CHAPTER I
THE MYSTIC HERITAGE

'Humanity is no longer the child it was at the beginning of the world.'(1) Now the spirit is old and burdened with experiences. Days of joy and dream are gone; and in the dusk of age, the mankind now blinks forward to catch a glimpse of the Infinite Magnificence which has always been knocking at the door to arouse consciousness — to see a living God. This is the sort of awareness which at present sweeps over almost every mind that gives a moment's thought to the deeper philosophies of life, or unveils the curtain of mystery to reveal the meaning of life. The shrines and scriptures have ceased to allure his cause-haunting mind and man needs instead, to look inward for a stronger faith and realisation to depend upon. This faith, which self-realisation delivers, is of tremendous force and unfathomable magnitude that can stand, and barricad at the entire world's conviction and accumulated knowledge of generations together. It is like a stream that bathes the contemplative mind in the light of wisdom which a mystic attempts to project in his concept.
Mysticism as a term has a wide connotation. As per its etymological analysis 'Mysticism' refers to a feeling which ought to be kept secret. The original Greek term, wherefrom both 'mystic' and 'mysticism' are derived, stands for the initiate or the person, in possession of an esoteric knowledge which he must shut his lips about, implying the ineffability of the mystic rapture. Thirst for knowledge is rudimentary to human intellect. By means of it man intends to grow all-powerful, asserting his superiority over the rest of the living organism of this planet. But this kind of knowledge which is basically empirical in nature is itself impaired owing to the imperfection of the brain. Beyond the theoretical or experimental knowledge which the faculties of brain possess, there remains beyond its reach, a vast world of spiritual and supra-natural knowledge, incomprehensible to human intellect and attained only by intuitive perception. This is an impalpable reality which cannot be proved by any law of physics or code of experiment. To quote A.B. Sharpe,
It is the desire and the search for such a means of approach to God that has produced Mysticism or "Mystical Theology", which in its general aspect is the experience, real or supposed, of actual quasi-physical contact with God—an experience undoubtedly known in reality by many, though by many more it has beyond question been merely imagined. (2)

Mysticism thus, is the understanding of the spirit in relation to its source. Knowledge, so far concerned with the material plane, is greatly dependent upon sensory organs, as knowledge in the spiritual plane is dependent upon apprehensions in the heart. Mysticism or the understanding of the mystic is therefore, the direct knowledge of God through an inner realisation. As the empirical knowledge reflects man's interaction with outside world, spiritual knowledge bears the reflection of the image of the spirit that lies within. The idea of God or God-head, in all the great religions of the world, carries one to the rudiments of being revealing thereby, the purpose of life. Attainment of spiritual knowledge, through blind faith in
dogmatic religion or through sudden exotic moments of spiritual illumination, is an awareness of man's place in the vast universe whose reproduction is the individual spirit itself. Realisation of this divine idea and the establishment of a causal relativity between the action and the consequent effect, counteract the fatalistic view on the one hand, and on the other, denounce existentialism, as held by eminent philosophers like Jean-Paul-Sartre, Martin Heidegger, and Nietzsche. Mysticism as a philosophy is unique in the sense that it is rooted in direct experience of the Almighty. In the words of W.R. Inge, it is an attempt to realise the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or, more generally, the attempt to realise in thought and feeling in immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal.\(^{(3)}\)

And, in either way, this divine revelation is incommunicable in its genuineness. The feeling it creates is highly inorganic and ecstatic; it is a view of totality which explains both the plenum and the void, the being and the non-being. It unfolds the entire mystery that baffles the normal mind. Caroline Spurgeon, in *Mysticism in English Literature*, describes the mystic mood as a 'temper',\(^{(3)}\)
an 'atmosphere' which lays scope for the mystic
to look beneath and beyond the veils of the cosmic
mystery. Mystic enlightenment, in other words, is
a state analogous to the Buddhic consciousness of
the Theosophist or the Christ consciousness of the
Christian. It is identical to the Progressive
Intelligence in Taoism, Ikhāyya in Islam or
apprehension of the Brahman in Hinduism. It is the
"revelation of an ineffable Reality filling and
transcending all things, upon which even the highest
of created spirits dare not look."(4) And through
this transcending enlightenment the spirit rises to
the union with the Ultimate, to discover the
mystic lineage.

Mysticism, as it strikes the mystic, comes
in form of flashes or short tides of blissful
ecstasy, with the dynamic force of a meteor and
the intensity of a thousand suns to illumine and
overwhelm the mystic's mind with the presence of the
Divine, the fount of eternal joy and love. The
spontaneity and luminousness of the rapturous
feeling elevates the individual consciousness
from narrow selfhood to egoless philanthropy.
Of such elevating state of mind Russell (AE) says:

If we meditate we shall lift ourselves above the dark environment of the brain. The inner shall become richer and more magical to us than the outer which has held us so long.

Mysticism is not fantasy, for the most rational mind records it; it is not the balancing of faith and doubt, for it is ratified by tranquillity and perfect stillness of mind. It is also far beyond the precincts of psychic or supernatural phenomena. Mysticism opens doors to the orchard of intangible understanding whereas psychic phenomenon contacts, through seances, with yet another world of objective existence. The mystic is exhilarated not because he sees, hears, touches or senses but chiefly because he feels, understands, and merges in the understanding. The feeling is nothing exiguous like a psychic perception; it is rather a consecration of the sense that leads to loftiness and altruism.

A mystic has direct experience of the Truth, which different religions call 'god' in their own language, whereas mysticism is not a mere knowledge of god through testimony and learning. It is rather the knowledge of the God which is also the eternal life — the higher Knowledge, Supreme Intelligence — opening unto spiritual world through transcendence of mind.
Mysticism takes no cognition of occultism or meditation so far as these restrict themselves to norms, tenets, rules and guiding principles. It recognises no religion — Christian, Hindu or Islam — no philosophical tract or no amount of devotion or faith other than an internal realisation and understanding of the Creator, the Divine Cause. Mysticism is direct experience of God whereas occultism, meditation and the various ways of religion only aim at reaching the point where the passage to the higher world opens.

Mysticism is often mistaken for various other concepts, and as such needs to be distinguished from them. Occultism is the path, the conveyance whereas Mysticism is the goal, the destination. It is the state where the mystic realises the eternal flow of the Divinity in his own being, and hence, cognizes his own share in the Great Being. At the time of mystic revelation his mind records no memory of past or of the present; he dwells in the eternity. It is the state where his narrow self is submitted to ego-less consciousness. His heart catches no ebbing sorrow, he is past the turbulence of emotional affectation. To quote here the words of Henry Summerfield, the mystic is
one who attempted to subdue the personal self or natural man to annihilate his selfhood, in order that the Spirit might act unimpeded through him.

Whereas the occultist, practises elaborate rituals involving chants and symbols, through which he hopes to attract to himself arcane images and forces. (6)

At this point the mystic and the occultist diverge. Whereas the mystic’s experience is authentic, natural and unintentional, the occultist’s practice makes his goal motivated and deliberate. In the mystic’s attainment there is no longing for material or spiritual profit, but the occult practice lays more importance on phenomenal gain and thereby refrains from a total unselfish attitude.

The primary objective of the mystic is, to quote Margaret Smith,

to establish a conscious relation with the Absolute, in which they find the personal object of love. They desire to know, only that they may love, and their desire for union is founded neither on curiosity nor self-interest. (7)

"Mysticism" says A.C. Bose, "in the traditional sense, is a form of spiritual culture" (8) and, if this be a culture then it is of a primordial nature
that a man is born with. Time and again it expresses itself in man's natural tendency to cling to the lucent, veiled, spiritual side of life — through religion, through meditation or whatever the mind accepts as a path to spiritual attainment. But the goal is always the same, i.e. merger in the Ultimate Reality. Once Rabindranath Tagore had said "In India the poets are often philosophers". But as is seen today, the whole of mankind has a more genuine claim in being philosophic than a circle of intellectuals called poets. Monk Gibbon recognizes it as quite natural and humane to make poetry. Keats says poetry must come to man as naturally as leaves to a tree, and for Wordsworth, it is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge. But along with poetry-making, philosophic interpretation of life too is innate in human character. Poetry and philosophy are in reality, interdependable facts of life and as there is poetry in every man, so there is also a philosophy in him.

Literature mirrors life and poetry, in particular, reflects the rhythmic being in man which always runs ahead of the material being. Practically,
man is a bundle of conscious and sub-conscious traits and poetry flows from him mostly as an emanation of dormant or sub-conscious modes of thought and feeling.

Mystic poetry, as a class in itself, has its hold in different literatures of the world. There had been and have been mystics all over the world. Sometimes religion penalizes them for the sake of preservation of its own rigorous principles; sometimes they are canonized by religious authorities after their death; but in reality they always stand above the reach of religion, ahead of the golden principles begotten by scriptures and religious institutions, for the mystics are at the end of the journey of which religion is the path. Thus mystic poetry is the expression of the feelings of the mystic in verse. The fountain of bliss which consecrates the mystic's mind and his vision of profundity, mused with perennial joy, find vent in the breadth of mystic poetry. The curtains of darkness and opacity which have been withdrawn for the mystic, unfolding the landscape of Beauty and Spirituality is given a reconstructed version in the spirit of the poem. Yet as no feeling can ever be transcribed, however forceful the words might be,
mystic poem is not the mystic experience in itself. It is only the repercussion of the moment of mystic experience held in mind. It is just like describing an ecstatic dream or narrating the visions seen in a trance. The spirit, which is buoyant and bountiful at the moment of revelation, is now contemplative, and the after-effect being still on the mind, the poet tries to project as distinctly as possible the intensity of the feeling experienced. By means of poetry the mystic attempts to make finer appreciation of the ineffable sensation experienced at the time of divine revelation. The moment of revelation comes to the mystic as a shudder, which makes him merge in the object of inspiration or the revelation itself. Then slowly, the ecstatic sensation passes by — the numbing feeling giving way to impression of deep faith and peace on the mind. The spiritual fervour is replaced by a terrible solitude and stuporous amazement. This solitude, however, is not solitariness but a detachment of the spirit from the grip of passion. This is the quality of inactive reception of mind known to the mystic. In this kind of passivity the distinction between the inner and the outer world dilutes; the individual consciousness is identified with the Mother Consciousness.
To experience the tranquil wonder is mysticism, and to reveal it still as a 'wonder' in verse is mystic poetry. It gives language to the unique experience where the seer becomes the seen, the word, the feeling, and the object of description.

In European literature the tradition of mystical poetry can be traced to a period as far back as the fourteenth century when practical mystics like Walter Hilton (d. 1395) and the unknown writers of The Cloud of Unknowing and The Theologia Germanica expounded their philosophies of love and faith through 'feeling' — a first-hand experience of the Divine. In these mystics there was a sincere urge to reform the soul of man which holds the reflection of God. According to Hilton, the mystic-feeling was the point of awareness where the parts became the whole. He recognized mystic-consciousness to be a spark of the Supreme awareness, where consciousness was not ramified into individual ones. Hence, to him, abolition of ego-consciousness and detection of the true spirit within the self was the philosophy of mysticism. To Yorkshire's Richard Rolle (1300-1349), one of the earliest English mystics, it was love and contemplation alone which made this
kind of realisation possible. He, along with his contemporary, Julian Norwich (1342-1413) formed the literary tradition of passionate mysticism in the late Medieval England. Both the mystics were characteristic in their ways of purgation through visions of love and melody that, they believed, formed the core of divinity in the world-order. Rolle's passionate devotion to Christ was not a way to mystic apprehension. It, on the other hand, was a post-mystic submission, which all the mystics enjoyed. The tradition of mystic enthusiasm which he initiated among the English mystical poets ranks him, to quote Mrs. Underhill, as "the Shelley of English mysticism."(10) — a harbinger of mystic-awareness to English literary trend.

Visions of 'love' and 'beauty' used abundantly in Rolle's _Fire of Love_ and Lady Julian's _Revelations of Divine Love_ represent the intensity of mystical fervour which raised them from mere Christians to Christian-mystics.

This tradition of love and submission of will to the power of Divinity in early mystical poets was extended in broadening magnitude in some of the Continental saints and mystics of the late Medieval
age. Among them, Thomas Haemerken (1380-1471) of Kempen, who became sub-prior of Mount St. Agnes, was an ardent lover of God and a major part of his life was spent in the contemplation on the purification of soul. He apparently saw the role of an efficient physical body in helping the soul to soar high at divine union and at the same time, realised the futility of attaching importance to it (body) through fulfilment of material desire that existed only in the physical plane. In other words, the key-note to his mystic philosophy was contained in nobility of heart that led to the realisation of the Divine Immanence. He knew, as he preached whole heartedly, that the deep understanding rendered by mystic revelation was far intenser and stronger than the knowledge acquired by the operation of intellect. So, in The Imitation of Christ he wrote:

O God of truth,
Make me one with Thee in eternal love.
Oft am I weary, reading, listening,
But all I wish and long for is in Thee.
Then silent be all teachers, hushed be all creation at the sight of Thee;
Speak Thou to me, alone.(11)
In the light of this wisdom Thomas a Kempis could harp on the pervasion of the indivisible stock from which various individual souls arose and again merged in the unity that held all in One.

The delight in mystic awareness and the thence-flowing love, loftiness and abandonment of self, went unabated down to the following century through the mystical writings of the great St. Catherine of Genoa, and other mystics like Juan de Avila, St. Ignatius Loyola, and the two famous Spaniards, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross.

In 1447, when Catherine Fiesca (1447-1510) was born in Genoa, she had to face the debility of Medievalism against the newly-rising spirit of the modern Renaissance. Outside, the revolutionary tides were high up, and inside, Catherine was slowly awakening to spiritual enlightenment. Instead of fighting against the odds and sufferings of life, she took the trials of life benevolently and tried to aspire at God through pain and misery. The profundity of love, which bathed her receptive mind with the grace of God the Almighty, came to
her along with queer mystic visions some of which she experienced at the time of an acute illness. Those 'visions' changed her view of life and through admittance of her sins, she passed over to a life of abstraction and idealization where all lives are One Life, and all beings are One Being. Speaking of the multi-dimensional influence of the spiritual experience of St. Catherine, and translating from Vita, Friedrich von Hugel thus sums up the philosophy of the saint:

"This creature, all lost in her own self, found her true self in one instant in God."
"Although she reputed herself to be very poor, yet she remained rich in the divine love."
"She, knowing the grace and operation to be all from God, remained lost in herself, and living only in God."
"She gave her free-will to God, and God then restored it to her."
"She gave her free-will to God, and God thereupon worked with its means."
"O the great wonder, to see a man established in the midst of so many miseries, and yet God having so great a care of him! All tongues are incapable of expressing it, all intellects of understanding it."

"That man becomes foolish in the eyes of the world, to whom Thou, O Lord God, dost manifest even but the slightest spark of Thine unspeakable Love."
"Thou, O God, desirest to exalt man, and to make him as though another God, by means of love"

Of later date or type:

"In God she saw all the operations, by means of which He had caused her to merit (in the past)."

And of still later, clearly secondary, character:

"God showed her in one instant the succession of His (future) operation, as though she would have to die of a great martyrdom"(12)

These fragments of wisdom constitute the true spirit of the mystic. Clearly, she conceived the world as one; good and evil — not as antithetical but as integral parts of the great cosmic order. She looked upon sins not as abominable but pardonable by the grace of God, who is no divine incarnation but the all-pervading God — immanent as well as transcendent.

A similar kind of understanding swept the mind of Juan de Avila (1500-1569), the spiritual mentor of St. Teresa. Though he did not identify himself with any religious order, he is noted for the dedication of his entire self to the power of God. St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) — his disciple — was considerably influenced by his mystic outlook. Like her spiritual guide she too evinced the great cosmic order where, beneath the
superficial diversifications of creation and personality, lies a unified identity. Much like her contemporary Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross (1549-1591), she expounded a mystic philosophy based on an ethical Christian ideology of total detachment and renunciation of selfhood. The perpetual strife between the spirit and the flesh had troubled both the mystics, and both of them got over the agony of such experience by an onsurge of selfless love and complete indifference to things in physical and emotional level. St. John in his philosophy clearly expounded the superiority of spiritual love over the intellect and logic, and proclaimed having got himself rid of this physical world which led to delusion, frustration, drawing man ever away from its primary and ultimate purpose. The senses of the physical body, he believed, ought to undergo purgatorial experience before it was ready for conjugation with the divine spirit. And the soul, when prepared to experience the great transcendental feeling, was promoted to a state of tranquilled calm where analytical interpretation was redundant. At this stage the mind only saw and merged — becoming one in many and many in one, taking to traits in his own, the personality which God possessed. It was that ecstasy, that rapture
induced, when the consciousness was one, transcending all fragmented sensations and emotions of the body and the mind. Only exaltation of joy and consecration of spirit were there, of which the saint wrote,

In safety, in disguise,
In darkness up the secret stair I crept, (0 happy enterprise!)
Concealed from other eyes
When all my house at length in silence slept.(13)

This 'happy enterprise' is the urge to unite with the Supreme Intelligence. And once the height of satisfaction is attained through union, the soul sees nothing but a vast eonian spring of divine grace. Of such state of oblivion, the saint wrote towards the end of the same poem:

Lost to myself I stayed
My face upon my lover having laid
From all endeavour ceasing;
And all my cares releasing
Threw them amongst the lilies there to fade.(14)

The self-forgetfulness described here is not self-annihilation where human existence is denied. It, on the other hand, is the detection of individual self in another selfless form. Through renunciation of ego, St. John of the Cross, thus aspired to fulness of life and love. He took God in His
transcendental form and saw the absurdity of comprehending the Transcendent through physical senses, and the imperfect faculties of mind and brain. It was an inward perception, fused with deep faith, which engendered the view of eternal bliss and magnanimity in him.

By the end of the sixteenth century English literature was steering towards a new vogue. The Metaphysical Poets of the time — Richard Crashaw and John Donne in particular — had a deft hand in projecting their spiritual ordeals in the web of religio-mystic poetry. John Donne's mystic understanding ranges from the culmination of human relationship to a final resignation of will to the Almighty. Donne (1572-1631) was one of the first English Poets not only to revolt against the traditional poems of the Medieval England but also to exalt the realm of human relation through spiritual love. He intends to perpetuate life through the experience of love; and the sort of 'love' he exposes in his poems is the natural instinctive love which aims at fullness of joy and life. It is a feeling which Grierson claims to be "far deeper and sincerer than the Platonic conceptions of the affinity and identity of souls".(15)
The kind of love which blooms in some of the finest love poems of Donne, in fact, rises above the level of individual relationship to touch the heights of integral consciousness. In his lovers, Donne perceives the spirit of the entire world, where identity is whole and not split into fragments:

If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none does slacken, none can die (16)

This kind of merger of identifications is frequent in Donne; and, he gives it a spiritual dimension as he traces the Mother-Consciousness through physical sensation and emotional fervour — recognizing both but submitting to none. There is no place for individual consciousness, it is all a unification of personality for:

She is all States, and all Princes, I,
Nothing else is.(17)

Even in the later poems, as the Dean of St. Paul's, Donne harps on the same idea. The intensity of love in the previous poems, here assumes the tone of complete dedication to the power of God. There is no claim for fissiporous identity. The spirit of surrender is grave, and man is lost in the cosmic
strain:

Since I am coming to that Holy room,
Where, with thy, Quire of Saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy Musique.(18)

The Supreme Being, often referred to by him in
religious poems, is not any Catholic, Protestant or
Anglican protagonist but a lofty spirit which surpassing
the rigidity of religious contours is contained in
everything present. Donne's birth in the staunch
Catholic family had not affected his deep faith in the
Unitary Being as he saw Him contrasted with the imperfect
human beings. A good number of his religious poems show
the poet's endeavour to rise at perfection through
destruction of personal weaknesses and short commings
in human character. Much like St. Catherine of Genoa,
Donne gets over his characteristic failures through an
admittance of sin. He calls the soul, sodden and laden
with the impurities of unholy living, a 'black soul':

Oh my Blake Soule! now thou art summoned
By sickness, death's herald, and champion;
Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason, and durst not turne to whence he is fled,
Or like a thiefe, which till deaths doome be read,
Wisheth himselfe delivered from prison;
But damn'd and hal'd to execution,
Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned(19)
'Black' and slurred though it is, the hope of redemption is never out of sight. The purgatorial experience is welcomed, for it emanates the soul from the tints of squalor which various sordid deeds have daubed it with. In 'Batter my Heart' the poet earnestly gropes for a unique purgatorial experience:

Batter my heart, three person'd God's
for, you
As yet but knecke, breathe, shine,
and seeke to mend;
That I may rise, and stand,

Your force, to breake, blowe, burn,
and make me new (20)

Donne clearly sees the distinction of the body from the soul — the transitoriness of the former against the immortality of the latter. In the opening lines of 'The Progresse of the Soule', he says:

I sing the progresse of a deathlesse soule,
Whom Fate, which God made, but doth not controule,

Plaid in most shapes (21)
In the course of the poem he shows how the immortal soul passes through various physical forms that die and perish with time. But the soul, on the contrary, continues on till God embraces it in the warmth of His love. Donne is optimistic in holding that, in essence, he is not different from his Creator, to prove which he says:

O God, first I was made
By thee, and for thee, and when I was decay'd
Thy blood bought that, the which before
was thine,
I am thy sonne, made with thy selfe to shine,
Thy servant, whose paines thou hast still repaid,
Thy sheepe, thine Image, and till I betray'd
My selfe, a temple of thy Spirit divine; (22)

The effacement of individual identity and the recognition of the source of identities are at the base of Donne's mystic faith. The fear of God and divine retribution which frequent the lines of his divine poetry, give way to repentance and egoless-submission establishing that human consciousness is not held outside the cosmic consciousness; for, He is the ark and
man, in the torn ship:

In what torn ship soever I embarke,
That ship shall be my embleme of thy Arke;
What sea soever swallow mee, that flood
Shall be to mee an embleme of thy blood;
Though thou with clouds of anger do
disguise
Thy face; yet through that maske I know
those eyes,
Which, though they tume away sometimes,
They never will despise (23)

Donne's concept of soul inherently matches with
that of Andrew Marvell (1621-78) as revealed in
his poem, 'On a Drop of Dew:
Orient Dew,

'Shed from the Bosom of the Morn'
Restless it roules and unsecure,
Trembling lest it grow impure: (24)

This can be effectively compared to Donne's
retributive compromise with God,

I tume my back to thee, but to receive
Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave,
O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
That thou may'st know mee, and I'll tume
my face.(25)
As Marvell sees the face of soul in the dew drop, he conceives the soul as the symbol of eternity in a transient home of flesh — forever in struggle with the sins of this world. But finally it returns to the bosom wherefrom it had been flung into this world, just as the dew does, dissolving, run
Into the Glories of th' Almighty Sun.(26)

Besides Donne and Marvel two other poets of English metaphysical tradition who seem to have sailed very close to the mystic tradition were Richard Crashaw (1612-49) and Henry Vaughan (1622-95). Crashaw's metaphysical mood has an affinity, more to the divinity-oriented vision of the Spanish mystics than to that of Donne. Tracing the origin of his mystic temper, Caroline Spurgeon, in Mysticism in English Literature, speaks of the impact which St. Teresa's verses had on him. His poems expose a rare combination of sensuality and spirituality, revealed in a highly metaphysical frame-work. The blending of the individual soul with the Original Soul — a theme, common to the Spanish Carmelites — is treated with the same mirth and intensity in his 'On a Prayer books sent
to Mrs. M.R.' But, to turn from Crashaw to Vaughan is to be aware of a spirituality, kindled by Nature and natural phenomena. It is worth quoting Legoués and Cazamian who, commenting on the mystic strain of the poems of Vaughan, observe:

these are pure gold. In them Vaughan is more melodious than Herbert; his mysticism is more fluid and less argumentative and his imagination is mellower ........

.......... His own picturesque country has inspired him with love for nature, and his feeling mingles with his Christian meditations and imparts to the best of his work something which is romantic and modern.(27)

In Vaughan's meditative poetry, as is later found in Wordsworth's, there is a skilful handling of Nature. He considers Nature to be a projection of the mood of the Almighty which affects humanity only on rare occasions, as he narrates in 'The World':

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,(28)
And, recovering from the mystic stupor, he asks earnestly,

What sublime truths, and wholesome themes,
Lodge in thy mystical, deep streams?
Such as dull man can never finde
Unless that Spirit lead his minde,
Which first upon thy face did move,
And hatch'd all with his quickening love. (29)

The Metaphysical poets, thus, in their appreciation of spirituality were far ahead of ordinary religious poets of the time. To them religion was not a path of blind devotion but one of abstract realisation. In God they perceived their own true personality which had been contaminated through contact with the impurities of the ego-centric living. Beneath the metaphysical veil of verbosity, innervated with conceits and far-fetched images, their mystic poems analysed the constitution of human soul and followed it to its culmination in divine understanding. Although their mysticism was not discernible from religion, their realisation of truth and acceptance of life revealed more of mystic awareness than of Christianity. Their
religion was love and attainment of Supreme grace which were genuinely expressed in their meditative chants and later in the adroit words of mystic-Romantics like Blake and Wordsworth.

Both William Blake and William Wordsworth were called mystics in their exploration of felicity in 'Vision' and in 'Nature' respectively. Both of them alike, discovered the presence of the Supreme in the inner as well as the outer world; but, while Blake's mystic postulation is highly unconventional, Wordsworth's is a form of profound pantheism — a case of Nature oriented mysticism.

Wordsworth (1770-1850) derived his mystic experience chiefly from Nature. The vernal beauty and babbling brooks enfolded before him the personality of the imperishable glory which he attributed as the all pervading spirit. His God, the Divine Immanence, thus, is reflected in Nature, which in essence holds the root of human personality too. Blake, if he is taken for a mystic, as often he is, then without thought
one can see that his mysticism is contained in his personality itself. He is the one who fully comprehends the rejuvenation of human spirit in Nature, as it operates through individual consciousness. He holds the vision of eternity, like any other poet of the mystic tradition, in the depth of contemplation which is "the daughter of the grey morning". And, he sees the limitations of human form with its miseries,

"Heavenly goddess! I am wrapped in mortality,
my flesh is a prison,
"my bones are bars of death; Misery builds over our cottage roofs,
"and discontent runs like a brook. Even in Childhood Sorrow slept
"With me in my Cradle; he followed me up and down in the house
"When I grew up.......and I oft found myself "sitting by sorrow on a tomb-stone! "(30)

And, in 'Jerusalem', he seeks relief from it through divine company,

Come to my arms & never more
Depart, but dwell for ever here:
Create my Spirit to thy Love:
Subdue my Spectre to thy Fear.(31)

Wordsworth too, in his poems fully realizes the operation of the Supreme force in the world around.
The sensuous manifestations of Nature, which the sensory organs perceive, surge through a finer sensibility to spiritual significance in the psyche. This spiritual experience is filtered through sublimation of senses, whereby upliftment of spirit is attained. And this, he calls an art:

life requires an art
To which our souls must bend;
and,
ere the flowing fount be dry,
As soon it must, a sense to sip,
Or drink, with no fastidious lip: (32)

Unlike the ideation of spirituality of some of the English metaphysical poets, Wordsworth's spiritualization of Nature is not a mere transfiguration of Nature but a purgation of spirit and attainment of ecstatic submission by the influence of natural beauty. Through understanding of harmonious identity, he realizes the existence of the one congregated life of which he says:

I saw one life, and felt that it was joy (33)
and, in book XI of The Prelude, he reiterates the
pangs of the same feeling, this time with a still intenser conviction:

I lov'd whate'er I saw;
nor lightly loved,
But fervently .......

I worshipped then among the depths of things
I felt and nothing else. (34)

To Wordsworth this world is a great mystery that can be unveiled through various moods of Nature. He was contented to regard Nature as the portal to human soul and was steeped in the mystic awareness that came to him from it.

Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), who carries the string of imagination farther to reach the still unexplored realms of life, works hard on finding out the way to such new spheres, commonly known as the occult sphere. Seeing the meagreness of human knowledge placed against the higher wisdom of the Masters — beings much higher than ordinary human entities — he developed a fascination for the mysteries of life. Tennyson understood and perhaps experimented with the feasibility of a rapport between the physical plane and the astral plane which contains both the past and the future in a subtle and impalpable manner. Often, in his shorter
and longer poems Tennyson is seen to be ruminating on occult themes such as life after death, reincarnation, evolution of the soul and the Divine Hierarchy. The poet's belief in rebirth and physical as well as spiritual evolution, accompanied by purification of senses, are boldly exposed in 'By an Evolutionist' — a poem which may be taken for a deeply contemplative comment on the thought contained in Marvell's 'Progress of the Soul'. Man, at the end of Tennyson's poem, is allowed a glimpse of the Divinity wherefrom he has sprung:

Man is quiet at last
As he stands on the heights of his life
With a glimpse of a height that is higher. (35)

Writing of the poet's contact with the world beyond, A.P. Sinnett says:

Tennyson lived and wrote at a period when none of this knowledge had become available for public use. As we see now — quotations from his writings will show this not as a matter of opinion, but as fact — Tennyson was individually put in touch with teachers on a level far above that of ordinary humanity, he — the real entity known as Tennyson to himself
and others — could pass out of the body, take cognisance of realms around unperceived by the physical senses, receive instructions there from Beings far advanced beyond ordinary human conditions, and (this was his all important capacity) bring back the recollection of what he had thus learned to his physical brain when he returned to the body (36).

If occultism is taken to be the study of spiritual knowledge, such beliefs and testimonies portray him more accurately as an occultist than anything else. But, peculiarly enough, his occultism was scarcely explicit to his contemporaries because of their lack of understanding in the field he was writing. Still, whenever he talked about it, it came ever piercing and exalting, as in 'Ulysses':

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch where thro' Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move. (37)

This is a meditative comment on a post-mystic thought. The poem is the expression of refulgent feelings, experienced at the moment of revelation, with a reflective treatment on the
Tennyson's inspiration does not come directly from nature as it comes to Wordsworth. His, on the other hand, is derived from ceaseless faith in the spiritual path. The conversation between the great seer and the man in 'The Ancient Sage' is a mere verbal battle between faith and scepticism. The sage in the poem is akin to what the Theosophists later believed to be Great Masters of the occult world. It can be read from his scroll that

Thou canst not prove the Nameless, O my son,
Nor canst thou prove the world thou movest in,
Thou canst not prove that thou art body alone,
Nor canst thou prove that thou art spirit alone,
Nor canst thou prove that thou art both in one;
Because,
nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproven: wherefore thou be wise. (38)

Similarly, the Masters of the occult world cannot be proved but only believed in. Tennyson's 'faith' here, is as strong as it had been with the Christian mystics of the late Medieval age or of the Metaphysical poets of England. Tennyson's belief in supernaturalism and his practice of occult science often make him one among the gifted occultists of the world. Thus,
Tennyson the occultist, in an era of doubt and conflict, contributed immensely, first to spiritual consciousness through literature, and then in handing it over to the coming generation when both practical, contemplative mystics and occultists like George William Russell (AE) and W.B. Yeats were to appear.

The place of W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) in mystic literature is one of much debate and controversy. He came into prominence along with a cluster of Ireland-based nationalists like Charles Johnston, Charles Weeke, John Enlinton, and the outstanding mystic, George W. Russell (AE) — all of whom were interested in exploring the cultural and aesthetic values of the Celtic society and had been, more or less, in contact with the great Theosophical Movement of the time. Although Yeats is not known to have collaborated in The Irish Theosophist or later, in The Internationalist, he had gone considerably deep into the mist of Oriental Occultism and had his place in the Dublin Hermetic Society and the Golden Dawn, or, as he called it, a Mystical Celtic Order. Besides
Cabbalism and Hermèsism, A.P.Sinnett's
The Esoteric Budhism, The Occult World,
Mabel Collin's Light on the Path, and some
of the Tantric and Hindu doctrines had played
a definite role in developing an occult
personality in Yeats. His poems, as seen in
retrospect, reveal more of an aesthetic norm
than a mystic enterprise. In the fringe of
the Celtic tradition his nationalistic mind
found pleasure of great magnitude and he was
drawn naturally towards his country's cultural
and aesthetic grandeur.

In the sense Wordsworth is a Romantic-mystic
and Donne, a religious-mystic, Yeats is a
symbolist and occultist, for, his expression
of spiritual reality is thickly garbed under
representative language and symbolic connotations.
The spiritual awareness in him is occasionally a
revelation, but often a sort of consecrated
romanticism which he follows logically in his
poems. True as A.C.Bose writes,

The bulk of Yeats's poetry is mystical more on
account of the temper of his mind, the tone
of his
feelings and the nuance of his style than for the
revelation of a mystic apprehension or declaration of a mystic faith. (39)

A few pages later he quotes Mr. C. L. Wrenn to reiterate what he has already said:

He is not the perfervid mystic. So absorbed is he in his dreaming exemplifications of the doctrine of Art before all things....... his mysticism is of the kind which M. Arnold, in his essay on Celtic Literature, has called Celtic. It is a mysticism founded on a basis of pure emotion and an exquisite sensibility, expressing itself in the melancholy of reveries or in happy dreams which to more prosaic races seems insubstantial. (40)

Yeats' interest in the Theosophy or the supernatural is primarily poetic. With his knowledge of the hidden truths of the Esoteric Section, Golden Dawn and occultism, he meant to improvise the occult standard in his poetry. And this was the reason why he insisted so much on direct experience in words more effable than
on an indescribable feeling of the heart. His 'Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni' and 'The Eaters of Precious Stones' (41) speak of his waking dreams and faith in occult manifestations.

Writing on Yeats's development of personality through magic and mythology, Mary Catherine Flannery says:

Magic will be the tool with which to open the Celtic past, make it present, and thus create a great art rooted in the soil of Folk-belief. (42)

Celtism constitutes a part of Yeats's occultism. In the treasury of Gaelic and Celtic culture he discovered the glories of legendary and mythic tradition which he analysed and reconstructed in the lines of his symbolic poetry. His *The Celtic Twilight* clearly evinces the poet's fascination for the world of undefinable phenomena and physically non-existent beings such as spirits and apparitions. Yeats was lucky to enjoy the company of his wife who is said to have had a mediumistic body and therefore could translate the astral plane into the physical. Speaking of Yeats's deviation from a mystic's goal and comparing him with his contemporary Dublin mystic G.W.Russell (AB),
Earnest Boyd, in *Ireland's Literary Renaissance*, thus observes:

The difference between the two poets is that Yeats is a symbolist, whereas AE is a mystic. They both make use of symbols, but the former does not succeed, as does the latter, in subordinating symbolism to the expression of truth. Yeats becomes enamoured, as it were, of the instrument and loses sight of its purpose. (43)

To move, from Yeats to AE, is to step into a world subtly different from the former's, in respect of realisation as well as expression of the divinity. AE's spiritual world is one of pure mysticism where the mystic-poet brings his unique experience into the cadence of language. George William Russell (AE), with his spiritual apprehension and mystic sensitivity, is one of the finest poets of mystic literature of the time. His mysticism is placed beside his deep and sincere love for various religious-philosophies of the world as well as his unalterable faith in the presence of the Great Cause to which the universe and the human will are ordained. Much like the Ireland-born medieval mystic Scotus Erigena (c810-c877), George Russell sees the fusion of the conscious personality with Divine Spirit as the culmination of human life.
Since childhood AE's mind and sensibility were cultivated in the lap of the Celtic myth and the traditions of the Gaelic past. With rapt attention he observed the beauteous moulds of the pastoral Ireland and bathed the solitude of his heart with the visionary charms of earth. Feeling the necessity of the development of soul he made experimentations with the world within, explored and assessed it, but never felt it detached from the outside world. Through sensations of the physical body he comprehended the possibility of illumination and evolution of the soul. With strengthening of the will and meditation he made his desires and passions calm down, so that the mind could communicate with God. Feeling the importance of personal experience in the aesthetic and spiritual evolution of the soul, AE wrote to W.B. Yeats in March 1899 that experience was good. But, he did not come out of the course of life to discover the meaning of life. He, like a practical mystic, sought life as it came to him. Eight years later, again he wrote to Charles Weekes, stressing on the need of a normal life:
I simply want to live a natural energetic life and if a poem ever takes me along the way I will welcome it but won't go out of my way to look for one. (44)

True, as he claims here, AE's poems are not deliberately composed as lyrics of a strained mind. They come as naturally as visions come to his meditative mind. The truth and philosophy he postulates in his poems are born of depths of experience, and hence they speak of the poet's convictions and not of any blind ideology which a homilist sings. AE identified his thought with that of the Theosophists, he studied the Oriental philosophies, had a great adoration for the Hindu Schools of thought. He was drenched in the song of love in Sufi literature, and the Tao enlightenment shaped a considerable part of his life's ideal. In spite of the various religious impacts on him, at the root, he is necessarily a mystic standing far beyond the reach of these numerous philosophies which helped him only to justify his personal conviction and to direct him mystically bent mind to dwell upon a delightful awareness.
NOTES

3. Ibid, P-10.
10. Underhill, Evelyn, Mystics of the Church, P-118.


29. Ibid, P-282.


34. Ibid, P-212.


37. Tennyson, *Ulysses*, Poetical Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, P-95

38. Ibid, P-548.


40. Ibid, P-27.

