Chapter : iv

MYSTICISM AND RATIONAL INTERPRETATION

MYSTICISM

The origin of the word ‘mysticism’ scholars say is from the Greek word ‘mueo’ meaning – joining together the edges of a round. The accidental split up of human from the divinity beckons the original unity – a bringing together the edges. Thus, the meaning of mysticism is man-God unity, the comprehension of which is beyond the human mind.

Mysticism has been described as the individual soul’s direct communion with the universal soul. The goal of mysticism is not a heavenly state of bliss or rebirth in a better world but freedom from the law of karma and identification with the Supreme. The aim of mysticism is not to take a man to the heaven but to bring the heaven into the man.

When persons focus shifts from the brooding on the wonders of the outside world to the meditation on the significance of the self, mysticism enters his being. The mystic sentiment grew out of human aspiration for a personal and direct approach to a more intensive experience of the ultimate reality.

Mysticism is an approach to truth and reality. Philosophy arises from an intellectual demand of consistent thinking whereas mysticism arises from the demand of life and spirit. Former is an approach through thinking while later is an approach through experience. Living is always better than thinking.

Mysticism is indeed a temper rather than a doctrine, an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy. It is an attempt to realize in thought an
feeling the immanence of the temporal in the eternal and of the eternal in the temporal. It is a religion in its most acute, intense and living stage.

Mysticism is not a theory of the intellect or a hunger but a definite and peculiar development of the whole self. It's a remarking of whole character on high levels in the interest of the transcendental life. At a more mature stage, we obtain a synthetic and intuitive knowledge of reality by means of an experience which embraces the whole self.

The overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the absolute is the most mystic achievement. In mystic state, we both become one with the absolute and we became aware of our oneness. This is an everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition hardly altered by differences of time.

In mystical experience, we pass into a state that is above the ordinary consciousness from a less into a more, from a micro to a macro, from the unrest to a rest. It’s a unifying state where we feel reconciled. Such experience is not a miraculous solution of life's problem but an unending deposit of life’s fullness.

In all the 'isms' of ethics, religion, philosophy and metaphysics, mysticism transcends all. Mysticism is the science of a higher subjective experience, a deeper order of knowledge from within for the quest of the Supreme Reality. Mysticism is usually described in essence, as, an autonomous realm of experience.

"....Some of the definitions of mysticism advanced by western writers are quoted by W.R.Inge in his mysticism in religion According to Otto Pfleiderer, 'Mysticism is the immediate feeling of the unity of the self with God' whereas according to Edward Caird, 'Mysticism is that attitude of
Definitions of mysticism lead us to a common understanding that it’s an insight, usually either monistic or theistic. It’s an immediate and intense experience in which a mystic experiences a separation from the physical and social world. Theistic mysticism seeks union with God but not identity. Monastic mysticism seeks identity with a universal principle that is divine.

As the experience is mystical, subjective and contemplative, it is not possible to interpret it rationally. As Albert Einstein once stated that I do not arrive at my understanding of the fundamental laws of the universe through my rational mind. The cosmic religious experience alone is the strongest and noblest main spring of scientific research.

Yet, philosophy demands that the revelation of the same (mystical experience) should be defined and described through reason and logic for authentic identification. Since the experience is personal and transcendental, both the revelation and the reason are absolutely subjective.

According to K.C.Bhatācārya; a philosopher of Bengāl, in philosophy it is compulsory to speak about one’s own experience. Mysticism is not merely an experience but it is an elaboration of what you have experienced.

To explain this Geoffrey Parrinder, “The question is often asked, ‘Have you had mystical experiences, and what were they?’ But one may take refuge in St Paul’s statement that he had heard ‘unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter’. Yet it is strange that mystics, with their unutterable claims, have uttered a great deal. There is a vast literature of mysticism, for mystics are often assertive and state what they hold to be true and real.”
RATIONAL INTERPRETATION OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Mystical experience could be described using Simile, relation between fact and value and by gradation. To explain mystical experience Simile is to use quite often. For instance, camel is the ship of desert. To indicate usefulness of camel in the desert, analogy of ship is used. Similarly, Rāmkṛṣṇa Paramahans also used to quote the example of a doll of sugar. If you drop a doll of sugar into water you cannot find where it is, either at the bottom or in the middle or on the surface. Likewise one who merges with the reality looses his individuality.

"The clay mouse is not the clay elephant; but dissolved in water, both become clay. Naturally, therefore, all the power, knowledge, and bliss of God exist potentially in the soul. If they were not there, they would never be manifested, as they do in the perfected stage. The moment its self-hypnotism is gone, the divinity that is always latent in it would manifest itself." 3

Rādhākrṣṇan also explains that "The simile of the cave reminds us of the Hindu doctrine of māyā, or appearance. Plato compares the human race to men sitting in a cave, bound, with their backs to the light and fancying that the shadows on the wall before them are not shadows but real objects. We live in the darkness of the cave and require to be led out of it into the sunlight" 4

Fact is what we are seeing but hidden behind this apparentness there is an invisible reality. This reality is termed as value. In Greek philosophy it is called nous, i.e. purpose. "Each lower stage is connected with the original essence by means of higher. Longing for the higher is the general feature of everything derived. The first emanation of the original essence is Nous." 5

In Taittiriya Upaniṣada it is argued that human individual is divided into five sheaths (kośa) namely Matter (annamaya), life (prāṇmaya), mental
(manomaya), intelligence (vijñānānātma) and bliss (ānandmaya). There are grades of experience like lower, higher, still higher and final. It is this sheath (kosa) that becomes refined through higher experience, in other words, this is known as the process of evolution. These grades constitute a ladder of increasing reality which passes from individualism to God’s absolute being.

Faith is not simply blind but is supported by intellectual direction. Mysticism that is an experience of oneness with reality is supported by intellectual reason, by arguments, by philosophy and rational explanation.

Reason is always dualistic in character because it supports and interprets. The reason and the basis are separate: Mysticism is the basis of our intellectual reasoning. So reasoning aspect is always multiple. Reasoning is instrument and not the final basis. Here philosophy becomes an argument. Reason is always the instrument whereas the experience is the basis.

Mystical experience has four dimensions, namely, ineffability, noetic, transience and passivity. No adequate explanation of the experience can be given in words. The mystic finds that most of us are incompetent to comprehend his experience. Mystical experience is insight into depths of truth, unplumbed by the intellect. They are illuminations, revelations full of significance and important but inarticulate.

Mystical states cannot be sustained for a longer period of time. They fade into the light of common day routine. One who experiences it feels as if he were grasped and held by a superior power. This later on results into definite phenomena such as prophetic speech, automatic writing or the mediumistic trance.

While relating a mystical experience, one of the mystic says, “Into this pervading genius, we pass, forgetting and forgotten, in God. There is no higher, no deeper, no other than the life in which we are founded. ‘The one’
remains, the many change and pass; and each and every one of us is ‘the one’ that remains. This is the ultimatum....as sure as being in content, beyond duplexity, anti-thesis or trouble where I have triumphed in a solitude that God is not above.”

NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE MYSTICISM

A close examination of mysticism reveals that it could be – negative and positive, dualistic and non-dualistic, introspective and unifying, monotheistic and pantheistic, chaotic and ecstatic, speculative and practical, world-affirming and world-denying. W. T. Stace in his book “Mysticism and Philosophy” differentiates between negative mysticism from positive mysticism. Positive mysticism affirms the existence of God, self and infinite. Plato, Plotinus and Philo unanimously promote the positive mysticism saying that ultimately there is a reality which is infinite. .

But negative mysticism emphasizes on the negative attributes of God. Since, God is ineffable negative mysticism shows some negative aspects. As said in Upanisada not this... not this..(Neti Neti). As God is not human personality, God is not compassionate, God is not righteous but God is something beyond attributes. This is negative mysticism.

The nature of mysticism would be clear from Plato’s analogy of ‘goodness’ with the ‘sun’. Plato in his book ‘Republic’ has explained what is good. He says, goodness is neither violence nor property, neither ego nor objects and idols but goodness is something beyond excellence and most beautiful, something absolute and infinite. Thus, there are different attributes of the nature of goodness. Ultimately he explains it by the analogy of sun. Sun is a self-manifesting and all pervasive element in the universe. Similarly, God is also an all-powerful entity.
Negative mysticism insists upon kind of dualism between man and God, between institution and religion, between worshipper and the object of worship. Whereas, positive mysticism is a kind of affirmative/assertive and unifying mysticism which unites the subject and the object.

Rādhākrṣṇan correctly puts it as “The way to the knowledge of the divine has two sides, the negative and the positive. The negative takes us to the spiritual consciousness, the silent witness which dissolves all form and thought, what Plotinus, the Neoplatonic Christian mystic called Dionysus the Areopagite, Eckhart, Ruysbroeck aim at, the ‘Divine Darkness’ the nameless, formless nothing. But there is the way of affirmation by which the God-conscious man affirms that the Great silent sea of infinity, in whose mysterious embrace the individual loses his name and form, is also the over-mastering, all-embracing life.”

SHANKARA AND ECKHART

Both are mystics, but Otto called mysticism as ‘the mysticism of introspection’, and the other as ‘the mysticism of unifying vision’. The mysticism of introspection withdraws from all outward things and retreats into its own soul, and expects to find the Infinite or God, or Brahma in the innermost depths. The world becomes immaterial. Only God and soul exist.

According to Śankarācārya even this dualism is dissolved in the one being of the absolute Brahman for ‘That Thou art’. Otto’s second form of mysticism is the way of the unifying vision. It knows nothing of inwardness but looks outwards to the world of things and seeks unity in multiplicity.

Both Eckhart and Śankarācārya were personally disinclined to emotionalism. They sought union with the divine reality through knowledge, which was based upon an understanding of real being. They pursued ultimate spirituality through an intellectual path. Though both of
them resemble with each other to some extent still they are basically different.

Geoffrey Parrinder says that, “According to Eckhart the union of man with God comes about by divine grace, whereas Śankarācārya believed that it comes through the realization of the true nature of the self. Śankara is other-worldly and therefore he believes that ethics is subordinate to metaphysics, he is not immoral but supra-moral; for Eckhart, righteous living comes from obedience to God, and essential righteousness comes from union with the divine essence.”

WESTERN MYSTICISM

**Plato**: Plato believes in dualism of matter and spirit. Yet he said, ultimately it is ethical goodness which is supreme and self manifesting. So, Plato in his idea of goodness was a mystic. But he is mystic, holding dualism.

According to Plato, “There are two orders of reality: the unperceived, exempt from all change and the perceived, which change perpetually. The soul is unperceived, simple, indissoluble, immortal: the body is complex, dissoluble and mortal. When the soul is mixed up with the senses it is lost in the world of change: when it withdraws from senses, it escapes into that other region of pure, eternal, unchanging being.”

**Plotinus**: The mystical aspect as explained by Plotinus means to look at the becoming part of the world, the happening soul, the phenomena and get behind the phenomena and see the invisible world, invisible reality.

Plotinus was a famous Roman philosopher. His well-known statement is to go from alone to alone, infinite to infinite. Plotinus believed that there are visible and invisible worlds. Visible world consists of happenings, events, phenomena or becoming. Invisible world consists of the Supreme
being, the Reality and the spirit. He says that there are several worlds and beyond these worlds there exists the Supreme Being.

In the individual also there exists an internal being. He believed that through Meditation one can approach this being and find access to it.

He has written a book called ‘Meditation’ in which he explains that in the world what is most valuable and important is the individual. The external world is limited and imperfect. So the function of the individual is to get beyond the imperfect world to come in touch with the supreme being.

**Philo**: Philo was a very famous mystic of Roman and Arabic world. He is one who emphasizes meditation, the contemplative and the internal function of the individual. Philo believes that the individual is capable of reflecting the finite aspects of the world, ridden in matter and spirit. In human individuality matter and spirit are combined. So human being alone can conquer the spiritual world.

He was the first philosopher who made a distinction between many and one, multiple and united. He also says that individual being is alone. He is not in multitude. Philo also avers that contemplation as a function of mind goes beyond thinking and reflection. It is in the activity of contemplation that multiplicity is blended with oneness. Like Plato, Philo as well says that there are two worlds, the world of matter and the world of spirit, the world of multiplicity and the world of oneness. It is in the activity of contemplation that one can arrive at the unity of Reality.

This activity is called mystical because in the mystical activity one goes beyond the dualism of thought, of subject and object, of observer and observed, of becoming and being and of matter and spirit. Actually mysticism is a system of thought whereas mystical activity or consciousness consists of an act of contemplation, an act of unifying.
These western mystics Plato, Plotinus and Philo; the Greek, the Roman and Arabic respectively influenced the European world of mysticism and philosophy to a great extent.

- Plato believes in the reality of goodness.
- Plotinus believes in the reality of individual being.
- Philo believes in importance of contemplation.

**Jewish Mysticism**: In medieval times there were schools of practical and speculative mysticism. The mystic tradition is preserved in the Jewish Kabbalah, whose two major scriptures are ‘Sepher Yetzirah’ or the book of creation, and Zohar, or the book of Light. This system admits the reality of En Soph, the highest unity, having no attributes and no definite form of existence. Though it comprehends within itself all existence. Since it is infinite, nothing can exist beyond it.

Both practical and speculative mysticism were concerned with the divine nature. In Kabbalah tradition God is described as En Soph, the endless and infinite. The Unity of God and the world was believed to have been originally complete, in the harmony of En Soph and the Shechinah. The goal of existence, therefore is the restoration of the original unity, through moral perfection and communion with God. Every individual must aim at this divine unity.

The Zohar teaches that love is the secret of the divine unity, and in both moral and devotional work. “Love unites the highest and the lowest stages and lifts every thing to the stage where all becomes one.”

G. G. Scholem remarks that: ‘Knowledge itself means the realization of union and this received a sublime erotic quality which is often stressed in Cabbalistic’ works.”
**Christian Mysticism:** In many ways Christian thought is closer to Indian mythology. For the Jews and the Christians, God is a Supreme person who reveals His will to His lawgiver and prophet. Christians also believe that God took the human form and led a human life on earth. The personal God of form of devotional Hinduism, are compared with the personal Christ who formed the faith from the Resurrection onwards and has remained central to Christian mysticism down the ages.

"'The Gospels teach us the immanent presence of God, but personalized in Christ. 'The Kingdom of God is within you.' 'I am with you always.' " 11

The four titles attributed to Jesus in the New Testament- the Christ, the Righteous one, the Elect One, and the son of man- are all to be found in the book of Enoch. "The son of man is also 'the Elect One in whom dwells the spirit of those who have fallen asleep in righteousness, when they rise up into all eternity, they will be clothed with the garment of glory; your garments will not grow old and your glory will not pass away.' The metaphor of garments recurs in Paul's eschatology and reminds us of the radiant body made of the element of the pure (suddhasattva) of the Hindu mythology." 12

**Tao Mysticism:** Confucius, like Socrates, was religious in the broad sense of the term. He too, believed in a divine order that worked for good, in observing certain rituals and in constituting his ethical teachings on religious convictions. He principally believed in Tao - the "Way", i.e. the Way of Heaven, the ideal and natural order of the universe. The harmony and union with the Way brought harmony with all natural things. Mystical ideas appear clearly in Taoism – known as real religion of China.
Philosophical Taoism is more subtle and reserved. Early classics, the Tao Te Ching and the Chaung Tzu, are much concerned with attaining peace and contentment for everyone. The Tao Te Ching teaches men to ‘hold fast to the unity’, i.e. the Tao that underlies and governs all existence. In its basic and undivided unity all the contradictions and distinctions of mortal life are resolved. All beings worship Tao and it is called ‘the mysterious power’.

Although the Tao Te Ching sees the Tao as finally indescribable, much of the book suggests that it can be known through mystical intuition.

**Shinto Mysticism** : Shinto is the Chinese term, Shen-Tao, for the Japanese ‘Way of the Gods’. It is an ancient Japanese religion which like Chinese Taoism was strongly influenced by Buddhism. The superior power of ancient Shinto was very diverse, natural, ancestral, heroic, fertile and magical. “More importantly they are of the conviction that the Gods (Kāmi) are related to men as the same divine blood flows through plants, animals, men and Gods. The universe is not inanimate but invested with life in which man shares and enjoys especially sacred places.”

**EASTERN MYSTICISM**

**Buddhism** : According to D.T.Suzuki, the northern Mahāyāna Buddhism has great richness and variety in its expressions of the supernatural. About Gautama the Buddha many stories are told in the canonical scriptures in which his mystical experiences are vividly described. Both at the time of his enlightenment and death the Buddha attained a unifying vision and passed through trance before attaining the final peace of nirvāṇa.

To quote Geoffrey Parrinder “...There seems to have been self-unity but no divine union in mystical experience of Buddha. The *Upaniṣadic Brahman*, as an absolute being in union with the soul, was apparently not
considered by the Buddha. But early Buddhist texts do speak of ‘becoming Brahman’ in the sense of liberation into nirvāṇa. The Buddha himself is said to have ‘become all sight, become all wisdom, become the truth (dhamma), become Brahman’

This is the state of those who have attained enlightenment and found their home in nirvāṇa. The goal of Buddhist discipline is nirvāṇa which has been described as ‘become Brahman’. It is the union of the soul with the divine or even with the abstract. There is no personal survival in nirvāṇa.

Some Mahayanists regarded the ‘Void’ (śūnya) as the Buddha-nature and the final nirvāṇa and this exists in all beings. All beings have the Buddha-nature, or at least have the potential. It is the Buddha nature within us who both makes us long for nirvāṇa and sets us free. This Void and Buddha-nature doctrine of Buddhism is very much like the doctrine of pantheism. Realization of the Buddha-wisdom comes from union with the Buddha-nature. This is the mystical participation in the ‘transcendent body’ of the Buddha.”

Jainism: Jainism and Buddhism are reckoned as heterodox because they teach doctrine outside the Brahminic orthodoxy of the Vedānta. Like the Buddhists, the Jains do not believe in an eternal creator God, though some of them believe in Hindu Gods that is Jinas - the ‘victorious’. Such beliefs are prominent in Jain temples and worship. The doctrine of soul is central in Jain teachings. The goal of Jain discipline is nirvāṇa and the nature of this state differs from monistic Hindu or agnostic Buddhist ideas. Thus, their mysticism is prominently soul oriented.

For the Jains, the universe is eternal, passing through infinite cosmic cycles of emergence, florescence and dissolution. In each cycle there appears Jinas or Tirthankaras, ‘fordmakers’, who not only themselves cross
the river of transmigration but also teach the way of salvation to others. The last Tirthankar, Mahāvira, ‘great hero’, was an older contemporary of Gautama the Buddha.

Nirvāṇa is considered as Kaivalya where the soul dwells in endless calm. Other Jinas and Tirthankaras (‘ford-makers’) are there but each soul dwells in ‘isolation’ (kevala or kaivalya), a notion that is found also in the Yoga-Sūtras of Patanjali. The state of mystical purity is self-unity, integration and isolation. Jain mysticism of unification and isolation seems restricted and abstract. In theory nirvāṇa is attainable in this world itself.

Jain philosophers develop the harmonized principle of “Identity-in-Difference” as basic ontological truth. Instead of making “identity” as a supreme category of Reality. Jainas insist upon Difference and plurality equally as status of reality.

Sufism: Mysticism (tasawwuf) is an important stream within Islam. It represents an introvert and recondite aspect of Islam. It emphasizes spirituality rather than ritual. Sufi saints represent this line of Islam.

Like the Bhakti saint-poets, the Sufis do not believe in artificial divisions among human beings. This belief has its roots in the Sufi principle of unhindered love of God. The Sufi doctrine of oneness of being (wahādat ul wujud) considers all human beings as manifestation of God. Mohiuddin Ibn Arabi says, “My heart is a mosque, a church, a synagogue and a temple.”

The Sufi tradition has a special standing (next to God) for the pir murshid, the Guru, who is exalted to a near divine status as the agent extraordinary through whom the voice God makes itself heard. The flow of force (twajeh) from him transforms the seeker. By meditating on the pir, the disciple himself achieves illumination. To a Sufi, his love for God / pir is the summum bonum of life.
VEDIC AND UPANISHADIC MYSTICISM

Mystic experience which is called 'Śruti' is the very core of Vedic religion. Mysticism is itself a pronounced feature of Vedic utterances. A famous saying of Śruti ‘Ayam keto hrida avicaste.’ (an intuition in the heart sees the truth) replete with the power of mysticism. The summit of the teaching of the Vedic mystics lies in the secret of the “Ekamsat vipra bahudhā vadanti” 16 (the supreme being is one, learned men call it by different names). The entire universe is pervaded and penetrated by One.

The idea of essential unity of all from the Gods to man and even to the lowest creature is the cornerstone of Vedic and Upanisadic mysticism. This infinite Brahma is regarded as both transcendent and immanent. In the Brhadāraṇyaka, Yājñavalkya says: “He who dwells in the earth and is within the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth within – he is yourself, the inner controller, the immortal”17

Śankarācārya also emphasized upon Aparokṣanubhūti that is in the consonance with Upanisadic mysticism. To know reality is to become Brahman. As the statement of Upnīṣada says: Brahmvid brahmaiva bhavati , The knower of Brahma becomes the Brahma itself. In mysticism, the knower, the act of knowledge and the known all the three aspects become one. This is the expression of mystical consciousness.

So in Indian Mysticism aspect of monism is fulfilled. Ultimately the knower and the known become one. To reach this end aspect of devotion is emphasized. Prapatti and Puṣti are deeply insisted in order to become one with the ultimate Reality. It is only through devotion that devotee can become united with Brahman. It is by the act of surrendering, consecration, and devotion. Thus, in Indian philosophy devotion has a unique significance.
The intense and true love of Mirābāī towards Lord Kṛṣṇa safeguarded her against the venom. She not only had divine vision of Lord Kṛṣṇa, but also talked to Him in person. At the last moment of her life she was bodily absorbed by the idol of Lord Kṛṣṇa. All this happened in her life because of her single minded and unhindered devotion which is reflected in her famous prayer: “mere to Giridhara Gopāla, dusaro na koi”. (I solely belong to Lord Kṛṣṇa, nobody else.)

The mysticism consists of two aspects - Unity and Dualism. Of course, in a certain philosophy of Vedānta the activity of consciousness is believed to be dualistic as propagated in the Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita and in Vallābha’s Śuddhādvaita.

In the former, unity becomes a fact, that is, ego merges with the supreme, it becomes effaced. Whereas, in later the self is not totally obliterated. The subtle consciousness of surrender, of devotion, of knowledge exists. Unity and multiplicity are accepted as the two aspects of mystical experience.

In Western Mysticism by and large, there is dualism between knower and known. But in Indian Mysticism, as described in Vedas and Upaniṣadas, the core idea is that of unity.

**MYSTICISM AND LORD SWAMINARAYAN**

Sublimity of Indian mysticism is unparalleled right from the Upaniṣada age to medieval age. “Mysticism is the soul of Indian philosophy from the Upaniṣadic time to this date. Indian philosophy is mystical in character and without mysticism it becomes meaningless and irrelevant to life. This is because philosophy in India is not divorced from actual life, it is an integral part of life. The biography of philosophers like Yājñavalkya, Janaka (of medieval age), Rāmkṛṣṇa, Vivekānand and Gurudev Rānade of
In the same mystical hierarchy, then came Lord Swaminarayan. There are various types of mystical experiences but mysticism of Lord Swaminarayan is all-embracing. It justifies Soul-mysticism, God-mysticism, introspective mysticism as well as unifying mysticism. Above all it also focuses on the element of identification with which the mystical experience is incomplete.

Prof. R.D. Ranade a great mystic of this century says, : “Mysticism denotes that attitude of mind which involves direct, immediate, firsthand, intimate apprehension of God, it implies a silent enjoyment of God, it also symbolizes a restful and loving contemplating of God, it consists of the vision of the self, identity of the self and God, supra-sensuous experience, intelligent feeling and will, devotion and high standard of moral virtue.” Mysticism of Lord Swaminarayan resembles the standpoint of R.D.Ranade. Lord Swaminarayan's life and teachings can be analyzed on the touchstone of mysticism.”

Lord Swaminarayan was the very embodiment of divinity. He was Himself the Supreme Godhead and this can be testified from His biography. It is recorded that at times he appeared before many in divine form (darśan) and transmigrated the dying souls to his divine abode Akṣardhām. He with His mere grace and divine power elevated many to the highest form of mystical experiences irrespective of the cadre, standard or desire. He even went to the extent of bestowing the gift of trance to the animals like monkeys and even fishes. Many followers of different schools of philosophy like Vallabhkul or Rāmānujā, Jains or Muslims considered him to be their own prophet or God incarnate.
The importance of rational understanding and logical interpretation has been fully recognized by Lord Swaminarayan. He strongly believed that mystical experiences are expressible and that they should be rationally interpreted and should not be accepted literally. This principle is clearly reflected in the *Vacanāmṛta* where he has distinctly spoken about His own mystical experiences.

“...In the space of my heart, I see an extremely bright light... Just as the sky is overcast with clouds during the monsoon season, there is only a brilliant light permeating in my heart. Within this luminous light (of the divine abode – *Aksārdhām*), I see the idol of God as exclusively lustrous. Although this idol is dark, it does not seem so due to its exceptional radiance; it seems remarkably fair. And that idol has two hands, and that idol is with two feet, and is extremely charismatic; but that idol does not possess four arms or eight arms or a thousand arms. This idol is extremely serene, human-like in form, and youthful.”

The main theme of Lord Swaminarayan’s teaching is pure theism and single-minded devotion to God. In the *Śiksāpatrā* where He has mentioned the important scriptures of Hinduism, He has laid more emphasis on devotional aspect of those scriptures in which He emphatically says:

“Sacred sayings from all these scriptures which give extreme exaltation about the form of Śrī Krṣṇa and of *Dharma, Bhakti* and *Vairagya* should be regarded as taking precedence over all other sayings and offer devotion to God along with the observance of *dharma* is the quintessence of all these scriptures.”

Introspective aspect of mysticism as focused by Lord Swaminarayan guides and leads to the ultimate experience.
"Thus, an uninterrupted inclination of mind towards the divine form of God is the most difficult of all the means of God realization." 22

The following passage reflects soul mysticism as propagated by Lord Swaminarayan. He says,

“One who has got satsang can easily have the vision of his soul. Knowing the Lord’s greatness and majesty, the person who tries to introspect, clearly sees his self extremely bright and luminous. In the midst of that bright light he sees the Mūrti of manifest form of Lord Puruṣottama. He attains the bliss as Nārad, Sanak and other sages did.” 23

Lord Swaminarayan has also advocated one more angle of undergoing the mystical experience. According to Him,

“Intense love for a God-realized saint is in itself a means of self-realization as well as of knowing the greatness of the saint and also of God-realization.” 24

Mysticism of Lord Swaminarayan is purely blissfull but there is no fanaticism. The devotion is accompanied by utter humility specially termed as ‘Swāmīsevakbhāv’. The state of ‘Swāmīsevakbhāva’ is attained after reaching the climax of submissiveness. It is becoming ego free or becoming brahma and yet being distinct from Parabrahma. To support this ideology Lord Swaminarayan explains saying that:

“Infinitive devotees of God (Vaiṣṇav) have attained the state of Brahma (similar to God in all respect) and yet Lord’s majesty and glory have not been lessened even by a bit because the majesty and glory of Lord is entirely endless and unfathomable. It neither increases nor decreases. Even such realized devotees worship the Lord like a submissive servant. Thus, in spite of attaining similarity to God in all respect, utter humility i.e. Swāmīsevakbhāv remains.” 25
Eckhart too believed that the humility, which a mystic possesses, does not disappear in the sphere of his mystical experience, but it increases. On the contrary it gains a dignity which of itself has something mystical about it. Humility is to him the cardinal virtue, the beginning and the end of all virtue.26

ETHICS AND MYSTICISM IN ŚIKSĀPATRĪ

The relation of ethics and mysticism days back to many precious centuries. The path of righteousness and altruism as shown in Śikṣāpatrī, a dynamic scripture gifted to mankind by Lord Swaminarayan highlights ideology of action and acceptance.

Love God and love fellow beings are two cardinal principles of Bhakti movement. Such love is possible only if one leads a moral life with an awareness of divine presence in all i.e. seeing all in one and one in all. This philosophy is advocated through the great Swaminarayan fellowship. Consolidating the idea of devotion in modern times.

“Two main scriptures of Lord Swaminarayan, Vaćanāmṛta and Śikṣāpatrī depicts the essence of Bhakti culture and inspires moral rejuvenation. Śikṣāpatrī, in a way, is Abhinava-Bhagawadgūḍā. It also contains the essence of Dhammapāda.” 27

Professor Ranade points out that the problem of the relation of metaphysics and morality has been much debated from very ancient times. Realization of the nature of self, for example, is as much a problem of metaphysics as that of ethics. He who has realized his own self, is an ideal ethical man.28

Dr. Rādhākṛṣṇan assumes that all the ethical theories are based on metaphysics in a philosophical conception of relation between human conduct and ultimate reality.29
In the higher religion of mankind, mysticism and ethics have grown together in close intimacy and interaction. Ethics is concerned with action and behind ethics there is mysticism and metaphysics. Thus, ethics is a proper source of action. Mysticism gives us knowledge, Ethics gives us direction, source of activity.

Morality, ethics and Śiksāpatrī are very closely associated. In fact, the gist of this minuscule scripture enunciated by Lord Swaminarayan encircles nothing but morality and ethics. If one follows the codes of conduct as propounded by Śiksāpatrī he is sure to attain the sublime virtue of morality. It is through the ladder of morality that one climbs the peak of mystic experience.

*Lord Swaminarayan* in Śiksāpatrī has propounded that,

“My disciples shall constantly keep the company of saints.” 30

This depicts that Śiksāpatrī advises to be in a close contact with a true saint in order to experience the ecstasy. It also signifies the company of a mystic.

The mystic is a seeker of the vastness which is its final stay and original source. The mystic excels others and commands a hearing and a following by his direct experience and enjoyment of such a life promising the realization of such a life.

The science of mysticism can be taught only by an experienced professor. The path towards the ultimate then becomes a life a devotional surrender of the seeker towards such a mystic. The mystic has illuminated vision that makes the life easier and more graceful. He has a dual personality. The man in him is intensely active and the divine in him is supremely quiet.
Man must become a new vessel, a new creature if he is to bear the spiritual light. The effort to conquer the will and subdue it is entirely unceasing. Until the union is absolute and the personality is permanently changed and a man becomes a God-moving soul. The end of mysticism is not only to give a glimpse of truth but also to effect a transformation of the individual to make him a fit vehicle for the transmission of divine life. Śīkṣāpatī truly endeavours the mankind to this end.

Thus, mysticism of Lord Swaminarayan leads us to theistic ethical humanism or humanistic ethical theism.

Notes & References:

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11. Luke 17.21, Matt. 28.20
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20. *Vachanamrit*, Gadhadā Middle 13
21. *Śiksāpātri*, 101, 102
22. *Vachanamrit*, Gadhadā First, 1
23. *Vachnamrit*, Gadhadā First, 20
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29. Rādākṛṣṇan S., *Eastern Religions and Western Thoughts*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1939, p. 80
30. *Śiksāpātri*, 36

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