Chapter V

The Agnostic in Quest of Synthesis

In his search for a workable Weltanschauung, which may synthesize faith and reason into an integral experience, Huxley comes to accept mysticism. His early novels illustrate the dilemma of the agnostic, who finds it difficult to seek meaning and value in the universe. Appalled by the cosmic pointlessness, the agnostic adopts an attitude of insouciance towards religious and moral values. It is precisely this attitude of indifference, which Huxley adopts, till the publication of *Eyeless in Gaza*. Huxley admits, that as a Pyrrhonic aesthete, he never tried to seek an answer to the question, whether the world has any meaning or value, we sometimes attribute to it. "For, like so many of my contemporaries," says Huxley, "I took it for granted that there was no meaning,"¹ because, for Huxley, and for most of his contemporaries, "the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation,"² from the prevailing system of values.

What leads to agnosticism is the common belief, that the scientific picture of the world, which is an abstraction from reality, is a true picture of reality. The assumption, Huxley concedes, is erroneous, for the scientific picture excludes the imponderables of
religion, namely truth, goodness and beauty. Perhaps the agnostic's ignorance is a deliberate refusal to seek a meaning in the world. Huxley writes:

Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We don't know because we don't want to know. It is our will that decides how and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence. Those who detect no meaning in the world generally do so because, for one reason or another, it suits their books that the world should be meaningless.

Huxley claims that mysticism alone can act as an antidote to that philosophy of meaninglessness, which has been the result of man's reliance on the scientific picture of the universe. The perennial philosophy pierces the veil of māyā, and makes man aware of ultimate reality. But if the intellectual agnostic, as Huxley was in the early forties of this century, was to accept a faith, he must accept it on the basis of logical argument and empirical analysis, not merely by appeals to feeling or tradition. It is through sheer empirical understanding that Huxley comes to accept the existence of the ultimate reality, which he names the "divine ground" which is "ineffable in terms of discursive thought," but can be "directly experienced and realized by the human being." His readings in the literature of mysticism, both Eastern and Western, convinced him that there was, in the words of Rudolf Otto, "an astonishing conformity in the deepest impulses of human spiritual experience, which — because it is entirely independent of
race, clime and age - points to an ultimate inward hidden similarity of the human spirit." Huxley says:

That so many philosophers and mystics, belonging to so many different cultures, should have been convinced, by inference or by direct intuition, that the world possesses meaning and value is a fact sufficiently striking to make it worth while at least to investigate the belief in question.

It is by "inference," not by any direct experience, that Huxley comes to accept mysticism as a source of values. The agnostic has achieved a synthesis, but, according to Colin Wilson, "it is an intellectual synthesis, not an existential one." But, then, to quote Huxley: "Even the fragmentary outline of a synthesis is better than no synthesis at all." Huxley was not alone in his quest of a synthesis. He shared the agonies and anguish of the twentieth century writers, who came to face the disillusioned post-War, devaluated world. Whereas T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden sought refuge in the High Anglican Church, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene returned to Roman Catholicism. Huxley, in his search for values, accepted Oriental mysticism. Huxley's failure to accept the Christian tradition has been largely due to, as D.S. Savage observes, his "pronounced bias towards the impersonal, the non-human." Huxley agrees with A.N. Whitehead that the "religious experience does not include any direct intuition of a definite person," and that there "may be personal embodiment,
but the substratum is impersonal." Huxley does not appear to accept the Christian conception that the immanent and transcendental God is a personal being, the creator and sustainer of the universe. Huxley holds, that the Christian belief, that Christ is the only avatar, and that the Christian revelation has been unique, has resulted on the part of Christians to be occupied with events in time. It is because of this servitude to the historical fact that "Christian history has been disgraced by more and bloodier crusades, interdenominational wars, persecutions and proselytizing imperialism than has the history of Hinduism and Buddhism." Hinduism and Buddhism are not disgraced by anything corresponding to Inquisition, and have believed in reality as impersonal. Hence their preoccupation with the timeless and eternal Godhead.

Huxley says:

Belief in a personal God has released an enormous amount of energy directed towards good ends; but it has probably released an equal amount of energy directed towards ends that were silly, or mad, or downright evil. It has also led to that enormous over-valuation of the individual ego, which is so characteristic of Western popular philosophy. All the great religions have taught the necessity of transcending personality; but the Christians have made it particularly difficult for themselves to act upon this teaching.

This counts for his attraction towards Eastern mysticism, which posits the belief in many avatars.
Lord Krsna says in the Bhagavad-Gita: "For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of evil-doers, and for establishing Dharma (righteousness) on a firm footing, I am born from age to age." (IV:8).

Moreover, Eastern mysticism advocates that the ultimate reality is not a person, but impersonal, for the highest religious experience never finds anything corresponding to a personal God. Such considerations, Huxley says, "should make us extremely chary of accepting belief in a personal deity." Huxley considers the classical arguments in favour of theism, and rejects them as unconvincing. He says: "There is probably no argument by which the case for theism, or for deism, or for pantheism in either its pancosmic or acosmic form, can be convincingly proved." Then the intellectual is justified to seek the fundamental philosophical principle, which Huxley calls the perennial philosophy, which has as its basis the religious experience of mankind. Sebastian Baraack in Time Must Have A Stop, gives expression to this perennial philosophy, which, according to Huxley, is the H.C.F. of mysticism:

That there is a Godhead or Ground, which is the unmanifested principle of all manifestation. That the Ground is transcendent and immanent. That it is possible for human beings to love, know and, from virtually, to become actually identified with the Ground.
That to achieve this unitive knowledge, to realize this supreme identity, is
the final end and purpose of human existence. That there is a Law or Dharma, which must be obeyed, a Tao or Way, which must be followed, if men are to achieve their final end. That the more there is of I, me, mine, the less there is of the Ground; and that consequently the Tao is a Way of humility and compassion, the Dharma a Law of mortification and self-transcending awareness.  

But this perennial philosophy, which Huxley arrived at, after years of search and scrutiny, is not acceptable to many critics. Gai Eaton particularly criticizes Huxley's "labour of selection and rejection which no man on earth is entitled to undertake," and accuses Huxley of having "filched from various doctrines, without any regard for their context, those elements which seem to support his own attitude to life." There is no doubt that Huxley approves of Vedanta, but has no regard for popular Hinduism, and whereas he approvingly quotes Jalalu'din Rumi, he cannot stomach the Moslem doctrine of 'Jehad'. But the fact remains that if religion is cleared of its theological debris, there shines the mystical experience, which is the central core of all religions. It was the belief in the possibility of having this unitive experience of reality, that helped Huxley, to acquire the conviction that the Final End of man is "the unitive knowledge of ultimate Reality, the realization that Atman and Brahman are one...that Tao or the Logos is at once transcendent and immanent." Such a belief cannot be
created through logical arguments, for, as Huxley says: "Final conviction can only come to those who make an act of faith." Though the agnostic, in his search for a nexus, comes to acquire faith in the existence of the Divine Ground, this faith does not result in any deeply-felt, first-hand experience of the realization that atman and Brahman are one. Huxley concedes the fact that "our interest in mysticism is mainly theoretical and scientific." The agnostic, from sheer curiosity, tries to explore different approaches towards the mystical experience, to discover an approach that could best suit his age. His mysticism, therefore, undergoes variations, according to the particular approach he adopts at a time towards the mystical experience. The result is a shift from the contemplative mysticism of *Eyeless in Gaza* to the mysticism of sexual love, and drugs, that Huxley advocates in *Island*.

II

Huxley's prooccupation with mysticism goes back to the twenties of this century. He read the literature on mysticism only, in the words of Woodcock, "to criticize, to debunk, to mock." As an agnostic, Huxley was not then sure of its efficacy as a source of value. Hutton, the hero of the story, "The Gioconda Smile," experiences a kind of "cosmic emotion" in the darkness of the night,
but he does not know the significance of such an experience, and therefore, does nothing to capture it again. Theodore Gumbril, in the company of Emily, whose pure and selfless love restores him to the world of innocent childhood, experiences a kind of mystical feeling. Gumbril says:

Lying awake at night, sometimes - not restlessly, but serenely, waiting for sleep - the quiet re-establishes itself, piece by piece; all the broken bits, all the fragments of it we've been so busily dispersing all day long. It re-establishes itself, an inward quiet, a growing, expanding crystal....the quiet grows and grows....And at last you are conscious of something approaching...Something inexpressibly lovely and wonderful advances through the crystal, nearer, nearer.23

But Gumbril fails to realize the full significance of this occasional, numinous emotion about something "inexpressibly lovely," for he is a victim of sloth and irresponsibility, which according to the mystics, are the most besetting sins, that blind the soul to primordial reality. He fails to transform his sinful existence into a state of blissful serenity, when the occasion for such a metamorphosis is vouchsafed to him. He has not the sufficient will power to pull himself out of that slough of Despond, which is his life. He falls an easy prey to Myra, the siren whose leprechaunish mirth invites him back to the world of cynical reality. Perhaps he could have had the full glimpse of that reality, of
which he had a fragmentary vision, while in bed with her. He wistfully realizes: "Wasn't she perhaps the one unique being with whom he might have learned to await in quietness the final coming of that lovely terrible thing from before the sound of whose secret footsteps more than once and Oh! ignobly he had fled?"^24

Sick of his futile and hollow existence, Gumbril decides to escape from his sordid milieu by going abroad, where he would record, in his proposed autobiography, of those experiences which had often shaken him out of his quotidian routine of life. Though he is on the verge of a final resolution, he is still checked by the fear of the other people, who may think about him as "a sort of dingy Romain Rolland, hopelessly trying to pretend that I feel the emotions and have the great spiritual experiences, which the really important people do feel and have."^25 Though unable to sunder the bonds of his self with samsāra, he has a "premonition that one of these days I may become a saint."^26

This desire to wear the saffron robe and renounce the world, gains a degree of intensity in Calamy, whose character is of cardinal interest, for it points out the direction of Huxley's future mysticism. Huxley often uses Ovid's proverb - Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor - I see the better course and approve it, but I follow the lower path, to express the spiritual predicament of
his heroes. Calamy, like his predecessor, Gilmbril, knows that a better and more desirable way exists, but he lacks the determination to change the course of his life. He is thoroughly disgusted with his life of amorous pleasures, and in some of his lucid moments, becomes aware of an higher level of reality, other than the sordid reality he lives in. He is certain that beauty and mystery beckon him, and that to know them is the ultimate aim of his life.

To look into the depths of that mystery, to fix the eyes of the spirit on that bright and enigmatic beauty, to pore over the secret until its symbols cease to be opaque and the light filters through from beyond - there is nothing else in life for me at any rate, that matters; there is no rest or possibility of satisfaction in doing anything else.27

But the spirit, opposed to the flesh, cannot reach the higher rungs of reality. Calamy knows that if "he wanted to look into the depths of mind, he must not interpose a preoccupation with his bodily appetites."28 But he fails to seek deliverance from the temptations of the flesh. In his bid to arrive at a synthetic view of existence, which may include the body as well as the spirit, Calamy thinks of the Latin Compromise, only to realize that indulgence is incompatible with the contemplative way of life, and that, "to the liver of this perfect Life of Reason the secret, the mystery and the beauty, though they might be handled and examined, refused to give up their significance."29 Calamy realizes
that all directors of spiritual life are unanimous on this point, that the self must abandon its attachment with the sensuous world, if it is to seek union with the Divine. The Bhagavad-Gītā urges the seeker of salvation to detach himself from the remora of desire. Lord Kṛṣṇa says: "Arjuna, when one thoroughly abandons all cravings of the mind, and is satisfied in the self through (the joy of) self, then he is called stable of mind. (II:55). Calamy realizes that he must purify his mind of those "charnel images" that keep returning again and again to his mind and that he should deliberately, empty himself, in the words of Eyelyn Underhill, "of the false images of the intellect, neglect the cinematograph of sense."31

Contemplating over his hand, which can be interpreted as electrical charges, as chemical molecules, as a part of moral being, Calamy tries to seek the relationship that exists between these different modes of being. Connection is there; but this integrating principle can be grasped only in a moment of samadhi. Discursive understanding can never reach it. Though himself incapable of meditation, Calamy knows, at least intellectually, that meditation "serves to open up the mysteries that lie below the commonplace surface of existence," and that by contemplating long enough, "one might get through the mystery to its explanation."32 Calamy comes to accept the Upanisadic truth - "tat
that reality is immanent in man, and that this reality can be realized through the arduous path of self-mortification and self-discipline. He accepts the Vedantic view of reality, that "everything that seems real is in fact entirely illusory - maya, in fact, the cosmic illusion. Behind it you catch a glimpse of reality." It is in search of this reality, that Calamy at the end of the novel, retires to mountains. Though on the verge of conversion, Calamy is yet unsure of the fact, whether there would come anything out of meditation, and thinks perhaps he had been a fool to pursue this newly-discovered ideal of mysticism. The novel ends on a note of uncertainty.

### III

Calamy's assurance about the realization of the divine in man through meditation, acquires a firm conviction in *Eyeless in Gaza* which, according to J.B. Coates, is "the record of his conversion." Huxley abandons his pyrrhonism, and comes to believe that the mystical experience is the aim and end of human existence. Huxley, in the words of Peter Firchow, "becomes engaged," and looks at things from the vantage point of mysticism. It cannot be discounted that P.M. Alexander and Gerald Heard considerably influenced Huxley's mind at this stage, and his conviction was further confirmed, that mysticism alone can bring integration and wholeness, in the mechanical,
atomistic existence of modern man. If the hero, in the words of Sean O' Faolin, "is the man who, in some way, 'embodies' the qualities most needed by his age," then Anthony Beavis can certainly be called the first Huxleyan hero. Anthony differs from early, shy, inactive characters, who merely point out the spiritual dilemma of modern life, but do not embody any satisfying philosophy that can answer the spiritual needs of our times. Anthony not only represents the wearisome condition of humanity, he also seeks integration and peace in the mystical experience, which he undergoes, under Dr. Miller who is a spokesman of Huxley's newly-discovered ideal of mysticism.

Huxley's conversion to mysticism is neither sudden nor arbitrary. His writings may be divided into two parts; whereas the earlier writings debunk and deride the ideal of mysticism, the same is accepted and advocated as the only satisfying philosophy in later writings. What induced Huxley to accept mysticism was perhaps the mood of self-disgust, generated by the shattering experiences of early life. His mother's early death, which according to Juliette Huxley, brought Huxley "an annihilating sorrow which he was never to outlive," his own blindness, and as if that were not enough, his elder brother Trev's death by suicide - these experiences shook the young idealist's faith in life. His sensitive mind was baffled by the question of human
sufferings which, according to Ronald W. Clark, "runs like a dark line through so much of his work." Like Philip Quarles' game leg, Huxley's partial blindness "raised an artificial barrier between him and the rest of the world," and perhaps he became too fond of shutting himself up inside his own private silence." It was from the depth of his own introspective meditation, that the conviction was born, that time is evil, and that the good lies in seeking eternity, that sufferings are due to man's preoccupation with events in time. "For any possible conception of time," Huxley says, "entails the recognition and intimate realization of the flux of perpetual perishing; and to be made aware of the flux - the flux in relation to one's own being; worse, as a treacherous and destructive element of that being - is intolerable."

Conversion to mysticism, in Huxley's novels, results from a mood of self-disgust, generated by the two irreconcilable factors, of human existence, physical love and death. Love, in his novels, often ends in humiliation and self-disgust, or else the idea of physical relationship causes repulsion to the young idealist, who thinks that the human body is merely an impediment to the human spirit, to remind its possessor, that despite his high ideals, he is after all an animal. In an early story, "The Death of Lully," the conversion of the young nobleman to religion takes place, when he he sees the half-eaten breast of the woman whom, in
his romantic transports, he has pictured as an embodiment of ideal beauty. Guy Lambourne, the romantic idealist of the story "Happily Ever After," experiences a mood of self-disgust when Marjorie Carling, the girl whom he loves, tries to kiss him in the moonlight, for he is reminded of a similar relationship with Minnie, the prostitute, and hates to think that romantic love ends in physical relationship. Sebastian Barnack, the hero of *Time Must Have A Stop*, experiences the same feeling, after his virginity has been violated by Veronica Thwale. Barnack thinks of the sexual relationship as "sheer madness; a maniac struggling in the musky darkness with another maniac." Gumbril goes abroad, for his escapades have brought him disgust; Calamy retires to mountains for, he, too, experiences disgust in his amorous relation with women.

It is this sense of self-disgust, which brings a transformation in the character of Anthony Beavis, the hero of *Eyeless In Gaza*. The title of the novel, which Huxley borrows from John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, suggests that Anthony is blind to reality, for he is a slave to irresponsible sensuality, which has not only been the cause of his friend Brian Foxe's suicide, but has also caused endless suffering to his mistress, Helen. He has all the sins of his predecessors, and like most of them, he is filled with self-disgust, and eschews
reality in a world of irresponsible sensuality. He knows that he is in the wrong, yet he lacks the determination to change the course of his life. In his own words: "Like all other human beings, I know what I ought to do, but continue to do what I know I oughtn't to do." Theoretically, of course, he knows that there exists a way out of the morass his life has stuck into, but he is "quite content with only knowing about the way of perfection." It is under the benign influence of Dr. Miller, the anthropologist, who professes belief in Vedanta and Zen Buddhism, that Anthony finally undergoes conversion. Dr. Miller convinces Anthony that his scepticism, which Miller calls, the "what's-the-good-of-it-all attitude" is due to his avidyā, wilful inattention to primordial reality, and the wrong use of the body.

Dr. Miller, whom Mark Staithes calls Anthony's "neo-Jesus avatar," convinces Anthony that the awareness of the ultimate spiritual principle, that is inherent in the universe, and a conscious control of one's body, lead to the unitive experience of the spiritual reality. Because of avidyā, man wrongly identifies himself with his jīva, the appetitive self, which makes him oblivious of reality. Prayer is the only way, Miller suggests to Anthony, "of getting beyond our own vomit....Beyond this piddling, twopenny-halfpenny personality, with all its wretched
little virtues and vices, all its silly cravings
and silly pretensions." Once the shell of egotism
is cracked, the ahamkara, the sense of I-ness is
annihilated, man attains the mystical experience
of the divine reality, which brings the conviction
that all is good, all is love. The mystic crosses
the world of samsara into nirvana, from a state of
desire to one of desirelessness. The mystical
experience transforms, in the words of D.T.Suzuki,
"trishna(tanha) into karuna, ego-centred love into
something universal, eros into agape." Violence and
aggression have no place in the transfigured life of
the mystic. Anthony says: "Consistently applied to any
situation, love always gains." Anthony's experience
brings about the conviction that pacifism and love
ultimately win. But fear and hesitation still urge
him to go back to the world of detached sensuality;
"'But why are you such a fool? a small voice began to
question; 'why do you go and saddle yourself with
convictions and philosophies?" He, however,
overcomes this temptation to seek shelter in the snug,
narrow world of self, and overcomes the indecision and
inertia, the most disappointing features of his
predecessors. The result is the unitive experience of
the ultimate reality, in which he experiences, "Unity
of mankind, unity of all life, all being even."

The
division between passion and reason, which afflicts characters in early fiction, is fused into the unitive experience of the Godhead, and the integral vision brings wholeness to Anthony. Anthony reflects over his early, unregenerate life:

'Born under one law, to another bound'. He himself, Anthony went on to think, he himself had chosen to regard the whole process as either pointless or a practical joke. Yes, chosen. For it had been an act of the will....He had chosen to think it nonsense, and nonsense for more than twenty years the thing had seemed to be - nonsense, in spite of occasional uncomfortable intimations that there might be a point, and that the point was precisely in what he had chosen to regard as the pointlessness, the practical joke. And now at least it was clear, now by some kind of immediate experience he knew that the point was in the paradox, in the fact that unity was the beginning and unity the end, and that in the meantime the condition of life and all existence was separation, which was equivalent to evil. 52

Separateness and diversity, the conditions of man's natural existence, can be transcended in the moment of ecstasy, when "there is no more discourse, only experience, only unmediated knowledge, as of a colour, a perfume, a musical sound." 53 The unitive experience of the Godhead brings a complete transformation in Anthony's character. In a transfigured world, he finds nothing but unity, peace and love. Commotion and restlessness are only at the surface of existence; deep down in the human soul there
is perfect peace, perfect stillness. He achieves peace from "pride and hatred and anger, peace from cravings and aversions, peace from all the separating frenzies." But this "final peace, this consciousness of being no more separate" cannot be achieved without self-effacement, the state of non-attachment to worldly cravings and aversions. Huxley suggests meditation as a "method for acquiring knowledge about the essential nature of things, a method for establishing communion between the soul and the integrating principle of the universe." Time and craving bind man to a life of earthly passions. Liberation from the bondage can be achieved, provided man directs his efforts to the actualization of the divine reality, which Huxley also calls "more-than-personal consciousness," in time. There is no place for despair, for reality is there in man. Propter, who acts as a spokesman of Huxley's mysticism in After Many A Summer says: "Hope begins only when human beings start to realize that the kingdom of heaven...is within and can be experienced by anybody who's prepared to take the necessary trouble." So far, Huxley's mysticism remains within the framework of Hindu and Christian tradition. Anthony Beavis reads The Way Of Perfection as well as follows the doctrine of non-attachment as expounded in the Bhagavad-Gītā. Propter talks about the inner self and the illusory nature of the phenomenal reality in terms of Vedanta. But after the publication of After Many A Summer, Huxley's mysticism
drifts towards Buddhism, especially Tibetan Lamaism. His later novels, therefore, betray the influence of Tantric Buddhism, which, with its mantras, mandalas, and sexual mysticism came to acquire popularity in the Western intellectual circles in this century. *Time Must Have A Stop* and *Island* embody the esoteric mystical tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

IV

Huxley's association with J.B. Rhine, the celebrated parapsychologist, with Dr. Humphry Osmond, who was probing the nature of consciousness through psychedelics, and with Eileen Garrett, the famous American medium, shows that during the last phase of his life, Huxley was chiefly interested in the question about the state of consciousness after death. *Time Must Have A Stop* is the direct dramatization of *Bardo Thödol*, The Tibetan Book of the Dead, which acquired great popularity during the early years of this century, not only because it contains the wisdom of ancient India, but also because of the enlightening psychological commentary by C.G. Jung. The book is a breviary, supposed to be read by the lamas, before the corpse of the dead person, to direct his consciousness towards the more-than-personal consciousness, which the Buddhists call the Clear Light of the Void. The Buddhists, like the Hindus, not only believe in the doctrine of *karma*, they also believe in
reincarnation. Based on the belief that the character of the next incarnation depends on the last thought or desire of the dying person, the book advocates that during the bardo plane - the intermediate stage between death and rebirth, consciousness, if properly directed, can seek merger into the Clear Light of the Void. Consciousness of an unregenerate being, while it comes into contact with the Pure Light, shrinks away in terror, and yearns for the world of familiarity, till it finds rebirth.

Eustace Barnack is a cultivated hedonist, who believes that one should "never put off till tomorrow the pleasure you enjoy today." He dies of apoplexy in his lavatory. His consciousness, liberated from the body, during the bardo plane, comes to face the Pure Light, but it shrinks from maintaining contact with the Clear Light of the Void. It craves for its familiar terrestrial surroundings, for the smell of his favourite cigars, of whisky and the female flesh. His unregenerate self, which Huxley calls an "unhappy dust of nothingness, a poor little harmless clot of mere privation," does not give up its right to a separate existence. This hunger for separateness finally triumphs, the light begins to get dim, and ultimately fades away. His consciousness is finally crowded by the memories of his earthly existence, of his school days, of his
mistress. Mimi's "round breasts, wax-white, tipped with a pair of blind brown eyes." The craving of the hovering consciousness to seek re-birth is satisfied, when the occasion for re-incarnation is provided by Mrs. Weyl, the wife of the art dealer, who has come to assess Eustace's paintings. His consciousness enters her womb.

There was a living uterine darkness awaiting him there, a vegetative heaven. Providence was ready for him, a providence of living flesh, hungry to engulf him into itself, yearning to hold and cradle him, to nourish with the very substance of its deliciously carnal and sanguine being.

Eustace fails to seek liberation from the inexorable law of Karma, and his consciousness remains tied to the wheel of transmigration, for he has failed to cultivate 'holy indifference' in his life. He has deliberately turned away from God, and sought refuge in his epicureanism, which acted as a shield against any numinous emotion. "From the sepulchre of his privation," Eustace makes fun of Carlo Malpighi's assertion that "there's only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self." He remains separate in life as well as in death, for he does not accept the Buddhistic truth: "Thine own consciousness, shining, void, and inseparable from the Great Body of Radiance, hath no birth, nor death, and is the Immutable Light - Buddha Amitabha."
Eustace's nephew, Sebastian Baraack is, however, converted to mysticism, under the benign influence of Bruno Rontini, the mystic, whom he has the chance to nurse, during the last days of his earthly pilgrimage. The spectacle of Bruno's "Joyful serenity" convinces Sebastian that Bruno was having the "knowledge of a timeless and infinite presence; the intuition, direct and infallible, that apart from the desire to be separate there was no separation, but an essential identity." Sebastian's conversion, like his author's, remains purely intellectual. In the novel, he is not anywhere shown as undergoing the process of conversion. His conviction about the perennial philosophy remains a mere "hypothesis", which he gives from his notebook, at the end of the novel. Sebastian reads another note from his diary, which is the first Huxleyan commentary on dying Hotspur's speech. Huxley says that mankind has paid attention only to the first cause of Hotspur's speech by making thought subservient to life, but life is time's fool, for time makes nonsense of all conscious planning and scheme. Only a few have transcended time, to experience the mystical eternity, when time does come to a stop. Salvation, Huxley seems to emphasize, lies in having this experience of timeless eternity. He has so far been emphasizing meditation as a technique to transcend time.
But meditation is not the only way to attain the Beatific vision. As Calamy says: "There are eighty-four thousand paths. The pure contemplative has a right to one of them." If contemplation, as J.B. Coates puts it, "becomes increasingly more difficult in an age whose tempo is determined by machine," the agnostic, in his quest of synthesis, may resort to such ways and means as are compatible with the present dispensation. It was Huxley's own failure to seek unio mystica through contemplation, that made him experiment, at least intellectually, with other ways of transcendence. Brander aptly observes: "Huxley, like all intelligent men who attempt the contemplative life ... was plagued by distractions." Island, therefore, is an attempt to investigate the possibility of mystical experience through sexual love and drugs.

V

C. Northcote Parkinson, in his review of Island, wrote that the novel is "a mirror in which modern man can see all that is rotten in his society and in himself." The novel not only traces the Western decay, from the middle of the last century till the present day, it also gives an ideal conception of society, which Huxley finally advocates. In fact, this novel is an attempt, in fictional terms, to seek an answer to those obstinate questions, which have defied any satisfactory answer in
early fiction. Though the agnostic has come to acquire the mystical view of reality, the problems of sex and death still demand reconciliation. The most striking feature of Huxley's attitude towards sex is disgust and abhorrence of the body. In the whole range of his fiction, there emerges no ideal sex relationship. The monster in the play in *Antic Hay* perhaps expresses Huxley's desire for an ideal sex relationship, when he wistfully says:

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Somewhere there must be love like music. Love harmonious and ordered:
two spirits, two bodies moving contrapuntally together. Somewhere,
the stupid, brutish act must be made to make sense, must be enriched, must
be made significant.72
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Tantric Buddhism provided Huxley a religious framework, 73 to overcome his obsession with the human body which, according to A.S. Collins, "came always between him and his spiritual vision."74 Tantric Buddhism does not advocate the renunciation of senses; it rather glorifies the human body, and takes a sacramental view of sex. Huxley's familiarity with tantric mysticism goes back to the early years of the present century. Denis, incapable of spontaneous living, thinks that perhaps pleasure "is one of the mystical roads to union with the infinite," and women "the broad highway to divinity."75 Chelifer urges Calamy not to retire to mountains in quest of truth, but to explore simultaneously both the temptation and the universe. To the ascetic ideal of
renunciation, which Calamy desires to embrace, Chelifer retorts that there have been "religions that prescribed indulgence in these particular temptations as a discipline and ceremony," to seek the portals of bliss. Huxley praises Lawrence's advocacy of the sexual experience, for it brings, says Huxley, "the immediate, non-mental knowledge of divine otherness." Anthony Beavis toys with the idea, that going to bed with women brings one into contact with truth, as does the mystical experience. Similarly, Propter talks about the ideal sex relationship: "If good could be manifested on the animal level, then there must be some kind of sexual behaviour that was absolutely normal and natural, just as there was an absolutely normal and natural sort of digestive activity." Sebastian notes in his diary, that man must progress from animal eternity through his humanity, to the divine eternity.

Island is an endeavour to rise from animal eternity to divine eternity, by systematically practising maithuna, the sexual union, which, instead of proving a hindrance, proves a means of liberation. The tantric Buddhists of the tropical island believe that maithuna is as good a way of attaining moksa as the way of abstinence and renunciation, advocated by traditional religions. The adherents of tantrism claim that their philosophy constitutes the fifth Veda, and that its esoteric teachings were expounded by Lord Śiva for the
weak-minded people, who are unable to curb their unruly passions. Since a tantric believes that all is Siva, all is Brahman, to him nothing seems impure. If trisna is the greatest obstacle to enlightenment, it is made an ally; and expression rather than repression is emphasized. Sir John Woodroffe says:

The Kulānarva Tantra says that man must be taught to rise by the means of those very things which are the cause of his fall....Man falls through the natural functions of drinking, eating, and sexual intercourse. If these are done with the feeling (Bhava) and under the conditions prescribed, then they become (it is taught) the instruments of his uplift to a point at which such ritual is no longer necessary and is surpassed.79

During his conversation with Will Farnaby, Ranga, a young inhabitant of the island, tells Will about their tantric philosophy. He says: "If you're a Tantrik, you don't renounce the world or deny its value; you don't try to escape into a Nirvana apart from life, as the monks of the Southern School do."80 The tantric manner of approach as Heinrich Zimmer puts it, is "not of Nay, but of Yea,"81 for it advocates the use of those very things which are forbidden by the traditional religions. Sex is not an addiction to the Palanese, as it is to Will Farnaby, whose unhealthy and morbid attitude towards sex has been responsible for his neuroticism. Profoundly impressed by the pragmatic and operational philosophy of these people, Will evinces a keen interest in the maithuna technique. He asks Ranga:
"What is maithuna?"
"Maybe you'd better ask Radha."
Will turned to the little nurse. "What is it?"
"Maithuna," she answered gravely, "is the yoga of love."
"Sacred or Profane?"
"There's no difference."
"That's the whole point," Ranga put in. "When you do maithuna, profane love is sacred love."
"Buddhatvan yoshidyonisanaritan," the girl quoted.
"None of your Sanskrit! what does it mean?"
"How would you translate Buddhatvan, Ranga?"
"Buddhaness, Buddhheaty, the quality of being enlightened."
Radha nodded and turned back to Will. "It means that Buddhhaness is in the yoni."
"In the yoni?" Will remembered those little stone emblems of the Eternal Feminine that he had bought...at Benares....
"Literally in the yoni?" he asked. "Or metaphorically."
"What a ridiculous question!" said the little nurse, and she laughed her clear unaffected laugh of pure amusement. "Do you think we make love metaphorically? Buddhatvan yoshidyonisanaritan," she repeated. "It couldn't be more completely and absolutely literal."82

But maithuna is not an easy path for the realization of the divine in man. The ordinary, unregenerate individual cannot seek integration through sexual union, unless his ego is suppressed, and mind prepared for this sacred ritual. Maithuna has the support of a strict, rigorous ethical system, which emphasizes as much discipline in 'self-naughting' as any other means of liberation. It strictly enjoins upon its adherents, that unless the guru approves the sadbhak's (novice) intentions and will, to experience the divine through the yoni, which is the embodiment of Sakti, he will not be included in the sect.

Herbert V. Guenther illustrates from a tantric text the mental discipline the shakt (worshipper of Sakti) requires...
during his bhoga (sexual intercourse) with a woman. The sādhak during his intercourse with his female partner (mudrā), writes Mr. Guenther, "must proceed in such a way that his mind does not swerve, for when his jewel-like mind swerves...perfection will never be accomplished." Moreover, this tantric ritual is not for every member of the sect. Maithuna is meant for the vīra (the hero), who has controlled his passions, and enjoys bhoga (sexual intercourse) as the manifestation of the Shiva-Shakti union, not as a gluttonous act enjoyed by the paśu, the ordinary, unregenerate individual. Maithuna is thus a kind of yoga, which demands arduous mental and moral discipline, and is as good a way of attaining the mystical experience as the other paths of religion. Will is informed about this discipline.

"And it's a real yoga," the girl insisted. "As good as raja yoga, or karma yoga, or bhakti yoga. In fact, a great deal better, so far as most people are concerned. Maithuna really gets them there." "What's there?" Will asked. "'There' is where you know. "Know what?" "Know who in fact you are—and believe it or not," she added, "Tāt tvam asi – thou art That, and so am I; That is me." Huxley's conviction, that maithuna could be a valid means of self-transcendence, was confirmed by Dr. Noyes's books Bible Communism and Male Continence. Dr. Noyes advocates Male Continence which, Huxley says, "transforms the sexual act into a prolonged exchange
of 'social magnetism' and this prolonged exchange makes possible an ever deepening knowledge of the mystery of human nature." Male continence, which Dr. Stockham was later to call Karezza, is the technique to separate the amative function of the sexual organs from the propagative, and by controlling the crisis, it ensures the prolongation of the sexual act. Huxley feels sure that this method transforms a "wild, God-eclipsing passion into a civilized act of worship." In the Oneida Community, which practised this particular technique of love making, there was to be no love in a private corner, no God-eclipsing attachment of one for one. Each was related to all, and any given pair could consummate their union through male continence. Huxley says: "Love was for Love's sake and for God's, not for offspring." The Palanese in Island, not only practise maithuna, as a mode of worship the technique also forms an important part of school curriculum, where students are taught this art of love making.

There can be no objection to maithuna as a marga for the realization of the kingdom of heaven. The problem is that maithuna is as difficult to practise as Karma yoga or Bhakti marga to attain the experience of ultimate reality. The fact that the Oneida community endured for only thirty years, and that tantrism was limited to a minor fraction of the Indian population, is a proof that maithuna is more difficult than
contemplation as a means of spiritual experience.

John Atkins aptly remarks that no "healthy young man would be capable of practising karezza. It belongs to an old man's philosophy." Maithuna will never produce saints on mass scale, for a real saint is a rarity, because not all of us are capable of attaining the state of non-attachment towards worldly joys and sorrows. Therefore, the way to the city of God through free, sexual love seems well-nigh impossible. John Passmore, in this context ironically remarks: "The road to paradise, one might conclude, is simple: It does not involve a prolonged agony through a night of the soul; all one need do is to take off one's pants."89

The body mysticism of Island shows that Huxley's obsession with the human body does not go even in old age. Huxley believed that since the mind is dependent on the body, any change in the body will produce a corresponding change in the mind. This belief made him experiment with the mind-changing drugs. If maithuna is not a short cut to the kingdom of heaven, perhaps the drugs could prove that. The agnostic in his search for valid and easy means of transcendence, for ordinary individuals, experiments with drugs, to explore the possibility of synthetic sainthood.

VI

Huxley, the agnostic, was essentially a pragmatic thinker who did never close his mind to novel ideas. He
admits that he belongs to "that fortunate minority of human beings, who retain the mental openness and elasticity of youth," and regrets that most "people encapsulate themselves...sometimes before they have stopped being undergraduates, and go through life barricaded against every idea, every fresh and unconceptualized perception." Having failed to seek any mystical experience through meditation or maithuna, Huxley tried to explore the avenues of spiritual reality through synthetic drugs. The idea, that the chemical means to transcendence are perhaps as good as the traditional methods of fasting and prayer, also occurs in Huxley's early fiction. As an agnostic, Huxley believed that the fruit of spiritual life was ecstasy, and that to induce an ecstatic state, one need not sit on the gazelle skin and squint at the top of one's nose for hours, for ecstasy can be produced by taking a dose of psychedelics. He comments on the artificial production of the state of mystical trance: "Every symptom of the trance, from the 'sense of presence' to total unconsciousness, can be produced artificially in the laboratory." Miles Fanning in, "After The Fireworks" echoes the same idea, when he points out that the opium is "as good a way of becoming supernatural as looking at one's nose or one's navel, or not eating, or repeating a word over and over again." It was Huxley's intense longing to
seek eternity, that made him experiment with drugs, which, at least temporarily, lead to some kind of self-transcendence. In Antic Hay, Huxley raises the question:

Who lives longer: the man who takes heroin for two years and dies, or the man who lives on roast beef, water and potatoes till ninety-five? One passes his twenty-four months in eternity. All the years of the beef-eater are lived only in time.93

Since the drugs induce a state of timelessness, bring elation to the user, and the drug-induced experience shares some attributes of the mystical experience, it has been assumed by the advocates of mind-changing drugs, that they can have a genuine religious experience through them. If rapture alone is the chief test of a mystical experience, then we may have rapture either way, for to quote Anthony Beavis, "a rapture is always a rapture, whatever it's due to. Whether it's champagne, or saying OM, or squinting at your nose, or looking at a crucifix, or making love,"94 then the modern neophyte need not undergo the traditional ascetical discipline, to mortify his self, because the pharmacist can help him seek the experience of the divine, without all those bodily discomforts, which the mystics deem as the pre-condition of such an experience. Huxley goes back to the religious rites of the primitive peoples to show that intoxicants had been an essential part of their religious worship. He says that "the drug-induced
experience has been regarded by primitives and even by the highly civilized as intrinsically divine. "95

There is no denying the fact that the intoxicants have been an important part of the religious rites of the ancient peoples. But the drug alone was never considered sufficient to give them the required religious experience. It merely acted as a stimulant to make the mind suggestive to religious prayers, and to bring it from its individual isolation, to a sense of solidarity with the world at large. Soma was, of course, used by the Aryans as a help to mystical experience, and the drug is addressed in the highest strains of adulation and veneration in the Rgveda. But, soma alone was never sufficient to give them the experience of bliss. Adolf Kaegi aptly observes that "Indra, the ruler of battles, takes no pleasure in the Soma offered without prayer; he scorns the sacrificial food prepared without a song."96 Even in the Vedic times, prayer, or the mortification of the self was considered an essential requisite to attain a union with the Brahman. Moreover, the Vedas are a record of the mystical utterances of the ancient Aryans; and some of the sublimest utterances are mixed with the superstitious character of the primitive people. When we come to the Upanisads, which
mark a more philosophical and speculative stage of the Indian thought, we do not find any specific importance given to soma as a means of mystical experience. In the Bhagavad-Gītā, soma is referred to only in a single sloka and the drug does not enjoy any importance as a means of God-realization. The Bhagavad-Gītā stresses three mārgas - the Karma mārga, the Jñāna mārga and Bhakti mārga - to attain the state of samadhi; and soma is nowhere mentioned as a way to experience the divine bliss. Huxley, too, in his anthology of mysticism, The Perennial Philosophy, nowhere talks about drugs as valid means of seeking moksa.

VII

Huxley was not the first Western intellectual to experiment with the mind-changing drugs. Before him, William James and Havelock Ellis had tried these drugs to know their effect upon the human mind. Writing about his own experiences, under the nitrous oxide, William James asserts that his experience was one of reconciliation when all conflicts were melted into unity, and the experience brought him intense metaphysical illumination. During the experience, he says: "The centre and periphery of things seem to come together. The ego and its objects, the meum and the tuum, are one....We are literally in the midst of an infinite, to perceive the existence of which is the utmost we can attain." James, however, does not try to interpret his experience under the gas, in religious
terms. As an empiricist, he just states facts as he finds them, and does not make an attempt, as Huxley does, to equate his experience with the genuine, religious experience. James in his *The Varieties Of Religious Experience* records the experiences of Benjamin Paul Blood who claimed that under the impact of anaesthetics, he realized "the primordial, Adamic surprise of Life," and of J.A. Symonds who felt under chloroform, "what some of the saints have said they always felt, the undemonstrable but irrefragable certainty of God," but he was not sure whether it was a delusion or an actual experience. John Blofeld's experience under mescalin is of greater significance, for like Huxley, he tries to interpret it in terms of Buddhism. He says that he experienced the "awareness of undifferentiated unity embracing perfect identification of subject and object," and admits that the drugs gave him "an incomparable insight into the true meaning of what I had learned from my Lamas."

Mr. Blofeld is modest enough not to make any tall claims about the efficacy of mescalin as a promoter of religious experience. Though the drug brings a modification of consciousness, it does not liberate the self from the fetters of this world. Timothy Leary, acclaimed by his followers as messiah and high priest of the psychedelics is, however, quite vociferous about
the astounding effects of the LSD, and asserts that LSD can vouchsafe a genuine mystical experience, if the drug is ingested in a suitable setting. Leary recites Hindu morning prayers, and claims that LSD experience is in line with the Hindu tantric practises. Tantrism, no doubt, lays emphasis on the human body as a vehicle of self-liberation, and advocates that the tantric hero (vira), who has totally subdued his passions and controlled his mind, can seek mental integration through sexual intercourse, but it does not allow every member of the sect to resort to maithuna, to become one with God. The tantric during his bhoga with the female counterpart does not seek sexual enjoyment, but the unitive experience of the Godhead, whereas for Leary, LSD is the chief promoter of ecstasy, for it intensifies the sexual enjoyment. He says: "In a carefully prepared, loving LSD session, a woman can have several hundred orgasms." Leary calls LSD "Western yoga," for its aim, like Eastern religions, is the expansion of consciousness and the promotion of ecstasy. He claims that the "LSD kick is a spiritual ecstasy" and the "LSD trip is a religious pilgrimage." Leary alone asserts that the LSD experience is a profoundly religious experience, and is equivalent to the genuine mystical experience.

There are others, who claim, that the drug-induced experience can never promote any genuine,
religious experience. They assert that the drug only causes hallucinations; it can never provide a genuine mystical experience. R.C. Zaehner, does not give any credit to such experiences, because mescaline only ushered him into "a world of nonsensical fantasy." He experienced neither ecstasy nor eternity during his mescal experience. Zaehner says that "the experience was in a sense 'anti religious,'" and that "'self-transcendence' of a sort did take place, but transcendence into a world of farcical meaninglessness." It seems that there is no unanimity amongst the intelligent and wise people with regard to the nature of the psychedelic experience. While some accept that the drug is potent enough to transport them into a larger area of consciousness, the others merely state its negative effects, and claim that the drug cannot bring us any nearer God.

About Huxley, Mrs. Laura Archera Huxley points out, that "one of Aldous's chief aims in life was the extension of consciousness." Huxley took mescaline under the expert guidance of Dr. Humphry Osmond, for it had always seemed to him possible that "by means of systematic meditation, or else by taking the appropriate drug, I might so change my ordinary mode of consciousness as to be able to know, from the inside, what the visionary, the medium, even the mystic were talking about." Huxley admits that the experience proved of
infinite value to him, for under the effect of the
drug, he realized that being and becoming, nirvana
and samsara were one and the same thing. Mescaline
gave him a peep into that 'other world', about which
he had been so emphatically writing for the past so
many years. Huxley says:

The Beatific Vision, Sat Chit Ananda,
Being-Awareness-Bliss—for the first
time I understood, not on the verbal
level, not by inchoate hints or at a
distance, but precisely and completely
what those prodigious syllables referred
to.109

Huxley describes his experience under mescaline,
as "the sacramental vision of reality,"110 and claims
that, under the impact of the drug, better things may
be experienced 'out there' or 'in here'; which means
that the drug can induce both extrovertive and introvertive
mystical experiences. Huxley claims that he had only the
extrovertive kind of experience, which brought him the
realization, that every thing in the universe is of
infinite significance, for the divine, is immanent in
every thing. Huxley says that the other mescaline takers
can discover an inner world "as self-evidently "infinite
and holy," as that transfigured outer world,"111 which
he had seen during his experience. Huxley is more
emphatic and dilative in his private correspondence
about the efficacy of psychedelics to provide a genuine
religious experience than in his literary writings.
Huxley's first experience showed no interest in human
affairs, but the second experience had "a human content, which the earlier, solitary experience, with its Other Worldly quality...did not possess." Another mescaline experience made him realize that love is the primary and fundamental cosmic fact, that Nirvana apart from the world, apart from Māhākārūpa for sentient beings, is as terrible as the pains of hell. As his experiences under the drugs increase, the generalizations about the experience become more bold, and the earlier cautious attitude is replaced by confident, assertive statements. About his psychedelic experiences, Huxley wrote to his friend Humphry Osmond:

What emerges as a general conclusion is the confirmation of the fact that mescaline does genuinely open the door and that everything including the Unknown in its purest, most comprehensive form can come through. After the theophany it is up to the momentarily enlightened individual to 'co-operate with grace' - not so much by will as by awareness.

In a letter to Victoria Ocampo, Huxley affirms that mescaline took him "beyond the realm of vision to the realm of what the mystics call 'obscure knowledge' - insight into the nature of things," and the drug also brought "the realization that, in spite of pain and tragedy, the universe is all right, in other words that God is Love." Mr. Merton wrote to Huxley raising a number of objections to the validity of the psychedelic mystical experience. Like Dean Inge, Fr. Merton found it hard to accept
drugs as a means of religious experience. Huxley's reply to him again affirms his positive attitude towards drugs. Huxley writes:

In the course of the last five years I have taken mescaline twice and lysergic acid three or four times. My first experience was mainly aesthetic. Later experiences...helped me to understand many of the obscure utterances to be found in the writings of the mystics, Christian and Oriental. An unspeakable sense of gratitude for the privilege of being born into this universe....A transcendence of the ordinary subject-object relationship. A transcendence of the fear of death. A sense of solidarity with the world and its spiritual principle...an understanding, not intellectual, but in some sort total, an understanding with the entire organism, of the affirmation that God is Love.116

Similarly, in a letter to Margaret Isherwood,117 Huxley reiterates his stand on mescaline, when he says that he was able to go beyond vision into the genuine mystical experience, as described by the mystics of all religions. From Huxley's correspondence, it becomes quite evident that his experiences under the drug had confirmed his conviction that drugs can shape men's minds towards religious-orientation, and that a genuine mystical experience is possible with these drugs. It is for this reason that psychedelics occupy a place of central significance in Island. It seems, Huxley exhorts people to try these drugs, which he names "the moksha-medicine, the reality-revealer, the truth-and-beauty pill,"118
if they desire to create an ideal society, fit for human beings to live in harmony with the universe.

The inhabitants of Island have a psycho-pharmacospiritual approach to the problems of man's activities. Since awareness for them is the chief aim of life, they make use of the moksha-medicine, to get the experience of the Clear Light of the Void. Robert Macphail, the chief spokesman of the philosophy of Island, like Huxley, is anxious to defend the use of the moksha-medicine by the Palanese, and asserts that they are not "a set of self-indulgent dope-takers, wallowing in illusions and false samadhis." Macphail assures William Farnaby that the only way of judging the authenticity of the drug is to take four hundred milligrammes of it, and then see its effects. Will, the reality-denying, neurotic, Western intellectual, weak-willed, and having no particular understanding of the Eastern and Western religious traditions, takes the moksha-medicine, under the expert guidance of Susila Macphail, and experiences a new level of consciousness. From the description of his experience, it seems that Will gets the direct unconceptual understanding of the ultimate reality.

"Luminous bliss." That was as near as one could come to it. But it - this timeless and yet ever changing Event - was something that words could only caricature and diminish, never convey. It was not only bliss, it was also understanding. Understanding of everything, but without knowledge of anything. Knowledge involved a knower and all the infinite diversity of known and knowable things. But here, behind his closed lids, there was neither spectacle nor spectator. There was only
this experienced fact of being blissfully one with oneness.120

The word 'God' no longer sounds funny to Will, who has never said yes for answer to anything in life. God becomes the self-evident fact, which confronts him, during his experience. Similarly, 'eternity', "one of those metaphysical dirty words which no decent-minded man would dream of pronouncing even to himself much less in public," becomes to Will, during his experience, "as real as shit."121 The blissful experience must also include the still, sad music of life; those ugly and unpleasant modes of human experience, which often drive man to a negative view of existence. Under the drug-induced samadhi, suffering and death, which had been an enigma to Will, assume a new significance. Sufferings are as good a fact as the Clear Light of the Void. If sufferings are there, love too, must be there, for "Sunnata implies karuna. The Void is light, but it's also compassion."122 Will realizes the meaning of compassion, and understands what it means when they say 'God is love'. He acquires the conviction that "there was this capacity even in a paranoiac for intelligence, even in a devil-worshipper for love," and that the fact remained that "the ground of all being could be totally manifest in a flowering shrub, a human face; the fact that there was a light and that this light was also compassion."123
Will Farnaby's visionary experience crystallizes the conviction, that all of us are potential Buddhas and that the drug can provide us the experience of bliss and positive reconciliation. To an agnostic, a mere vision of a world other than the one his rational consciousness apprehends, is sufficient to convince, of a higher level of consciousness, beyond the aesthetic or visionary consciousness. But to say that he has a fully blown mystical experience through drugs, for he describes his visionary experience in terms of the Eastern tradition, is perhaps to claim too much. Such an assertion raises the fundamental issue - can we place Will Farnaby, or in that way Huxley, in the category of mystics, because they describe their psychedelic experience in religious terms?

Huxley's advocacy of psychedelics in Island has been bitterly criticized by the Establishment, which has accused him of corrupting the youth. R.E.L. Masters and Jean Houston, to some extent, hold Huxley, Alan Watts, and other writers guilty of the seduction of the innocent youth, for these writers, "in their various writings imposed upon the psychedelic experience essentially, Eastern ideas and terminology," and led them to believe, that drugs could provide an authentic religious experience. Huxley had absolutely no intention to mislead anybody. His chief mission
in life was to dispel ignorance, and to make men aware of the light within them. If he tried the psychedelics, it was only to have an access to those remote regions of the mind, where perhaps lies joy and peace that pass all understanding. His refusal to appear before the T.V. in connection with drugs, shows that he never wanted to be the prophet of LSD. But the fact remains that he advocated the use of the psychedelic drugs, and believed that drugs were potent enough to generate a genuine religious experience. To justify his claim that drugs really open the doors of perception to heavenly beauty, and introduce their user to the Kingdom of Heaven, Huxley puts forward a scientific explanation of the spiritual experience.

Huxley accepts the Bergsonian theory of memory and perception, which expounds that the function of the brain and nervous system is in the main eliminative, not productive. Man is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him, and he can perceive everything that is everywhere happening in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to save him from being overwhelmed by useless and irrelevant knowledge, by allowing only as much consciousness, as is essential for his biological survival. The enzymes regulate the supply of glucose to brain cells, which enable it to work as an efficient reducing valve
to check the full and free flow of consciousness. Mescalin inhibits the production of enzymes, and thus lowers the amount of glucose needed by the brain and thus impairs its efficiency. The result is that strange things seem to happen to the drug-taker. Huxley says:

In some cases there may be extra-sensory perceptions. Other persons discover a world of visionary beauty. To others again is revealed the glory, the infinite value and meaningfulness of naked existence, of the given, unconceptualized event. In the final stage of egolessness there is an "obscure knowledge" that All is in all - that All is actually each.

If rational consciousness is just a fragment of that larger consciousness, of which we become aware at certain levels, aesthetic, visionary or mystical, and if the lowering of the biological efficiency of the brain can give us entry into that larger consciousness, then the whole matter depends on the change in one's body chemistry. Huxley says that yogic practices, fasts, prayers, flagellation and other physical and mental austerities, which the traditional mystics advocated as the most important requirements of the seeker of truth, were just the means to change the body chemistry. Since drugs are available now, the novice need not undergo the rigorous ascetical discipline. What he needs is a pill, which would produce the required change in his body without any physical discomforts. Huxley gives a
rationale of yogic breathing exercises.

Practiced systematically, these exercises result, after a time, in prolonged suspensions of breath. Long suspensions of breath lead to a high concentration of carbon dioxide in the lungs and blood, and this increase in the concentration of CO₂ lowers the efficiency of the brain as a reducing valve and permits the entry into consciousness of experiences, visionary or mystical from "out there."129

The psalm singing of the Christians, the sutra intoning of the Buddhist monks, and the japam of the Hindus have one aim — to increase the concentration of carbon dioxide in the lungs and blood, which results in the lowering of the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve, which allows the doors of perception to open wide. Huxley says that the "way to the super-conscious is through the sub-conscious and the way...to the sub-conscious is through the chemistry of individual cells."130 In defence of the chemically induced experience, and as an answer to the traditional religionists, who would not cherish such scientific explanation of fasting, hymn-singing and mental prayer, Huxley suggests:

A similar conclusion will be reached by those whose philosophy is unduly "spiritual." God, they will insist, is a spirit and is to be worshipped in spirit. Therefore an experience which is chemically conditioned cannot be an experience of the divine. But, in one way or another, all our experiences are chemically conditioned, and if we imagine that some of them are purely "spiritual," purely "intellectual," purely "aesthetic," it is merely because we have never troubled
to investigate the internal chemical environment at the moment of their occurrence. Furthermore, it is a matter of historical record that most contemplatives worked systematically to modify their body chemistry, with a view to creating the internal conditions favorable to spiritual insight.... Today we know how to lower the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve by direct chemical action, and without the risk of inflicting serious damage on the psycho-physical organism.

If spirituality means just a change in the body chemistry, then surely the vast, degenerate majority could be brought back to the path of peace and joy. And that this is not so, raises one's doubt with regard to the possibility of synthetic sainthood. Huxley's conclusions are, however, in conformity with the findings of the specialists in the fields of psychology and pharmacology. William Sargant suggests the possibility of mechanical sainthood, and believes that if human reflexes can be re-conditioned, and political indoctrination is a success, then a leucotomy operation can bring about a religious conversion. Such conclusions are at variance with the tenets of all religious disciplines. Man is said to be superior to the animal creation because he has a will power, which is the true mark of his freedom. If chemical or mechanical conversion can bring about a change in his religious beliefs, then the human will-power loses its meaning. William Sargant stresses the point that little scientific support has been found that any individual can resist for an indefinite period the
physiological stress imposed on his body and mind. He says that we "only delude ourselves if we think that any but the most rare individuals can endure unchanged to the very end."

To identify a psychedelic experience with a genuine mystical experience is perhaps to go too far. To justify Frank Barron's claim that "chemical technology has made available to millions the experience of transcendence of the individual ego, which a century ago was available to the disciplined mystic," it is necessary to look into the nature of a genuine mystical experience. The only empirical test, a student of mysticism can apply, to ascertain whether a particular mystic's experience is genuine or not, is to see the effect such as experience produces upon the mystic's personality. "Wherefore by their fruits Ye shall know them (St. Matthew, 7:20)" not by their roots. There can be no objection to chemicals as means of transcendence, if the experience under them can bring saintliness, the most coveted fruit of a mystic's pursuit. The mystical experience brings equanimity, resignation, fortitude, humility and unbounded love and compassion to the mystic. There is no evidence to suggest that the drug user suffers such a transformation of personality. Psychedelic experience brings elation, but it falls short of the ecstasy of a mystic. The drug-induced experience merely intensifies the senses,
but the mystical experience is essentially super-sensuous in nature. If the true test of a genuine mystical experience is the annihilation of the ego, as Huxley emphasizes in The Perennial Philosophy, then the psychedelic experience fails to qualify as a genuine mystical experience, for it inflates the self, rather than effaces it. The psychedelic experience does not prove of much value, for it does not provide any fresh outlook on life. P.J. Saher says that mysticism “through mescaline resembles paper currency during inflation; it was valid, yet its validity was a joke for it was without value.”

W.T. Stace, however, employs the “principle of Causal Indifference” to ascertain whether a psychedelic experience can be classed as a genuine mystical experience. According to this principle, if the phenomenological descriptions of the two experiences, the drug-induced and the mystical are similar, then the two experiences are certainly one, and the drug-induced experience is as valid as the experience of those, who have attained it after years of arduous, mental and moral struggle. It has been noted earlier that the descriptions of the various drug-induced experiences are not similar. While some claim that they had the experience of the ineffable bliss, the others brand their experience as mere hallucination, a non-sensical fantasy. On the other hand, the mystics all over the world are unanimous
with regard to the outcome of their religious experience.

The psychedelics, it seems, are potent enough to give us a peep into the world of enhanced beauty and wonder that our senses are not accustomed to perceive in their ordinary way. At the most these can produce a kind of visionary experience, and "visionary experience," as Huxley puts it, "is not the same as mystical experience. Mystical experience is beyond the realm of opposites. Visionary experience is still within that realm." Drugs, it seems, can never provide a genuine mystical experience. J. Krishnamurti aptly observes: "No dynamic golden pill is ever going to solve our human problems. They can be solved only by bringing about a radical revolution in the mind and the heart of man." To attain to a level of mystical consciousness, the disciplining of the ape-like, restless mind, according to the seers of religion, is an imperative necessity. The Katha Upanisad rightly puts it: "Not he who has not desisted from evil ways, not he who is not tranquil, not he who has not a concentrated mind, not even he whose mind is not composed can reach this (self) through right knowledge. (1.2:24)" The effort is a costly one and requires years of mental and moral struggle. Radhakrishnan aptly observes: "No tricks of absolution or payment by proxy, no greased paths of
smooth organs and stained-glass windows can help us much." Surely no golden pill can take man to the City of God. It may be an aid to the goal, but it cannot be an exclusive means of attaining saintliness.

Huxley, on his death bed, realized the fact that he had been wrong in claiming that the drugs can produce the mystical state of consciousness. His tape-recorded conversation shows that under the impact of the drug, he thought he was making an absolute "cosmic gift" of psychedelics to the world, and that he had a sort of "star role" as the advocate of psychedelics, only to realize that "when one thinks one's got beyond oneself, one hasn't." He realized the error, that the drug merely expanded his ego, and concluded that "there must be no magic tricks" and that we must learn to "come to reality without the enchanter's wand and his book of the words." Huxley's last words, writes R.C. Zaehner, are "his recantation and his last will and testament, a warning...that psychedelic experience is not merely similar to mystical experience but is identical with it." Surely, the psychedelic trick will never do. Huxley failed to have mystical experience through meditation, maithuna, or the moksha-medicine. Drugs revealed to him a world of visionary beauty, which affirmed his faith, that there lies beyond the visionary world, a world of spiritual
experience. But Huxley could never enter the spiritual realm and therefore remained an agnostic who had come to accept the mystical view of the universe. Huxley thus graduates from intellectual agnosticism to religious agnosticism, which forms the subject of discussion in the next chapter.
Notes


2ibid., p.273.

3ibid., p.270.


6Huxley, Ends, p.277.


8Huxley, Ends, p.330.


11ibid., p.62.
At the core of the Perennial Philosophy we find four fundamental doctrines.

First: the phenomenal world of matter and of individualized consciousness – the world of things and animals and men and even gods – is the manifestation of a Divine Ground within which all partial realities have their being, and apart from which they would be nonexistent.

Second: human beings are capable not merely of knowing about the Divine Ground by inference, they can also realize its existence by a direct intuition, superior to discursive reasoning. This immediate knowledge unites the knower with that which is known.

Third: man possesses a double nature, a phenomenal ego and an eternal Self, which is the inner man, the spirit, the spark of divinity within the soul. It is possible for a man, if he so desires, to identify himself with the
spirit and therefore with the Divine Ground, which is of the same or like nature with the spirit.
Fourth: man's life on earth has only one end and purpose: to identify himself with his eternal Self and so to come to unitive knowledge of the Divine Ground.


18 Huxley, Science, p.22.
21 Woodcock, Dawn, p.20.
22 Huxley, Mortal, p.35.
24 ibid., pp.242-243.
25 ibid., p.295.
26 ibid., p.296.
27 Huxley, Barren, p.267.
28 ibid.
29 Ibid., p.268.
30 Ibid., p.269.
32 Huxley, Barren, p.357.
34 Huxley, Barren, p.368.
38 Juliette Huxley, Memorial Volume, p.42.
40 Huxley, Point, p.315.
41 Huxley, Beyond, p.213.


44 ibid., p. 122.

45 ibid., p. 552.

46 ibid., p. 325.

47 ibid., p. 554.


50 ibid., p. 611.

51 ibid., p. 612.

52 ibid., p. 616.

53 ibid., p. 618.

54 ibid., p. 619.

55 ibid., p. 620.


58 ibid., 246.


60 ibid., p. 140.

61 ibid., p. 156.
62 ibid., p.258.
63 ibid., p.106.
64 ibid., pp.82-83.
66 Huxley, Time, p.281.
68 Huxley, Braven, p.375.
70 Brander, Aldous Huxley, p.175.
72 Huxley, Antic, p.227.
73 About the ideal of Tantric Buddhism, Huxley wrote to Timothy Leary:
...the basic ideal seems to me the highest possible ideal - enlightenment, not apart from the world...but within the world, through the world, by means of the ordinary processes of living. Tantra teaches a yoga of sex, a yoga of eating (even eating forbidden foods and drinking forbidden drinks). The sacramentalizing of common life, so that every event may become a means whereby enlightenment can be realized, is achieved, essentially, through constant awareness.


75 Huxley, *Crome*, p.25.


77 Huxley, *Olive*, p.204.

78 Huxley, *After*, p.228.


82 Huxley, *Island*, pp.76-77.

Huxley, Island, p. 78.


ibid., p. 275.

ibid., p. 278.

Atkins, Aldous Huxley, p. xv.


Huxley, Letters, p. 749.

Huxley, Jesting, p. 191.

Huxley, Brief, p. 246.

Huxley, Antic, p. 293.

Huxley, Eyeless, p. 135.


Soma ensures no moksa. It provides only "celestial pleasures in heaven." The sloka runs: Those who perform action with some interested motive as laid down in the three Vedas and drink the
sap of Soma plant, and have thus been purged of sin, worshipping Me through sacrifices, seek access to heaven; attaining Indra's paradise as the result of their good deeds, they enjoy the celestial pleasures in heaven (IX:20) The Bhagavad-Gītā: Or The Song Divine (Gorakhpur: Gita Press).


100 ibid., p.383.


103 ibid., p.113.

104 ibid., p.286.


106 ibid., p.226.


113 *Ibid.*, p. 771. Huxley admits that the drug can make possible a genuine religious experience. He writes:

> When administered in the right kind of psychological environment, these chemical mind changers make possible a genuine religious experience. Thus a person who takes LSD or mescaline may suddenly understand — not only intellectually but organically, experientially — the meaning of such tremendous religious affirmations as "God is love," or "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."


115 W.R. Inge criticizes those persons who make use of hashish, alcohol, and mescaline to induce a state of ecstasy, and says that all this belongs to the undesirable side of mysticism. He says: "Nothing can be


117 Huxley wrote to Margaret Isherwood:

In my first experiment with mescaline I had a merely aesthetic visionary experience; but since then, with LSD and again with mescaline, I have gone beyond vision into many of the experiences described in Eastern and Western literature - the transcendence of the subject-object relationship, the sense of solidarity with all the world so that one actually knows by experience what 'God is love' means: the sense, that, in spite of death and suffering, everything is somehow and ultimately All Right...the sense of boundless gratitude at being privileged to inhabit this universe.

*Letters*, p. 874.

118 *Huxley, Island*, p. 136.

119 *ibid.*, p. 140.

120 *ibid.*, p. 263.

121 *ibid.*, p. 267.

122 *ibid.*, p. 278.


In a letter to Dr. Humphry Osmond, Huxley suggests his friend to maintain secrecy about the LSD experience, and its effects. Huxley wrote:

...we still know very little about the psychodelics, and, until we know a good deal more, I think the matter should be discussed, and the investigations described, in the relative privacy of learned journals, the decent obscurity of moderately high-brow books and articles. Whatever one says on the air is bound to be misunderstood; for people take from the heard or printed discourse that which they are predisposed to hear or read, not what is there. All that TV can do is to increase the number of misunderstanders by many thousandfold...

Huxley accepts the Bergsonian model of the human mind. In a letter to Humphry Osmond, Huxley wrote:

It looks as though the most satisfactory hypothesis about the human mind must follow, to some extent, the Bergsonian model, in which the brain with its associated normal self, acts as a utilitarian device for limiting, and making selections from, the enormous possible world of consciousness, and for canalizing experience into biologically profitable channels. Disease, mescaline, emotional shock, aesthetic experience and mystical enlightenment have the power, each in its different way and in varying degrees, to inhibit the functions of the normal self and its ordinary brain activity, thus permitting the 'other world' to rise into consciousness.


In his "Foreword" to Sisirkumar Ghose's book, *Mystics And Society*, Huxley talks about the four levels of consciousness. Huxley writes:
...normal waking consciousness is not the only form of consciousness. There is also the aesthetic consciousness, for which the world is unimaginable beauty. There is also the visionary consciousness, for which the world is fathomlessly strange, enigmatic and unpredictable. And there is the mystical consciousness, for which the world is unity - the wisdom of the other shore whose other aspect is mahākaruṇā, universal love.


130 Ibid., p.63.

131 Ibid., pp.73-74.


135 Prof. Stace explains the principle of Causal Indifference as follows:
The principle of causal indifference is this: If X has an alleged mystical experience $P_1$ and Y has an alleged mystical experience $P_2$, and if the phenomenological characteristics of $P_1$ entirely resemble the phenomenological characteristics of $P_2$ so far as can be ascertained from the descriptions given by X and Y then the two experiences cannot be regarded as being of two different kinds—for example, it cannot be said that one is a "genuine" mystical experience while the other is not—merely because they arise from dissimilar causal conditions.


140 Laura Archera Huxley, *This Timeless Moment*, p.268.

141 *ibid.*, p.269.

142 *ibid.*, pp.289-290.