

MYSTICISM – A CRITICAL STUDY

“The Aim of philosophy is to maintain an active novelty of fundamental ideas illuminating the social system. Philosophy is mystical, for mysticism is direct insight into depths as yet unspoken. But the purpose of philosophy is to rationalize mysticism, not by explaining it away to but by the introduction of novel verbal characterization rationality coordinated”

A.N. Whitehead.

INTRODUCTION

Mysticism is the theory regarding the way of life which furnishes a supreme transcendence over all divided or disintegrated methods of living. It is a life lived constantly in union with the bed-rock of reality, which is conceived to be one and the only absolute Being or Existence. A mystic is one who lives entirely in and by this awareness of that reality. Through no adequate description or analysis can be given of this awareness of the Integral¹ or the Absolute, yet it is possible to understand what it is and distinguish it from what it is not. The descriptions and delineations of this experience however widely differ from mystic to mystic.

Mysticism can, however, be said to have three fundamental characteristics which are common to all

mystical experiences. First and foremost there is the quality of transcendence over (or freedom from) the forms and patterns of thought and perception with which man is normally acquainted. Secondly, there is the quality of dissolution of the individual himself in a larger and universal variety—a dissolution which has degrees and stages. Thirdly the mystic awareness dissolves the multiplicity of the world in the Oneness of the Absolute. Therefore transcendence dissolution and unification seem to be the essential qualities of mystical experience. Because it has these three characteristics, the mystical consciousness is said to involve supra-sensory knowing process, quite unlike our normal knowing (or cognitive) process. It involves a different method of acting in the world, since all our actions centre round individual fragmental portions of reality whether these be men or matter or even God's multiple personalities or powers. We seize upon one fact or portion of a fact in a large area and concentrate our efforts on the same. Even so is this true of our emotions and volitions.

¹ Integral means the unique totality which satisfies and sustains every fact and facet of beings, individually or collectively, and therefore the true concrete Universal

Our sensations are fragmentary snatches of sense, like colour, sound shape, taste or touch, Kant's² explanations notwithstanding, in this togetherness of senses in the perception of an apple for example, there is no given

unity nor is there any necessity which compels us to perceive them together. To infer inner necessity or prove it is impossible. This Gautama, the Buddha, and Hume, the British Philosopher, have shown once for all Mystic-sensory experience is super sensation, since it grasps in a single moment without the mediation of the diverse sense-organs the universal-particular nature of the object. Thus the reality given in the mystic supersensory and supra-rational experience is a true and integral reality requiring no further assistance. Of course a distinction has to be made between this mystic sensation and the non-sensory perception (or mental perception-*manasa-pratyaksa*). This latter is the extrasensory perception of modern psychologists. But ESP is not mystical, because it does not possess the three fundamental characteristics of transcendence, dissolution and unification as applied to sense-knowledge.

² Kant was a very great Philosopher in Germany. His discussions on our experience or knowledge are contained in his three critiques. Critique of pure Reason, Practical Reason and Judgement.

Mystic experience is of the universal reality as an existential imperative of Being of which one feels oneself to be an integral or inseparable part. One experiences even in this part of a feeling of fulfillment through the drive of an interpenetrative perfecting power of the Spirit that is One and indivisible. There happens

an enlargement of one's consciousness which almost reaches co-existentiality with the entire spread of Reality. This is also described as an experience of fusion of oneself with the Infinite. The experience is such that the feeling of one's erstwhile finiteness tends to be replaced by the feeling of one's new-born sense of infinite freedom. The passage is from ignorance to knowledge, (a passage that illumines not merely the forward but also the behind), from darkness to illumination, from mortality to immortality, from conditioned-ness to unconditioned self-freedom. Mystics know these in different levels and in different degrees of intensity, but the complete mystic experience-purnabrahmanubhava is not satisfied with any one of these but knows that all these are necessary for the integral experience of the Divine Absolute Spirit.

It is in this four fold movement that one becomes gradually compresent with God or the Absolute and is fused in an 'osmotic' inter-passage and finally inseparable union with Him. Such experience leads to the realization that all reality has a peculiar fullness in each part and in all its collective being. It is impossible for man to accept that what is true of the individual can also be true of the collective, for the collective is a new fact which cancels individual differences and evolves a new pattern. Mystic experience however transcends this collective and seizes the universal behind the collective

and the individual and states the axioms of mystic truth: that ‘what is in the microcosm is in the macrocosm’, that ‘What is true of the microcosm is true of the macrocosm, structurally, functionally and axiologically,’ and that it can be accepted that ‘if one knows oneself one knows the All’. But this self to be known is not the superficial physical, or the psychological or rational being, but that self which is intuited by mystic experience. He is God, immanent in oneself, and one discovers oneself with Him, of Him, dependent on Him, existing for Him, freely luminously immortally moving with Him in all His worlds, and beloved of Him. To know the One is to know all else.

Mystic vision leads to a peculiar perception of the human world and helps to transcend the human world. It would be wrong to say that it sublates the world. Certain changes happen which are incidental to seeing suprarationally and supersensorily, or from an integral spiritual view of the Self. At first or almost the very first thing that happens is the reversal or inversion of the percept or inference or comparison. Pratyaksa, anumana, and upamana, these instruments of knowledge undergo inversion.

a. Not the object but the subjective state it is that becomes an object.

b. The inductive is deduced from the deductive. Vyapti³ (invariable concomitance *Sahacaraniyama*) is given first and everything is shown to be a particular. Or even a particular is treated as a universal and universal as a particular.

c. The abstract appears to become concrete and the concrete tends to become abstract and afar.

d. In comparison that which is normally the *upameya* becomes the *upamana*. The archetype and the unperceivable becomes the upamana, or the upamiti-karana, which is used to explain the perceived, particular⁴. God Indra is said 'to be like Sri Rama ordinarily, but in this consciousness Sri Rama is said to be like Indra etc.

e. The mystic experience is its own authentic self certifying experience not dependent on any sruti. Sruti becomes helpful or subservient to this mystic omnipervading comprehensive reversed experience. Pravrtti or the external activity becomes an expression of the reversed withdrawing experience and activity. Reversed imagery is the quality of the mystic symbolism of self-experience; and expression in poetry and art lays bare this reversed (unnatural, unscientific, irrational) form.

³ Vyapti can be abstractly defined as a relation which is invariable concomitance between any two events. This

relation is presented first and the relata later.

⁴ The integral view can be said to be the most clear and complete perception of the entire reality from the spiritual inner point, or as Leibniz suggests from within-monadically which is the clearest perception of the mirrored universe including the Divine and all monads. Reversion is the clear perception of that which is known only immediately through reason and sensation. Which we normally call direct or immediate. Jaina doctrine called the inner knowing pratyaksa and not the indriyatha Sannikarsa Jnanam.

The mystic fusive comprehension of reality in its extra subjective or trans-subjective form is best communicated in the form of myth. But there is only one form which is suitable, if the myth personalities constantly, invariably should suggest and concretize their multiple reference in all the planes of experience and help recognition of their different forms (or masks so to speak). The wrong myth is 'closed' as Bergson put it, and expresses only the unconscious racial or biological, sexual or power-perpetuative drives within, surging up and creating more heat than light, more confusion than clarity, more bondage and ill-health than freedom. Myth of the higher order, as Plato knew, and invented is unhomeric, and is not the creation of lower forms in conflict with higher or equally demonic forces. But Plato missed the sheer unity of the Supreme. Mystic experience is, as already pointed

out, more than the cognitive affective unity of total being apprehended in an immediate integral vision. It is supra-affective since it reveals that one's own being is suffused with an overpowering delight in an orgasm of unity. Each pore of one's being suffused with the higher power and being becomes a prism so to speak that synthesizes or analyses the elements of super cognition and fusion. In this multiple integration is seen the dynamic energy of the myth-making function, where the myth becomes a real expression, and the only means of expression.⁵

The cognitive-affectivity of the Mystic consciousness is to be known as a dynamic creative continuity or infinite prolongation of the recovered unity with the whole. It is this intrinsic power of self-continuity without interruption or diminution through the Absolute Being in its infinite nature that gives the quality of immortality and peace. Mystic silence is the first sign of mystic experience of inward strength, and of solid knowledge. Further it is an experience of infinite bathing in the waters of light which flow into oneself from overhead enveloping all round, illuminating, cleansing, and delighting, opening out the interiors to the overhead consciousness leaving no darkness or suffering, no crookedness any where. One who has had this experience is a fearless forerunner, a quiet concentrated pillar of light-power, a messenger from above to lead, to teach, to transform and illumine the dark abyss within

and show its possibility. Such a mystic is ‘an Open’ one. Such a mystic has real existence, not indeed is he a vegetative animal or mental being closed up in customs which have lost their significance or hugging differences which have lost their boundaries. Even the ancient traditions and ways are restored to their eternal meaning. Thus is he restored to universal eternal history. Smṛti in this great and universal sense, the smṛti of one’s own eternal or long and beginning less past, and smṛti of one’s own fundamental nature are granted by mystic experience becoming slowly the only experience displaying every other.

⁵ Integral Mysticism (of Sri Aurobindo) aims at the experience of the Divine in all and all in the Divine. It is the *Simultaneous* full experience of the Eternal oneness of the eternal Manyness, which transcends all the states of mind, life and matter yet maintains them. It reveals this occult secret of oneness-manyness in each and every plane of *Existence-consciousness-Delight* and thus transfigures the so called levels of ignorance.

The soul in its ineffable rapturous union with God realizes its eternal oneness with Him. But more than this oneness there is the sense of ‘return’ and therefore reunion and rejoicing which does not forebode any further ‘separation’. Metaphysical it is difficult for the logical mind to grasp the meaning of the departure or fall or the meaning and significance of ‘return’ while yet

clinging to the experience of ‘eternal belonging’ (*aprathaksiddha sambandha*) to the Divine or in Sri Aurobindo’s terminology ‘eternal oneness in eternal manyness’ having the ascent and to the descent away from each other or fronting the one or the other poise of the Eternal. The mystics have always felt that this separation from God is due to a beginningless ignorance, karma or sin or fall or Ignorance which is due to the power of the Divine (*mama maya duratyaya*). Whether this is a delusive separation or otherwise there it is as a confronting fact. This is an original and primordial mystery of creation and to get over this mystery or maya it is necessary to have the grace of God. It is then that the Divine knowledge bodies forth into the individual and makes him realize his eternal oneness or unity with the Divine and grants the experience real existence (being). It is the culmination of integral divinely bestowed knowledge in vision and feeling (beauty)⁶.

⁶ A brief note may be added here to show the difference which mark out the three kinds of mysticism: advaitic, dvaitic and visistadvaitic.

Advaita mysticism is the fusion and dissolution of the many in the One, a complete nisrapancikarana of the world so that all that is just being or existence. This can be called Existentialistic non-relativistic Experience of the One, Identity.

Dvaita mysticism is the functional identification through dependence with the Godhead, which prognosticates a state of non-function through dependence with the Godhead, which prognosticates a state of non-function and as such of separational existence. But since the functional dependence is all through available it is the realization of functional identity.

Visistadvaitic mysticism is organistic unity, where the functional identity is as permanent as the existential for the individual and nature is the body to the self, who is the divine, in knowledge, works and delight. Thus it synthesizes the advaitic identity with functional identity, a synthesis that abolishes the need for nisrapancikarana or abolishes the world and the embodied state as such.

Aurobindonian Mysticism seeks the installation of the divine Mind in the embodied terrestrial existence and thus transforms the human and all and realizes the Divine organic transcendence which ensures the immanence of the eternal oneness in the eternal manyness.