CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis on the **personal and social expressions of mysticism**, with illustrations drawn from the lives and works of St. \(\text{Maṇikkavaccagar}\) and St. Paul, is a modest attempt to illuminate the general features of mysticism and emphasise the truth that, "If we love God and give ourselves to Him, we must give ourselves to the whole world. Otherwise we would divide off our personal experience of God from His Greatness and Infinite Presence and turn what ought to be dedication into private enjoyment."

The thesis proceeds in two parts. The first part deals with **mysticism in general**. The mystical experience is an emergence of a new level of life, a higher manner of correspondence with reality as such. "... a surge of the entire self towards ineffable fullness of life. It may be in the higher sphere of the inner life, an instance of what biologists call a tropism, i.e., an inherent tendency of a living thing to turn towards the sources of its nutriment."


All mystics assert that there is something real which lies beyond appearances and which is not experienced under normal conditions. The reality of experience which presents itself as plural, differentiated, and embedded in the flow of time, is for the mystic a One, undifferentiated or timeless. "It is a movement from the human consciousness to the Divine. It is a liberating experience transporting the soul from the human to the Divine." This does not make mysticism irrational. The distinction between appearance and reality is not inconsistent with logic and the requirements of rationality, it is in fact exactly what is presupposed in most sciences and rational enquiry. Scientists have shown that objects which present themselves to us as solids, are permeated by space, things which appear to be near in space or time are not near, in short many things under deeper analysis are different from what they appear to be. Any deep analysis, as we see in most sciences particularly the physical sciences, reveals the fact there is distinction between appearance and reality. Studies which do not accept such distinctions are those which deal only with mere surfaces. "All these considerations show that

true or false are not not rational, but their rationality is similar in structure to that of the sciences."

Mysticism and rationality are compatible and mysticism is not something entirely beyond the scope of study though mystical experience as such would not lend itself to a direct analysis. The mystical experience like any other experience may be valid or invalid, this validity or invalidity has no correspondence to mystical experiences being rational or irrational. This view that rational explanations can be given in these areas does not imply that reason is the only method to be applied. Rationalism on the other hand is not complete by itself and can carry us only a certain distance. For complete knowledge intuition is essential. Intellectual study is a rational activity and if we decide to study then it only follows that we adopt reason for this study. It is also necessary to remember that explanation given need not be final. On the other hand rational inquiry implies that no theory is immune to revision. It is also necessary to remember that even though a rational approach could be adopted the mystical phenomenon is not simple, plain or ordinary. Fritz Staal in Exploring Mysticism has convincingly stated "... this entire failure of the critical spirit of rational inquiry is

4 James Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, p.63
due to misconceptions; that a rational, theoretical as well as experimental approach in this area is not only possible but necessary if mysticism is ever to become a serious subject of investigation;...

Mystical experiences are better described as supra-rational instead of being qualified as non-rational. These experiences are often considered to be rare and unique, not easily repeatable and not within the reach of everybody. Hence it is thought that such experiences cannot be included in the realm of objective thought. Analysing a mystical experience is different from having a mystical experience. It is obviously not possible to have the experience and simultaneously subject it to some kind of analytical explanation. Intellectual study of mystical experience of our own or of others as available in records has necessarily to be post facto.

Experience of oneness is not given in the finished form all at once. It is given in stages. Before the final stage is reached there are several intermediary stages, characterised by partial and tentative realisation at various levels of experience.

---

Mystical experience in its plenitude implies the intense and joyous realisation of oneness with, or in, the sense that this divine One is comprehensive and all-embracing. Mysticism does not necessarily imply belief in a supremely divine being (i.e., God). The mystic may experience a sense of overwhelming beatitude and of salvation, and dissolution of personal individuality in the transcendental Self. This thesis is more in line with the first type, advocating an experience in which the subject-object distinction vanishes. It is an experience of "Self-immersion", of merging and realizing one's own basic identity with the One, the Infinite, or the All-That-There-Is.

Mystical experience is really perennial. From all recorded testimonies we see that it is as old as humanity and common to the human race as such. Mystical experience is marked by the emergence of a type of consciousness which is not clearly differentiated into a subject-object state, but is fused into a One. Distinctions disappear, limitations are surmounted, the temporal emerges as the eternal and the mystic himself freed from all bondage to time and circumstance emerges in the eternal. "When the individual is liberated from his bondage to time, he emerges in the eternal, into the spontaneity and freedom of the eternal..."

---

6 K. Seshadri, Emergence is the Eternal, Principal Miller Miller Endowment Lectures (University of Madras), p. 15
In such an experience the presence of unusual visual and auditory phenomena is not of importance. Logically coherent accounts of mystical visions and experiences seem unattainable, and hence the mystic's claim that his experience is 'ineffable' may be admitted. Very strangely mystics, inspite of the claims they have made about their unutterable experiences, have uttered a great deal. They have given us a vast literature based on their experiences with Reality.

Psychological approaches to the study of mysticism are valuable as psychology is the science of the human mind and mystical experience also is involving the mind, though it is much more, as relating to one's whole being. Moreover mystical experiences may be said to bring about a state of mind or consciousness which could be compared to other states.

States of consciousness induced by drugs exhibit parallel characteristics of mystical states. There are general similarities on the physiological, behavioural and experiential levels. However inspite of such similarities there is difference in value.

The second part of the thesis will be devoted to developing the idea that the mystical experience involves two aspects, personal and social and acquires appropriate expressions in them. This is not a comparative study, of persons or
faiths in a complete way. As suggested in the title, illustrations are drawn from the lives and works of the two great saints, St. Ōnippkavācagar and St. Paul to reinforce the main theme. Frequent references to the doctrines of the faiths of these two saints, Saivism and Christianity also are made.

St. Ōnippkavācagar

St. Ōnippkavācagar was one of the greatest of poets, sages and saints of the Saivite tradition of India. It is very difficult to disentangle his history from the many legends in which it is presented. Regarding the time in which he lived there are diverse opinions. Vannikanathan in Pathway to God through the Tiruvaachakam writes that the late Maraimalai Adigal places him in the third century A.D. Since the date of the saint is immaterial in this study, further investigation along this line is not made. He was born at Tiruvēthavūr on the bank of river Vaigai in the Pāndivan Kingdom of South India and was called Vūthavūran. He was also known as Tennavan Brahmarāvan signifying scholarship and culture. The fame of his great learning and accomplishments spread so widely that he was appointed as the chief minister in the royal court at Madurai, the capital city of the then powerful sovereign Arumurtar Pāndivan.

7 G. Vannikanathan, Pathway to God through the Tiruvaachakam (Delhi : Tamil Sangam Publication, 1971), p. vi
Nāṭiṅkavācagar was intelligent and compassionate and was highly respected. His personality attracted all those who were under his protection and care. He was successful as the chief minister of a powerful state. Such a life of fame and glory, of vast learning, and power, and irresistible temptations of the world did not attract the young minister and corrupt him. Through all the fleeting pleasures he saw the bondage of man. Though he refers to himself as a 'worthless cur' throughout the Tiruvācagam this cannot be a reference to his own sinful self. Saints consider themselves impure for they compassionately identify themselves with humanity. Engrossed in the study of the sacred writings of Śaiva faith he knew that this embodied life with all its ups and downs must be renounced, shaken off and forsaken and release obtained by the grace of Śiva. He was also concerned about the rest of humanity suffering and passing through the round of births and deaths. He was searching within and without for the supreme objective of man's life on earth. He was dissatisfied with everything. He was seeking for a cure of this great disease which was eating him up. It was in this state of mind that his master Arimurtarār Pāṇḍiyan commissioned him to purchase horses of the best quality. While on the way to purchase horses for the King, he met the Divine-Guru at Perunturai.
"Praise to the foot of the glorious Perum-turrai's God!" From that moment, having had supreme enlightenment in His presence, he became His slave and forgot his duty to the King, his master. "Our king made me his slave, and in the path of grace to keep."

"Truly, seeing Thy golden feet this day, I've gained release." For this neglect of duty he had to undergo punishment at the hands of the king. He was imprisoned, oppressed and harassed mercilessly. The king was exceedingly enraged at Māṇikkavaṭcagar's behaviour. Māṇikkavaṭcagar sought Śivan's guidance who assured him that the horses would be there on the nineteenth day of the month of avani.

"In goodness jackals into horses made,
To make me His, He of the sacred foot."

Implicit trust is witnessed in St. Māṇikkavaṭcagar's acceptance of assurance given by the Lord. The Lord had further plans for the glorification of his name and Māṇikkavaṭcagar was the chosen vessel for this purpose. The 'jackal-horses' resumed their original forms, causing much confusion around and subje-
cting Māṇikkavācagar to severe persecution. In and through all these one sees the dedication of St. Māṇikkavācagar to the Lord, his service to God and mankind, and the oneness of the universe. (This aspect is to be further developed in the concluding portion of the thesis.) When the Lord who was in the form of a labourer was struck by the king, the blow was felt by the whole universe and a shuddering cry went out from all creation echoing unity and harmony of the universe. The king conscious of his ignorance saw the Truth at last, pleaded forgiveness of Māṇikkavācagar and wanted to relinquish his kingdom to him. The saint on the other hand, had only one wish — to resume his spiritual pursuits. St. Māṇikkavācagar was faithful to his Lord till the very end.

In almost every poem Māṇikkavācagar refers to his conve-
sion and his worthlessness. "Lest I should go astray, He laid his hand on me!" "To me, mean as I was, with no good thing, Thou didst grant grace," "Today to me in condescending grace Thou cam' st; I praise Thee!" His thanksgiving and self surrender is explicitly expressed in

"...t is what my soul desires, because I am Thy slave, whom Thou didst make Thine own".

---

13 Ibid. IV : 60
14 Ibid. I : 56
15 Ibid. III : 119
16 Ibid. V : 327, 328
He went to seek horses for the king and found instead a kingdom of the Spirit. When he was redeemed by Śiva himself who came in the form of a venerable guru, his errand was forgotten and the world renounced. "He has gone from the Council and put on the shroud, and he journeys in pilgrimage from town to town, worshipping at every shrine and composing songs in the celebration of the various sects of Śiva and their god." The saint goes to Cidambaram visiting several shrines on the way, dictates all his songs to the Lord himself who acts as his scribe there, and attains mukti. Tiruvācagar, his best work, thus composed is sung daily with devotion and rapture in temples and homes throughout the Tamil land. It is said that "he who is not melted by the Tiruvācakam must have a stone for a heart." It is a remarkable mystical work, profoundly religious, in exquisitely beautiful verses divinely inspired, and undoubtedly ranking as one of the great religious classics of the world. Its stanzas express the ecstatic and profound love Mānikkavācagar always had in his heart, once he had forsaken earthly love to taste the love of God.


"... Thus from the pair of sacred feet
Like shadow from its substance parting not,
Before, behind, at every point, to it I clung.
My inmost self in strong desire dissolved, I yearned;
Love's river overflowed its banks;
My senses all in Him were centred; 'Lord!' I cried."

The point stressed time and again in the Tiruvācagām is that God is the Lord of creation, ruler of the universe,

"Eternal Source of all, to Thee be triumphs manifold!",
and indweller of all beings. He is present in the inmost essence of all beings and hence his indwelling resumes all divine activity.

"As when, - more than a hundred millions in number spread abroad, -
The thronging atoms are seen in the ray that enters the house,
So is He the Great ONE, Who exists in the minutest elements.

19. TV. IV : 77-82
20. Ibid : IV : 8
If you would know Him, Brahma, and the rest with Nal. —

His Greatness, source, glory, and end,
Conjoined with His eternity, His extent,
His abiding essence. 21

Lord Siva protects and destroys all worlds; he enriches them with his grace and releases them from fetters; he brings about in a special way the entry of souls into the company of the faithful. Saint Manikkavacakar’s personal experience was characterised by intense joy and ecstasy. The beautiful expression of the Tiruvacakam was strongly motivated by the urge for the uplift and rapture of humanity. "Duality ceases, Godhead alone remains. The vision of life after death was vouchsafed to Manikkavacakar, and he in his bounteous love for mankind, has left an account of it." Unlike the other saints who generally sing dozens of songs in the temples and in the congregations, Manikkavacakar did not sing his songs in the shrines, except at Tiruperutturai, Uttarakosamangai, Tirukakkanram and Cidambaram, where he had visions of the Guru. He took delight in watching the lives and plays of the common folk. He witnessed the happy life of these people. Due to

Ibid : III : 4-9

Ibid : 1 : 41

23 G. Vanmikanathan, The Pathway to God Through the Tiruvacakam, p. 98.
his identification of himself with the rest of the people whenever he sang the devotional hymns to the Lord the sights that he saw in life were always before him. He saw sights like women on swings singing under trees, the pounding of fragrant choonum on way sides; young girls, singing chālūl hymns, and being engaged in ammaizāl ādal. His great social concern is seen in the form he adopted to present his hymns. He composed the songs in such a way that they could be used on all these occasions. Throughout his poems there is an undercurrent of humility and adoration, a sense of his unworthiness and of divine grace. He taught the people that there was one supreme personal God - who was not a mere metaphysical attraction, but the Lord of gods and men. He also taught that it was the gracious will of Siva to assume human nature, to come to earth as a Guru, to enlighten and guide those who sought Him with adequate preparation. He announced that this way of salvation was open to all classes of the community. He also taught very emphatically the immortality of the released souls.

St. Paul

The Epistles of St. Paul show him as a man of iron will with an extraordinary capacity for travel, pressing on from land to land, crossing mountains and seas, suffering imprisonment, poverty, persecution and shipwreck. In Paul we see the
combination of determination and courage and a man in whose
tenderness and nature tears of rage are often close together. The first few
years of his life and the last two or three are hidden in
obscenity. For the rest he walks in the full day light of
history. As for his age we do not have a definite record.
ancient tradition says that he served God for thirty five years
and died in Rome aged 68 in the year 67 a.D. Christianity
was cradled in Judaism. It so happened that there was no love
lost between the Jews and the rest of the world. The world
was not prepared to accept anything from the Jews, neither
were the Jews prepared to part with what they had. A bridge
was necessary. This need was satisfied in St. Paul who formed
a channel through whom Christianity went out to the world.

Paul was born in Tarsus, the ancient city of Cilicia and
was educated in Jerusalem according to the Jewish tradition
by the erudite teacher Gamaliel. He was a Jew and bore the
features and evidences of his origin in his posture, manner,
complexion and features. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews of
the tribe of Benjamin. To the end of his life Paul was
proudly, stubbornly unalterably a Jew. His pride and joy

24 Acts. XXII : 3
25 Rom. XI : 1
26 II Cor. XI : 22
in the privilege of being a Jew, one of the chosen people of God, is echoed in his writings, in his words and actions. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and yet he was proud of his original heritage. Though he had cut himself off from Judaism, he was still a Jew at heart who loved his fellow Jews. He would turn to the Old Testament for guidance and support, he quoted from the Old Testament profusely in his epistles. Paul was equally proud of his Roman citizenship. It is to be noted that Paul was very familiar with the Greek language. All the wealth of Greek literature was open to him, yet at the most he only quotes a heathen writer twice, this was not because of his ignorance, but it was all he needed. All the same he was peculiarly fitted to be the mediator to the Greek world, and of this he was very certain. Again and again in his letters Paul discloses this same special consciousness of being uniquely the messenger of Christ to the Gentile world. "...he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles,..." From that time onwards Paul never lost an opportunity of insisting upon his apostleship to the Gentiles. Although Paul did not yet

27 Acts. XXII : 25-28
28 Acts. XVII : 28; Titus I : 12
29 Rom. I : 13
know it the Seed had been sown – he had already been, chosen
to take the New Testament out of the hands of the Jews and
to proclaim it in the far places of the world.  32

At a point on the road about 12 miles from Damascus Paul
was converted to Christianity. Conversion of St. Paul was
different from that of many others, more so from that of St.
Manikkavacakgar. Till the time of his conversion he felt no
conviction of sin in the ordinary sense, he was not in a
state of depression, he suffered no fear of damnation, he
never felt that he was lost, sold under sin or bound for
destruction. His devotion to God was not a later develop-
ment, it was there from the beginning. He had no sense of
separation, yet he was ready for the fulfillment of his reli-
gious life in total devotion to Jesus Christ. The Unknown
God he was worshipping through Judaism was revealed in Jesus
Christ. God dying on the cross was revolting to him as a
Jew. He got his salvation through a negative approach, he
persecuted the believers and gained his salvation.

The whole conversion, though sudden and unexpected was
not complete at once. Unlike many others he went to a humble
disciple for final direction. Instead of sudden illumination,
full-faith, exhilarating joy and profound peace, he suffered

32 Gal. I : 15, 16.
33 Phil. III : 6
34 Acts XXIII : 1; XXIV : 16.
a period of blindness, humiliation and uncertainty. Important elements like repentance are not mentioned. Though St. Paul’s experience of conversion is different in many ways, it is not so totally. When the scales of ignorance fell off from his eyes and he finally saw the True Light his life was changed suddenly. This was followed by the surrender of previously held religious approach through conformity to laws and externals and life became nothing without the Supreme Reality of which he had a vision. That a divine element is present in the transaction and the change in Paul’s character is obvious. From that hour Paul was a changed man. Paul’s religious pride burst like a bubble. He was swept from all his moorings, and left with nothing to cling to but the vision he had had of Jesus. All that he valued till then became nothing. He was charged with God. Thus he was authorised and consecrated to the apostleship in heaven itself. “Paul saw God’s hand in his own spiritual pilgrimage. He saw his life as something planned and designed by God……. Paul thought of himself as a man set apart by God for a special purpose even before he was born. He sees his apostleship not as something to which he attained, not as something to which he was called by men, but as something which came to him by plan and design of God.”

He learned from heaven what he was to teach among men. After he was baptised he stayed some days at Damascus and soon retired into Arabia. Paul must have gone to some retreat at a near-by oasis, to begin a tremendous inner reconstruction of his religious thinking. He did not merely add Jesus to his Jewish theology. His whole religious world had to be re-examined. Law, scripture, tradition, ceremonies, the corner stones of his theology and practice had to be restructured in the light of his new religious experience. His letters are a witness to this. Everything was subordinated in the light of his inward faith. During these months of recuperation and readjustment in an Arabian oasis, Paul was far from being idle. He was launched on his greatest voyage of spiritual exploration and discovery. He knew at last what it was to be free, and his lofty spirit and brilliant mind together reached forth to new heights or altitudes. Here began that extraordinary religious progress unsurpassed, unequalled in all the subsequent story of Christianity, which in every age has found strength and guidance in the findings of Paul. His heart was flooded with experiences like repentance, redemption, forgiveness, tolerance, faith, hope, and love. Great thoughts came with these experiences like freedom, sonship, salvation, and eternal life. He had broken through to the

36 Gal. I: 17
presence of eternal reality. A man of emotion may change his whole attitude in an instant, but a thinker must have time to reconstruct his inner world. The retreat in Arabia provided the period he needed. Returning to Damascus he felt his responsibility to the believers there, whom he had previously come to hurt and persecute. So the personal dimension in his mystical experience could not come to a halt in itself. He could not live a resigned life away from the rest of the community. The light he received could not be hidden in the bushel of his heart. It had to be lit and placed on a mountain so that many lost and forlorn souls could be gained. So St. Paul commenced his mission of service. His love and thought for humanity reached far and wide. It has had its effect not only on his contemporaries but it is alive to-day also and will continue to be so till eternity for his spirit is alive and is working through all that he has left behind, especially his Epistles. Fourteen, out of the twentyseven books of the New Testament, come to us from the mind of this man. The things on which St. Paul concentrates his attention are things upon which the evangelists (writers of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) do not concentrate attention. With St. Paul the whole of the biography of Jesus passes
unnoticed. He never uses his parables, and only once he quotes the words of his master: "Its more blessed to give than to receive." The aim of St. Paul was to point out that our Lord was alive; that he lived in the mystical body, the church. When they met on the road to Damascus the Lord said "Why dost thou persecute me" and that "me" remained in St. Paul's thought as the keynote of all his theology. The incarnation for St. Paul did not mean simply that God had become a man, it primarily meant that God had become Man, had radiated the human race as it were, with his divinity. In other words though he appeared in human flesh he showed humanity of the possibility of becoming children of God. His descent to humanity was to help in the ascent of humanity to God. After the encounter on Damascus road he saw Christ in everyone and everything. This identification of Christ with everyone is prominent in his mind and is reflected very strongly in his Epistle to the Galatians. He, Paul, has no longer any life of his own, it is Christ that lives in him; with Christ he hangs on the cross so that the world is crucified to him, and he to the world. He bears on his body the scars of the crucified Lord. This intimate indwelling is not for a privi-

37 Acts XX : 35 (A.V.)
38 Gal. II : 20
39 Gal. VI : 14
40 Gal. VI : 17
ledged few, it is general to the community of believers. This transformation is already a matter of development of a state that is already present.

The different way of approach adopted by St. Paul has caused many misunderstandings. He is accused of teaching a different doctrine from that of the other disciples, and by sheer force of his conviction and personality it is said, he came to impose his own doctrine on the Church. An examination of the pre-Pauline teachings in the Acts of the Apostles leaves little doubt that Paul's teaching, although more full-blooded, more systematically expounded, more clearly and brilliantly presented with the resources of a profound intellect, is not substantially different from the earlier teachings as found in that book. What St. Paul discovered after the experience on the road to Damascus was not a product of his own imagination, but something that had been there already. He may have drawn out of the implications of what he saw more logically than others, but he created no new gospel. The peculiar gifts of Paul, the clarity and penetration of his mind, his learning, the brilliancy of his expository powers, his passionate moral earnestness, may have played a great part in making the Christian message known and accepted in a world where it might have sounded a scandal and a foolishness, but the message was there before him. What Paul discovered was not that God will forgive, will be gracious, will redeem, but
that He has forgiven, has redeemed, that His grace has come
down in Jesus Christ.

Human beings are helped to start the upward journey
to their eternal home by other human beings. Accordingly
God uses His special sons, the souls, as the channels
through which His power can flow to His seekers among man-
kind. St. Paul, a chosen vessel of God did not fail in this
duty entrusted to him. "The books of Acts and the Epistles
of Paul present the background and foreground of a sketch
of the apostle’s ministry. Acts traces the public events;
the letters reveal the inner man, his thought and his essen-
tial teachings." History records that St. Paul stayed in
Rome for two years before he was beheaded. The months that
Paul was waiting for his death gave him many opportunities.
within limits imposed upon him, he earned his livelihood, pre-
ached and taught. He suffered much. "There has been work and
toil; often I have gone without sleep; I have been hungry and
thirsty; I have often been without enough food, shelter or
clothing. and not to mention other things, every day I am
under the pressure of my concern for all the churches, when

41 James L. Price, Interpreting the New Testament
(New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc,
which characterise such an experience.

Religious mystical experience is an intense and strikingly dynamic type of this undifferentiated consciousness. The individual soul feels strengthened with new energy merged with an unfolding presence liberated and exalted with the satisfaction of having found what it was always seeking for — that from which it has come and hence is flooded with joy.

The mystic can move inwards, upwards and outwards. The spiritual life of any individual has to be extended both vertically to God and horizontally to other souls. Man is simply a part of the vast organism of humanity. Each one of us has his own place in this scheme, and each one is required to fulfil a particular bit of that plan by which the human world is being slowly lifted God-ward and the kingdom of God is brought in.

The liberated enlightened souls thus have a two-fold function, an ever-deepening inward movement towards God, as the centre of their own being, and an ever-widening outgoing movement towards the world. The mystics are both tools and channels of God. The delight of mystical experience flows through them and the potency of its energy serves as a dynamic force for universal service and illumination.