1. Definition and Nature of Mysticism

Mysticism is a very vast and deep subject which has been related to religion, philosophy, art and occult sciences. Religions, which believe in God, and those that do not believe in God, have their own mystical schools. We shall take up the definitions of mysticism given by established scholars and analyse its nature and contents.

The Oxford Dictionary gives three popular opinions about mysticism: (1) "Mental tendencies, or habits of thought and feeling: characteristics of mystics; mystical doctrines of spirit; belief in the possibility of union with the Divine nature by means of ecstatic contemplation; reliance on spiritual intuition or exalted feeling as the means of acquiring knowledge of mysteries inaccessible to intelligent apprehension. (2) As a term of reproach, from the hostile point of view: mysticism implies self-delusion, or dreamy confusion of thought; hence the term is often applied loosely to any religious belief to which their evil qualities are imputed. (3) Sometimes applied to philosophical or scientific theories alleged to involve the assumption of occult qualities or mysterious agencies of which no rational account can be given."

Geoffrey Parrinder calls this definition "unsatisfactory from a religious point of view", which suggests that mysticism implies
self-delusion or dreamy confusion of thought"; and some old writers refer to it as 'Trash' or 'Poison' of mysticism and others spoke of its vagueness or crude speculation. "Recently", says Parrinder, "a writer on mystical experience said, 'Seen very broadly, mysticism is a name for our infinite appetites. Less broadly it is the assurance that these appetites can be satisfied; it may also be an attitude towards reality; or even a name for the Paranoid darkness in which unbalanced people stumble so confidently.'" This is also a hostile definition.

A scholarly and realistic definition is given by "Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics": "Mysticism, in common speech and usage, is a word of very uncertain connotation. It has in recent times been used as an equivalent for characteristically different German words: Mysticimus, which stands for the cult of the supernatural, for theosophical pursuits, for spiritualistic exploitation of psychical research; and Mystik which stands for immediate experience of a divine and human intercourse and relationship. The word 'mysticism' has furthermore been commonly used to cover both (1) The first-hand experience of direct intercourse with God, and (2) theologico-metaphysical doctrines of soul's possible union with Absolute Reality, i.e. with God. It would be conducive to clarity to restrict the word mysticism to the latter significance, namely, as an equivalent for the German word Mystik, and as designating the historic doctrine of the relationship and potential union of the human soul with Ultimate Reality and to use the term mystical experience, for direct intercourse with God." A more comprehensive and clear definition is given in the latest edition of Encyclopaedia Britanica: "Mysticism is quest
for a hidden truth or wisdom ("the treasure hidden in the centre of our souls"); the 20th century is experiencing a renewed interest and understanding and even a mood of expectancy similar to that which had marked its role in previous eras; such a mood stems in part from the feeling of alienation that many persons experience in the world. Put down as a religion of the elite, mysticism (or the mystical faculty of perceiving transcendental reality) is said by many to belong to all men though few use it. The British author Aldous Huxley has stated that a totally unmystical world would be a world totally blind and insane; and the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore has noted that "Man has a feeling that he is truly represented in something which exceeds himself." The goal of mysticism is union with the divine or sacred. The path to that union is usually developed by following four stages: purgation (of bodily desires), purification (of the will), illumination (of the mind) and unification (of one's will or being with the divine).5

Philosophers, theologians, religious men, poets have defined and explained mysticism from the point of view of their own subjects and their own experiences. We will record a few which are relevant to the subject of our thesis, and help to widen our knowledge and experience on the subject.

Bertrand Russell says, "The mystic insight begins with the sense of a mystery veiled, of a hidden wisdom now suddenly become certain beyond the possibility of a doubt. The sense of certainty and revelation comes earlier than any definite belief. The definite beliefs at which mystics arrive are the result of reflection upon the inarticulate experience gained in the moment of insight."6
Hocking, another philosopher defines mysticism thus: "Mysticism is evidently often the product of an intensely philosophical spirit discontented with the mere rationality of philosophy, and of an intensely religious spirit discontented with the dogmatic systems of theology in every creed. It is inspired by the insatiable ambition of individual spirits to know Reality by direct acquaintance, rather than by rumour as description. Relying on the "inner light" rather than on tradition, it has a constant tendency to heterodoxy. In any case, the mystic's confidence that the divine principle is identical with himself; and that he may for himself gain direct access to ultimate Truth, is well calculated to produce great and independent characters, as well as not a few fanatics and mystified spiritual wastels."

Rudolf Otto, the well known German philosopher says, "Mysticism essentially is the stressing to a very high degree, indeed, over-stressing of the non-rational or supra-rational elements in religion, and it is only intelligible when so understood." Among the non-rational elements he mentions a number of feelings and experiences for which he has coined his own words, and are now accepted by writers on mysticism. He describes the mystical feeling as the feeling of "holiness" to which he gives the name "numinous" feeling. He says, "For this purpose I adopt a word coined from the Latin numen; omen has given us 'ominous', and there is no reason why from numen we should not similarly form a word 'numinous'." Writing on the nature of mystical experience Rudolf Otto analyses three elements:

(i) Element of Awefulness, a religious fear which in the Guru Granth is known as bhai bhāvāni: awe full of reverence.
(ii) The element of 'overpoweringness' or the majestic might and power of God in the face of which man is humble and has creative feeling. It stands, for God's 'might', 'power', and absolute 'overpoweringness'.

(iii) The Element of 'Energy' or 'Urgency', which consists of vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity and impetus. These three elements form the numinous feeling of mysticism. 10

F.C. Happold in his book "Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology", writes, "The word 'mysticism' is not a fully satisfactory one. The word is, however, used with a number of different meanings and carries different connotations to different minds. To some it is simply a type of confused irrational thinking. In the popular mind it is associated with spiritualism and clairvoyance, with hypnotism, and even with occultism and magic, with obscure psychological states and happenings, some of which are the result of neurasthenia and other morbid pathological conditions. To some it is bound up with visions and revelations. Others use it as a synonym for other-worldliness or to describe a nebulous outlook upon the world as a religious attitude which does not care for dogma or the outward forms of religious observance." 11 Giving his own opinion Happold says, "The mysticism of knowledge and understanding springs from the urge, inherent in man, to find the secret of the universe, to grasp it, not in parts, but in the wholeness. This aspect of mysticism appears in a number of definitions. Mysticism is defined as experimental knowledge of God, i.e. a knowledge of God based on direct experience of Him; as intellectual intuition or formless speculation; as the endeavour
of the human mind to grasp the Divine Essence or the Ultimate Reality of things; as the assertion of an intuition which transcends the temporal categories of the understanding, relying on speculative reason; as integrated thought, bringing things together in a new pattern, integrating them instead of breaking them down into parts, as in analytical thought."

"Mysticism", says Pringle Pattison, appears in connection with the endeavour of the human mind to grasp the divine Essence or the Ultimate Reality of things, and to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the highest. The first is the philosophic side of mysticism, the second its religious side. God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience."}

In another important study of mysticism by the philosopher W.T. Stace, a search was made for a universal code of mystical expression. Seven representative experiences are chosen: two Catholic, one Protestant, one ancient classical, one modern Hindu, and two American agnostic. From their statements central themes were selected, and set out in seven propositions.

1. There is unifying vision, in which the One is perceived by the senses in and through many objects, so that All is One.

2. The One is apprehended as an inner life, or presence in all things, so that 'nothing is really dead'.

3. This brings a sense of reality, which is objective and true.

4. There is a feeling of satisfaction, joy and bliss.

5. There is a feeling of the holy and sacred, which is the specifically religious element of the experience.

6. There is a feeling that it is paradoxical.

7. There is a feeling that it is inexpressible in words."
Commenting on this Geoffrey Parrinder says, "These propositions have been criticized from different sides. They are said to be too vague or too inconclusive. They have been called a ragbag of single cases without a clear unity, and on the other hand, they are said to be too synthetic and not taking account of different forms of mystical belief or expression. This supposed 'universal core' of mysticism does not tell us much about the content of mystical experience, which to mystics is the central concern. Feelings are emphasized, and a unifying vision of the inner life, but it is not clear in what the object of the mystical vision consist." 15.

William James, the world famous psychologist in his "The Varieties of Religious Experience" gives four features of mysticism in his chapter on this subject. These four features are:

(i) **Ineffability**: One must have musical ears to know the value of a symphony; one must have been in love with one's self to understand a lover's state of mind. So mysticism must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others.

(ii) **Noetic quality**: These are states of insight into depths of truth, unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance.

(iii) **Transiency**: Mystical states cannot be sustained for long.

(iv) **Passivity**: The mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and some superior power or divine will is holding him and guiding him. He only plays a passive role. 16

The most important point brought out by William James in his
book is: "It is that our normal working consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the Universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality." 17

We have explained mysticism from the point of view of western scholars who have based their ideas on the study of Christian mysticism. We shall now give the views of some oriental scholars on mysticism.

R.D. Ranade in his book "Indian Mysticism : Mysticism in Mahara-shtra" says: "Mysticism denotes that attitude of mind which involves a direct, immediate, first-hand, intuitive apprehension of God. When mysticism is understood in this sense, there is no reason why it should be taken to signify any occult or mysterious phenomena, as is occasionally done. It is an irony of fate that a word which deserves to signify the highest attitude of which man is capable, namely, a restful and loving contemplation of God, should be taken to signify things which are incomparably low in the scale of being. Mysticism implies a silent enjoyment of God. It is in this sense
that mystical experience has often been regarded is ineffable."  

Criticising some of the views of Dean W.R. Inge, R.D. Rande says: "It is strange that Dean Inge should fight shy of emotions, and deny to them a place in mystical life, when he says that mysticism consists only in "seeing God face to face", and that it does not involve "an intensive cultivation of emotions" (Philosophy of Plotinus, 1.3). We may venture to suggest to the Dean that unless the emotions are purified, and are turned towards the service of God, no "seeing of Him face to face", of which he speaks so enthusiastically, is ever possible. Thus, it seems that intelligence, will and feeling are all necessary in the case of the mystical endeavour. Only intuition must back them all. It is this combined character of mystical experience, namely, its ineffable and intuitive character, which has served to make all God-aspiring humanity of common and hidden society, the laws of which are known to themselves if at all."

Two eminent scholars have expressed their views on Dr Radhakrishnan's views on 'mysticism', in "The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan" edited by P.A. Schilpp; E.S. Brightman and A.N. Marlow. E.S. Brightman says, "Radhakrishnan is a philosopher, not an ecstatic, and he demands a rational basis for belief, "we cannot believe a thing", he declares, "simply because we wish to. We cannot worship what we know to be a mental fiction." No external authority can compel his assent. In fact, he points out that "both Buddhism and the Upanishads repudiate the authority of the Vedas." He criticizes the Upanishads themselves for "The vagueness of (their) doctrines." He points out the rational difficulties in the Bhagavadgita. He asserts with great frankness that "religion
must establish itself as a rational way of living." Very earnestly does he protest against religious irrationalism. Mysticism for him "is not a flight to unreason or a glorification of ignorance and obscurity"."

Brightman further adds, "Radhakrishnan's view of mysticism prevents him from indiscriminate acceptance of everything that claims to be mystical. In the light of the highest experience, some mystical claims must be regarded as unworthy of deviations. Obviously, whatever is unethical, he condemns as perversion. He also frankly faces and condemns the immoral life of Krishna as related in the Puranas. Just as he rebukes immoralism, so does he reject mystical fanaticism. The extreme other-worldliness and asceticism which many regard as almost the essence of mysticism, he would abjure as mere excrescences. Ecstasy itself is "often a perversion of mysticism." "Fanatical asceticism is not", he declares, "indicative of a true renunciation but is only another form of selfishness"."}

A.N. Marlow, quotes an important passage of Radhakrishnan and says, "Mysticism is defended in one of those noble passages which occur so often in Radhakrishnan, which convey conviction by their lofty dignity and insight and in a way contain the whole of his doctrine, which cannot be expounded without repetition, since it is a statement of the same elusive truth in many ways : "Religion begins for us with an awareness that our life is not for ourselves alone. Religion as man's search for this greater self, will not accept any creeds as final or any laws as perfect, it will be evolutionary, moving ever onward. The witness to this spiritual
view is borne, not only by the great religious teachers and leaders of mankind, but by the ordinary man in the street, in whose inmost being the well of the spirit is set deep. In our normal experience events happen which imply the existence of a spiritual world. The fact of prayer or meditation, the impulse to seek and appeal to a power beyond our normal self, the moving sense of revelation which the sudden impact of beauty brings, the way in which decisive contacts with certain individuals bring meaning and coherence into our scattered lives, suggest that we are essentially spiritual. To know oneself is to know all we need to know." (Eastern Religion and Western Thought p. 78)

Buddhist mysticism and Islamic mysticism known as Sufism differed on many points from Christian and Hindu Mysticism. Their approach to mysticism was also based on different traditions. John Blofeld says, "Buddhism is perhaps, the one widespread religion which, in theory at least, is wholly mystical, for it recommends to all its followers, the practice of mind control and the attainment of intuitive wisdom. Even so, among Buddhists, people actively engaged in the sublime search are less common than might be supposed except for a few schools and sects of which the Vajrayana is one. Confirmation of the genuineness of the mystical experience is to be found in the high degree of unanimity observable in the attempts to describe its nature. Description by people widely separated in time and place are strikingly similar, especially if allowance is made for four diversive factors; the impossibility of accurately describing an experience that transcends all concepts for which words exist; the pious tendency to reconcile all religious experience with cherished doctrines; the prohibition in some
societies against expressing views not in accord with the prevailing doctrines; and the need to make descriptions intelligible and acceptable to others."

"The growth of Islamic mysticism or (Sufism) is a significant illustration of the strength of the mystical tendency in religion. On the face of it, the religion of Mohammad can scarcely be regarded as of itself providing fruitful soil for the growth of that tendency. Yet within a comparatively short time after the prophet's death a movement arose among his followers which has given birth to some of the greatest mystics." The Sufi mystics derived their inspiration from the life of Prophet Mohammed, his companions and the Koran. We are going to deal with the subject in detail in the next chapter.

Commenting on the nature and goal of Mysticism, Margaret Smith says, "Mysticism, therefore, is not to be regarded as a religion in itself, but rather as the most vital element in all true religions, rising up in revolt against cold formality and religious torpor. Nor is it a philosophical system, though it has its own doctrine of the scheme of things. It is to be described rather as an attitude of mind; an innate tendency of the human soul, which seeks to transcend reason and to attain to a direct experience of God, and which believes that it is possible for the human soul to be united with Ultimate Reality, when 'God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience.' Mysticism has been defined as 'the immediate feeling of the unity of self with God - it is the religious life at its very heart and centre; it is the endeavour to fix the immediateness of the life in God as such - in this God-intoxication, in which the self and the world are
alike forgotten, the subject knows himself to be in possession of the highest and fullest truth.' (Pfleiderer). The aim of the mystics, then, is to establish a conscious relation with the Absolute, in which they find the personal object of love, and their desire for union is founded neither on curiosity nor on self-interest, that union which they seek is 'the supernatural union of likeness, begotten of love, which is the union of the human will with the Divine. They seek to realize the unfelt natural presence of God in creation by entering into a personal relationship with the concealed presence which is the source of Being'.

Evelyn Underhill says, "Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment." "Mysticism", says Underhill, "is not an opinion: it is not a philosophy, it has nothing in common with the pursuit of occult knowledge. On the one hand, it is not merely the power of contemplating Eternity: on the other, it is not to be identified with any kind of religious queeriness. It is the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the Love of God: the achievement here and now of the immortal heritage of man, or, if you like it better for this means exactly the same thing - it is the art of establishing his conscious relation with the Absolute. It is rather an ordered movement towards ever higher levels of reality, ever closer identification with the infinite."

"To be a mystic", says Underhill, "is simply to participate here and now in that real and eternal life; in the fullest, deep-
est sense which is possible to man. It is to share, as a free and conscious agent - not a servant, but a son - in the joyous travail of the Universe; its mighty onward sweep through pain and glory, towards its home in God. This gift of "sonship", this power of free co-operation in the world-process, is man's greatest honour. The ordered sequence of states, the organic development, whereby his consciousness is detached from illusion and rises to the mystic freedom which conditions, instead of being conditioned by, its normal world, is the way he must tread if that sonship is to be realized. Only by this deliberate fostering of his deeper self, this transmutation of the elements of his character, can he reach those levels of consciousness upon which he hears, and responds to, the measure, "whereto the worlds keep time" on their great pilgrimage towards the Father's heart. The mystic act of union, that joyous loss of the transfigured self in God, which is the crown of man's conscious ascent towards the Absolute, is the contribution of the individual to this, the destiny of the Cosmos."

2. Identification and Goal

Mysticism is not a speculative system. It is a spiritual journey on some religious path. Its chief and fundamental aim is to reach the highest goal as they understand it. This goal may be the realization of highest Truth, Goodness and Beauty. It may be escape from the disturbing world and attaining inner peace and joy. It may be conquering the mind and desires and acquiring some spiritual powers through concentration, but for most of the mystics the goal is to attain union of the human soul with the Divine
Some religions worship the One and Absolute God and they seek ultimate union with Him. Some see God in Nature and seek identification with the power and beauty of nature. Some see God in Krishna, Buddha and Christ, and the goal of their mystic life is to become one with Krishna, Christ or Buddha. Some worship deities like Shiva and Vishnu or Durga and they seek union and identity with these deities. This identification with higher deities or God, may be imaginary or real. It may be true or false. It may be partial or of a very high degree. But identification is a common characteristic of all mysticisms.

Rudolf Otto says, "A characteristic common to all types of mysticism is the identification, in different degrees of completeness, of the personal self with the transcendent Reality. This identification has a source of its own, with which we are not here concerned, and springs from 'moments'; of religious experience which would require separate treatment. 'Identification' alone, however, is not enough for mysticism; it must be identification with something that is at once absolutely supreme in power and Reality and wholly non-rational. And it is among the mystics that we most encounter this element of religious consciousness."

R.C. Zaehner in his book "Mysticism: Sacred and Profane" gives four approaches of spiritual identity in Vedanta: (1) 'Thou art that', (2) 'This atman is Brahman', This individual soul is Absolute, (3) I am Brahman, and (4) Consciousness is Brahman. What is meant by this? Brahman is the word used to represent the Absolute: it is the sole truly existing and Eternal Reality, beyond time and space and causation and utterly unaffected by these which,
from its own standpoint, have no existence whatever. Atman means 'Self', the individual soul. The proposition, then, that "Atman is Brahman" means that the individual soul is substantially and essentially identical with the unqualifiable Absolute."30

R.C. Zaehner further tries to prove that Hindu view of identity of soul with God is considered blasphemous in Islam. He says, "If one were to remain orthodox, one could scarcely speak of union with God because that would be Shirk, to associate others with God, and this is an unforgivable sin; nor could one speak of identity, for that would be the grassest blasphemy."31

According to Zaehner such a complete identity is denied in Christianity and Islam and is even considered impossible. He says, "Now, it is obvious that if complete identity with the Deity is possible, then it would be ridiculous to say that such identity was only the beginning of the path that leads to God."32 Zaehner also admits that both in Islam and Christianity some mystics preached it and others condemned it. In Islam Al-Hallaj Mansur and Abu Yazid preached it while others condemned it. In Christianity Eckhart preached it while Pope John XXII condemned it. He says, "The Christian position is much less clear on this point since it is quite orthodox to speak of God as 'the deepest centre of the soul'. Absolute identity which Eckhart on occasions preached was among the propositions condemned by Pope John XXII; but both Nicolos of Cusa and Angelus Silesium reached a position very near to this, and neither of these was condemned."33

Aldous Huxley describes this sense of identification as "I" and "Thou" relation between the self of man and the spirit of God, and he illustrates his point with quotations from William Law, Plotinus
and Shankracharya.

He says, "The man who wishes to know the "That" which is "thou" may set to work in any one of three ways. He may begin by looking inwards into his own particular thou, and by a process of 'dying to self' - self in reasoning, self in willing, self in feeling - came at last to a knowledge of the self, the kingdom of God. That is within, or else he may begin with the 'thous' existing outside himself, and may try to realize their essential unity with God, through God, with one another, and with his own being; or, finally (and this is doubtless the best way), he may seek to approach the ultimate. That both from within and from without, so that he comes to realize God experimentally as at once the principle of his own thou and of all other thous, animate and inanimate."  

The completely illuminated human being knows, with William Law, that God 'is present in the deepest and most central part of his own soul, but he is also and at the same time one of those who, in the words of Plotinus: "see all things, not in process of becoming, but in Being, and see themselves in the other. Each being contains in itself the whole intelligible world. Therefore, All is everywhere, Each is there All, and All is Each. Man as he now is has ceased to be an individual, he raises himself again and penetrates the whole world."  

Aldous Huxley gives Shankaracharya's views from his book, Viveka-Chudamani (Crest-Jewel of Wisdom) in the following passages:

"The Atman is that by which the universe is pervaded, but which nothing pervades; which causes all things to shine, but which all things cannot make to shine...... The nature of the one Reality must be known by one's own clear spiritual perception; it cannot
be known through a pundit (learned man). Similarly the form of
the moon can only be known through one's own eyes. How can it
be known through others?"

"Liberation cannot be achieved except by the perception of the
identity of the individual spirit with the universal spirit. It
can be achieved neither by yoga (physical training), nor by the
practice of religious ceremonies, nor by mere learnings."

"The wise man is one who understands that the essence of
Brahman and of Atman is pure consciousness, and who realizes
their absolute identity. The identity of Brahman and Atman is
affirmed in hundreds of sacred texts."

"It is ignorance that causes us to identify ourselves with
the body, the ego, the senses, as anything that is not the Atman.
He is a wise man who overcomes this ignorance by devotion to the
Atman."

"When a man follows the way of the world, or the way of the
flesh, or the way of tradition (i.e. when he believes in religious
rights and the letter of the scriptures, as though they were
intrinsically sacred), knowledge of Reality cannot arise in him."
The wise say that this threefold way is like an iron chain, bind-
ing the feet of him who aspires to escape from the prison-house
of this world; He who frees himself from the chain achieve deliver-
ance..."36

The most important factor in mysticism is that the soul of man
rises into union with the transcendent and participates in the
spirit of the Divine and identifies himself with it. There is an
underlying relation between the self of man and the spirit of God.
The language of the mystics differ because of their different
This urge for identification with the Ultimate points to the goal of mysticism. Sidney Spencer says, "The eternal Reality in its fullness of being is indeed the inmost essence of all. Immanence implies a certain inner oneness of the Eternal with the sphere of finite being - a certain identification of the divine with the things of time and space. It is this identification which has given rise to the impression of pantheism. But identification is not the same thing as pure and simple identity. That is evident enough in the realm of human relationships. Personality carries with it a capacity for sympathy, compassion, 'suffering with' others; and sympathy in its intense form involves an actual participation in the experience of others, so that they become our own, and 'otherness' is transcended. When the saint identifies himself with his fellows in their sufferings or their sins, he does not cease to be himself; his personality is enriched and enlarged. So also God in the very fullness of His perfection and glory identifies Himself with all beings even in the alienation from Him, dwells at their heart, becomes the universe in its seeming separation from Him."  

Different types of mysticism have different goals though the spiritual essence is the same. Poets and artists who are devoted to mystical thoughts and experience aspire to be one with Nature and Beauty. Philosophers who are devoted to mystical studies consider Truth, Goodness, Beauty, and Justice the highest goal.  

The aim of Christian mystics after purgation (self-purification) is to achieve illumination and union with God. Evelyn Underhill says, by "illumination" is meant that peaceful certitude
of God, and perception of the true values of existence in His Light, which is the reward of the surrendered will: a perception which, as it grows, enters more and more deeply into the truths of religion and the meaning of loveliness of life—as when Angela of Foligno perceived that "the whole world is full of God." All artists in whom the love of beauty is greater than the love of self enjoy a measure of this illumination. Finally, by "union" is meant that perfect and self-forgetting harmony of the regenerate will with God which makes the full-grown mystic capable of "being to the eternal goodness what his own hand is to a man."38

The goal can be reached when the mind and body are cleansed of sensuality and lower passions. The mystic's will merges with the will of God." The soul now seeks not and possesses not, any other will but that of doing our Lord's will, and so it prays Him to let it be so, it gives to Him the keys of its own will—from henceforth the soul will have nothing of its own—all it seeks is to do everything for His glory and according His will."38

Margaret Smith says, "The mystic who has passed through the stages of the purgative and the illuminative life now enters upon the last stage of the way, which is also the goal of the quest, the unitive life when the soul passes from that which is imperfect to that which is perfect, when it ceases to see through a glass darkly, and beholds the supreme Reality face to face in the Beatific vision, and is joined thereunto in conscious union, so that the mystic can now say in truth, "I live, yet not I, but God in me. The soul of the mystic feels itself identified in union with the Divine; it has passed from consciousness of self and is
3. Types of Mysticism

W.E. Hocking divides mysticism into two major classes; theoretical and practical. **Theoretical mysticism**, according to him is based on metaphysics, logic and idealistic reflections of thought. They try to reach this vision of one Reality through deep thoughts and reflections on the universe around us. They express themselves through poetic ideas and allegorical thoughts. Hocking quotes Plato, Spinoza, Kant.

The second type, **Practical Mysticism** is considered by him more important and realistic. It is based on the experience of the mystics. Hocking quotes Plato, Plotinus and Laotze. For the Sufis mysticism is based on intense religious disciplines and practices. All the mystics who based their discipline on some religious ideals believed in practical mysticism. Sufism was based from its origin to the present day on practical mysticism.

Dr. S.N. Dasgupta, in his book "**Hindu Mysticism**" divides the long history of Indian mysticism into the following types.

(i) **Sacrificial Mysticism of Rigveda and the Atharva Veda**: The earliest religious documents of the human race are the Vedas. The simple prayers of primitive sages of Vedas and mysterious powers of the sacrifices are described in them.

(ii) **Philosophic Mysticism of the Upanishads**: A clear cut concept of God, soul, nature is presented in the Upanishads. The mystical goal can be achieved through self-abnegation, self-control and, patient search is required. The highest mystical state cannot be described.

(iii) **Yoga mysticism** aims at disciplining the body, mind and soul. The aim of yoga is to achieve concentration of the mind,
and achievement of samadhi in which state the mind and soul are free from the bondage of worldly attachments.  

(iv) Buddhistic Mysticism emphasizes on self-control and conquering desire and achievement of Nirvana. The highest mystical state of Buddhist mysticism lays stress on asceticism, compassion, moral purity and achieving the highest state of spiritual peace in Nirvana.

(v) Devotional mysticism or Bhakti is based on love and self-surrender to God. Many schools of bhakti like those of Kabir, Mira, Namdev are mentioned.

4. Sacred and Profane Mysticism

Mysticism is essentially based on love. Love mysticism leads the seeker in some religions to the highest spiritual union of the soul with God. Zaechner in his book 'Mysticism : Sacred and Profane' calls this mysticism sacred. He believes the Christian Catholic mystics alone reached this highest state.

There are other types of mysticism based on emotions, physical passion, erotic love and ecstasy, induced by drugs and even hallucination of half mad people. He calls these Profane mysticism. Zaehner tries to show that Sufism was inspired by Vedanta.

Criticising this approach of Zaehner, Professor Frits Stall says, "Zaehner's approach has nothing to contribute to the serious study of mysticism. It does not establish a position from which one can do more than scratch the surface of Hindu and Muslim forms of mysticism. The fact that such a testimony of faith is accepted without surprise or protest by a scholarly public as a possible contribution to our understanding seems intelligible only if it
is assumed that, in the realm of religion and mysticism, argument and rational inquiry are inappropriate and faith is all that counts."  

5. Drug-induced Mysticism

Patanjali says, "Spiritual powers come with birth, or are attained through herbs, incantations." Commenting on it Vyasa says, "Supernormal powers arising at the time of changing the bodily frame show themselves with birth; by herbs, as for example with chemicals, medicinal powers are acquired; by mantras or incantation, powers like flying or reducing one's size are attained."  

During the Vedic period soma was used to induce ecstasy. "Soma was prepared from a plant which has not certainly been identified, and traditionally it was pressed, mingled with milk, and drunk on the same day. It could not have been very alcoholic in this form, and the parallel Persian drink haoma, which is still used, has no special intoxication properties."  

These drugs were used to elevate the spirit which produced a feeling of confidence, expansion and enlightenment. But these drugs did not lead to any mystical experience. "Any driver knows that the effect of alcohol is to produce on unreasoning over-confidence, the cause of many accidents, and this would be dangerous ground on which to base a theory of mysticism."  

In 1954 the eminent scholar Aldous Huxley used mescal in a drug prepared from the root peyoti and described his experiences which he says resemble mystical experiences. He described these experiences in his book "The Doors of Perception". Huxley says that
Mescalin is better than hashish, opium or alcohol in that it is less toxic; but in suitable doses it is used clinically to produce a state similar to that of schizophrenia.

Huxley took a pill of mescalin and sitting in his study he describes his experience thus: "I continued to look at the flowers, and in their living light I seemed to detect the qualitative equivalent of breathing - but of a breathing without returns to a starting - point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty; from deeper to ever deeper meaning; words like Grace and Transfiguration came to my mind, and this of course was what, among other things, they stood for. The Beatific vision, sat-chit-anand: 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."  

To find out the truth of this experience Zaehner also took mescalin himself and wrote about his experience of the drug in his book, "Mysticism: Sacred and Profane", Zaehner's conclusion was that the experience was trivial, though it seemed hilariously funny. He felt that it was even anti-religious, in the sense that it did not confirm to religious experience and rather to his disappointment, the drug did not produce any kind of natural mystical experience.

Timothy Leary used a drug called LSO, which is considered to be the most powerful aphrodisiac. He declared after taking the drug that he was one with nature, God and universe. He declared, "I am God of light. Who am I? I am you?" He was imprisoned. He escaped and was further arrested. In 1974 he denounced psychedelic
drugs and gave information about illegal traffickers. Thus the use of drugs for religious or mystical experiencer is self-defeating. Drugs and occult practices do produce some experiences which lift our consciousness temporarily higher than our body-consciousness, but these experiences are neither genuine religious nor mystical experiences. These are the findings of leading scholars and experiments of mysticism. These days, scholars of mysticism notably, R.C. Zaehner, Geoffrey Parrinder are turning away from drugs.

6. Mysticism and Religion

Dean Inge says, "Mysticism has its roots in the dim consciousness of the beyond, which is the raw material of all religions." "Almost any religious system which fosters unearthly love is potentially a nursery for mystics", 56 says Evelyn Underhill; and adds, "Christianity, Islam, Brahmanism and Buddhism each receives its most sublime interpretation at their hands. Thus St. Teresa interprets her esctatic apprehension of the God-head in strictly Catholic terms, and St. John of the Cross contrives to harmonize his intense transcendalism with incarnational and sacramental Christianity. Thus, Boehme believed to the last that his explorations of eternity were consistent with the teachings of the Lutheran Church. The Sufis were good Mohammedans; Philo and Kabalists were orthodox jews. Plotinus even adapted, though with what difficulty! the relics of paganism to his doctrine of the Real."57

Almost all religions consist of rites and rituals, external observations and a vision of higher spiritual life. The priestly
class and the theologians all oppose mystical doctrines and experiences of saints. Thus, a conflict is created by fundamentalist who confine religion only to external observation and prayers. Saints who said they have experienced the light of God were condemned and many saints and mystics have been persecuted in the history of Christianity and Islam. Ultimately these mystical saints, in every religion, have been respected as martyrs and their work and experiences have been accepted as true and genuine. Al Hallaj Mansur, St. Terese, St. John of Cross and Suhrawardi Maqtul were intensely religious people but they were persecuted and condemned by the morally and spiritually blind fanatics of their times. The writings of these great saint-mystics show that true religion and true mysticism are inseparable from each other.

"Religion is more than ideas about God, and more than ritualistic or moral behaviour; it is an organization of the whole of life. Hence, meditation on religious values and beliefs is of great importance in the integration of a religious personality; repeated concentration of the mind on religion fills the memory with religious ideas and causes religious feeling to suffuse the entire being."58

It is this religious discipline of meditation and an effort to get near the Spirit of God which leads to mysticism. The higher and morally purer the religious faith and discipline the deeper and more authentic is the mystical experience. Just as there is no such thing as pure art, pure science and pure religion, there is no such thing as pure mysticism. Irrational religion leads to irrational religious and mystical experiences. By irrational we mean that which is not authentic and genuine. Mysticism develops
at the highest level of religious experiences. We will study
and note this when we take up the experiences and the works of
Sufi mystics who started their life as religious men and became
not only great saints in the religious field but also great
mystics.

7. Mysticism and Art

There has always been a close relation between Religion and
Art. Throughout the past centuries Art has been used by many
religions to express its inner feelings and emotions related to
religious and mystical vision and experience. The best pieces
of Art and Architecture are still found in churches, temples and
mosques of the past centuries.

Ananda Coomaraswamy in his well known book "The Dance of Shiva",
says "Religion and Art" are thus names for one and the same
experience - an intuition of reality and of identity. This is
not, of course, exclusively a Hindu view: it has been expounded
by many others, such as the Neo-Platonists, Goethe, Blake, Schopen-
hauer and Schiller; Nor is it refuted by Croce. It has been recently
restated thus: "In those moments of exaltation that art can give,
it is easy to believe that we have been possessed by an emotion
that comes from the world of reality. Those who take this view
will have to say that there is in all things the stuff out of which
art is made - Reality." 59

The mystics aspire to reach Truth, Beauty and Love in the highest
state of mystic union. This is also the aim of Art when artistic
talent is applied to religious and spiritual emotions. Religions
which depend on worship of images and idols, have made art an
important instrument of prayer and worship. In Islam and Sufism art is used only in architecture and calligraphy.

8. Mysticism and Music

Music has played a great role in the lives of many saints and mystics of almost all higher religions. Although music does not find any place in some of the higher religions, it has an important place in many other religions. Guru Granth of the Sikhs is classified according to Ragas (musical modes). Medieval Indian saints like Jaidev, Namdev, Kabir, Ravidas, Surdas, Mira composed and rendered their hymns in Ragas. In these Sacred writings which consider music or singing of religious hymns (Kirtan) to be the most important part of religious and mystical life, music (Nada) is believed to have divine power to reveal the inner reality of soul and God. "Those who sing here," says Shankaracharya, "Sing God." and the Vishnu Purana adds, "All songs are a part of him, who wears a form of sound."

In Japji Guru Nanak tells us that Ragas and Raginis sing the praise and glory of God:

Where is the Door, where the Mansion,
From whence Thou watchest all creation;
Where sounds of musical melodies,
Of instruments playing, minstrel singing
Are joined in divine harmony;
In various measures Celestial musicians sing of Thee.

R.A. Nicholson, one of the greatest authority on Islam writes in his book "The Mystics of Islam" on the influence of music on
Sufi mystics thus: "Many are said to have died from the emotion thus aroused. I may add by way of explanation that, according to a well-known mystical belief, God has inspired every created thing to praise Him in its own language, so that all sounds in the universe form, as it were, one vast choral hymn by which He glorifies Himself. Consequently, those whose hearts He has opened and endowed with spiritual perception hear His voice everywhere, and ecstasy overcomes them as they listen to the rhythmic chant of the muezzin, or the street cry of the saqqa shouldering his water-skin, or perchance, to the noise of wind or the bleating of sheep or the piping of a bird."\(^{62}\)

Pythagoras and Plato are responsible for another theory to which the Sufi poets frequently allude, that music awakens in the soul a memory of celestial harmonies, heard in a state of pre-existence, before the soul was separated from God. Jalaluddin Rumi observes that:

"The song of spheres in their revolutions
Is what men sing with lute and voice."\(^{63}\)

One of the most authoritative exponents of Sufi mysticism Al-Ghazali writes, "The purpose of music, considered in relation to God, is to arouse longing for Him and passionate love towards Him and to produce states in which He reveals Himself and shows His favour, which are beyond description and are known only by experience, and, by the Sufis, these states are called 'ecstasy'. The heart's attainment of these states through music is due to the mystic relationship which God has ordained between the rhythm of music and the spirit of man. The human spirit is so affected by that rhythm, that music is the cause to it of longing, joy and
sorrow and expansion and contraction; but he who is dull of hearing and unresponsive and hard of heart, is debarred from this joy, and such a one is astonished at the delight of the mystic and his ecstasy — for enjoyment is a kind of apprehension and apprehension requires something to be apprehended and the capacity to apprehend, and he who lacks such a capacity cannot imagine such enjoyment. How can anyone who lacks the sense of taste enjoy food, or he who has lost his hearing, enjoy the pleasure of sweet sounds, or one who is out of his mind enjoy intelligible things? So also, after the sound has reached the ear, the true significance of music is apprehended by the inner sense within the heart, and he who lacks that sense of necessity takes no pleasure in it.64

Cyprian Rice in his "The Persian Sufis", says, "Music in fact, like any other manifestation of beauty, has the effect of leading the soul upto and plunging it in the source of Beauty. Conversely, one who is habitually drawn to God hears His lauds and praises in every lovely melody. The true mystic, however, passes rapidly through the heard melodies to those unheard. Outward signs fade from his consciousness and his soul becomes absorbed in the inner meaning and reality of that which is hinted at by outward signs."65

9. Mysticism and Dance

Dance has an important place in many religions. In the Hindu temples and in Khangas of Sufi orders mystic dance became a very important features of their religious practices.

Shiva is called Nataraja, Lord of dances or king of actors. Dance plays an important part in Vaishnava temples where the dances of Krishna and Radha have become ideal of the love-plays
of the God and soul. A good many books have been written on the subject and each religious sect interprets its dances in its own way: Unfortunately these dances have been mere religious rituals and are not associated with mystical practices and mystical experiences, as we find them in the lives of such Vaishnava saints as Sri Chaitnaya Mahaprabhu. Some religions strictly prohibit dancing, even though they have given expression to highest mystical experiences.

Dancing is an ancient form of magic. The dance becomes amplified into being endowed with super-normal powers. His personality is transformed, like yoga. The dance induces trance, ecstasy, the experience of the divine, the realization of one’s own secret nature, and, finally, mergence into the divine essence. In India, consequently, the dance has flourished side by side with terrific austerities of the meditation, fasting, breathing exercises, absolute introversion. To work magic, to put enchantments upon others, one has first to put enchantments on oneself. And this is affected, as well, by the dance as by prayer, fasting and meditation. Shiva, therefore, the arch-yogi of the Gods, is necessarily also master of the dance.66

Orthodox Islam strictly prohibits music and dancing. According to A.J. Arberry, dancing became an important feature of Sufi life quite early and it became an essential feature of their spiritual life. He quotes the following from Yahya b. Muadh (871 A.D.) which indicates dancing had already become a part of Sufi mystical life:

The Truth, we have not found.

So, dancing, we beat the ground;
Is dancing reproved in me,
Who wander distraught for Thee?
In Thy valley we go around.
And therefore we beat the ground."67

"The Sama (mystical dance) is, no doubt, the most widely known expression of mystical life in Islam. This mystical dance was noted by the first European visitors to the converts of the Melevis, the whirling dervishes. For the Melevi tariqa is the only order in which this whirling movement has been institutionalized, though it has been practiced throughout the world of Islam from early times."68

"In fact, dancing and whirling belong to the oldest religious acts of all. Dance is the "absolute play", and was considered, in ancient Greece, the movement of the gods, both Apollo and Dionysius, have dancing movements that suit their particular characters. In primitive societies, dance had a magical character, rituals to produce rain or ensure victory were usually connected with dance. Dance is strictly prohibited by orthodox Islam and by the Naqshbandiyya order."69

10. Mysticism and Poetry

There is some deep connection between poetry and mysticism. Great Prophets and saints felt inspired to write mystical poetry. Jayadeva's 'Gita Govinda', Tulsidas's 'Ramayana' and Tyagaraj's mystical poetry and Mira's songs are sung in millions of households.

The whole of Guru Granth is in poetry. All the medieval saints of Maharashtra and Karnataka produced great mystical poetry. Sufi's have enriched many regional languages and cultures. Arabic and
Persian literature have monumental works by great Sufis.

Ibn al-Farid and Ibn Arabi have been the greatest contributors to Arabic Sufi poetry. Ibn al-Farid gave expression to his mystical experiences in Arabic odes. "When reading his intricate verses, one wonders how they could have been produced, as the tradition has it, in a state of rapture. Both in form and content these poems are perfectly Arabic: They display the Arabs' joy in word-play, puns and diminutives and speak of the love of the Absolute in terms taken from the pre-Islamic tradition, calling the beloved by the names of the heroines of old Arabic poetry, like Laila or Salma."70

Ibn Arabi has been considered the greatest master of Sufi poetry, the influence of whose mystical thoughts spread far and wide. His teachers were two talented women. He said his work Futuhut was dictated by God through the angel of inspiration while his other work Fusus was inspired by Prophet Mohammed: Ibn 'Arabi is usually praised as the advocate of religious tolerance, and everyone who tries to underline the "mystical ideal of tolerance" and indifference to exterior forms and rituals quotes his verses:

My heart is capable of every form,
a cloister of the monk, a temple for idols
a pasture for gazelles the votary's Kaaba,
the tables of the Tora, the Koran.
Love is the creed I hold; wherever turn
his camels, love is still my creed and faith."71

There are innumerable poets who have enriched Persian literature on mysticism. The most notable are Rumi, Hafiz, Attar, Jami and many others R.A. Nicholson calls Rumi "The greatest mystical poet
of Persia." Rumi's literary output is stupendous in magnitude as it is sublime in content, consists of the very large collection of mystical odes, perhaps as many as 2500. Rumi writes

Oh, music is the meat of all who love. Music uplifts the soul in realms above, The ashes glow, the latent fires increase; We listen and are fed with joy and peace.72

In English literature poets with mystical tendencies wrote poems which have high place in mystical literature. Well known names are: Crashew, Trahrne, Vaughan, Blake, Wordsworth and Browning. In his poem Pauline, Browning describes the quest of the soul thus:

What is it that I hunger for but God?
My God, my God! let me for once look on Thee;
As though nought else existed: we alone.
And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark.
Expands till I can say, Even from myself,
I need Thee, and I feel Thee and I love Thee.73

All Punjabi poets whether Muslims, Sikhs or Hindus wrote their mystical works in poetry. Even narrative poets commonly known as Kissa-Kavis like Waris Shah were basically mystic poets and they used love romances to express their mystical ideas. Waris Shah writes:

"Our soul is the tragic heroine Hir,
Our body is the lover Ranjha;
Our spiritual preceptor is the yogi Balnath
The five helpful saints are our five senses.
Who support us in our adventures dread."74
The whole world literature reveals that mystical thoughts and experiences are best expressed in poetry and thus there is deep bond between mysticism and poetry.

11. Comparative Study of Mysticism

Comparative study of philosophy, religion and mysticism has drawn the attention of scholars only recently. Only scholars with vast and deep knowledge of two or more systems of mysticism and religions can give an unprejudiced study.

Maxmuller was the first to point out that all religions have an element of truth and no religion can say that its philosophy and mysticism are absolutely superior to all. Maxmuller says: "I hold that there is a divine element in everyone of the great religions of the world. I consider it blasphemous to call them the work of God; and I hold that there is nowhere any belief in God except as the result of divine revelation, the effect of a divine spirit working in man. I could not call myself a Christian if I were to believe otherwise, if I were to force myself against all my deepest instincts to believe that the prayers of Christians were the only prayers that God could understand. All religions are mere stammerings. Our own as much as that of the Brahmins. They all have to be translated; and I have no doubt they all will be translated; whatever their shortcomings may be."

Some religions claim their faith and beliefs to be the only revealed religion. Dr Radhakrishnan says: "Revealed religion occupies a privileged position. Revelation is a universal gift, not a parochial possession. We can no longer say that truth has found its home in one part of the world alone. We are able to
realize more vividly than did our forefathers that God has made Himself known to men in diverse manners. We no more assume that all that is good and true and valuable is found in any one religion, while those who do not chance to adopt it are doomed to everlasting pain. Such religious Chauvinism would sound very strange on our lips. We have now a nobler and truer view of God.

There have been scholarly and fruitful attempts to present comparative study of mysticism. The notable attempts are: (1) Rodolf Otto: Mysticism East and West, in which he compares Hinduism and Christianity, (2) R.C. Zaehner brings out a comparative study of Hindu and Muslim mysticism in his book "Hindu and Muslim Mysticism", (3) D.T. Suzuki in his work "Mysticism Christian and Buddhist" gives a scholarly comparative study of Buddhism and Christianity. He takes Meister Eckhart as representative of Christian mysticism. Margaret Smith in her scholarly work "Studies in Early Mysticism in Near and Middle east", gives a scholarly comparative study of early Christian and Sufi mysticism and also an indepth study of the mystics of this period. Sidney Spencer in his Mysticism in World Religion, F.C. Happold's "Mysticism", and Frits Staal's "Exploring Mysticism" are all attempts to study mysticism in higher religions side by side in the light of Comparative Study of Religion.

References and Notes

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42. Ibid, See Chapter XXXVI for details.
43. Ibid, See chapter XXXV for details.
46. Ibid, p. 70-82.
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