Is man a god or a worm? In every age, this question about the image and stature of man has been of paramount interest and significance. Every age has tried to raise and answer this question in the light of the metaphysic of its times. The early years of the present century saw the dissolution of old certainties and dogmas. "Never before," observes Paul Brunton, "were so many people plunged in so much uncertainty, so much perplexity and unsettlement."¹ The artist and the thinker were left to their own resources to create a vision of life. The intellectual was obliged to hang down his hands in despairing impotency and look into the future as if into a vacuum. Lucy Tantamount in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* complains, that she no longer believes in God and morals, for she "came out of the chrysalis during the War, when the bottom had been knocked out of everything."² Huxley deplores that "there exists no single set of authoritative books," and that the "common ground of all the Western cultures has slipped away from under our feet."³ The Western man is confronted with a vision of himself, straying naked and forlorn through an indifferent universe. Shorn of that system of ancient wisdom, which provided value and meaning to life, modern man has nothing but
science and information as substitutes for faith and religion. But, then, science is knowledge, not wisdom.

It is this search for wisdom, that has engaged the attention of some of the best minds of our age. "Ours is a world," sadly notes Huxley, "in which knowledge accumulates and wisdom decays." The most striking quality of Huxley and several other writers of our age, is the intellectual integrity, with which they faced the spiritual vacuum of the present age. They would not take things for granted, and would not stick to the shifting rocks of tradition like limpets to a decayed body. They faced the shimmering, blinking light of truth without putting on any blinkers. Though the decay of religion led many of them to, in the words of C.R.M. Joad, "a state of bewildered agnosticism," the fact remains, that they came to acquire the conviction, that modern man needs a spiritual dimension to his existence. The answer to the spiritual malaise of the modern age lies, according to these thinkers, in subjectivity, in inward synthesis. Invariably all of them recognize the fact, that faith and reason, which lie apart, can seek reconciliation in the human soul only in the mystical experience. Mysticism alone can provide wisdom, which Bertrand Russell defines as the "emancipation, as far as possible, from the tyranny of the here and the now." Colin Wilson hopes that the native tradition of
"positive existentialism," which he defines as "a tradition of affirmative and irrational mysticism," will provide meaning and value to existence.

Thus, some of the most notable minds of this century, Bertrand Russell, C.E.M. Joad, Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley and Somerset Maugham, to name a few, in their search for meaning and value, come to believe, that there exists an order of reality other than the sensuous phenomena, and that that reality is also immanent in man, and that in the unitive experience of that reality, modern man's divided soul can seek integration and wholeness. Almost all of them start on a note of rational agnosticism, and many of them come to believe in the existence of the ultimate reality. They, however, fail to realize it in their souls, and thus end, in Mr. Joad's words, "on the positive side of agnosticism." 

What fascinates me most about Huxley is the fact, that of all the modern writers, Huxley perhaps best sums up the dilemma of the modern thinker, who fails to seek a fusion of faith and reason in the smithy of his soul. Laurence Brander aptly remarks, that "a study of Huxley's work is a study of the mood of intelligent Western Man over four remarkable decades." The Western intellectual in his search for values, comes to accept mysticism as the only satisfactory hypothesis, that can
satisfy most of his transcendental cravings. But the Western tradition of learning, with its increased emphasis on the empirical mode of inquiry and scientific method of verification, has given an inordinate prestige to the intellect. This preponderance of the intellect over the heart makes it impossible for the Western intellectual to reach the mystical experience which, as the mystics testify, can provide certitude to his inquisitive, restless soul. Huxley has been of chief interest to me, for he did genuinely knock at the doors of the kingdom of heaven. But the kingdom of heaven never revealed its celestial glory to him. He was a pilgrim, who was encumbered by his heavy intellectual baggage, which he could never throw away, to be able to enter the strait and narrow gate of this kingdom. He could never renounce his formidable intellect, which always came between him and the Beatific vision.

Another thing, which provoked me to study the intellectual and spiritual evolution of Huxley's eclectic mind, was his interest in mind-changing drugs. Huxley tried to break away from the accepted mystical tradition, and attempted to open the doors of perception, not through the traditional means of contemplation, but through the psychedelics, namely mescalin and LSD. During the past ten years, there had been an exodus of Western young men
and women to the East, especially to India. These disillusioned flower-childeren, the product of the machine-oriented, over-organized, Western culture, turn to the East in search of sanity, śānti and salvation. Clad in multi-hued guru shirts, with long hair and naked feet, the hippies throng the ghats of Varanasi and Rishikesh, and swarm the Buddhist temples in Sikkim and Bhutan. The followers of Hare Krsna cult, dressed in saffron robes, their tufts of hair waving in the eastern wind, beating Indian drums and chanting sacred Hindu verses in the streets of Delhi, may not be the portent of a psychological revolution. But they certainly point to the absence of spiritual values in the acquisitive Western society. These young people come to the East, not so much to steep themselves in the spiritual culture of the Orient, a culture which demands a very arduous, ascetic discipline from the novice on his way to enlightenment. They come to the East, because they can have here easy access to the mind-changing stimulants like opium and hashish, which can help them 'drop out' of the tribal game of getting and spending. The hippie, who smokes his hashish pipe with his female counterpart, and tries to imitate the different postures of maithuna, which he sees carved in stone in the temples of Khajuraho and Konarak, is not a whit religious from the point of view of the Hindu religion. Drugs, which
a hippie takes, can never promote a genuine religious experience. Otherwise, by now, all hippies would have been transformed into swamis, and there would have been no dearth of spiritual preceptors in the present-day world.

We cannot subscribe to the opinion of certain critics, that Huxley, to a great extent, is responsible for the promotion of the hippie culture, which advocates an extensive use of psychedelics, and sexual indulgence, as the ways to seek the experience of the divine bliss. Huxley experimented with the hallucinogens, only to ascertain their impact on consciousness. As a keen student of religions, he had come across the fact, that the ancient peoples, all over the world, had made use of certain intoxicants to modify their consciousness in order to experience a sense of solidarity with the community. Huxley took mescaline and LSD, not to 'drop out' of his milieu, but to satisfy the innate curiosity, which had been the badge of the Huxley clan. In his private correspondence, he speaks favourably about the impact of these drugs on the human mind, and admits that he had a genuine mystical experience under the impact of LSD.

In his spiritual testament, Island, Huxley advocates the use of drug, which he names the moksha-medicine, and maithuna (sexual love) as the means of attaining the mystical experience of the Godhead.
Experiments with drugs have been made earlier also, but no other thinker tried to equate his drug-induced experience with the genuine mystical experience as Huxley does. Huxley's claim, that drugs can lead us to the experience of the Divine, has the support of another Orientalist, Alan Watts. The claim of these thinkers, that salvation can be achieved through chemical means, raises the question of the possibility of synthetic sainthood. Hence, the provocation to study the implications of Huxley's positive assertions about the potentiality of the psychedelics to generate the genuine religious experience.

Huxley, however, failed to attain the mystical experience through either contemplation or drugs. He started his literary career as a rational agnostic, who adopted an attitude of Pyrrhonian indifference towards religious and moral values, and looked askance at the claim of the mystics, that there is an abiding reality behind the natural phenomena; and that this reality can be experienced in a direct, intuitive way. But he ended as a religious agnostic, for, though he had come to believe, that an intuitive experience of the divine reality is possible, he failed to have any first hand, religious experience of his own. To trace this agnostic element in his writings is, therefore, the aim of the present study.
My interest in Aldous Huxley goes back to my postgraduate days, when I read him with great interest and enthusiasm. While reading his obituary in the local newspaper, it came to my mind, that I might organize my responses to his writings in the form of a dissertation. But the plan was shelved for want of time. The idea materialized about five years ago, and has finally assumed the shape of the present thesis. I do not claim to have struck a note of originality in my approach towards Huxley. I have merely pointed towards that aspect of his writings, which has so far not been touched upon by critics. George Woodcock, in his study of Huxley, *Dawn And The Darkest Hour: A Study Of Aldous Huxley*, draws attention to Huxley's agnosticism but he does not give any elaborate treatment to his observation. It is just a coincidence that my conclusions are an attempt to elaborate the argument that Woodcock just adumbrates.

I have divided my study of Huxley into seven chapters. Whereas the first chapter introduces the purpose and plan of the present study, the second chapter is exclusively devoted to agnosticism. It concerns the postulates and principles of agnosticism, and traces its evolution in Western as well as Eastern thought, from the earliest times to the present day. The chapter establishes the definition of agnosticism,
and suggests, that there are two types of agnostics - the rational agnostic and the religious agnostic. The rational agnostic never transcends his reason, and does not recognize any intuitive mode of the apprehension of reality. His strict, epistemological, position would never allow him to accept intuition as a mode of knowledge. The rational agnostic mocks at the religious values of life, which seem to him to stem from a religious hypothesis, which can never be verified by referring to sensuous phenomena. The religious agnostic, on the other hand, not only accepts the existence of a spiritual reality, he also accepts the belief, that by direct intuitive insight one can gain the unitive experience of the divine reality. Huxley remains an agnostic, for he fails to rise above reason which, according to the mystics, impedes the vision of the ultimate reality. In a way, this chapter traces the fundamental dichotomy between faith and reason, which persists in Western thought from the times of Thomas Aquinas to the present day. Perhaps the two could be united in the mystical experience which mystics claim to be the experience of unity and oneness. But then the mystical experience is something very rare in the present age where men, to borrow a phrase from Oswald Spengler, "devote themselves to technics instead of lyrics."
Since chapter II ends with the conclusion, that agnosticism is of two types—rational and religious, the third chapter deals with Huxley's rational agnosticism. It is an analysis of how the decay of traditional beliefs, after the War, resulted in the loss of faith, and thus generated the spirit of agnosticism. The note of agnosticism finds expression in Huxley's early novels as an attitude of indifference towards values. Huxley suspends judgment on all issues concerning God and morals. The jesting agnostic makes fun of religion, and debunks mysticism. The chapter also points out the restlessness that underlies the mocking spirit of Huxley, who, in spite of his fun at the frivolities of his age, was desperately seeking a positive philosophy to overcome the spiritual inertia of his times.

The next chapter is devoted to an analysis of the wearisome condition of humanity, which he portrays in his early fiction. Suffering from the conflict between passion and reason, between faith and knowledge, Huxley's characters are escapers, who try to seek shelter in some imaginative world of their own liking, which has no contact with the harsh reality. An endeavor has been made here to show how Huxley dissects the malaise of modern life, and points out that man is no longer joyous, for he has failed to live in harmony with Nature. It expresses Huxley's disgust with the machine civilization, which has resulted in the
de-humanization of man, making him oblivious of the higher values of life. Huxley, the agnostic, in his search for values, comes to accept mysticism as the only philosophy, which can act as an antidote to the philosophy of inanity, flowing from our acceptance of the scientific picture of the universe as reality. The scientific picture of the universe, Huxley asserts, is not the whole of reality. It is the distortion of reality, for it is an abstraction from reality, and excludes the imponderables of religion. Mysticism alone, Huxley believes, provides us a comprehensive picture of the universe.

The fifth chapter, therefore, treats Huxley's mysticism. The attempt in this chapter is to analyse the causes which led to Huxley's acceptance of the perennial philosophy, and shows the kind of mysticism Huxley accepts. The chapter also traces how Huxley's mysticism undergoes variations from the contemplative mysticism of *Eyeless In Gaza* to the tantric mysticism of *Island*. It also points out that Huxley changed positions with regard to the means of gaining spiritual enlightenment, mainly because he could not seek any religious experience. As an intellectual, he found it hard to resort to meditation which demands complete renunciation of the body as well as the intellect. Huxley was, however, convinced that the mystical experience was the result of the change in body chemistry, and
believed that asceticism with its fasts and flagellations was only one of the means of bringing a change in body chemistry. Drugs can do it more efficiently, without at the same time causing any discomfort to its user. Perhaps drug could vouchsafe its user the sacramental vision of reality, and synthetic sainthood could be a possibility. The chapter also examines the psychedelic experience to ascertain whether it can be equated with the genuine, mystical experience. The argument against psychedelics, as a means of religious experience, has been built here by referring to the drug-induced experience of some well known thinkers, who are not unanimous with regard to the nature of the psychedelic experience. It has also been pointed out that Huxley could not have any religious experience through mescaline and LSD. Since he could gain moksha through neither contemplation, nor psychedelics, Huxley could not be a mystic, and remained an agnostic.

The sixth chapter deals with Huxley's religious agnosticism. It points out that, though Huxley has come to accept the religious view of the universe, the rational agnostic strain still persists in his later fiction. The mocking agnostic in later novels is not the central character as in early fiction. Rational agnosticism is associated with minor characters, who are made to look comic, and are made fun of by Huxley. The chapter also
deals with tantric agnosticism, the philosophy of Island, which constitutes Huxley's valedictory message to his readers. The tantric agnostic does not believe in God and human soul. He has nothing to do with metaphysics and theology. He believes in the reality of the mystical experience, and accepts all means, including maithuna (sexual love) and moksha-medicine (psychedelics), as valid means of transcendence. Moreover, the tantric agnostic believes that the mystical experience is intellectually acceptable because it is operationally verifiable. Anyone who is willing to accept the rules of the game, can have a first hand knowledge of the primordial reality. The conclusion which constitutes chapter VII, points out that Huxley, despite his affirmations about mysticism, remained a religious agnostic. He could never surrender his formidable intellect which always came between him and the ultimate reality.

Though the thesis, as the title suggests, restricts itself to the novels of Huxley, I have quite frequently drawn on his essays and letters. Every novel of Huxley is either preceded or followed by a book of essays, wherein he talks directly of his attitudes and interests, which ultimately find their way in fiction. This accounts for the need to study his writings other than novels. The bibliography is by no means a
comprehensive one; it catalogues only those sources that have been cited in the text. The foot notes are carried to the end of each chapter. Within my limitations, I have tried to consult as many books and journals as I possibly could. The only thing I can say is that to me the study of Huxley has proved the most rewarding and enriching experience of my life.
Notes


