CHAPTER- IV

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The mystic as a member of society and heir to a social heritage has an obligation to contribute to the development of other members and the society as a whole. What he has found has to be placed at the disposal of other individuals. For this purpose he needs a language that fixes and generalizes his experience to make it sharable by others. Such language arises as a component in the flux of mystic experience to give fixity to his experience. As the mystic’s experience and knowledge grow his inner and outer experience develop paripasu. But it must be remembered that the inner and outer is not an ultimate division. This is so because experience is an organic process of growth.

It is universally agreed that mystic experience is transcendental, ineffable and incommunicable. Yet, it is a paradox, mystics depending on their equipment, have tried to describe an absolutely indescribable experience as best as they could. Sophisticated clever intellectuals point out that “where of one cannot speak thereof one must be silent” or else “whatever can be said can be said clearly.” Therefore when the mystic describes an ineffable experience he must be talking nonsense by contradicting himself. The advocates of this view have an absolute confidence in the competence of human language to verbalize all that we experience. Accordingly experience, thought and language are equated. But this contention flies in the face of evidence. Experience outruns thought. Thought outruns language. Therefore language is thoroughly inadequate to express all that heart feels and experiences. Great masters of thought and language have wrestled with words and meanings to convey the imprecision of feelings. Because common sense language was inadequate science redesigned its
language and tools. Similarly religious mysticism has to design and re-design its language to convey the contents of its experience. Mystic experience per se is sacrosanct. It is a supreme gift. But the mystic's way of formulating that experience is the best for that impasse. Readers of that language must not do violence to what is the real import intended by the mystic. This can be possible only when a rasika sahradayi with an open mind approaches with a pure heart and sympathetic participation. Even so different interpretations are possible. This is so because there is a huge disparity between the ineffable experience and the language approaching it. Also there is a gap between the mystic rendering himself intelligible and that of his audience. In the process the living breath of mystic experience vanishes leaving only the dry bones in the form of the language of conceptual words.

Unless we are mystics it is impossible to talk about the mystic element as seen from inside. Non-mystics can only talk about mystical experience, as outsiders would do in a second hand manner. Even here it is impossible to talk about the mystical element in the experience of mystics without adopting to some extent the language of mystics. Their vocabulary is metaphorical. It has to be plastic and powerful to let them speak their serious and often difficult contents of experience. They cannot see mystic experience as "merely" this-or-that easily comprehensible phenomenon. They are too interested in it to make concessions to language. This thesis is not interested in battling with the vagaries of professional usage, but is interested in interpreting mystic's metaphorical language.

The employment of metaphorical or imagistic language serves two purposes: (1) To evoke some sense of that which is literally inexpressible – the extra linguistic factor. (2) Resort to poetic metaphor provides some tools whereby such evocation is possible. Yet certain insights are at present
incapable of finding literal expression. There are three levels of meanings of words.

1. Ordinary meanings.
2. Meanings enshrined in grammatical forms.
3. Beyond these are the meanings miraculously revealed in great literature.

In other words, mystic’s language is non-ordinary and non-literal. It is used in order to gain partial access to insights not completely accessible to reason. Such language serves both as a signpost pointing beyond and a boundary preventing further penetration. Literal language is altogether too abstract to deal with all the aspects of concrete experience. In Tagore’s words “We must keep in mind the fact that man is never literal in the expression of his ideas, except in matters most trivial. Very often man’s words are not a language at all, but merely a vocal gesture of the dumb.... The more vital his thoughts, the more have his words to be explained by the context of his life.... when we try to understand them by following their (prophet’s) words and not by realizing them in our own lives.” Language seeks to deal with the unspeakable and the ineffable. That is why mystic’s language seeks to evoke direct insight into unspeakable depths of non-ordinary experience. The use of metaphor and imagery is for the purpose of penetrating beyond the limits of explicit language as is evidenced in the sayings of Basava and Tagore. The multifariousness of the world, which may not be named or characterized, may nonetheless be sensed through such imagery. It is only through such literary imagery that the mystics try to convey the ineffable experience of depths and heights of mystical elements of their experience.

“Language can carry a lot of freight even though it need not bear all of the load itself. Words generate, reinforce and clarify religious experience.” All in all, then, the language of mystical religion is a very curious kind of
language. It says and unsays, unsays and says, oscillating perpetually between “yes” and “no”. It is a way of talking which seems to come naturally to some people, while others can see little or no value in it. Used by one who has skill and experience in the delicate balancing of yes and no, it can attract by a certain suggestiveness, which characterizes it. There is an impression that there is always more to be said than is being said. “We always mean more than we say, so that no statement can be a literal expression in the strict sense.”

It is an invitation to look beyond the statements made to a meaning, which transcends them. But it could be argued that though this may be a merit in poetry and perhaps too in liturgical and devotional language, this cannot be so in theology or philosophy. In those spheres it may appear baffling and repellant. The absence of certainty does not mean, as many people fear, that the whole subject is unimportant. It means that possession of the exact verbal formulation is not to be claimed. This is so by reason of the fact that concepts clearly and explicitly expressed with exactness are thereby condemned to death. Precision is always hard to achieve when we are dealing with matters of highest importance.

The very soul of religious mysticism consists in the humble recognition of the fact that the resources of human thought and language are inadequate to express all the truth and meaning of the Ineffable Power. The mystic is overwhelmed by the sense of awe and wonder in the presence of that mystery in the heart of reality. This consciousness of the inadequacy of all merely human modes of apprehension persistently accompanies all deep spiritual experience. It is doubtful whether mystic utterances can be reduced to the simple noonday transparency of the multiplication table. It is impossible that the mystic language is all light and no shade. It requires an imaginative leap to capture the suggestiveness of mystic’s metaphorical language. All language is elliptical. It requires a leap of imagination to understand it’s meaning as relevant to concrete experience. Words and
phrases must be stretched towards a meaning foreign to their ordinary usage. Both Basava and Tagore inheriting the cultural background of Vedopanishad express the difficulties of language in articulating the ineffable mystical element in their experiences as follows:

Wherefrom words turn back,
Together with the mind, not having attained-
The bliss of Brahman he who knows,
Fears not from any thing at all.  

In this effort to lift such insights into verbal expressions no one can hope to achieve complete success. T. S. Eliot points out the typical difficulties and inadequacies of language in giving expression to the inarticulate insights and expressions. He says: “That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory: A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion, leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings…” Our dissatisfaction with verbal expressions show that there are meanings beyond what we can accurately express in words. The problem of mystic experience is to express the unfathomable mystery of transcendental reality within the limitations of the existing technology of expression. The best that religious mysticism can do, in rendering that ultimate and integral experience, is to have recourse to metaphors, similes, multi-molded myths and parables. To insist upon their literal significance is to miss the ultimate meaning of the evidential force of the mystic element in experience and its effort to render the spiritual truths perceptible. Tagore declares: “The men who are cursed with the gift of the literal mind are the unfortunate ones who are always busy with their nets and neglect the fishing.” Since words are always an abstract approximate map of reality, the verbal interpretations of a scientific experiment or of a mystical insight are necessarily inaccurate and incomplete. The symbolic
rendering of experience is a vast topic. A people who speak in metaphors do not experience what it says as metaphoric; the symbols it uses are regarded by it not as symbols, but rather as realities. This is so because language cloaks our profound insights under its simplest words. This can be given different interpretations and meanings. This means that, though we do not know and express all that we experience; our knowledge is valid as far as it goes. Certainly the cause of awe is soul’s gaping with incomprehension of the greatness of the Reality. It is a Reality experienced as so much deeper and richer than the soul can ever express. And if we do actually experience the Reality no power on earth can prevent us from sooner or later translating our experience of it [or at least part of that experience] into ideas about it. Our thoughts and language about reality may never be wholly exhaustive of reality itself, of even of our experience of it. But fuller experience and reflection will enable us to correct them and to make them more and more adequate. Our revised thoughts will, however, have some sort of continuity with those, which they supersede; otherwise they would be unintelligible to us. Hence even the now obsolete ideas were true as far as they went. There is no absolute error or falsity; there is only inadequacy, a taking of the fragment for the whole.

The mystical language of symbols, metaphors, analogy, simile imagery, paradox, contradiction and so on are the best approximation to the concrete wholeness of mystic experience discarding as much as is possible the fragmentariness of the abstract language. No language can be a substitute for the full concreteness of such mystic experience. The best that is possible is to exercise our imagination to grasp multiple ripples of the multi-mooded symbols. The mystic language very often uses the language of human-divine relationship to convey the mystic union. It is by the simplest metaphors
like—the bridegroom and the bride, beloved and the lover, husband and wife, *saran sati*—*linga pati pashu—pashupati*, mother and child, *guru* and the disciple, master and servant, darkness and light, spiritual journey, city of God, God as the father, musician, friend and so on that we see the symbol of soul and God in all these relations.

In this context it is natural and inevitable on the part of mystics all over the world that they use spiritual marriage as the common imagery to describe their mystic experience as husband — *linga pati* and wife — *saran sati*. The human soul yearning for God's love is the bride and God who descends down to embrace the soul is the bridegroom. This symbolism is a sweet expression to signify such mutual love between two individuals. Many a great writers on mysticism say that the soul's thirst for God's love is like the betrothel where the soul “thirsts for the Beloved”. The burning desire to unite with God attains a still higher degree of love where the bride attains to pure contemplation. As the bride ascends still higher and higher in pure contemplation she can “see the Beloved” but “cannot yet come in to Him.” This is what the mystics call the illuminative way. Further when the soul enters into God i.e. unites with God in wedlock it is called the unitive way. After a long turmoil and pain when the soul thus unites with the God it feels that the mystic truth is “sweeter than honey”. The soul essence is enriched by union with God in spiritual nuptials and deified but it is not destroyed. Divine desire is reflected in human desire. God as Lord is feared; as Father is revered; as Master is honoured and served but here he is loved as a Bridegroom. The bridal feeling of spiritual amorousness is better than the physical. The expression of the personal passion, the intimate relation, here rises to its height. Prof. Pratt most justly observes: “There are several excellent reasons why the mystics almost inevitably make use of the love of God. The first and the simplest is this that they have no other language to
use...the mystic must make use of expressions drawn from earthly love to describe it at all. It is the only way he has of ever suggesting to the non-mystical what he has felt."

The same human-divine relationship has different nuances in the Bhakti moment. There are differences in the quality of loving devotion and its direction. The emotion of love is found universally. It can take the form of parental love, fraternal love and conjugal. In Bhakti yoga these loves are purified, idealized as well as transformed. One takes the form of master or father or mother or child or friend or lover. In all these cases human relations are sublimated to symbolize human divine relationship. For example, Basava says God is father, mother and kith and kin. Fatherly quality is sternness and command though with a motherly heart. The motherly quality is tenderness and forgiveness. She feeds and takes care of the child’s needs. Even her anger and punishment is well intentioned. The things denied to the child are meant to protect the child from harm, when the child wants to play with fire. Yashodha’s love for her darling baby Krishna is called vatsalya bhava, deepened love into tenderness or affection. Sri Krishna’s love of the cowherd boys (Gopals) is called fellowship between God and man or Sakhya bhava. It is a friendly relationship. It is in this sakhya bhava that the soul and God are treated equal and friendly taking liberty as Arjuna addresses Krishna in the most personal terms in the Bhagavad-Gita. Therefore very often we see the aspirant quarreling with God, questioning Him, teasing, and also getting angry with Him, when he does not respond to his entreaties. Once he implores and another time he commands Him. Thus in this sakhya bhava the aspirant enters into different moods. The case of Hanuman’s loving devotion to Sri Ram is called dasya bhava. It is the mood of loving service to God. It is the relation of Master and servant in the dharmic sense.
Gopi-love for Sri Krishna is the supreme example of spiritual love immortalized in the history of mysticism. Rasa lila is the word that explains the whole imagery. It is the intense soul-hunger for God. The Gopis in Brindavan lived, moved and had their being in Krishnaprema and were God-mad. Each Gopi was a note in the divine flute of Krishna. They were tantalized and enchanted by Krishna’s playing of divine flute even when they were away from him. It was a circular rhythm dance in which each Gopi; a queen of the fairyland of Krishna Maya was supported by Sri Krishna. There were as many Krishnas as there were Gopis and in the rapture of this Rasa dance, the sense of separateness was completely swept away and it was the very acme of Brahmananda. Love reaches its perfection in the relation of Radha and Krishna. This form of relation is called Madhura bhava. In this relation soul and God are distinguished and yet in mystic union. This is called bridal mysticism. Here the beloved is in a concert form of the love of God intrinsic to the soul. There is increasing intimacy of spiritual bhavas completely free from carnality. It has its own feeling tone or relish varying between Rati and Rasa. The episodes of Krishna’s life in Brindavan are all spiritualized. They are all rooted in the various forms of loving devotion or Bhakti. As Shri Ram Swaroop says, “Bhakti is founded on the feeling of love, reverence, adoration and trust. Spiritual love must be distinguished from the emotion of love, which is merely its outer expression. It is a silent language and worship offered by the heart to the indwelling truth of the heart, a truth which one may not be able to spell out but to which one is secretly drawn.”

Viraha experience is a preparation for a deeper union. Nothing is more purifying than the fire of separation. Love prospers more in separation than in union. It burns up all dross of desire and selfhood.

In Pashu and Pashupati relation Pashu symbolizes the raw animal energies of man, which need to be regulated, controlled and directed towards the final goal of man’s existence, Viz., God-union. God here is called
pashupati, the Lord who directs and helps to exercise discipline to bring order and harmony oriented towards the ultimate goal of Lingangasamarasya.

In his book, *Hindu Mysticism*, Dr. S. N. Das Gupta, has given the example of music and a lump of salt being dissolved in water to articulate the non-conceptual intuitive experience of the Upanishadic seers. Just as the various musical notes and tones are harmonized in the symphony of the whole, so also the souls in their blissful experience enjoy the infinitude of the divine. If we give attention to the various notes severally we miss the harmony of music as a whole of experience. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* Svetaketu was asked to put salt into water and next day to find it out. He did not find it. Then he was asked to taste different portions of the water. It all tasted salt. That is how the soul-God union is metaphorically explained leaving it to the imagination of the readers to visualized the ripples of meaning. In the *Mahabharata* the intimate relation of soul and God is articulated symbolically as the relation between friends – Arjuna and Krishna. It is also a symbol of spiritual Guru and the disciple. When Arjuna refuses to fight Sri Krishna as a friend and teacher instructs and enlightens Arjuna about his duty as demanded by his station in life. The intimacy and immediacy of their relation is an example of the mystic union immortalized in Hindu mysticism.

The nuances of the mystic language vary depending upon the progress and equipment of the aspirant. Life is considered as a boat floating on the flowing river of time and God is considered to be a boatman helping mystic aspirants to cross the river of time to reach mysterious destiny. Basava and Tagore use the metaphor of God as the eternal singer singing through the instrument of man (body and soul). Man must tune the strings of the mind to receive the harmonious music of God’s play in the universe.
Furthermore, Darkness and Light are natural universal symbols used by mystics all over the world to describe the predicament of human situation. Their spiritual significance is that darkness refers to man’s ignorance, spiritual agonies, temptation of flesh and sensuous attractions. Light symbolizes the dawn of awakening gradually blossoming into illumination and higher orders of consciousness. It is the real knowledge of what is worthwhile appropriate for humans. It is the knowledge of why and the wherewithal of man’s life, giving it a sense of purpose and fulfillment of life’s mission. In like manner in Christian mysticism St. Augustine, for example, uses the metaphor of spiritual journey. The goal of mystic quest is the “City of God” symbolized as Jerusalem. The mystic quest is a spiritual journey to that “City of God”. “Jerusalem is as much as to say a sight of peace; and betokeneth contemplation in perfect love of God.” The pilgrim’s mystical adventure had to face many ups and downs on the way to that celestial city of God. The physical pilgrimage is symbolic of the spiritual adventure of the soul. It is obvious that each mystic uses metaphors and images drawn from his cultural environment. He drives home his intense conviction of the reality of the soul’s intercourse with the transcendent. There are in his universe no fences between the natural and supernatural worlds. For him everything is a part of the creative play of God. Therefore even in the humblest details the aspirant is capable of seeing the Player’s mind.

The mystic language sometimes is paradoxical and even contradictory. The mystic experiences God as the Beloved and also as the Lover. He is regarded as the Cherished and the Cherisher. It is a paradoxical language; though true, to describe God as Father and Child. It may seem a contradiction, in their fervor of Bhakti to speak of God playing hide and seek, fast and loose as it were. In a tantalizing mood God appears disappears and reappears so much so that God’s ways are inscrutable. He is said to be bittersweet when accessible and also remains inaccessible. He is too near and
yet too far. The unique style of mystic language, which is full of paradoxes, contradictions and riddles is best summed up in the words of Prof. A. N. Whitehead as follows: "It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent. It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many. It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently, as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently. It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World. It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God. It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God." 10 This is how the mystics coming from rich culture background articulate the profundities of the ineffable mystic experience, to the extent possible.

In the next chapter an attempt is made to give an account of the biographical picture of Basava and Tagore.
REFERENCES:


