CHAPTER - XI

CONCEPTION OF MAN IN GITANJALI

The emphasis so far has been on the essence of mysticism in Gitajali. Its different strands have been lucidly unwoven. It has also been pointed out that the thread that weaves them together is the infinite yearning pent up in the heart of the poet for the Divine. The various strands are so harmoniously strung together that they are built into the very texture of the text organically and interpenetratingly -- something unique to Tagore.

Tagore's conception of man is romantic. For him man is the roof and crown of creation and the seat of the Infinite. The evolution of man consists in the graded emergence from darkness to light, from imperfection to perfection, from necessity to freedom. The poet-mystic relies on the Vedas and the Upanishads in his stress on the greatness and perfectibility of man. The first poem begins with the cosmic, awe-inspiring assertion: "Thou hast made me endless, such
is thy pleasure" (I, 1). The Infinite has invested the poet with endless possibilities of perfectibility.

The poet is the man within bounds and man the boundless, man the finite and man the Infinite. There are moments in the poet's life when his "heart is hard and parched up", when his "beggarly heart sits crouched, shut up in a corner" and when "tumultuous work raises its din on all sides, shutting" the poet "out from beyond" (XXXIX, 22). But there are also moments, epiphanic moments in *Gitanjali* when the poet is "drunk with the joy of singing" and forgets himself and calls the Infinite "friend, who art my lord" (II, 2). He could now "touch, by the edge of the far-spreading wing of" (II, 2) his song, the feet of the Infinite, which he could never before aspire to reach.

Tagore's concept of man, of human personality, finds its fruition in creativity through the surplus in man passed through certain stages of conceptual and experiential development. The first stage of this

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realization is through the feeling of intimacy with Nature. According to Tagore nature has two senses—one in which we ordinarily treat it as an insentient, objective channel for information, binding down man to the physical and vital levels, and the other in which it satisfies our personality with manifestations that make our life rich and stimulate our imagination in their harmony of forms, colours, sounds and movements.  

It has been stated in chapter four how the poet has experienced the opening up of the self through the fading away of the veil of ignorance through his intense love for and an intimate relationship with nature. The veil of ignorance is lifted and the poet declares the vision through his famous poem 'Nirjhoner Swapna bhang' (The Awakening of the Waterfall). Nature, for Tagore, is not the force that binds him down to his basal needs as a bio-physical organism, but fits him up in communion with his fellow beings, with the universe at large and with the Infinite that

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looms large through Nature and Man. The poet sings in poem no. 5, "Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove" (V, 4). And the poet realizes, "Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of life in the silent and overflowing leisure." Enjoying the beauty of Nature, the poet sings "dedication of life" i.e. he enters into mystical communion with the Infinite. The poet also realizes His footstool is there "where live the poorest, and lowliest and lost" (X, 6).

True to Hinduism Tagore believes that human spirit and nature are the twin aspects of the Absolute. He considers the Gayatri to be the epitome of all the Vedas. In Sadhana he writes:

By its help we try to realize 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,

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whose power creates the earth, the sky, and stars, and at the same time irradiates our minds with the light of the consciousness that moves and exists in unbroken continuity with the outer world. 4

Nature forms the background, as it were, of Tagore's understanding of the intricacies of the universe, man's relation with man, and his quest for the Universal Man. He came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued his voyage through the wilderness of the world (XII, 7). He had been pursuing his voyage through the rough-and-tumble of nature. He affirms, "The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end" (XII, 8). The poet has to converse with his fellow travellers before he realizes himself properly. He has also to commune with them in order to reach the innermost shrine where dwells the Infinite. For Tagore the other is the means by which he can reach the Almighty — through the

14 Sadhana 9.
finite to the Infinite. Here the poet presents himself in the persona of a 'traveller'. The journey motif as has been pointed out in chapter 3, is quite common in mystical literature.

The Tagore of Gitanjali is not a stranger in this universe. Everyone, everything, is his kith and kin. He specifies the reason too. He sings, "When one knows thee then alien there is none" (LXIII, 42). He is enabled to know himself and his Lord through the objects of nature and through his brethren. And the poet rejoices:

Through birth and death, in this world or in others, wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same, the one companion of my endless life who ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar (LXIII, 42).

In his creativity the poet of Gitanjali realizes the Supreme Person (Jivandevata) who makes the universe intimately personal to him. In poem no.2 the poet consents:
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. Listening in silent amazement the poet acknowledges:

"The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on" (III, 2-3).

And the poet longs to join with God in His song. He sings, "My heart longs to join in thy song," Then he exclaims, "Ah, thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master!" (III, 3).

In his creativity the poet, the representative of common humanity, becomes conscious of his power of transcendence, his ability to go beyond his physical finitude. The poet sings in the very first poem: "At the immortal touch of thy hands my heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable" (I, 1). In such moments the poet's personality transcends all its limitation and is dissolved in the
Infinite. And the mystical union takes place. The poet becomes the recipient of the Almighty's infinite gifts. Though "ages pass" God still pours His gifts into the poet's hands "and still there is room to fill" (I, 1).

Man, the poet, thus becomes aware of his finite -- infinite nature which draws him forward to the Supreme Being. He finds in himself the Divine who has made him infinite, though he is caged in finitude. He finds his God, not only as one who transcends the inanimate, the animate and especially the human world, but as one who is as much human as divine. He proclaims, "Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well" (LXXVII, 45). The universe is the interplay of the finite and the infinite. The reality of the Supreme Being is as much dependent on the poet's personality and vice versa. The Infinite has to condescend to the human world so that he does not brave the risk of becoming unreal.

The poet of Gitanjali feels as has been hinted earlier, that there is a 'Surplus' in him. It is his inherent ability to transcend his finitude and be one
with the entire universe including the Infinite, in love. Love is the ideal form of relationship between man and man between man and woman, between man and nature and between man and the Supreme Being. Tagore affirms:

The man whose inner vision is bathed in an illumination of his consciousness at once realizes the spiritual unity reigning supreme over all difference . . . . He knows that beauty carries an eternal assurance of our spiritual relationship to reality which waits for perfection in the response of our love. 5

Gitanjali, is the expression of the personality of its author. It expresses the creativity within him which in turn establishes the surplus in him. This surplus is manifested in the creation of all that is beautiful and good in Gitanjali. In his forward march to creativity the poet transcends his biophysical finitude and encompasses the Infinite within him. And

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so he is bold enough to declare that the Infinite would have been vain if He did not come down to man to manifest Himself. The poet of *Gitanjali* realizes in the state of the development of his personality that the entire universe is the *lila* of the Infinite Being, immanent in the finite. He establishes a spiritual unity, a tie between man and man, man and nature and man and his Supreme Person -- the object of the poet's adoration, respect and above all love.

Man becomes the eternal man, the complete Man in this realization of beauty, goodness and love. The poet of *Gitanjali* chides his inner self for being unaware of his greatness and glory. He exclaims, "O FOOL, to try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders! O Beggar, to come to beg at thy own door" (IX, 5). In *Gitanjali* Tagore seldom uses capitals. Even those words which explicitly refer to God do not begin with a capital. Perhaps he wants to keep the reader in eternal suspense about the nature of this Sublime Being. Here in the passage all the letters of the word 'FOOL' are in capitals. Probably he writes deliberately that way to emphasize the fact that man is "the Complete Man", "the
Eternal Man", the divinized man. Remaining hidden in the heart of the poet He divinizes him.

In poem no. 71 the poet sings, "That I should make much of myself and turn it on all sides, thus casting coloured shadows on thy radiance -- such is thy maya" (LXXI, 47). He is invested with infinite powers and he must make the best advantage of it. He is created to gild the white radiance of eternity. He is competent to do that, for he is infinite. No wonder, the poet affirms, "This thy self-separation has taken body in me" (LXXI, 47).

In the very same poem the poet refers to the "hide and seek" that goes on between God and the Poet. In a hide and seek game the partners are almost equals. So the poet affirms that he is almost on a par with the Infinite. The poem concludes: "The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me" (LXXI, 48). The terms indicate universality and the poet uses them deliberately to signify his divinity, and by implication the divinity of every man.
The following sentence is a very clear avowel and makes the Tagorean position regarding human personality abundantly clear. "The experience which I have described in one of the chapters which follow convinced me that on the surface of our being we have the everchanging phases of the individual self, but in the depth there dwells the Eternal Spirit of human unity beyond our direct knowledge."  

Man's finiteness, which the poet of Gitanjali takes to be quite real, is a pre-requisite for the forward march to communion with the Divine. That is why the poet affirms, "Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight." He continues, "Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim" (LXXIII, 49). Metaphorically the poet illustrates how the Infinite tries to divinise him.

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6 Tagore here refers to chapter six of the book, entitled "The Vision". It runs from page 56 to 67. Chapter two of the dissertation is almost entirely based on this personal mystical experience of the poet and it is the ground for the thrust of the whole thesis.

7 The Religion of Man 11.
at each moment of his existence. The poet is quite confident, "My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame and place them before the altar of thy temple" (LXXIII, 49). The poet and the Infinite move on equal terms and converse with the ease and mutual trust of friends. And the poet is quite confident: "Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love" (LXXIII, 49).

What the poet of Sitanjali tries to do is to unite beauty and goodness. The chapter on aesthetic mysticism and humanistic mysticism are complementary to this chapter on Tagore's conception of human personality. Whatever appeared ugly and brutal always received his share of disapproval and protest. Whatever appeared an insult to the inner man he loudly protested. No wonder, the Jallianwala Bagh incident drew out his loud, vocal protest.

At the personal level he will ever try to keep his body pure, for God's touch is upon all his limbs. He will try to keep all untruth out from his thoughts,
for the Infinite in him is that truth which kindles the light of reason in his mind. He will constantly strive to drive all evil away from his heart and keep his love in full bloom, for the infinite has His seat in the inmost shrine of his being. Finally it will be his relentless endeavour to reveal the Almighty in all his actions, knowing that it is the latter's power that gives him strength to act.