CHAPTER- III
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Man's situation is such that he is one among the many things surrounding him, which together constitute the universe. To live and survive effectively he is compelled to know and react to the world around him. There are many ways of experiencing, enjoying, understanding and analyzing the universe viz., science, aesthetics, morality, religion mysticism and so on. These are diversifications of one and the same general enterprise of understanding viz., the craving of reason that things discriminated in experience be understood. These various disciplines are so intimately and intricately interrelated in the vast and complex continuum of experience that, no matter where one begins, one tends to be drawn into dealing with the others before one can find satisfactory answers to any one of them. Science claims to know quantitative aspects of experience expressed in terms of mathematical formula. This scientific knowledge is said to be exact and certain. But concrete reality is more than mere formulae. Science does not ask the question: why of things. Why are we here? Whence do we come? Does the universe have a purpose? Whence comes our knowledge of good and evil? However, one should not expect simple answers to questions of far reaching importance. These mysteries and a hundred others like them are beyond the reach of science. They lie on the other side of the border within the jurisdiction of religion. The ultimate hope is that humankind will find solutions to many of life's enigmas: where did we come from? And where are we going? The path to enlightenment is long. The weapons of spirit must discover vehicle to explore the depths of the human heart and the vast uncharted oceans of the spirit. Aesthetics is different from this mode of scientific understanding. It deals with value, which is the name for the
intrinsic reality of things. This value takes the form of beauty. Moral experience discriminates the form of value called good. Religion claims to know that form of value called the ultimate meaning of life. Mysticism in the depth of its reach claims to know the highest intensity of relation between the finite soul and infinity of God. Unless we have abandoned ourselves to the doctrine of sense experience as the sole avenue, it is impossible to rule out the evidential force of religious experience. This is so because complete existence is an interweaving of quantitative (science) and qualitative (aesthetics, religion, morality) factors. Thus information about value is as much evidence as shape or figure is.

Religious mysticism emphasizes the sense of sanctity, dignity, sacredness and holiness of life. Accordingly earth, water and other elements are treated as sacred and holy. Life on this earth is a gift, a heritage that is ours. Religious sense feels that it is rare to have been born as a human being, still rarer to be endowed with flawless body and unimpaired faculties. If one is lucky to be born with a sense of righteousness, the wise men say, the gates of heaven will open automatically for such a person. In their origin religious consciousness and mystical consciousness are not discriminated. When religious consciousness grows deeper and wider transcending sense experience it is called spirituality.

The term spirit, spiritual, spirituality, mean things of highest worth living in the presence of the ideal. Durant Drake explains it thus: “This disposition of the heart and will, through which a man comes to care for the highest things and live in gentleness and inward calm above the surface aspects and accidents of life, we call, in its inner nature, spirituality; when it is embodied in outward forms and institutions, and spreads among whole communities, we call it a religion.”¹ In the West the term ‘spirituality’ is used in different senses: finer perceptions of life, a special mark of superior
intellects, warmer religious emotions, an active religious imagination, ability to appreciate nature, beauty, and life, sense of intimate relation with oneself and so on. In short it is love for truth, beauty and goodness.

In Indian experience this spiritual value of truth, beauty and goodness is described as *satyam, sivam, sundaram*. It is natural for man not to be satisfied with the “little” as the ultimate aim of life. He thirsts for the great infinite (*Bhuman*) in and around himself. In this respect in his widest perspective of complex and comprehensive interactions he finds his experience to be a strand of interwoven elements of truth, beauty and goodness. If our experience is to be meaningful realization of highest perfection of values is the only way as the Indian thinkers have visualized. God is said to be the infinite ideal of perfection. Man is what he is and can be in his ideal nature. The mystery in the heart of Being is the source of all truth, beauty and goodness that sustains man’s quest after perfection. Indian thinkers call it *satyam Sivam sundaram*. This is so because God is the home of the eternal values of truth, beauty and goodness in their highest absoluteness. In the wholesome self-development of man the aesthetic, moral and religious finite perspectives are unified in the widest synthetic outlook in realizing the infinity of such a God. Such realization is an individual affair depending upon the intensity of effort and the depth of his reach.

This spiritual religious consciousness is inward awakening to the presence of God in man or nature or any sphere of life. It is infinitely more valuable than the sensuous life of mankind. It is only when this consciousness grows wider, deeper and reaches higher peaks of intensity it is called mysticism. The spiritual journey is not simple or smooth. It is with true toil and trouble and sweat and blood alone of spirituality that the aspirant can get somewhere. The twists and turns in the spiritual tasks are not easy to overcome. In the actuality of spiritual living the aspirant is always haunted by
the terror of the senses and the rogue impulses hijacking him from the true path. The aspirant has to struggle to overcome the inner antagonism of flesh and spirit. But certainly there are occasions of brightening up under the inspiration of a happy thought. The taste of such occasions should kindle the embers of interest to greatness in experience. The aspirant disciplines himself and from this naturally acquired inner strength he dominates the external pressures and the pitfalls of inward and outward temptations. It is a long process of arduous, circuitous path culminating in concentrated religious experience called mysticism.

Now what is mysticism? It is universally felt that to really understand the nature of mystic experience one must actually have had that experience. Writers on mysticism have variously described and defined that experience. Etymologically the term “mystes” is derived from the Greek word “muein” (to be silent) meaning belief or knowledge of God or real truth transcending mind or senses. It is a non-ordinary experience. It is direct insight into the depths of mystery in the heart of experience. It is the finite soul’s consciousness of the infinite God. It is the first hand intimate direct experience of God, the infinite according to one’s measure of intuition. Western writers on mysticism such as Bertrand Russell, Inge and Evelyn Underhill have described mysticism in the following words. Of the two impulses, Russell says, one produces science and the other mysticism. According to him “Mysticism is, in essence, little more than a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe...The mystic insight begins with the sense of mystery unveiled, of a hidden wisdom now suddenly become certain beyond the possibility of a doubt.” W.R.Inge has given as many as twenty-six definitions of mysticism. He says, Mysticism is “ the attempt to realize in thought and feeling the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and the eternal in the temporal”. Evelyn Underhill an authoritative expert on mysticism says: “ It is the name
of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the Love of God: the achievement here and now of the immortal heritage of man... it is the art of establishing his conscious relation with the absolute...experience in its most intense form. That experience, in the words of Plotinus is the soul's solitary adventure.”

This same experience is called saksatkara or yoga in Indian mysticism. Dr. R.D. Ranade says: "Ineffability or incapacity of any adequate thought being given to one’s own feelings, it is this which is the mark of mystical experience.” A competent Indian authority, Dr.Das Gupta points out that the Bhagavad-Gita is “steeped in the mystic consciousness of an intimate personal relation with God, not only as the majestic super-person, but as a friend who...shares his joys and sorrows with him and to whom a man could cling for support...he could thus constantly talk of Him, think of Him, and live in Him. This is the path of Bhakti or devotion.” Taitiriya Upanishad describes this mystic experience in asymptotic terms. It is an ineffable experience of the bliss of Brahman, which mind and words recoil without reaching it. In this respect the Upanishad cites the authority of ancient Seer's words:

Wherefrom words turn back
Together with mind, not having attained -
The bliss of Brahma,
He who knows
Fears not from anything at all.

There are as many definitions of mysticism as there are thinkers. It is a pity that no one definition adequately brings out all the nuances of the firsthand, intimate, concrete experience unique to each individual mystic. This is so because mysticism is a notoriously difficult term to define by reason of its vastness, complexity and uniqueness. Insofar as our experience never starts with absolute zero a great part of it comes to us through many channels.
like heredity, environment and education. This is more so in the case of the
spiritual aspirant who lives and moves in the company of teachers and
advanced achievers in spirituality. Such spiritual environment is bound to
seep into the individual aspirant. It is impossible to tear off the individual
from his environment. Undoubtedly it is rooted in the life process itself. It has
a subjective private side and a trans-subjective character. It is an immediate,
non-discursive direct experience of infinite God or the absolute. It is
considered to be personal as well as impersonal by different thinkers. The
goal of the mystic is absorption in God. The process of mystic experience is
moved onward under the impulse of mystic's yearning and the luring power,
guidance and grace of God. Non-sensuous modes of experience and practices
are employed to attain the aim of God-union. Concentration of thought,
trances, ecstasies, and various yogic practices are found interfused in the
forward movement of mystical experience. Intuitive and ecstatic union with
God is achievable through contemplation. Devotional practices (bhakti) and
penance (tapas) are a means to the attainment of concentration or ecstasy or
direct experiential insight. It is an indescribable spiritual vision of God or
ultimate reality. It is an ineffable experience, which Otto calls
"Numinousness." It is the depth of insight and experience into the heart of
reality as yet unspoken. Intuitive insight gives the inward and immediate
awareness of God union. It enables the mystics to receive inspirations of an
immanent God or experience union with God. This mysticism is religion pure
and simple. It apprehends immense value of perfection. It sees God in
everything and everything in God.

In this respect the mystic calls to his aid all the resources within him
and from objective reality of God without which the mystic endeavor is
impossible. The mystic aspirant works himself up all these materials into
higher forms by creatively transforming into ever newer and deeper
experience. It is the nobler side of human nature continually striving to
exceed and surpass its own level. The life center is shifted from the lower to the spiritual plane linking it to the hoped-for-goal. In carrying out the spiritual task the aspirant has to spend according to his measure much energy in fighting and mastering the inner and outer negative forces. He must be aware of potential obstacles that could block his progress. The force of animal passions in man could not have effected this transition. It requires a force of ideals from above in proportion to the intensity of his effort. God becomes an indwelling supervisor without destroying man’s freedom. The mystic quest keeps the spirit alive fanning it into a flame of devotion, insight, and communion. Thus the purified aspirant is pitchforked into illumination. This is sharpened or intensified consciousness contemplating the divine. As a religious psychologist has put it: “In its barest form mysticism stands for that type of religion in which there is an immediate apprehension of and communion with the ultimate reality, or God. Its assurance of the divine rests on vision or intuition rather than on any ratiocinative process, and is for that reason, for those who entertain it, doubly sure...for such direct and immediate contact with the unseen due preparation is necessary. Hence the mystic way and the whole apparatus of practical mysticism which is bound up with it and will have to be considered in its turn...There is, therefore, a certain mystical element in all religion which rests on personal experience.”

Mysticism is a personal experience of the immediate apprehension of the divine. It is also called intuition giving us immediate feeling of certainty of the unseen power. It is a total response to some total situation and a direct insight into truth. Self-knowledge with conviction is the best case of intuition. It is quick perception. Intuition, which is instinct become self-conscious, can lead us to the inwardness of experience. It is seeing from inside. It gives fluidity of experience per se without freezing it. However it is by his struggle and discipline and exercise of freedom of choice to choose the good alone that can make him willingly conform and surrender to the Divine Will. This
spiritual life is concerned with the transcendent God becoming immanent in the life of soul. This does not mean God is identical with the soul though he dwells in the soul. Nor does it mean that soul's freedom is overruled or taken away. In other words there is a balance of the functions of both God and the man. If either were carried to the extreme it would deface evidence. God enters into the aspirant’s soul in proportion to the degree of fitness achieved by the soul through its transformation process. This is so by reason of the fact that mystical element is mainly concerned with the internal life of man apart from any book or prophet, church, mosque or temple.

This mystical union is the crown of mystic experience. It is reached only through various stages and that too after passing through a long winding, strenuous journey. The flux of human experience is a cumulative and creative organic process of growth. The analytical distinctions that reason distinguishes can only be convenient ways of understanding that organic experience. The intellectual life of man consists almost wholly in his substitution of a conceptual order for the perceptual order in which his experience originally comes. But the flux of personal experience as such means nothing and is but what it immediately is. It is always a – much-at-once, and contains innumerable aspects and characters which conception can pick out, isolate, and thereafter always intend. The distinctions that we make leave its unity unbroken. Its boundaries are no more distinct than those of the field of vision. It is in the light of this truth that we undertake to study the stages of mystic experience.

In the Indian terminology mysticism is called yogic experience. The term yoga literally means union. It is spiritual union of individual soul and God, the Ishwara. The word yoga occurs in the Rig Veda. It means yoking or harnessing, achieving the unachieved, connection and so on. Patanjali defines yoga as chitta vratti nirodha. It means cessation of the modifications of mind. In
other words it is a spiritual effort to achieve the hoped-for-goal of perfection. This perfection can be achieved by controlling the body, the senses, and the mind. The aspirant should have discriminated the highest possibilities of man's existence. This *vivek jnana* can lead to liberation or *moksa*. It can be possible only by controlling disturbances and distractions of the mind and body. For that purpose the method of *yoga* prescribes certain don'ts and dos. They are called *yama* and *niyama*. The aspirant must abstain from any form of injury to others, from falsehood, from stealing, from lust, passions and avarice. This step is called *yama*.

*Niyama* is self-culture. It means *shaucha, santosh, tapas, swadhyaya, Ishwara pranidhana*. The aspirant should cultivate internal and external purity, contentment, austerity, study and reflection, and devotion to God. He must adopt postures (asana) appropriate for the purpose. For all this breath control (*pranayama*) is vital. It means regulating, inhalation, retention and exhalation of breath. This brings about health of body and mind. *Pratyahara* requires the aspirant draw inwards the senses away from their objects by controlling their natural tendency to go after outward objects. These five are external aids to *yoga*.

*Dharana, dhyana* and *samadhi* are internal aids to achieve the goal of *moksa* or liberation (union with God). *Dharana* means fixing the attention on the object of meditation. For example, tip of the nose or the image of deity. The mind must be steadied like the unflickering flame of a lamp. *Dhyana* means meditation. It is the continuous contemplation of the object without interruption. *Samadhi* means concentration. It is the culmination of yogic practice, where the mind is absorbed in the object of meditation. Here all the mental modifications are stopped and ecstatic union takes place. Conscious or *samprajnata samadhi* and supra conscious or *asamprajnata samadhi* are its two forms. Thus the soul attains to the peak experience of mystic union with God.
Yoga is a vast subject with many ramifications used in different senses and practices.

According to Bhagavad-Gita yoga is karmasu kaushalam. It means action done with a spirit of detachment. It is called nishkama karma. It is a unique synthesis of action, devotion and knowledge. The Gita speaks not renunciation of action but the renunciation of the fruits of action leaving it to God. Prof. Hiriyanna says: “the Gita teaching stands not for renunciation of action, but for renunciation in action.” 10 The Gita’s mystic way is best summed up in the words of Annie Besant: “It is meant to lift the aspirant from the lower levels of renunciation, where objects are renounced, to the loftier heights where desires are dead, and where the Yogi dwells in calm and ceaseless contemplation while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that fall to his lot in life.” 11

The subject matter of all religion and philosophy centers round man’s soul, God, world and the relations between them. 12 But the nature and status of these entities differs from system to system. In Virasaivism in general and Basava in particular God is variously termed as Siva, Sthala, Linga, Bayalu, Kudalasangama and so on. The soul is termed as Bhakta, Anga as seeking mystic union with God. The world is taken as real. All the three entities soul, God, and the world are taken as real in the same sense ontologically. But they differ in embodying gradations of value. In India religion and philosophy are fused as Prof. Hiriyanna says: “In other words, the aim of studying philosophy is not merely to gratify theoretical curiosity, however disinterested that curiosity may be; it is also to live the right kind of life consciously adjusting one’s conduct to one’s intellectual convictions. It is in this sense of devotion to worthier living and not in the sense of dogma or superstition, that religion is blended with philosophy in India.” 13
Accordingly Tagore, in the pan Indian movement, has set the goal of the soul’s uniting with the one infinite God. This union is described as liberation or Moksa common to all systems of religion in India. But these religions differ in their methods of attaining the goal of life, viz, union with God. Depending upon the temperament of the aspirant there can be a method peculiar to each individual’s living experience. Pan Indian movement has recognized 1) Karma yoga 2) Jnana yoga and 3) Bhakti yoga as the methods of realizing the ultimate goal of life in accordance with the four purusharthas of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksa. Here the word yoga means harnessing. In truth “it is essentially a process of self-conquest and was not unoften resorted to in ancient India for the acquisition of super natural or occult powers.... It has, been compared to the entirely healthy and joyous phenomenon of aesthetic contemplation. Yoga is thus really a joint aid with jnana or right knowledge, the need for which in one form or another is admitted by nearly all the schools of thought.”

*Karma yoga* is the beginning and end of man’s life in so far as action (physical, mental, spiritual) is the essence of all life. To live means to act. It is impossible that man can remain without doing some or the other activity (karma=action). *Karma* becomes *karma yoga* when performed disinterestedly not caring for the fruits. It is doing duty for duty’s sake without the expectation of success or failure. It involves a sense of detachment in attachment (nishkama karma). It requires purity of motive and a sense of humility devoid of arrogant pride (ahankara, mamakara). “It is no longer a matter of mine or thine but of the divine.” It is not a means to something but an end in itself. It involves some idea of the goal to be realized and a sense of devotion to it. It is by the predominance of one or the other element bhakti or jnana in the activity that it is called karma yoga, jnana yoga or bhakti yoga. In the words of Prof. Sakre “It is merely a question of one being more prominent than the other.” *Karma yoga* purifies the mind by cleansing animal inclinations.
Jnana yoga comes to know the ultimate reality of Brahman through the scriptural intuition or sruti. It assumes that all phenomenal experience "identifies the self with the body, the senses or the objects of the senses." It is only the method of karma marga (path of duties), which cleanses and purifies our bodily desires, attractions and temptations of the senses. Only when the aspirant wants to know the ultimate truth of experience that he can enter the path of knowledge. Jnana yoga is possible for the aspirant only when he is able to discriminate between what is permanent and temporary (Nityanitya vastu vivek). Also he must abandon pleasures of this world and attain self-restraint, patience and desire for salvation. Thus qualified the aspirant must come to know in self-realization the identity of Atman and Brahman. It is the truth of such Upanishadic statements as Tat Tvam Asi, Aham Brahmasmi and so on. It is called intuitive immediate experience or paravidhya. The advocates of jnana yoga say that jnana and jnana alone is the path to reach the ultimate goal of God or Brahman. But concrete experience is neither jnana (intellect) alone, nor bhakti (emotion) alone or karma (will) alone. It is a blend of all the three.

Now we come to bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga is a way of realizing union with God through the path of loving devotion dedicating and surrendering to God. It is bhakti, which transforms jnana into the irrepressible thirst to realize God. It is the yearning for God-union. The aspirant tasting the divine glimpse does his best to transcend his animal nature into the realms of higher consciousness. The word bhakti is derived from the root bhaj. It means "to share in" or "to belong to", and to worship. To translate the word bhakti as devotion does not convey this sense of sharing in. It is a path towards God-union freed from our present imperfections and glamorous attractions of worldly pleasures. It seeks abiding communion with a personally conceived ultimate reality -God. It means participation and mutual indwelling between the devotees and God. This is the central meaning of bhakti marga - the "
divine-human relationship as experienced from the human side." Its goal is not any earthly benefits. It seeks blessedness and mutual absorption in God or Ishwara who is personally experienced as an antaryamin or indweller though God is transcendent.

In truth no experience is purely emotional, intellectual or conative. Every experience involves all these elements in some or the other proportion. The aim of yoga therefore must be the integral development of all the potentialities of man. That requires a method of dealing with the wholeness of experience. Sri Aurobindo calls it Purna yoga or Integral yoga or Synthesis of yoga. This yoga is a wider synthesis including the elements of the yogas discussed above. For him life itself is yoga. Sri Aurobindo says, "The passage from the lower to the higher is the aim of Yoga; and this passage may effect itself by the rejection of the lower and escape into the higher, the ordinary viewpoint, -- or by the transformation of the lower and elevation to the higher Nature. It is this, rather, that must be the aim of an integral yoga." Thus it is by the interplay of the human and the divine that the aspirant reaches the final goal of God-union through his "free scattered and yet gradually intensive and purposeful working determined by the temperament of the individual in whom it operates the helpful materials which his nature offers and the obstacle which it presents to purification and perfection."20

Among the three yogas discussed above, Basava follows Bhakti yoga, the most natural method of reaching the great Divine. Basava gave a new orientation especially in personal inner experience to this bhakti movement by popularizing the satsthalamarga. It is here that Basava enunciates the progressive path of satsthalamarga of self-realization of Anqa and Linga. Satsthalam is the art and theory of the internal life of man. Basava calls it the "art of heart" (karula kale). It is a blend of emotion, knowledge and will. It is a gradual process of attaining the ultimate goal of life. Thus Virasaiva
philosophy, says Dr. Nandimath, "poses gradualism in effecting the prime aim of spiritual life. Beginning with the acute realization of separation from God, the devotee passes through the stages of Bhakta, Mahesha, Prasadin, Pranlingin, Sarana, surrendering himself at least to God and presently achieving Aikya, the fact of identity and union with Him...But the principle underlying this is the same viz., gradualism in bridging the gulf between separation from God and final union with Him." 21

According to K.V. Zvelebil the essence of Virasaiva religion is not the five rules of conduct (Pancacara) nor the eight emblems (Astavarna) but (is) in the Lingangasamarasya – the integral association of God and soul the technique of which is the Satsthala (six-phase) path." 21a It is the mystical process involving 1) Bhakti: devotion – ‘devotee’ 2) Maheshwara: discipline – ‘master’ 3) Prasadi: ‘receiving’ – Lord’s grace’ 4) Pranalingi: experience – ‘Linga in the life-breath’ 5) Sarana: bliss – ‘the surrender’ 6) Aikya: oneness – ‘union with the Lord’. (Translations: K.V. Zvelebil). This doctrine of the six stages or phases and sub stages is due to the arrangement of vacanas. Linga or Parasiva is conceived under two modes: Anga and Linga. Anga is the devotee desiring union with Linga or God climbing the ladder of spiritual progress step by step. Linga or God with nirakara and sakara aspects functioning appropriately to the stage of devotee’s developmental progress from bhakta through discipline (Maheshi), receiving Lord’s grace (Prasadi), experiencing Linga as the life-breath (Pranalingi), the Sarana surrenders (Sarana) to attain union with the Lord (Aikya). This transformation of the devotee’s condition from pashu (animal passions) to his ultimate goal is called Nivratti. From God’s side bestowing grace to function appropriately to the devotee’s stage of climbing the ladder is called Pravratti. God’s functioning in the devotee stage is called Achara Linga, Mahesha stage is called Guru Linga, Prasadi stage is called Siva Linga, Pranalingi stage is called Jangama Linga, Sarana stage is called Prasada Linga and Aikya stage is called Mahalinga. This six-fold path is the
mystic process of transforming the raw individual through climbing the spiritual ladder in the light of the appropriate guidance from God so as to attain Lingangasamarasya. Man becomes a bhakta when characterised by sincere trust (Vishwasa) in God. When this sincere trust grows into deeper devotion (nishta) he reaches the stage of master (Mahesha) through discipline. When this devotion becomes constant he becomes fit to receive God’s grace (Prasadi). When this constant devotion earns God’s grace it is transformed into life breath of experience and the pranalingi stage is reached. When the aspirant becomes conscious of life-breath of experience, he becomes Sarana surrendering himself to God. When that consciousness becomes firmly rooted in the equally enjoyable bliss in God it is called Lingangasamarasya or Aikya. Thus satsthala marga is the fusion of theory and practice.

The six stages of this gradually progressive intensity of experience is only a matter of distinction while actual concrete living experience is peculiar to the temperamental differences of the mystic aspirants. As Sri Aurobindo says, “In a sense, therefore, each man in this path has his own method of yoga.”22 It is an ascending process from the side of the bhakta and descending process from the side of God appropriately to the various stages where each is absorbed in the other. Sri Kumarswami says: “Mysticism of the Saranas is a mirror which reflects the Lingayat (= Virasaivas). Faith as a rational mysticism bringing into bold relief the synthetic view of action and contemplation.23 So he says: “Mysticism may then be defined as an art to experience unmixed and pure delight in all contents of the cosmos through intuitive faith in the workings of the Supreme Being.” 24 Prof. Sakre says that this satsthala, bhakti is common to any form of yoga and that “ultimately ends or ripens into Sivayoga...The way of yoga (Sivayoga) followed here has a different purpose from that of others for its aim is not only to rise out of ordinary, ignorant, world-consciousness but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body.

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to transform them, to manifest the divine life in matter."  

The practice of this Sivayoga as a living concrete experience is too difficult to follow. Sri Aurobindo points out: "There is no royal road to the divine realization...Patience and firm resolution are necessary in every method of sadhana." This is so because obstinate impediments of daily life prevent it. Unless the aspirant wholeheartedly commits to it, and is ready to risk everything by giving up all else for the possibility of realizing God, the aspirant will not realize the truth behind it. Prof. Sakre calls it "at-one-ment with Siva the highest reality." More details of satsthala are given in chapter VI.

But majority of writers on the subject of mysticism analyze mystic life and practice into three or four stages. 1) The via Negativa or Purgativa 2) via Illuminativa 3) Dark Night of the Soul 4) The via Unitiva. Ms. Underhill adds Dark Night of the Soul as a distinct step. Since mystic life is said to be of the nature of an organic process the analysis into three or four stages is only for purposes of understanding. In the first step the mystic aspirant is awakened to the religious life. His attention must be turned inwards away from the outward mundane things. This inward looking must have been motivated by a desire to pursue spiritual life. This inward looking enables the aspirant to know himself for what he is and can be in truth. He comes to know the strong and weak points of his potentialities. This is called self-knowledge. He must have had some glimpse, however faint it may be, of the goal to be achieved. By going into himself the aspirant comes to know the pulls of lower impulses. Also occasional taste of bright thoughts may lure him by pulling upwards. Thus he becomes aware of the war between the demands of flesh and spirit. Unless the raw impulses are cleansed and purified his spiritual journey cannot move forward and upward. This process of cleansing the inward parts of the soul is the Purgative stage. It is negative in character. Few can succeed in spying out the temptations hiding in secrecy in the dark.
corner of the heart and head. To discover for him the tricks which temptations employ to hijack him from his true goal is the hardest task. Unless his current of yearning for the true goal is alert he may be ditched to sink lower rather than rise higher. It depends on which side the aspirant consciously or unconsciously canalizes his yearning. Very often, the soul is shaken by the intensities of private feeling, aversion or aversion. If he becomes a victim of anger, lust, greed, sloth, hatred and so on then the spiritual progress would be retarded. In that case, the aspirant will have to spend much energy in fighting to conquer them. This he can do by his alert striving for the higher goal. Shaken to its depths the soul comes to a stillness as though at rest at a station when the engine is still under steam.

However, the onward movement becomes a vibration on one spot until it is time to race forward again. The current of yearning is about to sweep it forward. It is keeping this spirit alive and constantly strengthens it that can propel the aspirant in the spiritual progress. Thus purified the aspirant becomes enlightened or illumined. This illumination is a sharpened or intensified consciousness contemplating the divine. It is accompanied by an emotion of the joyous grasp of the divine reality. Consequently there is a quickening of senses and the mind. The powers of the aspirant's soul are enhanced. The aspirant emerges from a smaller limited existence into a larger expansive self. But there is no straight-line progress all along the way. It is a zigzag path. There are set backs in the spiritual life that beset its progress. A cloud of darkest despair begins to cause painful agony. The aspirant suffers from doubts, fears and temptations. There is struggle, turmoil and pain of not being able to continuously moving forward and upward. When this agitation has grown to the extent of displacing everything else, the illumination has faded out. This is Dark Night of the soul. The soul finds itself alone again and sometimes desolate. Accustomed for a time to a dazzling light, it is now left
blindly groping in the gloom. The soul is not conscious of the transformation going on obscurely within it. The final phase is imminent. The mystics themselves say, how this happens is a mystery. The mystic's way thirsts for emancipation and larger freedom from the clutches of dark despair. It is here that the heroic saint thinkers' example is a great help. Their life at the advanced transcendent level inspires the aspirant to take clue. It is this clue, which makes the aspirant to take the initiative to get out of this dark night. In sheer helplessness and despair the aspirant instinctively cries out in prayer to a power higher and greater than himself for help to get out of the gloom of dark night. Prayer evokes a relation of response that quells anxiety, fear and despair by strengthening the aspirant's hope to receive help and guidance. It generates a feel-good response.

Prayer, in its essence is like meditation and contemplative in nature. It is a lure for feeling. It is an anguished cry of the heart in need. The aspirant is not only praying to God, but with God. Prayer persuasively affects God insofar as things and events affect and are affected by each other. The mystic soul yearns to become a fit instrument tempered and tested for its quality to receive and endure most intensely dazzling light and heat of thousand suns at a time. The various parts of the soul must be tested and prepared and put together to make the aspirant a fit instrument for the reception of the divine. The aspirant should be ready to throw out whatever is not pure enough, flexible and strong enough for that purpose. This is so because the aspirant had thought and felt the presence of God in contemplation. But this was not a permanently lasting experience since now and then it was lost to him intermittently. Here again he is driven forward by the intense current of yearning for still higher order of spiritual experience. This is how the inner eye of the soul can be opened for its upward journey of contemplative life.
The issue of it all is the vision and unitive life. This is final triumph and flower of mystic life of the spirit. It is reached after having overcome the long slow growth and psychic storms. This is the peak experience and core of mystic experience.

In this ecstatic mystic experience, extremists say that soul and God become one. It covers all the different degrees of relation with God from closeness of union and absorption of soul in God and God in soul. It is picturesquely described in the metaphor of the union of husband and wife. Yajnavalkya describes the union of soul and Brahman in the following words: "As a man, when embraced by a beloved wife knows nothing that is without, nothing that is within, thus this person, when embraced by the intelligent self, (Prajna) knows nothing that is without, nothing that is within." Mystic saints of the bhakti movement draw themselves nearer to God. They are in an intimately personal and inward experience. They regard themselves and all others as brides of their Lord God. The aspirant is compared to a child seeking the lost mother. All mystics say that what is disclosed is inaccessible to the intellect. Those who seek to know such experience; it is necessary to enter into a meditative state. Here critical facilities are superseded. Some say it is loving devotion that brings about this union, where soul’s distinction is upheld. Gone is the radical separation between him who loves and him who is loved. This is so because the aspirant had thought and felt the presence of God in contemplation. It is a communion, a dialogue, a meeting and an encounter. It is an "I-thou" relationship to use Martin Buber’s phrase. Communion with God presupposes, therefore, both the personality of man and the personality of God. Here there is a complete balanced harmony of the activities of the soul and God. It is a union, a fellowship and not a unity or identity. There is dialogue and partnership. Both God and soul are equally
enjoying each other. Here Taitiriya Upanishad gives a calculus of ananda, self’s experience of ananda in an ascending scale of values culminating in an absolutely blissful experience of Brahman. It is supreme ananda unsurpassed where language halts behind intuition. It is intuitional highest. It is paramananda, which is infinite, eternal, immeasurable and absolutely indescribable. Brahman is experienced as satyam, jnanam, anantam and anandam. This is liberation giving stability and security and there is no more unrest, travel or shipwreck. There is no undue emphasis on soul’s freedom or God’s role in endowing his grace. This is so because God is impartial without any preconceived prejudice for or against the activities of any creature.

Concequently all the faculties of the soul, in their exalted mood, begin to see things on a vast scale. The aspirant’s speech and conduct also become heightened with a new freshness of vision and action. A heightened sense of release and an absolutely indescribable bliss or ananda and peace are experienced. The sense of egoism and pride vanish. The sense of finitude is transcended. It raises man to an unparalleled quietness of higher orders of harmony and peace. It quickens the sense of personal dignity and self-respect making the aspirant spiritually free. Its influence in producing naked simplicity in our ways of living is captivating. Its sincerity is transparent. Devotion to truth of dynamic perfection is inexorable. Having nothing to lose, its possession is impregnable to attack. Sacrificing everything, it can ask anything of other energies of man. Material considerations, worldly cares and ambitions, have long since vanished from the aspirant’s life. The spirit, as manifest in truth and love, possesses him utterly. The spiritual authority of one unarmed man over great multitudes is in itself wonderful. His sympathetic love extends to the whole of mankind as such.

We shall now discuss the relevance of spirituality in the context of national crisis of character in the form of corruption, internal and external
security crisis threatening the very sovereignty of India in particular and humanity in general. Integrity of character is the main bottleneck for the right functioning of men and women in various positions of authority. Our character is shaped according to our faith in values. It is because people have a topsy-turvy sense of values that selfish greed has a dogmatic grip over the rulers and the ruled. It is here that spiritual religion can educate them by re-orienting their outlook to balance one’s own well-being with that of other members of the society. It is the function of spiritual religion to inculcate inward looking, self-control, self-knowledge, ultimate aim of life, a sense of fairness towards oneself and others and all other elements going into the formation of sterling character. As W.T. Stace says, “It is the universal testimony of those who know that mystical experience transforms human life, and alters character – often from the squalid and mean to the noble and selfless.”

In the absence of spiritual values vividly held before the minds of the people convinced of their efficacy in life a large part of mankind, it is true, lives very close to the merely biological level. But universal human experience includes factors and elements, which cannot be reduced to physical sensations, insofar as men cannot live by bread alone. Aspirations, hopes and social relationships characterize their self-transcendence- no matter on how low the level. Man is never satisfied with what he has and always strives to have something evermore. In this way man’s reach for the transfinite is evermore in search of the infinite in different directions. It is the longing of the human heart to find peace and contentment in life. We have shown above that it is mysticism par excellence that meets this craving of the human heart and existence.

It is a tragedy that people seek for peace in places and areas of life that bring more and more stress, restlessness, anxiety, frustration and what not. This is the style of life pursued by worldly-wise people. This style of life takes its toll in blood pressure, heart attack and many other manifestations of ill-
health and anxiety. Most men's lives seem to be going nowhere but simply running to stay in the same place. Ordinary life designates those aspects of human life concerned with production and reproduction. It is concerned with labor, the making of things needed for life, and our life as sexual beings including marriage and family. These are worldly-wise practical men bitten with the bug of worldliness. This worldliness, on their part, tends to increasingly prefer less compelling and more comfortable ways of earning livelihood. From the days of instant coffee nothing has been the same. There is the explosion of expectations of instant solutions to everything. This instant revolution has played havoc with the mentality of a whole people expecting instant answers to prayer calls, and justice (for our good and evil actions) in God's ways of dealing with us. If success is not prompt worldly-wise people get badly discouraged. But the lack of immediate victory does not prove the inefficiency or the lack of efficacy of religious experience. Integrity of experience demands that we refuse to settle for abstractions and secondly have faithful regard for facts. Passionate instinct for right doing, for novelty and the higher excellence raises mankind above the dead level of habitual dumb practice. When selfish greed grips the mentality of a people religion is scoffed at. And yet religious mysticism is the only antidote in exercising self-control and devotion to great causes, which can lift man out of his rut and take him along the road to peace of mystic bliss.

How to test the validity of mystic experience? The mystic does not require any confirmation from any authority. His intuitive experience, for him is the only authority. Intuition is a self-certifying experience. What the heart has intuitively felt the head may not be in a position to prove. The emotion of love or devotion is the heart of mystic life. Though intensity of emotional love is a testimony of some vivid experience it cannot be a guarantee of its truth. Truth cannot be tested without reason. The authenticity of mystical experience must be developed from knowledge acquired when our normal
senses and intellectual operations are at their highest pitch of discipline. “To move one step from this position towards the dark recesses of abnormal psychology is to surrender finally any hope of a solid foundation for religious (mystic experience) doctrine.”

Mystic experience should not claim immunity from verification procedure. But we must know that verification procedure should not be confined to sense experience only insofar as non-sensuous modes of experience such as intuition, our sense of derivation from the past, etc. are recognized as genuine sources of evidence. Mystics all over the world, in all ages and of different traditions are in agreement as to being in contact with and knowledge of the objective reality of an infinite being. The truthful validity of this experience can be accepted unless there is evidence to the contrary.

As the Upanishads have shown there can be direct checking procedure to verify the truth of our awareness of God in mystic intuition. This verification method consists of the process of shravana, manana and nididhyasana. Shravana means hearing of statements of mystical experience. Manana means prolonged meditation on those statements. Nididhyasana means continued and steady realization of what is stated in the statement. This process of verification would certainly give a kind of assurance of experienced God in a considerable number of cases. It shows that it is not easy for all persons to confirm the truth of mystic intuitions. This is so because attaining God-union requires alert striving, spending much energy in overcoming the obstacles and reaching the God-union. Any scientific discovery and verification of evidence – religious or otherwise – is not easily available to all but who make efforts. In the same way the truthful claims of mystic intuition into God’s existence and other religious values is not available to all but to those who have developed their capacity for such experience by training.
We are all imperfect vessels and yet we are all spiritual. Fulfillment of life comes with the full development of man. The body is viewed not so much as a limitation but as a necessity for the soul. We are not to despise bodily life nor are we to repress personal life in order to gain the end of religious mysticism. In the next chapter we discuss the nature of language commonly used by mystics.
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5. Ibid, p.5.


6a) Dr. R. D. Ranade: Introduction to Karnataka Mysticism, Karnataka University's Extension Series No. I, 1950, p.4.


20. Ibid


