CHAPTER IV

MYSTICISM

The mysterious has always lured the minds of men. Man has an in-born craving to find hidden truths and an innate curiosity to delve into the unknown. The greatest truths have always challenged the thinking minds by being enshrouded in mystery. Little wonder then that mysticism, the highest hidden aspect of religion and spirituality, the quest of the human soul for a union with its creator - these and something more - has tantalized the minds of poets from times immemorial. Rarely does one come face to face with the Absolute Reality shining in all its splendour. All that is afforded is but a glance at and a glimmer of the radiance. What poets perceive through a flight of fancy, combined with intuition, they but try to reveal and share with the reader through mere words. Mysticism, therefore, cannot be easily described or defined. Its boundaries and definitions are only hinted at, for nothing in it is a water-tight compartment. Much of it is left to be understood and experienced intuitively.

Mystics who have ventured into this baffling journey have shared their experiences and based on these, the term "mysticism" has been variously defined and its several stages analysed.
Bradford Smith finds it "strange that the word mystic suggests something distant and unknowable to many, when the whole point of mysticism is to come close to the divine, to experience it fully, deeply, personally" (177).

Evelyn Underhill attempts to make mysticism less distant and more knowable when she defines it as 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" (81). Man's awareness of his relation with God and the art of establishing this is emphasised by Rufus Jones also, when he defines the word "mysticism" as expressing the type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence. It is religion in its most acute, intense and living stage" (qtd. in Durr xiv).

Various kinds of mysticism are talked about by writers. According to Happold, the two kinds of mysticism are Mysticism of love and union and Mysticism of knowledge and Understanding. He mentions Nature mysticism, Soul mysticism, God mysticism, etc. as the many aspects of mysticism (Happold 40-43).
For the purpose of the present study, it is necessary to deal at length with mysticism according to the Christian and Hindu systems.

In the Western world, mysticism goes back to Plato. Socrates often spoke of his inner sense or connection with the divine and was led by his inner voice to walk the martyr's path. Even Aristotle assumes that man's power to reason is related to the divine reason (Smith 179). The early Christians had inherited from the teachings of Jesus a firm faith in personally experiencing the presence of God. Christianity is from the beginning a mystical religion.

Christian mysticism is Christ-centred, and is essentially the mysticism of the love of God. Christ Himself endorses this: "He who loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him" (John 14:21, 23).

Love is the essence of God's nature. The love of God for man is more than man's love for God and that is why God sent His only Son to redeem mankind. The twelfth century mystic Bernard of Clairvaux, dealing with the means by which man might reach God through contemplation, said:
"As the little water-drop poured into a large measure of wine seems to lose its own nature entirely and to take on both the taste and the colour of the wine... so must all human feeling towards the Holy one be self-dissolved in unspeakable wise, and wholly transfused into the will of God." (qtd. in Smith 180).

A Christian mystic is not satisfied with the mystic experience he has but comes back to the mundane world to help other men redeem themselves. This return of the mystic for the uplift of his brethren is a characteristic feature of Hindu mysticism also.

Hindu mysticism comprises various types of mysticism. An acquaintance with Indian religious experience shows that there are types of religious and mystical experience other than that of an intimate communion with God. S.N. Dasgupta in his Hindu Mysticism divides mysticism under five categories: i) Sacrificial mysticism, ii) Mysticism of the Upanishads, iii) Yoga mysticism, iv) Buddhistic mysticism and v) Bhakti mysticism.

Bhakti mysticism refers not only to man's love for God, but also God's love for man. A devotee is expected to practise self-abnegation and self surrender to God, saturated with love of God for its own sake.
In the Bhagavad Gita, self-surrender to God or self-abnegation does not involve a personal relationship of communion and love so much as it does the moral qualities of compassion, universal friendship, humility, contentment, want of attachment, self-control and purity. The mysticism of the Gita consists in the belief that the performance of actions without personal attachment or self-seeking motive and with a dedication of their fruits to God, leads man to his highest realisation or liberation. True knowledge is conducive to the acceptance of such a life of desireless self-surrender to God (Dasgupta 118).

The Bhagavata Purana (eleventh century AD) for the first time talks about devotion as the supreme source of spiritual enjoyment, that is itself the highest goal. It asserts that bhakti destroys all the past sins. A man who has completely surrendered himself has only God as his possession. His constant association with God keeps him happy and contented. Such a man does not aspire even for liberation. The devotee is purified by his devotion and is no longer overcome by external attachments or passions. This kind of devotion is entirely different from the calm contemplative life of complete self-abnegation and self-surrender to God with a mind wholly immersed in God.
Evelyn Underhill proposes four features by which mysticism may be identified: i) True mysticism is active and practical ii) Its aims are wholly transcendental iii) Reality or the Eternal one is a loving and personal object of Love and iv) to live united with the object of Love is the super form of life that is arrived at by following the arduous mystic way (81).

The total transmutation of a mystic is not sudden but gradual. Mystics have described the stages they pass through in various ways, yet the general lines do not vary much. According to Christian mystics, there are five stages in one's spiritual progression. They are:

i) the Awakening of the Self
ii) the Purgation or Purification of the Self
iii) the Illumination of the Self
iv) the Dark Night of the Self and
v) the Unitive Life or Union.

These different stages overlap one another and a mystic has to pass through all these stages, though gradually.

The types of mystic experience have been classified in different ways, but according to Smith, seem to resolve themselves into three:
i) Radiant apprehension of the Absolute, the One, the divine which comprehends both transcendent and immanent.

ii) A new clarity of vision which makes all things shine and which gives a fresh significance to everything in the natural world.

iii) A new internal energy which expresses itself in loving kindness towards others, in an outgoingness which draws others within the divine circle, and in cheerfully giving of oneself (188).

The Hindu mystic way, unlike the Christian way, does not speak of clear-cut stages. By "the Hindu way" is meant two different ways namely, the way of the Upanishads and the way of the Bhagavad Gita, both of which aspire for moksha or liberation. According to Upanishadic mysticism there are four stages: Jagrata, Svapna, Susupti and Turiya i.e. the waking, dream, deep sleep and the Realization state. These four stages may be said to correspond roughly to the Awakening, Purgation, Illumination and the Unitive Life respectively, of the Christian way.

In the Bhagavad Gita, three methods of approach or Yogas are prescribed for one to reach the ultimate: Karma or work, Jnana or knowledge and Bhakti or devotion. The path of devotion is most suited for those who are neither too much attached to sense desires nor too much detached
from them. **Bhakti** purifies their minds and they become averse to all other desires and enjoyments and thus they learn to live a life of supreme devotion. In due course they start experiencing such supreme bliss that even the bliss of ultimate liberation loses its charm for them. All their earthly passions are consumed in their passion for God. A distinction is made between two kinds of bhakti. When we make use of bhakti as a means to attain liberation, it is **sadhana** or **upaya bhakti**. When it is an end in itself, it is **sadhya** or **upeya bhakti**. The Azhvars belong to the second group. What begins as **sadhana** should develop into **sadhya**.

Four different stages are discernible in the mystical growth of a devotee. They are **parabhakti**, **parajnana**, **parama bhakti** and **parama priti** or **prema bhakti**. The first three stages together constitute a devotee's "first mystic life". As in the Illumination of the Christian mystic way, here also the devotee has visions and hears voices during the third stage. But he considers them as obstacles and wants to transcend them so that he can have a direct communion with God. At this stage he feels that God has abandoned him and he yearns to unite with Him, even as a lover seeks his beloved. This phase is akin to the Dark Night of the Christian mystic way. This love-
longing called the Love of the pain of separation from the Lord is quite palatable as it makes him remember the Lord constantly and with intense love. The last trace of 'I-hood' removed, the devotee enjoys the supreme bliss of Parama priti or prema bhakti, the absolute devotion to Him. The Lover and the beloved are finally united in the realm of mukti or liberation. In this state of Unitive Life, the finite self enjoys the bliss of doing service to the Lord and all His creatures.

Viewed against this background an analysis of the poetry of Herbert and Nammazhvar with reference to the various mystical states yields rich treasures. It should be stated in the beginning itself that Herbert is not considered as a very great mystic, while Nammazhvar is. Nevertheless, a careful study of Herbert's poetry makes it evident that his soul has trudged along the various mystic states.

The Awakening may be characterised as a spiritual conversion which is always preceded by a long and intense struggle. In this "preconverted state" the individual seems to get an uncertain awareness of the Absolute and it makes him feel restless. He fights with the self and his environment to maintain his equilibrium.
Herbert's ordination as a priest, a major event in his life, brings about a definite spiritual conversion in him. His mystic journey starts with the soul's struggle which is soon to lead it to the first lap of its journey, the Awakening state. This pre-awakening state is depicted in "Affliction (I)" where the poet's heart has been enticed by the divine Lover. The poet is torn between joy and a feeling of inadequacy but such is the vital attraction of the Lord that he cannot give up the longing although he becomes intensely aware of his being an unworthy sinner. This is the soul's struggle. "I could not go away, nor persevere" (48). This struggle leads to the Awakening state.

Vendler remarks about Herbert's situation thus:

Terrified by his own threat to abandon his master, Herbert recoils with his first epithet of affection, 'Ah my deare God!'... His life investment - his only life investment - has been in God, and should he leave God, his heart would be entirely empty. Love that has been placed in one hope alone is not so soon transferred... the absence of love, Herbert realizes, is worse, as a suffering, than the loss of health, life, or friends; it would be
the worst of afflictions to be prevented from loving. And so his final paradox hastily reaffirms his love and swears that if he fails to love, God may punish him by preventing him from loving. In this way, God is re-established as the source of value—value being love—and Herbert's love, his motive for perseverance, is renewed (46).

To trace the mystical progression in the case of Nammazhvar is a little difficult as he is considered to be a born mystic. It is not known whether he passed through the pre-awakening state. One cannot trace Nammazhvar's spiritual progression from the different versions of his biography. However, there is evidence in his poetry of his having overcome obstacles along the spiritual path.

Nammazhvar repeatedly talks about the need to control the senses which are the greatest enemies of man. Addressing his fellow-beings in Tiruvaymozhi 2.8.4, he reminds them of the imperative need to control the five senses. This can be done by constantly remembering the auspicious traits of the Lord. The Lord slaying the demons signifies to the Azhvar that the contemplation of the auspicious qualities of the Lord will destroy the demonic qualities and the evil tendencies in man. Destroying the
senses amounts to getting rid of these tendencies. Only the Lord who is above the ken of the senses can help man in this and hence the need to meditate on His divine attributes. So powerful is the attraction of the senses that unless the yearning to overcome them is intense, man's spiritual progress becomes impossible.

First Mystic Life

The first three stages of the mystical journey - the Awakening, the Purgation and the Illumination - together constitute what is referred to as the 'First Mystic Life'.

In the Christian way, the first in the sequence of the various mystic states is "the awakening of the transcendental consciousness" (Underhill 176). This may be termed as the conversion of the self from its hitherto lower levels of consciousness to the higher levels. This happens after the self, by constant effort, breaks down the barrier that separates it from the divine self. This conversion very often occurs suddenly, although in certain cases it is gradual and not marked by any definite crisis. In most cases the new consciousness is said to be imposed from without rather than developed from within. When the soul's eye is thus opened, it is accompanied by "an actual sense of blinding radiance" and immediately "the storm and stress,
the vague cravings and oscillations of the past life are forgotten" (Underhill 179). It is at this point that the life of the mystic begins.

The reaction of the individual is usually one of awe and rapture rather than of love. The self has to pass beyond this stage of metaphysical rapture and establish a definite and personal relation with the Absolute. The awakened subject should also participate in the transcendent life after undergoing a drastic change. This crystallization often "presents itself to the consciousness in the form of visions or voices" (Underhill 196).

Having set its goal, which is perfect union with the Absolute, the soul suddenly becomes aware of its own unworthiness. It realizes that illusion, evil and imperfection of every kind have to be got rid of. It becomes acutely conscious of its sins. The soul oscillates from the initial mystic pleasure to a state of pain. In order to make itself worthy of the vision of the Lord, the soul enters the purgative way. Although it is a harsh and painful process, the soul turns to it as an act of loving desire. Cleansing off of the sins is the most important aspect of the purgative way. The individual is expected to purge off the three kinds of sins - the original, the venial and the mortal - through a process of spiritual discipline,
which includes detachment and mortification. Detachment is the purging away of all that is harmful and which dissipates the precious energy of the self. According to Underhill, "Real detachment means the death of preferences of all kinds" (223). Mortification is a deliberate recourse to painful experiences or physical torture and its goal is not death but life. All mystics welcome pain as a divine necessity and active suffering elevates the soul to a higher plane. The object of this self-discipline is freedom from all fetters that bind the soul. The self already gets sporadic raptures of illumination, the third step in the mystical process.

The oscillation between the bitter struggles of purgation and the joy of illumination persists till the soul, like a child, struggles to stand upright and walk. According to Underhill, that moment "marks the boundary between the purgative and the illuminative states" (Underhill 230).

As a result of the efforts of the soul to purify itself, the higher consciousness which appeared at the time of awakening reappears. It enters into a kind of fellowship with the Absolute and gets a transcendental feeling with which it is able to behold the Absolute. This kind of beholding the "lifting of consciousness from a self-centered
to a God-centred world, is of the essence of illumination" (Underhill 234). The aspirant apprehends the Immanence and Transcendence of Reality and tries to see God in all natural things. This is popularly known as "nature-mysticism".

The first three stages of Hindu Bhakti mysticism may be termed Parabakhti or higher form of devotion, Parajnana or the transcendent knowledge and Paramabhakti or supreme devotion. Before a devotee enters the first of these stages, he practises several disciplines culminating in meditation. In the Parabakhti stage, the self rests on the blessed enjoyment of the Divine. While the Awakening of the Christian way connotes the impersonal awe and rapture at the knowledge of the Infinite, parabakhti includes the warmth and love towards the personal God.

The self realizes its unworthiness and incapacity to deserve God's love. It is also aware of the enormity of its sins. This realization makes it plunge into the practice of various purification processes. The bhakti way does not offer a separate category as purgation. Parabakhti is said to rout the three Karmas, the sancita, prarabdha and agami. From the parabakhti stage, the soul progresses into parajnana stage where it develops an intense thirst for the direct intuition of God in personal form. The short-lived vision of the Lord, fills the
aspirant with rapture and an unquenchable longing for Him. From here, the soul moves towards paramabhakti. The parajnana stage is equivalent to the Illuminative stage of the Christian way and paramabhakti is the peak of the Illuminative way from where the self moves to the next higher stage, the Unitive way.

Transcendence relates to the Absolute, beyond the world of sense perception. Immanence is that condition in which the mystic experiences overwhelming affection for God. Reality, to him, is an adorable person, very close to him. He addresses the Indwelling God in the most endearing terms and establishes relationship analogous to that between the human beings such as the Master-servant (dasya), fellowship (sakhyya), parent-child (vatsalya), Teacher-student (guru- sishya) and the lover-beloved (nayaka-nayaki) relationships. The abounding love and joy the mystic enjoys in such communion give him a new vision with which he looks at the phenomenal world. He perceives the fusion of the One in the All, and All in the One and finds that all created beings have a hidden meaning and significance. He learns God's mystery through Nature. Nature in a sense is the language in which God expresses His thoughts. Hindu mystics conceive Divine Immanence on the analogy of the body-soul
relationship, \textit{Sarira-Sariri} bhava. All the sentient and non-sentient beings together constitute the body of the Lord while the Lord enters the finite forms and remains as their soul.

Christian religion solves the paradox of Immanence and Transcendence by identifying respectively Christ as the personal, intimate and elusive Lover of the soul and the transcendent Godhead as the Undifferentiated One comprising the Trinity of persons. In the same way, the theological Hindu Vaishnavism identifies transcendent Brahman as Narayana while Vishnu as well as the incarnations of Vishnu are taken to be the adorable, personal Gods.

With his strong faith in his Church, its regulations and customs, Herbert constantly thinks of God and this leads him gradually to the Awakening state. In this state, the poet is highly conscious of his sins and feels unworthy; he resort to prayer and meditation; he is filled with awe and wonder rather than affection for God; he realizes God's initiative in uplifting his soul. The self starts succeeding a little in breaking the barriers that separate it from the divine self. In Herbert's case, the process of conversion and purification has begun.

In "Miserie" Herbert declares that man is foolish with "clay hearts". He lists his inadequacies and questions.
"How shall infection/presume on thy perfection? (35-36). In "Sinnes Round" he describes the vicious cycle of his sinful thought, leading to sinful words in turn leading to sinful actions which once again supply sinful thoughts.

Herbert mourns in 'The Agonie' that even the seas may be fathomed but not his sins. He becomes aware of his innate weakness for though God, parents and society have invented several strategies to avoid sin, "One cunning bosome-sinne" blows off all the fences that are supposed to guard him. So susceptible is man to sin. Herbert's feeling of unworthiness is expressed in "Employment (I)" where he admits that his life is barren. "I am no link of thy great chain, / But all my companie is a weed" (21-22).

The thought of his sins slowly mingles with his awareness of God's glory and he plaintively questions in "Even-Song": "What have I brought thee home / For this thy love?..." (9-10). The thought of God's love and supreme sacrifice leads him to a mood of meditation and he is filled with awe as seen in "The Altar" where he confesses that his heart is like a broken stone altar, which can be chiselled and cut by nothing but God's power.

"The Sacrifice" is filled with the immensity of man's sins and the grief and great love of God. The poem reveals
the simultaneous conversion and purification taking place in the poet. He has started considering the mighty passion of the Lord which awe-inspires him. When Herbert decides to return everything back to God in "Thanksgiving", he is stunned and dumbfounded when he thinks of God's passion and knows not how to return it. "Then for thy passion - I will do for that- / Alas, my God, I know not what" (49-50).

God's initiative in trying to elevate the poet is evident in 'The Pulley' where God who has showered so many gifts on man keeps back "rest" in the fond hope that "If goodnesse lead him not, yet wearinesse/May tosse him to my breast" (19-20).

God helps man's uplift in "Easter". It is God "Who takes thee by the hand that then likewise / with him mayst rise:" (3-4). He is hopeful of God redeeming him for though he is stone-hearted, he remembers that God "one didst write in stone" ("The Sinner" 14).

The poet's self is now intensely aware of its littleness and God's greatness and this leads him on to the stage of Purgation.

The soul of the poet realizes the necessity of severe purgation if it is to gain God's love absolutely. Herbert tries to cleanse himself by contemplating on the cross, for
it makes him "sigh, and seek and faint and die" ("The Crosse"). His contemplation on the cross reminds him of the great sacrifice of Christ, of the blood shed by Him for man's redemption and the grief that resulted. In "Good Friday" Herbert thinks of cleansing himself thus: "Then let each hour of my whole life one grief devour" (13-14). God's blood is the medicine "... Which doth both cleanse and close / All sorts of wounds" ("An Offering" 20-21).

Herbert gets cleansed by some of his rigorous efforts as well, such as, shedding tears for his sins, repenting and sighing over his misdeeds. He realizes the value of prayer and confession also as methods to cleanse himself. To him, prayer is "God's breath in man returning to his birth / The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage, / The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;" ("Prayer (I)").

Herbert notices that God defeats him in everything as a result of his sinful nature. But immediately, he reminds himself of the one thing he can be proud of, namely confession: "Yet by confession will I come / Into thy conquest:" ("The Reprisall" 13-14). In "Affliction (III)" the value of a remorseful sigh is described powerfully: "The sigh then only is / A gale to bring me sooner to my blisse" (11-12). The cleansing effect of sighs and tears
arising from "a throbbing conscience spurred by remorse" is the storm that "purge the aire without, within the breast" ("The Storm"). In "The Rose" Herbert declares that "repentance is a purge" (28).

Herbert welcomes Lent which is a time of temperance and abstinence and thus a means of cleansing himself. Lent is a time of fasting when sin is starved as well.

As part of the process of purgation, Herbert tries to achieve detachment by thinking on the futility of worldliness. The pleasures of the world are false and he realizes that they are but "colour'd griefs" and "blushing woes" ("The Rose"). In short, all things of the world are transient and if one does not detach oneself from these, he is like one who "... searchest round / To finde out death but missest life at hand" ("Vanitie (I)" 27-28).

Whatever be man's effort, the ultimate purging of sins can be done only with God's grace, for that alone, declares Herbert, can "purge all my sinnes". Not only is he aware of his sins in the past, but he confesses his heavy sins of the present and promises to strive to keep away from them in the future ("Trinitie Sunday").

Herbert, purged off all sins, seems to have entered the Illuminative state as some of his poems illustrate. He now
realizes and perceives God's greatness, glory and light. He seems to get a vision of God which is personal on one level and transcendental on the other. This is made possible by contemplation and the impact of the experience is tremendous.

The efficacy of prayer and the "easie quick accesse" it proves for men to reach God thrills the poet in "Prayer (11)". He realizes God's supreme power for it is His great arm "which spans the east and west, / And tacks the centre to the sphere" (8-9). He knows not how to praise the Lord's power and love which has created everything from glittering angels to ordinary dust ("Temper (I)"). The five "Affliction" poems trace the poet's progression from rebellion to submission.

In "Praise (11)" Herbert views God in a Transcendental level when he hails Him as the "King of Glory" and 'King of Peace'. In the penultimate stanza, his vision of God is that of a personal God: "Thou grew'st soft and moist with tears, / Thou relentedst: "(21-22). Having realized God's glory and love, he considers God as his Way, Truth, Life, Light, Feast, Strength, Joy, Love, and Heart, ("The Call"). This magnificent Lord is "... Lord of power, / Killing and quickning, bringing down to hell / And unto heaven in an houre;" ("The Flower" 15-17).
Herbert is not afraid of death now. He wants to rise up to the Lord. He is totally enthralled by the might and power, the glory and greatness, the love and light of God. The poem "Providence" lists out the immense variety and unending wonders of God's creation. What unifies the diversity, Herbert understands, is God's glory which has created all of them. Everything in this world awaits God's command or permission. In this stage of illumination, Herbert declares: "We all acknowledge both thy power and love / To be exact, transcendent and divine" (29-30).

Thus at the end of the first mystic life the poet's soul has awakened, purged itself and has gained illumination as a result of which he sees God in everything in nature. It is now that we see him as a nature mystic.

He is able to see symbolic meanings in every object of nature. The fact that everything in nature seems to have a place for itself and a role to perform makes the poet marvel at God's creation, at the same time reminding him of his own uselessness and making him compare himself to a weed "Employment (I)". Very often he wishes he were a tree. The tree gives fruit, shade, shelter and nesting place for birds and grows heavenward. Even after its death, it is of use to man. This selflessness reminds him in turn, of Christ's selflessness and sacrifice ("Flower"). He is able to draw philosophic truths from the changing seasons of the year.
Just as the spring flowers mark the end of the winter season, he is sure, the spell of aridity will certainly be followed by the influx of God's grace and his shrivelled heart will recover its greeness.

God is the complement of everything in life completing every design and pattern in creation. The unseen presence of God in everything is brought out in "The Discharge": "He is thy night at noon: He is at night / Thy noon alone. / The crop is his, for he hath sown" (14-15). Herbert not only uses nature to express a subtle thought but believes that everything in nature is intended to serve God. He often pleads with nature to supply what he lacks and he learns many a fine lesson from it.

But this state of illumination is fleeting and does not reside with him for long, for Herbert wonders: "...Where is that mightie joy, / Which just now took up all my heart?" ("Temper (II)" 1-2). Thus his soul is now poised for the second mystic life.

As for Nammazhvar, he generally lays emphasis on the hurdles that come in one's spiritual progression. He considers the five senses to be the greatest enemies of man. These enemies can be vanquished and union with the Lord achieved with the grace of the Lord. The Azhvar frequently
refers to his earlier shameful and sinful existence. The paradoxes present in creation are merely accepted in total faith as divine manifestations and hence there is no conflict in him to find out a solution for the external opposites.

The experiences revealed in the poems of Nammazhvar "range from despair attendant on the darkness of the spirit to an exultation dissolving into the ecstasy of realization, and they follow one another with a suddenness and apparent lack of connection that startle and elude common reason" (Raghavan 36). Nammazhvar looks back at the spiritual path he has traversed after reaching the Unitive state and therefore his poems are in the mode of retrospective narration.

There is a surrender of the self in the opening verse of Tiruvaymozhi (1.1.1). God is characterised as one with perfections and a repository of innumerable auspicious traits. The Azhvar exhorts his chastened mind to adore the dazzling feet of the Lord. The next verses speak of the Lord who is the embodiment of bliss and knowledge, who pervades all things sentient and non-sentient. (Verses 2, 3 and 4). This supreme Lord is also easily accessible to His devotees and hence His various incarnations. The Azhvar conjures up the vision of Lord Krishna stealing butter and
being tied down by His mother (1.3.1). Nammazhvar proclaims that the Lord has entered his self (2.6.1) and has illumined it. But he suffers greatly as a result of the accumulation of the three karmas in him. Soon he realizes that the Transcendental Reality need not be sought anywhere far away. It is available to him in the arca (icon) form (3.6.1). The arca form at Tiruvinnakar gives him the vision in paradoxical terms. The Transcendental God is also a very intimate mother, cajoling and comforting him (TVM 6.3).

Peria Tiruvantati depicts the different psychic moods of Nammazhvar - happiness and despondency, doubts and faith, weakness and strength. With God's grace the Azhvar has overcome all sufferings and the poem ends with Nammazhvar appealing to his heart that it should ever live in thanksgiving.

Various methods of purification have been suggested by Nammazhvar as necessary for one in the mystical journey. Chanting the thousand names of God is a religious exercise he commends. In Tiruvaymozhi 1.2.1 he declares that uttering the name of the Lord as "kesava" even once will destroy all our sins. The power of a single name of the Lord, "Madhava" uttered quite casually by the Azhvar is stressed in TVM 2.7.3. The Lord is said to have entered him, ridding him of all evils. Meditation on the name "Narayana" is another method advocated by the Azhvar (10.5.1).
According to Nammazhvar, even if one utters the Lord's name without understanding the meaning and significance or in hypocrisy, He showers His grace on him. Thus in TVM 5.1.3 the poet confesses that he addressed the Lord out of pretended devotion and He entered him at once.

Performance of religious rites and going on pilgrimage have also been mentioned as necessary in one's spiritual advancement. In TVM 10.5.5. Nammazhvar advocates the offering of flowers as a sacred duty to attain liberation.

In addition to these, he prescribes complete renunciation as a way to attain one's goal (TVM 1.2). One who renounces everything can destroy the ego completely, give up all forms of attachment and reach the Ultimate.

All these methods arouse bhakti or loving devotion to the Lord in the poet and his heart overflows with love for Him. Often he refers to his heart melting like wax at the mere thought of the Lord's exploits and His abundant love for the human beings.

His love for God expresses itself in his loving service to the Lord's devotees. In a number of verses, Nammazhvar expresses his desire to do service to the servants of God, even if they belong to the lowest of the low classes of society.
It is to be noted that in Nammazhvar the Illuminative way occurs almost alongside the Purgatory processes. In Tiruvaymozhi 1.9 and 1.10 Nammazhvar describes how the Lord entered him slowly and the resultant bliss enjoyed by him. Lest the Azhvar should collapse if He entered him all at once, the Lord gets on to his hip, moves upwards to the region of his heart, enters his tongue, looks through his eyes and finally reaches his head. Afraid that he would forget Him, the Lord has firmly lodged Himself in the Azhvar's heart (1.10.10).

Again in TVM 2.3, Nammazhvar describes his union with the Lord in terms of the dissolution of honey, milk, nectar and candy (1). In verse 4, he declares that He has dissolved into his soul so that there is nothing in him which the Azhvar can call his own. He gives vent to his supreme joy and exclaims that the very heavenly bliss has come to him. In TVM 2.5 and 4.3. Nammazhvar gives expression to his immense joy over the unique blending of his soul with the Lord.

Nammazhvar describes how he had a mental vision of the exquisite form of the Lord. His appetite for a complete vision of the Lord has only been whetted and soon this becomes a craving for ultimate union with Him (TVM 5.5 and 7.7).
Nammazhvar seems to have reached the Parama bhakti stage in 10.8 when the Lord has entered him and spread Himself completely in him. In verse 7 he asserts that his eyes feast upon Him constantly. The Azhvar is able to see God in every object of nature.

One finds nature mysticism in the poetry of Nammazhvar. Very often nature forms the background to the drama of love depicted in the poems and is in tune with the activities of mankind. He invests on nature the capacity for emotion.

In Tiruvaymozhi 2.1.5, the girl in love wonders whether nature itself participates in a universal longing for the Lord. It appears to intensify her own longing and the resultant suffering. The bird, the ocean, the north-wind, the sky with the rain clouds, the waning moon, the burning lamp etc. are all seen by the girl to be pining for the Lord. All the objects of nature "suffer because of Krishna's immanent presence in them and thus the girl's agony increases because even in these things she experiences the painful presence of Krishna" (Hardy 339-40). The red beak of the parrot reminds the love-lorn girl of the Lord's red lips, eyes, palms and feet; the dark rain clouds of His dark form; birds and peacocks in the company of their mates, of her separation from Him. Thus nature, by providing a symbolic presence of Lord Krishna only increases the girl's agony.
Nammazhvar's uses nature as a mediator between the girl and the Lord. She sends messages to Krishna through the bees, storks, herons and clouds.

The high degree of sensibility to nature which one finds in the classical akattinai poetry is seen in Nammazhvar also, but he exploits and develops such emotive responses to nature resulting in a cluster of poetic genres.

The four works of Nammazhvar are conventionally treated to illustrate the successive stages of parabhakti, parajnana and paramabhakti. The quintessence of the works is summed up by R. Ramanujachari thus: "Thiruviruttam narrates the sad plight in which he [Nammazhvar] himself and his fellowmen find themselves and makes a fervent prayer ... the Lord grants the Azhvar ... a vision of Himself. Getting a foretaste of what he would experience in moksha. The Alvar describes it in ... Tiruvaciriyam ... How this vision only serves to intensify his yearning for direct and sustained experience is described in... Peria Tiruvantati ... The last and the greatest of his works Tiruvoimozhi is a grand saga depicting the arduous adventure of the Alvar in quest of beatitude, the hazards, trials and tribulations on the way till the haven of peace, stability and bliss is reached" (qtd. in Srinivasan 280).
The Second Mystic Life

The Second Mystic Life comprises the two stages of the "Dark Night of the Soul" and the "Unitive Life" of the Christian mystic way. Corresponding to them are the Viraha Bhakti and Prema Bhakti of the Hindu mystic way.

The Dark Night of the soul is considered to be "the most intense period of the great swing-back into darkness" (Underhill 381), that separates the Illuminative way and the Unitive way. It is a period of utter stagnation and blankness as a result of the extreme mental fatigue and spiritual despair. He is overwhelmed with a sense of impotence and deprivation. "The sense is so deep and strong that it breaks all communication set up between the self and the Transcendent; swamps its intuitions of Reality; and plunges that self into the state of negation and unutterable misery" (Underhill, 455).

The self realizes its inadequacy in two ways. Objectively, it feels the absence of the Absolute and subjectively it understands painfully its own weakness and imperfection. But the Divine Negation produces a spiritual energy which directs the growth towards a new state of consciousness. As a mystical activity, the Dark Night is not a neatly defined, uniform experience, and mystics interpret the experience differently. But, in spite of the
differences in the nature of the experience, they all pave the way to the Unitive experiences.

The self that comes out of the Dark Night is not conscious of the Illumination of the Divine Spark but the transmuted humanity whose life is one with the Absolute life of God. Mystics commonly use the analogy of the lover and the beloved, with all its subtle shades of love to explicate their "Dark Night" experience. This is denoted as "Bridal Mysticism".

A religious mystic tries to communicate his rich experience of union with God in terms of human relationship. He naturally adopts the most passionate and intimate relationship - that of the lover and the beloved. In the bridal mysticism, the soul of the devotee is considered to be the bride and God, the bridegroom and the union is called Spiritual Marriage. All the characteristics that mark the human relationship such as love, dedicated service, unswerving loyalty and irrevocableness are to be found in the spiritual marriage. What is portrayed here is only an artistic representation of an experience and not the experience itself and so it is free from any sensuality. The marriage symbol, however, is not adequate enough to express the experience. Bridal mysticism not only signifies the ecstatic intimacy of the self with God but it also
implies moments of separation when God disappears during the "Game of Love". The longing devotion during separation is termed as Viraha bhakti in the Hindu bhakti system. Viraha bhakti connotes the love of the pain of separation from the Lord. It includes the joy of union and the sorrow of separation. The alternation between the two is essential for the self to reach the unitive consciousness. The inflow and the outflow of love between the self and the Self constitute the Unitive experience of the mystic.

Unitive Life is the "final triumph of the spirit, the flower of mysticism, humanity's top note" according to Underhill (413). It is often lived in its most perfect form in this mundane world. The mystics describe certain symptoms which mark the fruits of the unitive state, the chief marks of which are i) a complete absorption into the Infinite which the self apprehends ii) a consciousness of sharing the power of the Infinite so that it enjoys a total freedom and iii) the self turns into a resourceful power, "an actual parent of spiritual vitality in other men" (416). The aspirant is at last able to partake of the Divine Nature and he is a deified man. The Christian mystics believe that deification of man is virtually a corollary to the Incarnation, the humanisation of God. Once the mystic steps into the Unitive Life, he is free from all trials and he enjoys utter liberation.
The equivalent stage in the Hindu system is *prema bhakti*, when love and knowledge become one and the self becomes perfect even as God Himself is perfect. The mystic who has enjoyed *prema bhakti* sees the Lord in all created things and willingly serves them without expecting any reward. He is totally detached but is engaged in his duties, showing love to all alike and submitting himself to God's will.

Herbert's Second Mystic Life begins with a sense of stagnation, fatigue, despair, deprivation and intense yearning. These emotions are roused by the absence of God. The feeling of longing and languishing has an edge to its intensity, more than ever before, as the human soul has enjoyed a short and intermittent contact with the Divine. It is like the agony of one born blind, being gifted with sight for a short time and then deprived of it.

In "Home" Herbert is seen suffering physically and spiritually due to the Lord's absence. He is weary with the world and calls out in despair: "O show thyself to me, or take me up to thee!" which forms the refrain of the poem. His heart is broken as his verse when his pleas are not heard by God in "Deniall". In "Dulnesse" his soul languishes and droops due to God's absence. He goes in search of God in "The Pilgrimage" and "The Search". While
in the former he has to pass through the "cave of Desperation", the "rock of Pride", "Fancies meadow", the "wilde of passion" and the "gladsome hill". Yet the goal of his pilgrimage is a step further. In "The Search" the poet wonders what could have dared to eclipse God's glory and keep Him hidden. The short-lived joy of God's flying visit has sharpened his pain'.

Thou cam'st but now; wilt thou so soon depart,
And give me up to night?
For many weeks of ling'ring pain and smart
But one half houre of comfort to my heart? ...

....
Thy short abode and stay
Feeds not, but addes to the desire of meat.

("The Glimpse" 2-5, 11-12)

The poet is famished weary, crying, sighing, groaning, on his knees; his heart is dry and his "soul is hoarse" ("Longing"). The Lord's delay is death to the poet.

Such is his grief that his tears alone can not give vent to it. The poet requests rivers, springs and rain to supply him with tears ("Grief"). He wails about his pathetic condition thus:
O what a damp and shade
   Doth me invade!
No stormie night
Can so afflict or so affright.
   As thy eclips'd light.

("A Parodie" 11-15)

The first sweet look of God had enthralled Herbert. But since then there is a storm of bitterness brewing in his soul as it is separated from God. How wonderful it would be, thinks Herbert, when he can enjoy for ever God's full-eyed love ("The Glance" 20).

But right now, away from his God, union with whom he yearns for, Herbert's state is miserable. He is in a state of stagnation and decay and hence his pathetic cry:

O come! for thou dost know the way:
Or if to me thou wilt not move,
Remove me, where I need not say,
Drop from above

("Grace" 21-24).

Herbert at the end of the stage is tortured, suspended between this world and the world of grace ("Affliction (IV)"). Everything is in a state of chaos. He can bear to pine no more. God must necessarily release him from this
agony and he prays to God to dissolve the knot, "Till I reach heav'n, and much more thee" (30).

According to Underhill, "the stripping off of the I, the Me, the Mine, utter renouncement, or 'self-naughting' - self-abandonment to the direction of a larger Will - is an imperative condition of the attainment of the unitive life" (425). Such a stripping off of the ego is seen in "Clasping of Hands" where Herbert affirms that he belongs to the Lord much more than he can ever hope to be his. God too belongs much more to Herbert than to Himself. The poet only hopes that this state of unification remains for ever when there will be no distinction of "Thine" and "Mine" (20).

Herbert's absolute abandonment to the Lord's will is illustrated in "Temper (I)" when he submits to God's way: "Yet take thy way; for sure thy way is best." (21). In "The Crosse" too Herbert abandons himself to God's will: "Thy will be done" (36).

In the final Unitive state of Herbert's mystical progression, there is a merging of the finite with the Infinite, a sharing of the Infinite's power and the self itself turning into a source of power. All distinctions are crossed. The absolute confidence and fearlessness arising as a result of this is evident in "Judgement" and "The Invitation". While in the former, Herbert boldly asserts
that God will find on the day of Judgement that Herbert's faults are but His own, in the latter poem, the poet invites sinners and others alike to God's feast as he firmly believes that "where is All, there All should be" (36). Such a confidence and fearlessness can be enjoyed only by one who is secure in his love, having totally merged with the other, sharing the Infinite's strength and acting by its authority. The self turning into a source of power in the regeneration of other souls is exemplified in Herbert becoming a priest at Bemerton, dedicating himself in the service of the Lord. This Union has been made possible only because of God's infinite love for Herbert. As Ruysbroek points out, "To eat and be eaten! this is Union!" (qtd. in Underhill 425). This spiritual marriage is depicted in "The Invitation" in which God is both the host and the feast and in "Love (III)" where the poet is able to sit and eat. This is the final communion referred to in Luke 12:37. In this ultimate stage, we find "a tightening of the bonds of that companionship which has been growing in intimacy and splendour during the course of the Mystic Way" (Underhill 426). Herbert's love has been completely fulfilled.

The Dark Night or the Viraha bhakti is a very significant stage in the mystical progression of Nammazhvar. The entire Tiruviruttam consisting of a hundred verses and
nearly three hundred hymns of Tiruvaymozhi delineate this stage. The poet assumes the role of a girl in love, her mother and the companion in turn. In Tiruviruttam, in addition to these roles, he identifies himself with Lord Krishna, who also suffers as a result of separation from His beloved. Like the human husband, Krishna announces His intention to go far in order to earn and the mistress laments her inability to endure the separation (Verses 11, 12).

As Nammazhvar constantly yearns for union with the Lord, there is a swing in his mood from happiness and bliss to dejection, despair and desolation. The Lord appears to be playing hide and seek with the Azhvar. The pain of separation from Him and the resultant misery are depicted in a number of poems. The poet who has had the vision of the Lord wants unimpeded communion with Him and nothing less than that can satisfy him.

In Tiruvaymozhi 1.4 there is a heart-rending appeal to the Lord to appear before the Azhvar. The Lord shows His splendid form to him. But oppressed by his own lillleness, he tries to run away from Him. When assured by the Lord that He would not leave him, even if he wants to run away, the poet pines again. Thoughts of his sinful nature keep tormenting him every now and then, but he always
steadies himself by constantly remembering the grace of the Lord, who has lodged Himself firmly in his heart (1.10).

But this happiness is short-lived as he wants immediate union with the Lord. Not being able to achieve it, he is again thrown into utter dejection (TVM 2.1). Before he collapses completely, the Lord appears before him and this rejuvenates him a little (TVM 2.3). This kind of an alternation of moods can be seen throughout Tiruvaymozhi. In TVM 4.7 for example, the first six verses are a complaint that the Lord has not come. They express a mood of hopelessness. In the seventh verse there is a sudden and joyous affirmation that he has found the Lord. But the following three verses strike the old note bordering on despair: The Azhvar gropes for the Lord, searches for Him everywhere and cries. He realizes that he being a sinner cannot hope to see Him (Verses 8, 9, 10).

A number of verses in Peria Tiruvantati too express different moods ranging from disapproval and misgiving to affirmation, elation and fulfilment.

Nammazhvar having purified himself by undergoing the pangs of separation, repentance, discomfort, pain and by detaching himself of everything that is not of God and having undergone the Dark Night stage, is ready to enter the unitive state or Prema Bhakti in Tiruvaymozhi 10.9.
The Lord Himself seems to be eager to take the Azhvar to Himself and therefore grants him the mental vision of the entire panorama of his ascent to Heaven. The clouds and the oceans appear to provide the accompanying music and all the inhabitants of the celestial world bestow their offerings on him. The denizens of the upper world have set up huge banners greeting him all the way. All the great saints and the celestial beings join in welcoming the Azhvar to their abode in the Vaikunta.

After showing such a vision, preparatory to Nammazhvar's ascent, the Lord appeared to tarry a little and the Azhvar cries out, voicing his deep yearning to unite with Him for ever and requesting Him not to play hide-and-seek with him any more (TVM 10.10.1). The Lord is the only prop for the Azhvar now (Verse 3). Just as the red-hot iron swallows water sprinkled on it, the Lord enticed the Azhvar's soul and consumed it in full (5). The intensity of the poet for union with the Lord reaches a climax in verse 8 and 9 when he cries in helpless misery that there is no other way by which to sustain himself. The Lord is his only support and he cannot leave Him. In the tenth verse, Nammazhvar describes how the Lord held him in tight embrace and appeased his long and deep appetite for Him. His yearning is at an end and he has reached the highest stage of the mystic journey.
It is the complete and conscious fulfilment of his love here and now. "The only proper end of love is union" according to Underhill (428) and this is what he achieves at the end of his journey. And, the unitive mystic "participates according to his measure in that divine-human life which mediates between man and the Eternal, and constitutes the "salvation of the world" (433). Vaishnavites believe that Nammazhvar continues to do service to the world, as he is considered to represent the paduka or the sacred feet of the Lord.

In spite of their different religious backgrounds, the mystical progression of Herbert and Nammazhvar appears to be similar. They have crossed the different stages and successfully reached the ultimate unitive stage. These two poets who have enjoyed divine-human life become themselves the medium between man and God. They come out of their mystic experience and share it with their fellow beings and provide guidelines for a fuller and more meaningful life in this world. Their view of the world is founded on their mystic experience.