This thesis, though the fulfilment of a long time desire, saw its beginning only during 1977 when I had the privilege of starting this research work under the supervision and guidance of Dr V.A. Devaserapathi at the Dr S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Madras.

The primary aim of this thesis has been to make a survey of the common characteristics of mysticism to see if there is anything similar in the spiritual life of people, despite the clear differences and variety of organised orthodox religious traditions. The misunderstandings in the minds of many regarding mystics that they are useless to humanity on the grounds that they live secluded lives, has prompted this research work. This thesis brings out the personal and social expressions of mysticism.

God is love, and a mystic is one who dwells in this love, and in whom dwells love. Real love will reject freedom from pain if the freedom were for the individual alone. Love refuses to accept individual salvation without social salvation. Thus it is seen that in reality mystics do not isolate themselves from the burden and sorrow of the rest of humanity. Mystics spurn insulation
from the shock of the world's pain, but insinuate themselves into it as if the pain were their own.

The theme of this thesis, Mysticism — personal and social expressions find expression in the Tiruvācagam of St. Mānikkavācagar and the Epistles of St. Paul, hence illustrations are drawn from these works in support of the ideas brought forth in this thesis. At the same time it is to be noted that this is not a comparative study in the strict sense.

Though conscious of the controversial character of some of the views projected in this thesis, even the most provocative amongst them have not been relinquished as long as they have any foundation in available source material. It would be a great satisfaction if this work proves to be a mild antidote to the collection of standard works which denounce mystical experiences as nonsense and those which put on par genuine mystical experience with drug mysticism.

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