



MYSTICISM IN INDIAN TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

The present paper explores the concept of mysticism in Indian tradition and its prevalence in Indian theological thought. The concept of Mysticism though more in fashion since 19th century is in fact quite old in Indian context, having its mention even in *Upanishads*. In Indian tradition the term has multiple connotations, as India is a nation with religious as well as philosophical diversity. Discussing different types of mystic experiences as described in Ancient Indian Texts, it compares and contrast the sense of mysticism in different faiths. It describes Sufism as an Islamic offshoot of mysticism which got assimilated in Indian tradition over a period of a millennium for which it has existed in India. Sufi mysticism is readable in the various art forms such as poetry, dance and music.

Keywords: Mysticism, Indian, Sufism, Music.

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INTRODUCTION

Mysticism has been a very popular term in art and literature for around last 200 years. The term came in vogue in the artistic and intellectual circles of the western world in 19th century, particularly during the Romantic Movement in Europe, and Transcendentalist Movement in America. The term is said to have originated from the Greek word *mystikos*, and comes from the classical Greco-Roman mystery cults. Another view is that it has come from *myein* which means *to close the lips and eyes, and refers to the sacred oath of the initiates, the mystes, to keep secret about the inner workings of the religion.*" The Christian treatise on Mysticism appears in *De Mystica Theologia*, of a Syrian Neoplatonist monk Dionysius the Areopagite (pseudonym) of the late fifth or early sixth century.

Mysticism means direct insight or intuitive or instinctual experience such as communion with, identification with or awareness of the ultimate reality- God or self-, by an individual. Mystical experience thus is an Individual experience.

Mysticism as described by WT Stace (1960) is an experience that involves the apprehension of an ultimate non-sensuous unity in all things, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate. In other words, it entirely transcends our sensory-intellectual consciousness.

Mysticism in Indian Tradition

Mysticism appears in Indian tradition in many ways such as Innate Knowledge (*Sahaja* and *Svabhava* in Hinduism), experience of one's blissful nature (*Samadhi Svarupa-Avirbhava* in Hinduism and Buddhism),

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Seeing the Light of God in everyone (Hinduism and Sikhism), Complete non-identification with the world (as *Kaivalya*, *Sankhya* and *Yoga* in Hinduism and *Jhana* in Buddhism), sense of Liberation from the cycles of Karma (*Moksha* in Jainism, Sikhism and Hinduism, *Nirvana* in Buddhism), and deep intrinsic connection to the ultimate reality (as *Satori* in Mahayana Buddhism)

According to Stace there are two kinds of Mystical experiences: extroversive mystical experience, the other introversive mystical, both being "apprehensions of the One, but reaching it in different ways" (1960). They differ in the way that the former is focused outwards whereas the latter is focused inwards. The former finds the "One" through the physical senses. The latter introspectively finds the "One" at the bottom of the self and is more significant in the history of human thought and history of mysticism.

The extroversive mystic with his physical senses continues to perceive the same world like others, feeling that a Unity imbues in them. It is part sensory-intellectual as it still perceives physical objects; it is part non-sensuous and nonintellectual as it perceives them as "all one." The introversive experience is wholly non-sensuous and nonintellectual. The extroversive

Introvertive mysticism claims total suppression of the whole empirical content of consciousness. Here the ordinary sensory-intellectual consciousness disappears, and is replaced by the mystical consciousness which is entirely new kind of consciousness.

The mystical experience as described in *Kath* Upanishad is soundless, formless, intangible. *Svetvastra* Upanishad states it as a vision of "forms resembling snow, crystal, wind, smoke, fire, lightening, fireflies, the sun, the moon", these being the signs leading one on the way to revelation of *Brahma*.

The *Mandukya* Upanishad says that the introvertive mystical consciousness is "beyond the senses, beyond the understanding, beyond all expression...It is the pure unitary consciousness, wherein awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated. It is ineffable peace. It is the Supreme Good. It is One without a second. It is the Self."

The concept of *Samadhi* is quite important in Indian concept of mysticism. *Samādhi* is the main subject of the first part of the *Yoga Sūtras* called *Samādhi-pada*. *Samadhi* is a non-dualistic state of consciousness in which the consciousness of the experiencing subject becomes one with the experienced object, and in which the mind becomes still, one-pointed or concentrated though the person remains conscious. According to Rhys Davids- the British Pali language scholar- the first recognized use of the term *samādhi* in Sanskrit literature was in the *Maitri* Upanishad.

Mysticism in Indian thought can be interpreted in terms of Nature Mysticism, Soul Mysticism and God Mysticism. Nature mysticism comes from the idea of *Ekam* in *Rig Veda* which is a unifying vision not looking inwardly but outwardly. Nature mysticism stresses on experience of all in one and one in the all. Soul-Mysticism confines the experience to soul only and believes that the quest of the inner self is one's main goal, irrespective of the idea of existence or nonexistence of God. God Mysticism upholds the idea of the return of the spirit to its immortal and infinite ground God.

Different Indian faiths have different relationships to mystical thought. Hinduism has many mystical sects due to its historic reliance on gurus (individual teachers of insight). Students of both Shaivite Tantric schools as well as *Shakta Tantrics*, along with the *Vaisnavas*, use the symbolism and mythologies of their gods and goddesses, to take the one to one's highest awareness, through mystical practices designed and proven for these purposes.

As most Buddhists consider *jhana* (meditation) to be an advanced technique used only after many lifetimes, Mysticism in Buddhism is largely monastic. Mysticism in Islamic system is prominently visible in Sufism though Sufism itself is not very much acceptable in Islam. Being there in India for around 1000 years

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incorporated Sufism in Indian tradition. The advent of Sufism in India took place in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. One of the early Sufis to settle in India, was Al-Hujwari (died 1089) popularly known as Data Ganj Baksh. Among the Islamic mystics a notable figure is Mansur-Al-Haijaj (858-922 C.E) who was greatly influenced with Hindu mysticism while in India. His famous quote is 'ana'l-haqq' or 'I am the Reality'. similar to Hindu Vedantic principle. 'Ahm brahamasmi' or 'I am the Brahma'.

Most of the Indian Sufi saints were poets like Sheikh Farid, Shaikh Hamiduddin, Syed Gesu Daraz. The most notable sufi poet of the period was Amir Khusrau (1252-1325) the follower of the sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya. The sufi philosophy is reflected in the works of Kabir, Guru Nanak Dev and following Sikh Gurus.

Sufi thought has a high degree of subjectivism, dealing with the matters of no external observations, like the subtle states of the heart. That is why various Sufi treatises employ allegorical languages. Sufi philosophy appears prominently in Sufi poetry which is liberal. For example, it quite often refers to intoxication, strictly forbidden in Islam. This usage of indirect language and subsequent interpretation gave an impression of Sufism being different from Islam. Of course there were thinkers who did consider themselves above the *Sharia* and not believed in following the principles of Islam for salvation. Sufism embraces physical and sensory experiences too. This is the reason it employs poetry, dance and music. It extends the teachings of the Quran in the spirit of universal love through devotional musicians dancing *Zhikrs* and singing *Qawwalis*.

This Hindu principle of *Ahm Brahamasmi* appearing in *Bhrhadaranyaka* Upanishad 1.4.10 of the *Yajur Veda*, forms one of the four *Mahakavyas*- the great saying of Upanishads which are the foundational texts of Vedantic philosophy. These four *Mahakavyas* sum up the ultimate unity of the individual (Atman) with God (Brahma).

The other Mahakavyas stating almost the similar principle of Mysticism are *Prajanam Brahma* stating *Consciousness is Brahman*, appearing in *Aitareya* Upanishad 3.3 of the *Rig Veda*; *Ayam Atma Brahma* meaning *This Self (Atman) is Brahman*, appearing in *Mandukya* Upanishad 1.2 of the *Atharva Veda* and *Tat Tvam Asi* that is *Thou art That* in *Chandogya* Upanishad 6.8.7 of the *Sama Veda*.

These Mahakavyas appear in the thought and works of even western philosophers and writers. The Romantic Movement in Art in England and the Transcendentalist Movement in America reflect the concept of *Ahm Brahamasmi*. The poems of the national poet of America Walt Whitman reiterate the concept. His *Song of Myself* is a direct reflection of mystic experiences. This Philosophy of Mysticism also appears English poetry of Romantic period, particularly of William Wordsworth.

Conclusion

The mystical experience in Indian tradition is thus a feeling of self-realization, along with realisation of a sense of belongingness, identification and oneness with a divine being. India being an ethnically diverse country is philosophically diverse as well. In spite of this diversity, the century's long co-existence has led to assimilation- or at least a harmonious coordination -of different schools of thought. As change is the law of nature, this process of evolution will continue as such.

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