GENERAL CONCLUSION

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Mt. 7:13, 14).

In the symbolic sketch of the ‘Mount of Perfection’, St. John of the Cross has indicated that the broad road taken by one who loves goods of this world or of heaven does not lead to the summit of the mount of perfection. Only those who take the narrow road leading to life, i.e., a road leading to nothing other than God, will reach the summit of the mount.¹ A soul which seeks to tread the path of nothing, that is with no honours, glory, security, comfort, joy, taste, rest, liberty, and knowledge but chooses a path which is narrow and hard, will find fullness and fulfilment in God. It is precisely in nothingness that the soul is enriched with God. The one who reaches to the summit of the mount of perfection experiences the union with God. This is a gratuitous gift from the part of God. In the words of St. John of the Cross: “This is a characteristic of the union of the soul with God in marriage: God works in and communicates Himself to her through Himself alone, without the mediation of angels or natural ability. For the exterior and interior senses and all creatures, and even the very soul do very little toward the reception of the remarkable supernatural favours which God grants in this state. They do not fall within the province of the soul’s natural ability, work or diligence, but God alone grants them to her.”²

Mariam Thresia the mystic is the one among a very few souls who could reach the summit of the mount through the path of nothingness; the one who chose the narrow and hard path to find the life, life in its fullness; the one who experienced the union of the soul with God in the spiritual marriage. She had unusual experiences as she underwent active and passive purifications in order to attain the mystical union with God. Many people, even the ecclesiastical authorities misunderstood her. The present research was focussed on substantiating her mystical experience in the light of Bible teachings and the lives and teachings of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila on Christian mysticism.

² St John of the Cross, ‘The Spiritual Canticle’ (35, 6), 544.
The thesis is mainly divided into three parts. The first part prepares a background for the research through a brief description of the historical facts about the ecclesial, social, political and cultural context in which Mariam Thresia was born and lived, her life history, and the literary sources which gave ample proofs of her mystical experiences. The second part explains in detail her mystical experiences. The effects of her mystical union are described in the third and the last part of the thesis.

The lifetime of Mariam Thresia belonged to almost the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century while India was under British rule, and the freedom struggle was getting momentum. In those days Kerala was comprised of three provinces-Malabar, Kochi and Travancore. Puthenchira, the village in which Thresia was born was under Travancore province. At that time it was men who were dominating the society and women were not allowed for free movement, especially girls of marriageable age were confined to their homes. Caste system was prevailing and it contributed its share of sufferings, especially among the outcastes.

The spiritual journey of each soul, though essentially one, is different in many details. The masters of spiritual life have given various classifications concerning the spiritual growth. In order to study the spiritual journey of Mariam Thresia, according to the nature of her spiritual experiences, we have attempted to classify her journey into seven stages: 1) An awakening of the self 2) Practice of prayer 3) Active purification 4) Practice of virtues 5) Mystical contemplation 6) Passive purification and 7) Mystical union.

**Awakening of the Self** There is an awakening for every soul towards God to initiate its spiritual journey. It can happen abruptly like in the life of St. Paul or gradually as in the life of St. Therese of Lissieux. Mariam Thresia was awakened into a deep spiritual life from her early childhood. Her God-fearing mother imprinted in the child Thresia, great devotion to the Holy Trinity, Crucified Jesus and Mother Mary. Her spiritual father, Fr. Joseph Vithayathil has recorded that at the age of three and a half Thresia dedicated herself to God and at the age of nine she took the vow of perpetual virginity and chose Jesus as her spiritual bridegroom.
Practice of Prayer In this second stage the soul enters into discursive meditation and active recollection. It is termed active because it is acquired by the person’s active and positive efforts. Mariam Thresia’s active prayer consists in deep meditation, sacrificial prayer and special devotions. She wrote in her autobiography: “I used to recite a full rosary at midnight, meditate on the sorrows of Blessed Mother, discipline myself with whip, meditate on the passion of the Lord for an hour with arms outstretched and wake up many times during the night to say the prayers. From the very childhood Thresia manifested her devotion to the crucified Christ, accepted Mother Mary as the mother of her soul and body, offered special prayers in honour of Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Holy Family, Infant Jesus, St. Joseph and the guardian angel. She was zealous in her active prayer. Even though she attained the higher forms of prayer, she continued the practice of meditation and prayer and exhorted her followers to do it with more fervour and concentration.

Active Purification of the Soul According to St. John of the Cross the journey towards union with God is night and the night has two stages: active night when the activity of the soul prevails and passive night when the action of God prevails. The active purification of the soul takes place in two levels – one, the senses and two, the spirit. Thresia from her very childhood controlled her senses through mortification, sacrifice, abstinence and penance. She purified her senses effecting a total detachment from all sensual enjoyments.

Human soul possesses three faculties of the spirit through which it acts. They are intelligence, memory and will. Their purification consists in bringing these faculties to seek God alone by means of the three theological virtues: 1) by bringing the intelligence to know God alone by means of faith; 2) by bringing the memory to desire God alone by means of hope; and 3) by bringing the will to love God alone by means of charity. Mariam Thresia practised the three theological virtues faith, hope and charity in a most heroic way. Certain expressions in her letters like, ‘Isn’t God God’, ‘I trust that God is God’, ‘Our God is our hope’, ‘I do have the hope God will save even the worst sinners, I am waiting hopefully that He will save me too’, ‘Let God’s will and my will be one and the same’ manifest her deep rooted faith, strong hope and her conformity to the will of God.
Practice of Virtues  St. Teresa of Avila laid great emphasis on the practice of three virtues, namely humility, detachment and charity for a beginner in his/her journey towards union with God. Mariam Thresia practised these three virtues in a heroic manner from her childhood. She lived the virtue of humility in a supreme manner. Her humility was equal to the third degree of humility proposed by St. Ignatius of Loyola. This is the degree of the perfect souls. Such souls prefer enjoying poverty to riches, shame to honour and humiliations to glory of God and salvation of souls. Thresia practised the virtue of detachment in a perfect way. When she found the valuable pearl in the love of God, she could detach herself from every other joy of this world and consider it as refuse (Phil.3:8). True perfection consists in the love of God and love of neighbour. From the very childhood Thresia’s sole desire was to love God intensely. This love impelled her to go out of herself to join the suffering humanity.

Mystical Contemplation  The soul journeying towards union with God reaches a stage where God starts working on it, which then spontaneously experiences the spiritual delights without any effort on its part. Here the soul is entering into a passive stage called mystical contemplation. St. Teresa of Avila says that when the soul enters into the fourth mansions, it begins to touch the supernatural. It enters into such forms of passive prayer as infused recollection, prayer of quiet, sleep of the powers and inebriation by love. In the infused recollection the intellect of the soul is withdrawn and enters into the depth to meet God. In the prayer of quiet the will is affected and fills the body and soul with ineffable sweetness and delight. The soul is in the sleep of powers when it experiences a profound state of recollection in God and is absorbed in a kind of drowsiness. In this stage, the intellect, will and memory are affected. The intense delight produced by the sleep of the powers sometimes causes a divine inebriation. During these experiences the soul enjoys not only delights beyond description but at times a delectable pain. This pain too is so pleasant for the soul to bear that it is prepared to undergo any suffering in order to have it.

Mariam Thresia was essentially a contemplative. She used to contemplate the sufferings of Lord Jesus and the sorrows of Blessed Virgin Mary for long hours often at night. A soul in the prayer of quiet never wants to offend God. From her childhood she often expressed great desire to make confession and receive Holy Communion daily. There are many instances in the autobiography which manifest Thresia’s
infused knowledge. For example, when her mother objected to her going to the church everyday because of the ridicules from others, she told her mother: “One does not need to reach a certain age to love God.” In contemplation the soul is in so complete a concentration that all the faculties are absorbed in this union accompanied by the suspension of the senses. Owing to the intensity of the union the body cannot withstand it and falls into ecstasy. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil has recorded in the diary many such instances of Thresia’s ecstasy. Many a time she was in ecstasy for the whole day. As a result of this ecstatic union, Thresia received great courage to suffer for the Lord and an increased aversion to worldly matters.

**Passive Purification of the Soul** In the passive purification, God places the soul in the dark night. The soul does nothing in an active way; it however, suffers all passively and patiently. The two principal manifestations of this passive purification are passive night of the senses and passive night of the spirit. Mariam Thresia underwent the passive night of the senses through her physical pains, illness, sufferings, mental trials and the poor conditions of the family.

About the passive purification of the spirit St. John of the Cross says: “The soul is purified in this forge like gold in the crucible … God humbles the soul greatly in order to exalt it greatly afterwards.” During the passive purgation the soul feels very vividly the shadow of death, the sorrows of hell reflected in the feeling of God’s absence, experiences of being chastised and rejected by Him, and also a feeling of being unworthy of Him. God allowed Thresia to undergo these kinds of purgation. Her deep afflictions were very beautifully articulated in her letters to her spiritual Father. Here are a few extracts: ‘I feel like being thrown into a deep abyss’; ‘Father, what a disaster has befallen me’; ‘I don’t know to explain to you where exactly and how much I feel the pain. To put it in one way, my pain is like a tempestuous sea. God willed so for me’; ‘This is a time of confusion, I feel confused’.

Like the story of Job in the Bible, God allowed the devils to test Thresia for three years. Thresia had to face terrible temptations against faith, hope, charity and strong suggestions against purity accompanied by phantasmagoria. Devils tried their utmost to make her desperate. All these temptations and torments Thresia suffered with courage and won over them. As the sign of her victory over the demons Mother Mary through a vision gave her the name ‘Mariam Thresia’. Later during her religious profession Bishop John Menachery gave her the same name officially.
Mystical Experience of Blessed Mariam Thresia

**Mystical Union** The culmination of the mystical journey is the deep habitual union with God. At this stage the experience of God within the soul is almost continual. The soul gets a deep insight into the matters of God. Here the soul is characterised by deep joy, profound humility, desire to serve God and apostolic fruitfulness. The soul’s sufferings become a sharing in the redeeming suffering of Christ rather than the suffering for purification.

Thresia had habitual consciousness of the presence of God from her childhood. Child Thresia had asked her mother: “You ask me to sleep, but does our God ever sleep?” She had a unique experience of God’s omnipotence. Thresia was very cautious to be always free of even venial sins. Her spiritual Father has recorded that in case of any venial sin or aridity or lukewarmness in prayer she expressed her desire to confess it everyday or as early as possible. She seemed to be always confirmed in grace.

St. John of the Cross speaks about ‘wound of love’ that a soul experiences in this stage in its deepest centre caused by the spirit of God. It is recorded that Thresia had the experience of transverberation five times in her life. To identify herself with the crucified Jesus she was given His five wounds. Many a time her fellow sisters saw her like hanging on the cross, raised from the ground, bleeding from the five wounds and from the head, crowned with thorns as it were. Thresia was given one by one the sufferings endured by the Lord. “Sometimes she felt being scourged, a crown of thorns being thrust on the head, being slapped on the face, falling on the ground with the cross, being pulled with a rope tied round the waist, shedding blood and being nailed to the cross and a spearhead being thrust into the side. Her spiritual father has seen these directly.” Thresia endured all the suffering with joy meditating on the sufferings of the Lord.

The soul grows in virtues as it enters into deeper union with God. Thresia was fervent in practising all the virtues in a heroic way. As she was purified thoroughly through active and passive purifications, her virtues got more illumined and confirmed and grown into greater perfection. Thresia had the mystical experiences of receiving ring from the Lord and exchange of hearts. One can assume that at the age of three and a half she experienced the mystical union with God. As she grew in age.
there was a deepening of the mystical union and she might have had the experience of spiritual marriage during the crucial period of her life, between the age twenty seven and thirty six. The effects of spiritual marriage enumerated by St. Teresa of Avila in the book of Mansions are manifested profoundly in the life of Mariam Thresia. After the crucial period she did not have mystical experiences visible to the public; however, she had them in private till her death. She was more involved in the mission entrusted to her.

*Mystical Phenomena* The soul in the mystical contemplation peers into the essence of God and discovers divine secrets. The new light that the soul experiences, is frequently accompanied by certain mystical phenomena. These are extraordinary gifts. However, they are not necessary for a soul to attain mystical union. There are many mystical phenomena manifested in the life of Blessed Mariam Thresia. They are: visions, locutions, revelations, reading of hearts, gift of prophecy, stigmata, transverberation, exchange of hearts, inedia, levitation, crucifixion, mystical aureoles, supernatural odour and spiritual espousal.

The soul which experiences the union with God is distinguished by their heroic and unselfish activities. Mariam Thresia’s life was interwoven with deep spiritual experiences, passive sufferings and heroic charitable deeds. Through revelations she was entrusted with certain missions to be fulfilled. The final part of the thesis focuses on Thresia’s heroic charitable deeds effected by her union with God. This part consists of three chapters.

The family situation and the needs of the society served as the natural motivating factors for her activities. Spiritually she was inspired by the extraordinary gifts she received from the Lord. Above all, she was motivated by her great love for Him. And it was her supreme love for the Lord that inspired Thresia to give herself totally for the service of others. She had many visions of Jesus carrying the cross for the sins of others. Once Jesus told her that He was still suffering owing to the sins of the people. Thresia’s sole desire was to console Jesus by quenching His thirst for the souls. Hence she took up the great challenge to fulfil His mission.
Motivated by the spirit of Christ, Thresia visited families of all who were in need of her service. She attended to their spiritual and temporal needs. She prepared them for receiving the sacraments. She prayed the recovery of the sick by doing sacrifices and prepared the dying for a happy death. She collected funds to meet the needs of the poor, took care of the orphans and gave people instructions with the aim of their moral transformation. This was very extraordinary in those days as girls would not get engaged in such an apostolate. When unmarried girls were not permitted to enter other homes she dared to go out even at night to nurse the sick and dying for which she incurred the displeasure and criticism of others. She had to suffer harsh remarks, severe criticisms and ridicules from many, even from her kith and kin. Braving all those oppositions and brushing aside the prevailing customs and conventions, she took up the challenge of her special mission of the family apostolate in order to win souls for Christ. Thresia’s family apostolate was a heavenly guided mission. It was Mother Mary or the guardian angel or her spiritual Father who directed her to serve the needy people and families.

Many souls in the Purgatory trusting in Thresia appeared to her and asked for her prayers and sacrifices for their deliverance. Thresia observed severe acts of penance, offered indulgences, Holy Masses and Holy Communion for their speedy deliverance. She wrote in her autobiography that she had seen many souls going up to heaven holding the hands of Mother Mary.

Thresia’s love for the poor and orphans was very edifying. When there was no place in the convent and no way to provide proper meals, Thresia was ready to take care of children who were left orphans. Before her death there were ten orphaned children under her care.

Realising the value of education Thresia dared to start a school for girls from practically nothing. There was no building, no finance, nor even competent personnel. Trusting in the divine providence she ventured to start a school which could achieve the government aid and recognition within a year. Through her life and activities she could convey great values to the world such as: vicarious suffering for others, forgiving love, human dignity, women empowerment, opposition to caste distinctions, option for poor, patient waiting and self emptying.
To continue the mission of family apostolate Thresia was called to found a new congregation: ‘The Congregation of Holy Family’. She responded to the call with great generosity. God was preparing her through trials and tribulations for this great mission. The local Ordinary, Bishop John Menachery was suspicious of all the extraordinary happenings in Thresia. He tested her for twelve long years in the crucible of suffering and humiliations before he gave his permission for building a house of solitude for Thresia and which was also the desire of Mother Mary. This house of solitude later became the first convent of the congregation of Holy Family. There was special intervention of the Holy Family in the founding of the new congregation. It turned out to be a beautiful coincidence that the new congregation was founded for the renewal of families, to turn families into the likeness of the Holy Family.

Under the great providence of God, the congregation grew remarkably. After one hundred years of its foundation, today it has taken root all over India and in a few countries abroad. At the time of Mother Mariam Thresia’s death in 1926 there were only 55 members and 3 convents, whereas at present there are as many as 1890 members and 226 convents in the congregation.

“A single perfect soul is worth hundreds and thousands of average ones. Such a soul can compensate for all the sins of a community and even of a nation.”³ Mariam Thresia offered her life as a holocaust that burns up at a very slow pace. Even when she was ill treated or set aside she took it all gracefully and was ready to suffer vicariously. The total surrender and self abandonment practiced by Mariam Thresia, elevated her to higher levels of mystical experience. This extraordinary way of kenosis is the divine path tried successfully by Jesus. Her imitation of Christ continues to have implications even now in the Church, for the modern world and for the Congregation of Holy Family founded by her. Her life gives Christian meaning to suffering. She raises the cross as the standard for living and the sign of hope for those who find no meaning in their life. Her apostolic spirit and zeal promotes family life - ‘the domestic church’ and helps families to become Christ-oriented, which is one of the urgent tasks for the church to fulfil in our time.

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 which “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived.” It is “what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1Cor.2:9). She had a definite goal in her life. She wrote:

I too believe that life in this world is just a sojourn! If so, isn’t not madness to worry much about worldly affairs? Even if we hoard much money, at the end we will have to renounce everything and go. If our heart is like a mirror, nobody can take it away from us. We will shine like a lamp in the presence of God at the end. Is there any other great treasure like this?4

Yes, true to her dreams, she became forever a shining lamp in the presence of God.

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