What is consciousness? Has been debated since the time immemorial, all over the world. No conclusive answer has been found so far. As described in the following chapters, consciousness is inexpressible. Scriptures, ṛṣi-s (seers) and Mystics have tried to express consciousness in the way they have experienced depending upon their religious and cultural background.

State of consciousness is the expression of consciousness in individual species. Just as what is energy, say electrical energy is very difficult to understand; but what one perceives is various effects electrical energy produces by giving light or heat or by running machines etc. Similarly what one perceives is the expression of consciousness, which differs in different mediums viz body, senses, mind, intellect etc. Other various viewpoints regarding consciousness have been discussed later in chapter two.

The term ‘Altered States of Consciousness’ is used in this thesis in the sense of higher states of consciousness, attained through spiritual practices only. Wakeful state, dream state and deep sleep are regarded as common states of consciousness. The altered states are beyond these normal states. They are beyond the realm of senses.
Research Problem -

1) To verify if altered states of consciousness exist.
2) If so, whether they can be experienced by one and all?
3) What are the possible means to achieve these states?
4) What are the characteristics of these states?
5) Do those who experience altered states of consciousness undergo a change in their lifestyle?

Research Methodology -

The type of this thesis is conceptual research based on literature survey method. The research Methodology of this research is based on –

a) Literature survey of various Indian and Western texts/scriptures.

b) Research evidence based on Research already done in India and abroad by various institutes.

c) In this work, the focus is on finding out the effects of these states on the life style of the practitioner.

d) A comparative study of the means of attainment of the altered states, their characteristics and effects as per different traditions has been carried out.

e) In this work, we have tried to study altered states of consciousness acquired through spiritual practices only and not the states attained through any other means such as drugs, accidents etc.
f) Here by consciousness we mean the reflection of the cosmic consciousness in Individual and not the universal truth/cosmic consciousness. We will be studying the expression or states of consciousness in individual species.

g) The footnotes are numbered chapterwise.

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