6.1. Introductory

'Mysticism' is as bewildering a term in religious philosophy as it is important. Though we understand what it roughly means, a unanimously acceptable definition bringing together its various features is not available. It may be due to the subject-matter of mysticism that it is hard to be defined. Mysticism, by which we shall be meaning only religious mysticism and not other forms of it, is concerned with the spiritual background of the universe and the immediate awareness of it. Hence by its very nature it passes beyond the ordinary cognitive range of our experience and as such we cannot exactly describe 'mystic' experience. Mysticism is a religious phenomenon, but the philosophy of it has both its epistemology as well as its psychology. Such a complex phenomenon as this naturally defies precise formulation. In spite of the fact that there exists a 'communication gap' between the mystics and the non-mystics regarding the mystic experience - the mystics have described the experience, however imperfectly. Interested and inquisitive non-mystics too have tried to understand the mystics and describe the phenomenon of mysticism. Hence there have been plenty of descriptions of mysticism and
mystic experience in spite of the latter’s alleged indescribability. Mysticism was a very rich and wide ranging literature around it. In fact it is one of the most talked of, most seriously inquired into, subject-matter of religious philosophy.

"... I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns
..."

This is Wordsworth’s nature-mysticism. In religious terms the ‘disturbing presence’, ‘something sublime’ is God. Mysticism is the immediate awareness of Him. It is not just an awareness of the Reality, but an enjoyment of “the blessedness of actual communion with the Highest.” Rufus M. Jones observes that the mystic feels invaded, vitalised with new energy, merged with an enfolding presence, liberated and exalted with a sense of having found what it has always sought and flooded with joy.”

Experience is the forte of Mysticism. It is the way of experience. Mysticism is not an academic interest in God, it is the experience of Him. Philosophers talk of God, mystics have experience of Him. As Underhill observes, “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. Indeed, experience is the highest proof of anything. The last bits of doubt can be removed by personal experience only. Total conviction comes from within oneself and out of experience alone. Reason wets our knowledge but cannot uproot our old beliefs or implant new ones. It is only our experience that can do wonders to us which even a thousand sermons cannot. That is why the mystics are so formidable an evidence for the spiritual.

Empiricism emphasizes experience, so do the mystics. In fact the mystics are the more stringent in their emphasis on experience. Josiah Royce's treatment of this aspect of mysticism is well-known. The mystic, Royce says, deals with experience and tries to get experience quite pure and then to make it the means of defining the real. The mystic, "gets his reality not by thinking, but by consulting the data of experience. He is not stupid. And he is trying, very skillfully, to be a pure empiricist. Indeed .... the mystics are the only thoroughgoing empiricists in the history of philosophy. We owe to the mystic an illustration of what an absolutely pure empiricism, devoid of conventions, and fortified by immediacy would mean. The mystic loves unmediated simple facts without a question. That alone is real for him." If it takes a trance to find such a fact, that is the fault of our human ignorance and baseness."
We may have reservations about Royce's idealism in its details, but as regards his treatment of mysticism in the context of its stress on experience we are inclined to say that it was enough true in it. The only condition we would like to add here is that the mystic claiming immediate experience of God must be prima facie free from any trait of his having illusions, hallucinations or fantasies. Critics must not get chances to identify mysticism with fad. Sanity of the mystic is the prime condition. For religious mysticism is only one half of mysticism, the other half is "diabolical mysticism, a sort of religious mysticism turned upside down." ¹⁴

Is mystical experience a special privilege enjoyed by a fortunate few and the rest of the population incapable of it? Those who have made serious study of mysticism hold that it is not the case. Every one is capable of rising to the seat of communion with God, only that the capacity is not equal in all. May be it is a potentiality, of varying intensity, in various men, which actualises under congenial circumstances and trainings. Stace observes that mystical consciousness is latent in all men but is in most men submerged below the surface of consciousness ¹⁵. The germ of the mystical transcendent life, the spring of the amazing energy which enables the great mystic to rise to freedom and dominate his world, says Evelyn Underhill, "is latent in all of us; an integral part of all humanity."
Where the mystic has a genius for the Absolute, we have such a little buried talent, . . . . "16 We may dispense with such opinions as dogmatic assertions. At the same time, we cannot accept the other alternative that mysticism is not universal but individualistic as conclusive for the same reason. However, this is only a secondary question on which the worth of mysticism does not depend.

Mysticism is not restricted to any one religion of the world. In Hinduism, in Islam, in Buddhism, in Judaism, in Christianity, in Taoism in fact in all major religions of the world, mystic elements are there. It may not be, in reality it is not, identical in all religions but the apparent differences between a religion and another religion are mellowed down in the mystical developments in those religions. Thus we see that the gap between ordinary Buddhism and Hinduism is not there between Sūnyavāda and Vedānta; Hinduism and Christianity have more disagreements between them than Śaṅkara and Eokhart - two representative figures from these two religions; Hinduism and Islam have less similarity than Vedānta and Sufism. We can multiply the cases. This only shows that in mysticism the religions of the world come closer. We are tempted to say that mysticism is the real religion. It is the essence of religion. 17

The religious goal of human life is to establish a rapport with God. With the mental apparatus being used to know
the world around us and adjust ourselves with it — we are not in a position to say for certain about God, affirmatively or negatively. That reason cannot establish God's existence does not make God meaningless or religion a nonsense. It only frees religion from the limits of thought. Thought claiming itself to be the supreme arbiter regarding everything in the universe cannot be accepted. Whatever thought can grasp is all right; and whatever thought cannot grasp may be something beyond thought and for that reason meaningful in a different context. With reference to Kant, Charlesworth has put it thus: The benefit of Kant's agnosticism is that religion is removed from any dependence upon philosophy and so is not exposed to philosophical doubt and refutation in the way in which all forms of religious intellectualism are. 18

This transcendence of thought is intuition. Reason is surpassed by experience which does not fall back on reason for its certitude. Argument is supported by another argument and that by another and so on. But experience is self-supporting and self-certifying. 19 There lies the superiority of mysticism over theology. It is the culmination of all positive religious endeavours.

Theologians accept mysticism. They are expected to do that. But it is gratifying to note that some agnostics also are moved by its worth. Russell is an example. He thinks that in a metaphysical creed, mysticism is fundamentally mistaken. Yet we
believes that "by sufficient restraint, there is an element of wisdom to be learnt from the mystical way of feeling, which does not seem to be attainable in any other manner." He continues to say that the mystical emotion", as colouring and informing all other thoughts and feelings, is the inspirer of whatever is best in man". It is a rich tribute paid to mysticism coming as it does from an avowed agnostic.

6.2. Otto on Mysticism

Yasyāmataṁ tasya matam
matam yasya na veda saṁ,
Avijñātāṁ vijñātāṁ
vijñātāṁ avijñātāṁ.

Upaniṣads abound with such teachings highlighting the incapacity of human understanding in grasping the reality. The Upaniṣadic mysticism is echoed in the theology of Rudolf Otto who is a product of the mystical trend set in Protestant theology by Schleiermacher. Otto has improved upon Schleiermacher's position by accepting that basic religious consciousness is 'feeling' but not 'feeling of absolute dependence'; it is the 'numinous' feeling. In the theology of 'absolute dependence, the blissful experience of God are not done justice to; this
stigma can be removed and mysticism can be accommodated as a piece of true religion by a theology of non-rational numinous feelings. 24

Otto is not a mystic in the traditional sense but he has been aware of the value of mysticism as a 'non-rational' 'spiritual' phenomenon since an early period of his career. Mysticism indicates the superiority of spirituality to naturalism and vindicates the religious outlook of the universe. As a spiritual phenomenon, it is not suited to systematic treatment. "Where it has been subjected to it, everything becomes crude and repulsive, a mere caricature of pure mysticism ... In fact of the witness borne to it by all that is finest and deepest in history especially in the history of religion, naturalism is powerless." 25

Otto describes mysticism thus: while sharing the nature of religion, it shows a preponderance of its non-rational elements and an over-stressing of them in respect to the 'over-abounding' aspect of the 'numen'. 26 Mysticism is the tendency to stress up to an extreme and exaggerated point the non-rational aspect of religion. 27

Otto has throughout remained firm in his view that mysticism is non-rationalistic. Mysticism, for him, "enters into the religious experience in the measure that religious feeling
surpasses its rational content... to the extent to which its hidden, non-rational, numinous elements predominate it determines the emotional life." Dominance of non-rational numinous elements in mysticism marks it off as something coming 'of the spirit' and hence incomunicable and indefinable. The mystical state of mind has to be *sui generis* and irreducible to any other. The only way to help others in understanding it is to guide them to the point where such experience is awakened in them. This is true of spiritual life as a whole and mysticism rises "from the very depths of the human spirit." Hence there is no substitute for mysticism.

Otto thinks that etymologically the term 'mysticism' does not mean union with God (unio mystica). The terms 'mystical' and 'mystic' are derived from Latin "Mystica" which was originally an *adjective* qualifying the *noun* "theologia". Mystica theologia, contrary to ordinary theology "claimed to teach a deeper "mystery", and secrets and depths otherwise unknown. Thus mystical originally meant a kind of esoteric school of theology, a way of interpreting the scriptures. Whereas Otto does not say that mystical and mysticism should now-a-days also mean a way of interpreting religious scriptures - he is not prepared to accept that mysticism has to mean only 'unio mystica' - an act of union with God. Man is a mystic as soon as he has his idea of God even when the element of union is not emphasized. As Otto says, "Mysticism is not first of all an act of union, but
predominantly the life lived in the "Knowledge" of "wholly other" God." This is a very significant point and if accepted will not only make Otto a mystic (which, in the ordinary sense, he is not) but many of us who have an idea of God and occasionally hold that He cannot be exhausted by our understanding also can have the satisfaction of being mystics (which, once again, in the usual sense, we are not). Otto, then, seems to have liberalised the definition of a mystic. This was antecedents in his theology and consequences for his religion.

For Otto a man is a mystic when he has knowledge of God and stresses on the non-rationality of the idea of God; he need not necessarily have the experience of union with God. Otto makes self-depreciation as one of the chiefest and most general features of mysticism. God is all and the mystic is naught. This is nothing but the 'creature consciousness' stressed to the utmost and to excess.

Now where is the root of Otto's letting go the union and stressing on the idea of God? 'The -Numen-that-is-mysterium' is wholly-other and a communion in the literal sense with it is a difficult proposition. Though religions, including Christianity, talk of communion with God, the root of the idea of God, in Otto's finding, is metaphysically and epistemologically a 'wholly other' Numen about whose real being nothing can be said. Hence instead of saying that a man is experiencing union with
such a Numen it is easier, more logical and more in conformity with facts (in Otto's analysis) to say that the Numen is beyond the grasp of our reason. This is what Otto means by the act of stressing the non-rational aspect. But at the same time, Otto's theory presupposes an experience of the divine, though not the communion with it. For stressing the non-rational elements in the idea of God, one has to have the numinous feelings. Thus his theory, while on the one hand stresses on knowledge and acquaintance with God, on the other hand, probably due to the complicity involved in conceiving the 'union situation', denies the union with God.

Otto has referred to mysticism of identity\(^36\). He nowhere treated this problem with seriousness. Mysticism of identity, taken to its extreme (as in Advaita Vedanta), can work as a metaphysical rival to his theology of 'creature-consciousness'. In the identity-mysticism, there is neither a creature nor a creator. They are one.

6.3.1. East and West in Mysticism

We do not know if geography has anything to do with men's intellectual, cultural and spiritual pursuits. The contacts between the east and the west are age old. But still we dive east and west in philosophy, religion, art, aesthetics etc. Only in science which deals with observable reals (and in commerce,
speaking in a lighter vein, which deals with the material well-being of men) that there is no east or west. In the fields where men’s deeper attitudes and approaches to life are concerned the difference between the east and the west has remarkably continued throughout the ages: east has remained east and west, west. There are indeed distinctive attitudes displayed by the two sides. Dr Radhakrishnan has put it thus: In the history of human culture Asia and Europe represent two complementary sides: Asia with the spiritual and Europe the intellectual. In the Indian context Aurobindo has said that it is India’s "urge towards the spiritual and the eternal that constitute the distinct value of her civilization. And it is her fidelity, with whatever human shortcomings, to this highest ideal that has made her people a nation apart in the human world." Spiritualism is the distinguishing characteristic of the East.

Whereas the dominant features of eastern wisdom is its 'insistence on creative intuition', the western philosophies are characterised by 'a greater adherence to critical intelligence'. Philosophy is called darsana, insight, in India. Immediate perception or intuition is the primary origin of Indian systems of philosophy. On the intellectual plane the east and the west can be characterised as intuitionistic and rationalistic respectively.
In religions also we have the east and the west. Though all the living religions of the world were born in the east—Christianity spread to the west and is now a days synonymous with the term western religion. There is an anxiety for definition and form in western religions. They are used as a support to social stability. Religion in the east is the cultivation of the interior life, the struggle for the attainment of spiritual freedom by individual hard work. That is, the general difference in attitudes of the east and the west is reflected in religion as well. Now, in mysticism, which is the immediate awareness of the ultimate reality—can we talk of the east and the west? For the Reality is the One, it is the same for all; and mysticism purports to have caught the Reality in 'all immediacy' so that there can be no scope for divergence of opinions concerning it. But in fact there is divergence of opinions. Mystical experience, which claims to be the experience of Truth and Reality, is also not understood absolutely similarly by all the mystics. Mysticism is also not a united house: there appears to be an east as well as a west in mysticism too.

6.3.2. Otto an East-West in Mysticism

"..... Mysticism, is the same in all ages and all places..... Whether the flower of mysticism bloom in India or in China, in Persia or on the Rhine and in Erfurt its fruit is one .... One and the same experience speaks here, only by chance
in varying dialects.\textsuperscript{43} This is how Otto speaks of the similarity of major mysticisms. This statement of his has sometimes been oversimplified.\textsuperscript{44} He is equally emphatic about the differences among the mystics. There are similarities as well as differences among the mystics - this is what Otto contends. He says: We contend that it is false to maintain that mysticism is always just mysticism, is always and everywhere one and the same quantity. Rather, there are within mysticism many varieties of expression...\textsuperscript{45}

At another place he says, "In spite of all the similarity of terms which can be surprising enough, there is a diversity of mystical experience which is not less than that of religious feeling in general."\textsuperscript{46} All this is to show that there are varieties of mysticism and that mysticism also can be Eastern and Western.

We feel that it will be pertinent to write a few sentences on Otto's book \textit{Mysticism East and West} from which we have mainly drawn materials for the subsequent sections.

\textit{Mysticism East and West} is a major work of Otto. It comprises of the Haskell Lectures he delivered at Oberlin College, Ohio, in 1923-24. Here he has tried to "penetrate the nature of that strange spiritual phenomenon which we call mysticism by comparing the two principal classic types of Eastern and Western mystical experience."\textsuperscript{47} For the purpose he has selected one prominent mystic as representing the east and one from the west.
Samkara is taken to represent the east and Meister Bokhart the west, and we feel that he could not have made a better selection. He has assiduously compared the two mystics. He has brought out remarkable similarities between the two; he has brought out equally remarkable differences between them also. Though it is difficult to agree with some of his conclusions and comments, the book, on the whole, is extremely scholarly and will continue to have a place in the literature of mysticism.

Study of Otto's comparison between Samkara and Bokhart is significant in the sense that it brings out Otto's own reactions to the eastern and western mysticisms. Otto happily appreciates the similarities between the two mystics but in the cases of difference he side with Bokhart. This shows his personal views on mysticism. His idea of a good mystic is that of a Christian mystic. Let us now turn to how Otto has compared Samkara and Bokhart.

6.4. Samkara and Bokhart: Conformity

Before embarking in the serious comparison of the two mystics, Otto brings out some casual but interesting similarities between them. If Samkara is an 'acarya', Bokhart is a 'Meister'. Both the terms, acarya and Meister, mean the 'preceptor', 'master' or the 'Guru'. Both of the masters are products of their traditions and expressions of the general tendencies of their
own epochs. Each of them is a theologian and a philosopher.

"Both are men of abstract, soaring and yet subtle speculation. Both are mystic and scholastic ...... present their teachings in the form of commentaries to the ancient holy scriptures of their religious communities." Their main teachings are gathered in one speculative work each: Sariraka-bhasya (Sāmkara) and Opus tripartium (Bokhart). That is why in spite of their having lived at two far away places at two different times - Otto calls them 'contemporaries' in a deeper sense. One difference between the two masters is their life-spans: Sāmkara, as the tradition goes, lived for 32 years and Bokhart ...

In the serious study of the two mystics, the first similarity Otto notices between Sāmkara and Bokhart is in their metaphysical speculation. They agree in their concept of the ultimate reality. It is a 'Sat' or 'Essence' for both of them. And both of them believe in a two-tier concept of the ultimate reality: God and Godhead, Īśvara and Brahman.

Otto summarises Sāmkara's non-dualism thus: True Being is Sat alone. Being itself, the eternal Brahman, unchanging and unchanged, undivided and without parts, skam eva advitiyam. This Brahman is homogenous consciousness. Human soul, in its ontological status, is identical with the Brahman. Through the inscrutable power of Brahman, Maya, the soul superimposes body on itself as well as a universe on the Brahman. Saving knowledge is the identity-consciousness of the soul with the Brahman and a realization of the ultimate unreality of the world.
Eckhart also drowns the multiplicity of the world in the unity of Godhead. 'In principio', in their origin, all "this and that", all "die et nunc" all multiplicity and duality is eternal Unity.\(^5^2\) The unity is one and without a second. This unity is the Being itself, "That which is" or "Esse". Esse est Deus. Being is God. And this being or Existence is pure and simple, absolute and unconditioned - it is, in Upanisadic terms 'sat eva'.\(^5^3\) Hence both for Śāmkara as well as for Eckhart there is a non-dual ultimate Reality which in its essence is Absolute Being. "Esse or Sat".

But a more striking conformity between the ontological speculation of the two masters is in their belief in two ranges of the Reality: God and Godhead. This similarity is extraordinary, says Otto. For Eckhart "high above God and the personal Lord abides the "Godhead" having an almost identical relation to God as that of Brahman to Īśvara."\(^5^4\) Deitas and Deus of Eckhart are the Brahm and Īśvara of Śāmkara. God is self-knowing, thinking and personal. Inpersonal Godhead is the ground of God's possibility.

Godhead (Brahman) is the 'prinus' (agre âsīt) of everything. It is absolutely secondless: Quod enim alius est ab esse (sato 'anyad), nihil est (For what is other than Being is nothing).\(^5^5\) Godhead or Brahman is the Absolute of metaphysics and is described by both Śāmkara and Eckhart in more or less negative terms - for
every determination is negation. Neti neti is the best description of the Reality. No predicate derived from finite beings is applicable to the Absolute. \( ^{56} \) "God is neither this nor that like these manyfold things. God is One." \( ^{57} \)

Otto has collected together so many parallel ideas of Śaṅkara and Eckhart regarding Godhead and God. To put it in our own terms, the distinction between Absolute and God is a problem which sometimes has led to metaphysical and religious quarrels among philosophers. For instance, a pantheist and a theist will have strong opinions regarding this problem, a conciliatory approach would be to take the Absolute as the intuitively knowable Reality (Numen); and its thought in terms of concepts is the idea of God (dōly). Brahman, Godhead, is the Reality; and its concept, Īśvara, God, is the maximum approximation by human thought to that Reality.

Even though Śaṅkara and Eckhart agree in believing in two-tier system of Reality, they are not unanimous about the relation between the Reality and human self. Whereas Śaṅkara unequivocally believes in their identity - tattvamāsi, sūnām; āham brahmāsmī etc., Eckhart's position is rather undecided. Sometimes he says that godhead dwells in his image, soul and godhead are one, knower and the known are one; but sometimes he says that they are one only in 'essence' and not equal, for equality co-exists with difference. \( ^{58} \) We can attribute this indecision probably to his scholastic background or to his attitude of appeasement to the prevailing mood of the clergy.
The second point of similarity noticed by Otto is that the systems of the two speculative mystics are not just metaphysics but doctrines of salvation. In spite of being great philosophers, the two masters, at bottom, are theologians. Their main interest is not in giving some scientific or metaphysical statement about the Absolute; they are more concerned with the rationally unintelligible and incommunicable ( = non-rational) "salus" or "salvation", or "sreyas" or "Heil" and how it can be attained. Šāmkara and Eokhart are not interested in Brahman or Godhead out of philosophical curiosity, but because the knowledge of it and the practice in accordance with it "saves". They are the ultimately valuable. Without reference to the 'value' element the teaching of Šāmkara and Eokhart would be mere abstruse ontology.

Maitreyi says in Brhadāranyaka Upanisad (II.4.3.) "yenādā namōm nāmṛtā syām, kim abhām tena kuryām" - what shall I do with that by which I do not acquire immortality?. The same Upanisad (I.3.28) has the verses : 'asato mā sad gamaya, tamaso mā jyotir gamaya, mṛtyor māmṛtām gamaya' - 'from the unreal lead me to the real; from darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to immortality.' Such Upanisadic thoughts are the corner-stone of Šāmkara's Vedānta. Liberation, Mukti, Mokṣa, Immortality - by whatever name we designate, it is the acquiring of the Life Divine which is eternal and fearless, unchanging and unmoving that was taught by Šāmkara. It is the life in the identity-experience
of the distinctionless Brahman - the pure-Being (sadeva).

Eckhart too makes God as the true aim of one's life. A God unchangeable is the most desirable. 63 God is the sole good in which all separate goods are contained. 64 God is the only value. 65

Otto says that there is numinosity in the Bein of Godhead or Brahman. The pure Being is beyond the rational: it is the non-rational, numinous. Hence the speculation-part of Eckhart's and Śāṅkara's systems is only a plank to the higher idea of the Being. The term 'Being' itself is then only a simulacrum, a symbol, an 'ideogram' of the "Wholly Other", "anyad", "the alienum" "the dissimile". 66 This is a remarkable point. Both Śāṅkara and Eckhart do treat the Reality as of transcendent value in respect to mundane objects, and absolutely different from them. The Reality cannot be 'conceived' and the intuitive awareness of It is not amenable to proper 'expression'. In this sense it is really 'Wholly Other'. Otto must be happy that in his analysis of religious experience he has reached the same conclusion about the Idea of the Holy in its non-rational place—the feelings of the mysterium-tremendum et fascinosum Fūmen.

Not only do the two masters agree about God as the highest value and salvation as the sumum bonum of human life—but they agree also that salvation has to come with the help of knowledge. Both of them are "seekers after knowledge, jñāna,
vidyā, samyagdarsanam" and believe that "God is a silence rather than speech" and yet they say a great deal to communicate what is uncommunicable, to express the inexpressible. 67

For Śaṅkara the universe as it is experienced is only a superimposition - adhyāropa-on Brahmān and to that extent illusory. Any separation from Brahmān is falsehood and bondage. In Eokhart: "All that is created was no truth in itself. All creatures in so far as they are creatures, as they are in themselves" (quod sunt in et per se) are not even illusion, they are "pure nothing" "All that is created is nothing." 68 Hence the difference between the Reality and the world; truth and falsity; bondage and salvation - in the case of both the mystics is one of wrong notion of 'oneself'; that as ourselves we are nothing and that essentially we are the Reality. What is Māyā for Śaṅkara is Creaturehood for Eokhart and both of them are cases of ignorance; māyā is outright ignorance and creaturehood is ignorance for it lacks truth. Thus if bondage is ignorance, its antidote, 'knowledge', is 'salvation'. As Otto has shown, the positions of Śaṅkara and Eokhart are quite close in this respect.

Otto believes that in spite of much formal agreement mystical experience is capable of diversity. 69 He speaks of at least, two types of mystical experience: the mysticism of introspection or "the inward way" and the mysticism of unifying vision or "the outward way. 70 These are what Stace has described
as introvertive and extrovertive mysticisms. Otto contends that both these types of mysticism are found in Śāṅkara as well as Bokhart. He does not dwell on the inward way elaborately, nor does he mention the names of Śāṅkara or Bokhart. He simply says what this way is: That its maxim is, "The secret way leads inward", that it is introspective and teaches sinking down into the self in order to reach intuition and to find God, Infinite or Brahman in the inmost depths of the soul — atman ātmanam ātmanā (the self to know itself in itself). The second way, however, he elaborates at a great length. We shall touch, as we have been doing, only the central points.

The second way looks upon the world of things in its multiplicity, and in contrast to this leaps to an "intuition" or a "knowledge" of its own kind which we may call either fantasy — if we are critical of mystical experience, or a glimpse into the eternal relationships of things — if we are sympathetic to mystical experience. Otto says that there are as many as three stages in the way to this unity — vision or vision of unity of the manifold things of the world — perception of the non-dual being as the background of the world full of indefinite variety and multiplicity.

At the lowest stage things and events lose their multiplicity and form an organic whole. Perception of "samatām" and non-perception of the "nānātvām" is the characteristic of this stage. Śāṅkara says that objects lack multiplicity
absolutely and Eokhart, similarly says that all is in one and one is in all. As a first step to the highest unity-vision, the diversity and variety of the worldly objects are not perceived, only the One expressing itself through them is intuited.

At the second stage "unity" is not the result of diversity, rather it supercedes diversity and comes to the fore. If at the first stage, diversity was perceived but was to be pushed behind in favour of unity, at this stage unity is spontaneously perceived. The difference between the two stages is that if at the first stage effort not to perceive diversity is there, at the second unity is effortlessly perceived, but diversity does not seem to vanish altogether. As a correlate to unity it is there.

At the third and the final stage diversity is not there at all. Only the One shines in its spiritual glory "The many, at first identical with the One, comes into conflict with it and disappears. It disappears either by sinking down into the indivisible One, as with Eokhart, or by becoming the obscuring veil of the One, the illusion of maya in Avidya, as with Sankara."  

The next important point Otto notes is the uncompromising spiritualism of Sankara and Eokhart over against some other forms of mysticism. Both of them are opposed to the mysticism of the so-called "illuminists" with its fantastic visions, occultism and miracle-mongering. They are similarly
opposed to mysticism of excessive emotion. Though salvation is a kind of emotion — beatitude or ānanda, but it comes out of knowledge and not out of excited states of feeling. Finally, both of them are opposed to nature mysticism, say, of the type of Jalaluddin Rumi's. Bota of them are uncompromising spiritualists.

Last, but not the least, Otto was shown in a well worked out chapter that both Śāmkara and Eokhart, though uncompromising monists or rather non-dualists, are not hostile to tueism. They have accommodated God and Īśvara in their system of the supremacy of Godhead and Brahman. The masters of the East and the West, Otto observes at the close of Part A of Mysticism East and West, agree in the demand that "God should disbecome." But they agree also in this, that each in his time and place is a faithful tueist, that their mysticism towers above a tueistic basis, and that however high their mystical speculation soars, they never demy the ground upon which they stand.

In Part B of the book Otto gives a whole-hearted approbation to Eokhart's mysticism. He shows its superiority to that of Śāmkara. It is rather disconcerting to note that after being so much similar in nature, one is after all quite superior to the other.

6.5. Śāmkara vs. Eokhart: Differences

The differences between Śāmkara and Eokhart are due to the foundations from which their mysticisms arise. The basic
differences between Hinduism and Christianity and those between India and Germany (in general terms, East and West) persist through their mysticisms as well.

In spite of the similarities mentioned earlier there is a marked difference between the concepts of God in the mysticisms of Eckhart and Śaṅkara. Otto says that Śaṅkara’s Brahma is passive restful Existence (Sat). On the contrary, the Godhead of Eckhart “is both the principle and the conclusion of a mighty inward movement, of an eternal process of overflowing life. ‘A wheel rolling out of itself’ ‘a stream flowing into itself’.” Disappearance and disbecoming of God in Godhead is not an end of a cosmic anomaly, termination of an illusion, in Eckhart. “God is the wheel rolling out of itself, which, rolling on, not rolling back, reaches its first position again. . . . God is, in himself, tremendous life movement.” Eckhart’s concept of Godhead is closer to Aurobindo’s concept of the Absolute which involves itself in the world to evolve back to itself. And moreover it is a tremendously moving, dynamic Absolute. As ‘Being’, zoë, vita and ‘the Life’ Eckhart’s God is the only living person in the universe, men only have flesh, basar, death. Eckhart’s concept of God is voluntaristic — for the Eas is a ‘will’ as an eternally dynamic principle. In contrast to this, Śaṅkara’s is a static concept of Godhead. There is no motion in it. It is Śānta — an actionless poise.
Another important difference Otto notices is concerning salvation. The 'value' that distinguishes between salvation and bondage is 'objective' in Eckhart. It is not just subjective happiness but 'holiness' to be acquired and sin dispelled. Otto thinks that here lies a palpable difference between not only Śaṅkara and Eckhart, but East and West as well. Śaṅkara is so deeply interested in the subjective pole of salvation that the other is scarcely noticed by him. The whole construction of his doctrine of salvation, and of the Indian teaching of salvation, is based upon the subjective element, and in speculative systems as well as in popular preaching the matter is thus subjectively presented. The antipode of salvation is 'Sin' to Eckhart but vexations of Śaṁsāra due to ignorance — to Śaṅkara.

The rest of the differences are concerning the ethical content. That Indian mysticism has no ethics — is a stock allegation against it. Otto thinks that in the negative approach of fleeing the 'miserable' world there can be no question of work and no question of morality. Śaṅkara's doctrine is not immoral but amoral. "The Mukta, the redeemed, who has attained ekatva or unity with the eternal Brahman, is removed from all works, whether good or evil. Work binds man. He leaves all activity and reposes in oneness." But in Eckhart the position is different. In a world actually created by God, man's life has its own status though it lacks 'holiness' due to its inherent sinfulness. Hence shunning of 'work' or 'world' is not taught by Eckhart.
Whatever a mystic gets in his experiences of God, he has to give out in love. So ethics is combined with mysticism. In Śaṅkara, it is given only an empirical status.

Another aspect of the ethical content of the mysticism of Eokaart is its 'experience of grace.' In Śaṅkara knowledge is enough for acquiring a divine life. But Eokaart, a Christian, having belief in God, Christ and Holy spirit accepts the idea of grace, repentance, penitence, forgiveness, surrender, humility etc. The same argument works in case of the love between soul and Godhead. In Śaṅkara it was no place. But in Eokaart: unity and the oneness in Being and essence, expressed emotionally is love, and also confidence, faith, surrender of the will, and service. The expression of God's love towards men is grace and men's towards God is self-surrender. This is the central point in Christianity.

The 10th and concluding chapter (of Mysticism East and West) on the differences between Śaṅkara and Eokaart consists of a small paragraph only but is packed with value-statements. We quote it in extenso:

"Eokaart thus becomes necessarily what Śaṅkara could never be: the profound discoverer of the rich indwelling life of the "soul" and a leader and physicians of "souls", using the word in a sense which is only possible on a Christian basis. Upon Indian soil there could never have developed this inward unceasing preoccupation with the soul’s life as a life of Gemüt and of
conscience, and therewith the "cura animarum" in the sense which
is characteristic of, and essential to, Christianity from the
earliest days. It is upon this calling as a curator animarum
(sheihered of souls) that finally everything which Eckhart has
said or done as a schoolman or as a preacher, as a simple
Christian or as a profound Mystio, depends."32

So the final statement of Otto on Eckhart's superiority
to Śāmkara is that on Indian soil Eckhart's type of mysticism
is impossible.

6.6. Estimation

Otto's interpretation of mysticism based on his
analysis of religious consciousness is partial and incomplete.
His definition of mysticism has favourable consequences for theism
in general and Christianity in particular but leaves out partheis-
tio mysticism — Otto has tried to minimise the importance of
union-experience and stress the importance of non-rationality
in mysticism. Whereas there is nothing objectionable in stressing
the non-rational aspect, we feel that Otto's attempt is at
showing that ordinary religious ideas and mysticism are not much
different. This is hard to accept. Ordinary understanding of God
and mystical experience of Him are as different as understanding
a poem and writing one.
Otto says that occasionally mystics stress the non-rational aspect of religious experience to an extreme. And in such extreme stressings the mystic feels that God is all and the mystic is naught. This is the Christian position. God is all and the holy and man, the creature, is insignificant and unholy. This is the implication of Otto's definition of mysticism as a life in the knowledge of God - and not a life of union with Him. We do not impute dishonesty and bias on the part of Otto in his understanding of mysticism. But the fact remains that he has been working under the Christian blink. It is quite understandable that the term mysticism might once originate not as meaning union with God - but as an adjective of esoteric theology. But this does not preclude anyone to accept the fact that there are persons who claim direct experience of union with God and they are called the mystics.

Otto's theory assumes the distinction between creator and creature to be inviolable and absolutely true - whereas it is only a part of the religious beliefs and experiences of some forms of theism including Christianity. There are other kinds of experiences too - say - like the following:

Only the illimitable Permanent
Is here. A Peace stupendous, featureless, still,
Replaces all, what once was I, in It
A silent unnamed emptiness content
Either to fade in the Unknowable
Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinitude.
Otto is ill at ease to account for such experiences in their proper perspectives. He does not explain such facts directly but in a round about way. He first gives a definition of mysticism and mystics; and then fits the mystics in it. Would we first analyse the cases of the mystics and then frame a definition, we believe that we would reach a different conclusion.

In spite of this criticism we agree with Otto that mystical experience is non-rational, that it cannot be properly understood nor can it be completely communicated. This is where Upanisadico and Otto's mysticism are parallel.

Otto's comparison between Śāṅkara and Eokaart is nicely illuminating. It has brought to light the remarkable similarities between the two masters. It has given credence with some limitation, to the already existing view that mysticism is the same in all times and climes.

Otto has not only shown the similarities, but he has brought out the differences as well. But the felicity with which he has shown the similarities is missing in the showing of the differences. He says that the differences are many, but in effect the differences veer round the problem of a dynamic Reality and an ethical content. Now, if Eokhart's mysticism is so ethical, it cannot be so similar to Śāṅkara's mysticism as Otto has shown (in the first part of Mysticism East and West). If it is so similar, reductio ad absurdum, it cannot be so superior to Śāṅkara's
mysticism in its ethical contents. In effect, the latter alternative is more probable. We have the evidence of an authority, Albert Schweitzer, a German, Christian and Indologist like Otto himself. Schweitzer says with reference to Identity-Mysticism that "it can no more succeed than did Master Eckhart succeed in making his mysticism become ethical. The attempt invariably consists in nothing more than adding an ethical element to mysticism by means of inadmissible explanations." 24

Again, in his accusation of 'amoral' 'unethical nature' of Śāṅkara's mysticism Otto has betrayed his misunderstanding of Śāṅkara. The Advaita is not unethical but only non-ethical but that also only in a realm where ethics has no sense. Ethics is possible in a world of distinctions. In the distinctionless Absolute - good or bad have no place. Ethics is for the lower, empirical order of existence; and there it is admitted by Śāṅkara. If, however, we ask as to how a saint who has risen over the distinctions and yet continues to live will act, the answer is "he has to follow the rules of good conduct." "The conception of saintliness which is beyond good and evil is not an invitation to practise unethical conduct." 25 Till the final release, no one can violate the ethical rules. So the western criticism of the East as unethical is a misunderstanding founded on confusion of the two standpoints: empirical and ultimate.
The charge of inactivity against Śāṅkara’s Brahmān is equally liable to Ekaart’s Godhead. Only by virtue of a paradox he holds that Godhead acts. In moments of deep concentration, free from inconsistencies, he also says that Godhead is inactive. "God acts. The Godhead does not. It was nothing to do and there is nothing going on in it... The difference between God and the Godhead is the difference between action and non-action." This can well pass off as a quotation from Śāṅkara.

The main problem with Otto is that he has taken the inconsistencies of Ekaart as his merits. It may be that the inconsistencies of Ekaart make him more Christian than the consistencies. In the last analysis it depends upon the standpoint of the enquirer. Otto was enquired into the differences between Śāṅkara and Ekaart from the Christian standpoint and found Ekaart to be superior to Śāṅkara. A person inquiring from the Advaita standpoint will reach the opposite conclusion.

While concluding our discussion on Otto’s interpretation of mysticism we can say that Otto has done well by emphasizing the non-rational in mysticism. For Otto, the difference between ordinary religious consciousness and mysticism is that in mysticism the non-rational element is predominant. This explains why the mystics fail to give a proper account of their experience. But at the same time it has to be pointed out that Otto’s denial of union with
God as the essential element in mystic experience goes counter to the accepted tradition. One cannot be a mystic by emphasising the non-rational aspect of the idea of God unless one has a sense of union with Him. The reason for Otto's denying it may be that even in ordinary religious consciousness (the idea of the holy) he has already presupposed a feeling of God: then the question of further union with Him need not arise. But we have underestimated the distinction between ordinary religious awareness and mysticism. This distinction is not of mere degree but of kind. Mysticism is not only an awareness of God, but a union with Him. We may be aware of an 'X' but we may not have a rapport with it. Similarly, mysticism is not just an idea of God with non-rational aspect emphasised; it is a positive rapport or union with Him.

References and Notes

1. Etymological note on mysticism -

Mysticism = Mystic + ism

Mystic =

(a) < Middle English mystic < Latin
Mystic (us) < Greek mystikos, equivalent to myst- (stem of mystis) an initiate into mysteries + ikos-ic, akin to mysin, to initiate.

(The Random House Dictionary of the English Language)
(b) Old and modern French mystique or Latin
mysticus < Greek mustikos from mústēs
initiated one, from músin close (of eyes, lips),
müsin initiate.

(The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology)

2. "Mysticism is indubitably a most important, perhaps the most
vital element in religion. It is also very much open to abuse
by charlatans and others whose religion is of a superficial kind."

-Geddes MacGregor, Introduction to Religious
Philosophy, P.183

3. "Mysticism.... from its very nature is hardly susceptible of
exact definition." — Pringle-Pattison, A.S., 'Mysticism' in
Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol.16, P.50

4. Cf.

"But such experience can only be hinted at
In myths and images. To speak about it
We talk of darkness, labyrinths, Minotaur terrors.

But that world does not take the place of this one."


5. Wordsworth, W., 'Lines' (composed above Tintern Abbey,
July, 1798)

In his 'Imagination' Wordsworth was written the immortal
lines:

"But such experience can only be hinted at.
In myths and images. To speak about it
We talk of darkness, labyrinths, Minotaur terrors.

But that world does not take the place of this one."
"Our destiny, our being, heart and home,  
Is with infinitude, and only there;  
With hope it is, hope that can never die,  
Effort, and expectation, and desire,  
And something evermore about to be."


W.R. Inge says, "Mysticism means communion with God, that is to say with a Being conceived as the supreme and ultimate reality." - Mysticism in Religion, P.8

8. There is that famous statement of Henri Bergson. ".... mysticism means nothing, absolutely nothing, to the man, who has no experience of it, however slight."

- The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, P.396

9. Underhill, E., Mysticism, P.72


"Mysticism consists in asserting that to be means, simply and wholly, to be immediate. ...." - loc.cit.

11. Ibid, P.81
12. Ibid, P.83
13. loc.cit.
14. James, W., The Varieties of Religious Experience, P.416
15. Stace, W.T., Mysticism and Philosophy, P.343
16. Underhill, op.cit., P.445

Of "The mystics founded their endeavour on a power of supra-rational knowledge, intuitive, inspired, revelatory, and on the force of the inner being to enter into occult with truthe and experience: but these powers are not possessed by men in the mass or possessed only in a crude, undeveloped and fragmentary initial form on
which nothing could be safely founded...."

--- Aurobindo, The Life Divine, P.774 (E.W. Hoicking is quoted in Perm's Encyclopaedia of Religion (p.513) as having said: "Everyman is an avowed or unavowed mystic.")

17. Cf. "... it (mysticism) is now more and more generally accepted by theologians, philosophers and psychologists, as representing in its intensive form the essential religious experience of man."


19. Cf. "When the philosopher guesses and argues, the mystic lives and looks, and speaks, consequently, the discorcerd language of first-hand experience, not the neat dialect of the schools".


20. Russell, B., Mysticism and Logic, P.16


22. Kena Upanisad, II.3. Radhakrisnan's translation: "To whosoever it is not known, to him it is known: to whosoever it is known, he does not know. It is not understood by those who understand it; it is understood by those who do not understand it."

- The Principal Upanisads, p.585

Radhakrisnan's personal comment is: "This verse brings out how we struggle with the difficulties of human expression, how we confess to ourselves the insufficiency of mental utterance." - Loo. cit.
23. "It was in the early works of Schleiermacher that mysticism first sought entrance into Protestant theology... Among those who were influenced by Schleiermacher, mysticism as such penetrated deeply into the very foundation of their theological thought (E. Troeltsch, R. Otto, P. Tillich)."


24. Otto, Mysticism East and West, p. 164
27. Ibid, pp. 22, 194, 197
28. Mysticism East and West, p. 159
29. Mystical experience understood as numinous feeling.
   Our application of what Otto speaks about numinous state of mind (The Idea of the Holy, p. 7) to mystical experience.
30. Mysticism East and West, p. 13
31. Ibid, p. 159

Of. "Where the knowledge of God is pursued for the sake of the inner life of the soul, it may be termed mystical theology; but, where the knowledge of the world in relation to God possesses an independent objective interest the term 'Scholastic theology is used.'"

-Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 6, p. 264

32. Mysticism East and West, pp. 153-59
33. Loc. cit.
34. The Idea of the Holy, p. 21
35. Ibid, p. 22.
36. Loc. cit.
37. Rudyard Kipling, the westerner who knew a good deal of the east, wrote in his "The Ballad of East and West":

"Rudyard Kipling, the westerner who knew a good deal of the east, wrote in his "The Ballad of East and West":"
"Oh, East is East and West is West and never the twin small meet; *
Till Earth and sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;"

*This is the line with which Otto begins 'Mysticism East and West'.

33. East and West in Religion, p. 43
40. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life, p. 101
41. Radhakrishnan, East and West in Religion, pp. 49 ff.
42. Ibid, p. 54
43. Otto, Mysticism East and West, p. 13
   Cf. A mystic's statement in Rāhula Saṁkṛtyāyana's Vṛtti-see-Gangī, p. 236: "Tat pravṛt suk jana ek aai, bāhari colet eka jivāna naaīn, vah colā samanikā bai na saktā aai, simakā bai, musalmānā bai (Mysticism is the same everywhere; it has no quarrel over its external outfits, the outfit can be that of a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim.)."  
44. For instance Dr S.P. Dubey says that Otto firmly believes that mysticism is the same in all ages and places. East and West and other differences vanish here. According to him East is West and West is East. (Rudolf Otto and Hinduism, p. 38) Now this is a clear oversimplification of the case. If Otto is enthusiastic about the similarities, he is no less enthusiastic about the differences.
45. Mysticism East and West, p. 14
46. Ibid, p. 157. At still another place Otto has said: The variety of different types of mystical experience can result in estrangement and conflict. It was the mystics who fought against the mystic Dussein ibn Mansur at Hallaj and helped to bring him to the cross, while he himself from the standpoint of another type of experience, fought against the mysticism of his day. —Mysticism East and West, p. 58
48. Śāṅkara is the best representative of what eastern spiritualism can offer. Meister, Eckart, on the other side, as come to be accepted as a true representative of the Christian (western) mysticism; while Otto has compared him with Śāṅkara, Eckart has compared him with Buddhist mystics in *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*.

49. *Mysticism East and West*, P.15
51. Ibid, P.19
52. Ibid, P.21
53. Ibid, Pp.21-22
54. Ibid, P.29
55. Ibid, P.24
58. Ibid, P 29

59. Maurice de Wulf says that Eckart propounded an equivalent kind of mysticism bordering on pantheism. As created essence, the finite is different from the infinite (*esse rerum extra rerum naturam*), yet the identity of existence compromises the distinction between them. (*Vide, history of Medieval Philosophy*, P.453 ff.)

Śāṅkara's position is more straightforward regarding this problem.

59. *Mysticism East and West*, P.33
60. Ibid, Pp 33-34
61. Ibid, P.36
63. Ibid, P.37
64. Ibid, P.39
65. Ibid, P.46
66. Ibid, P.41
67. Ibid, Pp 48-49
68. Ibid, P.110
69. Ibid, Pp 58, 14, 159
70. Ibid, Pp. 58-59
72. Mysticism East and West, P. 59
73. Ibid, P. 61
74. Ibid, P. 66
75. Ibid, Pp. 70-71
76. Ibid, P. 89
77. Ibid, P. 91
78. Ibid, P. 93
79. Ibid, 153
80. Ibid, P. 136
81. Ibid, P. 137
82. Ibid, P. 138
83. Ibid, P. 139
84. Ibid, P. 193
85. Ibid, P. 207
86. Ibid, P. 208
88. Ibid, P. 225
89. Loc. cit.
90. Ibid, P. 219
91. Ibid, P. 232
92. Ibid, P. 235
94. Sonweitzer, A., Indian Thought and its Development, P. 263
95. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought, P. 134