

## MYSTICISM : THE GLORIOUS INCOMPREHENSIBLE

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### ABSTRACT

Mysticism cannot flourish in an atmosphere where ratiocination is regarded as an enormous and the prevailing dominant force for the latter cripples the power of spiritual imagination and creative visualization in man. On the other hand, mysticism finds a fertile soil in the romantic world of feelings ; a world where man can breathe in the air of unbridled imagination and unprecedented impulses. As a matter of fact, the mystic as a true romanticist, while resorting to an anti- intellectual attitude , looks upon the heart as a much safer guide than the head, but in his sublimest moments, he goes even further. He gives himself to the spirit. He realizes the real value of meditation or spiritual insight. The soul of a mystic is illumined by the celestial light "which maketh the Creator visible unto the creature". This is the reason why a mystic finds value even in the so-called trivial things of life. When Tagore wrote, towards the end of his life, 'honeyed is the earthly dust', he was expressing a mystical sentiment.

**Key Words:** mysticism, ratiocination, imagination, creative visualization, unbridled imagination, insight, romanticist, sublimest, celestial.

"...the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure."

- "Defence of Poetry"

Man, made in God's own image, has in him what William James calls "mystical germ". Naturally, he has a longing for union with the Divine. In most men, this longing is dormant. In the mystics, however this longing is at its most intense. That is the reason why a mystic is never lukewarm in his approach. He is all the time in an impassioned state craving for incessant inspirations directed to him from the Heavenly realm. In fact, the ever-intensifying aura of mysticism depends largely, for its brilliant resplendence, on the ineffable nature of mystical experiences. In the words of W.E. Williams: "The mystic's ecstasy lay in penetrating the veils and finding more alluring mysteries beyond. He found his delight in following the mirage of the unattainable." "Where the philosopher guesses and argues," as Evelyn Underhill puts it, "the mystic lives and looks", for the latter knows that mysticism is the knowledge of the Real and Transcendental which is independent of the mind and the senses and this knowledge can only be obtained through contemplation or spiritual insight. This newly gained knowledge opens new vistas of esoteric imagination and lends to the spiritually awakened being the power of Transcendent vision which is the be-all and end-all of a mystic's life. It is this vision that Sri Aurobindo has in mind when he writes: "Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight."

The mystic has a natural yearning for an intimate communion with the Divine. His soul purpose in life is to yield himself in the selfless service of the Divinity and this can only be achieved through the negation of the Self and the renunciation of the materialistic desires of corporeal existence. It is of this mystic union that the fifteenth-century Muslim poet, Jami writes:

"All that is not One must ever  
Suffer with the wound of Absence,  
And whoever in Love's city  
Enters, finds but room for One  
And but in One-ness, Union."

This intense longing for union or the "Spiritual Marriage" with the Divine is related to man's higher self ; the Eternal self which is the repository of the 'mystical germ'. "It is this self" , according to Visvanath Chatterjee, "which inspires man to see visions and dream dreams. And these dreams and visions , transcendent as they are, have a new dimension about them. Whether we call it 'cosmic consciousness' or ecstasy or simply 'imagination' does not matter much. What actually matters is our awareness of this qualitative difference and that awareness can only be attained through an intuitive knowledge of the Divine Source."

Mysticism cannot flourish in an atmosphere where ratiocination is regarded as an enormous and the prevailing dominant force for the latter cripples the power of spiritual imagination and creative visualization in man. On the other hand, mysticism finds a fertile soil in the romantic world of feelings ; a world where man can breathe in the air of unbridled imagination and unprecedented impulses. As a matter of fact, the mystic as a true romanticist, while resorting to an anti- intellectual attitude , looks upon the heart as a much safer guide than the head, but in his sublimest moments, he goes even further. He gives himself to the spirit. He realizes the real value of meditation or spiritual insight. As Novalis wrote in his *Blutenstaub* in the very year that the *Lyrical Ballads* was published in England :

"The way to all mysteries heads inwards. Eternity, with all its worlds, all past and future, is either within us or nowhere."

The soul of a mystic is illumined by the celestial light "which maketh the Creator visible unto the creature". This is the reason why a mystic finds value even in the so-called trivial things of life. When Tagore wrote, towards the end of his life, 'honeyed is the earthly dust', he was expressing a mystical sentiment. It is this very sentiment which Blake was expanding when he wrote in "Auguries of Innocence" :

"To see a world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold Infinitely in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour."

The supreme mystic experience for Blake is to find everything to be human and at the same time, divine. "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite," wrote Blake in "A Memorable Fancy". This modification of Platonic idealism is at the

root of Blake's mysticism. He is a supreme visionary and he himself has left us with an eloquent account of his mystical vision in Milton :

“What to others a trifle appears  
Fills me full of smiles and tears;  
For double the vision my Eyes do see,  
And a double vision is always with me.  
With my inward Eye, 'tis an old Man grey,  
With my outward, a Thistle across my way.”

A mystic is often condemned to be an escapist but Blake, on the contrary, was not at all blind to the endless human sufferings. Blake believes in the all-embracing nature of the godhead. Thus his view of the GOOD and the EVIL, as manifestations of the same heavenly spirit, is essentially mystical. In fact, Blake's saying, “Without Contraries is no Progression”, is the basis of all his philosophy. In claiming this, Blake anticipates the duality in human condition that the Twentieth Century philosopher Nietzsche conceptualizes as the Apollonian and the Dionysian aspects of existence. In fact, real enlightenment lies in the acceptance of the inevitability of contradictions. The right and mystical approach is not to be contemptuous of the vigour and energy offered by the contrary forces but to accept them as steps towards a fuller life. The apparent evil of existence has its bearing upon the formation of a man's character.

The world of Wordsworth, like that of Blake, glows with the light of mystical illumination. It is this very light which helps him to see, even for a split second, into the life of things. Wordsworth, a pantheist, worships Nature not for its ordinary outward beauty but for the Immanent Spirit dwelling within her. While contemplating the nature of this Spirit, he had glimpses that were essentially enriching and mystical and eventually he became a transformed person altogether. Wordsworth wanted to share with all mankind his supernal knowledge and teach men the art of right living. Recalling the mysterious experience of a curious 'inland' child with the 'the convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell', Wordsworth assured his readers of the genuineness and universality of the mystical experiences:

“Even such a shell the universe itself  
Is to the ear of Faith; and there are times,

I doubt not, when to you it doth impart  
Authentic tidings of invisible things;  
Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power;  
And central peace, subsisting at the heart  
Of endless agitation.”

( “ The Excursion”)

Wordsworth’s confrontation with the mystical occurrences made it possible for him to have that rare and profoundly sublime experience, essentially ineffable, which makes all the difference in one’s life. He could now discern in Nature the presence of the Universal Spirit :

“...And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.” (Tintern Abbey)

The realization of this presence induces in him a sense of inner illumination and he cultivates an intuitive awareness of the ultimate meaning of existence. This is the culmination of Wordsworth’s mystic experience of Nature:

“...that serene and blessed mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on...  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.”

If Blake could see the world in a grain of sand , Wordsworth can find sermons in everyday flowers:

“To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

John Keats is a great worshipper of beauty and it is no wonder that his intense love of beauty sometimes reaches mystical heights. Only a man mystically inclined could look upon the roaring of the wind as his wife and the stars through the window pane as his children, or could identify beauty and truth in the climactic close of the “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, thus completing the circle originally started in the opening passage of Endymion-

“ A thing of beauty is a joy forever;  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness.”

The vision of the chariot and the strange journey it went in “Sleep and Poetry” is the vision of a mystical poet:

“The charioteer with wond’rous gesture talks  
To the trees and mountains; and there soon appear  
Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear,  
Passing along before a dusky space  
Made by some mighty oaks: as they would chase  
Some ever-fleeting music on they sweep.”

Mysticism can never be fancy-mongering or idle dream. At its core is a deeply felt experience which is extremely difficult to communicate. “It suggests mist, and therefore foggy, confused, or vague thinking. It also suggests mystery and miracle-mongering, and therefore hocus-pocus.” Whatever it may be, but it can’t be denied that mysticism is a kind of experience which transforms the entire life of a man. This is the true philosopher’s stone which can transform all the base metal of life into gold. Some mystics have even gone so far as to suggest that mysticism is the ultimate source of ethical values. Actually, the ecstatic mystic makes no distinction between ‘mine’ and ‘thine’, and so can love everybody as his own self. One mystical touch makes the whole world kin. It is this alone that can make a man a proper participant in the community life of mankind and feel.

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