Chapter - 5

The Vision of God in
The Divine Comedy
and Paradise Lost
Chapter - 5 : The Vision of God in The Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost.

One of the most striking matters in The Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost is the vision of God. Both poets' chief concern is with the redemption of man and this is possible only after the realization of God. Salvation is not possible without the realization of God. Therefore, God occupies the central place in Dante and Milton. Both poets tried to probe into the mystery of God, human existence and the destiny of man in their own specific ways. Both poets were God-possessed. Though Dante was Catholic and Milton Protestant, at the end of The Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost both Catholic and Protestant philosophies seem to converge and we find both poets face to face with the self-same God. All sorts of differences seem to vanish. There is no place for duality after the vision of God.

Before directly examining the vision of God, I would like to examine Milton's presentation of God in Paradise Lost. Ever since the publication of Paradise Lost, Milton's portrayal of God remains the major problem for critics and scholars of Milton. Some critics severely criticised Milton for presenting God as a character in the poem. There is a group of critics including Blake, Shelley, A.J.A. Waldock, Werblowsky and others who believe that Milton's presentation of God is not proper because his God is pale and Satan has the dynamism of power and greatness. Some critics believe that Milton's God is
a tyrant and a dictator. For William Empson *Paradise Lost* is indeed a sublime and great poem because Milton presented God as tyrant and oppressor.

Blake, Shelley, Dryden, William Empson, H.J.C. Grierson, Werblowsky, Ezra Pound, T.S.Eliot, F.R.Leavis and a number of other critics are not satisfied with *Paradise Lost* on one account or the other. Critics like Esmor Jones and Empson outrightly criticise Milton's God, while Werblowsky compares Satan with Aeschylus's Prometheus. For him Milton's God is a tyrant and an oppressor like Zeus. He writes,

"What matters here is the fact that Zeus whom Prometheus opposes is dangerously near the Father of *Paradise Lost*, or rather that the God of *Paradise Lost* is dangerously near the Zeus of the Greek drama. The difference between the two lies not with God, but with his opponents: Prometheus suffers in his own sphere

See what I suffer from the gods, a god!

(Prom.92)


whilst Satan sets himself up as a sort of anti-god."1

Here the comparison is at fault. Prometheus suffers for the sake of others' happiness, while Satan derives pleasures by making others miserable. The rebel of Prometheus was based on a just cause, while Satan rebelled because of his envious nature. He lacks the moral and spiritual courage of Prometheus.
William Empson in his *Milton's God* writes, "The reason why the poem is so good is that it makes God so bad." ²

Even a highly imaginative poet Shelley too, somehow could not properly understand Milton's presentation of God. For him Milton's God is inferior and pale before his Satan. In his *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley writes,

"Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, ... Milton has so far violated the popular creed (if this shall be judged to be a violation) as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil." ³

A great poet, prophet, mystic and a visionary like Blake also thought that Milton consciously favoured the Devil. He writes,

"The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it." ⁴

Let us see what H. J. C. Grierson has got to say about Milton's God. He writes,

"But Milton was in a difficulty. His God was twofold, the God of the *Bible* and the Deity of Philosophy as taken up into Christian theology. How is he to deal in an epic poem
modelled on Homer and Virgil with such a transcendent conception."

There are many other critics who blame Milton for the presentation of God because of their belief that language is inadequate to describe God's Infinity and finite mind of man cannot successfully fathom the mystery regarding God who is Infinite and ineffable. It is not possible to quote all of them in a chapter, but the above four quotations should make it clear that Milton's God is perhaps the most controversial character in creative literature.

Prof. Grierson is perfectly right in saying that Milton modelled his poem on Homer and Virgil. But does it mean that he must slavishly imitate them? Moreover, the most important factor which Prof. Grierson failed to notice is that Milton lived in a different age. He met Galileo and was aware of the theory of Copernicus. He was very well familiar with Jewish, Jesuit, Catholic and Protestant philosophies and mysticism. His purpose was not to glorify one person or to celebrate the victory of one race over another. His vision was different. He is concerned with man's reconciliation with God. Milton poured all his knowledge and spiritual experiences into the writing of Paradise Lost.

Milton modelled his poem on Homer and Virgil, but it was not compulsory for him to imitate them perfectly. Milton was a genius and genius works differently. He is a poet who represents a vision of the world which belongs not to one age or one generation but
the men of all generations and a whole human civilization. The same is the case with Dante. Here lies their greatness. Neither Dante's nor Milton's vision is confined to the age in which they lived or to Christianity alone. Poets and artists are free to present their visions in their works. We cannot curtail their liberty. We cannot prescribe them rules.

Milton tried to fathom the mystery of Divine Truth in his poem. Those who believe that a finite mind cannot comprehend God and present Him in a work of literature are wrong. There is no doubt about God's Infinity. But can we say that God is Infinite and not possible to comprehend and therefore, we should not talk about him or write about him? Can we sit passively by saying that we can never realize Him? There are thousands of hymns in every language of the world depicting the greatness and glory of God. Hundreds of mystics have tried to convey their experiences of the Infinite through language. Can we tell poets not to present God directly in their works because language is inadequate to cope with the Infinity of God. Of course, it is not possible to describe Him perfectly through the medium of language. But at the same time the most magnificent and sublime visions of God are to be found in great poems alone. How can we stop poets from conveying their experiences and visions of God? Imagination is the chief tool of the poet and therefore, his vision is more reliable than intellectual discourses of philosophers and critics. Shelley writes, "All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially."6
"A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not." 7

"In the infancy of the world, neither poets themselves nor their auditors are fully aware of the excellence of poetry: for it acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness; and it is reserved for future generations to contemplate and measure the mighty cause and effect in all the strength and splendour of their union." 8

If this is the case how can we say that a poet has no right to talk about divinity and present God in a poem. Dante and Milton were aware of the limitation of language to describe the exact vision of God. The Divine Comedy is a lyrical poet's vision of God, while Paradise Lost is an epic poet's vision of God. Dante's poem is a personal narrative and therefore, he invites us to share his experience in the last canto of the Paradiso. But the epic poem requires a different kind of treatment. It requires characters and that is why Milton had to present God as a character. Milton cannot communicate his vision of God in a personal lyrical form in an epic. The greatness and divinity of God have to be exposed through His actions.

The most important issue must be the vision of God, not the propriety of presentation. Dante keeps his God off the stage because he adopted the form of personal narration. Milton's form requires
characters and therefore, we find his God as a character. In this regard Irene Samuel comments,

"In Paradise Lost Milton's God, unlike Dante's, is himself shown speaking and acting. The difference has troubled many readers who compare the two: Dante, they assert, has taken the right way in presenting God indirectly, as a mystery behind the experience of the narrator, whereas Milton, in daring to report God's words and ways, offers a figure more appropriate to Homer's Mount Olympus - or a Sunday school. But here again the ground of comparison is at fault. In the Commedia, where the beholder and the narrator are linked in the "I" of the poem, it would have been puerile to concoct speeches and deeds for God. How could Dante declare, This is God as I saw him and these were his very words? But in Paradise Lost - unless one argues that it ought not to have been written at all - God must himself speak and act and not only manifest himself through other agents. From the earliest telling of the fall God has been a chief agent. To omit him from a narrative of man's disobedience would be an impossible innovation. The proper ground for comparing Paradise Lost and the Commedia is not, then, the extent to which God is directly presented but what the presentation reveals about him."  

C.M. Bowra also defends Milton's presentation of God. According to him epic form requires God as character. He writes,

"Milton follows epic precedent in giving an important part
to divine persons. With his Puritan convictions he could not resort to the allegorical divinities of Camões, and he boldly presented the God of his own faith. He could hardly have done otherwise; for God is an essential character in his story and must appear in His own person. Milton's God and Devil are far from what Dryden calls "machining persons".¹⁰

C. S. Lewis could not find fault with Milton's presentation of God. He observes,

"In depicting the Messiah Milton is much more successful. Some objections here are based on confusion. People complain that his Messiah is unlike the Christ of the Gospels. But of course, He ought to be. Milton is not writing about the incarnate Lord, but about the cosmic operations of the Son. The 'count'nance too severe to be beheld' (VI, 825) is, indeed, fully represented in the Gospels, too; but the scale and mode of operation are necessarily different."¹¹

Douglas Bush believes that the presentation of God is unavoidable in a heroic poem and Milton's God is not a tyrant but full of love. He comments,

"Above all, the anthropomorphic and "royalist" presentation of God, which was almost unavoidable in a heroic poem, has misled many readers and critics into seeing only the trappings of a tyrant and not the religious and metaphysical ideas He embodies."¹²
Thus Milton's God is not a tyrant or an oppressor but full of love and mercy. The epic form requires characters and therefore, Milton presents God as a character. This is a generic requirement. Milton was a very conscious artist and he knew very well what he was doing. He was aware of the fact that 'mortal sight' could not fathom the mystery of God or could see Him. In order to see the vision of God one must transcend the world of senses. Milton writes,

"So much the rather thou Celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irraditate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight."

(PL. III, 50-55)

Milton was very well aware of the limitations of senses. He knew that God could only be realized by transcending the sensory world. In the invocation of Book III, he requests the Muse to give him different kinds of eyes to see God so that he can have celestial vision of God which he can put forward before future generations. Those who said that the finite mind of man could not realize the Infinite, failed to notice the fact that highly imaginative poets and mystics, through their visions could see the glory of God. Milton and Dante belong to the group of poets and mystics who had glimpses of the Ultimate Truth.
The Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost are based on the spiritual experiences of Dante and Milton respectively. Both poets had their personal visions of God. C. M. Bowra observes,

"Though Milton's religious experience, as he presents it, is not in the least like the mystical vision which Dante presents in the Paradiso and though it seems to lack that intimate and passionate love for God which gives so special a sanctity to the poetry of St. John of the Cross, it has at its centre a real sense of a personal relation, of a spiritual communion with the Divine, especially in those moments when Milton, alone with his inspiration, was most fully and most truly himself." 13

Hence it is clear from the observation of Bowra that both poems are based on Divine revelation and therefore, God occupies the central place in both poems. In almost all his important poems Milton presents some religious truth. During the last phase of his life he was completely disillusioned. He had withdrawn himself from politics. His mind was preoccupied with the religious quest. John Arthos observes,

"There is a sense in which the burden of Milton's poetry is apart from what the words and sentences say. It is as if he were always thinking of Heaven; this is his true subject-
God, the mind of God, and the vast complexity of His truth and love- and what he works out with words - thought, doctrine, the delight of the senses - is but the shadow of his subject.  

The true subject of Milton's epic is man's union with God. The redemption of Fallen Man is the central doctrine. He celebrates the Infinite goodness of God throughout his epic. Dante’s subject too, is the spiritual union of soul with God. Dr. R. A. Malagi in this regard points out,  

"Though, on a literal level, the Comedy is concerned with 'the state of the soul after death straightforwardly affirmed' (Letter to Can Grande della Scala), symbolically it is concerned with the state of the soul in time and in eternity, in the world and in God. The Paradiso is fully occupied with the nature of the relation between time and eternity which the beatified soul inhabits. In fact, one of the central concerns of Paradiso is the reconciliation of time with eternity, the world with the Empyrean."  

According to Dante and Milton God is not only objective, dwelling in high heaven but subjective too, who dwells in the heart of the individual. His presence can be felt everywhere because it is He who fills every spot of nature. For Dante and Milton God is not only transcendent but immanent. God for them is not outside the nature but resides in every particle, birds, beasts and man. For them God is not extra cosmic, outside nature. The whole universe is filled
with the presence of God. A Devotee has to develop inner vision to see the presence of God in nature and in himself too. When his spiritual eye is opened, and when he tries to understand the true nature of his soul and its relationship with God, he begins to realize the divinity of God. Divine communion takes place only after the realization of the Self. Once this happens, he begins to realize that God is objective as well as subjective. F. C. Happold observes,

"The poet's vision of God is, most commonly, one of God as immanent in the natural world. His experience is of the 'pan-en-henic' type, an experience of the All in the One, of the One in the All."\textsuperscript{16}

Dante writes,

"O Light Eternal fixed in Self alone,
known only to Yourself, and knowing Self,
You love and glow, knowing and being known!"

(Par. XXXIII, 124-26)

The essence of The Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost is the vision of God in all things and of all things in God. For them God is not separate from His creation. The manifestation of God could be seen in nature and in every creature. But for that man has to develop an inner vision. In the last canto of the Paradise Dante describes his vision,
"O grace abounding and allowing me to dare
to fix my gaze on the Eternal Light,
so deep my vision was consumed in It!

I saw how it contains within its depths
all things bound in a single book by love
of which creation is the scattered leaves:
how substance, accident, and their relation
were fused in such a way that what I now
describe is but a glimmer of that Light.

I know I saw the universal form,
the fusion of all things, for I can feel,
while speaking now, my heart leap up in joy."

(Par. XXXIII, 82-93)

For Dante the whole universe is bound together by God. Like Arjuna of The Bhagavad Gita, Dante sees the whole universe in God. This experience of Dante is based on revelation. When a man sees the manifestation of God everywhere in the universe, he ceases to blame anyone, the obsession in the good and evil disappears, because he can feel the presence of God everywhere. For such a man every spot is divine and every creature blessed because he can see the spark of divinity in them. Arjuna in The Bhagavad Gita sees the universal form of the Lord. Dante's experience is similar to that Arjuna. Arjuna says,

"If the light of a thousand suns suddenly arose in the sky,
that splendour might be compared to the radiance of the Supreme Spirit.

And Arjuna saw in that radiance the whole universe in its variety, standing in a vast unity in the body of the God of gods.

Heaven and earth and all the infinite spaces are filled with thy Spirit; and before the wonder of thy fearful majesty the three worlds tremble."17

(The Bhagavad Gita, 11 Verse; 12,13,20)

Arjuna saw the Universe united in the one Cosmic form. It was St. Thomas Aquinas who in Canto XIII of the Paradise explains the principle of God's cosmic form to Dante. For him every object reflects the glory of God.

"All that which dies and all that cannot die reflect the radiance of that Idea which God the Father through His love begets:"

(Par. XIII, 51-53)

Commenting on the vision of St. Thomas Etienne Gilson writes,

"Dante is indeed astonished when he thinks of the fullness of wisdom with which God endowed Adam and Mary, that Thomas has earlier been able to say that 'the perfection
contained in the fifth light (i.e. Solomon) has not been repeated.' (Par. XIII, 46-48). To which Thomas replies that all beings, whether mortal or immortal, are merely the splendour of the Word that was engendered by the Father and is inseparable from Him as from the Holy Spirit, the bond of love that unites Them."\textsuperscript{18}

Milton expresses the similar vision in \textit{Paradise Lost}. For Milton too, God is in all and all is in God. Everything exists in God and God is in everything. Through the words of Michael Milton expresses his vision. In Book XI Michael tries to console Adam by saying,

"Adam, thou know'st Heav'n his, and all the Earth,
Not this Rock only; his Omnipresence fills
Land, Sea and Air, and every kind that lives,
Fomented by his virtual power and warm'd:
----- ----- ----- 
Yet doubt not but in Valley and in Plain
God is as here, and will be found alike
Present, and of his presence many a sign
Still following thee, still compassing thee round
With goodness and paternal Love, his Face
Express, and of his steps the track Divine."

\textit{(PL. XI, 335-354)}

Hence we can say that God is not separate from the universe. There is no gulf between God who is Infinite, all-pervading and
Omnipotent and the human soul and the world of nature. In Book VII God says,

"... because I am who fill
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
Though I uncircumscrib'd myself retire,"

(PL. VII. 168-170)

Blake and Wordsworth express the same philosophy of God in their poems. For them too, God is immanent.

Blake writes,

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour."

In 'Jerusalem' Blake describes his vision in the following words:

"We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
We behold multitude; or expanding, we behold as one,
As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man
We call Jesus the Christ; and he in us, and we in him
Live in perfect harmony in Eden, the land of life,
Giving, receiving, and forgiving each other's trespasses.
He is the Good shepherd, he is the Lord and master,
He is the Shepherd of Albion, he is all in all,
in Eden, in the garden of God, and in heavenly Jerusalem."
Wordsworth too, experienced the manifestation of divinity in nature. For him God is eternally present.

"... And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."21

Thus for Dante, Milton, Blake and Wordsworth God is not only transcendent living in heaven, but immanent too, residing in every particle. (Heaven is not only a place in a spatial sense of the word. It is also a state of mind) God dwells in every individual's soul. In the philosophic vision of Dante and Milton God is ever present throughout the universe. For them God is not a separate entity existing in heaven and governing the human affairs from there only. For them God is not unapproachable. This is the teaching of Jesus too. He says,

"And the kingdom of heaven is within you and whosoever knoweth himself shall find it. And, having found it, ye shall know yourselves that ye are sons and heirs of the Father,
the Almighty, and shall know yourselves that ye are in God and God in you. And ye are the City of God."22

It is not possible to see God with physical eyes because he is beyond the sense perception. Nor can we know God in normal consciousness. Knowledge has limitations. One can find ultimate truth in one's soul. When a man develops the highest kind of spirituality he can feel that heaven is within himself. This is what Milton conveys through Michael. Michael tells Adam,

"... but shalt possess
A Paradise within thee, happier far."

(PL. XII, 586-87)

Paradise is internal, not merely external. This is what Dante explained. His journey is an inward journey. In the very first stanza of the Inferno he describes his symbolic encounter with three fierce beasts who stand for pride, lust and avarice. Dante realises the fact that without overcoming these deadly sins lying in him, he can never ascend to God. Man must abolish hell within him and only then he can see the true glory of his soul and God. George Poulet in this regard comments, "So it appears that Dante's journey, like all mystical journeys, is an inward one. Its final goal is a God in which the soul sinks itself because it sinks into itself."23

Irene Samuel writes,
"If God himself is hardly seen in Paradiso except in the blinding vision at the end, a good deal still can be learned about him in the ascent through the heavenly spheres. He shows himself in his creation, not only as its shaper (Par. 10. 10-12) but also as its source (Par. 13. 52-63). What he reveals is above all the infinite plenitude of his being, which delights to overflow into other beings and then to behold them (Par. 19.40-55, 88-90). The magnanimity of the creator is thus the first attribute revealed by his creation."  

In their vision of eternity both poets discovered Infinity in everything. Through their spiritual experiences Dante and Milton realized that as long as God is extra-cosmic, there remains a gulf between man and God. If God is separate from the universe and man, the less chance is there for man to realize Him. In such a case direct communion with God is impossible. But in the philosophical system of Dante and Milton there is every possibility of realization because God is not separate from His creation. When the inner layers of ignorance are removed, a seeker of God can realize God within him.

This is the teaching of St. Paul too. He writes,

"Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made."  

Again he writes, "Surely you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you!"
William Law observes,

"Poor sinner! consider the treasure thou hast within thee; the Saviour of the world, the eternal Word of God lies hid in thee, as a spark of the divine nature which is to overcome sin and death and hell within thee, and generate the life of Heaven again in thy soul. Turn to thy heart, and thy heart will find its Saviour, its God within itself. Thou seest, hearest, and feel'st nothing of God, because thou seek'st for Him abroad with thy outward eyes, thou seek'st for Him in books, in controversies, in the church and outward exercises, but there thou wilt not find Him till thou hast first found Him in thy heart. Seek for Him in thy heart, and thou wilt never seek in vain, for there He dwells, there is the seat of His Light and holy Spirit." 27

Yes, it is not possible to see God with the physical eye because He is beyond sense perception. When Christ says, 'You are in God and God in you', he means, one can find Ultimate Truth in one's soul. When a man develops this type of highest spirituality he can understand the truth of the statement 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.' This is what Michael explains to Adam when he asks him to see and realise the Paradise within him (XII, 587). The purpose of Michael was to educate Adam and Eve. Through the last two books of Paradise Lost Milton expresses his spiritual experiences through Michael, Adam and Eve. For Milton, as for Dante union between God and the human is possible because God is not separate from the soul. This is what St. John of the Cross says,
"To understand... the nature of this union, it must be known that God dwells or is present substantially \textit{(per essentiam)} in every soul, even in the soul of the greatest sinner. This kind of union between God and all His creatures is never lacking, since it is in and by this union that He sustains their being. ...If we were to speak of the union of the soul with God... we do mean that the union of the soul with God which is consummated in the soul's transformation in God - a union which can come about only when the soul attains to a likeness with God by virtue of love."\textsuperscript{28}

The final destination of every soul is the union with God because God alone is directly related to the human soul. This is what Dante felt towards the end of his pilgrimage. He realised God within himself and every wish for worldly glory disappears. According to Milton there is a bond of union between man and God. The grace of God is continuously flowing, but it left to the person to receive it or to reject it. God is not divided from man. It is sin alone that separates man from God. There is a divine element in every individual's soul. It requires a unique self-consciousness on the part of a devotee to realize divinity within him. But for this, man first of all must overcome sin which is also within himself. Raphael says,

"O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not deprav'd from good,.... "

\textsuperscript{PL. V, 470-72}
Adam and Eve suffered not because God separated himself from them but it was they who separated themselves from God. They closed the door from inside. The sin of pride instigated Eve to transgress. The same is the case with Satan. It was he who refused to receive the grace of God. Milton wants to convey his belief that it is sin which creates a gulf between a being, man or angel, and God. Once the block of sin and ignorance is removed, man could see divinity within himself. According to Dante the true home of the soul is heaven and it is destined to return there if not degraded. It participates in God's divinity. Francesco De Sanctis observes, "The soul comes to us from Heaven, its home; it descends to us from a very high habitation. It shares in the divine nature."³⁹

Marco Lombardo explains the truth to Dante:

"Esce di mano a lui che la vagheggia
prima che sia, guisa di fanciulla
che piangendo e ridendo parieggi
Issuing from His hands, the soul-on which
He thought with love before creating it-
is like a child who weeps and laughs in sports."

*(Purg. XVI, 85-88)*

*(Trans. Allen Mandelbaum)*

Hence soul shares the glory of God because it is created lovingly by Him. But sin is the root cause for the misery of a soul. It separates the soul from its creator.
"Sin is the only power that takes away
man's freedom and his likeness to True Good,
and makes him shine less brightly in Its light;"

(Par. VII, 79-81)

Here 'True Good' means God. Thus, according to the vision
of Dante and Milton the manifestation of Divinity can be felt everywhere. The universe is a manifestation of God. He is eternally present everywhere but it requires the highest type of spiritual consciousness to see and feel the glory of Almighty God. This kind of realization is possible only after overpowering the evils lying within the self. Thus according to the vision of Dante and Milton sin alone separates man from God. But once the purification of the self takes place God can be realized within the soul itself. After this kind of realization a devotee cannot find any gulf between him and God. He can realize that he himself is the portion of God's loveliness. He could see that the spirit of God is within him.

III

The God of Paradise Lost and The Divine Comedy is full of love and light. In the poetic theology of Dante and Milton God is not tyrant, but a judge. Adam and Eve committed the crime of transgression and therefore, God must pass His judgement on them. The same is the case with the sinners of Dante's Inferno. They suffer because of their own wrong actions. According to both Dante and
Milton punishment is the consequence of evil actions committed by man. Our happiness and misery are the outcome of our actions which we did in the past. Hence man himself is responsible for his happiness and misery as well. God simply acts as a judge. We are free to choose the beatitude of Heaven or the wretchedness of hell. We are free to create our heaven and hell according to our thoughts and actions. God is not responsible for our misery and happiness. Milton's God says,

"...I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all th'Ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who fail'd;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell
They therefore as to right belong'd,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Their maker, or their making, or their Fate;
As if Predestination over-rul'd
Their will, dispos'd by absolute Decree
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: ...
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose;..."

(PL. III 98-125)

Thus, man is the author of his destiny. His happiness and
suffering depend upon his actions and thoughts. Raphael says to Adam,

"... stand fast; to stand or fall
Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies."

(PL. VIII, 640-41)

God has given the faculty of reason to discriminate between good and evil. Man is not a puppet in the hands of God. Man is accountable for his actions and its consequences. In the Purgatory Marco, the Lombard explains this truth to Dante. For him rewards and punishments depend on the exercise of Freedom of Will.

"You men on earth attribute everything
to the spheres' influence alone, as if
with some predestined plan they moved all things
If this were true, then our Free Will would be
annihilated: it would not be just
to render bliss for good or pain for evil.

You are free subjects of a great power,
a nobler nature that creates your mind,
and over this the spheres have no control.
So, if the world today has gone astray,
the cause lies in yourselves and only there!"

(Purg. XVI, 67-83)

Dante himself made the point explicitly clear in a letter written to his patron, Can Grande della Scala,
"The subject of the whole work, then taken in the literal sense alone, is simply 'The state of souls after death', for the movement of the whole work hinges on this. If the work be taken allegorically, the subject is 'Man-as, according to his merits or demerits in the exercise of his free will, he is subject to reward or punishment by justice."\(^3\)

If man is responsible for his tragic plight how can we blame God? How can we call him a tyrant? Had He been a tyrant, he would have never provided a remedy. He would have never offered His son to endure punishment and humiliation for the sake of suffering humanity. The God presented by Dante and Milton is merciful and full of love. For both poets God is Supreme Love. Their belief is based on the central Christian creed. St. John in his Gospel writes,

"...for God is love. And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him."\(^3\)

In the religious philosophy of Dante God is 'Summum Bonum' (the Highest Good). He is divine love. For Milton too, God is merciful. Throughout his epic, Milton celebrates God's Providential love for mankind Those who condemned Milton's God by calling Him tyrant, perhaps failed to see that it was the intention of Milton to glorify his God for His unbounded love and mercy as against Satan whose only pleasure lies in inflicting miseries on others. Even after transgres-
sion Adam and Eve were not completely doomed. They were punished for their actions but at the same time God provided an opportunity of redemption.

Milton's God stands for love, mercy and justice. He is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of mankind. Milton writes in The Christian Doctrine,

"Predestinated; that is, designated, elected: proposed to himself the salvation of man as the scope and end of his counsel. Hence may be refuted the notion of a preterition and desertion from all eternity, in direct opposition to which God explicitly and frequently declares, as has been quoted above, that he desires not the death of any one, but the salvation of all; that he hates nothing that he has made; and that he has omitted nothing which might suffice for universal salvation." \(^{32}\)

Throughout Paradise Lost Milton celebrates the glory and divinity of God and Jesus, not the pride, envy, obstinacy and despair of Satan. Those who think that Milton's God is pale and Satan glorious, again fail to see the providence of God. Satan wanted to ruin Adam and Eve completely. But see what happened! He was doomed for ever, Adam and Eve on the other hand found grace of God. Through his providential love God turned even Satan's evil into good. He provided Adam and Eve with an opportunity of salvation. A.E Dyson and Julian Lovelock observe,
"We shall be less ready to find fault with God's tone and proclaim Him a tyrant if we discover in the poem the miracle of evil taken and turned into good."\textsuperscript{33}

God provided His Son to bear the burden of Adam's sin and thus provided an opportunity of redemption. If this is the case how can we call Him a tyrant or an oppressor of mankind? Milton's God says,

"Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will,
Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
Freely vouchsaf't; once more I will renew
His lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthrall'd
By sin to foul exorbitant desires;
Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand
On even ground against his mortal foe,
By me upheld, that he may know how frail
His fall'n condition is, and to me owe
All his deliv'rance and none but me."

(\textit{PL. III.} 173-182)

Only the grace of God can save man and redeem him and Almighty God grants it to man. God's love for man is an essential part of Milton's epic. In order to fulfil God's justice the Son offers himself:

"Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life
I offer, on mee let thine anger fall;
Account mee man; I for his sake will leave
Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
Freely put off, and for him lastly die

Then with the multitude of my redeem'd
Shall enter Heaven long absent, and return,
Father to see thy face, where in no cloud
Of anger shall remain, but peace assur'd,
And reconciliation; wrath shall be no more
Thenceforth, but in thy presence Joy entire."

(PL. III, 236-265)

God grants the Son's wish:

"...O thou
My sole complacence! well thou know'st how dear
To me are all my works, nor Man the least
Though last created, that for him I spare
Thee from my bosom and right hand, to save,
By losing thee a while, the whole Race lost.
Thou therefore whom thou only canst redeem,
Their Nature also to thy Nature join,
And be thyself Man among men on Earth,
Made flesh, when time shall be. of Virgin seed,
By wondrous birth: Be thou in Adam's room
The Head of all mankind, though Adam's Son.
As in him perish all men, so in thee
As from a second root shall be restored,
As many as are restored, without thee none.
His crime makes guilty all his Sons, thy merit
Imputed shall absolve them who renounce
Their own both righteous and unrighteous deeds,
And live in thee transplanted, and from thee
Receive new life. So man, as is most just,
Shall satisfy for Man, be judg'd and die
And dying rise, and rising with him raise
His Brethren, ransom'd with his own dear life.
So Heav'nly love shall outdo Hellish hate,
Giving to death, and dying to redeem,
So easily destroy'd, and still destroys
In those who, when they may, accept not grace."

(PL. III, 274-302)

Here lies the supreme proof of God's mercy and Son's love
for the fallen man. C.M Bowra writes,

"Since man is free and God is just, it follows that man
must be punished for his disobedience to God. The logic
is faultless if we admit that justice lies in giving their deserts
to those who have done wrong. Milton follows orthodox
tradition in explaining the Crucifixion in this way: the fall
of man must be atoned for by death, and the Son makes
the atonement for man by dying in his place. Milton's
presentation of this may seem a little too legalistic, but
behind it lies something of great importance, his conception
of God's love for man. Adam knows of this love and in
his unfallen state believes that he can never desert it, but
it's fullest expression is in the Son's speech when he offers
to give himself in atonement for man's sin. The sacrifice which he will make is the supreme example of God's love for man, and Milton pays it a special tribute:

"O unexampl'd love,
Love no where to be found less than Divine!"

(PL. III, 410-411)

This love is bound to the divine order and is an important part of it...

Just as man must play his part by following his reason, so God plays His by exercising His love."34

Death is not punishment but remedy. God foretells that Man will be united with Him. Hell will be closed for ever and the Earth will be just like Paradise. The future of man is bright. God says,

"Till I provide Death; so Death becomes
His final remedy, and after Life
Tri'd in sharp tribulation, and refin'd
By Faith and faithful works, to second Life,
Wak't in the renovation of the just,
Resigns him up with Heav'n and Earth renew'd."

(PL. XI, 61-66)

Thus, we can see that God is the embodiment of love and mercy. In the ethical philosophy of Milton God and Son stand for infinite love. Bush says,
"Christ, God's executive agent in the heavenly war and in the creation and judgement of man, is the Logos, the Creative Word, and, in contrast with Satan, the incarnation of supreme love and right reason. He is also the Redeemer and the Mediator through whom man becomes regenerate....

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Like Christ, God is Divine Love and much more."\(^{35}\)

According to Milton the real fortitude lies in suffering for others. It was Milton who changed the old concept of heroism. For Milton a real hero is he who has a tremendous capacity to suffer and capacity to love without any selfish motives. Homer and Virgil glorified great warriors who aimed at destroying cities and civilizations. Homer glorified the brute military prowess of Achilles who had no regard for even the dead body of Hector. Ajax, Agamemnon, Diomedes and others are honoured for their strength to destroy others. For Milton the real strength of character does not lie in military prowess but in self-less love and sacrifice. This is what Jesus did. It was he who gave the light of love to humanity. He never longed for any earthly glory and fame. Along with God, the Son is the illustrious hero of Milton who fought against Satan and defeated him not by destroying him physically but by vanquishing sin and evil in man. For Milton it is very easy to inflict pain on others. The greatness of man does not lie in making others miserable. Real greatness lies in making others happy. Michael explains this to Adam:
"He shall endure by coming in the Flesh
To a reproachful life and cursed death,
Proclaim Life to all who shall believe
In his redemption, and that his obedience
Imputed becomes theirs by Faith, his merits
To save them, not their own, though legal works.

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... : this God-like act
Annuls thy doom, the death thou shouldst have di'd,
In sin for ever lost from life; this act
Shall bruise the head of Satan, crush his strength
Defeating Sin and Death, his two main arms,
And fix far deeper in his head their stings
Than temporal death shall bruise the Victor's heel,
Or theirs whom he redeems, a death like sleep,
A gentle wafting to immortal Life."

(PL. XII, 405-435)

Adam realises:

"... that suffering for Truth's sake
Is fortitude to highest victory."

(PL. XII, 569-70)

It was not the intention of Milton to glorify Satan, consciously or unconsciously. Satan is the slave of his unworthy desires. He failed to overpower evils lying within him. He deceives himself and his followers. He failed to remain true to himself and his companions. Because of his bestial instincts he reduced himself to the level of
a serpent. God and the Son on the other hand are full of grace, mercy and love. C.M.Bowra observes,

"It is clear that Milton quite deliberately fashioned Satan or heroic models, because he rejected the old heroic standards and wished to show that they were wicked. He had his own ideal of heroism, which he displays in other ways, and his Satan prepares us for it by showing that pride, on which the old ideal was based, is not only inadequate but dangerously wrong.

When Satan is indirectly compared with Aeneas, the comparison harms Aeneas. For what Milton rejects is the whole notion that heroism lies in deeds which bring earthly glory or are concerned with human power. In their different ways Virgil, Camoes and Tasso, even Boiardo and Ariosto, had made this assumption, but Milton thinks that heroism lies in suffering for the good and that the only true glory belongs to this."36

Hence, Milton praises God and the Son. Even Adam and Eve show better fortitude by confessing their crime. They both are ready to suffer punishment in order to reconcile with God.

In the Paradise Dante describes his experience of the Beatific vision. All the Blessed Spirits in Dante's Paradise know that God is love. Hence, God who is Love is adorned and glorified by Dante. According to Dante, the fall of Adam alienated man from God and
was not in a position to regain blessed spiritual state until Christ's sacrifice for the sake of human beings. Redemption is possible only through the grace of God. Like Milton, Dante pays the highest tribute to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The crucifixion atoned for the sin of Adam. In order to expiate the sin of Adam God gives His Son.

"there, moved by His unselfish Love alone,
He took unto Himself, in His Own Being,
that nature which had wandered from its maker."

(Par. VII, 31-33)

Francesco De Sanctis in this regard observes, "Only God could redeem man. God made Himself man, and redeemed the world by giving Himself as victim for it." 37

Thus according to the vision of Dante God is Supreme Love. There is no limit to His grace and mercy. Manfred says to Dante:

"Horrible was the nature of my sins,
but boundless mercy stretches out its arms
to any man who comes in search of it."

(Purg. III, 121-123)

The love of God for man was so profound that He gave His only begotten Son to human race. He took human nature upon Him and suffered for the sake of humanity. Here lies the supreme proof of God's love for man.
In the last canto of the Paradise, Dante pays glorious tribute to Christ and God.

"O Virgin Mother, daughter of your son,
most humble, most exalted of all creatures
chosen of God in His eternal plan,
you are the one who ennobled human nature
to the extent that He did not disdain,
Who was its Maker, to make Himself man.
Within your womb rekindled was the love
that gave the warmth that did allow this flower
to come to bloom within this timeless peace."

(Par. XXXIII, 1-9)

The beatific vision of Dante is not mere philosophical abstraction based on his knowledge of mystics and philosophers, it is rather an intense personal experience. Through his vision Dante realizes that God is the Prime Move. Dr. Malagi in this regard observes, "the whole universe is spurred into motion by divine Love and spins in love." Like Adam of Paradise Lost Dante, the pilgrim realizes the fact that real happiness of man lies in submitting himself completely to God who is Love, Light and Truth. He describes his vision:

"At this point power failed high fantasy
but, like a wheel in perfect balance turning,
I felt my will and my desire impelled
by the Love that move the sun and the other starts."

(Par. XXXIII, 142-145)
Thus according to Dante God is the Living Light, Love, eternal and unchanging. Irene Samuel writes about the God of Dante and Milton,

"The Commedia, if we attend to what is said of God by all authoritative speakers as well as by the poet, reveals far more of the divine than is commonly assumed, and what it reveals is far closer to the substance of Paradise Lost. The revelation in the one poem comes more largely through statement, in the other through demonstration, but in each the God revealed is transcendent in his infinity and omnipotence, unknowable in his omniscience, perfectly benevolent in his transmission of life, light, and joy to all beings, the creator and sustainer of every part and aspect of the universe, immanent in his creation, the center and circumference of all things."^39

Through a supra-rational intuition both poets tried to penetrate the mystery of God. Knowledge acquired from this kind of intuition is more reliable than through the intellect. Intellect may take one to a certain point and then it stops. The vision of God presented by both poets is not a mere philosophical abstraction. They had their own visions of God. In moments of solitude and bliss both poets found themselves face to face with God. They enjoyed divine communion. Bowra observes,

"Though Milton's conception of God has its logical basis
and is fortified by argument, it is informed by a spirit which suggests that his own personal experience was based neither on logic nor on argument but drew its strength from a belief in a divine reality which appealed to some of his inmost needs, his desire for order, reason and love.\(^40\)

The essence of Dante's as also Milton's poem lies in an intuitive vision of God and the spiritual communion with Him. Both poets believe in the possibility of the soul's communion with the Divine Spirit.

Both poets tried to penetrate the mystery of God through a supra-rational intuition. Truth can be realised through intuitive vision. Both Dante and Milton reconciled poetry and philosophy through the agencies of imagination and intuition. Hence their God is not a God of philosophy, an abstraction but a God of spiritual experience and poetic discovery, a living, personal God.
NOTES


(7) Ibid., p. 228.

(8) Ibid., p. 232.


(16) F. C. Happold, *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology*  

(17) *The Bhagvad Gita*, Trans. Juan Mascaro' 1962; New Delhi:  

(18) Etienne Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy*, Trans. David Moore  


(22) Quoted in F.C. Happold's *Mysticism: A Study and An Anthology*,  


