank my daughter Piyu Mathew and son Piyush Mathew for their encouragement and patience when I could not find enough time to meet their needs. I appreciate Piyush for his skills in editing and designing the book.

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I raise my heart to God in gratitude for granting me the grace of this most enriching and ennobling experience. My earnest wish and fervent prayer is that, all those who read this book may be inspired by Tagore's love for God, Nature and Man and try to establish the same in our family, society and the world at large. May His name be glorified, exalted and honoured.

Dr. Reji George

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1

Rabindranath Tagore:

A Poet of Infinite Variety and Theme

*“When you came, you cried and everybody
smiled with joy; when you go, smile and
let the world cry for you.”*

— Rabindranath Tagore

1.1. Introduction

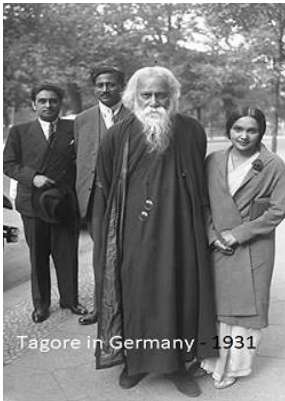
A new Renaissance was born in our country with the birth of Tagore in 1861. We have other poets, but none that are his equal; we call this the epoch of Rabindranath. He is as great in music as in poetry, and his songs are sung from the west of India to as far east as Burma. In literature or art, it can truly be said that, there was nothing he touched which he did not adorn. Plays, novels, stories – long and short, essays, reviews, poems, nursery rhymes, ballads, songs, and paintings flowed from him until the world marvelled at his brilliance. All the aspirations of mankind are embodied in his hymns. Tagore’s genius is essentially lyrical, and he exhales a lyric as a flower exhales fragrance.

Rabindranath Tagore was basically a poet: poet par excellence, poet with the full connotation given to the word *Kavi* by the Vedic Sages. His genius as an educationalist, as a philosopher, as a social reformer and servant was but a manifestation of his poetic faculty in various fields. Even his soulful music was but an expression of his poetry through the medium of pure sound. We understand the full significance of the poet's personality only when we accept him chiefly as an artist, an artist of words, images, pictures, an artist who, like an architect builds a noble edifice, and a majestic city by combining all the facets of his art in one mosaic or a grand symphony. To live the life of Rabindranath Tagore is an achievement. To him the universe was a harmony, music was the mother tongue of the soul, art was the expression of the infinite or divine in man.

Like the sun after which he was named (Rabi in Bengali, derived from Sanskrit *ravi*, means the sun), Rabindranath shed light and warmth on his age, vitalized the mental and moral soil of his land, revealed unknown horizons of thought, and spanned the arc that divides the East from the West. To those who have access to the language in which he wrote, the vitality of his genius is truly amazing. No less amazing are the variety and beauty of the literary forms he created. He gave to his people in one lifetime what normally takes much longer to evolve- a language rich and flexible, freed of many centuries of old inhibitions, a literature cherished as much by the people as by the academics. There is hardly a field of literary activity, which was not explored and made fruitful by his daring adventures, and many of these were virgin fields in Bengali, which his hands were the first to stir into life. He is one of the world's few writers whose works- in his own language -

withstand the severest tests of great literature - eastern or western, ancient or modern.

Tagore is India's greatest mastermind; he was the first Indian and Asian poet to win the Nobel Prize in literature. The range of his verse technique will carry us from Wyatt and Surrey across Spenser, Marlowe, Dryden, Shelley, and Swinburne, right up to the early Ezra Pound. He has something of Wordsworth, Keats and even of Tennyson in him. Here and there he reminds us of Whitman as well. Tagore is a poet whom we can place in the same rank with Shelley or Keats, Wordsworth or Tennyson in him or any other romantic poet with whom he has certain characteristics in common. His situation in Bengali letters may be likened to Hugo's in French, and certain forms of poetry and prose the world can show greater masters than both, but the compulsion to mark Tagore as unique, grows stronger when we think of his range, variety, and quality.



Tagore in Germany - 1931

1.2. Tagore: the prophet of internationalism

Tagore was not only one of the makers of modern Indian mind and civilization but also, he was highly influential in introducing Indian culture to the West. He is a renaissance figure with variety, abundance and dynamism in his character. The mental horizon of Rabindranath Tagore was not confined to the land of his birth alone. He was a universal man. He looked beyond the narrow limits of nationalism. That is

why he wrote: "There is only one race in the world that is the human race.'

Tagore loved India. He said: "I love India but my India is an idea and not a geographical expression. Therefore, I am not a patriot. I shall seek my compatriots all over the world" (Saha 2001). Tagore is regarded as the prophet of internationalism. Nehru writes in the Golden Book of Tagore: "Rabindranath Tagore has given to our nationalism the outlook of internationalism" (Saha 2001). He was a true follower of Raja Rammohun Roy. Rammohun Roy is regarded as the architect of modern India. His vision of humanity brought India and the West into an internal relationship.

Tagore was essentially a poet of Bengal who sang of its sights and sounds and plucked music out of its very air. He was superbly, the organ-voice of India and the symbol of her immense aeonic vitality. And his mind being rooted in India, his genius was like a noble tree, the benignity of its branches touching every age and clime, a truly universal spirit that gloried in the visible world of man and nature, and well apprehended what T.S. Eliot describes as:

'The intersection of the timeless with time.'

Rabindranath was unique among the sons of men in the present age in being a full and a universal man, whose motivating presence is felt everywhere in the world. He was also in possession of a natural power of imagination which enabled him to put himself in the place of other people, thinking their thoughts and appreciating their motives and actions and walking with them hand in hand in their quest of the ideal. He

worked for one Supreme cause, the union of all sections of humanity in sympathy and understanding, in truth and love. His Visva-Bharati is an international university where the whole world became a single nest.

Tagore is one of the most loved and most widely read writers of world literature. His works are always published in very large numbers of copies, and are immediately sold out. His writings are intensely personal and modern, and lacked that usual accent of asceticism. It is something so familiar, so close to the reader, something responding to his own spiritual aspirations and needs, and at the same time so truly Indian, so peculiarly Indian, but not difficult to understand. The inexpressible charms of his poetry help the reader to get into the infinite beauty of life that is here on earth. It soothes the soul, and floods it with life, true strength, and courage. It leads to the heaven of freedom where the mind is without fear and where the world has not been broken up into fragments. On reading the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Shklovsky made the following comments about him:

Rabindranath Tagore is a great national poet...In his country Tagore has long been famous... His songs, set to music by the poet himself, are now sung by tens of millions of peasants everywhere where Bengali is spoken... His songs are also in harmony with us. Tagore is the bard of life, singer of love and joys inspired by the contemplation of the cosmos...His simplicity, cheerfulness, sincerity, and depth of thought often remind us of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass (Danil'chuk 85).

Tagore is not merely an Indian or a poet, rather he is acclaimed to be a 'world poet' who has infused the message of peace and love through his poetry, which is a link between the East and the West. He has been called, 'one of the most elusive poets of the modern time.' He is regarded as a world poet for his universality of appeal; his poetry is 'a festival where all the peoples and epochs are brought together.' 'To think of him only in terms of Indian, Asian or Oriental literature,' says Prof. Buddhadeva Bose (129) 'is to miss his main points.' Like Goethe's, his poems are illustrations of his wisdom. He has a dream and a vision for the whole world:

Once we dreamt that we are strangers

We make up to find that

We were dear to each other (*Stray Birds* 9).

The world hails him as a world poet and singer whose melodies contain a universal appeal, and has voiced the yearnings and aspirations of all humanity in the verse of singular sweetness and penetration. His poetry radiates light; it is illuminating, resplendent with the glorious rays of the morning sun, lighting up to hilltops and bloodying the dark recesses of grottoes. His muse does not reflect the scorching and blinding glare of the noonday sun. His exaltation comes from invincible and abiding faith; not from fitful gusts of passion. This is the secret of his rapid and universal popularity. The world has reacted promptly and eagerly to the magic of his songs because the world longs for words of faith, harmony, peace, and beauty.

1.3. Immense range and variety in Tagore's lyrics

The most characteristic role of Tagore is that of a lyric poet, yet he is different from other lyric poets in his immense range and variety. Shelley, for instance, plays on a single chord. Like the music of Pan, his song is sweet and piercing, but the burden of the song is always the same. This is the case with all the lyric poets; however, Tagore is an exception. He is a poet of infinite variety, and his range is Shakespearean. His voice is not the voice of a lyre, nor that of a Pan's reed; it is rather a full-throated orchestra where several instruments play in harmony. When we have a close look at each of his books of poems, we find that each book is different from its predecessor in technique as well as in tone. His lyrics are as beautiful as they are numerous; their profusion is amazing, and the perfection of each little poem even more so. Here indeed is God's plenty. He has been able to sustain the lyric fervour over sixty years. He began to stir us with songs when he was sixteen, and at eighty he had not quite finished. We all grow older with the passage of time; while every year that passes, makes Tagore younger. When he was about forty, he wrote the lovely poems of *Kshanika*, between sixty and seventy (roughly speaking) he reaped the most magnificent harvest of songs since the *Gitanjali* - *Gitimalya* - *Gitali* cycle. Even in his very latest books of poems there is a shade of feeling, a tone of thought he had not exploited before.

Urvasi is one of Tagore's greatest lyrics; a lyric, which has exercised eternal fascination on the mind and the heart of the readers of Tagore. According to Hindu mythology, Urvasi is the heavenly dancer of Lord Indra's court, the type of eternal

beauty, who in the beginning rose from the sea when it was churned by the gods. Tagore views Urvashi as the perfect woman - not child, nor mother, nor wife, but the beautiful woman who is goddess and seductress at once. Edward Thomson says Urvashi is the meeting of the East and the West indeed. Urvashi is a glorious tangle of Indian mythology, modern Science, and legends of European romance.

Additionally, Tagore has left behind him several patriotic lyrics in which patriotism finds its truest and noblest expression.



Mahatma Gandhi hailed him as 'The Great Sentinel,' who was one of those versatile men of his age, who touched and enriched modern Indian life at several points. *Gitanjali* is the collection of some of his best-known lyrics, and

it brings out his humanism, spiritual realism, as well as his cosmopolitanism. The emphasis throughout is on the spiritual reality of life. The poet does not pray for the heaven of material prosperity in India. On the other hand, he prays for fearlessness, truthfulness, and unity for the dominance of reason over superstition:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards
perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into
the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever
widening thought and action-

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country
awake

(*Gitanjali* 35).

Tagore's poetry is so vast, varied, and voluminous that it escapes any easy categorization. It appears as if there are two Tagore, one in English and the other in Bengali. Despite being a Bengali to the fingertips and his wide participation in national life, Tagore was essentially a solitary individual. He is perhaps closer to the romantic poets than to the people nearer to the home. His emotional connection with the *Sufis*, *Vaishnavas* or *Bauls* was more romantic than real. Like the romantic poets, Tagore was a man of many moods and many masks too. Armed with these rare qualities, Tagore's poetry spread over many decades and moving through sea-changes. His poetry is many things to many people. He could sing even in distress. Smooth on the surface, there were abysses below and within him. The poet of Santiniketan (Abode of Peace) had known but little

peace in his life; hence the constant quest for peace is a dominant theme of his lyrics.

Rabindranath's poetry is a reflection of all that is best in the Indian tradition summed up: the spiritual quest of the Upanishads, the preoccupation with beauty as exemplified in Kalidasa's works, the craving for communion with the super sensuous expressed in sensuous images by the Vaishnava poets, the carefree laconic intimacy of the Bauls of Bengal, the grand opulence of the Mughal Court, and the open-air manner of the folk song mirroring the life of the common man. It is a case of mustering a whole civilization in one's own person and recapturing its significance in terms of beauty. Simplicity is the hallmark of Tagore's Poetry. His simplicity, however, is full of grandeur and serenity; it is divinity made simple. He is not a tract of land where edifices are built and tunnels forged through mountains; but, a stretch of water that is changeable, continuous, always on the move, cool and bland. When he composes, his heart dances like a peacock.

Tagore's lyrics can be compared to a beautiful meadow, surrounded and studded with flowers, with a stream of pure and crystal water flowing through it. "The shock, the pang, and the sudden blow of poetry is not what Tagore can offer: his poems are mild and gentle on the surface, like the Bengal south wind celebrated by him and Jaydeva, or like the 'tender night' of Keats. He is never unfeeling, never hard and his language feels like velvet. He uses poetic words all the time; like Petrarch or like Ronsard, he writes beautiful poems entirely with words traditionally related to the idea of beauty, words which support but do not contradict one another" (Bose 68). Hence the shock or

pang is not what Tagore creates in his poetry. Ramamurthy (83) is of the opinion that Tagore's poems are "velvety, smooth and gentle and do not distract anyone beyond a certain point. They are not in the romantic masochistic or sadistic tradition. Like a soft breeze they send us into a languorous dream. Language is chosen and carefully chiselled for mellifluous effects. The words are never harsh or vulgar or out of the way."

If Tagore had been nothing more than a poet and a writer, the quality and output of his contribution to his people's language and literature would still entitle him to be remembered as one of the world's truly great immortals. But he was something much more. He was an artist in life. His personal life was as harmonious and noble as his verse is simple and beautiful. He lived, as he wrote, not for pleasure or profit but out of joy; not as a brilliant egoist, but as a dedicated spirit, conscious that his genius was a gift from the divine, to be used in the service of man:

My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight

O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet.

Only let me make my life simple and straight,

Like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music

(*Gitanjali* 7).

Tagore is a lyric poet par excellence. In his music and melody, cadences, rhythms and refrains, subjectivism, melancholy, love for nature, love for death, simplicity of diction, spontaneity and brevity and his treatment of love, he is a lyric poet. Most of his

poems are either songs or short poems. He rejects the epic tradition in favour of the lyrical tradition.

Poetry endures longer than prose, and lyric poetry has a greater hold on the individual mind than either epic or dramatic verse. Tagore is greater in his poetry than in his prose, and greater in his songs than in his poetry. He is wonderfully versatile. When it comes to any sort of an evaluation, we find that of all the princely gifts he has rained on his undeserving countrymen, the princeliest of all is, without doubt, his poetry. It is in his short, lyrical pieces (most of which were originally composed as songs or set to tune later on) that his highest poetic powers have been revealed. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for *Gitanjali* not for its mystical qualities but for its superb poetry. It is not:

I dive down into the depth of the Ocean of forms,
hoping to gain the perfect pearl of the formless-

Or

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

But

Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens.

Ah, love why dost thou let me wait outside at the
door all alone-

Or

In the deep shadows of the rainy July, with secret steps,
thou walkest, silent as night, eluding all watchers-

That really goes deep down into our beings and thrills us to the marrow. These poems, simple, delicate, and flower-like in form, have a rock-like core that will preserve the Tagorean aroma for centuries. It is on such pieces that Tagore's greatness and uniqueness as a lyrical poet rests.

1.4. Aims and functions of poetry

Tagore holds the view that, art is very like creation and the artist is akin to Brahma. "Art reveals man's wealth of life." Rabindranath himself says, "Art has the magic wand which gives undying reality to all things, it touches and relates them to the personal being in us. We stand before its productions and say: 'I know you as I know myself, you are real'" (Tengshe 45).

Rabindranath Tagore had a very high conception of the aims and functions of poetry. The object of poetry according to Tagore is to elevate man's soul from materialism and to establish a perfect communion between man and his surroundings and the ultimate reality. Creation is the summum bonum of a poet. He says:

Construction is for a purpose, it expresses our wants,
but creation is for itself, it expresses our very being
(Mukherjee 76 - 77).

According to Tagore, art is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Divine. "Art," demonstrated Rabindranath in the third issue of the French quarterly *Verve*, "represents the

inexhaustible magnificence of the creative spirit; it is generous in its acceptance and generous in its bestowal; it is unique in its manner and universal in its appeal; it is hospitable to all, because it has a wealth which is its own; its vision is new though its view may be old."

Rabindranath did not have any rigorous formal training in either philosophy or the history of arts. On the other hand, not only was he a voracious reader in these subjects, but he was deeply involved in them, both as a creative writer and as a leading intellectual of his time. He had a natural impatience towards all formalism: he did not formulate his methods of literary analysis in precise terms, nor did he identify his critical tools with any objectivity. His approach to art was intimately linked to his philosophy of life; and like his philosophy, his view of art was free from rigidity, never aspiring to the condition of a system.

Man is endowed with the capacity to transcend him and his surroundings; in art, he reveals this quality of transcendence. In *The Religion of an Artist* (23), he says:

Life is perpetually creative because it contains in itself that surplus which ever overflows the boundaries of the immediate time and space, restlessly pursuing its adventure of expression in the varied forms of self-realization.

Therefore, in art, the artist reveals himself and not his objects. The world takes its special feature of shape, colour and movement from the particular range of quality of the artist's perception. Similarly, human personality owes its existence to

the world, to the life around us. In short, this world becomes a part of our personality; it grows with our growth, it changes with our changes. An artist reveals his personality, which has been moulded by the world around him. English romantic poetry expresses the ideal of creative unity between the poet and the world. Wordsworth expressed in his own style what he realized in nature. Shelley had a Platonic contemplation, accompanied by a spirit of revolt against every kind of obstacle: political, religious or otherwise. Keats's poetry was wrongly out of the meditation and creation of beauty. Emotions are essential for poetry. Defining poetry Wordsworth said that it is "emotions recollected in tranquillity." Tagore further interpreted poetry in his *Lecture and Addresses* 83):

Our emotions are the juices, which transform this world of appearance into the more intimate world of sentiments. On the other hand, this outer world has its own juices, having their various qualities, which excite our emotional activities. This is called in Sanskrit rhetoric *rasa*, which signifies outer juices having their response in the inner juices of our emotion. And a poem, according to it, is a sentence or sentences containing juices, which stimulate the juices of emotion. It brings to us ideas vitalized by feeling ready to be made into the life stuff of our nature.

Art is an emotional expression of reality. What is reality? Things differ with one another in their appearance and not in their essence. In other words, we may say that they differ in their

relation to one, to whom they appear. These relational differences, which are observed by individual human personality, find expression in art or poetry. So, the abiding greatness of art lies in expression. All art is realization of the harmony of the feeling of oneness with the Eternal.

Furthermore, Rabindranath Tagore points out that a scientist can make only what he has learnt by analysis and experiment; but an artist cannot express by merely informing and explaining. Art reveals feelings, and feelings cannot find expression in plain language. It deals neither with facts nor with laws; it deals with taste. So, in poetry we must use words, which have got the proper taste, which do not merely talk but conjure up pictures and sing. Pictures and songs are not merely facts - they are personal facts. They are not only themselves but ourselves also. They defy analysis and they have immediate access to our hearts.

Rabindranath does not accept literature as an imitation of the external world. But he does not deny that the world is the cause of literature. In *The Religion of Man*, he writes that "art is the response of the creative human soul to the call of the real. It is not an imitation of external reality, but a response to that reality." He cannot accept the view that self-expression is the final goal of literature; the writer's main target should be his audience. When a person is alone, there is no need of literature; literature becomes inevitable and imperative when one is part of a larger community. *Sahitya*, then, is an instrument to achieve togetherness. Of course, it is created by individuals out of their urge for self-expression, which Tagore accepts as innate in

humankind; but it is created not for the self alone but for all humanity. He remarks:

For man, as well as for animals, it is necessary to give expression to feelings of pleasure and displeasure, fear, anger, and love. In animals, these emotional expressions have gone beyond their bonds of usefulness. But in man, though they still have roots in their original purposes, they have spread their branches far and wide in the infinite sky high above their soil. Man has a fund of emotional energy which is not all occupied with his self-preservation. This surplus seeks its outlet in the creation of Art, for man's civilization is built upon his surplus (qtd. in Das 12-13).

Tagore also regarded art as an account of man's realization in life. What man has felt to be true in his life finds expression from the artist's pen, brush, and other instruments. A literary artist is not a historian who gives a chronicle of events for our information; instead, he gives what has sunk deep in man's consciousness and what is acknowledged to be human truth. For instance, the arrangement of the furniture of his room was altered every day, his easy chair faced different directions and we did not find the room arranged in the same manner on two consecutive days. This proves that Rabindranath was as great an artist in life as in literature. Not only the entirety of his life, but his mode of daily living was a perfect work of art.

The chief object of art is the expression of personality and not of that, which is abstract and analytical, hence it uses the language of picture and music. This should not make us think

that the principal object of art is the production of beauty. Beauty in art has been a mere instrument and not its complete and ultimate significance. Tagore was also greatly concerned with art as form. He employed seasoned words, metrical innovations, and conscious artistry in his poems. Art was to him man's response to the mystery of and to the essential form of life. The artist who partakes the creativity of the Supreme Person employs rhythm to create harmony. Tagore never used a wrong word while talking; if you recorded his conversation it would sound like a prepared speech - the choice of words, the intonation, the inflection, everything was so incredibly perfect. The greatness of Tagore lies in his perfect fusion of words and melody.

1.5. Developmental phases in Tagore's poetry

His early poetry has little poetic merit but it shows promise for future development and greatness. It is romantic in character and expresses the young poet's joys and sorrows. Some of his early poems written in Bengali were published in *Jananakur*, a periodical. The following lines are the specimens of his early imitative poetry:

Come my maiden gay, heartless beauty

What do I tell thee, over and over again?

The wound has rocked the abyss of my soul

My heart and mind, oh how they burn!

The second stage in Tagore's development came when he was at the crossing of adolescence and youth, when he was

rising above vague, self-obsessed miseries of adolescence and discovering his own ground. Analysing his creative mood during this period, Tagore writes in *Reminiscences*:

The strength I gained by working, freed from the trammels of tradition led me to discover that I had been searching in impossible places for that which I had within myself. Nothing but want of self-confidence had stood in the way of my coming into my own. I felt like rising from a dream of bondage to find myself unshackled. I cut extraordinary capers just to make sure I was free to move.

The second phase begins with the appearance of the *Evening Song*, which bears an unmistakable stamp of a new art and new standard in the sphere of poetry. *Sandhya Sangeet* is a lyric of very high order and marks the real beginning of his poetic career. It was followed by another masterpiece the *Prabhat Sangit*, which is known for the expression of Tagore's mysticism. *Manasi* presents all the motives of Tagore's poetry: love, nature, death, the motherland and the world. The poetic spirit of Tagore was liberated from the shackles of imitativeness and began to enjoy spiritual intimations, which found expression in flawless lyricism:

When the heart is hard and parched up,
come up on me with a shower of mercy.
When grace is lost from life,
come with a burst of song.

When tumultuous work raises its din on all sides
shutting me out from beyond,
come to me, my lord of silence,
with thy peace and rest.

When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust,
O thou holy one, thou wakeful,
come with thy light and thy thunder (*Gitanjali* 39).

Sonar Tori, (the Golden Boat) and *Chitra* are two more masterpieces of this period. His poems of the second period are remarkable for their superb romanticism, richness, and intensity of poetic expression, mysticism, rounded perfection, and felicity of loveliness.

In the third stage, Tagore's poetic genius had reached its climax in *Chitra*. The golden period of youth and of its feverish dreams was over. *Caitali* (1896), *Kahini* (1900), and *Kalpana* (1900), represent a lull, a conclusion or a momentary exhaustion in Tagore's imagination and creative power. Instead of developing deep into the mystery of life and death or soaring higher and higher in the infinite realm of spirituality; the poet is content with the humble realities of life, with the petty sights and sounds of the world.

The fourth stage in Tagore's poetic career began with a spiritual experience. Describing this experience, he says that one morning he was gazing upon the rising sun when all of a sudden:

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

(*My Reminiscences* 217).

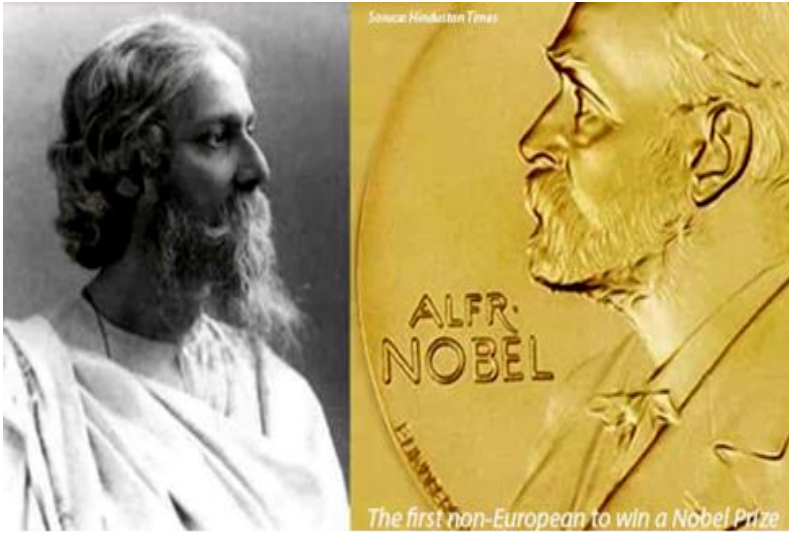
Before this experience he had seen the world only with his eyes; now he began to see with the whole of his consciousness. All his writings of this period express the joy of attaining the infinite within the finite. It is the poet's new voyage of spiritual exploration. *Gitanjali* (1912), and *Gitali* (1914) reveal again and again the wordless world of spirit, the sky of infinitude and its stainless white radiance. The poems in these collections are mainly composed on four themes: God and nature, God and human soul, Nature and the soul, and the Soul and humanity.

The realization of universal or eternal spirit in man is the accomplishment of God in him. The idea of God, thus, in the observation of Tagore, is the substratum of the highest value of human goodness. God, in this sense, as the ontological essence of man, removes all the evils of life and thus he tries to realize his perfect goodness as God. In Tagore's perspective, man reaches his own God on the basis of his own feeling of divine humanity. According to Tagore we can come to the idea of God from the idea of perfect goodness or divine humanity. Tagore observes: God is *Manawa Brahma* which means 'Reality is human.'

1.6. Origin of the English *Gitanjali*

Tagore was due to sail for England on 19th March, 1912, but had to cancel his voyage due to illness and retire to the family property at Shelaidah for an enforced rest. While there, he did not have the energy to write anything new, so he decided to translate some of his Bengali poems into English. That was the origin of the world-famous collection of poems, the English *Gitanjali* (Song Offering).

In May of the same year, Tagore sailed to England in the company of his son Rathindranath and his daughter-in-law Pratima. On board the ship, he continued the translation of the *Gitanjali* poems. Upon his arrival in London, he called on Sir William Rothenstein and gave him the booklet with the English translations of his poems to read. Rothenstein was so impressed by them that he arranged a reading of the same by the poet William Butler Yeats. The poems appealed to the Irish poet so much that he gave eloquent expression to his admiration. The other well-known literary figures like Ezra Pound and Andrew Bradley also read the translations and expressed their deep appreciation. In fact, William Rothenstein was the bridge that helped Tagore to cross over his little world of Bengal to the big world of the West; while it was the poets W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound who made his fame known in the West as a great poet and a deeply spiritual person. The West honoured him like a king. He won the Nobel Prize and the admiration of eminent literary personalities. The following is the copy of the homage from the members of Lyceum Club, London on Rabindranath receiving the Nobel Prize.



To Kabibara Rabindranath Tagore,

We the members of the Oriental Circle at the Lyceum Club, London, have heard with great satisfaction of the award to you of the Nobel Prize for Literature, which sets the seal of universal fame on your achievement.

You have dedicated your genius, the gift of God to the purest ends.

*You have brought joy to the heart, serenity to the mind,
music to the ears, image of beauty to eyes, and to the soul
the remembrance of this divine origin.*

*We wish that you may long remain the living bond between
East and West, and we offer you our heartfelt
congratulations.*

*Signed on behalf of the council and members of the Oriental
Circle.*

*Eleven Martinengo Cearesco... President Alethea Appleby
Moller.*

Vice-President Rosanna Powell... Hon Secretary.

Gitanjali created an unprecedented sensation in the intellectual circles of the West. The use of the machine and applied science had doubled and tripled the material prosperity of the West. People were fascinated by the growth of their industries and the spread of their empire. Literature was caught between a boastful pride of race and colour on the one hand, and immense greed and selfishness on the other. It had become an article of luxury. Into this milieu came the English Gitanjali. The spiritual certainty, and the sense of sanctity which pervaded the poems seemed to challenge the West, saying: "Turn your eyes within you. Look away from outer things" (Roy 64). Like

the melody of the bamboo flute from the fields and meadows of Bengal this message entered the places of the West.

It became a fashion everywhere to carry a copy of *Gitanjali* among the elite throughout the world. Many of his distant alien disciples started quoting the lines of *Gitanjali* in their letters. "Give the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles" (Bhattacharya 4). Helen Meyer Franck, who translated Tagore's poems into German and brought out a collected edition of his works in 1921, records how she recited poems from *Gitanjali* at night as a prayer. Pearson considered Tagore as a manifestation of Christ. Andrews in every letter addressed the poet as "the dearest and best friend in the world." In a personal letter he records, "for the moment your name is called, or an audience can be found who will listen to your name, my own personality is raised a hundredfold" (Bhattacharya 4). Levi writes, "What a sweet time we had, listening to your songs, to your music. I think that there is no power of evocation more efficient in the world than music; pictures and words reach eyes and mind and heart, music appeals to the whole self" (Bhattacharya 4).

1.7. Features and elements of Tagore's lyrical poetry

The most characteristic role of Tagore as a lyric poet is his humanistic essence combined with spirituality. The spiritual message does not, however, urge us to run away from the 'fret and fever of life' and seek shelter in a hermitage, rather, he insists on our full participation in the joys and sorrows of life. W.B Yeats praises Tagore's lyrical genius:

The lyrics... full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of material invention – display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much as the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes.

His lyrics are rich both in content and form, and they are noticeable for the exquisite blending of harmony of thoughts, feelings and emotions. They are suffused with everlasting wisdom of India; the age cannot wither or custom stale its infinite variety.

1.7.1. Variety

Tagore's literary work is characterized by immense variety and abundance. In the course of his long period of active production, covering over sixty years, he published more than three hundred volumes of poetry, drama, short stories, novels, discourses on history, religion, politics, philosophy, etc. He has left behind him more than twenty million lines of poetry, a number larger than that of many other poets of the world. This poetic vein penetrates over his prose works. His dramas are symbolic poetic plays, his novels and short stories are poetic and even his other works are remarkable for their passages of impassioned poetic prose. Throughout his literary works, Tagore strived for the renewal of human personality and society. Vivek Bhattacharya states, "Tagore always sang to the glory of man. Man was the hero of all his songs" (19).

There is a depth of thought in Tagore's poetry which takes a whole life's time to fathom. His narrative and dramatic poems are superb and, of course, he is a master of metaphor. He has invented new metrical principles and stabilized the old ones, he has exploited every technical device possible to the Bengali language; his genius glows in his use of rhyme, alliteration, assonance and even onomatopoeia. All this is true; he has poems to suit every taste, every passing mood, and it is not at all surprising that different persons admire his poetry for different reasons.

Tagore's verse in English is essentially lyrical in quality. His subjects are the elemental subjects of all lyrical poetry, such as: God, Nature, Love, the Child, Life and Death. He treats them with a born lyric poet's simplicity, sensuousness, and passion. His is poetry steeped in the Indian ethos, because he sings with the *Upanishads* in his bones. His basic ideas are mostly from this source: God is no remote Absolute for him but is an entity embodying *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ananda*; and the universe is a joyous expression of God's play; evil is but part of the Infinite Perfection; the finite world and body are both the real and good, and human love a step to divine; man must remain close to Nature for Nature is a manifestation of the Divine; all misery arises out of self-will and self-love, and the antidote to these is universal brotherhood.

1.7.2. *Music*

Music played a very prominent part in Rabindranath's creative activity. He was born in a house where the best Indian music was a living force in everyday life. He absorbed its traditions and conventions until they became part of his musical

nature and the basis of his musical appreciation. Rabindranath wrote about 2500 songs, and his most popular songs number about hundred. The tunes are many in number; in fact, almost as many as the songs he composed. Tagore's music has a universal appeal; the tunes are so catching that the songs leave an echo in the heart of the reader. He feels like repeating it and finds that he has mastered it in a few repetitions. This easy mastery satisfies the ego of the singer. About his achievement as a musician Rabindranath writes: "I do not hesitate to say that my songs have found their place in the heart of my land, along with their flowers that are never exhausted and that the folk of the future, in days of joy or sorrow or festival, will have to sing them" (Tengshe 151).

Music is the most abstract of all arts, as mathematics in the region of science. In fact, these two have deep relationship with each other. Mathematics as the logic of number and dimension is the basis of our scientific knowledge. When taken out of its concrete associations with cosmic phenomena and reduced to symbols, it reveals its grand structural majesty, the inevitableness of its own perfect concord. But there is also such a thing as the magic of mathematics, which works at the root of all appearances, producing harmony of unity, the cadence of the interrelation of the parts bringing them under the dominion of the whole. This rhythm of harmony has been extracted from its usual context and exhibited through the medium of sound. And thus, the pure essence of expressiveness in existence is offered in music. In sound it finds the least resistance and has a freedom unencumbered by the burden of facts and thoughts. It gives it a power to arouse in us an intense feeling of reality, it seems to

lead us into the soul of all things and make us feel the very breath of inspiration flowing from the supreme creative joy.

Rabindranath Tagore, like Chaucer's forerunners, writes music for his words, and one understands at every moment that he is so abundant, so spontaneous, so daring in his passion, so full of surprise, because he is doing something which has never seemed strange, unnatural, or in need of defense. Tagore's lyrics are full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour and metrical invention. Music is the breath of Tagore's poetry. The addition of music has increased the popularity of his songs. His poems are *geets* (songs) comparable to the Urdu *Gazals*. They are offerings and scatterings of melodies sweet and unique, dazzling and imperishable in beauty. No doubt his poems have gained much from their being written in the form of songs, but they are much more poetry than songs. To Tagore, poetry and music were the essence of life, which gave it rhythm, and his philosophy was one of living harmony with nature.

The lyrics of the *Gitanjali* and other works have haunting music of their own. A great deal of the charm of *Gitanjali* lies in its music and melody. Tagore's self-criticism talked more about the tone he adopted for his translation of *Gitanjali* in 1912 than it did about the tone of his teenage letters. Indira, daughter of Satyendranath was also a source of music for him. Music was the strongest link between uncle and niece for over sixty years. Her vivacious uncle sang fashionable Victorian songs, for instance, such as 'Won't you tell me Mollie darling', and 'Darling you are growing old.' He also had the comic style of singing a particular Hindi song. 'He would start singing in common time. Then gradually the tempo would get faster and

faster until his lips become a mere trembling line, and we would rock with laughter' (Dutta 68).

1.7.3. *Beauty*

Like Keats, Tagore also was a poet of Beauty; Beauty, which is Truth. He, too, loved the principle of Beauty in everything, and for him, too, a thing of beauty was a joy forever. His concept of *Sundaram* is never devoid of *Shivam* and *Satyam*. Besides spiritual and divine beauty, he also woos other kinds of beauties - of colours, sights, sounds, imagery, phrase, and grace. There is a biblical simplicity, a lyricism, and a rare grace of diction in almost all his poems. Tagore's imagination is highly constructive and sublime that it is capable of harmonizing ideas among themselves as well as with the beauty of spontaneous expression. He converts his ideas into living beauties with the magic of his powerful imagination, by clothing them with sweet and harmonious expression. He produces lines of hunting beauty by his harmonious blending of words, music, imagination and above all, by almost invariably turning his theme and verses to the inevitable spiritual purpose. The luxuriant abundance of imagery enriches the beauty of his poems.

1.7.4. *Imagery*

Tagore's imagery is often functional. In his early poetry the cosmic elements predominated, on account of his close and unbroken relationship with nature. The peculiar garden and sky outside his childhood confinement in the family mansion in Calcutta, was a source of rich imagery and a mythical witness to an abiding reality. In his boyhood meditations nature came first,

diversified with humanity but, never dominated by human events and passion. The high Himalayas where his father took him became the symbol of both remoteness and grandeur. The dance of Siva, the story of his snowy locks melting as the stream of Ganges appear in Tagore's songs and are aesthetically rendered in his lyrics. In *Gitanjali* his images are mostly elemental or are drawn from nature. In *The Gardener* Tagore presents images of flowers, honeybees, thorns, music, birds, and animals. We also come across the jungle of bracelets, the filling of pitcher at the fountain, the lamp extinguishing, the golden stag, the caressing of the soft-fleeced lamb, the green and yellow rice fields, beautiful meadows, streams, and cowherds.

1.7.5. Diction

There is a biblical simplicity, a lyricism, and a rare grace of diction in almost all his poems. Tagore's imagination is highly constructive and sublime. He converts his ideas into living beauties with the magic of his powerful imagination, by clothing them with sweet and harmonious expression. He produces lines of hunting beauty by his harmonious blending of words, music, imagination and above all, by almost invariably turning his theme and verses to the inevitable spiritual purpose.

In the later phases of his career, his diction became colloquial close to the everyday language of man. The *Gitanjali* is a rare example of the union of simplicity with sublimity, and the language too is simple. There is rarely, a hard unfamiliar word. There are no poeticisms; the language approximates as closely as possible to the language of everyday use. The vocabulary and the grammatical constructions are simple, easy, and familiar. The shortest words, mostly monosyllabic, have been used, and

the words are selected both with reference to their sense and their sound. The use of monosyllables results in concentration of vowel sounds, and thus alliteration, onomatopoeia liquid consonants, etc, also contributes to the music and melody of his poetry.

Sometimes a single word is so used as to make it profoundly significant and suggestive. In a well-known lyric of *Gitanjali*, the poet contrasts the smallness of his desires with the greatness of God's gifts. One of the simplest and most effective expressions of this idea is to be found in *Gitanjali* 56

Thus it is that thy joy in me is so full.

Thus it is that thou hast come down to me.

O thou Lord of all Heavens,

Where would be thy love if I were not?

It is easy to see how the poet expresses his idea by emphasizing in 'Thus' at the beginning of the first two sentences. It is explained in the second part of the third sentence, and it is further strengthened by the contrast between 'I' and 'all heavens' and the interrogation, which seems to come abruptly at the end of the stanza.

Furthermore, Tagore's diction is characterized by extreme simplicity, but this simplicity is deceptive. This simple language is the vehicle for highly abstract and mystical truths. To convey his apprehension of divine reality, the poet uses concrete and picturesque images, similes and metaphors drawn from the commonplace and ordinary objects abundantly and profusely.

No other poet displays such a wealth of natural illustration. The use of such graphic and vivid images is an important characteristic of Tagore's diction, and contributes much to the open-air charm of his poetry. Due to the effectiveness of the use of such concrete imagery, God does not remain an abstraction in Tagore's poetry, but becomes a living and breathing reality. Sometimes he is the bridegroom, at other times the bride, or the traveller, or the sailor, or the guest who comes to visit the poet unexpectedly. Images come out of his pen as sparks do from a chimney fire. Some of the most commonplace words acquire a symbolic significance by constant repetition, 'flower,' 'river,' 'the sky,' 'the wind,' 'spring,' 'autumn,' 'rain,' etc, are all important symbols.

1.7.6. Rhythm

Rhythm is the movement generated and regulated by harmonious restriction. This is the creative force in the hand of the artist. In perfect rhythm, the art form becomes like the stars, which in their seeming stillness are never still, like a motionless flame, which is nothing but movement. A great picture is always speaking, but news from a newspaper, even of some tragic happening, is stillborn. Some news may be a mere commonplace in the obscurity of a journal; but give it a proper rhythm and it will never cease to shine. That is art.

Tagore was a lover of rhythm. Since his childhood, rhythm had been guiding all his finer works - composing poems, singing songs and painting pictures. Introducing his pictures, Rabindranath wrote:

One thing which is common to all arts is the principle of rhythm which transforms inert materials into living creatures. My instinct for it and my training in its use, led me to know that the lines and colours in art are no carriers of information; they seek their rhythmic incarnation in pictures. Their ultimate purpose is not to illustrate or to copy some outer fact or inner vision, but to evolve a harmonious wholeness which finds its passage through our eyesight into imagination. It neither questions our mind for meaning nor burdens it with unmeaningness, for it is, above all meaning (Bhattacharya 59).

While writing music for his words, Tagore appeared like Chaucer's forerunners, who is so abundant, so spontaneous, so full of surprise and so daring in his passion; for music never seemed strange, unnatural, or in need of defense. Tagore's lyrics are full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour and metrical invention. Paul Nash puts his reaction of Tagore's lyrics straightforwardly:

One feels about them, they are the thoughts that come to our minds in moments of deep feeling, to some of us quite often, to others rarely, written down for us in the simplest way. And so, they delight me: for everywhere 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
(Dutta, 167).

1.8. Conclusion

Variety is the life of Tagore's art and the art of his life. His lyrics are rare combination of simplicity and sublimity; the words are as simple and sublime as the heavenly theme. Tagore's lyrics are perfect in music and melody; they convey the intensity of the poet's feelings in a variety of ways. His lyrics shine like a smile, glisten like tears, blush like the cheeks of a bride, and flash like lightning, in the darkness of soul. In stature, stride, and sweep Rabindranath Tagore is an all-round creative genius the like of whom has seldom been seen. He was also greatly concerned with art as form. He employed seasoned words, metrical innovations and conscious artistry in his poems. His poetry shows such finesse and cohesion in form, matter and feelings as would have been otherwise incomprehensible in our language. He had drunk deeper than anyone else, from the mainsprings of Indian poetry. Tagore's poetry is as much Bengali as Indian, and much of it is as much Indian as universal, because he has gone deepest to where the stream of eternal life runs, the ultimate source of creation and continuation of life in every form.

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2

Devotional Lyrics: A Depiction of Tagore as Indefatigable God seeker

*"I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and
saw that life was service. I acted and behold,
service was joy."*

-Rabindranath Tagore

2.1. Introduction

In developing the idea of 'the divinity of man' and the 'humanity of God,' Tagore, like a true philosopher, tries to evaluate the proper relation between man and God. God as the absolute ideal is manifested through human life in a perfect form and becomes human, and man; through the realization of this absolute ideal in life, becomes divine, and thus a relation between man and God is finally established. Tagore explains the nature of this relationship "as the union of the infinite with the finite in finiteness" (Chattopadhyay 87). The union of the finite life with the Infinite, expresses the complete view about the relation between the finite individual with God.

Tagore is a great believer in God. Without God his poetry will look very shallow, although there would be critics to regard him as a great poet of love and nature. From God to man and from man to God is a frequent transition we witness in his poetry. He fuses nature and God. Several times he looks at God as Gopi will look at Madhav. At various occasions he emphasizes the Radha - Krishna relationship.

Tagore's God is not the 'ultimate' of Dante nor the Upanisadic 'essence' in which we must lose our identity. Others may indulge in the controversy about God's existence but Tagore knows that He exists. Tagore's love for God includes love for everything He has created. In *The Religion and Man* Tagore speaks about the Supreme love whose touch we experience in all our relation of love: the love of nature's beauty, of the animal, of the child, of the comrade, of the beloved, the love that illuminates our consciousness of reality. Love makes us immortal and deathless. "When do you find the touch of immortality in things mortal?" Tagore asks, "When there is love, it is love that casts the shadow of the infinite and keeps the old perpetually young and does not acknowledge death?" (Santiniketan).

Western critics too have elaborately emphasized the mystic and romantic notes in Tagore's poetry. The most vociferous are Edward Thompson as well as Aronson who through his book, *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes* has explicated the western evaluation of Tagore's poetry and who says that Rabindranath "was hailed as a prophet of the East, coming to deliver his message of goodwill and fraternity among men" (Aronson 32). The familiarity of his devotional lyrics was

due to its recommendation to India; its apparent novelty was its recommendation abroad. In it, poetry approximates the condition of prayer and prophecy: it is mystical in nature where the poet is concerned with relationship of Man, God and Nature. It owes its inspiration mainly to the Upanishadic doctrine according to which the entire creation has sprung out of joy, residue in joy and will go back to joy. The all-pervading presence of God is everywhere in the universe; yet God is not an abstraction. He is also a living person who appears to us as our friend and comrade, as our father and sometimes even as our lover. Tagore maintains that the infinite expresses himself through the myriad forms and shapes of the creation which is his Lila; and the relation between man and God is one of love. In the words of Budhadev Bose "Tagore's God is not the 'ultimate' of Dante nor the Upanishadic 'essence' in which we must lose our identity" (48). 'The Guardian' remarks on Tagore's mysticism "The cult of the amiable Bengali literature and mystic, Rabindranath Tagore, threatens to become something of a nuisance. It is being promoted by that class of person whose credulity is unbound wherever a hint of hostility to Christianity can be detected, and this trait Mr. Tagore possesses in sufficient quantity for their purpose" (Guardian).

Tagore's concept of religion is very much fascinating to study. To facilitate my study on Tagore's God-concept, I would like to divide the eighty years of his life into five equal periods: the early years, youth and early adulthood, the Gitanjali period, period of mature reflection and the final years. Each part takes a detailed look at Tagore's relationship with God.

2.2. The early years

In the early years of his life, Rabindranath, consciously and unconsciously learned much from his father. The strength of character, dedication to ideals and religious devotedness that Debendranath (his father) learned from Rammohun Roy were in turn imbibed by Rabindranath. Again, Debendranath's freedom of mind and courage to disagree even with his father in abandoning his ancestral faith to live the faith and religion of his choice, undoubtedly had a powerful influence on Rabindranath's own attitude to faith and religion. In addition to this, the father's piety, honesty, love of nature and sense of beauty, made a great impression on Rabindranath because his father always remained a kind of ideal and model for the young Rabi. Perhaps, Rabindranath's ability to give his best to a variety of activities and initiatives was inherited from his father, who with all the demands of being the patriarch of a large joint family, was active also in the management of vast estates and paid off all debts and was scrupulous in his obligations. What planted Tagore's feet firmly on the earth was his father's religiosity.

Even in his early years, Rabindranath was an indefatigable God-seeker. His childhood and early boyhood days at home was a life within walls- walls of concrete as well as walls raised by socio-religious do's and don'ts. The child felt that beyond these walls there lay a world, rich in possibilities that was being denied to him. This 'beyond' created in him a deep sense of mystery and aroused in him an earnest desire to get in touch with it. He wanted to reach out to that 'beyond,' discover its secrets and make it his own.

Rabindranath always experienced the joy of liberty in doing what he was not allowed, as for instance, stealing into his father's room and having a good long shower in his father's bath. This, he says, was not so much for comfort of the bath but to give rein to my desire to do just as I fancied. This may prove that his attempts to reach out to the 'beyond' was purely for the childish thrill of 'eating the forbidden fruit' and entering the forbidden territory. This deep longing that he had right from his early age, to know and to have what lay outside the boundaries imposed on him, has a deeper or we may call it a spiritual significance.

Tagore's search for the 'beyond' began as a search for the 'outside,' the world beyond the imprisoning walls of his childhood days. Though he is allowed the freedom of wandering freely in the world of nature, he was not satisfied with the knowledge of the 'beyond' that he had conquered. His yearning for the 'beyond' took the shape of the yearning for human love and then more specifically for feminine love and companionship. He got in touch with that aspect of the 'beyond' and found great joy in it. The ideal of love that appealed to him was half human, half divine, and to some extent he realized it in the person of Kadambari Devi. But the joy was overshadowed by the frustration of not being able to fully make his own the true object of love. He thought he had attained the 'beyond' of his dreams, but the 'beyond' in some way, escaped his grasp and remained unrealized. There was still the persistent emptiness in his heart and he did not know where to turn, or to whom to go, to fill that void. So, he became a wanderer. The 'beyond' he is seeking is 'someone' to centre his life and love on, someone who can fill the emptiness of his heart.

We find in his poems a movement from nature to human love and then to an ideal higher than the human and then disappointed, return to the human. The condition of his mind can be best described by a phrase from one of the essays he wrote while in Ahmedabad: “our mind is a bundle of hungers.” His mind was indeed ‘a bundle of hungers - hunger for understanding and love, hunger for recognition and fame, hunger to become someone respected and thus regain the esteem of his elders who had given up all hopes in him, and above all, hunger for that ‘someone’ that ‘dear one’ who could actually fill the emptiness in his heart.

This hunger for God is clearly expressed in a poem called *Abhilasa* (yearning). This is a prayer addressed to God:

Oh! God, why did you place me in the midst of
pomp and splendor,
Where everyone’s heart is like a machine,

Where love and devotion and every faculty,

Is governed by harsh and merciless laws?

The show of heartless grace, the cruel laws of
artificial civility,

The affected smile of gentleness is not for me.

He wrote the above lines in the context of the anger and pain he experienced at being pressurized by insults and appeals to submit to formal education. He had to suffer the ridicule and scoffing of his relatives because he would not let himself be cast into their mould of greatness and respectability. In the same poem he expresses his longing for a life free from heartless

contempt, false accusation and antipathy. He thinks, if instead of having been born in an aristocratic family, he was to have been born in a farm house, he would have been able to satisfy the natural longing of his heart. It is this feeling of pain and longing that he communicates to God.

2.3. Youth and early adulthood

The state of emptiness that Tagore experienced in his late teens continued through the time he spent in England and for at least three years after his return. The emptiness in his heart persisted right up to 1882; restless and confused, his mind and heart continued to wander in search of someone who could fill the voidness of his heart. The feeling of desolation continued even in his early adulthood; he felt alone, lost, and enveloped by darkness. In such a state of mind he seeks consolation in talking to his 'beloved' that is, the image of the ideal beloved that he nurtures in his heart. He keeps on searching, keeps on longing, not knowing what he himself wants. The yearning for the beloved finds clear expression in a ballad composed during this period, *Apsarar Prem* (The Love of Apsara).

Come O beloved, come,
Endless this waiting, waiting by the window,
Sitting alone, ever hoping,
Feeble in body, never a wink of sleep,
I await your coming, gazing at the road....
A waiting that knows not day or night.

The poem *Premmaricika* (The Love Illusion), written in 1880 is another expression of the preoccupation with love and of the heart tirelessly seeking its object. Here he asks the question, 'whether love is but an illusion.' In another song published in

1881, he asks, “Beloved, what is it you call love! Is it just pain, only tears? Is it merely the breath of sorrow?” All this is due to the fact that he was not able to have a lasting love relationship.

With the publication of the collection of poems *Prabhat Sangit* (Morning Songs) Tagore’s state of bewilderment has passed. The night has gone and the new day has dawned. Here the poet rediscovers life with a wider dimension. The morbid introspection is not there anymore. The first of these poems, *The Awakening of the Waterfall* written on the very day of his extraordinary spiritual experience, celebrates this newness that is an all-pervading light and power. He wrote:

After a long time, a light has entered the dark cave...

I do not know why after so long my heart has been awakened...

I am suddenly able to see this world In a new light.

... I don’t know how, but heart today has woken up.

Where I can find so much happiness, such beauty,
so much play!

I experience great joy, ...my heart is full.



**Faith is the bird
that feels the light
when the dawn
is still dark.**

Rabindranath Tagore

The *Prabhat Sangit* concludes with these words to the 'beloved' in the poem *Samapan* (Conclusion):

Come, come close to me, my heart longs for you,

Only let me sit near you.

I will only look; I won't utter a word.

New life has come, a new song is heard, look the night is gone.

There is joy and laughter all around, love and affection shine forth.

It is evident from the above lines, that the state of bewilderment has been overcome. Something of the 'beloved' he knows, be it indistinctly, as his life has been blessed by brief encounters. However, the poet's ardent desire is for a constant presence and a total union. In the absence of that, the heart keeps longing and the eyes keep searching. The absence is always very painful and this is powerfully expressed in the poems *Rahur Prem* (Rahu's Love):

This ceaseless hunger, unending thirst, wail loudly.

... will this terrible longing that is like a knife in the breast,

like poison in the mind, like an illness, a pain

be ever satiated through the ages...!

These lines are expressions of the poet's longing for the beloved, the uncertainty, the agony of the waiting and hoping. The unbearable pain, the lost feeling, all these persist; but it is not all darkness and desert any more. There is light and there are flowers. The dawn is there and there is spring time as well.

The best way to describe who is God for Rabindranath Tagore is to examine the different names he used for God in this period. In a letter written in 1891, he addressed God in the following way: "Oh You the Indescribable One!" In another song, in the course of trying to describe the way he understands God, Tagore says: "He is beyond description." *Vidhata* is the name most often used by him. At least fifteen times we find it in his poems, letters and other writings of this time. The word means providence, director and the one who ordains and make

things happen. He is the controller for man and for the whole universe. It is obvious from two of his letters: one written on 23 January 1890 and the other on 7 February 1893, that for Tagore God is the Creator. In the former he wrote, "Among all the qualities with which God the Creator of the universe adorned the human person, meekness is pre-eminent." And in the latter, he speaks of God as "the Creator, alone in the midst of his Creation"

Another name often used by Tagore for God is *Antaryami*, which means, the one who dwells within. Sometimes the name is used in a very general way. For instance, once he had to write a political essay, he wrote a letter to his niece, "Only God knows if some good will come from writing this," and in a song he wrote "I have found you, O God" (Chunakapura 107). At some other times *Antaryami* is used to mean God as the one who has a higher and more penetrating knowledge of persons and things. The *Antaryami* not only dwells within, but knows all the secrets of the inner self that are unknown to man, or are beyond the reach of human knowledge: "We are not able to know fully our own thoughts, half of these are known only to God" (Chunakapura 107). Further, in a letter he wrote, "knowing everything about whole and undivided self of an individual is beyond the personality of all, except God."

An often-repeated name for God that we find in Tagore's writings in these years is *Pita* (Father). I wish to quote a few examples from his *poems and songs*:

"You... are our Father" (Tumi... go pita amader);
"call out to all and say, let us go to the Father's
house" (Bolare deke bolo, pita ghare calo); "All

are crying distressfully, listen O Father, listen”
(Sokatore oi kandieche sokole, suno, suno, pita);
I have come in fear, O Father... turn to me and
see there is no strength in my heart” (Sobho ye
esechi Pita... ceye dokho hridayete nahi bal).

Several names used for God, indicates a special, very close relationship of God to the heart of man. *Pranes* - God of the heart, *Hridayasvami* - ruler of the heart, *Hridaya Nath* - Lord of the heart and *Hridayer Cira Asraya* - Constant refuge of the heart, are a few examples.

Additionally, some names he uses are very endearing. Tagore addresses God as *Priyatama* - Darling, *Priyatama Nath* - Beloved Lord, *Premamaya* - Loving one, *Manoranjan* - Dear one. Other names like *Bandhu* - Friend, and *Sakha* - Companion, speaks of friendship and companionship. Tagore is very consistent in his understanding of God as Lord, Master and Ruler of the hearts and minds of people and of the whole universe. In the course of his writings in this period, nine times, he refers to God as *Prabhu* (Lord), and seven times *Nath* (Master, Ruler).

God’s greatness, majesty and supremacy are proclaimed in several of the names. For Tagore, God is *Maharaj* (Great King), *Mahasaktimay* (Most Powerful), *Ati Mahan* (Supremely Great), *Devadidev* (God of gods), *Parabrahma* (The Supreme Being). The names like *Satya*, *Sundara*, *premamaya*, *Purna Mangal*, *Purna Ananda*, *Sukh*, *Santi*, *Dhruvajyothi*, all addressed to God, we find that for Rabindranath, truth, beauty, love, goodness, joy, happiness, peace and light are all realities closely associated with God.

According to Rabindranath Tagore, God's most preferred dwelling place is the heart of man. The heart of man as Tagore sees it, belongs to God and therefore it is His rightful dwelling place. Everyone else who has found entry and enthroned himself therein is a usurper. Therefore, Rabindranath says in one of his songs, - "Cast out everyone else and make Him your Lord" (Chunkapura 111). Tagore is of the view that the relationship between God and man is created by God himself. In his poem *Anugraha* (Blessing), Tagore says, "Least of the least, you have created me," Again in a hymn composed for the Brahmo Samaj worship he writes, "I know this that because You are, I also am, You are living and so I too am alive." In another hymn Tagore sings, "I am here, only because of your great love." This indeed is the basis of all relationship of man to God, that man has being because God is Being. Man owes every bit of his life to God because it is God who created him and it is He who continues to sustain his life.

Rabindranath is always aware that, to realize his goal and attain the One he is looking for, he needs the help of God. He asks God "Remove, O remove this evil of ignorance and I will delight in the vision of your glorious face," "In this oppressed heart shower down the nectar of your love, mitigate this burning in my heart;" "You yourself, O Lord of the Heart, wake me with your touch of love, that at the end of the dark night I may see you. Slowly, slowly, may the pure radiance of your face spread itself out in the heart's horizon" (Chunkapura 118-119).

Rabindranath's constant prayer is one of longing for love and union. At first, the longing was for union with that undefined ideal 'beloved.' By the last decade of the nineteenth

century he realised the 'beloved' of his heart's longing - God. He constantly expresses his desire of being close to Him, "O Lord, ... do not stay far, in solitude and in company, within and without, I want always to see you." "Lord, ... I will immerse all my desire in the ocean of your love, all the pain of separation I'll forget in the immortal joy of union with you;" "Give me yourself to me, fulfill my longing, you come close to me" (Chunkapura 120).

From the early years of his life to the end of this period (early adulthood), Rabindranath has made some progress in his search for God. Although, the end of the early period was characterized by a state of bewilderment; gradually it all passed away, and Tagore's search for the 'beyond' began to take a precise shape. He moved from a mere 'something' to a 'someone' to centre his life and love on; someone who could fill the emptiness of his heart. His attitude towards life is more positive and hopeful. The 'someone' he sought to centre his life and love on is no longer a woman or any other human person, but very clearly 'God.' This is evident in a song of January 1881, a hymn addressed to God at the Brahmo Samaj prayer meetings:

You alone I've made my life's pole-star,
Never again to lose my way in this ocean.
May you always shine wherever I be!
Your light be the balm of my eyes.

Furthermore, Tagore's search for union with God during adulthood is best expressed in a poem *Pratidhvani* (The Echo)

published in the collection of poems titled Prabhat Sangit (Morning Songs).

Will I have to keep searching for you all my life, for ever,

Will I then never be able to find you?

2.4. The Gitanjali periods

In the second phase Tagore, the seeker, moved from a state of bewilderment to a clearer grasp of the object of his seeking, and from a state of restlessness to a certain degree of peace and tranquillity. However, his ardent desire is for a constant presence and a total union exists. In the third phase, (The Gitanjali period) the poet is able to enter more deeply into the mystery of the divine and arrive at a more personal and profound understanding of that reality. The presence of his 'beloved' becomes more constant and he enjoys a greater degree of union. He is able to bridge the gap between himself and the 'beyond.'

The writings of this period are powerful expressions of images which illustrates his hearts deep yearning for God. Tagore's favourite image is 'waiting at God's door.' For example:

I am only waiting for love to give myself up at
last into his hands. That is why it is so late and
why I have been guilty of such omissions.

They come with their laws and their codes to bind
me fast; but I evade them ever, for I am only

waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands (*Gitanjali* 17).

Some of the expressions that Tagore uses in his poems and songs convey the idea of the depth and passion of his heart's longing and of the earnestness with which he seeks God.

My heart longs to join in Thy song, but vainly struggle for a voice. I would speak, but speech breaks not into song and I cry out baffled. Ah! Thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master! (*Gitanjali* 3).

The above song reflects Rabindranath's intense waiting, with a heart full of ardent longing.

The central theme of *Gitanjali*, Tagore's finest achievement in English verse, is devotion and its motto is, 'I am here to sing thee songs' (Poem 15). These songs, firmly rooted in the ancient tradition of Indian saint poetry, yet reveal a highly personal quest for the Divine, characterized by a great variety of moods and approaches. Tagore sees God as 'unbroken perfection,' as the giver of 'simple great gift,' 'infinite gifts' which 'come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass and still thou pourest and still there is room to fill.' But on occasion, he is also the 'King of the fearful night,' armed with the 'mighty sword, flashing as a flame, heavy as a blot of thunder.' He is everywhere, the light of music 'illuminates the world,' 'every moment and every age, every day and every night, he comes, comes, ever comes.' He is not to be found in the temple; 'he is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones.' Hence

deliverance is not for the poet in renunciation; for one need not give up this world, itself a beautiful creation of God, in order to reach Him.

Tagore used diverse names to addresses God in *Gitanjali*. Some of them are: Thou (1), My Master (15), Our Master (11), My Father (35), My Lord (36), My God (102), My Poet (65), Master Poet (7), My Sun Ever Glorious (80), My King (39), My Friend (23), Love (17), Life of my Life (4), The Lord of my life, Lord of all worlds (76), My Only Friend, My Best Beloved, the solitary Wayfarer (22), My Lover (41), My Darling (57), My Lord of Silence (39), Lord of my Heart (52), Lord of all worlds (76), King of all Kings (56), The King of our Dark Dreary House, The King of the fearful Night (51), Thou Holy One, Thou Wakeful (39), Thou Spotless and Serene (68), The Innermost One (72). Additionally, some of the descriptive names that he used in this period are: "Thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind" (4), "He who can bear all burdens" (9), "The friend on his journey of love" (23), "A thirsty traveler who comes to drink at the village well" (54), "The Inscrutable without name and form" (95), and "He who is formless, he who is beyond touch" (96).

Tagore's use of rich variety of names to describe God, portray his qualities, attitudes, and closeness with God. No one name or set of names satisfies him. Each new name sheds fresh light on Rabindranath's understanding of God. The wide variety of names bears witness to two things: firstly, his fervent love for God that never tires of probing the mystery of the object of that love; and secondly, the realization that the Ultimate Reality can never be fully contained in or demonstrated exhaustively by

finite words and formulas. The names and descriptions are an account of the delight of discovery and the jubilation of knowing and loving Him.

Furthermore, Tagore's writing in these years proclaim God's lordship of the world and the universe. Some of them are: God of the universe, Protector of the world, Lord of the three worlds, Lord of the universe, God who bears the burden of the universe, Lord of all worlds, God of the boundless world, God of the world and of the universe. He represents God, not only as the Lord and master of the universe, but also as the Captain, holding in his hands to its destiny and bearing its burdens.

Tagore goes on to acclaim God's supremacy in the following names: King of Kings, King of the World's Kingdom, King of the Universe, King of the Dark Night of Pain, Lord of Darkness, King of the Fearful Night, Supreme King, The Supreme Master. What is significant here is that, by referring to God as the King of the Dark Night of pain and the Lord of Darkness, Rabindranath aims to express his faith in God as the Lord of pain, Sorrow, doubt and anxiety, symbolized by night and darkness. While God is supreme over darkness and night, He is also the God of light. God, for Rabindranath is Light and the origin of light, the Perpetual Sun, the Sun ever Glorious.

In many of his poems and songs, Tagore addresses God as 'You / Thou' (Tumi). This is not because of the inability to find other names for God; rather, it is a clear expression of the very personal relationship that he enjoys with his God. The use of the word 'You' divulges a certain affinity with God. In the second song of the English *Gitanjali*, Rabindranath himself

confesses such a relationship. He says, “Drunk with the joy of singing, I forget myself and call Thee friend who art my Lord.”

The awareness of a personal and intimate relationship with the divine is reflected in many endearing expressions Tagore uses for God: life of my life, my only friend, my best beloved, darling, my lover, sweetheart, golden dream, my life’s favorite, my affectionate one, and my beatitude. God is not someone common but, very personal and intimate. Therefore, it is noticeable that he adds ‘my’ to most of these titles which indicates the depth of Tagore’s relationship with God.

These ‘superlatives’ are an emphatic indication that Tagore has not only found the God he has been seeking all through his life; but also found the fulfillment and realization of that ideal ‘beyond’ he had been longing for: the Supreme Good, the Fullness of Truth, the Perfect Happiness, Love itself; in short, the Ultimate in everything.

In this period Rabindranath also answers the question ‘Where does God Live? For him, God is within and without. He also refers to God as someone dwelling in majesty and glory. He writes “Clothed in infinite mystery, God dwells alone and silent in his glorious abode” (Chunakapura 139). In another song, we read, “The king of the universe is seated in his heavenly throne greatly glorious” (Chunakapura 139). These quotations speak of heaven as God’s dwelling place, while some other writings refer to God as someone present in the world. In many of his songs and writings Tagore speaks of God’s presence in the heart. For example: “Thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart” (*Gitanjali* 4), “The one who dwells within” (*Gitanjali* 72).

In Tagore's understanding, God's presence is with the poor and the lowly and this is because, he has a fondness for them. It is very powerfully expressed in three songs of *Gitanjali*, and he says that God is present with the poor in their lowly labor and with every needy person than in the temple:

There rest thy feet where live the poorest and
lowliest and lost (*Gitanjali* 10).

Whom does thou worship in this lonely dark
corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open
thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard
ground and where the path maker is breaking
stones. He is with them in sun and in shower and
his garment is covered with dust. Meet him and
stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow
(*Gitanjali* 11).

Thou art the brother amongst my brothers, but I
need them not, I divide not my earnings with
them, thus sharing my all with thee (*Gitanjali* 77).

Man's very existence and all that he has, comes from God. This persuasion is clearly mentioned in many of Tagore's writings during *Gitanjali* period: "My life itself is your gift", "That I am where I am, is because of your love", "My love and devotion, all that is my strength, is a gift of your kindness".

The relationship between God and man flows from the understanding and faith in God. God is a provident God who

takes care of man in every need. Tagore says to God, “Thy gifts to us mortals fulfill all our needs” (*Gitanjali* 75). Tagore had a strong conviction that even without man’s asking for it God brings his tasks to a successful end. At various occasions, Rabindranath initiated several activities completely depending on God’s providence, without the means in hand to realize them. In one of his letters, after recounting all the things he had been able to do for his school in spite of his financial crisis, Tagore wrote, “I myself do not know with what courage I have been spending so much money; but God will in extraordinary ways provide what I am lacking (*Chunakpura* 142).

In the opinion of Rabindranath, not only has God a plan for the individual, but also, He guides the nations towards the realization of its dreams. In a prayer for his country, Rabindranath requests God:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is
held high... where the mind is lead forward by
thee into ever-widening thought and action...
into that heaven of freedom my father, let my
country awake (*Gitanjali* 35).

In another song he sings,

Wealth and fame come from thee and it is for thee
to give or to withhold them (*Gitanjali* 83).

Coming to Rabindranath’s personal life, he says that the decisions he makes, the friendship he forms etc., are all under the guidance of God, even though it is not always clear to him why God permits certain things to happen in his life. It is God

who led him step by step from one stage of life to another, from one event to another:

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not, thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger. Wherever thou leadest me, it is thou... who ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar (*Gitanjali* 63).

Referring to the close friendship that Tagore had with the king of Tripura he wrote to a friend, "Why God drew me to this place, I do not know... He has granted me a wonderful bond of relationship with the king" (Chunakapura 148). After his birthday celebration in 1911, Tagore wrote a letter, "God made this joyful event to happen as if presaging the new life I was to begin." There are two songs in *Gitanjali* which sum up the right relationship of man to God:

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure ... to keep all untruths out from my thoughts... to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower... and it shall be my endeavor to reveal thee in my actions (*Gitanjali* 4).

In one salutation to thee my God, let my sense spread out and touch this world at thy feet... let all my mind bend down at thy door... let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee (*Gitanjali* 103).

Referring to Raja Rammohun Roy Tagore remarked, “He found strength and inspiration in God. If we also want to achieve something, following the footsteps of Rammohun, we should place God at the center of all our tasks.” In a song composed on the occasion of a wedding, Rabindranath addresses the following words to the young couple: “Of the boat that you launched today together, make Him Helmsman, who is the Helmsman of this world” (Chunkapura 150).

Tagore always desired that man should submit himself to God in every eventuality. In a letter to his niece, Rabindranath wrote, “You will be deluding yourself terribly, if at least for a moment during the day or night you do not surrender yourself to God, if in all your moments you turn only to yourself.” He strongly feels that man should not always be at the receiving end, instead he too must give to God his gift of love. This idea is beautifully illustrated in song 50 of *Gitanjali*:

When thy golden chariot appeared in the
distance... my hopes rose high... the chariot
stopped where I stood. Thy glance fell on me and
thou camest down with a smile. I felt that the luck
of my life had come at last. Then of a sudden thou
didst hold out thy right hand and say, ‘what hast
thou to give to me’? Ah! What a kingly jest was to
open thy palm to a beggar to beg.

Towards the end of this period, we come to the realization that the union with the beloved Tagore looked for was a permanent one; a union without the fear and the pain of separation, a meeting that knew no parting. Such a union was

indeed 'not yet' and Tagore waits with the hope of such blissful moments with his Beloved, and feels that he is yet to travel a long distance. On several occasions Tagore feels that the vision of his beloved is not a permanent reality, and the joy resulting from it is partial and short lived. Some of his writings reveal that at times he is not able to meet and be with his Beloved; rather he has to be satisfied with the sweet perfume from his King and Lord that float down to him.

I know not why today my life is all astir and a feeling of tremendous joy is passing through my heart... I feel in the air a faint smell of thy sweet presence (*Gitanjali* 46).

Rabindranath's longing for God was not just to find Him, but to be united with him forever. During the *Gitanjali* period, he has been able to attain a deeper, personal and profound relationship with his God. The songs of *Gitanjali* and the many endearing names he used in this period confirms his deeper relations with God. He never bothered about the praise or criticism of people. The only thing he was concerned with was that his poems should be acceptable to the One for whom it has been offered.

Oh my only friend, my best beloved, the gates are open in my house, do not pass by like a dream (*Gitanjali* 22).

Art thou abroad in this stormy night on thy journey of love my friend... ever and again I open my door and look out on the darkness my friend (*Gitanjali* 23).

I shall be wise this time and wait in the dark
spreading my mat on the floor and whenever it is
thy pleasure my Lord, come silently and take thy
seat here (*Gitanjali* 99).

To sum up, although Rabindranath made tremendous progress in exploring his Beloved, his quest for a permanent union still persists. He is yet to achieve an element of paoa (getting) and at the same time the element of caoa (waiting/longing). That is to say, the longing is realized and yet not realized. In one of his poems he says to God that he will no longer sit and wait for his beloved to come, rather he would set out in search of Him in unwavering hope:

This is my delight, thus to wait and watch at the
wayside... From dawn till dusk I sit here before
my door I know that of a sudden the happy
moment will arrive when I shall see (*Gitanjali* 44).

2.5. Years of mature reflection.

The fourth period is titled as 'the years of mature reflection' because people who read about Tagore's faith in God, began to ask him questions about this God. Tagore refers to this in the second last song of *Gitanjali*:

I boasted among men that I had known you. They
see your pictures in all works of mine. They come
and ask me "Who is he? I know not how to
answer them... I put my tales of you into lasting
songs. The secret gushes out from my heart. They
come and ask me, "Tell me all your meanings." I

know not how to answer them. I say, 'Ah who knows what they mean!' They smile and go away in utter scorn. And you sit there smiling.

In the fourth phase, Tagore enters into an intimate relationship with God. Most often he refers to God as a 'person.' The Supreme Person, the Immortal Person, the Infinite Personality and the Self of Self are a few examples. Apart from other names, the two most frequently used names to describe God are: 'Supreme' and 'Infinite.' He calls God the Supreme One, the Supreme Person, the Supreme Soul, the Supreme Lover, the Supreme God, the Supreme Truth, the Supreme Lord of Time, the Supreme Spirit of Perfection, and the Infinite, the Infinite Personality, the Infinite Soul, the Infinite joy, the Infinite Love.

Endearing names are not wanting. He calls God, Most Beloved, My Lover, Dear Friend, Bridegroom, Eternal Lover and the Supreme Lover. Several times he describes God as Perfect. He calls God, the Perfect, the Infinite Ideal of Perfection, the Infinite Reality of Perfection. Another often-recurring name is Traveler, Wayfarer and Eternal Traveler.

Love, truth, unity and goodness are not referred to as mere qualities of God. For Tagore, God is the Love, the Truth, the One, the Good and the All. He is confident that there is only one God and no other. He describes God as the One, the Eternal Spirit, the One God revealed to all human races. The best way to know God is to understand Him as fully as possible, through the free surrender of love. Love and action are the two intermediaries through which perfect knowledge can be

obtained. This path of knowledge through love and action is a prolonged process, stretching over one's life span and further into eternity. However, man's knowledge of God will always remain limited and incomplete. He writes in *The Gardener*, "I cannot find what I seek, I cannot understand what I would learn."

Rabindranath's writings of this period shed a new light and grandeur on his understanding of the relationship between God and man. God is the creator of man and everything in this universe and in man's life is God's gift to him. The numerous names used for God: Father, Friend, Companion, Beloved, and Sweetheart, speak of a great familiarity and even intimacy between man and God. In his writings it is a repeated mention that God is the Creator, the Infinite, the Supreme, while man is the creature, the finite and always dependent on God for his very existence.

Tagore considers life as a journey towards the Beyond which is the path of fulfillment and salvation, and God and man are fellow-travelers. God, the Eternal Traveler, is man's companion for the road. Man's life is something like a voyage in which God is the Ferry's Steersman, the Ship's Captain. Sometimes, it is man who steers the ship, but always according to the orders from God the Captain. In one of his poems Rabindranath wrote, "Do you hear the Captain's call to the steersman to turn the ship to an unnamed shore?" (*Fruit Gathering* 218-219)

In this stage, Tagore tries to answer the question as to what is man's role in realizing his union with God? "God wants

man to add his own string to the numerous strings in God's lute, to place his own little lamp amidst God's numberless stars" (*Crossing* 280). Our life here on earth is a call to collaborate with God in his creative activity in the freedom of spirit, and spontaneity of love. This world is "God's love taking form" and man is called to "help it with his own love" (*Stray Birds* 325). God expects much more from man than what he expects from other creatures. Man's response to God's love should be more creative, it should be the fruit of hard work and sacrifice. Tagore expresses it very clearly in one of his songs:

To the birds you gave song, the birds give you
songs in return. You gave me only voice, yet
asked for more and I sing. You made your winds
light and they are fleet in their service. You
burdened my hands that I myself may lighten
them, and at last gain unburdened freedom for
your service. You created your Earth, filling its
shadows with fragments of light. There you
paused; you left me empty-handed in the dust to
create your heaven. To all things else you give;
from me you ask. 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 (*The Gardener* 214).

In Tagore's opinion, not only does man need God, but God also needs man. In many of his writings in this period, Tagore voices the conviction that God needs man, that He seeks man, offers His love and waits for love in return. For example:

God loves man's lamp-lights better than his own great stars (*Stray Birds* 312).

God waits to win back his own flowers as gifts from man's hands (*Stray Birds* 315).

Through slow time you give me what is yours, and ceaselessly win your kingdom in me. Day after day you buy your sunrise from my heart (*Fruit Gathering* 214).

Tagore further moves on to explain 'what is prayer'? It is, he says, "allowing God to lead you into the centre of his silence" (*Stray Birds* 323). Prayer is "sitting in peace and listening to God's words in the soul of silence" (*Crossing* 271). It is to "sit face to face with God, to sit by God's side, to return to the sight of God's face" (*Gitanjali* 5). Prayer is to sit by God's side after the day's work and with one's lips "to do the work that can be done in silence and in the dim light of the stars" (*The Gardener* 116). Prayer, for Tagore, is a sign of his awareness of God, and his desire to place Him at the centre of his life and activity. It is acknowledging God as the steersman of one's own life's boat and the Helmsman of the world and asking Him who is the sure refuge, to guide man safely through life's perilous waters. Prayer is surrendering oneself to God. It is a daily offering of oneself, with devotion and love to God.

To have a deeper understanding of Tagore's views on prayer, is to take a closer look at the prayers he himself addressed to God in the course of his life:

Keep me at your door ever attending to your wishes, and let me go about in your kingdom accepting your call. Let me not sink and disappear in the depth of languor... Let me hold my head high in the courage and pride of being your servant (*Fruit Gathering* 217-218).

Let only that little be left of me whereby

I may name thee my all.

Let only that little be left of my will whereby

I may feel thee on every side, and come to thee in everything, and offer to thee my love every moment.

Let only that little be left of me whereby I may never hide thee (*Gitanjali* 34).

Prayer is the acknowledgement of man's incapability and God's greatness. Without God's help, man cannot know or love God and fulfill the task entrusted to him by God.

According to Rabindranath, an intimate relationship exists between God and man. The names he uses to address God, indicates the depth of this relationship: the Maker of the World, the Lord of the World, He who made Heaven, the Great King of the Universe, Worker of the Universe, the world's God, the God who controls, etc. The basic of the relationship between God and the universe is that, God is the creator of the universe. The whole creation is the handiwork of God, and therefore the world and everything in it has its origin and existence in Him.

God is the Infinite Personality in whom the reality of the world is contained. Acknowledging the power of God the Creator Tagore wrote, “He who can open the bud does it so simply. He gives it a glance and the life-sap stirs through its veins. At his breath the flower spreads its wings and flutters in the wind. Colours flush out like heart-longing, the perfume betrays a sweet secret. He who can open the bud does it so simply” (*Fruit Gathering* 183).

God realizes Himself to man through the universe. The universe is an overflow of God’s joy, beauty and love. In Tagore’s view, the best way to understand the universe is to understand God’s love. God fills man with all the varied gifts of His love spread throughout the universe. This is revealed in many of his songs:

Thou hast given me thy love, filling the world
with thy gifts. They are showered upon me when
I do not know them (*Crossing* 272).

Beauty is the self-offering of the One to the other
(*Creative Unity* 211).

The flowers have opened in hedges and gardens
and may be there is one heart that has found in
them this morning the gift that has been on its
voyage from endless time (*Fruit Gathering* 211).

Gods’ creative activity in the universe is an on-going reality, it is something like a love-story that has started and that goes on and on, it is the story of God’s marvelous offer of love to man that seeks an ever more perfect response of love from man.

During the fourth phase, (the years of mature reflection) Tagore has achieved a lot as a seeker. In several of his poems and songs addressed to God Rabindranath speaks of his success. He says to God:

Time after time I come to your gate with raised hands, asking for more and yet more. You gave and you gave, now in slow measure, now in sudden excess (*The Gardener* 188).

You are my own, my own, ...I have caught you and wrapt you, my love, in the net of my music (*The Gardener* 111).

There were also moments of darkness and confusion in Tagore's life. We come across several passages in his writings, which speak of non-fulfilment in his efforts to realize his goal. In moments of bewilderment, he calls God: the Eternal Stranger, the Extremely distant One, and the One who is hard to obtain. It is evident from these names that despite his best efforts, Tagore feels that God is still beyond his grasp. Therefore, Rabindranath describes himself as a wanderer and a wayfarer of an endless road.

In the past, as well as during this period, both the elements of *paoa* (getting) and *caoa* (longing) persist. Although he has achieved tremendous success in having a personalized experience of God, his heart is not yet contented. Many of his writings in these years illustrate that tension:

It is a game of giving and withholding, revealing and screening again... this love between you and me (*Gardener* 103).

Tagore's failure to realize his goal causes him grief and he says to God, "I weep when I cannot see you" (*Gardener* 93). Many of Tagore's writings in this period, demonstrate the depth and intensity of his heart's longing for God:

Love, my heart longs day and night for the meeting with you (*Gardener* 123).

I am restless, I thirst for far away things. My soul goes out in a longing to touch the skirt of the dim distance.... O great Beyond, O the keen call of thy flute... (*Gardener* 93).

Love is the driving force behind all Tagore's seeking. While speaking to God, Rabindranath says, "Do not keep to yourself the secret of your heart, my friend. Say it to me, only to me, in secret... softly whisper, my heart will hear it, not my ears" (*Gardner* 107). He is now persuaded that to be able to know God's secret, man should seek him wholeheartedly.

Tagore's faith in God and the hope of attaining complete union with Him have become even stronger in this period. What strengthens his faith and nourishes his hope is not only what he has already been able to achieve, but also the awareness he gained all along his path as a seeker. The certainty that God has been, and will ever be with him; molding his life in ever new ways, gave him strength in the course of his seeking. What nourished Tagore even in pain and failure is his great

confidence in the love of his Beloved. He confessed his faith and love in significantly strong words: "Let this be my last words that I trust in Thy love" (*Stray Birds* 329).

His faith did not rest on the artificial props of borrowed beliefs but was founded in the experience of sorrow. He had indeed inherited or imbibed in his young age many beliefs, but what in them was unreal was gradually dropped off or was discarded. Only what had been burnt into him and had melted into his being remained with him to the end. The last two poems (quoted in Amiya Chakravarty's rendering) which he dictated as he lay on what become his death-bed are a testament, at once somber and shining, tragic and sublime, of his faith's climax. The following is dated on 29th July, four days after his arrival in Kolkata:

Sorrow's dark night, again and again,
has come to my door.
Its only weapon, I saw,
was pain's crooked pretense;
fear's hideous gestures
preluding its deception in darkness.
Whether I have believed in its mask of dread,
fruitless defeat has followed.
This game of defeat and victory is life's delusion;
from childhood, at each step, clings this spectre,
filled with sorrow's mockery.
A moving screen of varied fears-
Death's skillful handiwork wrought in scattered gloom
(Poems 56).

Tagore feels that in the past he has been asking too much from God while giving too little to Him. He realizes his folly, pledges to change things and decides to give more to God. He says:

The wrecks and the hoard of your gifts grew immense, hiding you, and the ceaseless expectation wore my heart out. Take, oh take- has now become my cry. Shatter all this from my beggar's bowl... raise me from the still-gathering heap of your gifts into the bare infinity of your uncrowded presence" (*Fruit gathering* 188).

The realization, that he himself had become the hindrance in attaining union with his Beloved, and the wanting to put things right by removing all the obstacle to that goal, is more powerfully expressed in the following prayer:

Take everything I have; break open my sleep and plunder my dreams. Rob me of my world. In that devastation, in the utter nakedness of spirit, let us become one in beauty (*Gardener* 123).

Towards the end of this period, Rabindranath understands that the fame and glory that he had gained at the international level after winning the Nobel Prize, made him consider himself great. In one of his songs, he admits to God the weakness of having sought his own glory and not that of his Lord. He says, "My Lord... even when I bring you my songs for an offering, I have the secret hope that men will come and love me for them" (*Fruit Gathering* 213). Further, he promises God, "from today all my works will be for your glory." He was

convinced that worldly fame and glory could not satisfy his heart or give it the peace and the security that he had been looking for. He confesses, “I have scaled the peak and found no shelter in fame’s bleak and barren height.” (*Stray Birds* 328)

Ultimately, we find that Tagore has a feeling that the time is short and he has reached the evening of his life; the time is running out for him, and that he has much to do yet to gain the object of his longing. In many of his poems we find expressions like “for the time flies to its end” and praying to God, “Lead me, my Guide, before the light fades into the valley of quiet” (*Stray Birds* 328).

The only aim of Tagore now is to keep his beloved bound for ever, and then his heart would be contented. Even though the darkness persists, the path is unknown, and that the total union with the beloved still seems a distant and an impossible reality; yet it does not disappoint him. Rabindranath says that although he is restless, he is still unperturbed and sure that one day he will be able to know and experience fully the ‘life’ and ‘joy’ that up to now he has had only ‘in glimpses’ (*Fruit Gathering* 185).

2.6. The final years

In the last fourteen years of his life (final years), Rabindranath wrote and spoke more than ever on humanism. The common theme that pervades most of his writings of this period is ‘man’ and the emphasis is on humanism and related subjects. Due to this emphasis on man and humanism, some were of the opinion that Rabindranath lost faith in God and therefore became a secular humanist. At a symposium, held in

Kolkata in 1987, on Rabindranath Tagore, some eminent professors and Tagore scholars expressed their idea that he was frustrated with God in the final years of his life and therefore he turned towards man in most of his writings.

It is to be noted here that, Tagore turned to humanism not because of his frustration with God, rather his attempt was to reveal the divine in man. The perfect way to understand Tagore's humanism is to examine what he calls 'the religion of man,' because it is in this that Tagore illustrates in detail his understanding of man and humanism. It deals with the transformation from the partial to the complete, from the less perfect to the more perfect. It includes all man's activities and endeavors, both material and spiritual that enable man to transcend the realm of freedom, creativity, and love. The 'religion of man' is the sum total of the efforts of mankind as a whole and thus revealing the divine in man.

Rabindranath describes the greatness of human relationships in one of his letters he wrote from Russia. According to him love and goodness are expressions of being truly human. Goodness represents the detachment of our spirit from the exclusiveness of our egoism. He writes:

Man finds his own larger and truer self in his wide human relationship, ... in his ideal of unity, he realizes the eternal in his life and the boundless in his love; ... the consciousness of this unity is spiritual and our effort to be true to it is our religion. It ever waits to be revealed in our

history in a more and more perfect illumination
(qtd. in Chunkapura 245).

To reach the sense of perfection, man should abandon the individual self. This abandoning according to Tagore is not in the negation of self, but the dedication of it. Man should reveal the Eternal in him in the varied manifestations of truth, goodness, and beauty. The individual man must exist for Man the Great, and must express him in disinterested works, in service and worship. Man must represent Man the Eternal in all his creative works.

Tagore gives a very prominent place to God in *The Religion of Man*. This is clearly expressed in the writings of his final years.

The God in man depends upon men's service and man's love for his own love's fulfillment (*The Religion of Man* 44).

Free spirit is godly and alone can claim kinship with God (*The Religion of Man* 17).

From the above quotations it can be understood that Rabindranath's humanism is a religious humanism and not a secular one in which God has no place. The expressions like, 'the God in man depending upon man's service and man's love,' 'the free spirit's kinship with God,' 'man and his universe as one of the numerous manifestations of God,' and so on, are ample proof of the place that God has in Tagore's humanism.

Rabindranath had to go through a lot of pain both physical and mental, during the final years caused by a variety of circumstances: personal, social, religious and political; yet, he was not exasperated with God. In one of his poems he wrote, "Sorrow's dark night, again and again has come to my door." In another letter he wrote: "I know how many times I had to bear extreme pain. But that has been my good fortune" (qtd. in Chunkapura 253). All the pain and negative experiences that came to him in life did not lead Tagore to discouragement or frustration. In this regard, the following words of Rabindranath's biographer is very significant: "... from each great sorrow, he had emerged more chastened in spirit and firmer in his faith" (Kripalini 109).

Rabindranath made untiring efforts to spread the gospel of humanism during the final years of his life with great faith, hope, and dedication rooted in the ideal of the Supreme Man, and to cultivate and promote unity and co-operation of all people and nations. Tagore himself, in his last public address titled *Crisis in Civilization* describes this period as 'days of graceless disillusionment.' Yet he never lost his faith in God. In another public address he said: "I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man."

How many a time have I lain defeated in fear and
shame, and yet in my voice has echoed the victory
of the Infinite. Blessing have I won in this life of
the Beautiful ..., Sorrow, hard to bear, has shown
me the unhurt, unconquered soul... fear's defeat
has not been mine (qtd. in Chunkapura 254).

Rabindranath's understanding of God during the closing years of his life is reflected in the names he uses for God. They express the same understanding of the nature and attributes of God and of the relationship between God and man, and God and the universe, as in the Gitanjali period and in the years of mature reflection. The name *Vidhata* is used at least twenty-five times in this period. It is a name which was used by Tagore even in his early writings. Thus, it can be concluded that in spite of Rabindranath's concentration on man and humanism during these years, his understanding of God had not undergone any substantial change. God for Tagore, continued to be the Creator, Protector, Lord, Master, Judge and Friend. God is Light and Truth and he is not only the Source of Life and Love, but also the King of Death and the Perfect end of all that is. God's mighty power is expressed by names such as the Supreme, Undivided, Complete in Himself, the All-Powerful One, Ultimate Truth and the All beyond all.

As far as the relationship to man is concerned, God is the God in man and the God of man. For man, God is the giver of everything that is good. God is not only the one who creates and controls everything, but also, the one who will remove all burdens. He is the goal of man's seeking. Rabindranath also uses the feminine name '*She*' while speaking about God. He repeatedly uses the name *Jivan Devata* during these years. In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore speaks more at length of what he meant by the *Jivan Devata*. He describes the Jivan Devata as "the Lord of my life, the innermost spirit of my being, the infinite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and cooperation" (*Collected Poems and Plays* 60). The idea of *Jivan*

Devata found expression in his poems. Given below is one of them from *The Religion of Man*:

Thou who art the innermost spirit of my being.

Art thou pleased, Lord of my life?

For I gave to thee my cup filled with all the pain and
delight

That the crushed grapes of my heart had surrendered,

I wove with the rhythm of colors and songs the cover
of thy bed,

And with the molten gold of my desires,

I fashioned playthings for thy passing hours.

I know not why thou chosest me for thy partner Lord
of my life!

Through these lines, Rabindranath reveals the intimate and personal relationship that existed between God and himself. Here he makes it clear that his *Jivan Devata* is not merely an ideal, but a person. For Tagore, *Jivan Devata* is the Lord who is worthy of worship, the One to whose feet he brought his joys and sorrows, to whose pleasure he dedicated his music and songs, and all his life's task and dreams.

Tagore's preoccupation in all his life's seeking has been to open his life to Truth, and the path which he had to travel to achieve it, was not very easy. It was a terrible path of sorrow. However, his sufferings did not lead him to lose faith in God. In

one of the poems written in the closing years of his life, Tagore says to God:

Cripple me if you will, shut out all light from my eyes,
Shroud me in the shadow of infirmity,
Yet in the dilapidated temple of my being
The ancient God will remain enthroned

(Later Poems and Plays 182).

Tagore is profoundly aware of the *Jivan Devata*, the spirit that guides him and acts through him. At times Tagore feels he does not know Him well enough. He feels God is an immense mystery beyond his grasp. In one of his poems he beautifully sums up his experience saying, "In the playground of this world, in joy, in suffering, I have beheld in sudden flashes, the Infinite behind the veil of the finite..." (*Later Poems and Plays* 133). In the very first poem of *Arogya* written in 1941 we find, "When I take leave of this earth, I shall say to her, ... through the veil of Maya I glimpsed the glory of the eternal, saw the beauty of truth take image in your dust, knowing this I leave behind my reverence." In another poem he wrote, "I cast away all doubt, ... I shall depart with these my last words, I go, I leave my love behind" (*Later Poems and Plays* 117). Until his dying breath, Rabindranath brought to his God the love and homage of his poems and songs. In one of these he says to God, "Ever new flower-songs I bring to blossom for you to gather them dawn and dusk. Take them smiling..." (*Later Poems and Plays* 117).

Rabindranath was convinced that with death all mists and shadows would be removed from his life's path, and God himself would be at the helm of his boat till last voyage to the Great Unknown. Tagore expressed his faith in a song which he composed to be sung at his death.

In front lies the ocean of peace,

Launch the boat, Helmsman.

You will be the comrade ever,

Take, O take him in your lap...

Giver of freedom, your forgiveness, your mercy.

Will be wealth inexhaustible in the eternal journey.

May the mortal bonds perish ...

And may he know in his fearless heart the Great
Unknown

(Later Poems and Plays 218).

2.7. Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore was basically a man of faith; his faith was brave and true, for it had been tested on the fire of suffering. His faith did not rest on the artificial props of borrowed beliefs but was founded in the experience of sorrow. Variety is the life of Tagore's art and the art of his life. Underlying the multitudinous forms of creation there was an astonishing changelessness in message. Whenever he withdrew

to the still places of his heart, when he contemplated the Ultimate, he returned with the same assurance of undying youth for himself, for mankind and for all living things. This certitude never failed him even in his last days, when his cup was full of physical and spiritual suffering. What strengthened Tagore even in pain and failure is his great confidence in the love of his Beloved. He confessed his faith and love in significantly strong words: "Let this be my last words that I trust in Thy love" (*Stray Birds* 329). His sufferings did not lead him to lose faith in God. Right to the very last, Rabindranath brought to his God the love and homage of his poems and songs.

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3

Nature Lyrics: A symbolic Representation of Nature, God, and Man

*"Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to
carry rain or usher storm, but to add colour to my
sunset sky."*

- Rabindranath Tagore

3.1. Introduction

Throughout his life Rabindranath Tagore exhibited a passionate love for nature. Nature delighted him more than it delighted Wordsworth or Robert Frost. Nature runs as a consistent motif in all Tagore's literary works, particularly in his lyrics. He was an adorer of nature and its beauty; having the closest tie with both these elements, he nearly lived and breathed in them. His lyrics are sweet and distinctive, dazzling and enduring in beauty. He took life as a whole, and in a most spontaneous and inevitable manner experienced it as a whole. The poet believes that nature and human being are integral part

of the universe and the purpose of this world is not solely living in it and making use of it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect union. The objective of the present chapter is to bring to light Tagore's inseparable intimacy with Nature, God, and Man; to stimulate the readers to fall in love with nature and give our Mother Earth a reason to smile.



Never has a poet drawn more profusely varied pictures of nature's loveliness, of her beauty and her mystery, to arouse his thought, mood, or emotion. Tagore's uniqueness and originality lies in his ability to depict in verse the familiar yet elusive charms of the country with a more sensitive imagination: the

breath of the wind as it rustles through the parted foliage; the rippling sounds of water in the pitcher tossed by the rhythmic sway of a girl's waist; the soft fragrance of the nameless flowers; the drone of the honey-laden bees; the light trembling on the water in the blazing sun, the deep dark waters of the lake darkened evermore by shady trees around and catching the last rays of the setting sun. They bear testimony not merely to the variety of Tagore's pictorial art but, more significantly, to the profound sensitiveness of an imagination. Tagore, in short, is a great nature-poet, in more ways than one. His love of nature is all inclusive, many-sided, and realistic.

Rabindranath Tagore has always been a great lover of nature. His love of nature is second only to his love for humanity. Every poet of nature has felt some kind of harmony with her but none has felt as deeply as he, the inseparableness with nature. No poet has been able to efface his separate identity and blend so completely into the vaster life of nature as Tagore. This feeling of self-effacement and of absolute identity with nature is the distinctive characteristic of Tagore. He is indeed a pure lyricist, and one can feel God's presence in his lyrics. We are yet to know of any other poet who has to his credit such poignantly dazzling lyric poems, and in such profusion. We think of Shakespeare's songs and sonnets, of the fragments of Sappho, of Villon and Pushkin, Shelley and Heine. Excellence is established in all, profusion in some, but this reckless abundance, this scattering of all the world's resources on the wayside for any casual traveler to come along and pick up - this is unique to Tagore.

Tagore is a believer in the coexistence of nature and human beings. Nature is more than an objective reality for him; in his poems nature breaths the air of joy and sings the songs of harmony. In most of his poems nature is so intrinsically connected with the main theme that it appears they are complementary to each other. Although, Tagore's poems bear a major change with the ripening of the poet's mature years, yet, the sensibility and the faith in nature remains constant.

Tagore was a distinguished nature poet and it will not be wrong to say that nature exercised the most potent influence in making him a poet. The environment in which Rabindranath grew up as a child helped him absorb, in fusion, the best of both the East and West. Nature played the foster-mother to the motherless child and the eager child assimilated the beauty and grandeur of nature. He writes:

I remember, when I was a child, that a row of coconut trees by our garden wall, with their branches beckoning their rising sun on the horizon, had given me a companionship as living as I was myself (*Creative Unity* 8).

What had thus become part of him cried irresistibly for expression. With a true awareness of self, he said- "what a profusion of song and story, of being and bliss of longing and aspiration is in me!" (Ghose 152). Rabindranath Tagore was indeed a versatile genius; a poet of so high a calibre that the world hardly came across one such in a millennium. He was a worshipper of nature and beauty, having the closest tie with both these elements, he virtually lived and breathed in them. According to Tagore, 'the highest purpose of this world is not

merely living in it, knowing it and making use of it, but realizing our own selves in it through expansion of sympathy; not alienating ourselves from it and dominating it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect union. The perfect relation with this world is the relation of union' (Estborn 58).

3.2. Inseparableness with nature

Tagore is a prominent nature-poet, in more ways than one. His intimacy with nature is all inclusive, many sided and practical. He describes nature with great precision, painstaking attention, and details. He regards nature



as the primeval storehouse of all life, hence, constantly identifying himself with nature, and ceaselessly using nature to exemplify the human and the abstract.

The young poet took the supervision of the far-flung landed property of the family in East Bengal in 1894, and came to live in a boat on the river Padma. The dreaming boy, who once peeped hungrily at nature from within barred casements, discovered the flush of a glorious sunrise, the fountains of beauty and joy in the universe after a decade. 'This great awakening' as the poet calls it, was the first significant event in the poet's spiritual life. Nature suddenly threw away her veil and led the enchanted youth to her innermost sanctuary. He first discovered the ravishing beauty and the enthralling

majesty of nature with a great sense of excitement. The entranced soul stood all alone in wonderment before the naked loveliness of nature's charm and in the process, there stepped out in all her splendour a being of empyreal beauty whom the poet loved as no man loved a woman. It was his sojourn on the river Padma that made Tagore a great lover of nature. Tagore cherished a strong belief that peace can only be found in the close proximity with nature. He perceived nature not from its objective reality, but being a subjective entity, and found in them a life force which is manifested in his treatment of nature.

Tagore, in his early life had not been educated in formal schooling; he loved to be learned in the hue of nature. Nature's spell inflicted him from the very first time he started writing. At the age of fourteen his poetic exuberance found its words in a poem named *Banaful* (The Wild Flower) which is of sixteen hundred lines. It is about a young girl named Kamala, brought up by his father in a solitary retreat in Himalaya. Kamala's playmates were the wild plants and denizens of the forest. This heart-breaking love between nature and kamala finally ends with Kamala's death. But nature embraces her child and Kamala becomes the representatives of those wild flowers, being plucked from its mother's womb.

After Kalidasa, hardly any Indian poet has delineated the beauty of nature in such concrete detail as Rabindranath Tagore did. Tagore's works bristle with pictures of the infinite play of light and shade under the Indian sky- those of the ceaseless cycle of seasons. The immutability of India's mountains and vast plains has passed into his poems. Tagore's love for nature made his work appealing to humanity. He was

basically a universalist first, and a nationalist after. He found oneness among every living creature or plant. His identification with nature was the keynote of all his literary works. The poet himself said emphatically, "The language of harmony in nature is the mother tongue of our own soul" (Bhattacharya 90). This indicates not only his hard disciplined literary works, but also a reflection of his deep meditation in quest for truth. Rabindranath is not a mere poet, but a prophet guiding the destiny of humanity through the natural bond of love.

Tagore spent much of his life in complete seclusion, in the midst of nature. He realised the meaning of human life with and without nature. Tagore's descriptions of nature is deeply rooted in his realization of sublimity along with his belief in the innocence of love. The spontaneous overflow of emotions, through the symbolical representation of one's mind in its co-relation with natural phenomena, gives the poet freedom to express his feelings in a way that had never been attempted before in Bengali Literature. According to Tagore, each natural phenomenon: thunder, lightning, rain, sunshine, etc. not only have their impact upon human life; but also, are intrinsically related to human psyche. Thus, each of them has been used by the poet, to symbolically represent different moods in human beings like: love, hate, freedom, joy, sorrow, happiness, and pensiveness. Throughout his writings, Tagore has maintained a lucid style and rhythm for ease of understanding; the joy of reading his poems is shared equally by the scholars, critics as well as the common people. It was his affinity with nature that inspired him to write the Gitanjali: Song Offerings, songs to celebrate the call of nature, which has

bestowed him the Nobel Prize. Most of Tagore's Gitanjali songs were composed in Santiniketan and spoke of a deep spiritual presence in nature's harmony amidst the varying moods of the seasons. In his Nobel winning speech Tagore accepts the impact of nature on him. All through his poems and songs, he tries to put forward his belief on how human nature complies with 'Nature' itself.

Rabindranath had a deep love, an inseparable love, for man and nature. He has even lamented how he would miss their affectionate touch after his departure from this world. He writes:

I have loved the world
And have wrapped it within my heart in numberless folds.
The light and shadow of night and morning,
Here flooded my consciousness,
Till my life and my world have become one.
I have loved the light of the world, therefore I have this life,
Yet I know,
I shall have to take leave of it one day.
My voice will no more blossom in this air,
Nor my eyes bathe in this light.
My heart will not rush forth to greet the early dawn,
Nor will the starry night whisper her secrets into my ears
(Poems 42).

Tagore is nearest to Wordsworth as a poet of nature and both of them believed that there was a natural sympathy between man and nature. Nature and man, both being manifestations of God, are capable of finding themselves in a union of joy. Shelley held a similar philosophy but, his

emphasis is not on beauty in nature but on love as the law of the universe. Coleridge took nature to be a sort of picture which has no life unless we breathe life into it.

O Lady! We receive but what we give

And in our life alone does Nature live.

Scott and Byron loved nature because it offered them comfort. They went to nature as wounded animals go to a lake. Byron's attitude to nature has been rightly called anti-social; he seeks nature to avoid men. Tagore's attitudes to nature made his work appealing to humanity; there is a profusion of a dancing ring of seasons, the evasive play of lights and shadows, of wind and water, the many-colored wings of unpredictable life. The flowers, the rivers, the stars, the sun and the moon, the lightning, and a host of other objects and phenomena are all scattered in and through his poetry.

Indeed, no poet has ever shown greater power of identification of himself with nature, of merging himself into her life. The distinguishing feature of Tagore as a nature poet is his complete surrender and identification with nature. His sense of oneness with nature is revealed in the following verses:

How often, great earth, have I felt my being yearn to
flow over you, sharing in the happiness of each blade
that raises its signal banner in answer to the beckoning
blue of the sky...

I feel sad as for some great separation that happened in
the morning of existence (*The Fugitive* III- 7).

The poem makes it clear that 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 birth has cut him off from his vaster life of nature and he wants to merge himself once again into the pre-human cosmic existence.

Man has come out of nature and it is the great mother of man. Like Wordsworth, Tagore also feels that when approached in a proper mood and spirit, mother nature is bound to influence the human soul. For this reason, she can be the best teacher and guide for man. But while Wordsworth believed in nature's education only in theory, Tagore tried to give a practical shape to this concept. In his open-air university at Shantiniketan, the entire education system is based on a living contact with nature. One of his main objectives behind establishing the Visva-Bharati University at Bolpur was education in contact with nature. He encouraged the students to walk barefooted to feel the dust under their feet and experience the touch and feel of trees. Tagore's model was the forest dwellings of ancient times – the tapoban – which Kalidasa had immortalised in his epic works. To commemorate the surroundings, Tagore arranged several festivals in Santiniketan and composed songs such as Basant Utsav (for the spring), Barsha Mangal (for the monsoon), Sharad Utsav (for the autumn), and Ritu Ranga (for all the seasons). Harvest was celebrated with Halakarshan when the agricultural fields were ploughed. As the school song, students sang of their communion with nature, nurtured by the groves and sheltered by an all-embracing sky. Tagore's philosophy behind his school at Santiniketan was to enable students to have a direct contact

with nature. The institution later became a place of cultural heritage where the hearts of the East and the West are united. Tagore is a practical idealist or a romantic realist in his approach to nature.



Education in the heart of Nature

3.3. Spiritual communion with nature

Tagore was less concerned with the mere sensuous manifestations in nature than with the spiritual significance underlying this manifestation. In fact, we find in his poetry a gradual development from sensuous delight in nature to a spiritual and mystic apprehension of the inner spirit of nature. To him, nature, man, and God are one and the same. Tagore's lyrics are not independent nature poems mainly concerned with the glorification of its beauty and charm. His sweet and harmonious lyrics are "the fruit of the poet's meditations on God, Man and Nature." In lyric after lyric Tagore stresses man's complete identification with nature, which is a distinguishing

feature of his poetry and in this respect no other poet can stand a match to him. In *The Fugitive* III-2 he writes:

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, the encounter with the Eternal Stranger.

Tagore's nature lyrics are an overflow of his conviction that the power and grace of the Supreme Being can only be felt in the spiritual communion with nature. Tagore's approach to nature seems much closer to the western concept of pantheism that was brought into poetry by William Wordsworth who also believed in the presence of God in the objects of nature. In interpreting Wordsworth's pantheistic idealism Mac Farland wrote, "He was a worshiper of nature, he was a pantheist and not a Christian, for Christian worship God through Christ" (Mac Farland 270-271). But Tagore had his own distinctiveness in his approach of pantheistic idealism. As W. B. Yeats aptly puts it, "Mr. Tagore like the Indian civilization itself has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity."

It is interesting to compare Tagore's mystic experience with Wordsworth's. In *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth gives us an analysis of a mystic mood. Sometimes we are asleep in body and become a living soul. In such blessed moods we see the spirit "whose dwelling is the light of setting suns" (Tengshe 37). Tagore, too, caught a glimpse of the spirit behind nature when he saw a sunset. His self was eliminated, the sunset glory got into him, and somehow, he clutched at the principle behind the Universe, viz. the principle of joy. Like Wordsworth, Tagore thinks that there is a harmony between the spirit of nature and the mind of man. Mother Nature communicates her own

thoughts to man, and when man opens his soul to the influence of nature; a complete harmony is established between them. It is this harmony, which gives peace to the soul of man. Nature is a moral teacher and guide to man who counsels him and impels him to goodness and virtue. Tagore once wrote:

We do not want nowadays temples of worship and outward rites or ceremonies. What we really want is an *Ashram*.

We want a place where the beauty of nature and human soul meet in union (*The Religion of Man* 98).

Tagore, as we have seen, is a romantic mystic who loses himself in his contemplation of nature and gets into direct communion with the infinite. To him, the whole of the universe is permeated by one life, and one soul. In moments of inspiration, Tagore realizes this oneness and loses his consciousness of the material forms under which life appears. The fusion of God and nature is a recurrent theme in his poetry. Nature is the abode of God. The various aspects of nature are symbols of eternity:

The light of thy music illumines the world. The life
breath of thy music runs from sky to sky.
The holy stream of thy music breaks through all
stony obstacles and rushes on (*Gitanjali* 3).

The themes of love, womanhood and beauty intermingle with those of nature and God. S.B. Mukherji writes:

A sovereign note that recurs again and again in
these poems with endless variations is ... Raptur-

ous oneness ... yearning for it, joy in contemplating it. Nature in these works is a spirit spread out like the sea, heaving with life and mystery. The one tireless longing of the poet is to lay bare the soul and her gifts: the one aching desire is to plunge headlong into it and dive deep for the endless treasures hidden in its bosoms (121).

3.4. Multitudinous nature portraits.

Never has a poet drawn more abundantly varied pictures of nature's loveliness, of her beauty and her mystery, to vivify his thought, mood, or emotion. And never has a poet caught in his verse the familiar yet elusive charms of the country with a more sensitive imagination: the breath of the wind as it rustles through the parted foliage; the rippling sounds of water in the pitcher tossed by the rhythmic sway of a girl's waist; the soft fragrance of the nameless flowers; the drone of the honey-laden bees; the light trembling on the water in the blazing sun, the deep dark waters of the lake darkened evermore by shady trees around and catching the last rays of the setting sun. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to sum up the multitudinous nature-portraits that abound in Tagore's poetry. They bear testimony not merely to the variety of Tagore's pictorial art but, more significantly, to the profound sensitiveness of an imagination. Tagore, in short, is a great nature-poet, in more ways than one. His love of nature is all inclusive, many-sided, and realistic. His descriptions of nature are characterized by minuteness of observation and description. He regards nature as the primitive warehouse of all life, and hence is constantly identifying himself

with nature, and constantly using nature to illustrate the human and the abstract. In this lies his uniqueness and originality.

There is an abundance of word-pictures of the quiet and the gentler side of nature in the poetry of Tagore. Splendid pen-pictures of nature in all her splendour and glory, in all her springtime beauty when she is decked out in her very best are scattered all about his poetry. To quote one such piece of nature-description, selected at random from *The Gardener* 16:

It is the moonlight of March; the sweet smell of
henna is in the air; my flute lies on the earth
neglected and your garland of flowers is
unfinished.

The jasmine wreath that you wove me thrill to my
heart like praise.

Tagore's nature poems are magnificent with its dancing ring of seasons, the elusive play of lights and shadows, of wind and water, the many-colored wings of erratic life flitting between life and birth. The sea, the rivers and streams, the meadow, the trees and flowers, the flute, the sky, the sun and the moon, the sunset, the clouds, birds and wings, mountain, life and summits, the morning and the night, the dark and the light, the village women and men, the farmer etc. all occur and recur in his poetry:

While ages passed and the bees haunted the
summer gardens, the moon smiled to the lilies of
the night, the lightning flashed their fiery kisses to
the clouds and fled laughing, the poet stood in a

corner, one with the trees and the clouds. He kept his heart silent, like a flower, watched through his dreams, as does the crescent moon; and wandered like the summer breeze for no purpose (*Lover's Gift and Crossing* 17).

The vivid panoramic exposure of nature along with the symbolic presence of rain creates a mystic environment where love and nature become inseparable. The music that rain bears make his mind bloom into expressing fervour of feelings. Rain enkindles the fire in the heart of the lovers and all the natural world with their lush green vegetation is participating in the union of the lovers. Tagore's romantic heart further resonates with melody when he writes:

The thick grove of flowers vibrates with the melody of flute. Casting off all fear and shame come, dear thee, come (Kripalini 32).

However, this does not mean that Tagore is only a poet of the softer side in nature. His love of nature is realistic, comprehensive and all-inclusive. Like Shelley, he also loves nature in her more dynamic, vaster and wider aspects. He is also aware of all that is harsh, ugly and cruel in nature. Nature, 'red in tooth and claw' was not unknown to him as it was to Wordsworth. Picturesque description of nature in her terrible mood abound in the poetry of Tagore. The English translations of *New Year* and the *Sea Waves* in *Manasi* are regarded by Edward Thompson and other competent critics as the greatest land-storm and the greatest sea-storm ever depicted by any other poet. The *Sea Waves* (*Shindhutaranga*) is an example, where nature is presented as merciless, death dealing, utterly scornful

of human feelings. There is none of the 'interpenetration of human life with cosmic life of the world,' so characteristic of classical Indian drama and poetry. The poem written in June 1887 was inspired by the sinking of a ship in May that year containing seven hundred and thirty-five pilgrims on their way to the great Jagannath Temple at Puri; the ship was hit by cyclone in the Bay of Bengal. Edward Thomson called it 'the greatest sea-storm he ever did.' The first stanza of this poem (as translated by Edward Thompson) reads as follows:

On the breast of the shoreless sea
Destruction swings and sweeps,
In dreadful festival.
The indomitable wind is roaming, ungovernable in strength,
Beating its thousand wings.
Sky and sea in one are reeling together in vast confusion;
Darkness veils the eyes of the universe
The lightning flashes and threatens, the foam-fields hiss,
The sharp white terrible mirth of brute Nature,
Eyeless earless rootless loveless,
The mad force of Evil
Rush to ruin, without direction, they cast off all restraints.

Furthermore, the poet described a storm to Indira (his niece) in sharp detail. He and two guests had gone out for a

walk and had travelled about a mile when they realized that the beautiful line of clouds, they had seen on the horizon to the north had 'swollen and darkened and was making for us with regular flashes of lightning,' unanimously they decided to get back to the house-but too late:

The storm, with giant strides over the open ground, was upon us with an angry roar... Dust made the sky so dark that we could not see beyond a few paces.

The fury of the storm continued to increase, and grit driven by the wind stung our bodies like shot, while gusts took us by the scruff of the neck and thrust us along and drops of rain slapped and whipped our faces.

Run! Run! But the ground was not level; it was deeply scarred with watercourses, and not easy to cross at any time, much less in a storm.

I managed to get entangled in a thorny scrub, and as I was trying to escape, the wind grabbed me and practically threw me to the ground (qtd. Dutta 134).

There is a kind of ambivalence in Tagore's depiction of nature. On one hand, he expresses his genuine regard for the gifts that nature has bestowed on us, and on the other, his deep sorrow for the ravages caused by nature. Mohit K. Ray opines in his article:

In some contexts, nature is the mother whose benevolent affectionate presence and healing touch

is not only enjoyed by the poet or the persona but also equally by the readers. At other times nature appears to be angry, ruthless and harsh. In Tagore's poetry nature is a curious juxtaposition of kindness and unkindness.

Nature is a consciousness that drives his feelings throughout his poetic narrative. It is a symbol that keeps changing its meaning and sensibility with the passage of time and experience of the poet. It symbolises a perfect harmony without which human life cannot exist. An individual explores one's self through nature. Nature in Tagore's poetry symbolises manifold significance: sometimes it is the nurturing mother, a friend, a love, a mystic, and a conscious soul. Tagore believed in the harmonious co-existence of nature and human being.

3.5. Treatment of nature: Tagore vs. the Western poets

Tagore's concept of nature is many-sided and romantic. His imagination transfigures the common objects of nature and glorifies them as the manifestation of Eternity. The central faith - that an unbroken chain binds all things in the outward, and that the spirit of man can commune with God through nature - is the faith that informs all his poetry. Tagore's trust in the unity of man and nature informed everything he did. Dwelling on Shakespeare's plays he commented that despite Shakespeare's "great power as a dramatic poet," there was in him "a gulf between nature and human nature owing to the tradition of his race and time. It cannot be said that beauty of nature is ignored in his writings; only that he fails to recognize in them the truth of the interpenetration of human life with the cosmic life of the world" (Dutta 14).

The poetry of nature in *Gitanjali* is purposive, existing not only for the beauty of the thing as it is, but for its symbolical significance. They are tied to the apron strings of thought. The ecstatic joy of the mystic, the agony of the adorer, the high expectations of the tryst with the Beloved have been explained through the objects of nature. Like Wordsworth, Tagore does not draw conclusions from it; rather, his songs are reflections of the intense feelings that look fresh in the light of the natural objects. *The Nightingale* playing such a great role in the poems of the younger romantics in English literature is a peace-giving bird in *The Cortège*: "for when the nightingale sings, all is beauty and joy and religion, and the spirit is soothed and the reward is peace." The pride of an individual, even when he dies, has been compared with the pride of an eagle in the poem. However, the *Gitanjali* is not essentially a poem composed with the sole object of illuminating the life of nature. It is a harp, which strums upon the different aspects of life, even beyond it at times.

The immensity of nature felt by Wordsworth in *The Excursion* and in other poems is one of Tagore's concerns in *Gitanjali*. He is not out to find the 'active principle' residing in nature. The poet is in a different frame of mind; he has no time to focus on the stern winter, which in 'loves a dirge-like sound.' The occasional symbols and metaphors drawn from nature suit immensely the flow of the poem.

Khalil Gibran in *The Cortège* says that it is in nature where resides the reward of the soul who seeks it. Behind the cloud resides the moon but one has to pierce it before one can hope to see it. A mystic must have that courage and determination. In nature he sees the equality professed so much

by the democrats and socialists in the various societies. The falling leaves are not wasted; they are revived by the process of the cycle of nature. Rebirth has a different meaning in Gibram from what we find in Tagore. There is no consciousness of the superiority or beauty of ugliness in the objects. If there is beauty in foliage or in a peacock it remains there in its own right. It does not carry any idea or conscious thought along with it. Beauty and sweetness exist in nature but the forest does not stand in need of it. The capering gazelle just caper on without being conscious of its own glory. The subtle thoughts drawn from nature are abounding in this poem. However, Tagore in the *Gitanjali* has an altogether different frame of mind. The destiny of man hovering on the verge of God-realization possesses him strongly. He skips by the possible luscious aspects of nature or the thoughts emanating from them. He does not pause to look at the glory of nature, but whenever he touches an object of that description, he pours all beauty on it. The ecstasy of the mystic, and the gloom of the despair have been described with the aid of objects of nature.

3.6. Treatment of Nature: Tagore vs. Sarojini Naidu.

Both Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu have made significant contributions to the development of Indian English literature. Toru Dutt, first undertook the task of interpreting the culture of India and creating a truly Indian atmosphere in English poetry, but her premature death left it unfinished. This was taken up by Sarojini Naidu whose poems deal almost entirely with Indian themes. The most ordinary incidents in the lives of common men and women in India are portrayed with a romantic colour and sympathetic imagination. It is delighting to

find in her poems, the charming descriptions of Indian flowers and festivals, the palanquin-bearers and the coromandel fishermen, the dancers, and the bangle-sellers. She deals with typical Indian scenes in her poems. She describes how the palanquin-bearers lightly bear their precious burden 'like a pearl on a string.' She portrays how the coromandel fishers gather their nets from the shore and venture out upon the sea. She sings of the bangle-sellers carrying loads to the temple to sell them to 'happy daughters and happy loads.' She reproduces in some of her poems the twinkling sound and the rhythmic tread of the Indian dancers.

We may make a comparative study of the poems of Tagore and Sarojini Naidu under four heads: Songs of Nature, Songs of Love, Songs of Life and Songs of Death.

3.6.1. *Songs of nature*

Sarojini is essentially romantic in her attitude towards nature. The beauty of flowers and the glory of spring enthrall her. She sings of the bright moon and the dark nightfall. She describes the color and fragrance of Gulmohurs and Champak blossoms. Rich and luxuriant images are vividly drawn in lines of utter simplicity. The common factor in the poetry of both, Tagore and Sarojini Naidu is that they both deal with the Indian background.

In her poem, *In Praise of Henna*, Sarojini Naidu tells the maidens that they must hasten to gather the leaves of the henna-tree. The red of the *tikka* may be meant for the brow of a bride, and the red of the betel nut may beautify the lips that are sweet. But for anointing 'lily-like fingers and feet,' there is nothing like

‘the red of the henna tree.’ Additionally, in praise of *Gulmohur Blossoms*, the poet grows ecstatic in her admiration for the beauty of Gulmohurs. She piles up images to bring out the exquisite loveliness and rich red hue of Gulmohur flowers. We find her love for Indian mythology in her poem on *Nasturtiums*.

Sarojini Naidu has also written several poems on the spring season: *Spring*, *A Song in Spring*, *The Joy of the Spring-Time*, *Vasant Panchami*, *The Call of the Spring*, *Coming of spring*, and *The Magic of Spring*. Spring with its songs and flowers are the symbol of youth and joy, and the poetess sings of the various forms and colors, the enchanting sights and sound of the season with gay abandon. She combines in her poetry of nature the sensuousness of Keats and melody of Tennyson.

The songs that Sarojini sings are objective descriptions of nature. They do not preach any doctrines or philosophy. The songs of Indian birds, the aroma of Indian flowers, the murmur of Indian streams and variegated hues of the Indian sky are embodied in them. They are fine specimens of the Indian landscape paintings in English poetry.

However, Rabindranath Tagore has been able to efface his separate identity and merge so completely into the vaster life of nature in his poems. His love for nature is second only to his love for humanity. Every poet of nature has felt some kind of affinity with her but none has felt so deeply as he, the inseparableness with nature. The feeling of self-effacement and of complete identity with nature is the distinctive characteristic of Rabindranath as a nature poet.

Like Sarojini Naidu, Tagore also finds beauty in the simple object of nature. In one of his beautiful poems Tagore celebrates the river Kopai that does not possess the lofty associations of either the Ganges or the Padma. He appreciates its slow and zigzag movement which is in tune with the surrounding environment where a market cart is lazily lumbering with a load of straw and the village school master is trudging along with a torn umbrella over his head.

Unlike Naidu, Tagore is not content with describing merely the outward beauty of nature. He has a feeling of mystical affinity with nature, which is absent in Sarojini Naidu. For instance:

While ages passed and the bees haunted the summer gardens, the moon smiled to the lilies of the night, the lightning flashed their fiery kisses to the clouds and fled laughing, the poet stood in a corner, one with the trees and clouds. He kept his heart silent, like a flower, watched through his dreams, as does the crescent moon, and wandered like the summer breeze for no purpose (*Lover's Gift and Crossing* 17).

Tagore's attitude towards nature is, however, not confined to the romantic fancy and a mysterious feeling of affinity with her. He also accepts Nature's influence upon the growth of the human mind. The belief in the ennobling influence of nature did not remain cramped within the limits of poetic imagination, but was translated into action in real life. It took a concrete shape in Shantiniketan where the entire education system sings the songs composed by the poet to celebrate the advent of different seasons. Very few poets have

attached so much importance to different seasons and their influence upon the human mind as Tagore. The nature-poems of Tagore, like those of Sarojini Naidu, contain a happy blend of music and pictures. His treatment of nature is equally realistic, but more comprehensive than that of Naidu.

3.6.2. *Songs of Love*

As a singer of love, Sarojini is supreme. Love is a multi-colored gem whose variegated splendor she has pictured with the sure touch of an artist. The joys and sorrows of love, the pangs of frustration, the ecstasy of body and soul at the altar of love, have burst forth in a sweet sympathy of music in her poems of love.

Contrastingly, Rabindranath Tagore, being a great poet of love, sings songs not only of divine love but of human love as well. No poet has a keener appreciation of human love in its difficult moods, its joys and sorrows, the happiness of union and the pangs of separation. No one has ever surpassed Tagore in the originality of his perception and the delicate art with which he portrays the minute shades of love that fill the mind with a strange thrill of joy never experienced before:

You have made me great with your love, though I
am but one among the many, drifting in the
common tide, rocking in the fluctuant favour of the
world.

You have given me a seat where poets of all time
bring their tribute, and lovers with deathless names
greet one another across the ages.

Men hastily pass me in the market, - never noting
how my body has grown precious with your cares,
how I carry your kiss within, as the sun carries in its
orb the fire of the divine touch and shines forever.
(*The Fugitive* 11).

In some poems such as in *The Gardener* (18-19) Rabindranath describes an ordinary experience having rich poetical associations. Two sisters go to fill their pitches, when they come back to a particular spot, they smile because they are aware of somebody waiting behind the trees. Their pitchers lurch suddenly and water spills. This indicates the pleasure and excitement of the young girls who do not even meet the young man. In another poem, the woman with the pitcher, casts a furtive look at the young man shown behind her veil and then passes by. The young man who has received the fascinating glance treasures it in his heart. The mysterious spell, by the women on the young man has been delicately suggested with appropriate imagery culled from nature.

The intensity and immensity of love, its infinite mystery and explicability, its pleasures and pain, its frustration and rapturous fulfilment are all vividly described in many poems in *The Gardener*, *Lover's Gift*, and *The Fugitive*. It is wrong to suggest that Tagore deals only with Platonic love and that in his love poetry there is no place for a physical relation between the lover and the beloved. Tagore depicts physical relation also, but he does it with artistic refinement and not with crude vulgarity. The following passage from *Chitra* will illustrate the point - Chitrangada says to Arjuna, "Take me, take all I am!" And she stretched out her arms to him. "The moon set behind the trees.

One curtain of darkness covered all. Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain, death and life merged together in an unbearable ecstasy" (Chitra 161). It is difficult to find a more dignified way of expressing the supreme fulfilment of love than in the passage quoted above.

Tagore sings the songs of divine love in the *Gitanjali*. There are many poems in which the poet depicts the relation of love between the individual soul and the Eternal soul. The songs of Sarojini are confined to human love. Both Tagore and Sarojini have described the different facets of the many-splendored gem called love. But Tagore's treatment of love is more comprehensive than that of Sarojini:

I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side.
The works that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest or respite, and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.

Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and the bees are playing their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove.

Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure (*Gitanjali* 5).

3.6.3. Songs of life

Sarojini Naidu has given us the pageant of Indian life in her poems. Her songs of love cover every aspect of Indian society. They mirror the hopes and aspirations, the customs and conventions of the Indian people and give a panoramic view of Indian life. *Palanquin-Bearers, Wandering Singers, Indian Weavers, Coromandel Fishers, The Snake Charmer, The Indian Gipsy, and Bangle Sellers* represent different sections of the common people of the country. *Vasant Panchami, The Festival of Serpents, Songs of Radha, The Milkmaid, The Call of Evening Prayer, The Flute-player of Brindaban, The Imam Bara, and The Prayer of Isirm,* describe different facets of Indian religious life. She has also written patriotic poems like *The Gift of India, Awake* and *Anthem of Love*, which are full of inspiration.

Romanticism has been defined as the renaissance of wonder. It means that the poet recaptures the feeling of wonder at the commonplace things of the world. This is particularly true in the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. He has endowed the ordinary experience of life with a freshness and novelty, all his own. Even 'the daily waking from sleep brings out a new significance in the imagination of the poet' (Poems 92). Every object, great or small, has a beauty and mystery of its own. It is the screen of familiarity that hides them from our sight.

In a few poems in *The Crescent Moon*, Rabindranath tries to depict the beauty and wonder associated with the child. He gives a vivid and graphic account of the psychology of the mother and the child. The very birth of the child evokes a feeling of wonder and mystery. The child asks the mother where he came from. The natural curiosity on the part of the child

evokes an answer, which is at once true and imaginative. The mother says that the baby lay concealed in her youthful desires, hopes and prayers. The softness of the baby's body has its origin in the tender beauty of her youthful limbs. In another poem, *Clouds and Waves*, the child wants to merge himself in the life of the clouds and the waves, but he cannot, because he does not want to leave his mother. The difficulty is solved as the child imagines that he will be the cloud and his mother the moon or he will be the waves and his mother a strange shore. In another poem, *The Champa Flower*, the child wants to become a Champa flower to conceal himself for some time and, after giving some anxious moments to his mother, wants to return to her to give her a warm surprise. Rabindranath Tagore is unique in depicting the intimate feelings of the mother and the child for each other. No other poet, including Sarojini Naidu, can compete with him in this respect.

The Indian scene does not limit Tagore's poetic range. He takes the entire international scene as his ken. There are several poems in which the poet dwells upon the modern stockpile of armaments and condemns the devilish hatred and inhumanity which they represent. The tragedy of the situation is heightened by the fact that modern wars are perpetrated in the name of justice and God. In his poems entitled *The son of Man*, the poet imagines that Jesus Christ has come down to this earth and is mortified to see these warlike preparations. The poet says that Christ looks about him and finds that the deadly weapons 'are hissing and raining sparks as they sharpened on monster wheels.' But what pains him most is the fact that the most fearful weapons are those 'on which has been engraved his own name' (Poems 107). In another poem, Tagore refers to the war

waged by Japan against China. The bitter sorrow and burning indignation of the poet are evident from the beginning to the end of the poem, which is remarkable for its merciless attack against modern barbarism, which goes by the name of civilization.

It is quite evident that Tagore's songs of life have a wider range and variety and are more comprehensive than those of Sarojini Naidu.

3.6.4. Songs of death

Sarojini's songs of death are not less inspiring than those of life and love. Since she has loved life, she is not afraid of death, for she knows that life and death are the warp and woof of human existence. Once she has fulfilled the mission of her life by her songs and services to the motherland, she is prepared to face death fearlessly. In *Death and Life*, she says:

Or fail ere I achieve my destined deed
Of Song or service for my Country's need?

In *The Soul's Prayer* God reveals the secret of existence in answer to the poet's prayer:

Life is a prism of My Light,
And Death the shadow of My face.

The spirit of defiance is the dominant note in her songs of death. She challenges fate to do the worst but she is confident that her spirit is invincible. In her poems, *A Challenge to Fate* and *The Challenge*, Sarojini expresses this indomitable spirit that emboldens her to accept bravely the challenge of pain, sorrow, and death. Sarojini recognizes death as the inevitable accompani-

ment to life and she welcomes death in a spirit of calm resignation.

Rabindranath Tagore does not consider death to be an enemy or a tyrant who has to be fought and defeated. He regards death as a messenger of God and a friend who is to be given a cordial welcome. He goes even a step further. He reviews life and death as the beloved and the lover. Just as the bride and the bridegroom unite in the silence of night, in the same way life merges into death in the utter darkness of silence. This conception of life and death as the beloved and the lover has no parallel in English literature.

In poem 86 of *Gitanjali*, Tagore describes death as a messenger of God. When death comes to him, he will feel that the Divine messenger has brought the message of his Lord and Master. The poet will give him a cordial welcome and offer at his feet the treasure of his life.

Death, thy servant, is at my door. He has crossed
the unknown sea and brought thy call to my house.

The night is dark and my heart is fearful-yet I will
take up the lamp, open my gates and bow to him
my welcome. It is thy messenger who stands at my
door.

I will worship him with folded hands, and with
tears. I will worship him placing at his feet the
treasure of my heart.

Death can take life but not the Soul. He will offer life to Death
but his soul to the Divine Lord and Master. In poem 91, the poet

says that Death is the last fulfilment of life, without it all his life's work will remain incomplete and unfinished. Death completes what life prepares. When death comes, his life will be united with him as joyfully as the bride to the bridegroom.

Sarojini accepts the challenge of Death as the sworn enemy of man and refuses to yield to him. Rabindranath welcomes death as the fulfilment of life, as a dearly loved friend who brings him a call from the beyond and releases him from the bondage of this world.

Both Tagore and Sarojini are great writers of lyrical poetry. In many of their poems, they have described different moods, thoughts and feelings, their hopes and aspirations, their failures, and disappointments. Sarojini has written many poems in which she has expressed the pangs and sorrows, and also the joys and ecstasy of human love.

3.7. Conclusion

Both in faculties of mind and heart, Rabindranath was endowed with extraordinary verve and vigor. Even when age restricted his physical movement and activities, his interest in and commitment to life continued to be as earnest and vibrant as ever. He always felt a sense of duty towards the great world to which he had been born. He writes, "I have a world given to me which is mine, which depends for its perfection on my own creative soul. It is great because I have the power to make it worthy of its relationship with me, it is great, because by its help I can offer my own hospitality to the God of all the world" (*Lectures and Addresses* 13). In the morning the sun comes out brightly, in the dusk the stars hold up their lights. But these are

not sufficient for us. Until we light our own little lamps, the world of lights in the sky is in vain, and unless we make our own preparations, the wealth of the world-preparations remains waiting like a lute for the finger touch.

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4

Love Lyrics: A Fusion of the Divine, Human and Nature

"Love does not claim possession, but gives freedom."

-Rabindranath Tagore

4.1. Introduction

It is perhaps true to say that no man in the whole range of known history can rival Rabindranath Tagore's all-comprehending genius, equally splendid in thought, in creation and in action. In literature or art, there was no form that he did not touch and there was nothing he touched which he did not adorn. The keynote of Rabindranath Tagore's literature is love - the love that stands the test of time, the love that gives invincible strength to undergo extreme sacrifices. It is the love for man that condemns war and violence in every form. It is the love that transcends the differences of races and colours, castes and creeds. It is the universal cord of love that binds all life in a single knot that is unshakable and unbreakable. It produces an

unending rhythm of truth, beauty and bliss. It is love that conquers old age and kills death itself. It is the omnipotent love that transforms a hardened criminal into a saint. The objective of the present chapter is to bring to light Tagore's inseparable love for God, and man and to stimulate the readers to strive for true love where violence and murder has no role to play.

Rabindranath's life was long, covering the last forty years of the nineteenth century and the first forty of the twentieth. His creative output, in its great variety, was prolific. Tagore is the voice of the nation's dreams and longings, its sorrows and sufferings, the memories of its past and the visions of its future, its attitudes and its ideals. He was that rare phenomenon in the world of men - the integrated man with a mind of very wide perception. Rabindranath Tagore was a prominent poet of love and tenderness. In most of his works he has presented the beauty of love in its contrasting forms. Tagore's poetry predominantly deals with love -love for humanity, love for divinity and love for nature. His early poetry is concerned with man's love for woman, but his later poetry mainly deals with man's love and longing for God's beauty and presence. The treatment of physical love in his poetry is without exaggeration and is well within the bounds of Indian culture. The later and mature forms of literature is a vigorous description of his passionate love and yearning for God. Some of Tagore's poems may seem spiritual, some purely romantic; the feelings are freely combined and very often cannot be separated. A sense of spiritual romanticism penetrates his works - where divinity, nature, and human souls interact in perfect harmony.

Rabindranath Tagore was a versatile genius. He was a poet of so high a caliber that the world hardly came across one such in a millennium. He seems to have adorned Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, but not Shakespeare to the same extent. Shelley's doctrine of love, Wordsworth's view of nature and Keats's worship of beauty had a profound influence on him. His treatment of love is romantic, warm and humane. He is a superb singer of the various aspects of love. He wrote in *Creative Unity*, "Peace is true and not conflict, love is true and not hatred." He addressed a letter to Mahatma Gandhi in 1919 with the following invocation:

Give me the supreme courage of love, this is my prayer, the courage to speak, to do, to suffer at thy will, to have all things or be left alone.... Give me the supreme faith of love, this is my prayer, the faith of life in death, of victory in defeat, of the power hidden in the frailness of beauty, of the dignity of pain that accepts hurt, but disdains to return it (Saha 7).

Love constitutes the major theme in Tagore's poetry. His love-poems display a great depth of feeling and variety, of form, which rank them as the finest love poetry of the world. They reveal the pangs and frustrations, trials and tribulations, sorrows and joys of love. A critic writes about him:

He is above all the poet- the poet of love. Love flows from his heart, mind and soul in continuous stream assuming all different forms; the known to the unknown, from the finite to the infinite. He interprets in all its multiform expressions - the love

of mother, of son, of husband, of wife, of lover, of beloved and of friend. Each and every one of these he portrays with his characteristic softness of touch that recall the lyrics of Theophile, Gautier, and with the exquisite felicity of Shelley and Keats (Thomson 24).

The greatest of Tagore's discoveries is love and his conception of love is beyond measure. He melts into one sweet harmony all that is ugly, hideous, monstrous, depressing and revolting in life. There is no wonder why torture and brutality have hardly a role to play in his creative works. Each of his poems, lyrics, stories, essays, novels, plays and travelogues and even the large number of letters written by him to his friends are highly finished products of a consummate artist belonging to the great Indian heritage.

The theme of Tagore's poetry can be summed up in four letters 'LOVE.' His love poetry often resorts to a somewhat too rarefied air - many of his songs of love and devotion (puja) are interchangeable - but like the Vaishnava lyrics, which influenced him much, his best love songs have a body to them, a rich sensuality. The strength and grace of his words lend a special quality to his love songs which are rare in any country's literature. Tagore is a profound philosopher, a spiritual and patriotic leader, and a singer and composer. Love flows from his heart, mind and soul in a continuous stream assuming all different forms in its windings from the finite into the infinite.

4.2. Love for Divinity

According to Tagore, man can achieve God through self-purification, self-surrender that is through love and devotion to him. "In Love" says Tagore, "we find a joy which is ultimate because it is the ultimate truth." Therefore, it is said in the *Upanishads* that the *advaitam* is *anatam* - "the One is Infinite, the One is Love" (*Creative Unity* 8).

In *Ananta Prem* of *Manasi*, Tagore explains, love is eternal and man and God are also eternal. In eternal love finite man is lover and Infinite God as beloved becomes intimate or one, and thus in truth, love makes God human and man Divine. The Infinite manifests itself in the finite where lies the fundamental ideas of truth and beauty. Now with reference to the beauty of nature it is to be mentioned that nature also like the lover of the beloved plays a game of love with man. So, the eternal ideal of love establishes a relation of unity among man, nature and God. Tagore expresses this idea of eternal or intimate relation of love between lovers and beloved in his different writings, where he tries to establish his idea of *Jivandeavata*. Tagore, in his realization of Reality in love, was very much influenced by the ideas of *Vaisnavism*. But he interprets *Vaisnavism* in his own way where we get both personal and impersonal aspects of God in love. Rabindranath was much influenced by *Vaisnavism*, and he was a *Vaisnava* in his own way. He calls His Supreme Person *Advaitam* and his philosophy is a sort of *Vaisnava Advaita* or an *Advanta* in which *bhakti* or love plays the chief role.

Tagore's poetry is thrice born. It is a *Triveni* of Bengali, the Vaishnavite saints like Chandidas and Vidyapati and the great English romantic and mystic poets like Blake, Wordsworth and

Shelley. In one word, it is both a realization and an expression of Truth. W.B. Yeats comments in his Introduction to *Gitanjali* (7) 'every morning at three - I know, for I have seen it'- one said to me, 'he sits immovable in contemplation, and for two hours does not awake from his reverie upon the nature of God.' *Gitanjali* fixed Tagore's image in the western mind irrevocably. He would be seen as basically a mystic, a wise man from the East, 'an ineffective dreamer, dignified and calm.'

The *Gitanjali* has many aspects and many levels, yet, at root harks back to as Yeats comments: 'We are not moved because of its strangeness, but we have met our own image' (Dutta 169). Tagore's western admirers saw the humane spirit of Christianity was venerated only in theory but ignored in practice, was reflected back at them from *Gitanjali* in a pure form. Jesus Christ was an Oriental, Tagore emphasized; and his own idea of Indian spirituality had a strong affinity with that of the New Testament. Charles Darwin's granddaughter Frances Cornford told Rothenstein in July 1912: 'I can now imagine a powerful and gentle Christ, which I never could before.' Others felt the similarity, without making the comparison as explicit. Nirad Chaudhuri exclaimed, 'Tagore brought back the ideal of the first beatitude transfigured, that is to say, without any painful abnegation and asceticism, and endowed with joyous peace' (Dutta 169-170). Once Harriet Monroe in her memories recalled, sitting around a hearth fire listening to Tagore 'chanting his lyrics' and talking of 'Oriental Creeds,' making her feel as if she was 'sitting at the feet of Buddha.' She described *Gitanjali* as 'those sacred songs of praise which were chanted everywhere in his native India.' She noted his 'satirical-humorous observation of Western Civilization,' his 'bitter'

attitude to the British subjection of India, and the fact that 'His English was more perfect than ours' (Dutta 172). But overall, it was the 'serenely noble Laureate of Bengal' that struck her, not Tagore's other selves. The poet Thomas Sturge Moore wrote to a friend on 7th July 1912:

Yeats and Rothenstein had a Bengali poet on view during the last days I was in London. I was first privileged to see him in Yeats' rooms and then to hear a translation of his poems made by him and read by Yeats in Rothenstein's drawing room. His unique subject is 'the love of God.' When I told Yeats I found his poetry preposterously optimistic he said 'Ah! You see, he is absorbed in God' (Dutta 170).

God's Love in the Eye of Tagore



In *Crossing and Gitanjali* Tagore's conception of love assumes spiritual significance. Humayun Kabir writes: "Tagore's love for man unconsciously and inevitably merged into love of God... For him God was essentially love. The love of mother for her child, or the love of the lover for the beloved are only instances of the Supreme love

that is God. And this love expresses itself not only in the ecstatic devotion of the mystic but also in the routine of everyday life of the common man" (Kabir 24).

God's relationship to man is essentially a relationship of love - a continual self-giving in love. Addressing God, Rabindranath says, "Thou givest yourself to me in love" (*Gitanjali* 65). Right from birth, it is God's love which keeps man alive and takes care of him in God's own home. We read in his *Gitanjali* 95:

When in the morning I looked upon the light, I
felt in a moment that I was no stranger to this
world, that the inscrutable without name and
form had taken me in its arms in the form of my
own mother.

God's love is of a superior quality than man's and unlike human love, God's love leaves man free:

By all means they try to hold me secure who love
me in this world. But it is otherwise with thy love
which is greater than theirs and thou keepest me
free (*Gitanjali* 32).

God's love is patient and forgiving. Instead of being quick to condemn, punish or abandon man for his lack of love, waits for a change of heart in man:

If I call not thee in prayers, if I keep not thee in my
heart, thy love for me still waits for my love
(*Gitanjali* 32).

God does not despise man's humble activities; rather He comes down to the level of man to join him and walk with him:

Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish
play among dust and the steps that I heard in my
play room are the same that are echoing from star
to star (*Gitanjali* 43).

God's love is appreciative of every human endeavor and
achievement:

Masters are many in your hall and songs are sung
there at all hours. But the simplest carol of the novice
struck at your love...with a flower for a prize came
down and stopped at my cottage door (*Gitanjali* 49).

God's love is tender and full of affection:

Thy face is bent from above,
Thy eyes look down on my eyes (*Gitanjali* 59).

God's love not only keeps continuous touch with man, it is a
love that by repeated contact rouses man to life and action:

He it is the innermost.
One who awakens my being
with his deep hidden touches (*Gitanjali* 72).

God in his love keeps coming closer and closer to man,
sometimes silently and without man being aware of it, and at
other times suddenly and even uninvited. Several times in the
course of his writing, Tagore has expressed this faith:

I know not from what distant time thou art ever
coming nearer to meet me (*Gitanjali* 46).

And entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd unknown to me, my king (*Gitanjal* 43).

Tagore spiritualizes love. His spiritual concept of love shows the influence of *Vaishnava* love poetry, which centers round the love of Radha and Krishna. His love for God is full of vivid, sensuous and erotic images.

Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear
lest it droop and drop into the dust.
It may not find a place in thy garland, but honor it
with a touch of pain from thy hand and pluck it.
I fear lest the day end before I am aware, and the
time of offering go by.
Though its color be not deep and its smell be faint,
use this flower in thy service and pluck it while there
is time (*Gitanjali* 6).

Rabindranath always had an ardent desire for constant presence and a total union with God. He wishes to enter more deeply into the mystery of the divine and arrive at a more personal and profound understanding of that reality:

Oh, how indeed could I tell them that for thee
I wait and thou hast promised to come? (*Gitanjali* 41)

There is a secular and the spiritual mingling in his love lyrics. The secular longing for the lover becomes the spiritual longing of the human soul for complete union with God.

Love, my heart longs day and night for the meeting
with you - for the meeting that is like all-devouring
death.

Sweep me away like a storm; take everything I have;
break open my sleep and plunder my dreams. Rob
me of my world.

In that devastation, in the utter nakedness of spirit,
let us become one in beauty.

Alas! For my vain desire! Where is this hope for
union except in thee, my God? (*The Gardener* 50)

In *Crossing* he writes:

Accept me my lord, accept me for this while.

Let those orphaned days that passed without thee be
forgotten. Only spread this little moment wide
across thy lap, holding it under thy light.

I have wandered in pursuit of voice that drew me
yet led me nowhere.

Now let me sit in peace and listen to thy words in
the soul of my silence.

Do not turn away thy face from my heart's dark
secrets, but burn them
till they are alight with thy fire.

God, for Tagore, is the one infinite centre to which all
personalities and all the world of reality are related. He is the
one Supreme Person, the one Supreme Reality. He expresses
himself in creation. Describing the relationship between God
and man, Estborn (162) says, "For Tagore, God is the Supreme
Lover whose touch we experience in all our relations of love.
His love is absolutely unselfish and it leaves man free. God

seeks man and waits for man's response." His love songs depict a game of hide and seek that goes on between the finite soul and the infinite. This game is a love-game; love, which is the perfect personal relationship.

The Supreme Love, in Tagore's conception takes the shape of fatherly love. The name 'father' is central to Tagore's understanding of God. According to Tagore's view, God's love comes not out of surplus but out of want. Without our love God's love is imperfect. It can be supported with the following lines qtd. in Estborn: "The infinite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation," (60) "For the God in man depends upon men's service and men's love for his own love's fulfillment," (44) "O Thou Lord of heavens, where would be thy love if I were not?" (*Gitanjali* 56) So, it can be concluded that for Tagore, God's love would be nothing without man's love.

4. 3. Love for humanity

Rabindranath Tagore believed in love as a bond between man and man. Human love was something eternal for the poet; it transcends beyond life. A man can meet his beloved even in the next life because real love never perishes. Just like the human soul, real love could also be eternal. A few western poets too, believed in eternal love, "that hath no beginning, hath no end." Shelley, for instance, maintained: "there is no death, nor change" (Bhattacharya 14). Rabindranath expressed similar thoughts in innumerable poems and other works. He noted:

My eyes have lost their sleep in watching;
yet if I do not meet thee still it is sweet to watch.

My heart sits in the shadow of the rains waiting for
thy love;
if she is deprived still, it is sweet to hope.
They walk away in their different paths leaving me
behind;
if I am alone still, it is sweet
to listen for thy footsteps (*Crossing* 11).

Tagore's poems on love and nature are highly sensitive and full of passion and life. The lover's agony in his spellbound heart is far more an idea than a person. This love is of a rare kind, a bodiless love in the end, an eternal confession, of the world's love-lorn. Such type of love continues age after age, life after life. In *Urvashi*, he begins by a characterization of the personality as a romantic image of an abstract idea - the myth maiden, who is neither mother, daughter, sister, nor wife. *Fruit Gathering* and *Lover's Gift* give expression to his feelings of love for the mortal beloved; whereas, *Gitanjali* is an expression of his love for the immortal one. In *Gitanjali* we have the calm starlight of the deep midnight sky, the full moon of the love of God - that blessed love in which all the fragmentary radiances of human love, love of art, and love of nature have been gathered up into a full and divine radiance.

Tagore is a great love poet with extraordinary subtlety, he analyses the different moods and captures the ardent passion, which lovers feel for each other. There is great originality and delicacy in the art with which he portrays the ever-shifting moods and emotional intricacies of love. He shows again and again how love comes in one's life suddenly, with a strange thrill and overpowers the soul with ecstasy and disturbs them in

the daily occupation of their lives. In *The Gardener and Lovers Gift*, the yearning of the lovers has been brought out with great skill. Many of the poems reveal the depth, the agony and the fever of this most fundamental of all human passions. He conveys the intensity of love and the pleasure as well as the pain, which it causes. *The Gardner* is regarded as the main feast of love poetry that have appeared in English. It exhibits the human soul lit with the morning radiance of beauty; rejoicing in its new born sensation of keen delight in beauty of form and beauty of soul. Dr. Iyengar (106) says, "All the make-believe and love play that lovers feed on, all the agony and hopelessness, all the ecstasy and fulfilment of lovers lives, all is woven here into a garland of memorable songs."

Rabindranath's great originality lies in the images which he uses - drawn from the common objects of nature, - sensuous and concrete, to express the various shades, moods etc. of love. His imagery is highly expressive, suggestive and original; it surprises and startles. Thus, in one of the poems in the *Lover's Gift*, the lover's heart is likened to an orchard in which ripe fruits are eager to burst, and hold their sweets to the beloved's lips. Elsewhere, the lover's heart is represented as a lake and the ladylove is invited to fill her pitcher in it. These images are fresh and startling like a metaphysical conceit. But Tagore is never far-fetched in his imagery like Donne and his followers.

Tagore's poetry expresses his ardent love for someone whose identity remains a mystery. There are indeed many lines in his poetry, which show him as a masculine lover. In this role, he wants to hold the little fists of his beloved and bind flower-charms on them. He asks her to come with quick steps over the

green; her hair need to be braided nor the ribbon on her bodies be fastened. Her blue mantle will be left on the shore and the blue water will cover her and hide her. The waves will rise and stand tip-toe to kiss her neck and whisper in her ears. The sky overhead is bright and the love between her and him is simple as a song. Her veil of saffron color makes his eyes drunk. He asks her to give him leave to sit by her side and bid his lips to do the work that can be done in silence and in the dim light of stars. He feels lost in her spells. Her young body is slim and swaying and there is a twinkling smile in the edge of her eyes. Her robe is colored like the rain-cloud. Last night in the garden he offered her his youth's foaming wine. She lifted the cup of her lips, shut her eyes and smiled while he raised her veil, unbounded her tears drawing up to his breast her face sweet with silence.

His treatment of love is without pangs, without pricking, without frustration and without exaggerated sighs. It is natural and simple; it is a product of Indian culture; it knows its limits; it does not go beyond an acceptable line. He fashions his beloved as a shy woman who braids her hair, puts on a green mantle and goes alone to her love-tryst. In another picture she milked the cow with hands as tender and fresh as butter. He stood with his empty can. He did not say a word. The bird sang unseen from the thicket. He did not move near her. He went on observing her. Yet she asked him to go away. He held her hands and brought his face near her. What shame, she said. His lips touched her cheeks but she trembled and said that he dared too much. He put a flower in her hair and she remarked that it was useless. He took the garland back and went away. Tagore's descriptions of love and lovers are natural, sweet and touching. In the fourth song of *Lover's Gift* Tagore writes:

She is near to my heart
As the meadows flower to the earth,
She is sweet to me as sleep is to the tired limbs.
My love for her is life flowing its fullness,
Like a river in autumn flood, serene abandonment,
My songs are with my love,
Like the murmur of a storm,
That sings with all its waves and currents.

Tagore's love lyrics are full with Indian sensibility. In the *Gitanjali*, says Prof. Iyengar (110), "the imagery, the conceits, the basic experience, the longing, the trial, the promise, the realization, all have the quaintly unique Indian flavor and taste."

In poems like *The Gardener* 18 and 19, Tagore portrays the yearning of a lover with a marvelous economy of suggestion. There is no emphasis, no intricacy; it is just a passing excitement, which stirs the heart and stops where it begins. Sometimes a young man watches from behind a tree as two sisters come from the river after filling pitchers. Their consciousness of his presence makes them lurch and the water spills. It is through the description of this trivial occurrence that the poet suggests the nervous tremor of the young girls who do not even meet the young man. The beauty of such poetry is derived largely from understatement and from artistic potentiality of apparently insignificant incident. The following lines may be a summary of his treatment of and approach to love:

Someone has secretly left in my hand
a flower of love,
Someone has stolen my heart
And scattered it abroad in the sky.
I know not if I have found him
or I am seeking him everywhere,
if it is a pang of bliss or of pain (*Crossing* 33).

The sensation of novelty and strangeness associated with the feeling of love is expressed in *Lover's Gift* 60 in which, the most impure woman suddenly awakens, to the dawning of pure love in her heart. It is one of those prostitutes who were sent by a king's minister to tempt an ascetic. This ascetic who had never seen a woman, was entranced by her beauty and hailed her as a goddess, a wonder of creation. This was a novel experience also for the prostitute who has defiled and been defiled by many men. But the ascetic's mind responded to beauty with an ardor that had no connection with carnal desires; the woman, too, realized that the sinful life she had led was only a screen behind which the divine innocence of a virgin had preserved itself beyond the reach of corruption. Some of the images very tellingly represent the uniqueness of the experience that comes equally to the sophisticated woman and unsophisticated childhood.

Not only is love a strange, disturbing sensation but it is also an absorbing passion, and many of the poet's love-lyrics reveal the depth and the agony, the fever and the fret. The intensity of love is portrayed through a number of original and telling images as in *Lover's Gift* 4. In his eager desire for union, the lover naturally minimizes the distance between him and his

sweetheart, saying that she is as near to him as the meadow flower is to the earth, an image which is as novel as it is suggestive.

In some poems along with the intensity of love, the poet deals with its infinite mystery. In *The Gardener* 28, it is a man who is the speaker; by a series of contrasts he shows that even when the human heart has completely surrendered itself, it fails to explain all its significance. Love is too deep for expression, and the ladylove who wants to know her sweet heart completely, is like the moon trying to fathom the bottom of the sea. The same idea is expressed in a completely different manner in *Lover's Gift* 23. The lovers are on the two banks of the same river, which beautifully suggests separation in union. The same river runs between them, singing the same song, but as they hear from opposite banks; there is a difference between the messages it conveys to them.

Rabindranath, not only portrayed the depth, the intensity and the expansiveness of love but also analyzed its more lighthearted phases. In *The Gardener* 40, the speaker tries to evoke a note of pathos because he is bidding farewell; but the sweetheart knows and so does the speaker himself, that he will come back and that the leave-taking is only a pretense. But he pleads with her all the while to accept the illusion of farewell; for it will add zest to their lovemaking and if she can shed tears, it will only deepen the dark rim of her eyes and thus add to her beauty.

In some lyrics of love there is a dramatic interpretation of motives. An example of the mixture of mood is seen in *The Gardener* 33, in which the heroine alternately asks for pity and

forgiveness in love to a bird losing its way: she realizes, too, that by yielding to the call of love her heart has laid bare its secret. In this moment of absolute surrender, she wants the lover to cover her with his pity. It is probable that the man to whom she has given her heart may not be able to respond to her advances. In that case, she will cover her forlornness with both her hands. In the next stanza, she changes the possibility of his loving her. Then she will sit on a throne and rule him like a goddess, but even then, she realizes that her power will depend on him and her strength will be the strength of weakness. That is why she asks him:

If you love me, beloved, forgive me my joy.
When my heart is borne away by the flood of
happiness,
do not smile at my perilous abandonment.
When I sit on my throne and rule you with my
tyranny of love,
when like a goddess I grant you my favour, bear
with my pride, and
forgive me my joy (*The Gardener* 33).

Tagore's early love poetry is marked by authenticity of personal experience. It reveals his intense love for someone whose identity is shrouded in mystery. The fair creature who intoxicated the young poet's heart with beauty and passionate love might be Nalini, the young Maharashtrian girl whom the poet loved, or she might be Kadambari, his sister-in-law who inspired him to write and whom he adored. In *Kada O Kamal*

and *Manasi*, his lyrics echo his personal unfulfilled longings, frustration and he conjures up vivid romantic images to visualize his beloved whose beauty is beyond all description. In *The Gardener* 34, he graphically describes the romantic meeting of two young lovers:

Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.
I have watched all night,
and now my eyes are heaving with sleep.
I fear lest I lose you when
I am sleeping.
Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.

Kada O Kamal and *Manasi* express his personal love on a real physical plane. It thrilled the lovers of poetry, as it was something new in Indian literature. The following lines, match for their exquisite lyricism that reveal the passion and intensity of lovers:

I clasp your hands, and my heart plunges into the
dark of your eyes, seeking you, whoever evade me
behind words and silence (*Lover's Gift* 25).

Tagore shows high esteem to woman. She is not only beloved but also harbinger of beauty and order in man's life. He writes in *Fruit- Gathering*:

Bring beauty and order into thy forlorn life, woman,
as you brought into my house when you lived.
Sweep away the dusty fragments of hours, fill the
empty jars, and mend all that has been neglected.

Then open the inner door of the shrine, light the candle, and let us meet there in silence before our God.

Rabindranath believes that woman's love is the noblest of all life's gifts. He thinks it is possible to realize the Infinite through love. He has written the play *Sanyasi* or the *Ascetic* on this theme. The Sanyasi who prided himself upon renunciation, and thought of the world as darkness or emptiness, comes across a girl and finds that the world is worthwhile to live in and that love is a reality. He says: "The finite is the true infinite and love knows its truth" (Tengshe 108). Tagore used the word 'love' in its widest and noblest sense. He is ecstatic when he talks of motherhood. "The honor which is given her by English custom because she sets fire to the hearts of men, had better not be termed worship. The altar at which woman may be truly worshipped is her place as Mother, the seat of the pure, right-minded Lady of the house" (Tengshe 108).

While saying that the first sign of manliness in the character of Vidyasagar was his partiality towards women, Tagore remarked: "The first sign of a coward is that the more he gets from people, even without asking for it, the more he becomes ungrateful. Are there many such wretched men who have been deprived of the affection, kindness and courtesy of women? But they do not think that they also have to do something for women in return. So, in our country, the happiness and comfort of women are the main topic for comics" (Ghose 96). Likewise, we find manliness in the poet from the description we get from him of women. Numberless pictures of women are strewn over the vast literature of Rabindranath.

The way in which women live in our society pained the poet a lot. A woman is useful to her household and her husband. It is very convenient to have a woman in the house. Her life is something of an unchanging chain of cooking and feeding. It is filled with the wants and wishes of other people in the house. She can realize her joyful self only when death calls her. In Tagore's *Manasi* it is mentioned:

I am a woman
I am sacred.
The sleepless moon
Of the moonlit night is in tune with me.
If I were not here.
In vain would rise the evening star.
In vain would flowers blossom
In the garden.

The poet has written much about the nobility, sweetness and depth of love in a woman. A broad-minded mother is full of love and motherliness that she adopts a helpless child even if it is not her own. She forgets all superstitions. The barriers of caste or creed cannot hold back the motherly affection of a woman. The character of Anandamoyee in *Gora* is one such. She says to Gora: "When I took you in my lap, I understood that a man is not born with any cast. A small child has no caste. If I hate anyone because of his cast, then God will take you away from me."

Rabindranath had kept the sacred lamp of worship kindled in his heart for the worthy women with whom he came in contact. While speaking of them, he said: "Sometimes such a

bright picture of a woman flashed upon my eyes who cannot be termed as modern but who belonged to all times" (Ghose 99). "Whenever we committed a fault in our conduct, we saw the light of forgiveness in their eyes. They lighted the lamp of love from the fire of Virtue" (Ghose 98). This is always the nature of woman. Her nobility lies in her ability to forgive the fault of others with a smile. Tagore believes that the greatest treasure of a woman is not her body but her mind. He wrote: "O beautiful one, what are you looking at in your mirror? Are you trying to find if there is any blemish in the offering of love which you are going to give to the dear one?" (Ghose 99)

A man is able to realize the endless bliss of God in a woman. God divided Himself into two in order to realize his own sweetness in a woman. The poet said in *Manasi*:

Oh woman, coming to me for a while You filled
my mind with hints
Towards that secret of bliss of
Union with God.

Rabindranath Tagore's conception of love is the product of Indian culture and does not transgress acceptable limits. Commenting on Tagore's conception of love Dr. Radhakrishnan (58) writes:

Physical union without love is the essence of prostitution. This is true within and without marriage... Love is spiritual and aesthetic, a matter of conscience and good taste and one of law and codes. Married life without love is like a slave labor... As beauty is higher than harmony, as truth

is higher than consistency, so is love higher than law. Like fire it purifies everything.

Tagore's treatment of love is very warm and human, and he must be ranked with the greatest love poets of the world despite his mysticism and despite the large bulk of his devotional poetry. In his *Urvashi* we get a picture of a perfectly beautiful woman such as poets have dreamed of, but few have succeeded in giving their dreams such a sensuous and perfect expression. She is the nectar of beauty in the sparkling bowl of eternal youth. Passion here shoots out like a flame only to smolder in a glow.

4. 4. Love for nature

For Tagore nature is a vast storehouse of images, similes and metaphors; he is constantly drawing upon her to illustrate his mystical concepts. Everyday commonplace objects and phenomena are constantly utilized by him to communicate highly abstract religious truths. There is a surprising wealth and abundance of nature imagery and illustration in his lyrics. No poet that ever lived, has a more constant and intimate touch with natural beauty as Tagore had. He can use at his best, the same images and pictures, the oldest ones in the world, a score of times in as many lines, and each time with freshness and charm. His wealth here is inexhaustible, and it is manifest in prose as in verse and is almost as manifest in English as in Bengali. Flowers, rivers, the stars, the sun and the moon, the lightning, and a host of other objects and phenomena are all pressed by him into service. His nature imagery is visual,

graphic and pictorial. In this respect, he remains unsurpassed and unmatched.

Everyone who has the slightest acquaintance with Tagore's poetry will know how dominant a place nature occupies in them. His delight in this 'sun-kissed world' and all that is in it; its dark forests, its streams and torrents and lakes, its pattering rain, its moonlit nights, its multifarious forms of life, the green trees and smiling flowers, the cattle grazing on the slope by the river, and the children merrily singing and dancing in the grove - this we come across in almost every page of his poetry:

I have kissed this world with my eyes and my limbs;
I have wrapped it within my heart in numberless
folds; I have flooded its days and nights with
thoughts till the world and my life have grown one, -
and I love my life because I love the light of the sky
so enwoven with me (*Fruit Gathering* 53).

This love for nature was apparently innate in him and came to light very early. In *Reminiscences* he tells of the inner garden of the Tagore house, Joransanko, in Kolkata, a garden which was poor enough, consisting only of a citron tree, a couple of plum trees and a row of coconut trees. Nonetheless, this Jorasanko garden was a paradise to little Rabindranath, the adornment of which could well match that of Adam's Garden of Eden (*Reminiscences* 18).

When, in his twelfth year, for the first time, in the company of his father, he visited Santiniketan. Arriving at Bolpur in the evening, he closed his eyes, when he got into the

palanquin which was to take him from the railway station to the *ashram*; for he wanted to preserve the whole of the wonderful scenery to be unfolded before his waking eyes in the morning light, he feared that the freshness of the experience would be spoilt by incomplete glimpse caught in the vagueness of the evening dusk (*Reminiscences* 18).

Nature exercised a great influence in shaping Tagore as a poet. From his very boyhood, he enjoyed the beauties and glories of nature. As a boy he looked at the earth and the sky, the sun and the moon, the stars and the mystery of nocturnal sky, and trees and hills, birds and flowers, rivers and streams, the deep sea, and the day and night with a feeling of wonder and mystery. Nature appealed to him as it appealed to Wordsworth. He writes about his early love for nature:

I had a deep sense, almost from infancy of the beauty of nature and intimate feeling of companionship with the trees and the clouds, and felt in tune with musical touch of the seasons in the air. At the same time, I had a peculiar susceptibility to human kindness (*Lectures and Addresses* 8).

All these carved expressions, as he grew up, gave them his own expressions in lyrics of boundless beauty and sweetness. The following song in *Crossing* 61 reveals his immense love for nature in his childhood:

I remember my childhood when the sunrise, like my playfellow, would burst into my bedside with its daily surprise of morning, when 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 beasts, the common weeds, grass and the clouds had their fullest value of wonder: when the patter of rain at midnight brought dreams from the fairyland and mother's voice in the evening gave meaning to the stars.

Tagore is of the opinion that love is the governing principle in human life which can overcome all the boundaries and barriers that comes in its way; it is the noblest of feelings that human heart can comprehend. He was a true romantic, as N. Dwivedi reports: "Tagore's poetry sometimes imitates the style of Kalidasa, revealing different facets of natural beauty in all its splendor. The varying moods of nature are recorded in his poetry" (45). In lyrics we find a tendency of integrating the human characters with the landscapes. This brilliant achievement enhances the spirit of mysticism. Tagore was a worshipper of nature and beauty, having the closest tie with both these elements, he virtually lived and breathed in them. Nature has drawn him intensely towards universality. He sings

Take me back, O Mother Earth,
Take your child into your arms.
In the folds of your vast protecting garments
O Mother Earth,
Let me expand in your soil,
Scattering myself in endless directions
Like the joy of Spring (*Collected Poems and Plays*).

It is to be noted that nature in Tagore's love poetry is not merely decorative; she is represented as sympathetic to the mood of the lovers. Again and again, she takes on their moods and is identified with them. Nature is humanized – she reflects the joys and sorrows of lovers, and thus human joys and sorrows are intensified. When the lovers meet, their joy find its expression in the joy of nature, she dances with joy. When they are separated, nature reflects their suffering. Thus, the nature background is brought into close harmony with the human situation and in this way human moods, joys and sorrows, are sharpened. Sometimes the sentiments of love especially its sorrows, supply the poet with food for reflection on the facts of life and death, and the treatment of love with his philosophy of life. Tagore's love poetry seems to have been influenced by Browning; M.K. Naik (62) writes:

Possibly influenced by Browning of whom he was a great admirer, Tagore exhibits a Browningsque variety and complexity in his love poetry, though his setting, unlike that of the British poet, is invariably rural and feudal. Like Browning, Tagore too is capable of both, the subjective and objective approaches, and can offer both a direct outpouring of emotion and the poetry of situations, of which the very first piece in *The Gardener* is a fine example.

Tagore's idea of *Jivandeavata* expresses both the personal and impersonal aspects of reality. In Love we find the manifestation of these two aspects of Reality; sometimes He is manifested in man and nature, and sometimes He stands as distinct from supreme ideals that is to be realized by man. Both

nature and Absolute Jivandevata play the game of love with man. But man's object of love is not two, as *Jivandevata* being Absolute and perfect being. If nature is taken as man's object of love, then *Jivandevata* as nature, is immanent in nature and then both Jivandevata and nature are taken as identical. But *Jivandevata* also is transcendent or impersonal, and hence distinct from both nature and man. He creates man and nature for his own self-manifestation in love. So God, Nature and Man are three essential factors of Tagore's poetry. Nature being potentially divine helps man to develop his true and perfect nature, which is the divine personality. Thus man in nature tries to develop his divine personality through the realization of the highest idea of Jivandevata, and the Absolute *Jivandevata* also realizes Himself in absolute love through man and nature.

4.5. Conclusion

Tagore vividly describes almost all the aspects of love in lyrics of unsurpassable beauty. The human and the spiritual have been blended together in his love lyrics, and in this respect, he is without a parallel in Indian English poetry. The fusion of God, nature and man is a recurrent theme in his poetry. Nature is the abode of God; the various aspects of nature are symbols of eternity. He spiritualizes human love and humanizes spiritual love. The greatest of Tagore's discoveries is love and his conception of love is beyond measure. He melts into one sweet harmony-the harmony of love all that is ugly, hideous, monstrous, depressing and revolting in life. Each of his poems, lyrics, stories, essays, novels, plays and travelogues and even the large number of letters written by him to his friends are highly finished products of an exemplary artist belonging to the

great Indian heritage. God dwells in his own creation, and it is expected of man that he also must create his environment, his own dwelling-place, which should be worthy of his soul.

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5

Rabindranath Tagore's Influence on Indian Culture and Civilization

*"The highest education is that which does not
merely give us information
but makes our life harmony with all existence"*
-Rabindranath Tagore

5.1. Introduction

Great men leave behind them a sparkling sequence of their glorious deeds. India is fortunate to be the birthplace of her eminent son - Rabindranath Tagore, who tried to raise the name of the motherland to spiritual heights, not known before in the history of the country since the arrival of the British. The myriad minded genius and Asia's first Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore with his genius as an artist made notable contributions in the field of education, politics, culture, art, music, social reform, and economic reconstruction.

The wide-ranging literature of Rabindranath Tagore is indeed one of the greatest wealth of India today. At a time when Indian art was dying for want of encouragement, when Indian life was looked upon as backward and inferior, when English education attempted to denationalize the educated citizens of the country, there emerged the myriad minded poet as a torch bearer, illuminating the path of true Indian life. Rabindranath Tagore, who breathed his last in 1941 at the age of eighty, is a towering figure in the literary world of India, particularly of Bengal. The west knows him as a mystic, an admirable Hindu seer, embodiment of India's message to the world, and a better specimen of Indian culture. But, to his countrymen, he is the *Gurudev*, the beloved poet, the maker of modern India and the singer of songs.

Tagore's place as a critic has been partially overshadowed by his fame as a creative writer. Yet he is undoubtedly one of the makers of modern Bengali criticism and among the most perceptive critics in the language, if not the best. His corpus of critical writings is considerable, comprising more than one hundred essays of varying lengths. Practically all forms of artistic expression in Bengal bears the indelible influence of Tagore. *Rabindra Sangeet*, *Rabindrik Nritya*, and *Natya* constitute an important role in the cultural heritage and tradition of Bengal. In the words of Shanti Bose "Tagore has almost become synonymous with the term Bengali culture" (Sheth 11).

The winds of a common literature began to blow in the land of Bengal with the preaching of religion. It was the Christian missionaries who first felt a lack of means to communicate their message to the people of Bengal; so, they set

about developing the language of the common people to spread education and diffuse knowledge.

However, this was not a task that could be achieved entirely by the foreigners. Raja Rammohun Roy, the maker of modern Bengal, was in fact, the first to lay the foundation of Bengali prose. Before him, Bengali literature had been restricted to verse, and verse was not enough for Rammohun Roy's purpose. The language of sensibility and beauty, the idiom of the connoisseur of the 'rasas,' was insufficient; the language of reason and statement, a language that could discourse on all matters to all people, was what he needed. Till then, there had existed only poetry for gatherings of contemplatives; there now appeared prose for the concourse of the people. Without such conjunction of prose and poetry, no literature can achieve fullness.

Just as there was only water in the earliest phase of evolution of life on the earth, there was only flowing and rippling rhythm of verse in the earliest phase of literature in Bengal. Nevertheless, a new age dawned in Bengal under the rule of a new Raja. The first Bengali prose writer of new Bengal anointed the common people as king, and set up a royal place for literature on a deep, firm foundation on the extensive soil of Bengal. The literature of Bengal was established on a large and noble idea. When this work of construction began, the Bengali language had neither worth nor esteem; it brought fame or money to none; it was difficult even to express one's thoughts in it; and if expressed, it was almost impossible to spread such thoughts among the people. No king gave it shelter; no educated public encouraged it. Those who cultivated English

ignored Bengali, and those who knew Bengali failed to see the importance of the new effort.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, India was indeed in a sorry state: politically crushed, economically exploited, poverty stricken and ignorant. People had become oblivious of their own glorious past, and seemed to have lost all confidence in the future. Undoubtedly, Ram Mohun Roy, Shri. Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda had tried to awaken the people; however, the impact of these men had been experienced only by limited sections, and the currents generated by them were running dry. Stagnation seemed to have set in at all levels of national life. It was against this background Rabindranath Tagore came as a torch-bearer, to wake up the sleeping giant. With the coming of Tagore, India once again demonstrated her innate vitality. He was superbly, the organ-voice of India and the symbol of her immense aeonic vitality. And his mind being rooted in India, his genius was like a noble tree, the benignity of its branches touching every age and clime, a truly universal spirit that gloried in the visible world of man and nature, and well apprehended what T.S. Eliot described as: 'The intersection of the timeless with time.'

5.2. The literary background of Bengal in the early 20th century.

When Rabindranath Tagore loomed on the literary scene, Bengali criticism was only a few decades old. Critical writings were still very few, and the reading public was hardly interested in criticism as a serious intellectual enterprise. On the one hand there had been a complete break with the indigenous critical tradition; on the other, the Indian exposure to Western critical literature was still too limited and feeble to fill the vacuum.

The influence of Rabindranath Tagore on Bengali literature was so strong that the tone of Bengali culture was changed entirely. He wrote an enormous amount, each work registering an advance in technique and new areas of content. He taught the people the quality of refinement and brought to Indian writing the treasures of "the romantic with his nostalgia, his unconscious aspiration, his fine uncertainties and delicate fatigue and the abstract sense of beauty" (Mukherjee 149). As Bishnu Dey puts it:

He seems sometimes 'the most splendid Coral Island' in the stream of our literature rather than being in the stream and part of it. Seeking, however, to link always the finite with the infinite and bondage to the world and to life with freedom from it, he built a beautiful bridge and attained a poise, even as unresting fires burned in his soul, reaching to 'that profundity, where peace reigns in the heart of turbulence (Mukherjee 149).

There was no criticism at all in most Indian languages till the mid-nineteenth century. In West Bengal, there was never a dearth of scholars specializing in poetics, but none included Bengali literature within his purview. Rupa Goswami's *Ujjoala Nilamani*, a sixteenth century work on Vaishnava poetics, was undoubtedly a fine piece of scholarship. It became a model for the classification of Vaishnava lyrics in Bengali and other Indian languages, but did not reflect any interest in the emerging Vaishnava literature in these languages at that time. In Bengali literary activity, criticism was a nineteenth-century innovation, mainly, if not entirely, an enterprise of the English-educated Bengali.

Rabindranath wanted to liberate criticism from the restrictions of all structured approaches to literature and art. His concept of literature, its nature and function, and consequently his literary theory, is deeply rooted in the etymology of the word *Sahitya*, the Sanskrit term for literature. Some ancient scholars explained the term *Sahitya* as the togetherness of *Shabda* (sound, word) and *Artha* (sense, meaning) (Chaudhuri 12). Rabindranath extends the interpretation beyond the relation of sound and sense to a larger human relationship. According to him, not only literature but also all the arts seek to ensure the relationship between human beings. Literature brings people closer to one another: the reader to the writer, one country to another, the ancient times to modern times. This concept of togetherness being central to Rabindranath's literary theory, he rejects the doctrine of art for art's sake, as well as the idea of absolute artistic freedom, untampered by any concomitant ideal of *mangal* (the good or beneficent). It is this 'togetherness' that draws him to the idea of literature as communication as well as expression. Literature becomes an institution like language itself, created and sustained by a community.

5.3. Unconventional approach to education.

According to Tagore, the main objective of education is to prepare the individual for the service of the nation. Education represents human regeneration, cultural representation, harmony, and intellectualism. Tagore believed that the expansion of basic education is central to social progress, because the future of India would completely depend on it. He identified lack of basic education as the fundamental cause of many of India's social and economic afflictions such as, caste divisions, religious conflicts, aversion to work, and precarious

economic conditions. He was one of the first Indian to argue for a humane educational system in touch with the environment, which provide education on essential human virtues like freedom, purity, sympathy, perfection, and world brotherhood.

Tagore was completely dissatisfied with the prevalent system of education, and called the schools as factories of rote learning. He was apprehensive not only about having wider opportunities for education across the country, (especially in rural areas where schools were few) but also about the schools being livelier and more enjoyable. Tagore himself had not been educated in formal schooling because he was unwilling to go to school. He discontinued studies early, largely out of boredom, and had never bothered to earn a diploma. He wrote extensively on how schools should be made more captivating to boys and girls, where they can be more productive.



Unconventional Approach to Education

As an alternative to the existing forms of education he started a small School at Santiniketan in 1901; which later grew into the Visva Bharati University in 1921. Santiniketan, popularly known today as a university town, a hundred miles to the north of Kolkata, was originally an ashram built by Debendranath Tagore, where anyone, irrespective of caste and creed, could come and spend time meditating on the one

Supreme God. It was established with the aim of helping education go beyond the confines of the classroom. Tagore believes that an educational institution should not be a dead cage where living minds are fed with food that's artificially prepared by the teachers. Hand work and arts are the spontaneous overflow of our deeper nature and spiritual significance.

Nature was the best teacher for Tagore, therefore he adopted the model of the *Ashram* of the ancient India for the realisation of his educational ideals. Tagore wanted the academic institutions to offer elements of culture and opportunities for studying the socio-economic conditions of villages around the educational centre. Tagore's educational philosophy does not only speak of teaching and learning, but also of larger interests, of cultural upbringing, of a common sharing of life with village folk with no feeling of moral superiority. One of the leading individuals who gave the ideas of university education to Tagore was Patrick Geddes. Like Tagore, Geddes also advocated for the service of the community life. He contributed a lot in fulfilling the poet's dream of uniting teachers, students and humble village workers in a bond of necessity. Tagore's championing of the rural uplift work as part of education still continues to influence the 21st century mind. Tagore's educational ideas have been shared by other educationists and many of his innovations have now become part of general educational practices.

The Visva-Bharati University is the oldest central university in India; a centre for culture with the objective of exploring the arts, language, humanities, music etc. It's establishment led to pioneering efforts in many directions, including model for

Indian higher education and mass education as well as pan Asian and global cultural exchange. As one of the earliest educators to think in terms of the global village, Tagore's educational model has a unique sensitivity and aptness for education within multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural situations amidst conditions of acknowledged economic discrepancy, political imbalance and social evils. The whole educational system was a synthesis of East and West, Ancient and Modern, Science and Vedanta although he protested against the emphasis on foreign language.

Santiniketan is a learning centre where conflicting interests are minimized; individuals work together in common pursuit of truth and beauty. It is an abode of peace where teachers and students live together in a spirit of perfect comradeship. It has open spaces and atmosphere of freedom surrounded by natural environment. It is open to all, irrespective of country, race, religion, or politics. Its motto is simple living and high thinking. Artists in all parts of the world have created forms of beauty, scientists discovered the secrets of the universe, philosophers solved the problems of existence, saints made the truth of the spiritual world organized in their own lives, not merely for some particular race to which they belong, but for all mankind.

5.4. Contributions to the scholarly world of Bengal.

Rabindranath's writings on language are partly the outcome of his concern with style, diction, standardization, and the role of language in society. But a substantial part also grows out of his abiding interest in linguistics. This may seem contrary to the traditional image of the poet deriding the grammarian.

But when one thinks of Rabindranath's involvement with so many 'unpoetical' activities - rural reconstruction, agriculture, social reformer, scientist, educationalist - and the wide range of subjects he studied and wrote about; his interest in grammatical studies appears natural. His Bengali primer *Sahaj path* (easy reading) is, however, a classic. None of these primers is the amateurish work of a poet; they are products of careful planning and graded arrangement of linguistic material, imbued with a strong urgency to introduce an alternative method of language teaching. *Sahaj Path* has not lost its utility even today: quite recently, it was the subject of a heated controversy over its alleged ideological moorings.

These works reflect a lifelong engagement with the study of language. It began as early as 1885, when Rabindranath was deeply involved with experiments towards a new poetic idiom, as well as with establishing a new line of Bengali criticism. Around that time, he wrote an essay on the erratic features of Bengali pronunciation - or, more accurately, the imperfect correspondence between the phonic structure of the language and its alphabet and orthography. The essay ended with the observation that though several Bengali grammars had been composed, they were all mere modifications of Sanskrit grammar: "of real Bengali grammar, there is nothing" (Chadhuri 18). This was the beginning of Rabindranath's investigations into the nature of Bengali language, based on observed practice and free from any preconceived notions. Over the next twenty-five years, he frequently wrote on various aspects of the language, chiefly its sound system and morphology and sometimes also etymology. These pieces were collected in the book *Shabdatattwa* (Linguistics) in 1909. All his essays on Bengali morphology are strong pleas for recognizing

Bengali as an independent language-system with its own rules of operation.

Tagore himself had an infinite mastery over the Bengali language. This cannot be comprehended unless one heard his talk. His talk was a rainbow of songs, a symphony of colors. It was sustenance to the sensual ear as well as a charmer of the spirit. What flew from his lips was exactly the language he used in later prose works, and he beat all his characters in the power of presenting a most commonplace thing in an extraordinary manner. As the words flowed, similes and metaphors blossomed like flowers, and there were sudden flashes of humor at the most unexpected moments. Bengali seemed to be a powerful and much sweeter language when Rabindranath spoke it.

Again in 1938 at the age of seventy-seven, he produced a monograph, *Banglabhasha-Parichay*, (Introduction to Bengali Language) now regarded as a classic both for its insight, originality of thought, and for its attractive prose. These two books differ in origin, structure, and design, but unified by their acumen and originality of thought, substantially present in Rabindranath's writings on language and linguistic issues.

It is also significant that Rabindranath had only a marginal interest in historical linguistics, although he grew up in milieu where it was a dominant force. Bishop Robert Caldwell's *A Comparative Grammar of Dravidian or South Indian Families of Languages* (1856) and John Beam's *A Comparative Grammar of Modern Aryan Language of India* (3 Volumes, 1872-79) had opened up new horizons in Indian linguistics. Rabindranath admired these works, but his own field of inquiry fell almost

entirely within synchronic linguistics. He was interested in living language, its structures and functions; not in historical change.

Rabindranath's essays on Bengali enclitics, the plural number, the case system, inflexions, and suffixes are products of this interest. His finest achievements as a linguist undoubtedly goes to the comprehensive lists, he prepared of Bengali verb root and of onomatopoeic words abounding in Bengali, or written so illuminatingly on their functions indicating their wide semantic range and expressiveness. The essay remains unsurpassed even today: unfortunately, its close reference to Bengali vocabulary and usage makes it unsuitable for translation. They indicate his attachment to the language of the people, as opposed to the formal, ornate, recondite Sanskritic mode. This strong advocacy of a new approach to Bengali grammar, free from the hegemony of Sanskrit, generated a healthy debate in contemporary Bengal. The only other scholar who took up the cause of Bengali as a living language in its own was the renowned Sanskritist Haraprasad Shastri.

A contemporary hailed them both as the true heirs of Panini. This may be an exaggerated eulogy, but it testifies to the impact of Rabindranath's thought on the scholarly world. *Banglabhasha-Prichay* treats of technical matters with rare clarity and ease. It is remarkably free of technical terms, and follows no specific model of linguistic analysis. The book is divided into twenty-three short sections and after some general introductory comments, devotes itself to various issues: the expressive and 'counter-factual' aspects of the language, the arbitrary relation between sound and meaning, the symbolic nature of words, the relation between language and reality, and the role of language

in the creative and social activities of humankind. These matters have been addressed by Philosophers of language over centuries, but only very recently have they been integrated with formal linguistics. Truly speaking, Tagore is the only Indian author of our times to foreground these issues and create a new space within the field of linguistic studies.

The book is not, however, an exercise in the philosophy of language. It deals with specific problems of Bengali grammar: its sound system, its gender, number and case systems, its suffixes, and inflexions among other matters. Being free from the demands of a precise methodology, Rabindranath moves freely from one linguistic 'region' to another: issues of style, meter, spelling, etc. all find their place within a comprehensive treatment of the language. *Banglabhasha- Parichay* exemplifies an approach to language that may fitly be called holistic. It aims to present the Bengali language in its totality.

It is possible to reconstruct Rabindranath's entire concept of language based on these two books, along with other observations scattered through his works, including some of his poems. His thinking about language has been described as both 'counter-factual' and 'expressive.' It has been linked with the idea of 'surplus,' an essential element in his critical and philosophical thought, as well as with the Vedic view of *vak* (word or speech). It is also possible to discover similarities, sometimes quite striking ones, between his observations and certain premises of modern linguistics. It has recently been shown how his idea of a comprehensive Bengali grammar, taking account of its various dialects, has remarkable resemblances to the 'panlectal' or 'polylectal' grammar proposed by a modern language planner (Chaudhuri 21).

5.5. Aspects of Indianism in Tagore's poetry

In stature, stride and sweep Rabindranath Tagore is an all-round creative genius, the like of whom has seldom been seen. His poetry shows such finesse and cohesion in form, matter and feelings as would have been otherwise incomprehensible in our language. Tagore's is in no way a sequence of the new poetry of the school of Michael Madhusudan Dutt nor of the romantic poetry of Bihari Lal Chakravarti. It is all his own. He had drunk deeper than anyone else, from the mainsprings of Indian poetry.

Tagore was a very well-read man and he had keen interest in everything human having a permanent value. He could indeed say with Terence: *Homo Sum humani nihil a me alienum puto* (I am a man, nothing human can be alien to me). Tagore's poetry is as much Bengali as Indian, and as much Indian as universal, because he has gone deepest to where the stream of eternal life runs; the ultimate source of creation and continuation of life in every form. His attitude towards life was one of acceptance, appreciation, and thankfulness and not of hesitation, fretting and complaining. For a proper understanding of him and his poetry this fact is significant. His poetry was produced by a very healthy mind housed in an uncommonly strong, healthy, and handsome body.

The poetry of Tagore holds universal quality and its merit is recognized beyond the frontiers of history. He is a poet of the whole world, and it is because of his international humanism that he has been awarded the Nobel Prize. His love for India is evident not only in *Gitanjali* but in his other poems as well. One

of his poems translated into English is the best illustrations of his delight of having been born in India:

Blessed am I that I am born to this land and that I
had the luck to love her.

What care I if queenly treasure is not in her store but
precious enough for me the living wealth of her love.

The best gift of fragrance to my heart is from her
own flowers

and I know not where else shines the moon that can
flood my

being with such loveliness.

The first light revealed to my eyes was from her own
sky and let

the same light kiss them before they are closed for
ever (Poems 38).

Tagore possesses hundreds of patriotic songs to his credit, and is the only poet whose songs have been embraced as the national anthems of two countries – Bangladesh and India. His morning song of India - *Jana Gana Mana* is the greatest testimony of his Indianness. He stood for India's unity in diversity. Additionally, the whole of the *Naivedya* (1901) out of which he included some songs even in *Gitanjali* (1912) is steeped with the color of patriotism, nationalism and Indianness. He upholds the ideals of ancient India and advises time and again to shun the initiation of the West. He asks his countrymen to follow the ideals of unity, self-sacrifice, and fearlessness. He asks them to give up ignorance, bigotry, and superstition. In *Naivedya* the poet says:

Be not ashamed my brothers, to stand before the proud and the powerful with your white robe of simpleness.

Let your crown be of humility, your freedom the freedom of the soul. Build God's throne daily upon the ample bareness of your poverty, and know that what is huge is not great and pride is not everlasting.

Tagore's original Bengali poems are remarkable for their sweet music and unheard melodies. The flavor of the original is maintained in the English version too. The poems have gained immensely from their being written in the form of songs, but they are much more poetry than music.

Tagore was a prolific composer with over 2000 songs to his credit, which is popularly known as *Rabindra Sangeet*. Influenced by the Hindustani music, and intoned with Bengali folk flavour, the songs surpassed the tonal colours of ragas portraying human emotion and divine devotion. His songs were known for their simplicity of diction and was adored by the common folk, making them immensely popular all over India. Additionally, he embraced the art of painting at about the age of sixty and exhibited his artistic skills with off-beat aesthetics and strange colour schemes.

Despite his affluent background inherited through his aristocratic ancestry, he observed the working-class people of society from the close quarters while managing the family estate at Jorasanko, North Kolkata. His deep insights into the inequalities affecting the living conditions of the people,

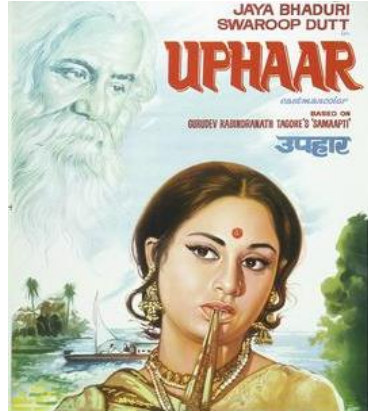
particularly the downtrodden, influenced his ideology towards social reforms and it began reflecting in enormous volumes of prose. The poems like *Punashcha*, novels like *Gora*, short stories like *Kabuliwala*, musical dramas like *Chandalika*, *Syama* are collectively known as *Rabindra Nritya Natya*, paved the way to social reforms.

Rabindranath Tagore's works are mostly in Bengali language and he is generally accepted as a pre-eminent writer in Bengali and not an Indian writer in English. But he has translated or it would be more appropriate to state that he has translated his Bengali works into English himself. He attained the stature of an all-India writer and made an extraordinary impact on every regional literature. He is the inspirer and molder of the literature of the whole nation, more particularly of Bengal.

Tagore's poetry had some interprovincial impact even before he became a Nobel Laureate. He had achieved a pre-eminent position in Bengali literature even as a young poet. A few of his poems and stories had been translated into Malayalam before 1913 by P.R. Menon. T. Suryanarayana Rao had published in 1911 a translation of Tagore's *Chokher Bali* into Telugu (Nayanakantakamu). The impact of Brahmo Samaj in Andhra Pradesh had also introduced Tagore's writings to Andhra literary circles. Tirupati Shastri of the Telugu Classical School had translated some of Tagore's short stories in Telugu.

5.6. Striking contributions to the theatres

The wide range of creative disciplines that went into the making of Tagore's intellectual percept; and multiplicity of his interests, were indeed amazing. Scholars and researchers have written in depth on his creative genius in different art forms: poetry, novels, short stories, music, paintings, etc. Yet curious enough, his views and his links with cinema, which established its status as a Seventh Art, particularly, his impact on the more worthwhile Indian film music has been barely dealt upon by even those for whom Tagore is virtually a stock-in-trade.



The arrival of Rabindranath Tagore on the Bengali theatre scene was indeed a great event. Tagore's was a striking presence on stage at the Jorasanko Theatre and, later, at Santiniketan. He was the first person to conceive theatre as a contribution of multiple art-forms including music, dance, painting, graphic art, plastic, and literary art. His seminal influence on theatre continued till 1939 - with thirteen original plays and eight adaptations from his novels and short stories. Tagore's many-sided genius and his almost missionary zeal for the development of the Indian arts, be it dance, music, painting or the handicraft; his appreciation of the indigenous folk arts and his fostering of both, the classical and the folk traditions in his school at Santiniketan provided a stimulus and a prestige to these arts which have enabled them to flower.

Apart from Vishwa Bharati, Hemanta Mukherjee, Debabrata Biswas, Kanika Banerjee, Suchitra Mitra and her institution *Rabi Tirtha*, Santosh Sengupta and his *Surmandir* have played a significant role in reaching Tagore songs and dance-dramas to the people of Bengal, and to a certain extent, outside Bengal also. Pankaj Mullick pioneered in the field and devoted his whole life in taking Tagore songs to the masses by using the media of film, radio, and gramophone records. He wrote in his autobiography, "Rabindra Sangeet is my life. Therein lies my redemption. It is not my life's ambition to be a great singer. My only dream is to sink deeper and deeper into this ocean of music in life and thereafter" (Sheth 12).

Thus, Tagore seems to be more than an influence, he pervades the thinking of the Bengali in every walk of life. Even Bengali cinema could not escape the influence of Tagore. From a very early age, Rabindranath Tagore began to appear on the stage in the main roles of his own plays. He had a powerful tenor voice which, in the days when microphones were unknown, reached the farthest corners of the stadium when he spoke or sang. Quite apart from his gift as an actor, Tagore was a meticulous, highly imaginative and exceptionally competent producer. Every production was preceded by exacting rehearsals over a long period during which Rabindranath spared neither himself nor the others. Many Bengali film directors, amongst them Debaki Bose, Nitin Bose, Tapan Sinha, Ajay Kar and Partha Pratim Choudhary have mined the rich realm of Tagore's stories, novels, plays and poems. But Satyajit Ray's relationship to Tagore is by far the deepest and most interesting. In the words of Andrew Robinson, "Satyajit was exposed to an influence throughout his childhood and youth. Indirectly through his literature and, especially, through

Rabindra Sangeet, which filled his house in a way that was so familiar as to be almost invisible; the songs appear again and again in a most moving and surprising way throughout his films” (Sheth 13).

Satyajit Ray speaks in his Memoirs, of how deeply he was influenced by Tagore:

I consider the three years I spent in Santiniketan as the most fruitful of my life. This was not so much because of the proximity to Tagore who continued to remain unapproachable. It was just that Santiniketan opened my eyes for the first time to the splendor of Indian and far Eastern art. Until then I was completely under the sway of western art, music, and literature. Santiniketan made me the combined product of East and West that I am. As a film maker, I owe as much to Santiniketan as I do to American and European cinema (Sheth 13).

Rabindranath Tagore, the first introducer of Bengali literature, with the power of his unique talent, wrote over forty stories almost in a cycle in the early nineties. These were in no way inferior to the best specimens in the world literature.

The short stories of Tagore are scraps of life itself, sometimes colored in the sparks of his rich imagination... scenes of Bengali village painted in brilliant colors... these stories portray thousands of small details of unsophisticated homely life of the simple people... his descriptions are full of power and skill of a genius. In realism and in subtle understanding and portrayal of human soul his

stories can be compared with those of Leo Tolstoy (Daniel'chuk 84).

The new wave films, based on Tagore's short stories and novels, which were made in the '30s and the '40s, had a strong literary accent and, it was left to a later generation of filmmakers, to make films with the accent on the visuals rather than on words. Without the use of too many words, Satyajit Ray superbly interpreted Tagore in *Teen Kanya* and *Charulata*; so did Tapan Sinha in *Atithi. Kabuliwala*, also directed by Tapan Sinha, brought Tagore's humanism undistorted to the screen and *Khudhita Pashan* sought to project cinematically Tagore's blending of fantasy and realism.

The interest in Tagore's stories has not been confined to Bengal alone. The Hindi film industry in Bombay also drew inspiration from Tagore. Way back in 1945, Nitin Bose (under the banner of Bombay Talkies) made *Milan*, a Hindi version of Bengali film *Naukadubi*. Prafulla Roy made *Phulwari* from *Malancha*. Paul Zils made *Zalzala* from Tagore's *Char Adhyay*. Hement Gupta made *Kabuliwala* in Hindi. Inspired by Tagore's short story *Khudita Pashan*, Lata Mangeshker and Gulzar made *Lekin* in Hindi.

Tagore went out of his way to help the young director Madhu Bose with the scenario and script of the silent version of the *Giribala*, a film based on the story, *Manbhanjan*. He also attended the film's premiere at Crown Cinema in Kolkata. Tagore was delighted to receive Bose and readily agreed to correct the entire screenplay and also added new dialogue to make it more suited to the celluloid medium. It was Tagore who changed the name of the film to *Giribala* after the name of the

story's major character. In 1930, Tagore personally attended the premiere of the film *Dalia* made by Madan Theatres Ltd.

In 1930, during his tour to Europe, Tagore visited Munich, where an exhibition of his paintings was being held at the Kaspary Gallery. While there, he spent a whole day at the village Oberamarggau watching passion plays, which have been performed there every 10 years, since 1634. He was so moved by these plays on Christ's Passion that on returning to Munich, he produced his only poem originally written in English *The Child*. Later translated into Bengali as *Sishu Tirtha*, this long poem is perhaps the only scenario ever written in verse. *The Child* had six chapters and the first of these was written especially for the cinema, in the pure language of the cinema.

Tagore never wanted cinema to be just an extension of literature. That cinema would grow on to become an independent and complete art form, was realized by him at a time when film appreciation was yet to start as a serious movement even in the West. In fact, committed filmmakers all over the world is still experimenting with the nature and character of the medium that Tagore perceived so many years ago. Addressed to Murari Bhaduri, brother of Shishir Kumar Bhaduri, an eminent stage and screen actor of Bengal, he wrote:

The characteristics of an art form are determined by the nature of its requisites. I believe that the expected emergence of cinema as an art form is yet to take place. As in politics, so in art, the aim is independence. The aim of art is to express itself freely in its self-created world, otherwise its dignity is lost, the manifestation marred (Sheth 29).

5.7. Contributions to music.

Tagore's contributions to the Renaissance of Indian culture is manifold. His remarkable contributions in the field of music lies mainly, in trying to harness the great gift of music to the service of poetry and literature. The world knows Tagore through literature and philosophy; yet, his genius is essentially musical. Music completes his personality and perfects his art forms" (Sheth 34). He tried to fashion a new music, and that is what is now popularly known as *Rabindra Sangeet*. His acquaintance with Indian music was so profound that he realized its great beauty, its profundity, and the depth of emotion. In all he did, he tried to bring that music nearer to the public and that is how *Rabindra Sangeet* came into being. Rabindranath was himself a great musician and a great poet. It is rare to find such a combination in one person and he gave birth to many new forms, musical as well as poetical. At the same time, he understood the beauty of both - the traditional music as well as the new form which he was trying to produce.

Tagore is known to have written and set to music, more than two thousand five hundred lyrics. Here is richness and variety, and a kind of sheer verbal magic which only a great poet could invoke. Dhurjati Prasad Mukherjee describes, "The rhythm of music supports his philosophy, its melody permeates. His prose, and its harmony orchestrate the numerous manifestations of his genius. Music completes his personality and perfects his art forms" (Sheth 34). The Tagore spell has fallen on at least three generations of Bengalis through his songs, supplying the texture of their thoughts and even of their dreams. It is difficult to mark exactly the nature of the music, but it is there for all to see. Tagore's music was there even in his

early period, but it manifested itself more prominently in his later days. The transition was from his *dhrupadic* composition, via blending with classics and with folk-songs, to a sophisticated form of rural songs, pure and simple. The structure of the peculiar property of Tagore's music was the fact that each song was an independent entity. Each entity carved out a kingdom ruled itself in its own ways; and each rule formulated its own regulations.

Manasi (The Lady of the Mind) was published on 24 December 1890, some seven weeks after Rabindranath's return from Europe. He was then just short of thirty. During Tagore's birth centenary seventy years later, a Bengali critic and poet, Sudhin Dutta spoke of this seminal collection:

No poet before Tagore knew how to extract music out of Bengali consonants; and if at times our lyrical needs made us rebel against the tyranny of fourteen-lettered line called *Payar*, we either resorted to forms borrowed from Sanskrit, and thus unreadable by the rules of Bengali pronunciation, or like Biharilal Chakravarti [Tagore's idol as a teenager] reduced the use of closed syllables to a minimum, imparting to our verse a sort of spineless elasticity. *Manasi* ruled such compromise out of existence, restored our measures to ordered autonomy, and broke with the past so sharply that ever since its appearance most of our previous poetry has seemed not only imperfect rhythmically but also metrically defective... Though the technical skill of its author never ceased to grow, his next basic contribution to the poet's craft occurred when, at seventy, he set

about bridging the gulf between verse and prose (Dutta 101).

Rabindranath Tagore mentioned at several occasions that even if his poetry would not be remembered by his successors, his songs alone would be. That would certainly be a tall order; those who would follow him would not probably allow his poetry to die of desuetude, for the quality of his poetry is permanent and universal. Their moods are multitudinous, and their variety is bewildering. There was hardly anything that did not correspond with the refinement of Indian moods. The songs of rivers and fields, in all their spaciousness and simplicity, appealed to the universal spirit of man, the man that was bound to earth and heaven. Tagore's music thus had the quality of profundity not inferior to the quality of his poetry. We can, however, analyze the technical quality of Tagore's music as such without referring to the greatness of his poetry.

Tagore's deep involvement in music was amazing. In the words of Sitansu Ray, "Tagore was a voracious reader of the Indian and Western works on Music" (Sheth 34). His conversations and correspondence with some of his great contemporaries like Romain Roland, Albert Einstein, and H.G. Wells (published in 'Asia' magazines in 1931 and 1937), throw enough light on poet's perception of the melodic essence of Indian music and the harmonic superstructure of Western music. In essays, *Antar-Bahir* (the inner and outer), *Sangit* (music), *Sonar Kathi* (the golden stick), and *Sangiter Mukti* (emancipation of music) the poet has made a comparative study on Indian and western music. Great musicologist including Fox Strangeway, Arnold Bake, Alain Danielou, Ethel Rosenthal,

Margaret E. Cousins, and many others were patronized by the poet at the Vishva Bharati University.

Bhimrao Sastri, the famous 'Been' player, was employed to teach classical music at Shantiniketan. Bhimraoji in his later years came to Bombay and joined the Fellowship School at Gowalia Tank. In an interview, he once said, "Gurudev had high regard for Indian classical music. He used to listen to instrumental recitals by great *Ustads*" (Sheth 34-35). Being a poet and a music composer too, Tagore off and on investigated the essential characteristics of poetry and music and all the aspects of their inner-connections in *lyrico-musical entity*, i.e., Songs. The tonal acrobatics and time-length in overall classical singing were undue and artistically questionable to Tagore. His essays *Sangeet-o-Kabita* (music & Poetry), *Katha-o-Sur* (words and tunes) and his conversations with Dilip Kumar Roy Published in the book *Tirthankar* (the pilgrim in quest of truth) provide interesting reading on the subject. It is amazing to note that even at a young age of hardly twenty, Tagore addressed the then music-mongers not to concentrate on so-called purity of grammar but the emotional fervor and aesthetic feeling associated with music.

The compilation of letters exchanged between Prof. Dhurjat Prasad Mukherji and the poet in the book *Sur-o-Sangati* is also a well-documented research work on Tagore's thoughts about music. Tagore was also an earnest collector and documenter of Bengali folk music. He edited a special collection titled *Geet- Sangraha* in *Bharati* and *Pravasi* magazines. According to Sitansu Ray, "Tagore always emphasized the inclusion of music, dance and drama in the curriculum of general education" (Sheth 35). He spoke and wrote on this subject on various

occasions. The most noteworthy is his lecture *Shiksha-o-Sanskritite Sangiter Sthan* (the place of music in education and culture) which is included in the book *Sangit-Chinta* (thoughts on music), an anthology of the poet's writing, conversations, and lectures on music.

Tagore is the most original composer of music that India has ever known. In sheer number and richness, and no less in the delicacy and suggestiveness of valuable moods, his songs form an excellent exhaustible repertoire. Tagore's music plays on the whole gamut of human feelings with equal skill. The moods in his songs are multitudinous, and their variety is bewildering. His songs are on myriad subjects like prayers, sorrow, joy, universe, oneness, separation, discipline, love, seasons, the largest is probably of the rains, with spring following a close second. His patriotic songs are some of the best that he wrote.

Tagore used to tour all over India. During these visits, he was exposed to the territorial languages and music of different parts of the country. He was particularly fascinated by Karnataki music and made some remarkable songs in that style. As Dhurjali Prasad Mukherjee said:

In such a context, and with such equipment, the poet was eminently fitted to synthesize the classical and folk types having different territorial ethos of our music, into a style which modern Indians needed. He was an inheritor of the best of Indian and Western culture, he interpreted freedom and joy of life as continuous initiative in the creation of human values; he was the child of the new city of the old

village. In him were combined the sense of values of the aristocrat and the simplicity, directness, and universality of the child of the soil (Sheth 37-38).

With the advent of sound in film, in 1931 in India, unlike the film movement abroad, the music played a role, which is more than equal to other cinematic elements. In fact, songs came to be regarded as the most integrated part of the film expression.

5.8. The impact of Tagore music on film industry

Pankaj Mullick was the first among the early film music composers who could identify in Tagore music, the versatility which the film music needed. In Tagore music he found ready-made material, which truly represented the spirit of new India. So, when he was invited by the famous impresario, Haren Ghosh, to conduct music from the orchestra pit for the silent films *Chor Kanta* and *Chashar Meye* of international Films Crafts Co., (later renamed as New Theatres) Pankaj took the opportunity to use Tagore melodies as the background. It was a historic occasion in the year 1929, though only a few realized it.

A few years later when films became talkies, Pankaj, introduced Tagore's poem *Diner Sheshe* and set to music by himself in the film *Mukti*. When Pankaj went to Tagore for his permission, Tagore not only gave his consent but also recommended that his other songs including, *Aaj Sabar Range* and *Ami Kan Pete Roi*, be incorporated in the film. He even changed certain words in his poem *Diner Sheshe* to improve rendering into music by Pankaj. Thus, with the film *Mukti* in 1937, Tagore songs were introduced for the first time in films. Pankaj then continued to use Tagore songs in New Theatres' Bengali films, and he was the first to show how effectively

Tagore songs could be used in films to emphasize the different moods of the plots. It is no mean success that the Tagore songs he used, and in some instances sung himself, proved extremely popular with the audience. He even made the famous Saigal, sing Rabindra Sangeet in original Bengali! Kanan Devi, who learnt Tagore songs for the first time and sang under his baton, said, "I studied music from several *Ustads*, but what Pankajda taught me was unique. The inner meaning of the words opened to me like the morning dawn where the word and music became one!" (Sheth 40-41).

Pankaj set an example and inspired most of Bengali film composers who began using Tagore songs for various situations that the film story demanded. Since then, Tagore songs have been regularly used by Bengali Cinema and even today the trend continues.

Rabindra Sangeet, (Tagore music) means more to Bengalis than any other part of Tagore's life and work –and yet it is the least accessible to his achievement to those who do not know Bengali. The greatness of Tagore Songs lies in their perfect fusion of words and melody. It inspired Satyajit Ray to say: "As a Bengali I know that, as a composer of songs, Tagore has no equal, not even in the west- and I know Schubert and Hugo Wolf" (Dutta, Anthology 385).

Arthur Fox Strangways, author of *The Music of Hindustan* (1914) the best books on Indian music commended on Rabindra Sangeet:

To hear him (Rabindranath) sing them is to realize the music in a way that is seldom given to a foreigner to do. The notes of the song are no longer

their mere selves, but the vehicle of a personality, and as such they go behind this or that system of music to that beauty of sound which all systems put their hands to seize. These melodies are such as would have satisfied Plato. 'I do not know the moods,' said Socrates, 'but leave me one that will imitate the tones and accents of a brave man enduring danger or distress, fighting with constancy against fortune; and also, one fitted for the work of peace, for prayer heard by the gods, and for the successful persuasion and exhortation of men (Dutta, Anthology 385).

Fox Strangways wrote in 1914, in his book *Music of India*, "In accordance with the best Indian tradition, he (Tagore) is poet and Musician in one" (Sheth 5). Tagore was in every sense a *Vaggeyakara*. He composed song with due regard to the musical value of words and phrases. The texture of his verse i.e., beginnings, pauses and ends are all in tune with its music. The poetic value never jars with, in fact almost invariably supports the musical value. To Tagore, words came clothed in music and the two were inseparable. Tagore himself remarks:

The language of words belongs to the world of man and the language of music to the world of nature. Words convey a distinct concept with a definite and limited meaning. But the domain of music has no definite bounds - in fact it is impatient of limitations. This is the reason why man has dealings with the fellowmen in the language of words, while music provides him with a mode of communication with the vaster world of nature. When music is wedded

to words, it signifies much more than what the words can ever mean by themselves. Its range becomes wider and deeper (qtd. in Sheth 52).

For every change of season, each aspect of his country's rich landscape, every undulation of the human heart, in sorrow or in joy, has found its voice in some song of his. They are sung in religious gatherings no less than in concert halls. Patriots have mounted the gallows with his song on their lips; and young lovers unable to express the depth of their feeling, sing his songs and feel the weight of their dumbness relieved.

The Bengali film music composers took a cue from Tagore in this respect also. They realized that only such happy combinations could generate and reinforce the human emotions. They educate themselves on how the verbal sequence must be in perfect accord with the sequences of musical notes, and only then a song can stir emotion. The intimate union of music and words, the strongest force in Tagore's compositions, was a feature, which, at the time of the advent of talkie, was not so prominent in India. This unique feature in Tagore songs amazed the early film composers. They tried to imbibe such synthesis of lyric and music in their own film songs.

The musical structure in a song expanding into four couplets or quatrains -*Asthaye, Antara, Abhog* and *Sanchari*_- properly developed as well as simplified by Tagore in his works, helped the early pathfinders of film music in structuring their song compositions. Pankaj Mullick, in his autobiography, and R.C Boral in some personal interviews, have acknowledged their indebtedness to Tagore in this regard.

While rendering Tagore's songs in original Bengali, Pankaj sometimes used to improvise, and introduce minor variations in musical notes in order to capture the inner spirit and essence of mood more effectively. Being himself a singer and a composer of extraordinary merit, he even set his own music to a Tagore poem *Kheya*. The Puritans protested against Pankaj but Tagore himself blessed his attempts and permitted. In this connection, Tagore's conversation with Dilip Kumar Roy offers insight about the poet's thoughts on improvisation in singing his songs. The poet told Dilip Kumar that individual expression is bound to differ according to the voice that sings his songs. He believed improvisation is a singer's right; it should be permitted as long as it captures the original spirit of the song. However, the poet vociferously proclaims that such liberties be permitted to master singers only; an average singer cannot be granted this freedom.

The views of William Radice, the well-known translator of Tagore in English, also offer interesting reading on the subject:

There are many forms of translation. To be effective, a translation must have life of its own - an offspring of the original: that is very important. Bengali is an *Abhimanini Bhasha* which yields only to the most persistent learners. Today when the miracle of the natural human language is being assailed on all sides by machines, a true love of language can begin to fight back" (Sheth 56).

When Pankaj arrived on the music scene of Bengal, Tagore music was generally confined to the hallowed precincts

of Shantiniketan or the ornate music room of large mansions of the elite. Tagore music had not yet gained its right place in society. It had to be taken out of the confines of Santiniketan and taught to the common man. That was the task Pankaj set himself to do in those challenging times. He remarked:

Rabindra Sangeet is my life. Therein lies my redemption. It is not just music but something much more. I can't speak for others, but Rabindra Sangeet transports me away from this world, far away, farther than even the sun and stars. Far, far away where brightly colored Sunbeams break into the pitch darkness. It is not my life's ambition to be a great singer. My only dream is to sink deeper and deeper into this ocean of music in life and thereafter (Sheth 33).

Apart from films and gramophone, it was the medium of radio that enabled Pankaj to fulfill his ambition to take Tagore songs to the masses. Pankaj took the greatest delight in teaching his innumerable students the nuances of Rabindra Sangeet by giving music lessons in Tagore Songs over the radio since 1929. Additionally, his programme *Sangeet Siksaar Asar* continued every Sunday morning till 1975. It was indeed, an achievement that deserved entry in the Guinness Book of World Records.

When Pankaj died in 1978, Satyajit Roy wrote, "Pankaj Mullick earned legendary fame and popularity as a singer and teacher of Rabindra Sangeet. He devoted his whole life to this cause using the media of the film, the radio and the gramophone and succeeded in endearing himself to music loving Indians all

over the country." One of the Bengali publications, while offering tribute to Pankaj said, "Tagore died again" (Sheth 42).

5.9. Conclusion

Underlying the multitudinous forms of creation, there was an astonishing changelessness in Tagore's message. Whenever he withdrew to the still places of his heart, when he contemplated the Ultimate, he returned with the same assurance of undying youth for himself, for mankind and for all living things. This certitude never failed him even in his last days, when his cup was full of physical and spiritual suffering. With his habitual composure and wonted wit, he cheered his attendants to the end. 'In my Ashram there should be no sorrow,' he said to one of them. 'It must be banished with songs and dances and plays.

Tagore stands as a great torchbearer of the Renaissance of Indian culture. Although Tagore is a superb representative of his country, he is truly a man of the whole earth, a product of the best of both - Indian and the West. He is a complete man who combines in himself the gifts of a philosopher, a poet, a musician, a mystic, a social reformer, a scientist, an actor, educationalist and a veritable man of action. He takes into account all types of men and their aspirations, all facets of the human personality, all levels of man's experience, all fields of endeavour and achievement. He was the leader and symbol of the culture revival of our country, and today we honour him as the great symbol of the spirit of our country, because it is culture which really is the quintessence of a country's spirit. The noblest flower of a spirit is embodied in its culture and that is what Tagore symbolizes for all of us and so let us salute him, that

great spirit who represents the spirit of the whole of India. Nothing would be more apt to conclude with, and pay tribute to 'the Great Sentinel' and world poet than his own words:

When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.

I have tasted of the hidden honey of this lotus that expands on the ocean of light, and thus I am blessed - let this be my parting word.

In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play and here have I caught sight of him who 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. (*Gitanjali* -96).

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