

# Mysticism. (Mystically Viewed.)

By Jayantilal Acharya, B. A.

## I

Through innumerable centuries, historical and pre-historical, man has passed and yet he is not tired of asking the same question: What is the Self? The same old and ever-new glories of the dawn, the same infinite expanse of the sky, the same infinite gestures of Mother Nature are yet the topics which inspire the poet. The grey-bearded philosopher yet plunges deeply into the enquiry of Truth manifested in the world, and sometimes finds some solace, some recreation in the philosophy of the sages of the East. And scientists like Einstein think it "enough to contemplate the mystery of conscious life perpetuating itself through all eternity, to reflect upon the marvellous structure of the universe which we can dimly perceive, and to try humbly to comprehend even an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in Nature."

The modern Englishman garlands John Masefield as the poet-laureate and yet says: Shakespeare is the greatest poet of England; the modern Indian accepts the poet-sage of Santiniketan and yet says: Kalidas is the greatest poet of India. Over and above all this one sees, in the article on "Buddhism and Einstein" in the Buddhist Annual of Ceylon, 1931, the writer (D. B. Jayasinghe) saying that "Einstein is slowly but surely labouring towards the position laid down by the Buddha nearly 2500 years ago." Says the modern man: it is the craze of the bigoted; says the orthodox: it is the idealisation of the past. And amidst this whirlpool of conflicting cultures the modern youth is bewildered and takes refuge under anything that luck brings to him. What is all this?

These are the problems, and there are many more—problems that are with-

in our grasp and manipulation—that stand at our threshold, expecting a sympathetic invitation. What to talk of the one with his smiling face and sparkling eyes and hallowed heart, expecting a simple “Yea”! There it stands.

Many modern scholars of the subject have tried to define what mysticism is, but in the end almost all of them have confessed that what they tried was not complete. For it is a subject, not of discursive, analytical intellect, but of unitive synthetic experience. Hence Cordelia had to say to King Lear: “I cannot heave my heart into my mouth”. How much is this true of those who have realised the bliss of all that is without, from within! It is like telling one who has never taken sugar, the taste of sugar.

It is an experience within. At the slightest flutter of the wings of a bird his consciousness awakens, and deep down in the valley of his heart he feels the throb of the All-pervading One. To him music has not only the meaning in its diverse and manifold combinations of melodies, but it has a direct connection with the chord of his heart. To him a picture of a master artist appeals, not only because of its proportion, composition and colour, but in so far as it reveals the infinite Master Artist. It is this idea which a modern essayist tries to convey by saying: “Fools and fools only think that they see all that there is to be seen, when they are looking at a flower-bed or a wood or a sunset. When we think that we are enjoying the beauty of Nature the most, we are still trying to empty the Atlantic by dipping into it with a tea-cup. If you want to pay a compliment to the beauty of Nature, you ought, really, to die of the

shock of it: just say ‘Oh my’ and expire.”  
( Paget )

The following three quotations I take from three different writers expressing their realisations in their own vivid language.

Says Tennyson: “I have never had any revelations through anæsthetics, but a kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has come upon me through repeating my own name to myself silently, till, all at once, as it were out OF INTENSITY of the consciousness of individuality, individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state but the clearest, the surest of the surest, utterly beyond words—where death was an almost laughable impossibility—the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life. I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said the state is almost beyond words?”

The second is the realisation of Edward Holmes, from his “In quest of an ideal”. He spends his life in quest of an “emancipative”, an “illuminative” and a ‘regulative’ ideal.

He says, “It was the hour of dawn. The early summer morning has always made an appeal to me, to which not my heart only, but my whole being responds. It has a fragrance which is all its own, the sublimated essence of the sweet, natural scents; and when I inhale its breath, my cares, my troubles, my perplexities fall away from me and are as though they had never been. Its freshness, its purity, its serenity seem to belong to some other world than ours. And in the silent but invisible advance

of the flowing tide of the day it gives me an assurance of victory, which carries me far beyond the furthest horizon of aspiration and hope. As a rule, men are in bed while the drama of the dawn is being enacted.....

"And then I thanked God that I had been sleepless and restless; for then, 'without a sound', without a cloud, the pageant of the dawn was passing and I was initiated into its inmost mystery. If there were a moment in my life in which I underwent that sudden and complete transformation of the inner man which is called conversion, it was then. I seemed to be admitted into, I seemed to become one with, "the pure eternal course of things", and I know, if I had never known it before, if I was never to know it again, 'at last, at last, the secret of the world.'

And the third is that of Gurudev (Tagore) as he describes it in his "Religion of man".

"When I was eighteen, a sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to my life and passed away, leaving in my memory a direct message of spiritual reality. One day, while I stood watching at early dawn, the sun sending out its rays from behind the trees, I suddenly felt as if some ancient mist had in a moment lifted from my sight, and the morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy. The invisible screen of the commonplace was removed from all things and all men, and their ultimate significance was intensified in my mind; and this is the definition of beauty. That which was memorable in this experience was its human message, the sudden expansion of my

consciousness in the super-personal world of man."

The states described above are transient, inexpressible and 'poetic'. Seemingly they seem to be accidental transports of their inner being; but there is in reality, in the background, a life spent in quest of some ideal, a life of 'Sadhana'. Nothing comes out as such accidentally. The 'unveiling' is the effect of the sum-total of past experience, which lies dormant in the sub-conscious. When time ripens, all these impressions form a single whole—a unity—and manifest themselves in the direct realisation of the identity of the inner in us and the Supreme. The sparks smothering under the heap of ashes require the wind, and they blaze out in their native glory.

## II

The world is so much with us that we do not even try to think on that which is in all of us. So many things we see occurring and re-occurring before our own eyes, but we never respond to their mute cry—a cry of their innate unity with our inner being. It was Newton who heard this cry and evolved a theory out of it. When a poet comes and tells us of these seemingly trivial things in a vivid and sympathetic language, we admire him and say: "How fine!" The philosopher comes with his sharp-edged sword of rational criticism. He cuts asunder the actual and points to the guidepost of an ideal life. A religious preacher comes and the mob deifies him. But how few of these know that with which they move. They grope in search of that which already is there within them.

But comes the voice: How can one afford to look within when there is so

much without to be looked at—Motors, engines and mills; dramas, dances and matches; hotels, gardens and cinemas? The world is heaving with active life. There is no time to waste on things that bring forth nothing. And the other voice comes: Then why do you go for a walk in the evening, what charm is there, what purpose? Oh, that's only a recreation after the day's weariness and rush. That's it. That which you call recreation, is it not the hankering of the soul to spend some time in quiet seclusions of nature? Man has not only body but something which is called 'soul' (call that whatever you may). You cannot deny the one and nourish and develop the other. You must sprinkle water at the root, to grow the tree.

It is said: "The typhoons and the cyclones of the China seas are some of the most formidable storms that ships can encounter. But now with the increased knowledge much of their danger has been averted. It is known that they are circular in character, and that, though the wind on their outskirts often reaches a speed of 100 miles an hour, in the centre of the storm there is a space of complete calm—not a calm of the sea certainly, but a complete absence of wind. The skilled navigator, if he cannot escape the storm, steers right into the heart of it and rests there." This "space of complete calm" is in the centre of our own personality.

What does history say about this? The Nature-mystics of *Rigveda* were firstly confused and astonished at the raging phenomena they saw outside themselves. Gradually they came to realise that what seemed was not true, that the Gods they attributed to diverse natural objects were in reality one. The confusion remained and the priests of the later generation introduced the

cult of sacrifice. Fantastic symbolism grew into vogue, and the priestcraft became the instrument of liberation. But men's minds, however crude they may be, develop and gradually tend towards perfection. The later asceticism of the Aranyakas shows a stage of this kind of development. And as in all religions we see in India also mysticism of the Upanishads following the severe asceticism of the pre-Upanishadic people. We see the same parallel among the Sufis. Perhaps it is out of this that the two currents manifested themselves in the strict asceticism of Mahavira and the middle path of Buddha. Thus the childlike simplicity of Rigvedic seers was the stage of initiation (*Brahmacharya*); the rising up of a sacrificial mysticism was the active, fruit-desiring life of the householder (*Grihastha*), the third was the stage of the ascetics taking refuge in the forests to perform penance; and the fourth is the stage of realisation, of the unveiling, of renunciation of all external things and drinking the essence of all in their inner self. And they did not say to renounce the world. They proclaimed to know that thing by knowing which everything is known, to know him who is seated in the core of all, ( सर्वेषु बाहू इति संनिविष्टो ) 'who is the string of all ( सूत्रे ललितयणा इव ). And how to know this? A Gujerati poet has summed up in only one line the whole of Hindu mysticism: "Take part in every affair of life, but keep your mind in me."

संसारमां सरसो रहे, ते मन मारी पास ।

This keeping one's mind in the pure eternal delight of the heart is the keynote to all mystical doctrines. And those people who have taken refuge in the centre of calmness from the whirligig of the world, raging outside, are called mystics. Neither do all of them renounce the world, nor do they exhort

others to do it. Outward bindings, false discussions, religious hypocrisies, sectarian theories, gods of fancies and modern gods of machines they struck hard wherever they found and with such vehement force of their language and personality and actions that the society scathed and sometimes they had to pay for their theories with their head. They were not like poets flying on fancy's wings, idealising every straw they saw; they were not like philosophers "putting certain chemical ingredients together which may gradually combine, and, under proper circumstances, bring out a flash of light, or may fail" ( Vivekanand ). They were like lamps enkindling other lamps.

Thus the mystic neither dreams merely nor destroys merely, but both destroys and creates. All shams and quackeries he denounces and tries to destroy, and, on the other hand, brings out the real soul of man. He does not say that he has brought out the man; in fact, he has faith in the potential goodness of every man, faith in the omnipresent self that works through human instruments, faith in the remedies he prescribes, for he himself has experimented upon them. Limitless he adores and expounds, unnameable he mutters. As a worker he works in the fields, removing weeds and thorns; as a fellow-man he weeps with the suffering and shows to the latter the way to happiness, of peace; enjoys the company of others and warns them to see whether what they call happiness is happiness in reality.

He does not claim to be perfect, nor does he ever like the future to idealise him. His life is an open page, which any passer-by can open and read. His personal passions and weaknesses he hides

not, for he knows that the world is full of them. It is his satisfaction to give men yearning for higher life a key to open the gates of secret life and instruments to resist the onslaught of inner enemies. He believes with Al-Hujwiri that "knowledge is a quality whereby the ignorant are made wise." He believes that whom the world casts off as stones are not all of them such. There is a "veil of Clouding" enveloping them. Here he works as a teacher, punishing the pupil, not physically but psychologically, i. e., removing the false notions of the ineradicableness of man's nature. His homely heart draws the hearts of all, and feasts of love he ever gives. Serene his face, with smiling eyes, in silence speaks His love to all. What things appear trivial to many have an importance in his eyes, "for, having cleansed his vision of all personal impediment, he apprehends the true proportion of all the elements that compose the universe." ( Clifford Bax )

Thus we see that the mystics were, many of them, illiterate, so much so that whom the world adores now were even ignorant of alphabets. Their real study was not of books, but of man—their own inner man. Many of them came of the "lower" grade of society. There is among all mystics—of all ages, all nationalities and all castes—a common bond of unity, which never breaks and never shall break. And that unity is the unity of their purified hearts. It is only those who try to construct Babel that get confounded and, not understanding one another, fail. But these mystics have no Babel to construct, for whatever they desire they seek from themselves. It is this League of World Mystics that keeps up the equilibrium of the universe, for the Lord of the Universe works through His devotees.

