"Samādhi" is a prestigious word which has recently become increasingly popular, and has found a place even in common parlance. We find it used in Sanskrit literature for centuries, but at no time in the past, it seems, the use of the word was so common as it is now. This was because Yoga, of which samādhi is usually taken to be a part, was itself a discipline known to very few persons. Yoga, in the past, used to be taught only to the chosen few, carefully selecting students fit to receive its training after giving hard tests to ascertain one's curiosity, sincerity, and unflinching faith in the Guru and the science he taught.

We find an interesting account of such a tradition in the Prashnopanishat (I. land 2) where it is said that when six very capable students of brahmavidyā went to the famous Guru Pippalāda for knowing the ultimate truth, he first asked them to stay in his āshrama for one year under observation, leading a life full of confidence and faith (shraddhā), penance (tapas), and celibacy (brahmacharya), and then only he would answer their inquiries, if he knew the answers.

Such a tendency of the ancient masters of Yoga and samādhi to impart the knowledge they possessed to strictly chosen ones only, was instrumental to the fact that the secrets of samādhi have so far remained rather obscure, and those who practised it were always very few. This seems
to have been the case even as far back as the time of the Bhagavadgita, where Lord Krishna has declared (Gita, VII.3.) that "out of thousands of men there may be one who strives for attaining the highest state, and out of many such rare individuals there may be hardly one who actually realises the final truth".

The latter part of Lord Krishna's declaration may be true even today. But the former part seems to have undergone a little change lately, and at present there are many who are keen to understand the state of samādhi, have some experience of it, and study it by scientific methods. This change has come about just in the past two decades or so, and it would be interesting to see how it took place, because it is responsible for opening up a new chapter in the history of Yoga and samādhi.

It all started in the west in the late fifties of the present century, when the hallucinogenic drugs like L.S.D., mescaline, marijuana, heroin, and speed (Methedrine amphetamine) became popular and their use especially by the younger generation in affluent societies increased tremendously. All these drugs had a tranquilising effect on the mind, and so the turbulent, uneasy, young people, both boys and girls of the post-war Europe and America took to them very quickly in order to find an escape from their anxieties and frustrations. These drugs had many side effects, and due to their action on what are called the 'chemical transmitters' in the nervous system, they gave rise to many unusual experiences like elation,
intensification of sensations, peace and tranquillity, universalization of the ego, impersonalization of personality, floating in the air, and so on. Sensations of colour became very intense and immensely enjoyable, sounds and colours got mixed up in experience, and one was completely free from any awareness of tension, anxieties, worries, and problems. Such experiences were described as ecstasy, nirvana, samadhi, liberation, and so on, by the persons using the psychedelic drugs. The only trouble with them was that the experiences lasted only a few weeks, as long as the drug was influencing the nervous system. Moreover, after a trip into nirvana was over, the initial problems and tensions came back. The worst thing about the drugs was that the dependence on them went on increasing with every dose, and as the doses went on increasing, the psychological balance of the drug addict was found to be progressively vanishing.

The drugs, in a few years of their use, posed a great danger to the well-being of the society. Their popularity swiftly diminished, but not before hundreds of thousands of drug users became permanently crippled mentally. In the beginning of the drug wave, it was thought that drugs are the answer to all our problems; they are like a passport to samadhi. But this belief was quickly falsified by actual experience, and the drug-induced samadhi proved to be nothing more than a sweet hallucination. So the drug wave dissipated, but it had done a service to Yoga and samadhi. These two words which used to be dictionary words hitherto, were lifted from their age-old obscurity to the forefront of popularity among the talented and resourceful young people of the west. This happened about the middle of the
sixties, and gave rise to a steady flow of enthusiasts of Yoga and samādhi to India, the home of the oriental wisdom. This flow has increased over the years, and to cater to the needs of the one time drug addicts and their friends, many Indian Gurus, robed or otherwise, have come up during the past decade or more.

This does not mean that at present there are many Yogis or masters of samādhi in the field. Lord Krishna's warning that real enlightened ones are always very rare, holds good even today. But there is one certain change, namely, that the awareness or consciousness of samādhi and Yoga in general has, during recent years, increased very considerably.

With this growth of interest in samādhi and allied states, the need for a comprehensive study of the concepts and techniques involved has been increasingly felt. Although some books and journal articles on the subject have recently appeared in many languages, the picture presented in them is as yet far from complete. The present study was undertaken with a view of presenting a complete picture of samādhi as far as possible, including its etymology, the complexity of the notion, the many approaches to it, its varieties and the confusion about them, the various aspects, such as, philosophical, psychological, behavioural, ethical, and social aspects of the state of samādhi, the pre-requisites of the state, and its importance to man's future.

Samādhi has been a concept typical of Indian Yoga, but its experience has not been limited to the Indian or Hindu Yogis alone. There is no doubt that the adepts and holy men of all major religions had experienced the state of samādhi, which they have described in the format of their own religious
disciplines. It was thought necessary to study these various descriptions also, from Zen Buddhism and Sufi and Christian mysticism, with a view to compare the views and procedures of the ancient masters of samādhi in India with their counterparts in other regions of the world. In the pages that follow these introductory lines an attempt has been made at such a comparison after first describing the concept and state of samādhi in all its aspects.