

## Demystifying Mysticism: A Comparative Study of William Blake and Allama Iqbal

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### Abstract

Mysticism is often accepted as a spiritual quest for the hidden truth or wisdom, the goal of which is union with the Absolute. Mystic experiences are said to be unique for each individual. However, the reader always finds that there is a stamped similarity between the encounters of spiritualists, not just of a similar race or faction, yet in addition of assorted social orders and religions. This paper examines the concept and perception of supernatural quality in the works of the occidental poet William Blake and the oriental poet Allama Iqbal. Born in different worlds with different religio-social values, they appear to share a profound affinity in terms of using similar thematic purpose in their poetry, which is mysticism. William Blake's works, however; generally spiritual in its symbolism, are prophetically calamitous in style and degree. In Indo Islamic magical idea-Iqbal offers a framework in which the belief in a higher power of the Heavenly Quran, the transcendentalism of Persian stories, the Rubayas, the mystery of the Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi and the philosophical standards of Sufism exist in the blend. A top to bottom investigation of their works uncovers that, the graceful vision of Blake and Iqbal can be viewed as a juxtaposed entity in the religious parlance. In comparative exegesis, it gives a multicolored dissimilarity by concentrating on their graceful workmanship, art and oeuvre, while pushing off the Religio-social strains and nationalistic pretensions aside.

**Keywords:** Mysticism; Essence; Symbolism; Spirituality; Sufism.

### Introduction

A definitive objective of mysticism is to accomplish the most noteworthy flawlessness possible for man. Mysticism is the pursuit of people to arrive at a definitive reality and experience the happiness of being in communion with God, by means of personal revelation, introspective philosophy and examination or reflection on the Heavenly. It brings about the freedom of the mind from the shackles of the senses and the standard limitations of social existence (Encyclopedia Britannica). The mystic, being initiated into the secrets of existence and the knowledge on the real factors of life and death, aims for a far, longs for the out of reach, and looks for the ideal heart's empathy and the craving to know the unexplored world (Samantaray, p.41). The mystic perceives the illumination of mind and sanitizes his heart from each kind of worldly longings and irreverence which

drives him to a condition of complete mindset of joy and ecstasy. In a blissful company with God a mystic attempts to arrive at where he should not see anything, but God. Each individual has a special spiritual encounter. Figurative language is additionally used to give reasonable shape to these theoretical considerations, encounters, and bits of knowledge. Mysticism isn't a quest for heavenly ecstasy in particular; rather it is a profoundly specific and dynamic quest for the Truth, which is consistently an object of investigation finishing in the living association with the One and the Absolute. (Samantray 2010, p. 42). As Jerome Gelman remarks:

“A unitive experience involves a phenomenological de-emphasis, blurring, or eradication of multiplicity, where the cognitive significance of the experience is deemed to lie precisely in that phenomenological feature”. (Mysticism, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Ed. 2019)

### Discussion

An intensive investigation of the historical backdrop of English writing uncovers how mysticism has pervaded English verse. Unnecessary to emphasize that the mysticism one experiences in English verse is generally Christian in motivation. In any complete investigation of mysticism, William Blake (1757-1827), on the sheer strength of his colossal creativity, needs to possess a nodal position. As we probably are aware, Blake was a conceived visionary. Having had the blissful vision of holy messengers early in his childhood, Blake, as St. Catherine of Siena, committed himself to the assistance of the Absolute. To demystify his spiritualist encounters he painted the indescribable encounters, utilizing enigmatic images sufficiently incredible to make his poems on the double supernatural and maybe, in this manner, freighted with heaps of significance. His spiritual vision is reflected in the well-knitted artwork of images efficiently utilized in his poetical works. Blake confirms love as the substance, everything being equal. For his purposes, the whole universe with its show contraries and inconsistencies is strengthened with Divine Love and accordingly man, cherished and adored by God, can never be unparadized. In *The Lamb* (2008, p.9) Blake contends that affection is the quintessential trait of both man and the Creator

“He is called by thy name,  
For He calls himself a Lamb  
He is meek, He is mild,  
He became a little child.  
I a child, and thou a Lamb,  
We are called by His name”.

A comparable microcosm in the universe condition is clear in the sonnet subtitled *Auguries of Innocence* (Blake 2008, p.490):

“To see a world in a grain of sand,

And a Heaven in a wild flower,  
 Hold infinity I the palm o your hand,  
 And eternity in an hour”.

The expressed thought in the above-mentioned lines does bear sufficient declaration to the poet’s proven mysticism. Blake is respected by the critics for his expressiveness and inventiveness and for the philosophical propensities in his works. He lived during a period of serious social change – a time of aggressive British Colonialism, English Imperialism, progressive changes in America and Europe, just as the start of Modern Upheaval. He acquired the greater part of his schooling through his readings of the Bible, Milton, and Greek and Latin works of art. Blake is highly influenced by Hindu mythology as is evident from his poetic works. He was additionally affected by Hindu folklore. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell shows how he has been affected by "the Hindu conception of Samsara (mundane existence), which comprises of discordant components contrary to each other" (Nanavutty 1968). Blake's The Four Zoas, namely Tharmas-the Body, Luvah-Emotions, Urizen-Intellect, and Los-Urrhona–the Imagination and spirit act precisely as the four people produced from Brahma's breath, to be specific Sinnoc-the Body, Sinnunda-Life, Sonnatin-Permanency, and Sonnin Kunar-Intellectual Presence. However Blake's Zoas are morphological subordinates from the Zoas, or Living Creatures of Ezekiel's Vision.

Poetry and art, as per Blake, were the roads to social change. The flashes of sentimentalism and creative mind are strongly reflected in Blake's poetry. To him, craftsmanship was the articulation and language of the Heavenly and the way wherein one could achieve salvation. Blake accepted that the creative mind was timeless and Divine and consequently better than the limited material world. He proclaimed to have seen dreams from a significant youthful age. The dreams that he found in his adolescence (which he continued to see for the duration of his life) were a result of his numinous creative mind. As per him, the human creative mind was the impression of the Heavenly vision as well as its realization. Blake, the visionary, has looked past existence. He recognized God with Man to show that all individuals encapsulate a heavenly component. He lauds both God and man while ascertaining identity between the two:

“For mercy pity peace and love,  
 Is God our father dear  
 .....  
 Where mercy, love and pity dwell,  
 There God is dwelling too”. (The Divine Image 2008,pp.12-13)

The four virtues, associated to Jesus were alternately assigned to man and God. All that Blake wrote - his sonnets, his inscriptions, and his enlightened books - were to disclose to people the Higher Reality. In Jerusalem, he writes:

“I rest not from my great task!  
 To open the Eternal Worlds,

To open the immortal Eyes of Man,  
Inwards into the worlds of thought;  
Into eternity, ever expanding,  
In the Bosom of God,  
The Human Imagination”

He considered all worldly things as everlasting, having a transcendental nature. Though composing almost half a century later even after Blake, his eastern counterpart Muhammad Iqbal was strikingly an adequate of similar comparable mystical encounters rising above fleeting and spatial limits verging on the mysterious.

The mystical perspective is certainly the main form of Iqbal's poetry. We ought to think of him as a mystic poet and in this regard, he is quite the same as other mystic writers of Iran and Pakistan. During the past decade, the great mystics of Pakistan and Iran used Persian as a medium in their writings to propagate their ideas and thoughts among the people at large. The mystics focused on the common men and attempted to give them appropriate guidance. The mystics didn't pay much importance to people in power rather in their congregation assemblies of 'Sima' they offered higher places to the poor against the rich. In their eyes, the Zoroastrians, the Christians, and the Jews were all equal. They viewed each being as a reflection of God. They firmly believed in the doctrine preached by the holy Shari'at of Islam, namely, "The most virtuous among you is the most esteemed in the eyes of God" and the saying of the Prophet "I am commissioned to bring perfection to man's moral conduct".

The incredible mystics of Iran and Pakistan have not connected any uncommon significance to the expansion of religion and have restricted their teachings to the spirit of religion. That is the reason Tawhid—Oneness of God and Wahdat-Ul-Wujud—Oneness of the existence is more significant goals for them, and they have carried the philosophy of 'Monism' (opposite philosophy of Dualism) to its most noteworthy stage. The superlative form of perfection, as per them, was to lose one's individual existence in that of God. They have given many excellent interpretations to the following Qur'anicVerse:

"God is the Light of the heavens and the earth." (Al-Quran 24:35)

One of the extraordinary spiritualists says, "Man should reach where he should see nothing but God." Our Sufis, subsequently, have had faith in a sort of annihilation (fana) which some of them have named as 'assimilation into God'. This is very much the same as the 'Nirvana' of the Hindus.

Sina'i has said: "Die before death O, friend! if you need eternal life." As per the Sufis, these stages can't be accomplished except through revelation (kashf) and perception (shuhud). The real voyager is he who accomplishes all the stages one by one until he reaches the final destination. This fascinating and important origination, which established the most elevated and noblest human idea, has been named by Iqbal as the 'Philosophy of Self'. His first insightful and philosophic poetic collection, *Asrar-I-khudi*, manages this incredibly fine and unpretentious origination.

Iqbal has put the following questions:

“Who am I? What are you? And whither the universe? Why there exists distance between us? Why am I put in chains of Destiny (Predestination)? Why do I die while you don't?”

Also in Javed Namah, he answers:

“Do you want Life? Then bring forth your ‘self’  
Absorb all four directions within yourself.  
Then you will realize who you are and who am I  
And also how you died and how you lived in the world”.

Iqbal, like other incredible mystics of Iran and Pakistan, accepts that the acknowledgment of the ‘self’ must be trailed by "renunciation of self." This is like Iqbal treads the old path of spirituality propounded by many great Sufis which starts with ‘Self’ and ends with ‘renunciation of Self’.

This beautiful thought must have led to the making of various extraordinary literary masterpieces. There are number of such examples of all-time masterpieces in the literary field. The popular ‘Arda Wiraz namag’ (The book of the JustWiraz) is a Zoroastrian strict sonnet wherein the spirit from the lower world moves upwards through the skies until it achieves perfection. The writer has based his plot on the theory of ‘renunciation of self’ in order to attain perfection. Farid-ud-Din Attar has picked a specific bird as addressing a specific quality of man and in their journey towards perfection. The birds initially lag behind but in the end they achieve perfection.

In European languages, the best expression based on the same mystic philosophy is in Dante’s magnum opus “Divine Comedy”. After that it could be named John Milton’s “Paradise Lost” and the “Sentimental Journey” of Jonathan Swift. Iqbal's ‘Javed Namah’ offers the most excellent and delicate illustration of the poetic treatment of the theme—Man's Ascension. Iqbal, in his onward venture, interacts with the extraordinary characters of the human world like the Holy Prophet of Islam, Zartasht, Jalaluddin Rumi, an Indian ascetic 'Jehan Doost', Sayyid Jamal-uddin Afghani, Sa'id Haleem Pasha, Mehdi Sudani, Husain bin Hallaj, Qurratul 'Ain, Shah Hamadan, Ghani Kashmiri, Abdali and even the ancient gods.

Apart from philosophic thought and skepticism Iqbal brings in social and political issues in his conversations with incredible personalities. Javed Namah, consequently, is to be viewed as the most recent composition on mysticism, and Iqbal must be acknowledged not just as one of the topmost proponents of mysticism, but also as the last incredible advocate of Irano-Pakistani mystic thought. A study of Iqbal's works shows that he has firmly studied the compositions of the incredible Sufis. Asrar-I-Khudi, Rumuz-I-Bekhudi, Javed Namah, and surprisingly his last Masnavi ‘Pas Cheh Bayad Kardai Aqwam-I-Sharq’ ought to be viewed as the best epics of the twentieth century.

Iqbal has not restricted his philosophy of perfection just to the individual like his predecessors, he has stretched out it to the countries and peoples of the East as

well, and in this manner, he has changed the conventional "Individualism" of older Sufis in a dynamic 'collectivism'. This has yielded self-reliance and self-confidence for the people of the East. And if the history of the creation of Pakistan is to be read from a philosophical perspective, it seems clear that the independent state of Pakistan is the byproduct of Iqbal's mystic thought. As it is vivid in the following verse:

“Country is the biggest among these new gods!  
What is its shirt is the shroud of Deen (Religion)

.....  
You are the followers of Muhammadpbh, your country is Islam”.( Bang-e-Dara. 102)

The Europeans have named Tasawwuf as mysticism and sometimes as 'esoterism'. I disagree with them. For there is nothing concealed in Tasawwuf. The Sufis have consistently, and even at the expense of their lives, taught their ethical standards most intensely and truly. They were not afraid of being excommunicated by the jurists.

The jurists, who opposed Sufis initially, regretted later on when they perceived the truth in the teachings of Sufis. Imam Muhammad Ghazali is the best example in this regard, for in his later life he regretted having opposed the Sufis. I accept that it would be more appropriate to portray Tasawwuf by the term Sufism.

From a purely philosophic perspective, Iqbal is probably the greatest poet of Tasawwuf (Iqbal and Sufism by Dr. Khalid Alvi). The Persian Sufi poets used symbolism to express their ideas and make their thoughts easy for the common people. This style of expression started with the first Sufi poet, Abu Said Abul Khair, in the 11th Century, progressed at a great height till the end of the 16th Century, and Jami might be viewed as the last extraordinary poet of this school.

One of the incredible writers of this school, Shams-uddin Hafiz, has on occasion utilized the clique of "impressionism" in his poetry, which, in course of time, found favor with the poets of India and Pakistan, and this style is referred to in Iran as the Hindi School of Poetry.

In the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent writers like Fughani, 'Urfi, Faizi, Zuhuri, Naziri, TalibAmuli, Ghani, Kalim, Sa'ib, Bedil and Ghalib added to the turn of events and progress of 'impressionism'. The outcome was that verse lost its fluency and simplicity that is so vital for the expression of fine mystic thought. Iqbal understood the drawback of this style and once again brought back to poetry, the form, simplicity and flow of the symbolic school.

The world has seen countless poets, but few among them are worthy of admiration who have played the role of a prophet or divine messengers like Iqbal and Blake in their respective ages.

To understand the significance of such poets we should study them in the backdrop of their own time and their own country, for then alone shall we know what a world, their country and their people have gained from them.

## Conclusion



Mysticism played a major role in the works of both the essayists, i.e., William Blake and Muhammad Iqbal. Blake believed that 'whatever was divine in God should be divine in man'. He used symbols to explain this mysticism. These symbols were for the most part objects of nature, consequently recommending that the spiritual reality exists behind everything. The eccentric nature of Blake was maybe because of the supernatural components that he frequently envisioned. Mysticism is a nature of thought rather than a system of philosophy. Many mystic thinkers have different viewpoints on reality. They even contradicted each other's perspectives on truth. Iqbal has deciphered mysticism in a positive and constructive manner. Obviously, expression of Iqbal in appearance might be very incongruous with the expressions of the predecessors. However there are no logical contradictions in principle and meaning of these words. Literature is the only discipline which permits us to permeate and explore this multitude of different features of the human universe. It is the poems that we read and that gives us stage where realities and fiction, energy and reason, uncertainty and confidence have a dialogue with each other rather than having a disagreement.

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