CHAPTER - X

MONISTIC-DUALISTIC MYSTICISM

What remains for us to survey is the strictly religious variety of mysticism in Gitanjali. Here we are faced with a paradox. Certainly there are monistic traits. But there are also the dualistic traits. We shall see that Tagore is unique in defending both monism and dualism.

In Sadhana Tagore affirms, "Man's highest revelation is God's own revelation in him." On the same page he writes, "The manifestation of his soul is the manifestation of God in his soul."¹ And this revelation of the supreme soul in the poet's soul is rewarded with an expansion of consciousness, holds Tagore. It is this height that the Tagore of Gitanjali, like the of yore, poet-prophets/quite admirably, reaches.

The consequent new dimensions provide Tagore with a comprehensive vision in which the realms of reality

¹ Sadhana 40.
within and without are harmonized. The all comprehensive One, according to Tagore, is the ultimate reality, which he has variously described as the Supreme One, Supreme Reality, Supreme Soul, Supreme Person, Eternal Spirit or Sachidananda. All these expressions point to the primacy of the spiritual unity and refer to the Advaitam or the Ultimate One. Sankara bases his whole philosophy on those passages of the Upanishads which proclaim that the individual soul is identical with the Brahman, the Absolute, the world soul or God. This leads him to the logical and inevitable conclusion that all diversity must be illusion, maya. We learn his teachings mainly from his commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad. He holds that this Upanishad embodies the quintessential substance of the entire philosophy of the non-dualist Vedanta. Sankara is one of the greatest interpreters of the Upanishads.

To Tagore Advaitam is an all comprehensive unity in which diversity is brought into order by an inner perfection. The ultimate end of man, according to Tagore, is to find the One, which is in him, which is
his truth, which is his soul. It is the key with which he opens the gate of the spiritual life, the heavenly kingdom. That which is 'one' in him is ever seeking for unity -- unity in knowledge, unity in love, unity in purpose of will. Its highest joy is when it reaches the Infinite one with its eternal unity.

Tagore holds that "the vision of the Supreme One in our own soul is a direct and immediate intuition, not based on any ratiocination or demonstration at all."

He quotes in Sadhana the Upanishadic saying, "This deity who is manifesting himself in the activities of the universe always dwells in the heart of man as the supreme soul." This is what he emphasizes in many of the Gitanjali poems.

Through the twentieth lyric the poet conveys to us the mystical truth that God lives in his own heart. The poet metaphorically says that when the "lotus" bloomed his "mind was straying." The lotus here is the symbol of God. Since the poet's mind was "straying", he could not discover the God who resides in the innermost shrine of his being. He confesses that his "basket" was empty. Basket here symbolises the fact

\(^2\) Sadhana 30.
that the poet's consciousness was bereft of the sublime knowledge that God resides in his own higher self.

But at times he was startled out of his dream and "felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance." The poet is very sad that he could not recognize the Parabrahman with him. He confesses, "I knew not that it was mine, and that this perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart" (XX, 12). One of the attributes of Tagore's God is Ananda, Sweetness, Bliss. The poet personifies 'sweetness' and equates it with the Divine.

But Tagore confirms that that vague sweetness made his heart ache with longing which is the essence of aesthetic mysticism. But he thought it was, perhaps, "the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion" (XX, 12). Only very late does the poet realise that the Infinite is nearer to him than he is to himself, that he is within his own heart and to the extent the poet could not recognise Him in the depth of his being, he missed God and His love. The dominant school of Vedanta represented by Sankara and his followers preach the dissolution of the individual soul in an impersonal One as the highest state of mystical
realization.

Tagore himself refers to this school in the following words:

According to some interpretations of the Vedanta doctrine Brahman is the absolute Truth, the impersonal It, in which there can be no distinction of this and that, the good and the evil, the beautiful and its opposite, having no other quality except its ineffable blissfulness in the eternal solitude of its consciousness...of his undivided unity with the Parabrahman.³

The mystic Aurobindo also asserts the ultimate absorption of the individual in an undivided unity. He says "At the gates of the Transcendent stand that mere and perfect spirit described in the Upanishads, Luminous, Pure, Sustaining the world, without the flaw of duality without scar of division, the transcendent silence."⁴ The sufi mystic Mansur al-Hallaj

³ The Religion of Man 127-128.

is celebrated for his outbursts claiming identity with the Divine. Malimud Shabistari affirms that there is no duality in God. In that presence 'I', 'We' and 'You' do not exist. 'I' and 'You' and 'We' and 'He' become one. Since in the unity there is no distinction, the Quest and the way and the Seeker become one. In clear, decisive words Plotinus proclaims the merger of man with the Supreme. Meister Eckhart claims in unmistakable terms his identity with God. He declares, "God and I, We are one." Again he affirms, "My eye and God's eye are one and the same, one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving." 

Tagore does not contradict the claims of the monistic mystics. He even asserts that there is none who has the right to contradict this belief, for it is a matter of direct experience and not of logic. He approvingly says that this is the purest state of consciousness. It is all joy without any object or


6 Bhupendranath 64.

7 Qtd. in W.T. Stace 224.
content. This is considered to be the ultimate end of yoga, the cult of union, the attempt to completely identify one's being with the Divine Being, holds Tagore. He writes, "Such realization of transcendental consciousness accompanied by a perfect sense of bliss, is a time-honoured tradition in our country, carrying in it the positive evidence which cannot be denied by any negative argument of refutation." 8

In poem no.71 Tagore sings that God made him by setting a barrier in His own being and then calls his severed self in myriad notes. Then he affirms, "This thy self separation has taken body in me" (LXXI, 47). What the poet implies is that he is 'part' of God. He is related to Him as part to the whole. The whole is the reality. In other words he seems to support the monistic view and express his union with the One. The very next lyric opens, "He it is, the one, who awakens my being with his deep hidden touches" (LXXII, 48). Hidden in the innermost depth of the poet's being, the Infinite gives him pleasure and pain. He awakens the poet's soul to the beauty and enchantment of His

8 The Religion of Man 74.
creation. This all-pervading spirit of unity is the highest flowering of Tagore's mystical consciousness.

But Tagore has his preference for the testimony of others who have asserted the survival of their individuality which enters into mystical communion with God. As he puts it:

while accepting their testimony, the testimony of the non-dualistic mystics as true, let us, at the same time, have faith in the testimony of others who have felt a profound love, which is an intense feeling of union for a Being who comprehends in himself all things that are human in knowledge, will and action.  

Tagore characterises "the evaporation of individuality in the undifferentiated unity of Brahman" as "an extreme form of mysticism." He holds that in our common sense view of the world the objects are real in their concrete manifestations. It is this view of the world that works in our everyday experience.

Nevertheless, Tagore does not question the validity

9 The Religion of Man 79.

10 The Religion of Man 74.
of extreme monistic mystical experiences. He holds that they are true at their own levels. He writes, "Without disputing its truth, I maintain that it may be valuable as a great psychological experience, but all the same, it is not religion."\textsuperscript{11} Tagore has his own conceptio of religion. Religion, according to him, is a quest for perfection and one attains perfection not by abandoning his humanity, but by realizing it fully. Tagore's ideal is to realize the dignity of the eternal self of man, in union with the Supreme Self.\textsuperscript{12} In poem no. 72 he proudly affirms:

\begin{quotation}
He it is who puts his enchantment upon these eyes and joyfully plays on the chords of my heart in varied cadence of pleasure and pain.
\end{quotation}

The concluding stanza is still more revealing. It reads, "He it is who weaves the web of this \textit{maya} in evanescent hues of gold and silver, blue and green, and lets peep out through the folds his feet, at whose touch I forget myself" (LXXII, 48).

\textsuperscript{11} The Religion of Man 119.
\textsuperscript{12} Bhupendranath 68.
In *Gitanjali* Tagore makes a clear distinction between the two aspects of the self — the lower and the higher. The higher self is the soul of man vested with everlasting individuality. In the celebrated very first sentence of the English version of *Gitanjali* he proudly declares, "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure" (I, 1). About this ever lasting individuality he has these words in *Sadhana*: "There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable."  

This individuality is an interminable feature of the soul. Under no circumstance can the soul be divested of its uniqueness. Poem no.30 opens, "I came out alone on my way to my tryst" and in poem no.37 the poet says, "But I find that thy will knows no end in me" (XXXVII, 21). This again points to the everlasting nature of the personality of the poet. He prays to the Supreme to lead him "into ever widening thought and action" (XXXV, 20), which refers to the

13 *Sadhana* 57.
perennial nature of the poet, the individual.

In Sadhana Tagore asserts, "The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine." He continues, "We are absolutely bankrupt if we are deprived of this speciality, the individuality, the only thing we can call our own, and which, if lost, is also a loss to the whole world. It is most valuable." Against the traditional stand, Tagore holds that man's individuality is not a limitation. Rather, it is an asset through which he seeks the truth of the universal. He concludes poem no.44. "In the meanwhile I smile and sing all alone. In the meanwhile the air is filling with the perfume of promise" (XLIV, 26).

The Tagore of Gitanjali realizes the expansion of his consciousness in love in which everything assumes a richer meaning. In his unifying vision of love in Gitanjali, union and distinction are not opposed. Tagore's prayer is very revealing: "Let only that little be left of my will whereby I may feel thee on

14 Sadhana 57.
every side, and come to thee in everything, and offer to thee my love every moment" (XXIV, 19-20). Unity and duality are reconciled in love. Love, indeed, must be 'one' and 'two' simultaneously. "In love all the contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost." 15

Many of the Gitanjali poems present God as Lover and the poet as His beloved. The communion between them, as has already been established, is poetically, aesthetically, humanistically and transcendentally expressed in Gitanjali. This is definitely a dualistic approach. The presentation of the poet as subject and the Infinite as King is another instance of dualism. A few poems in Gitanjali present God as the giver and the poet as the recipient of gifts. The poet exclaims, "I sit and muse in wonder, what gift is this of thine ... Yet I shall bear in my heart this honour of the burden of pain, this gift of thine" (LII, 34). A gift always implies a 'giver' and a 'receiver'. The father-son relationship implied in poem no.35 also

15 Sadhana 94.
points to duality. The poet prays, "Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake" (XXXV, 20). Of the 103 poems in the English *Gitanjali* 61 explicitly refer to the "I"-"Thou" relationship, "I" standing for the poet and 'Thou' for the Divine. The rest of the poems also, in one way or other, refer to a similar relationship. "Thou" and its allied forms referring to the Infinite have been used more than 120 times in the collection and all of them point to Tagore's God. The addressee is the poet himself. The following are a few of the first lines of the poems of *Gitanjali* which explicitly refer to dualism.

Art thou abroad on this stormy night? (XXIII, 14)
Beautiful is thy wristlet decked with stars (LIII, 34).
Ever in my life have I sought thee (CI, 66)
Here is thy footstool (X, 6)
I am here to sing thee songs (XV, 9)
A asked nothing from thee (LIV, 35)
I boasted among men that I had known you (CII, 67)
I know not how thou singest my master (III, 2)
Thou hast made me endless (I, 1)
I know thee as my God and stand apart (LXXVII, 51)
That I want thee, only thee (XXXVIII, 22)

Joy is central to Tagore's theology in Gitanjali. He affirms, "This is my delight, thus to wait and watch at the wayside where shadow chases light and the rain comes in the wake of summer" (XLIV, 26). Again, "Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf... The heaven's river has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad" (LVII, 38). "This joy", Tagore affirms in Sadhana, "whose other name is love, must by its nature have duality for its realization." Duality is a necessary factor in the relationship of joy, in the relationship of love. There must at least be two to love, to enjoy. Joy, love, is realized in the union of two. So duality and union are the prerequisites of joy, love. It is union in love which gives final meaning to love and makes it a thing of joy and beauty. Love, joy, is the central truth of all existence and it is for the realization of love, joy, that God, who is love, joy, created the poet. In the fifty-sixth poem he exclaims,

16 Sadhana 86.
"Thus it is that thy joy in me is so full. Thus it is that thou hast come down to me!" He continues in indulgent love and joy, "O thou lord of all heavens, where would be thy love if I were not?" (LVI, 37). In *Sadhana* he asserts, "The universal is ever seeking its consummation in the unique."\(^{17}\)

Duality between the Infinite and the poet is, thus, the former's own making and it must be eternally sustained for the everlasting play of love. The poet thankfully avows, "Thou hast taken me as thy partner of all this wealth. In my heart is the endless play of thy delight. In my life thy will is ever taking shape"(LVI, 37). In *Sadhana* Tagore writes, "The *amritam*, the immortal bliss, has made himself into two. Our soul is the loved one. It is the other self."\(^{18}\) And "the lover seeks his own other self in his beloved. It is the joy that creates this separation in order to realise through obstacles the union."\(^{19}\) Tagore seems to reconcile the dichotomy between monism and

17 *Sadhana* 58.

18 *Sadhana* 87.

19 *Sadhana* 86-87.
dualism when he says, "We must know that the meaning of our self is not to be found in its separatness from God and others, but in the ceaseless realization of yoga, of union; not on the side of the canvas where it is blank, but on the side where the picture is being painted." 20

In maintaining the eternal coexistence of the finite and the Infinite in a union of love, Tagore shows striking affinity with the Vaishnava mystics. Tagore's approach in Gitanjali has much in common with the Vedantic schools of Madhava and Vallabhacharya, from which arose the Bengali School of Vaishnava Bhakti. 21 The theistic interpretations of Vedanta and the popular cults of love springing from it have made a special appeal to his poetic mind and they became the chief inspiration for his mystical outlook in Gitanjali.

In line with the Semitics, Tagore too upholds the duality of God and himself, but a duality that is

20 Sadhana 65.

21 Mukerjee 180.
in consonance with unity. Here in lies the uniqueness of the mysticism in *Gitanjali*. Tagore's God partakes in his humanity and he, in turn, shares God's divinity. Tagore's endeavour seems to be a sincere attempt to reconcile the Vedantin and Semitic stands. His is a qualified duality which springs from God's joy. It attains its fuller meaning in God's love which comprehends both unity and duality. Tagore thus transcends the rigorous stand of the monists and seems to subscribe to the moderate dualistic position of mystics like St. John of the Cross who speak of union with God and at the same time profess a view of dualism.

It has been made abundantly clear that theistic mysticism implies communion between God and man in love. The present discussion has been centring round the nature of this communion. It has been proved that Tagore's is a unique stand where he defends monistic-dualistic mysticism.

Nevertheless, so far the conception of man or personality and the conception of God in *Gitanjali* have not been dealt with. For the completeness of
this undertaking such an analysis is essential. So before dropping the curtain, in the following two chapters, these two topics will be studied.