MYSTICISM IN ENGLISH POETRY
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO BLAKE, WORDSWORTH AND W.B. YEATS

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This dissertation is the record of my research work in the Department of English, S.V. University, Tirupati, from 1982-’85. It represents an attempt to trace the mystical element pervading the poetry of Wordsworth, Blake and Yeats. This is by no means an untrodden path, yet an unending one leaving scope for more study and research. A deeper analysis into the mystical leaning found in the imaginative work of these poets reveals a transmutation of simple day to day living experiences and ideas into a series of illuminated visionary passages.

The work consists of eight chapters. The opening chapter is a general study of the term 'mysticism' and its implications in literature in general. The second and third chapters cover the mystical elements in the work of the joyful mystic William Blake, followed by two chapters dealing with Nature mysticism highlighted in William Wordsworth’s poetry.

As a mystical poet Wordsworth sought to reveal the belief that the divine power which activates the universe, which is also the ancient Vedic belief, is immanent in every part of Nature. While with a natural spontaneity he could feel this presence and at times found it possible to be one with it, his orthodox religious belief prevented him from
accepting his intense experience as mystical. 'The Prelude' and some of the poems from 'The Lyrical Ballads' like 'The Tintern Abbey Lines' have been chosen for special attention as they contain profound mystical truths. His other pastoral works and poems though rich in poetical excellence, have not been analysed in this effort, as they do not fall into the purview of mystical study.

Blake, on the other hand found immense joy when by virtue of imagination, which for him was the 'Absolute Reality', he could visualize the multiplicity of the universe as a unity, as one whole. People who could not understand the inherent truth in his poetical works termed him 'The Mad Mystic' but a deep analysis of several of his major works show a similarity with the profound mystical truth uttered in the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedas. 'The Four Zoas' and 'The Songs of Innocence' and 'The Songs of Experience' along with 'The Book of Thel' have been considered specifically so as to show this similarity.

Turning to modern poets, the next two chapters deal with mystical works of one of the greatest poets of recent times, William Butler Yeats.

Yeats, with his extensive philosophical studies and interest in occultism, magic and oriental doctrines could
assimilate a mystical system of study which is quite difficult to comprehend unless one realises the basic mystical elements of the different doctrines which impressed and influenced him. His profound knowledge of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita shaped his intellectual ability which brought forth the noetic quality which is essentially mystical. 'A Vision' and important poems like 'Byzantium', 'The Second Coming', 'Lapis Lazuli', 'The Tower' etc. have been discussed extensively. The emphasis in this study, then is less on the life of these poets themselves and more upon the inherent mystical element in their poetical work which is compared to several passages from the Upanishads and The Bhagavad Gita.

This also is an attempt to establish the fact that right from the time of the Romantic revival, the poets were deeply interested in the mystical literature of India and were influenced by the essential Truth preached in them. 'The Bhagavad Gita' had impressed Blake to such an extent that he made a painting of one of the scholars of his time translating it.

The works of these poets also reveal the fact that the poet's vision and his expression of it, bring humanity to an awareness of the validity of the secret doctrines preached by these gems of ancient mystical literature. All these three poets have tried to shift their attention from
time to eternity, from a concern for man as an earthly being to an awareness of him, as the Man with inherent divinity, eager to escape the dungeon of flesh.

Through an examination of the mystical poetry of these three poets, it is hoped that an insight may be gained into the 'Absolute Reality' which dwells within oneself and which can be realized by the stages of contemplation, meditation and illumination. The way has been shown by the ancient oriental philosophies especially 'Gita' and this has been shown to travel beyond time, space, race and religion and accepted as the spiritual guidance for practical living. Following these thought waves supplied by mystical study, the poetry of these three poets is found to reflect profound wisdom illuminating the mystical bounty presented in their work.

The concluding chapter summarises the essentiality of symbolic representation and the similarities as well as the dissimilarities in the approach of these three poets towards mysticism as seen in their poetry. The influence of the Vedic literature and the essence of Gita teachings on their work is also established in conclusion.

I owe a special and sincere debt of gratitude to Dr. Radhamani Gopalakrishnan, Reader and Head of the Department of English, S.V. University, Tirupati, for having
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T. N. Sudha