Tagore’s ‘Gitanjali’ is one of the most celebrated works in modern Indian literature. Its fame has been due, partly at least, to its having been instrumental in winning for its author the much-coveted Nobel Prize (the first to be awarded to an Indian) two years after its publication in 1911. As soon as it was published, it caught the imagination of lovers of poetry all the world over, and especially in the West. In his enthusiastic Foreword to the book W. B. Yeats gave eloquent expression to the magnetic charm which it exercised upon his mind and heart. ‘I have,’ he said, ‘carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me.’ What Yeats said about the manuscript proved true of the printed book also. With spontaneous joy thousands everywhere welcomed into the House of Fame the poet who seemed to give voice to the yearnings of their own innermost beings. It appeared to them, as to Yeats, that what they had been aspiring to but had not been able to say throughout their spiritual lives had been inimitably crystallised in the ‘Song-Offerings’ of the great Indian bard. ‘They took up our half-formed wishes and gave them a voice’. This is how Earnest Rhys describes the remarkable fascination which the songs of the ‘Gitanjali’ had for the western mind in the wake of its first publication.

In the English ‘Gitanjali’ Tagore has included not all the songs which comprise his Bengali work of that name. It contains selections from that source and also a good many from different other works of his like ‘Naivedya,’ ‘Kheya’ and ‘Gītimālya’. And he has not, it is said, made literal translations of the Bengali originals into English, but only given free renderings of them. Sometimes, two poems have been combined or telescoped into one, and, sometimes, lines and phrases have been either completely omitted or epitomised. But, on the whole, the spirit of the originals has been invariably retained or reproduced in the English versions. The Bengali songs of Tagore are famous for their enchanting rhythm and cadence. The poet himself thrilled many an audience in the East and the West by singing his compositions. It is obvious that much of the charm of the original poems which is dependent as much upon their melody as upon their meaning must have become diluted in the English renderings. In a poem of his (not found in the ‘Gitanjali’) Tagore writes:
'Alas, the poems which were for the listening ears are tied today as chained lines of slaves before their masters of critical eyes, and banished into the greyness of tuneless papers'.

In another small poem he complains—

'Listlessly you turn the pages of my poems reclining in your easy chair, and you never have the chance to listen with half-shut eyes to the murmur of metre'.

When such was Tagore’s opinion regarding the way in which his Bengali songs and poems might be read by people, we can easily imagine how imperfectly the English versions represent the music and the metre of their Bengali originals, and how unsatisfactory they sound when they are read or recited by a person who lacks the rich and resonant voice of the poet. Yet, these English versions are not devoid of the echoes of the music of their Bengali counterparts. In the words of Sri K. S. Ramaswami Sastry, ‘... even though it (the “Gitanjali”) is couched in prose and hence loses all the melody and poetic grace of the original, it charms and enraptures and elevates the mind by the marvellous music of its thoughts and by the grace and beauty of the English prose which a learned critic has called “this flower of English prose”.’ As Edward Thompson succinctly puts it, ‘The metrical achievement of “Gitanjali” is impeccable. The poems were written to be sung; but they sing themselves.’

Though the songs which comprise it have been taken from different books, the English ‘Gitanjali’ is not merely a miscellaneous assortment of mutually unrelated poems. Tagore did not select these ‘gems’ at random and ‘put them in the frame-work of a single volume without any objective or purpose, any order, conscious or unconscious.’ A close examination of the several poems of this book shows that there is a clearly visible plan in their arrangement. ‘The English “Gitanjali”’, says Prof. C. C. Chatterji, ‘is an organic whole. One single vein of thought runs through all the poems, linking them in natural piety. Though drawn from different sources the poems have not been thrown in promiscuously. They have been arranged and disposed in a regular order, which indicates the development of the poet’s thought as he passes from stage to stage in his spiritual life, and marks the changes that come upon his spiritual moods as he gains or loses contact with the Infinite’.

Dr Radhakrishnan tersely characterises the poems of ‘Gitanjali’ as the offerings of the Finite to the Infinite. To quote the words of Sri K. S. Ramaswami Sastry, ‘In many places in this great book of poems Tagore expresses in language full of the passion of Godward aspiration his keen desire for God-Vision, and conveys to us the message that such desire is the crown and glory of life’. And again, ‘Tagore
points out how this crown of life is to be won after a great deal of preparation of the inner life and after fulness of experience is acquired, sweetening the soul and purifying the heart. In other words, the poems of ‘Gitanjali’ give impassioned expression to the aspiration of the human Soul—the ‘JeevAtma’—for union with God, the Universal Soul or ‘ParamAtma’. The book is, therefore, profoundly religious in content. But, unlike many other religious books, it is also a literary ‘gem of purest ray serene’. The unique distinction of the book lies in the fact that it is intensely religious and at the same time enchantingly poetical. ‘The lyrics,’ says W. B. Yeats, ‘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 the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and the noble.’ This means that though Tagore sings about religion and God, he does so not in a dry-as-dust abstract manner, but in terms of human life, and human love. ‘To him fulness of life and deep religious fervour, the Finite and the Infinite, Beauty and Holiness are not irreconcilable. Yeats quotes approvingly the words of a certain ‘distinguished Bengali doctor of medicine’ who said to him, ‘All the aspirations of mankind are in his (Tagore’s) hymns. He is the first among our saints who has not refused to live, but has spoken out of life itself.’ Yeats himself goes on to say, ‘These verses will not lie in little well-printed books upon ladies’ tables, who turn the pages with indolent hands that they may sigh over a life without meaning, which is yet all that they can know of life, or be carried about by students at the University to be laid aside when the work of life begins, but, as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway, and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth. At every moment the heart of this poet flows outward to these without derogation or condescension, for it has known that they will understand; and it has filled itself with the circumstance of their lives. The traveller in the red-brown clothes that he wears that dust may not show upon him, the girl searching in her bed for the petals fallen from the wreath of her royal lover, the servant or the bride awaiting the master’s home-coming in the empty house, are images of the moods of that heart in union or in separation; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing upon a lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself. A whole people, a whole civilisation, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination.’ This lengthy quotation from Yeats clearly and emphatically draws attention to the imagery pertaining to our human and earthly life which the poet has employed in pouring forth the irrepressible eagerness of his soul.
to become one with God. Prof. Nolinikanti Gupta sums up this tendency in Tagore’s poetry in these words: ‘Tagore is in direct line with those bards who sang of the Spirit, who always soared high above the falsehoods and uglinesses of a merely mundane life and lived in the undecaying delights and beauties of a diviner consciousness. Spiritual reality was the central theme of his poetic creation; only and naturally, he viewed it in a special way and endowed it with a special grace. Tagore can be said to have seen things, in their essential spiritual reality, under the figure or mode of beauty.’ This is only another way of saying that Tagore is a mystic.

‘The poetry of mysticism,’ says Miss Evelyn Underhill, in her illuminating Introduction to the ‘Poems of Kabir’ in the translation of which she assisted Tagore, ‘might be defined on the one hand as a temperamental reaction to the vision of Reality; on the other, as a form of prophecy. As it is the special vocation of the mystical consciousness to mediate between the two orders, going out in loving adoration towards God and coming home to tell the secrets of Eternity to other men; so the artistic self-expression of this consciousness has also a double character. It is love-poetry, but love-poetry which is often written with a missionary intention. This willing acceptance of the here-and-now as a means of representing supernal realities is a trait common to the greatest mystics. For them, when they have achieved at least the true theopathe tic state, all aspects of the Universe possess equal authority as sacramental declarations of the presence of God; and their fearless employment of homely and physical symbols—often startling and even revolting to the unaccustomed taste—is in direct proportion to the exaltation of their spiritual life.’ Later on in her Introduction Miss Underhill again says, ‘It is a marked characteristic of mystical literature that the great contemplatives, in their effort to convey to us the nature of their communion with the supersensuous, are inevitably driven to employ some form of sensuous imagery: coarse and inaccurate as they know such imagery to be at the best. Our normal human consciousness is so completely committed to dependence on the senses that the fruits of intuition itself are instinctively referred to them. In that intuition it seems to the mystics that all the dim cravings and partial apprehensions of sense find perfect fulfilment. Hence their constant declaration that they see the uncreated light, they hear the celestial melody, they taste the sweetness of the Lord, they know an ineffable fragrance, they feel the very contact of love.’ The gist of all this is that the mystic represents God as the Divine Lover and represents himself as the lady who is beloved. The insatiable desire of the devotee for union with God is presented as the yearning of the beloved for her lover. The uninitiated may miss the inner significance of this symbolism. But once we acquaint ourselves with it, the meaning becomes unmistakable. Representation of God as the Lover had been a common practice among the religious mystics of medieval India long before Tagore, who was merely adopting
and continuing a technique employed by the vaishnava singers of Bengal, notably Vidyapathi, Chandidas and Chaitanya. He has confessed in one of his addresses delivered in China that very early in life he laid his hands upon a collection of such Vaishnava songs which were apparently erotic but had a deeper core of meaning. Tagore also uses another device of the mystics, namely, the representation of the Divine Being as Supreme Beauty. The beauty of this world is considered but a manifold manifestation of the Beauty of God. Such a devotee sees God in the various aspects of Nature. As Tagore himself puts it in his ‘Sādhana’, ‘The touch of an infinite mystery passes over the trivial and the familiar, making it break out into ineffable music. The trees and the stars and the blue hills appear to us as symbols aching with a meaning which can never be uttered in words. We seem to watch the Master in the very act of creation of a new world when a man’s soul draws her heavy curtain of self aside, when her veil is lifted and she is face to face with her eternal lover’. In his ‘Stray Birds’ the poet makes the pithy remark, ‘The Perfect decks itself in Beauty for the love of the Imperfect’. The beauty of Nature (that is, of creation) is, therefore, one of the forms in which the Lord may be apprehended by the true mystic. ‘He,’ as Dr Radhakrishnan says, ‘can never escape the divine presence, twist and turn as he will. The deep shadows of the rainy July and the stormy night suggest God’s presence. He is a mystic soul who can hear the voice of God in the tempest and see His hand in the stilling of the wave.’ The mystic derives joy in the contemplation of the beauty of Nature. For he sees in it, as Wordsworth did, ‘a presence that disturbs him with the joy of elevated thoughts’ and something,

‘Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.’

Or, as Blake says, he is able

‘To see a world in a grain of sand
And Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.’

It will be seen that this direct approach to God brushes away all theological dogmas and ecclesiastical regulations. The mystic is so eager to go straight to God that he cares nothing for the formulae laid down by different interpreters of religion, professional or otherwise. In the words of Miss Underhill, ‘To those who keep their eye on the “one thing needful,” denominations, creeds, ceremonies and the conclusions of philosophy, the disciplines of asceticism are matters of comparative indifference. They represent merely the different angles from which the Soul may approach that simple union with Brahma which is its goal; and are useful only in so far as they contribute to this consummation’. Or, as Kabir sang,
TAGORE'S 'GITANJALI'—AN INTERPRETATION

'Knowledge is the branch, the Name is the root.
Look, and see where the root is, happiness shall be yours when
you come to the root
The root will lead you to the branch, the leaf, the flower and the
fruit.'

Or, as Mira Bai picturesquely and concretely put it—

'Pray you, cease your magic mantrums,
And forsake your incantations,
And the spicy herbs and medicated drugs.
Bring dark curly-headed Krishna!
Bring me bright-eyed laughing Krishna!
Bring me Krishna, pray, companions,
Krishna bring!'

(Mystic Lyrics from Indian Middle Ages, p. 33)

We may sum up by repeating that the mystic does not bother himself with elaborate methods of worship, and, to take a phrase from Mahadevi, 'incantations innumerable'. He adores God, of course, in a particular form, but without involving himself in the quagmire of rituals and ceremonials and chantings. To use the words of Miss Caroline Spurgeon, 'Mysticism is, in truth, a temper rather than a doctrine, an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy'.

'Gitanjali' which won for Tagore the Nobel Prize for literature also won for him reputation as a mystic. In the songs of this book the poet represents himself as the Beloved, God as the Lover, and his poetry as the means of attaining union with God. This attitude is excellently expressed in a little lyrical poem by the sixteenth century Punjabi mystic poet, Amar Das,

'Along dark paths my heart strays in longing,
Ever seeking to find the Beloved.
'My soul sings mournful songs of sadness,
Hoping to reach the Master's ear.
'My songs are the path
That my longing soul chooses:

'Happy the Maiden found by the Lord
Happy the Maiden loved by the Lord,
Happy the Maiden made one with the Lord.'

(Mystic Lyrics from Indian Middle Ages, p. 91)

Tagore feels that he (or the poet) has been sent here by God and has to do his work of singing, perfect himself and go through a number of lives before he can reunite with God and become acceptable to Him. This assumption of the singer's separation from God in spite of his keen desire to become one with Him is the very foundation of all mystic poetry.
It gives rise to the idea that the poet is yearning to reach the Lord and unite with Him, and that, therefore, he cries out passionately for this union. When the Lord vouchsafes some kindness or reveals Himself in the least little manner, the poet feels immense joy. The first poem of 'Gītānjali' expresses this idea effectively. It is God that inspires all the songs of the poet: 'At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable'. When God asks him to sing it is a sign of His kindness, and raises hope in the heart of the poet that he is going to be taken up by the Lord—'When thou commandest me to sing, it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face and tears come to my eyes. I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I touch by the edge of the far-spread wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach' (No. 2). The hope that his longing will be fulfilled finds voice in the lines—'From dawn till dusk I sit here before my door, and I know that of a sudden the happy moment will arrive when I shall see. The air is filling with the perfume of promise.'

But God's love and grace cannot be had unless the devotee is sincerely fervent in his aspiration for their attainment. Unreserved dedication or consecration of his life and the purification of his body, mind and soul are the indispensable pre-conditions for winning the love of God. So the poet says, 'Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure.' (No. 5). He further sings,

'Lete of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

'I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

'I shall ever try to drive all evil away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

'And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act' (No. 4).

Having purified himself in this way, he feels that he is worthy of receiving the Grace of God, that is, of being accepted. But in this self-confidence there is no complacency. Hence this poignant appeal to the Master,

'Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop in the dust.

'It may not find a place in thy garland, but honour it with a touch and pluck it . . .

'Though its colour be not deep and its smell be faint, use this flower in thy service and pluck it while there is time.' (No. 6).
The fact that the poet compares himself to a little flower devoid of deep colour or strong scent shows that he realises the need for utter humility in approaching God. Indulgence in riches and earthly adornments and the pride which follows it are obstacles to communion with God. So Tagore says—

‘My song has put off her adornments. She has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union; they would come between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers. ... Only let me make my life simple and straight like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music.’ (No. 7).

This poem also serves as an illustration of the almost prurient phraseology which mystic singers sometimes employ to give concrete expression to their spiritual experiences. But such language is only an emphatic way of communicating the acuteness of the desire for communion with God which overflows the heart of the poet. He is impatient of conventional restrictions, decorative formalities and ceremonial delays. Consciousness of separation from the Beloved Lord makes him unhappy; it gives him no peace. He cannot find comfort until he is able to commune with the Lord straightway, free from the impediments of gaudy tinsels. He, therefore, cries: ‘I ask for a moment’s indulgence to sit by thy side. ... Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite.’ (No. 5). The inimitable and incomparable melody of the Lord’s voice ‘haunts him like a passion,’ and he exclaims, ‘I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amazement. ... Ah! thou hast my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master.’ (No. 3). And, again, he is oppressed by the thought of not having attuned his music to that of God, that is, of not having become one with God—

‘The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day. ‘I have spent my days in stringing and unstringing my instrument. ‘The time has not come true, the words have not been rightly set, only there is the agony of wishing in my heart. ‘The blossom has not opened; only the wind is sighing by.

* * * * *

‘I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this meeting is not yet.’ (No. 13).

The same idea occurs in Poems Nos. 15 and 16.

His continued separation from God and his inability to fulfil his desire for union with the object of his adoration and love makes the poet feel that the whole world is pervaded by a sense of this separation. It appears to his love-lorn eyes that all Nature is yearning for the same consummation that he is longing for:

‘It is the pang of separation that spreads throughout the world and gives birth to shapes innumerable in the infinite sky.'
‘It is this sorrow of separation that gazes in silence all night from star to star and becomes lyric among rustling leaves in ramy darkness of July.

‘It is this overspreading pain that deepens into loves and desires, into sufferings and joys in human homes; and this it is that ever melts and flows in songs through my poet’s heart.’ (No. 84).

The poet is so much obsessed by the thought of God that he sees the Lord everywhere. The beauty of Nature is to him a revelation of the presence of the Lord, or, at least, it raises in him hopes and expectations of the coming of God. ‘Rabindranath’s conception of Nature,’ says Dr Radhakrishnan, ‘is antagonistic to the view which makes Nature opposed to the self and its aspirations.’ To Tagore, Nature and man’s self are ‘aspects of the Absolute.’ ‘Nature and Society are revelations of the divine spirit’. Tagore himself says in his ‘Sadhana,’ ‘The text of our everyday meditation is the “Gayatri,” a verse which is considered to be the epitome of all the Vedas. By its help we try to realise the essential unity of the world with the conscious soul of man; we learn to perceive the unity held together by the one Eternal Spirit, whose power creates the earth, the sky, and the stars, and at the same time irradiates our minds with the light of a consciousness that moves and exists in unbroken continuity with the outer world.’ And in ‘Gitanjali’ he sings, ‘The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.’ It is not surprising that the poet sees the presence of the Divine Grace in the Beauty of Nature. In the twenty-first poem of ‘Gitanjali’ he asks, ‘Do you not feel a thrill passing through the air with the notes of the far-away song floating from the other shore?’ The twenty-third poem begins with the words, ‘Art thou abroad on this stormy night on thy journey of love, my friend? The sky groans like one in despair. I have no sleep to-night. Ever and again I open my door and look out on the darkness, my friend!’

Sometimes we fail to see God when he comes:

‘He came and sat by my side, but I woke not. What a cursed sleep it was, O miserable one!’

* * * * *

‘Alas, why are my nights all thus lost?
Ah, why do I ever miss his sight whose breath touches my sleep?’ (No. 26).

Moreover, the body imprisons our soul and is a formidable obstacle to the attainment of liberation and union with God. The temptations of the flesh retard the upward flight of the soul towards the realisation of its aspiration. This is the idea that runs in the following verses of ‘Gitanjali’—

‘Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when I try to break them. . . . Freedom is all I want. . . . I am certain that
priceless wealth is in thee, and that thou art my best friend, but I have not the heart to sweep away the tinsel that fills my room. . . . The shroud that covers me is a shroud of dust and death; I hate it, yet hug it in love.’ (No. 28).

‘He whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this dungeon. I am ever busy building this wall around; and, as this wall goes up into the sky day by day, I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.’ (No. 29).

‘I came out alone on my way to my tryst. But who is this that follows me in the silent dark? . . . He is my own little self, my lord. He knows no shame; but I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company.’ (No. 30).

Our human companions are also hindrances to the realisation of God. They divert our attention which should be exclusively directed to the Lord if we are to win His grace. So there is truth in the following lamentation of the poet—

‘When it was day they came into my house and said “we shall only take the smallest room here. . . .” and then they took their seat in a corner and they sat quiet and meek. But in the darkness of night I find they break into my sacred shrine, strong and turbulent, and snatch with unholy greed the offerings from God’s altar.’ (No. 33).

And, then, there are certain other obstacles—the weaknesses due to human frailty—that have to be conquered by us before we can hope for His favour. Greed is one of them.

‘I thought I could outdo everybody in the world in wealth and power, and I amassed in my own treasure-house the money due to my king, when sleep overcame me I lay upon the bed that was for the Lord, and on waking up I found I was a prisoner in my own treasure-house.’ (No. 31).

The Ego is another drawback to be got over by the devotee. The poet prays:

‘Let only that 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.

‘Let only that little of my fetters be left whereby I am bound with thy will, and thy purpose is carried out in my life—and that is the fetter of thy love.’ (No. 34).

And, thirdly, we must ‘sedulously cultivate’ the feeling ‘that worldly honour, riches and joys, when they come, are nothing, and that
the only possession worth having is the joy of the love of God.’ This is the reason for the following prayer of the poet—

‘As my days pass in the crowded market of this world and my hands grow full with the daily profits, let me ever feel that I have gained nothing—let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours. . . . When my rooms have been decked out and the flutes sound and the laughter there is loud, let me ever feel that I have not invited thee to my house. . . .’ (No. 79).

As a matter of fact, the deepest desire of the human soul is for God and God only. Tagore expresses this in a series of extremely beautiful and moving lyrics of which this is one—

‘That I want thee, only thee—let my heart repeat without end. All desires that distract me day and night are false and empty to the core.

‘As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light, even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry—I want thee, only thee.

‘As the storm still seeks its end in peace when it strikes against peace with all its might, even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love and still its cry is—I want thee, only thee.’ (No. 38).

The hope of realisation is also ever-present in the heart:

‘From dawn till dusk I sit here before my door, and I know that of a sudden the happy moment will arrive when I shall see.

‘In the meanwhile I smile and sing all alone. In the meanwhile the air is filling with the perfume of promise.’ (No. 44. See also Nos. 45 and 46).

Not merely hope, but certainty is voiced in Poem No. 76 of which the last sentence reads—

‘And when my work shall be done in this world, O King of Kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face.’

For God loves us even if we forget Him. This is the central idea of Poem No. 32 which reminds us of Thompson’s ‘Hound of Heaven’ and the beautiful lyric of George Herbert, ‘Love bade me welcome.’

‘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.

* * * * * * * * *

‘If I call not thee in my prayers, if I keep not thee in my heart, thy love for me still waits for my love.’

And, at last, realisation of the Lord may come quite unexpectedly. In Poem No. 48 the poet describes himself as going out along a road on a
bright sunshiny morning in the company of many others. At midday he laid himself down by the water and stretched his tired limbs on the grass. ‘At last’, says he, ‘when I woke from my slumber and opened my eyes, I saw thee standing by me, flooding my sleep with thy smile. How I had feared that the path was long and wearisome, and the struggle to reach thee was hard!’ Poem No. 49 strikes the same note in a more emphatic manner—

‘You came down from your throne and stood at my cottage door.

‘I was singing all alone in a corner, and the melody caught your ear. You came down and stood at my cottage door.

‘Masters are many in your hall, and songs are sung there at all hours. But the simple carol of this novice struck at your love. One plaintive little strain mingled with the great music of the world, and with a flower for a prize you came down and stopped at my cottage door.’

But this can happen only when we give up self. This idea is conveyed by the poet in the form of a beautiful allegory—

‘I had gone a-begging from door to door in the village path when thy golden chariot appeared in the distance like a gorgeous dream, and I wondered who was this King of all Kings!

‘My hopes rose high and methought my evil days were at an end and I stood waiting for alms to be given unasked and for wealth scattered on all sides in the dust.

‘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 it to open thy palm to a beggar to beg! I was confused and stood undecided, and then from my wallet I slowly took out the least little grain of corn and gave it to thee.

‘But how great my surprise when at the day’s end I emptied my bag on the floor to find a least little grain of gold among the poor heap. I bitterly wept and wished that I had the heart to give thee my all.’ (No. 50).

God may show Himself in sorrow as well as in joy, in storm as well as in sunshine, as the following verses indicate—

‘In the depth of the night has come the king of our dark, dreary house. The thunder roars in the sky. The darkness shudders with lightening. With the storm has come of a sudden our king of the fearful night.’ (No. 51).
'I thought I should ask of thee—but I dared not—the rose wreath thou hadst on thy neck. Thus I waited for the morning, when thou didst depart, to find a few fragments on the bed. ... Ah me, what is it I find? What token left of thy love? It is no flower, no spices, no vase of perfumed water. It is thy mighty sword, flashing as a flame, heavy as a bolt of thunder. ... Lord of my heart, thou hast given me thy sword for adornment.' (No. 52).

A true devotee should welcome sorrow and trouble as well as joy, since both come from God. In fact, sorrow chastens our spirit, purifies us, and consequently hastens our approach to God. Hence says the poet—

'Beautiful is thy wristlet, decked with stars and cunningly wrought in myriad-coloured jewels. But more beautiful to me thy sword.' (No. 53).

It may be Death itself that lifts us up to God. The poet welcomes Death in these significant words—

'Death, thy servant, is at my door. He has crossed the unknown sea and brought thy call to my home.' (No. 86).

Poems Nos. 90, 91 and 93 depict Death as the benevolent messenger who comes to take the devotee to the Lord. Death becomes the passage, nay the auspicious ceremonial, which enables the bride to go to her Bridegroom. Death is the gateway to the Kingdom of Heaven. Here is a very moving presentation of this attitude—

'I was not aware of the moment when I first crossed the threshold of this life.

'What was the power that made me open out into this vast mystery like a bud in the forest at midnight!

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

'Even so, in death the same unknown will appear as ever known to me. And because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well.

'The child cries out when from the right breast the mother takes it away, in the very next moment to find in the left one its consolation.' (No. 95).

And finally comes the ineffable joy of union with the Lord. The poet expresses his exultation in a number of songs. The following are a few lines from them—
“Thus it is that thy joy in me is so full. Thus it is that thou hast come down to me. . . . Thou hast taken me as thy partner of all this wealth.’ (No. 56).

‘Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light! . . . Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling, and gladness without measure. The heaven’s river has drowned its banks, and the flood of joy is abroad.’ (No. 57).

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

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

‘Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow into a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

‘Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.’ (No. 103).

But we should remember that Tagore does not seek this liberation of his soul—this salvation—by renouncing the world. He is too genuine a poet not to care for life and nature. Indeed, he loves both, and emphatically asserts, ‘Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. . . . No, I will never shut the doors of my senses.’ (No. 73). And, again, ‘I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.’ (No. 69).

He will not lose contact either with nature or with fellow-men. God, he says, is to be found ‘where live the poorest, and lowliest and lost.’ (No. 10). Then comes the well-known poem—the eleventh in ‘Gitanjali’—

‘Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost 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. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!

‘Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for ever.

‘Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and
stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

Love of God leads us to love of all men. This is the burden of the following song of Tagore—

‘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. . . . when one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut.’ (No. 63).

This extension of the poet’s vision is again strikingly revealed in Poem No. 35 of ‘Gitanjali’ ‘which has found an echo in every heart for its thought and expression.’ It must be quoted in full—

‘Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
‘Where knowledge is free;
‘Where the world has not been broken 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 haven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.’

Poem No. 36 is almost a synopsis of the philosophy expressed by Tagore in ‘Gitanjali’—

‘This is my prayer to thee, my Lord—strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.
‘Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.
‘Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.
‘Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might.
‘Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.
‘And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love.’