ABSTRACT

All are called to lead a life of perfection (Mt.5: 48). But a very few respond to this call seriously and tread a path of holiness and reach the peak spiritual experience, namely the spiritual marriage or the transforming union. The experience of this spiritual union with the Absolute by grace is called the mystical experience. This is a gratuitous gift from God in which secret wisdom is infused into the soul. Mariam Thresia, an unassuming, illiterate woman from a remote village in Kerala, is one among a very few souls who could attain the rare experience of this mystical union.

The purpose of this research is to interpret the mystical experiences of Mariam Thresia in the light of Christian mysticism and to establish that she was a mystic of the highest order and that her mystical experiences affected the society around her and brought about its transformation. The method used in the research is a systematic monographic study based on the writings of Mariam Thresia. References from the Holy Bible and the teachings of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila are referred to in order to examine the authenticity and depth of the mystical experiences of Mariam Thresia.

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part gives a short description of her life and literary sources. The second part consists of the central theme of the Thesis. Here we delve deep into the mystical experiences of Mariam Thresia and prove that she has attained the highest spiritual experience, the spiritual marriage. The final part describes the effects of her spiritual union.

The research arrives at the conclusion that Mariam Thresia was essentially a mystic. The spiritual journey of each soul, though essentially one, is different in many details. Referring to various classifications of the spiritual journey given by eminent mystical authors, an attempt is made to classify the spiritual journey of Mariam Thresia taking into account the nature of her mystical experiences. Her spiritual journey is classified into seven stages. 1) Spiritual awakening 2) practice of prayer 3) active purification 4) heroic practice of virtues 5) mystical contemplation 6) passive purification and 7) mystical union.
At the age of three and a half Thresia was awakened into the spiritual journey and started the practice of intense prayer. She used to meditate on the sufferings of Jesus and sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary for long hours in the night and do severe acts of penance and mortification from her tender age. She had the experience of active purification of her soul by the heroic practice of the theological virtues, faith, hope and charity.

Through the mystical contemplation she was filled with infused knowledge and wisdom. Her expressions ‘Isn’t God God’, ‘If God is God’, ‘God knows’, ‘I am a wretched sinner’ etc. reveal her achievement of infused knowledge of God the infinite and of herself.

During the crucial period of her life from the age of twenty six to thirty six, she underwent the passive purification of her soul in preparation for entering into the experience of spiritual marriage. She had severe diabolic assaults as in the lives of many saints. As the sign of her victory over the demons Mother Mary added her own name, Mariam, to Thresia. Thenceforth she was called Mariam Thresia.

The culmination of spiritual journey is the habitual union with God. As the effect of her mystical union, she was entrusted with a mission to serve the families. Brushing aside the customs and conventions of the society, and ignoring the criticisms of the people and ecclesiastical authorities, with heroic courage she visited the sick and needy, educated the children around and worked for the moral transformation of sinners. In order to continue her mission she founded a congregation for women, ‘the Congregation of Holy Family’.

The thesis provides enough data for us to conclude that Mariam Thresia was a great mystic who was raised to a very high level of mystical union.