VIRAŠAIVA MYSTICISM
CHAPTER THREE

VĪRAṢAĪVA MYSTICISM

The word ‘mysticism’ has been abused in many different ways by poets, theologians and even philosophers. “It has been claimed as an excuse for every kind of occultism, for dilute transcendentalism, vapid symbolism, religious or aesthetic sentimentality and bad metaphysics”¹. If, for example, somebody behaves mysteriously or talks of lofty things or of things mysterious he is called ‘mystic’, while in reality, he may not be. Thus we hear tell of ‘Hitler’s mystical belief in the superiority of the Herrenvolk’, etc, and of the ‘mystic influence of the stars’, etc².

Since it is also a fact that the words ‘mysticism’ and ‘mystic experience’ are used in various senses by the mystics themselves, it is difficult for us to define them adequately clearly. Our problem of defining them is aggravated by the fact that the mystics themselves often both say that mystic experience is incommunicable and say a lot about it, though in many different ways. There are mystics who claim to have had experience of something beyond personal God, and such a claim is regarded by people of their own religion as blasphemy. Again, there are mystics who think that genuine mystic experience cannot go beyond the feeling of dependence on and oneness with a personal God. There are also mystics, like Buddhists, who claim that the content of their
mystic experience is neither personal God nor impersonal God, nor something easily communicable. Our confusion is confounded further by claims that mystic experience can also be naturalistic. Therefore, it falls to the lot of philosophers to give a clear picture of mysticism. In this process they should address themselves to such questions as (1) what are the common characteristics, if any, of mystic experience? (2) what is its value as a way of knowing? (3) is it objective or just a kind of illusion? And so on.

Though India is known to be a land of mystics, and though we know many mystics either by acquaintance or by description, an accurate definition of mysticism is desperately lacking even to date. Mysticism as subject matter of philosophy is still less known.

Many religious persons and a few philosophers argue that mystical experience is not amenable to philosophical understanding. Some even go to the extent of arguing that one cannot understand mysticism unless one is a mystic. But this argument is unjustifiable, because empirical study by psychologists and theoretical analysis by philosophers have rendered mysticism understandable. To argue that one need be a mystic to understand mysticism is like arguing that one need be mad in order to understand madness or one need be a poet in order to comment on a poem.

A philosophical discussion on mysticism is important for two reasons. Many religions, especially the Indian ones, including
Vīraśaivism, regard mystic experience as a necessary step to mokṣa. A philosophy of Indian religions is, therefore, incomplete without a study of mystic experience. 1) Many of the religious and philosophical doctrines are based on it. For example the Upaniṣadic texts like "Aham Brahmāsmi" and the like can be interpreted meaningfully only with reference to mystic experience. So a clear understanding of mysticism is clearly a help in determining the precise meaning of religious and philosophical doctrines. 2) Mystics claim absolute certainty for their mystic intuitions; they go to the extent of asserting that one may doubt the veracity of sense reports, but one cannot doubt the truth and objectivity of mystic experience. This is the chief reason why the ancient Indian thinkers regarded knowledge derived from and based on mystic experience as the knowledge (Jñāna or Vidyā or absolute higher) and all else as avidyā or ajñāna (lower knowledge or ingrurance). This has led the Hindu mystics to claim that Ṣabda (revelation) which is a linguistic expression of jñāna or vidyā is the final authority on metaphysical matters. Therefore, mysticism, if true, would prove the validity of the Hindu doctrines of God, soul, etc.

Even when the word 'mysticism' is properly understood, it is used normally in either of the two senses - in the sense of a doctrine based on mystic experience and in the sense of the mystic experience itself. But whether taken in the first sense or in the
second, it cannot be defined with the felicity of a science like physics or economics. As a doctrine it cannot be easily defined because there are several mystical doctrines some of which are opposed to each other and it becomes difficult to choose any one in preference to the rest as a representative doctrine. For example, Advaita Vedānta as a doctrine based on mystic experience claims that the ultimate reality is featureless Brahman, while Mahāyāna Buddhism, also based on mystic experience, claims that the mystic experience is not that of Brahman, Saguṇa or Nirguna. Again, the Jews never regarded God as accessible to any form of human experience, including mystic experience. Says Prof. Scholem:

Ecstasy there was, ... but we find no trace of a mystical union between the soul and God. Throughout there remained an almost exaggerated consciousness of God’s otherness...

Even in the sense of religious experience it cannot be defined easily because many who claim to have had mystical experience are probably either imposters who deliberately tell lies in this regard, or probably ones who, being ignorant of the nature of genuine mystic experience, mistake some delirium for mystic experience. For example, one who is under the temporary influence of LSD, may mistake his peculiar and temporary psychological state for a genuine mystical experience, or, a devotee may see some visions or hear some melodies by extrasensory means, but (as we shall
see subsequently) neither vision-seeing nor melody-hearing by extra-sensory means is an essential characteristic of mystical experience.

But unfortunately, some philosophers who have attempted to drive away the clouds that prevent us from seeing mysticism clearly have only added some more. This is confirmed by the fact that they have given a variety of definitions some of which are inadequate in many respects. W.R.Inge considers some of these conflicting definitions in his *Mysticism in Religion*:

1) Mysticism is the immediate feeling of the Unity of the self with God; ...what makes the mystical a special tendency inside religion is the endeavour to fix the immediateness of the life in God. (Otto Pfleiderer)

2) Mysticism is religion in its most concentrated and exclusive form. It is that attitude of the mind in which all other relations are swallowed up in the relation of the soul to God. (E.Caird)

3) Mysticism 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. (Pringle-Pattison)

These three definitions are inadequate for the reason that they apply at best to theistic religions and not to mysticism of
atheistic Buddhism or monistic Vedānta where duality and relation are ultimately illusions.

4). True mysticism is the consciousness that everything that we experience is an element and only an element in fact; i.e., that in being what it is, it is symbolic of something more. (R.C. Nettleship)

Commenting on this, Ninian Smart has this to say: the Buddhist mystic "might well be sceptical about the third-in what sense is the experience of Nirvāṇa symbolic of something else?"

Our first task, therefore, is to arrive at a set of criteria by which we can distinguish genuine mystic experience from what is not mystic experience. This not only helps us to determine the essence of mystic experience, but also helps us to tackle the question whether there is any substantial difference between mystical experiences of people of different religions, or is the so-called difference due only to difference in the interpretations of these mystic experiences. Once we settle these primary issues, we are in a position to take up the more important question, What is the nature of Vīraśaiva mysticism, how far is it, if at all, different from mysticism of other religions, especially Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism.

**GENERAL CRITERIA OF VĪRAŚAIVA MYSTICISM**

While many psychologists and philosophers are of the opinion that there are certain features which are uniformly common to all
forms of mystic experience, others have denied the existence of such common features. The latter argue that what is common to theistic forms of mysticism is absent from non-dualistic forms of mysticism; what is common to both of these forms is absent from atheistic mysticism like Buddhistic and Jaina mysticism. But the writers like Stace, who have a good background of philosophy, have noticed that there are no types of mysticism, such as theistic and atheistic, but only types of mysticism, such as introvertive and extrovertive. This again means that each of these may be theistic, pantheistic or atheistic. So searching for features which are common all of these forms of mystic experience is a logically absurd task. In such a case it would be proper for us to look for common minimum features. So our question is, What is it that makes an experience a mystic experience?

Before finding out the common minimum features let us consider the features already noted by the writers on mysticism: William James in his psychological study of mysticism, Varieties of Religious Experience, has noticed only four characteristics, namely, Ineffability, Noetic quality, Transiency and Passivity. It is surprising that he draws a hasty conclusion that "These characteristics are sufficient to mark out a group of states of consciousness peculiar enough to deserve a special name and to call for careful study-let it then be called the mystical group". Miss Evelyn Underhill who thinks that "Mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of
ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and that the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it. Not to know about, but to Be, is the mark of the real initiate. William James's celebrated "four marks" of the "mystic state, Ineffability, Noetic Quality, Transiency, and Passivity, will fail to satisfy us. She is right in her rejection of James's criteria as they are in fact inadequate.

The following may be considered as the common criteria of mystic experience, whatever is its philosophic or religious background.

1. **Mystic Experience Is Supra-sensory And Supra-intellectual:**

Mystic experience does not necessarily involve the sense and intellect. In fact, mystic experience is impossible without the temporary suspension of sense and intellect. Withdrawal of sense and intellect, pratyāhāra, as it is called by Patanjali, is a necessary step to mystic experience. The mystic withdraws his senses from their respective objects, smell, taste, etc and prevents his intellect from thinking, desiring, etc. As a result of this he becomes unaware of the external stimuli and the internal psychical states. But while he loses consciousness of the physical objects and psychical states, he still retains self-awareness.

However, mystic experience may begin with sense experience (e.g. staring at a black spot on a white wall or at a lighted lamp) or
with imagination (e.g. imagination of a flower), coupled with regulated breathing. But there is nothing in the sensory or intellectual function itself that is the essence of mystic experience.

A Vīraśaiva mystic begins his mystic experience [for which we may substitute words like ‘dhyāna’, ‘kūta’ (union), ‘saṅga’ (union), ‘sāmarasya’ or ‘liṅgāṅga-sāmarasya’] with his intense gaze at the īṣṭa-liṅga during his worship. Īṣṭa-liṅga is a thumb sized, oval shaped, black object and its worship involves the washing of this object, smearing it with sacred ash, offering it flowers and incense, and ultimately, some food. This completed, the mystic utters the mantra ‘om namahśivaya’ (“O Śiva, I bow to you”) and concentrates on the īṣṭa-liṅga, preceded by pratyāhāra. But just as in the act of staring itself there is nothing mystical, so also, in the worship of īṣṭa-liṅga itself there is nothing mystical. Mōlige Mārayya, one of the leading Vīraśaiva saints, asks:

If one places the liṅga on the palm and worships it,
With a mind that has its hand in the worldly affairs,
How can it be called Liṅga-worship?11

When the body is hungry and demands food
How can it (the food) be offered to Liṅga?12

It is true that we have a spiritual experience through the worship of and gazing at the liṅga, but for that we must have earned a good amount of religious merit (punya) and have sacrificed the bodily interests13. What Mārayya and other saints say
is that the liṅga-worship is a means of mystic experience and it cannot be effective unless we have cleansed our mind such that it becomes fit for mystic experience (The method of cleansing the mind is dealt with in the chapter on Means of Mystic Experience).

However, it is a point to be noted that although mystic experience is a supra-sensory and supra-intellectual experience, all supra-sensory and supra-intellectual experiences are not mystical. For example, seeing visions, and hearing voices, independently of the respective senses, are not necessary aspects of mystic experience. What is supra-sensory and supra-intellectual experience?

Since we are not directly acquainted with supra-sensory and supra-intellectual experience, we can understand what it could be only in contrast to certain states of consciousness with which we are acquainted. Upaniṣads using this method of contrasting describe the four states (avasthā) of consciousness in the following way:

**Jāgrata** (waking) state is one in which our consciousness is related to the external world by means of senses, on the one hand, and mind, intellect and ego, on the other. Thus when the senses report a colour, the mind concentrates on it, the intellect determines that it is red colour and by means of ego, I claim to have experience of red colour.
Svapna (dream) is a state in which the senses are temporarily inactive. But the consciousness is still related to antahkaraṇa (the group of psychical faculties, ego, mind and intellect). It is related to the world created by the antahkaraṇa, and the creation is far from the actual and enjoys or suffers as such.

Susupti (deep sleep) is a state in which the consciousness has severed its relationship with senses and antahkaraṇa, and is unaware of itself as well as of the external world. It is not even aware of its own state. A person’s susupti can be reported in the propositions of past tense.

Turīya (true state of ātman) is a conscious state, in the sense that the subject is neither sleeping nor dreaming. Since it resembles susupti the subject is not aware of the external world. Turīya may broadly be stated as having three main stages.14

At the first stage of meditation the yogi becomes unaware of the external world. But he is aware of his own self in which there are no states like thoughts, emotions, volitions, etc. He may experience bliss in this state.

In the next stage the subject experiences the endless expansion of his self. The endless expansion is later described as Brahman (i.e., he declares “I became Brahman = my consciousness became infinite”). Sometimes he experiences his consciousness as uniting with the universal consciousness and this is later described as union of Jīvātma and Paramātma or Viśvātma (universal soul).
In the third stage the subject becomes unaware of both himself and the universal soul. The subject's self is practically empty of all its contents - it has no ideas of the external world and it has no idea of itself. When such an empty experience ends, the mystic may report the consciousness is featureless. The Buddhists may report that it is a state which cannot be categorised either as this or as that – it is śūnya (void).

Now, it becomes clear, turīya or mystic experience is a supra-sensory and supra-intellectual experience and is easily distinguished from sensory and intellectual experiences. It is different from deep sleep, in that turīya presupposes purity of self while deep sleep does not so presuppose. Or, in other words, the subject is temporarily free from pain and suffering in deep sleep whereas he is permanently free from them once he achieves turīya. (for the details of Vīraśaiva mystic who is free from pain and suffering, etc., please see the last section of this chapter, entitled “Transformed Life”)

2. The Content Of Mystic experience Is Noumenal:

The content of sense experience is always a physical spatio-temporal object having categorical characteristics like quantity, quality and relations. We cannot know a non-physical object, if there is any, by means of sense experience, just as we cannot know physical objects except by sense and intellect, under normal
circumstances. It is a well known fact that the object of sense experience cannot be known without the category of number. When we know one object, we identify its number as one by distinguishing it from many, and vice versa.

The content of mystic experience, on the contrary, is not phenomenal object, but something which is sometimes called consciousness or conscious force, life or life-force, etc. This consciousness is one, indivisible, and undifferentiated. The mystic feels its presence in all phenomenal things of the world including himself. He may see grass, stone, trees, etc as well as we do, but what he sees, but we do not, is the non-physical noumenon. His experience of the ubiquitous presence of this consciousness or spirit makes him think that it is God.

One day (says St.Teresa), being in orison it was granted me to perceive in one instant how all things are seen and contained in God. I did not perceive them in their proper form, and nevertheless the view I had of them was of a sovereign clearness, and has remained vividly impressed upon my soul. It is one of the most signal of all the graces which the Lord has granted me... The view was so subtle and delicate that the understanding cannot grasp it.

The consciousness that is experienced is not an individual consciousness which is bound and limited in many ways, but an infinite and pure consciousness. Speaking of the Upaniṣadic mysticism, S.N.Dasgupta says:
In music, the different notes and tones cannot be grasped separately from and independently of the music itself, and when we are busy in apprehending separately the different notes we miss the music or the harmony which is in itself a whole of experience that cannot be taken in parts, in the multiplicity of varied notes. So it is with this ineffable experience, which in reality underlies all our ordinary experiences and states of knowledge as the basis or ground of them all; when we are lost in the discursive multiplicity of our ordinary experience, we miss the underlying reality. But when once again we are in touch with it, our so-called personality is as it were dissolved in it, and there ensues that infinitude of blissful experience in which all distinctions are lost.\textsuperscript{16}

Even if the consciousness is an individual self, “it is only this supra-conscious experience which actually underlies them all (desires, interests, etc) that can be called the real self…”\textsuperscript{17}

That it is immaterial and that it is consciousness or life is the claim of almost all the mystics the world over. It is for the mystics an indescribable experience and yet they do not hesitate to claim that it as an experience of God. William James has offered some examples to show the unanimity of the mystic experience in regard to this claim.

In that time the consciousness of God’s nearness came to me sometimes. I say God, to describe what is indescribable.\textsuperscript{18} (for more examples of this kind please
see James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp.311-336).

That the consciousness that is the content of mystic experience is the cause and essence of all that is clear from the question which the father Uddālaka puts to his son Śvetaketu:

Do you know that which when once known everything becomes known? When you once know what iron is, you know all that can be made out of iron, for these are in essence nothing but iron; we can distinguish the iron vessels only by their specific forms and names. But whatever may be their names and forms, the true essence in them all, whether they be needles, pans or handles, is nothing but iron. ... What are these names and form worth without the essence? It is the essence, the iron, that manifests itself in so many forms and names; when this iron is known all that is made of iron is known. It is the ineffable reality, being, the ultimate being, which is the essence of everything else.

Many a time the content of the mystic experience is identified as light. In Kashmir Saivism, the supreme consciousness is not only the highest reality but also light. Hence it gets the name Prakāśa (brilliant light) or Cit-prakāśa (consciousness-light). According to it, it should be called Prakāśa not only for the reason that it is perceived as light in mystic experience, but also for the reason that it illumines all objects of our ordinary experience.

Vision of brilliant light in mystic experience and identifying it with infinite consciousness is not peculiar to Indian mysticism
alone, but is quite common in Christian mysticism as well. St. Augustine, one of the greatest Christian mystics, gives in his *Confessions* (Book vii) a description of the divine light. Says he

> Into myself I went, and with the eyes of my soul (such as it was) I discovered over the same eye of my soul, over my mind, the unchangeable light of the Lord ... superior to my soul, because it made me ... Thee when first I saw, thou liftedst me up, that I might see there was something which I might see; ...

Ruysbroek thinks that

> In the depths of this darkness, in which the loving spirit has died to itself, ... there shines and there is born an incomprehensible light, which is the Son of God ... And here there is nothing else than an eternal contemplation and beholding of the light...

St. Teresa, another great Christian mystic, who takes every mystic experience for 'spiritual marriage' concludes that

> it is evident that there is someone in the interior of the soul who sends forth these arrows and thus gives life to this life, and that there is a sun whence this great light proceeds ...

The light that is the content of mystical vision is neither physical nor imaginary; yet it is more real and more convincing than either. It cannot be a physical light, because the eyes that can see it are closed during the mystic experience. Moreover, the physical light is localizable. Nor can the mystic imagine a great
light comparable to the one he sees in his mystic intuition, because his mind that can imagine it is also inoperative during the mystic experience.

Underhill analysing the concept of God as Transcendent Light notes that the Greek and Latin names for God, Deus and Theos have something to do with light and love.

_Deus_ whose root means day, shining, the Transcendent Light; and _Theos_, whose true meaning is supreme desire or prayer – the Inward Love – do not contradict, but complete each other. They form, when taken together an almost perfect definition of that Godhead which is the object of mystic’s desire: the Divine Love which, immanent in the soul, spurs on that soul to union with the Transcendent and Absolute Light ... at once the source, the goal, the life of created things²⁴.

Underhill’s these words immediately remind us that our own Sanskrit name, ‘Deva’ for God means ‘one who shines’ and ‘one who gives’ and is equivalent to _Tajjalän_ (the source and goal of our being). The _Chāndogya Upaniṣad_ (III, xiv) describes the highest reality cryptically – as that (tat) from which the world is generated (ja), into which it is re-absorbed (li) and by it is supported (an).

What is worth noting in this connection is that the consciousness is perceived not just during the mystic experience but later also. The mystic sees it everywhere or feels its presence everywhere and always. Although he was aware of the external
objects distinctly and of his own self indistinctly he was never aware of his own self, still less the cosmic Consciousness so clearly and distinctly as in the mystic state. During and after frequent mystic experiences he has become aware of it so distinctly, clearly and certainly that he refuses to doubt its being. Says Teresa,

I understand, how our Lord was in all things, and how he was in the soul; and the illustration of a sponge filled with water was suggested to me.25

Similarly, for Eckhart it is God who is perceived in the mystical perception and this is beyond doubt. He says “God is nearer to me than I am myself to me”26. Rama-krishna Paramahamsa’s report of the after-effect of the mystic experience is clearer:

The Divine Mother revealed to me that... it was She who had become everything... that everything was full of consciousness. The image was consciousness, the altar was consciousness... the door sills were consciousness... I found everything in the room soaked as it were in bliss - the bliss of God.... That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that all this was Divine Mother- even the cat.27

Though the mystic is sometimes said to ‘see’ life or mind or consciousness in all objects including non-living objects, such a ‘seeing’ cannot be termed sense experience, for it is not objective, nor is the object of mystic experience physical object. The mystic
usually experiences consciousness or life-force which permeates all things in the world including himself, but such perception of one's own consciousness is not amenable to others.

What is the content of the Vīraśaiva mystic's perception? The vacana literature describes the content of mystic perception variously as 'Līṅga', 'Paraśiva', 'bayalu', 'śūnya' or 'mahāśūnya', 'arivu', 'jñāna', 'jñānajyoti', 'jyotirlinga', etc. They also use terms which are nearly equivalent to consciousness or light or a combination of the two.

A point of clarification is needed in this context. The light which the Vīraśaiva mystic claims to see is definitely not the empirical light, because the latter, however brilliant, cannot be equal to the light which the mystic perceives.

The consciousness (cit) which is perceived in the mystic experience is according to the Vīraśaivas, as also to the Upaniṣadic, Christian and Muslim mystics, is the highest reality. Though this consciousness is present in everybody it cannot be realized by everybody. It can be known only by a guru who is himself a mystic.

This is expressed in two ways. Some vacanakāras say that everything is God and some others say that God is everywhere, although he is hidden from the human sense perception and thinking.
God’s existence in the world and in atman cannot be known empirically, just as the fire that is unmanifestly present in water element cannot be known empirically\textsuperscript{29}. Allama Prabhu, one of the greatest Vīraśaiva mystics, says that just as the fire hidden in the flint stone does not burn or just as the tree hidden in a seed cannot murmur, so also, God though present in the self and the world cannot be known by anybody except the mystic\textsuperscript{30}. The same opinion is echoed by the other Vīraśaiva saints like Basavaṇṇa, Cennabasaṇṇa, Tōṅtada Siddhaliṅga Śivayogi, etc.

Though God’s existence is unmanifest, the Vīraśaiva mystics have no doubt about his existence. In one of his vacanas Śaṅmukha Svāmi says;

\begin{quote}
Come let us search for the one full of consciousness  
And hidden in my body;  
Come let us search for the Great Thing which is behind  
The curtain of my mind;  
Come let us search for Parabrahma who is  
Behind my \textit{prāṇa}. \ldots \textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

From this it becomes clear that for Śaṅmukha Svāmi the content of mystic experience is consciousness hidden behind one’s own body, mind and life (\textit{prāṇa}), and this consciousness is Parabrahma (transcendent God). It is transcendent because it is beyond sense perception. He himself says that though the highest reality has been present from time immemorial, it has not been
perceived by him and once the curtain of prakṛti made of sattva, rajas and tamas is torn apart he experiences its true nature32.

The highest reality appears to the Vīraśaiva mystic, just as it does to the mystics of other religions, in the form of light. Allama Prabhu compares the transcendent light perceived in mystic experience to the brilliant light of hundred crore suns (śatakotisūrya) put together, and sometimes to a collection of many creepers of lightning33. He says that such a light cannot be an object of sense perception and its source can be known only by mystics34. He further adds that its brilliance is such that it cannot be seen even by gods like Hari, Brahmā, and the like35. According to Basavaṇṇa, it is a great light amongst lights36. Since infinitely brilliant transcendent light is another name of God, they also say that Liṅga is Jyotirliṅga (Light-God) or Paraṇjyotirliṅga (Transcendent Light-God)37.

Another special aspect of Vīraśaiva mysticism is the treatment of Consciousness which is the content of mystic experience as “bayalu” or “nirbayalu” (space) or “śūnya” or “niśśūnya” (void). This implies that the consciousness experienced in mystic experience is a pure or contentless consciousness. The reason for calling it bayalu is that space is unlimited and pure like consciousness. The mystic during the mystic experience perceives pure consciousness and consciousness which has in itself no desires, thoughts, etc. Moreover, since he perceives his own
consciousness as growing bigger and bigger without end, he feels that consciousness must be infinite like space. Śaṅmukha Svāmi regards it as a space without beginning, imperceptible, which has neither form nor is formless, neither ego, nor mind, endless and partless space. He says that he is ignorant of the location of his own being. Allama Prabhu describes the mystic experience in these words:

People having put the seed of bayalu and having grown bayalu, bayalu has ultimately become bayalu.

Cennabasavaṇṇa says that space called body has merged in the Impartite, the mind-space has merged in the Impartite. This may be compared to Śaṅkara's description of Brahman as nirguṇa and nirākāra.

The mystic's perception of the infinite consciousness does not prevent him from regarding the world as a reality. In fact, he sees the world in bayalu or consciousness. When Śaṅmukha Svāmi says

All that is there in the world is you, O God;
All that has filled the world is you, O God;
You are of the form of the world, O God;
You are also the Lord of the world; O God;
You transcend the world too, O God;...

what he means is that God who is consciousness is not only in the world, but also transcends the world, allowing us to conclude that God both includes the world, permeates and transcends it.
While the introvertive mystic sees consciousness alone in his mystic intuition, the extrovertive mystic sees the world as well as consciousness, or rather, the consciousness in the world. A mystic like Basavaṇṇa would say that God is present in everything.

Whichever way I look,
Thou only art, O, Lord!
The form of all the circumambient space
Thou only art, O, Lord!
Thou art the universal eye,
O, Lord, and thou the universal face!
Thou art the arms of the universe, ...

An exactly similar view is expressed by a seventeenth century mystic, Śaṅmukha Svāmi:

O, Lord, you are the face of the universe;
You are the feet of the universe;
You the arms of the universe are;
You are the eyes of the universe, too ...

Uriliṅga Peddi, justifying his conception of God as being closely related to the world, says that since the world is a self-transformation of God, the world is dependent on God and is not separate from him; God cannot see the world except as being in him. The point of all these statements is that once the Vīraśaiva aspirant achieves mystic intuition, he begins to see God not only in temples or in the ista-liṅga which he worships daily, but in all things and always.
3. Vision Of Unity:

All our empirical knowledge involves necessarily a distinction and interdependence between the subject and the object. I am aware of myself as myself, only in relation to something which is an object. Similarly, when I know a physical object, I am aware of myself also, though indistinctly. That I know an object without being aware of myself or that I am aware of myself or my psychological states without reference to objects is not a psychological fact. Thus, the relation between the subject and the object is built into the very structure of sense experience.

Another essential factor found in sense experience is the distinction between the object now perceived and other objects. Thus, for example, I perceive a book on the table and conclude (though implicitly) that it is the same book which I saw yesterday and that it is different from tables, chairs, pens, other books and other objects. Its recognition as a book presupposes other objects which are different from it, either qualitatively or quantitatively. It is this differentiation that renders our experience of an object possible. If there were only one thing in the universe, I could not have called it a book, though it is really a book. Because I did not have to distinguish it from other objects, because there were no other objects. Using proper names implies plurality of objects. In any case, there are actually a number of objects and each my experience definitely involves a distinction amongst them,
sometimes bringing them under one group or the other, and some other time without so bringing. In any case, sense experience is impossible without recollection of the past perceptions and without a distinction between the object of perception and other objects.

In contrast to this, mystic experience ignores both diversity and plurality of objects and seeks to provide knowledge of unity. However, 'unity' experienced in the mystic state must not be mistaken for unity conceived by us in our day to day experience. The latter is known by logical form. We can imagine the whole world as a unity, but the world so imagined is rather a totality than a unity and is still different from the unity experienced by the mystic. We can imagine that the whole world is made of some stuff, water, as Thales conceived, or some such thing, as the other ancient Greek philosophers conceived. Such a conception has indeed induced Rudolf Otto to infer that "what we call Greek science was maybe the offspring of something which in its inception was mystical intuition." But Otto's inference is perhaps not correct, because the Greek way was speculative rather than mystical. Moreover, their search was not inward, which usually is a part of the mystic way, but an outward one. That the One sought after by the Greek philosophers was not the fruit of mystic experience becomes clear when we note the One was both sensible and imaginable, unlike the One of mystic experience.
So, what is the mystic meaning of unity? To the mystic vision of unity is not merely seeing all things together as if they all fall under a concept, but seeing all things as one. Thus, for example, all books, whether they are books on philosophy or on history or on chemistry, whether they are small or big, whether they are red or blue or black, whether they are French or English or Kannada fall into one group, the group of books. This is a mental unification. If subsuming different objects of sense perception under a particular empirical concept is regarded as a vision of unity, then everybody does it at every moment, without any training and without any conscious effort. But such an unconscious subsumption is not mystic perception of unity. Even if we collect all books in one place, as in a library, it would not be a unity.

The unity thus brought about is physical, geographical, external and artificial unity. For example, the same books may be united according to their language or according to their subjects, or according to alphabetical order of their authors' names; they may be united here or somewhere else; they may be united in order to transport them or in order to store them in a godown.

The unity or oneness perceived by the mystic is the one single principle, which is uniformly present in all things. When for example, Meister Eckhart says that the stone, grass and tree are one he means, not that they are numerically one, but that they all
have a content, namely, consciousness, which cannot be perceived empirically. When he says

All that a man has here external in multiplicity is intrinsically One. Here all blades of grass, wood, and stone, all things are One. This is the deepest depth.\footnote{51}

he means to say that there is something underlying all variety of things. This underlying something is not physical like the water of Thales, or the four material elements Empedocles or Cārvāka. Nor is it one thing having parts just as a tree is one having many branches, fruits, leaves, which are all different from one another.

As we have already seen, the mystic perceives one consciousness or one Life in all things, living and non-living, as their essence. But the perception of this is not all. The mystics perceive not only the essence but also the phenomena in which the essence resides and it not perceived by the non-mystics. The latter may suppose or infer such a thing but they have not encountered it directly as the mystics have done.

It is still possible to perceive everything, including God as one object, but without the perceiver himself being a part of that one object. The mystic usually claims that the single principle that is uniformly present in the whole world is the same principle that is present in himself. In the mystic experience, the essence of the universe and his won essence come together and melt into each other. In that state he not merely experiences the essence of
himself, that is, he not merely experiences his own contentless, pure consciousness, but also experiences a union with the universal consciousness, the highest reality. This double experience is called union – wherein the mystic's limited self which is purified now, unites with the infinite soul. This experience unlike the sense experience transcends the duality of subject and object. Such a vision of unity is a characteristic common to Christian, Muslim, Hindu (Upaniṣadic) and Vīraśaiva mysticism.

The union experienced by the Christian mystics is often claimed as a state of grace (i.e., a state granted by God) in which the soul feels the communion with God. What the Christian mystic means by this is that he has a direct apperception of God: “the mystic knows that God is in him and with him; his body has literally become a ‘temple of the Holy Ghost’.”

Though the mystic union is often described as merging of a finite soul in a universal soul, like a river merging in an ocean, the other way is also stressed. That is, just as the individual soul merges in the universal soul, so also the universal soul merges in the finite soul. This language stripped of its figurative form means that the individual soul loses its finiteness or boundary and feels some kind of expansion. This would either mean that it becomes infinite or that it merges in the great soul. In any case, it has imbibed the extraordinary qualities which it did not have earlier. These extraordinary qualities not found in ordinary human beings
are usually regarded by all mystics as divine qualities. So the ultimate conclusion of a mystic is that he has entered the world of God and he is penetrated by God. Speaking of such a state Underhill says “The self, though intact, is wholly penetrated – as a sponge by the sea – by the Ocean of Life and Love to which he has attained.” In such a case, the mystic cannot speak of himself as himself, because he is wholly occupied by the highest reality. He can only say “I live yet not I but God in me”\(^5^3\). This does not imply the mystic’s vacillation between the statement “I am the occupant of my body-mind complex” and the statement “God is the occupant of my body-mind complex”. It rather implies, with a certain degree of certainty, that the body-mind complex in which I existed is now occupied and owned by God. In other words, the mystic’s self is not destroyed but only transformed completely.

In Islam also the state of union is recognized as important aspect of the Sufi mysticism. The concept of union with God in the Sufi mysticism has drawn the attention of both the traditional Muslims and the mystics of other religions. In Islam “Allah is essentially an active God” and “not the timeless Absolute”\(^5^4\) of Advaita. Junayd says that man is always united with God although he is unaware of it and that “he should return at last to his first state and be as he was before he was”\(^5^5\). Abū Yazīd compares the union of soul with God experienced in the mystic state to the union
of a river with the sea. By means of this metaphor he wants to make another point clear. Says he

You see how rivers flow with a plashing, chattering sound, but when they draw near to the sea and mingle with it, their plash and chatter is stilled, and the sea has no experience of them nor do they increase in it;...56

What is so striking about the passage is not its content, but its use of the metaphor, for an exactly similar metaphor is used by both the Upaniṣads and the Buddhist texts. The Udāna says:

Just as – whatsoever streams flow into the mighty ocean and whatsoever floods fall from the sky, there is no shrinking nor overflow seen thereby in the mighty ocean, even so ... though many monks pass finally away into that condition of nirvāṇa which has no remainder, yet there is no shrinkage nor overflow in that condition of nirvāṇa seen thereby.57

In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (VI) also the union of the self with Brahman is compared to the merging of rivers in the ocean58.

The Advaita of Śaṅkara, taking clue from the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad and Gauḍapāda’s commentary on it, namely, Māṇḍūkya-kārikā, speaks of two Gods, Nirguṇa Brahman and Īśvara or Saguna Brahman. Of these two Nirguṇa Brahman is the higher reality. But when Śaṅkara says that the individual soul (jīva) unites with Brahman, it gives rise to two problems. (1) Since any union implies logically at least two units, and in this
case, ātman and Brahman, it must follow that ātman and Brahman are two distinct realities which unite. But for Śaṅkara neither plurality nor individuality of the soul is real. In fact, there is nothing other than Brahman. Brahman is one without second (ekamevādvitiyam). So, the recognition of soul as unreal makes the idea of union meaningless, for anything unreal cannot unite with anything, real or unreal. Thus there is a paradox here: either there is no unitive experience or the unitive experience, like the individuality of the soul, is itself unreal. (2) If for some valid reason the union soul and Brahman is regarded as possible, then does the soul unite with Nirguṇa Brahman or Īśvara?

According to Śaṅkara, Īśvara is only an emanation of the highest reality, Nirguṇa Brahman. The emanation is not real, not only because it is not permanent, but also because it is a part of the whole reality. This implies that for Śaṅkara what is conscious, one, eternal (nitya) and whole (akhaṇḍa) alone is real and matter, change and many are illusory. This also means that the plurality of individual souls is unreal. But though as related to Nirguṇa Brahman, Īśvara is an emanation, he is essentially the same as Nirguṇa Brahman, just as the souls, though they as related to Nirguṇa Brahman are unreal, are essentially identical to Nirguṇa Brahman. So according to Advaita there is no union – there cannot be a union; but there can only be actualization of the hidden potentiality. That is why, often the Advaitins use the analogy of
The individual soul appears limited though actually it is Brahman, the infinite soul; just as the indivisible space (mahākāśa) appears delimited in a pot. When the limiting adjuncts such as antahkaraṇa, etc are cast off, the soul shines forth and becomes the infinite Brahman, just as on breaking the pot the space in it becomes infinite space. The word 'becomes', it may be noted, has a limited meaning. When the individual soul is said to become infinite soul it does not logically imply that there could be many infinite souls. The idea of plurality of infinite souls is a logical absurdity. What the idea of becoming simply means is that the finite soul loses its finitude, because it loses its boundary and dissolves into an ocean of consciousness, Brahman.

The answer to the second question is just an extension of the answer to the first. Since the individual soul which is unreal is essentially identical to Nirguṇa Brahman, it unites with Nirguṇa Brahman, not with Īśvara. If it were essentially identical to Īśvara, then on its union with Īśvara, it should have become the Lord of the universe. But there cannot be one Īśvara.

However, while experiencing the consciousness in the mystic state is universal, regarding the experience of consciousness as the experience of a union with God or Brahman is not a universal phenomenon. The Hīnayāna Buddhists emphasize the aspect of becoming a Buddha, but this does not mean that the mystic unites with Buddha. Similarly, in Jainism, the mystic becomes a
thirthaṅkara, but does not unite with anything else. The Jainas
describe a liberated soul as Paramātma, but the word does not
mean universal soul nor do the Jainas believe in a universal soul.
Even according to Patañjali, the highest state which a yogi can
attain is only *citta-vṛtti-nirodha* (cessation of mental modification)
and not union with God.

Vīraśaiva mysticism is based on the metaphysical doctrine
that there is one indivisible (*akhaṇḍa*) reality underlying all
phenomenal things and that this reality is undifferentiated
consciousness (*arivu*) permeating all things including the human
beings.

One may know from books that all human beings are united
with God (Paraśiva) in all states but such a union is realized
actually in the mystic state. But what is more important for the
mystic is the perception of himself as a part of the whole. There is
no known piece of knowledge with which it can be aptly compared
and therefore, it cannot even be imagined. In short, it is beyond
understanding and language (*vāṁmanakkagocara*)

That God is the content of the Vīraśaiva mystics’ perception is
no doubt. Because as Basavaṇṇa says:

Embracing form and formlessness,
Thou art the form, O God; Thou art
Also the formlessness.
Thou are the universal eye, O God; Thou art
The universal face, Thou art
The arms of the universe, O Lord ...  

Whichever way I look,  
Thou only art O Lord!  
The form of all, the circumbient space  
Thou only art, O Lord!  
Thou art the universal eye,  
O Lord, and Thou the universal face!  
Thou are the arms of all, O Lord,  
And Thou the feet, ...  

He perceives phenomenal things, but he perceives Paraśiva behind them. Rather, the different things like mountains, rivers, etc are perceived by him as the eyes, arms, etc of Paraśiva.  

Allama Prabhu's account of the mystic experience is more accurate. He says  

By entering into your vast expanse,  
I saw you in mountains and caves  
In valleys and plains but without touching them,  
You are not amenable to mind and are beyond sense.  

We may add here a saying of another Viraśaiva saint,  
Svatantra Siddhaliṅgeśvara;  

You are smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest ...  
You are the only God, consciousness-light, the Highest Lord!  

All these saints (and many others who cannot all be quoted here) are declaring that all is God and God is all and that there is
no place where there is no God. To say that the world is God and God is world is also to say that the world is made up of God, the Great Substance. Another mystic says:

Like the many pots made out of one clay,
Like the many ornaments made out one gold, ...
The world made out of you is not different from you ...⁶⁴

What these vacanas mean may be summarized as follows:

Though there are infinite varieties of living and non-living beings, they are all made of one substance, just as ornaments of various shapes and sizes are made of just one substance, gold. Rather, they are the different forms which Paraśiva himself chooses to appear in. In short, all things, Paraśiva and the mystic are one.

Here, a problem naturally crops up: in saying that God is the world, or God’s head is here, his arms are there, and so on, what does Basavaṇṇa, Allama Prabhu and Svatantra Siddhaliṅgeśvara mean? When for example, Allama Prabhu looks at a mountain and declares that it is God’s great toe or looks at a great cave in it and regards it as his earhole, what is it that he perceives? Is he not perceiving the mountain as mountain and cave as cave? But, if he does perceive so, how does he also perceive God or some part of God there, simultaneously or in the same place? In other words, is regarding a mountain as great toe of Paraśiva the same as really perceiving? Or, is it only a comparison?
Now for Allama Prabhu, or for any mystic, who is in such a position it is not an act of comparison, but an act of direct perception. This is like Eckhart's statement: "Here all blades of grass, wood, and stone, all things are One"\(^65\), where 'One' means, not merely unity of things perceived but One consciousness or God. Analyzing this statement of Eckhart, Stace says:

In saying that the grass, wood and stone are perceived as one, he (Eckhart) does not mean that he does not perceive the differences between them. He certainly perceives that this thing on the left is wood and this thing on the right is stone, and that stone is a different thing from wood. For he could not make a statement of the form 'the wood is stone' unless he was conscious that the object before him was in fact wood as distinct from stone. Unless he perceived that wood is wood and stone is stone, he could not assert that wood is stone. Thus he means that they are both distinct and identical\(^66\).

Stace concludes his passage with Rudolf Otto's words:

Black does not cease to be black, not white white. But black is white and white is black. The opposites concede without ceasing to be what they are in themselves\(^67\).

Now, we can, with Stace and Otto, arrive at a similar conclusion: It is true that Allama Prabhu and others see mountain as mountain and sky as sky, just as we do. But they see and we cannot, the mountains, sky, etc as the different parts of Parasiva's
body. In other words, they perceive one consciousness in them. It is this presence – the universal presence of Paraśiva or God in all things – which holds together the multiplicity of things. This is compared to the relationship of a thread which, by passing through the beads, holds them together in a unity:

You are like the thread that passes through the beads
O, Three-eyed Lord!
If you count, bodies are many, but the soul (in them) is one.
You are the centre of every atom and molecule...⁶⁸

For the Viraśaiva mystic, as for the mystics of other religions the perception of himself as a part of the whole, a perception in which he is neither a subject nor a part of the external object is not easily described. In fact it is more important than mere perception of the whole world as a synthetic conglomeration of the different phenomena which are all made of one substance, God. Because, in knowing a universal divine substance underlying the phenomena one may not be a part of what is known, where as in knowing Paraśiva one has become Paraśiva or apart of Paraśiva. The importance of this lies in the fact that it is the goal of Viraśaiva spiritual life. The so called spiritual life is futile, if it does not lead to the knowledge of Paraśiva resulting from mystic union. Basavaṇṇa asks

What is the use of worshipping Liṅga
Unless you experience a mutual love,
Mutual effort and mutual joy?
What is the use of worshipping Liṅga
Unless it leads to your union
With Kūḍāla Saṅgama Deva
Like a river in a river?²⁶⁹

He who can give form to Void
Is a śaraṇa;
He who can turn that form to Void
Is Liṅga-experient.
If he cannot can give form to Void,
How is a śaraṇa?
If he cannot turn form to Void,
How is a Liṅga-experient? ...⁷⁰

We cannot know or experience Paraśiva as we know or experience a sense object. Because our mind is not able to know the infinite object, God. In this connection it is well to heed what Allama Prabhu says:

What is it that searches for what cannot be found?
What is it that knows (it) ?
Hark, the result of the union!
That is Guheśvara, you see!⁷¹

Comparison having failed to compare has
Declared it (Paraśiva) incomparable;
Knowledge having failed to know
That which is behind knowledge
Is stuttering 'transcendent and immanent'!
Meditation having failed to meditate has
Declared (it) as beyond the form of meditation;
And what kind of knowledge does one expect
From the triune of knower-knowledge-known?\textsuperscript{72}

Has the bee imbibed the nectar (of the flower)?
Or has it been imbibed by the nectar?
Has the Liṅga become the individual soul
Or, the individual soul Liṅga?
O, Guheśvara, Only you know the difference between
the two!\textsuperscript{73}

All the individual souls that touch Liṅga
Become themselves Liṅga...
Just as all the rivers which touch
The ocean themselves become the ocean...\textsuperscript{74}

What these vacanas together mean is this: (1) If one seeks to
know the universal consciousness, it cannot be known, nor can it
known by comparison or meditation, because it is neither the
object of sense perception nor an object of imagination, nor even an
object of contemplation. (2) If it can be known at all, it can be
known only by merging in it. Because by merging in it one comes in
direct contact with it. (3) But even then it cannot be known as an
object, because it is a union in which the loses sight of itself and of
Paraśiva or the union of itself and Paraśiva. It transcends the
distinction between the subject and object. (4) One who merges in
the universal consciousness himself becomes the universal
consciousness. (5) The union suggests that it is not unilateral but
bilateral, i.e., that not only the soul has merged in Paraśiva, but also it is penetrated by Paraśiva.

From this it clearly follows that the aim of the Vīraśaiva mystics is not the discovery of God, the highest Reality, or an essence of the world, such as water, air, for which the ancient Greek philosophers were searching, but an experience of one consciousness which permeates the diversity and which by being in diversity creates unity in it, much as a thread which, by passing through various kinds of beads, makes a garland out of them.

The unity or non-duality of the soul and Paraśiva achieved by the mystic is not something new, but something regained. In other words, the relation between the an̄ga and Liṅga is eternal and timeless. This is illustrated by Tōṇṭadā Siddhaliṅga Śivayogi, a great mystic of the 16th century as follows:

Just as various golden ornaments
When melted yield the original gold,

Just as the hailstone, a product of water,
When melted becomes again water,

so also, the individual soul, born of Liṅga, becomes again Liṅga on its mystic union75.

This concept of eternal unity is after all logically compatible with the Vīraśaiva doctrine of creation, according to which the individual soul in its pre-creation state was pure and free and was inextricably one with Paraśiva. When embodied, it, owing to the
influence of the creative forces (kala-śaktis) comes under the illusion that it is separate, independent, ignorant and limited. When knowledge dawns on it, it realizes its timeless oneness with Paraśiva. As long as man is under the influence of this beginningless illusion and other limitations, he continues to distinguish himself as a subject or an agent and all else, including his goal, Paraśiva, as an external object. In other words, he believes in an ontological dualism and practises ego-centric ethics. But once the ego is naughted, as it happens in the mystic experience (called liṅgāṅga-sāmarasya, a Vīraśaiva technical term), the experience stands beyond the boundary of the subject-object relation. It is a unique relation in which even the experient himself is not aware of himself so long as he is under its spell. This is very effectively brought out by a vacana of Vīraśaiva woman-saint, Akka Mahādevi:

I cannot say that this is Liṅga, or that I merge in Liṅga; Nor can I say that this is union or that I am one with Liṅga; I cannot differentiate myself from you ... (O, Lord,) Having united with you I cannot say anything ...

[This unity-experience in which the limited individual soul finds itself merged in, and identified with, Paraśiva, is an extraordinary experience. While in the ordinary experience “I” (the subject) presupposes something that is not “I” (object), and vice versa, in the sāmarasya state there is no room for such a distinction, because in that unique state the soul is liberated and
the liberated soul and Parasiva are epistemologically and ontologically ‘dead’ to each other].

It is necessary at this juncture to remove some possible doubts regarding the union described by the mystics.

(a) It is not quite meaningless to interpret the term “sāmarasya” literally to mean harmony, which points to the existence of two or more things between which harmony is believed to exist. But neither the term “śiva-sāyujya” nor the term “sāmarasya” should be translated as harmony obtaining between the soul and God in all respects including purity. Only in a limited sense there is a sāmarasya between the soul and God.

This implies that unless the individual soul and God were substantially the same there would not be sāmarasya between them. A stone, for example, which is substantially different from water cannot have sāmarasya with water, even if it is immersed in it for a long time. Similarly, we are not one with Parasiva in spite of the fact that we are in him from time immemorial, because we are, unlike him, impure, ignorant, etc though temporarily. Once these impurities and ignorance are cast off, i.e., once it regains its original purity, it merges with and becomes, Parasiva. This is precisely why Liṅgāṇga-sāmarasya is compared to the union of river in sea, or space in space, oil in oil, rather than to the union of stone with water.
To the theists the Vīraśaiva non-dualistic idea of the individual soul becoming Paraśiva seems somewhat irrational, besides being improbable. How can a finite soul, however pure or perfect, become the infinite soul, Paraśiva? Their objection is against the possible wrong implication that it is logically possible for innumerable souls to have mystic experience (sāmarasya) and become infinite souls, Paraśivas. How can there be many infinite souls?

What, however, the vacanas which speak of union in which the soul fails to distinguish itself from Paraśiva mean is, not that an individual soul is transformed into Paraśiva (such that there could be conceivably many Paraśivas), but that it loses its individuality and finiteness, just as a river which merges in an ocean is not transformed into the ocean, but only loses its individuality. After the merging the waters of the river are decomposed, or have become one with the ocean, and as such, can no longer be localized or identified. Similarly, the aṅga (the liberated soul, or the soul which has had mystic experience), having united with Liṅga (Paraśiva) can no longer be identifiable. It does not become another Paraśiva, but just ceases to an impure individual.

Nor is it right on our part to suppose that aṅga is an addition to Liṅga, in the sense in which the waters of a river are an addition to the ocean in which they merge. While the concept of addition or
subtraction is rightly applicable to sense objects, its application to the spiritual substances would result in category-mistake. Even when the emergence of the individual souls from Paraśiva is compared to that of sparks from a great fire, the same mistake results. The analogy of merging of a river in an ocean, like any other analogy, is limited, and should be taken to mean that the individual soul in its mystic state crosses the boundary of individuality and begins to feel that has become infinite. The thought that the merging of the soul in Paraśiva should result in the increase in the quantity of the universal consciousness is absurd for another reason also. Since all that exists is already included in Paraśiva the addition (if any) of āṅga cannot result in the increase in Paraśiva. If the soul joined Paraśiva from outside, then there should have been an increase in him. This can be made clear by an analogy. Suppose a pot full of water-A merges in water-B; suppose at some point we break the pot. Now the water-A does not increase the quantity of water-B. The union of individual soul and Paraśiva is almost like the union of water-A and water-B.

(c) The term 'union' also seems to be a source of some confusion. The concept of union normally presupposes at least separate things which travel in space and time before they unite. Though sometimes it is said that Liṅga enters into āṅga and vice versa, the union of the two does not involve the prior passage of one (or the other or both) in space and time, for otherwise it would
inevitably mean that Paraśiva exists in, and, therefore, is limited by, space and time. Moreover, even if we suppose that aṅga moves in space before it unites with Liṅga, it would imply that it moves in a space where there is no Liṅga (Paraśiva). But that would be absurd. The term 'union of aṅga and Liṅga' is only a symbolic expression meaning that the aṅga (pure soul) realizes (now) its timeless union. Earlier the aspirant thought that he was separate from Liṅga, but now he has realized that his idea of separation was always wrong. The idea of becoming Liṅga similarly means not that the finite soul has become infinite soul, but that it has lost its limiting adjuncts. Thus the idea of union associated with spatio-temporal conditions is as illusory as the idea of spatio-temporal separation, as Allama Prabhu would say. If the union is construed in spatio-temporal terms, we would again commit another category mistake.

In the Upaniṣads and in the Advaita system of Śaṅkara it is clearly shown that the quest for Brahman-realization consists in the aspirant's identification with the highest reality, Brahman, which is of the nature of pure consciousness. In other words, it is the identification of the knower (the soul) and the known (Brahman). Though such a state of pure consciousness is called jñāna or prajñāna, it is not at all like knowledge with which we are familiar (for example, knowledge of tables, chairs, etc), because the mystic does not get it as a subject does and it is not knowledge of
an external object. It is a peculiar kind of knowledge in that the soul does not know Brahman as a subject knows an external object, but by becoming Brahman. The Upaniṣads employ many suitable analogies to make this point clear; and one of them is that of the merging of a lump of salt drowned in water. Just as the lump of salt drowned in a sea (which also has salt in it) dissolves itself completely and becomes one with the salt of the sea, so also when the soul which is consciousness, in its mystic state, merges in Brahman (which is also infinite consciousness) and becomes one with it. It is a state pure consciousness in which all duality (of subject and object) is lost.

An exactly similar position is held by the Vīraśaiva mystics. In one of his vacanas Sakaḷeśa Mādarasa says

The wick that touches light
Itself becomes light;
The rivers that touch the ocean
Themselves become the ocean ...
The souls that touch Liṅga
Become themselves parts of Liṅga ...

The very important aspect of Vīraśaiva mysticism is that the mystic not only loses his ego but also loses sight of God. This needs a little clarification. (Please see the next section entitled Loss of Ego).
4. Loss of Ego

Another universal feature of mystic experience is the loss of ego. In fact, mystic experience is incomplete without this feature. It is the third and final stage of the mystic experience which results from the union of the self with God. The mystic, as a result of this unique union with Paraśiva loses its self-consciousness, as also the consciousness of Paraśiva. For such a soul in such a state, there is neither itself nor Paraśiva. It is a subject-objectless state in which the mystic is not aware of anything whatsoever: he is aware neither that he is different from Paraśiva; nor that he and Paraśiva are united. Nor is he aware that he is not aware of anything. It is a no-awareness rather than awareness of nothing. Experience of nothing is not itself an experience.

Now, one who reads such vacanas as describe the mystic union as no-awareness may be tempted to conclude that that is the highest aim of the Vīraśaiva spiritual life, and that, since mystic experience is the most trustworthy means of knowledge for the Vīraśaivas, there is absolutely nothing. Such a temptation may be strengthened by Prabhudeva's vacanas, such as, for example, the one below:

There is neither reality, nor unreality,
Neither natural, nor unnatural,
Neither I nor Thou
Even the nothing itself is not,
Guhesvara is nothing but void.
If this conclusion is true then it points to two glaring self-contradictions: (1) Though it is philosophically, on, for example, Humean ground possible to assert the non-existence of God, world and the substantial self, it is logically impossible to assert the non-existence of everything, for if the assertion is true, then the asserter and his assertion must also be non-existent. Obviously neither of them is actually non-existent. (2) Prabhudeva's assertion that nothing exists runs contrary to his own earlier assertions that Paraśiva exists and that Paraśiva transforms himself into the phenomenal world, like a seed into a tree\textsuperscript{81}. Even a cursory look at his vacanas makes it difficult for us to attribute ignorance of these two self-contradictions to him. If these vacanas are what they appear to be, we ought to attribute it to him. Or, we have to search for a new and deeper meaning in these and similar vacanas.

A proper understanding of the mystic vacanas rests on a clear distinction between the two important characteristics of mystic experience, namely, loss of self-awareness and the resultant no-awareness during the mystic experience, on the one hand, and the loss of I-sense after the mystic experience. That these are distinguishable is clear to the Vīraśaiva mystics in general, and Prabhudeva in particular.

It is as rational for the mystic who has mystic intuition as for the ordinary man who has dreamless sleep not to say anything about his state during that state. Yet the former like the latter can
make statements about his contentless experience only after he returns to waking state. But his statements will be necessarily in past tense, and to a considerable extent, biased by the metaphysical school in which he is disciplined. However, when the mystic returns to waking state he notices a tremendous transformation in himself: he has lost his ego-centered individuality.

The experience has left an indelible impression on him, as a result of which he begins to firmly believe that he has wholly and irremediably lost his earlier individuality. What is meant by this is that he ceases to think of himself as an independent individual, because he notices that all his thoughts and wishes, talks and deeds are wholly controlled and directed by Paraśiva. The sense of I has been replaced by the sense of Paraśiva, and it is this double aspect of loss and replacement that enables the mystic to assert that he does not exist, and that only Paraśiva exists, and he is that Paraśiva.

Both of these statements lead to certain difficulties. One may object that it is self-contradictory to assert that I, the individual or the distinct myself, do not exist. But what the mystic assertion means is that I still exist as an individual thinker, doer and enjoyer, but what I would have normally called my activities, are in a certain sense not mine, for they are not my conscious, deliberate and purposeful activities. Being naughted, how can my self
originate them? They are really directed and controlled by Paraśiva, who has completely occupied my personality, driving out my earlier self.

Further, it is important to note that Paraśiva who is believed to guide and control the mystic is not outside the mystic, but inside him. At best the two assertions that I do not exist and that I am Paraśiva may be treated as unconscious misuse of words, but definitely not as self-contradictory. Nor do they mean that the mystic, like an inanimate object, is no more a self-conscious being, for otherwise he would not have uttered 'there is neither I, nor Thou'. It is logically impossible for one to speak of loss of one's own selfhood unless one is also in some sense aware of himself as distinct from others and as one who has lost his selfhood. Thus even when the mystic says that Paraśiva thinks on his behalf (although empirically speaking the mystic himself is thinking) he does not believe that he is Paraśiva who creates, etc. In the entire vacana literature no one gets a reference to the thesis that the mystic identifies himself to Paraśiva, the creator. If he could, he could as well identify himself with you or me. However, when he calls himself Paraśiva, he is neither using a metaphorical epithet to describe himself. The position of the Vīraśaiva mystic is clearly expressed in the following vacana of Prabhudeva:

All actions of one who, having integrated in Liṅga and
Having transcended the difference between his own self
And non-self are verily actions of Liṅga itself! The mystic experience of one who has lost his mind (self) is beyond knowledge and words. For a Śivayogi who has integrated himself in himself There is no difference!82

The application of the analogy of the confluence of two rivers also makes this point clear. Just as a small river before the confluence with a big river is distinct from it, so also the individual soul because of ignorance (i.e. before mystic union) regards Paraśiva as the other. Just as after the confluence the small river loses its identity and only big river remains, so also after the mystic union, the individual soul loses its individuality and only Paraśiva remains thereafter; lastly, just as the waters of the small river are somehow there in the big one, though inseparably, so also the individual soul regards itself as existing in Paraśiva, though inseparably. In other words, he has realized that he is a part (aṅga) of Paraśiva who is the whole, and that he, as a part, has no existence apart from the whole. There is in fact even a more important feature to the Vīraśaiva mystic, which is not suggested in the analogy, the feature that the individual attributes what could otherwise be called his egocentric psycho-physical activities, not to himself, but to Paraśiva, because he is fully occupied, controlled and guided by Paraśiva, not from outside but from inside.

The position of the Vīraśaiva mystic can be compared to a man who is possessed by a spirit. Just as all the thoughts, words,
and enjoyment of the spirit possessed man are not his, but the spirit's, so also, all psycho-physical activities of the mystic are Paraśiva's. The only difference, however, is that the former is unaware of his being possessed while the latter is aware of his being possessed by Paraśiva.

The Vīraśaiva mystic's claim that he has a completely transformed individuality and has realized himself as Paraśiva can easily be confused with the similar claim of Cidadvaitins like Śaṅkara. In fact, Śaṅkara himself employs the same analogies to describe the Cidadvaitin's mystic state. But while Śaṅkara does, the Vīraśaivas do not, assert the illusoriness of selfhood. Prabhudeva and many other Vīraśaiva mystics categorically say that the self is, but it has lost both its selfishness and selfhood, thus dismissing the illusionist theory of individuality. When Prabhudeva says "one who knows himself really forgets himself\(^ {84}\) he does not mean that individuality is a myth, as Śaṅkara would readily regard it, but that "the individual is, but individuality is not"\(^ {85}\). It is possible, of course, to argue, like Śaṅkara, that the individual self integrates itself in Paraśiva because of its essential identity with Paraśiva. But, even if the Vīraśaivas recognize the essential identity of Brahman and Ātman, for them individuality is not illusory, because for them an individual is not merely an individual self, but its psycho-physical complex as well. In other words, Śaṅkara regards the psycho-physical complex as illusory,
on the ground of his definition of Brahman as nothing but sat, cit and ānanda; whereas the Viśvaśaivas consider selves, the psycho­
physical complex, and material objects as inseparable qualities of Paraśiva. The qualities have as much reality as the substance.
According to them, if self means some one who has metaphysical
bifurcation from Paraśiva, such as the one misunderstood by the
self itself before mystic union, such a self does not exist. But if self
means an individual who, after and because of mystic experience
loses his selfhood (and along with it its selfishness, ignorance, etc.),
and consequently becomes a seat or vehicle of Paraśiva, such a self
exists, even after the mystic union. The individual soul looks into
himself, sees not himself there, but sees instead Paraśiva. What
this means is in conformity with the Viśvaśaiva ideal - he has
sacrificed his self and everything including freedom to think, etc. to
Paraśiva. He is a Śaraṇa (one who has submitted himself).
However, certain vacanas reveal clearly that the mystic does indeed
think that he and Paraśiva have one body, one mind, etc. In fact,
taken in a broader sense the word aṅga means not only soul, but
body - body of Paraśiva. When, for example, Cennabasavaṇṇa says

In my body is Thy body, and in Thine mine;
In my self is Thy self, and in Thine mine;...
In my senses are Thy senses and in Thine mine;
In my sense objects are Thine ones, and in Thine mine;...
Thus I am visible, Thou art invisible;...
I am camphor, Thou a lamp...
he clearly means that the mystic can point to his body, sense, etc. and if he can do so he is in some sense aware of himself as a knower and as distinct from the known body, sense, etc. He also knows that he is fully occupied by Paraśiva, as a pot by water. Or, though his selfhood is naughted like camphor by fire his self as a knower remains intact.

The mystic also makes distinction between himself as visible and Paraśiva as invisible. The import is that they are alike, with visibility and invisibility alone making the difference. But their likeness is not sameness. On this ground, then, we can make another distinction between Śaṅkara and Viṣaṣaivism: For Śaṅkara the distinction between the individual soul and Paraśiva (Brahman) holds at the empirical level, thus rejecting individuality as illusory in the final analysis; whereas for the Viṣaṣaivas the distinction between the two holds both for the ordinary man and for the mystic as well.

Since the Śivayogi (the Viṣaṣaiva mystic) firmly believes that he is Paraśiva (i.e. he is controlled and guided completely by Paraśiva) he is not engaged in what are conventionally considered as religious activities, such as, worship, offer, meditation, etc. That is why Cennabasavaṇṇa says

Others contemplate on you, but I cannot,
Because you have become my contemplating mind...
Others may offer (things to)you, but I cannot,
Because I have (already) offered you all my parts;
Thus, God has ensouled the devotee's body, and
The devotee has ensouled God's body...87

More effective is Prabhudeva's argument: 'If the seeker seeks
for the Impartite Absolute, he cannot find it, because the seeker
himself is that Thing!'88. Because to seek anything is to seek it as
other than oneself. In theistic religions like Christianity, Islam,
seeking God is meaningful, since the seeker in these religions
believes that at best he can go near God and attain to some extent
some qualities of God, such as, pure consciousness and bliss, but
cannot become God. But the seeking in Vīraśaivism is not seeking
a theist God, but seeking to become one with (or uniting in) the
Absolute. One who feels that his individuality has suffered
destruction and has become a seat of Paraśiva does not regard
himself as ontologically independent of Paraśiva. That is, for the
mystic there is logical or epistemological duality, and ontological
unity. Because of ontological unity, a seeker cannot seek Paraśiva
who exists in him and in whom he already exists like a quality in a
substance.

This is not peculiar to Vīraśaiva mysticism only. An exactly
similar account in Muslim mysticism also is available. Abū Yazīd,
in his quest for God reaches his throne, finds it empty, and,
therefore, takes possession of it himself. Then he says:

'I plunged into the oceans of malakūt (the realm of pure
ideas) and the veils of deity (lāhūt) until I reached the
throne, and lo, it was empty; so I cast myself upon it and said, "Master, Where shall I seek thee?" And the veils were lifted up, and I saw that I am I, yea, I am I. I turned back into what I sought, and it was I, no other, into which I was going. The phrase 'I am I' is combined with 'I am He' in another saying: 'I am not I, I am I, for I indeed am He, I am He, I am He, He.89

So, since the mystic statement that I do not exist and in my place God exists, is not self-contradictory, but pregnant with deeper meaning. It also means that the Viraśaiva mystic does not lose his individual soul, for he says, his soul is still there, though occupied by Paraśiva.

5. Mystic Experience Is Spaceless And Timeless:

It is a well known fact that our sense experience is governed by the conditions of space and time. To say that I see an object is to say that, that object is in some space. It also implies that I saw the object for some time [or that the object was in some time]. I can imagine a space without an object. In fact, the notion of empty space is not an all together imagination but based on fact. However, I cannot imagine any object which is not located in any space. One may object that we can think of objects and such a thought is only in time but not in space. But such an objection ignores the fact that thought of an object ultimately refers to an object in some space. Similarly, there is no event, which does not take place in some time or the other. I can imagine an empty
time, a time in which no event took place or nothing existed, but I cannot imagine any event or an object which has no reference to time.

Mystic experience, in contrast to sense experience is beyond space and time. What this means is not that mystic experience does not take place in any time but that the content of the mystic experience is not governed by space and time. Karl Joel reporting his mystic experience says:

Distance and nearness become blurred into one; without and within glide into each other; ... the world exhales in the soul and the soul dissolves in the world.

The mystic literature of the Upaniṣads is both clearer and more emphatic in positing the doctrine that Brahman or consciousness is spaceless. For e.g. Īśa Upaniṣad referring to Brahman Says:

It moves and It moves not; It is both far and near; It is within all this and It is outside all this.

Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad similarly declares that:

This is my Self within the heart, tinier than a rice-grain, tinier than a barley corn, or a mustard-seed, or a grain of millet, or the kernel of a grain of millet. This is my Self within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the atmosphere, greater than the sky, greater these words.
Interestingly enough, the *Katha Upanisad* gives two contradictory accounts of Brahman, namely,

a) His form is not visible: no one whatever sees Him with the eye.93

b) Though the self is concealed in all beings and is not obvious, It can be seen by subtle seers, through their subtle discernment.94

The reason why the mystics of the *Upaniṣads* describe Brahman in this paradoxical way is obvious. Brahman is consciousness (*Cit* or *Jñāna*) and consciousness cannot have observable form comparable to the form of empirical objects like, ‘big’ or ‘small’, ‘circular’ or ‘rectangular’, etc. Even if Brahman were an empirical object, he could not be perceived as Brahman. Because Brahman being infinite cannot be perceived as infinite. To perceive the infinite Brahman we must transcend Brahman or perceive him from a distance as we perceive an object. But we cannot transcend Brahman, nor can we go away from Brahman because there is no place where there is no Brahman. Though God cannot be perceived (because he is not an empirical object) he can be perceived by the mystics in their mystic intuition. When the *Upaniṣadic* seers declare that Brahman is neither here nor there what they mean is not that Brahman is nowhere but that Brahman is everywhere. Strictly speaking, even the expression ‘Brahman is everywhere’ is not proper. The proper expression is
'Brahman is spaceless'. To be everywhere for the consciousness it has to be conditioned by space. But this is not what the Upaniṣadic thinkers mean. What they mean is that he is beyond all space or, in other words, spatial predicates cannot apply to Brahman. If a thing is here as well as there, far as well as near, in as well as out, there is no meaning in saying that he is here as well as there, etc. If everything in the world were green there is no point in saying this object and that object are both green. The expression would be meaningful only if some objects were green and some were not green. Similarly, if the infinite consciousness is everywhere there is no point in saying that it is near as well as far; it is here as well there, etc. This expression would be meaningful, if one part of consciousness is here and another there; one part of consciousness near another far. But since, as is already said, consciousness is partless and indivisible, such expressions become meaningless.

The vacanakāras describe Paraśiva both as Arīvu (consciousness) and bayalu (empty space). Sometimes they use the words 'cidākāśa' or 'cidbayalu' (consciousness-space). This expression means that the content of mystic experience is consciousness which is infinite like space. The word 'cidākāśa' (bayalu) also implies that consciousness like space, is partless. The experience of partless consciousness is expressed by the Viṣṇu mystics in clear terms. For example, Allama Prabhu says:
The consciousness is neither inside me nor outside me, 
Nor is it in any other direction. 
I do not know what happened and how it happened. 
Argument: 
Śūnya is inside, śūnya is outside, 
Śūnya is everywhere. 
Everything is sunya and Absolute non-dual and the highest state. 
Therefore, it is neither here, nor there, nor anywhere. 
Guheśvara is simply void.

It can be noted that Prabhudeva speaks of Śūnya (contentless and partless consciousness) in contradictory terms; that is, he says in the same breath that Śūnya is everywhere and Śūnya is nowhere. But this is only an apparent contradiction and not real one. What this means is that, if a thing is everywhere, our description of it as being here or there, or not being here or not being there, is futile, because if it is described as being here, it implies that it is not there; and if it is described as not being here, it implies that it is somewhere else. Therefore, since it is in every particular space it is not in any particular space.

This void or pure consciousness cannot be perceived by the mystic, as an object is empirically perceived by us. Because the duality of subject and object which is an essential factor of sense experience is not found in the mystic experience. So Allama Prabhu says:
If I think consciousness is hidden inside me
I cannot worship it mentally;
If I think consciousness is hidden outside me,
It is not bound by action (like worship) ...
So how can I perceive the Śūnya
Which is neither inside nor outside (me) ...

From this it becomes clear that the mystic actually perceives something in his mystic intuition, and that since it is a partless and contentless consciousness, it escapes his spatial predication. Spatial predicates like 'here' and 'there', 'far' and 'near', etc are basically relative, that is, they have meaning only in relation to the user of those words and in relation to the other relatum. Thus when I say 'something is far' what I mean is that something is far from me. Similarly, if I say that 'X is in me' it implies that it is not outside me. So nobody can say 'Paraśiva is in me', because that would mean either that Paraśiva is in me like a book in a bag or that Paraśiva is not elsewhere. Similarly, nobody can say that 'Paraśiva is outside me' for that would imply that Paraśiva is not in me. Even if one utters that Paraśiva is everywhere, that should not mean 'Paraśiva is everywhere except the speaker.' Because if it means so, it implies that is very vast, but not vast enough to be called infinite. The mystic perceives his own consciousness as infinite and does not distinguish it from anything else. There is no 'other' (i.e., the object) for the mystic, and where there is no other, there is no division, no relation. So either he has to say that
consciousness is beyond spatial predication or he has to say, as Allama Prabhu does:

(Paraśiva) is neither on the earth nor in the sky,
Nor anywhere in the fourteen worlds.
Nor outside them -
I am not aware of what is happening. . .97

The world or man in which consciousness is said to be hidden may be with form and with parts, but Paraśiva who is uniformly present in everything is formless or partless. (To describe something as divisible is to describe it as having boundary or being in space. Therefore, if anything is partless, it is spaceless, too.)

The mystics all over the world are unanimous in regarding consciousness which is the content of their mystic experience as timeless. It is generally held that the mystic who realizes himself as a seat or vehicle of God becomes immortal. The concept of immortality is described by the mystic in various words. Theists like Christians and Muslims describe immortality as man's unending fellowship with God in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is a prize which the aspirant is rewarded for the long and strenuous spiritual discipline he has undergone in his mortal life. According to both Islam and Christianity man has only one earthly life and the life hereafter is either in Heaven (Kingdom of God) or in Hell, depending upon the kind of actions, he has performed in his earthly life. Both heavenly and hellish life are eternal, that is,
have a beginning but no end. However, the mystics who are regarded by the traditionalist as renegades think that immortality means being one with God.

For the Vīraśaiva mystics the word immortality carries two meanings (1) A person is unconditionally immortal, if he is said to be reborn innumerable times. He is immortal in the sense that his body dies and his soul transmigrates to another womb where it gets in to a new foetus. A person is immortal in this sense whether he likes it or not. It is an immortality which one gets without any conscious effort directed towards it. (2) Conditional immortality means attainment of a state in which there is no rebirth and therefore, there is no death. In other words conditional immortality is identical to liberation.

The Vīraśaivas advocate the doctrine of immortality taken in both the senses. But they shun unconditional immortality and recommend conditional immortality.

The vacanakāras are of the view that the soul is never created by God. It is ‘Anādi’ (beginningless). While the body is subjected to such changes as childhood, youth, old age, disease and death, the soul in it is untouched by them. As Allama Prabhu says:

I am not the one who is born
Nor the one who changes...
Once I know the reality
Can I take birth again?\(^{98}\)
But the wise man realizes that unconditional immortality is a curse and one must get rid of it as only as possible. Freedom from such a curse is a real freedom, or conditional immortality. In this state the soul unites with Paraśiva and loses his ego.

According to the vacanakāras, the unity between Paraśiva and the soul (aṅga) is eternal and only the realization of it is temporal. The soul in its original state was pure and as such an inextricable part of Paraśiva. But because of its association with body, sense, mind, intellect, etc, and because of ignorance it has become impure. In his impure state the ignorant man thinks wrongly that he is separate from, and independent of, Paraśiva, and that he is essentially a body-mind complex. This ignorance creates in him an impetus to gratify his bodily instincts and sensual desires. In gratifying them he forgets the divine elements in him and acts both in moral and immoral ways. As a consequence of this, he has to experience the unseen fruits of his action, either in this life or in the next. His ignorance provokes him to do similar actions in the next life. And this goes on. But once somehow he realizes that it is not proper way of living, he approaches an able teacher (Guru) for spiritual guidance. By his own self effort and under the guidance of the spiritual teacher, he acquires mastery over mystic experience, as a result of which, he becomes again one with Paraśiva. This means for the Vīraśaivas the relationship with Paraśiva is not new but eternal. The mystic
only realizes this eternal or timeless relationship with Paraśiva. Thus Tōṅtada Siddhaliṅga Śivayogi speaks of the uncreated īśaraṇa (‘at first...uncreated īśaraṇa...”). In another vacana the same saint says:

Out of the Consciousness -Force
Of Paraśiva, who is
Eternal, perfect and
The Existence -Consciousness -Bliss
Called the true Knowledge and
Infinite Brahma,
The highest energy of knowledge was born.
And with that perfect knowledge, which is
The embodiment of Consciousness -Fire,
Radiant with all - pervading splendour of light,
Was the īśaraṇa’s birth, existence, end.
Once you are convinced
By way of the holy Guru, that one is oneself,
Of the nature of the immaculate,
Blissful enlightened Brahma, one is
Eternally free; beginningless,
Perfectly free; the īśaraṇa is
Pure, formless, impartite, immaculate,
O Mahāliṅgaguru Śivasiddhēśvara Lord !100

He says in another vacana

... therefore, Thy īśaraṇas
Were free in time and before time,
And at all times free ...101
What is meant is that the soul’s relationship with Paraśiva is eternal and beginningless and in the *aikya-sthala* (the state of union) the mystic realises it. (note the italic words in the above vacanas. Italics mine.)

Two things must be said in this connection. (1) The soul is eternal and (2) its relationship with Paraśiva is also eternal. Even if we assume that there is no Paraśiva or that the soul has no relationship with Paraśiva, the mystic is right in regarding his spirit as eternal, for it is assumed to be uncreated and eternal. But the Vīraśaiva mystic feels not only eternality of his self but also the eternality of the relationship of his self with Paraśiva.

6. Mystic Experience Is Blissful:

Bliss (*ānanda*) is another essential characteristic of mystic experience. It accompanies mystic experience at one stage or the other. Though Indian mystics regard mystic experience as incomplete if it is not characterized by *ānanda*, it seems that the mystics of all countries and all times regard mystic experience as an invaluable experience for the bliss it offers. The meaningfulness or otherwise of this claim cannot be determined unless we know the exact meaning of ‘*ānanda*’ or bliss. Let us, therefore, distinguish *ānanda* or bliss from ecstasy or rapture. Miss Underhill speaks of ecstasy in these words:

Physically considered ecstasy is a trance; more or less deep, more or less prolonged. The subject may slide
into it gradually from a period of absorption in, or contemplation of, some idea which has filled the field of consciousness; or, it may come on suddenly, the appearance of the idea – or even some word or symbol suggesting the idea – abruptly throwing the subject into an entranced condition. This is the state which some mystical writers call Rapture
t
She also notices that if the ecstatic state is longer it expresses in some physical abnormality. She cites many examples from the lives of both St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa. The latter speaking of the difference between union and trance says that the trance lasts longer and is more visible outwardly, because the breathing gradually diminishes, so that it becomes impossible to speak or to open the eyes. And though this very thing occurs when the soul is in union, there is more violence in a trance; for the natural warmth vanishes, I know not how, when the rapture is deep, and in all these kinds of orison there is more or less of this. When it is deep, as I was saying, the hands become cold and sometimes stiff and straight as pieces of wood; as to the body, if the rapture comes on when it is standing or kneeling, it remains so; and the soul is so full of the joy of that which Our Lord is setting before it, that it seems to forget to animate the body and abandons it. If the rapture lasts, the nerves are made to feel it
Stace also quotes an ecstatic event in the life of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. The latter after the event is over reported it to somebody in these words:
For six months I remained in the state from which ordinary men can never return; generally the body falls away after three weeks... I was not conscious of day or night. Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do a dead body's but I did not feel them104.

From her study of various accounts, Underhill concludes that ecstasy "is an abnormal bodily state, caused by psychic state: and this causal psychic state may be healthy or unhealthy ..."105. Such an ecstasy in the case of weak bodied mystics, is an illness. The more important fact is that it has no spiritual value, and of this the mystics themselves are aware. According to them, true ecstasy is not rapture or trance; or bliss is what the mystic enjoys not in the form of trance but as an afterstate. Malaval having studied St.Teresa's mystical accounts, makes a distinction between two kinds of rapture. Rapture of the firsts kind is still not free from self-awareness and may be produced

either by the force of heated imagination which vividly apprehends a sensible object, or by the artifice of the Devil. These are raptures which St.Teresa calls, in various parts of her works, Raptures of Feminine Weakness. The other sort of Rapture is, on the contrary, the effect of pure intellectual vision in those who have a great and generous love for God. To generous souls who have utterly renounced themselves, God never fails in these raptures to communicate high things106.
From this it follows that ecstasy or rapture may be unhealthy or psychopathic, or healthy or intellectual. Though both may be found in one and the same mystic, on different occasions of his life, only the latter is regarded as true.

Stace and Eckhart think that trance or rapture is neither a universal mark of mystic experience nor it should be regarded as the goal of spiritual life. Stace very categorically asserts that rapture and trance are accidental accompaniments of mystical consciousness, by no means universal or necessary. They occur among the more emotional and hysterical mystics and not among those of the more calm, serene, and intellectual types. They cannot therefore be regarded as belonging to the universal core mystical experiences.\textsuperscript{107}

Eckhart quotes the example of Jesus Christ. Christ, according to him, lived a perfect, exemplary spiritual life without aiming at extravagant emotion.

Satisfaction through feeling might mean that God sends us as comfort, ecstasies and delights. But the friends of God are not spoiled by these gifts. Those are only a matter of emotion, but reasonable satisfaction is a purely spiritual process in which the highest summit of the soul remains unmoved by the ecstasies, is not drowned in a delight, but rather towers majestically above them. Man only finds himself in a state of spiritual satisfaction when these emotional storms of
our psychical nature can no longer shake the summit of the soul.

Bliss, on the contrary, is more intellectual than emotional. The mystic has reached the end of spiritual life and has attained greatest satisfaction. But his satisfaction is not expressed in any form of emotion, like singing and dancing or in any form of trance, the kind of which St. Teresa, St. Catherine and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa expressed. It is a mental state of equilibrium. Underhill says of bliss that is

It is a state of equilibrium, of purely spiritual life; characterized by peaceful joy, by enhanced powers, by intense certitude. To call this state, as some authorities do, by the name of Ecstasy, is inaccurate and confusing: since the term Ecstasy has long been used both by the psychologists and ascetic writers to define that short and rapturous trance – a state with well-marked physical and psychical accompaniments – in which the contemplative, losing all consciousness of the phenomenal world, is caught up to a brief and immediate enjoyment of the Divine Vision.

The spiritual satisfaction spoken of by the mystics may be of different degrees and may result at different stages of the mystic experience. One of the conditions of the spiritual satisfaction is an effective contemplation, in which the subject concentrates his mind on one object, either a real one or an imaginary one, without, however, losing self-awareness. Because the fundamental aim of
mystic education is the attainment of fixing of attention. This "is technically called 'complete mono-ideism', that withdrawal of consciousness from circumference to centre, that deliberate attention to one thing, ... (and) is here pushed - voluntarily or involuntarily to its logical conclusion."¹¹⁰

Ecstasy is an exalted form of contemplation, and might be expected to develop naturally from that state in appropriate subjects. "A simple difference of degree", says Maury, separates ecstasy from the action of forcibly fixing an idea in the mind. Contemplation implies exercise of will, and the power of interrupting the extreme tension of the mind. In ecstasy, which is contemplation carried to its highest pitch, the will, although in the strictest sense able to provoke the state, is nevertheless unable to suspend it¹¹¹.

Speaking of the relation between ecstasy and mono-ideism Underhill goes on to say;

In complete mono-ideism, then, the attention to one thing, and the inattention to all else is so entire that the subject is entranced. Consciousness has been withdrawn from those centres which receive and respond to the messages of the external world: he neither sees, feels, nor hears. The Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat of the contemplative ceases to be a metaphor, and becomes a realistic description. It must be remembered that the whole trend of mystical education has been toward the production of this fixity of attention. Recollection and Quiet lead up to it.
Contemplation cannot take place without it. All the mystics assure us that a unification of consciousness, in which all outward things are forgot, is the necessary prelude of union with the Divine; for consciousness of the Many and consciousness of the One are mutually exclusive states. Ecstasy for the psychologist is such a unification in its extreme form. The absorption of the self in the one idea, the one desire is so profound – and in the case of the great mystics so impassioned – that everything else is blotted out. The tide of life is withdrawn, not only from those higher centres which are the seats of perception and of thought, but also from those lower centres which govern the physical life. The whole vitality of the subject is so concentrated on the transcendental world – or, in a morbid ecstatic, on the idea which dominates his mind – that body and brain alike are depleted of their energy in the interests of this supreme act.

While ecstasy of this type results from voluntary concentration of mind on one thing, there is another type of satisfaction which results from the union of the soul with the universal soul. In a passage quoted by Underhill the Divine Voice tells St. Catherine:

Oftentimes, through the perfect union which the soul has made with Me, she is raised from the earth almost as if the heavy body became light. But this does not mean that the heaviness of the body is taken away, but that the union of the soul with Me is more perfect than the union of the body with the soul; wherefore the strength of the spirit, united with Me, raises the weight of the body from the earth, leaving it as if immovable.
and all pulled to pieces in the affection of the soul. Thou rememberest to have heard it said of some creatures, that were it not for My Goodness, in seeking strength for them, they would not be able to live; and I would tell thee that, in the fact that the souls of some do not leave their bodies, is to be seen a greater miracle than in the fact that some have arisen from the dead, so great is the union which they have with Me. I, therefore, sometimes for a space withdraw from the union, making the soul return to the vessel of her body ... from which she was separated affection of love. From the body she did not depart, because that cannot be except in death; the bodily powers alone departed, becoming united to Me through affection of love. The memory is full of nothing but Me, the intellect, elevated, gazes upon the object of My Truth; the affection, which follows the intellect, loves and becomes united with that which the intellect sees. These powers being united and gathered together and immersed and inflamed in Me, the body loses its feeling, so that the seeing eye sees not, and the hearing ear hears not, and the tongue does not speak; except as the abundance of the heart will sometimes permit it, for the alleviation of the heart and the praise and the glory of My Name. The hand does not touch and the feet walk not, because the members are bound with the sentiment of love. In this experience the departmental activities of thought and feeling, the consciousness of I-hood, of space and time - all that belongs to the World of Becoming and our own place therein - are suspended. The vitality which we are accustomed to split amongst these
various thing, is gathered up to from a state of 'pure apprehension': a vivid intuition of – or, if you like, conjunction with - the Transcendent. For the time of his ecstasy the mystic is, for all practical purposes, as truly living in the supersensual world as the normal human animal is living in the sensual world. He is experiencing the highest and most joyous of those temporary and unstable states – those 'passive unions' – in which his consciousness escapes the limitations of the senses, rises to freedom and is united for an instant with the 'great life of the All'\textsuperscript{14}.

If ecstasy means earthly pleasure, then it is not the aim of Christianity, even if ecstasy is sought after in a religious ceremony. This point is made clear by St. Paul's sermon, which is summarized by Zaehner in his Mysticism, Sacred and Profane:

You Corinthians have come over to Christ because the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth which has taken place in Judaea in our own times seems so striking a confirmation and actualization in history and in time of what your mystery religions have always taught. In your Bacchic orgies you thought that, by devouring the quivering flesh of beasts, you were entering into direct contact with the divine. This you did in a state of frenzy, even madness. You may have thought that this was what I offered you in the sacrificial meal we call the agape. If you did, you were wrong: for whereas your own sacrificial meals may well have prefigured the Christian sacrament, they were essentially different in kind. They
provided you certainly with a temporary release from your egos; and that is why they satisfied you, and will probably satisfy others like you till the end of time. Strong drink, you found, contributed to the attainment of ecstasy, and for that reason you used in your ceremonies. This is not, however, what I preach. I preach to you redemption through Christ. When you come to take part in the sacrificial meal, I would prefer that you came without having taken any stimulants. Christ came to make you whole: he did not come to make you ecstastics. He came to make you sane: he did not come to make you mad. Therefore, it is wrong to approach his table when you are half-drunk, because, if you do so, you are confusing this new mystery with your own more ancient ones. By the Christian mystery you enter into the life of Christ which is the life of God transmitted by grace to this imperfect world. In your ancient mysteries you sought to escape out of yourselves: you wanted ecstasy. The Christian mystery is not primarily designed for this purpose. Its purpose is that Christ should live in you, and you should live in Christ. Our Lord said that each and all of us should make full use of talents that are his; each person must complete and fulfil his natural self. Only then will he be ripe for the life of grace which elevates him above nature onto a supernatural plane. During this process it may be that you will have praeternatural experiences: you may have ecstasies; you may see visions and dream dreams. All this means nothing for the same effects can be produced by the use of wine or drugs. Do not be lead astray into thinking that what happens in the Eucharist is the same as, or even comparable to, what
happens to you in a Bacchic orgy. In the Christian Eucharist you will probably have no sensible impression at all. It is not exciting: you will feel nothing; you will experience nothing. But something is in fact going on in your soul which in the fullness of time will become apparent in your life. Above all do not mistake elation for grace. Elation or exaltation is a state that is common to saints and sinners alike: it can be produced by alcohol or drugs, but do not confuse that with the grace that is infused into you at our agape. For in this agape which we call a 'rational oblation', there is no room for ecstasy. It is a receiving of Christ quietly into the inmost essence of your soul. You must realize that there is total difference between the two.

Any discussion of the Vīraśaiva concept of bliss (ānanda) as an essential feature of mystic experience must take into consideration (a) the Vīraśaiva concept of God as Sat-cit-ānanda and (b) the Vīraśaiva concept of liberation.

The aspirant who wants to become a śivayogi (Vīraśaiva mystic) is taught that he is essentially identical to Paraśiva, who is generally described as Sat-cit-ānanda. It follows, then, that if one becomes Sat-cit-ānanda, then one should, like Paraśiva, enjoy unmitigated ānanda (bliss). However, ānanda, according to Vīraśaivism is a pleasure which is neither derived from the contact of senses and their objects, nor is comparable to any sensual pleasure. It is supra-sensory and supra-intellectual pleasure.
Just as a man of good taste does not like, and keeps away from, things of smaller and baser value, so also the Viraśaiva saint who has set as his goal the union of his soul with Paraśiva shuns all things of lower value. The acquisition of eight powers, such as making one's body very light (laghima) or as big as a mountain (mahimā) or as small as atom (anīmā) etc in which some yogis are interested, are looked down upon by a śivayogi; acquisition of the ability to see the wealth hidden underground, to make one's own body as strong as a diamond, or to convert the iron to gold, clairvoyance and claireaudience, the ability to know the events of past, present and future, to enter another body, to hypnotize, to fly in the sky, etc which are regarded by some yogis as excellent achievements have, like a straw, no value for a śivayogi. Similarly, acquisition by some sages of wish-granting cows and wish-granting precious stones, touch-stones, etc the acquisition by demons of great magical powers to destroy cities at one stroke, etc do not interest a śivayogi as they are all momentary. Even the positions of Brahma (the creator), Viṣṇu (the maintainer) and Rudra (the destroyer) of the universe and of Indra to rule over the region of gods are temporary, though longer than other pleasures. The śivayogi denounces even the attainment of heaven (svarga), on the ground that the heavenly pleasure lasts as long as one's punya (merit) lasts and once it is exhausted, he is bound to return to the mortal world. Siddhārāma making fun of
those who attempt to attain Kailāsa (heaven or the mythical abode of Paraśiva) says

Listen ye brethren, who cry out
Incessantly for kailāsa!
Kailāsā is a ruined mountain on the earth!
The sages dwelling there are idlers all!
The wearer of the Moon (Paraśiva) is a great dolt!
What need for all this show?
Behaving righteously towards the saints
And conning the consubstantial union
Of Liṅga and āṅga,
To vanish into Thy lotus feet,
O, Kapila Siddha Mallikārjuna,
That state is verily kailāsa!119

So, according to the Vīraśaivas, the greatest conceivable happiness comes, not from the acquisition of earthly pleasures available on the earth or heaven, but from something else.

Since the aim of a Vīraśaiva aspirant is, on the one hand, to escape from the cycle of life and death which is full of pain and suffering, and, on the other, to attain the union with Paraśiva (Liṅga) leading to the loss of ego and attainment of an enduring bliss, the success in his attempt must result in a blissful state of freedom. The attainment of freedom is really the attainment of freedom from the threefold karma, the ignorance (marevu) of one’s own real nature and the limitations and defects like greed, lust,
anger, etc which induce man to behave irrationally, immorally and irreligiously.

The soul which has been originally and naturally blissful is somehow bound to the karmas, namely, prārabdha, saṅcita and āgāmi. (1) prārabdha is that karma which, being accumulated over many previous lives, has begun to fructify; (2) saṅcita is that karma which is accumulated over many past lives; (3) āgāmi is that karma which we do in this life and will fructify in this life or next life or lives. As long as the soul is associated with the threefold karma it has to suffer. By implication it means that a soul free from threefold karma regains its ānanda.

Another cause of man’s perennial suffering is his metaphysical ignorance or forgetfulness (marevu). Man was once upon a time a body or part (aṅga) of Liṅga (Paraśiva). He has somehow missed this fellowship and even forgotten that companionship. In addition, he wrongly thinks that he is a separate individual and that he should work for his personal glory and sensual happiness. In fact, this forgetfulness which is the root of all his pains and suffering, because he in order to fulfil his sensual desires has to adopt all kinds of activities, good and bad, right and wrong, as a result of which he has to suffer in his future lives. Once he acquires metaphysical knowledge by means of mystic experience, he attains the eternal companionship with Paraśiva and the resultant bliss.
A close look at man's behaviour shows that he is unhappy not because he has not acquire wealth, health, power, etc, but precisely because he acquires them or wants to acquire them. Any man who frequently has such psychological states as anger, greed, infatuation, lust, arrogance and jealousy, and who is subject to changes like old age, decrepitude, and diseases, cannot be expected to be happy. The mystic education offered by Vīraśaivism is a means to the eradication of the psychical enemies of spiritual life and physical evils. By implication it means that if the mystic education is successfully imparted to the aspirant the latter has to regain his original bliss.

The attainment of freedom (mokṣa or nirvāṇa) conceived by the Vīraśaiva saints is not sudden but gradual and has six stages. The aspirant is called bhakta, mahēśa, prasādi, prāṇaliingi, śaraṇa and aikya, depending on the spiritual grade he has acquired (for details please see Chapter Four). Of these six stages the first two consist of training of acquisition and strengthening of faith. The third stage that of prasādi consist in the imparting knowledge that all is created by Para Śiva and that the aspirant in gratitude, has to offer everything possible to Para Śiva and get it converted to prasāda or holy food, equivalent to thing which God offered as a token of grace. Thus not only food and drink, but sound, taste, touch, etc but also our sensory and motor organs and even the mind, ego, intellect and will should be converted into prasāda. The
fourth, the fifth and the sixth are education in mystic experience and only in the fifth stage called Šarana sthala acquires ānanda as a prelude to the consubstantial union which takes place in the sixth. This means that anybody who experiences mystical union as a result of mystic education, must experience ānanda also. Or, in other words, ānanda is an essential characteristic of Vīraśaiva mysticism.

While ānanda is a necessary characteristic of Vīraśaiva mysticism it is not the final goal of Vīraśaiva mystical life. Spiritual progress is gradual and attains the ānanda (bliss) in the penultimate stage called Šarana-sthala and the union in the sixth and final stage, called aikya-sthala. If the goal is ānanda which means freedom from attachment to body, senses and antahkarana, then it is attained in the fifth stage itself because the aspirant experiences it not only in the form of bodhanness, but also in the form of what he calls consumption of amṛta (nectar). The latter form described as a state of meditation in which the drops of nectar trickle near the region of throat as a result of which the aspirant experiences incomparable pleasure. In such a case, the aspirant need not make further spiritual efforts. But the aspirant, as it is said, has yet to reach the sixth and the last stage, namely, aikya-sthala. This implies that ānanda is not complete happiness and only the last state offers complete happiness. So our problem is,
what is the nature of that ānanda which offers complete satisfaction?

The word ānanda is used by the vacanakāras in two kinds of contexts – to describe the psychological state of the aspirant who is in the fifth stage of spiritual journey and to describe the original nature of Paraśiva as Sat-cit-ānanda.

In the fifth stage, the aspirant has completely surrendered himself to Paraśiva, such that whatever he does or thinks or desires, is for Paraśiva and his mystic experience at this stage results in ānanda which is superior to all pleasures we know, both qualitatively and quantitatively. It is qualitatively superior, because it is not a result of contact between sense and its object; in fact, it is like no pleasure we have enjoyed or hope to enjoy. Moreover, while the pleasures we know are always mixed with some kind of pain or the other, the spiritual pleasure is pure. For example, the pleasure of eating good food is mixed with the painful feeling that it ought to come to an end or the feeling that it is not available tomorrow or the feeling that we cannot exceed the limit or otherwise we have to face the pain of indigestion. It is also superior quantitatively because while the sensual pleasure is of short duration, the mystical bliss is unusually longer.

If we study the last two stages of Vīraśaiva spiritual life we will be in a position to distinguish between the happiness (ānanda) attained in the fifth stage, and that attained in the sixth. It must be
noted that these two stages are closely related to the last two stages of mystic experience.

Many of the vacanakāras describe the union of ānīga (soul) and Liṅga (Paraśiva) in terms of the sexual union of husband and wife, and they place themselves in the position of wives of Paraśiva\textsuperscript{120}. When Allama Prabhu says

\begin{quote}
Look, it is a drop in the night! ...
The union with Guheśvara
Is bliss today and good for tomorrow ...
\end{quote}

and the bliss of the union is indescribable\textsuperscript{122} even as the bliss enjoyed by an infant\textsuperscript{123}, what he means is that though he is united with Paraśiva, he is in a position to identify his psychical state as bliss which is indescribable. It is a union in which the soul has not yet identified itself with Paraśiva. Sometimes the same is expressed in physiological terms. The ānanda of the śarāṇa sthala is the result of certain bodily changes which take place during deep meditation. The nectar-consumption, whatever its meaning, has reference to particular taste and takes place in a particular part of the body. Therefore, the intensity of ānanda lasts as long as the meditation lasts.

In the sixth and final stage, in which also the union continues the individual soul has identified itself (aikya) with Paraśiva, but becomes unaware of all the events that take place in that stage. This means that there is no ānanda in that stage. But
once the mystic returns to the waking state, there is a kind of ānanda which has the following marks.

a. The aspirant of the aikya-sthala is called aikya. He enjoys undisturbed bliss of eternal communion with Paraśiva; the communion is a sort of conversation without the medium of words\textsuperscript{124}. This communion which is unlike sexual union or nectar tasting, is a permanent feature of aikya.

b. The longing for union has wiped out the feeling of his separation from Paraśiva. This results in bliss\textsuperscript{125}.

c. During his quest for perfection he would often be disturbed 'group of the six enemies' ('ariṣaḍvarga') of spiritual life, namely, lust, anger, greed, infatuation, arrogance and hatred. His mind used to be upset and lose its balance and would be unhappy. Now, that he has overcome those enemies, he is neither disturbed by them nor has other worries\textsuperscript{126}.

d. Since he has achieved the highest that man can think of, he has no desire for things of smaller value. He scorns what others normally hanker for, namely, wish-tree, the wish-cow, the philosopher's stone, etc. He does not even want the position of the gods; in fact, he has just forgotten the difference this world (the cycle of births and deaths) and the world hereafter\textsuperscript{127}.

e. Normally all our ills result from desires. But the mystic has attained a position of desirelessness\textsuperscript{128}. The past frustrations have only taught him that it would be better to be unselfish or
desireless. This achievement has produced in him a kind of sense of satisfaction, sense of fulfilment and sense of meaningful life.

f. He, like others, may enjoy good food, etc, but in the presence of evils his mind is not unhappy. He has attained equanimity.

7. Mystic Experience Is Ineffable:

Bliss (ananda or sukha), according to Allama Prabhu, is experienced without a body and is therefore without touch and without end; and it is such experiences that are ineffable or indescribable. They go, it is said, beyond words and understanding. We use the word ineffable or indescribable in two senses. Suppose a man who loves his wife very deeply loses her in a tragic accident. About the grief over the loss of his wife he may say that it is indescribable. What he means is, not that the grief is in principle indescribable or incommunicable, but only that he is in a very high degree of grief. In fact, there are no proper words which can adequately describe his terrible grief. He may, like a novelist, describe his grief very effectively; yet it is possible that the description is not adequate. Or, more importantly, it may not evoke sorrow in some readers who do not like her for various reasons. In the same strain we often exclaim that the ghastliness of the accident is indescribable. But to a great extent, one may claim that we can describe the ghastliness of the accident. However, there is a point here in saying that the ghastliness in indescribable. We can
describe verbally, or show a piece of movie film about the details of
the accident. Yet some people may not be moved by the description
or by the details of the scene of the accident: for them it is not
ghastly. In other words, in spite of the detailed show of the accident
it is not a ghastly accident while for others the details are the
details of a ghastly accident. So in such cases the accident in detail
is described, but the ghastliness is not at all described. For them it
may be a weird or fatal accident, but not a ghastly one. It is like
describing a sunset, which to some people is very beautiful. Such
people exclaim that the scene is indescribably beautiful. But
nobody can actually describe grief, beauty, and such other feelings.
Exactly so is the case of ānanda. Ānanda cannot be described as a
chair or as an accident can be. For example, we can describe the
chair as brown, wooden, small, rickety, etc., and such a description
is communicable. But ānanda cannot be described in such
objective language. It is incommunicable (anirvācyā)\textsuperscript{130}. While the
chair or accident can be mentally pictured, we cannot have a
mental picture of ānanda. The bliss experienced by the mystic
cannot even be imagined on the basis of an analogy. Most of our
states of happiness come from the contact of the senses with their
objects, some from recollection of the past happy events or some by
imagining a happy incident which has not yet taken place. But the
mystic's bliss is nothing like these and therefore cannot be
compared (anupama-sukha, parma-sukha)\textsuperscript{131}. 
One may argue that ānanda is described by the behaviour in which it is expressed. A child's pleasure over getting a toy is expressed in its behaviour like dancing or 'jumping with joy' or shouting in words like 'Hey, I got it! I got it!'. Similarly, other feelings like grief may be expressed in crying or weeping or sobbing or a dejected look or indifference to food, etc. But not all people – at least, not all adults – express the joy as a child does. Moreover, not all behaviours are indices of the feelings. An accomplished actor may weep or sob, but he is not really unhappy. The person who has attained immense emotional maturity by means of long and strenuous spiritual training is the last person to cry or jump with joy as an emotionally immature child does.

Yet the Viraśaiva mystics are clear. They ask: What is the proof for having attained lingāṅga-sāmarasya? The answer they give is: The mystic who has attained this goal has overcome all likes and dislikes, and has developed compassionate attitude to all living beings.

In another sense also, the bliss is indescribable. Ordinarily a pain is localizable with high or low degree of accuracy. For example, when we complain of pain in the chest, the doctor touches the different parts of the chest in order to locate the exact point of pain. But when somebody exclaims that he has bliss, nobody can meaningfully ask the question, Do you have bliss in the left leg or in the right? If it is in the left, is it in the calf or thigh? And so on.
Such questions cannot be asked meaningfully because bliss cannot be located as pain is.

Not only bliss, but in fact no other aspect of the mystic experience can be described. If description means a chance for the listeners to formulate a mental picture of what is described, then, for example, the consciousness which is temporarily dissociated from the sense, mind, intellect and ego, or the union of the atman and Paraśiva cannot be described. We are familiar with thinking, doubting, feeling happy or unhappy, but we are not familiar with consciousness which is not related to activities like doubting, thinking, desiring and other psychical activities. Thus, when the mystic claims to have experienced pure consciousness, consciousness which is not a consciousness of anything, consciousness which is cut off from its relation to sense, mind, ego and objects, the listeners are baffled, for the simple reason that they have never had such an experience. In fact, the first instance of such an experience baffles the mystic himself.

Having seen a bodiless form
On the tip of mind
I was amazed!
In the inmost recess of my soul
I have seen with amaze
Allayya Guheśvara!...¹³²

exclaims Allama Prabhu. Similarly, when a mystic claims that his consciousness became infinite, the listeners who are not familiar
with infinite consciousness or consciousness of the infinite or consciousness of the Void are baffled. Again Allama Prabhu exclaims

If we bring the Great Thing
To mind and try to describe it
In words, it becomes finite, you see!
The happiness results from
No union with such a Thing! ...

In all such cases the experience remains indescribable, but not ununderstandable. They do become understandable because of the analogies employed to describe them.

The union of the individual soul and the universal soul, which is the highest experience that man can have is also said to be indescribable. This is said to be indescribable for the same reason as the above. The peculiarity of the experience of the union is this: The mystic not only experiences the union of the finite soul and the infinite soul, but also experiences himself as a part of infinite soul. It is, in other words, the subject’s experience of himself as a part of what is experienced. If one could say “Look, I am going there!” it would be an almost accurate description of the experience of the union. But nobody except the mystic can say this. It is such a peculiar experience that has no parallel in our ordinary experience and therefore it is rightly said to be indescribable. The only way to know the indescribable nature of the union of the self and Parasiva, or the bliss of the union or the consciousness which
is dissociated temporarily from the body, sense, mind, etc., is to become a mystic.

8. Transformed Life:

One of the distinguishing results of mystic experience is the transformed life of the mystic. There is a tremendous difference between the life of the aspirant and that of the mystic, such that in Christianity the transformed life is aptly called second birth. In Viraśaivism the aspirant who becomes a mystic and as a result begins to live an altogether different life is called punarjāta (literally, 'one who is born again') However, this term must not be mistaken for the one who is reborn as a result of evil deeds committed in the past life or lives.

There are several aspects to the transformed life and we will deal with a few of them.

a). Transformed life and metaphysical beliefs: In the primary stage of his spiritual life the aspirant believed that Paraśiva is in everything, though unmanifestly, but his belief was based, not on any direct evidence, but merely on faith in the authority, viz, the guru. He might have even inferred from certain evidences the omnipresence of Paraśiva. But neither the authority-based belief nor his inference inculcates in him a strong conviction or indubitable knowledge like the one provided by mystic experience. Sometimes during the mystic experience he may feel that Paraśiva is consciousness and is everywhere and such a feeling may be
temporary. But as a result of frequent mystic experiences, he comes to steadfast conviction that Paraśiva, the universal soul, is uniformly present in the universe. His conviction is so hard that he cannot see the world or any part of it except as a manifestation of Paraśiva's śakti. Statements to the effect that the entire universe is Paraśiva's body and Paraśiva has permeated its every particle are not the result of hard reasoning, but the result of mystic experience.

b). Realisation of oneself as aṅga of Paraśiva: Not only does the mystic see Paraśiva everywhere, but also sees himself in Paraśiva. It is this aspect of seeing himself as a part (aṅga) of the whole (Lingga) which makes him claim that he has lost his ego (individuality) and is rather a vehicle of Paraśiva. Sometimes as a result of some physiological or psychological shock one may forget one's name and behave like an automata, or one, suffering from schizophrenia, but one under such circumstances does not feel united with the whole; nor does one lose one's ego.

c). Religious Transformation Or Conversion: As an aspirant he was a dualist and was worshipping God as 'the wholly other'. In fact worshipping is logically impossible without conceiving God as the other. But once the aspirant becomes a mystic who, having lost his individuality, becomes one with the whole, dualism becomes meaningless to him. Cennabasavanaṇṇa says:
Others may contemplate you (O, Lord), but I cannot
contemplate you;
Because the mind that contemplate you, you have become...
Others may worship you, but I cannot worship you;
Because the body that worships you, you have become;
Others may make offering to you; but I cannot make it;
Because all my limbs have already been offered to you.\(^ {134}\)

Allama Prabhu is also of the same opinion. He says:

If somebody tells me 'contemplate, contemplate'
What can I contemplate?
My body has become Kailāsa (the abode of Paraśiva);
My mind has become Liṅga ...\(^ {135}\)

Allama Prabhu also says: “Once the illusion is destroyed and truth
realized, whom else should we know?"\(^ {136}\)

These mystics and many more ask the same question: If the
worshipping body-mind complex has become one with Paraśiva,
how is it possible for them to worship Paraśiva, for the latter is not
the other, the worshipped? They are also of the opinion that there
is no necessity of worshipping or offering. A mystic asks

Why should the one who has lost his individuality
Be obliged to worship the Liṅga?
Why should the one who has known his consciousness
Be obliged to worship the symbol?
Why should the one who has become oneself
Be obliged to meditate?\(^ {137}\)
d) **Freedom from egotism:** It is true that losing ego means losing selfishness and egotism. A mystic, according to Cennabasavanña, "loses his caste, his adamancy, his hatred, his arrogance, etc"\(^{138}\). But this could happen to a non-mystic also. But while it is possible for a non-mystic to acquire these qualities again, the mystic cannot acquire them again, because they are the symptoms of ignorance, selfishness and, to a certain extent, of impurity of the soul, and the mystic has left them far behind. Also, in the context of a mystic, it is a loss of ego and the loss of the ability to take decisions on certain matters. One mystic says:

I do not know how to think, nor how to decide;  
Because I do not have a mind;  
I cannot desire, nor I can use (my motor organs)  
Because my ego is naughted ...\(^{139}\)

\(^{138}\)equilibrium: For one who has attained the mystic state making no distinction between the value of a house and that of a cremation ground, between desirable things and evils becomes a part of his life. Allama Prabhu says, "For one who has realized the Reality there is no distinction between water and earth"\(^{140}\). This means that he does not long for comforts, nor does he detest evils. He can live in water-logged place as happily as he does on earth. In another vacana he says, "If the mystic has attained equilibrium, why should he make preferences of a monastery over a mountain, or company of people over solitariness?"\(^{141}\). What Allama Prabhu
means is that phenomenal things have ceased to attract the mystic’s attention and the mystic is happy as much in what others regard as evils as in what others regard as good things.

This is same as saying that the mystic is a liberated person and as such becomes the vehicle of Paraśiva. Normally, in mythology Paraśiva is pictured as riding a bull, called Naṇdi. The Sanskrit word for bull is ‘paśu’ and paśu means not only bull, but any animal. Perhaps the use of the word ‘paśu’ to describe the individual soul has this principle: that the individual souls just like the animals, are ignorant and as a result are subjected to rebirths because of their karmas done in an ever ignorant state. The word also applies to the liberated soul, which, like the animals, is without self-consciousness. Further the name, ‘Naṇdi’, is a derivative of ‘ānanda’ (bliss), thereby meaning ‘one who is in a blissful state’. Thus the mystic is a naṇdi (blissful) person and is vehicle of Paraśiva, controlled and directed by him.

That the liberated person is a vehicle, according to Vīraśaivism, is proved by the statements of these mystics. For all practical purposes he is like one of us: he eats, drinks, walks and talks. But he thinks that since ‘he’ is ‘dead’ (his ego is dead), and since God has occupied his body, mind, intellect, etc, all these activities are activities of God. In one of his vacanas Basavaṇṇa says:
When the mystic-devotee sleeps,
It is equal to incantation;
If he wakes and sits up, It is Śivarātri,
If he treads a path, it becomes holy;
Whatever he speaks becomes the doctrine of Śiva;
(because) His body is Kailāsa (Śiva's abode) 102

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(p stands for page and v for vacana)


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