I

MYSTICISM

A. ITS NATURE AND VARIETIES

Men, in general, experience a feeling of longing, and a sense of uncertainty, in spite of the comforts that may surround them, and in spite of the unnecessity of worrying for the morrow. Longing not for more comforts but for something that is lasting, for the comforts that surround them do not give the satisfaction that is lasting. We may ask why this longing? What is this longing for? Why this anxiety? Self questioning will reveal that man wants to be lasting, wants to be part of the Infinite. Some men claim to achieve this even in this world; they claim to be experiencing their union with the Infinite, with the God-head. We call them mystics.

Considerable amount of research has been made on mysticism in the past four decades. Though this interest in mysticism is new, mysticism is as old as mankind, and as wide spread as mankind, irrespective of the membership of any formal religion. G.B.Browne, who spent some time among the Iranians and studied their religion old and new states:

There is hardly any soil, be it ever so barren, where mysticism will not strike root; hardly any creed, however formal, round which it will not twine itself. It is, indeed, the eternal cry of the human soul for rest, the insatiable longing of a being wherein infinite ideals are fettered and cramped by a miserable actuality; and so long as man is less than an angel and more than a beast, this cry will not for a moment fail to make itself heard. Wonderfully uniform, too, whether it came from the Brahman sage, the Persian poet, or the
Christian quietist, it is in essence an enunciation more or less clear, more or less eloquent, of the aspiration of the soul to cease altogether from self and to be at one with God.\(^1\)

Browne has rightly stated that it is 'the eternal cry of the human soul for rest', and it is because of the 'aspiration of the soul to cease altogether from self and to be at one with God'. As long as man is finite and what surround him, likewise, finite, this longing will be there, and the endeavour to be united with the Infinite will continue. The basic reason for this is the aspiration of the soul or better say human being to exist forever; and to exist forever man must somehow share the Infinite. Annihilation and non-existence is most fearful. This sharing in the Infinite may be conceived differently according to the religious tenets that different men follow. Names may differ but the goal is the same.

The word 'mysticism' comes down to us from the Greeks, and is derived from the root word meaning 'to close'. For the Greeks, the mystic was an individual who had been initiated into the esoteric knowledge of Divine realities and upon whom was laid the necessity of keeping silence concerning his sacred knowledge. This knowledge, however, referred not to the doctrines of any particular religion but to its rituals. The mystics formed the privileged few, who could participate fully in the sacred rituals that established their union with the divinity they worshiped. Later, much later, the word also included the meaning of closing the mind to the influences of all external things,

so that it could be withdrawn into itself, and thus be prepared for divine illumination. With the coming of Christianity the word 'mistikos' acquired the present religious and doctrinal meaning. Even then it had a slow transformation as it moved from the Biblical texts to the liturgical texts and then to the spiritual writings of the early fathers of the Church.

Mysticism is not to be regarded as a religion for it transcends all boundaries of established religions. But we may, rightly, say that mysticism is the most vital element in any true religion, often rising up in revolt against the cold formality and religious stupor, even though we may not go to the extent as Coomaraswamy, who said:

The only real heresy is to maintain that one religion only is in exclusive possession of truth. All are rather facets of the same truth, this truth being presented in a different manner at different times in accordance with the spiritual development of the society to which it is directed. The truth itself is that experienced by the mystics whose unity of thought and language is said to speak for itself.²

Coomaraswamy's opinion may not be shared by many who are adherents to proselytising religions, but the fact remains that religion took shape according to the cultural milieu in which they originated and developed. We, therefore, have to find out the true reason that induce people to accept religion. Religion shows the way to the Supreme Being; and every religion proclaims

itself to be the only one that can show the surest way to union with that Supreme Being. In that sense all religions tend to the same goal. Goal being the same, approaches to that end may not be very varied.

Researches made in mysticism have shown great similarities among mystics, irrespective of the formal religion to which they belonged. This made Evelyn Underhill to say:

We cannot honestly say that there is any wide difference between the Brahman, Sufi and the Christian mystic at their best. They are far more like each other than the average believer in their several creeds. What is essential is the way the mystic feels about his deity, and his own relation with it; for this adoring and all-possessing consciousness of the rich and complete divine life over against the self's life, and of the possible achievement of a level of being, a sublimation of the self, wherein we are perfectly united with it, may fairly be written down as a necessary element of all mystical life. This is the common factor which unites those apparently incompatible views of the Universe which have been claimed at one time or another as mystical.\(^3\)

This feeling 'about the deity' can be widely different from place to place, depending upon the culture evolved in the region. Among the Semitic and the Roman people, who were mainly herdsmen, the male principle dominated: God is the 'father', the 'provider'.

On the other hand, for people who depended, mainly, on agriculture and who were nourished by the bountiful Earth at her breast, the divine principle was feminine. Thus in India, where people have relied on agriculture for the last several millenia, and had the experience of the bountiful earth, who saw the seeds sprouting from the earth, nourished by the earth, and that provided a bountiful harvest that kept them alive, the divine principle was feminine, like the bountiful Earth. Thus it is the daily experience that made the people think of a deity, or many deities. For them religion is a matter of experience, unlike in the West, where religion is reduced to an ethical code. However perfect this ethical code may be held to be, it would not satisfy the deep-down, inner longing of man. Thus R.C.Zaehner says:

On turning to Oriental religions, however, we will see that in India, and in those parts of Asia, which have come under the Indian influence, such views are far from finding universal acceptance. Religion for the Hindu or Buddhist, we are repeatedly told by the modern advocates of those two religions, is primarily a matter of experience; it is not so much something to be believed as something to be lived. By belief or faith too, they do not understand a series of propositions to which assent is given, they mean not only faith in but contact with a supra-sensory world. Religion for them, is not so much something to be professed, as something to be experienced; and such experience in its higher forms, is usually called mystical experience.\(^4\)

In established religions, where rituals and code of conduct preponderate, adherents are bound to assess their religiousness by their devotion to rituals and faithfulness to the prescribed code of conduct, forgetting that the only purpose of religion is to achieve union with the divine. To such people religion is something to belong to as a social necessity, but not to be experienced; at least experience does not form an essential and necessary part of their expectation. Nevertheless we must admit that such people have the hope that the rituals would lead them to and help them to achieve union with the divine.

Comparative analysis of religious experiences, or rather I would say mystical experiences, show that such experiences cannot be in the abstract. It is always an experience through a particular religious system, Brahmanic, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist or other forms of religions. This does not mean that there are no common characteristics, for the achievement of any mystic, under any religious system, is the overcoming of the barrier between the individual and the Absolute. This triumphant mystical tradition is hardly altered by the differences in clime and creed. Experiencing one's self as one with the Universe or with God is the hallmark of the mystic experience. Phenomenologically the experience is the same, whether this God be the Transcendent Divine Principle of the religions that originated among the herd-keeping, nomadic tribes of the Middle East and the Mediterranean Peninsula, or the Immanent Divine Principle of the agriculturalists, as propounded in the monism of the Upanishads and the monotheism of the Baghavat Gita. The interpretations of the experiences will differ because of ways of life, but then these are factors extrinsic to the
mystic experience itself. The reality hidden in beings are mediated to the mystic through symbols and forms and these speak to him through his own credal conceptions. Evelyn Underhill writes:

An identical consciousness of close communion with God is obtained by the non-sacramental Quaker in his silence and by the sacramental Catholic in the Eucharist. The Christian contemplative's sense of personal intercourse with the divine as manifest in the Incarnate Christ is hard to distinguish from that of the Hindu Vaishnavite, when we have allowed for the different constituents of his apperceiving mass.5

Quakers reject sacraments, official ministry and rituals, as for them the Bible is the source of spirituality and the way that God has pointed out to reach Him. Through the Bible God speaks and communicates to the individual, and no medium or mediator is needed for achieving this. The Catholics give great importance to sacraments and ministerial actions. Ritual is an essential part of Catholic worship. The Catholics have asserted the sacramental effect so much that they hold that the sacraments properly administered will have effect, even though the recipient is not aware that sacrament is administered to him or even conscious of it. Thus they justify the baptism administered to the newly born and the anointing of the sick and the dying. People belonging to these two groups, with emphasis on different things and even rejection of each other's dogmas, reach the same consciousness of the

divine. What could be the reason? It is not the scriptures or the rituals that unite man to the divine, but the Infinite and therefore the Unknown deigns to be Manifest to the seeker, whatever be his or her religious affiliation. The seeker is satiated, is made happy beyond any measure when this manifestation takes place.

We have stated that basically there is not much difference among the mystics, irrespective of the formal religion they profess, as mysticism, essentially, is the union of the self with the Absolute. Can there be some essential difference between the mystics and the non-mystics? To me it hardly seems possible that our common human nature could embrace something so absolutely different as the presence or the absence of the divine. Mystics could be those who are aware of experiencing what we all do experience. The unconscious intuition present in all of us becomes in the mystic conscious intuition. For we have to make some distinction between experience conscious and unconscious and its interpretation. At any moment we are subjected to several experiences. As I read this, I am seated in a room, well ventilated or stuffy, well lit up or dark, seated on a comfortable or uncomfortable chair, reading something intellectually stimulating, with, perhaps, a tape-recorder or a radio playing some soothing music. How many of these experiences are conscious experiences for me? We have the capacity to exercise a significant selection process over the wide array of stimuli that we are presented with at any one moment of time. This process becomes automatized in all of us to such an extent that we cannot easily recover our perceptual and cognitive options. The mystic by undertaking a number of disciplines bring about a deautomatisation so that he is able to have fresh perceptions and to make interpretative judgements.
Being is naturally presented to us through material symbolism, though the interior movements of our intelligence carries it beyond matter. The distinction between the experience and the interpretation of the experience is not clear-cut for the reason that we use derived concepts to describe and explain the experience, and those concepts occur as part of a doctrinal scheme. When we make the statements "This atman is Brahman", and "I am Brahma", it involved bringing together of different strands of religious thought and life as given by the Mandukya Upanishad and Bradaranyaka Upanishad. It could not have been, possibly, the result of contemplative experience, though we cannot overlook its relevance. So also when a Christian mystic speaks of his or her experience, the concepts are not simply from the nature of the experience, but the mystic relates the inner experience to the beliefs already acquired.

The same happens when we try to explain mysticism. Professor Zaeher is an authority on mysticism. Yet while explaining mysticism he is often unable to come out of the Catholic outlook that he acquired due to his being a member of that Church. We may take as example a few lines from what he wrote about the first parents, according to the Bible:

Assuming, as we are still encouraged to do so, that man developed physically from the higher apes, we must interpret the creation of Adam as an original infusion of the divine essence into what had previously been an anthropoid ape. Adam, then, would represent the union of orders of nature and grace, the order of coming to be and passing away, which is created from nothing by God, and the infused spirit of God. Adam, after he sinned, brought bodily death into the world, but did not and could not destroy his soul, because the soul was infused into him from God and there-
fore was itself divine. Though Adam may have repented he was no longer able to take the supreme step of offering himself back completely and entirely to God, because he had lost contact with his source and could no longer find it again.

Professor Zaehner has taken for granted the veracity, almost literal veracity, of the creation account given in the book of Genesis. He continues:

Thus, tradition has it, at death his soul departed to Limbo, where, like all disinterested Yogins who have sought to separate their immortal souls from all that is transient and ungodlike, yet who cannot acknowledge God, it enjoyed the highest natural bliss, the soul's contemplation of itself as it issued from the hand of God and of all created things as they are in the sight of God.

He justifies the above assertions because of the difference seen in the approach of the theistic and monistic mystics. He continues:

The proof, it seems to me that I am not talking pure nonsense, lies in the complete difference of approach which separates the theistic from the monistic mystic. The latter achieves liberation entirely by his own efforts since there is no God apart from himself to help him or with whom he can be united. In the case of the theistic mystic, on the other hand, it is always God who takes the first step, and it is God who works in the soul and makes it fit for union.⁶

To a Hindu or to a Buddhist the concepts propounded by Prof. Zaehner has no meaning because he is unaware of the 'Adam', infusion of soul, the fall, limbo and the rest of the theological speculations he has accepted.

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Thus Prof. Zaehner, a great scholar on mysticism, analysed mystical experiences with the theological and biblical concepts he had already acquired. One may rightly question his concepts based on the Adam story. The Bible does not mention anthropoid apes, or eternal soul, nor could Adam have brought death into the world as the apes were not immortal, and apes themselves were the result of evolution. Does this analytical approach have any value for the mystic? He would accept these concepts already handed down by the theologians of his faith, as Professor Zaehner did, while interpreting his own experience. The interpretation of a particular experience may be made from various points of view. The mystic or the poet, since we will be considering the poets, who underwent the experience may interpret the experience in terms of his own tradition. Others of his own religious tradition and others of different religious traditions may interpret those experiences in terms of their traditions and standpoint. The difference between these interpretations will depend on first the degree of ramification involved and secondly the difference between the presupposed truths incorporated in the ramification.

However complicated be the sequence and the consequences of mystic experience, the fact remains that the mystic is an ordinary human being, enjoying all the advantages and suffering from all the limitations that the society and his own 'being' impose on him. George Santayana says:

Yes, in spite of himself, the mystic remains human. Nothing is more normal than abstraction. A contemplative mind drops easily its practical preoccupations, rises easily into an ideal sympathy with impersonal things. The wheels of the universe
have a wonderful magnetism for the human will. Our consciousness likes to lose itself in the music of the spheres, a music that finer ears are sometimes privileged to catch. The better side of mysticism is an aesthetic interest in large unities and cosmic laws. The aesthetic attitude is not the moral, but it is not for that reason illegitimate. It gives us a refreshment and a foretaste of that perfect adaptation of things to our faculties and of our faculties to things which, could it extend to every part of experience, would constitute the ideal life. Such happiness is denied us in the concrete; but a hint and example of it may be gathered by an abstracted element of our nature as it travels through an abstracted world.\(^7\)

Human disposition, and the training undergone have helped man to commune with the Godhead. A person accustomed to reflection and commune with other beings can with more facility achieve this mystic union; and the preoccupations of daily life may not cut him off from this union completely. But will man be able to adapt himself in such manner that he could not look on things without thinking of God? The Catholic poets we will be considering had acquired such empathy with Nature, that she could make them think of God. But we must remember that thinking does not bring about mystic union, though a reflective mind is more disposed to have this union. Mystic union has to be the result of a two way flow, the divine and the human, and when they meet the mystic union takes place.

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In fine, we may say that mysticism has no religious or geographical barriers. There is much that is common in the mystics of various religions, as, essentially, mysticism is the union of the self with the Absolute, though the Absolute may be conceived differently. Mystics are adherents of one religion or another, and their experience is interpreted through the concepts they have already acquired from their religion. We are all potential mystics as there cannot be absolute difference between the mystics and others.

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B. CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

God, if not the pantheistic Absolute, at least the true Absolute, is transcendent in relation to man, not to speak of other beings in the world. As such no man has 'a right to God'. Semitic religions that originated among the nomadic, herd-keeping people of the Middle East held that God, the Absolute, is unapproachable. The strictly orthodox among them, among the Jews and later among the Muslims, held that it was wrong to speak of 'love of God'. For them God was transcendent, male principle, to be feared and therefore, to be worshiped but not to be loved. Christ came when the Jews had already settled down to agriculture. Christ changed the Semitic attitude to the Absolute. Perhaps the most important new teaching that Christ gave the people of Israel and to that of the world, was that 'God is Love', and therefore, to be loved and to be worshiped. The logical extension of this concept of love for the Infinite to love for the finite beings followed. Christ taught:
"This is the first (commandment): Listen Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord you God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength." Then Jesus continued: "The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." 8

This new relationship, vertical and horizontal, between God and man, and among men themselves, was not easy to be explained philosophically. This new relationship or religious experience is the experience of the Transcendent as the divine phenomenon not as the divine noumenon. The religious experience of God will, therefore, be a joint product of the various human concepts of the Transcendent, which various cultures have produced. The concept of Transcendent varies from culture to culture and therefore we have different concepts of the Divinity and different explanations of the mystic experience. The distinction between the Absolute as the divine phenomenon and as the divine noumenon is unavoidable if we are not to reduce God to a finite being, who can, in principle, be known by the human mind and be defined within human concepts. So the Christians speak of God-in-himself (Godhead) who is beyond the grasp of human mind, and God-in-relation to mankind, who is revealed as Creator and Redeemer. Perhaps the distinction made by Shankara, the great Indian philosopher, is more explicit. Shankara speaks of Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman. Nirguna Brahman is without attributes and beyond the scope of human knowledge. Saguna Brahman is, on the other hand, Brahman as known by human experience, Brahman with attributes, whom.

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we call Ishwara, the Creator and Ruler of the world. Rudolf Otto, in his comparative study of Shankara and Eckhart, a mystic and theologian of the Middle Ages, who was condemned as heretical by the Catholic Church after his death, but who, at present, is praised by several Catholic writers as a remarkable mystic, who wanted to take the Bible to the common man, says:

Herein lies the most extraordinary analogy between Eckhart and Shankara: high above God and the personal Lord abides the 'Godhead', having almost identical relationship to God as that of Brahman to Ishwara.

The mystics do not consider this fine philosophical distinction. Their concern is not whether they are in union with the 'Godhead' or the Lord, with Brahman or Ishwara; for them what matters is that they are in union with their God. This need can be said to be almost a human need, and therefore we find mystics in most unlikely religions: the Kabbalists among the Jews, the Sufis among the Muslims. These people are accepted by their fellow religionists as true members of their religion. Dr. Rufus Jones in his Studies in Mystical Religions defined mysticism thus:

I shall use the word to express the types of religion which put the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and immediate consciousness of the Divine Presence. It is religion in its most acute, intense and living stage.

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Many feel dissatisfied with the formal religions because these religions have drifted more and more into a position of identifying religion with an ethical code, or a body of fixed traditional ritualistic practices, like in ancient times when religion meant a collection of ritual practices and not primarily a body of beliefs. In this modern man is very similar to his primitive ancestors. Robertson Smith writes:

Religion in primitive times was not a system of belief with practical applications; it was a body of fixed traditional practices, to which every member of the society conformed as a matter of course.11

Mystics, it is true, do not attempt to philosophically justify their position, nevertheless they have certain postulates: They hold that the soul can see and perceive God with that spiritual sense that penetrates through the veil of matter. They do not distinguish whether the God they thus perceive is the 'Godhead', 'Nirguna Brahman', 'the Divine Noumenon', or the 'God-in-revelation', the 'Saguna Brahman', 'the Divine Phenomenon'. They do not even attempt to explain how this union of the self with the divinity is achieved. In fact most mystics have been silent about their experience. The Kabbalists, a group of mystics among the Jews, have not produced any literature that we know of about their experience of Yahveh. A few Sufis, the mystics among the Muslims, have made some lyrical statements about their union with God. It is in Christianity that we find considerable amount of literature on mysticism.

Even that is mainly confined to the Catholic denomination. It seems that those who had the mystic experience wrote down their experience so that their followers could be instructed and guided in spiritual life.

Man has to be partaker of the divine nature if he is to know God. John Ruysbroeck (1293-1381), the Flemish mystic, held that through mystical transformation the soul surpasses its createdness and participates actively in God's uncreated life. He wrote in The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage:

All those men who are raised up above their created being into a contemplative life are one with this divine brightness and are that brightness itself. And they see, feel and find, even by means of this Divine Light, that, as regards their uncreated nature, they are that same simple ground from which the brightness without limit shines forth in a godlike manner, and which according to the simplicity of the essence remains in everlasting, mode-less simplicity.\(^{12}\)

The mystic, according to Ruysbroeck, becomes 'one with the divine brightness', and more becomes 'brightness itself'. They find their 'uncreated nature' to be from the same 'simple ground' from which the divine brightness comes. Pantheism could not have given a better explanation! The Christians explain this participation by 'sanctifying grace', freely given by God. By this sanctifying grace man is elevated to God. Adam, the progenitor of mankind in the Bible story of Creation, had it when God fashioned him out of clay of the earth

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and breathed into him, His spirit. Adam lost that 'grace' when he disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit. God promised that He would restore it one day. So the Jews wait for the Redeemer and the Christians hold that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer sent by God. Jesus Christ by his Incarnation and death once and for all united mankind to God. St.Paul, in fact, speak of the whole universe being redeemed by Christ, by the redemptive sacrifice of himself on the cross on Calvary. Because Christ is God-man, being the Second Person of the Trinity, and became man, humanity is united inseparably with God. Man can know reality only if the self is real and know the Creator only if as creature he is akin to the Creator. We read in St.Paul's letter to the Romans:

The whole creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal His sons. It was not for any fault on the part of creation that it was made unable to attain its purpose, it was made so by God; but creation still retains the hope of being freed, like us, from its slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God. From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; and not only creation, but all of us who possess the first fruits of the Spirit, we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free.13

Pantheism does not have to face the problem of loss or gain as everything is god. Whatever there

13 Romans. 8: 19-23.
is in this universe, we included, are part of God. The celebrated 'Man-hymn' of the Rig Veda explains this position beautifully. The gods offered the Supreme Man as a sacrifice and from this great oblation all living creatures, as well as the atmosphere, sky, earth, the four quarters came into being. Three parts of the Supreme Man transcends the world, while one part of his is the whole universe. The Supreme Man himself is the object of the sacrifice and the sacrifice itself. Some see the Christian position a similar one, at least so far as the sacrifice and the victim of the sacrifice is concerned. It was the will of God the Father that Jesus Christ should die on the Cross. Jesus died on the Cross as Man, though the union of God and Man in Jesus was inseparable. As God, the Second Person of the Trinity, Christ is the object of the sacrifice and as Man he is the victim of the great sacrifice on the Cross on Mount Calvary, so that men could be gods.

This union with God, the knowledge of God through the spiritual sense can be attained only when the self is purified. So the mystics, both of the East and of the West, hold that man must strip himself of all selfishness and sensuality if he is to be united to God. As the Hebrew Psalmist had sang nearly three thousand years ago:

Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? Even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart.  

It is not intellectual activity that will take man to God but the work of the heart: 'love'. What about religions whose tenets hold that God is absolutely 'Transcendent'? How can by human endeavour man reach

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Ps.24:3-4.
God? Muslims hold that God, as presented in the Koran, is absolutely transcendent and we 'finite' creatures have no right to God. As such, they hold, it is not proper to speak of love of God, for love implies kinship. Koran warns that salvation depends entirely on the inscrutable will of Allah, Who guides aright the good and leads astray the wicked. Man's fate is inscribed on the eternal tables of His Providence, and nothing can alter it. One thing can be sure of is that if they are destined to be saved by fasting, praying and pious works, then they would be saved. This heresy of predestination was wide spread in Asia Minor, Egypt, and in the Mediterranean Coast two centuries before Islam appeared. Church upheld the freedom of man and said that the foreknowledge of God does not in any way take away the freedom of man. Belief in predestination results in quietism, complete and unquestioning submission to the will of God. This was the attitude of Sufism in its oldest form. The main spring of Muslim religious life during its years of formation was fear, fear of God, fear of hell, fear of death, fear of sin. But on fear alone a religion cannot be built. So we find the opposite motive, love, had already began to make its influence felt, even as early as the formative years of Islam and produced the saintly woman Rabia, a mystic. Jewish theology also was very similar to that of Islam as both originated among the Semitic people of the same area, with the same culture.

Mystics, in general, have adopted renunciation as a strategy to establish the receptive mode. In most spiritual disciplines a psychological system has been developed where technical exercises, communal living, and ideology are integrated to bring about the receptive mode. We, who are familiar with Nazism, Fascism, and modern Fundamentalism, can easily under-
stand what changes these regimented, doctrinaire lifestyle can bring about in individuals. Regimented lifestyle will be helpful but true union with the divinity can be achieved only by self-giving and by disinterested love, the complete abolition of egoism. This alone could get rid of the inward disharmony, one aspect of the universal conflict between the instinctive and rational life. Fasting, watching and praying may help one to dominate the unruly instincts and so attain the receptive mode, pure concentration, but could make another so hungry, so weak and sleepy that he can think of nothing else. These facts have to be kept in mind to understand one of the Catholic poets, Hopkins.

From the beginning of Christianity, privation has been the one main means by which Christians sought union with God. The whole purpose of this exercise is to concentrate on an ultimate reality, to the complete exclusion of all else and by it they mean all that is not God, including the world, and human relation. This involves, therefore, an absolute detachment from nature, and an isolation of soul within itself, in order to enter into communion with God. The exclusion of all that we normally call Nature is the sine qua non of the Christian type of mystical experience. Monasticism developed because of the need felt to provide a setting in which the mystical life could be lived. Christians of the Eastern Churches still uphold this original aim of monastic life. Because of it in the East, unlike in the West, there are no multiplicity of monastic orders. The secular clergy (married priests and deacons) and confraternities of laymen were to be engaged in social work and other outward activity, but the monks were to renounce completely the life of this world to achieve union with God. The monastic rules of poverty, chastity and obedience aim at the removal of all self-centred desires and attachments.
which chain consciousness to a personal life instead of universal life. His attention is freed from its usual concentration on the self's immediate interests and at once he sees the universe in a new, more vivid and more valid light but this experience develops within the parameters of the teachings of the Church.

Christianity has always upheld the possibility of mystical union with God. In fact some of the earliest dogmatic battles the Church fought against Bishops Arius, Nestorius, and Appollinarius in the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era, was to uphold this possibility. The early Christians proudly proclaimed that God became man so than men might become gods. Against the Gnostics of the second century of the Christian era, the Church upheld the possibility of man's deification. Against Bishop Arius, the Church upheld the consubstantial Trinity for it is the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, who opened for us the way to union with God. If the Incarnate Word, the Church argued, has not the same substance as God the Father, then our deification is impossible. Nestorius held that there are two persons in Christ, God and Man. This would have separated God from man and the possibility of our own union with God. So the Church condemned Nestorianism. Against Appollinarius and Monophysites the Church held that the Word took up the whole human nature, because if the divine and human wills are not united in Christ, man can never attain deification. And last of all the Church faced the iconoclastic controversy to affirm the possibility of expression of divine realities through a material medium.

The Church avoided pantheism by declaring at the same time, the individuality of finite beings. St. Bernard used the simile of an iron rod in a furnace. A time comes when the iron rod in the fire is indistinguishable from the fire itself, because the rod is so
impregnated with heat that it has almost lost its own individuality. The same thing happens to beings united with God. They become so completely transformed, that they take the form of divinity that it becomes difficult to speak of their individuality any more, but in truth the individuality is still there. St. Bernard has used another simile. The air that surrounds us is heated by the heat of the Sun and the air is transformed. Similarly human beings are transformed by the Sun, the Son of God, but at the same time they remain human beings as does the air though it has changed its quality because of heat, yet remains air. So also a qualitative change takes place when finite beings are, so to say, permeated by divinity.

This elevation of the finite to the infinite is not a sudden achievement. Rather it is a slow process. Human beings have to develop the strength to withstand the experiences of this 'inner world'. The long periods of suffering, the fallowness that we see in men are due to this strengthening process. Thus the mystic's life is a process of freeing himself from those habits and customs that had been adopted as security measures against the insecurity, and anxiety that inevitably accompany the growth towards independence and the full consciousness of the self. The ordinary awareness of the self is had by reflection upon its operations. Transcendental meditation or other forms of meditation help to achieve this, but in mystical experience we get a direct and explicit awareness of the self as such. We discover that the selfhood is more than mere self, that transcendence reduces the self to less than itself.

Christian authors speak of different stages of this process. They use the mystical number 'three'
and speak of three processes or steps towards the mystical union. The process starts with a desire and a disillusionment, strong enough to pull man out of his natural sloth and primitive horror of change. There is strong hunger for reality and an unwillingness to be satisfied with the purely animal or social level of existence. Dionysius Areopagite, who lived around 500 A.D, had influenced later Christian writers on the subject. In his work *Mystical Theology*, he called the first phase of mystical union as the time of 'purification'. Richard of St. Victor, a mystic of the twelfth century, called this first phase 'dilation of the mind' as we read in his book *The Mystical Element in Religion*. This purification or dilation of the mind results in illumination. When a person has gone through the stage of purification, suddenly he will perceive wondrous beauty around him. This illumination transforms the world into a garden of immense beauty. It becomes the reflection of the beauty of God. There is a mental and emotional enhancement, whereby the self apprehends the reality it has sought whether under the veil of religion, philosophy or nature mysticism. A very wide variety of experiences have to be attributed to this stage. Here the reality behind the appearance is still mediated to the mystic under symbols and forms. He finds new life and significance in the appearance of Nature, in the creations of music and art, in the imagery of religion and philosophy; but at the same time reality speaks to him through his own credal conceptions. Most of the poets could be in this phase of mystical union. Hopkins found in Nature this new significance, while Patmore saw it in conjugal love and Thompson in the liturgical rites.

Intuitive contact with the divine, the third stage, is the true goal of every mystic, but one can speak very little of this stage as the mystics who have stated that they have reached that stage find it impossible
to describe their own experience. St. Paul who had such experience could only say:

I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago, was caught up - whether still in the body or out of the body, I do not know; God knows - right into the third heaven. I do know, however, that this same person - whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know; God knows - was caught up into paradise and heard things which must not and cannot be put into human language.¹⁵

Thus St. Paul, in his own words, received this highest union with God, but he was both unwilling and unable to explain this union. This has been the attitude of all Christian mystics. Dionysius Areopagite, in the earlier mentioned work, spoke of the threefold way to God. The first is the way of purification in which the mind is inclined to learn true wisdom. The second is the way of illumination in which the mind by contemplation is enlightened by love. The third is the way of union, in which the mind by understanding, reason and spirit is led up by God alone. In the first phase the purification of the mind results in enlarging and deepening of our vision of the world. Nature, created beings are seen in their true worth and beauty. In the second phase the mind is elevated through illumination and the mystic behold realities that are above themselves. The third phase results in ecstasy when the whole being of the mystic is carried up to and attain contact with truth in its pure simplicity, that is God. There is no indication that the poets we are dealing with ever reached this last stage, but they had enlarged and deeper vision of Nature, and recognised realities not ordinarily seen by us.

¹⁵ 2 Cor. 12:2-4.
Our poets had a keener insight into the realities presented before them, and that made them turn to the Creator, but they did not experience the intensity of divine union as described by several mystics. Eckhart says the third stage, or true mysticism, is had when the mystic sees 'God face to face'. For he says:

These three things stand for three kinds of knowledge. The first is sensible. The eye sees from afar what is outside it. The second is rational and is a great deal higher. The third corresponds to an exalted power of the soul, a power so high and noble, it is able to see God face to face in his own self. This power has naught in common with naught, it knows no yesterday or day before, no morrow or day after, (for in eternity there is no yesterday or tomorrow) therein it is the present now; the happenings of the thousand years ago, a thousand years to come, are there in the present.  

So according to Eckhart there are three sources of knowledge: the senses, intellect and the free gift of the mystic union. The mystic's knowledge is far superior because it is the result of union with God, and in this source of knowledge there is nothing that can dim that knowledge. The statement of another German mystic of the same period, Henry Suso will further strengthen our argument that these poets were far from having reached the stage of true mystics. According to the statement made by him in his book *Horologium Sapientiae* (The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom) the true mystic stage is achieved when the soul is united with God. This is an indescribable experience, in which

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all ideas of images and forms and differences have vanished. All consciousness of self and of all things have gone and the soul is plunged into the abyss of the Godhead and the spirit has become one with God. No human language can adequately explain this experience for it is participation in the Infinite.

At this one may ask, have the mystics who have reached the third stage and beheld, in their own words, the eternal reality through an intellectual vision, contributed anything new to the world in the form of knowledge that the philosophers or the theologians have not spoken of? From the accounts of the mystical experiences that have come down to us, we are forced to answer in the negative.

I feel that their experience is an intense awareness of the truths or doctrines that their religion and religious philosophy had presented to them. Thus St. Theresa, the great Spanish monastic reformer of the middle ages, wrote of her experience of the truth of the Incarnation. Incarnation is the basic doctrine of Christianity, that says the Word, Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, became man by a virgin birth through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, in order to redeem mankind from the sin into which man had fallen, and by the redemptive work unite mankind with God. She wrote:

I once had a great light from the presence of the Three Persons which I bear in my soul that it was impossible for me to doubt that the true and living God was present and I came to understand things which I shall never be able to describe. One of these was how human flesh was taken by the Person of the Son and not by the Other Persons. As I say, I shall never be able to explain any of this, for there are some things which take
place in such secret depths of the soul that the understanding seems to comprehend them only like a person, who though sleeping or half asleep, believes he is understanding what is being told him.\textsuperscript{17}

She received a great light or knowledge from the presence of the Trinity. This awareness is so strong in her that she could never doubt that the experience she had had was not effected through the Trinity's presence. Incarnation is one of the great mysteries of the Christians, and therefore beyond the understanding of human intellects. The virgin birth is also a mystery, and St. Theresa seems to have understood the process. We will comprehend the full ramification of her statement when we go through the various Christian mysteries that are involved: one God, though there are Three Persons Indivisible. Nevertheless the Second Person, the Word, became man without at the same time disturbing the indivisibility in the Godhead. Besides the normal process of human generation was suspended, and the Second Person had a virgin birth. Being matters divine these things are beyond, under normal circumstances, the reach of the understanding of finite creatures.

Mystics claim that in the transcendent state multiplicity disappears and a sense of union with one or with all occur. In mystic state man's spirit becomes so absorbed into something that is one, simple, divine, that he seems no longer distinguishable from it. Besides he finds himself to be possessing knowledge of things more luminous and more perfect which created intelligence cannot acquire by its own efforts. These being the claims of most mystics, should not there be seen

some remarkable change? If there be no such change noticed then what to think of the experience they have had?

Christianity always upheld the possibility of an intimate union with God. This union is received after much sufferings and the personal effort of the mystic is a pre-requisite for this final gift that God gives him. Many Christian mystics have spoken of their having reached the final union with God, the third stage, when they were absorbed into God and came to know of truths that they could have never known by their own efforts. The fact that these men and women have not added anything new to the already existing knowledge, and that their narration of the experience, granting the difficulties imposed by the limited vocabulary at their disposal, has nevertheless not strayed outside their limited credal conceptions, make me think that their experience must have been nothing but an intense awareness of the religious concepts they already held. Christians hold that when they pray God is by their side. Jesus said that when one or two are gathered in his name, He is with them. St.Theresa had a vivid experience of this truth while at prayer. Consider for example this account:

I was at prayer on a festival of the glorious Saint Peter, when I saw Christ at my side, or to put it better, I was conscious of Him, for neither with the eyes of the body nor with those of the soul did I see anything. I thought he was quite close to me and I saw that it was He, Who as I thought was speaking to me.

It was more of an awareness or feeling that Jesus was by her side than a union achieved by the elevation of the soul and the senses. A couple of paragraphs later, still discussing the vision, she said:
It is not like another kind of consciousness of the presence of God which is often experienced especially by those who have reached the prayer of union and the prayer of quiet. There we are on the point of beginning our prayer when we seem to find Him, Whom we are about to address and we seem to know that He is hearing us by the spiritual feelings and effects of great love and faith of which we become conscious, and also by the fresh resolutions which we make with such deep emotion. This great favour come from God; and he to whom it is granted should esteem it highly, for it is a very lofty form of prayer. But it is not a vision. The soul recognizes the presence of God by the effects of which, as I say, He produces in the soul, for it is by that means that His Majesty is pleased to make His presence felt; but in a vision the soul directly sees that Jesus Christ, the Son of the Virgin, is present. In that other kind of prayer there comes to it influences from the Godhead; but in this experience, besides receiving these, we find that the most Sacred Humanity becomes our Companion and is also pleased to grant us favours.

She is rather confused while trying to explain her experience. She was 'conscious of Him', but this awareness and the feeling that he is near by and 'hearing us' are 'effects of great love and faith', but such consciousness 'is not a vision'. She further stated:

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'nor with those of the soul did I see anything', but at the same time stated that 'in a vision the soul distinctly sees that Jesus Christ, the Son of the Virgin, is present'. It seems the mystics become confused while trying to explain their experience. The poets do not face this confusion, conceding that they do not deal with great mysteries of any religion.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) who greatly influenced Christian piety of the Middle Ages had similar experiences. Perhaps no one has better explained this experimental knowledge than he. St. Bernard stated:

I confess, though I say it in my foolishness, that the Word has visited me, and even very often. But although He has frequently entered my soul, I have never at any time been sensible of the precise moment of His coming. I have felt that He was present. I remember that He has been with me; I have sometimes been able even to have a presentiment that He would come, but never to feel His coming nor His departure.

It is more like an effect produced in the soul as stated by St. Theresa, because of love and faith. A 'consciousness' produced because of the receptive mood of the person at prayer. St. Bernard continued:

And thus I have learned the truth of the words I have read: "In Him we live and move and have our being". (Acts XVII, 28); but blessed is the man in whom He is, who lives for Him, who is moved by Him. You will ask then, how, since the ways of His access are thus incapable of being traced, I could know that He was present. But He is living and full of energy, and as soon as He has entered into me He has quickened my sleeping soul; has aroused and softened and goaded my heart, which was in a state of torpor and hard as stone. He has begun to pluck and destroy, to plant and to build, to water the dry places, to illuminate
the gloomy spots, to throw open those which were shut close, to inflame with warmth those which were cold, as also to straighten its crooked paths and make its rough places smooth, so that my soul might bless the Lord, and all that is within me praise His Holy Name. 19

This is more of the description of the working of grace in souls, as taught by Christian theology. In the reformation and the renewal of his spirit, he perceived to a certain degree the Divine beauty and acquired a certain degree of union with Him. It is not that third stage of union that mystics talk of. It could be termed as an intermediate knowledge between ordinary faith and the beatific vision, but which, in its last analysis, belongs to faith and shares its obscurity.

Thus Christianity upholds the possibility of union with God as claimed by the mystics. This union is not achieved by the loss of one's individuality, but by the divinising action of God, who respects the individuality of man and every being in creation. Man has to do his part to obtain this union in this world, though God gives this favour to whom He pleases. Christian poets could be mystical poets because of the highly receptive mood they have acquired. Their receptive mood takes in not only what is heavenly but also what is earthly. Does this fact create tension in them? How do they solve this problem?

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C. NATURE MYSTICISM

We have spoken of mysticism in general and Christian mysticism in particular. Mysticism, we may say, is the conscious communion that one has with some one or something outside himself. It could be spontaneous or be the result of a prolonged quest or could be part of a phenomenology or psychologic episode or even be produced by psychedelic substances. Christian thinking accepts the fact that there can be spontaneous union with God. Such union would be a gift from God for God can and do act where and when He wills as is the case of the two disciples who experienced the presence of Jesus Christ, on their way to Emmaus, as narrated in the New Testament; or it could be the result of long years of struggle, but nevertheless a free gift of God. We are not interested in the trance like situation produced by drugs. Our interest is in the phenomenological and psychological events that have produced changes in individuals, in their attitudes, in their concept of reality. Because of such experiences we hold that there is a fellowship between man and other beings in the Universe, there is communion, there is common origin.

'Nature' is a comprehensive term that include all beings and all the powers and their manifestations. Nature Mysticism would, therefore, mean the conscious communion of an individual with whatever there is in the World. This communion gives them a keener perception of reality, and produce a new relationship with other beings. The Victorian Age is remarkable in having produced many a man who had conscious communion with Nature. This being so we may not question its possibility. But could it be that this experience ends with created beings and do not ascend to embrace the Creator? Since we treat of the Catholic poets we also ask if
there be justification, Biblical or otherwise, to be so.

According to Zaehner 'Nature Mysticism' discredits Christian Mysticism and reduces God to the sum total of natural impulses. According to him it is unthinkable, as in nature there is neither morality nor charity nor even common decency as he stated in his book Mysticism Sacred and Profane. Surely he is comparing the laws as they exist in nature with the derived morality of Western and therefore Christian culture. In the concluding part of the above book he stated:

Thus the confusion that is popularly made between nature mysticism and the mysticism of the Christian saints can only discredit the latter. By making the confusion one is forced into the position that God is simply another term for Nature; and it is an observable fact that in nature there is neither morality nor charity nor even common decency. God, then, is reduced to the sum total of natural impulses in which the term 'good' and 'evil' have no meaning. Such a god is subhuman, a god fit for animals, not for rational creatures.  

The fact that some people have experienced a sort of union with reality outside themselves cannot be denied. This comes to them in a striking and intimate way. These may not be people engaged in meditation, prayer, corporal penances or other exercises aimed at achieving religious experience. They are from all walks of life. Nature with her power, her beauty, her music possessed Walt Whitman (1819-92). In 'Proud Music of the Storm' he wrote:

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Proud music of the storm,
Blast that careers so free, whistling across the prairies,
Strong hum of forest tree-top - wind of the mountains,
Personified dim shapes - you hidden orchestras,
You serenades of phantoms with instruments alert,
Bending with Nature's rhythmus all the tongues of nations;

This power, the force that is manifested by Nature in her storms, so captivates the poet that he is rendered powerless. It is not the force of the storm overpowering him but the effect produced in his soul is so strong that his person is absorbed by Nature. He continues:

Come forward O my soul, and let the rest retire,
Listen, lose not, it is toward thee they tend,
Parting the midnight, entering my slumber-chamber,
For thee they sing and dance O soul.21

Nature wants to unite with the soul of man, and man also tends to unite with the rest of his fellow beings. Few achieve this rare communion that lifts them above the ordinary and gives them a perception above the normal. They see a divine reality substantial to the world of things, minds and lives. They find in the soul something similar to or even identical with the reality outside, the ground of all being.

Emerson went even further and asserted that the 'soul' is all embracing, because of which man and everything else have being. In his essay 'The Over-Soul' he stated:

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Meantime, within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul.22

For Emerson the soul, 'the eternal One', and the 'deep power' within the reason for this unity of the whole universe. Our fellowship is not only because we are all creatures, but more important that we all have this 'deep power' within us and we all exist in it. Many do not base their feeling of oneness on philosophical considerations as Emerson. For them what matters is the experience of this oneness that they have had when the veil that hides the reality is momentarily lifted. William James was interested in everything individual, original and instinctive. Hence he was naturally interested in those who tried to make their way to God without institutional help. His book The Varieties of Religious Experience is the result of that attitude. He narrated an experience one of his acquaintances had:

For nearly an hour I walked along the road to the 'Cat and Fiddle', and then returned. On the way back, suddenly, without warning, I felt that I was in heaven - an inward state of peace and joy and assurance indescribably intense, accom-

panied with a sense of being bathed in a warm glow of light, as though the external conditions had brought about the internal effect - a feeling of having passed, beyond the body, though the sense around me stood out more clearly as if nearer to me than before, by reason of the illumination in the midst of which I seemed to be placed. This deep emotion lasted, though with decreasing strength, until I reached home, and some time after, only gradually passing away.23

The experience was 'indescribably intense', and it produced an 'inward state of peace and joy and assurance'. Not only that, it also produced a 'feeling of having passed beyond the body', and having received an illumination that is not ordinarily available. It could not have been a mere illusion for the feeling lasted long and only gradually fading away.

The interpretation of such experiences may differ, depending on one's religious belief or lack of it. There could be the possibility that such experiences are unusual modes of perception rather than unusual effect of external stimuli. There is the possibility that the perception of unity, and 'having passed beyond the body', could be the perception of one's own psychic structure, or could be the perception of the real structure of the world. Experimental science explains all knowledge as the result of electrochemical activity. We do not experience the world directly but we infer the nature of the stimulating object due to the experience of sensation and associated memories. The actual

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substance of perception is the electrochemical activity of the brain that constitutes perception and thinking. The contents of awareness are variations of the same homogeneous substance. If the awareness is turned back on itself, the electrochemical activity itself may be experienced as a truth about the outside world. Thus according to the nature of thought process as explained by experimental science, the unity perceived is a valid perception, though may not be a correct perception of the external world. This is not to deny the possibility that the perception of unity do not correctly evaluate the outside world. Deautomataization, as we explained earlier, may bring in new dimensions in perception - a 'perceptual expansion', as scientists call it. Thus judging by the process of the electrochemical activity of the brain we can say that the perception of unity, or mystic experience of any kind, could be a process in the person himself, or also could correspond to the reality outside himself. But no one can question the validity of the experience itself.

Experiences of individuals, and experimental science establishing the possibility of mystic experience, we may ask if external reality has any part to play in this. Zaehner says that 'Nature Mysticism' is nothing but 'Pan-en-henism'(all-in-one-ism). If it is so then the conscious communion that we speak of is an illusion, and the phenomenal world is unreal and non-existent. Do the people who claim to have had an extraordinary experience of nature hold that what the outside represents is unreal? The mere fact that they speak of such experience is their assertion of reality of the external world.

Nature Mystics assert the reality of the external world. Do they deny something or someone outside and superior to the external reality? In other words do
they exclude the Absolute, or do those who have experienced or said to have experienced this extraordinary perception of unity of all things exclude even the possibility of the Absolute; or do they only maintain that in their experience the Absolute did not enter. Zaehner's 'panenhenism' excludes the Absolute, as he clearly distinguishes panenhenism from pantheism. Most of the nature mystics are not votaries to atheism. Even though they speak in panenhenistic terms they do not really mean they become a tree or a flower or the leg of a chair, or the sun set.

It is good to remember that Judaeo-Christian tradition has upheld the close union of nature with the Transcendent Being. The prophet Elijah had taken shelter in a cave on Mount Horeb, while he was fleeing from his enemies. There Yahweh communicated with Elijah through a gentle breeze. One may be surprised to note that the prophet expected to hear his God's message through several of the natural forces. We read in the First Book of Kings:

There he went into the cave and spent the night in it. Then the word of Yahweh came to him saying, 'What are you doing here Elijah?'. He replied, 'I am filled with jealous zeal for Yahweh Sabaoth, because the sons of Israel have deserted you, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left, and they want to kill me.' Then he was told, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before Yahweh.'

The author seems to be repeating the narration. But whatever may be the events, God seems to have communicated with the prophet on the mountain, in communion with nature. The narration continues:

Then Yahweh Himself went by. Then came a mighty wind, so strong that it tore the mountains and shattered the rocks before Yahweh. But Yahweh was not in the wind. After wind came an earthquake. But Yahweh was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire. But Yahweh was not in
the fire. After the fire came the sound of a gentle breeze. And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance to the cave. Then a voice came to him, which said, 'What are you doing here Elijah?' He replied, 'I am filled with jealous zeal for Yahweh Sabaoth, because the sons of Israel have deserted you, broken down your altars and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left and they want to kill me.'

What is remarkable is that according to this narration the ancient Jews expected God in the forces of Nature. They lived close to nature and could therefore commune with her and see God in nature. Even before the prophetic times this concept was very strong among the Jews.

The Yahweistic tradition speaks of God manifesting Himself and His power through natural means. Jews hold that Yahweh, through the instrumentality of Moses and Aron, led the Israelites through the Sinai Peninsula to freedom and to the promised land to Haanaan. Before the Jewish people started from Egypt, the land of bondage, and throughout the years of their wandering in the desert, their God, Yahweh made his presence known to the people through Nature. We read in the book of Exodus:

Yahweh went before them, by day in the form of a pillar of cloud to show them the way, and by night in the form of a pillar of fire to give them light; thus they could continue their march by day and by night. The pillar of cloud never failed to go before the people during the day, nor the pillar of fire during the night.

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I.Kings. 19:9-14

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Exodus 13:21-22
The book of *Exodus* also speak of the wanderings in the desert for forty years. It is unthinkable how they could have taken such a long time even though they were guided in their march by God. The Sinai desert, even now, is not such a vast desert that it took them forty years. The narration could reflect, therefore, the transition from nature worship to monotheistic worship. The fact is that they saw God in the forces of Nature and felt that in uniting with these forces they were uniting with their God. The Transcendent God, Yahweh, as in the Elohistic tradition, could come as a cloud: 'The Cloud covered the mountain, and the glory of Yahweh settled on the mountain of Sinai.' (Ex.24:16). God could also manifest Himself as a 'devouring fire', (Ex.24:17) or as 'peals of thunder on the mountain and lightning flashes.' (Ex.19:16).

The Nature Mystics' joyous consciousness of God in creation is similar to the experience that the Israelites had in the Sinai desert or the prophet on mount Horeb. According to A.B.Sharpe, the greatness of a nature mystic is that he enters into a personal relationship with the concealed God:

They seek to realize the unfelt presence of God in creation by entering into a personal relationship with the concealed Presence which is the Source of being.  

To the Israelites wandering in the desert with the hope of reaching the promised land, the land of their rest, the cloud that went before them was not mere cloud but God's Presence. Similarly the burning bush that Moses saw, was not merely a bush on fire, but God's Presence. This is the feeling of a theistic nature mystic. He sees the presence of God in Nature,

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in her beauty, joy, force and power. They are in commune with the hidden presence in Nature. The Jewish Psalmist had said it long ago:

The heavens declare the glory of God,  
the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork;  
day discourses of it to day,  
night to night hands on the knowledge.  
No utterance at all, no speech,  
no sound that anyone can hear;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth  
and their message to the ends of the world. 27

In short all things declare of God, but their statements are not in words but living up to their being. A few individuals are aware of and can read what Nature tells. It is almost like the gift some have of reading faces of individuals. We all see others as they do, associate with them, but seldom discover what they really are, what is in them. But there are people who can fathom the persons they associate with or meet. When an individual has such ability as regards Nature, he will feel one with Her. He sees his life in other beings as he sees their life in himself.

Established and formal religions separate the divine from what is natural and human, but the mystic goes beyond the creeds of religions and sees God in everything. He seeks to pass out of what is phenomenal, out of all forms of reality, to the Being Himself.

In the New Testament, unlike in the Old, we do not find the Transcendent Being manifesting Himself through Nature. It is because Christ is the Incarnate God, the final and definite revelation of God, but it does not mean that such communion with Nature is excluded.

27 Ps.19:1-4.
Christians believe in the special presence of Christ in the agape they partake in; and the Roman Catholics hold that the bread and wine of the Eucharist is truly and really the Body and Blood of Christ. This takes place through transubstantiation - the doctrine that says that during the consecration the substance of the bread and wine are changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ, though the appearance of the bread and wine continue. The basis of this belief is the words of Christ at the Last Supper. Jesus at the Last Supper took bread in His sacred hands and said: 'This is my Body', and likewise taking the cup of wine He said: 'This is my Blood'. Some Christian Denominations interpret these words of Christ differently, and therefore do not hold the doctrine of Transubstantiation. In this doctrine Christ is identified with matter; consecrated bread and wine. It is not that Christ becomes matter but the matter is raised to the level of divinity. Matter retains the form but the substance is changed: it is the divinisation of the matter.

The believing Christians, who have experienced this unity with and communion with Nature, have been explicit that what they experienced is the work of God and God through them. Thus William Wordsworth states in 'Lines Composed Above Tintern Abbey':

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.  

William Wordsworth's communion with Nature had taken mature colour as he himself grew out of his youthful impetuosity. He felt that in all visible things there is a spirit that 'impels' and it 'rolls through' them all. It is something that is in the very depth of the 'being', being 'deeply interfused'. This presence is at once disturbing and enjoyable. It is disturbing for the knowledge that they too have a life and indwelling like man and enjoyable for man is no more isolated being in creation, there is a fellowship with other creatures who like him are moved by the Spirit.

Contemporaries hailed Wordsworth as a great Nature mystic. He tried to transmit to others the gifts that Nature had given him: peace of mind, joy and the discovery of the face of God in things visible. Stephen Prickett says of Wordsworth:

His poetry showed men once again how to feel a kinship with Nature. Many Victorians received from it what they most wanted: a sense of belonging that could integrate head and heart. That truth could be tested 'on the pulses' (in Keats' phrase) mattered to them quite as much as that it could be intellectually demonstrated. 'Feeling' provided its own 'inward witness' to experience that was as much religious as poetic.

Many of his admirers would not agree with the formal philosophy of Wordsworth, nevertheless he had great influence over them because of the new and valid experience, religious experience, that opened up for them.


Poets express their direct apprehension of the Infinite, on cosmic dimension, in beautiful imagery. Alfred Lord Tennyson saw God in Nature. For him the sun, the moon, the hills, the seas were the 'Vision of Him'; they are not mere bodies but they are the invisible God made visible. In his poem 'The Higher Pantheism', he wrote:

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills
and the plains-
Are not these, O Soul, the Vision of Him who reigns?
Is not the Vision He? tho' He be not that which
He seems?\(^{30}\)

These lines of Tennyson are at the same time a self questioning and an intuitive acceptance of God in visible things. He addressed his 'Soul', the lasting and in a way the divine principle of his being. Does this principle, the soul, the spiritual part of man, recognise that divine presence in things visible? Does it find fellowship with the visible things for 'Is not the Vision He?'. But there cannot be total identification of the Infinite and the finite visible things: 'tho' He be not that which He seems.'

Gerard Manley Hopkins combined the personal and the impersonal aspects of this experience in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland':

\[
\text{I kiss my hand}
\]

To the stars, lovely - asunder
Starlight, wafting him out of it; and
Glow, glory in thunder;
Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west;\(^{31}\)

\(^{31}\) ibid. p.22.
A person kisses his hands because he expects the other towards whom it is shown to understand him. Hopkins accepted a personality in the stars, the moon, the sun and other beings. His reaction is to respect them and reverence them because they bring God's message to mortal man. They may have no speech but 'their voice goes out through all the earth'.

People who live close to Nature, and therefore conditioned to commune with Nature, have this mystical union with Nature. It is not some vague quality of some supernatural experience which spontaneously comes to them, but rather it is an experience that comes to them because they are prepared for it. We have a good example of it in the Red Indians of America, for whom the Prairies and everything in it lifted them up to the Eternal Spirit. The union with the Great Spirit through Nature is the result of the quest that starts with prayer and rites performed in solitude. The prayers, rites and fastings are helps that bring about a form of rebirth, where a new relationship is established with the primary elements: earth, fire, air and water, and with all the beings of the earth: the animals, the winged creatures and all that grows on the earth. Such relationship is further deepened by the ritual use of the sacred pipe, the sacramental smoking, which establishes a ritual relationship with all creation and with the very source of life. One must be silent and watchful for the sacred powers may manifest themselves through any form or being of the natural world and may appear visually or may wish to communicate some audible message. The Great Spirit is present within every being; even the smallest being, a little ant, for example, may appear and communicate something.
This sentiment is not limited to the Red Indians and animists. Even those who are strictly transcendentalists have the same attitude to Nature. Kabir, the Sufi mystic, found the beauty of his Beloved, God, in every being for He is 'merged in all beauty', and His colour in all the pictures of the world. This attitude to Nature existed in the Middle East even before Kabir. Early in the third century of the Hegira, the ninth after Christ, we find the Sufis communing with Nature. Reynold A. Nicholson, in his article 'Sufis: The Mystics of Islam' quotes a sentence that has come down from that period:

O God, I never listen to the cry of animals or to the quivering of trees or the murmuring of water or the warbling of birds or the rustling of wind or to the crashing thunder without feeling them to be evidence of Thy unity and a proof that there is nothing like unto Thee.  

Nature mysticism, we may say, cannot be construed as atheistic, rather it is the result of humble and loving receptivity in which human spirit apprehends outside reality. It is not a mere receptivity of the senses but goes beyond the appearances to see the being, the unity in them. The nature mystics have the same happiness as God felt when He beheld His own creation, as we read in the Book of Genesis. It is the joyous consciousness of union with the world outside: 'I am that, and that me'.

Thus the mystics, without religious or denominational distinction, have one thing in common: their union with the Godhead and whatever is in God which includes Nature. The Sufis saw God and God's oneness.

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with Nature in the gentle breeze, in the murmuring water of the springs, in the quivering leaves of the trees, as well as in thunder, the volcanic eruptions. The same thing happened to the prophets of the Jews. Prophet Elijah saw God in the gentle breeze, in the fire that consumed the sacrifice and in the cloud that settled over the altar. Some mystics go further. They intuitively recognize the eternal union of everything in God and realize that the greatness of beings is not that they exist here and now but that they are eternally in God. They question like Lord Byron in his poem 'The Prayer of Nature', why established religions do not see God as they see:

Shall man confine his Maker's sway
To Gothic domes and mouldering stone?
The temple is the face of day,
Earth, ocean, heaven, thy boundless throne.  

God has to be seen in the light and heat of the day, in the beauty of the earth and heaven and not enshrine and confine God to temples built by human hands. God has to be freed from the limitations placed by established religions, if He is to be truly glorified. Lord Byron voices the inevitable tension that exists between the socially conditioned concept of God and the mystics' concept of God. We speak of socially conditioned concept because the concepts of God that established religions uphold and propagate can be traced to the cultural and social development of various peoples. In societies where the male dominated, naturally God figure was male, while in societies that were settled and had

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taken up agriculture the female figure dominated. Among people who depended mainly on nature to provide them with the necessities, Nature's powers became gods. Thus the God that man worships took different forms and different names among various peoples, but one unchanging principle remains: man's desire to commune with the Eternal Principle, whom we call God. Mystics uphold this and therefore they have encountered hostility from entrenched conservatives, who had everything to gain by perpetuating the established religions, or forms of them, and the manner of lives arranged by them.