CHAPTER III

INDIAN MYSTIC TRADITION AND GURU NANAK.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND.

India has been the cradle and birth-place of many great religious of the world. The founders of these religions were invariably men of faith and of mystic vision. Sri Aurbindo says:

Mystics ... had an enormous influence on ... early civilizations; there was indeed almost everywhere an age of the Mystères in which men of a deeper knowledge and self knowledge established their practices, significant rites, symbols, secret lore within or on the border of the more primitive exterior religions. 1

The mystic tradition in India has, therefore, always been co-existent with the origin and development of religious processes and operations. Mysticism and religion both seem to have, as their basis, the same spiritual impulse inherent in all human beings. "Mysticism", remarks E.Caird, "is religion in its most concentrated and exclusive form." 2

What religion seeks to achieve i.e. the establishment of a direct bond and union between man and God, 3 is possible only in a developed and heightened mystical state. It is not possible by merely observing the external forms and rituals, rules and ceremonies, so prevalent in all religions.

2. Quoted in Inge, Mysticism in Religion, p.25.
3. "The oldest and most common definition of religion is that religion is the link between man and God." Leo Tolstey, Essays and Letters, p.293.
Mysticism, as sometimes misunderstood, is no idle pursuit or a spiritual lethargy and stasis. It is actually the main motive force in religion. It has a great conative and operational value. Aldous Huxley so pertinently observes:

"The philosophy of mysticism is a kind of transcendental operationalism. Perform certain operations, it teaches, and certain states of the mind-body may result. These states are experienced as being intrinsically valuable, and their fruits improved character, increased sensitivity and insight are often ethically desirable."4

The Indian religious apotheosis, it can be safely remarked, has not only been representative of the Indian continent but the whole Eastern hemisphere. As Radhakrishnan says, "In the matter of religion, India typifies the East. Geographically it is between the Semitic West and the Mongolian East."5

Max Muller, the celebrated orientalist taking cognizance of the rich Indian tradition of religion and mysticism, says:

"If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of the choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life and has found solutions of some of them which will deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant— I should point to India." 6

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5. East and West in Religion, p.46.
This great mystic tradition of India comprises not only the indigenous Vedic religion, now called Hinduism, but also Buddhism, Jainism, Yogaism and after the advent of Muslim rule, Islam and Sikhism.

All these great religions, as long as they were enlivened and energized by the corresponding mystical inspiration and impulse, proved efficacious social institutions, but the moment their spiritual vitality was bogged down in the morass of mere ritualism, dogma and cant, they lost all social and human value and were, in turn, replaced by a more dynamic and progressive religious movement.

So is the fate of all religions, considered in their historical perspective. Divested of mystical impulse, they die and infused with spiritual elan, they live, Tolstoy very sagaciously observes:

"In all human societies, at certain periods of their existence, a time has come when religion has first swerved from its original purpose, then diverging more and more, it has lost sight of that purpose and has finally petrified into fixed forms, so that its influence on men's lives has become ever less and less." 8

This is exactly the moment that warrants the appearance of a mystic saviour. Guru Nanak, in his own turn and time, came upon the Indian scene at the right moment, when the current religions, chief among which were Hinduism (which

9. Cf. Bhagavadgita's well-known and oft-quoted lines: "Whenever righteousness languishes and unrighteousness is on the ascendant, I create myself. I am born age after age, for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil doers and the establishment of the law." Bhagavadgita, iv. quoted in I.P.H. vol.1
represented a whole body of many successive religious
movements since the time of the Vedic *Rishis* and Islam (the
one Aryan religion and the other Semitic) had got totally
petrified into mere form and ritual and, thus, the darkness
of ignorance and superstition, selfishness and evil, prevailed
everywhere. Guru Nanak himself sharply reacted to this
utterly deplorable state of affairs and gave a lucid, though
laconic, expression of the same in his poetry: 10

"This age is like a drawn sword, the kings are butchers.
Goodness has taken wings and flown.
In the dark night of falsehood
I espy not the moon of Truth anywhere;
I grope after truth and am bewildered,
I see no path in the darkness.

Bhai Gurdas, the first authentic chronicler and
exponent (in poetic form) of Guru Nanak's life and thought,
also strongly emphasized the inevitable correspondence between
the hopeless religious conditions of the time and the need and
exigency of a prophetic revelation, in order to dispel darkness
from the world scene by the proliferation of the divine
principle of light in the form of the Guru. 11 He says:

"When Nanak, the true Guru, appeared in this world,
all the mist vanished and the world was filled
with light.

10. SSWS, p.82.

11. The word Guru etymologically means 'the one who dispels
darkness' Cf. V.S.Apte, Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary,
p.665 and MK 314. Cf.also Mohan Singh Oberoi, Sikh Mysticism
p.47. "Guru is not a person but the certainty of one's being
led from darkness unto light ... "
With the rising of the sun, the stars disappeared and darkness was no more. 12

Again:

"The world was so much filled with evil, that the (mythical) Ox, beset with anxiety, wept day and night.

... ... ...

There was none to arrest this catastrophe except a Sadh (i.e. Perfect Man) and Sadh there was none in the World." 13

When religion as an institution fails to deliver the goods, it is only the personal religion of a mystic that can come to its rescue. Toynbee rightly observes that mysticism is "personal religion raised to the highest power."14

Verily, the mystic, by his inner spiritual and esoteric achievement, exemplifies the true religious impulse in his own life and then disseminates it to the world abroad. So did Guru Nanak. For many long years of his early life, he kept his own (inner) council and deeply pondered over the miseries of the suffering world (just as many centuries before him Lord Buddha had, in moments of deepest compassion, brooded over such basic problems) and also about his own providential role towards amelioration of all this unbearable and rank misery.

Guru Nanak undoubtedly inherited and imbibed the strong Indian mystic tradition -- a tradition which had been built up, nourished and sustained by a succession of such exalted mystics as the Vedic Rishis (who composed the Upanishads), Lord Krishna, Lord Buddha, Muhammed, Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, 

12 Var, 1.27.
13 Ibid., 1.22.
14 Quoted in Sisirkumar Ghose, op.cit.p.1. Cf. also Emerson, Essays, p.244. "The religions of the world are the ejaculations of a few imaginative men."
Gorakhnath, Namdev, Farid, Kabir and others.

But he was no inheritor in the usual eclectic or syncretic sense. He was a great mystic in his own right. He accepted no human Guru as his spiritual preceptor and claimed to have received all inspiration and spiritual insight directly from the Divine Being.

Though essentially a man of peace, Guru Nanak possessed and evinced in his mystic person tremendous revolutionary fire and reformative zeal. All mystics are basically rebels and recalcitrants. They are a truly non-conformist lot. When they cannot reform, they seek to change. When they find the foundations of a religious edifice completely rotten and unserviceable, they opt for a replacement and the promulgation of a new Dispensation. This is what Guru Nanak did in his own inimitable way. There is no exact parallel to what he achieved.


16. Sabad or Revealed Word, according to Guru Nanak himself, is his Guru. Siddh Gosht, 43, AG, 942. Cf. also Guru Gobind Singh, Chaupai, 9: "The only One who is eternally-incarnated, is my Guru."

17. Cf. Radhakrishnan, op.cit., p. 104 ff.: "The believers in God possess the faith that rebels." Again: "If a new and better order is to arise, the old order must be broken." "What we call anarchy, revolt, revolution, are the means by which progress is achieved." Cf. also Hegel: "Stepping over corpses is the way in which the objective spirit walks in order to reach fulfilment." Quoted in Radhakrishnan, Loc.Cit.
Guru Nanak, as a matter of fact, had much to reject and denounce and little to accept and assimilate from the time-old religions extant in his time viz. the various forms of Hinduism, Vedanta, Yoga, Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Jainism, Tantrism, etc. and also Islam, with its popular form called Sufism. His very first doctrinal declaration was: "There is no Hindu and no Mussalman", which was a polite way of saying: "There is no Hindu Religion and no Islamic religion." He had, thus, to create a new faith, a new Dispensation, a new religion. Time was quite ripe for such a mystical tour-de-force.

What was it, then, one may ask, that Guru Nanak inherited from the Indian mystic tradition? Nothing, if we believe and consider that he had direct communion with the Supreme Being and that Truth was intuitively revealed to him as a divine favour and grace which descends upon only a few 'chosen ones'. Actually speaking, the term 'mystic tradition' is a misnomer. Mysticism has no tradition, in the ordinary sense of the word. It has no genealogy, says K.A. Nizami (Islam, art. 'Mysticism', p. 50). There is no historical continuity in the sphere of mystic thought. It is always new and fresh whenever and wherever it appears. It is always sporadic and phenomenal. Hence it is that we can only correlate Guru Nanak's mysticism with the past similar realizations in a general and illustrative manner. He had achieved his mystic moment after ages and ages of darkness and evil had contaminated and ravaged the annals of time.

Like all mystics, his appearance on the Indian scene was a challenge and a consternating shock (as that of
lightning) to the slowly-gathered fuel-like clouds of religious and temporal powers of the time. Like all mystics, he was an 'iconoclast, an image-breaker, a reverser of tradition, a restorer of the primal mystic truth. Mystic truth and religious tradition (whether it be religious, or social or cultural or doctrinal) are a contradiction in terms; they are poles apart. Tradition often corrupts and engenders evil, while Truth always purges and purifies.

Radhakrishnan, who is no advocate of mysticism, affirms this fundamental reality, in his lucid words:

"The great religious teachers of the world preach something different from the tradition they inherit. The seers of the Upanisads, Gautama, the Buddha, Zoroaster, Socrates, Jesus, Muhammad, Nanak and Kabir had to undergo in their lives an inevitable break-away from the traditional views. Even as the seers of the Upanisads and the Buddha protested against Vedic ceremonialism, even as Jesus denounced Rabbinical orthodoxy, we have to protect the enduring substance of religion from the forms and institutions which suffer from the weaknesses of man and the corruptions of times." 19

So did Guru Nanak, in his own age, try to protest and 'protect' the 'enduring substance of religion' which is another phrase for the perennial philosophy, called mysticism. He was not an isolated figure in his Herculean effort towards.

18. For this Carlylian metaphor, see infra Chap.iv.
20. The term used by Aldous Huxley as the title for his famous book conveying the meaning of an abiding truth which can only be mystical.
a wholesale religious-cum-social reform, but was a powerful compatriot and compeer of a larger reform movement called the medieval Bhakti Movement.

We may here suggest one remote example of the Reform-ation Movement of the 15th century Europe to match the Bhakti Movement in India of the same historical period, of which Guru Nanak’s religious revival was most probably the culminating point.

Macauliffe has brought out this important analogy in the following memorable words:

"During the very period that Luther and Calvin in Europe were warning men of the errors that had crept into Christianity, several Indian saints were denouncing priestcraft, hypocrisy, and idolatry, and with very considerable success. Several of those great men who led the crusade against superstition, founded sects which still survive. But the most numerous and powerful of all is the great Sikh sect founded by Guru Nanak..."

It may easily be perceived and conceded that there was certainly some powerful mystical impulse or enthusiasm at the back of the great Reformation Movements in Europe and India, without which there would have been no revival or re-awakening of the dead and petrified souls which had equally dead and petrified religions to uphold them.

But the crucial question to be probed is the discovery of any original mystic tradition or impulse in India or the East, which gave birth to and sustained so many

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religions and theologies during the past three or four thousand years and which had the intrinsic worth or power to stand up against the onslaught of a powerful, dynamic and proselyting foreign religion like Islam and which ultimately in the form of the broader Bhakti Movement and the particular Sikh Movement, developed and fructified into a great nationalistic crusade against all temporal and religious bigotry and tyranny and thus in a matter of two hundred years or so turned the tables on the most aggressive onroads and chauvinistic tyrannies known to the world. We have also to discover and see how Guru Nanak, the great saviour-mystic of the nation came to perform and accomplish what centuries of religious sophistry could not.

Let us now examine Guru Nanak’s mystical reaction and response to the ancient and current faiths of his time viz. Hindu, Vedanta, Yoga, Jainism, Bhakti and Islamic Sufism. We may consider, first of all, the Hindu mystic tradition, as it was.

**HINDU MYSTIC TRADITION**

When we speak of India, and its mystic tradition which is primarily Hindu, in origin and character, we imply

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22. Cf. Fauja Singh’s remarks on Sikhism vis-a-vis Bhakti Movement: "Sikhism is one of the most important, if not the only surviving link of the several Bhakti movements that made their appearance in various parts of India during the Medieval period." *Sikhism*, ed. Fauja Singh and others, art. ‘Development of Sikhism under the Gurus’, p.1.
the East and the Eastern Mysticism. The Aryan and the Semitic religions all comprise the Eastern matrix, so fruitful for the incidence of religious growth. "Among living religions", says Radhakrishnan, "there is none which has a Western origin. They have all been cradled in India, Iran of Palestine. Some of them spread to the West." The West, therefore, merely borrowed or inherited the infecting religious tradition from the East, and then lent its peculiar qualities of activism and pragmatism to the quietist and peace-loving tendencies of the typical Eastern religions i.e. Hinduism and Buddhism. Thus, we can say that whereas Christianity and Islam, under the Western influence became typically Western religions, Hinduism and Buddhism remained typically Eastern.

The Eastern mind has been specially prone to mystic inspiration; in terms of psychology, it has been, and still is, mostly speaking, introvertive, full of introspection and inwardness, while the Western mind, conversely, is primarily extrovertive. In the words of the renowned Indian philosopher, quoted above: "The Western mind is rationalistic and ethical, positivist and practical, while the Eastern mind is more inclined to inward life and intuitive thinking." This

24. *loc. cit.*
illuminating observation certainly corroborates the common view that Eastern countries and nations are inheritors of a rich mystic tradition from time immemorial.

Stanley Cook also says in affirmation of this truth: "The Greeks with all their acuteness and skill had little real religious instinct. In this respect the more practical West and the more mystical East have always diverged." In India, the common behaviour of an average man of religion has always been to prefer 'other-worldliness' to 'this-worldliness'. The life of spirit has always attracted him, to the detriment even of a balanced healthy life and a socially responsible programme of corporate life. This too much preoccupation with the 'inwardness' of life often gave a slant to the Hindu mind to become too individualistic and insular in character. Guru Nanak is his teachings tried to re-establish this much-wanted ethical balance in the Indian polity of his times.

This emphasis on matters of spirit, as against matters of the world, was not just accidental or extraneous to the Hindu mind. It was something ingrained and deep-seated, in their ethnic and climatic conditions. It was a part of their culture and milieu. The real basis of this preponderating religious tendency was probably their unshakable belief and unalterable faith in the Unknown but inwardly-perceived Divine Reality, called Brahman. Faith became their very life and want

of faith, the negation of life. In the words of Radhakrishnan: "Human societies like human beings live by faith and die when faith disappears." 28

Faith brought into play the mystical quality and the mystic insight in the early Hindu sages whose religion was essentially spiritual and emotional. There was no hampering dogma in their religious liturgy. Dogma comes where spirit is missing. It is only a substitute for the inner spirituality. When men are morally degraded and spiritually impoverished (in fact, when they lose the mystic anchor) they catch at some dogma or some cult or sham. In the words of Haveli: "In India, religion is hardly a dogma, but a working hypothesis of human conduct, adapted to different stages of spiritual development and different conditions of life." 29

The Indian mind has always been in search of God and in search of the meaning of life. 30 They always valued direct experience of Reality above every thing else and were never satisfied with mere epistemology or knowledge. The path for them was as important as the spiritual goal. Every vatary of God, (i.e. every Sadhu) in India thus became a potential mystic. The Upanishadic philosophy, in its essence, the message of Bhagavadgita in its true perspective and the Vedantic speculations, especially the Yogic esotericism, are

nothing if not mystical in quality and nature. The Hindu mind was basically synthetic, though it often, by lapse and default, became vague and amorphous.

"The dominant character of the Indian Mind," says Radhakrishnan, "which has coloured all its culture and moulded all its thoughts is the spiritual tendency ... It is mysticism, not in the sense of involving the exercise of any mysterious power, but only as insisting on a discipline of human nature, leading to a realization of the spiritual." 31

The very word for philosophy in Hindu religion is "darsana" which has a mystic connotation. It is from the root 'dars' which means 'to see'. Seeing implies intuitional experience; it is not just knowing or cognition. It appropriately means "a spiritual perception". 32

Moreover, the Indian mind has always been tradition-loving and respecter of the past. This fact has lent continuity to the Indian religions tradition. Mystic initiation has been a common spiritual practice which was not only a traditional element involving a Guru and a Shishya ( or a Sikh ) but was also a secret, mysterious process. From mouth to mouth, from person to person, from soul to soul, the mystic tradition of religion in India, has survived from countless centuries right unto the modern times. 33

31. IPH, Vol.i, 41.
32. Ibid., p.44.
The Vedic period (1500 B.C. to 600 B.C.) and the Epic period (600 B.C. to A.D. 200) of Indian History are the most significant periods for the proliferation of Indian religions tradition in its true mystical aspect. These comprise the upanishuds, Buddhism, Jainism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism and the Bhagavadgita. For Advaita Vedanta and for Bhakti mysticism, we have to turn to the later premedieval and medieval times.

Sri Aurobindo, the great Indian mystic, holds the view that the Vedas are replete with suggestions of secret doctrines and mystic philosophies. He looks upon the gods of the hymns as symbols of the psychological functions. Surya signifies intelligence, Agni will, and Soma feeling. The Veda to him is a mystery religion corresponding to the Orphic and the Eleusinian creeds of ancient Greece. 34 In the words of Aurobindo himself: "One of the leading principles of the mystics was the sacredness and secrecy of self-knowledge of the Gods." 35 Though the philosopher Radhakrishnan does not agree with the mystic Aurobindo in the view discussed above, yet there is no denying the fact that there was enough mystical substance in the Vedic hymns, in the form of spontaneous poetic effusions, which was akin to the early mysteries of Greek

34. IFH, Vol.1, 69 Cr.IX, 830.
Orphism\textsuperscript{36} of the pre-Socratic times. These early Vedic mystics were the counterparts of the Greek Orphic mystics, Heraclitus and Ephesus.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Vedanta Mysticism}

Vedanta, or to be more exact, \textit{Advaita Vedanta}, constitutes the teaching of the Upanishads, which, having been written to form the concluding portion of the Vedas, are named Vedanta i.e. that which comes in the end of the Vedas. By implication and suggestion, it also means "the essence of the Vedic teaching."

Upanishads represent the essential basis of all Hindu mysticism. "$\text{There is no important form of Hindu thought, heterodox Buddhism included, which is not rooted in the Upanishads.}\"$\textsuperscript{39} Schopenhauer, who was born exactly one thousand years after Shankara (who was born in 788 A.D.\textsuperscript{40} and is easily regarded as the greatest exponent of the Vedanta Philosophy)

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\textsuperscript{36}For study of Orphism see W.R. Inge, \textit{Mysticism in Religion}, Chap., 'Greek Mysticism', p.91. Even it has been claimed by some scholars that "Orphism came from Persia and more probably from India." Hence the view held by Aurobindo seems to be tenable.
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\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Ibid.}, p.92.
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\textsuperscript{38}\textit{IPH}. Vol.1, 138 Cf. also Max Muller, \textit{Collected Works (The Vedanta Philosophy)}, p.15 and \textit{MK}, 830.
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Max Muller, in this connection, remarks: "If philosophy is meant to be a preparation for a happy death, or Euthanasia, I know of no better preparation for it than the Vedanta Philosophy."

The Upanishads, unsystematic as they are, and even in the words of Max Muller, seem to be "subversive of all religion" and not only reject the Vedas as useless but call them mischievous, are in themselves "Sudden intuitions or inspirations", which is proof of their mystical quality.

Radhakrishnan says: "The aim of the Upanishads is not so much to reach philosophical truth as to bring peace and freedom to the anxious human spirit."

Their mystical depth is certainly one of the profoundest in the history of all religion. "On the tree of Indian Wisdom there is no fairer flower than the Upanishads and no finer fruit than the Vedanta Philosophy."

41. Max Muller, *collected works* (The Vedanta Philosophy) p.8. Cf. also the enlightening remarks of Sir William Jones and Victor Cousins, *Ibid.*, pp.9 f. The word "Upanishad" means, etymologically, 'sitting near a person' or the French seance or session, *Ibid.*, p.23. Cf. also Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism* p.28: Upanishad means (according to Shankar) "that which destroys all ignorance and leads us to Brahman". Again: "It has also been interpreted to mean a secret or mystical doctrine or a secret instruction and confidential sitting." (Loc-cit).

42. *Collected Works*, (The Vedanta Philosophy) p.22.
Upanishads, with their emphasis on spirituality and inwardness, are in the nature of a reaction against the vedic formalism and ritualism. This tendency was certainly mystical. The Vedas provide largely an objective study, while the Upanishads tend to engage an inward and subjective attention. "The self-existent pierced the opening of the senses so that they turn outwards; therefore, man looks outward, not inward into himself; some wise man, however, with his eyes closed and wishing for immortality, saw the self behind."  

The Upanishadic thought centres round the basic mystic problem of the search for 'real' out of the phenomena of the 'unreal' and thus to discover the "central reality which is infinite existence (sat), absolute truth (cit) and pure delight (ananda)." The favourite Upanishadic prayer is: "Lead me from the unreal to the real, lead me from darkness to light, lead me from death to immortality."  

From the highest Vedic conception of the ultimate reality, as Ekam Sat, the Upanishadic thought at once rises to the Vedantic concept of the one absolute Brahman in the form of tat tvam asi ("That art thou") and aham brahm asmi ("I am Brahman").

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47. IPH, Vol.1, 150.  
49. "Brahman seems to have meant originally what bursts forth or breaks forth whether in the shape of thought and word or in the shape of creative power or physical force." Max Muller, Op.Cit., p.22, Cf. also IPH, Vol.1, 173.  
51. BAU. i. 4. 10. Loc. Cit.
On the one hand, we find in the Upanishads the postulate of the oneness of Brahman or Paramatman with the Jivaatman i.e. "Brahman is the Atman and the Atman is the Brahman", and on the other, the identification of the Brahman-without-word and the Word-Brahman (the significant utterable 'word' being OM or OM, as also the identity of the Brahman-without-attributes (i.e. Absolute) and Brahman-with-attributes (called the Nirgun and the Sagun Brahman). The latter has been called Ishvara, the Logos of the Greek and Christian mysticism.

From Vedic polytheism (i.e. worshipping many gods) and Henotheism (i.e. the consent of regarding one of the 'vedic gods' as a supreme one), the Upanishadic thought gradually evolved and apotheosized to the elevated stage of Monotheism, which tended to become more and more monistic in the speculative philosophy of Shankaracharya. Not absolute Monism, but the indefinable Monotheism (in which the Absolute is neither the finite nor the infinite, neither manifested nor unmanifested) is the Upanishadic ideal. Monotheism includes the higher and the lower Brahman or the 'esoteric' and the 'exoteric' Brahman. While the esoteric Brahman is formless (The Nirankar of Guru Nanak) or the attributeless God, the exoteric Brahman is concrete, or with attributes (called gunas or upadhis). Upadhis are the limiting conditions and as such limit the Absolute one in the bounds of time and space, i.e. in the limits of the world,

54. *Janji, 15*, "Thou art the eternally-abiding Formless one." (Tu sada salamat Nirankar).
the body, the deeds (Karma) and the consequent illusory state of avidya in which, under the effect of Unadhis, we see the form but not the underlying esoteric Brahman.

In avidya lies the soul's transmigrations or the cycle of birth and death. Deussen says that it is vidya (Knowledge) that cancels the effect of avidya:55

"The supreme aim of human beings is emancipation, that is the cessation of the soul's transmigrations:56 but this emancipation of the soul from its transmigration is brought about by the recognition of the individual self (Atman) as identical with the highest self (Param-Atman), namely Brahman. The entire content of vidya, is consequently, knowledge of the Atman or Brahman, for the two concepts are inter-changeable."

While the higher knowledge (para-vidya) leads to the attainment of the higher Brahman, the lower knowledge (anara-vidya) leads to the attainment of the lower Brahman.58 The higher knowledge (called samvar-darshna) is the 'right cognition' or the mystical intuition, without which no one can know or realize the Par-Brahman (i.e. the absolute Being). The lower Brahman is regarded as the 'world-soul', and also named the personal God. The more common name is Ishvara. It resides in the individual soul of each human being as a 'psychical' principle.59

The great mystical truth underlying all Vedanta philosophy is the knowing and seeing of the self or atman by

56.i.e. Moksha or Muktii, in religious terminology.
57.i.e. Samsara (Cosmos) or Jagat. See MK, 177.
58.Deussen, op.cit., p.5.
59.Ibid., p.12.
the atman itself. It is an intuitive process, for as Shankara says, "never canst thou see the seer of seeing", which means that the soul is not knowable or seeable by the senses; it has no objective perception and is only inwardly realized or perceived. For this inner perception, no outer condition or discipline can be effective. Hence it is a matter of divine grace. Just as the mystical realization of truth is unknowable in the objective sense, it is also ineffable in the linguistic sense. What cannot be known, cannot be stated. Radhakrishnan says:

"The mystic insight is inarticulate. As to a man born blind we cannot explain the beauty of a rainbow or the glory of a sunset, even so to the non-mystic the vision of the mystic cannot be described. 'God put it into my head, and I cannot put it into yours', is the last word of the mystic experience." 62

The Upanishadic religion is essentially esoteric and mystical. It inculcates the three stages of religious consciousness, which are, actually speaking, mystical states viz. Sravana (listening), Mannana (reflection) and nidhidhasana (contemplative meditation).

The highest mystical state is that of rapture and ecstasy, a condition of ananda or bliss. "Ananda or delight is the highest fruition, where the knower, the known and the knowledge become one." "As the flowing rivers disappear in

60. Ibid., p.40.
63. Ibid., p.230.
64. Ibid., p.165.
The most mystical concept revealed in the Upanishads is perhaps the concept of 'the fourth state' called the turva. It is the highest mystical state in which the divine principle is empirically perceived. Sometimes it is confused with the third state of dreamless sleep, which is akin to it but is still different. The Mandukya Upanishad points out that the highest is not this dreamless sleep, but another, a fourth state of the soul, a pure intuitional consciousness, where there is no knowledge of objects, external or internal. This state brings out the positive aspect as distinct from the negative aspect of the third state. This Turva is the Atman itself. In fact, the problem of the self or Atman is one of the most important discussed in the Upanishads.

It is on this aspect of Vedanta that Shankar laid the greatest emphasis. The self-seeing Atman, it may be said, is decidedly a mystical concept.

The use of metaphorical language in illustration of recondite thought in the Upanishads is also a mystical process, for the esoteric meanings cannot be expressed directly and thus imperatively need figurative language. Hence the metaphors: 'the rope appearing to be a snake', 'the spider

65. Mandukya, iii. 2. 8., IPh., Vol.1, 236.


and the web' and 'the waves and the ocean' are mystical jargon.

The Concept of Maya

The concept of Maya, as it occurs in the Upanishads has deeply mystical ramifications. It is another name for avidya which has been discussed earlier. It involves the highly subtle, almost inexplicable, discussion of the relative position of the Transcendent and the Immanent Brahman. It also involves the question of the unknown cause of creation, of the reality and the unreality of the cosmic existence and of whether the world exists or not, whether it is a mere appearance or is something real. These are very crucial questions.

The word māya actually occurs in the early Mantras and denotes a kind of magic. It has been mentioned as "cosmic illusion" in the Svetasvatara Upanishad: "Know then that prakṛti is māya and that the great God is the Lord of māya. The whole universe is filled with objects that are parts of his being." This doctrine was, however, developed in the Vedanta philosophy, in a systematic form, by later thinkers.

In general, the concept of māya basically implies that the world of sense-and-intellect is the sphere of relativity which is neither unreal, illusory or void, nor

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ultimately real in self-existence, but is a form of manifestation of the absolute spirit which is in essence indeterminable. It is the key to the reconciliation of the timeless perfection of pure Being with the perceptual becoming of the phenomenal world.  

Upnishads declare that the world is *maya*; all that is perceived through our senses or in other words, "any thing beside the supreme self, is illusory ... the world is created by maya, the inscrutable power of the Lord, and is therefore, unreal" and again "duality is an illusion and Non-duality is Ultimate Reality."  

The multiplicity perceptible in the universe, independent of *Atman*, is *maya*. It is coming down of Brahman from the Absolute to the relative plane. "Maya", says Radhakrishnan, "is the name of the negative principle which lets loose the universal becoming, thereby creating endless agitation and perpetual disquiet."  

There are many ways to express the concept of the *maya*, viz. the change from Being to becoming; the subject becoming the object; the infinite becoming finite; the one becoming many; the motionless becoming moved (the "motionless mover" of Aristotle); the non-dual (advaita) becoming dual (dvaita) and so on. The purely monistic concept of Godhead

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74. *IPII*, vol. 1, 35.  
expounded by Shankara, was later developed by Ramanuja into the doctrine of Vishishtadvaita, in this very context of the mystic interpretation of the cosmic illusion called maya.

The upanishadic concept of maya, that the world is only maya, was very much akin to the Greek mystical thought propounded by Parmenides and Plato "who asserted the empirical reality to be a mere show, or shadow of reality." 76

The Vedic Rishis conceived that "the great Omnir-present Atman" which is "greater than heaven, space and earth" is, at the same time, present - "small as a corn of rice" - in man's own self. 77

The Upanishads repeatedly declare that the duality perceived in the universe, independent of Atman, is maya. The Self or Atman contains in itself, as pure consciousness, the essence and the source of all that exists, nothing is beyond or beside it - only that which appears to be real to the senses and not in the Atman, is the unreal maya. It is in the nature of a veil or curtain which conceals Reality in the eyes of the duality-perceiving seeker. Guru Nanak called this impediment as the "wall of falsehood", which must be removed in order that seeker should become "truthful" (Sachiara). 78

Maya, in fact, is nothing extraneous to the 'indwelling' Reality. It is only a 'superimposition', a 'seeming', an appearance as a mirage, which seems but is

77. Words within commas refer to the Upanishads, Ibid., 52.
78. Japji, 1.
not. It is the external aspect of the esoteric Brahman but in its essence as real as the Brahman Himself, for it is the primal cause of the Universe, as Brahman is beyond the causal law. It is an essential contingent fact or a mystical conjunct. No one can know Brahman unless he rends the veil of maya, the more one realizes the futility or unreality of maya, the nearer he would be to Brahman.

The maya, being a necessary hurdle, one has to cross it or to transcend it. For a seeker, this mystical transfiguration or metamorphosis is inevitable so that, in mystical language, he may become a butterfly which emerges winged from the prison of the chrysalis.

How paradoxical, this concept of the maya is, one can judge from the mystical fact viz. that which appears is unreal and that which is hidden behind the appearance, is real - and yet both the apparent and the real are one and the same. According to Guru Nanak the conception of maya is a great stratagem (jucat) devised by the Inscrutable Brahman. He says:

"The One (divine) Mother (called Maya) got conceived by stratagem and manifestly gave birth to three children."

The three children born of Maya are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, respectively the creative, sustaining and the

79. Max Muller Collected Works: Vedanta Philosophy, p. 5.
80. Japji, 30, (trans. Devan Singh, Guru Nanak's Message in Japji, p. 145.) See also Tilang, AG, 721. "This body has been processed with maya and tinted with averice. My Lord does not like the robe (of this body), how can this bride (wearing such robe) meet Him in union."
destroying principles or powers of the Divine Being. The \textit{maya} or \textit{avidya} (or what Max Muller calls 'Nescience'),\textsuperscript{21} forms the 'object' to the divine 'subject' and both are contradictory to each other (though inwardly, and mystically speaking, they are 'complementary' or rather, identical) in the sense that the subject and the object cannot be one and hence the Vedantic postulate would be, for all human and empirical purposes, as stated in the words of Max Muller: "If the world is real, the Self is not, if the Self is real, the world is not."

The illusory nature of \textit{maya} and its relative unreality does not, however, make its concept untenable or a mere intellectual speculation, as it is sometimes misunderstood in view of the extreme monism propounded by Shankara. As Ramanuja later clarified and revised the whole thesis by postulating a new doctrine of "qualified non-dualism" (\textit{vishishhtadwaita}) superseding the "pure non-dualism" of Shankara, the \textit{maya} is not mere illusion, but on the relative plane it is tangible and real, because it represents the Brahman who has assumed attributes (the three \textit{rupas}, \textit{sattva}, \textit{rajas} and \textit{tamas}) while on the absolute plane it is unreal and non-existent. In fact, admitting the empirical reality of the universe, caused by \textit{maya}, "the Vedic seers developed an elaborate system of theology, cosmology, ethics, spiritual

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Collected Works: Vedanta Philosophy}, p.99, Cf. also Max Muller, \textit{Collected Works: Ramakrishna}, p.73.

\textsuperscript{22}Max Muller, \textit{Collected Works: Ramakrishna}, p.90.
disciplines and methods of worship. Their division of Hindu society into four castes and of the individual life into four stages, was based upon their recognition of the relative world. The Hindu seers were wise enough to formulate the ideals of righteousness (dharma), wealth (artha), sense pleasure (kama) and final liberation (moksha) because they upheld human values in addition to the spiritual ones. Had they regarded the world as unreal and illusory, they would not have inculcated human values. It shows they viewed maya in its true perspective. The question here is of immediate or relative standpoint and the ultimate or absolute standpoint. The true understanding of Vedanta is to correlate them.

"Relativity is maya", says Nīhilananda. It is a working principle, so to say. We have to accept the maya and then to transcend it. By merely regarding it as illusion (mithya) or a mirage, we cannot dismiss the universe. Guru Nanak, in this respect, accepted and upheld the concept of maya and advaita advanced by Ramanuja and later propagated by the Bhagata Nanddev, Ramanand, Kabir and others, viz. the world is unreal when viewed apart from its basis in the ultimate reality or Brahman, but when viewed in its relation to Brahman, it is real, in fact, it is all Brahman.

83. Nīhilananda, Upanishads Vol. 1. 54 Cf. also RadhaKrishnan, Brahma Sutra, Introduction, p. 34. See also Nīhilananda Hinduism, p. 42.

84. Nīhilananda, Upanishads, Vol. 1. 54.

85. Cf. RadhaKrishnan, Brahma Sutra, p. 34. For Guru Nanak's views, Cf. Yog Asa Slokas (Pauri 2 and 10). Cf. also RadhaKrishnan, Religion and Society, p. 104. He says maya is something not totally unreal, not "mere smoke without fire".
Sadananda defines *maya* as "something positive, though intangible, which cannot be described as being or as non-being, which is made of three *gunas* and which is antagonistic to knowledge." The *gunas*, says Nikhilananda, are the very substance of *maya*. They are actually mystical substance. Upanishad says: "The one she-robed, white and black casts many young ones which are fashioned like to her." The *Chandogya Upanishad* states that every thing in the universe consists of three elements, namely heat, water and food. These elements are the same three *gunas*, red, white and black viz. the red (*rajas*) is emotion, the white (*sattva*) is goodness and the black (*tamas*) is darkness or evil.

*Maya* functions in the world through its two powers: the power of concealment and the power of projection, while it conceals the true nature of Brahman, it projects the world in creation.

*Sapuna Brahman* is the cause of the universe through *maya*. *Maya* has no independent existence. It is only the efficient cause of the universe, while Brahman is the material cause.

"The *Brahma-Sutra* of Badarayana", says S.S.

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86. *Vedantasar*ara, Quoted in Nikhilananda, *Unanishads*, pp.55 f.
87. *Brahma-Sutra*, p.56.
88. *Loc.cit.* (Svet. ur. iv. 5.)
89. *Loc.cit.*
Raghavachar "builds up the system of Vedanta by a process of coordination, substantiation and elucidation, working up the immense body of the insights contained in the Upanishads into an ordered whole." 91

Raghavachar says further about the mystical aspect of Vedanta:

"Mystic experience is construed as the direct experiential realization of the identity of the Atman and Brahman. The Yoga technique formulated by Patanjali is harnessed to the monistic realization aimed at. This contemplative mysticism, signifying the absorption of the individual self in the absolute non-dual spirit remains a lasting type of mysticism in the later Hinduism." 92

The Vedanta, especially the Advaita-Vedanta, may be described as Identity-mysticism, as it seeks to establish the identity of Atman and Brahman in the spiritual consciousness.

The Universal aspect of Vedanta and its timelessness, considered in the sense of not being a historical philosophy of religion, makes it essentially mystical. 93 "According to Hinduism, religion is experience and not the mere acceptance of certain time-honoured dogmas or creeds. To 'know God is the become like God.' 94 "From the philosophical stand-point Hinduism is non-dualistic and from the religious stand-point, monotheistic." 95 It may be added, that from mystical standpoint, Hinduism, especially Advaita Vedanta, is universally representative and typical.

91. Hinduism, ed. (art. 'Mysticism'), p.74. Cf. 5 Dasgupta, Indian Idealism, p.53.
92. Hinduism, ed. (art. 'Mysticism'), p.75.
94. Ibid., p.25.
95. Ibid., 24.
The Upanishadic or Vedanta mysticism is not only universal in nature and essence, but also primal and prehistoric. Marquettte says: "Most if not all of the tenets of other mystical theologies have been formulated at an anterior date in India, often with deeper analytical acumen and more comprehensive scope."

Upanishads provide the first instance in history of the method of negative theology so much extent in Christian and Muslim religions viz. "He is this, He is that, He is beyond all this"— the well-known method of Neti-Neti.

Brahdaranyakara Upanishad says: "He, the self, must be described by No, No. He is incomprehensible, since He cannot be grasped."

Hindu Mysticism (which is predominantly Vedanta mysticism) is very comprehensive and synthetic. From Polytheism of the Vedas, it proceeded towards Pantheism which denotes "the idea of a single and transcendent divine principle, Ishvara, who under his three aspects Brahma Vishnu and Shiva encoders this universe through the operations of Maya which is even the cause of the appearance of the personified aspects of the Holy Trimurti."

From Monism (i.e. Advaitavada) or Non-dualism which implies that "True Being is Sat alone, Being itself, the eternal Brahma, unchanging and unchanged, undivided and without parts, Eka eva advaitam ... the nirruum, nirvishesham

96. Introduction to Comparative Mysticism, P.31.
97. Ibid., p.34.
98. Ibid., p.36.
Brahman ... who is opposed to all alteration (vikara) and to all change, to all beginning (utpada) and becoming (sambhava) ... is purely atman or Spirit (chit and chaitanyam) i.e. pure consciousness (jnana)\(^99\) the Vedanta mysticism inevitably proceeds to the pantheistic and dualistic phases of Divine existence, from unity to multiplicity, from oneness to manifoldness. In the words of Otto: "Through the enigmatic power of Maya, there arises in the soul avidya -- not knowing (or better false knowing). Maya superimposes (adhyanapa) upon the reality of the One Being, the deceptive multiplicity of the world."\(^100\)

These mystical concepts, however, become metaphysical speculations and ontological theology in the hands of Shankara-charya, as in the case of Eckhart of Christian mysticism.

The chief features of this Upanishadic mysticism, says Dasgupta, are the earnest and sincere quest for the spiritual illumination and the rapturous delight the sages actually experience.\(^101\) The Upanishads, however, indicate no definite method for arriving at the perception of truth. "One of the fundamental conditions of attaining it is the complete elevation of the moral life including the absolute control of all passions and desires."\(^102\) But, at the same time, it

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99. Otto, Mysticism East and West, p.3.
100.Ibid., p.4.
101.Hindu Mysticism, p.42. Cf. also Dasgupta, Indian Idealism, p.31. "It may be regarded as a sort of mystical idealistic absolutism."
depends, not on our own efforts, but on Grace: "there is something like divine mercy that must be awaited." 103

The Vedanta mysticism mainly revolves round the concept of Godhead or Divinity. "The Rig Veda describes the Supreme as an inconceivable wonder, a sublime unity, a totality from which light shoots forth to generate out of darkness and emptiness a living universe." "The Absolute appears in a double aspect, eternity and time. Though apparently opposed, they are one in reality ... It is the supreme Purusa or God working on Prakriti or matter." 104

By way of conclusion, it may be said, that in Vedanta mysticism the elements of religion and theology are subservient to the mystical and speculative aspects. By and large, mystical concepts in their pure and empirical sense, have been broadly enunciated in the Upanishads which form the basis of Vedanta mysticism.

This is exactly what Guru Nanak emphasized in his teaching while dealing with religion in general and Hinduism in particular. While he attached no special sanctity to the reading or recitation of the four Vedas (which had, incidentally, become the chief occupation and religious motif of the Brahmans and Pandits during the middle ages when Guru Nanak appeared on the scene), he accepted and affirmed the mystical truths expressed in the Upanishads. He used the word 'veda' (rather, 105

103.loc. cit.
'ved') to mean spiritual knowledge or mystical illumination, i.e. in its original or literal meaning and not the particular or historical meaning. He combined all the six philosophical schools of Vedic religion into one Divine school of Higher mysticism enunciated by the Primal Guru, that is 'Brahman'.

"Six the systems, six their teachers
And six their different teachings:
The Lord (Guru) of them all is the One Lord,
However various His aspects are;
O brother, follow that system
That sings the Lord's praises
There thy true glory lies."

The essential quality of all religious truth being submission to the Guru (i.e. Divine Preceptor) or the attitude of humility towards the Supreme Being, Guru Nanak went straight to the heart of things and criticised the arrogance and pride even at the highest level of spiritual attainment. Brahma, it is believed, became vain after revealing the Veda and was thus made to repent for his arrogance, by losing the Veda, his rich prize. Guru Nanak Says:

"Brahma did not perceive truth and became arrogant.
When he was beset with the predicament of losing
the Veda, he repented.
One who remembers God, only his mind is satisfied.
Such pride (as of Brahma) is a great evil in the world;
One whom the Guru meets, his pride gets resolved
by the Guru."

106. SSWS, 61 (Mac Asa) - Sohila Arti, A2.12.
107 Gauri, A2, 224.
Brahma, again, by creating the world, became subject to Time and Death, thus losing the principle of absolute eternity. This limitation is not only binding on Brahma, but all the celestial beings (the Devas and Devis of the Hindu Pantheon). Guru Nanak Says:

"First it was Brahma who came under the sway of Death. He could not probe the inmost depth of the Divine lotus.

He did not obey the Lord and thus came into doubt. Whoever was born was destroyed by Death.

We were saved by Almighty, who gave us to understand the word of the Guru.

Maya bewitched all the Devas and the Devis.

Death does not spare any one except one who adores the Guru.

The Supreme Lord is Eternal, Unseeable and Unknowable."

Guru Nanak accepts only the One Supreme Being (who is Nirgun as well as Sarpun) as fit to be worshipped and adored. No other deity, however, exalted, can take His place or equal Him. Guru Nanak, thus, is strictly monotheistic. He rejects the worship of all the Hindu deities who are created by the Supreme Being and, as such, are subject to the limitations of the Space-Time-Continuum or the contingencies of the all-bewitching Maya. He has, therefore, adversely criticised the common objects of Hindu worship i.e. the avatars or the jihot-devas, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Rama, Krishna, Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, Parbati and so on. In his uncompromising attitude on this issue, being a

mystic, pure and simple, who does not swerve an inch from his monotheistic purism, Guru Nanak remarks, with all force and emphasis at his command:

"By creating Ether, the Lord placed in order the Earth and blended together the water and the Fire.

The blind ten-headed Ravana got his own head smitten (by his folly) but how did Rama become exalted by 'killing him?"

What praise of Thine, O Lord, can we utter.

Thou art immanent and immersed in every thing, which thou keepest in mind.

It is the Supreme Lord who has created all beings and controls their lives; but by killing the black serpent, how did Krishna become great?

Whose husband can we say thou art O Lord, and who be regarded as thine spouse; Thou art eternally immersed in all that is.

Brahma went into the narrow channel, with the help of his benefactor Vishnu, in order to probe the universe but in vain.

Ultimately he could not know the extent of the Lord) but by merely killing Kansa, how did Krishna become great?

By churning the Ocean, the angels and demons, extracted fourteen Ratans (precious things) but they vainly boasted of it.

Nanak says, the truth cannot be hidden; Vishnu intervened and distributed one (Ratan) each to the fighting lot."

Such examples of Guru Nanak's discussion and elucidation of the essential truth in connection with Hindu polytheism and avatarvad can be multiplied from his poetic works but we can, at best, only confine to a general assessment of his response and attitude towards Hinduism, as it would become too voluminous to go into all the details.

While questioning and denying the divine infallibility so commonly attached in Hindu religion to the divine incarnations or avatars like Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Rama, and Krishna, on the rational grounds of their human and anthropomorphic limitations, Guru Nanak, at the same time, evinces in his thought considerable positive affirmation of and concurrence with Vedanta mysticism. Modern writers on Guru Nanak have recently discovered many references in his teachings to the Vedic and upanishadic sutras. A.C. Banerjee, for example, says:

"Guru Nanak was fully aware of the sanctity and importance assigned to the Vedas by the Hindus. It is hardly likely that he was well read in the Vedas, but his compositions testify to his general acquaintance with their contents." 110

Khushwant Singh, goes still further to affirm;

"Besides being a Bedi (One who has a knowledge of the Vedas) it is legitimate to conclude that he studied the sacred Hindu texts. Even a casual reading of his hymns reveals the influence of the Rig Veda, the Upanishads, -- notably the Mandukya, Chandogya, Prasna, Katha and the Bhagavad Gita." 111

But this similarity is probably more accidental, than purposive. Mystic thought in various mystical systems is, generally speaking, identical and similar, because the fundamental truths experienced by mystics in different times and places are the same.

In fact, as A.C. Banerjee points out, there are more

110. Guru Nanak and His Times, p.182.

111. Hymns of Guru Nanak, p.19 (Quoted in Ibid., p.182.f.)
differences and divergences than similarities and affinities between Vedic thought and Guru Nanak's mystical views. In the words of Banerjee, the differences "are so fundamental as to make Sikhism a definite protest against the Vedic Way of life." 112

Guru Nanak's reaction to many Vedic practices and Vedantic beliefs was so sharp and categorical that a most recent writer has clearly stated this fact:

"Guru Nanak rejected rituals and priests; he rejected the whole concept of varanasastra dharma, and the sanctity of deva-bhasha (the language of the gods i.e. Sanskrit). Above all, he rejected the authority of the Vedas, the foundation on which the entire Brahminical system rested from time immemorial. The result was that the Vedic traditions played no recognisable part in the development of Sikhism." 113

It may, however, in all fairness he pointed out that Guru Nanak did not so much differ with and reject the fundamental and mystical aspects of Vedic religion or Hindu theology, as he did their contingent externalities which came to be appended and accreted during the course of historical development and circumstances. He was equally conscious of the eternal divinity in man, as of his pragmatic and physical needs. The merely contemplative and intellectual side of Vedanta philosophy did not appeal to his mystical empiricism.


He simultaneously lived in the moment as well as in eternity. He accepted, rather salvaged, some mystical concepts from the vedanta mysticism, while he rejected so much of superstitious and futile dogma. What he accepted or what spontaneously came under the purview of his own mystic realization, out of the ancient mystical tradition, may be summed up as under.

(i) The dual concept of the non-dual Godhead (developed at a later stage by Ramanuja in reaction to Shankar's rigid Monism or advaita), (ii) the attendant concept of \(\mu\nu\) which is the cause of the creation of the universe, under the providential and inexplicable change wrought in the nature of the Absolute Godhead, in the form of \(\text{Ishv\text{ara}}\) or the Personal, Lower Brahman, (iii) Brahman's pantheistic immanence in the three \(\text{gupas}\), the three states of ignorance caused by the illusory power named \(\mu\nu\), and the fourth transcendental state called \(\text{Tt\text{r\nu\a}}\), (iv) the threefold concept of Brahman, as \(\text{S\u\text{at-Chit-An\a}}\), (v) the necessity of inwardness and intuition in the search for the hidden Brahman (\(\text{Par\text{am-\text{it\a}}\text{man}}\) in the individual soul (\(\text{At\text{man}}\) itself and their complete identification or unity after a mystical realization inwardly achieved, and (vi) complete dedication to and dependence upon the grace and mercy of the Supreme Being (Brahman) for the ultimate realization

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114. Cf. G. S. Vansukhani, Guru Nanak World Teacher, p. 76. "Guru Nanak's \(\text{Bh\a\text{t}}\text{\i\text{ti}}\) leads to a dynamic mysticism which is not divorced from the hard facts of real life." Cf. Gurmit Singh, Versatile Guru Nanak, Foreword. Cf. also I. Banerjee, op.cit. p. 125. "Guru Nanak had not attempted a destruction of the old order but a reformation to suit the growing needs of the time." Again: "\(\text{S\text{ikhism}}\ ...\) was a protest against conventionalism and not Hinduism." Ibid., p. 143.
of the dualistic-panistic, baffling Reality.\textsuperscript{115}

These are some of the common grounds and concurrent premises that inhere in both Vedanta mysticism and Guru Nanak's mysticism.\textsuperscript{116} But the interpretation, assimilation and exposition of the said mystical concepts, as we find in Guru Nanak, are, at once, more coherent, \textsuperscript{117} integrated and enlightening for the modern spiritual needs of humanity.

Guru Nanak's general attitude towards Hindu religious heritage may be summed up, in the words of Meleod:

"He did indeed receive an inheritance and its influence is abundantly evident in all his works, but it would be altogether mistaken to regard him as a mere mediator of other men's ideas. In his hands the inheritance was transformed." \textsuperscript{118}

\textbf{BHAGAVADGITA MISTICISM:}

The \textit{Upanishads}, the \textit{Brahma Sutra} and the \textit{Bhagavadgita} are the three main canonical works for all schools of Vedanta.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{115} See Infra, Chp. V, for detailed discussion.

\textsuperscript{116} Guru Nanak's radical differences with the later Brahmanical Hinduism which was caste-ridden and set so much store with idol-worship, pilgrimages and ritualistic discipline, should not confuse a clear perception of his affirmation of some of the aspects of the earlier Hindu mysticism of Vedanta, Yoga and Bhakti, which had their origin and source in the \textit{Upanishads}. Cf. I. Banerjee, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.128. For Guru Nanak's rejection of the contemporary religions, see J.S. Crewel \textit{Guru Nanak in History}, Chap. 'Contemporary Religion and Guru Nanak'. \textit{Passim}; S.S. Kohli, \textit{Philosophy of Guru Nanak}, pp. 92-98; Gurjit Singh, \textit{Versatile Guru Nanak}, Chap. 'Guru Nanak and Hinduism', \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{117} Cf. W.H. Meleod, \textit{Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion}, p.150. "Guru Nanak ... produced a coherent pattern and one which, with some additions by later Gurus, is followed to this day by orthodox Sikhism."

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Ibid.}, p.1.

Collectively they constitute the vedanta philosophy.

Gita is the quintessence of the Upanishadic thought. It is said that the Upanishads are the milk cows, the Gita the milk. Hence it has great mystical potentialities. In this respect it has a close kinship with the Upanishads.

K. Sircar says:

"The central teaching of the Gita, like that of the Upanishads, is confined to the Brahman, the Being, the conception of the transcendence and immanence, for it upholds with the Upanishads, the common belief that the highest end is realized through the knowledge of the Absolute, and the greatest consummation is the quietude in Brahman, which sets doubt at rest." 120

Bhagavat Gita even has been termed an Upanishad, so akin it is to its original source. 121 It is a synthesis of various ways and means of spiritual life such as Karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga and Gyan-Yoga. 122 There is much emphasis on the concept of selfless action, which is a sort of divergence from the Upanishadic teaching. As Sircar observes: "The Gita is the gospel of knowledge applied to activity. The Upanishads are the gospel of knowledge confined to itself." 123

The Gita presents a transcendental mysticism with a strong note of devotional consciousness. Hence it is different from the mystical philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga. 124

122. Ibid., p. 266.
123. K. Sircar, op. cit., p. 27.
124. Ibid., p. 102.
Besides devotion or Bhakti, Gita lays great emphasis on the solution of a basic ethical question, which is: Arjuna in the midst of strife is confused about his duty and Krishna instructs him to do his duty.  

"The way of work and the performance of duty is the path of salvation and the kingly sages of ancient times, like Janaka, trode this road."  

An 'inner quietness' or 'composure' of the whole self has been emphatically inculcated in Gita. What Shankar calls "in activity rest and in rest activity," is the ultimate ideal presented in this scripture. This 'utter composure' can at times be called faith (Sraddha) which is the true ideal, the emotional background and also the source of this ethic of the Gita. This 'inner relationship' has been expressed in incomparably devout words in Gita:

Man is made by his belief  
As he believes, so he is.  

Despite the different paths leading to realization discussed in Gita, there is a remarkable attempt at synthesis of a mystical nature in the whole argument underlying the divine composition.  

"The Bhagavad Gita", says Marquette, "was really a taking of stock, comparing the doctrines of current religious forms and particularly the two great philosophical

125. Otto, Mysticism East and West, p.119.  
126. Ibid., p.121.  
127. Ibid., p.122.  
128. Loc.cit.  
schools which were emerging out of the general religious tradition: the Sankhya and Yoga. 130

Bhagavadgita is the most popular religious poem of Sanskrit literature. It is said to be "the most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known tongue." 131

The initial and dramatic bewilderment of Arjuna in the battlefield is rather significant. His mood of despair is "what the mystics call the dark night of the soul, an essential step in the upward path." 132

The emphasis on Bhakti in Gita is a direct development of the Upasana of the Upanishads, says Radhakrishnan. 133

Like Buddhism, Gita also protests against the authority of the Vedas and the extreme heretical polarities of the Vedic times, laying more emphasis instead on ethical principles. 134 From the contemplative and intellectual aspects of the Vedic religion, Gita came to acquire and absorb purely theistic devotionalism, which was a necessary development commensurate with the changed times.

Krishna's resort to the demonstration of his mystical powers in the form of cosmic vision (Vishvarupa)

130. Introduction to Comparative Mysticism, p. 37.
133. IPH, Vol.1, 525.
134. Ibid., 530. Cf. also S. Dasgupta, Indian Idealism, p. 59. According to him, the Gita contains elements of Pantheism, Deism and Theism, all fused together into one whole.
to the bewildered Arjuna, is certainly a decisive factor in the Gita's argument.

The creation of the Universe or cosmos through the artifice of *maya*, according to Gita's author, is a mystical process, for which the mystical name *maya* has been coined.

To sum up the Gita teaching, we might say that while it insists much on social duties, it recognizes a mystical supra-social state, of the perfect man (*Sannyasin*) who is transcendent as well as involved in the Universe.

Guru Nanak's response vis-a-vis Gita may be said to comprise his affirmation of Theism and *Bharti Yoga* taught in Gita, in place of the earlier Vedantic abstruseness, and his broad concurrence with the basic ethical principle of selfless service and duty enunciated in Gita, as against the Vedic individualism and escapism from society. What Guru Nanak strongly denounced in Gita was the theory of *avataravad* and the basic Vedantic postulate of *aham brahma asmi* (i.e. "I am the Brahman"), which was a flagrant deviation from the original Upanishadic concept of *tat tvam asi* (i.e. "That art Thou").

This pantheistic self-apotheosis (rather self-conceit) at the highest *avatar* level, which is probably the greatest conceptual fallacy in Vedanta as well as Gita, is quite alien to the absolute monotheism of Guru Nanak. This worship of

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endless deities, beginning with the trinity of Vishnu, Brahma and Mahesh and their numberless incarnations (avatars) inevitably degraded in later times to idol-worship of extreme, even aberrative types, in all the later religious cults, vaishnavism, shaivism, shaktism, tantrism etc., from which more strictly speaking, Kabir and Guru Nanak extricated Hindu theism in the 15th and early 16th century. 137

Guru Nanak in his own inimitable and inevitable way attempted, in his mystical perception, to strike a synthesis and balance between the rigid (almost untenable), extreme Monism of Shankarcharya, on the one hand and the most unprincipled, extremely degenerated pantheistic idol-worship of later Brahmanical Hinduism, on the other. In this huge task Guru Nanak was, however, preceded by mystics like Ramanjya, and Namdev in the south and Ramanand and Kabir in the north.

Gita, thus speaking, provides a rich ground for a comparative and critical sifting from the viewpoint of Guru Nanak's thought.

YOGA MYSTICISM

Yoga is the great school of the technique of divine union, with its concept of the nature of God and of man and its different methods of union. It asserts that "the love of the Lord is better than much knowledge." 138

136. Twenty four and sometimes ten is the recognized number. Cf. for instance, Gurmeet Singh, loc. cit. A.C.Banerjee, Guru Nanak and His Times, p.159; and J.S.Grewal, Guru Nanak in History, 205 f.
The Yogi's ambition is to attain 'the exalted liberation' (called Samadhi) by reaching the Fourth state of consciousness, name the Turva, after transcending the three lower states of consciousness, Jagrat, Svapna and Sushupti.

The study of Yoga mysticism includes many spiritual technicalities so peculiar to the study of Vedanta, such as the two aspects of Brahman, the Nirguna and the Saguna Brahman (i.e. the absolute God and the Creatively-active God named Ishvar); the three great essences of manifested universe, Atma, Pursha and Prajriti; corresponding to these above-named "Causal tiers", the three aspects of the Atman, i.e. Jivatma, Pratvratma and Paramatma; the three gunas produced by the action of Pursha on Prajriti viz. rajas, sattva and tamas, which have corresponding deities to support them i.e. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, respectively; the three essential attributes of Ishvara viz. sat, chit and ananda; the four states of consciousness already mentioned; the 27 elements of man i.e. psyche) viz. 5 avayavdrayas (senses of perception), 5 karmaydrvas (organs of action), 5 pranas (vital breaths), 5 tanmatras (invisible essences), 4 antakarnas (internal mental organs), 3 aspects of atman already mentioned, totalling twenty seven elements; and so on.

The four antakarnas stated above assume special value as they are the vital spiritual entitled viz. 1. Karas 2. Buddhi, 3. Chit and 4. Bhakara.

139. Ibid., pp.40-42.
140. Ibid., pp. 39, 40 and 42.
The main schools of Yoga are Hatha Yoga, Lava Yoga, Mantra Yoga, and Bhakti Yoga. Besides these Yogic schools which seek union through Physical and sensuous (specially audatory) means, there are also Yogic schools which seek union through truth, knowledge and wisdom, such as Vidya Yoga, Swam Yoga and Raja Yoga. Still above these Yogas of thought are the Prana Yoga and the Karma Yoga.

The general technique of all schools is to so completely master the faculty or man that union is reached with its archetype, the divine creative purposive impulse, which gave it birth and keeps it in activity.

Of all these schools Bhakti Yoga is the quest of union through sanctified sentiment. It is the Yoga of love, the greatest of mystic schools.

Emphasis on methodology in Yoga is paramount. The eight fold process includes, Yama (abstention), nivama (observance), asana (posture), pranayama (regulation of breath), pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), dhvana (fixed attention), dharana (contemplation), and Smadhi (concentration).

Yoga is deeply mystical, but it is not God-Mysticism, it is soul-mysticism. Yoga conforms to the

141.Ibid., pp.43-45
142.Ibid., pp.46-47. The more common view represents 4 kinds of Yoga, Mantra, Lava, Raja and Hatha. Cf. Max Muller, Collected works: Ramakrishna, p.8.
143.Marquette, op.cit.,p.43, 45.
144.IEH, Vol. II, 352.
general Indian mystical teaching which consists in the terminology: "atman, atmanam, ataman," which means: "know the Atman, in the Atman alone, through the Atman. Otto observes about the Yogic ideal:

"Yoga has arisen from magical conceptions and practices and it always remains a refined form of magic. Its ultimate goal, the kaiyalyam is magical—a miraculous state; it is connected not only with the acquisition of magical powers, the siddhis and the riddhis but it consists in attaining aisvaryam, a supernatural miraculous 'glory' with an abundance of power and knowledge."147

Yoga, thus considered, falls short of theistic principles (like Buddhism) without which no religion becomes a religion in the real sense.

Though rooted in the Vedas (particularly Rig Veda and Atharva Veda) and the Upanishads (especially the Katha, the Svetasvatara, Taittiriva and Maitravani Upanishads) in which it represented the practical side of the theoretical philosophy of Samkhya, and though widely discussed in the Bhagavadgita and tacitly accepted by Buddhism, Yoga, as a system, was formulated and perfected by Patanjali (2nd cen.B.C.) in his Yoga Sûtra.148

The word Yoga may simply mean "method" or yoking i.e. union of two separate entities. In Patanjali it means the

146. Ibid., p.33.

147. Ibid., p.142, Cf. also Mohan Singh, Order of Sidha-Yogins, p.15.

search for the divine and eternal element in man. It has more to do with the 'method' or the Via mystica of the Christian theology than with the theoretical or philosophical content of spiritual idealism. Hence it is primarily a mystical and esoteric study of the ways and means of attaining perfection. Every seeker after truth, thus, in some way or the other, becomes a Yogi in the technical sense, in as much as he has to pass through a spiritual discipline in the strictly pragmatic or empirical sense. No theory can avail when the aim is to tame and conquer the mind. Some method has to be adopted for the achievement of this purpose. And all such methods constitute Yoga. Even Gautam the Buddha had to pass through Yogic discipline, to take one example out of a legion. In this sense, even Brahman has been called a Yogi, because He Himself is the source and teacher of all Yogic methodologies.

Stilling the mind in perfect quietude (as taught by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tze) or controlling it by a spiritually synthesizing or harmonizing process involved in the mystical-ethical perception of the Name (as preached by Guru Nanak) seems to be the ultimate object of Yoga.

The Katha Upanishad (iii) says: "our senses are like horses which are always running after their respective sense-objects." Again: "There is a state in which the five senses,  

thought, intellect, and mind all cease to operate and this highest stage of absolute sense-restraint is called Yoga or spiritual union." (Katha, VI)

In other words, the cessation of all mental states is Yoga. For the attainment of Yoga, moral qualities of purity, contentment, self-surrender, endurance, persistence and dedication to purpose are essential.

Of all branches of Hindu mysticism, Guru Nanak was probably most deeply impressed and affected by the Yoga mystical philosophy. It was apparently as much due to the universal, empirical and ethical character of Yoga as to its mystical and esoteric aspect. Another potent reason for Guru Nanak's special concern with the Yoga way of thought and life was its dominant prevalence and influence in all Northern India during and preceding Guru Nanak's times.

He had naturally to give full attention to the great religious problem posed by the widely-demoralizing and unethical spirituality taught by the Manaphata Nath Yogis of the Machhindernath-Gorakhnath origin.

Though Guru Nanak found the contemporary Yoga cult in a most degenerated condition, having reached almost the nadir in the whole history of the ancient Yoga philosophical movement, yet he was not unmindful of some inherent and inceptual fallacies of the ancient Yoga system itself which could form a potential danger to the genuine religious

153. Ibid., pp.70 and 73.
interests of his age. He, therefore, devoted largest portions of his compositions to discuss, criticise, refute and correct the aspirations and practices of the Yogis. 155 Siddh Gosht, his most philosophical and absorbing composition, is a complete discussion on the subject of Yoga mysticism, and he has made fullest use of the Nath-Yogi terminology.

Rejecting almost all the Yogic practices of his age as utterly futile and unethical, Guru Nanak enunciates his own conception of true Yoga. According to him true Yoga lies in transcending the evil effects of Maya by living actively amidst society and the world: 157

"By remaining pure among the impurities of the world, we can find the true practice of Yoga."

The greatest flaw in the Yogic way of thought and life as perceived by Guru Nanak in his own time was the Yogis' persistent aversion to married life, to earning bread and living in society and, above all, to their antinomian, amoral and escapist ideologies and practices. 158


156. Cf. Janji, 28. AG.6. The common practices of the Yogis were wearing earrings, besmearing their bodies with ashes, keeping a begging bowl and a staff, blowing conches, wearing a patched coat, keeping matted hair, uttering loudly alakh niranjan and so on.

157. SuhI, AG,730 (Anjan Mabi niranjan Rahaij jog jugat im paiai).

158. Guru Nanak vanquished the Yogis by superior religious and mystical argument thrice during his travels, at Sumer Mountain, at Gorakhmata (now called Nanak-mata) and Achal Vatala (near Batala, Gurdaspur District). He invariably attacked them at their weakest point, of renouncing the world and cheating people of money and food by overawing them by display of occult powers, which was utterly futile and cowardly. Cf. Pritam Singh Gill, Doctrine of Guru Nanak, pp. 143 ff.
Since Yogis exerted vast influence on the masses by acquiring and displaying mystical (rather, occult) powers, which is a rare and attractive phenomena in all religions (a close parallel in this respect being the extensive popularity of the miracle-working Muslim mystics called Sufis, who flourished contemporaneously with Yogis in the three or four centuries preceding Guru Nanak's advent), it was utmost necessary for Guru Nanak to counteract this negative influence wrought by the spurious and futile Yogic mysticism, by convincing the beguiled and betrayed public of his times, with his more positive, sincere and genuine religious teachings and ideals which advanced social and ethical principles of the highest quality. Even in the mystical domain, he excelled the Yogis by expounding, for instance, the true meaning of the esoteric terms, Anhad Sabad, Sunn (the Sunyata of Buddhism) Niralam, Guru-chela, Chautha-pad, Nirban-pad, Surat-dhun, Surat-sabad, Parvirat-narvirat, Sahaj-dhyān, Nij-ghar etc.159

BHAKTI MYSTICISM

Bhakti or devotion is a vague term extending from the lowest form of worship to the highest life of realization. It has its origin in the Rig Veda itself and has been in vogue ever since.160 The word Bhakti was first of all used in the Upanishads and then is mentioned frequently in the Puranas

159. Siddh Gosht, passim, for Guru Nanak's Yoga mysticism, Cf. Mohan Singh Oberoi, Sikh Mysticism, pp.3-10.

as well as Buddhistic and Jaina literature. In the Bhagavad-gita, the Bhakti-yoga, in comparison with the other Yogas, finds a dominant note.

Bhakti is a direct development of the upasana of the Upanishads. The love for the Supreme involves the giving up of all else. Only the highest can give us freedom. Only the true Lord Purusottama can serve as the object of devotion. Bhakti needs, above all else, Sraddha or faith. It is emotional attachment distinct from knowledge or action. After Upanishads, the devotional way of the Bhagavats greatly influenced the ideal of Bhakti in Gita. Absolute self-surrender and complete dedication of all work to God mark the conduct of the true devotee.

As a mystic principle, Bhakti combines theism with pantheism. The love of the Lord invariably turns to be the love of the universe, as it is created by the Supreme Being. This is the basis of the true ethical principle involved in Bhakti. Ethics in Gita is thus essentially connected with the spiritual concept of love which underlies Bhakti Yoga.

Hindu mysticism is very comprehensive and synthetic. From Vedic polytheism it proceeded towards pantheism which was the direct result of the Vedantic theory of Ishvarvad and Mayavat and the concept of the divine Trimurti (Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva complex). Vaishnavism which is the true historical

163. Ibid., pp. 558-65.
basis of Bhakti mysticism believes in divine love through the mercy of Ishvara who in the form of Krishna saves his devotees from the clutches of rebirth.164

The effusive and unrestrained emotion of love (as between Krishna and the gopis) in the Bhagavata Purana became the most acceptable principle of Bhakti in the later cults of Vaishnavism. Ramanuja's concept of Bhakti was, however, more restrained and organized. According to Ramanuja, Bhakti is loving God with all our mind and with all of our heart. This complete resignation to God is called Prapatti.165 As a theist, Ramanuja believes that salvation is possible, not through inana and karma, but through bhakti and prasada (grace).166

"Bhakti Yoga", says Marquette, "is the quest of union through sanctified sentiment. It is the Yoga of love, the greatest of Mystic schools." "It reaches union through the harmonization of the love nature of man with its prescribed destiny which is to manifest, in all its purity, the Divine love of the creator under its treble aspect of life-giver preserver and upholder."167

By uniting wholly his love nature with that portion of the divine aspect of love and cohesion which is giving him life, man reaches the divine union of mystic love. Bhakti Yogis adore the objectified, personalized and active

164. Marquette, Introduction to Comparative Mysticism, p.36.
166. Ibid., p.703, Cf. J.S.Grewal, Guru Nanak in History pp.121 f.
aspect of the Infinite Ishvara or Saguna Bhraman.  

Bhakti Yoga presents three degrees. The elementary one, Bhava Bhakti, is the worship of the gods through formulas, images, rites etc. The second Ananya Bhakti is the cult of the transcendent but objective monotheistic God. Yekanta Bhakti is interior and silent adoration of the Ineffable Formless ubiquitous Presence.

Bhakti as a way of realization is often connected with the popular story of Bhagat Prahlada in the Vishnu Purana. Ramanuja defines Bhakti "as a contemplation of God unbroken as the smooth and ceaseless flow of oil." Even Prahlada desired from God the satisfaction of divine love at the sense-level. Bhakti involves not only contemplative union but love union which is aesthetic and sensuous. This Bhakti is the mysticism of love.

The Bhagavata Purana (11th century A.D.) is treated as the standard work on bhakti. According to this Purana, "It is the quintessence of the Vedanta philosophy. He who has tasted its nectar-like juice will not be attracted by anything else."

Shandilya Sutra says, bhakti is the highest attachment to God, paramurakti. Again, the Bhagvat Purana says: "The devotees are my heart and I am the heart of the devotees. They know no one else than me; I know no one else

168. Ibid. Cit.
170. Ibid., p.123.
Bhakti in its complete wholeness and theoretical description is dealt, first of all, in Shandilya's Bhakti Sutras and Naradas Bhakti Sutras. For Shandilya, Bhakti is "Supreme devotion to God."  

Ramanuja was the principal organizer and exponent of the Bhakti cult. He was influenced, besides earlier scriptures, i.e. Upanishads, Vedanta-sutra, Bhagavadgita, Brahma-sutra and so on, by the Bhagavata doctrines and the Bhakti cult of the Alvars. Ramanuja's qualified Monism (Vishishtadvaita) was the conceptual basis of the later Bhakti cult which developed to such mystical heights in the hands of Namadev, Ramanand, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, Vallabha and others. As a religious cult it was first perfected in the south by the mystics known as Alvars and Adiyars, and then it was propogated in the north by Ramanand and other Bhagats mentioned above.

Bhagavat Purana exemplifies the true nature of Bhakti in the following words: Bhakti destroys all past sins. (ii.14). Again: "The Lord can be realized by bhakti and by nothing else." "It is the ebullition of feelings and emotions of attachment to God." It is a mad intoxication of love, a soft melting of the heart, sometimes expressed in tears, sometimes in laughter, sometimes in songs and dances.

173. Ibid., p.169.


and also in silence. 176

The Bhagavat Purana exalts Bhakti above other paths of approach to God i.e. work (Karma) or knowledge, because the spiritual power realised by love raises Bhakti to the highest mystical levels. A true bhagat has so great a passion for God that it consumes all his earthly passions. He is beside himself with this great love of God. 177

Bhaktishataka of Ramachandra Bharati (13th cen.) is also a valuable treatise on the subject of Bhakti.

Ramanuja's idea of Prapatti may be explained by the metaphor of chatrik's yearning for the water from the clouds. The basic idea behind Prapatti is the belief that God is naturally attracted by a devotee's pure and selfless love and He always abides with such a bhagat and encourages his great love for him. 178

Chaitanya symbolizes this passionate love as the love between a lover and the beloved -- a man-woman relationship of pure love. He called tender love for God as shanta, service attitude as dasva and intimate love as sakhya -- the highest type of love.

There are still other analogies used by bhagats to express the love of a devotee for God e.g. father and son, master and servant, Lord and slave, teacher and disciple, mother and child, water and fish and so on. The Krishna legend has come very handy to the vaishnava Bhakti cult. 179

177. Ibid. p.125.
179. Ibid., p.141, 143.
Vallabha has amplified the idea of grace as a necessary adjunct of the Bhakti philosophy: Only whom God chooses, attains Him.  

Guru Nanak, along with Kabir and other Bhagats in the north, inherited the Bhakti movement developed by Ramanuja and Ramanand and propagated it at large to the masses. Dasgupta says about this movement:

"It followed the line traced by the Gita and Bhagavata. Having been developed in the vernacular, it appealed directly to the masses. It largely dissociated itself from the complex entanglements of Hindu mythology which had enmeshed the devotional creed of spiritual loyalty to God in the legend of Krishna and his associates."  

Whereas Guru Nanak, like the mystic Kabir, adopted the basic mystical principle inherent in the Bhakti cult, he rejected vehemently other theological accretions of vaishnavism, shaivism and shaktism, such as idol worship, avataryad, caste-distinctions, asceticism, fasting, pilgrimage, etc. and developed a new Bhakti of his own which may be called the Bhakti of the Name. Moled connects Guru Nanak with the Sant tradition of Northern India (known as Nirguna Sampardaya) which was essentially a synthesis of the three principal dissenting movements of the time -- a compound of elements drawn mainly from vaishnava-bhakti, and the hatha-yoga of the Nath yogis, with a marginal contribution from Sufism."  

180. Ibid., p.146.  
181. Ibid., p.156.  
SUFI MYSTICISM.

Bhakti mysticism and sufism are kindred mystical cults. Both flourished in medieval times almost contemporaneously, in India. A recent writer says: "The bhakti cult develops into a mighty movement with many regional ramifications and permeates the entire country. The medieval Hinduism is dominated by this bhakti mysticism." Again, "It is as a powerful variation of this (bhakti) movement that the Sikh religion has to be viewed; it also assimilated some of the insights and principles of the Sufi movement in Islam, owing to an identical affirmation, on the part of Sufism, of the supermacy of love in the approach to God." 184

This "supermacy of love in the approach to God" is undoubtedly the common ground between Bhakti and Sufi mysticism. While bhakti derived its mystical impulse from Vaishnavaism, as Yoga did from Buddhism, Shaivism and Shaktism (and both of them had their intellectual source in the upanishads and Bhagavadgita), the Sufi mysticism, specially in India joined hands both with Bhakti and Yoga. It was a unique mystical synthesis that came to formulate the mystical tenets of Sufism.

"Sufism", says Tara Chand, "is a complex phenomenon; it is like a stream which gathers volume by the joining of tributaries from many lands ... Hinduism and Buddhism supplied a number of ideas ... " 185

Nicholson also regards Sufism, or tasawwuf as 'a complex thing', calling it 'undefinable' in the sense

185. Influence of Islam on Indian Culture, p.63.
that all mysticism is undefinable and ineffable. All the same, he has offered a few definitions: that "it is control of the faculties and observance of the breaths;" that it is "to possess nothing and to be possessed by nothing;" that it is "wholly self-discipline"; "that actions should be passing over the Sufi which are known to God only and that he should always be with God in a way that is known to God only;" that it is "to put away what thou hast in thy head, to give what thou hast in hand, and not to recoil from whatsoever befalls thee;" and "that God should make thee die to thyself and should make thee live in Him." 

The Greek word 'mystic' is exactly what in Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages is implied by the term 'Sufi', with the only difference that a Sufi is strictly a 'Muslim mystic'. Noldeke has conclusively shown that the name 'Sufi' is derived from suf (wool) and was applied to those ascetics who wore coarse woollen clothes, as a sign of penitence, for "the earliest Sufis were in fact ascetics and quietists rather than mystics." 

However, varied sources be conceived for the genesis and origin of Sufism, such as Christianity, Buddhism, 

186. Mystics of Islam, pp.9, 25 Cf. schuon who offers a definition of tasawwuf: "It coincides according to tradition with ihsan and ihsan is 'that thou shouldst adore God as if thou didst see Him and, if thou dost not see Him, yet He seeth thee'". Understanding Islam, trans. D.M. Matheson, p.154.

187. Ibid., pp. 26 f.

188. Ibid., p. 3 Cf. MK, 162.

Neoplatonism, Vedanta, Gnosticism, etc., the fact remains that koran is the most authentic source, for Mohammed himself was a mystic and was thus the first Sufi, and he felt God both as transcendent and immanent. Islam, as D.B. Macdonald points out, is not without pantheistic tendencies. He says that "all thinking, religious Moslems are mystics" and he adds, "All, too, are pantheists, but some do not know it." 190

The Sufi path called 'tariqat' is all-important in Sufism, just as in Yoga and Bhakti mysticism the real emphasis is on the method and manner of approach to the spiritual problem and not the problem itself. The two higher states to 'tariqat' are 'ma'rifat' and 'haqiqat' (Gnosis and Truth). The oldest available Sufi treatise Kitab al-Luma given seven stages (1) Repentence, (2) Abstinence, (3) renunciation, (4) poverty, (5) patience, (6) trust in God, (7) satisfaction. 191

Fana, Bagh, Yaqin, Ishq, Dhikr, Muraqabat, Firasat are some of the well-known positive and cardinal Sufi terms. Some of the metaphorical Sufi terms are Waud, sama, 'dhawaq, shirb, shaybat, jadhabat and sukr. These metaphors, more or less, imply 'ecstasy'. 192 Love of music has a special mystic appeal to the rapture-loving Sufi, as Hujwiri (author of Kashf al-Mahjul) explains at length. So does Jami praise the music of Sama' in his Lives of the Saints.

192. Ibid., p.59.
Love of God is the most essential concept of Sufism, just as it is the innermost truth in Bhakti mysticism. Ibn al-'Arabi declares that no religion is more sublime than a religion of love and longing for God. 193 Love has its pantheistic efflorescence in the form of universal mercy and charity so natural to a Sufi. The higher Sufi mysticism, as represented by Jalaluddin Rumi, teaches that "the phenomenal is a bridge to the Real." 194

The Muslim saint is commonly known as a wali (plural, awaliya) The supreme head in the heirarchy of saints or awliya is entitled Qutb (Axis) -- the most eminent Sufi of his age. Below in rank to the Qutb, in descending order, according to Hujwiri, are three Nuqaba, four Awtad, seven Abrar, forty Abdal and three hundred Akhyar. A Qutb is also called Ghawth. 195

A Sufi is also sometimes called dervesh or fakir. Hagiography is a special mark of the Sufi cultus. There are many orders of the Sufis known in the particular name of the patron-saint or the peculiar ideology involved. The great sufi Murshid (Guru) or Sheikh is the pivotal figure round which the whole Sufi spirituality revolves. The disciple or murid must obey and venerate the Murshid so that his mystical progress is ensured. Miracle-working is a favourite achievement of the Sufi adepts. In fact, the whole Sufi

193. Ibid., p.105.
194. Ibid., p.109.
195. Subhan, Sufism, pp.105-7, Cf. Nicholson, op.cit. p.124. Both authors differ in the order and names of the cadres of these higher categories of Sufis.
process and ideal has mystical ramifications.

Ibn al-'Arabi developed the highly mystical concept of the Perfect-man (Insan-al-Kamil) which was later discussed in detail by his disciple al-Jili. As Louis Massignon shows in his Kitab al-Tawasln (Paris, 1913), the Vedantic tour de force of Husayn Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj who was executed at Baghdad in 923 A.D. for uttering the blasphemous formula: "Ana 'I-Haqq" ("I am God"), was the profoundest Sufi apotheosis which was mystically linked by Ibn al-'Arabi with the abstruse notions of the halul (incarnation) and ittihad (identification), the fusion of nasut and lethut and ultimately, the concepts of the 'personal deification' and the 'impersonal monism'. Extreme monism and extreme pantheism have thus got mingled up in Sufism.

Sufism, in fact, is a higher thinking or a free thinking, as all mysticism is a free-thinking. It is a 'take off' from the dogma-level in Islamic religion.

Speaking of Sufi practice, Subhan says:

"Sufism is a description of the adventures of a soul. It speaks of the seeker after God as a Salik or a "traveller" and of the progress in the spiritual life as a Suluk, a "travelling" or "journey" along which he is guided by a Murshid or Pir, a "guide" or an "elder", who has already attained the goal by completing the journey, and is thus qualified to lend a seeker, now his Murid, an "aspirant" to the attainment of W'rifat, "the knowledge of God." 

The Sufi path called Tariqat or 'the way' is corresponding to the Chinese Tao, the Via-Mystica of Christian

theology, the Marg or Panth of Sikh Mysticism, the Dhamma-pada of Buddhism, and the Yoga of Hindu theism. It embodies the old Greek idea of 'Method' (Meta-en-odos) i.e. 'the way beyond'. This mystic path or methodus is actually a process of self-discipline. 199

The sufi cosmogony or cosmogenesis has Christian, Neoplatonistic and Buddhistic ramifications. The seven cosmic planes accepted by the Sufis are Alim-i-sughra, Nasut, Misl, Malkut, Jabarut, Lahut, and Habut, in ascending order. 200 Sufism conceives, like Vedanta, two aspects of God (in fact, three) the Absolute (Allah) and the Logos (Al-Haqq). 201

The Sufi concept of Nirvana or Moksha called Fana (or fana al-fana) which is certainly akin to (or perhaps borrowed from) Buddhistic and Vedantic sources, means complete absorption or passing away and attenuation of the self. It has four evolutionary stages, Fana fi'l Sheikh, Fana fi'l-Rasul, Fana fillah, and Fana al-fana. 202

Though Sufi mysticism has been called hot and passionate in contrast with the cool and abstract mysticism of Hindu Advaita, yet it tries to create a synthesis between the two, i.e. between emotional rapture and gnosis. Baba Farid, the Ghishti Sufi of Pakpattan, for instance, "believed in the life of Sahy (sobriety) and he could not allow his

199. Marquette, Introduction to Comparative Mysticism, p.25.
200. Ibid., p.175.
disciples to develop interest in the life of uncontrolled ecstasy."  

Sufism has been called the soul or the 'kernel' of Islam. It has, therefore, to be vigilant and guarded whenever pantheistic and heretical incarnationary theories accost it, as in the case of Mansur, Shamas Tabrez, Sarmad and others there was a severe doctrinal conflict. The best axiom for Sufism, therefore, would be: "Islam is the meeting between God as such and man as such." Again: "The Sufi after the pattern of the Prophet, wants neither 'to be God' nor 'to be other than God'..."

A word about Mu'jiza and Karamat, with their subtle difference of the former belonging to the Prophethood and the latter to sainthood. Most of the miracles (karamat) extant about Sufi fakirs, are probably later inventions or accretions to the hagiographic process, very few of them being genuine. Higher Sufism actually disowns and discourages them. The true Muslim saint does not say that he has wrought a miracle: he says, "a miracle was granted or manifested to me." "A saint would be none the less a saint," says Qushayri, "if no miracles were wrought by him in the world." Similarly,


Bayazid says: "During my novitiate God used to bring before me wonders and miracles, but I paid no heed to them; and when He saw that I did so, He gave me the means of attaining to knowledge of Himself." Sufism in this respect largely agrees with Guru Nanak's views on this subject. He says: "The Riddhis and Siddhis (i.e. miracles) are extraneous occupation." 207

India proved a fruitful ground for the ingress of many great Sufis from Middle East countries, earliest among whom probably was Hujwiri of Lahore (d. 1071 A.D.) who exerted great influence among the masses and converted many to his faith. He was followed by the great Qadri and Chishti Sufis. While Indian thought created deep impact on Sufism, as is widely admitted, the Sufi teaching, in return, also left a lasting impression on the Indian mystic thought. So it was a mutual and reciprocal intercourse. The Bhakti movement started by Guru Nanak in the Panjab in early 16th century brought Hindu Bhakti theology and the Islamic Sufism still nearer to each other. The Sufi Pir and the Hindu or Sikh Guru became almost synonymous terms. 208

Sylvestra de Sacy thought that the idea of union of soul with God reached Persia from India. Goethe supported this

207. Jap.11, 29. (Riddh Siddh avara sad).
Theory in his *West Ostlicher Divan*.

Though monasticism had no place in Islam (as it is revealed in Quran: "In Islam there is no monachism") yet the Sufi orders and institutions began to be formed not long after the demise of the Prophet. This was probably an exotic influence, probably of Judaism and Christianity and possibly of Buddhism.

As Sufism developed in India, its affinity with Indian religions gradually increased so much so that scholars have recently discovered many identical mystical views between sufism and Indian thought. Emphasis on the devotional aspect is perhaps the nearest meeting-point between the two. Thus, a popular definition of Sufism given by Tara Chand says: "Sufism indeed was a religion of intense devotion; love was its passion; poetry, song and dance its worship; and passing away in God its ideal."

Love of music, emphasis on devotion (*Bhakti* or *Ishq*), strict monotheism, limited pantheism (*Sufi, Hama ust*), spiritual novitiate under a *Guru* (*Sufi, Murshid* or *Pir*), deepest faith and trust in God, a higher ethos (virtues like humility, tolerance, charity, etc.) and intuitional approach to God, are some of the points in Sufism which came nearest to Guru Nanak's message and teaching. It is mostly a mystical synchronization. But since there are many points of mutual divergence also, as suggested by Mcleod, the Sufi

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211. *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, p.83.
influence on Guru Nanak may be almost ruled out, because the similarities were only coincidental and originally caused.

**CONCLUDING ASSESSMENT**

In the end, Guru Nanak's total and general response to the Indian mystic tradition can be summed up in the words of G.C. Narang: "Nanak respected every religion so far as the real essence of it was concerned but regarded each one of them with contempt where its votaries stopped short at the mechanical part of it." What the learned writer implies by the real essence of religion is obviously its mystical aspect and the mechanical part is the ritualism or Karam-Kand which later Hinduism had adopted as it 'Brahmanical' faith. He further observes that Sikhism was "a phase of Hindu religious revival and has in consequence, retained all essential features of real Hinduism." (emphasis on real added). The 'real Hinduism' evidently is the ancient Hinduism of Vedanta mysticism anterior to Buddhistic reactions and accretions.

Tara Chand, however, takes a different view of Guru Nanak's religions teaching: "The mission of Nanak was the unification of the Hindu and the Mussalman." This view, also held by some other authors, does not hold ground, because Guru Nanak was not after synthesis or eclecticism but wanted a new religion or dispensation. According to J.S. Grewal, it was no Hindu-Muslim rapprochement but a new religious pattern evolved

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214. Ibid., p. 379.
by the Guru on the basis of his originality. 216 Again: "On
the whole therefore, we have no hesitation in suggesting that
Guru Nanak's message was meant to transcend Islam, as it was
meant to transcend Hinduism." 217

Teja Singh is very much near truth when he says:
"The way of religion, as shown by Sikhism, is not a set of
doctrines, but a way of life lived according to a definite
model." 218 The Model referred to is the mystical person of
the Guru who is the pivotal figure in Guru Nanak's religious
thought. In Guru Nanak, as a matter of fact, the Indian
religious tradition, which is essentially a mystic tradition,
reached the culminating point, after a long historical process
of cultural assimilation. It has been said: "But for the
Vedas there would be no Upanishads, but for the Upanishads,
there would be no Buddha. These four stages (the fourth
being the Bhakti School) are interdependent. Each led to the
next and all the first three culminated in the Bhakti or
Devotional School." 219

The Bhakti Movement which "exemplified best and
fullest in Nanak" 220 was certainly a definite and positive
reaction against a dead, mechanical Brahmanism of the early
medieval times.

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Guru Nanak's mysticism, says Darshan Singh, was "a revolt against the perpetuated religious mechanism. It is, in itself, a way, a gradual process of development -- a way of detachment and attachment, of leaving and embracing." 221

Gopal Singh makes the point further clear: "Sikhism cannot be understood as a philosophy, but as a way of life, as a mystic rather than a metaphysical path. It is a strictly monotheistic religion." 222

Connecting Sikhism with the Indian religious heritage, Loehlin concludes that "although the foundation of Sikhism is Hindu, in that it everywhere assumes Karma and transmigration and accepts the Hindu pantheon; yet the superstructure is pervaded with Sufi materials which blend, on the whole, harmoniously with those of Hindu mysticism of the bhakti type." 223

Whereas it is natural, almost inevitable, to establish Guru Nanak's contact with the kindred and antecedent religions, it is more important to realize that his mystical thought transcended the existing ground, thereby acquiring fresh hues and nuances of originality.

Arnold Toynbee, the well-known historian and historical thinker, says:

"Perhaps Nanak himself would have modestly disclaimed the title of 'founder'. He might have preferred to say that he was merely bringing to light, and gathering together, the cardinal religious truths and precepts that had been scattered, in explicit form or implicitly, through the religions legacies

221. Religion of Guru Nanak, pp. 52 f.
223. Sikhs and their Scriptures, p. 66.
of a number of forerunners of his. For Nanak the fundamental truth was that, for a human being, the approach to God lies through self-abnegation and this is indeed the chief message of most of the higher religions that have made their appearance up to date. 224

Toynbee is, however, more specific when he regards Sikhism as a synthetic religion. "The Sikh religion might be described, not inaccurately, as a vision of this Hindu-Muslim common ground." He calls this achievement "a noble spiritual triumph; and sikhs may well be proud of their religion's ethos and origin."225 But this historically based view is not probably the whole truth about Sikhism, because this new religion was not merely the product of historical circumstances but was rather the fruition of the great mystic Guru's original and positive realization of religious truth.

Radhakrishnan has rightly discovered, in Guru Nanak and other Guru's teachings contained in *Adi Granth*, a wide range of mystical emotion, intimate expressions of the personal realization of God and rapturous hymns of divine love. 226 He says further: "At a time when men were conscious of failure, Nanak appeared to renovate the spirit of religion and humanity."227

Comparing Guru Nanak with Kabir (a widely recognized analogy in the matter of synthetical efflorescence of the Bhakti movement) Mcleod has discovered in Guru Nanak "a coherent pattern" of great organizational and ethical value which the purely mystical genius of kabir could not establish -- a pattern

which has subsisted upto the present time. 228

Mcleod has made a further significant analysis about Guru Nanak's relationship with the antecedent Sant tradition in which he includes the Vaishnava bhakti, the hatha-yoga of the Nath Yogis, and to some extent, Sufism. 229 He has summed up the whole relevant discussion in the following words:

"It is accordingly incorrect to interpret the religion of Guru Nanak as a synthesis of Hindu belief and Islam. It is indeed a synthesis but one in which Islamic elements are relatively unimportant. The pattern evolved by Guru Nanak is a reworking of the Sant synthesis, one which does not depart far from sant sources as far as its fundamental components are concerned." 230

Some of the mystical concepts of Guru Nanak such as the Sabad, the Nam, the Guru and the Hukam, according to Mcleod, are concepts originally evolved and explicitly developed by Guru Nanak, far beyond what they were in the works of earlier Sants. 231

228. Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, pp.149 f. The baseless myth of Guru Nanak being a disciple of Kabir and vice-versa, has by now been thoroughly exploded and rejected. Besides some Indian authors, even Westerners like Westcott upheld this former theory, see his Kabir and the Kabir Panth, pp. 1-2. For a strong refutation of this myth, see Mohan Singh Dewana, History of Panjabi Literature, pp.24-27 and Mcleod: "there is no sound evidence to support the popular tradition that Guru Nanak met Kabir and little to suggest that he knew any of his works." op.cit., p.157. Even if we suppose they had met, there is no reason to assume that Guru Nanak accepted him as his spiritual guide, because Guru Nanak never accepted any human being as his Guru - only the Supreme Being was his Guru. See Supra Chap.III. Inclusion of Kabir's Bani in Adi Granth shows only the mystical affinity between the two great mystics. This affinity probably led Max Muller to say that Kabir was the greatest disciple of Nanak. Auld Ldng Syu, p.71.


231. Loc.Cit.
Cunningham, Macauliffe and Dorothy Field have explicitly accepted and affirmed the orthodox Sikh view that Sikhism is a new and separate world religion and that it is a religion in its own right and as such cannot be regarded as something eclectic or syncretic.232

"Each religion", says D.S. Maini, "has its own unique raison d' etre and afflatus. It is called into being at a given time in history and has an ineluctable destiny."233

The greatest religious achievement of Guru Nanak and his chief merit as a prophet and founder of the most modern world religion is his unique organisational and nation-building quality, which Cunningham was the first writer to discover and express in his famous words:

"They (i.e. other contemporary and earlier religious leaders like Ramanand, Gorakh, Chaitanya, Kabir and Vallabh) perfected forms of dissent rather than planted the germs of nations and their sects remain to this day as they left them. It was reserved for Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform, and to lay those broad foundations which enabled his successor Gobind to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality, and to give practical effects to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes." 234

This statement clearly shows that Guru Nanak was unique as a mystic and was not a reclusive and log-sided preceptor of a limited circle of devotees, but a world teacher

232. For this interesting discussion see Sher Singh, Philosophy of Sikhism, pp. 89 f. Cunningham, History of the Sikhs, p. 34; Macauliffe, Sikh Religion, p. Liv, Dorothy Field, Religion of the Sikhs, p. 10.


and saviour, with a remarkable capacity of laying "broad foundations" and everlasting institutions.

As regards Guru Nanak's courage of conviction and termerity of belief (a proof of his mystical contact with Godhead), the words of G.C.Narang are significant: "Rama and Krishna had received the homage of everyone as Divine beings. It was Nanak who boldly questioned their divinity and brought them down to the level of mortals ... Guru Gobind Singh went further and stated: 'He created millions of worms like Krishna, made many Ramas and destroyed them. Many Mohammads came into the world. All died when their time expired." 235

This relentless and absolute faith in one God, termed as monotheism (tauhid), was the root from which all mystical power of Guru Nanak stemmed. S.A.A. Razvi says: "Guru Nanak's intense faith in monotheism is the keystone of the structure of his thought." 236 In the words of Latif: "The Doctrines of Nanak were those of pure deism." 237 On the basis of this great emphasis on deism or theism in Guru Nanak, as if his foremost religious preoccupation, Mcleod regards the word 'theology' as the keyword of his whole mystical thought. 238

A word, in the end, about Arnold Toynbee's historical views in his voluminous Study of History (10 vols.) as discussed

237. History of the Panjab, p. 246.
by J.S. Grewal in a most recent study, may be useful. He looks upon rise of Sikhism as a creative response to the challenge presented by Islam. Again he calls it a Higher Religion that was meant to serve as a chrysalis for a new society to rise on the ruins of the disintegrating Hindu civilization.  

As Niharranjan Ray points out, Sikhism and Sikh society would not have been what they are if they had not gone through the dialectic process that any confrontation generates within a given society, its religion and way of life.  

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From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh:  