Preface

Mysticism is an experience that cannot be learned from books. A deeper understanding of any mystical tradition can only be felt when one decides to become actively involved in it. It would ultimately be highly rewarding. But the wisdom of the Eastern mystics is so vast and deep that whether it can be probed within a lifetime, is doubtful.

Lawrence Durrell’s life and career paralleled one of the most innovative and tumultuous periods of human history. He was born in India in 1912, to British–Irish parents, during the glorious days of Imperial England. Call it chance or call it luck, this uniqueness of the age has had a tremendous impact on the formation of Durrell, the man and the artist. The formative and everlasting influence on Durrell has been his boyhood days in India. When Durrell was packed off home to England for education in 1923, the skulking Durrell fervently hoped to fly back to India soon. But the untimely death of his father soon after, and the family’s return to England closed the Indian chapter forever. But India lived in the heart of Durrell; he fondled its memories, its culture, its tradition, its religion and allowed it to grow, until eventually it converted him into a Vedantist and a Buddhist.
This thesis is a humble attempt to throw light upon the mystical Durrell as revealed in his most popular fiction The Alexandria Quartet comprising of Justine, Balthazar, Mountolive and Clea. Though Durrell has been a prolific writer after the thirties, no other work before or after it has gained the appeal and attention gained by The Alexandria Quartet. Taking the cue from Einstein and his Theory of Relativity and Freud and his Theory of the Unstable Ego, Durrell envisages a spiritual journey of the human soul to a metaphysical world called “the heraldic universe”, where ultimate peace or rest may be attained. This quest motif dominates the entire literary oeuvre of Durrell. The quest does not correspond to that of the Western hero rather it corresponds to the Eastern view of the spiritual journey of the human soul towards the Universal Soul.

Durrell claims that the four novels of the Quartet run parallel to the four stages of the mind in its journey towards Self-discovery. It is no different from the evolutionary stages of the yogic mind in its journey towards the Ultimate Truth or the “heraldic universe” which is an exalted state of mind or point of stasis when all creativity becomes possible. It may be said to correspond to the Hindu-Buddhist nirvana or satori.
Through a Tantric –yogic perspective, an examination of the different characters and their journey to the heraldic universe has been attempted. A structural analysis is made, supported by primary and secondary sources. A selected Bibliography has been provided to promote further studies on Durrell. End Notes have been supplied and Sanskrit terms have been translated in parenthetical references, while terms which require further explanations are clarified in End Notes. All page references to The Alexandria Quartet are to the Faber edition, first published in 1962, which combined a single paperback volume of all four novels: Justine, Balthazar, Mountolive, Clea.

The thesis is divided into five chapters which includes an Introduction and a Conclusion. The Introductory chapter begins by analyzing the term mysticism and its implications. The major religions of the world that influenced Durrell to encompass the Quartet are briefly surveyed. A collection of critical lectures of Durrell, Key to Modern British Poetry which is indeed the ‘key’ to the Quartet has been briefly unlocked. The two major discoveries of Einstein and Freud which went into the making of the novel are looked into. The confluence of Eastern metaphysics and Western physics which forms the cosmology of the times is one aspect of exposition of the present work.
Chapter 2 traces the growth and maturity of Darley as a man and as an artist. Since he is embarked on a quest for truth (satyam) through art and love, the chapter has been named satyam to conform to the Hindu theme. The classical Indian concepts of satyam, shivam and sundaram have been taken up as titles. They mean truth, love and beauty respectively though in essence they are all one. Satyam is shivam, shivam is sundaram and sundaram contains both satyam and shivam. Though Darley aspires to be a writer, he is too much involved in the sensory world to concentrate fully on his work. In the Hindu-Buddhist tradition, a total participation in worldly life is essential, so that Man may be able to sacrifice it and emerge purged and purified for the spiritual move towards the Heraldic Universe. A surrender of the Ego is the essential prerequisite. Darley’s spiritual evolution through a yogic- tantric perspective is traced out.

In chapter 3, the focus will be on Justine, one of the most enigmatic of Durrell’s feminine creations. Her life is typically Alexandrian; a rare combination of mysticism and sensualism. This takes us to the world of Shiva mythology which exposes some parallelisms in the novel, hence the chapter is named shivam. Justine may be said to combine the Shiva-Shakti figures in herself. In her varying moods or gunas she may at times appear to be the Goddess herself.
Chapter 4 begins by briefly looking into the deeply desired Heraldic Universe or the state of nirvana in all its senses. It discusses the theme of Death in Durrell’s Quartet. Since Ego and Time are conquered there remains the last of the hurdles to be confronted –Death. Death is synonymous to Time in Durrell. Life and Time are viewed through the perspective of Death. Death is welcome as it is a chance for expurgation of one’s sins to start life afresh. This is a purely Eastern view and Durrell had full faith in it.

That Durrell has woven into the fabric of the Quartet, themes and symbols from a variety of Eastern mystical sources is doubtless. These themes and symbols include the search for Enlightenment the tantric – yogic way, Shaivism and Shaktism, the theories of Karma and Transmigration, space-time and its yogic connotations, cause-effect, dual personality, cosmic male-female reunion – to name a few. These symbols are not present in the works as explicit and easily recognizable images, but they are intricately woven into the texture of the Quartet. The Quartet is in fact a work that connects the classical past and the modern ages together.

The subject of study becomes most suitable to the present context. In an Age when human values and aspirations, nay even human lives have dwindled away to nothing, a way back to the ancient path of mysticism and devotion would lead us to a better understanding of our world and life. The
cosmic power of man and the wonders of the human body, should be unleashed to make the earth a heaven. Durrell’s choice of Alexandria is quite apt as its cosmopolitan aspect enabled him to use it as a symbol or cross-section of the Twentieth century world which reflects the diseased and egocentric soul of modern man.

As a novelist Durrell is best known for his *Quartet*, short listed for the Nobel Prize in 1983. His anti-British stand kept him away from Britain; Britain too refused to acknowledge him. But Durrell cut across nationalities and races, gained lovers in Europe, America, France, Russia. His books have been translated into many different languages.

Durrell fans have founded the International Lawrence Durrell Society in 1980, an educational organization devoted to promote the study, and appreciation of Durrell’s works. It sponsors meetings, seminars and conferences worldwide on Durrell and publishes a newsletter, *The Herald*, and a journal, *Deus Loci: The International Lawrence Durrell Journal*. In 1980 the first International Durrell Conference, *On Miracle Ground* was co-sponsored by Ian Mac Niven (Suny Maritime College) and Carol Peirce (University of Baltimore). Since then conferences have been held regularly in different venues. The next Durrell Conference On Miracle Ground XV is scheduled to be held in July 2008, in Paris.